

OLD TESTAMENT OVERVIEW TEACHER'S NOTES

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LESSON 1

THE OLD AND NEW CREATION

Genesis 1

You have to have faith to read this chapter right; for the record goes back beyond human history; and for its statements we have the authority neither of testimony nor experience, but the plain word of God (Heb. 11:3). These pre-historic annals of earth are in the region of faith, quite as much as those post-historic annals given in the book of Revelation. It is by faith that we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God; for faith has to do with the unseen both behind and before us. This chapter contains the substance of our creed concerning God, as THE CREATOR.

1. THE CREATION.

It comprises the whole of what we call the universe, and all that it contains, visible or invisible, "the heavens and the earth." This universe was created; it did not create itself, nor did chance create it, nor did it exist eternally. Its Creator was God, not a god; but the one living and true God, who calls himself El and Elohim, and God. Its Creator was the Word of God, the Son of God, the second person of the Elohim or Godhead (John 1:2; Col. 1:16). This was "in the beginning;" that is, the indefinite past, the far past. Then the things which are now seen were made, not out of pre-existing materials, or "things which do appear," but out of nothing.

2. THE CHAOS.

It was shapeless and unfilled up, without form and void. It was not properly "the earth" or "the world;" and "the fullness thereof" had not yet come. Whether this chaos was the first state or an after condition, that of fall and punishment, in connection with the apostasy of angels, we do not know. Here, however, earth lies before us in chaos; how long we cannot say. This chaos was one of "darkness," which covered the whole face of the abyss or deep. How this could be, other than in connection with a sinning race, is not easily seen; for "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

3. THE LIFE.

The Spirit of God moved upon (or brooded like a dove over) the face of the waters. These waters were everywhere; the globe was fluid, but the waters were dead: the fluid mass had no vitality in it; it was like the lifeless bodies of the valley. The Holy Spirit came upon them, and the power of the highest overshadowed them; life was imparted; the deep was quickened, or as Milton writes, "made pregnant." This Spirit, then as now, came from Him "who has the seven spirits of God," the Son of God, the Creator, for "in him was life." The quickening Spirit is with him. "The Life was manifested" (Psa. 104:30; 1 John 1:2).

4. THE LIGHT.

God spoke; the light came, following the life. For it is not first light then life, but first life then light. "The life was the light of men." Christ *the life the light* the world. It was God, the Son, who commanded the light to shine out of the darkness. It needed a word only; no more.

5. THE ORDER.

Sky and earth, light and darkness, air and water, are all commingled. Every needful element is there, but they are mixed up with each other, and so are useless. As to the air and earth and water, there must be division; the landmarks of each must be set; as to light and darkness, there must be alternation; day and night, sunrise and sunset. All must be perfect order; no one interfering with the other, but each left free to work its own work in the development of a glorious universe.

6. THE BEAUTY.

It is no longer "without form." It is now coming into shape in all its different features, and all is beautiful." By His spirit He hath garnished the heavens." It is by degrees or stages that this beauty is drawn out; yet it does come. The blue heavens, the translucent atmosphere, the sparkling stars, the bright sun, the waxing and waning moon, the green earth, the blossoming trees, the many-colored flowers, all beautiful; for He who formed them is Himself the fountainhead of all beauty, the perfection of perfection, the infinitely loveable One. We were made to love "the beautiful" in the creature, how much more in the Creator! He has made everything beautiful in its season, and He has given us minds capable of appreciating and admiring it all; but it is He himself who is altogether excellent, the sum as well as source of all beauty. He claims admiration

and love for himself, as the infinitely glorious One.

7. THE FRUITFULNESS.

Valley, plain, hill, and field are all fruitful; and they bring forth their shrubs and fruit trees, their corn, their abundance of everything that is good for food, as well as pleasant to the eye. It is a fruit-bearing earth. Barrenness is unknown. Man and beast are there, fish and birds are there; all kinds of life, intelligent or unintelligent. It is not mere beauty or order that satisfies God, but fruitfulness. It is fruitfulness He asks from us. We are ourselves part of His fruitful earth, as well as its lords, and in both aspects He asks for fruitfulness. He comes to us daily "seeking fruit."

8. THE GOODNESS.

He gazed on it, and pronounced it all very good. Each part of it was good; the whole "very good." It is good in every sense; good in the sense of beauty; good in the sense of subservient, beneficent and loving ends; earth and sea, hill and valley, river and forest, all mutually helping each other. All is goodness! Yes, a marvelous whole of unutterable goodness. Death is not here, nor cruelty, nor warfare. All is good, very good. The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. God delights in His handiwork. And though much marred and defaced, it still exhibits its original excellence. But it will do so more gloriously in the times of the restitution of all things, when there shall be the new heavens and new earth wherein dwells righteousness. "Behold, I make all things new."

LESSON 2

THE LINK BETWEEN BEING AND NON-BEING

"God said." – Genesis 1:3

THIS chapter, in many places, prefixes the name of God to what is said or done, that there may be no mistake as to who the speaker or doer is, and that God himself may be prominently presented to us in his divine personality. We read, "God created"; "God made"; "God saw"; "God divided"; "God called"; "God set"; "God blessed"; "God formed"; "God planted"; "God took"; "God commanded." But the most frequent word here is, "God SAID." As it is elsewhere written, "He spoke and it was done"; "he commanded the light to shine out of darkness"; "the worlds were framed by the word of God"; "upholding all things by the word of his power."

God's "word" is the one medium or link between Him and creation. Creation is in one sense immediate, the result of direct power; in another, it is communicated, as accomplished by the intervention of speech. How far this mode of statement is a condescension to man's weakness, we cannot say; but the frequency with which it is repeated, shows what stress God lays on it. There was evidently an intervention of something corresponding to human speech, if, indeed, the actual words were not spoken just as they are set down. Between the "nothing" and the "something," non-existence and creation, there intervenes only the word; but after that many other agencies come in, animate or inanimate, second causes, natural laws and processes, devolving the great original command; for it is only as in connection with it that these laws and processes have any power at all. The power or energy of the original "word" still lasts, still vibrates through the universe, still keeps creation in motion, and still preserves the sequences and orderliness of all created things above and beneath.

He is the sovereign Speaker and the sovereign Worker. All are under his authority. He says to this creature, Go, and it goes; and to another, Come, and it comes. He sits on his throne commanding the universe.

It is that same word that is still acting; as effective, as potent as at the first. Why does the sun still move and shine? Not merely because of a word spoken some thousands of years since; but because that word is

operative and energetic still. We read the original "God said" in every revolution; in every sunrise and sunset. "By the same word are these things kept in store." Vitality, growth, beauty, fruitfulness, all are indications, not of a past power, but of a present energy; a continuation of the original impulse, or rather of the very same original impulse still prolonged and working. "My Father worketh hitherto."

When the Son of God was here, it was how he acted in doing His miracles. He spoke and it was done: "Lazarus, come forth"; "Young man, arise"; "Damsel, arise"; "Be opened." It was a word that was still the medium. And in His case we see the appropriateness; for He was "the Word." But there is the same suitability in the first creation, for He was Himself the Creator. It was He who spoke the creating word at first. His words are the words of authority and power.

This God (and this Son of God) speaks to us still. He does not keep silence though our outer ears hear no sound.

1. HE SPEAKS TO US IN CREATION.

This earth and these heavens are the echo of his voice. God speaks to us in each part of his handiwork. It is not "nature's voice" as men speak. It is the true, authentic voice of God. He speaks each day to us, and is never silent. As He spoke at first, and the universe heard his voice, so he speaks to us now. Shall we hear or not?

2. HE SPEAKS TO US IN THE WORD ITSELF.

This Book embodies His words. Creation is the visible embodiment of His power and wisdom; it is the result of His words. His power came forth in speech as a channel or medium. This book of His is, in a different way, the effect of His speaking. It is his written wisdom and power. There is His voice to us. The thunder and tempest are his loud voice of grandeur; the sunshine and the gentle breeze His still small voice; but deeper, clearer, keener, softer, yet more penetrating than all these, is His word. Men speak of the Bible being the thoughts of God, but not His words. As if you could speak of a certain piece of music apart from the notes which compose it, or of the sea apart from the drops which make it up; as if you might say that creation embodied the general purpose of God, but not any minute or special designs. That Book is what it is because it contains the words of God. To our outer ear God speaks to us; and through our outer ear to our inner man. For it is through the word, and in connection with it, that God communicates with us. That word

motivates: "Thy word hath quickened me." That word produces faith: "Faith cometh by hearing." That word strengthens, comforts, heals, nourishes, revives. It gets into contact with each part of our souls, and works its own work there. And it does this because it is divine. No human words could be trusted to work the work in a human soul so unrestrictedly. It is not eloquence, nor poetry, nor argument; but something more than all these together; something peculiar and indescribable, which man could not have formed, and which he cannot understand, that makes it so suitable for the soul of a foolish and sinful man.

3. HE SPEAKS TO US IN PROVIDENCES.

When we listen reverently to everything that happens, we will recognize a divine voice, and divine words in all. No providence is dumb. No sorrow, no joy, no sickness, no recovery, no calamity, public or private, is dumb. "God said" sounds out from them all. By them God is pursuing us at every step, and all the day stretching out his hands to a disobedient and combative race. How articulate, how eloquent are the daily events of the commonest life on earth. Yet we close our ears! Day after day speaks it speaks to us, yet we will neither interpret nor pay attention to it!

4. HE SPEAKS TO US BY HIS SABBATHS.

I mention this especially because of its connection with the creation-scene. Each Sabbath is to us a silver trumpet speaking direct from God. It gives no uncertain sound. It speaks of grace, and love, and rest. It is God's weekly invitation to the weary. He who would take from us our Sabbaths would silence the voice of God.

So it is that God speaks to us. Yet deeper than all these there is a divine and irresistible voice speaking to our inner person. Not separate from the word, yet still distinct, the direct, sovereign, almighty voice of God by which the new creation is formed. Yet out of many hearing the same sermon, or reading the same Bible, some believe, and some do not. As in the old creation, so in the new, it is God that is the speaker and the worker. "Behold, I make all things new." The new creating words come from His lips to souls dead in sin.

What noble and mighty things are words! Through them we wield the mind of our fellow men. We cannot operate on dead matter through them, as God can, but on living souls we can. What a responsibility on us for our words! What a danger and sin in idle or evil words. Let our words be

ever true and holy.

LESSON 3

A HAPPY WORLD

Genesis 2

WHAT a poem, what a picture was the first chapter! Unrivalled in magnificence. The work done, and the words which describe it, are both of God. Now we get some details of the work.

1. ITS COMPLETION.

The heavens and earth were finished, and the whole host or array of all that they contained. God finishes what he begins. He leaves nothing imperfect. And he delights to speak of it as finished. So with creation; so with the tabernacle; so with the temple; so with the great work on the cross. "It is finished." So at the close of time. "It is done."

2. THE REST.

The seventh day saw the work done. Up till now it had been continuous work. Now it is rest. God rests. Creation rests. The morning stars begin their song, and the sons of God their shout. What rest means in Him who "fainteth not, neither is weary," we cannot say. It means more than mere cessation from work. God's rest must be as real a thing as His joy and His love; though what it is we cannot say. He calls it rest. It must be something in him exactly corresponding to what rest is in us. The day on which He rests He "blesses;" and blessing with Him is no mere word. It must be a day more fraught with blessing to us and to creation than the rest. More blessing flows out on that day. There are deeper things in this than we think. One day we will learn that neither earth nor man could have done without this day of blessing. Invisible blessing flows out from it even to those who are profaning it. God sanctifies it; sets a fence round it; makes it a holy thing, like the altar when sprinkled with blood. He has done this, because He rested, and because He shall rest.

3. THE DETAILS (Gen. 2:4-6).

God graciously recapitulates; and gives us a glimpse of the process of creation. All plants and herbs were his handiwork; not chance; nor nature; nor man. As yet the ground was unfilled; and rain had not fallen. But now God interposes. He covers earth with a refreshing mist, and he creates man. Probably the state of the atmosphere then was such as to produce

mist instead of rain; and it may be that this was the state of things up till the flood. How wonderful are his works; in wisdom he has made them all, the finished or the unfinished!

4. MAN'S FORMATION.

Man is said to be "formed," to be "made," and to be "created." All by God; and out of the dust. His origin is partly of earth and partly of heaven; his body from beneath, his soul from above. God breathes the "breath of lives" into him, and he becomes a living soul. Thus his body is "made" or "formed;" but his soul is "created." The first Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam a quickening spirit. The first man is of the earth earthy, the second man is the Lord from heaven. In Him we live and move and have our being. We are his offspring.

5. MAN'S DWELLING (*Gen. 2:-15*).

God plants a garden for him, in a region which he names Eden (delight). This garden is the eastern part of Eden; afterwards called Paradise. He stores it with all that is beautiful and fruitful: a tree of life he puts there; a tree of knowledge also. Down from the heights of Eden there comes a river, which waters the garden, and then into four streams, in four directions, each flowing through some goodly land. Thus the garden is doubly watered by the mist and the river. It is a dwelling fit for man; and worthy of God. God is not ashamed to be called their God; seeing He has provided for them such a habitation. This habitation man is to keep and dress. It needs his care; yet the care is slight. No sweat of the face; no anxious toil. Easy and pleasant labor! Such is the love of God.

6. THE TEST (*Gen. 2:16-17*).

A right to every tree but one! A large scope and free welcome to every tree except the tree knowledge. Herein is love. Yet here is a link fastening man to God. Man is not to be allowed to go at large, without anything to remind him of God or divine law, or divine sovereignty. Even in this pleasant garden God's authority must be acknowledged. Thou shalt, and thou shalt not; thou may, and thou may not, is the formula in which God presents his authority, and lays down a test of obedient love. Here is love on the largest scale of benevolence; here is obedience reduced to the smallest possible point; liberty as wide as possible; restraint almost nothing; one little piece of forbearance.

7. THE HELP-MEET.

Man cannot do it alone. It is not his nature; it cannot consist with his happiness. He will not need much to remove the gloom of solitude; one companion will do. God forms this one for him, a help-meet; taken, not out of the dust, but out of himself; not out of his head, as if superior; not out of his feet, as if inferior; but out of his side; where his heart lies; his equal in one aspect; and yet he is the head, the first Adam the representation of the second, out of whose wounded side, when He slept the sleep of death, his Eve, the church, was brought; the offspring of his heart, the object of His love, altogether one.

8. THE PURITY.

Naked, yet not ashamed. This is holiness; the perfection of innocence. No fear; no blush; nothing to hide. They can look to one another without shame. They can look up to God without fear. For sin is not there. It is sin that gives an evil conscience. It is sin that spreads blushes on the face. Conscious guilt; how this makes one hang his head!

Let us learn,

(1.) That evil is not of God. God creates nothing sinful. Sin comes from the creature, not from the Creator; from beneath, not from above.

(2.) That God's works in connection with earth and man are those of love. He made the world and its fullness so excellent, because he loved man. God is love.

(3.) That God loves holiness. He made man holy, because He is holy, and He loves what is holy. He loves to see holiness in the world which He has made; and He is to see it yet when all things are made new.

LESSON 4

THE SIN, THE SINNER, AND THE SENTENCE

Genesis 3

THE first two chapters gave us creation's perfection. Like a newly finished statue, there it stands. The chisel has given its last touch. The sculptor is satisfied; pronounces it very good, and rests. All is fair. Earth is like heaven.

But now the descent begins. The steps are no longer upward, but downward. Creaturehood cannot stand alone. The moment that it is left to itself it totters, it falls. It must be joined to the Creator before it can stand. The fall is the first step towards this everlasting union, in virtue of which creation is to become infallible.

1. THE TEMPTER.

Outwardly the serpent, inwardly the devil; hence called "the old serpent;" hence the Apostle says, "as the serpent beguiled Eve," and "lest Satan should get advantage over us." This is the first demoniacal possession. Afterwards we read that the devils entered the herd; that Satan entered Judas; that he filled the heart of Ananias. In speaking to man he must use some fleshly form. Thus by means of the serpent he communicates with man.

2. THE TEMPTATION.

The tempter makes use of the testing-tree, and points to it as a mark of restraint and tyranny. His object is to separate Adam and Eve from God; to produce the evil heart of unbelief, which would make them depart from the living God. For this end he suggests doubts on three points, (1.) As to God's goodness, in prohibiting the tree. (2.) His faithfulness, in fulfilling His threats. (3.) His truthfulness, in deceiving them as to the real nature of the tree. Having got Eve to listen, he leads her on, and then flatly contradicts God. Ye shall not surely die.

3. THE BAIT.

(1.) Negative, you shall not die.

(2.) Positive, you shall be as God, knowing good and evil. The first was to remove the dread of danger, the second to lead on. Knowledge! Knowledge like that of God! Intellectual ambition, this is man's first snare, and it will be his last. Worship of intellect and genius. Human supremacy in mind. Progress! Not in the knowledge of God Himself (Satan does not dare promise that); but of good and evil. Does this not imply that evil is in itself a strange attraction? To know evil man will do and dare as much as to know good. Evil is in his eyes an empire of boundless range, to whose utmost limits he would attempt to penetrate. Hence his love of the "sensational." The opening of the eye to see afar off, whether into space or time, or the substance of things, is irresistible bait. For the obtaining of a wider range of vision, what will man not do?

4. THE SUCCESS.

The tempter triumphs. Woman, "the weaker vessel," yields. She falls, and in falling, drags her husband down. Three things win her over.

(1.) The tree is good for food. Why not eat of it as of all the rest? Yet for this she had only Satan's word. But "the lust of the flesh" prevailed.

(2.) It is pleasant to the eyes; it looked good, and the lust of the eye prevailed.

(3.) It makes wise; it is the tree of knowledge. She wants to be wise, and she will not wait for God's time, nor take it in God's way; but in her own, or rather the devil's. *Wisdom* the devil's bait; wisdom apart from the God only wise, apart from Him who is the wisdom of God. What harm is there in wisdom, he still asks; and so with this fraudulent logic he leads men into knowledge where God is not; into literature where God is not, and where Christ is unknown.

5. THE SHAME.

We are unfit to be seen, is the first feeling that arises after the sin; unfit to be seen by anyone, even by one another; unfit for the sun to shine upon. A covering or darkness is their only refuge. Now they know what nakedness is. The virus of the forbidden tree has shot through them, and the sense of disobedience clouds their conscience; they now know for the first time the distinction between their appropriate and inappropriate parts, the clean and the unclean. They take the nearest and the broadest leaf, and twist it over them. Here it is simply covering, in later days it became an adornment as well.

6. THE DREAD.

How shall we look on God, or God look on us? God comes down; they flee, as far off as possible, into the concealment of the trees. Their fig-leaves were more for themselves, this is for God. They dare not face Him. They dread His anger. What foolishness! To hide from God! Yet man has always done this; his doing deeds in darkness or when alone, which he would not do in the light or before the others, is the same feeling as here.

7. THE TRIAL.

God summons them. They come forth and stand before Him. He questions them, and brings out their whole guilt step by step. They blame each other, they blame God, and they blame the serpent. But they sullenly admit the deed. Poor excuses! What can cover up our sin? Guilty on their own admission; this is the verdict.

8. THE SENTENCE.

Each of the guilty parties receives judgment.

(1.) The Serpent. As the instrument he is cursed, and as the representative of the old serpent. A greater than the serpent is here. In this curse on the serpent, God reveals His love to the sinning race, and tells that instead of cursing the victim, as no doubt Satan expected, he means to take his part against Satan, to raise up a deliverer, the Son of the woman, who, though not without wounds, will destroy man's enemy. The man with the bruised heel is to be the bruiser of the serpent's head.

(2.) The Woman. No curse, but still a chastisement, a memorial of her sin; as the first in sin she is to be in subjection, and though through child-bearing she is to be the source of blessing, yet this very thing shall be in sorrow, to remind her of her sin.

(3.) The Man. No curse on himself, but on the ground for his sake. Fruitfulness in evil is the doom of the soil; sorrow and death, toil and sweat are the doom of man. Yet these after all are earthly. They do not separate from the love of God.

9. THE MAN'S FAITH.

He names his wife according to the promise; mother of the living, not of the dead mother of him who is the living one, the resurrection and the life. Adam believed God, and was justified; accepted God's testimony to the coming Messiah as the living One, though born of her who had brought in death, and he became partaker of life eternal.

10. GOD'S CLOTHING FOR MAN.

Coats of skins; those of the slain sacrifices, provided by God himself, better and more durable than the fig-leaves; types of heavenly raiment, and pre-intimations of the source from which that raiment was to come, of the materials of which that raiment was to be composed, viz., the life and death of the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. This was what the Lord meant when he said, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him," and what Paul meant when he said, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."

Yes; the Son of God has come to clothe us! He has provided the garments, and He puts them on. They are fair and substantial; washed white in His own blood; glorious as the sun. He asks us to take them; indeed, He implores us to allow Him to put them upon us." Buy of me white raiment, that thou may be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear" (Rev. 3:18).

LESSON 5

MAN'S FIG LEAVES

"They sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves aprons." – Genesis 3:7

THEY are alone, yet they are ashamed. They are in Paradise, yet they are ashamed. It is conscience that is making them blush. It not only makes cowards of them, but it works shame and confusion of face. They are ashamed of themselves; of their nakedness; of their recent actions. They cannot look one another in the face after their disobedience and recriminations against one another. They cannot look up to God now. Possibly too, they shrink from being in view of the serpent who enticed them. The feeling of happy innocence is gone.

They must be covered, is their feeling, the dictate of conscience. The eye must not see them, either of God or man. The light must not shine on them; the eye of the sun must not look on them; and the fair flowers and trees of Paradise must not see their shame. They love darkness rather than light. Covering is what they seek, covering from every eye. Consequently, shame and guilt are inseparable. "I must be covered," is the sinner's first feeling, from the eye of God and man, even from my own.

So far they are right. But now they go wrong. Their mistake was twofold:
(1.) That they could cover themselves;
(2.) That they can be covered with materials from vegetation. Let us look at these.

1. MAN THINKS HE CAN COVER HIMSELF.

He does not know the greatness of the evil; he does not calculate on the penetration of the all-seeing eye. He sets to work and makes himself a covering, and he says this will do. What sin is, or what the sinner needs, or what God requires, he has no idea of. Each sinner has his own way of covering himself; he weaves his own web, whatever may be the substance of which it is composed. He wishes to be his own coverer, the maker of his own garment. He thinks he can do it himself. He has no idea that it is utterly beyond his power. He trusts to the skill of his own hands to provide the clothes that will hide his shame from the eye of God and man. He thinks it an easy thing to deal with shame, and fear, and conviction, and conscience. He will not believe that these can only be dealt with by

God. This is the last thing that he will admit. He will try a thousand plans before accepting this. He will make and try on many kinds or sets of garment before accepting for himself that which God has made. The unbelieving man's whole religious life is a series of plans and efforts for stitching a covering for himself, with which to appear before God and before men; and with which he hopes to appear before the judgment-seat. It is with this man-made, this self-made clothing, this earth-made, or priest-made, or church-made religion, that he robes himself; with this he soothes conscience; with this he quiets fear; with this he removes the feeling of guilty shame. He can do all that is needful himself, or at the most with a little help from God.

2. MAN THINKS HE CAN COVER HIMSELF WITH LEAVES.

He supposes that what will hide his shame from his own eye will hide it from God; that even such a frail covering as the foliage of the fig-tree will do. He has no thought of anything beyond this. The fig-leaf will do, he thinks. What more do I need? But he is mistaken; the fig-leaf will not do, broad and green as it may be. But why will it not do?

(1.) It is man's device, not God's. That which covers sin, and renders the sinner fit to draw near, must be of God, not of man. God only has the right, God only can prescribe to man how he is to draw near. What then is ritualism but a religion of fig-leaves?

(2.) It is simply for the body, not the soul. It does not relieve the conscience, or satisfy the guilty spirit, or cover the whole man. It is utterly insufficient. It could not remove one fear, or quiet one pang of remorse, or make the man feel tranquil in the presence of God.

(3.) It is composed of life, not of death. That which is to cover man's sin, and deliver him from the sense of shame, must be something which has had the life taken out of it. The green fig-leaf will not do. It is no better than Cain's sacrifice, the fruit of the ground. The only thing that can relieve the sinner from guilt and shame is atonement; the only atonement is by blood; for without shedding of blood is no remission; and therefore the only sufficient covering must be one connected with atonement, one which represents death, one which tells of the payment of the righteous penalty and the removal of the righteous condemnation. The fig-leaf spoke of life, not of death; of the blessing, not of the curse. It had nothing in it which told of propitiation or substitution; nothing which spoke of God's anger

turned away by means of the endurance of that anger by another.

The truths we learn here are many, and they are of profound importance.

(1.) Man's devices for covering sin are useless. They may be easy or difficult, cheap or costly, still they are vain. They profit nothing. The covering is narrower than a man can wrap himself in. These devices are innumerable. Good, deeds, long prayers, fervent feelings, self-mortifications and penances; church-connection, rites, ceremonies, religious performances, such are man's ways for approaching God, his coverings for a sinful soul. They are all fig-leaves!

(2.) Man's devices all turn upon something which he himself has to do, not on what God has done. Man misses the main point of importance. This was not wonderful in Adam, to whom nothing had been revealed; but it is amazing in us now, when God has announced that he has done all, that "it is finished!"

(3.) Man's devices assume that God is such a one as himself. He can conceal himself from his fellow man; therefore he thinks he can cover himself, so that God will not see him. That which conceals him from a human eye, he supposes will conceal him from a divine.

(4.) Man's devices all trifle with sin. They do not fathom its depths of malignity in God's sight. They assume that it will be easily forgiven and forgotten. They overlook its evil, its hatefulness, its eternal desert of woe. What are fig-leaves as a protection against the wrath of God or the flames of hell!

LESSON 6

EXPULSION AND RE-ENTRANCE

"So he drove out the man: and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubims and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." – Genesis 3:24

WE may safely conclude that this solemn act on the part of God is not separate from, or in contradiction of the previous promises of grace, but in fulfillment of it, embodying an illustration or exposition of it. As generally interpreted, it stands alone, and speaks wholly of judgment, not of grace. But rightly read, it anticipates the apostle's statement, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life;" or if there be anything about it apparently stern or terrible, it amounts to nothing more than that in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest."

1. THE EXPULSION.

The holy dwelling so specially made for man can no longer be his abode. He has sinned it away. He is not to be cast out of earth, or even out of Eden; but out of Paradise he must go, that God may testify to the evil of sin. But the simple fact of his being left on earth, in Eden, is a proclamation of God's forgiving love.

(1.) The Expeller. It is God himself. He who made Paradise for man, and set man in it! He expelled him. The expulsion and the introduction are the acts of the same Being.

(2.) The expelled. It is man, "the man," the same as mentioned before; the man so newly made, so greatly loved, made in God's image, to represent him and to serve him!

(3.) The expelling. The word is a strong one, driving out by force, as the nations of Canaan. In verse 23 we read, he "sent out"; but man would not go, so he is compelled to force him out! It is forcible ejection from a forfeited abode.

Paradise was the place of God's dwelling with man; and now either God or man must leave. If God leaves, man is hopeless; if man leaves, his place is still kept open for him by God. Even in the expulsion God shows his grace, His longsuffering, His unwillingness to leave man or man's

earth. He desires still to have a habitation here. "This is my rest," He says.

2. THE GUARD.

This was a sword, or rather, "the sword," the sword of fire, or "the flame of the sword," the sword which turned round every way, perhaps surrounding Paradise with a flaming belt; the sword spoken of, Josh. 5:13; 1 Chron. 21:16; 1 Chron. 21:27; Psa. 45:3; Isa. 34:5-6; Eze. 21:5, Zec. 13:7. It was placed, not simply to bar entrance, but to inflict death on all who should attempt to enter. It was "the veil"; but it was more. It told that the holiest was not opened; and that until God withdrew the barrier it was death for the sinner to enter. What more efficient, more terrible fence could there be? Sword and fire in one! God's sword and fire, revolving, in life and power; making access an impossibility. Living fire or fiery life! It is the Shekinah in the form of a sword, as elsewhere in the form of a pillar, according to the purpose to be served. O man, can you re-enter Paradise without God's permission? Can you open the barred gate? Can you remove or quench the sword of fire? You cannot. There is one that shuts and no man opens; that kindles and no man quenches. Only He can open who closed the gate; only He can quench the fire who kindled it; He who said, "Awake, O sword, against the man that is my fellow!" That sword is quenched, in the blood of God's fellow, the gate is open, the access unchallenged and free!

But the special object of this fence was to keep the way to the tree of life, which was in the midst of the garden. The eating of this tree was to preserve man's immortality. As the common fruit of the garden was to uphold him against the wear and tear of each day; so the tree of life had in it special virtue; and it is no more inconsistent with man's immortality to say this than to say that he needed other food to maintain his life. It was "in the midst," as the most conspicuous and most accessible place: marking its importance and preeminence among the trees of the garden. The preservation of man's immortality was now no longer a desirable thing. Besides, it was forfeited. He was taught that there was immortality in store for him; but not through that tree. It must be reached through death. It must be the immortality of resurrection. His being debarred from the tree of life was the preliminary or preparatory step to his being taught this wondrous lesson which after ages were to evolve. Man shall one day approach the tree of life (Rev. 2:7); but not now! Death lies between him and life. Death is the gate of life; resurrection is our hope.

3. THE NEW OCCUPANTS.

The cherubim now are set where man was. Their appearance (earthly animals); their position on the mercy-seat; their being one with the mercy-seat, their being sprinkled with blood; the song they sing in Revelation, all tell us that they are redemption-symbols, proclaiming man, and man's earth with all its creatures, redeemed and glorified; man reintroduced into Paradise, higher than that from which he was driven out, the Paradise of God. These cherubim in the earthly Paradise are said to dwell there; not "set", but "made to tabernacle" there. They are placed there as in a dwelling, to indicate man's future restoration to the abode he had lost. The sight of them is good news to Adam. He and his seed are to be restored after all. They are not always to be banished; not always to worship at the gate, or stand upon the threshold. They are to re-enter and partake of the better tree in the better Paradise.

The way is now opened; the sword withdrawn; the invitation unrestricted and unconditional. A new and living way! Let us draw near! Without is condemnation, within is pardon; without is death, within is life and immortality. There is no barrier now; no veil; no hindrance; no distance; no uncertainty. The blood is shed and sprinkled. Through death, life has come. The tomb becomes the gate of life. Why stand without, as if the sword of fire were still there, or as if the veil were not rent in two? Why hesitate, or tremble, or doubt, when all is plain, and when God himself is beckoning us in? Let us come boldly to the throne of grace. Let us draw near with a true heart, and in full assurance of faith. Let us not linger on the threshold, but go in at once. The blood which has been shed on earth and accepted in heaven is that which emboldens us to approach with confidence, not reckoning it possible that we can be sent away empty.

LESSON 7

THE BLOOD OF SPRINKLING AND THE BLOOD OF ABEL

"And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." – Genesis 4:10

"And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." – Hebrews 12:24

THIS cry of Abel's blood reminds us of the "How long?" of the martyrs (Rev. 6:10), and of the injured widow's "Avenge me." It was a cry from the ground where it had been hidden from every eye but God's; a cry to God; a cry which brought down a curse.

The "blood of sprinkling" is, first of all, the blood which was sprinkled in the tabernacle; which, with all its imperfections, spoke better things than Abel's. But it is especially the blood of the Lamb of God as sprinkled on the conscience, in believing.

In one aspect the cry of Christ's blood is the same. For it is that blood that now rests on Israel. Through it the long curse has come upon the nation. But still this is not the direct and proper meaning or application of the blood. It speaks better things than that of Abel.

1. IT SPEAKS OF LOVE, NOT HATRED.

It was to Cain's hatred, a brother's hatred, that Abel's blood bore witness. The blood of sprinkling speaks of a brother's love, the love of Christ, the love of Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood. It is truly of love that the blood so loudly and explicitly speaks. Therefore it speaks better things than that of Abel: for it speaks both of a father's and a brother's love. "God is love" is its message. Of the love which passes knowledge it bears witness to us; love unto death; love stronger than death.

2. IT SPEAKS OF GRACE, NOT OF WRATH.

Because of Abel's blood God was angry. It was divine wrath that spoke out in his words to Cain. But it is divine grace and mercy that speak in the

blood of Christ. The blood of sprinkling satisfies God, and draws out grace. It says, Where sin abounded grace did much more abound. Grace "abounding" over divine wrath and human sin; "riches of grace;" "exceeding riches of grace;" the "grace of God that bringeth salvation," these are the voices which come from it to us."

3. IT SPEAKS OF FORGIVENESS, NOT CONDEMNATION.

The blood said, Father, forgive them. It was not condemning blood. He who heard of it, and believed God's testimony to its meaning and effectiveness, was thereby assured of forgiveness. The blood showed the true basis and the true way of pardon; pardon through the condemnation of another; Pardon through the blood-shedding, for the blood-shedders themselves; righteous, true, holy, unchangeable, eternal Pardon. "No condemnation;" indeed, justification through the great transaction on the cross.

4. IT SPEAKS OF COMFORT, NOT OF TERROR.

Abel's blood was dreadful to all who saw it; full of terror to the murderer; alarm to his conscience; remorse to his spirit. Not so with this better blood. Its voice is comfort. It soothes the sinner's terrors. It does not cover his sin; yet it speaks to him concerning it as to let him know that the blood-shedding which brings him in guilty, and deserving of a murderer's death, assures him at the same time of the removal of all his fears. It is indeed nobler, richer blood, the blood of God, and so bringing on the shedder more awful guilt; yet by its propitiatory nature, its expiatory power, it announces, with divine certainty, the deliverance from the infinite danger under which they who had shed it had brought themselves.

5. IT SPEAKS OF PEACE COME, NOT OF PEACE GONE.

The blood of Abel said, Peace is gone; peace has forsaken the earth; it has left man and the families of man. All is now hatred, variance, murder, separation between man and God; between man and man; between brother and brother. The blood of Jesus tells that peace has returned. He is our peace. His blood has brought it back to earth. He has made peace by the blood of his cross. It has come! It has come down from heaven. Heaven and earth are meeting. God and the sinner are being reconciled. There is yet hope for man and man's earth. We need not despair, as if peace had fled away forever.

6. IT SPEAKS OF THE BLESSING, NOT OF THE CURSE.

Abel's blood spoke wholly of the curse; it brought the curse on Cain; and on the earth. It doubled the curse which Adam's sin had brought to the world. Christ's blood blesses and does not curse. Its voice is the voice of blessing. It means blessing in every drop. It meant blessing when first shed; it means blessing still. There is no curse in it, saving to those who reject it. In it is the fullness of eternal blessing, blessing such as the sinner needs; the removal of all curse for soul and body.

7. IT SPEAKS OF NEARNESS, NOT OF DISTANCE, BETWEEN MAN AND GOD.

Reconciliation, friendship, communion, nearness, all these are contained in it. "We who sometime were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ." No separation, no darkness, no uncertainty of relationship, but re-cemented union, on the basis of a purged conscience and an everlasting righteousness. Every hairbreadth of the distance which sin had produced is forever swept away. Perpetual nearness! Eternal fellowship! This is our portion; secured to us by the righteous removal of all that intervened between us and God; either on God's side or ours.

8. IT SPEAKS OF THE PURGED, NOT OF THE CONVICTED AND DESPAIRING CONSCIENCE.

Abel's blood spoke to Cain's conscience; it must have been a perpetual convicting and wounding. Christ's blood speaks of purging, healing, soothing. No more conscience of sins! A conscience purged from dead works to serve the living God! Every wound in it healed; every trouble laid to rest; every shadow resting over it dispelled. Not despair, but hope.

9. IT SPEAKS OF LIFE, NOT OF DEATH.

Abel's blood seemed the seal set to the death of the race. Brother murders brother, what is to be the end of this? But Christ's Word speaks of life; the reversal of the sentence by the payment of the penalty. There was no life through the Word and death of Abel. There is life through the blood and death of the Son of God. Life from the dead is the voice of the blood; life to the slayers of the Prince of life. The voice from the cross was one of life; "I give unto them eternal life." The voice from the tomb was the

same; “quicken together with Christ.”

10. IT SPEAKS OF RESTORATION, NOT OF EXPULSION.

It was Abel's blood that made Cain a fugitive and wanderer, Christ's blood brings us back from our wanderings; restores us to Paradise; delivers us from exile; gives us possession of the Paradise of God, the heavenly city, the new heavens and earth wherein dwells righteousness. It is the blood of the Son of God that makes us friends, children, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.

Let us receive God's testimony to this blood, this better blood, this blood of the everlasting covenant. The reception of this divine testimony is life, and peace, and holiness.

Be warned against the rejection of this testimony and trampling on this blood. It is blood which, when sprinkled on the soul, saves; but which, when not sprinkled, condemns. It will sink the rejecter to the lowest hell.

LESSON 8

THE WAY OF CAIN

"And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord." – Genesis 4:16

"Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." – 1 John 3:12

"Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core." – Jude v.11

AS "the way of Cain" is spoken of by the apostle Jude, as specially the way of the last days, let us inquire what it was. It was evil, not good. He is an open and defiant sinner; and in him sin takes its full swing. He is the first child of the fall, and the offspring of the fallen; he is no common transgressor; he runs no ordinary career of wickedness; he rushes to the extremity of evil. He is given as a beacon, yet as a true specimen of man, of the human heart even in the most favorable circumstances. He came into the world, not like Adam, full-grown, but a child, and therefore with the least possible amount of evil. He is the child of believing parents; for Adam showed his faith by calling his wife, and Eve showed hers by the way in which she received her first-born. He had a most godly brother, and was one of a pious household; brought up within sight of Paradise, and from childhood taught the knowledge of the true God, and the woman's seed. He was exposed to no outward temptation; he had no companion in sin; he walked the broad way alone. He was warned, no doubt, against the serpent and his seed. He was more than once spoken to directly by God. He had every possible advantage, in the absence of evil and the presence of good. Much might have been expected from him; yet he turns his back on God, on Paradise, on the altar, on the sacrifice, on all that is good and blessed.

But let us see more specifically what the apostle calls "the way of Cain."

1. IT IS THE WAY OF UNBELIEF.

Cain is the first specimen of an unbelieving man. His parents were sinners, but they believed. His brother was a sinner, but he believed. Cain is not an atheist, nor an altogether irreligious man. He owns a God, and brings his fruits to the altar. But he brings no lamb, no blood, nothing that

speaks of death. He comes with no confession, no cry for mercy. He sees no need of the woman's seed, no danger from the serpent; no preciousness, and perhaps no truth, in the promise of the serpent's crushed head or Messiah's bruised heel. He takes Satan's side against God, not God's against Satan; for all unbelief is a siding with Satan against God. God is not to him the God of grace, nor the woman's seed the Savior of the lost. He has a religion, but it is self-made, a human religion, something of his own; without Christ, or blood, or pardon. The love of God is to him mere indifference to sin. Rejection of God's religion, and of His Messiah, this is "the way of Cain."

2. IT IS THE WAY OF APOSTASY.

He turns his back on God, and will have none of Him. He is not like one of the heathen, ignorant of the true God. He knows God, and has heard His voice; but he turns away. He is an apostate (the first apostate) from the religion of his father; a scorner of the Messiah; he wants a Messiah of his own, "a Christ that is to be"; not God's Christ, but man's. From what small beginnings apostasy springs.

3. IT IS THE WAY OF WORLDLINESS.

Having forsaken his father's God, he makes a god to himself; that god is the world. He goes far from Paradise, builds a city, becomes a thorough man of the world; becomes the father of the inventors of all curious instruments, leads the ever-swelling crowd in its race of worldliness and vanity, with the cry, Onward, onward; progress, progress. They eat and drink, marry, and are given in marriage. All about Cain is of this present evil world. In our age what a spirit of worldliness is abroad; often not open wickedness, but simply worldliness, so absorbing the soul as to draw it quite down from the region of "the world to come."

4. IT IS THE WAY OF HATRED.

He begins with envy of his brother; goes on to hatred; ends in murder. He is particularly jealous of his brother's having found favor with God. Yes, strange, though he would have none of God for himself, he cannot bear that his brother should have it. Not the love of man or woman, but of God is the cause of the first jealousy and the first murder. He hates God, and all the more for loving his brother. He hates Abel, and all the more for being loved of God. He cannot lay hands on God, as he would like to, but he lays hands on His favorite, and so takes his revenge. Yes, the way of Cain is the way of envy, jealousy, hatred, murder!

5. IT IS THE WAY OF GOD-DEFIANCE.

He dissembles; he wipes his bloody weapon and his bloody hands, saying, What have I done? He lies; he pretends; he would hide his doings from God. He has enticed his brother into a lonely field and slain him, thinking that none would rescue, and none see. He acts as the liar and the hypocrite in the very presence of God. The way of Cain is way of hypocrisy, falsehood, and defiance of God. God asks him of his brother; his answer is not only a lie, but a brazenfaced piece of impiety: "Am I my brother's keeper?" In this way he mocks God; utters the language of irreverence and defiance: "He is your favorite, why do you not keep him? I never pretended to keep him." Here mingled fear, shame, audacity, defiance are manifested. He would deny the deed, but dares not. He trembles, and would conceal it. He puts on a defiant air and attitude, as if to brave it out before the all-seeing One!

Such is the way of Cain! Mark his doom.

(1.) Despair. No cry for mercy, but merely, My punishment is greater than I can bear. So it is in other ages. The sinner's despair of mercy, or complaint against God for making his punishment so heavy, is the repetition of Cain's transgression and his doom. Why should a sinner despair on this side of hell? There is forgiveness to the uttermost; grace reaching far beyond the extremity of human guilt.

(2.) Banishment from God. He goes out from the presence of God, as if he could no longer bear that. He must go away from Paradise, the birthplace of the race, the old seat of worship. But what is this to the eternal banishment? Cain has no rest, moving to and fro without hope or aim, a fugitive and wanderer, seeking rest, finding none. Sad curse! Yet nothing to the eternal wandering!

(3.) Disappointment. He himself was his mother's disappointment, for she thought she had gotten the man-child. So is he a disappointment to himself. From first to last we see in him a disappointed man, trying everything, succeeding in nothing; building cities, roaming from place to place, to soothe his conscience, and fill up his heart's void. But in vain!

(4.) Fruitless worldliness. He is the heir of a barren world; for the whole world is his. He is possessor of a soil made unfruitful by a brother's blood; tilling and sowing, yet not reaping. A weary man, toiling for that which is not bread; trying to wring water out of the

world's dry sands and broken cisterns. Such is the career of thousands. Fruitless worldliness. A life of vanity; a soul utterly void; a being wholly wasted.

LESSON 9

THE MAN OF REST

"And Lamech lived an hundred eighty and two years, and begat a son; and he called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed." – Genesis 5:28-29

THIS is the utterance of faith; it is the voice of a believing man that we hear in Lamech's words. Lamech speaks because God had spoken to him. It is not mere parental yearning; it is not mere selfish weariness crying out under toil; it is not the expression of a dark and vague hope; it is faith speaking out the revelation which God had made to it regarding creation's deliverance; and it is the first indication we have as to the removal of the "curse," as to the "rest" and "consolation."

It is a double prophecy. By this I do not mean a doubtful or a conditional prophecy. There is no such thing as a conditional prophecy. If it is a prophecy, it is not conditional; and if it is conditional, it is not prophecy. A double prophecy is one that takes in two events, or persons, or places in one description; the near and the far; predicting both, while seeming to predict only one; as David, in the seventy-second Psalm, points both to Solomon and to a greater than Solomon; as Isaiah points to the Babylon of his day and Babylon the great. The prophet sketches a scene or person immediately before his eyes, but in language which intimates that a far greater is coming. The near or miniature sketch is so drawn as to bring out the full features of the larger and more distant.

So is it here with Lamech. God reveals to him the future of two persons and two things: (1.) his own son, and a far greater, of whom his son was but the shadow; (2.) the alleviation or removal of earth's curse, partially under Noah, fully under the greater than Noah. There are two remarkable prophecies before the flood, first, that of Enoch, concerning Messiah's coming with his saints, to destroy the wicked; which was a double prophecy, relating both to the flood and to the judgment at the Lord's coming; the second is that of Lamech concerning "the rest" of the saints (2 Thes. 1:7) and the removal of the curse. Let us look into this second prophecy.

1. THE CURSE ON THE GROUND.

When man sinned, the first stroke of the curse fell. It had now lasted

about fifteen centuries, unabated. It was something real: its results were both barrenness in what was good, and fruitfulness in evil. The whole creation groaned; the blight and sadness were felt everywhere. It was a record of human sin; God's visible testimony to the greatness of the first sin, the one sin of primal disobedience "Cursed is the ground for thy sake." It is not yet removed. Creation is still subject to vanity. Corruption, mortality, decay, death are here. It has been a long curse, yet it is the memorial of a single sin.

2. MAN'S TOIL AND WEARINESS.

The whole verse prepares us for weariness and heaviness of spirit, almost despair. The world was growing more wicked and more luxurious. It was increasing in population. Men were not allowed to eat flesh; nor to kill animals save for sacrifice. These animals, increasing rapidly, would require immense acreage. Man's toil would consequently be greatly on the increase; it would become quite oppressive and overwhelming. He did not know what to do, or which way to turn. Toil, toil, toil! This was his daily lot. In the sweat of his face he was made to eat his bread. The curse on the ground did not grow any lighter, and his labor grew heavier. With barrenness in good and fruit-fullness in evil, it demanded of him endless labor and weariness. He groaned under it along with a groaning creation. He was compelled to sympathize with the groaning and travailing creature. Such ought to be our feeling. Our toil may not be quite so oppressive; we do not so wholly depend on our toil; the appliances of art and the permission to eat animal food have alleviated our labors. But still creation groans, and man eats his bread in the sweat of his face.

3. MAN'S LONGING FOR COMFORT.

The words of the verse are those of the hireling looking for the shadow, and longing for rest. These patriarchs were aged men; some nearly a thousand years. One thousand years of toil! What a life! Lamech, when he uttered these words, was one hundred and eighty-two. Surely he had known toil and weariness beyond what we can do! Do we wonder that he longed for comfort, that he sighed for rest, and that he breathed out these deep longings for deliverance?

Are we not longing too? Is toil so sweet that we wish its continuance? Or is rest so terrible that we do not desire it: and say "how long"!

4. MAN'S EXPECTATION OF DELIVERANCE.

He knew that the case of earth was not hopeless. He would gather from the first promise that God meant some time or other, to undo the curse. And while he sympathized with the "groaning and travailing" of creation, he joined in its "earnest expectation." He sustained himself under his toil by the expectation of rest.

He was not satisfied to remain forever toiling and sweating. It was part of his creed to look for rest; to grasp the coming consolation. Man labored and was heavy laden; but he heard the voice of the true Noah saying, Come unto me, all ye that labor, and I will give you rest.

5. MAN'S EXPECTATION WAS CONNECTED WITH ONE INDIVIDUAL TO BE BORN IN DUE TIME.

Lamech had been taught of God to expect something in connection with his son, whom he named Noah, in consequence of this expectation. And in his time relief was granted, the alleviation, though not the removal, of the curse and the toil,

- (1.) Noah received a confirmation of the first blessing given to Adam before he fell;
- (2.) In his time man's life began to be shortened;
- (3.) Permission was granted to kill animals and eat their flesh;
- (4.) Special attention was directed to husbandry, "Noah began to be a husbandman." These partial alleviations given in connection with Noah were figures of the complete deliverance of creation in connection with a greater than Noah; in the day of the Son of man, the day of the manifestation of the sons of God, of those of whom Enoch prophesied "the Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints."

Thus we anticipate the deliverance of creation, the removal of the curse, in the day of the Son of man, when He shall say, Behold, I make all things new. The greater than Noah is at hand; and with Him the manifestation of the sons of God; and, with that, the rest which remained for the people of God; the times of the restitution of all things; when barrenness shall be exchanged for fruitfulness; and the wilderness rejoice and blossom as the rose: for we according to His promise look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness. Seeing, then, we look for such things, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!

LESSON 10

GOING OUT AND KEEPING OUT

"Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran." – Genesis 12:1-4

THUS begins the story of Israel's calling, as a nation. Like the great rivers of earth, it has a small beginning, one individual; a Chaldee of Ur; an idolater of Mesopotamia; with no recommendation or worthiness; a genuine specimen of God's electing grace, and of divine sovereignty, as well as of the power of the Holy Spirit.

So far as appears, God had not personally intervened, from Noah's time to this. The only kind of intervention was at Babel. Now he comes forth out of His silence and darkness. He speaks; indeed, He appears; He, as the God of glory, or "God of the glory" (Acts 7:2). The Shekinah re-appears; and out of it God speaks to Abram. The frequent use of the words "the Lord APPEARED to Abram," in connection with Stephen's reference to the glory, intimates this mode of revelation.

1. THE COMMAND.

It is sovereign and authoritative; it is explicit and uncompromising; it does not wait on our will or choice; it leaves no room for hesitation on our part. "Get thee out" are God's words to Abram. They refer to one single transaction, about which there can be no mistake; and lest there should be any mistake, the three things to be left are specified, country, kindred, father's house. The getting out is to be complete and decided. It is also to be immediate; no waiting, nor lingering, nor preparing; get out at once. This command is all the more peremptory from its not specifying the place to be gone to. With that he was not to concern himself. It was on the bare command of God that he was to act; putting himself blindfold into the hands of God. All that Abram was to know of his route or destination was this, "It is the land which I will show thee." Thus completely was he shut in and shut up to obedience.

2. THE PROMISE.

It is as directly from God as the command is; so that he can no more doubt the one than the other. It relates wholly to the future, much of it to the future of far ages. Yet it is a very explicit and blessed promise, for the fulfillment of which he had the divine truthfulness and unchangeableness. "God who cannot lie;" who "does not repent," this is the God both of the command and the promise. He gives both; let us accept both; not separating the one from the other. In this promise God comes forth strikingly as the one who will accomplish it all; "I will show;" "I will make;" "I will bless."

All is of the Lord and of no one else:

- (1.) A land, though unknown;
- (2.) numbers;
- (3.) blessing;
- (4.) honor;
- (5.) fountain of blessing;
- (6.) the occasion of blessing or cursing;
- (7.) the blessedness of the whole earth in him. Large promises these! Glorious blessings! Including all that Abram needed for eternity as well as time.

This gives a vision of Messiah and his glory, as well as of all earth under Him; for Abram is to be "heir of the world" (Rom. 4:11).

3. THE OBEDIENCE.

"He departed as the Lord had spoken to him." "He obeyed," says the apostle (Heb. 11:8). God called, he complied. He did not argue, nor linger, nor hesitate, nor look back. He set out at once. He did not know where he was going; not a step of the way or anything of the land. He had no earthly counselor or guide. Only the God of the glory, God in His shekinah, He went before him, as in the pillar-cloud. Everything connected with this obedience was supernatural and divine. God broke his earthly ties; enabled him to triumph over earthly affections; made his face like a flint against all opposition; took him by the hand and led him out. Here we have obedience in its simplest, purest form, believing, trusting obedience. "God has spoken," that is his answer to all suggestions from without or within. "God has spoken," that cheers and gladdens him. He could not mistake the voice, either its meaning or the place from which it came. That was enough for him. We need not ask particularly, was this the time of his conversion? Probably it was. It was

the day of God's power to him. It was what Christ's words were to the sons of Zebedee, or to Zaccheus. God spoke, and the Holy Spirit carried the message to the inner man. He was turned from dumb idols to serve the living God; he became heir of the righteousness which is of faith; became Messiah's ancestor, yet a trophy of Messiah's power.

There are some striking texts in subsequent scriptures which derive much light and point from this scene. They are the following :

(1.) Psa. 45:10, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider; and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house." God thus speaks to His chosen ones; the bride of Christ. Thus he speaks aloud to an unheeding world." Hear, and your soul shall live." Oh, listen now, turn your back on the world; your face to Jesus!

(2.) Matt. 16:25, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Christ's command is as explicit as that to Abram. "Come after me," come at once. Come now! Deny self and come! Deny self and take up your cross! Whatever hinders, come!

(3.) 2 Cor. 6:17, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate." Here the words are remarkably like those addressed to Abram. The command is, therefore, come out; be separate; touch not; the promise is like unto it, "I will receive you;" "I will be a father;" "Ye shall be my children." God speaks to us, and says, "Come out."

(4.) Rev. 18:4, "Come out of her, my people." In one aspect this is the likeliest to Abram's call, for it is a call out of Babylon. It suits these last days well. Come out of Babylon! Come out of every false church; every city of idols; every refuge of lies! Come out! Say not, I will stay, but worship the true God inside! No. Come out! This is God's command!

LESSON 11

THE SHIELD AND THE RECOMPENSE

"After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." – Genesis 15:1

THE full meaning of this "word of the Lord," which "came unto Abram in a vision," can only be understood by reference to the events narrated in the preceding chapter. Never had such an unequal battle been waged as between Abraham and these mighty kings. With his 318 servants he had pursued, conquered, spoiled thousands, perhaps tens of thousands. Truly he put his life into his hand, and with marvelous courage encountered the peril. On the back of this, God comes to him with "I am thy SHIELD." He had moreover, given up the spoil to others, reserving nothing for himself; and God comes in with His "I am thy exceeding great REWARD." He had done both of these in simple faith; having no previous command, or promise, or assurance of success; and God having tested his faith, comes to him with a blessed word of assurance: speaking to him in a vision, and calling him by name. Let us notice,

1. THE WORD OF CHEER.

"Fear not, Abram." It is God who speaks. He calls Abram by name, as one on familiar terms with Him; and no doubt Abram recognized the comforting voice and cheering words. How frequent throughout Scripture are the divine "fear nots"; how ready God is to utter them, even as a father to his trembling child. To Isaac He said, "Fear not, for I am with thee" (Gen. 26:24). To Jacob He said, "I am God, the God of thy fathers: fear not to go down into Egypt" (Gen. 46:3). Frequently to Israel He said the same words, "Fear not, for I am with thee" (Deu. 31:6, Isa. 41:10). And in many cases, as here, He names the name of him whom He is cheering; fear not Zacharias, fear not Mary, fear not Paul! God takes for granted that His servants may have cause for fear, that at times their hearts may fail them: fightings without and fears within; sorrows, storms, dangers, burdens, troubles, enemies. To meet and counteract the influence of these upon the soul He says, "Fear not." Yes, it is God, our God, who speaks this way. He knows our frame, and remembers that we are dust. He knows the world in which we live, and remembers that it is all adverse and hostile. He knows that Satan rages, and that his legions are all abroad. He knows that the spirit may be willing, yet the flesh is weak. And so He says to us, Fear not, be of good cheer. Jesus spoke this way on earth, and

He speaks this way still from heaven.

2. THE WORD OF SECURITY.

"I am thy shield." This is truly a divine form of expression, full of force and point. God does not say "I shield thee," but "I am thy shield." This latter is far stronger than the former; just as the expression, "He is our peace," is far stronger than "He gives us peace," or "He is our righteousness," is stronger than "He justifies us," or "He is our treasure" is stronger than "He makes us rich." Here God proclaims HIMSELF to be Abraham's shield. So is He the shield of all who are Abraham's seed.

The past, the present, and the future are all included in this.

(1.) I WAS, or have been, thy shield. He had been so in Abraham's case; memorably and marvelously so, in the recent conflict with these invaders from the east. Had God not been both sword and shield to him, how could he have ventured into, or come safely out of, such a conflict with such superior forces? So has He been to us, as every day of our past lives has testified, a perpetual and impenetrable shield.

(2.) I AM Thy shield. It is not the past alone that is witness to this protection. It is still continued. Each day we need the shield, each day we have it. Each day brings up a new battlefield and a new enemy; a new danger and a new assault. But God is our perpetual shield. Round and round us, above and beneath us, our complete panoply, our high tower. This is our daily security.

(3.) I WILL be thy shield. Abraham dwelt among enemies, dangers on every side; he was a stranger in a strange land; without a friend but God. He gets the assurance of perpetual protection. No evil shall attack, no weapon shall prosper, no enemy shall overcome or wound. God says to His church, "I will be thy shield." Her dwelling is among enemies, she is a lily among thorns, a sheep among wolves. The world is against her, hell is against her. If God were to permit it, she would be swept from earth in an hour. She has no might, no skill against such an array of deadly foes. Her sufficiency, her security is only of God. He is her shield. Not only does He defend her, but He is her shield. Yes; each of us may say, God is my shield, I am safe, I can defy the world, I can shake my fist at hell. I shall be more than conqueror through Him that loved me. Safe now, safe in days to come, safe in conflict, safe in evil days, safe in sorrow or in joy, safe on a sick-bed or a death-bed, safe forevermore. God the Lord is my sun and shield.

Who shall make me afraid? This is more than even the "shield of faith" and the "breastplate of righteousness"; it is a divine shield and breastplate, behind which I am absolutely and entirely secure. God Himself stands between me and danger. His omnipotence compasses me about. Am I not safe forever?

3. THE WORD OF RECOMPENSE.

Abraham had given up all and left Chaldea, he had refused to lay his hand on the spoil of the invaders whom he had defeated, he had parted with everything of earth, and now God comes in and promises to make up for all by giving HIMSELF. He does not say, I will recompense thee, but I am thy recompense. How forcible are the words? (1.) I am thy reward; (2.) I am thy great reward; (3.) I am thy exceeding great reward. How full and rich are these words of promise! Here is present, and there is ETERNAL reward. God does for us exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think. Not pardon, we have that already, it is far beyond that; not salvation, it is far beyond that; not heaven, nor glory, it is far beyond these. It is God Himself, He whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain! He is our reward. He HIMSELF!

In all this we find,

(1.) Strength for work and duty. What encouragement, comfort, invigoration is here! How can we weary in well doing, or shrink from peril? God is our shield and recompense.

(2.) Motive for self-denial and self-sacrifice. We are called to these. But God gives more than a command or call, He presents us with a motive, protection and everlasting reward. Shall we grudge the surrender, seeing the reward is so great?

(3.) A reason for calmness and steadfastness. God is with us. We are on His side, He is on ours. It is His work that we are doing, His battle that we are fighting, not our own. Let us not be ruffled nor moved. Let no opposition, provocation, aggravation, defeat, triumph of evil annoy us. Our shield is Omnipotence. Our reward is the fullness of God Himself.

LESSON 12

LIBERTY AND SERVICE

"Let my people go, that they may serve me." – Exodus 8:1

THUS God spoke of Israel in Egypt, commanding deliverance for them. It was a word of power, like, "Let there be light." Reluctant Pharaoh was compelled to let go of his grasp. The command was irresistible.

God adds His reason for the command and its peremptoriness, "that they may serve me." He did not need to give a reason, yet He does so; He justifies His claim upon them and against Pharaoh. God's authority over men is an infinitely reasonable one. He makes no claim in regard to which even our own consciences do not justify Him. He has a claim on us; and no other can compete with this. You must serve me, He says to us; they must serve me, He says to them who held them in bondage. The length, and strength, and apparent justice of other service cannot be taken into account when God puts in His claims.

In this way Christ speaks respecting His church, His elect; the Holy One of Israel respecting His Israel. He speaks to His enemies and theirs; to those who hold them in bondage, the Pharaohs of the world, to Satan, "Let my people go, that they may serve me." It is out of earthly bondage into heavenly liberty that He calls us; from the bondage of Satan to the liberty of Christ. It is both to a divine service and a divine liberty that we are called. These are the two things; and they are inseparable. Not liberty for its own sake, but liberty for the sake of service; not service without liberty, but service as the result of liberty. Liberty and service conjoined; not the one without the other, but hand in hand. "Freedom is a noble thing," yet its value consists in the position in which it places us for service.

But what I specifically notice here is the order of the two things, first liberty, and then service, implying that service is impossible without freedom. There may be Egyptian service, such service as will satisfy the gods of Egypt, without liberty, but not such as will please the God of Israel. There may be self-righteous service, mechanical service, Pharisaical service, the service of the outer man, without liberty, but not the glad service of the soul.

1. WE ARE IN BONDAGE.

Our natural condition is one of bondage. We are born in Egypt, not in Canaan; born in a prison; born with the shackles on our limbs; born slaves. Our wills are in bondage; our faculties are in bondage; our affections are in bondage; our whole souls are in bondage.

There is no free motion or free action of any part of us. All is constraint. We act under the sense of terror, or for a reward, or in order to obtain pardon. We do nothing freely or purely. Work done in chains is no work at all. Work done in order to purchase liberty is not acceptable work.

2. WE WERE MADE FOR LIBERTY.

Israel was not made for Egypt, nor Egypt for him. So we were not created for bondage and the prison-house. God made man both upright and free. His whole being, faculties, and affections, and will, were made free, truly free, with nothing of constraint upon them save the glad constraint of love. God did not create us bond slaves. Liberty is the proper, the normal condition of the creature.

3. WE CANNOT SERVE GOD WITHOUT LIBERTY.

We may do some things without it. The body can labor in a prison, and with restraints; but the soul must be free in order to serve; free in all its parts, so that nothing may be of constraint but willingly. Other services may be performed in any way, for wages, or under threat; but God's service must be performed freely in all its parts. We must be free in order that we may serve. It is not service in order to gain liberty, but liberty in order to perform service. This is God's order; and he who disregards it, or inverts it, is a servant of whom the Master cannot approve, whose service He rejects. Indeed, his is no service at all. Till we are free, we cannot serve. He that is not free can perform any duty correctly, no true work for God.

4. CHRIST CALLS US TO LIBERTY.

He came to open our prison doors; to bring us out of the house of Egypt. He came to break our chains, and to make us wholly free. He has stated the matter this way: (1.) the Son shall make us free, implying that the liberty comes directly from Himself; (2.) the truth shall make you free, teaching us that it is through the truth that He gives us the liberty. He liberates. His truth liberates. His Spirit liberates. With our chains broken

by His touch; our souls receiving His truth; ourselves filled with the spirit of liberty, we go forth as freed men to serve God. In the bondage of unpardoned sin, in the disquietude of uncertainty as to our relationship, we cannot serve God. It is not true service, or happy service, or loving service, or acceptable service. We must be let go that we may serve.

Have you been set free? Are you walking at liberty? Has the gospel brought its peace in to you? Is the Spirit of adoption teaching you to say, Abba, Father? You say you are endeavoring to serve God. But in what spirit? In love or dread? In gladness or in terror? In light or in gloom?

LESSON 13

THE DAY OF DESPAIR

"Intreat for me." – Exodus 8:28

PHARAOH is brought down from his arrogance. Not long before he had scoffed both at Moses and his God; now he is humbled, only for a season indeed, yet he is humbled. He confesses God; he becomes a supplicant to Moses and to his God. Is this the Pharaoh that said, "Who is the Lord?" How he has come down from his pride!

What brings him down? It might be (1.) true repentance; (2.) cunning; (3.) terror. It is only the last of these that is here at work, and his impressions pass away with the terror. He cares no more about God than he did before; but he desires to be delivered from these judgments. Now let us look beyond Pharaoh.

1. THE SINNER'S DAY OF PROSPERITY.

There is such a thing as prosperity even in this fallen world; prosperity for the wicked, "Lo, these are the ungodly that prosper in this world." They are not in trouble as other men. They revel in pleasure, they roll in wealth, they are decked with honor; all things go well with them. They say, "Tomorrow shall be as this day, and more abundant." The sinner sits at ease, and puts away the thought of trouble. He basks in sunshine, and laughs at storms. He sails onward with favoring winds, and believes in no shipwreck. No adversity for him!

2. THE SINNER'S DAY OF TROUBLE.

No prosperity lasts forever; it is not life-long, or even half a life-time. Then the clouds gather; the tempest breaks; the waves wash over the vessel, and it becomes a wreck. Sometimes it is one long day of trouble, after as long a day of peace. Sometimes it is the fluctuation, at brief intervals, of joy and sorrow, light and darkness, health and sickness, prosperity and adversity. Each man has his day or days of trouble. Let this be thoroughly considered and laid to heart. Care will come; distress will come; sickness will come; death will come; weariness will come. The sky will darken; the smile will vanish; the night will fall. These are certainties, O sinner, and perhaps very near. You cannot ward them off. Wise precautions cannot ward them off; or powerful friends; or prudent counselors; no; these will not help. God's word, God's purpose, will break

through all these, and lay you low. You will find what it is to be in the hands of the living God. He will deal with you. He is dealing with you now by His goodness; tomorrow He may be dealing with you in severity and much displeasure.

3. THE SINNER'S HELPLESSNESS.

He does not know what to do. He once thought himself strong; now he feels himself weak; unable to contend against his temptations. The current is too strong; he cannot swim against it. His enemies are numerous; his difficulties great; his friends fail; his conscience awakes; his heart trembles; what can he do? He is utterly helpless; and in his helplessness he turns coward.

4. HIS REMEMBRANCE OF GOD.

Up till now God had not been in all his thoughts; now he says, only God can help me. Man cannot; devils cannot; angels will not. Perhaps God will. His long despised God comes now to remembrance. So in danger the sinner cries. In shipwreck; in the plague; he cries.

5. HIS DREAD OF GOD.

He does not go straight to God; or if he does, it is in despair. He trembles before Him; afraid to look up. He is overawed, overpowered by a sense of God's greatness. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. God is to him the most terrible object of all, yet he cannot help but to be drawn to Him in some way. He is undone any way. Perhaps this dreadful God, who is more powerful than these evils, may assist him.

6. HIS APPEAL TO GOD'S PEOPLE.

He once despised them, hated, and shunned them; now he goes to them with, "Entreat for me." What a different man a saint seems now! He has something to say with God, and that is a great thing for a despairing sinner. He has influence at court. So he goes to him. How often has the stricken, afflicted sinner, had these words wrung from him, "Pray for me."

O sinner, look forward to your day of darkness. Prepare for it now. It is coming. How dreadful to be overtaken by it unprepared.

O sinner, go now to God; straight to God; not to Moses, nor to any saint;

but at once to God. Go, with all your sins, and burdens, and trials; go now! He will receive you, and bless you.

The day is coming when another cry shall be heard; when you shall cry on rocks and hills; and all in vain. Seek the Lord while he may be found! When Jesus Christ the great Judge may come, we do not know. He may come soon. Earth is growing old. Its sin is heavy upon it. Your sin adds to the load. It will soon be too heavy to bear. Then the vengeance comes. God's long-suffering is great, but not forever. The great day approaches. He that shall come, will come, and will not delay. Up and make ready! Up and watch!

LESSON 14

THE BLOOD OF DELIVERANCE

"It is God's passover." – Exodus 12:11

WE first notice:

1. THE NAME GIVEN TO THE ORDINANCE.

The Lord's, or God's, Passover. This reminds us of our New Testament feast, so similar in name, "the Lord's Supper." Both belong to the Lord. Both were instituted by him. Both referred to Him. The Passover and the Supper have no meaning without Him. He is the Alpha and the Omega of both. "The Lord" is Christ's New Testament name; but it is also His Old Testament. It is He the Son, the Messiah that is so often spoken of there under the name, "the Lord." As a result, we rest our belief that Christ is God, not so much on the fact that the names of God are applied to Christ, as on this greater fact, that the names of Christ are applied to God. It was of him that Eve said, "I have gotten a man from the Lord"; of Him Enoch spoke, "Behold, the Lord cometh"; of Him we read, "The Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive"; "it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth"; "The Lord said to Noah"; "the Lord said to Abram; for He who appeared to Saul appeared to Abraham; and so in regard to the Passover, "the Lord spoke unto Moses and Aaron."

2. THE PEOPLE THE ORDINANCE IS GIVEN TO.

"To Moses and Aaron." In almost all other places we read, "the Lord spoke to Moses" alone. Here it is specifically to both, to Him who was King in Jeshurun, and to Him who was Israel's High Priest. They were the representatives of the nation of kings and priests, even Israel; and representatives also of the church, the higher and truer "royal priesthood," to whom the Lord's Supper was to be given. To us then, as the true Moses and Aaron, kings and priests, the Lord's Supper is given. It is the banquet of God's royal priesthood. To us He says, Eat, drink. Do this in remembrance of me.

3. THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS GIVEN.

In the land of Egypt. It was a feast in Egypt, and yet not of Egypt. It did not consist of Egyptian viands. It spoke of deliverance from Egypt, and yet it was first to be observed in Egypt. It told of Egypt, and it told of

Canaan. So with the Lord's Supper. It is in the world, yet not of the world. It is given here, observed here, yet it points away from this; it reminds us of our heavenly inheritance.

4. THE INSTITUTION ITSELF.

It consists of two parts, according to the division of the apostle (Heb. 11:28): (1.) The feast; (2.) the sprinkling of blood. Let us examine these.

(1.) The feast. What is it? In itself, it is a lamb, without spot; a lamb roasted; with bones unbroken; bitter herbs; eaten in haste, staff in hand.

Symbolically. It is commemoration; it is testimony; it is nourishment; it is contrition; it is strength.

Such is the Supper of the Lord. It is a feast; the food is the Lamb of God. The bread and wine speak to us. The Supper is full of meaning. It is commemoration, testimony, nourishment. My flesh is meat indeed. Man eats better than angels' food. Take, eat, are the gracious words of the divine provider.

(2.) The sprinkling of blood. The feast and the blood must go together. The one hangs upon the other. It is not simply "blood," but "sprinkled" blood which we find in the Passover, the blood of the Lamb on which we feast. What then does this blood proclaim? What is it? What does it mean? There is life in question; for wherever the blood comes in there the question of life and death come in. Here there is then the giving of life for life. It is not cleansing that is the special signification of the Passover blood, though indirectly that may come in. It is something else. Let us see what it is.

It is the blood of separation. That blood was sprinkled on door-post and lintel; and by this Israel was separated from Egypt. The difference between them was marked by the blood. They in our day who deny the blood would obliterate the distinction between the church and the world. Hatred of the blood has been the mark of the world since the days of Cain. Love for it, and trust in it, the characteristic of the church of God from Abel downward. Israel dwells alone; isolated by the blood.

It is the blood of protection. "When I see it, I will pass over." That blood was Israel's shield. There seems a twofold kind of protection,

the blood warding off the destroying angel, and making him pass over; and God himself (attracted by the blood) passing over as a defender, between Israel and the angel (Isa. 31:5). God says, "When I see." The blood is ever before Him. We do not see it. It is outside, beyond our vision, shed over 2,000 years ago. But God sees it, and that is our security. We think upon the blood which God sees, and feel ourselves secure.

It is the blood of deliverance. It not merely protected in Egypt, but it delivered out of Egypt. It was this blood that saved: "I gave Egypt for thy ransom." There is death for Egypt, but life for Israel. Pardoned and set free, Israel turns his back on the land of bondage. That blood was the opening of his prison doors. It is still the blood that sets us free! Freedom through the blood is what we preach.

It is the blood of doom. It was doom to Egypt. It did not merely say, God is for Israel, but he is against Egypt; indeed, there is death for Egypt, for God's enemies. It is still the blood that condemns. For all who are not under its shield there is only death! It seals the sinner's death! The wrath of God abides on him. The blood that would have saved now dooms.

LESSON 15

HOW GOD DEALS WITH SIN AND THE SINNER

Leviticus 4:27-35

WE have here, (1.) the sinner. He is one of the common people; "any man;" "whosoever." (2.) The sin. It is one of ignorance; he is not aware of it; conscience did not take cognizance of it; he has forgotten it. (3.) The remedy. It is a sin-offering; this only can make it pass as completely from God's memory, as it has passed from his own. (4.) The atonement. It is by blood; through the intervention of priesthood; no atonement without the blood of a substitute. (5.) The connection between the sinner and the atonement. He lays his hands on the sacrifice, for a two-fold reason; to identify himself with it; to transfer his sin to it; he says, Let this stand instead of me, its life and death for my life and death. (6.) The forgiveness. The sin passes away; there is no condemnation; it is instantaneous, complete, perpetual pardon.

Such was the symbol. Full and expressive, revealing to us atonement and pardon through the one great sacrifice. Let us see what this old sin-offering teaches us.

1. WHAT GOD THINKS OF SIN.

It is something which must not be slighted. It is infinitely hateful, calling for condemnation and wrath. Nothing light or trivial about it. Not to be jested with, or transiently frowned upon, or forgotten in a day. It calls for special marks of wrath. It is the abominable thing which He hates; its beginning is wrath and death, its end is hell. And as He thinks so does He want us to think. What do you think of sin? What is your opinion of its nature, its evil, its deserving?

2. HOW HE DEALS WITH IT.

He does not despise nor forget it. He deals with it as a Judge. He estimates it as a Judge. He condemns it as a Judge. He inflicts punishment as a Judge. This must be either executed on ourselves personally, or on our substitute. Condemnation must be proclaimed; the penalty must be executed,

(1.) He condemns sin. He gave the law to condemn sin. He set up the cross to condemn it more. The soul that sins, it shall die. The wages of sin is death.

(2.) He provides a sin-bearer. He does not leave us to do this; but does it Himself. He not only appoints the sin-offering, but He provides the victim. His Son, the Word made flesh, He is the appointed Sin-bearer, divine and human in his constitution, perfect in all respects, sufficient for the great undertaking, able to bear wrath without being consumed.

(3.) He transfers the guilt. The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. The chastisement of our peace was on Him. He whose is the right to retain or transfer the guilt transfers it to a substitute.

He has provided the atonement. His appointed High Priest has made the atonement. This atonement is now a past fact. It is done. The sin-offering has been brought. The blood has been shed. The propitiation has been accomplished. God has done it all, without man's help, or desire, or concurrence. Nothing more is needed now in the shape of atonement for the most guilty. No more blood, no more fire, no more endurance of wrath. It is all done! Nothing can be added to it or taken from it. Love is now free to flow out.

3. HOW HE DEALS WITH THE SINNER.

He bids him come for pardon, and assures him of getting it at once, freely, on the ground of the provided atonement, and simply as a sinner. His object is to connect the sinner with the propitiation; for so long as they remain separate there is no benefit resulting to man from the shed blood. He provides in this way for the connection of the sinner.

(1.) He issues a declaration concerning His own free love, His goodwill to men, His willingness to pardon any sinner. "God so loved the world." "God, who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith He loved us." Thus we have God's own assurance of a personal welcome to each of us, as we are. We do not make the welcome personal by our prayers or feelings; we avail ourselves of an already existing personal welcome to each sinner, as a sinner.

(2.) He issues a testimony to the completeness of the atonement. He raised up His Son from the dead as the visible testimony. But besides this He has in various ways given full testimony as to the sufficiency and suitableness of the atonement.

(3.) He issues a promise of forgiveness to everyone who will receive this testimony. "It shall be forgiven him," is His promise to everyone who believes. In this way forgiveness becomes a matter of certainty to everyone who connects himself with the divine sin-offering.

Perhaps you say, I see that God has provided propitiation, that this is complete, and available for me, but how am I to be so connected with it as to obtain the pardon? Everything depends on this connection being established, for without it there is no pardon. Now, how did the Israelite connect himself with the sin-offering? He simply took the lamb and brought it to the priest and said, Let this stand for me, laying his hand on it and thereby transferring all his guilt to it. So we, by receiving the testimony and the promise, connect ourselves with the divine atonement. We go to God saying, Let this life and death be for my life and death. We consent to be dealt with on the footing of another, not our own, and immediately the personal exchange takes place. He gets all our evil, we get all His good. Our demerit goes to Him, His merit comes to us. We take the royal grant of life and righteousness through the life and death of another. Pardon is secured, and ought to be a thing as sure and as conscious to us, as to the Israelite after he had brought the sacrifice and seen it laid on the altar.

LESSON 16

THE FIRE QUENCHED

"The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out." – Leviticus 6:13

THIS was one of God's special commandments to Israel, and no doubt has a special meaning both to them and to us. For he speaks no random words; his trumpet utters no uncertain sound. He says only what he means, and he means all he says. His words are profoundly real; more so than those of the deepest thinker of any age; and far more enduring; for they are eternal words, embodying eternal truths. The fire, the altar, the sacrifice, the tabernacle, have all passed away; but the truth embodied in these remains forever. It is for our instruction as truly as for Israel's.

1. THE FIRE.

Fire in general is the symbol of wrath. It is sometimes the figure of purifying; but more commonly of anger, divine anger, anger on account of sin; for in no other connection do we ever read of divine anger. Not personal affront, or impulse, or resentment, or partiality, or ill-humor; none of these are ever connected with God's wrath. Only SIN! The history of fire in Scripture is very instructive. It begins in Paradise, and ends in the last chapter of Revelation. There is the flaming sword; the fire of the sacrifice; the fire of Sodom; the fire of Egypt's plagues; the fire of the pillar; the fire of Sinai; the fire of Korah; the fire enfolding itself of Ezekiel; the "unquenchable fire"; the fire that accompanies Christ's second coming; the fire of Apocalyptic judgment; the lake of fire; the fire that comes down from heaven, that is to consume the ungodly; these are some of the memorable allusions to fire in Scripture. Most of these are connected with the Shekinah or visible symbol of the divine presence, intimating that it is from that presence that the fire proceeds; even from God Himself. In this way God suggests most solemnly that there is such a thing as wrath. Yes, there is wrath; now hidden, one day to be revealed; wrath which the wicked treasure up against the day of wrath. God is not too benevolent, too merciful, to be angry. If there is no anger in God, the Bible utterly deceives us. A large, very large portion of it is quite unmeaning, or rather false. The expulsion from paradise, the flood, Sodom, sacrifice, pain, death, sorrow, the law, the cross, the unquenchable fire, these are very plain intimations of wrath, wrath against sin; wrath for the punishment, not merely for the deliverance or warning of the sinner. All the ills that flesh is heir to are originally and in

their proper interpretation (however over-ruled) expressions of divine anger. How terrible for a sinner to be confronted with an angry God!

How hateful a thing must sin be to excite that anger; to be the one thing that provokes His wrath.

2. THE ALTAR.

The word means the place of sacrifice. It was elevated; implying that what was placed on it was lifted up to be presented to God. There was but one altar of sacrifice, one spot for the sinner to meet God. It was the most essential part of tabernacle and temple; without it there could be no place of worship for a sinner. A sinner can only worship at an altar; can only meet God there. Why? Let us see. There are two things; very prominent and visible about the altar, the fire and the blood; the fire the symbol of wrath; the blood the symbol of the effects of that wrath, in the infliction of punishment. Therefore while the altar proclaimed wrath, it also proclaimed wrath appeased in consequence of the deserved punishment having been inflicted. Condemnation and pardon were in this way fully expressed; hatred of sin, yet love to the sinner; inexorable justice, inexhaustible grace. No sin pardoned without first being punished (either in person or by substitute); no debt cancelled without being fully paid. A just God, and a Savior; not only a Savior though a just God, but a Savior because a just God. Thus the altar was,

(1.) The place of condemnation. There God condemned the sinner and his sin. Condemnation was the first thing the altar exhibited and proclaimed.

(2.) The place of confession. The sinner comes, not to hide, nor to extenuate, nor to excuse, nor to deny, but to confess his sin.

(3.) The place of pardon. The pardon is the result of the condemnation, the condemnation of the substitute or surety. First condemnation, then confession, then pardon; free, and large, and irrevocable.

(4.) The place of meeting with God. The one spot on which God and the sinner can meet. Only over blood, over death, can the great business of salvation be transacted, and the great question of pardon settled between the sinner and God. There only is it lawful or honorable for God to meet with the sinner; there only is it safe or comfortable for the sinner to meet with God. There the great reconciliation takes place.

The cross is the altar. At the cross we meet with God and God with us. There we learn our condemnation and our deliverance, our death and our life. There we confess, and there we are freely forgiven. There we know what sin is, and what grace is! Our God is a consuming fire; yet God is love.

The fire upon this altar was peculiar in many respects.

(1.) It was kindled by God. At first it was lighted directly from heaven, from the shekinah-glory. It was God's own fire.

(2.) It was fed with the fat of the sacrifices. The peace offering is specifically mentioned in connection with this. As if that which ratified the peace was that which satiated the fire.

(3.) It was never to go out. Once kindled, it was to burn always. It needed no rekindling. It was kindled by God, but fed and kept up by man. In the case of the lost the fire of God is eternal and unquenchable; and in the case of the saved it is only quenched, because exhausted in and by Him who, as the eternal one, endured the wrath of eternity during his brief life on earth. Good news to sinners! **THE FIRE is QUENCHED.** There is one who has borne wrath for sin. He who accepts that one wrath-bearing is personally delivered from it all. But he who rejects it and tries to bear the wrath himself must reap what he sows, and bear it forever.

There is but one tabernacle; one altar; one fire; one sacrifice; one Priest! Not two ways of approaching God, or two ways of pardon; only one! He who accepts and uses that one is safe; he who tries another must perish forever. Yes, there is but one cross, one Christ; one Savior. But He is sufficient. "Christ is all and in all."

LESSON 17

THE VISION FROM THE ROCKS

"From the top of the rocks I see him." – Numbers 23:9

IT was of Israel and Israel's glory that the false seer of Pethor spoke. He stood upon the top of Moab's barren rocks, and gazed down on the happy nation, whom God had delivered from Egypt, had brought through the desert, and was about to lead into the land flowing with milk and honey. It was with wonder, perhaps with envy too, that Balaam looked on the goodly tents beneath him. So, from this desert land and these desert hills, we gaze upon the church on her way to Canaan, about to be settled in the blessed land and holy city. And when we gaze, what do we see?

1. THE RUGGEDNESS OF THE LAND OF OUR PRESENT JOURNEY.

It is the region of hostility as well as barrenness. This is not our rest. These dark mountains are not our home. We may pitch our tents among them for a season, or climb to the top to gaze around us. But they are no dwelling-place for us. We may look on Canaan from Pisgah, but Pisgah will not do for a home. Nebo lies hard by Pisgah, and Nebo tells of death, not of life, mortality is here. This is the land, not of Israel, but of Moab; and its gods are Baal, not God. We could not abide here.

2. THE GLORIOUS LAND.

Afar off just now, but still visible, still beautiful. It is the Paradise of God; it is the new Jerusalem; the city which hath foundations; the new heavens and new earth, wherein dwells righteousness. The vision gives us a wondrous contrast between what we are and what we shall be, making us long for the day of entrance.

3. A PEOPLE DELIVERED FROM A PRESENT EVIL WORLD.

Once in bondage, now free; once groaning under oppression, now in the service of a heavenly Master, and heirs of the world to come; the red sea crossed, and now between them and their persecutors as an iron wall. Forgiven and redeemed; with their backs on Egypt, and their faces to Jerusalem. "A people saved by the Lord."

4. A PEOPLE SUSTAINED BY GOD HIMSELF.

Theirs is the hidden manna, the water from the smitten rock. God feeds them; God gives them the living water. It is not man but God who cares for them. All that they have they owe to Him who has delivered them. They feed on angel's food; indeed, better, the very bread of God; on Him whose flesh is meat indeed, whose blood is drink indeed.

5. A PILGRIM BAND.

They are strangers on the earth; this is not their home; here is not their city. Their loins are covered, and their staff is in their hand, and they are hastening onward. No sitting down; no taking ease; no folding of their hands. Forward, still forward, is their watchword! Theirs is a pilgrimage, not a pleasure-tour. They must not linger.

6. A PEOPLE BOUGHT WITH A PRICE.

Their ransom has been blood; and they are not their own. Another life has gone for theirs. They have been plucked from death and the grave because another has died and risen for them. To that other they belong, not to themselves, nor the flesh, nor the world.

7. A PEOPLE LOVED WITH AN INFINITE LOVE.

The banner that is over them is love. The song they sing is love, "Unto Him that loved us." It is a love which passes knowledge; a love without bound or end; a love eternal and divine. All around and above them is love, the love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are the monuments of love; the witnesses of love, free love, forgiving love, redeeming love; love beyond that which angels know, a love which constrains them, purifies them, urges them forward, gladdens all their way.

8. A PEOPLE PREPARING TO PASS OVER TO THE SUBSTANTIAL LAND.

It is within sight; a few days, perhaps less, will bring them over. Their journey is nearly done. Their toil and weariness will soon be exchanged for rest and glory. And "now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." From the top of the rocks they can see Jerusalem, and Olivet, and Bethlehem; and get glimpses of the whole outstretched land. It is a land of plenty, where they shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; it is a land of light, where there is no night; a land of blessing, where there

is no curse; a land of gladness, where sorrow does not come; a summer land, where the frosts of winter do not chill; a calm sunny land, where storms not aggravate and shadows do not fall; a land of health, where the inhabitant will not say, I am sick; a land of peace, where the war-trumpet never sounds; a land of life, where corruption and mortality do not enter, where death and the grave are unknown; a land of union, where broken ties are all reknit, and broken hearts all healed. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes! (Rev. 7:17.) There Jesus reigns; there we reign with him.

LESSON 18

THE DOOM OF THE DOUBLE-HEARTED

"Balaam also, the son of Beor, they slew with the sword." – Numbers 31:8

BALAAAM had taken the field against Israel, against a people whom he had pronounced blessed, whom he had pronounced invincible both by earth and hell. Yes; Balaam "the son of Beor," he, and not another with the same name, he rushes on the bosses of the Almighty's shield; he defies Israel and Israel's God!

But he fails. He would have cursed Israel; but he could not. He counseled Moab to seduce Israel by temptation, and his device succeeded too well. He now fetches his last stroke. In vain He perishes shamefully. He is slain with the sword which he had defied.

Such is the end of the backslider; of one who knew the truth but did not do it; who once said, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." It was certainly not the end he prayed for; yet it was the end to which his whole life had been tending. He reaped what he sowed, and in him "God was not mocked." He died as he lived, in fellowship with Moab, yet in heart persuaded that Israel was the beloved of the Lord, and that God was God. His life had been with Midian, and so was his death. His grave is with the unclean. He passes from earth with none to soothe his death-bed and close his eyes; none to lament for him or to build his monument. Sad end of a life of halting and indecision, and resistance of the Spirit, and braving of conscience, and rejection of light, and wretched covetousness. He loved the wages of unrighteousness, and he had his reward.

Let us see what he wanted and how he failed; how ambitious he was, yet what a life of utter failure and disappointment his was. He desired to rise, but instead he sunk. He desired to be rich, but he lost everything. What a wasted life! Yet the life of one who knew better things but did not do them; who knew that the world was vanity, yet followed it; who knew that Israel's portion was the best, yet chose that of Moab; who knew the true God and the true Messiah, but preferred the idolatries of Israel's enemies. He saw Him from the top of the rocks, but that was all. He got a passing glimpse of the cross, but no more. It was all he saw of the way of

life, so he plunged into death and woe.

1. HE WANTED TO SERVE TWO MASTERS.

These were the same as the Lord in later days designated God and mammon. He did not want to offend either; to please both. He was like Issachar crouching between two burdens. But it would not do. He failed. Such is the certain failure of all who make a similar attempt. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." He loved the one master, mammon; and he dreaded the other; but would attempt to do the will of both. He could not afford to lose the favor of either. Miserable life! More miserable death! The life and death of one whose whole career was one long attempt to do the bidding both of God and the devil.

2. HE WANTED TO EARN TWO KINDS OF WAGES.

The wages of righteousness and the wages of unrighteousness (2 Pet. 2:15) were both in his eyes; he desired to have the pay both of God and of the devil. He was unwilling to do or say anything which would deprive him of either. He was as cautious and cunning as he was covetous. He would not work without wages; and he would work for a hundred masters if they would only pay him well. How like many so-called "religious" men amongst ourselves.

3. HE WANTED TO DO TWO OPPOSITE THINGS AT THE SAME TIME.

He wished both to bless and to curse. He was willing to do either according to how it might serve his interests. The only question with him was, "Would it pay?" If the blessing would pay, he would take it; if the curse would pay, he would take it. If both would pay, he would take them both. Blessing and cursing were both alike to him, confessing and denying the true God, worshipping Baal or God, it mattered not, if by "this craft he could have his wealth." So it is with many among us. If Sabbath-keeping will pay, they will keep the Sabbath; if Sabbath-breaking will pay, they will break the Sabbath. True Balaams, without principle, without faith, and without fear!

4. HE WANTED TWO KINDS OF FRIENDSHIP.

He would like to be friends with everybody. Perhaps he was timid; of those whom Scripture calls "fearful" (Rev. 21:8); perhaps, also, he was ambitious, and sought great things for himself wherever these could be

obtained (Jer. 45:5); certainly he had before him "the fear of man which bringeth a snare," and the love of man's approval which brings no less a snare; he dreaded Israel's God, of whom he knew much, but he dreaded also Moab's gods, though whether he really believed in them we do not know. Made up of these contradictions, and acting not by faith but unbelief, he tried to secure the friendship of all whom he counted great, whether in heaven or in earth. He shut his eyes not only to the sin but to the impossibility of such a course; he did not see that the friendship of the world is the enemy of God, and that whosoever will be the friend of the world must be the enemy of God.

5. HE WANTED TO HAVE TWO RELIGIONS.

He saw religion to be a paying concern, a profitable trade, and he was willing to accept it from anybody or everybody, to adopt it from any quarter if it would raise him up in the world, and make his fortune. Perhaps he thought all religions equally right or equally wrong, equally true or equally false. He would rather not offend any god if a lie could help it. He would make concessions to "religious prejudices" of any kind if the prejudiced people will only help him on. He was like Erasmus of old, whom a German writer describes this way, "Erasmus belongs to that species of writers who have all the desire to build God a magnificent church; at the same time, however, not giving the devil any offense, to whom, accordingly, they set up a neat little chapel close by, where you can offer him some touch of sacrifice at a time, and practice a quiet household devotion for him without disturbance." Such was Balaam; two gods and two religions he wanted to have.

But this double service, and double friendship, and double religion would not do. He could make nothing by them. They profited him nothing either in this life or that to come. His end was with the ungodly, his portion with the enemies of Israel. And his soul, where could it be? Not with Israel's God, or Israel's Christ, or in Israel's heaven. He reaped what he sowed.

He was a good specimen of multitudes in these last days. An educated and intelligent man, shrewd and quick-seeing, of respectable character, high in favor with the rich and great, a religious man, too, after a fashion, not unsound in his creed, for he acknowledges God as the true God. But he is fond of the world, fond of money, fond of promotion; one that would not let his religion stand in the way of his advancement; who could pocket all principles if he could pocket a little gold along with them; hollow of heart, but with a fair outside; just an Erasmus; no Luther, no Calvin, no Knox, no confessor, no martyr. His worldly interests are the

main thing to him. He would rather not risk offending God, but yet he would not like to lose Balak's rewards and honors. He would rather not take up his cross, nor deny himself, nor forsake all for his God. Religion with him is not just a thing to be suffered for, at least if he can help it.

So is it with multitudes amongst us. They want as much religion as will save them from hell; not a bit more. The world is their real God; gold is their idol; it is in mammon's temple that they worship. Love God with all their heart! They don't so much as understand the meaning of such a thing. Sacrifice riches, place, honor, friends to Christ! They scoff at the thing as madness.

Oh, be on the side of God, out and out. Don't trifle with religion. Don't mock God and Christ. Love not the world. Be religious in your inmost soul. Don't mistake sentimentalism for religion, or a good character for the new birth. You may go very far and yet not be a Christian. You may follow Christ in some things; but if not in all, what is your following worth? This world *or* the world to come, that is the alternative; not this world *and* the world to come. Christ all or nothing. The soul more precious than worlds, or utterly worthless.

No middle ground; no half-discipleship; no compromise. No. The friendship of the world is enmity with God. Come out and be separate. The new birth, or no religion at all.

Look to your latter end! What is it to be? Where is it to be? With whom is it to be? Anticipate your eternity. Is it to be darkness or light, shame or glory?

Do not sear your conscience by praying Balaam's prayer, "Let me die the death of the righteous." What will that benefit you? It is the life of the righteous that God is calling you to lead and he will take care of your death. Decide, do not hesitate; or else surely yours will be a wretched life and a still more wretched death. What will gold, or honor do for you when you lie down to die, or rise up to be judged?

LESSON 19

DO NOT BE BORDER DWELLERS

"Go in and possess the land." – Deuteronomy 10:2

ISRAEL passed through many changes in their history; but here we have its termination, the possession of the land. They were bondsmen, wanderers, outsiders, borderers; but they were not to remain that way; they were to possess the land. Here their earthly history, which began with Abraham, ends. Let us learn from this something as to ourselves and our history.

1. WE ARE NOT TO BE WITHOUT A LAND.

We are to have a country and a city. When in the world, we have these in a certain way, but they are all carnal, they pass from us and we pass from them. The world's cities and possessions will not do for us. They cannot fill us, nor satisfy us, nor abide with us. Even when in the world, we are truly strangers; landless, city less, homeless. And after we have come out from the world we are strangers, though not as we were before; for a land, a city, a home have been secured to us. Sinners, God offers you the better Canaan!

2. WE ARE NOT TO BE DWELLERS IN EGYPT.

The house of bondage is not for us. Pharaoh cannot be our king. We must, like Moses, refuse to be called the sons of Pharaoh's daughter. We must go out, not fearing the wrath of the king; counting the reproach of Christ's greater riches than Egypt's treasures.

3. WE ARE NOT TO BE DWELLERS IN A BARREN LAND.

The wilderness may do for a day, but not for a permanent home. Ishmael may have the desert, Israel must have the good land, the land flowing with milk and honey.

4. WE ARE NOT TO BE BORDER DWELLERS.

To be out of Egypt is one step, to come up to the borders of Canaan is another; but that is not to be all. We are not outsiders, never crossing the boundary; nor outsiders, belonging to neither region, ever crossing and

recrossing the line, as if we had no wish to stay or no portion in the land. The border lands are not for the church, nor for any one calling himself a Christian, an Israelite indeed.

5. WE ARE TO GO IN AND POSSESS.

Out of Egypt, out of the wilderness, across the borders, into the very heart of the land, Judah's hills, Ephraim's vales, Issachar's plains, Manasseh's pastures, Naphtali's lakes, and Zebulun's fertile reaches. We go in and take possession, leaving all other lands and regions behind. It is the God-chosen, God-given land. Let us enter it. It is rich, substantial, well watered, let us possess it. We do not want to merely survey it, or pitch our tents in it, but build our residences there, to dwell in it forever.

What I gather specially from our text is that we are not to be borderers; not merely not Egyptians, nor Ishmaelites, but not borderers. The place to which God invites us is the land, the kingdom, the city. Just now, of course, it is but the promise, for the kingdom has not yet come. But I speak of the promise as if it were the thing itself, for the promise is God's, not man's.

There are many borderers in our day; half and half Christians; afraid of being too decidedly or intensely religious. They are not Egyptians, they are not perhaps quite outsiders, for they occasionally seem to cross the line and take a look of the land from some of its southern hills. But they are borderers. They have not boldly taken up their abode in the land; they have not entered in nor possessed it. They are vacillators, worshippers of two Gods, trying to secure two kingdoms and to lay up two kinds of treasures. Let me speak of and to these.

Why shouldn't you be border dwellers?

(1.) It is sin. It is not your misfortune merely, it is your guilt. That half-heartedness and indecision is about the most sinful condition you can be in. Borderer, you are a sinner; a sinner because a borderer!

(2.) It is misery. You cannot be happy in that half-and-half state. You don't know what you are, or whose you are, or where you are going. You are sure of nothing good; only of evil. Were you dying in that state, were you cut off on the borders, you are lost; and does not that thought make you truly wretched?

(3.) It is danger. You think perhaps that because you have gone a little

way that all is well; or at least that you are out of danger. No. The danger is as great as ever. Were you to die on the borders, only almost a Christian, you are as sure of hell as if you had died in Egypt.

(4.) It is abomination to God. It is an insult to him. It says that you do not care for him or his substantial land. That half-heartedness is abominable to God. It is like Laodicea, or perhaps worse. Borderer, beware of thus provoking and insulting God.

(5.) It is loss to yourself. Even just now, how much you lose. You might be so happy! If decided and sure, you might have such peace! And then the prospect of such a land! What a loss! Yes, your own interests as well as God's honor demand decision. It is such a large, glorious land! It is so foolish, and so cowardly to hold back. Oh decide. Be a border dweller no more. Enter in and possess the land at once!

LESSON 20

THE OUTLINES OF A SAVED SINNER'S HISTORY

"He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye." – Deuteronomy 32:10

WE might take this figuratively, of Abraham, in Chaldea; or of Israel in Egypt; but Moses is speaking literally of the Sinaitic wilderness, and of Israel there. No sooner had they crossed the Red Sea than they became wanderers in the desert. There God found them; he came to them. It was truly a desert land; without bread, or water, or dwellings, or cities. All heat, barrenness, danger, terror. He met them, came to them, took their hand, and became their guide (Deu. 1:31; Deu. 1:33; Neh. 9:19); by day and night he kept and led them for forty years; taught, protected, watched, as if they had been the tenderest part of the tenderest member of His body. Such was Israel's story, until brought to Canaan; and such that of every Israelite indeed, every saved sinner from his first arousing till he enters into the joy of his Lord. Consider,

1. THE SINNER IN HIS NATIVE COUNTRY.

That land of his nativity is a desert waste; it is the far country into which the prodigal went; the world where all is evil. It is a barren land, without comfort, or safety, or friends, or family. No living bread to feed his famished soul. No fountain of living water to quench his thirst. No peace, nor rest, nor gladness; no shelter from the wrath to come. He is wretched and empty; a poor wanderer of the desert, a man without a home.

2. THE SINNER FOUND BY GOD. (Jer. 2:2)

The three parables of our Lord bring this out: the lost sheep found by the Shepherd; the lost coins found by the woman; the lost son found by his father. It is not the sinner that seeks God, but God the sinner; and when God comes He finds him in the land of barrenness, and famine, and danger; He finds him in his sin and wretchedness; a child of wrath, an heir of hell. He goes in quest of him; seeks him; saves him. By convictions, by terrors, by disappointments, by a sense of want, by weariness; by these he pursues him from valley to valley, from refuge to refuge; and not by these only, but by a thousand such things great and

small. Each believer, as he looks back reminds himself of this, "He found me in a desert land, a waste howling wilderness." Ask them all, and they will tell you this. Ask Abraham, Moses, Manasseh, Zaccheus, Paul; ask the Corinthians, the Thessalonians, they will tell you the same story, "He found me in a desert land; "He chose me, sought me out, found me, called me, sent from above, took me, and drew me out of many waters. I was a lost sheep, but He found me! A prodigal, but He found me! Some in childhood, some in youth, some in adulthood. Yet all the same at last.

3. THE SINNER UNDER GOD'S CARE.

The finding is not the ending, but the beginning of God's dealing with him; which from first to last is all marvelous; the display of wisdom and love.

(1.) Guidance. No place needs a guide like the desert. One gets utterly bewildered in its intricacies and labyrinths of rocks and plains. The one who finds him knows this, and takes him under his guidance, so that at every turn, every step, he shall be sure of being in the right way. Indeed, often God brings him into circumstances, in which there can be no help save in Himself. The desert is pathless, the sinner is ignorant; there are false guides, uncertain ways, as well as darkness and enemies. Therefore God does lead us! By His word, His providence, His rod, His hand, His eye; by sorrows and joys, prosperities and adversities; by the footsteps of the flock; hedging up our way; denying us our own will. He "leads us about;" not directly, but with many a winding, and apparent turning back; many stages and unlikely paths. He does not take us at once to Canaan, but leads us about; for wise ends; of grace and discipline, and purifying; for the manifestation of Himself and the overthrow of Satan. What a leader! Whatever be the entanglements, briars, thorns, darkness, He will guide us; onward, still onward, to the city of habitation; we come up out of the wilderness leaning on the Beloved. We pray, "thy Spirit is good, lead us to the land of uprightness."

(2.) Instruction. One of his first words is, "Learn of me." The sinner needs his teaching, divine, not human teaching; as to what sin is, himself, God, Christ, the cross, the love of God, the grace of Christ, the glory to be revealed. These God teaches us. Every day and hour is a teaching time; and He who has found us is one who has compassion on the ignorant.

(3.) Protection. He comes at once under the shadow of the divine

shield; so that he is kept by the power of God; "preserved in Christ."
No enemy prevails; no weapon injures, no evil comes near; he is made more than conqueror. How careful God is of the new found one! How sensitive about injury done to him, as if done to Himself, to the apple of His eye! What a guardian, what a protector do we find in God! The sun shall not strike by day or the moon by night; nor shall the sand of the desert blow into our eyes.

Men and women of earth, are you still wanderers? Lost, unguided, uninstructed, unprotected? What will the desert do for you? Will it be an equivalent to Canaan and Jerusalem? God pursues you, appeals to you, seeks to win you, asks you, Have I been a wilderness to you? He calls! In every way, and by every agency; by the gospel, by the law, by a sense of want, by sorrow, by pain. He calls, he pursues! Flee no longer from him. Let him overtake you today!