

WRITINGS OF H L ROSSIER - VOLUME 1

by H.L. Rossier

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by H.L. Rossier (Volume 1), compiled for study and devotional reading.

100 Chapters

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01.00. Job's Three Questions and Their Answers

Job's Three Questions and Their Answers H. L. Rossier.

(The quotations from the Bible are from Darby's "New Translation The First Question, "Wherefore was I born?" The Second Question, "How can man be just with God?" The Third Question, "If a man die shall he live again?"

Hardly is man born than he is full of questions. From his early childhood he faces numberless problems and unsolvable riddles. This must be so, for man should not pass through this earth in indifference. But how many questions remain unanswered — or what is much worse — are answered wrongly!

Most people in the days of outward prosperity are content with satisfying their earthly needs. They pass their days as a dream and put away all disquieting thoughts. But when they get into trouble and straits when all human supports break down; then they ask for the original causes of things, seeking comfort in some reply to their questions. Unfortunately it often happens then that the "liar and murderer from the beginning" gives the answer and drives them to despair, or what is worse still, by poisonous lies numbs their minds again.

True believers have, through Jesus; received a satisfactory answer to all questions. Blessed be His name! God Himself is fully satisfied, why should not the believer be so also? In the book of Job we find the highest and deepest questions, and some of them elucidated in a way far exceeding any other revelations in the Old Testament. It is marvellous to see how in this book all-important questions that man can put in his seeking for forgiveness, and in his searching out the mysterious ways of God are satisfactorily answered. Even the presumptuous cavillings of the doubter are here silenced. For these reasons the study of the book of Job can only be a blessing to the believer and especially in these days when many Christians are, perhaps, like Job, tempted to argue with God. May the Lord therefore help us to learn from the book of Job, to the glory of His Name!

Job was evidently a man of fine perceptions and deep emotions. All the more then must he have suffered from the blows that Satan was allowed to deliver. But no word of murmuring escaped his lips. The temptation only brought to light his perfect submission to God's will. Even whilst suffering the greatest bodily tortures and when his wife spoke as "one of the foolish women" he still uttered words of wisdom and devotion, which have since then instructed and comforted many a soul. Although not understanding why all this calamity came over him. he yet held fast the assurance that God had permitted it, and that it would work together for good. He had received good from God's hand should he not also receive evil?

How this puts us to shame to whom God's love in Christ Jesus has been so fully revealed, and to whom God's word distinctly says that all things must work together for good! How often do minor trials make us disagreeable and rebellious or cause doubts to arise in our hearts. One thing is worthy of notice; it was Satan not God who killed Job's children, who destroyed his possessions, and smote him with boils. God certainly permitted it; not only in order to prove Satan a liar but also

to teach Job a needed lesson. The lesson which Job and his friends learnt was of such great importance that he later indeed considered his suffering of no account compared with it. At first, of course, everything seemed incomprehensible to him. At the end of the first chapter we read "in all this Job sinned not nor ascribed anything unseemly to God." In Job 2:10, however, it says only "In all this Job did not sin with his lips." Surely God would have wished to spare Job his sufferings; also what Satan was permitted to do did not come directly from the hand of God. This is a mystery, hard to understand, and if Job later on did charge God foolishly it was partly because he did not understand this mystery. Job's patience was admirable and has rightly become proverbial. When his three friends arrived, however, and through their seven days' silence showed only that they had no words of comfort for him but rather thought in their hearts that Job was receiving the due reward of his deeds, then he began to despair of all and in the bitterness of his heart uttered his first presumptuous "why?" "Wherefore is light given to him that is in trouble, and life to those bitter of soul?" "Why, yes why?" Many millions have asked the same question since. Why do I live at all? Would it not be better if I had never been born? See Job 3:10-20. In Isaiah 45:9-12, we see a grave woe pronounced on those who ask such questions.

01.1. Job's First Question, "Wherefore was I born?"

Job's First Question, "Wherefore was I born?" The first question of Job, "Why has God given me life only to send me such suffering now?" is the language of the natural man in rebellion against his Maker. Contending with the Almighty man wants to instruct Him (see Job 40:2). He curses the past, reviles the present and all his future hope is gone, just as Jeremiah (Jeremiah 20:14-18) not only bemoans his torments but also his very existence. What a state to be in!

Yet both Job and Jeremiah were faithful and devoted men of God. How did they come to forget themselves? What led them even for a moment to despair of the power and goodness of God?

First of all, these men passed through very unusual exercises of soul. All blessings seemed to them to be changed into curses, and instead of hearing words of comfort and sympathy, they were covered with reproach. Their best friends had ceased to show loving sympathy; but, worse than all, they themselves could no longer understand why they should so suffer, and saw neither purpose nor profit in it. Just as Asaph in; Psalms 73:1-28 they came to the conclusion: "Truly I have purified my heart in vain and washed my hands in innocency," and with the Preacher, looking only on visible things, they said "All is vanity." The original cause of such despair lies deeper. If the creature had not in the beginning turned away from his Creator he would not now curse his existence. The fact that men like Job and Jeremiah were capable of cursing the day of their birth, only proves how far man has drifted away from God. As long as all goes well the rebelliousness and sullenness of the human heart do not show themselves, but trials bring them to light. Temptations are therefore good and necessary, not in order that God may find out what is in man's heart (to Him the hidden things of the heart are manifest, and whatever comes out of it does not increase His knowledge), but that man may learn to know himself. By nature, as we have said, man is in rebellion against God, and even when born again still the old nature constantly shows itself in times of temptation. Let no one think, however, that he is more capable than Job of bearing temptations, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Although Job in bitterness of soul said many perverse things, the result of it all was to God's glory and to the blessing of His servant. Many of the questions which he in anguish asked, became clear to him in the course of his pleading in defence of himself. Others were answered for him by Elihu, and again God answered some in the whirlwind and that mostly by counter questions.

Every question can be asked in two ways, either in humility and with the sincere desire to learn, or else in presumptuous rebellion against the solution, be it what it may. In the first case the questioner honestly takes the place of a learner, which is the right thing for him to do; in the second case he takes for granted that there is no satisfactory answer or else that it is definitely withheld. Alan either comes before God in sincerity and with the prayer which later Elihu taught Job "What I see not teach Thou me" (Job 34:32) or he asks in rebellion "Why is everything so different from what it ought to be?"

He who does not wish to sit at the feet of the Master and say "I will demand of Thee and answer Thou me" takes the place of judge against his God. The vessel says to the potter "What makest thou?" Foolish as the question is, we yet find it frequently among the children of Adam, the generation of backsliders. The so-called Higher Criticism that has done so much harm in Christianity puts all its questions in the latter way. In our day, when the spirit of independence forces an entrance everywhere, and all men want to be free to think and do as they please, this fundamental error is almost universal. Even believers must take heed lest they be affected by the spirit of the times. Moreover there is nothing new under the sun. In reality the men of Job's time had to solve the same problems as we have to-day; only with this great difference, that God's counsel has since then been more clearly revealed. There may be some excuse for Job arguing with God, but for the Christian professor who possesses the whole word of God, it is a terrible thing to doubt the wise and loving providence of God.

Job's first great question implies a doubt about the purpose of human existence, and therefore also about the wisdom of the Creator. This is an insult against God Himself, answered by Him at the end of the book and by a series of counter questions. Then Job submits, and his tormenting questions find a satisfactory answer in the power and goodness of God. But for the man without God, and without a Saviour, there is really no adequate answer to Job's question "Why have I been born?" What is the purport of the terrible words pronounced by the Lord Jesus over the traitor Judas: "It were good for that man if he had not been born," for all the millions who have since then gone to their own place? Will mockers like Tom Paine, Voltaire, and others in the place of torment, indeed curse their day through all eternity? Yea, truly, he who does not submit to God's verdict and accept Christ as the Redeemer, will never receive light about the purpose of man's existence nor about creation generally. Only in the restoration of all things (Acts 3:21) promised by God and pledged through the cross, will the problems of present day suffering be solved. Only when the groaning creation is delivered from the bondage of corruption (Romans 8:21) will all questions be satisfactorily answered. This was shown to Job figuratively in his own experience.

It is only in the New Testament, however, that God has revealed His plan for man. Only since the Holy Ghost has come down has the Third Person of the Godhead shown to the nations through the apostles' writings that "the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us." It is only in our time, to him who hears and believes, that it has been proclaimed that we according to God's will are heirs of His glory through Jesus Christ. This Spirit, also called the Spirit of promise, is the pledge of our heirship (see Ephesians 1:13-14).

Therefore the viewpoint of the Christian cannot ever be so dark as that of Job. Job saw only as from afar off and groped in the dark, but we are brought nigh to God through Christ and walk in the light. Should we not, therefore, so much the more guard ourselves from harbouring doubting thoughts and from presumptuously arguing with the Almighty? We may, indeed, in all humility, ask what the purpose of our life is, but let us beware of the rebel's spirit and of the language of the presumptuous.

It is also good for the Christian to remind himself daily what the ultimate aim of his life is and when he does this in the spirit of communion with the Lord, he comes to the point where he can "glory in tribulation." When the ungodly man however, because of the vanity of earthly things curses his very being, or when the mere professor in times of trial, loses his apparent faith and argues with

God, then he adds rebellion to his sin. The spirit of independence develops into open rebellion, and the state of mind previously hidden shows itself in action. May the Lord grant to every child of God to keep the purpose of his life and the end of his course always before his eyes, so that he may be kept from the presumption of Job in arguing with the Almighty! And if there be one of my readers who has not yet accepted God's answer to Job's question, oh, let him shake off his indifference, and flee from the ranks of the rebellious before it is too late! Do not seek the answer with the pride of the rebellious, or the perversity of the doubter, but with a humble and submissive heart. Then only in learning of Jesus will you find rest unto your soul.

01.2. Job's Second Question, "How can man be just with

Job's Second Question, "How can man be just with God?" The oldest of Job's three friends had answered the first argument. Eliphaz was a wise, eloquent, and pious man, and his first speech is perhaps, the best of the speeches of the friends, (none of the speeches were equal to Job's either in form or contents, not to mention those of Elihu and Jehovah's own). In this speech Eliphaz takes trouble to show Job that everyone on the earth reaps what he sows. "Even as I have seen, they that plough iniquity and sow mischief reap the same" (Job 4:8). All he says is true in principle but in Job's case false. Although right in itself it is wrong in its connection, for often the wicked become old in sin, and the good in the strength of their youth are cut off. The ungodly often live in plenty while the god-fearing have to do without the common necessities of life. Eliphaz and his two friends drew false conclusions, just as it often happens nowadays. According to his opinion, Job's sufferings proved that his former righteousness was only malicious hypocrisy. He describes with great eloquence a dream, in which a spirit was revealed to him, in order to show Job that the reason of his suffering was to be found in his own folly. Job had expected, and rightly too, more understanding for, and deeper sympathy with, his sufferings. He says "For him that is fainting kindness is meet from his friend," and soon after "Return, I pray you, let there be no wrong; yea, return again, my righteousness shall be in it" (Job 6:14; Job 6:29). He cannot admit that he deserved such a trial. The words of his friends are now harder to bear than the sufferings of his tortured body. The death of his children and the loss of his goods were terrible blows; the sickness with which Satan had visited him was of the most trying and horrible kind, but both the silence and the speeches of his friends were as the innumerable poisonous arrows which pierced his soul. In these three men Satan had found unconscious but all the more efficient tools. Instead of really comforting Job they brought him to despair. Instead of reminding him that the goodness of God endureth for ever, and that the reason of his ways although hidden for a time, would in the end be revealed as glorious, they accused the poor man, first in their hearts, then openly, of the grossest crimes, simply because they could not account for his sufferings in any other way. Who then can still be surprised that Job became vexed and wished that God might destroy him? (Job 6:9). He saw deeper than his friends and recognised the dealings of God clearer than they did. For this reason they received at the end a sharper rebuke from God than he did. His mistake consisted in taking for granted it was God who tormented him, and in his presumption in calling God to account. And yet in his bitterest speeches we find gleams of light which break out as rays of hope in the darkest night, and cause him to see from afar God's salvation out of all his troubles. Thus his sad speech ends with a request to God Himself and not to his friends, and he already admits that he needs forgiveness for his transgressions, and pardon for his misdeeds (Job 7:20-21).

Bildad the Shuhite answers Job's second question. He is more personal than Eliphaz and calls Job's words a "strong wind." At the same time he declares that Job and his children are only receiving the due reward of their deeds. The story of Job's friends should be a solemn warning to us. There is nothing so dangerous as a truth falsely applied. One can do the greatest harm with a word of Scripture in a wrong place. This is one of the devil's methods, and only unbroken

communion with God can keep us from it. How important then is the exhortation "be slow to speak," especially in spiritual matters. Conclusions too quickly drawn and hasty judgments are often bitterly repented of, just as Job's friends were surely ashamed of their mistakes when it was too late. At the end of his speech Bildad points out that God will not forsake the perfect man but assuredly fill him with joy and gladness, whereas he could hardly know that this would in Job's case be fulfilled to the letter.

Bildad's speech is poetical and picturesque, as are all the other speeches, but he does not bring out anything new. His words do not help to a better understanding of the question which troubles poor Job. Therefore the latter begins his third speech with the words "Of a truth I know it is so, but how can man be just with God?" And the words about God which follow are words of insight which are becoming for the creature towards the Creator. Job's question shows that all Bildad's statements were worthless and comfortless for him. Morally it is the vital question of man's being on earth since the fall. Peace for the heart of man is dependent on the answer. Here lies the mystery of a conscience brought to rest. The believers of the O.T. from Adam onwards, sought to solve this problem. Both before and after the flood, before and after the Law, every sincere soul puzzled over this question. What does the expression "be just with God" mean? First of all we must remember that in God's vocabulary there are no words of uncertain meaning. Any comparison or diminution of adjectives is here not admissible. That which is good in His eyes does not require any improvement, and to be just before Him implies to think, to speak, and to do what is right; and to be as is meet to be before the eyes of a thrice holy God. With Him alone is the standard of measure Think a little over this, dear reader, and you will agree that so it must be. Whoever has understood this, does not need to be told that "There is none righteous, no not one." He who does not deceive himself must admit that the thoughts of his heart are often impure and corrupted, that his words are frequently wrong and irresponsible, and his actions again and again unjust and wicked. In short, that he in his innermost being (and the question here is about this) is anything but "just with God." And now perhaps someone will say: "Although that is man's condition it does not necessarily follow that he must remain so. What is not can be. Have not the sages and teachers of religion from ancient times onward been working for the moral betterment of mankind? Is there no progress visible in the development of the human spirit? Do not thinkers and poets of all generations teach us that we should further our powers for good? Is there no remedy? Is there no hope of recovery? Has man neither strength nor gift nor invention to fight against unrighteousness, that greatest of all evils, and cast it out of the world?"

All these questions can only be answered by a decisive "No." Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Who can bring a clean man out of the unclean? Not one. Can a slave whose whole time is spent in weary working for a hard taskmaster earn his ransom? Can man escape the bondage of sin? Will Satan allow him to go? Can man outwit the devil? or is he able, after having-been captured by him, to fight and overcome him? Can prisoners put the hosts of the enemy to flight? Has that "murderer from the beginning" left any weapons for his victims with which they could fight for their freedom? These questions are all to be answered in the negative. There is no hope of salvation to be looked for from the side of fallen man. The exertion of all his strength, the display of all his learning cannot make him "just with God." There is no remedy from within. There is no improvement to be hoped for on the part of man, neither from the individual or from mankind in general. The talk of a progress towards goodness, towards human virtue, is a

phantom, a deception, a lie of Satan's, that "liar from the beginning." What then? Is the fall of man quite hopeless? Is there none capable and willing to redeem the slaves of Satan? Can no strong hero be found in the whole universe who is able to wrest the spoil from the strong man? Is there nowhere a physician capable of healing the death wound of the human race? God be praised! Job already received satisfactory answers to these questions although not so clear and detailed as we find them developed in the N.T. First the Spirit of God leads him to give utterance to the words, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," and later Elihu speaks to him of a messenger "an interpreter, one among a thousand" (Job 19:25; Job 33:24) so that God can have mercy on him and (to the messenger) say "Deliver him from going down to the pit I have found a ransom." We do not know to what extent the believers of the old covenant understood these words, for the Scripture says that they, for the most part, ministered not unto themselves but unto us the things which are now reported unto us (comp. Job 33:23, with 1 Peter 1:12). But doubtless Job heard in spirit the words "I have found a ransom" as he in shame and repentance threw himself at his Judge's feet. And that is the only way to be "just with God." Hebrews 11:1-40 shows clearly that all the saints of the O.T. were only justified through faith, and only so could they be well-pleasing to God. What, however, was the ground of their faith? For faith must have a person whom it can trust, a staff on which it can lean, an object to which it can look. Was it not the seed of the woman, whose heel the serpent bruised, that should destroy death and bring life and incorruptibility to light through the gospel? Yes, the object of Job's faith was no other than the one we have, although it could not then be told him in so many words that God is now just when He justifies him whose faith is in Jesus. See Romans 3:26.

Now it goes without saying that the man who is justified by faith should henceforth walk in righteousness. That is indeed another part of the truth which is explained in Romans 6:1, and elsewhere in the N.T. But before we turn to the third and last question of Job I would entreat the reader who has not yet found a satisfactory answer to the question, "How can man be just with God?" prayerfully to look for the same in the word of God and that without delay.

01.3. Job's Third Question, "If a man die shall he

Job's Third Question, "If a man die shall he live again?"

Job asks his third question in his fourth speech, where he also answers Zophar's hard words. This man had called Job a prattler and had challenged him to put his wickedness away. In this, his attitude resembled that of the other friends. He points out that the hope of the ungodly (and such he considers Job) ends in the breathing out of life (Job 11:20). In other words the motto of the ungodly is, "Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die" (Isaiah 22:13). It is really astonishing to see what a lack of discernment Job's friends showed at that time. But are we to-day more intelligent than they? Do we not often judge before the time? Do not the children of God very often judge according to appearance in spite of the solemn warning, "Judge not that ye be not judged." It is no wonder that Job, with biting irony, answers, "Truly ye are the people and wisdom shall die with you !" What was the use of reciting truisms in flowery language? Such speeches brought neither comfort nor light to the sufferer. "Who does not know the same?" asks Job, and then he shows that he had already long ago carefully thought over their questions and that he can develop them in all their variety not in a one-sided way as Zophar. "I also have understanding as well as you, I am not inferior to you." Yes, Job recognized the unsolved questions of man's moral existence much clearer than these glib-tongued talkers, and quite rightly did he tell them plainly, "Ye indeed are forgers of lies, ye are all physicians of no value." And then he turns again to the Almighty and seeks to justify himself before Him. He is convinced of his innocence and wishes to convince God. He desires rest and wonders whether he will find it in death. Man withers as does a flower, and dies off as a tree. "Yet through the scent of water it will bud, and put forth boughs like a young plant." The tree dies and lives again, but what happens to man, who clearly in this earthly life seldom gets what he deserves? For very often "a derision is the just and upright man," while the "desolators are in peace" (Job 12:4-6). The houses of the wicked are "safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them" (Job 21:9). If death is the end for both, then the motto of the godless ("Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die") is after all the best. But then, what would become of God's righteousness? Would not mankind sink into a desperately hopeless selfishness, every man's hand against the other for evil? None feels deep down in his heart that life on earth is the only or the final existence. Some may deny life after death, others may spend their days in indifference to this question; but the majority of men have, throughout the ages, demonstrated through the practices of their religions (wrong and corrupt as most may be) that in reality they do not suppose that all ends with death. From the mummies and pyramids of the ancient Egyptians to the ancestral worship of the Chinese (which to be sure is already thousands of years old) man shows that he believes in a resurrection or at least in a continuance of existence after death.

Certainly this belief is in most cases unconscious or else subconscious. It is misty and indistinct and seldom clearly formulated. The myths and fables of the nations offer no firm foundation for the faith of the heathen. Concerning the resurrection of the body, Job is perhaps the only one in the O.T. who clearly asks this question and who in Job 19:25; Job 19:27, through the Spirit, answers it. The wonderful words "I know that my Redeemer liveth and the Last he shall stand upon the

earth. And (if) after my skin this shall be destroyed, yet from out of my flesh I shall see God; Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold and not another, my reins are consumed within me," may have been in Job's restoration partially fulfilled, but doubtless they find their definite fulfilment in Him who is the Resurrection and the Life. And how precious it is for faith to find out that Job already in the prophecy was able to suggest how close the life of the Redeemer is connected with the resurrection. "Because I live ye shall live also," said the Lord before He departed from His disciples, and the apostle points out in 1 Corinthians 15:1-58 that because Christ has risen those who sleep in Him shall be raised through Him. The life of the Redeemer is always in the present. He lives forever, as the Last One He will stand on the earth. He is the last Adam, a "quickening spirit." From all those whom the Father has given Him, He would lose none but raise them at the last day. Job had the assurance that he himself in his own person (not merely in spirit as some perverse dreamers fancy) would see God. And our Redeemer says in His so-called high-priestly prayer, "Father (as to) those whom Thou hast given Me I desire that where I am they also may be with Me that they may behold My glory."

What a blessed hope! What a glorious outlook! No wonder that Job in the consciousness of his present sufferings adds, "My reins are consumed within me." The contrast between such a glorious hope for the future and the torture he had to bear in the present was so great that he nearly fainted for the longing after this unspeakable bliss. But after his restoration and recovery it is certain that he often strengthened himself with this hope. Surely many a time did he think over, and enquire as to what the full significance of those wonderful words might be which the Spirit of Christ had revealed to him. But he had to satisfy himself with the assurance that God was ruling all in wisdom and righteousness and that He would yet bring all to a glorious end. Only at the appointed time could God's counsel with regard to the resurrection be fully revealed. Now there is no more excuse for the fools who raise stupid questions concerning the resurrection. There is a kind of ignorance that is criminal. It springs from the preconceived disinclination to learn about things which might disturb man's false security. He who believes in a resurrection of the dead, must arrange his life in the light of eternity. He who waits for the "last Adam" will prepare himself for His reception. But he who has to fear a reckoning after death acts often like the ostrich when he is pursued and sees no escape; he hides (so they say) his head in the sand and denies the presence of the hunter. An unpleasant truth simply does not exist for that class of people. The judgment on such fools will be dreadful but deserved.

02.00. John the Baptist.

John the Baptist.

H. Rossier.

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(This instructive little work is translated from the French.) Chapter 1. The Nation and the Remnants. Luke 1:1-80, Luke 2:1-52, Luke 3:1-38.

Chapter 2. His Birth. Luke 1:15.

Chapter 3. John the Baptist in the Wilderness. Luke 1:80; Matthew 3:1-17.

Chapter 4. John the Baptist as Prophet. Matthew 3:1-17.

Chapter 5. John the Baptist as a Man and a Witness. John 1; John 3:28-31.

Chapter 6. Failure of John the Baptist. Matthew 11:1-30.

Chapter 7. John the Baptist's Death. Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29.

02.01. Chapter 1. The Nation and the Remnants.

Chapter 1. The Nation and the Remnants.

Luke 1:1-80, Luke 2:1-52, Luke 3:1-38. The title of this little book might mislead the reader; its subject is not so much John the Baptist as Christ. All-important and interesting as his personality may be, John can only be like the background of a picture intended to bring into relief One who was greater than he; and it is thus, as his words and his life prove, that the prophet himself would have written his history.

Luke 1:1-80 very strikingly portrays the circumstances in which Israel was found at the coming of the fore-runner, and which preceded the manifestation of the Messiah. A great change had come over the circumstances of Israel since the days of Nehemiah. The people had been brought into subjection to the last universal Gentile empire, but morally their state differed little from that revealed by the prophet Malachi 450 years before Christ. Israel was no longer in open warfare with Jehovah; the false gods had disappeared out of the house which was swept and garnished, the fig-tree was covered with the leaves of an empty profession, but absolute barrenness lay hidden beneath this outside show. Indifference and insensibility, worse than hatred, were to be found in the heart of the people. One feature of the apostasy is, that God is no longer esteemed worth the trouble of thinking about, and men of our days are in process of casting Him aside as a thing of the past. That which will bow to the very dust the forehead of the repentant remnant of Israel, when at last their eyes are opened to Christ, will be the fact of having been able to pass by the Man of Sorrows with indifference, setting no value on Him. (Isaiah 53:1-12)

Such were the relations of Israel with God in the time of Malachi. When Jehovah said to them in the tenderest accents, "I have loved you," they replied, "Wherein hast thou loved us?" for they knew not the heart of God. When He said to the priests, "You have despised my name," they replied, "Wherein have we despised thy name?" so blinded were they as to their own state and transgressions. They polluted the table of the Lord, and "offered the lame and the sick;" because, in spite of all their religious forms, God was not in their heart or their life, nor had they the least conscience as to the dishonour they brought upon Him. (Malachi 1:1-14) Such a religion must end some time or other by seeming superfluous to those who practise it. What is the good? "Behold, what a weariness is it!" they say. (Malachi 1:13.) It is thus that the heart of a professor expresses itself; and if beneath religious weariness he do not become an idolater himself, he soon returns to the idolatrous world, connects himself with it, "marries," as says the prophet, "the daughter of a strange god," and becomes one flesh with her in the eyes of an avenging God, who will execute judgment on both. (Malachi 2:11-16.) This is a great danger even for the Christian in these days of ruin. Asaph expressed it thus: "Therefore His people return hither [towards the wicked] and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them," when times of affliction came upon him, contrasting with the growing prosperity of the world. (Psalms 72:1-20) But for the believer there is a second and more subtle danger than this, because a more plausible one; and that is to isolate himself in proportion as he sees the increase of the indifference and worldliness so general among the children of God.

Now this tendency is diametrically opposed to God's thought for His own, and it is precisely in view of these times of ruin that the prophet says to us, "Then, they that feared the Lord spake often one to another." (Malachi 3:16.) The apostasy does not isolate those who fear the Lord; it incites them to come together. As the psalmist says, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee." (Psalms 119:63.) It is the same at every dark epoch in the history of the people of God; it was thus with the youthful witnesses during the Babylonish captivity. (Daniel 2:17.) Such is now the case in the perilous times of the end (2 Timothy 2:22); so it was during the gloomy hours that followed the cross, when the still ignorant disciples communed one with another on the road to Emmaus; and in the early chapters of the Gospel of Luke we see a present and striking realization of His word.

"They that feared the Lord spake often one to another" is God's resource for days of ruin. Look at these few faithful saints, amidst the barren waste of a lifeless profession, seeking and finding one another, and holding converse together. Mary and Elizabeth talk one to another, Zacharias and his neighbours commune of these things, the shepherds publish them, Simeon announces them, and Anna speaks of them "to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." Remark, moreover, that there is but one subject of intercourse for all these faithful ones — it is the consolation of Israel; it is Christ, the Messiah; it is the person of the Saviour; and such conversation is pleasing to God, who lends an attentive ear thereto. He records these things in a book of remembrance — a special book. Nothing is so pleasing to God as hearts appreciating His beloved Son. Dear reader, He takes note of the value that you and I set on the name of Jesus. Those who appreciate Christ in days of affliction will have God's own approval at a future day of glory. "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels." (Malachi 3:17.) Is not such a promise well fitted to encourage our souls?

"Spake often one to another." This occupation of the faithful allies itself with the most simple daily duties of this life. Zacharias accomplishes his priestly functions, and offers incense; Elizabeth is in the country; Mary journeys; the shepherds keep their flocks. It even connects itself with the apparent inactivity of a Simeon, who dwells at Jerusalem; of an Anna advanced in years, weakened by age, confined to the temple, but preserving unimpaired the most precious part of her activity, the hidden life of her soul with God, "night and day." But what an element of freshness and joy the person of Christ brings into the intercourse of these saints! Souls are running over, conversation changes into adoration, and those who speak one to another necessarily realize what worship is. (Luke 1:46; Luke 1:68; Luke 2:29.)

Two messages had been brought by the angel Gabriel, the one concerning John the Baptist, the other about Jesus; and both elicit praises from the mouths of those by whom they are received. Still, even before His birth, as ever after, John the Baptist disappears before Christ to make way for the universal song, which rises around this little child from the lips of all the faithful. Whom does Elizabeth celebrate? Not her son, but the Lord. And Zacharias, while announcing the glorious mission of his new-born infant, only does so to exalt the Lord, the God of Israel, the Horn of Deliverance, the Christ, the Most High. With true witnesses it is always so. Blessings from the hand of God are only used by them as occasions of praise to Him who is the origin and centre of these blessings. The circumstances which accompanied and preceded the Saviour's first coming seem to me, in many ways, applicable to the present time. As then (see Luke 3:1-2) organization is increasing in the world, which seeks a ground of safety in its own institutions; as then, under the auspices of the world, a traditional and orthodox religion prevails, indifferent, self-righteous, and

ripe for the apostasy; as then, sects flourish, such as the Rationalistic Sadducees, or the Herodians, who pronounced the then existing administration excellent; as then, the Lord's coming, or rather return, is at hand; but does this happy message produce now in the hearts of the saints the same fruit as then? Oh that there might be found in our hearts that freshness of hope, those divine rays from the morning star appearing for faith in the splendour of its pristine dawn, that star resplendent with grace, herald of the glory, whose sight causes the heart to overflow with unspeakable adoration! Dear reader, if we are awaiting it, we shall be found speaking one to another until the day of glory, when we shall be the peculiar treasure of One who is coming.

02.02. Chapter 2. His Birth.

Chapter 2. His Birth.

Luke 1:15. The angel Gabriel was commissioned to announce two glad tidings — the one to Zacharias, the other to Mary of Nazareth; but the circumstances and the import of these two messages present more of contrast than of similitude. Zacharias and his wife "were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." Nevertheless, old age had crept over them, and Elizabeth was barren. May we not see in them a picture of godly Israelites under the law, and of the utter inability of the law to bring forth fruit even in a regenerated man? Moreover, it does not produce intimacy with God any more than fruit; for Zacharias, who was of exemplary piety, seeing the angel, "was troubled, and fear fell upon him." Finally, it does not induce confidence, which grace alone calls forth. The priest under the law was unbelieving as to the message of grace brought by Gabriel, and so this representative of Israel remained dumb until the day when, the divine promise having in grace been fulfilled, he could, like the remnant by-and-by, praise the Author of his salvation. Mary was not only pious, but humble and simple — an object of grace, and not an exponent of the law. "Thou hast found favour with God," said the angel. She was subject — "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord;" and her confidence was in the word of God, for she added, "Be it unto me according to thy word." (Luke 1:30-38.) The contrast between these two messages is worthy of remark. John should be "great in the sight of the Lord." Of Jesus the angel said, "He shall be great." We will return to this subject in another chapter. All John the Baptist's greatness depended on the Person whose herald he was, whilst Jesus was great in Himself and of Himself. From the place whence I write, I can see, in the light of the rising sun, the shadow of a chestnut tree assuming gigantic proportions; yet this shadow is not a picture of the size of the tree, but a witness to the sun's rising and splendour. Such was John — great because he had the signal honour of being the messenger of One of whom the angel said, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom their shall be no end." (Luke 1:32-33.) But these words of Gabriel's — "He shall be great in the sight of the Lord" — do not express all that should characterize the Baptist; for he adds, "And he shall drink neither wine nor strong drink." This is Nazariteship; at least, the first mark thereof. John could only be great in the sight of the Lord by being a Nazarite. From Numbers 6:1-27 we see that to be a Nazarite was "to separate one's self unto the Lord." There were three distinct signs. First, the Nazarite abstained from wine and strong drink; next, he allowed the hair of his head to grow; and finally, he "came at no dead body." He deprived himself of wine — sign of joy to the heart of the natural man in the company of his equals. His long hair proclaimed that he abandoned the dignity and rights of man for subjection to the will of God, whose claims on him he acknowledged; and lastly, he avoided all that could bring him into contact with sin, whose wages is death. Such was the ordering and the secret of a Nazarite. Separation to God could only subsist at the expense of these three things, and they were carried out in the life of John the Baptist. But in this passage he is presented to us as especially set apart from all that constitutes the joy of a

social man. The world, no doubt, on seeing him, would have said, "He is a sad and dismal misanthrope." What a mistake! This natural joy, the only one known to the world, was replaced in the prophet's heart by a joy which communion with the Saviour gives. These two joys are opposed to each other, and cannot subsist together; and it is only in proportion as we deny ourselves the former that we can enjoy the latter. Throughout his career divine joy was one of the characteristic features of this most austere man. As a miraculous babe in his mother's womb, his first movement is one of joy when the salutation of the mother of his Lord reaches Elizabeth's ears (Luke 1:44); and at the end of his course he says again, "This my joy therefore is fulfilled." (John 3:29.)

We must not forget that every Christian is called to be a Nazarite, and that with regard to this there is no longer any thought of a special class of persons among God's people; neither is it now a question for us as for the Nazarite Jew of an external separation or one consisting in forms. True Nazariteship - separation to God — is of the heart. The world sees the effects in life, joy, and power, without understanding them; but separation in itself is a secret between the soul and God. Proclaiming that I am separate, occupies others with me; saying that I am in dependence on God, is to be so no longer, since I ascribe something to myself. I surrender by so doing my secret to the world, and, like Samson, abandon my flowing locks to its scissors. When once Satan and the world have learned the secret of my strength, they will not rest till they have robbed me of it. But if there are Christians to be found who are so satisfied with themselves as to divulge the secret of their Nazariteship, there are others who are constantly talking about their failures; doubtless two extremes, but two formed of the same pride. The one does not see the spots on his coat, while the other displays them; but both neglect the only things needful — humiliation and purification. If in any particular we have broken our Nazarite vow, if we have defiled ourselves for the dead, restoration is possible. (Numbers 6:9-12.) Let us examine ourselves. With humiliation we shall find purification. But, alas! and it is a solemn thing, we lose through sin a joy such as the Baptist's, and a power such as the man of Zorah's. We must begin over again. It took time for Samson to recover, along with his hair, strength to break down the pillars in Dagon's temple. To the words, "He shall drink neither wine nor strong drink," Gabriel adds, "He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb." Here it is as if the special power of the Holy Ghost were connected with Nazariteship. Many Christians imagine that to be filled with the Holy Ghost is a special favour, that only could belong to privileged ones among the people of God. No such thing. This condition is in point of fact the normal state of the Christian — he is qualified to be filled with the Holy Spirit, that is to say, in order that the Spirit may restrain and annul every manifestation of the flesh which the child of God has in him. Every believer is a temple of the Holy Ghost; but every believer is not filled by Him. And why? Is it a lack of power to do so on the part of the Holy Ghost? Certainly not, or it would not be the Holy Spirit of God. Is it perhaps that we are unable to do aught but grieve Him? In this case we do not, as believers, know deliverance. What then is lacking, even among Christians knowing deliverance, in order to be filled with the Spirit? The reality of Nazariteship. As it is said in Ephesians 5:18, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." Oh, beloved children of God, what power of enjoyment, testimony, conformity to Christ would be ours if, true Nazarites, we were filled with the Spirit! Have we never, were it but for a moment, tasted such a blessing?

Stephen enjoyed it to the full during his short career as a witness. "Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost," it is said after the first mention of him; "Stephen, full of grace and of power," the

Word adds, when this Nazarite, full of the Spirit, was in active service among the people; Stephen, "being full of the Holy Ghost," it says again, when the sanhedrim were gnashing their teeth on him. (Acts 6:5; Acts 6:8; Acts 7:5-5.) And there, in presence of those who were stoning him - the ungrieved power of the Spirit fixing Stephen's eyes on heaven — he sees "the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." His eyes and his heart, occupied by the Spirit with this heavenly vision, are arrested by an object - Jesus in glory. This man on earth sees the Son of man in heaven, and rejoices in the One who, having finished His work, has, in His own person, prepared that glorious place. Our inability to "see Jesus," our want of personal acquaintance with this precious Saviour, is connected — note it well — with the measure in which we realize the apostle's recommendation, "Be filled with the Spirit." But Stephen not only enjoys Christ; he is a witness, and says, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." That with which he is filled by the Spirit flows abundantly from his lips. He does not say to himself that he must bear testimony. The river overflowed its banks and watered the earth. Supplied from a heavenly source, it became in Stephen's heart a fountain of springing water. Moreover, this blessed martyr does not only bear witness; he is himself changed, while beholding, with unveiled face, the glory of the Lord. He reflects on earth, and without dimming their lustre, the character, ways, and words of the Saviour. All this, I repeat, is not a special gift, but the fruit of the Holy Spirit acting in our hearts without hindrance. Let us then exhort one another with these words, "Be filled with the Spirit."

Alas! in many ways we all fail. Jesus only, the true Nazarite, never failed. Jesus, conceived of the Holy Spirit, baptized by the Spirit, full of the Spirit (Luke 1:35, Luke 3:22), realised all these things in absolute perfection, without a shadow of failure. Man of sorrows on this earth, His joy was full; humble amongst the humble, He was possessed of a divine power which made Him victorious in conflict with Satan when led by the Spirit into the wilderness, which caused "His word to be with power" when "He returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee." (Luke 4:1-14; Luke 4:32.) Pure and holy, He could say, Satan "hath nothing in me." May He be the pattern of our Nazariteship — "He that was separated [a Nazarite] from his brethren." (Genesis 49:26; Deuteronomy 33:16.) Then in the power of the Holy Ghost we shall follow Him, at a distance of two thousand cubits, no doubt, as Israel followed the ark; but we shall follow Him nevertheless, and to follow Him is to grow in His likeness.

02.03. Chapter 3. John the Baptist in the Wilderness.

Chapter 3.

John the Baptist in the Wilderness.

Luke 1:80; Matthew 3:1-17. The two passages at the head of the chapter describe the life of John the Baptist from his birth "till the day of his showing unto Israel." "The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit," it is said. To be a Nazarite is, as we have seen, the first condition necessary to the normal development of the man of faith. Then the Spirit can exercise His activity in order to make us grow, and to strengthen us with might in the inner man. Nothing will grieve Him, and He will not need to be occupied in rebuking and correcting us; we shall be like a tree planted in good soil, watered by streams of living water, and exposed to the sun's vivifying rays. The tree develops under such a salutary influence: its buds become flowers, and its flowers fruit, according to the season. Such were the characteristics of the prophet when still a child, and yet he was but a feeble picture of the One whose coming he was about to announce. Of Jesus, John the Baptist's Lord, it is said, when a child that, He "grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon Him." And again, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." (Luke 2:40; Luke 2:52.) He would not have been truly a man, if He had not from His birth passed through the successive stages of a man's life; He would not have been God, had He not done so in absolute perfection. John was in need of help to grow and wax strong in spirit; and the evangelist says, "The hand of the Lord was with him." (Luke 1:66.) Jesus grew and waxed strong of Himself, so to speak, although, as man, in absolute dependence. In Luke we find the perfection of this unfolding. The flower is in bud, not a blemish; it is in full bloom, not a defect; divine favour, the dew of heaven, fills its chalice; its perfume and grace are such as may delight God and men. It gives promise of fruit which appears in due season, the divine development of perfect maturity.

We have seen the moral state of the son of Zacharias. Let us briefly consider his external condition, such as it would, from his youth, have appeared to a human observer. The Word tells us that he "was in the deserts." What a contrast with the world by which he was surrounded: The Roman "beast" was at the zenith of its prosperity, and stable as no empire which had preceded it. (Luke 3:1.) Its administration, army, art, religion, even the Jewish religion (Luke 3:2), were organized to a remarkable degree. This certainly did not resemble the desert; and it was pleasant to live under such an economy. Between the desert and Judea under Herod a Lot would not have hesitated. John the Baptist found nothing there to attract him; he was in the desert, separated from the world wholly and visibly. Hence when, sent by God, he crosses the threshold of the desert to prophesy amidst the world and its noisy activity, his heart is met by emptiness and silence — "the voice of one crying in the wilderness," he says, for the world was a wilderness to him. He asks nothing of it; he does not go to it seeking "soft raiment;" he brings into it the customs of the country of his choice. His raiment is of camel's hair, the only coarse garment that the desert can offer him; he has a leathern girdle about his loins, as had in other times the prophet Elijah, when he

presented himself to the officers of Ahaziah (2 Kings 1:8); his meat is locusts and wild honey, which he gathers in these desolate places. Like Elijah by the brook Cherith, he depends entirely for subsistence on that which God had prepared for him in a barren land — dependence painful to the flesh, but doubly blessed, for it is the power for all true ministry. John the Baptist was qualified by his wilderness life and experience to be the "voice" of Him who makes Himself heard there, and, like Elijah, fearlessly to fulfil his dangerous mission. But there is One who has distanced John the Baptist in these experiences, He of whom it is said, in Psalms 110:1-7, "He shall drink of the brook in the way" - a short sentence expressing the Saviour's earthly career. In this psalm David views Him as already at God's right hand; but also he considers the way which will lead Him thither. How much is contained in these words: "He shall drink of the brook in the way." It is a picture of a man on the march hastening to accomplish his mission. Our thoughts are straightway carried back to Gideon's companions, who were raised up by the Lord for the deliverance of the people, and who drank of the brook in the way. (Judges 7:1-25) There were three hundred of them chosen for a temporal deliverance: Jesus was alone and took the responsibility of an eternal salvation. Nothing arrested Him even for a moment. Of provisions He has none, only water to quench His thirst; and He does not deviate from the path to seek any. The resources which God has put in His way suffice, for He has only one end in view, the accomplishment of the mission on which His heart is wholly set. He would not have gone down upon His knees beside the brook to drink at His ease. Have you ever noticed in the Gospels how many times the Saviour drank of the brook in the way? The springs of refreshment which He meets with after long stages under a burning sun are quickly counted springs produced by some beneficent rain wherewith heaven has for a moment watered His path, and whereat He has drunk without slackening His pace. When, at the well of Sychar, the conscience of a wretched woman of Samaria was reached by One who asked of her a drink, when she knew not even how to give Him a drop of water, the brook was flowing in the Saviour's path. And with what joy does He quench His thirst thereat by the way — "I have meat to eat that ye know not of He that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together!" (John 4:32-36.) When at the Pharisee's table, a poor woman, a sinner already convicted of sin, brought her tears, her kisses, and her ointment to the feet of grace, to Him who alone can forgive, it was not of Simon's repast which the Saviour partook, but of the table which God had prepared in the heart of this woman. While Martha, "careful and troubled," and "cumbered about much serving," prepared to receive Jesus into her house, He drank of the brook in the way with His eyes resting on Mary, who, seated in silence at His feet, listened to and found in Him the good part. And at the extreme limit of the last stage of His journey, where beneath the consuming fire He was about to cry, "I thirst," He finds a second time, not at the table at Bethany, but in Mary's house, the brook made ready for Him, when, anticipating the day of His burying, she expended all her perfume on the feet and head of the Saviour about to die.

Ah! these occasions were rare, but they were enough for a heart so perfect, so entirely subject to and dependent on the Father. Blessed Saviour! Thou hast drunk of the brook in the way, but Thou shalt lift up the head. Already Thou art in the highest place, seated on the Father's throne at His right hand. Thou hast the joy of having finished Thy work to the glory of Thy Father, and Thy presence on high is the unalterable witness thereto. In virtue of this work Thou hast been saluted of God a High Priest for ever for us, after the order of Melchisedec. But it yet remains for Thee to occupy Thy throne, to take Thy place there, and to make Thine enemies Thy footstool. Then Thou wilt have us with Thyself. Thou shalt see of the travail of Thy soul, and shalt be satisfied!

02.03. Chapter 4. John the Baptist as Prophet.

Chapter 4.

John the Baptist as Prophet.

Matthew 3:1-17. In Matthew 3:1-17 we have the public ministry of John the Baptist presented to us. A few words of the Saviour's, uttered in defence of John before the multitude, seem to me to characterize this ministry. "A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet." (Matthew 11:9.) John the Baptist was a prophet, but even as such his position and ministry went beyond those of the ancient prophets. These last prophesied at Jerusalem, in Israel, or in the midst of the captive or returned people. John the Baptist separates himself from the people; he dwells in the desert. The only prophet to whom he can be likened in other respects is Elijah; but his failure, and not Jehovah, led him into the wilderness. (1 Kings 19:1-21) A remnant of Judah had returned from captivity in Babylon, but in the eyes of the prophet it did not merit the name. Henceforth there was but a remnant of this remnant which could be recognized as Israel. This is why John the Baptist does not appeal to the people as a whole, like the prophets who had preceded him. He says, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness." Israel was a wilderness for God. The prophet's appeal is henceforth based on their irretrievable ruin, whilst that of the ancient prophets always supposed the possibility of a national return to Jehovah. Divine judgment was not then definitively pronounced on the human race, and the prophets were authorized by their mission to search and see if there were any good in man by which he might be brought back to God. Like them, doubtless, John the Baptist had preached repentance, but a repentance founded on ruin without remedy. Therefore Isaiah, describing the ministry of John, adds, "The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it surely the people is grass." What remains of man? Nothing. The wrath of the Lord has blown upon him. Henceforth repentance owned that there must be self-judgment in the presence of God; and they "went out" to the prophet, "confessing their sins," to be baptized of him in Jordan. The sinner did not confine himself to the confession of his sins, but owned that henceforth the only answer to his state was death, that there was no remedy.

Moreover, the period about to dawn in the world's history rendered such a ministry necessary. The Lord was appearing upon the scene. The history of the first man was virtually at a close (it was ended, in fact, at the cross), to make way for the history of the second Man, to whom henceforth it was a question of belonging. The way to belong to this living Messiah on the earth* was to pass condemnation on oneself, and to accept grace. Thus Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, prophecies of the little child, "Thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death." (Luke 1:76-79.) *John baptized to a living Christ, Christian baptism is to the death of Christ. And what kind of people are seen coming to the prophet's

baptism? Publicans, men whose character was openly despicable; soldiers, accustomed to oppress the people. Corruption and violence, but owned and judged, find a meeting-place at the baptism of repentance. "John," said the Lord, "came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him." (Matthew 21:32.) For such people there is no resource, and God can only recognize in them the fruit of His own work. "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." (Matthew 3:9.)

There is another character of prophetic ministry which cannot be lacking in John the Baptist, and which he presents more fully and strikingly than his predecessors. It is judgment in contrast to grace. The Pharisees and Sadducees went with the crowd to his baptism. They did not come as guilty, but as self-righteous. The sight of the work of God in publicans and harlots produced among these people neither remorse nor faith (Matthew 21:32), and their final sentence is pronounced. A "generation of vipers" can only be destined to "the wrath to come;" such cannot be taught to flee from it. If they accepted this judgment, they would bring forth fruits meet for repentance. The seed of Abraham, according to the flesh, was set aside. God would raise up children to Abraham by giving life to that which was dead and hard as stone. (Matthew 3:9.)

John adds, "And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees." As in a forest the trees to be cut down are marked with a hatchet, so already the objects of judgment were designated; but it was no longer a question of cutting off branches or even the trunk; the root was bad. "Nothing will remain of you," said the prophet, "in view of the judgment which is at hand." And who will execute this judgment? Christ. "He," said he, "shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." (Matthew 3:11) He possesses the two means of destroying sin — the Spirit, the gift of grace consequent on the Saviour's work; and fire, consuming judgment. It seems as if the prophet said, "I cannot do a work in your favour. I baptize with water; but He brings to you complete deliverance, and to the world definitive judgment." Then, describing what the Lord is about to do in Israel, he contemplates in the future the final result of His action, "whose fan is in His hand" - a judgment which separates the chaff, but which preserves the grain to be gathered into His garner. This is what will take place for Israel. Then the threshing-floor of Jehovah will be thoroughly purged, and there will be no more defilement, but unquenchable fire will destroy all the chaff. Such then is one of the features of the ministry of John the Baptist — the fulness of judgment and the greatness of deliverance, both made known in the person of the Messiah. This brings us to the Lord's second word, "Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet." John the Baptist is the only prophet heralded by the prophets themselves (Isaiah 60:1-22; Malachi 3:1-18; Malachi 4:1-6), but that does not constitute the especial greatness which raises him above them. He does not announce in the midst of Israel future glories introduced by the coming Messiah, but he is the messenger of the Lord Himself, sent to prepare His way before Him. (Matthew 3:1; Luke 1:76.) The Messiah whom he announces is a coming Messiah, already present among His people. The kingdom of heaven was there; not near at hand, but having come in the person of Christ. (Matthew 3:2.) The Lord was going, if received, to take in hand the government of the earth immediately. John did not fail in his mission. He prepares the way before the Lord. (Malachi 3:1.) He appeals to faith, and finds an answer in the heart of a feeble remnant of Israel. He cries, "Prepare ye the way." This way by which the Lord could enter was repentant hearts convicted of sin, confessing their guilt, finding the end of the flesh, in death and grace the only resource. John had hardly said the words, "He that cometh after me," before Jesus came Himself. (Matthew 3:13.) John opens the door, and in the

person of Jesus — this Man, poor and abused — the Messiah of Israel appears upon the threshold.

How admirable at this moment is the great prophet, John the Baptist! He stoops lower than the latchet of the sandals of Christ. (Matthew 3:11; John 1:27.) He declares that he has need to be baptized of Him. (Matthew 3:14.) Thus humbling himself, he exalts, on the one hand, the personal dignity of his Lord; and owns, on the other, in the presence of such perfection, his own condition as a sinner. But how much more worthy of admiration still is the Saviour Himself! He, the most high, humbles Himself still lower than John, who stooped to the sandals of His feet. "Suffer it to be so now," He says; and taking His place in grace at the baptism of John with those who repent, He finds His delight in broken and contrite hearts, and associates Himself with the "excellent" of the earth. Then, not content with abasing Himself, He adds, "It becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," raising John to a level with Himself, and making him a companion in the accomplishment of the will of God. "The heavens were opened" upon and occupied with such perfection, and our hearts too may well be opened to contemplate it.

02.05. Chapter 5. John the Baptist as a Man and a Witness

Chapter 5.

John the Baptist as a Man and a Witness.

John 1:1-51; John 3:28-31.

We have been considering John the Baptist's greatness as a prophet, according to the Lord's words in Matthew 11:9. A second word in this same chapter presents to us rather his greatness as a man — "Verily," said the Lord, "among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11:11)* In John 1:1-25 he is great in three ways personally, as a witness, and morally.

*We do not forget that Luke 7:26 applies this same passage to the prophet John the Baptist.

Let us first consider his PERSON. From the opening of the gospel, after having brought before us, to borrow another's words, "that which the Lord is divinely in Himself" (John 1:1-5), the Holy Spirit solemnly introduces a man upon the scene who was distinguished by his mission from all other men — "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John." (John 1:6) Then (John 1:8) he characterizes him by a negative sign — "He was not that Light." What must have been the personal worth of this man, for the Holy Spirit to declare that he was not that which God Himself is in His essence! The Lord proclaims in John 5:1-47 what he actually was — "He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light" (John 5:35) As a lamp, his brightness was so great, that when he appeared he brought with him nearly as much joy as the daystar brings. When the Jews send priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask who he is, John replies, "I am not the Christ" nor "that prophet" (announced in Deuteronomy 18:15-18). Such was his worth in the eyes of men, that he must needs announce that he is not the most noted person in Israel. Except Christ, never was there in this world a greater than he.

Let us now examine his TESTIMONY. It was well-nigh unbounded as connected with Christ's divine character in this gospel. It was manifold, even though referring to an only and unique object.

First, "he came to bear witness of the light" — a mission unprecedented in the history of man. Morally the world was a desolate place, buried in perpetual night. John the Baptist comes upon the scene, announcing the appearance of a Luminary which would dissipate the darkness, and bring health and joy and life to the miserable. Such is the earliest testimony of this man. Alas! its results ought to have been in proportion to its importance, for John came "that all men through him might believe" (John 1:7); but the predicted Light was neither comprehended by the darkness, known by the world, nor received by His own (Israel). These last were very willing to rejoice for a season in the light, but they would not come to the Son to have life. (John 5:35; John 5:40.)

Secondly, John the Baptist bears witness to the Word made flesh (John 1:15), to God become man, come down to change our state and to reveal to us the Father. What a testimony was that in contrast with what God had revealed in past ages! The law was given by Moses, but that which in

grace could meet man's state while also revealing it had till now been unknown. Israel had been able to know God as Jehovah. The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, has brought us into relationship with the Father. Moreover, the testimony of John admits of this revelation. A third testimony is found in John 1:19; a negative testimony you may say, for John tells us here what he is not. It is this to which the Lord apparently alludes when He says, "Ye have sent unto John" (comp. John 1:19), "and he bare witness unto the truth." (John 5:33.) Now this record sets John the Baptist aside entirely. The truth was that he was nothing, and that the Christ - the Prophet whom he had not yet seen — was everything. This testimony is of exceeding beauty. John the Baptist sets himself aside for the triumph of the truth. Later on, the Christ announced by John, after having made nothing of himself, appears before Pilate, witnesses to the fact that He is a King, and sets no value on His life in order to maintain the truth. John the Baptist had said, "I am not;" Jesus said, — "I am." On this occasion the Lord might have kept silence; but when it is a question of the truth He speaks, and His reply is like the signature to His condemnation.

We now come to a fourth testimony (John 1:29) of particular importance in the career of this man of God. Until now John did not know the Lord personally. "He seeth Jesus coming unto him," and he utters a cry of joy. He does not say, "Behold the Light," or the Word made flesh, or the Christ; but, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." The value of the work and person of Christ are made known to him at one and the same time. In Jesus he recognizes the perfect victim and the Saviour. He beholds the work of the "Lamb of God" right on to the confines of eternity. He contemplates it in its results until the new heavens and the new earth are established, where righteousness dwells, where sin shall be for ever banished. He is still occupied with its results. When bearing record, he says, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him The same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." (John 1:32-33) By this baptism the believer is henceforth assured of the efficacy of this work in his favour. He is filled with the hope of soon being with Christ, and conformed to Him in heaven.

Dear reader, what was the case with John ought to be the case with all of us. We only really appreciate the value of the work of Christ when we know Him as a Person. If John the Baptist had a profound knowledge of these things, it was because Jesus filled every place in his heart. The personal knowledge of Christ increases in our souls the knowledge of every thing, at the same time that it brings us to nothing in our own esteem and in that of the world, or rather in the way in which we seek its esteem. The apostle Paul, while looking at the unsearchable riches of Christ, said, "I, who am less than the least of all saints." But Christ is known only by faith. This is what men discover when with the intellect they seek to find out God — they think that John the Baptist is the Christ, and they say that Christ is John the Baptist. (Matthew 16:14.) This testimony, be it remarked, is not strictly prophetic. John, instructed beforehand, understood these things, as we may understand them, in making the acquaintance of the Lamb of God. Also we find, in John 1:34, a fifth testimony: "And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God." He can say, "Now I have seen, and borne witness to that which I have seen. This Man, to whom God Himself bears witness by the descent of the Holy Ghost, is the Son of God."

Such a witness as John the Baptist might have, without doubt, had a high opinion of himself. But what renders him MORALLY great (we have already touched on this point) is that he is less than nothing in his own eyes, not because he seeks to put himself out of sight, but because for him Christ fills heaven, earth, eternity, and his own heart, and that He is for him all that is contained in

these precious names: Lord, Christ, Prophet, Lamb of God, Delight of Heaven, Son of God, Bridegroom. His whole heart is taken possession of by this Man, who comes after him, but who is before him. So when the emissaries of the Jews ask him, "What sayest thou of thyself?" he replies, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness." "I say nothing of myself; I am a voice." He might have said, "I am the mouthpiece of God;" but no, an instrument might even think itself something. "I am the voice of one crying" — that, so to speak, robs him of his personality; "crying in the wilderness" — a voice which awakens an echo, valueless in the hearing of men. "Why baptizest thou then?" they ask. "I baptize with water," he replies: "what is my baptism beside His?" Then, on the morrow, in company with his disciples, he stands there and looks; he looks upon the Son of God as He walks. His heart goes out to Him, "Behold the Lamb of God," he says. An eminent teacher likes to gather together disciples who listen to his instructions. Is this teacher sent from God? His satisfaction will be enhanced by the thought that he is communicating to them a divine teaching. Well, John incites his disciples to go to Jesus, and remains alone — not alone in the wilderness, he was accustomed to that, but alone amidst that which was about to become the family of God. In John 3:26 his disciples have not the same self-abnegation. They come to him and say, "Rabbi, He that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to Him." They make John the important man, and Christ the secondary person. "See," they say to John, "how He treats you." John reminds his disciples of his own testimony with regard to Christ. Then he adds, "He that hath the bride is the Bridegroom." (John 3:29) The bride is not John; he knows that. But the great prophet is content to have a secondary place; for he has Christ. He is the "friend of the Bridegroom." He listens to outpourings which are not addressed to him; but what matter? He hears the Bridegroom's voice, and his joy is fulfilled. Others will find their joy in more intimate relationships; but John the Baptist's joy is perfect in an inferior relationship; the Lord has given it to him. It is not the highest, but it is of Him, and that is enough for this man of God. His joy is fulfilled in Him who is the Bridegroom of another. Touching humility in the greatest among them that are born of women! May it not be truly said that John the Baptist's joy in this inferior position was much greater than ours is generally who have the privilege of being the Bride of Christ? And are we not humbled at the thought of this? John appreciated our relationship, kept his own, and did not covet another. There was no more jealousy in him than among the angels, when at the birth of Christ they celebrated good-will toward man, and magnified a work of which they were not the objects, but which contemplated guilty and lost sinners. John stood by with his eyes fixed on the Bridegroom's face, and his ears strained to hear Him. He found his pleasure in self-forgetfulness, like Mary at the feet of Jesus, and allowed his heart, like an empty vessel, to be filled by the countless perfections of a Bridegroom who was not for him. "He must increase," he adds, "but I must decrease." Christ has increased; John has decreased into nothingness. This great witness, after having recorded his testimony, gathered his disciples around Jesus, and saw his testimony entirely replaced by Christ's. His glory consists in having brought into prominence the glory of the One who alone is worthy of glory. May it be so with us. We are not called to assume John the Baptist's prophetic and personal glory, but may it be ours, in self-forgetfulness, to be clothed with something of his moral greatness, and to have Christ filling our souls!

02.06. Chapter 6. Failure of John the Baptist.

Chapter 6.

Failure of John the Baptist.

Matthew 11:1-30.

We have hitherto considered John the Baptist in the different phases of his progress as a man of faith. We are coming to the only point in his history where weakness and failure are exhibited. The great prophet John, like Elijah, was for a moment disheartened. He was in prison, and his Master had not delivered him; his hopes were disappointed, and apparently there were no fruits to his ministry. The people, "offended in" Christ, had not "gathered under His wings;" the disowned Messiah had not where to lay His head; and this glorious Lord, who had been announced as coming "suddenly to His temple," on the very heels of His messenger, with His fan in His hand to purge His floor, was rejected and despised. Alas! under such circumstances, for the prophet to be discouraged was natural, but it was not faith, for it led John to doubt Christ, to ask himself if He was indeed the promised Messiah, He who was coming according to Malachi 3:1. John did not in his uncertainty ask himself if he were really the messenger; our failures more readily lead us to suspect God than ourselves. Any way, this scene is somewhat consoling; if John be led to question the Messianic character of the Saviour, he is in no doubt about Him in other respects. The word of Jesus is his only and sufficient resource. "Art thou He that should come? or do we look for another?" It is decline in a career of faith; but, thank God, it is still faith, however small its measure, and it finds, as it always will, a perfect response. John, however, the great witness, failed in his testimony. It is ever so with man; something is lacking, and even be he a John the Baptist, he will not compare with Christ. We lose nothing by it. The Lord alone remains unchangeable. It is beautiful to see in John 1:1-51 the man of faith humbling himself before the Lord; the Lord Himself is still more admirable when, man being necessarily lost to sight, He alone remains in view.

Let us consider in greater detail the Saviour's part in this scene. Whilst John is in doubt about Christ, the Lord meets his failure by putting before him His grace. "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see" (His words and His works): "the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." (Matthew 11:4-5) All these miracles, accomplished in presence of John's messengers, were the sign of the presence of Messiah in Israel (Isaiah 61:1-2), not Messiah in grace. Was grace then a less thing than the glory expected by the Baptist? To his question Jesus replies, "Grace remains in power, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." It is a precious thought, that in the present time — a time of weakness and of the cessation of miracles — a soul may recognize Jesus in the preaching of the gospel to the poor, and say, — "I myself have heard the Lord." Jesus adds: "And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." (Matthew 11:6) In spite of the forsaking of the people, there is a blest remnant convicted of sin, who, instead of awaiting Messiah's glory, have found favour in a rejected Saviour come for sinful man. The knowledge of grace in the person of Jesus constitutes the happiness of such. This

was a gentle and delicate reproof to John the Baptist. Ought not the one who had saluted Jesus as Lamb of God to have remembered this grace? "Are you any longer of this blest company?" the Saviour's voice seems to say. But for the glory of Christ, the great prophet John the Baptist must be an object of grace even as others.

Whilst the imprisoned forerunner is for a moment discouraged, and abandons his testimony, the Lord Himself bears witness to John before the multitude. What grace! What divine delicacy in the choice of such a time for re-instating John, whose doubts had lowered him in his capacity of prophet, in the eyes of all! "What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?" A man who in trial was weak and uncertain? Ah!! if he shows himself such at the time when Jesus was speaking, he had not been so at the outset of his career, and it was then that they had been called to make acquaintance with him. Or had they gone to see a rich man clothed like the great ones of this world? Nothing of the kind. But John the Baptist was still the great messenger of whom Malachi 3:1-18 speaks, although the Lord had not come to His temple. A little further on, alluding to Malachi 4:5 (not to Malachi 3:1-18), Jesus adds, "And if ye will receive it" (that which I say), "this is Elias, which was for to come." If they received the Lord Jesus, the kingdom might be established, the curse still hanging over the people set aside, and relationships according to God re-established in Israel; in such a case, the future mission of Elias would not be necessary, and John the Baptist, come in the spirit and power of Elias, would occupy the place, so to speak, of the future prophet.* In what follows (Matthew 11:16-19) Jesus does not content Himself with declaring the greatness of His messenger; in grace, He raises him in presence of the multitudes to the level of his Master, or rather associates Himself with him in testimony. Their testimonies are not alike. John was likened to those who "mourned," when he called the people to repentance; the Lord resembled those who "piped;" He brought the sweet strains of grace to all. The first presented himself with the severity of a prophet, separated from the people on whom judgment was pronounced; the second made Himself accessible to men, in order, if it were possible, to win for God the confidence of sinners. These two testimonies had found no echo; these two witnesses had been rejected; man did worse than that, he accused John of having a devil, and Christ of being a participator in the sins of those He came to save. By refusing grace, by refusing it thus, what a weight of suffering has not man accumulated on the heart of the Saviour

*This explains why John the Baptist said to the messenger of the Jews that he was not Elias. In consequence of the rejection of Messiah, the mission of Malachi 3:1-18 will be accomplished by another. Who will this future Elias be? "Elijah the prophet," it is said. We must remember that Elijah did not see death. Such a man would be a worthy precursor of the One who is coming in judgment.

Whilst John, unstable beneath accumulated rejection and opprobrium, is like a reed shaken by the wind, Christ alone abides unmoved amidst the ruins. The prophet and the man of faith, the wise and prudent of this world, Israel with her cities, nothing of this remains. He abides for ever. He abides, not only in a divine repose, which meets everything, but in an unruffled and ineffable joy, even whilst His human heart is broken and bleeding under undeserved reproach. "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit," the Gospel of Luke tells us. (Luke 10:21.) The hopes of Israel were interrupted by the fact of the rejection of Christ; but even that opened to view other vast and infinite prospects. Jehovah hid His face (see Isaiah 8:17); the Father was revealed. Heaven was opened when earth shut the door on Christ. Babes, being of but little value, were raised to the enjoyment

of supreme blessings, while the wise and prudent were blinded. The least in the kingdom of heaven was henceforth greater than the greatest of prophets (Matthew 11:11), through the enjoyment of privileges unknown to the most eminent among the representatives of the law. Henceforth a little child would be nearer to Christ, in position, in knowledge, and in glory, than the greatest witness to the coming of His kingdom. I repeat it, the Lord sees in His rejection the foundation of present and future kingdom-blessing for the people of God. The people according to the flesh had miserably failed, and there was an end to all right to the kingdom as to fleshly descent; henceforth it would be taken by force, and could not be entered by right of inheritance; to have part in it, there must be a necessary act of faith, the giving up of pre-existing relations, the breaking of natural links. The mass of the people had turned away, but a remnant remained according to the election of grace, established in virtue of the work accomplished after the Saviour's rejection. Those who formed part of it were not offended because of Him; to these "violent" the kingdom henceforth belonged. As wisdom's children, begotten by her, they justified her by accepting grace. The Lord found all His delight among these few, and even if His work of grace had only brought Him one poor woman of Samaria, it would have been enough to enable Him to say, "The fields are white already to harvest." The rejected Jesus remains alone amidst the rubbish, unmoved, full of assurance and joy, praising the Father, even though there was nothing more to be expected from man. He is not more perfect — that He could not be — but His perfection shines forth more absolutely in circumstances, which, putting the faith of a man to the test, acknowledged the incompetency and feebleness of man. Abiding alone, a high tower, a sure refuge, He says, "Come unto Me." Neither John nor any other could be resorted to. The weary and heavy-laden of this world could only find rest with Christ. The grace which revealed the Father's heart to poor sinners could only be known in His person; and practical peace of heart in the abandonment of self-will could only be realized after having been learnt of Him, the perfect man, subject to the yoke, the Father's will.

John the Baptist has vanished. The One whose herald he had been remains alone, the only One capable of meeting in grace the failure of His servant, of bearing all the weight of the work of grace which lays the foundation of the new creation, the only Centre of attraction for every poor sinner who thirsts for grace, and the only perfect Model for any who seek to be like Him. The law and the prophets come to an end. In Christ grace abides, set up for eternity, established forever.

02.07. Chapter 7. John the Baptist's Death.

Chapter 7.

John the Baptist's Death.

Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29.

We cannot conclude these meditations without a few words concerning the close of John the Baptist's career. Come in the "way of righteousness" (Matthew 21:32), he persevered in it to the end; separated to God from his mother's womb, he maintained this precious characteristic to the last. Herod knew him to be "a just man and an holy." (Mark 6:20.) His practical righteousness and holiness are shown when he says to the king, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." But the testimony of the faithful, instead of improving the world, condemns it, and this is what it cannot bear. A frightful unfolding of the character of Herod fighting against the truth is to be found in this narrative. The lust of the flesh was at work in the heart of this man; and in order to satisfy it he is led into wickedness and pollution. The sinner cannot give up sinning even though under restraint; he goes on in his sin by getting rid of the witness who condemns him. Herod causes John to be taken, bound, and put in prison. (Mark 6:17.) Corruption is necessarily followed by violence, which, kept within bounds at first, opens the door to murderous thoughts (Matthew 14:5), and his conscience is hardened more and more. It is not the fear of God which makes him object to the crime, but that of public opinion, and a selfish desire not to lose his influence and prestige. It is also a certain respect for a superior man, who cannot be got rid of without further formality, besides the loss of the profit of his counsels for self-exaltation. (Mark 6:20.) Herod is led by Herodias, a passionate woman, governed by her hatred, and esteeming the prophet's reproof an unpardonable affront; she also "would have killed him" (Mark 6:19), but had found Herod's feeling of respect for John a hindrance. (Mark 6:20.) The passions of these two converge to one point; Herod's are accompanied by some scruples and cunning (Luke 13:32), while Herodias is more energetic in her accomplishment of evil and triumph over obstacles.

"A convenient day" arrives; the hand of Satan is there urging on his instruments to the final act. Men are blinded, and think to accomplish their own will; they do not see that they are the sport of the devil, and that he is leading them on in warfare against God. It only remains to touch one or two more secret springs in man's heart, and the crime will be perpetrated. The day is well chosen; it is Herod's birthday, whereon his power and sumptuousness are displayed in such a way as to satisfy the pride of life. His lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee surround the king on this occasion. (Mark 6:21.) The daughter of Herodias comes in, dances, and pleases Herod and those at table with him. The lust of the eyes enters with the damsel, and takes possession of the king, and he promises with an oath, "Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom." (Mark 6:23.) Incited thereto by her mother, this thoughtless girl, with no conscience, accustomed to see her caprices obeyed, eagerly asks (Mark 6:25) "straightway" the head of John the Baptist.

Herod is exceedingly sorry, but what matter? He is taken in the meshes of Satan. To his heart's secret desire is now added his so-called honour, and the fear of breaking his word before his courtiers. The devil leaves him no time for reflection; he has taken complete possession of his victim, and succeeds in stifling the testimony of God which was opposed to him. The end is attained; the instrument is left to himself and his misery. Of what advantage is his crime to him? Henceforth it will always be his companion. He hears Jesus and His miracles spoken of. "It is John," says he, "whom I beheaded; he is risen from the dead." (Mark 6:16.) Striking fact, this hardened man, like the Pharisees, believes in the resurrection; but believing a doctrine gives neither satisfaction nor rest of conscience; on the contrary, it is a means of increasing the torment. "He was perplexed." (Luke 9:7.) The desire of getting rid of this vague terror, which had laid hold of him at the thought of finding again the one whom he had put to death, makes him seek to see Jesus (Luke 9:9), perhaps to kill Him also. (Luke 13:31.) Anything is better than uncertainty. But the uncertainty remains in spite of all; when at last Herod sees the Saviour, he can neither see His miracles nor hear Him. He meets on earth a silent Christ, whose voice he will not hear until by-and-by when he will see Him as Judge! (Luke 23:8-10.)

Freed from John the Baptist, Satan succeeds later on in getting rid of Christ by means of other springs in the heart of man. But, blessed be God, Satan, himself deceived, is only an instrument through which God will accomplish His own designs. However, all this wickedness draws forth divine vengeance. The Lord will execute judgment on men, and the God of peace will bruise Satan shortly under our feet. Then also afflicted saints will be at rest, and Christ will be glorified and admired in them, without restriction, in a John the Baptist, and in all those who have believed! H. R.

03.00.1. Meditations on the First Book of Kings

Meditations on the First Book of Kings from The Writings of H.L. Rossier

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03.00.3. About the Author

About the Author

Dr. Henri L. Rossier was born on January 25, 1835 at Vevey in French Switzerland to a family that was among the first there to gather to the Lord Jesus alone. After studying medicine at Zurich and Wurzburg he settled in his native Vevey, where he lived a long life of devoted self-sacrificing service. At age 27 he married Madeleine de Graffenried from Berne, and the Lord in time granted them six children. Along with practicing medicine for well over fifty years, as time went on he increasingly devoted himself to ministering the Word in assemblies and taking part in Bible conferences in Switzerland, Germany, and France.

However, it is for his written work that Rossier is best known today. Acquainted from his youth with J. N. Darby, he began early in life to translate this brother's writings into French. He was helpful also with the editing of Darby's translation of the Bible into French and with preparation of the volumes of *Etudes sur la Parole*, later to become better known as the *Synopsis* after it had been translated into English. For 58 years he served as editor of *Messenger Evangelique*, a monthly magazine for the edification of believers widely circulated throughout the French-speaking world. He wrote many articles for this magazine himself, often while being driven in a horse-drawn coach to the homes of his patients.

Besides this, Rossier wrote commentaries on most of the books of the Bible, especially on the historical and prophetic books of the Old Testament and on the epistles of Paul and Peter and the Revelation in the New Testament. He was a prolific hymnwriter as well. Some 28 of his hymns are included in *Hymnes et Cantiques*, the hymn book used among many French-speaking assemblies and which he played a major role in compiling and revising. Some of his hymns have been translated into English, as have his commentaries on Joshua and Judges.

After a long and useful life of service, he was called home to be with the Lord on March 20, 1928 at the advanced age of 93.

03.00.4. Copyright Information

Copyright Information

Rossier wrote in the 1800's - and originally in French. The articles were translated into English and appeared in "The Rembrancer," a Canadian periodical which ran from 1890 to about 1905. They are in the public domain. The text came from STEM Publishing. Thanks, Les!

03.00.5. Table of Contents

Table of Contents

{module note: the module format will basically follow a chapter by chapter breakdown. Rossier's original "Table of Contents" is still quite helpful. It allows the reader to see his "outline/analysis" of the book.}

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03.00.6. Introduction

Introduction The Second Book of Samuel presents the establishment of the kingdom of Israel* by David; the opening of First Kings shows us this kingdom definitely established by Solomon. It should be noted that the rule of Solomon forms one Continuous whole with that of David. The death of the aged king did not cause even a momentary interruption, Solomon having sat upon the throne of his father during David's lifetime. In type, this is a unique and continuous reign which, while presenting most contrasting characteristics according to one or the other of its periods, unites both of them in an indissoluble and absolute unity.

{*Meditations on the Second Book of Samuel, by H. L. Rossier.}

Considered in its entirety, this reign begins with the rejection of the true king of Israel (1 Sam.), is consolidated, after victory, in the midst of dissensions of the people and strife (2 Sam.), and is finally established in peace, righteousness, and glory at the beginning of the book which now occupies us. This account, as indeed the whole of the Word, directs our eyes to Christ and presents His reign in all its various phases. Rejected as Messiah, He appears again upon the scene in the last days, gradually gathers Judah and the tribes of Israel under His sceptre, extends His dominion over the nations by judgments, but also in grace, until the final establishment of His universal, millennial kingdom. Then, in peace and in righteousness He rejoices in His victory, associating His earthly people with Himself in this.

Thus we find in these books the exposition of the whole of the counsels of God in regard to the earthly inheritance of the Messiah, the Lord's Anointed - the true David and the true Solomon. Apart from the period of David's afflictions these counsels have not yet been fully realized, but they shall be during the Millennium when the Lord shall be established upon His throne as King of Israel and of the nations, as King of righteousness and of peace, the true Melchizedek, a priest forever.

These books moreover present another very important trait to consider, without which one would continually run the risk of falsely applying the types found here. We have already mentioned this trait in reference to the Second Book of Samuel: The king established by God is a responsible man. This responsibility, which will rest upon Christ with all its glorious and blessed consequences, leads necessarily to the ruin of weak, sinful men when placed in their hands. The two Books of Kings therefore present the ruin of royalty in the hands of man and its definitive judgment. In maintaining the certainty of His counsel of grace God maintains just as firmly the certainty of His judgments should the king fail to answer to the demands of His holiness. These two currents, grace and responsibility, flow on in parallel without ever becoming confused. In 2 Samuel 7:13-16, the words of the Lord to David bring out this truth in a remarkable manner. On the one hand there is the election of grace, and on the other hand there is the responsibility of the king and its consequences; then after these two principles there is the assurance that the counsels of God will nevertheless be fulfilled.

All this is the more striking because the two Books of Chronicles show us the royalty in another aspect. They narrate the history of the house of David from the point of view of grace, as we shall have ample occasion to consider if the Lord allows us to reach the study of these books. It is enough to mention here that according to this principle Chronicles presents not the history of the kings of Israel, but that of the kings of Judah who remained faithful longer than the former and to whom the testimony of God was entrusted. The spirit of God points out the work of grace in them and all that the Lord could approve, often passing over their shortcomings in silence in order to bring out His purpose, but not seeking in the least to hide their weaknesses. In contrast, the two Books of Kings retrace the history of the kings of Israel, introducing those of Judah only as landmarks in the account, or to bring out the mutual relationships of the two dynasties.

Let us establish one more important fact in regard to the history which is before us. In these books the principles, according to which God governs His people remain the same as in all the Old Testament. Israel, as well as her kings, is placed under the system of the law. It is not a case here of the law in its initial character of absolute, unmixed righteousness, such as Moses received in the beginning. The tables on which this law was written were broken by the legislator at the base of the mountain and never reached the people who, before receiving them, had already made the golden calf. From its very promulgation on, this pristine law would have crushed the people under judgment. But it is a case here in the entire history we are about to consider, of the law as given by God to Moses the second time, and which we find in Exodus 34:1-35. It was a mitigated law, offered to man to fulfill, if his flesh had been capable, at least that which is relatively good. It proclaimed in the first place that which pure law could in no wise manifest: the mercy and the grace of the Lord. "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." Secondly, it proclaimed righteousness: "And that will by no means clear the guilty." Lastly, it announced retribution according to the government of God on earth: "Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation" (Exodus 34:6-8). In the course of the history before us we shall have occasion to note the application of the principles of which we have just spoken, both in regard to the kings and in regard to the people.

Lastly, these books expose a final general truth. Since its ruin the priesthood had ceased to be the means of a public relationship between the people and God. The king, the Lord's anointed, had been substituted for the priest to fill this office. (See the beginning of 1 Samuel). All the blessing of Israel, its judgment also, depended henceforth on the conduct of the king. The king failing in responsibility affected, properly speaking, the relations of the people with God. But then a phenomenon occurred which persisted throughout the entire duration of the kingdom and even afterwards: the prophet came on the scene. His appearance proved that the grace and mercy of God could not be destroyed even when everything was ruined.

Without a doubt prophecy existed before the time of which we speak. The fall of man had given occasion to the first prophetic utterance. Abraham was a prophet (Genesis 20:7); Jacob prophesied (Genesis 49:1-33); Moses was a prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15; Deuteronomy 34:10); but Samuel inaugurated the series of prophets whom we see laboring in the books before us (Acts 3:24). In these dark days the prophet became, in place of the king, the link between the people and God. He was the messenger of the Word; to him were confided the thoughts of God. Immense

grace! Without doubt, the prophet announced the terrible judgments which would fall upon the people and the nations, but at the same time he presented to faith grace as the means of escaping. He testified against iniquity and even delivered the people, as did Elijah by the exercise of power, in order that the people might begin again, if possible, to walk in God's ways. He taught, he gave the people, to use the words of another, "the key to the ways of God, incomprehensible without him." He consoled also, turning the attention to a future of blessing, the "times of restitution of all things," "a kingdom which cannot be moved," and where the responsibility of the house of David shall be borne by Christ, the Son of David, to the full satisfaction of God Himself. Fixing the eyes of faith upon the glorious person of the Anointed of the Lord, he announced the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories to follow. He felt at the same time the great gulf which separated the present time from this future "regeneration." He humbled himself on behalf of the people when the latter could not and would not do so. Without him in the dark days of the kingdom there would not have remained even one ray of light for this poor people, guilty and chastened. The prophet supported and encouraged. But on account of the principles proclaimed under the dispensation of law the mercy of God immediately acknowledged the monarch when he acted by faith and when he was faithful.

However incomplete this faithfulness might be, God appreciated it, and even when the link was ostensibly broken, the blessing of the people was the consequence. Accordingly, in the period of the prophets bright days followed on dark days and respites were granted despite the judgment announced, because the king had looked to the Lord. This faithfulness in the king was chiefly found in Judah, where God maintained yet a while "a lamp for His Anointed," whereas Israel and her kings, having begun in idolatry, continued in this path and soon became the prey of the demons that they had not wished to remove from their path.

03.01. 1 Kings 1

1 Kings 1:1-53 Solomon: Adonijah's Rebellion

PART 1: 1 Kings 1:1-53, 1 Kings 2:1-46, 1 Kings 3:1-28, 1 Kings 4:1-34, 1 Kings 5:1-18, 1 Kings 6:1-38, 1 Kings 7:1-51, 1 Kings 8:1-66 1Ki_9:1-28, 1 Kings 10:1-29, 1 Kings 11:1-43

1 Kings 1:1-53 Solomon: Adonijah's Rebellion At the time our account begins, King David was about seventy years old. He was far from having reached extreme old age, but a life of sufferings, conflict, and grief wears at the strength of even the most robust of men, so that the king "was old and advanced in age." At thirty-three years of age, the Lord Himself appeared to be fifty years old (John 8:57), but His strength was unbroken. He was not, like David, worn by grief, but, Man of Sorrows, His face was marred more than any man. Love impressed this character upon His features, for He in sympathy carried all the sorrows that sin had brought upon our miserable race. The king's servants devise a means of recalling him to life (1 Kings 1:24), imitating in this the sovereigns of the surrounding nations. It seems that David lacked the willpower to oppose the plan of those around him. A Shunammite* is brought to him. She cares for him and serves him. This "very fair" virgin of Israel will later be considered by Solomon as one of the most precious jewels in his crown. She is to belong to him, and whoever may dare to look on her to covet her shall bear his judgment. But let us not anticipate. That which the Word teaches us is that she did not become the wife of David, the king of grace. It is thus at present with Christ. Though having His eyes upon Israel, all the while there is another bride at the present moment taken from among the Gentiles. He shall keep her as King of Glory, but as such He will also renew His relations with the remnant of Israel, the excellent of His people.

{*The Word does not authorize us to affirm, as some have pretended, that she is the Shulamite celebrated in the Song of Songs (Song of Solomon 6:13).}

Before Solomon comes upon the scene, Adonijah, the son of Haggith, seeks to seize the throne of David, his father (1 Kings 1:5-8). Born immediately after Absalom (1 Kings 1:6; 2 Samuel 3:3-4), though of another mother, he thought no doubt to have the same claim as this latter to the kingdom. He "exalted himself, saying, I will be king." Pride, an unchecked will that had never been curbed, and a high opinion of himself, all motivated him. He was "a very comely man." His flaws had been nourished by his father's weakness, a weakness that had contributed so greatly to the disasters of David's own life. David had not been unaffected by the appearance of his children, as the history of Absalom points out; perhaps for this same reason he had spared the rod in Adonijah's case. "His father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?" Families of believers often see their testimony ruined through the weakness of the parents. In sparing the rod with their children they bring the rod upon themselves, as well as dishonour upon Christ. God never acts thus. The proof of His love toward us is furnished by His discipline. The weakness of parents is not a proof of their love, but of their egoism which would spare themselves in sparing their children (Proverbs 13:24).

Adonijah follows the same path as did Absalom (2 Samuel 15:1), perhaps with less cunning deceit, for he openly manifests his pretensions and prepares chariots, runners, and horsemen for himself just as would a sovereign. Joab and

Abiathar follow him. Joab, ever the same, seeks only his own self-interest. Sensing that David is near his end, he turns to Adonijah, just as previously at first opportunity he had turned to Absalom. How could he have taken the part of the king of righteousness? The misdeeds of his past life must have made him fear too intimate a contact with Solomon. And then there is nothing in the true king that is an attraction to the flesh. The natural man orients himself and will ever orient himself without hesitation toward the usurper and the false king. It is thus that we will see in a time to come that "All the world wondered after the beast."

Adonijah is a type of the man who seeks to exalt himself to the very throne of God (Daniel 11:36); Joab and Abiathar are such who take advantage of this (Daniel 11:39); the following of Adonijah are those who are subjugated by his ascendancy (Revelation 13:4). As far as Joab is concerned, sooner or later the flesh, however clever it may be, must discover itself and show its true character. For a long time Joab was able to keep company with David, the Lord's Anointed, and to conceal the motives which animated and dominated his heart, but an occasion always arises when the natural heart shows itself to be hostile and rebellious, manifesting that it is neither subject nor capable of being subject to the law of God.

Abiathar, the representative of religion, already condemned at the time of the judgment pronounced upon Eli,* is also on Adonijah's side. Surrounded by such a fair show, it is not surprising that this latter becomes the centre of gathering for the many. He is no such centre for faith. What can faith find in the company of the usurper? Zadok, Benaiah, Nathan, and the mighty men of David are not present with Adonijah. The true priest; the prophet, the messenger of God; Benaiah, the true servant who walks in the footsteps of his master** - what have they to do with him? The priest looks to God, the prophet to the Spirit of God, the servant to David, to Christ. Do they need anything else? Those mighty men who have found their strength in David, shall they go after Adonijah who is unable to communicate it to them?

{*Meditations on 1 Samuel, by H. L. Rossier} {**Meditations on 2 Samuel, by H. L. Rossier}

Benaiah is of special interest to us. In David's time he already occupied a preeminent place in service (1 Chronicles 27:5). Is he not worthy, he who had followed in everything, step by step, the footprints of his master, later to be established chief captain over the entire army? Nevertheless this man has no ambition other than to remain faithful to his king and to imitate him. He is not like Joab who takes the stronghold of Zion to acquire the preeminence. No, he is humble, for his whole purpose is to reproduce David in his conduct.

Adonijah (1 Kings 1:9-10) gives the meeting at En-rogel the false appearance of a peace offering. He follows the footsteps of his brother Absalom who had said that he wished to pay a vow to the Lord. He invites his brothers, the sons of the king, and even the servants of the king. These later go to his feast. The rebel does not fear that they will fail him. We know what the title of servants of the king is worth if the heart is not truly attached to David, or of servant of God if Christ is not the object of the affections. How many of these "king's servants" do we not see in our day running to those who cloak their enmity against Christ under an appearance of piety? But Adonijah is too

shrewd to invite those whose faith or whose testimony keeps them in David's intimacy. He invites all his brothers, with one exception: the only one having the right to the throne according to the will of God and of his father, Solomon, he who is to become the king of glory. It is evident that he must exclude from his feast him whose presence would judge it, would condemn it, would bring to nothing all his plans and all his ambitions. Christ is the last to be invited by the world; more than that, the world is loathe to invite Him. On the other hand, was there anything at this feast with which Solomon could associate himself? No, if he had put in an appearance there, it would have been only to bring well-deserved punishment upon these rebels. In the day that this great danger threatened Israel, no measure had been taken to ward it off (1 Kings 1:11-31). The king, weakened by age, confined to his palace, "knew not" what was happening. Blessedly, God was keeping watch for him. God who has the glory of His Son and His kingdom in view, does not allow the designs of the usurper to succeed. To this end He sends the prophet to Bathsheba with a word of wisdom. Be assured that we shall always find in the Word of God the means by which Christ may be glorified and we ourselves preserved from the ambushes of the enemy. What a contrast between Nathan's mediation and that of Joab through the woman of Tekoah (2 Samuel 14:1-33)! There all was ruse and lying in order to affect the king's spirit and to flatter his hidden leanings, and in order eventually to substitute for David a deceitful and violent man as king over Israel. Here prudence suggests that which is to be done, but without wavering in the least from the truth. The king must be made aware of the imminent danger. He must be persuaded to act resolutely for God. The mind of the Lord concerning Solomon had already been revealed to David. He knew it very well. It was not without reason that the Lord had given to David's son the name Jedidiah, Beloved of the Lord (2 Samuel 12:25). David knew the mind of the Lord on this subject so well that he had sworn to Bathsheba "by the Lord God of Israel, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead" (1 Kings 1:17; 1 Kings 1:30). It was enough to remind this man of faith of his oath for him to see the path to take.

Doubtless Adonijah had counted upon the weakening of his father's faculties in order to seize the kingdom, but he had not reckoned on God, the prophet, or the truthfulness of the king's heart. Bathsheba speaks with respect and boldness. She shows David that he is unaware of the danger (1 Kings 1:18), that the purpose he had resolved on was to have a king according to the heart of God (1 Kings 1:17) as his successor; she also points out to him his responsibility towards herself, her son, and the people, for the eyes of all Israel were upon David, that he should tell them who should sit upon his throne after him. The truth is in the heart of this woman, as also in the heart of the prophet - a lovely example of the spirit in which we should behave one towards another. Nathan appears in his turn, and in his own conversation with the king lays stress upon the fact that not only had none of the faithful servants of the Lord been invited, but above all, that Solomon had been deliberately set aside. What must one expect from a man who gives no place to the Lord, to the true King, in his purposes or in his life?

Nathan also points out that the true servants of the king did not know the king's plans (1 Kings 1:27). Certainly such is not the case with us! God has "made known to us the mystery of his will" (Ephesians 1:9), which is to gather together in one all things in Christ. But the aged king must be exhorted to reveal his secret. His decision is made immediately: all his energy is renewed when it is a matter of the Beloved. "Even so," he says, "will I certainly do this day" (1 Kings 1:30).

We have seen in this chapter that the counsel of Nathan was according to God and according to the respect due to the king. Here it is not a matter of human counsel, as when this same Nathan said to David: "Go, do all that is in thine heart" (2 Samuel 7:3); but of divine wisdom which purposes to prevent the prophet-king from a fall, and to defend the honour of Solomon, the anointed of the Lord, after his father's passing. Above all, it is a matter of the establishment of the king of glory upon his throne. Of all this the world neither sees nor hears anything. Gibeon with its refreshing waters, seems to be ignored by Adonijah. But what an awakening! What trouble overwhelms those at his feast! Suddenly, in the midst of the feast, the false king, Joab, and all the guests hear the sound of the trumpet and such cries of joy that the very earth is split by the noise of Solomon's train. "Wherefore," says Joab, "is this noise of the city being in an uproar?" Thus the public establishment of the reign of Christ will surprise the world and deeply trouble it. Then "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision . . . Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion" (Psalms 2:4-6). Do we not hear the noise of this scene in our chapter?

Jonathan, Abiathar's son, appears suddenly in the midst of the guests (1 Kings 1:41-48). Once before (2 Samuel 17:17) he had left En-rogel together with Ahimaaz, Zadok's son, to go at the risk of his life to warn David of that which was transpiring against him. Now he returns to En-rogel to warn Adonijah of the failure of his attempt, though he is in no wise associated with the rebels. He comes, full of what is good news to him, for we see by his language that his heart has remained faithful to David. "Thou . . . bringest good news," Adonijah says to him. "Indeed," he replies, but these tidings were not good for his hearers. They were a disaster to Adonijah. In no way is this incompatible with Jonathan's feelings as a son for his father who by his own fault had embarked on this dead end road. These feelings cause Jonathan to report truthfully to this company all that had taken place, holding nothing back from them. Let them take heed! - As for himself, his joy, one senses, is with David's successor. His service has not changed its character since the days of his king's afflictions. He is ever ready to bring news, just as his companion Ahimaaz to run. His character is remarkable in its consistency. Whether he fulfills his service to David during the time of his rejection or to the world in the day of the triumph of the son of David, Jonathan remains the same faithful messenger. The time is short: it is imperative to submit immediately by "kissing the Son." So it will be in the last days when those whom the King will call His brethren will announce far and wide the necessity of recognizing the reign of the true Solomon.

Just as Jacob in former days, the aged king, seeing the desires of his heart fulfilled, "bowed himself upon the bed" (1 Kings 1:47). We find in David the slowness of age to make a decision, but once the word of God is addressed to him by Nathan, everything changes. He does not hesitate; he sets everything in order, and acts in every detail according to the mind of God which the word recalls to him. At first he was ignorant of the plot - now he knows everything: he knows that the hour of his son's reign has come. He is neither bitter, displeased, nor jealous in confiding to other hands the reins of government. One thought alone fills him with happiness and adoration: "Blessed be Jehovah, the God of Israel, who has given one to sit on my throne this day, mine eyes even seeing it!"

David here is no longer a type of Christ, but a figure of the believer who forgets himself and overflows with thanksgiving, giving all the glory to the true king; a type of those saints who, adorned with their glorious crowns, remove them to ornament the steps of the throne of the "Lion

of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David." But this Lion of Judah is the Lamb who was slain. The grace of David and the glory of Solomon are concentrated in this unique Person. The joy of a Simeon, holding in his arms the grace and salvation of God represented by the child Jesus, will be mixed in heaven with the joy of David who sees the glory of God shining in the person of the King. In 1 Kings 1:49-53, all Adonijah's guests, stricken with fear, flee hither and thither. They no more attempt to resist than will men before the proclamation of the reign of Christ, for they shall be broken immediately. Adonijah beseeches the mercy of the king and seeks to obtain from him his solemn promise to spare his life. Solomon consents to forget, to be gracious yet another time, but he places Adonijah under responsibility before the glory of his reign: "If he will show himself a worthy man, there shall not an hair of him fall to the earth: but if wickedness shall be found in him, he shall die" (1 Kings 1:52).

It will be the same in the future reign of the Messiah. He will spare many rebels who come to him feigning repentance, but once evil is found in them He will cut them off from the land (2 Samuel 22:45; Psalms 101:8). When righteousness reigns the wicked will no longer be tolerated. Solomon, figure of the millennial King, knows Adonijah and does not modify his judgment when he sees him bowed before him. He knows what is harbored in his proud heart which is merely feigning submission and repentance. "Go to thine house," he says to him. Brief, severe words. Adonijah should have taken warning from them. From henceforth his role was to be quiet as a man who has been found guilty and is being kept under surveillance. He benefits from this longsuffering as long as evil is not manifested in him.

03.02. 1 Kings 2

1 Kings 2:1-46 1 Kings 2:1-12 - David's Last Recommendation As he dies, David leaves a commandment with his son Solomon, and insists upon his responsibility. It is, so to speak the testament of the aged king and the fruit of his long experience. Here we do not find "the last words of David" as 2 Samuel 23:1-39 gives them to us. The discourse contained in our passage historically precedes these "last words" which could be inserted between 1 Kings 2:9 and 1 Kings 2:10. It is not here a question of David judging his entire conduct in view of that of the true King, "the just ruler over men," and proclaiming the infallibility of the counsels of the grace of God (2 Samuel 23:4-5). No, Solomon at the dawn of his reign must first of all be armed against that which could hinder or ruin it.

There are many analogies between the words of David to his son and those of the Lord to Joshua (Joshua 1:1-18). The king must first of all "be of good courage and be a man." Obedience to the Lord and dependence upon Him are the proofs of this strength which is to be used to "walk in his ways. " The walk itself is directed by the Word of God, as we see here and in Psalms 119:1-176. The Word has different characteristics and it is necessary to pay attention to all of them. Here it is said: "To keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies; (Psalms 119:3). Such is the whole of the Word. His statutes are the things He has established and to which His authority is attached; His commandments, the expression of His will to which we are obliged to submit ourselves; His ordinances (or judgments), the principles He conveys and according to which He acts; and finally, His testimonies are the thoughts He has communicated to us and which faith must receive. All this constituted "the law of Moses" for the Israelite and was to be the divine standard for the walk of the faithful. A life ordered in this manner must prosper in whatever aspect one might consider it: "That thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself." This was to have been the secret of the reign of Solomon and his successors. With these principles there would not ever have failed him "a man on the throne of Israel. "

It is the same for us. Our life finds its nourishment and its strength in the Word of God, and it is only by keeping it that we are enabled to travel through an inimical world without fear and see all we do prosper (Psalms 1:2-3). It teaches us to walk in the way of God. Can there be a greater blessedness than to find a perfect path here on earth, the path of Christ upon which the eyes of God rest with complacency? See then the task of Solomon and of his successors. Had they walked in God's way and under His eye their dominion would have continued to be established forever (Psalms 132:11-12).

David's second recommendation to his son had reference to the judgments which the latter was to execute. David, who represents grace, understood what was appropriate to a reign of righteousness. If there were no righteousness, grace itself would be nothing but guilty weakness. As a man, David had shown himself very little able to give each of these qualities its rightful place. Thus, many times we find him too weak to exercise righteousness, as in the case of Joab, or we

find him extending grace at the expense of righteousness. He alone has found, in Christ, the way to reconcile these two things: His perfect hatred for sin and His perfect love for the sinner. But this absence of judgment was nothing less than weakness in David. A time is coming when the actions of men will be appraised according to the standard of righteousness, a standard that has long been postponed, but which will not have its sway until then. When righteousness reigns, can it appear to ignore sin? Men do not violate the laws of a kingdom with impunity, and when this kingdom is established in power those who have trampled these laws underfoot during the reign of grace must suffer the bitter consequences of their revolt. There are no legal exceptions to the law of God as there are to the laws of men. The sinner's act of iniquity will find him out - perhaps when his hair is white with age, but without question it will be recalled to mind.

Joab is mentioned first (1 Kings 2:5-6). We have already sufficiently evaluated his career* that we will pass over it here. David's weakness (2 Samuel 3:39) had prevented the king from immediately avenging the murder of Abner, and later that of Amasa, but he had not forgotten them. What Joab had done to these men, he had done to David. "Thou knowest also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me."** Perhaps this bloody man thought he was serving his king all the while he was serving his own self-interests. Impossible! That which man does in his self-interest, he is doing against God. In time of peace Joab's "girdle and shoes," his service and his walk, had been spotted with the blood of war. This was a defilement. War must overtake him in turn; he must learn that there could be no peace for him, for this is reserved for those who make peace (James 3:18). Neither Solomon's reign of peace nor his reign of righteousness could tolerate such elements. Joab must be immolated without delay and without mercy. "Do therefore according to thy wisdom," says David (1 Kings 2:6). Yes, there is retribution according to the wisdom of Christ (Revelation 5:12). Without it His glory would not be completely displayed.

{*Meditations on 2 Samuel, by H. L. Rossier} {**We do not believe that the king was here referring to the murder of Absalom by Joab.} But David's thoughts delight to linger, in contrast, on what Barzillai had done for him (2 Samuel 19:31-40). He rewards that devoted old man far beyond his desires in the person of his sons. Originally Chimham alone was concerned; now, all the sons of Barzillai have a right at the king's table in return for the faithfulness of their father. They enjoyed the glory of the kingdom in a particular position of honour and intimacy. Let us be mindful of this in our families. The devotion of parents to Christ is recompensed in their children. "When I call to remembrance," says the apostle, "the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice" (2 Timothy 1:5). A third person here is Shimei, the Benjaminite who had cursed David, and then at his return had given tokens of repentance in confessing his sin. This same Shimei had not joined Adonijah's following;* he remained in the company of David's mighty men and had followed Solomon. Of him David says, "And, behold, thou hast with thee Shimei the son of Gera." He was then apparently restored, but if David in grace had spared him, he did not hold him innocent. All was made to depend on his conduct under the king of righteousness. His conduct would show if his repentance was real. As with the case of Joab, Shimei's case is entrusted to the wisdom of Solomon (1 Kings 2:9).

{*Despite opinions to the contrary on part of some, we see no reason why the Shimei of 1 Kings 1:8 should be any other person than the son of Gera.}

David dies (1 Kings 2:10-12), and the Word notes here not the opening of Solomon's reign, but that which characterizes it both generally and in its entirety: "His kingdom was established greatly." This is the character of the kingdom of righteousness in contrast with that of the kingdom of grace, full of trouble and sedition.

1 Kings 2:13-46 - Righteousness and Judgment are the Foundation of His Throne

Scarcely is the throne inaugurated before elements hostile and foreign to the kingdom manifest themselves; but it is the character of the kingdom of righteousness to reprove all that is not in harmony with itself. In Solomon's presence the flesh can no longer push itself forward nor freely follow its bent.

Adonijah addresses himself to Bathsheba, that she may present his request to the king, her son. "Comest thou peaceably?" asks this pious woman who stands in doubt of the son of Haggith. She knew in effect that if he would have succeeded in his projects, she and her "son Solomon should be counted offenders" (1 Kings 1:21). This man though outwardly broken is nevertheless far from being so in his heart. "Thou knowest," he says, "that the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel set their faces on me, that I should reign" (1 Kings 2:15). How could such pretensions fail to raise the indignation of the true king? He - Adonijah - to have all the rights of succession to the crown and to the people of David! His words alone betoken an embittered heart, a bitterness long suppressed now manifesting itself because he had not judged himself in the least. To be sure, he also adds: "The kingdom is turned about, and is become my brother's: for it was his from the Lord," but is this a true recognition of the will of God, a true submission to the throne of righteousness? Adonijah accepts this because he cannot do otherwise. Certainly he does not belong to the "willing people" in the day of the power of the son of David. To his mind Solomon is an intruder, and this being the case, what must be the Lord who had established Solomon therefore be to Adonijah?

"And now," he says, "I ask one petition of thee, deny me not . . . that he give me Abishag the Shunammite to wife" (1 Kings 2:16-17). Abishag! - that young maiden who had served David and had tenderly cared for him, who had lived in the intimacy of the king of grace, to be given to this rebellious man whom only the patience of Solomon had spared to this moment! How little he knew both David and Solomon!* To give Abishag to him would be to admit to him some right to his father's succession, some contact with the kingdom which he might be able to assert at some favorable occasion; it would be to accept his pretensions and the revolt led by Joab and Abiathar (1 Kings 2:22) as legitimate. Should the woman who as a chaste virgin had served David be given to this profane man?

{*Nothing gives us any positive authority, as we have said in 1 Kings 1:1-53, to identify Abishag the Shunammite with the Shulamite of the Song of Songs, the beloved of Solomon; moreover it is prudent in the application of these types not to go beyond that which the Word clearly teaches us.}

It will be the same with regard to the Church. Will the King of Glory ever consent to yield to another the bride He has chosen for Himself as King of Grace? The Antichrist, the man of sin, may hope to rob Christ of His bride by seizing apostate Christendom, become Babylon the Great at the end; but his efforts to substitute himself for Christ, to take possession of His bride, and to seize the kingdom will end for both the harlot and for himself in the lake of fire and brimstone. Here judgment did not have to wait: the very same day Adonijah is put to death. The leader of the conspiracy, the false

king, having met his fate, Solomon's righteousness catches up with the priest (1 Kings 2:26-27) who had been supported for a long while by David, but whose sentence the Lord had already spoken to the ears of Eli (1 Samuel 2:35). Here we find the principle that is expressed in the words "I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau" (Malachi 1:2-3) pronounced thirteen centuries after He had said, "The elder shall serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23). It was the Lord's free choice, but the sentence is pronounced only after Esau had manifested himself to be the irreconcilable enemy of God and of His people. It is the same with regard to Abiathar. One hundred thirty-five years after the judgment is announced, he is cut off from the priesthood, after having first furnished a reason for his judgment by his alliance with the rebel.

Thus the reign of righteousness commences with the judgment of all those who when placed under the grace and longsuffering of God had not availed themselves of this to reconcile their hearts and their actions to this rule. Abiathar was all the more guilty in that he had borne the ark of the Lord before David, and that he had also shared in his afflictions from the beginning (1 Samuel 22:20). Thus he had had part in the testimony of the Lord's anointed and had suffered. Solomon recognizes this, but in the only case where Abiathar's faithfulness is put to the test and where it is a matter of the glory of the son of David, he makes shipwreck and abandons his master. The word of the Lord, long suspended, is fulfilled: Abiathar is rejected.

Joab comes next. Of him it is expressly said that he had not turned after Absalom (1 Kings 2:28), whatever may have been his feeling in this, as we have seen in the Second Book of Samuel. But it was a far more serious thing to turn away from the reign of righteousness at its beginning, for this denoted an absolute lack of fear in the presence of him who was destined to sit as glorious king upon his throne.

Joab flees to the tabernacle and takes hold of the horns of the altar. That cannot save him. The Word of God is against him: "If a man come presumptuously upon his neighbor, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from my altar, that he may die" (Exodus 21:14). Solomon remembers this. When Joab's judgment is determined it is too late for the altar to shelter him. Vengeance must be executed upon him in order that "upon David, and upon his seed, and upon his house, and upon his throne, shall there be peace for ever from the Lord" (1 Kings 2:33), for without vengeance, blood would have remained upon the house of David. Judgment was necessary for his glory.

Lastly comes Shimei (1 Kings 2:36-46). Solomon places him on the footing of responsibility and he accepts this. He thus reveals his pure ignorance of his state of sin and consequently of his incapacity to obey. Had not Israel spoken the very same words when the law was proposed? "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:8). And so Shimei: "The saying is good: as my lord the king hath said, so will thy servant do" (1 Kings 2:38). He knows, wretched man, that to disobey means death for him and that his blood will be upon his own head - and nevertheless he is unable to do aught but disobey. He is unable to surrender two runaway slaves. In order to regain possession of them for a day, he sacrifices his own life! What a picture of the world which knows the law of God and which will not and cannot submit to it once a passing interest comes between the will of God and itself. He is judged by his own word: "The word that I have heard is good" (1 Kings 2:42). The man who is placed under responsibility and who accepts this and fails, cannot be tolerated under the reign of righteousness.

03.03. 1 Kings 3

1 Kings 3:1-28 1 Kings 3:1-3 - Pharaoh's Daughter

"And Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the Lord, and the wall of Jerusalem round about" (1 Kings 3:1). The mention of the establishment of the kingdom under Solomon's hand (1 Kings 2:12) is followed in 1 Kings 2:1-46 by the account of judgment which purifies the kingdom from all that had risen up against David. The repetition of the mention of this establishment (1 Kings 2:46) is followed in 1 Kings 3:1-28 by Solomon's alliance by marriage with the king of Egypt. He brings into his alliance the very nation which had formerly enslaved his own people - a most intimate union, for he takes his wife from Egypt. This union recalls that of Joseph with an Egyptian bride, the daughter of the priest of On, but their typical meanings differ. Joseph, rejected by his brothers, before making himself known to them, finds a wife and sons in Egypt among the nations according to that which is said of Christ in Isaiah 49:5-6 : "Though Israel be not gathered . . . I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." Joseph's marriage typifies the relationship of a rejected Christ with the Church, and it brings before us the posterity which He acquires outside the promised land before taking up his relationship with His own people again.

Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter, contracted in different circumstances, does not have the same meaning. The kingdom is established in the king's hand; the period of the rejection of the Lord's anointed in the person of David is over; Solomon is established as king of righteousness (he proves this in executing judgment) over Israel, his people. Then, and only then, does he make affinity with Pharaoh and take his daughter to wife according as it is written in Isaiah 19:21-25 : "And the Lord shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the Lord, and perform it . . . In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance."

Solomon brings his Egyptian wife into the city of David. Thus at the beginning of the millennial reign the nations shall first be put under the safeguard of the alliance made with Israel and represented by the ark established on Mount Zion (2 Samuel 6:12). Afterwards they shall have their distinct place of blessing, just as Solomon later builds a house for his Gentile wife outside the city of David, "For he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places are holy, whereunto the ark of the Lord hath come" (2 Chronicles 8:11; 1 Kings 9:24).

Up to this moment Pharaoh's daughter is established in the blessings - not in the relationship - of which the ark of the covenant is the type. Wherever this ark was found, whether in the house of Obed-edom (2 Samuel 6:11; 2 Samuel 6:18; 2 Samuel 6:20), or in the city of Zion, it brought blessing with it. During the Millennium the nations will take account of this privilege: "Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before

the Lord . . . In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you" (Zechariah 8:22-23).

1 Kings 3:4-15 - Gibeon In 1 Kings 3:2-3 we see clearly that the order of things was not the ultimate at the beginning of Solomon's reign. The ark of the Lord abode under curtains; it remained to David's son to build the house of the Lord. At that time the tabernacle and the altar were at the high place at Gibeon and the ark, which David had brought back, was at Jerusalem. How David had this ark of the covenant, the throne of the Lord, the sign of His personal presence in the midst of His people, in his affections (Psalms 132:1-18)! From the moment he brought it back to Zion we do not see in his history that he personally ever sought another place of worship, though he was not unmindful of Gibeon. When the ark was being carried to Jerusalem he took care to link worship before the ark with the sacrifices upon the altar at Gibeon (1 Chronicles 16:37-43), maintaining in this way the unity of worship. Each day service was performed before the ark and before the altar at Gibeon, so that at the same moment and "continually" these two parts of worship were carried on together, though separated geographically.

Later, according to the commandment of the Lord, David built an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, and there he offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. His God did not long deprive him of an altar in relation to the ark. In this way Gibeon lost its value and meaning.

Solomon does not appear to have thought of this unity at the beginning of his reign. Doubtless God bears him a lovely testimony: "And Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father" (1 Kings 3:3), but this testimony is qualified: "only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places." In so doing he accommodated himself to the religious practices of his people, of whom it is said in 1 Kings 3:2 : "Only the people sacrificed in high places."

It was not a positive sin against the Lord, as was the case later on with certain pious kings of Judah, when the building of the temple had removed every plea for such practices. If they still continued then, it was to the Lord's great displeasure, for they must needs lead to idolatrous practices.* In these days of blessing and power under young King Solomon it was not at all so, but "he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places," and not only at Gibeon, "for that was the great high place" (1 Kings 3:3-4) where the brazen altar was still found, the tabernacle and all its furniture. At any rate, this practice served to disperse worship in Israel. And so the unity of worship was lost, for the altar was, among its other attributes, the expression of this unity, just as the Lord's Table is today for Christians. In former days under Joshua with regard to the altar Ed (Joshua 22:1-34), Israel had understood this and had risen up in zealous energy against sacrifices offered on an altar other than that of the tabernacle.

{*See 1 Kings 14:23; 1 Kings 15:14; 1 Kings 22:44; 2 Kings 12:3; 2 Chronicles 20:33, where the people do not seem to have acted otherwise than they had at the opening of Solomon's reign. But we see idolatry allied to the high places under Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:4; 2 Chronicles 31:1). Wicked Manasseh rebuilt them and raised altars to Baal (2 Kings 21:3). When he repented, "the people did sacrifice still in the high places, yet unto the Lord their God only" (2 Chronicles 33:17). This proves what we are saying, that is, that these high places at certain periods in Israel's history are not necessarily connected with idol worship, though they led to this. From the moment that worship no longer has Christ as its centre, as the ark at Zion but finds place only for blessings received,

even though they be the blessings of salvation, it has deviated from its purpose and become an instrument in Satan's hands to finally replace Christ with false gods. Josiah entirely abolished the high places together with all idolatry in Judah and in Israel (2 Kings 23:8).}

God bore with this state of things as long as the full manifestation of His will concerning worship had not yet been given by the consecration of the temple. Nevertheless it was a weakness in this great king. How much more intelligent was David's worship, even before Moriah, than Solomon's! The ark was everything for David; for him it was the Lord, the mighty God of Jacob (Psalms 132:5), whose worship was there where the ark was found. Solomon did not rise to the height of these blessings and did not enjoy the intimacy of this relationship with God. He did not go beyond the common level of religion of his people. Do we not find in our own day the same weakness, the same lack of intelligence, even there where the desire to worship is present? Everyone chooses his own high place without troubling himself about the presence of the ark - of Christ. Everyone builds his own altar without even dreaming that since the cross, as in old times after Moriah, there could be but one symbol of unity for the people of God.

Solomon went to Gibeon, but he loved the Lord, and the Lord always takes account of our affection for Him. There it was that He appeared to him in a dream (1 Kings 3:5). This fact, as others have remarked, has its importance. In a dream one is unable to disguise the true state of one's heart; one is not controlled by either his reason or his will to repress the manifestation of what is in his heart. In a dream the soul is laid bare before the Lord. What then were the thoughts harbored in this young king's heart when God said to him, "Ask what I shall give thee" (1 Kings 3:5)? What the divine word finds in the first place in this heart is gratitude for the great mercy of the Lord towards David: "Thou hast showed unto thy servant David my father great mercy," and at the same time the high esteem he held this latter in (1 Kings 3:6) because of his walk of truth, of righteousness, and of uprightness which had proved that David feared the Lord (Proverbs 14:2). Next there is thankfulness for the mercy of God towards himself, David's son; "Thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day" (1 Kings 3:6). Lastly, there is the consciousness of his youth, of his ignorance, of his incapacity. "And I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in." Such a state of soul promises abundant blessing; it is summed up in this: Fear the Lord, have the consciousness of His grace, esteem others better than yourself, and count yourself as nothing.*

{*All this is reflected later on in the Proverbs, counsels of the wisdom of the king. See, for example, Proverbs 3:7; Proverbs 4:7; etc.}

Solomon was there before God with an undivided heart and he was seeking but one thing: to serve the Lord in the circumstances in which He had placed him as leader of the people. He asks the Lord for "an understanding heart,"* for hearing is the door to discernment and intelligence. In order to be wise one must begin by listening to wisdom: "Blessed is the man that heareth me" (Proverbs 8:34). All true service starts with hearing. Solomon did not know how to "go out or come in"; he could not learn this except by listening. He who does not begin by enrolling himself in the school of wisdom will never be a true servant. Such was the pathway of service of Christ Himself as man. "He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned" (Isaiah 50:4).

{*Literally, "a heart that hears."}

Let us remark that Solomon asks the Lord for "an understanding heart." One does not truly learn to know the mind of God except with the heart - not with the intelligence. True intelligence is produced by affection for Christ. The heart listens and when it has received the lessons it needs, it is made wise, capable of discerning between good and evil and of governing the people of God. That which makes the role of the heart so important in service is that no judgment can be according to God if it does not have love as its starting point. We experience this in cases of discipline, in guiding souls, and in caring for saints and assemblies.

Solomon's answer "pleased the Lord" (1 Kings 3:10). What grace to have His approval on all that we ask of Him and to receive His testimony that we have been pleasing to Him! The Lord grants Solomon his request and is pleased to add that which Solomon had not requested. He grants him the first place in wisdom, "so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. " Moreover, He gives him "both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days" (1 Kings 3:12-13). Solomon's humble dependence put him in first place, according as it is written: "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." It was so with Christ: "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:43-45). In every respect there is none like Him! Wisdom, power, wealth, the crown of glory and honour - all things shall be His in "the day which the Lord shall make," and even the greatest, most magnificent things will only serve as His footstool! In 1 Kings 3:14, as in all the books we are studying, the question of the king's responsibility is brought up. "If thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days." It is this if that Solomon could not come up to and which led to his ruin and to the division of his kingdom.

Having received these blessings, Solomon leaves Gibeon to come to Jerusalem, where he "stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord" - the act of a submissive heart which understands the mind of God, the first manifestation of the wisdom which he has just received. He leaves the forms to take hold of the reality; he leaves the external display of his religion to come to seek the presence of God represented by the ark - Christ in figure. The altar of Gibeon is no longer sufficient for him; this place is abandoned and no longer plays a role in Solomon's religious life. Later the Lord reveals Himself to him again (1 Kings 9:2), but no more at Gibeon.

Before the ark Solomon offers up "burnt offerings" and "peace offerings" and makes "a feast to all his servants" (1 Kings 3:15).

There is more joy before the ark than at Gibeon, though the king had probably offered up many more sacrifices at Gibeon (2 Chronicles 1:6) than here; but before the ark we find peace offerings, the true sacrifices of communion, and at the same time a feast for all the servants of the king.

1 Kings 3:16-28 - Righteous Judgment

After the understanding to worship before the ark, the first manifestation of his wisdom, we find in Solomon "the wisdom of God . . . to do judgment" (1 Kings 3:28). Though it concern harlots, nothing changes this judgment. Men ever allow themselves to be influenced in their judgments by the character of those who speak to them; it is not so with God. What is important for Him is the heart, not the outward character. Solomon's judgment is based on the affections manifested by the

heart. Affirmations or denials were of equal value in this case, and judgment could not be based upon them (1 Kings 3:22). That which could establish judgment was the manifestation of the heart. Neither was the question which of the two women was the more worthy - both were harlots; nor whether the actions objected to were probable or had taken place - there had been no witness to it; nor whether the true mother could recognize her child by certain outward signs - there were none. The only testimony was that one of these women said that she did not recognize her son in the dead child. It was a matter therefore of judging the state of her heart, and this could only be judged by the affections manifested. One of these women had an object she loved. Which of the two had this object? For there where true ties of love exist, we seek to safeguard at any cost that which is dear to us, even at the risk of losing it for ourselves. That is the character of love. Love is not selfish: it sacrifices itself for the object loved. The love of Christ has done that for us and we can do that for Him in return: "For thy sake we are killed all the day long" (Romans 8:36). When the true mother saw the sword lifted over her child, "her bowels yearned upon her son." The object loved is more to us than our love for it. This is how one distinguishes reality, the true mother. In the Christian profession he who has not found an object for his heart and bowels betrays himself quickly. "Divide it," says the one who is not the mother, yielding to her resentment. One quickly sacrifices Christ when it is a matter of satisfying one's own passions. Only divine wisdom is able to discern the reality of profession by the state of the heart. How frequently there is profession without reality! Where are the affections for Christ? Where the devotion which sacrifices even its legitimate advantages and rights for Him? In this passage, it is not a question of natural goodness nor of nobleness of heart, for, we repeat, we are dealing with two harlots. It is a question of ties created by God, of an object given by Him which the soul appreciates. God will never take it away from us; to the contrary, in the trial we shall receive it afresh from His own hand. "Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it: she is the mother thereof."

03.04. 1 Kings 4

1 Kings 4:1-34 The Glory of the Kingdom This chapter tells us of the internal order and of the splendour of Solomon's kingdom, but also of its moral glory characterized by the wisdom of the king.

All Israel was gathered under his sceptre (1 Kings 4:1), thus forming one peaceful unity. Such had been unknown during his father's reign, as the seven years at Hebron, the rebellion of Absalom, that of Sheba the son of Bichri, and that of Adonijah prove. Now everything is in order and worthy of this glorious reign, but we find only eleven princes (1 Kings 4:2-6). The perfect order in relation to government on earth, represented by the number twelve, had not yet come and would not come until the advent of One greater than Solomon.

Azariah the son of Zadok heads the princes. "He it is that executed the priest's office in the temple that Solomon built in Jerusalem" (1 Chronicles 6:10*). The very highest function falls to him. The temple is to become the centre of the whole order of Solomon's kingdom, just as it will be on the earth at the establishment of the millennial kingdom by Christ (Ezekiel 40:1-49, Ezekiel 41:1-26, Ezekiel 42:1-20, Ezekiel 43:1-27, Ezekiel 44:1-31, Ezekiel 45:1-25, Ezekiel 46:1-24, Ezekiel 47:1-23, Ezekiel 48:1-35). Abiathar himself (1 Kings 4:4), who had been driven from the priesthood, is counted among the princes alongside Zadok. He had carried the ark and shared all David's afflictions, and though he was removed from his office, his lord did not wish to deprive him of the dignity which he was bestowing upon all those who had suffered with the rejected king.

{*It is probable that this Azariah was the son of Ahimaaz and the grandson of Zadok. The term son for any descendant whatsoever is found continually in the Jewish genealogies. A somewhat obscure passage in 1 Chronicles 6:9 would seem to attribute the priesthood to Azariah, the great-grandson of Ahimaaz.}

Among Solomon's twelve stewards (1 Kings 4:7-19) we find two who had married daughters of the king, a singular honour granted to the son of that same Abinadab who had received the ark and had guarded it for twenty years in his house on the hill. To be of the family which had religiously watched over the ark of the Lord was a title to nobility in the king's eyes. An equal honour is granted to Ahimaaz, son of Zadok,* faithful to David at the risk of his life, and concerning whom the old king had given this testimony: "He is a good man, and cometh with good tidings." He was the first to announce to David the victory which restored his throne to him and assured him of inheriting it according to God.

{*The critics, without any apparent reason, make this Ahimaaz out to be another individual.}

1 Kings 4:20-28 describe the condition of the people under Solomon's reign and the character of this reign. "Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude" (1 Kings 4:20). The promise made to Abraham after he had offered his son upon the altar was now realized (Genesis 22:17), at least in part, for his seed was to be "as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore." This promise will not be fully realized until Christ's millennial

reign. Then as far as that which concerns Israel, the two parts of the kingdom, the heavenly and the earthly, shall be established forever in perfect harmony. Here the people is as numerous as the sand by the sea - restraining/he surrounding peoples and keeping them within their bounds. Solomon's subjects ate and drank and made merry (1 Kings 4:20). They had material abundance; there were no more needs which were not satisfied. Joy filled their hearts; security reigned everywhere (1 Kings 4:25). Everyone had his possession and was dwelling under his vine and under his fig tree. That which men vainly seek in this world of iniquity where Christ was cast out shall be fully realized when the Lord, acknowledged by all, shall reign over all the kingdoms of the earth (1 Kings 4:21; 1 Kings 4:24). Moreover, this powerful reign shall be a reign of universal peace: "He had peace on all sides round about him" (1 Kings 4:24). All the prosperity, all the resources of the kingdom serve to exalt the king, unite to bring out his glory (1 Kings 4:22-23; 1 Kings 4:26-28). But that which characterizes this universal dominion above all was its moral aspect, much more glorious than its material aspect (1 Kings 4:29-34). "God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart even as the sand that is on the sea shore" (1 Kings 4:29). God had given Solomon wisdom, the moral discernment that applies itself to all things, to the good, to the evil, to the various circumstances of man, and the knowledge of the manner of conducting oneself in relation to these things. This moral discernment is not to be found apart from the fear of God which, as we have seen, characterized Solomon at the beginning of his career. The Word of God is the means of communicating this wisdom to us; that is why Solomon asked God for "an understanding heart." This wisdom has found its expression in the Proverbs of Solomon, themselves become the Word of God.

"And understanding exceeding much." Solomon's understanding was as great as his wisdom, to which it was intimately bound. Understanding is the capacity to take in and to appropriate the thoughts of God in such a way that one is able to communicate them to others. Beyond that - "largeness of heart even as the sand that is on the sea shore," a heart capable of embracing all his people (cf. 1 Kings 4:20), identifying Israel with himself, providing all their needs according to his love, responding to all their interests and making them his own. Does not this speak to us of Christ, of that which He will fully manifest when He shall introduce us into the glorious rest of His presence, when His heart, divinely large, shall embrace us all; when "He will rest in His love" (Zephaniah 3:17)? The extent of Solomon's wisdom is described for us in 1 Kings 4:33-34. During his reign there was much more than mere physical rule. His wisdom had sway over all things. "And he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spoke also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes" (1 Kings 4:33). Adam had rules physically "over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26). God had delivered into Noah's hands "every beast of the earth, and . . . every fowl of the air . . . all that moveth upon the earth, and . . . all the fishes of the sea" (Genesis 9:2). Later the God of heaven gave "the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven" into the hands of the king of the Gentiles and made him ruler over them and over men. All this is not said of Solomon, but his wisdom held sway over all these things, from the cedar to the hyssop, from the beasts to the fishes. He understood their life, the reason for their being, their relationships among themselves and their interrelationships with the whole of creation, the examples God was furnishing by their means for the moral life of mankind; and he spoke of all these things. Modern science, with all its high pretensions, is nothing but darkness compared with these certainties. But Solomon did not

possess universal dominion under these two aspects. This is reserved for a Greater than Solomon, for the Second Adam: Thou hast "crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea" (Psalms 8:5-8). It is also said of Him: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Revelation 5:12).

Solomon's dominion was but a weak type of Christ's, who will have "the uttermost parts of the earth" (Psalms 2:8) for His possession. The king of Israel had dominion "over all the region on this side of the river" "unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt" (1 Kings 4:24; 1 Kings 4:21). In sum, these were the limits the Lord had assigned to Israel in Joshua 1:4; but when it came to the wisdom of Solomon, these limits were exceeded by far: All people came to hear him; all the kings of the earth came to inquire of him (1 Kings 4:34), and we see in type that which is said of Christ: "I will . . . give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth."

"Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol" (1 Kings 4:30-31). We have no other mention of the two latter except in 1 Chronicles 2:6, but we have an indication of the wisdom of Ethan and of Heman in the Word. Heman the Ezrahite is the inspired author of Psalms 88:1-18; Ethan the Ezrahite, that of Psalms 89:1-50. Now, what kind of wisdom is found in these two psalms? Psalms 88:1-18 has a very special character which is found to the same degree in no other psalm. It shows us Israel, convicted of having broken the law, and under the consequences of this disobedience. Nothing could be worse! Death, the grave, being cut off, and darkness are Israel's lot. Moreover, the wrath of God weighs upon her and she is afflicted with all His waves. She is abandoned by men and is shut up. She cries, she cries in vain (Psalms 88:1; Psalms 88:9; Psalms 88:13). She is rejected; God hides His face from her. The intense heat of the Lord's wrath has passed over her; she is overwhelmed by His terror. God has removed from her all who might have sympathized with her. And the conclusion of all this? None! Not a ray of hope! A soul who cries out, and God who does not answer!*

{*We find these same feelings expressed in the prayer of Moses in Psalms 90:1-17 : Psalms 90:1-6, concerning sin; Psalms 90:7-12, concerning the breaking of the law - but not without hope.}

Now, let us note, Psalms 90:1-17 is the only record given us of the wisdom of Heman. This is very great wisdom, indeed, to consider the responsibility of man relative to the demands of righteousness and divine holiness; wisdom which ascertains that there is no way out of this position, and that the law, the measure of this responsibility, must cast man into the darkness of death, forever far from the face of God.

Through wisdom Heman reached the conclusion which God desired to teach man by the law of Moses. Has not this man of God's spirit already been convinced of the experience to which the long centuries of man's history must lead and which should form the basis for the gospel? In reading this Psalm does one not seem to read the description of the law which kills the sinner which we find in the Epistle to the Romans? In Psalms 89:1-52 the wisdom of Ethan instructs us.

What does this other wise man speak of? Of grace! This Psalm is about the unchangeable promises of God and the sure mercies of David. The people's relationship to God on the footing of the law can only lead to the darkness of judgment and death; their relation on the basis of the covenant of grace made with David leads to this: "Mercy shall be built up forever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens" (Psalms 89:2) - in the heavens, where nothing shall ever touch it. This magnificent Psalm is the hymn of grace and of all the glory of God which this grace has established and brought to light.

Righteousness, judgment, mercy, truth, faithfulness, and the power of God are celebrated as manifested in a Person, Himself the centre and the key to this Psalm: the True David, exalted as One chosen out of the people, the Lord's Anointed (Psalms 89:19-20), He who is to be made the First-born, higher than the kings of the earth (Psalms 89:27), He from whom He will not withdraw His loving kindness, whom His faithfulness shall not fail (Psalms 89:33), He whose seed shall endure forever, whose throne shall be as the sun before the Lord (Psalms 89:36)!

Doubtless, in this marvelous picture of grace seen in the True David and in His glorious throne, the question of the responsibility of David's sons (Psalms 89:30-32) cannot be absent, nor the consequences which result for the people who have failed (Psalms 89:38-51), but this dark scene ends in blessing: "Blessed be the Lord forevermore. Amen and amen" (Psalms 89:52).

Such are the instructions of wisdom by the mouth of these two men of God, one showing the system of the law which ends in the curse and the darkness of death, the other the system of grace based upon the Person of the True David and ending in eternal glory. The first proclaims the end of the old man, the second the endless reign of the new man.

What then must have been the wisdom of Solomon to surpass that of these two wise men?

03.05. 1 Kings 5

1 Kings 5:1-18 Hiram. Preparations for the Temple

After having described the internal order of Solomon's kingdom and all the wisdom that governed there, the Holy Spirit conducts us to that which, above all, was to characterize this reign: to the temple of the Lord. David was unable to build this house, for peace must be established (1 Kings 5:3) for the Lord to be able to make His abiding dwelling in the midst of His people. As long as they had wandered in the desert the Lord had associated Himself with them in their condition of pilgrim and traveler by the tabernacle. Then followed the wars of Canaan under Joshua and the judges; these had not ceased until the reign of David. God cannot dwell in rest where there is war. The first condition of His abiding* dwelling with His people in Canaan is that peace be made. It is the same, spiritually, for the Church. When the "good news of peace" is announced, the house of God, the holy temple in the Lord, is built up, and this work continues until the full rest of glory.

{*We say "abiding" because the first condition for God to be able to dwell with His people is redemption, typified by the Passover and the Red Sea.}

Under Solomon this peace was outward, material, so to speak. The Lord had given him rest on every side (1 Kings 5:4). The blessings that filled his reign had the same material character. All the desirable things of earth were brought to him, and he made them contribute to the glory of the Lord who had firmly established his throne. The king of Tyre is the first one mentioned as coming to bring his services to the newly founded kingdom. In the Word Tyre is a type of the world with all its riches and desirable things. In Ezekiel 27:1-36 we see what Tyre, whose commerce spread over all the earth and to which the resources of the whole world flowed from every direction, was in antiquity. Precious woods which the Sidonians excelled in working, ivory and ebony, fine linen, white wool, embroidered work, blue and purple, silver, iron, tin, lead, brass, carbuncles, coral, rubies and every precious stone, gold in great abundance, spices, oil and wheat, flocks innumerable; to say nothing of warriors to defend her, sailors to guide her fleets, wise men to direct her and to make use of her resources - such was, in very few words, the wealth of Tyre. All that the human heart could desire upon earth could be procured there. In Solomon's time Tyre had not yet taken on that character of pride denounced by Isaiah and especially by Ezekiel, and which went so far as to deify the intelligence of man. Hiram, the friend of David, still ruled over this people. Of his own free will he had come to offer his services to Solomon's father, and his carpenters had built him a house (2 Samuel 5:11). The same willing spirit led him to send his servants to David's son because he had always loved his father (1 Kings 5:1). How could he fail to be welcomed by the king of glory when he had always loved the king of grace?

Solomon tells Hiram of his plans, plans that in no way were the fruit of his own will. He had resolved to build the house of the Lord because God had so decreed, communicating His will beforehand to David (1 Kings 5:5). Such is the true character of the decision of faith. Faith decides because God has determined. This point is important. Often we know the will of God beforehand and instead of saying, "I have determined" to do it, we seek excuses and good reasons to avoid it

or at least to avoid putting our whole heart into it. At other times our resolutions have no motive behind them other than our own self-will, and lead us to bitter disappointments.

Solomon's rule is characterized, as we have said, by an earthly glory to which all the natural resources the whole world can furnish contribute. But this glory was to be to the glory of God and to give Him, in the midst of His people a temple which would exalt His holiness and His greatness. So it will be in the glorious reign of the Messiah.

We shall see later that Solomon, as responsible king, was not content with that which the Lord bestowed upon him, but later sought to augment this by and for himself and had to bear the consequences of this.

Hiram rejoiced greatly when he heard the words of Solomon. He considered himself honoured to be able by his service to contribute to the glory of the God of Israel. This Gentile king said, "Blessed be the Lord this day" (1 Kings 5:7). He looks upon the Lord, the God of Solomon, as his God, and thanks Him for giving David a son to reign over His people. Affection for David, the rejected king, leads his soul to appreciate the king of glory, to appreciate God Himself, and to appreciate the people of God. The fruit of a rejoicing heart is entire devotion to the service of Christ. "I will do all thy desire" (1 Kings 5:8). And after all, what is Hiram's service in comparison to that which Solomon does for him? Sometimes that which we do for the Lord looks like something. The cedars of Lebanon and all the effort to transport them were no little thing, but Solomon uses many other materials also to construct the temple besides Hiram's cedars and cypresses: the great costly stones and the gold which overlaid everything were more important for the foundation and the glory of the building than the products of Lebanon. Nevertheless Solomon accomplishes the desire of Hiram because the latter accomplishes that of Solomon (1 Kings 5:9-10), and the desire of Hiram is the feeding of his house. The Lord could do without us, but He does not want to do so; He well knows that to use us in His service gives joy to and blesses our hearts - but we cannot do without Him. It is He who gives life, nourishment, strength, and growth. The food of Hiram's country, the wheat in which his merchants trafficked, came from Palestine (Ezekiel 27:17). It is the Lord's land which furnishes those things needful for our existence. Thus Hiram depended upon Solomon for this: "giving food for my household" (1 Kings 5:9). And what abundance reigns among the servants of the king of Tyre thereafter! four million eight hundred thousand litres of wheat annually! One might own cedar trees and cypresses and yet die of hunger. Certainly one doesn't die of hunger when one places them into the service of Solomon!

Peace characterizes this whole scene. Hiram and Solomon made a league of peace (1 Kings 5:12).

"And the Lord gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him" (1 Kings 5:12). He had received wisdom (1 Kings 2:6) in order to purify his kingdom by judgment; then (1 Kings 3:12) in order to discern aright in view of governing his people; then (1 Kings 4:29) in view of leading and instructing the nations, the peoples, and the kings of the earth; finally, he received wisdom in view of building the temple, the great work which was to characterize his glorious reign. In 1 Kings 5:13-18 we witness the organization of the preparatory work on the temple. Each is employed according to his own ability. The wisdom of Solomon directs everything. His workers come to assist Hiram's for the wood with which to build, carrying burdens, cutting stones out of the mountain. The men of Gebal have their part in the work. Ezekiel 27:9 mentions them as skilled to

repair the breaches of Tyre, which is there represented by the form of a magnificent vessel sailing the seas.*

{*The Gibrilites are mentioned in Joshua in relation to Lebanon as those to be conquered by Israel (Joshua 13:5). The Gebal mentioned in Ezekiel (Ezekiel 27:9), a seaport at the foot of the northern slopes of Lebanon, was probably their city. In this glorious reign of Solomon they were to be tributaries, as belonging to the conquered race of Canaan.} The first act of Solomon is to transport "great stones, costly stones, and hewn stones, to lay the foundation of the house. " It was of prime importance to lay a costly foundation, one whose solidity would be proof against every test, as the base of the temple of God. This is what God has done for His spiritual house as well. The foundation is Christ, the Chief Cornerstone; the foundations are the truths touching Christ and His work as He has presented them by His apostles and prophets. These are the great stones, the costly stones. It is impossible to remove one without compromising or shaking the whole building. This is what Solomon's wisdom had well understood in preparing the hewn stones on which the house of God was to be built.

03.06. 1 Kings 6

1 Kings 6:1-38 The Temple

Four hundred eighty years have passed since the exodus from Egypt; the Lord's purpose in delivering His people has been attained. That which Israel had sung on the shore of the Red Sea is at last realized: "Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established" (Exodus 15:17). The two things mentioned in this passage are realized in type by David and by Solomon. To prepare is not the same as to build. It was David who had prepared everything for the construction of the temple (1 Chronicles 22:14). Much more, it was to him that the plans of the building and all its contents had been communicated in writing (1 Chronicles 28:11-19). David had imparted these plans to Solomon. Solomon built. The Savior "prepares"; the Lord "establishes by His hands." The materials prepared by God for His dwelling with men and for the accomplishment of all His counsels are the fruit of the sufferings and rejection of the true David; Christ, the Son of the living God, builds, and says: "Upon this rock I will build my church."

Before beginning the subject of the construction of the temple, we need to present briefly the significance of this building. The temple, as also the tabernacle, was the dwelling of God in the midst of His people, the visible sign of His presence. His throne, the ark where He was seated between the cherubim, was found there. The ark contained the tables of the law, the testimony of the covenant between the Lord and His people. This covenant, on God's part, was kept with scrupulous and unchangeable faithfulness, but it was conditional. If Israel fulfilled its conditions, God would dwell in the midst of His people. If Israel disobeyed, the Lord was obliged to abandon her, to leave His throne and His house in Israel. The temple was the centre of worship. One approached God in His temple by means of sacrifices and the priesthood. Nevertheless, God remained inaccessible, for in actual fact man in the flesh could not approach Him. The way into the holiest, though revealed in type, was not made manifest. Only the work of Christ was able to open this up. The temple, the place of worship, was also the centre of the government of Israel. It was God who governed. The king was only the responsible representative of the people before God and the executor of the Lord's will in government. From the moment that God acquired an earthly people, a tabernacle or a temple was indispensable and became the centre of all their political and religious life. When the people was declared to be "Lo-ammi" the glory of the Lord abandoned the temple which eventually disappeared after having been destroyed and rebuilt many times. But when the sure relationship of the Lord with His people shall be reestablished under the new covenant of grace, the temple will reappear, more glorious than it has ever yet been. The temple (like the tabernacle) also has a typical meaning. The temple represents heaven, the Father's house, and we can apply its symbols to our Christian relationships. All that is found in the temple is but the figure of spiritual things which are the portion of the Christians, as we shall have ample opportunity of considering.* *We shall be presented with many other details throughout the course of 1 Kings 6:1-38 and 1 Kings 7:1-51. The temple being God's dwelling-place, it is necessarily also

the dwelling-place of those who are His (John 14:2; John 4:21-24). This is why Solomon's temple shows us the priests' rooms as being one with the house. This brings us to note an important difference in the way the temple is presented in 1 Kings 6:1-38 and 2 Chronicles 3:1-17. In 1 Kings the priests' dwellings form a part of the house; 2 Chronicles 3:9 mentions them only in passing and without indicating their connection with the temple. In 1 Kings the two most important parts of the Jewish system, the altar and the veil, are completely missing, whereas Chronicles mentions them. Without them one could not approach God. Finally, the height of the temple's great porch is passed over in silence in Kings and given in Chronicles.* From these facts we can conclude a priori that Kings presents the temple as dwelling-place and Chronicles as place of approach. We must keep this in mind as we consider these chapters.

{*This is why the following pages of necessity present a constant mixture of Jewish and Christian elements.} The temple, viewed as a whole, is also the figure of the Christian Assembly, the Church, the spiritual house, the holy temple, the dwelling of God by the Spirit.

Finally, the temple is Christ. "Destroy this temple," He said, "and in three days I will raise it up." Here below He was the temple in which the Father dwelt (John 14:10). But if in a general way the temple is Christ, all its parts present Him in diverse characters. The ark with the law in its heart, the mercy-seat on the ark, the veil, all the utensils of the holy place and of the court, all the way to the walls and foundations of the building - all, absolutely everything, just as in the tabernacle in the wilderness, speaks to us of Him. Everything presents His glories, the efficacy of His work, the light of His Spirit, the perfume of His Name, the value of His blood, the purity, the holiness, the glory of His Person. Wherever we turn, whatever object our eye contemplates in this marvelous building, we ever find the perfections of Him in whom the father has found His delight, in whom He has manifested Himself to us. If we enter into the Father's house, it is to find the perfect manifestation of all that He is, in the Person of His Son.

Having said this, let us examine the teaching of our chapter in detail.

"And the house which king Solomon built for the Lord, the length thereof was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof twenty cubits, and the height thereof thirty cubits" (1 Kings 6:2). At first glance, the proportions of the temple seem astonishing, for they are very restrained, and this fact has struck even unbelievers. There is a great difference between the dimensions of Solomon's temple and those of the gigantic sanctuaries of Egypt. It is not size, but holiness, perfect order, righteousness, and glory, that is to say the balance and harmony of all the perfections of God that characterize His house. The dimensions of the temple were exactly double those of the tabernacle in length, in width, and in height, but the proportions of the different parts remained the same. While crossing the wilderness, the tabernacle might have seemed a thing of relatively little importance in view of what the house of God was to be in glory. But all God's plan, all the order of His house, was found in this transitory building and was to be manifested there. It is the same with the Church. This is why it is said to Timothy: "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth": (1 Timothy 3:15). In glory the order of the government of the house will be fully manifested, as we see in the description of the New Jerusalem in relation to the kingdom (Revelation 21:1-27).

Moreover, if one considers carefully the manner in which the temple was built, beyond the astonishing analogy between its dimensions and those of the tabernacle one observes that the temple was built upon no model other than that one. We insist upon this point because men who often without even a thought, disbelieve the revelation of God will go to great lengths to discover whether Tyrian, Assyrian, Egyptian, or Babylonian temples have more or less served as models for Solomon's, whereas it served as its own model. Is this not worthy of the True Architect of the temple, who revealed all its details to David just as previously those of the tabernacle to Moses? But now, what was impossible with any purely human undertaking - every one of these details had a divine meaning which would draw out our thoughts by faith to the Person and work of Christ. The porch of the temple, its only entrance, differed in its proportions from those of the tabernacle. 2 Chronicles 3:4 tells us that it was one hundred twenty cubits high.* It was four times as high as the house. In figure it corresponds to the passage in Psalms 24:1-10 : "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in the holy place? . . . Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in." This true arch of triumph was worthy of the King of glory, the Lord of hosts, strong and mighty, of whom Solomon was but the feeble type.

{*Rationalistic critics contest this figure, seeing, as always, errors in that which they do not understand.}

All around the temple, except at its entrance, naturally, were the side chambers, dwellings of the priests. There was nothing comparable in the tabernacle in the wilderness, where God doubtless was able to condescend to dwell in the midst of a people according to the flesh on condition that He would hide Himself in thick darkness, but where He could not allow man to come to dwell with Him. This latter condition is here realized under Solomon's glorious reign, as it will for us be realized when the Lord brings us into the Father's house. All of us who are children of God belong to this family of priests which will have its home around its Head, though already the Father's house is open to our faith and we may dwell there, though still in this world. The priests' dwellings were inseparable from the house, forming one whole with it without spoiling any one part. The walls of the temple had offsets where the beams could be fastened without hurting the walls. In this way the priestly rooms were perfectly adapted to the house without in any way compromising the integrity of the building. It is thus that we shall dwell in glory. The fact that we shall be there, far from weakening the perfection of God's house, will only enhance it. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Revelation 21:3).

"And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building" (1 Kings 6:7). No trace of human instruments was seen during the construction of the temple. It was built in silence; neither axe nor hammer was heard. It was the work of God; everything was prepared beforehand. The stones that made up the house had the same character as the foundation stones, also precious and prepared beforehand (1 Kings 7:9-12). It is the same with the assembly (1 Peter 2:4-5) insofar as its being built up is not entrusted to man's responsibility (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

Yet it was this very responsibility that fell upon Solomon (1 Kings 6:11-13) in connection with the construction of the house. Just as so many others, he failed, thus bringing ruin upon his kingdom "If thou wilt walk in my statutes . . . I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel." The only condition God set for not forsaking His people was the king's faithfulness. All His blessing was dependent on this condition being met. The oracle as well as the holy place ("the temple before it") was covered with cedar wood. In the Word cedar represents majesty and height, durability and firmness. No part of the walls within was not covered. Nowhere did the stone appear. But the cedar wood itself and even the planks of cypress of which the floor was made were entirely covered with gold. In the Word gold always represents divine righteousness and glory.

Thus the house was made up of precious prepared stones built upon the great and precious foundation stones. This was the temple's value in God's eyes. But within, everything was firm, durable, and consequently incorruptible, worthy of the greatness and majesty of the Lord. Finally, those who entered the temple to dwell with God saw nothing but divine righteousness round about them. Down to the very floor beneath their feet, all was covered. Man cannot dwell with God except according to divine righteousness. Moreover, all the furnishings of the temple were either made of gold or overlaid with gold, as for example the altar of incense, the cherubim, and the doors of the most holy place. As in the tabernacle in the wilderness, the most holy place formed a perfect cube within. "And the oracle in the forepart was twenty cubits in length, and twenty cubits in breadth, and twenty cubits in height thereof" (1 Kings 6:20). So shall the New Jerusalem be: "The length is as large as the breadth" (Revelation 21:16). The result of God's work is perfect without adding anything or taking anything away. Everything is ordered according to the mind of the Divine Architect. The New Jerusalem is, so to speak, a great most holy place where God can dwell, just as in the oracle of the temple, because everything answers to His holiness and His righteousness. There is no temple to be found in her, "For the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it," but she herself answers to a/l that is of the most holy character in the temple of God. God's sanctuary is the Church in glory!

{*The house itself was thirty cubits high (1 Kings 6:2). It is a fact worthy to be noted that the millennial temple described by Ezekiel, despite the immense development of its outer and inner courts and the dimensions of the body of the building which reached one hundred cubits including its chambers. does not go beyond the dimensions of Solomon's temple for the holy and the most holy places. These measurements are unchangeable. That which was from the beginning in God's plan is to be realized without change or development in the age of Christ's glory. The overall dimensions can be adapted to the future greatness of this reign, but the sanctuary remains the same.} As stated previously, the veil is not mentioned here. A double door of olive wood (1 Kings 6:31) overlaid with gold replaces it - a free, large access, allowing one's view to penetrate into the most holy place, although, corresponding to the order of things under the law, golden chains were stretched out before the oracle (1 Kings 6:21). The cherubim played a great role in the temple. In the tabernacle they were beaten out of the mercy seat and overshadowed it. They looked toward that which was hidden in the ark, toward the covenant of the law which had been placed within it, written on tables of stone. The cherubim, two in number, were witnesses of the contents of the ark (Matthew 18:16). At the same time they were attributes of the judicial power of God. These attributes made the covenant sure. On His side God kept it faithfully by all that which characterized

Him in government.* The ark and the cherubim of the tabernacle had been brought over into the temple. On condition that the king, on his side, be faithful, God remained seated on His throne between the cherubim, faithfully keeping, for His part, the covenant contracted with His people.

{*We shall speak of these attributes again in respect to the ornamentation of the temple and of the cows.} But the temple contained two other cherubim, each ten cubits high, with their wings spread so as to touch each other on the one side and to touch the walls of the sanctuary on the other. "Their faces were toward the house" (2 Chronicles 3:13, J.N.D. translation), that is, facing out of the sanctuary. They faced outward because under the reign of glory the judicial attributes of God, terrible to sinful man, can look upon him in blessing. In our chapter, where it is not a question of dwelling with God, the cherubim are not presented to us as facing outward.

Several other details of the ornamentation call for our attention. The walls were decorated with cherubim, palms, and half-open flowers within and without. These ornaments were visible outside. Within, they were covered and hidden by a wall of cedar. We have already seen that the cherubim are attributes of the righteous government of God. The "beasts" of Revelation (1 Kings 4:6-7) are cherubim and represent: the lion, strength; the ox (or calf), firmness and patience; the man, intelligence; the eagle, the rapidity of the judgments and government of God. The bearers or representatives of these attributes may be either angels or saints, depending on the occasion (Revelation 4:1-11, Revelation 5:1-14). In these chapters before us the cherub has a unique place. It is neither an ox nor a lion. It is an intelligent being. It is "the cherub" in contrast with the others. The eagle is not mentioned in the ornamentation of the temple nor of the vessels of the court, for the eagle represents rapidity of judgment and does not apply to an established, peaceful government. 1 Kings 7:29 proves what we are saying: "And on the borders . . . were lions, oxen, and cherubim." The cherubim therefore are the aspect of intelligence in the government of God here. This intelligence ornaments the house of God. Those who draw nigh may see it in all the details of the divine building. All the ways of God in His government, the external portion, that which may be read upon the wall, bears witness to this intelligence, to this infinitely varied wisdom. But beyond this we find another whole portion of the thoughts of God, unknown under the law, hidden and covered over in the interior of the temple where no human eye could see them. These are the counsels of God. Now divine intelligence goes into them and they are familiar to us, for God has revealed them to us by his Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

Palm trees or palm branches also have their significance in the Word. When the Lord entered Jerusalem as the King of Peace, His disciples bore palm branches before Him. It is the sign of the peaceful triumph of a reign about to be inaugurated. Similarly, the immense multitude of Revelation 7:1-17 carry palm branches in their hands, celebrating the Lamb's victory. The palm trees of Elim are the symbol of peaceful protection in the wilderness; the palm branch (Isaiah 9:14), a protection and shelter. Palms were used at the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:40), symbolic of the millennial celebration where the people, dwelling beneath palms and the branches of other green trees, shall take part in the universal rest of the kingdom, but not without the reminder of the years of testing in the wilderness. Thus palm branches symbolize the peace, security, and triumph of that reign of righteousness. The half-open flowers are the emblem of a new season, of the beginning of spring (Song of Solomon 2:12). In Psalms 92:13-14 we see that "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree . . . Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God." Thus these emblems are not only those of the kingdom, but

also emblems of those who belong there.* There will be perfect harmony between the glories of the kingdom and those who will have part in it, between the Father's house and those who dwell there. And everything will be in perfect accord with Christ, the true Solomon. Intelligence shall be His, for upon Him as Man rests the Spirit of the Lord, the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2). He is Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. He is the true Son of David, and upon Himself shall His crown flourish (Psalms 132:18).

{*It is likewise with the cherubim, as we have seen previously. The king of Tyre was a cherub in Eden.}

Divine wisdom, perfect peace, beauty, freshness, and joy thus characterize this entire scene, and we shall participate in it also, made like unto Christ, and with Him who shall bear all these glories. On the doors of the oracle (1 Kings 6:32) were found cherubim with palm trees and flowers. This was the only spot within the holy place where the cherubim could be seen. Similarly to the veil which they take the place of, the doors represent Christ who by giving Himself has opened up access for us to God. In the sanctuary the wisdom of God only is contemplated. Christ crucified is the wisdom of God. By His cross we enter the sanctuary in full peace, in full joy, and there we can in an intelligent way praise the Lamb who was slain. The cedar walls do not bear the same decoration. They were ornamented only with half-open flowers and colocynths (or buds or knobs, for that is perhaps the meaning of this word in 1 Kings 6:18). There one saw the representation of a perpetual flowering, of a renewal full of freshness and beauty in harmony with the rest of God, of an eternal season of joy, all this covered and protected by divine glory there in the temple of God which for us is the Father's house!

03.07. 1 Kings 7

1 Kings 7:1-51 1 Kings 7:1-12 - Solomon's Houses

"But Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished all his house" (1 Kings 7:1). It had taken Solomon seven years to build the house of the Lord. We see in this his promptness at this work. It took Herod forty-six years to build his temple (John 2:20). At the beginning of his career the service of the Lord came before all else in the king's heart. His own house, certainly of less importance than the temple, cost him thirteen years of labor. The passage before us speaks of three different houses. The first is called Solomon's "own house," "his house where he dwelt," his own residence. Little is said about it except that in place of the "porch for the throne" which characterized the "house of the forest of Lebanon" (1 Kings 7:7) the king's house had, within the entrance porch (cf. 1 Kings 7:6), "another court" which was of like work (1 Kings 7:8). Solomon did not judge in this house. He dwelt there. It is presented to us in a rather mysterious way; it is a house of intimacy. But it is mentioned immediately after the temple and is its counterpart, so to speak. God dwelt in the temple and had "many abodes" there for His own. The temple was an image of the Father's house. The house we have before us here is the Son's house (1 Chronicles 17:13). If we seek its analogy in the New Testament, our thoughts turn immediately towards the Church of which He said: "Upon this rock I will build my church. " As we know, the Church was not revealed in the Old Testament. It was a mystery which could only be known after the Lord's resurrection. Nevertheless, there is nothing in the Old Testament which contradicts this future revelation. Quite to the contrary, it seems at times that her place is depicted beforehand, waiting for the Church herself to be introduced at the appropriate moment. Certain types go beyond Jewish relationships and suggest more intimate ones. May we just call to mind the relationship of Adam and Eve, of Rebecca and Isaac, of Abigail and David. May we remember above all the assembly of Psalms 22:1-31, mentioned in Hebrews 2:12. Finally, let us consider this house of Solomon's of which the New Testament presents the glorious foundation.

Christ's millennial reign will not only be characterized by His relationships with His people and with the nations, but by the glorious intimacy of the Church with Himself. She shall be the Bride, the Lamb's wife; but, we repeat, our passage in no wise goes on to this point - and it treats these things in a manner designedly obscure and mysterious. This is not so of "the house of the forest of Lebanon" (1 Kings 7:2-7). The name given it calls to mind its construction on the one hand and perhaps its architectural appearance as well. It was built of cedar wood; throughout, both inside and outside, it presented cedar columns which, set in long rows, may have given the house the appearance of an imposing forest. On the other hand, we can see in this name a beautiful image of this glorious reign. Lebanon faced Tyre and even belonged to it. Thus there was a relationship between this house and the nations in submission to the great king. It was there that Solomon sat as sovereign and judge of the nations as well as of his own people. The house of the forest of Lebanon was one hundred cubits long (forty cubits longer than the temple), fifty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high. It rested upon four rows of columns. On both sides were three rows of columns, set in groups of fifteen, and suites of chambers superimposed one on the other, according to all

appearances, in three stories like those of the temple.* The windows were opposite one another; that is to say, we have reason to think that some faced outward and the others inward toward the building itself, facing the porch. Above these chambers a ceiling of cedar formed a roof and also covered the centre of the building, which supported this ceiling by four rows of columns. The centre itself was composed of two porches, first the porch of pillars, well named for its six lateral rows of pillars and the four rows of pillars rising in the middle of the porch. Next the porch of the throne or the porch of judgment, a continuation of the first and occupying the back of the building.** At the back of this porch a marvelous throne arose, to which we shall return later.

{*The expression "light was against light in three ranks," (1 Kings 7:5) can scarcely, so it seems to us, be taken otherwise. The chambers contained the golden shields which Solomon had made for his guard, for the house of the forest served as an arsenal as well (1 Kings 10:16-17; 1 Kings 14:26-28; Isaiah 22:8).}

{**The expression "porch of pillars" leads us to suppose that the lateral chambers did not extend beyond half the length of the building and did not face the porch of the throne.} In front of the porch of pillars there was an entry porch, whose dimensions are not given us. It too was garnished with a colonnade and had an entablature or flight of steps by which one reached the house. We can easily imagine the majesty of this construction. One's eye penetrated through the forest of cedar pillars of the central portion to the second porch at the farther end of which rose a throne of gold and ivory, marvellously executed, and upon this throne one could contemplate the glorious king, peaceable Solomon, the beloved Jedidiah of the Lord, whose wisdom was never surpassed - the righteous king executing righteousness. This porch of the throne was the "porch of judgment." The seat of the government of the nations was there, the place where righteousness was upheld. The house of the forest of Lebanon linked the government of Israel itself with that of the nations. This house where pillars were found everywhere was in contrast to the temple where there were none, except for Jachin and Boaz at the entrance of the house, as we shall see later on; at least there is no pillar mentioned, neither in the holy place nor in the oracle. The house of God supports itself, and has no need of other support in its perfect stability. The glory of God suffices for itself, only God the Father associates His children with it and gives them a dwelling place there. It will not be so with the reign of Christ over the nations. The saints will be called to share in His reign and to judge the world with Christ (1 Corinthians 6:2; Psalms 2:9; Revelation 2:26-27). The Lord will have companions in His government who will always dwell near the king, as formerly the companions of Solomon dwelt in the house of the forest of Lebanon. Similarly, the Lord had priests dwelling with Him in His temple. The third house is that of the Gentile wife, the daughter of Pharaoh. There is little more said of it than of the house in which the king dwelt. We know only that it was built according to the plan for the porch* of the house of Lebanon. We have already said that the union of Solomon with Pharaoh's daughter did not prefigure the relationship of the Lord with the Church, but that of the nations, formerly oppressors of God's people, with the Messiah. This union, beyond doubt glorious, does not afford the same intimacy as that of the Messiah with Israel or so much the more, as that of Jesus with the Church.** {*Probably the porch of pillars.}

{**This relationship is nevertheless much more intimate than that with the nations at the extremities of the kingdom. There were various categories of rations. Under Solomon's reign, the remainder of the Canaanites were employed at servile labour (2 Chronicles 2:17-18, 2 Chronicles 8:7-9). The nations, like Tyre, co-operated voluntarily in this work. Egypt and Assyria, formerly

Israel's oppressors, will turn to the Lord during the millennial period and will serve Him together. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land; whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance (Isaiah 19:24-25).}

1 Kings 7:9-12 connect the glory of these houses to that of the temple and of its inner and outer courts. The same precious stones were used for all these buildings. Their foundations were the same. No element entered in which did not correspond to the character of the Lord and of Solomon.

These three houses and the temple give us an insight into the characteristics of the glorious reign of the Son of God, of the Son of Man, and of the Son of David. There is a heavenly sphere, the Father's house, where a people of priests shall dwell with Him - a glorious Assembly, the Son's house, His intimate dwelling place and His wife. There is an earthly sphere, a Gentile bride, sharing in the blessings of the covenant - a government of all nations, in submission to the sceptre of the great king - to say nothing of Israel, rejected so long on account of her unfaithfulness, now received in grace under the new covenant as the beloved Jewish wife, centre of Messiah's earthly government.

1 Kings 7:13-51 - Hiram and the Court

Solomon called Hiram from Tyre in order that he might make the brazen objects destined for the court of the temple. "He was a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father was a man of Tyre, a worker in brass." In the wilderness the Lord had chosen Bezaleel of Judah and Aholiab of Dan for the work of the tabernacle (Exodus 35:30-35). Then the work of the tabernacle had devolved upon the children of Israel alone. The people, entirely separated from the nations, could have no work in common with them. The scene changes under Solomon: the reconciled nations are engaged in God's service together with His own people. The Lord's Anointed has dominion over them both. Hiram belonged to both by birth: his parentage was formed by the alliance of Israel with the Gentiles - a remarkable fact perfectly suited to the scene before us.

Hiram "was filled with wisdom, and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass" (1 Kings 7:14). He is the representative of the Spirit of God (Isaiah 11:2) for this work.

Two metals, gold and brass, play the preponderant role in the construction of the temple. Gold is always the symbol of divine righteousness which brings us into the presence of God. In virtue of divine righteousness we are able to stand before Him. We possess it in Christ in heaven. Brass is the symbol of the righteousness of God displaying upon earth what He is for sinful man. The furniture of the temple was made of gold, the furniture of the court was of brass and had been cast in the earth. Hiram worked in brass only.

We have already remarked that First Kings does not speak of the brazen altar, of which Hiram nevertheless was the artisan (cf. 2 Chronicles 4:1). This altar represents the righteousness of God coming to manifest itself in favor of sinful man, there where he is, in such a manner as to enable him to approach God in virtue of the sacrifice offered upon the altar. The Book of Kings does not develop this viewpoint. It speaks to us of dwelling with God in His temple, and when it mentions brass, it is not as a figure of divine righteousness by which we approach God, but as the manifestation to the eyes of the world of that righteousness which characterizes the kingdom and

the government of Solomon or of Christ. In a word, it is the righteousness of God, but manifested without in government. The furniture of the court, mentioned in our chapter, shows us what is necessary in order that this manifestation be not hindered. The Spirit of God, represented by Hiram, is occupied with this. Thus we find in the chapters before us, God opening His house that we may dwell there with Him, Christ supplying us with the divine righteousness (the gold) necessary for this objective; the Son, as King of Righteousness, manifesting the glory of His kingdom; and the Spirit acting so that this righteousness can be manifested without hindrance before the eyes of all men upon earth.

Let us now consider the objects which Hiram cast for Solomon in the plain of Jordan. They all belonged, we repeat, to the court of the temple; that is to say, to the outward manifestation of the glorious government of Christ. The Pillars (1 Kings 7:15-22) The brazen pillars, situated in front of the porch of the temple, attracted attention immediately. They represented the outward manifestation of the principles of the kingdom. We have already said that no other pillar is mentioned in the temple. They were named Jachin (He shall establish) and Boaz (in Him is strength). These were the two great truths presented symbolically to whosoever took part in the blessed reign of Solomon. All came from Him; in Him and in Him personally there is strength. He maintains Himself and needs no external help whatsoever. His strength is used to establish rather than needing to be established.

Millennial blessing is based upon these two principles - our present blessing as well.

Solomon's throne, his government, his people's relations with God, his worship, everything, in type, was based upon that which God had done: He had established his reign. But under Solomon himself the pillar Jachin - He shall establish, not, He has established - spoke of a future establishment of which Solomon's reign was but the feeble picture. As for the pillar Boaz - In Him is strength - this is something past, present, future, and eternal. Strength is in Him. Solomon, just as every godly king in Israel, had to know this. At the moment the link with God was broken, neither the king nor the kingdom would have any strength.

We make the same experience today. Philadelphia has "a little strength," but its strength is in Christ, for He has the key of David. And the Lord says to Philadelphia: I shall establish thee a pillar in the temple of my God. Thou shalt be a Jachin and a Boaz. In a time to come the poor remnant without strength shall be acknowledged publicly. Christ with His incommensurable power shall be admired in all those who have believed.

We need not wait for some future time to experience this, for He is our strength today, as He shall be forever. But the time is coming when Christ's witnesses shall be established and shall manifest in a glorious way all that shall be theirs throughout eternity. "I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name" (Revelation 3:12). The pillars were crowned with lily work, a picture, we believe, of the glory of this reign at its commencement (Matthew 6:28-29). One characteristic detail: they had hundreds of pomegranates on their capitals. In the Word the pomegranate seems to be the image of fruit borne for God. The hem of the high priest's garment was trimmed with bells and pomegranates alternately (Exodus 28:31-35). The bells represent the testimony, the pomegranates, the fruit. These latter were "of blue, purple, and scarlet," heavenly fruit, fruit corresponding to the dignity of the Lord, and to His royal dignity as

Messiah. Our fruit should bear the character of Christ and be worthy of Him; it should also correspond to and be like our testimony, just as the pomegranates were the same in number as the golden bells. One often finds Christians with more bells than pomegranates, more words than fruit!

Fruit cannot be borne nor testimony be rendered except in virtue of the anointing oil, that is to say, of the Holy Spirit, which "ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments" (Psalms 133:2). The hem of our High Priest's garment is ourselves, we who can make no pretence to the title of Christian if we do not render testimony to Christ and bear fruit for God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Brazen pomegranates ornamented the tops of the pillars. How can the divine character be declared before all without bearing fruit abounding in righteousness? The Lord desires to be crowned with fruit. If strength is in Him, it is there in order to produce fruit. He is the True Vine here below, and as such, He has no other function. All His care for His own, all His disciples, has for its purpose that they might bear fruit. He must show Himself before all eyes as He who produces it. The Spirit of God has publicly erected a pillar. This pillar is Christ. He bears His own, who have no strength save in Him. "Without me ye can do nothing." That which God establishes, that which draws its strength from Christ, must necessarily bear fruit in abundance. Our passage applies properly to the fruit of righteousness manifested under the reign and government of the Lord. In Solomon's case, the brazen pillars could not be kept because of the unfaithfulness of the king and his successors. They were broken up by the Chaldeans (Jeremiah 52:17-23). His kingdom could not be established because he did not seek his strength in God. But even if the material pillars have disappeared, the moral pillars remain: the day shall come when the Lord in whom is strength will show to all that He has established in righteousness a kingdom which shall never be moved. Then shall it be said, "The Lord reigneth, he is clothed with majesty, the Lord is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded Himself: the world also is established, that it cannot be moved. Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting" (Psalms 93:1-2). The Brazen Sea (1 Kings 7:23-26)

Behind the pillars the temple court held the brazen sea. We are specifically told (1 Chronicles 18:8) that Solomon "made the brazen sea and the pillars, and the vessels of brass" of the brass which David had taken from the cities of Hadarezer. We have seen that brass here represents the righteousness of God coming to meet man where he is to deliver him and to manifest itself outwards, as shall be seen in Christ's glorious reign. This righteousness was here displayed in the destruction of the power of the enemy whom David had conquered. We know that this has already taken place at the cross of Christ, but under His reign of righteousness the power of Satan, bound for one thousand years, shall be annulled, that it may no longer hinder the practical purification of the saints who serve the Lord. The brazen sea differs from the brazen altar. The latter represents divine righteousness coming to meet sinful man to expiate his sin by the blood of a victim and to purify him by death so that he can approach God. From Christ's pierced side issued the atoning blood and the purifying water. Under the law the washing of the priests at their consecration corresponds to purification by death. They were completely washed, and that once for all (Exodus 29:4; Leviticus 8:6). This ceremony was not conducted at the brazen laver nor at the brazen sea. It was never repeated. It was a figure of the "washing of regeneration" (Titus 3:5), the death of the old man, and the purification which places the believer in an entirely new position, that of Christ

before God (cf. John 13:10). The brazen sea served for the daily purification of the priests. There they washed their hands and their feet. Thus they were qualified to accomplish their service and to dwell (for in this book it is always a matter of dwelling, not of approach) there where the Lord dwelt. Likewise, the disciples could have no part with Christ in the Father's house unless He would wash their feet (John 13:8). This washing is effected by the Word of God in virtue of Christ's intercession as Advocate. Under the law this washing applied to hands and feet, that is to say, to works and walk. Under grace it applies only to walk, for we have been purified from dead works to serve the Living God, and this has taken place once for all - something the law was unable to do. The brazen laver of the tabernacle differs somewhat from the brazen sea of the temple. We have just seen that this latter was the manifestation of divine righteousness breaking the power of the enemy in order to make possible the daily purification of the priests. This victory was not gained in the wilderness. The laver was not cast of brass taken from the enemy, but from "the mirrors of the crowds of women who crowded before the entrance of the tent of meeting" (Exodus 38:8). This passage alludes to that which followed the sin of the golden calf. Moses had set up a tent outside the camp and had called it the "tent of meeting." All the people, as a sign of humiliation, were to strip themselves of their ornaments, and those who sought the Lord went forth to the tent of meeting outside the camp (Exodus 33:4-7). The mirrors of the repentant women of Israel served to make the brazen laver. They acknowledged their sin and humbled themselves; they stripped themselves of that which until then had served their vanity. How could they still delight to consider their natural faces? They did not wish, nor could they any longer behold themselves. They truly judged themselves, their selfishness, their lightness, all that had contributed to make them forsake God for an idol. That which presented them in their state of sin must be destroyed. Thus the brazen laver is the righteousness of God pronouncing judgment upon the old man, but in order that the believer might obtain practical, daily purification by the Word. In order to deliver us, this righteousness has been brought upon Christ. It is in Him that we now realize that "Know thyself" so impossible to sinful man. The obstacle which the flesh and Satan presented to our daily cleansing being removed, the water of the brazen sea teaches us that without this purification we cannot have communion with God in our service and walk, and that every manifestation of the flesh must be suppressed in practice. In Revelation 4:6 we find the sea again, as in Solomon's court, but "a sea of glass like unto crystal." It is the final result of the righteousness which has gained the victory over Satan and has destroyed him. Those who stand there before God are found in a permanent condition of holiness and of purity, having reached their unchangeable, and so to speak, crystallized character forever. One can no longer wash himself in the crystal sea: one is that which it represents before God eternally. In Revelation 15:2 we again find a heavenly scene. It is a sea of glass, mingled with fire, on which stand those who have overcome the Beast and his image. They are the faithful from among the nations who, after having gone through the tribulation and having stood fast to the point of martyrdom, have part in the first resurrection. They do not possess absolute and final purity until after they have undergone baptism by fire.

Let us come back to the brazen sea. It rested upon twelve oxen, three facing each of the four quarters of the horizon. The ox is one of the four animals which form the attributes of the throne (Revelation 4:1-11), and represent the active qualities of God, the principles of His government. The ox, as we have already seen, is the firmness and patience of God in His ways. The twelve brazen oxen are the complete manifestation in every sense of God's patience in His ways by which He has succeeded in bringing Israel under the sceptre of the Messiah, in making her

capable of standing in holiness before Himself. This does not signify that in the millennial reign of which Solomon's reign is the type, the purification of a priestly people will no longer be necessary. Sin shall not yet have been taken away from the world. Doubtless it will be restrained and its manifestations hindered, for Satan shall be bound, but the flesh will not be changed (it cannot be), much less abolished (that it shall be), and the Word in the hands of Christ the High Priest shall ever have its cleansing virtue.

It is interesting to note that the sea is not mentioned in the temple of Ezekiel - not that it is not there, but its importance is relegated to the background as it were. In contrast, the altar dominates there, and though the sin offering is offered there, the principal role is given to the burnt offering and the peace offering.

Just as the pillars, the sea was broken up by the Chaldeans (Jeremiah 52:20). The Lavers and Their Bases (1 Kings 7:27-40) The brazen sea served to cleanse the priests; the ten lavers, five on the right of the court and five on the left, served to "wash . . . such things as they offered for the burnt-offering" (2 Chronicles 4:6). In Leviticus 1:9 we see that the priest washed the inwards and the legs of the victim with water. This type must correspond to future reality - to the offering of Christ to God in perfect purity. He who offered Himself as an odor of a sweet smell was holiness itself and had no need to be washed, but the type must be washed in order to show the perfection of the offering of Christ. The burnt offering represents the sacrifice of Christ offering Himself to God, glorifying Him in all that He is, and this in regard to sin. God is able to receive us according to the perfection of this sacrifice. As the victim must needs be presented to God without any defilement, it was needful to show that it was perfect and that this purity went further than conduct alone, but included the "inwards" of the offering. This truth was presented by the water of the lavers. The "molten sea" washed the priests. They all had access to this single way of being cleansed from the defilement of their walk. Christ, made sin, is the source of cleansing for His own; His Word is the means. Ten lavers were needed to wash the victims; these were, we do not doubt, symbolic of the absolute purity of Christ. The lavers did not belong to the tabernacle in the wilderness, though doubtless this latter had vessels for washing the burnt offering (Exodus 27:19; Exodus 38:30). They manifested in the kingdom the perfection of the burnt offering, the basis of the people's acceptance before God. This purity, this holiness of the sacrifice, satisfied all the demands of God's government. We also see that the bases and the chapters of the bases proclaimed by their ornaments all the attributes of this government.*

{*Except for the eagles. We have previously stated that promptness of judgment has no relationship to a reign of righteousness and peace.}

"Lions, oxen, and cherubim"* were sculpted on the bases themselves: strength, patience, and divine intelligence. The burnt offering is presented pure according to these attributes. It is manifested that they have been used to establish an offering by which the people might be made acceptable to God, having been identified with the victim. One might read on the "bases" what was the manner of the God who had supplied His people with a means for dwelling with Himself.

*These latter simply bear the human figure here, as on the walls of the temple. In Ezekiel 41:19 they have two faces, that of a lion and of a man, the power and intelligence which characterize the reign of Christ definitely established. In Ezekiel 1:1-28 the four creatures each had four faces, for it was a question of charactering the throne of God in judgment.

These lavers, continually pushed about on their wheels, were placed at the threshold of the platform of the altar, in order that the victims might continually be presented as pure. The chapter, that is, the crown of the base, bore nothing more than cherubim (men) and lions with palm trees, as on the walls of Ezekiel's temple* (Ezekiel 41:18-19). Strength and intelligence crown the foundation of God's ways in government. If Solomon would be faithful, there would be no more need of patience: it would have accomplished its goal. Strength and divine intelligence could now, as in the millennial temple to come, look towards the palm trees, symbols of triumph and of peaceful protection. Peace upon earth! The reign of peace was established in righteousness: the lavers for the burnt offering proclaimed this, as did the walls of the temple.

{*In our book here the walls also bore partially opened flowers, perhaps because this was not yet the full bloom of the kingdom. These partially opened flowers are missing in 2 Chronicles 3:5-7.}

God had been glorified by the burnt offering. All that He had been manifested by the holy offering, and this had been declared openly. Under the glorious reign of Solomon the people had these things before their eyes everywhere - but, could this reign, entrusted to man's responsibility, maintain itself?

It should be noted that the lavers, which are merely mentioned in 2 Chronicles 4:6, are here described in greater detail, for it is a matter of the external manifestation of what God is both in His government and in His kingdom. This manifestation of God will be shown in Christ who will reign in full view of the world. The work of Hiram ends here. It was, in type, the development in this world by the power of the Holy Spirit of what Christ is and of what God Himself is in His government. The Golden Objects (1 Kings 7:48-51) The objects of gold are presented, just as also in 2 Chronicles 4:1-22, as being the work, not of Hiram, but of Solomon. Solomon is occupied with all the objects by which divine righteousness is displayed in its glorious essence. Christ alone can display this. Intercession (the golden altar), the showing forth of Christ (the table of shewbread), the light of the Spirit (the candlestick), even the least of the vessels of the sanctuary correspond to this righteousness established by Himself. Even the doors of the sanctuary swung upon golden hinges. How would it be possible to enter into the most holy place and dwell there apart from divine righteousness? In this chapter we have seen the outward manifestation of the kingdom, and as belonging to it, a glorious temple which corresponds in type to the heavenly part of this same kingdom, and in which the priests dwell with God.

All that had been prepared during the reign of grace is brought to adorn the house of the Lord under the reign of glory. The entire plan came from David, and not from Solomon - even less from Hiram, as rationalists would suppose (1 Chronicles 28:11-13). The first reign prepared the glory of the second. A suffering, rejected Christ precedes a glorious Christ. That which David had done was less in appearance than the work of Solomon, the materials less than the glorious workmanship; but in reality David's work served as that indispensable basis of that which represents the whole of the millennial blessing.

03.08. 1 Kings 8

1 Kings 8:1-66 The Dedication of the Temple The temple having been built and all its vessels having been put into place, He for whom Solomon had established all these things must come Himself to dwell in His house; and His throne must be placed there. The temple was built upon Mount Moriah at the place where David had set up his altar upon the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. Until now the ark had dwelt under tents in Zion, the city of David. Solomon, together with all the men of Israel, all the elders, all the heads of the tribes, and the priests busies himself with bringing it up from there to the temple. It is no more "the chosen men of Israel" (2 Samuel 6:1) as in the time of David; all the people assist at this complete and final celebration. Final indeed, for the dedication of the temple takes place during the great days of the Feast of Tabernacles which closes the series of Jewish feasts (Leviticus 23:1-44). It is indeed "the feast" above all feasts, "the feast in the month of Ethanim, which is the seventh month." Properly this feast comprised seven days, followed by an eighth which was "the great day of the feast" (John 7:37). It was held after the harvest and the vintage, figures of judgment. It was the symbol anticipating the marvelous reign of Christ when the people will dwell in joy and security in their tents, remembering the testings, past forever, in the wilderness. It speaks of millennial joy after the forty years of chastening which the rebellion of the people brought upon themselves. The eighth day, the great day, the new day, the day of resurrection and of the new creation, is added to the feast because those who will be resurrected will have a special part in this joy. It is the heavenly day added to the earthly days. When David brought the ark up to the city of David, this was rather a "feast of trumpets" (2 Samuel 6:15) preparatory for Solomon's solemn day. Here that very day has arisen in all its glory. The priests have indeed finished with the miserable state of things at Gibeon. All the vessels of the holy place, the altar, and even the tent (1 Kings 8:4; 1 Kings 8:64) are now reunited there where the ark is found. This is the end of the tabernacle - there is no further mention of it. In this great feast the memento of God with which the tent was associated during Israel's pilgrimage abides alone. At last God has found a final resting place in the midst of His people.*

{*We would only remark that in all this we leave the teaching proper to First Kings and enter into the teaching of Second Chronicles. As a matter of fact, our chapter omits the words, "Now therefore arise, O Lord God, into thy resting place, thou, and the ark of thy strength"; it omits the millennial song: "Praise the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endureth forever" (cf. 2 Chronicles 6:41; 2 Chronicles 7:3; 2 Chronicles 7:6). It does not mention the eighth day except to tell us that on that day Solomon dismissed the people (1 Kings 8:66), whereas Second Chronicles emphasizes the solemn feast of the eighth day after the first week of the dedication of the altar and the second week of the feast (2 Chronicles 7:8-10). All this clearly shows us God's different objects in these two accounts. The feast of First Kings is necessarily incomplete, because the responsible king occupies the foreground; that of Second Chronicles is complete, because this book presents the king according to the counsels of God - in consequence, a much more complete type of Christ. The rest of First Kings is rather the end of a period of the history of the king in responsibility. The period of grace having been completed under David, God shows that He can

finally rest under Solomon, on the one condition that the king be faithful.) On this day countless sacrifices, burnt offerings, meal offerings, and peace offerings are presented (1 Kings 8:64). Joy and fellowship prevail throughout: Solomon offers as peace offering alone 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep, and the brazen altar being too small for all these offerings, he hallows the middle of the court for the sacrifices. The ark of the covenant with its cherubim beaten out of the mercy seat, who are witnesses of this covenant, is introduced into its place, along with the standing cherubim, their wings touching, who are its guardians. On the Lord's side nothing was missing; all was assured; God was faithfully watching over the carrying out of His will. But of what benefit was that under the old covenant if the people for their part were unfaithful to the covenant? It will not be so when the Lord makes a new covenant with Israel, all of grace, unconditional, and one in which the responsibility of the people will not count at all. The cherubim covered not only the ark, but its staves as well. On God's part the rest which the covenant gave was as sure as the covenant itself. The staves of the ark, witnesses of its pilgrimage through the wilderness, are henceforth useless and serve no more; they remain as witnesses of the past in the very place of rest. We have already explained why the veil is not found in 1 Kings as it is in 2 Chronicles, but in both cases "the ends of the staves were seen out in the holy place before the oracle, and they were not seen without" (1 Kings 8:8). Manifestly it was the rest of God, and it had all the more value in that it was accompanied by the permanent reminder of what had preceded it. Only, to be assured of this rest and to enjoy it, it was necessary to enter the Holy Place. Those outside could not take account of it. The final rest of God is the portion of those who dwell with Him, of the priests who dwell in His house.

Yet other things characterize the wilderness journey, too, in relation to the ark - blessings were precious stored up within it. The golden pot containing the manna and Aaron's rod that budded were no longer found in the ark at that moment when Solomon brought it into the temple of God (1 Kings 8:9; cf. Hebrews 9:4). In the wilderness, God had revealed Himself as a God of mercy despite the severity of the law; hiding the condemning law under the mercy seat, establishing grace under the shadow of the cherubim - attributes of divine righteousness; guarding under their gaze together with terrible law the glory of a Christ come down to earth as the true bread of heaven to nourish His people, but resurrected, having clothed His humanity (the manna) with a glorious body (the pot of gold), now hidden in the most secret place of the tabernacle; keeping also the rod of the priesthood, alone capable (at Korah's opposition) of leading the people safely through the desert. These two objects, the manna and the rod, will no longer be necessary in the millennial reign, as we see here in type. The covenant shall be kept, God being the sole contracting party; the priesthood will have Melchizedek, no longer Aaron, as its model, and its function will be to bless. The glory of Christ the Man instead of being hidden in the sanctuary will be manifested to all eyes in the person of the true Solomon.

"And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord" (1 Kings 8:10-11). Striking picture of that which could not be obtained even under the most glorious dispensation of the law. God's presence excluded that of the priests. In the heavenly sanctuary the priests are able to stand in the presence of His glory, to dwell there, and to have their part there; but indeed that which we have in spirit already now cannot be equalled in the millennial temple. This is what Solomon begins to establish in 1

Kings 8:12 : "The Lord said that he would dwell in the thick darkness." The way of approach was not yet manifest. The dispensation of the temple at Jerusalem was the same as that of the tabernacle. The veil, even if it is not mentioned here, subsists nonetheless (2 Chronicles 3:14). Meanwhile Solomon knew that this was not the last word in the counsels of God, and he had built Him a house, a fixed place, in order that He might dwell there forever (1 Kings 8:13).

After having turned his face towards God the king turns towards the congregation of Israel. He fills the role of Melchizedek, whereas the Aaronic priesthood is unable to stand in the sanctuary. He blesses all the congregation of Israel; then (1 Kings 8:15) he blesses the Lord. He recalls that the sure mercies of David are the beginning of the glory of his kingdom, even though this glory is dependent upon a legal covenant. God had done to the king of glory all that He had promised to the rejected, suffering king. We find here in Solomon, as in Christ, the accomplishment of all the promises, because David, the rejected king, object of God's special favor, had walked here, having but one object and but one thought: to find a place of rest for the glorious throne of the Lord. Christ throughout all his affliction had at heart only to glorify God there where sin had dishonoured Him. For this reason the Father loved Him and demonstrated it in raising Him to the glory. This magnificent house had been built to harbor the ark of the covenant (1 Kings 8:21). The responsibility of the people was to be put to the test under a new regime, hitherto unknown, that of glory, but in which the tables of the law remained as standard of this responsibility. So it shall be in the Millennium, only Satan shall be bound for the duration of this reign; men shall no longer be seduced by his tricks, and the reign of righteousness will compel men to bow to its demands.

1 Kings 8:22-30 : Here Solomon really fills the role of priest. He stands before the altar, facing all the congregation of Israel. There he stretches out his hands toward heaven, taking the character of intercessor. He is truly, as we have said, the type of Melchizedek, king of righteousness and king of peace. Like Melchizedek he knows and proclaims the Lord, the God of Israel, as the Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth. He acknowledges that God keeps His covenant - Israel had not kept it - and His mercy (1 Kings 8:23). Without the latter, to keep His covenant would be the sure condemnation of His people. Nevertheless this mercy itself was according to the covenant of the law: God kept it with those that "walk before him with all their heart." And now he supplicates God to keep with David that which He had promised him (1 Kings 8:25). All the faithfulness of God towards His own depends on what He has promised Christ. Here we would be entering upon the ground of pure grace if only there were not an if. "There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit on the throne of Israel; so that thy children take heed to their way that they walk before me as thou hast walked before me." How this "so that" or "if only" condemns us all! It absolutely condemned wise Solomon, and how much more ourselves, a worthless lot. Under a system of responsibility in order to obtain anything from the Lord, we are condemned from the outset. It goes without saying that grace also brings with it responsibility for those under its rule, but this responsibility is completely different. It can be put into these words: "Let us be that which we are," whereas legal responsibility says: "Let us become that which we should be."

"But," adds Solomon (1 Kings 8:27): "will God indeed dwell on the earth?" Even in the Millennium this will not be. God as such will dwell above the earth in His Assembly, the New Jerusalem. His dwelling upon earth with men awaits the eternal heaven and earth of Revelation 21:3. Solomon, knowing these things, asks God that His name might be there, this name that to faith represents His very person. He asks that from His dwelling place in heaven God might hear the king, His

servant, and His people Israel when they turn toward His house. At the same time he expresses his feeling that both the one and the other will need forgiveness: "And when thou hearest, forgive."

Next Solomon begins to enumerate various situations where these prayers and this intercession may be addressed to the Lord.

1. The first situation (1 Kings 8:31-32) is individual. It is the request for God to condemn the wicked when an oath is imposed upon him before the altar "in this house" - and to justify the righteous. The presence of God in His house makes iniquity impossible. It is the simple and general truth of individual retribution, as it was known under the law when God consented to come to dwell in the midst of a people in the flesh.

2. He admits the case (1 Kings 8:33-34) where the people having sinned against the Lord, He would raise up enemies against them to smite them. If the people would repent and seek the Lord in His house, God would pardon them and cause them to return to their land.

3. He supposes that plagues, drought, famine, locusts, enemy attacks, or the like might smite the land because of its inhabitants' unfaithfulness. Should they repent in heart, the supplication of only one man would be sufficient when they would stretch forth their hands towards this house; might God then hear in heaven and forgive, yet rendering to each according to his ways, in order that He might be feared. It is ever law, but with that mixture of mercy that it might allow if God would find truth in the heart (1 Kings 8:35-40).

4. There are also resources for the stranger (1 Kings 8:41-43); he would come from afar, hearing tell of the great name and of the power of the Lord, and would address his request to Him, facing toward this house. God would hear him in heaven and answer him, for the king wishes that all the peoples of the earth, as well as his people Israel, might know the name of the Lord and fear Him. Here there is no judgment, no conditional blessing at all. The stranger, outside the circle of the law, approaches God by faith and receives a full blessing. It is in short a beautiful picture of the millennial blessing of the nations, whose privileges flow from the fact that God has His house at Jerusalem in the midst of His people.

5. Here (1 Kings 8:44-45) we find, not the shortcomings of the people, but Israel acting according to the will of God and guided by this will to wage war against her enemies. This is a remarkable fact. After the nations have acknowledged the God of Israel, the people of Israel themselves will be a people willing to fight the enemies of the Lord. The house henceforth will be the centre of blessing and strength for the people.

6. 1 Kings 8:46-53 mention the end of their history as a responsible people. They are led into captivity on account of their sin. Solomon is a prophet here. He anticipates what must necessarily come upon this people under the law, for there is no man who does not sin. Yet a resource still exists. The house is there, and God cannot deny His promises. Solomon does not refer to the law, but to grace. By pure grace the God of the promises had saved His people from Egypt - could He deny this grace, even under the system of law? They are His people; shall God abandon them? No, if in repentance they turn toward the land, the city, and the house, God will hearken to them. Daniel is an example (Daniel 6:10). He remained upright amid disaster, the only righteous man who prayed for the people and humbled himself on their behalf, and did not God hear him? But a greater than Daniel, Solomon the king of glory himself, was there. He said to God: "That thine eyes

may be open unto the supplication of thy servant, and unto the supplication of thy people Israel." And this Solomon himself is but a weak picture of the true King, the true Servant of the Lord. Christ's intercession causes God to receive this people anew. He will restore them for the glory of Him who made the promises and for the glory of His Beloved. Thus the future restoration of the people depends upon the presence of the righteous Servant of God before Him, and on the fact that God cannot deny His character of grace, manifested long before the law.

Another characteristic trait: in his supplication Solomon goes back further than David, all the way back to Moses. The more the people of God go away from Him, the more faith returns to that which was set up in the beginning. The ways of God towards His people may vary according to their faithfulness or unfaithfulness, so that a certain way of acting on God's part may be appropriate for one period of history and inappropriate for another, but the counsels of God never change: His purposes are eternal. This is what makes the apostle say at the end of his course, when the ruin of the Church was already evident: "Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Titus 1:1-2). This is also what causes Solomon to say: "Thou didst separate them from among all the people of the earth, to be thine inheritance, as thou spakest by the hand of Moses thy servant, when thou broughtest our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord God" (1 Kings 8:53). It is always so. In darkest times faith finds its refuge in "that which was from the beginning" (1 John 1:1; 1 John 2:7; 1 John 2:13-14; 1 John 2:24; 2 John 1:5-6). "As for you, let that which ye have heard from the beginning abide in you.

(1 Kings 8:54-66). Solomon knelt before the Lord to intercede on behalf of the people; now he rises to bless all the congregation of Israel. He praises God first of all because He has given rest to His people, rest which depends upon that into which the Lord has just entered, Himself and the ark of His strength. The king acknowledges the absolute accomplishment of all the Word of God: "There hath not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised by the hand of Moses his servant" (1 Kings 8:56). He presents his own words of intercession as a motive for God to bless His people, and the result of this blessing should be "that all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God, and that there is none else" (1 Kings 8:60). This shall be realized in Christ's millennial reign toward which all this history, as we have so often remarked, is directing us. Only, in order that this blessing may take place, the heart of Israel must be "perfect with the Lord our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments." Again the legal condition, impossible for this fallible king and people to fulfill - that which shall find its accomplishment in Christ alone!

03.09. 1 Kings 9

1 Kings 9:1-28 1 Kings 9:1-9 - The Lord Speaks This passage completes the second part of the history of Solomon. The first part, 1 Kings 1 and 1 Kings 2, tells us of the proclamation of the throne and the principle upon which it is established: judgment executed upon those who had dishonoured God under the reign of David.

1 Kings 3:1-28, 1 Kings 4:1-34, 1 Kings 5:1-18, 1 Kings 7:1-51, 1 Kings 8:1-66, 1 Kings 9:1-9 present the internal history of this glorious reign. In 1 Kings 3:1-28 and 1 Kings 4:1-34 we find the beginning of this history, Gibeon; the principles and the order of the kingdom; the character of the moral perfection of the king. In 1 Kings 5:1-18, 1 Kings 7:1-51, 1 Kings 8:1-66 the king's wisdom is used to give the Lord a place of rest worthy of Himself in the midst of the people that is subjected to him. The construction of the temple is the main event of Solomon's reign; then comes the construction of the king's palace, in which the nations are associated with the people of God. Lastly, as we have seen in 1 Kings 8:1-66, the dedication of the temple with the Feast of Tabernacles prefigures the rest of the people around the Lord during the reign of Messiah, and Solomon himself appears in his character of Melchizedek and intercessor. This internal history ends with a new appearance of the Lord. He appears to Solomon in a dream, as He had appeared to him at Gibeon. He grants his request: "I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication which thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually" (1 Kings 9:3). It is an unconditional response to that which Solomon, as a type of Christ, had done for the Lord. He receives that which Solomon had built as being established forever before His eyes. But immediately, as in all this Book, the question of responsibility follows, which is exactly the opposite of the foregoing. When it is a matter of Solomon the type, all is assured; when it is a matter of Solomon in responsibility, all comes into question. His throne cannot be established forever unless he be upright and faithful; his posterity cannot be established except on this condition. Let Israel prove unfaithful as well as her king, let them bow down before other gods, and nothing will remain of all that the Lord has established by Solomon. The people will be cut off, the house itself rejected and destroyed (1 Kings 9:6-9).

Thus in the space of two verses God declares unconditionally that His eyes and His heart shall forever be upon this house, and that He shall cast it out of his sight! Does God contradict Himself? Certainly not, and just as the conditional warning has been fulfilled to the letter, so shall the unconditional promise be fulfilled to the letter, when the true king after God's heart shall have built Him a house, a temple upon earth much more glorious than that of Solomon, and a habitation in heaven where the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be, there when God shall rest in Zion and at the same time in His glorious Assembly.

Thus ends this part of Solomon's history. The remainder of 1 Kings 9:1-28 and 1 Kings 10:1-29 deals with his relations with the nations. It is the external history of his reign. Not that this was not mentioned in the preceding period, but these relationships are not mentioned there except in their

connection with the internal kingdom, as for example the marriage of Solomon with the daughter of Pharaoh and Hiram's connections with the king for the construction of the temple.

1 Kings 9:10-23 - Hiram

1 Kings 9:10-14 speak of the outward relationship of Solomon with Hiram. In return for his voluntary collaboration on the temple and on the king's house, at the end of the twenty years of their being built, Solomon gave Hiram a territory consisting of twenty cities in the land of Galilee, the nucleus of what was later called "Galilee of the nations" (Isaiah 9:1; Matthew 4:15). This territory originally consisted of a part of the borders of Naphtali and later spread to include the area of Zebulun, all of "Upper Galilee," reaching to the Sea of Tiberias by way of Capernaum. The first of this territory thus was ceded to Hiram. Was Solomon acting according to God in thus subtracting a part, be it the very least part, of Israel's inheritance for the profit of one of the chiefs of the nations? We do not hesitate to answer in the negative, for the land could not be given away. The Lord had said: "The land shall not be sold forever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me" (Leviticus 25:23). So the land belonged to the Lord. It is a remarkable fact that the book of Chronicles, which for reasons already given never indicates wrongdoing in the kings unless it has to be mentioned to make the history understandable, does not speak of this gift. On the contrary, it substitutes for this account that of the "cities which Hiram had given to Solomon," and which the latter, after having built and fortified them, gave to the children of Israel to dwell in (2 Chronicles 8:1-7). Thus in 1 Kings Solomon diminishes God's inheritance; in 2 Chronicles he enlarges it. This fact seems very significant to us. What is even more significant is that this territory is given up to a nation overrun more and more by idolatry until the whole land came to be called "Galilee of the nations." Still, it was there that God's grace began to be revealed through the ministry of the Lord. Thus, a thousand years after Solomon, grace remedied his fault. This mistake has an immediate consequence: it brings discredit and shame upon the Lord's land. Hiram was unable to appreciate that which had great value in the eyes of Solomon and of any Israelite. He said, "What cities are these which thou hast given me, my brother? And he called them the land of Cabul [amounting to nothing] unto this day" (1 Kings 9:13). He gave them this name because "they did not please him." So it always is. When the world, even with best intentions like Hiram, simply - that is, without faith - has the use of those good things of Christianity that are our joy, it finds no relish for them. These things weary the world; they count for nothing in its life. The world will doubtless keep them so that it can boast, on occasion, of having them, but it cannot keep them in their pristine character. Without at all appreciating them, it will use them as a means of showing off, and Satan will use these things that appear religious to spread his dominion over a greater number of souls. He will use them to slight their worth; he will convince the king of Tyre that what is offered by Solomon cannot be compared to the splendors of a kingdom granted by the bounty of the prince of darkness. The Christian who in the pursuit of broadmindedness abandons the least part of his inheritance to the world, will gain nothing but to see his own character debased, his religion despised, and in the end, shame cast upon God Himself. When it is a matter of giving to Solomon (1 Kings 9:14), Hiram shows that he is very generous. This is well-suited to the pride of the head of the greatest maritime and commercial power of that day, the England of the ancient world. Hiram gives one hundred twenty talents of gold (18,000,000 francs at the time of the writing of this book). Is this a benefit, a profit to Solomon? As long as Hiram was tributary to him for the construction of the temple, everything had divine approval. Now Hiram is calling Solomon "my

brother" and giving him presents!

Solomon's activity and wisdom are seen (1 Kings 9:15-23) in the establishment of store-cities, cities for chariots, and cities for horsemen. It is the external organization of the kingdom, be it for commerce and trade or be it for war. He receives Gezer from Pharaoh who had exterminated the Canaanites who dwelt in that city, and who had given it to his daughter, the king's wife. Thus the order to destroy the Canaanites is realized without trouble for this reign of peace. Their city rightfully belonged to Israel. All the Canaanites, spared of old through the weakness of the people, are subjected, just as formerly the Gibeonites. Solomon does not repeat Saul's error toward these latter (1 Samuel 21:1-22), but he reduces to servitude those Canaanites who still remain among the people.

Like Solomon, Christians need not consider as valid the claims of the world which the unfaithful Church has allowed a foothold in her midst; on the other hand, they are not to drive them out. They themselves should walk in the liberty of the children of God and leave them to their yoke of bondage, the only religion proper to the flesh and that which the flesh recognizes. Never before Solomon had so complete a separation ever existed in Israel, but so it can and should be realized even in the worst days of Israel's history or of that of the Church. "Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity." "From such turn away." Under the glorious reign of Christ, separation will be absolute; we read of this even to the point that "In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO JEHOVAH" (Zechariah 14:20).

1 Kings 9:24-28 - Pharaoh's Daughter In 1 Kings 9:24 Pharaoh's daughter comes up from the city of David to her house which Solomon had built for her (cf. 1 Kings 7:8). In keeping with this house, the king built Millo, the citadel which henceforth made up a part of Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:9; 1 Kings 11:27; 2 Kings 12:20; 1 Chronicles 11:8; 2 Chronicles 32:5). The Second Book of Chronicles (2 Chronicles 8:11) informs us of the reason for this change of residence. Solomon said, "My wife shall not dwell in the house of David, king of Israel, because the places are holy, whereunto the ark of the Lord hath come." The ark had first been placed in the city of David (2 Samuel 6:12) and, as the passage in 2 Chronicles tells us, in the very house of the king. Solomon had carried it from the city of David, or Zion, into the temple. But the Gentile wife could not dwell in the place sanctified by the presence of the covenant God, Jehovah. Doubtless she could have her own large part in the benefits of the covenant, even to being associated with him who was its representative on earth; nonetheless, a distance must be maintained. The covenant made with Israel did not directly concern her. In the Millennium there will be a difference between Israel and the nations. These latter shall not receive their blessing except through the medium of the people of God. The covenant will not be contracted with them.

Three times a year Solomon sacrificed upon the brazen altar (1 Kings 9:25) constructed for the temple by the ministry of Hiram (2 Chronicles 4:1) - the only mention thereof in 1 Kings, and an incidental mention at that. Furthermore, he burned incense on the golden altar. As we have seen in 1 Kings 8, on certain occasions he filled the office of priest, of Melchizedek, and of intercessor. Does this not speak to us of Christ? Every dignity is concentrated in His Person, and He has acquired them all by virtue of His death, without which He would not be able to assume even one of these offices. The Captain of our salvation was made perfect through sufferings. In 1 Kings 9:26-28 we again find the relationship of Solomon with Hiram in view of the glory and external

affairs of the kingdom. Gold flows into Jerusalem. Hiram is the Gentile friend, ever ready to serve the greatness of the king who is seated on Jehovah's throne, and his good will for the house of the Lord likewise extends to the wealth and prosperity of the kingdom.

03.10. 1 Kings 10

1 Kings 10:1-29 1 Kings 10:1-13 - The Queen of Sheba The preceding chapter has shown us Solomon's relationships with the representatives of the nations in submission to his rule. Tyre; Lebanon; The Pharaoh of Egypt; his daughter, Solomon's wife; and again the land of Edom where he organized his fleet, the desert where he built Tadmor, the kings of Arabia (1 Kings 10:15); the remnant of the Canaanites whom he brings into bondage - all these diverse elements gravitate around him as their centre and contribute to the fame of his kingdom.

Finally we see the queen of Sheba, this "queen of the south" who "came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon" (Matthew 12:42). What distinguishes her from all the others is that she was attracted by the fame of the king's wisdom. She had heard tell of it (1 Kings 10:1), and this had produced in her an intense desire to see this extraordinary monarch, a desire which had caused her to conquer the enormous distance separating her country from Jerusalem and the numerous obstacles to such a journey. This act was an act of faith. She believed the word which had been spoken to her; she believed in the excellence of Solomon, having only that which had been told her to judge by. It is always so with faith. It is attracted by the Person and the perfections of Christ. Rebecca, convinced of the love of Isaac which Eliezer had spoken to her of, sets forth to go to meet him. The wilderness does not frighten her, for she desires to reach her bridegroom. Abigail, when judgment is at the door, sets forth to meet the one from whom she should have fled. Why? Because she knew by hearsay the moral glory of David. Later she becomes the companion of His royal glory. Rebecca is drawn by love, Abigail by the perfection of grace, the queen of Sheba by wisdom. This is what happens to souls who become acquainted with Christ. It is impossible for a finite being to embrace infinite perfection; we are attracted at most by a limited knowledge of one side of this divine character, whatever it may be; they all bring us to know His Person, and it is on Him that faith feeds.

"She came to hear the wisdom of Solomon." The queen may have been, in fact was a person of remarkable intelligence, whom nothing escaped and who loved to give an exact account of all things; but from the moment she heard tell of Solomon she had but one thought: to prove his wisdom. Wisdom for herself consisted in having none and in seeking it from another. It was hard questions that she brought to him. Certainly these were not lacking with her: the world is full of enigmas to which man has never yet found a solution. From the mysteries of creation, for the simplest of which Job had no answer, to the mysteries of bodily life; from the mystery of the soul to that of good and evil in the world; from the veiled hereafter to eternal life; all is mystery, a dark enigma. Man is unable to decipher the unknown writing of this book. God must reveal its secrets, and if there is no divine revelation, positive and direct, man's poor, limited spirit finds that from the very first question on he is brought to a standstill before an insurmountable wall. He may boast and exalt himself, but all his knowledge can never cause him to penetrate beyond the verification of facts whose first cause completely escapes him. The queen of Sheba brought her enigmas to Solomon to prove his wisdom by them. But what was the reason for her confidence? She had heard tell of Solomon's fame in connection with the name of Jehovah. If this fame was grounded

upon the Lord's presence at Jerusalem, was not the queen assured beforehand that it was not in vain for her to undertake this long journey? If Solomon should answer her enigmas, it is because his wisdom is none other than that of the Lord who had revealed Himself to him. Thus the queen comes to Solomon - and what will she carry away from this interview? The knowledge of God through him.

She comes with a great train, with all the most precious things her kingdom can produce, and with an abundance of spices such as never would come to Jerusalem, for she esteems this august monarch worthy of all homage. Let us here note that it is becoming not only for a queen, but for the lowest of sinners to approach Him with her perfume, for it is not an exchange that the soul is soliciting in coming to Him; she cannot do otherwise than to present him the homage that is his due. It is the knee that bows before Him, the sign of the obedience of faith, the adoration of a heart that finds in Him all the resources it desires and of which it has need. But the queen brings something better yet than her gifts; she comes to speak "to him of all that was in her heart. And Solomon explained to her all she spoke of: there was not a thing hidden from the king that he did not explain to her" (1 Kings 10:2-3). She opens her heart to Solomon; the secrets of her heart are made manifest (1 Corinthians 14:25); but they find a perfect response on part of him from whom nothing is hidden. In meeting Solomon, she has found God Himself. God is indeed there, in condescending mercy occupied with bringing full light into this soul, so as to leave no place for a doubt or for a question without an answer. The king has the secret of all things; he does not keep it to himself; he shows that His secret is with them that fear Him (Psalms 25:14).

Next the queen sees all Solomon's wisdom in the prosperity and in the perfect order of his house (1 Kings 10:4-5). Such shall be the marvellous order of Christ's millennial kingdom to the eyes of the nation. The queen of Sheba acknowledges (1 Kings 10:6) the truth of what she had heard tell about Solomon. She has passed from his person to the words of his mouth, and from these to all that has come from his hands, to all that surrounds him - and she has found nothing but perfections. It is thus that every soul comes to know Christ. One hears tell of Him: this excites the interest of a heart in need; one goes to find Him, for He is readily accessible; one enters into relationship with Him; He answers the needs of the heart. One admires Him and adores Him in hymns of praise. One says with the queen: "Mine eyes have seen. Thou surpasses" all I had heard about Thee." One esteems happy His men and His servants who stand continually before Him and hear His wisdom. And pursuing this path, one's soul boasts in God who has taken pleasure in His King, who has found His delight in Christ and set Him upon the throne. And this is also the proof of the love of God for His people, that He has given them such a King to execute righteousness and justice (1 Kings 10:6-9). This song is really a song of the kingdom. The Church shall also raise her own song about the Lamb that was slain, and her heart and mouth shall be filled with His love even more than with His wisdom and with His righteousness. The queen of Sheba gives the king all the riches she has brought. The spices for making the incense were most highly esteemed by all at Solomon's court. Never had they been seen in such abundance at Jerusalem (1 Kings 10:10). The happy queen's heart thus overflows in her gifts. But how greatly did Solomon's gifts surpass those of the queen! He is not consent to give to her in return for her gifts - he grants her "all her desire, whatever she asked" (1 Kings 10:13). Ah! Surely we have to do with Him who does not ask, but whose glory it is to be and to remain the sovereign Giver of all good. Ask and you shall receive. Ask - you will never exhaust them, all the riches of His kingdom, those "unfathomable

riches of Christ." His kingdom is not now of this world, so you will not carry out of His presence the temporal goods that were heaped upon the queen. These lesser treasures are reserved for the millennial reign of the Messiah. Our goods, our treasures, are spiritual; the world despises them; the Christian worthy of this name calls them the true riches (Luke 16:11). The queen returns to her country with treasure in her heart, a thousand times better than that her caravans had brought. Her eyes have seen! Now she knows the king of glory!

1 Kings 10:14-29 - The Throne

1 Kings 10:14-22 describe the riches and the splendor of the kingdom. Gold, the emblem of divine righteousness, stands out everywhere under Solomon's reign, from the temple to the throne. The throne was marvelous: "There was not the like made in any kingdom." It was the throne of righteousness and of power, and it bore the emblems of these. When he had been raised to the royal dignity, Solomon, according to the order of David himself (1 Kings 1:35), had sat upon his father's throne. Now we see him on his own throne in this marvelous "house of the forest" adorned with six hundred shields of gold, where he judges in righteousness. So it shall be with Christ. At present He is seated on His Father's throne, at His right hand, according to this word: "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (Psalms 110:1). By these words, "Sit thou at my right hand," God the Father expressed His complete satisfaction with the work accomplished by the Son of Man. It is as though He were saying to Him: Take this supreme and glorious place, my Son, until I shall have prepared a throne for Thee. It must surpass every other throne. Never shall the like be made in any kingdom. None that rise up against Thee shall be spared; they shall be crushed. Thy victory over them shall be the first step by which Thou wilt ascend the throne. The throne of the victorious Son of Man shall be like none other, after that voluntary humiliation that brought Him down to descend lower than the vilest of sinners. Then every knee shall bow, every mouth boldly proclaim the Lord on His throne of glory. Meanwhile this man who has drunk of the brook by the way is seated upon the throne of the sovereign God, at the right hand of the Majesty; but it is the throne of His Father; He takes His place there as Son, a testimony to the perfect satisfaction of His Father's heart in Him! The queen of Sheba was not the only one to come to him: "All the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom" (1 Kings 10:23-29). What a blessed time it will be when all will be able to come and draw from this divine spring, sure of finding God's thoughts in their completeness there! These verses also contain the enumeration of the king's riches. Here unbelievers shake their heads. For them all that man says seems believable, and all that God says, nothing but lies. In fact, such is their way of reasoning. In one year Solomon received six hundred sixty-six talents of gold - one hundred million francs (at the time of the writing of this book); the queen of Sheba had given him one hundred twenty talents of gold - about eighteen million francs - this was also the sum the king of Tyre had rendered to him. Is there then something unbelievable about this in comparison to the present revenues of the kingdoms of the world? Need we remind ourselves that under this reign all the kings of the earth paid tribute to him? In 1 Kings 10:26-29 we find the king's power, marked by his chariots and his horsemen. All thus was joined together for the glory of Solomon's reign.

03.10a. Two Psalms (Ps 72, Ps 127)

Two Psalms Psalms 72:1-20, Psalms 127:1-4 In ending this history, we would like to set two Psalms before our readers, one of them having Solomon as its subject, and the other composed by him. We would run out of space were we to attempt to set forth the wisdom of Solomon in the various writings of which he is the inspired author. We shall therefore limit ourselves to this short appendix.

Psalms 72:1-20 is a psalm "concerning Solomon": human reason at first glance may even doubt that this psalm is prophetic and applies to the reign of Christ, since so many of the details apply so exactly to that of Solomon. "And he shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. The dwellers in the desert shall bow before him, and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall render presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer tribute: Yea, all kings shall bow down before him; all nations shall serve him" (Psalms 72:8-11). "And he shall live; and to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba; and prayer shall be made for him continually: all the day shall he be blessed" (Psalms 72:15). As to his character: "He will judge thy people with righteousness, and thine afflicted with judgment" (Psalms 72:2). As to the blessings of his reign: "In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace till the moon be no more" (Psalms 72:7). "There shall be abundance of corn in the earth, upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon; and they of the city shall bloom like the herb of the earth" (Psalms 72:16). "All nations shall call him blessed" (Psalms 72:17).

Truly, there is scarcely one characteristic feature of that reign with which we have been occupied missing here. Nevertheless we find one thing that is not mentioned in Solomon's reign: grace. That is why, too, this reign speaks less to our heart and conscience than that of David does. Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of the lilies of the field. His glory speaks less to the soul than the tender care of a father for his children and the grace with which his love overwhelms them. We find this stream of grace, which characterized David much more than it did Solomon, throughout our psalm.

We must therefore look to Him who will unite in His Person the characters attributed to these two men of God in order to understand the millennial reign of the Messiah. His reign of righteousness will not only surpass Solomon's reign, so miserably interrupted, by its splendor and its length, for they shall fear Him "as long as sun and moon endure, from generation to generation" (Psalms 72:5), and there shall be "abundance of peace till the moon be no more" (Psalms 72:7); but it shall begin as that of Solomon never began: "He shall come down like rain on the mown grass" (Psalms 72:6), bringing heavenly blessing there where judgment has done its work and has left nothing to harvest. Under His gentle influence a new harvest shall spring up. David had predicted this of One greater than his son: "From the sunshine, after rain, the green grass springeth from the earth" (2 Samuel 23:4). Observe this character of grace in our psalm bringing compassion, deliverance, and salvation, in order to bring out the afflicted from under the yoke of the oppressor: "He will judge . . .

thine afflicted with rectitude" (Psalms 72:2, margin). "He will do justice to the afflicted of the people; he will save the children of the needy, and will break in pieces the oppressor" (Psalms 72:4). "For he will deliver the needy who crieth, and the afflicted, who hath no helper" (Psalms 72:12). "He will have compassion on the poor and needy, and will save the souls of the needy" (Psalms 72:13). "He will redeem their souls from oppression and violence, and precious shall their blood be in his sight" (Psalms 72:14). It is this that will give its incomparable stamp to Christ's glorious reign, as it is said again: "I will satisfy her needy ones with bread" (Psalms 132:15). Thus thought the rejected Messiah here on earth when He fed the multitudes, and if the people would have had Him, He would have manifested Himself as the Messiah entering into His reign. But when He shall take His power to Himself and shall shine upon the earth as the Sun of Righteousness, He will rejoice in the work of His grace and will bring healing in His wings.

Psalms 127:1-4 is the only psalm of which Solomon actually is the author. He speaks of the house, the great object of his reign; but he announces a future time when men shall turn to building it and to laboring in vain, to watching in vain to keep the city from the enemy. Such a thing never took place under his sceptre. That which Solomon established of course was not final; that which men shall set up will be even less so. But the time will come when Jehovah Himself will build the house and keep the city. Then His Beloved shall at last find "sleep," that rest of which it is said: "He will rest in his love" (Zephaniah 3:17). Then shall He have children as "an inheritance from Jehovah," a new people; "from the womb of the morning shall come to thee the dew of thy youth" (Psalms 110:3). Then shall He be called happy.

Solomon, just like David, looks on to Christ. Each of them knows that he cannot be that righteous ruler over men. Both of them rejoice to see their dignity conferred upon Him who will never use it except for the glory of God.

03.11. 1 Kings 11

1 Kings 11:1-43 1 Kings 11:1-13 - The Cause of the Kingdom's Ruin In this chapter we come to the history of the responsible king, a subject the Second Book of Chronicles passes over in absolute silence.

Up to this point, though it is a question of a man and therefore of an imperfect being, we have been able to see in the life of Solomon a beautiful unity joined to the wisdom that highly exalted the king's name among the nations, in association with the name of the Lord. The greatness, the majesty, the power, the wealth of his reign were but a feeble image of what will be seen during the Millennium under the reign of the true King of Glory.

Now God points out the blemish in this reign to us. It was not the marriage with Pharaoh's daughter, for this was indispensable if Solomon were to be a type of Christ in His government. Joseph in his time had contracted a similar union; the sons who issued therefrom had given their names to two of the tribes of Israel after having received the blessing of the patriarch, the father of this people. What is more, Solomon had acted according to the thoughts of God toward this Gentile wife, and Chronicles is careful, as we have seen before, to show us that the king did not give her a place of immediate nearness to the ark of the covenant and the city of the son of David. Thus it was not on account of this union that blame fell upon Solomon; as a millennial type, he, "the light of the nations," of necessity went beyond the ordinary relationships of a king of Israel. Also the Word sets Pharaoh's daughter in a place that is distinct from the other strange wives (1 Kings 11:1).

"But king Solomon loved many foreign women, besides the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, Hittites; of the nations of which Jehovah had said to the children of Israel, Ye shall not go into to them, neither shall they come in to you; they would certainly turn away your heart after their gods . . . and his wives turned away his heart" (1 Kings 11:1-3). Solomon's sin lay in having "loved many foreign women." These latter had played a relatively restrained role in David's life, and yet, as we have seen in 2 Samuel, he had borne some sad and often dreadful consequences in his children. By the very discipline which had resulted from these prohibited marriages God had of old kept His anointed from the snares that might have been spread for his piety. But if his lusts had swept him away in his affair with Bathsheba, a daughter of Israel, Solomon's lusts attracted him to foreign women. And yet God had said: "And thou shalt make no marriages with them: Thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor take his daughter for thy son; for he will turn away thy son from following me, and they will serve other gods, and the anger of Jehovah will be kindled against you, and he will destroy thee quickly" (Deuteronomy 7:3-4). And again: "And thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods" (Exodus 34:16). At the head of this humiliating list we find the Moabites who had led Israel astray into the idolatry of Baal-Peor, having gained control of them through the lust of the flesh (Numbers 25:1-5). All the nations - the Ammonites, the Edomites, the Zidonians - at the borders of Canaan hated

God and His people. The Hittites, mentioned in last place, should have been exterminated, and never had been. Solomon was openly disobeying God who had said to His people: "Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in to you." There was a double prohibition. We are in danger of going to the world or of letting it come in to us. Perhaps the latter possibility is even more dangerous than the first. On account of conscience towards God the Christian might perhaps abstain from an act of self-will or of disobedience that might incline him to go to the world, whereas the world might more easily seduce him by coming to him. Little by little it insinuates itself into our homes and into our lives, and often when we open our eyes to the danger, it is already too late. "They would certainly turn away your heart after their gods," the Lord had said. Marriage with the world will necessarily lead us to the religion of the world. This is an earnest word and well worth being weighed by every godly soul today. In the measure that we avoid or cultivate such union, our religion will take on a heavenly or an earthly character. "To these Solomon was attached in love." And it was this same king whose lips, by divine inspiration, had dropped wisdom for others and had shown them the path to follow with respect to the strange woman lest they fall into "all evil in the midst of the congregation and the assembly" (Proverbs 5:1-14)! It was he, too, who in the Book of Proverbs (Proverbs 7:1-27) had insisted upon the terrible consequences of evil conduct. What blindness! What a sad spectacle! He had taught others and had not taught himself. He, the responsible head of the people, did things from which the people were to abstain, but in which the king failing, he would draw down judgment not only on himself, but also on those whom he should have been feeding, leading, and protecting!

"His wives turned away his heart" - the word is repeated in 1 Kings 11:4. It is a terrible thing when that which is in the world lodges in the heart and takes control of it, thus turning one's affections aside from their only object to turn them towards vile, shameful, guilty objects. We would remark that these things did not arise suddenly in the life of this man of faith, or at least their consequences did not develop all at once. For "it came to pass when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods." Time was needed for this fleshly sowing to bear its fruit. Who would have believed that the Solomon of the temple, at one time on his knees, spreading out his hands toward God in the sight of the people, would become an idolater? Perhaps today some might say that he had a large heart, respecting the freedom of conscience of others; some would adorn this idolatry with some lovely humanitarian or social label. But of what value is human opinion? The question is what God thinks of it. God was dishonoured. "Solomon did evil in the sight of Jehovah." It was not indifference, hateful enough in itself, to build these high places for his wives: it was associating himself with their worship and becoming one with them. It also says, "Solomon went after Ashtoreth (Venus Astarte) the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites." He himself is regarded as an idol-worshipper. He "followed not fully Jehovah, as David his father," that is, he did not follow him to the end. And yet the Lord "had appeared to him twice," the first time at Gibeon, the second time after the consecration of the temple. God had warned him about idol worship (1 Kings 9:6-9), showing him its terrible consequences for the people - and he had not kept His commandment! David had committed serious, humiliating errors, but at least he always kept the Lord in view. Even after his fall, his first words were "I have sinned against the Lord." All the affliction of this man of faith had only the glory of God as its goal, and the close of his life had magnified grace joined to complete self-judgment. Such was not the case with Solomon. We do not even hear the cry of a convicted conscience from him when the terrible words, "Forasmuch as this is done by thee," resound in his

ears just as once the words "Because thou hast despised me," had rung in his father's ears. We are about to learn what very different feelings God's discipline elicited from his heart. But God would have him know all that is to happen to him. The kingdom, that kingdom of glory spread by divine power to the borders of the nations, was to be violently torn away from him; his son would keep but one tribe, Judah, for Benjamin scarcely counted. In a moment power, majesty, wealth, unprecedented glory, the submission of nations - all was to melt away, and in the midst of the storm only a poor remnant preserved by God would remain, like a fragile boat which had lost everything: oars, sails, masts, and ropes - except only its compass and rudder. As far as man is concerned, this is the end of the kingdom. But what a perspective for the future! After the judgment of the kingdom of Satan, the Beast, and the False Prophet, the kingdom of the Divine Solomon will reappear like the sun that shines in its strength, never again to depend on the fallible obedience of man, but upon the infallible responsibility of the King whom God shall anoint upon Zion, the mountain of His holiness.

1 Kings 11:14-43 - The Enemies

God does not limit Himself to revealing to Solomon the judgment which out of regard for David his father would fall upon Rehoboam his son instead of upon himself; but the king's unfaithfulness would also bring down on himself the Lord's discipline during the last years of his reign. Peace, that fruit characteristic of this reign, is destroyed; Solomon goes through a period abounding in troubles, seditions, and plots against his throne; nations such as Egypt who had in former times deemed being allied with him an honour, now nourish, raise to honour, and support his worst enemies. All kinds of ties are weakened. The yoke of the king weighs heavily upon the people in order to avoid internal sedition. This results only in poorly repressed discontentment which breaks out from time to time (1 Kings 12:4).

God stirs up enemies against Solomon from among those nations toward whom his lusts had drawn him. Edom was filled with deadly hatred against Israel because David, by the hand of Joab, had cut off all the males of that land (2 Samuel 8:13-14; 1 Chronicles 18:12; Psalms 60:1). Hadad had escaped with a few servants. But had his hatred lessened because Solomon had taken Edomite women as wives? Hadad had fled to Egypt, had been welcomed at Pharaoh's court, had become his brother-in-law, and his son had been brought up among the heirs to the throne. Where do the sympathies and favors of the world go? Not to David, but to David's enemy. One emotion in the heart of Hadad speaks more loudly than all the honours and delights of Egypt's court: hatred, hatred against Solomon. He gives up all his advantages to satisfy this hatred. Doubtless the conduct of David's companions had provided the motive for it, but Joab and David were dead: the hatred continued. Underneath it all, the world always hates the Lord's anointed, and conduct of believers, whether more or less blameable, only serves as a pretext for this hatred.

Rezon, the servant of Hadadezer, king of Zobah, whom David had smitten (2 Samuel 8:3-8; 2 Samuel 10:6), is a second adversary. Rezon becomes king in Damascus and reigns over Syria. "He abhorred Israel" (1 Kings 11:23-25). The world is like Hadad and Rezon. As long as we maintain the place relative to it that the cross of Christ authorizes us to take - the cross by which the world is crucified to us and we to the world (Galatians 6:14) - as long as we consider the world as a defeated enemy (John 16:33), it does not make a move. But let us make alliance with it, then it cannot forget its defeat, and though it may perhaps maintain an appearance of indifference, it will

not hate us any less. The last, the most dangerous enemy of Solomon's, is the enemy from within, Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:26-40). He was "Solomon's servant," an Ephrathite or Ephraimite. Solomon had set him over Ephraim for the work of the fortification of Millo, which was the defense of Jerusalem against enemies from the north. It was a most dangerous kind of move, but what was Solomon able to foresee? God alone knew. Through his duties Jeroboam knew all the secrets of the stronghold, and he gained the sympathies of his own tribe as well. In the same way, when difficulties arise among God's people, the greatest danger comes from those who by their activity have appropriated the principles of their brethren and have succeeded in substituting themselves for Christ in winning the sympathies of the many. Such are the weapons they use to make a breach among the people of God. Their motives seem to be unselfish; like Jeroboam, they would deliver the people from a yoke that is difficult to bear; in reality they are Satan's instruments to destroy the testimony of God, as we shall soon see. And yet they are servants of Christ, as Jeroboam was of Solomon!

Now a prophet appears. Just as Samuel at the time of the ruin of the priesthood, so the fall of the kingship now raises up a prophet. He becomes, as we shall see so strikingly in the course of these books, the bond between the people and God when kingship in responsibility has failed. Ahijah the prophet meets Jeroboam outside Jerusalem. He rends the new garment with which he is clothed (indeed, the kingdom was still quite new), and gives ten parts to Jeroboam. At that very moment the kingdom is torn out of the hands of Solomon, although this fact is only realized later. One tribe is left to the house of David on account of the free choice of grace with regard to David and Jerusalem. "They have forsaken me," says the Lord, "and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in my ways, to do that which is right in my sight, and my statutes and mine ordinances, as David his father" (1 Kings 11:33). "They" was Solomon, the king! No doubt, all the people later followed that same path, but at this moment one man had sinned - the king. Set before God in a position of responsibility for all the people, his unfaithfulness brought judgment upon Israel. What a severe punishment Solomon had incurred. In 1 Kings 11:34 God, ever coming back to the grace he had shown to David, adds: "And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a lamp always before me in Jerusalem, the city that I have chosen for myself to put my name there" (1 Kings 11:36). Grace is more in God's eyes than all glory, or rather, grace is the most precious part of glory, for it is, so to speak, at the head of all divine perfections.

"And it shall be," says Ahijah to Jeroboam, "if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that which is right in my sight, in keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, that I will be with thee, and build thee a lasting house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee" (1 Kings 11:38). A new responsibility now devolves upon Jeroboam. God was giving him a privileged position. His house was to be as sure as that of David, if he would hearken to the commandments of the Lord. But God makes one reservation: "And I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not for ever" (1 Kings 11:39). In due time that grace upon which David's kingdom was founded would again assert its rights, for it was not upon grace, but upon responsibility that Jeroboam's kingdom and that of Solomon itself were established. The promises of God are without repentance; He delights in grace. Thus the future kingdom of the true King of Glory will be based upon a new covenant, a covenant of grace where God alone is under obligation, upon a new creation - that which was not the case with Solomon's

kingdom.

"But not forever": one finds in the ways of God, periods where judgment, so to say, eclipses grace. It is not that grace no longer exists - it remains absolutely the same, but it ceases to shine out so that other perfections of divine glory, such as righteousness and judgment, can be manifested. So too the sun which is more than one hundred times the diameter of the earth is eclipsed by the shadow of the latter. When the eclipse is over, the enormous star appears again in all its brightness, for the shadow that covered it has taken away none of its splendor, except to the eyes of men.

Solomon seeks to kill Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:40). Such are the feelings produced in his heart by this discipline! Instead of bringing him into God's presence bowed, humbly submitting to the chastening, the obstacle God had raised up to him only irritates him and provokes him to seek to free himself of it. How sad the heart that has lost its communion with God and that does not judge itself. What has Solomon, the king of righteousness, come to? His heart is no longer upright before God. How far he is from his beginnings!

Jeroboam flees to Egypt, remaining there until Solomon's death.

All the events related in 1 Kings 11:1-43 are missing in 2 Chronicles, but two expressions in 1 Kings 9:1-28 give us to know that they are omitted by design. "And the rest of the acts of Solomon first and last, are they not written in the words of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer concerning Jeroboam the son of Nebat?" (2 Chronicles 9:29). An omission in the Word of God always has its reason, and we have so often called attention to this one that there is no need to repeat it.

03.12. 1 Kings 12

1 Kings 12:1-33 Division of the Kingdom: Rehoboam PART 2: 1 Kings 12:1-33, 1 Kings 13:1-34, 1 Kings 14:1-21, 1 Kings 15:1-34, 1 Kings 16:1-34 1 Kings 12:1-24 - Division of the Kingdom: Rehoboam The Word of God is fulfilled by means of feelings in the depths of the heart of man that drive him to his own ruin.

All Israel comes to Shechem to proclaim Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, king. Jeroboam is there, called by the people to be their spokesman before the king. These men complain to the king of the yoke his father had imposed upon them: "Thy father made our yoke grievous" - an expression showing that this had not always been the case. Christ's yoke will never be grievous upon His people; to His own He will ever remain the same as they have known Him in the day of suffering and of grace: "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Beyond all doubt, the nations must submit to Him, and He will smite them with a rod of iron, but all the prophets bear witness to the grace wherewith He will feed His people. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young" (Isaiah 40:11).

Rehoboam consults with the old men who had stood before Solomon to drink at the fountain-head of wisdom. Their counsel is that of Jesus to His disciples: "Let the greater among you be as the younger, and the leader as he that serves" (Luke 22:26). "If this day," say the old men, "thou wilt be a servant to this people, and wilt serve them and answer them and speak good words to them, they will be thy servants for ever" (1 Kings 12:7). Rehoboam forsakes the counsel of wisdom in order to follow that of the young men who had grown up with him, and who stood before him (1 Kings 12:8). They could not thus be anything other than the mirror and reflection of their master's thoughts. Had he himself stood before his father hearing the wise proverbs that fell from his lips, he could have communicated somewhat of this wisdom to others. He would have known what was becoming to a king; he would have known that "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (Proverbs 15:1); that "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18), and many other precepts. But no, those who flatter his pride are the ones who win his approval. The counsel of the young men in the final analysis is but that of his own heart. Pride goes hand in hand with despising one's neighbor; this base people counts for nothing in the eyes of a king who exalts himself. Great Solomon, his father, even seems little to him in comparison to his own greatness. This saying that his courtiers suggest to him: "My little finger is thicker than my father's loins" (1 Kings 12:10), does not meet with his disapproval. In any case, he esteems himself stronger and more energetic than his father and despises the people of God. He does not listen to them; this thing was of the Lord, that He might fulfill His prophetic word (1 Kings 12:15). What God has purposed, must come to pass.

Israel rebels. "What portion have we in David? And we have no inheritance in the son of Jesse: To your tents, O Israel! Now see to thine own house, David! (1 Kings 12:16). This was the rallying cry to rebellion, the common cry of those who were malcontented in the days of David (2 Samuel

20:1). Rehoboam flees; nothing but Judah and Benjamin remain to him. To recover what he had so foolishly lost, he gathers together an army of 180,000 men against Israel. But Shemaiah the prophet exhorts them on God's behalf: "Go not up, nor fight with your brethren, the children of Israel; return every man to his house, for this thing is from me" (1 Kings 12:24). The king and the two tribes fear the Lord and return according to His word. Had they only continued in this path, which is the beginning of wisdom!

It should be noted that the role of the prophet becomes increasingly emphasized with the ruin of the kingship. In all this part of the history we are taken up with prophets. Ahijah was the first to appear, when Solomon fell under God's judgment. There was also at that time a Nathan, and an Iddo who had a vision concerning Jeroboam, the son of Nebat (2 Chronicles 9:29). Now here is Shemaiah who turns Rehoboam from his plans of war. The role of the prophet was a great grace, allowing relations between God and His people to continue despite the ruin. Above all the prophet was the mouthpiece for the Word of God. This Word was addressed to him and he could say, "Thus saith the Lord." Whoever followed this Word could be sure of being well directed and of finding blessing. It is the same for us who live in these sad end times. Our prophet is the Word of God. God no longer grants us new revelations, as He did in times past, for He has revealed everything to us; but when His Word speaks to us, let us respect it and not turn aside. In the world there are many false prophets who pretend to know more than the true Word of God. They despise it, accusing it of being false, telling us that it is not God who has spoken. Let us turn a deaf ear to their words. God has spoken to us; our prophet has communicated His thoughts to us. Have we not proven a hundred times over that His Word is our souls' life and safety? Let us prove it afresh; and when this prophet tells us, "Thus saith the Lord," let us do like Rehoboam and Judah who had no need to repent of it. Let us "hearken to the word of the Lord" and act "according to the word of the Lord" (1 Kings 12:24).

1 Kings 12:25-33 - Jeroboam and His Policies The division of the kingdom being an accomplished fact, we enter upon the history of the kings of Israel. That of the kings of Judah does not enter into our account except to explain certain events or to give the context, except that at the end of the Second Book of Kings the independent history of the kings of Judah is traced to its end. In contrast, the Second Book of Chronicles gives us the history of the kings of Judah from the special point of view that characterizes this book.

What is now to become of this new kingdom? Jeroboam had received a conditional pledge from the Lord: "And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that which is right in my sight, in keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, that I will be with thee, and build thee a lasting house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee" (1 Kings 11:38). He had only to let God act in his favor, to obey Him, and he was assured of reigning over all that his soul desired (1 Kings 11:37).

Events unfold without his having to interfere, but he is mistrusting and says in his heart: "Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David." Not having confidence in God, he weighs over the probabilities and stops there. Faith never stops at probabilities - I would even go so far as to say that it feeds upon impossibilities and is the better for it. Having once admitted the probability that the kingdom would return to the house of David, Jeroboam carries his reasoning even further. It is necessary, he thinks, to prevent the people from going up to Jerusalem and offering their

sacrifices there, lest they have contact with the royal house of Judah. The king concludes that this is a matter of life and death: "The heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me." His decision is made: Israel must have a new religion. Out of his unbelief in God's promise, out of his indifference to the worship of Jehovah, comes the establishment by Jeroboam of a national religion, distinct from that worship which God had instituted at Jerusalem. From that moment on that this worship was not a worship of the Lord, what could it be? Idol worship. To forsake the worship of the true God is to fall into idolatry, whatever form this may take. In religion there is no middle ground. No doubt Jeroboam thought he had found such a middle ground: he did not adopt the false gods of the nations round about; he wanted only to establish a common religion for Israel. Having no heart-knowledge of the God who had spoken to him, he took counsel with himself and made two golden calves. "Behold thy gods, Israel," he says, "which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." He restores to honour that Jewish idolatry which had been practiced by the people at the foot of Sinai and which had brought down upon them the judgment of God. Only he goes further than Israel had in the wilderness: his forsaking of God is more complete. "Behold thy gods," he says, whereas the people had said, "This is thy god" (Exodus 32:4-5, J. N. Darby translation). He does not add as Aaron had done, "Tomorrow is a feast to Jehovah!" The Lord is completely set aside.

Jeroboam is a cunning politician. He sets up one calf at Bethel, on the boundary with Judah, and the other at Dan, the northern frontier of his territory. He patterns his worship after the form of the worship prescribed by the law of Moses. "A house of high places" replaces the temple; the Levitical priesthood is replaced by "priests from all classes of the people, who were not of the sons of Levi." As Israel had its Feast of Tabernacles, Jeroboam also established a feast, but a month later than this. He sets up an altar at Bethel corresponding to the brazen altar, setting it up before the idol, and burns incense upon it instead of burnt offerings (1 Kings 12:31-33). All this "he had devised of his own heart"!

Thus, despite its misleading external forms, this religion was a complete forsaking of the worship of the Lord, an instrument of polity in the hands of the government. Lulled by false appearances, souls were kept far from the true God, and the king of the line of David became a stranger to them. Can we not find similar principles in the religions of our day? Are they based upon faith in the word of God or upon practices that only vaguely resemble the worship of God - an arbitrary religion, a voluntary worship, a forsaking of the house of God, the Assembly of the Living God, a denial of worship in the Spirit, priestly functions accorded to such who are not true worshippers, the efficacy of the sacrifice replaced by perfume, so that one worships and pretends to approach God without having been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb! Doubtless it is not idolatry, properly speaking, as in Jeroboam's false worship, but we know from the Word that before long it will all be part of the lifeless religion characterizing professing Christendom today, and that this latter, left to itself, without ties to Christ, making religion a matter of the intelligence, not of the conscience and of faith, will end up by returning to idols and by bowing down before the works of its own hands.

03.13. 1 Kings 13

1 Kings 13:1-34 The Man of God and the Old Prophet of Bethel A man of God, a new prophet, comes out of Judah, where the Lord was yet maintaining a light for David. He comes to Bethel to prophesy against Israel at the very moment that the ten-tribe kingdom has been formed.

"Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense" (1 Kings 13:1). It goes without saying that he who had made his own priesthood and had consecrated anyone who wished to be (1 Kings 13:33) could not have this priesthood in very high esteem. Subordinated to the royal authority, the priesthood had become a political instrument in his hands; and there was nothing surprising in the king arrogating to himself the right to carry out its rites according to his own pleasure. The man of God cries against the altar (1 Kings 13:2), not against the idol. For man to imagine that he can replace God's altar is more hateful in God's eyes than anything else he can do. God's altar is unique; this He has proclaimed before all. Believers have but one altar, Christ, the Lamb of God (Hebrews 13:10). God will judge wicked men who want to set up another altar alongside His own. A worship instituted by man cannot subsist forever; divine judgment shall fall upon it, as upon the harlot of the Revelation. But God will not destroy it without at the same time putting the priests of this profane religion to death upon their own altar. The man of God announces a king of the seed of David, Josiah, who would overturn the high places of Israel, calling him by name three hundred fifty years prior to his day (1 Kings 13:2); he gives a present sign of that which would happen in years to come: the altar is rent and the ashes upon it are poured out. The hand of the man who had established this odious system, the very hand which is stretched out against the man of God in order to seize him, is dried up at the very moment the king thought to suppress the witness of the Lord and of His Word. The hand which he is unable to bring back to himself again remains outstretched in his menacing gesture against the man of God and against God Himself as a monument to his powerlessness. But upon the king's request the man of God intercedes that the judgment might temporarily be set aside, and that Jeroboam might be granted more time to repent (1 Kings 13:6.)

God shows here that He is God indeed; He preserves his loved ones, his witnesses, and defends them. He is for us as He was for His prophet, and who can be against us? What security for the testimony! We have nothing to fear when God sends us. No one, not even the highest authority on earth, can seize us, and should this power be granted to one, it is only in the measure in which the purposes of God may be realized through his instrumentality. Such was the case with Elijah, with the apostles Peter, John, Paul, and with all the Lord's servants. The value of the man by whom God renders testimony is so insignificant that the prophet is not even called by name in this account. He is simply a man of God - but what a title! A man of God is a servant who represents God before men and upon whom God has impressed his own character. Such a man speaks for God, speaks as the oracles of God: an august and solemn function, but one which reduces man to nothing and removes all confidence in the flesh from him. Moses and David are each called a man of God; this name is also applied to the prophets in a time of ruin. Timothy was a man of God. 2 Timothy 3:17 shows us that he was prepared for his commission by the Word; 1 Timothy 6:11

shows us that he could not carry it out except by bringing his life and conduct into accord with what he was proclaiming. The king's violence had returned against himself; but Satan does not regard himself defeated; he comes onto the scene and seeks to use Jeroboam as his instrument. "Come home with me, and refresh thyself, and I will give thee a present" (1 Kings 13:7). Let us beware of the favors of the world even more than of its threats! If the man of God had accepted the king's testimony of gratitude, it would have been an act of disobedience that would have dishonoured the Lord. Jeroboam no doubt was ignorant of what God had prohibited His servant, but Satan was well aware of it. The profane king did realize that if the man of God would accept his hospitality and reward, he would in some measure connect himself with the king who had dishonoured the lord, and would thus tacitly declare that things were not as serious as he had first thought. Thereby his testimony would be annulled, as Satan well knew. But the prophet remains faithful; he follows the example of Abraham with the king of Sodom and accepts nothing; he obeys the word of the Lord and is not tempted by the greatest of temporal advantages. "If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee; neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place: For so was it charged me by the word of the Lord, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest" (1 Kings 13:8-9).

Whether he understands the charge given him by the Lord or not, the prophet's path is simple: God has spoken to him; he must obey. He must not return by the same path; that would be to deny that the ways of God are without repentance. And the prophet obeys. At Bethel there was an old prophet who was not living there by command of the Lord, for the Lord was not using him in His service, but he was living there with his family. Perhaps, we might even say probably, he had nothing to do with Jeroboam's false religion, but his presence alone at Bethel sanctioned what was going on there, a thing which the prophet from Judah understood. Whether he wanted to be or not, the old prophet was associated with the evil, and the result of this association was that he, a prophet, was not in the secret of the thoughts of God. He learns them from others - from his sons who repeat the words of the Lord to him. God manifests neither Himself nor His thoughts to a servant found in an association that dishonours Him. No revelation was made to him; another was employed while he remained barren for the work of the Lord. How could he prophesy against Bethel when he was used to living there?

There is something more serious yet. This old prophet becomes an instrument of ruin for the ruin of the Lord's witness (1 Kings 13:11-19). What was his interest in acting thus against him? It was this: If the man of God would listen to him, it would be like a divine sanction of his position at Bethel. The same thing happens in our day also. More than one servant who should be separated from evil enters into association with another servant who is not, there in the very place where God is being dishonoured. The old prophet does not think of the consequences for his brother of the course of unfaithfulness in which he is engaging him. A false position makes us selfish and lacking in uprightness. The old prophet catches up with the man of God on the road that goes out from Bethel. To his request, "Come home with me, and eat bread," he answers just as categorically as he had answered Jeroboam (1 Kings 13:16-17). "I am a prophet also as thou art," replies the old prophet, "and an angel spoke to me by the word of Jehovah saying, Bring him back with thee into thy house, that he may eat bread and drink water" (1 Kings 13:18) - and the Word adds: "He lied unto him." But how could the man of God lend an ear for even an instant to this lie? How could he imagine that there could be contradictions in the word that God had addressed to him? And yet,

this is what unfaithful Christians tell us in order to justify their bad walk in their own eyes. Everyone, they tell us, understands the Word differently. "I am a prophet also!" But no, thank God, His will can only be understood in one way, and who can understand it but the one who is separated from evil in obedience to the Word? By appealing to brotherly love the old prophet succeeds where the king's offer had failed. "Then he went back with him, and ate bread in his house, and drank water" (1 Kings 13:19). The old prophet was a pious and respectable man. Why should not the man of God believe what he said? But however pious he might be, should a man's word have more weight than the word of God? The prophet from Judah is ensnared by the age and authority of his brother prophet and by his sympathy for him. Let us ask ourselves seriously what role these ties play in our religious life when the question of obedience to the Word is placed before us. The old prophet is severely chastised for his lie (1 Kings 13:20-22), for he becomes God's instrument to pronounce, against his will, the condemnation of his brother who had trusted in his word. He is obliged to judge in another the evil which he himself had committed. "Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord, and hast not kept the commandment which the Lord thy God commanded thee, but camest back, and hast eaten bread, and drunk water in the place, of which the Lord did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcass shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers" (1 Kings 13:21-22). If the lie of the old prophet was punished, how much more the disobedience of the man of God who had been put in an even more intimate relationship to Him by His office and the Lord's revelation. Who does not recognize himself in the features of the man of God? "Thou hast disobeyed," says the Lord. Who does not recognize himself in the features of the old prophet? Art thou a prophet also? Very well, the moment is coming when you must pronounce a curse upon your own work and punishment upon those whom you have led astray! And what will be left to you? Will it be a crown?

(1 Kings 13:23-26). The serpent, disguised as an angel of light, had seduced the man of God. Now he finds a lion on his path. The extraordinary circumstances of his death force one and all to recognize the divine intervention. The lion is not permitted to do more than to fulfill the word of the Lord. The old prophet, instrument for the fall of his brother, is the witness of the consequences of this fall. How this ought to have reached his conscience and filled his soul with sorrow and mourning (1 Kings 13:29)! His work is reduced to nothing and judged, but God uses this to bring him back; he himself is not lost. "When I am dead, then bury me in the sepulchre wherein the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones. For the saying which he cried by the word of the Lord against the altar in Bethel, and against all the houses of the high places which are in the cities of Samaria, shall surely come to pass" (1 Kings 13:31-32). His soul is restored before he dies, and he seals the testimony of his brother against the altar of Bethel by his own, extending this testimony to all the high places in the cities of Samaria. Be our unfaithfulness what it may, God will not leave Himself without a witness. The weakest, the most guilty among us may become its bearer, if he repent. In his death the old prophet testifies to his association with the man of God (1 Kings 13:31). But no testimony stops the idolatrous career of Jeroboam (1 Kings 13:33-34). He sets his heart on the religion he has invented more than on the word of the Lord; and yet this infallible Word had declared all to him beforehand by the mouth of Ahijah. He had been able to verify it by what had happened, had received its blessings without any positive result for his soul - he was about to make acquaintance with its judgment.

03.14. 1 Kings 14

1 Kings 14 Jeroboam and the Prophet Ahijah

"At that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam was sick" (1 Kings 14:1); this was a blow keenly felt and a reason for great anxiety on the part of the king. If this cherished son, his successor, should die, what would become of the monarchy he had thought to secure to himself by so much cunning? For Jeroboam was what men call a great politician. He had other sons, no doubt, but this one, the heir, enjoyed God's favor and that of the people. It is thus that the folly of human strategy devised apart from God becomes manifest. The Lord had assured Jeroboam of the kingdom, but he had preferred to secure it for himself by forsaking the Lord. He must learn whether his way was the way of wisdom. He had not reckoned with death; his plans had not taken into consideration the one thing men can never escape, and they were at the point of being reduced to nothing.

What to do? He remembers the prophet "who told [him] that [he] should be king over this people" (1 Kings 14:2). He knew these things. "He will tell thee what shall become of the lad. " Jeroboam acknowledges the man of God's ability and thinks that he can help him. One thing, however, is lacking, that which an unconverted soul always lacks - the consciousness of having to do with God; it just does not enter his mind that he is about to come before Him. If it were otherwise, could he be telling his wife to disguise herself? No, even this profane king could hardly suppose he could hide from God by being disguised. But God was not in his thoughts, so he does not take account of the connection between the prophet and Jehovah. That which the man of God had said had come to pass; therefore it was worthwhile to consult him. Jeroboam would as easily consult a fortuneteller. "Disguise thyself," he tells his wife, "that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam." And indeed he had good reason for this. What would his people say if he, their head, who had fabricated a new religion, should turn back to the representatives of the old faith, to the prophets of Jehovah, to seek help and light from them? And then, had he not learned at his own expense that these prophets were not favorably disposed towards him? Perhaps Ahijah who at one time had spoken well of him would be more favorable . . . In any event, disguise yourself, he says, and bring him some presents - not such as would go with the dignity of a queen, which would give us away, but after all, a present is always in order when one goes to consult a prophet!

Ahijah was dwelling in his own city in the territory of Ephraim. He is called Ahijah the Shilonite (1 Kings 11:29; 1 Kings 12:15). It was fitting that God have His prophet in Israel and on the other hand, how well suited was this place for the prophet of the Lord! It was at Shiloh that the ark had remained during the long period of the judges and of the priesthood of Eli. One could call it to mind in Israel now that one could no longer go up to the temple at Jerusalem. To the faithful, obliged to dwell among the ten tribes, at least there remained the remembrance of the worship of former days, the initial blessings connected with the presence of the tabernacle at Shiloh. "For go now," said the Lord, "unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I caused my name to dwell at the first" (Jeremiah 7:12). A man of faith must not forget that the name of the Lord had been placed there, and he could consequently reside there as well. In the troublesome circumstances in which Israel

now was, perhaps Ahijah had no more to do at Shiloh than did the old prophet at Bethel, but he was separated from idolatry there and fit to receive communications from God who had placed His name there. How good it is in a day of ruin to remember that which was from the beginning! One can always find God there, for if His ways change in the different dispensations, He Himself never changes. He can still reveal Himself to the faithful soul there in the place where He has placed His name in the beginning.

Ahijah lived in hope at Shiloh. Apparently all was against him; how could he still be useful in service? "And Ahijah could not see; for his eyes were set by reason of his age." But the prophet's dull eyes did not hinder his spiritual vision, as had been the case with Eli. He remained in direct connection with the Lord. God speaks to him, reveals to him who it is who is about to come to him, for what purpose, and that she will come disguised (1 Kings 14:5). Ahijah's natural sight could never discern all this, but by grace, the Lord had given him his real sight. He had seen everything; He sees in the present and in the future. Ahijah knew and saw because the Lord knew and saw. Blessing of this kind is found only in communion of heart with God. May it ever be ours! It is not our weaknesses that hinder divine communications from being granted us; it is our worldliness and our disobedience. God finds satisfaction in weak vessels if their hearts are faithful to Him, and the weakest - Paul was a testimony to this publicly - receive most precious revelations right here in this world.

"I am sent to thee," says Ahijah to Jeroboam's wife, "with a hard message" (1 Kings 14:6). As he could not go to her, God brought her to him, and to Himself who had ordered all things from the child's illness right down to the thoughts and decisions of Jeroboam, in order to bring this latter face to face with the Word that the Lord had sent against him by the prophet. "Thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do only that which is right in my sight" (1 Kings 14:8). Could David have spoken thus of himself? No - neither he nor any other man. But God had chastened him as a son whom one acknowledges, and the discipline had borne fruit. In virtue of his sacrifice God had been able to pass over the sin of His servant, never to remember it any more, and to consider only the fruit produced in his heart, His own work in which He could find pleasure. But to Jeroboam He says, "But thou hast done evil above all that were before thee, and hast gone and made thee other gods, and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back" (1 Kings 14:9). Jeroboam had dispensed with God, had despised Him as a useless object. And is it any different today? Man dispenses with God as with a "negligible quantity"; he banishes Him from his life, casting Him behind his back so as to see Him no more. That which man has before him is the pursuit of his own plans, his ambition, and his well-being; he does not think about what he has cast behind him. But the moment will arrive when like Jeroboam, he must turn around to meet the God whom he has counted as nothing face to face. Then he will hear this terrible word: "I . . . will take away the house of Jeroboam, as a man taketh away dung, till it be all gone" (1 Kings 14:10). God will cast him to the dogs and to the fowl of the heavens. So much for the future. But for the present, death is at the door: "When thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die" (1 Kings 14:12).

He shall die! What a judgment upon Jeroboam! What grace for the child! He was one of the Lord's elect. "In him there is found something good toward Jehovah the God of Israel, in the house of Jeroboam" (1 Kings 14:13). The eyes and heart of God rested upon this weak offshoot of family given up to destruction. There too God had a remnant according to the election of grace. Of such a

young child was the kingdom of heaven. He could not remain in Israel. God would take him out of the scene of judgment to have him with Himself. He was righteous. "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart; and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from before the evil. He entereth into peace" (Isaiah 57:1-2). Just so before the flood the righteous, Noah's contemporaries, were gathered up; just so the saints will be gathered up at the approaching day of the coming of the Lord: "I also will keep thee out of the hour of trial, which is about to come upon the whole habitable world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Revelation 3:10). But what? - already now! Yes, judgment is at the door; there will be no more delay. Oh, if only men's consciences might be reached before it is too late! Already now! How this reminds us of the words in the Revelation: "The time is near. Let him that does unrighteously do unrighteously still; and let the filthy make himself filthy still . . ." (Revelation 22:10-11). But the people must be judged, too (1 Kings 14:15-16), not just because the king had seduced them, but because they had themselves sinned, for "they have made their Asherahs, provoking Jehovah to anger." They must be judged according to the principle set forth in Romans 5:12 : "As by one man sin entered into the world, and by sin death; and thus death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." From this moment Jeroboam's history comes to a close. The chronicles of the kings of Israel have recorded it, but God passes over it in silence. If He makes mention of it somewhat in the Second Book of Chronicles, it is in reference to Abijah, Rehoboam's successor.* Nadab, Jeroboam's son, succeeds his father.

{*We intentionally are not relating the account in 2 Chronicles to what we have here. It is preferable to let events speak in the context where God has recorded them. When we do otherwise we run into danger of confusing principles which should be kept distinct and of losing a part of the blessing God has attached to each book of His Word. Thus, except for details we have already come to, we shall refrain from commenting here on those things God has not given us in the Books of the Kings.} In a few words (1 Kings 14:21-31) we have the history of Rehoboam, king of Judah. It does not appear to be he himself who introduced idolatry into his land. It was rather the act of the people (1 Kings 14:22), but Rehoboam in allowing the evil to become established in his kingdom is just as guilty as Judah, because he was responsible for Judah's conduct (cf. 2 Chronicles 12:1-2; 2 Chronicles 12:14). His mother, it is twice repeated (1 Kings 14:21; 1 Kings 14:31), was Naamah, an Ammonitess. How this would have influenced the sin of Judah, for Solomon had built high places for Moloch, the abomination of the children of Ammon, for the sake of this woman and her fellowcountrywomen, if there were such among the kings' wives. Idolatry goes hand in hand with most horrible corruption (1 Kings 14:24; Romans 1:1-32) - and such things took place among the people of God! God had destroyed the cities of the plain and had cast out before His people the nations whose iniquity had become full. What would He do to Judah?

Shishak, the king of Egypt, comes up against Jerusalem (1 Kings 14:25-28). All Solomon's prosperity, the treasures of the temple, the riches of the king's house, the golden shields of his guard, all is gone, and so quickly! In less than seventeen years the kingdom of David's son collapses - all its glory is cast down and trodden underfoot! The gold is gone, and only brass is left in its place (1 Kings 14:27).

03.15. 1 Kings 15

1 Kings 15:1-34 Nadab and Baasha, Kings of Israel; Abijam and Asa, Kings of Judah

Abijam or Abijah (2 Chronicles 13:1-22), the son of Rehoboam, began to reign over Judah in the eighteenth year of Jeroboam, king of Israel. His mother was Maachah, the daughter of Absalom. Absalom's mother was named Maachah (2 Samuel 3:3); it was natural that this name should be perpetuated in the family. This Maachah the mother of Abijam must herself have been the granddaughter of Absalom according to the evidence of 2 Chronicles 13:2. Here in 1 Kings 15:10 Maachah is called the mother of Asa, Abijam's son, according to the Jewish custom, although she was his grandmother. This woman was a worthy counterpart of Naamah, the mother of Rehoboam, an Ammonitess. Throughout the course of these books we shall see how the character of their mothers and where they came from had its influence upon their children. A pious mother sees her sons prospering round about her. The apostle Paul reminds Timothy of his blessed ancestry: "The unfeigned faith . . . which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and in thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that in thee also" (2 Timothy 1:5). The children of the "elect lady" walked in the truth (2 John 1:4). We shall notice other similar things as we go through Kings and Chronicles.

Here we find the other side of what we have just been saying. A profane or worldly mother is all the more dangerous for the moral development of her children, as according to divine order, both in nature and in relationship, the responsibility of guiding their youthful years is naturally entrusted to her. Thus it was that during the three years of his reign Abijam walked in all the sins of his father. "Nevertheless," it is said, "for David's sake did the Lord his God give him a lamp in Jerusalem, to set up his son after him, and to establish Jerusalem" (1 Kings 15:4). God remembers David and his obedience, even though he had turned aside from uprightness in the matter of Urijah; but after the bitter discipline this had necessitated, his restored soul had again found fellowship with his God. The Lord did not forget these things; thus we see Abijam's success and son, Asa, for David's sake raised up as a true witness for God in Judah. Only the grace of God could do this, not the merits of man, and so much the more so as Asa was placed under the same female influence as had been his father. His grandmother Maachah sought to promote the practice of idolatry under his reign, but Asa's faith fought this influence, reprovved it, and destroyed it in order that the rights of the Lord might be known again in Judah. Maachah occupied the position of queen, perhaps of regent mother, at Asa's court. He stripped her of her dignity and prestige, she who in face of her grandson's zeal to abolish idolatry had ventured and had wished to reestablish it in its most corrupt forms.

Asa's reign was a long one and singularly blessed; it lasted for forty-one years, thus being longer than the reigns of David and of Solomon. Chronicles gives us the detailed account of all the faithfulness which he demonstrated. Here the Word considers him more from the standpoint of responsibility. The close of his reign is marked by a very sad lack of faith. Baasha, the king of Israel, comes up against Judah and begins to build Ramah with the goal of shutting up Asa in his

kingdom so that he might not be able to go out (1 Kings 15:17). In order to oppose this project Asa relies upon Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, sends him presents, courts his alliance, and uses him to make Baasha depart. This plan was successful to all appearance: the king of Israel abandoned Ramah, the building materials for which were then dispersed. But what unfaithfulness in this pious king who had vanquished Zerah the Ethiopian with his army of a million men (2 Chronicles 14:9) to fail to commit his interests to the Lord. A league with the world at first may bring us advantages, but afterwards we taste its bitter fruits. Asa's conduct is not severely condemned here as it is in Chronicles, because the kings of Judah are not the special object with which the Spirit of God is occupied. But how sad to hear these words in the mouth of a godly king: "There is a league between me and thee, as between my father and thy father!" (1 Kings 15:19). Abijam had walked "in all the sins of his father," and lo, Asa identifies himself with him. His father had allied himself with the enemies of God's people; Asa acknowledges and seeks after this alliance!

"Asa slept with his fathers" (1 Kings 15:24) - the same words that are said of Jeroboam, of Rehoboam, and of so many others. It may be a special favor, for the opposite is said of certain wicked kings and of their posterity (cf. 1 Kings 14:11), but this favor is far from indicating that the Lord took pleasure in them or that they had found beyond the tomb the happiness their hearts had sought in vain in the world. It is still so everywhere here below. The sons are buried beside their fathers; they die, if one may so say, a natural death, without letting us draw a comforting conclusion as to their eternal future.

"In the time of his old age he was diseased in his feet" (1 Kings 15:23), and there again Asa manifests his lack of confidence in God: "Yet in his disease he did not seek Jehovah, but the physicians" (2 Chronicles 16:12). One unjudged act of independence (cf. 2 Chronicles 16:9-10) necessarily leads to another; at the same time the judgment of God falls upon those who instead of bearing his testimony, have preferred to seek the alliance, support, and help of the world. In order not to interrupt the account of the events of Asa's reign, Baasha's attack, though much later, had been mentioned in 1 Kings 15:17. The Word turns back in 1 Kings 15:25 and tells us of Nadab, the son of Jeroboam, who began to reign over Israel in the second year of Asa. His reign lasted two years; this short period of time was sufficient to prove his iniquity. The Lord's word against Jeroboam is fulfilled with regard to his son and all his family (cf. 1 Kings 14:14). Baasha conspires against him, smites him, and slays him at Gibbethon and reigns in his stead in the third year of Asa, king of Judah. "And it came to pass when he was king, he smote all the house of Jeroboam; he left to Jeroboam none that breathed; until he had destroyed him, according to the word of Jehovah which he spoke by his servant Ahijah the Shilonite, because of the sins of Jeroboam which he sinned, and wherewith he made Israel to sin; by his provocation with which he provoked Jehovah the God of Israel to anger" (1 Kings 15:29-30). Baasha reigned twenty-four years and did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. This whole account, filled with wars and cruelty, follows Solomon's reign of peace which ended so quickly on account of the unfaithfulness of the king and of his people. "And there had been war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of his life" (1 Kings 15:6). "And there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days" (1 Kings 15:16), and 1 Kings 15:32 repeats the very same thing. This is one of the principal symptoms of decline. War is declared, implacable war between people of the same race. Rehoboam had been at the point of attempting war, but, warned by the Lord, he had desisted. Next the kings of Israel are authors of warfare, for they feel their position jeopardized by the

maintenance of God's testimony in Judah. A nation which has turned idolatrous after having known the true God cannot endure God's testimony so near by. It hates this and wages desperate warfare against it.

03.16. 1 Kings 16

1 Kings 16:1-34 Complete Decadence

Prophets of the Lord are multiplied under these ill-omened reigns. We have first seen Ahijah the Shilonite prophesying to Jeroboam that he would be king over the ten tribes (1 Kings 11:29), then pronouncing the death of his son and the annihilation of his whole line to the same king (1 Kings 14:1-31). After him Shemaiah, the prophet to Rehoboam, persuading the king and his people not to fight against their brethren, the children of Israel (1 Kings 12:22; 2 Chronicles 11:2), the only thing appropriate for those who yet maintained the lamp of David. They, the Lord's witnesses, ought to accept the division as the result of their sin and ought to commit themselves to God who would know how to remedy the situation once His judgment, having run its course, would bear its fruit. And that is why Ahijah had said to Jeroboam: "And I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not for ever" (1 Kings 11:39). Before these prophets, under the reign of Solomon Iddo the seer had prophesied concerning Jeroboam,* to say nothing as to Nathan, who had played such a marked role in the days of David and at the opening of the reign of his son. Lastly, Azariah the son of Oded encouraged Asa, the king of Judah, to restore the worship of the true God after his victory over Zerah the Ethiopian (2 Chronicles 15:1; 2 Chronicles 15:8).

{*See also as to Iddo: 2 Chronicles 12:15; 2 Chronicles 13:22.}

All these prophets were, properly speaking, prophets of Judah, for even Ahijah the Shilonite first prophesied to Jeroboam near Jerusalem, and would not have been found in the territory of the ten tribes were it not through the circumstances of the division of the kingdom. It is so too with regard to "the man of God from Judah" who prophesied against Jeroboam in 1 Kings 13:1-34. We will not speak of the "old prophet" in that same 1 Kings 13:1-34, remaining behind at Bethel through his unfaithfulness.

Hanani, a prophet of Judah (2 Chronicles 16:7), prophesies against Asa who had called upon Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, for help against Baasha, the king of Israel. Despite the apparent success of this league, Hanani tells the king that henceforth he would have wars and not the rest he had hoped for in his alliance with the world. Pious Asa, incensed at the divine reproof, sets himself against the Lord by casting His prophet into prison!

After Hanani there appears Jehu, his son. He is a prophet in Israel as well as in Judah. He prophesies against Baasha, the king of Israel, Asa's enemy, but also against Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, the friend of Ahab (2 Chronicles 19:2; 2 Chronicles 20:34), for these two things - the world's hatred for the children of God and the friendship of God's children for the world - are equally sinful in the eyes of the Lord.

Jehu prophesies against Baasha who had smitten the house of Jeroboam, pronouncing the same judgment upon the former that had already come upon the latter: "Him that dieth of Baasha in the city shall the dogs eat, and him that dieth of his in the field shall the fowl of the heavens eat" (1 Kings 16:4; cf. 1 Kings 14:11). Nevertheless Baasha, just like Jeroboam, "slept with his fathers,"

and "The rest of the acts of Baasha, and what he did, and his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?" (1 Kings 16:5-6). Reference is made quite frequently in these books to the chronicles of the kings of Israel or to those of the kings of Judah. These chronicles were drawn up during the course of the reign of all the sovereigns of those times, whether Jewish or Gentile. They have nothing to do with the Word of God. That which it has not pleased the Lord to record or to explain is found recorded there. These chronicles have been lost; perhaps someone will one day find some fragments of them. The believer has no need for any of them; he has God's Word. There in God's account he finds all that is necessary for him as well as the divine evaluation of people, events, and things. Certain deeds may be recorded in non-inspired writings, and even with great exactness, but these deeds are never accompanied by anything more than human evaluation. And what is more, men of God, prophets, seers could be used to draw up these chronicles, to make these genealogical registers, to write these commentaries (2 Chronicles 12:15; 2 Chronicles 13:22); these writings are still not the inspired Word of God. In spite of their human interest they are of no importance whatsoever for setting forth the truth of God. And so they have disappeared, whereas the Word of God remains. When they were still in existence they testified to the divinity of this Word and to the reality of the facts recorded in it; now that they have disappeared, they have no other witness than the mention of them in the sacred writings. Amid the ruin and disappearance of these things the Word of God remains, the only monument, the only document that cannot be shaken! The history of the kings of Israel becomes increasingly dark and tragic. The curse of God rests upon this apostate line. Elah, the son of Baasha, reigns two years (1 Kings 16:8); Zimri, who had a high rank in the army, kills him at Tirzah while he was drinking himself drunk. Thus the word of Jehu the prophet begins to be fulfilled, for "As soon as he sat on his throne, he slew all the house of Baasha: he left him not a male, neither of his kinsmen nor of his friends" (1 Kings 16:11). This action of extermination was accomplished in a few days, for Zimri reigned seven days at Tirzah (1 Kings 16:15). And these seven days were sufficient for him to do "evil in the sight of Jehovah, in walking in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin which he did, making Israel to sin" (1 Kings 16:19). When a man's heart is estranged from God, each of his deeds bears the impress of this, and so it is that a mass of iniquities may accumulate in so short a period of time. The people, encamped before Gibbethon on the day of Zimri's usurpation, choose Omri, the captain of the army, for their king. These facts always repeat themselves in the decline of empires. When the people is without God, His will is counted as nothing. That which He established in the beginning is done away with; he who has might reigns, and as might lies in the army, the empire is at the mercy of the military power. Conspiracy on the one hand, soldierly revolution on the other.

Another feature characterizes the decline of the kingdom. Israel is divided against itself: how shall it stand? Half the people choose Tibni for king, while the other half follows Omri. This latter prevails: Tibni dies, Omri reigns. He reigns twelve years altogether, six years at Tirzah. He builds Samaria and does worse than all those who had been before him. He sleeps with his fathers and is buried in Samaria.

Ahab, the son of Omri, begins to reign during Asa's lifetime yet, for all the catastrophes mentioned in 1 Kings 15:1-34 and 1 Kings 16:1-34 take place during this latter's reign. Just as the reigns of Ahab's predecessors (Nadab, a year; Elah, two years; Zimri, seven days) except for Omri had been short, just so the reign of Ahab is prolonged (twenty-two years). Ahab has time before him for

doing only evil. He follows the idolatrous worship of Jeroboam, but does worse yet: he marries Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and bows down before Baal to whom he builds an altar and a temple at Samaria. He sets up an image of the Phoenician Astarte and provokes the Lord God of Israel to anger (1 Kings 16:29-33). And it is in such days that God, provoked to anger, goes forth to manifest His power in testimony against the evil, but also to deliver this miserable people who were willfully serving demons. What a God is ours! He chooses the moment when man has completely rejected Him to show that He is God, He alone, as we shall see in that which follows. But as for us Christians, have we not contemplated what God is at the cross of Christ?

Before beginning with the history of Elijah, one detail is added: "In his [Ahab's] days Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho; he laid its foundation in Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates in Segub his youngest, according to the word of Jehovah which he spoke through Joshua the son of Nun" (1 Kings 16:34). Five hundred thirty-two years had passed, and the Lord had not forgotten His word (Joshua 6:26), a detail all the more remarkable that it is intended to prove before the eyes of men the infallible authority of all the words God has spoken. Israel was idolatrous, the name of the Lord was being dishonoured, evil of most frightful description was vaunting itself in broad daylight in this time of apostasy. Why did God not intervene? Why did He not crush this ungodly one? It is because He is a God of infinite patience and He proves this. He fulfills His word when after five centuries man might have thought and no doubt did think that He was no longer paying any attention. One act of disobedience brings on the judgment foretold, down to the very letter. This event takes place before the eyes of all; did it speak to the conscience of the people and of their king? And it is a man of Bethel who builds Jericho! There is no more fear of God before the eyes of Israel. God's threats are just as despised as His promises. This event is given us here as being morally the final stage of the condition of the individual in a time of apostasy, for historically speaking, it took place during the twenty-two years of Ahab's reign.

03.17. 1 Kings 17

1 Kings 17:1-24 PART 3: 1 Kings 17:1-24, 1 Kings 18:1-46, 1 Kings 19:1-21, 1 Kings 20:1-43, 1 Kings 21:1-29, 1 Kings 22:1-53 1 Kings 17:1-7 - Elijah and the Brook Cherith

God's Word here introduces the first great prophet of Israel. As we have said previously, all the other prophets had come from Judah or had begun their ministry before the separation of the ten tribes. Elijah was "of the inhabitants of Gilead." He comes on the scene in the most evil days of Israel's history when the falling away is universal and the worship of Baal, patronized by Ahab and Jezebel, had become the national religion. Under this government the servants of the Lord are obliged to hide in order to save their lives, and those still seen are silent. Thus to all appearance Elijah is all alone before this formidable apostasy. His name is characteristic: Elijah means "Whose God is Jehovah," and each of us can read this name in this man's words and in all his conduct. His God is the one whom Israel had abandoned. His testimony is just as characteristic: he is completely separated from the general apostasy. He is the witness of the truth in the midst of evil, and the truth always separates us for God. "Sanctify them by the truth," the Lord said. This truth here consists above all in the judgments of God. In a broad general way Elijah is the prophet of judgment just as, on the other hand Elisha is the prophet of grace. Nonetheless, as we shall see in the very course of this chapter and of the next, Elijah's mission is not accomplished without the accompaniment of grace and deliverance, and this at the very time God's judgments are being prepared and running their course.

Elijah's moral character is just as remarkable as his character as a witness. Above all, he stands before God. "Jehovah, the God of Israel," says he, "before whom I stand" (1 Kings 17:1; 1 Kings 18:15). He enjoys a relationship with God and dwells in communion with Him. Like Elijah, Abraham "stood yet before the Lord" (Genesis 18:22). Elisha likewise (2 Kings 3:14), and so many other prophets and men of God. When one stands before God, one receives the communication of His thoughts. "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?" says the Lord. It is the same for Elijah: standing before the Lord, he knows His thoughts and can declare them: "There shall not be dew nor rain these years, except by my word" (1 Kings 17:1). When one stands before the Lord, then like Jeremiah, one hungers for His word; one eats it (Jeremiah 15:16). Then one can communicate it to others: "Thou shalt be as my mouth" (Jeremiah 15:19). In Revelation 10:10 John cannot prophesy until he has taken the little book and has eaten it. Ezekiel speaks forth God's words when he has eaten the roll (Ezekiel 3:3-4). It is the same here with Elijah; when he says, "Except by my word," it is because his word is that of the Lord which had been revealed to him (1 Kings 17:2; 1 Kings 17:8; 1 Kings 18:1). But in order for the Word to unfold its power outwardly by means of us, something more is necessary than feeding upon it. Dependence is needful. Elijah announces the mind of God, proclaims the word of God, but he prays (and that is dependence) in order that this mind may be realized. This same dependence in prayer is the source of the prophet's power. The sphere of this power is very elevated: it is heaven. Heaven opens and closes according to Elijah's word; he makes fire come down from heaven to consume the burnt-offering in the presence of Baal's priests. In every one of these situations we find the prophet praying. "Elias

was a man of like passions to us, and he prayed with prayer that it should not rain; and it did not rain upon the earth three years and six months; and again he prayed, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth caused its fruit to spring forth" (James 5:17-18). Our chapter does not tell us that Elijah prayed the first time, but much later in the Epistle of James the Word reveals this to us, for God remembers these prayers, records them, and can reveal them at the appropriate time. None of the prayers of His beloved fall to the ground. When fire came down from heaven it was not only at Elijah's word, but also at his prayer. When the power of the prophet was displayed in raising the dead, the source of this power again was in prayer (1 Kings 17:20-22).

We would remark right away that dependence (of which prayer so frequently is the expression) with one exception (1 Kings 19:3) characterizes the entire life of this man of God. It is shown at the brook Cherith, whether it is a matter of going there or of leaving there. It is shown at Zarephath in all the circumstances of the poor widow. It is shown before Ahab, before Baal, upon Carmel, in the matter of Naboth, and throughout the history of the prophet until that moment when he is caught up to heaven upon the chariots of Israel.

Such was thus the threefold cause of Elijah's extraordinary power: he stood before God, received His word, and lived in dependence upon Him. On that one occasion when his faith failed, he neglected these three things! Instead of standing before God, he fled to the wilderness; he forgot to consult the Lord; and he went according to the dictates of his own heart, which is independence.

Scarcely had he rendered the solemn, public testimony of 1 Kings 17:1 than Elijah is set aside by the Lord, until that day when he would reappear to deliver the people by judging the agents of the enemy which had enslaved them. To be set aside is a situation infinitely painful to the flesh, which is thus deprived of all that nourishes it, but easy for faith, for faith finds its happiness in obedience. The great prophet must hide himself; this energetic man must fold his hands, in solitude awaiting the Lord's time; he who had the power to shut up the heavens must depend in a unique way upon the Creator who sends out birds to feed His servant and makes the water of the brook last just as long as He wishes to keep his prophet at Cherith. A painful situation for the flesh, we have said, but a blessed school for dependence! Elijah enjoys its fruits. While all Israel was perishing of thirst and hunger, he could say, "I lack nothing." The apostle Paul passed through the same experiences morally as did Elijah. At Damascus he had preached that Jesus was the Son of God; then had been sent into the solitude of Arabia in order to return to Damascus, and then finally to go up to Jerusalem. We know nothing of his experiences during his isolation, nor do we know anything more of Elijah's experiences in isolation. What we do know is that both came forth with power acquired in communion with the Lord. So it was with John the Baptist. Already in his mother's womb he renders his first testimony to the presence of Him who was to come; then he is kept in the desert until the day of his manifestation to Israel. Was it not so with the Lord Himself? Only He who could say, "I am lowly in heart," had no need of being kept in humility; but the Word is silent about His mature years preceding His public ministry. There He was, living before God, finding His delight in dependence, waiting upon the will of God to act, then coming forth when the time was come in the power of the Holy Spirit to defeat Satan and to deliver those enslaved by him. Much more than Elijah, Jesus was a man of prayer. Prayer was always the source of power with Him and preceded its manifestation. We see this at His baptism by John (Luke 3:21-22; cf. Luke 4:1; Luke 4:14); upon the mountain (Luke 6:12; cf. Luke 6:19); at His transfiguration (Luke 9:28; cf. Luke 9:29); and on so many other occasions during His career. But let us again go back

for a moment to God's ways with His prophet. They follow a definite order gradually leading on to the high point of his mission. God speaks to him; he believes, obeys the divine word, then comes to realize entire dependence at Cherith and at Zarephath. The more he depends upon the Lord, the more he learns to know His faithfulness and the riches of His love and grace. All this is governed, as we saw to begin with, by a complete separation from evil. The secret of power is in all these things. Their absence is the reason for the lack of real power among Christians in our day. It is not that pretensions to power are lacking - but where is its reality? One no longer believes in the Word of God, one lives in independence and disobedience to this Word, one is in fellowship with the world which has crucified Christ, and one is crying loudly that one has found the secret of power! There indeed exists a secret of power in the world, but of a satanic power based on the giving up of all these things. Let us beware of becoming bewitched by this kind of power. Elijah's power had a character distinguishing it from every other kind of power: it was the power of the Spirit of God, and every true servant of God had to recognize this (1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:16).

1 Kings 17:8-24 - Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath When the brook had dried up, Elijah was sent to Zarephath to be sustained there by a widow woman (1 Kings 17:9). In Luke 4:25-26 he is sent to the widow to sustain her. Both these things are true and our account proves this. God had a double purpose: to sustain His servant and to bring a message of grace to the widow by him. The Lord, speaking in the synagogue, compares this message to the gospel spread among the nations beyond the borders of Israel. The evangelist finds his own sustenance in bringing the good news of grace to others. But we find a third thing in Luke's account. If the message is carried to the nations, personified by a Zidonian widow, the widows of Israel are set aside. Judgment upon Israel's state opens the door to the Gentiles to receive grace, and this, remarkably, in the very territory from whence Jezebel, that great corrupter of God's people, came (1 Kings 16:31). In Matthew 15:21 the Lord withdraws to this same territory, but though He was still being sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, He could not be hidden to faith; and faith finds in Him much more than crumbs fallen from the children's table.

Here then Elijah is sent in grace to a widow of Zarephath who is dying of hunger, and just as much as Israel under the weight and consequences of the judgment God had pronounced. This woman was going to die, and she knew it. Elijah's words stirred up the faith that lay in her heart. "And she went and did according to the word of Elijah" (1 Kings 17:15). Instead of doubting something that would happen in a way incomprehensible to human reason she accepted this impossibility and found salvation therein for herself and for her son. The king of Israel, too, felt this imminent death weighing down upon himself and his people, but instead of being sure about his lot, he sought means to escape it. This is the opposite of faith: it is unbelief. Ahab thought he could have or find human resources against famine and death; this woman had none; "That we may eat it, and die" (1 Kings 17:12). This widow's faith is of the same kind and quality as that of the prophet; consequently she follows the same path he does. It is always so: "And he went and did according to the word of Jehovah" (1 Kings 17:5). "And she went and did according to the word of Elijah" (1 Kings 17:15), but the word of Elijah was "the word of Jehovah which he had spoken through Elijah" (1 Kings 17:16). It is the same word, whether it comes directly to the prophet or whether it is addressed to men through him. So it is today with the gospel. This poor widow came to know the divine resources for a dying soul. She is called to make experiences even more profound and blessed. Her son dies; she now has to deal with the reality of death. At the same time she

acknowledges that which is right, that death is the wages of iniquity. "Art thou come to me to call mine iniquity to remembrance, and to slay my son?" (1 Kings 17:18). To know that death awaits us and will overtake us is not everything; it is necessary besides to realize the actual power of death upon us, sinners. The widow needed this experience to learn to full extent of the power of grace. How, if her son had not died, would she have been able to know the power of resurrection that delivers from death? The same was so for Martha at the tomb of Lazarus. This whole scene speaks to us of Christ. Elijah is a picture of Him. In sympathy he entered into all the consequences of man's sin. Just as Christ wept at the tomb of Lazarus, Elijah "cried to Jehovah and said, Jehovah, my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?" (1 Kings 17:20). Then he brought the dead child to life again, taking his place. "And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried to Jehovah and said, Jehovah, my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again!" (1 Kings 17:21). The meal and the oil were a great blessing for the poor widow. They kept her from dying. A soul, still ignorant of all the riches of Christ, may be conversant with the Word and find nourishment for its life therein. At first the widow was a bit like the man left for dead by the thieves, to whose help the Samaritan came, pouring oil and wine onto his wounds. The oil and the wine answered to his needs, just as the oil and the barrel of meal answered to the woman of Zarephath's needs. But resurrection answers to death. "Being dead in your offences and sins . . . God . . . has quickened us with the Christ . . . and has raised us up together." Elijah stretched himself upon the child three times; Christ spent three days in death. But Elijah did not depend upon himself to raise the dead any more than did Christ. "Father," said the Lord at the tomb of Lazarus, "I thank thee that thou hast heard me," and as for His own resurrection, "For thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol, neither wilt thou allow thy Holy One to see corruption." In the same way, as we have already remarked, here Elijah expresses his dependence by praying. The prophet delivers the child to his mother. "And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of Jehovah in thy mouth is truth" (1 Kings 17:24). She had learned two things by the resurrection of her son: First, that God had come to manifest Himself here below in a man - "Thou are a man of God." And so Christ was "marked out" - much more than a man of God - "Son of God in power . . . by resurrection of the dead." Previously God had revealed Himself to her as providing for her needs, now, as giving new life, resurrection life, there where death had entered in by the "iniquity" of man. The second thing is that through resurrection she gained the assurance that the word of the Lord in Elijah's mouth was the truth. The truth of the word of grace is proven by resurrection. Christ has not only died for our offences; He has been raised for our justification.

1 Kings 17:1-24 has occupied us with a time when Elijah was hidden from the eyes of his people and from the world. We have seen him exercise a ministry of grace during this period. In the following chapter he is going to manifest himself publicly at the time for executing judgment. Do we need to point out how much the prophet in this respect is a remarkable type of Christ? We are in the day when the Lord is hidden, but when the grace that brings salvation is appearing to all men, when the power of resurrection is being announced to the nations. The days are coming when our rejected Lord will again appear, when every eye shall see Him, and they which have pierced him, and all the tribes of the land shall wail because of him. Yea, Amen!

03.18. 1 Kings 18

1 Kings 18:1-46 1 Kings 18:1-16 - Elijah and Obadiah A third time the word of the Lord comes to Elijah (1 Kings 18:1; 1 Kings 17:2; 1 Kings 17:8); a third time Elijah obeys. The career of this man of God is marked by obedience. May it characterize us also! Only one time does Elijah go where his own heart directs him (1 Kings 19:3), and the thread of his career is interrupted. Doubtless he then arises and sets out at the angel's word (1 Kings 19:8), but it is that he may come into God's presence and there learn to judge himself. Later we shall see that despite this, God does not set His servant aside entirely, for the experience of learning to know himself bears fruit; we find him again in 1 Kings 21:1-29 before Ahab and in 2 Kings 1:1-18 boldly presenting himself before Ahaziah's messengers to pronounce the judgment of the king of Israel.

"Go, show thyself to Ahab" (1 Kings 18:1). Previously it had been, "Hide thyself by the torrent Cherith" (1 Kings 17:3). Elijah obeys without arguing. His obedience stems from implicit confidence in God, His authority, His power, and His goodness. Every disobedient act of a Christian demonstrates a lack of appreciation of what God is.

"I will send rain upon the face of the earth." This does not hinder Elijah from praying that it may rain (1 Kings 18:42). He is in full fellowship with the Lord, having received the revelation of His thoughts and of His purpose, but in order to be an instrument for the fulfillment of His ways in grace, he must depend upon Him. God could well give rain without Elijah or by someone other than the prophet, but He never sets His seal upon disobedience or independence; and it is this which so often strikes the work of God's children with barrenness.

While Elijah was enjoying divine abundance at Cherith and at Zarephath at a time of want, Ahab was using all his faculties to seek to bring about a remedy for the judgment of God by strategies of human wisdom. He associates Obadiah, the steward of his house, one who occupies a public place at the king's court, with himself. "Obadiah feared the Lord greatly" (1 Kings 18:3). This might seem to be enough for a faithful walk, for "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; (Proverbs 9:10). But we are also told: "Fear the Lord, and depart from evil" (Proverbs 3:7). And again: "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil" (Proverbs 8:13). One may fear the Lord greatly, yet nevertheless dishonour Him by being in association with the world that rejects Him. This position, so lacking in openness, is found on every hand in professing Christendom. Yet nevertheless Obadiah's piety had prompted him to hide those who were being persecuted for the Lord's name's sake. "And it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of Jehovah, that Obadiah took a hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and maintained them with bread and water" (1 Kings 18:4). In one sense, his work had not been insignificant. It was no small thing, especially on part of a man in the public eye at Ahab's court, to hide one hundred prophets whose lives were being hunted and to feed them.

Only - for there is an "only" - Obadiah was dependent upon Ahab, and that was evil. If Ahab was his lord, how could he excuse himself from following his master's orders, and how could he testify by his walk to just the opposite of what his faith taught him? Moreover, alliance with the world of

necessity makes one little by little lose one's appreciation of its true character. The world is willfully ignorant of God's judgment. Beyond doubt, it suffers it, as did Ahab and his people, but it does not have recourse to God to be delivered from it. All its doings proclaim: I hope to get myself out of this without You.

Even if he "greatly fears the Lord," a believer associated with the world or dependent upon it of necessity acts according to its principles. The Word calls this "the elements of the world." Such a believer first of all will be in ignorance of the fact that God's judgment upon man is absolute and final, and that the wrath of God is already revealed from heaven upon him. Secondly, he will be seeking to improve the condition of man placed under this judgment. All the associations, all the organizations in Christendom today - and they are innumerable, so that we forbear enumerating them - have no other character. Those dear children of God who like Obadiah "divide the land" with Ahab to seek water and grass, show forth the principles of the wicked king in their walk and inevitably draw the responsibility for it upon themselves.

Elijah meets Obadiah (1 Kings 18:7-16). This godly man recognizes the Lord's servant and falls on his face before him. Others perhaps would have passed by on the other side of the road, embarrassed by this so dangerous meeting. "Go, say to thy Lord, Behold Elijah!" such is the word of the prophet. Elijah, as we have seen, being accustomed to this word, often heard a "Go," and he would go. "Go," he himself had said to the poor Zidonian widow, who had then gone and done "according to the word of Elijah." With the one as well as with the other this stemmed from faith, which always obeys. But where is Obadiah's faith? A believer may "greatly fear the Lord," and have an unbelieving heart. Obadiah is struck with consternation and terrified: "And now thou sayest, Go, say to thy lord, Behold Elijah!" (1 Kings 18:11; 1 Kings 18:14). When it came to obeying Ahab, Obadiah did not object; but when it came to obeying God, he found objections to His word presented by the prophet. "And it shall come to pass when I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of Jehovah shall carry thee whither I know not; and when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he will kill me" (1 Kings 18:12). He who can adapt himself to Ahab's plans for finding sustenance and avoiding death cannot rely upon the Lord and entrust his life to Him. How many souls are in this situation! When the word of God calls for simple obedience on their part, they quickly find fault with it. From this, we may be sure, come the great majority of the arguments of children of God who, walking in a pathway of disobedience, seek to avoid the positive obligation of obeying by persuading themselves that the Word contradicts itself or is not clear: "Thou sayest, Go, say to thy lord, Behold Elijah! And it shall come to pass . . . that the Spirit of Jehovah shall carry thee whither I know not." This is also the source of the lack of deliverance of souls bound up in this state of things. They are afraid, afraid of the world's opinion, afraid of difficulties, afraid of death: "He will kill me."

"And now thou sayest . . . Behold Elijah!" Elijah's coming, as we shall see in the rest of the chapter, meant the deliverance of the little remnant of Israel through the judgment of Baal's priests. It was also the sign of the end of God's judgment upon His people and it ushered in the blessings that would follow: "Go, show thyself to Ahab; and I will send rain upon the face of the earth" (1 Kings 18:1). Could the news of Elijah's coming bring anything but joy to one who was faithful? How the seven thousand who had not bowed the knee before Baal must have rejoiced at this news: "Behold Elijah!" For them it meant the end of long sufferings, the sure hope of better times. But it could not be so for Obadiah. He was too entangled with the world to rejoice at seeing

its yoke broken. Is it not the same today when one speaks to Christians of the appearing of the One who is greater than Elijah? We are not speaking of His coming to take away His saints, but of His appearing to distribute rewards and to execute judgment upon the world. Will these souls be able to say that they "love His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8)? Will they, like the elders in the Revelation, in the face of this display of judgment have only adoration and the homage of their crowns cast before the throne to render? Obadiah did not know this assurance. He saw nothing but this lot awaiting him with the king: "He will kill me," a fate which due to his lack of faith he considered to be more sure than deliverance.

We find many different characters in Israel in these sad days for faith and the testimony. It is no longer the time of spiritual power, when the beloved of the Lord, gathered around Himself, resolutely enter into the conflict. These are days of weakness when the faithful are persecuted and hide themselves, no longer able as a collective testimony to resist the evil. In short, Elijah alone is a witness. And Obadiah? Beyond doubt he shows his piety in secretly providing for the needs of the saints, and this devotion is recognized by God; but to be the messenger of Elijah (of Christ) before the world goes beyond his courage. Nevertheless God had said to him, Go! One would be glad to unload the responsibility that the word of the Lord imposes on us onto anyone else, for how can one carry it out? Would it not be openly censuring Ahab's apostasy to go and say to him, "Behold Elijah"? And how can one speak thus when one has never done so before? And then, look again! In this state of bondage to the world one feels it necessary to justify oneself by giving testimony to oneself: "Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of Jehovah, how I hid a hundred men of Jehovah's prophets by fifty in a cave, and maintained them with bread and water?" (1 Kings 18:13). How many Christians themselves report of their work, of their activity and of its results, thus giving a wrong impression to themselves and to others as to their moral condition! Obadiah adds: "I thy servant fear Jehovah from my youth" (1 Kings 18:12), and this was true enough, but it was not for Obadiah to state this. God had deigned to use him, even in the wrong position he held, and he could be sure that the Lord would not forget even a cup of water given to one of these little ones - but how much more pleasing it would have been to God to have seen Obadiah, full of trust and obedience, setting forth at His command to carry out the mission to the king with which he had been entrusted!

We have dwelt upon Obadiah's character at length on account of its very present day application. May God grant us each to give heed to that which his example teaches us! Elijah reassures this poor fearful, trembling heart (1 Kings 18:15-16). As surely as he stands before the Lord, he will show himself to Ahab that very day, for he has nothing to fear. God is with His servant; what is the power of the king in comparison to that of God?

1 Kings 18:17-46 - Elijah Before the Prophets of Baal

Ahab goes to meet Elijah (1 Kings 18:16-20); he accuses God's servant of being "the troubler of Israel." This is how the world regards the activity of the Lord's witnesses. To announce the judgment that is inevitable, to declare that there is no resource against it except in God Himself, to stand fast for the Lord in the presence of evil, in effect is to stir up the world which is sleeping in a false security and does not want to be disturbed from its sleep. "I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house," says the prophet. "Ye have forsaken the commandments of Jehovah" - that is the true cause of the troubles, for "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

"Send," says Elijah to Ahab, "gather to me all Israel to mount Carmel." "So Ahab sent to all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel" (1 Kings 18:19-20). God wants it so; whether Ahab wants it or not, this must be done. But doubtless the thought would never occur in the mind of this impious king that his religion with its eight hundred fifty prophets would be absolutely nothing before one single prophet of Jehovah!

"Then Elijah drew near to all the people, and said, How long do ye halt between two opinions? if Jehovah be God, follow him; and if Baal, follow him. And the people answered him not a word" (1 Kings 18:21). Israel under the yoke of an idolatrous religion was following Baal without positively abjuring Jehovah. She was halting between two opinions. This is one of the characteristics of the world's religion. Doubtless the number of those walking in open unbelief is growing daily. But there are others who deny neither the faith nor impiety. They find good reasons both for, excusing the evil, objecting to the good. They are the indifferent ones who abstain from choosing between the two sides and who do not answer a word when Elijah speaks to them. The prophet begins by taking his stand for the Lord by himself (1 Kings 18:22) in the face of Baal's four hundred fifty prophets. He proposes to the people a sign that the Lord alone would be able to produce and which had a deep significance. "The god that answers by fire, let him be God" (1 Kings 18:23-24). Here it is not a question of fire from heaven falling upon men in judgment, as would happen later at the summons of the prophet (2 Kings 1:10), but of fire falling upon the burnt offering.

Baal does not answer (1 Kings 18:25-29). With what irony does the prophet treat this inert object by means of which Satan was exercising his abominable influence upon the hearts of men! The blood of the false prophets flows (1 Kings 18:28), but neither their blood nor that of any man can atone for Israel's sin or open heaven to this poor people!

Two religions meet face to face: Elijah's and Baal's, for the third, Israel's, is party to both. Publicly these two religions appear to have the same sacrifice. How are they to be distinguished? One of the bullocks must be consumed by fire from heaven, but not the other. By this means one will be able to recognize the true God; by this means the people too will be able to learn to know themselves so that they may be turned to repentance.

Elijah says, "Draw near to me" (1 Kings 18:30). At that time he was God's representative upon earth, that which Christ was in perfection. If they would remain afar off, Israel would not be able to be witness to what God was about to do. Elijah repairs the altar that was broken down (1 Kings 18:31-32). The twelve stones represented the twelve tribes, the people in their entirety before God. The prophet, at a time of ruin, bears testimony to the unity of the people, just as today's witnesses bear testimony to the oneness of the body of Christ. Elijah does not act as a sectarian man would, but by faith in the deep reality of this unity which God had established at the beginning. Outwardly the altar was broken down; that is to say, Israel as a whole no longer existed. But it was enough that one man should bear witness with his altar of twelve stones that that which God had established in the beginning would remain forever. It is the same today. We do not tire of rendering testimony to the fact that for us there is but one body and one Spirit, just as there was one altar of twelve stones for Elijah. Those who proclaim this truth will ever be few in number. Perhaps they will remain alone like Elijah, but what does their number matter if this testimony has been entrusted to us, as it was to Elijah, in the midst of universal apostasy? The burnt offering was the victim presented to God for the people. Fire from heaven - divine judgment -

falls and consumes everything: the sacrifice, the wood, and the very altar itself, leaving nothing standing (1 Kings 18:38). In this way the Lord indicated that there was but one offering by which one could know the true God, the offering upon which His judgment had fallen. Each Israelite present at this sight could at the same time learn what was due to him, and that the people, represented by the twelve stones of the altar, could not stand before the judgment of God. But oh, the wonder of grace! If the people were present at their own judgment and saw themselves being consumed together with the sacrifice, they were not struck down themselves. The sacrifice was consumed; the people are consumed with the sacrifice; but judgment without mercy upon that which represents them before God sets them free to rejoice in His deliverance. So also we can say, "Our old man has been crucified with him, that the body of sin might be annulled, that we should no longer serve sin" (Romans 6:6).

Drought and famine had been warning judgments to straying Israel, God thus making Himself known in part by His ways, but the people did not really know God in the fullness of His being until the fire from heaven had consumed the burnt offering and the altar.

Elijah had two desires: that God might be glorified, and that the people might learn to know Him. "Jehovah, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things by thy word. Answer me, Jehovah, answer me, that this people may know that thou Jehovah art God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again" (1 Kings 18:36-37). There is a twofold result: the people, delivered by divine power, acknowledge the Lord, turn their heart to Him, and render homage to Him! "And all the people saw it, and they fell on their faces and said, Jehovah, he is God! Jehovah, he is God!" (1 Kings 18:39).

"And Elijah said to Ahab, Go up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain" (1 Kings 18:41). There is a sound of rain, but only Elijah's ear - or rather his faith - perceives it. "And Ahab went up to eat and to drink." He is helpless against God, a tool the Lord uses as it may please Him. Thoroughly wicked though he may be, he is obliged to obey. He who had said, "Thou troubles" Israel," can do nothing against the dreadful humiliation that is inflicted upon him in seeing all the priests of his false god slaughtered before him. But after all, of what importance was this profane king? It was not a question here of his own salvation, about which he did not care in the least, but of the salvation of the whole people of God.

Elijah goes up to the top of Carmel. His patience emerges victor from the trial; his faith has its perfect work. The showers of blessing come after God's judgment has fallen upon the burnt offering and only after Israel, in presence of this event, has acknowledged the Lord and turned their hearts back to Him. In our days abundance of rain is sought without the conscience being reached. This desire can be crowned with but one result. The rain was not given to Israel until after the work of God had been done for them and in them. The hand of the Lord is upon Elijah who with his loins girded, runs before Ahab.

Let us again summarize briefly the beautiful character of this man of God. We do so all the more gladly since we are going to be present at a scene that no longer testifies to the power of the Holy Spirit in the prophet.

Completely separated from the evil that surrounds him, Elijah is not in the least taken up with himself nor desirous of personal recognition. He stands before the Lord, hears His word, obeys Him, lives in dependence upon Him in every detail. He depends upon God for sustenance, to bring grace to the nations, to resist the enemy, to bear witness, to exercise divine power in holding back or in giving rain, but above all else, to cause fire to fall from heaven upon the burnt offering and to judge the world. He waits upon the Lord, walks with Him, and, like Enoch, will be caught up into glory. The word of the Lord, the angel of the Lord, the Lord Himself all speak to Elijah; as for himself, he speaks to God and God listens to him. Elijah is a friend of God (1 Kings 17:22, 1 Kings 8:38; 1 Kings 8:44). Elijah is an epistle of Christ. But, where the Lord never failed, this man of God did fail, and that is what we are about to consider.

03.19. 1 Kings 19

1 Kings 19:1-21 1 Kings 19:1-9 - Elijah Before Jezebel and Before Himself

It is worthwhile to remark as we begin this chapter, that if men of God or their actions serve as types for us in the Word, this does not mean that these men understood the hidden meaning of their lives or their acts. Without even going beyond Elijah's history, we have already remarked that in Luke's Gospel the Lord gives an import to his mission to the widow at Zarephath quite other than that in the account here in our book. The fire falling from heaven upon the burnt offering is another proof of this. Elijah could not have seen in this either the cross or crucifixion with Christ, things that have become so clear for us in the light of the gospel. In fact, Elijah as a man of God was above all a prophet of judgment, and as far as his personal experiences go, it is only in our chapter that he lifts his eyes under divine instruction beyond the scene of judgment to that lofty, serene region in which God finds His delights, makes Himself known, and reveals Himself in the fullness of His character. This remark will help us understand the scene that is about to unfold before us.

After the total destruction of the prophets of Baal and the account Ahab gives Jezebel of this, she swears by her false gods to take her revenge upon Elijah within twenty-four hours, and she lets him know this. "And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life" (1 Kings 19:1-3). He flees before a woman, he who had met with Ahab and had resisted the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal! This attitude, so contrary to his attitude before, came from Elijah's at this moment forgetting the source of his strength. He could no longer say, "The Lord before whom I stand." He felt himself to be before Jezebel, not before the Lord. And the thing was so true that he was going to have to walk for forty days and forty nights in order to stand before God again. From the moment a believer lets any object whatsoever come between his soul and God, the distance immediately takes on incalculable proportions. The result of this estrangement necessarily is that the prophet loses all his strength, for one does not find this anywhere but before God. "Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled." Elijah, a quite remarkable instrument of the Lord's power, had not realized in the same measure that in himself there was neither goodness, nor light, nor strength. It was needful for him to make this experience, and God would bring him to this in leaving him to his own resources before the enemy's power. He who had sent the message, "Behold Elijah," to Ahab flees for his life at a mere threat from Jezebel. From Jizreel he passes into the territory of Judah where the queen could no longer reach him, continues his flight to Beer-sheba, the farthest border of Judah toward the wilderness, leaves his servant there, and not satisfied with his flight, goes into the wilderness itself a day's journey. There he "sat down under a certain broom-bush, and requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough: now, Jehovah, take my life; for I am not better than my fathers" (1 Kings 19:4). He is so completely discouraged that he wishes for an end to his life. Why this? "For I am not better than my fathers!" The prophet thus had thought, even if only for a moment, that he was better than his fathers and that God had supported him in the conflict because of this excellence! Poor prophet! - powerless before Jezebel, absolutely discouraged in his own sight, he who had believed that he could build something upon this

foundation of sand. But in order that this man of God might be entirely delivered from self, the Lord was going to have him undertake a long journey, at the end of which he would meet the God of the law at Horeb.

How many lessons this scene contains for us! We can have been used in God's service and yet know Him very imperfectly. Then too, a time of special blessing often precedes a period of great spiritual weakness, because Satan, ever on the lookout, causes us to find in the blessings themselves an occasion to be puffed up and to exalt the flesh. Such is in part the reason for Elijah's discipline; such was the reason for the apostle's discipline after he was caught up to the third heaven, though this was only preventative. Notice again that Satan attacks us on that side which we guard the least because it seems the least vulnerable to us. Would it be likely that a man whose courage had resisted the entire people would be seen fleeing at a mere threat?

"He himself went . . . into the wilderness." What a blessing when the Lord leads us there so that we may there experience those infinite resources which are in Him; how humiliating but how beneficial too, when our own will has brought us there, that we be there to learn what is in our hearts! Such was Elijah's situation. - "And he lay down and slept under the broom-bush." He was giving up his mission, so to speak, just as its reality had been proven by brilliant exploits. But it was necessary for him to learn that his inner life was not being sustained by faith as his outward testimony had been.

"And behold, an angel touched him, and said to him, Arise, eat!" (1 Kings 19:5). In 1 Kings 17:1-24 it had been he, Elijah, who had dispensed food to others after having been fed himself; here where his lack of faith had driven him, he had no food at all. But God does not abandon him: He thinks of him. The only strength available to him comes from food which God has prepared for him; at his head he finds a cake baked on hot stones and a cruse of water. He eats, but does not understand what God wants of him, and goes to sleep again. A second time he finds the same food and the angel says to him, "Arise, eat; for the journey is too great for thee" (1 Kings 19:7). God fed him in order that he might walk. An important lesson for us! The Lord had fed him at Cherith and at Zarephath so that he might render a powerful testimony, but if divine food does not impart strength to us for ourselves, will God's purpose be attained? This food which Elijah finds at his head has miraculous power. Is it not so with the Word of God? It brings us to "the mount of God." So deemed the apostle as he spoke to the Ephesian elders: "I commit you . . . to the word of his grace, which is able to . . . give to you an inheritance among all the sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

Elijah "went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God" (1 Kings 19:8). With it one walks and does not faint. Moses had spent forty days and forty nights upon Horeb, conversing with God. His word and His presence were enough to sustain His servant's strength. The Lord Himself spent forty days and forty nights in the wilderness without any food, in the presence of wild beasts and exposed to Satan's attacks. He hungered and found nothing at His head to cause Him to resist the enemy's temptations. But He was the Man who did not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceeded from the mouth of God. Simple dependence upon this word fed Him, was His strength, and gave Him the victory in extraordinary circumstances that He alone could overcome.

1 Kings 19:9-21 - Elijah Before God

Elijah comes to Horeb, the mountain of God, and goes into the cave, the same place, no doubt, where the Lord had hidden Moses (Exodus 33:1-23). The prophet did not know where God would bring him; he did not intend to betake himself to Horeb when he fled a day's journey into the wilderness. But though he reaches the cave, it is not with the feelings of the heart of a Moses toward the guilty people - a heart which despite all their iniquity, beat for the people of God. "Blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book that thou hast written" (Exodus 32:32), ready to suffer being made a curse in order to save Israel. "Consider that this nation is thy people!" (Exodus 33:13), he said again, interceding for them. This same Moses who proclaimed the God of the law appealed to the mercies of the God of grace towards those who had offended Him. But Elijah had not yet learned the lesson which God wanted to teach him. "The word of Jehovah came to him, and he said to him, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for Jehovah the God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I am left, I alone, and they seek my life, to take it away" (1 Kings 19:9-10). Then God teaches him what Moses had desired to know when he said, "Let me see thy glory." First He makes various manifestations of His power and His judgments pass before the prophet. Elijah knew them well: he had been present when the stormy wind had preceded the rain (1 Kings 18:45); at his word fire had fallen from heaven in presence of all the people (1 Kings 18:38); and these same phenomena had occurred of old upon this very mountain when God had given the law; the mountain had also quaked and there had been thunder and lightening and fire. But - what a lesson for Elijah - the Lord was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire. The whole life of this most powerful of the prophets might well have slipped away without him ever really knowing God!

Elijah hears "a soft gentle voice" (1 Kings 19:12-13); then he understands that this is something new surpassing the scope of his experiences, and, his face wrapped in his prophet's mantle, he stands at the entrance of the cave. This soft gentle voice was that of grace. It is in grace that God has revealed Himself in the fullness of His being to poor sinners like ourselves. The God who thus reveals Himself repeats His question to the prophet to probe him to the very depth: "What doest thou here, Elijah?" Elijah makes the same reply (1 Kings 19:14; cf. 1 Kings 19:10). He had had time for reflection; he lays bare what is in his heart. Whom does he credit with good? Himself: "I have been very jealous for Jehovah . . . I am left, I alone . . . they seek my life." Whom does he accuse? The people of God: "The children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets . . . they seek my life." In a word it is an orderly accusation, a pleading against Israel, and a panegyric for Elijah.

"Know ye not," says the apostle, "what the scripture says in the history of Elias, how he pleads with God against Israel? Lord, they have killed thy prophets, they have dug down thine altars; and I have been left alone, and they seek my life. But what says the divine answer to him? I have left to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed knee to Baal. Thus, then, in the present time also there has been a remnant according to election of grace." "God has not cast away his people whom he foreknew" (Romans 11:2-5; Romans 11:2 a).

Elijah had come to intercede against Israel! In accusing the people and in justifying himself he was showing his ignorance of grace and of himself. How was this then? He was appearing before the God of grace to play the role of accuser and to plead for judgment! But what was the divine answer to him? First of all, that vengeance would be executed. To Elijah would fall the sad mission of

preparing the instruments: Hazael and Jehu. Secondly, the prophetic administration is taken away from Elijah and he must anoint Elisha as prophet in his stead. He who was saying, "I am left, I alone," must learn that God chooses, forms, or discharges His instruments as it suits Himself. How Elijah thus is judged to the very depths! No longer will he say, "Take my life; for I am not better than my fathers." He will have to live on, all the while being witness to another ministry which he will have to acknowledge, being himself used of God in forming it.

Thirdly, and this is the great point of "the divine answer": "Yet I have left myself seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth that hath not kissed him" (1 Kings 19:18). There was therefore a remnant according to the election of grace, known by God, but unknown to Elijah. The soft gentle voice was still being heard in these days of apostasy, and it was in this feeble remnant that God found His pleasure.

Elijah accepts this humiliating lesson: he submits when for the fourth time God says to him: "Go!" (cf. 1 Kings 17:3; 1 Kings 17:9; 1 Kings 18:1). He returns by the way by which he had come (1 Kings 19:15). He finds Elisha the son of Shaphat and casts his mantle on him - the mark of identification as a prophet. Had he stuck to the mere letter of God's word, he would have had to begin by anointing Hazael and Jehu (1 Kings 19:15-16), but he makes haste to carry out the act which would reduce himself to nothing - himself, the great prophet - by handing over his authority to another. Thus he who had said, "I am left, I alone," shows that from now on he is nothing in his own eyes. As for Hazael and Jehu, it would not be Elijah, but Elisha who would anoint them. He surrenders all claims to that which could have made him stand out and leaves that work to be carried out by someone other than himself.

Elisha leaves his oxen and runs after Elijah. "Go back again," the prophet answers him, using the same words he had heard from the mouth of the Lord (1 Kings 19:15). He was nothing in his own eyes from now on, and this was not the moment to induce Elisha to follow him. "What have I done to thee?" Elijah had not cast his mantle on him to draw him after himself, but that he might be prophet in his stead. What a beautiful example of humility, of selfjudgment, of unselfishness, of obedience, of trust in the Word this man of God gives us here! How quickly chastening had produced its fruits in him! Can we not say that Elijah's humiliation will glorify God more than all the prophet's power? His career is apparently broken off, but a new career, beginning in chastening, is about to open before him; and if the first has not ended in glory, the second will end in nothing but glory! Let us all follow Elijah's example in the breaking of self in order to glorify the Lord!

03.20. 1 Kings 20

1 Kings 20:1-43 Ahab and Ben-Hadad

Ever since Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, had lent a firm hand to Asa, king of Judah, against Baasha, king of Israel, he had remained the enemy of the latter, had taken cities from him, and had even acquired by conquest certain rights over Samaria, the capital of the kingdom (1 Kings 20:34). His son, also named Ben-Hadad,* goes up against Ahab and besieges Samaria. Laying claim to his father's rights, he sends an insolent summons to the king: "Thy silver and thy gold is mine; thy wives also and thy children, the goodliest, are mine" (1 Kings 20:3).

{*The name Ben-Hadad is probably the religious title of the kings of Syria: "Son of Hadad" or "hadad's worshipper." Hazael's son is also called Ben-Hadad (2 Kings 13:3; 2 Kings 13:25).}

What does Ahab do? He, before whose eyes the scenes of 1 Kings 18:1-46 had been unfolded, who had heard his whole people cry in his ears, "Jehovah, he is God!" has not even a thought for the God who had just restored His worship by His power, that worship for which Ahab had substituted the worship of Baal (1 Kings 16:31-32)! Ahab does not consult the Lord nor commit his cause to Him. For that matter, had he ever humbled himself before Him? Had he tried to stop the arm of Jezebel as she sought to put Elijah to death? No, this weak, wicked-hearted man "did sell himself to do evil in the sight of Jehovah, Jezebel his wife urging him on" (1 Kings 21:25).

Demonstrating that God was a stranger to him, acting as though He did not even exist, he accepts the humiliation inflicted upon him by the heathen monarch: "My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have" (1 Kings 20:4). What, indeed, could he do against Ben-Hadad at the head of all his forces and accompanied by thirty-two kings? So those who do not know God reason things out. But what is accomplished by his humiliation before Israel's enemy? This latter uses the occasion to add outrage to his harshness: "Thou shalt deliver me thy silver, and thy gold, and thy wives, and thy children; but tomorrow about this time I will send my servants to thee, and they shall search thy house, and the houses of thy servants; and it shall be, that whatsoever is pleasant in thy sight, they shall put in their hand and take away" (1 Kings 20:5-6). There again, Ahab does not return to God; to him it is more important to call together and consult with the elders of the land. They favor resistance; he, accepting the first conditions and rejecting the second. At this answer Ben-Hadad's anger knows no more limits. Ahab replies spiritedly: "Let not him that girdeth on boast himself as he that putteth off" (1 Kings 20:11), but God is still not taken into consideration. A great multitude is arrayed against the city. God intervenes by a prophet whose name is not revealed to us: "Hast thou seen all this great multitude? behold, I will deliver it into thy hand this day; and thou shalt know that I am Jehovah" (1 Kings 20:13). What was the Lord's ground in speaking thus? The condition of Ahab's heart? We have just seen its callousness. But Israel in presence of Elijah's miracle had acknowledged the true God. Would He not show His grace at the least sign of His people's returning to Himself? As for Ahab, God tells him: "Thou shalt know that I am Jehovah." If he had not learned this before under the weight of the judgments of God, this miraculous deliverance might perhaps touch his heart so that he would be

restored. What touching patience on part of God, even toward the most profane, the most indifferent, the most hardened. The God whom man rejects, instead of tiring, reappears to him as the God of grace and of deliverance! At this critical moment Ahab seems inclined to let God work; in any case, he has no other resource. The prophet answers his questions categorically. The "servants of the princes of the provinces" by whom the enemy army would be delivered into the hands of Ahab are only a handful against this multitude. Instead of awaiting the assault of the enemy, it is Ahab who is to begin the battle, and his army only numbers seven thousand men! Ahab follows the prophet's word, and that day the Syrians suffer a great defeat. No spirit of thankfulness is produced in the king's heart. God warns him by the prophet that at the return of the year Ben-Hadad will attack him again. This time it is a matter of proving to the Syrians that Israel had not gotten the victory by their "gods of the mountains." In vain does Ben-Hadad change the organization of his army and the place of battle: the Israelites, in number like two little flocks of goats, in one day smite one hundred thousand of the enemy's men; the wall of Aphek falls upon those who were left. Thus the Syrians had to learn who the Lord was and thus Israel could know Him.

Ben-Hadad flees into the city and escapes from chamber to chamber. His servants offer to beg clemency of the victor, for they have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are gentle and merciful kings. Humiliated and conquered, they come supplicating on behalf of their king: "I pray thee, let me live." Ahab replies: "He is my brother," when God had given him into his hands for destruction. The idolator who had likened Jehovah to "the gods of the mountains" is brother to the king of Israel! What an outrage to the glory and the holiness of God there is in this word, "He is my brother"! Ahab has Ben-Hadad come up into his chariot, makes a covenant with him, and sends him away. The king of Syria restores to him the cities that his father had taken away. The world loves and owns this kind of clemency and affability. How often those who ought to be God's witnesses before the world call the latter, "My brother, my brethren"! How sad is this word which deceives the world and denies Christian character. No, Christians are of another family than the world; they are children of God; the world has the prince of this world for its father.

But, you say, are not all men brothers since they are all sinners? No indeed, for Christians can and ought to say: "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Thus they are that no longer and cannot call those who are still sinners their brothers. It is true that there is "one God and Father of all" in the sense of God's relationship with His creatures, but even in this respect, only those of His creatures who belong to Him by faith are able to add: "Who is . . . in us all," which absolutely excludes the world from any intimacy with Him in this relationship (Ephesians 4:6). To call Ben-Hadad his brother! Poor Ahab lays bare the state of his heart, still a follower of Baal, one whom even this twofold deliverance wrought for him had not led to repentance. A second prophet comes (1 Kings 20:35-43). The one of 1 Kings 20:13 announced the deliverance, this one the judgment of Ahab. What patience on part of God! Even in the next chapter He still delays with pronouncing the final word of judgment! But first we are to learn to know God's chastening towards His own. "And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said to another by the word of Jehovah, Smite me, I pray thee. But the man refused to smite him." If this man was not a prophet himself, he was at any rate the prophet's companion. God's chastening of his own is so much the more severe, as they are in a more privileged position. Here we have a different case from that of the prophet from Judah in 1 Kings 13:1-34. The latter, having a positive word from the Lord to act

upon, gives it up to follow another word that is asserted to be the word of God, and he finds a lion on his path. Here a companion of a prophet refuses to do according to the word of Jehovah. He does not want to smite and wound his companion when God orders him to do so. His intentions were good, you say; he loved his companion too much to hurt him. Doubtless, but there was an imperative word! God had given the command. You still object that the man did not understand the benefit of what was being ordered; but when it comes to the word of the Lord, it is not a question of understanding, but of obeying. And indeed, it was impossible for him to understand; he could not and need not give account for what God wanted to do. The thing was that there was an express command, and that "by the word of Jehovah." Could this man ignore it? No, he was the prophet's companion and ought to know the word of God. The man of God from Judah ought to have known that the word of the old prophet could not have been the word of God; this man ought to have known that the word of his companion was the word of Jehovah. The more our position places us in direct relationship with God, the less excuse we have when we treat the word of God as though it were not so.

Positive disobedience to the Word is an infinitely serious thing. How many lives of Christians are made up of similar acts of disobedience! Christians are often asking why they meet a lion in the way without being able to answer this question. Should they not first of all ask themselves whether or not they have been willing to submit to the word of God when it has shown them His will in a positive way? Usually one looks everywhere else to find the reason for God's chastening of His children or His servants. Judgment overtakes this man "because [he had] not hearkened to the voice of Jehovah" (1 Kings 20:36).

"Another man," who does not seem to have been in as intimate a relationship with the prophet as the first man, hears and obeys. He smites him hard and wounds him. He does not try to understand, but does what God tells him to do.

Now the prophet can appear before Ahab with the sure proofs of what would happen to him. God had said: Smite! He had refused to do so. Now another would smite Ahab and wound him. His fate was determined.

Ahab, like David when Nathan came to him, is compelled to pronounce his own judgment (1 Kings 20:40). He was blind; the bandage he saw over the prophet's eyes was the bandage he had over his own eyes, and he did not even know it! Suddenly the word of God, like a violent wind of judgment, echoes in his ears: "Because thou hast let go out of thy hand the man that I had devoted to destruction, thy life shall be for his life, and thy people for his people" (1 Kings 20:42). Will repentance and contrition of spirit finally penetrate into this hardened heart? "And the king of Israel went to his house sullen and vexed, and came to Samaria" (1 Kings 20:43).

"Sullen and vexed" - these two words describe him. "Sullen": oh, how this characterized the world! It does its own will and is sullen, sad. Joy is never found in the pathway of disobedience and of rebellion against God. Only the Christian can really know joy, "full joy." The Word and the Lord Himself show us where it is to be found: In obedience to His commandments, obedience which itself is His love realized (John 15:9-14); in dependence, fruit of the new nature which we have from Him (John 16:24); in assurance which the knowledge of our union with Him gives us (John 17:11-13); and finally, in communion with the Father and with the Son (1 John 1:3-4).

How this poor man who had thought he could follow his own thoughts in spite of the word of God was wanting in all these things. However ungodly Ahab might be, God was judging him according to the favored position in which he had been placed. In Christendom people are accustomed to reasoning about the fate reserved by divine justice for the poor heathen. It is certain that they will be judged according to the witness they have received and by which they could have known God (Acts 14:15-17); but we do not hear the Christian world reasoning about the fate awaiting it. Ahab's lot is more dreadful than that of Ben-Hadad. The Word also says that Ahab was "vexed." The king's grief was not the kind that leads to repentance, but to vexation. Against whom? Against God. Would the king then meet with God on his pathway all the time? Come, says the world, tell us of the love of God when He takes away our health, our loved ones, or our wealth! Really! Wouldn't it be better to do evil like everyone else instead of trying to behave ourselves well, since God treats us so unjustly? This is one of the thousand varieties of this vexation that fills men's hearts against God. But when there is a certain knowledge of the Word, as in Ahab's case, one can no longer be diverted by doing evil. This had been easy in times past before the sudden appearance of Elijah who came to "trouble Israel." Now the Word is there; one cannot shake it off; it gnaws at the heart, allowing one no rest. This word of the prophet has unveiled the future. Nothing, perhaps, will come of it . . . but who can know? One thing is certain in the life of this monarch: this Word is constantly being fulfilled, and so often in undeserved blessings to which he has not paid attention. Will the threats be fulfilled too? The prophet had said, "Thy life shall be for his life." He did not say when. What if it were today? Or tomorrow? Couldn't he just leave me alone? There is well reason for being "sullen and vexed." The gnawing worm is there; it has begun its work, that worm that never, never dies.

03.21. 1 Kings 21

1 Kings 21:1-29

Ahab and Naboth

Fresh circumstances show us the king's moral condition. Covetousness overruns his heart, eager greed for something God had not given him. Now this is idolatry just as well as is the worship of Baal (Colossians 3:5). Ahab, dominated by the enemy, has simply passed from one form of idolatry to another.

Ahab's proposal to Naboth is much greater in import than would appear at first glance. It would result in permanently giving away the inheritance of this godly Israelite. To make an exchange or even to give the value of the land in money would mean that Ahab would take full and final possession of his neighbor's vineyard. Now an Israelite who feared God could not accept such conditions. When he would sell his land, he would only sell its harvests, and, as his possession would be restored to him in the year of jubilee, its price would be set according to the number of years the buyer would harvest its produce (Leviticus 25:15). The seller even had the right to redeem his land at any time by refunding the buyer the amount over the value of the crops for the years that had passed since the time of the sale. The Israelite who feared God would keep the inheritance of his fathers because they had received it from the Lord; but there was a reason even more peremptory than that. In reality the land, the ground itself, did not belong to the people, but to the Lord: "The land shall not be sold for ever; for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me. And in all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land" (Leviticus 25:23-24). This makes Naboth's very categorical answer understandable: "Jehovah forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to thee" (1 Kings 21:3).

1 Kings 21:4 shows us the effect produced by unrealizable covetousness on the heart of a man without God: "And Ahab came into his house sullen and vexed." Here we find again the same words as at the end of 1 Kings 20:1-43. Oh, the poor heart of man, overwhelmed with sorrow, swollen up with vexation! And that is all that it can hold unless Satan, in order to keep his sway over him, comes to him to whisper of new deceptive lusts. Ahab is sullen at seeing the object of his desire placed out of his reach; vexed with a will that presents an obstacle to him that he cannot make give way because, in short, it is the will of God.

Thus on every hand Ahab had met God on his path. Behind drought and thirst, he had found God; he had found Him in opposition to his religion, in opposition to his league with Ben-Hadad, and in opposition to his lusts. God, always God, that God whom he had thought to replace by his idols! Since the slaughter of his priests the house was, it is true, swept and garnished, but already worse demons had entered it. Who stirs up the evil spirits that feed these lusts? It is Jezebel, a true type of the satanic spirit (1 Kings 21:5-14). Jezebel does evil, knowingly and willingly. She rouses all the evil instincts of her husband's heart. She appeals to his pride: "Dost thou now exercise sovereignty over Israel?" (1 Kings 21:7). She adds, "I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the

Jizreelite." When a man has sold his soul to Satan, as Ahab had, Satan does not fail to make him all sorts of promises. He is the tempter. What God does not want to give you, I'll give you. Leave it to me; I shall give you the vineyard. Ahab leaves it to her, because he sees that thus his eager desire will be realized. And now, Ahab, "arise, eat bread, and let thy heart be glad." That indeed is the constant goal of the flesh: health, a gay time, doing what one pleases, and getting what one wants. But how to attain this goal? Naboth had said, "I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers." Jezebel comes and says, "I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth." She takes Ahab by the hand and leads him down her own path, a path of lying and murder, under the guise of being his benefactress. She "will give him," but meanwhile she possesses herself of his authority, of his royal prerogative: "She wrote a letter in Ahab's name, and sealed it with his seal" (1 Kings 21:8). Ahab has turned into her slave. She does not shrink back from either perjury or from the murder of a righteous man in order to bring gain to her protegee. This worshipper of Baal has the false witnesses say: "Naboth blasphemed God and the king" (1 Kings 21:10; 1 Kings 21:13). She uses God's name, acknowledged by the people but not by herself, to destroy a servant of the true God. Has not Jezebel always acted thus? We see her appearing again in Revelation 2:1-29, no longer in Judaism but in the Church, taking on the character of a prophetess and accusing God's true witnesses of "knowing the depths of Satan," while she herself is teaching her children to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols.

Ahab lets evil be done and iniquity be consummated in order to profit thereby; the men of Jizreel, the elders and nobles, do it knowing the reason for it, for the letters sent them told them to choose two wicked men, sons of Belial, who should perjure themselves in order to get rid of Naboth. They have hardly any scruples, for it is in their interests to please the king and to gain his good will.

Naboth is stoned; at last the time has come for Ahab to enjoy the fruit of his covetousness. "Arise," says Jezebel, "take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jizreelite, which he refused to give thee for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead" (1 Kings 21:15).

Ahab goes down. Is he going to be happy now? This is the moment for him, his goal having been attained, to have that gay time that Jezebel had promised him. Scarcely has he begun to take possession when Elijah, informed by God, meets him there where he had come to survey his new estate. His enjoyment, his happiness disappear. Satan always entices us and leaves us facing God after having betrayed us and plunged us into the mire.

Ahab says to Elijah: "Hast thou found me, mine enemy?" (1 Kings 21:20). Yes, his enemy! He had taken Satan as his friend; he finds God to be his enemy. In the very place of promised satisfaction he finds nothing of that he had hoped for, but God stands up before him, represented by His prophet, and says to him: "Hast thou killed and also taken possession?" (1 Kings 21:19). Others had done the killing; God holds Ahab accountable. The joy so longed for is replaced by that horrible curse which is repeated all through this sad history of Israel. This was the judgment of Jeroboam, the judgment of Baasha, in the very same words: "Him that dieth of Ahab in the city shall the dogs eat, and him that dieth in the field shall the fowl of the heavens eat" (1 Kings 21:24; cf. 1 Kings 14:11; 1 Kings 16:4). And Jezebel is not forgotten: "The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the moat of Jizreel" (1 Kings 21:23). The execution of the judgment foretold is postponed for her (2 Kings 9:1-37), but it is no less certain. This time Ahab must say to himself: God's judgment has reached me. He is aroused to the fact that God's word against his predecessors had been without

repentance. For himself, who had done worse than all the rest, judgment is at the door.

What does Ahab do? He humbles himself; he goes about afflicted, mourning, and fasting (1 Kings 21:27-29); he lies down in the sackcloth he has put upon his flesh; he "went softly," as one does in a funeral home. Where is his pride and his merry heart, and even his sadness of the wrong kind and his vexation? Nothing remains but unbounded mourning in face of his inevitable fate. Is this conversion? The next chapter will give us the answer, but in the meanwhile, what a merciful God is our God! If He discovers the evil, He also ascertains the slightest return of a soul to that which is good; He takes note of the least sign of repentance. He says to Elijah: "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house" (1 Kings 21:29). Not one jot of His Word will fall to the ground, but the judgment is to be deferred until the times of his heir.

03.22. 1 Kings 22

1 Kings 22:1-53 Ahab and Jehoshaphat

"And they continued three years without war between Syria and Israel" (1 Kings 22:1). Aside from the question of God's judgment, this then was what had resulted from Ahab's covenant with Ben-Hadad: a short respite of three years without war! After that Ben-Hadad, just scarcely set free, had not kept his promises (cf. 1 Kings 20:34): he had not restored Ramoth-Gilead. "Do ye know," says the king of Israel to his servants, "that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we keep quiet without taking it out of the hand of the king of Syria?" It would be shameful to pass over this in silence; thus war is unleashed again. God is not taken into account in these claims between peoples. History is ever the same, and the Christian nations of our day are no better in this respect than the heathen nations. The desire to expand, on the one hand, and the desire to resist such encroachments on the other, form the basis of politics. God does not engage in politics; He is a stranger to these strifes, though He has the upper hand in all things and makes use of all to accomplish His purposes.

Jehoshaphat, the son of pious Asa, and faithful like him to maintain the worship of the Lord in Judah without admixture, goes down to the King of Israel. From whence did this relationship arise? From the fact that Jehoshaphat had "allied himself with Ahab by marriage," not personally, but Jehoram his son had taken a daughter of Ahab as wife (2 Chronicles 18:1; 2 Chronicles 21:6). This alliance was a great evil, and the king of Judah had to prove its serious consequences. "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate Jehovah?" Jehu the son of Hanani, seeing this, later said to him. This alliance disastrously led the faithful king to espouse the interests of a king unequalled for his iniquity in the land of Israel (1 Kings 22:25-26).

"Wilt thou go with me to battle?" Ahab asks Jehoshaphat. The latter replies: "I am as thou, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses" (1 Kings 22:4). This alliance thus leads Jehoshaphat to declare that he, the godly king of Judah, is just like wicked Ahab, and to throw down the barrier separating the man of God from the world. Is there any great difference between this word and that of Ahab to Ben-Hadad: "Thou art my brother"? Alliance with the world, we cannot repeat too often, makes us liable for its iniquity. In the historical books again and again we find the solemn truth that to associate or cooperate with a system where evil is tolerated or recognized is to become jointly liable for that system. One might ask whether Ahab's momentary repentance may not have influenced Jehoshaphat's frame of mind. We are not told this, but it would not have excused the king in any way. A believer does not remain in any system whatsoever because he can find some good there, but because it is approved by God. But Israel and its king had no more to expect than God's final judgment, and there were no more righteous men in the city who could save them from this.

Still (1 Kings 22:5-12), in this unfortunate alliance Jehoshaphat is too pious to act without consulting the Lord and His Word. Ahab immediately assembles four hundred prophets. There were many of them. Where did they come from when hardly a few isolated prophets could be

found in all the territory of Israel? They were few, for only one prophet of the Lord was sufficient to make known His mind. These four hundred prophets of Ahab's, who were they? Could they perhaps have been in disguise the four hundred prophets of the Asherah, the female divinity, who had not been destroyed at the Kishon? This is quite likely! Whatever it may have been, if they were the same, they had changed their dress with the circumstances. They were now pretending to speak by the Spirit of God, whereas a lying spirit who served their own interests had taken hold of them. One can wear the livery of a prophet of the Lord and be lying. How often this has been so at all times, and how much more so today. "Go up," they all cry, "and the Lord will give it into the king's hand" (1 Kings 22:6).

Nevertheless Jehoshaphat is ill at ease. There is a spiritual sense that warns a true heart, though perhaps not being able to account for it, that certain spiritual manifestations do not have the Spirit of God as their agent. This is not the gift of discerning of spirits (1 Corinthians 12:10), which is not given to all, but a sense which, however weak it may be in a child of God, ought never to be wanting with him. He feels ill at ease in an environment opposed to God, ill at ease in presence of certain discourse which claims to come from religious tongues but lacks the divine character, ill at ease confronted with such vaunting as that which takes place here before the king of Israel. So it was with Jehoshaphat, too, for after having been present at the scene brought on by his request to Ahab, "Inquire, I pray thee, this day of the word of Jehovah" (1 Kings 22:5), he finds himself obliged to add: "Is there not here a prophet of Jehovah besides, that we might inquire of him?" (1 Kings 22:7). It would be enough for him that there be one, truly separated to God, to counterbalance the other four hundred. Ahab replies: "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of Jehovah; but I hate him, for he prophesies no good concerning me, but evil: it is Micah the son of Imlah" (1 Kings 22:8). He hated him, and he likewise hated all those who pronounced the Lord's judgment upon him. He wanted the prophet to "prophesy good concerning him." Such will ever be the character of the religious world. Those composing it choose for themselves teachers according to their own lusts, teachers who call them brothers just as Ahab himself said "My brother" to Ben-Hadad, teachers who praise them, extolling the world in which they live, and foretelling success and prosperity for them. Honest Jehoshaphat cannot suffer these words. He is accustomed to respect every word that comes from the Lord. One does not see him contesting Jehu's word condemning him later on (2 Chronicles 19:1). "Let not the king say so!" he says (1 Kings 22:8).

Ahab has but one thought: to show proof of Micah's malice toward himself (cf. 1 Kings 22:18). Promptly he has him sent for. The man of God naturally kept himself apart from the four hundred prophets - a good example for the king of Judah who had joined himself to the profane king. The very sad but necessary result of this alliance is that he follows Ahab instead of following Micah. Such is the effect of "evil communications" upon the believer. Never does one see the opposite effect produced, that is to say, that the world follows the example of God's children. One has well said: "There is no equality in an alliance between truth and error, for by the very alliance itself, truth ceases to be truth and error does not become truth." To make that which he is going to proclaim even more solemn, Micah at first speaks just like the four hundred prophets: "Go up, and prosper; for Jehovah will give it into the hand of the king" (1 Kings 22:15). "How many times," replies Ahab, "shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but truth in the name of Jehovah?" (1 Kings 22:16). We see here what conscience is, even a hardened one. It speaks within the heart,

telling Ahab: What Micah is saying cannot be the expression of his opinion! And even though Ahab is seeking after a lie, his conscience forces him to want the truth. He will not follow it nor obey it, but the uneasiness produced by his conscience allows him no rest until he hears, knows, and sees it, like a murderer who despite himself is drawn back to the scene of his crime. Then these harrowing words reverberate in his ears: "I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And Jehovah said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace" (1 Kings 22:17). The prophet does not stop there. He points out the satanic lying spirit that has gotten hold of all the prophets in order to cause Ahab to go up to Ramoth. Jehovah had said: "Who shall entice Ahab that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?" (1 Kings 22:20). This was the judgment of God, prepared beforehand against Ahab, an indirect judgment by which the demonic spirits he had worshipped became the instruments for their victim's doom.

Zedekiah, who had played the leading role in this scene, making himself horns of iron and saying to the king: "With these shalt thou push the Syrians, until thou have exterminated them" (1 Kings 22:11) - this Zedekiah smites Micah on the cheek and says: "Where now went the Spirit of Jehovah from me to speak to thee?" (1 Kings 22:24). He claims the Holy Spirit's direction and makes use of violence to prove this, but he thus proves what spirit is urging him on. He too would come under judgment when he would "go from chamber to chamber to hide" himself (1 Kings 22:25).

Micah, like so many prophets and faithful servants of the Lord, is thrown into prison, cruelly persecuted for the truth which he had proclaimed (1 Kings 22:27-28). But his testimony spreads, in that way becoming public, just as later that of Paul. He has the honour of speaking the mind of God as to the future to all: "Hearken, O peoples, all of you!" (1 Kings 22:28).

Poor Jehoshaphat beholds this scene in silence. Being on his ally's territory, he has no authority to thwart his orders. Did his feeble remarks change Ahab's plans and decisions? Does he find the courage to break this unfortunate alliance? Nothing of the kind. And of what use is this alliance to him except to lead him to be unfaithful to God? He goes up with the king of Israel to Ramoth-Gilead. But here is that troublesome conscience coming again to besiege Ahab. What if Micah has spoken the truth? Has he really foretold Ahab's death on this expedition? He wishes and believes he has found a sure means of escaping that judgment which is directed towards him and pursuing him. He disguises himself, and under the sway of selfish fear is not even noble enough in heart to avoid imperiling his ally against whom, on account of his royal garments, the attacks in the battle are going to be directed. The captains of the chariots turn aside after Jehoshaphat, thinking that they have to do with Ahab. Just then "Jehoshaphat cried out." We see in 2 Chronicles 18:31 that in this extremity Jehoshaphat had recourse to the Lord: "Jehoshaphat cried out, and Jehovah helped him." He does not forsake His own in distress.

Ahab is struck by an arrow shot "at a venture," something he had not anticipated. He dies a hero, as the world would say, stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians even though dying. He dies at even and his blood fills the bottom of the chariot. "And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked his blood, where the harlots bathed: according to the word of Jehovah, which he had spoken" (1 Kings 22:38). Thus the judgment against him is carried out, but it is not fully accomplished until later by the hand of Jehu.

How differently men would have written up this history than God has done! The reign of Ahab was long and relatively glorious. For a man not having divine revelation his victories over the Syrians were deeds of high value and intrepid courage; his alliance with Ben-Hadad one of noble clemency and good politics; that with Jehoshaphat still wiser yet; the war at Ramoth was forced upon him for the honour of his kingdom. The annals of his reign, probably lost forever, enumerate all the cities he built and fortified, tell of his ivory palace - probably an imitation of Solomon's palace - and of still other things (1 Kings 22:39). But of all this nothing remains except the horrible example of a man responsible to serve God who, knowing Him, preferred his idols and his lusts to Him and hated the faithful witnesses of the God of Israel. A few words close this book (1 Kings 22:41-50) and refresh our heart a little in the midst of so much ruin. Jehoshaphat was faithful, though not free from reproach, for he was not zealous enough to destroy the high places, remains of the idolatry which had been implanted in Judah. He exterminates those infamous creatures who had established themselves in the land along with the Canaanitish idolatry. But one sees with regret that he does not immediately learn the lesson that Jehu had taught him upon his return from Ramoth. He joins himself with Ahab's son Ahaziah who does wickedly (2 Chronicles 20:35-37), and associates himself with him in building ships and in going together to Ophir for gold. Wanting the riches that would be acquired by the alliance with Ahaziah is a motive that is taken up less than his wanting the influence that would be acquired by the alliance with Ahab. But the Lord does reprove him: "And Eliezer the son of Dodavah, of Mareshah, prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, Jehovah has broken thy works. And the ships were broken, and could not go to Tarshish" (2 Chronicles 20:37).

Thank God, after the prophet's word and the destruction of his fleet Jehoshaphat understood what had been the great weakness of his life - that an alliance with the world, whatever its purpose may be, is a thing of which God disapproves and which will bring judgment upon His children. "Then said Ahaziah the son of Ahab to Jehoshaphat, Let my servants go with thy servants in the ships. But Jehoshaphat would not" (1 Kings 22:49). This scene, cheering after all, is followed by a few words (1 Kings 22:51-53) summarizing the reign of Ahaziah the son of Ahab, a short reign, but one filled with all that could provoke the Lord to anger. Under his reign the worship of Baal revives again in Israel, and the king himself bows down before this abomination of the Zidonians.

04.00.1. Meditations on the First Book of Samuel

Meditations on the First Book of Samuel from The Writings of H.L. Rossier

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04.00.3. Copyright Information

Copyright Information

Rossier wrote in the 1800's - and originally in French. The articles were translated into English and appeared in "The Rembrancer," a Canadian periodical which ran from 1890 to about 1905. They are in the public domain. The text came from STEM Publishing. Thanks, Les!

NOTE: This title originally included "Ruth." I have separated them out for ease of use.

04.00.4. Table of Contents

Table of Contents

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04.00.5. Introduction

Introduction The Book of Samuel is the continuation of the Book of Judges and the Book of Ruth. As it opens, the period of the Judges is not yet over: Eli the priest was one of these judges (1 Samuel 4:18), and Samuel, the first prophet (Acts 3:24; Acts 13:20), was also a judge over Israel (1 Samuel 7:6). He thought he could establish his sons as judges after himself (1 Samuel 8:1), but their unfaithfulness put an end to this dispensation. Moreover, the period of the judges had a rather transitory character: the judges brought temporary relief to the wretchedness of the guilty people of Israel who, instead of exterminating the enemies of the Lord, had allowed them to live. Drawn away into iniquity and idolatry by these nations, Israel, as chastening for her disobedience, was obliged to bear their yoke. Under this tyranny, the people groaned and cried out to the Lord. Full of pity, He sent them deliverers who gave them respite by delivering them from the the hand of their spoilers. Alas! this did not change their heart. "And it came to pass when the judge died, that they turned back and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down to them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way" (Judges 2:19).

During the period of the judges, the priesthood remained the immediate and recognized link, the point of contact, between the people and God. It represented the people in their relations with God who was Himself the King of Israel. Sometimes in those days when "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25), the role of the priesthood might appear to have been eclipsed, but the link subsisted nonetheless. The Book of Ruth is inserted, as it were, toward the end of the history of the Judges, in order to reveal God's secret thought concerning a new dispensation, that of kingship or the kingdom. There we see God preparing a king according to His own heart; like Shiloh in Jacob's prophecy, he must proceed from Judah. Therefore this book begins with Elimelech, a man of Judah, and in closing it proclaims the name of King David, showing us beforehand who will be the Lord's anointed.

Let us note here that the relationship with the Lord differs under the priesthood and under the kingdom. Under the priesthood, this relation was immediate, for the priest represented the people before God, whereas the kingdom is an authority established over the people. The people were subjected to the king who was to govern according to the mind of God. It was the king whom God expected to be faithful; he it was who was responsible before God for Israel's unfaithfulness, and the destiny of the people depended on his conduct.

Until the final establishment of the king, we have in the First Book of Samuel a period of transition. The first great fact noted in this book is that the priesthood had proven unfaithful and could no longer serve as the foundation of a relationship between the people and God. Without doubt, the priesthood was still necessary and could not be abolished, but it ceased to have the first place. A new basis of relationship was established in the kingship. God was about to raise up "a faithful priest, who [should] walk before [His] anointed continually, instead of being, as in the past, the link between the people and God (1 Samuel 2:35).

All this explains why the First Book of Samuel begins with the tribe of Levi and the priesthood, and not, as the Book of Ruth, with Judah and the kingdom.

Elkanah was a Levite. Eli was the high priest; thus we are on the ground of the priesthood. Had the priesthood remained faithful, there would have been no occasion for a change of dispensation; therefore it was necessary, first of all, to ascertain that it was ruined before the true king should enter the scene, for God could not remain in relationship to the people through the medium of a corrupted priesthood.

But, on the other hand, it was necessary to show, now that God was introducing His king as the intermediary between Israel and Himself, that this relationship could not be established on the basis of the flesh. This is the reason for Saul's entire history from 1 Samuel 9 to the end of the book. God could, without doubt, use a king according to the flesh to deliver His people, but this function did not qualify him morally to be the leader of Israel. The Book of Judges presents the same truth in the history of Samson. The gift and the moral state of a man are two very different things. Saul, who was later reprov'd, might be "among the prophets"; Balaam might bless Israel; Judas might do works of power together with the other disciples and all the while be an instrument of the enemy to betray the Lord, his Master.

04.01. 1 Samuel 1

1 Samuel 1:1-28 1 Samuel 1:1-28, 1 Samuel 2:1-36, 1 Samuel 3:1-21 ELI, OR THE RUIN OF THE PRIESTHOOD

Hannah has a remarkable trait: her character is that of the believer in all ages. Hannah means “grace”; but before answering to her name, she represents the flesh incapable of bearing fruit for God. We must always begin there. The Word of God teaches us that the natural man has two characteristics: wickedness and incapacity, and the law has no other purpose than to convince us of this. But it is easier to confess that we are guilty than to admit our incapacity, for to admit the powerlessness of our flesh is deeply humiliating. Hannah felt this, but her trial was not limited to this alone. Like Sarah of old, she was the object of the hatred and disdain of the wife according to the flesh. This wife was prospering fully, for Peninnah “had children” when Hannah had none. But the hatred of the first wife was all the greater as the love of their husband turned toward Hannah, the wife who was miserable and barren.

Poor Hannah was full of bitterness and wept abundantly. One resource remained to her: to present her affliction before the Lord. Only God’s heart could give her an answer in grace; therefore she presents herself before Him at Shiloh. A new trial awaits her there. She encounters the lack of intelligence in the spiritual leader of her people who, confusing the activity of the Spirit of God with the activity of the flesh, believes that she is drunken when she is in fact anguished. What suffering! She has no resource within herself; the world is hostile to her; those who bear the Lord’s name judge her and do not understand her! How can she eat and drink and rejoice, when her soul’s only desire has found no response. She does not desire this son for herself; she is entirely disposed to “give him to Jehovah all the days of his life,” to make of him a Nazarite for God; but what she needs is a sign of God’s favor; what she needs is “grace!” Did God give her, the barren wife, this name in vain? Grace alone remains for her, and this is the point to which she must come.

Eli has conscience sufficient, for after all he is a true servant of God, that the language of truth brings its weight to bear on him and causes him to reverse his first impression. He blesses Hannah on behalf of God: “Go in peace; and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition which thou hast asked of Him” (1 Samuel 1:17).

Hannah’s faith at once lays hold of grace even before receiving its effects. “And the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more as before” (1 Samuel 1:18). This assurance of faith is enough to strengthen her heart and fill her with a joy that is visible to all.

Now she is full of thanksgiving. It is not enough for her that she has found joy and rest after anguish. What will she return to God for such a great blessing? She will render what she promised Him in 1 Samuel 1:11 : the complete consecration of her son, a true separation for Him. When her request is answered by the gift of Samuel, she does not withdraw her offer: “that he may appear before Jehovah, and there abide forever.” This humble wife of Elkanah the Levite brings a costly sacrifice to the Lord - “three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a flask of wine” - but one that is

nothing in comparison to the gift of Samuel. She parts with her only son, given her by God Himself, from him whom she had “asked of God,” thus showing that for her God was more precious than this son whom she had so desired. May we have such faith! In order to manifest it, God puts our hearts to the test. Just as with Hannah, this trial will not be an occasion of joy at the beginning, but rather of bitterness and sorrow, but then it will bear the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are exercised by it.

04.02. 1 Samuel 2

1 Samuel 2:1-36

1 Samuel 2:1-11

Consciousness of her irremediable condition, brokenness, and humiliation had prepared Hannah to receive the grace that God was granting her in giving her Samuel. But hardly was she holding him in her motherly arms, than she must part with him in order to consecrate him to God. Her life was to be more solitary than ever, and this at a time when the people's condition was increasing the ruin all around her. Nevertheless Hannah is full of a joy which overflows in a song of triumph: "My heart exulteth in Jehovah ... for I rejoice in Thy salvation" (1 Samuel 2:1). This is because God had revealed Himself to her in grace; because He had revealed Himself again to his faithful servant who, having received everything from Him, had kept back nothing for herself and had returned everything to Him. Having deprived herself of her son, she better understands all that God is in Himself; she appreciates all the more all that He is for her. Abraham, having sacrificed Isaac at the Lord's command, had made a similar experience. It was then that God had revealed to him the full extent of the promises that he had received and that God was confirming to his seed (Genesis 22:15-18; Galatians 3:15-16).

Along with joy, Hannah found strength: "My horn is lifted up in Jehovah" (1 Samuel 2:1). This power "is perfected in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9); after she has repudiated all that is elevated, everything of renown in Israel, God shares this strength with a weak woman, humiliated and despised. Hannah's beautiful song therefore begins with her painful personal experiences, although it goes much further. In the course of this book we shall see the same thing produced in David. The inspired psalms are the fruit of his experiences, but the bearing that the Spirit gives them goes far beyond that, concentrating prophetically on the sufferings and the glories of Christ, on the person of Him who is the fulfillment of all the promises, of all the ways, and of all the counsels of God. This is how we must interpret Hannah's song. Her personal circumstances serve as an introduction to things still unrevealed, reserved till then in God's counsels. The main theme of Hannah's song, the great principle presented in it, is the sovereign grace and power of God, who abases the proud and the one who puts his confidence in the flesh, and who lifts up the weak and powerless, "for the pillars of the earth are Jehovah's, and He hath set the world upon them." On His grace and power He has established the entire order of created things. Israel, miserable and fallen, and a faithful remnant that was poor and weak, needed to know these things and to learn that everything depended on Him alone, that He alone could keep the feet of His saints, silence the wicked, bring all man's strength to nothing, break all His adversaries and, lastly, give strength to His King and raise up the horn of His Anointed, for He intervenes in Israel's favor by giving strength to His Christ. He does not give strength to His people, but to His Anointed. He raises up the King on whom everything depends, the pivot of all things, the only means of sustaining a relationship between Himself and His people.

Let us take up again one or two details of this song. 1 Samuel 2:1 celebrates the salvation of the Lord. All is pure grace on His part, for it is “grace ... which carries with it salvation.” 1 Samuel 2:2 celebrates Jehovah’s holiness. The believer cannot separate these two traits one from the other; one who has found God as Savior understands that He is “holy ... for there is none beside [Him].” But it is necessary to be holy in order to belong to Him; this is why He has sanctified us for Himself. All our conduct should henceforth display this characteristic. This great truth was brought to light at the Passover. The Israelites had been sheltered by the blood of the Lamb, which had been delivered up to judgment instead of themselves. The people appropriated this sacrifice by eating the lamb together with unleavened bread which typically represents Christ’s holy humanity. From this moment on, they were enjoined to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days. As He who had called them was holy, they also were to be holy in all their manner of behavior (1 Peter 1:15-16).

1 Samuel 2:3 is a warning to the wicked, typified by Penninah. They are placed in the presence of God who knows all and who weighs men’s actions. In 1 Samuel 2:4-8, we find the reason for the discipline which had come upon the faithful. This was so that the character of grace might be brought to light by lifting them up to glory, and so that the character of righteousness might be brought to light in granting them vengeance on the wicked. This grace goes so far as to give seven children to the barren woman - the perfect number, which Hannah never reached (1 Samuel 2:21), for she had only six children. The promised blessings will not reach their fullness until the glory that is in store for the restored remnant of Israel.

1 Samuel 2:10 predicts, as we have seen, the coming of Messiah, the true King. God will exalt the horn of His Anointed. Direct association with Him is the power granted to Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:1 : “My horn is lifted up in Jehovah.”

1 Samuel 2:12-36 The continuation of this chapter shows us the ruined state into which the priesthood had fallen. “Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial”: a terrible pronouncement, when it concerned those in Israel who were the closest to God! The sin of these men had two characteristics: they disregarded the rights of those who came to worship the Lord by confiscating their portions (1 Samuel 2:13-14); they disregarded the rights of the Lord, laying profane hands on the Lord’s portion, seeing to it that they themselves were served before He was, thus taking precedence over God Himself (1 Samuel 2:15-16). They made themselves fat with the Lord’s offerings and caused men to abhor them. Are not these the principles of any clerical system, whether pagan, Jewish, or Christian - no doubt, more or less coarse and despicable according to the case - but, in the final account, the principles of every class of men who appropriate to themselves authority or privileges over other men in religious matters? (Matthew 24:48-49). They pretend to have rights over simple believers, they see that they themselves are served at the expense of these same believers, and in their opinion even the priest’s servant has more authority than the worshippers themselves. They usurp, in a measure, God’s prerogatives and, in sum, cause Him to be despised, in order that they themselves may be honored instead of Him. They did not know the Lord (1 Samuel 2:12); “There [was] no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:18). Without this fear, there is no hatred of evil. Is it surprising that they displayed the most shocking corruption? (1 Samuel 2:22). In the midst of all this ruin, was the high priest’s function at least being maintained? Alas no! Eli, godly Eli, lacked spiritual discernment. Nevertheless he showed himself to be capable of teaching God’s mind and ways to young Samuel. Furthermore, he formed

a righteous judgment of the evil, and his heart bled at the sight of the dissolute life of his sons. He did not hide it from them. Doubtless no one had expressed his disapproval as plainly as their father had: "Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil deeds from all this people. No, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make Jehovah's people transgress. If one man sin against another, God will judge him; but if a man sin against Jehovah, who shall intreat for him?" (1 Samuel 2:23-25).

You ask, What was this man of God lacking? Just this: He judged the evil, but he did not separate himself from it. It is a sad and humiliating thing to state: this is the situation of the majority of God's children in Christendom. Their bonds, their relationships, their affections, and their customs to which they are more attached than to the Lord's glory prevent them from recognizing that one is liable for an evil which one judges but from which one does not separate oneself. This is what the man of God is charged to declare to Eli. In no way was Eli personally following the ungodly and disorderly behavior of his sons, but nevertheless these solemn words are addressed to him: "Wherefore do ye trample upon My sacrifice and upon Mine oblation which I have commanded in My habitation? And thou honorest thy sons above Me, to make yourselves fat with the primest of all the oblations of Israel My people" (1 Samuel 2:29). "Thou honorest thy sons above Me!" Poor Eli! despite all his piety, there were men, his sons - his behavior proved this - whom he was honoring more than the Lord. God had been patient with him, but now he was about to reap the bitter fruit of the lack of holiness in his walk, for holiness is nothing other than separation from evil in view of God's service. The house of Eli, the descendant of Ithamar, was about to come to an end; it could not, in the condition in which it was found, "walk before [God] forever" (1 Samuel 2:30). "For them that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Samuel 2:30). Did this righteous man, Eli, then despise the Lord? Yes, for "no servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and will love the other, or he will cleave to the one and despise the other" (Luke 16:13). And so a terrible judgment is pronounced on the house of Eli (1 Samuel 2:31-34). But God, the God of grace, takes no pleasure in judgment; He uses it in order to establish before Himself a priesthood once for all. He entrusts the priesthood to Eleazar's descendants: "And I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in My heart and in My mind; and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before Mine Anointed continually" (1 Samuel 2:35). Simultaneously with the establishment of a priesthood according to His heart, the Lord makes known the change of dispensation which is to follow, but prophetically, this reaches far beyond the priesthood of the sons of Eleazar under David and under Solomon. The Anointed is Christ, and when He shall be on high as king and high priest according to the order of Melchizedek, on earth there will be, during the Millennium, a faithful priesthood of the family of Zadok whose functions will all tend to glorify the chosen king, the Man at God's right hand (Ezekiel 44:13-15). May we profit from Eli's example. We are living in times characterized by a certain activity in service. This activity often presses itself upon ourselves and others, for it has the appearance of great zeal for the Lord and for His work. It may even be accompanied by eminent gifts, but the gifts and activity are of little significance, if there is not the corresponding moral character. This moral character was grievously flawed in Eli's case; and without this character there can be no true service according to God.

Samuel offers a striking contrast to this state of things in every detail. In his case, we may trace the uninterrupted development of a life of holiness, despite more than one weakness, for perfection is

found only in Christ. When he was still only a small child, it is said of him, in 1 Samuel 1:28 : “And he worshipped Jehovah there.” Just so, a “newborn babe” in Christ must immediately take his place as a worshipper before Him. In 1 Samuel 2:11 his second act is: “And the boy ministered to Jehovah in the presence of Eli the priest.” This attitude will characterize Samuel’s entire life, but here he serves under Eli’s direction, for being still very young, he needed to learn before becoming capable of teaching others. In his third act (1 Samuel 2:18), Samuel does not serve before Eli, but rather more directly, “before Jehovah, a boy girded with a linen ephod,” that is to say, in a priestly character, for the linen ephod was the special clothing of the priesthood (1 Samuel 2:18). Now that the priesthood had fallen, the Lord clothes this young Levite with it, provisionally, so to speak. The scene is the same later on in the case of David, who wore the ephod before the ark (2 Samuel 6:14) However, the Christians’ situation is different: they are perpetually kings and priests before God the Father. In his fourth act (1 Samuel 2:21), “the boy Samuel grew before Jehovah.” The point here is his intimacy with God, without which service cannot be effective. In his fifth act (1 Samuel 2:26), “the boy Samuel grew on, and was in favor both with Jehovah and also with men.” I call this the intimacy of favor. The relationship of affection between Samuel and the Lord caused his walk to draw the attention of men, who took note of it as a walk pleasing to the Lord. Intimacy with God was reflected in the face of this young boy. This is what is told us of John the Baptist (Luke 1:80), and for how much greater reason, of Jesus: “Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52). All the power of our Christian testimony depends on a secret life spent in the Lord’s presence. May God grant us to resemble young Samuel in our conduct more than Eli, instructed as he was in the knowledge of the Lord’s mind through his age and his public functions!

04.03. 1 Samuel 3

1 Samuel 3:1-21

Let us pursue the parallel in this chapter between Eli and Samuel. Eli continues in his downward path, whereas Samuel grows until all Israel knows that the Lord has established him as a prophet. In 1 Samuel 3:1, Samuel is depicted in the same way as at the beginning of his career: "The boy Samuel ministered to Jehovah before Eli" (cf. 1 Samuel 2:11). There is no progression in this passage: the Spirit of God once again lays the basis of what is to follow. In 1 Samuel 2:1-36, the consequence of Samuel's service was to ascribe to him certain attributes of the priesthood which was soon to be removed from Eli. In a time of ruin, the functions of the house of God are not as clearly defined as in a time of spiritual prosperity. Such is the case today too with regard to gifts in the Church. As all the members of Christ are not fulfilling the functions which have been apportioned to them, the Lord often confides to a single member capacities which, in a normal state of things, He would have distributed among many members. In no way am I here speaking of the principle of the clergy which pretends to amass on one man's head gifts acquired by study and confirmed by examinations. In 1 Samuel 3:1-21, Samuel's service leads him to prophecy. Through service one acquires a good degree (cf. 1 Timothy 3:13). If we do as Samuel who did not go out of the sanctuary, so to speak, God will entrust other services to us. When, like Samuel, one serves the Lord from his youth, and when one grows in His presence, one may then be usefully employed for the benefit of His people.

Nevertheless two things were still lacking in Samuel's spiritual development, without which there can be no public testimony: "Samuel did not yet know Jehovah, neither had the word of Jehovah yet been revealed unto him" (1 Samuel 3:7). The point here is personal knowledge of the Lord, for Samuel belonged to Him, served Him, and worshipped Him from his infancy, but he had not yet met the Lord face to face. It may happen in our Christian career that we joy in the finished work of the cross on our behalf without knowing the Lord personally. Knowing salvation and knowing the Author of salvation are two different things. Now, there is no power for testimony in one who does not know the person of Christ. The secret that would allow the Corinthians to be the epistle of Christ, known and read by all men, lay in the contemplation of the glory of the Lord with unveiled face.

"Neither had the word of Jehovah yet been revealed to him." Often in times of ruin the revelation of the mind of God is hindered by the enemy. Just so it is said in 1 Samuel 3:1 : "The word of Jehovah was rare in those days; a vision was not frequent." But although hindered, the word had not been stopped, for grace provides for the needs of each era, and most consolingly, it is often in the darkest days of decline that God gives the most new light in order to guide and encourage His own. In a time when the vision was not widespread, God raises up the first prophet, properly speaking, in Israel. Through the priesthood's unfaithfulness the ordinary means established by God for approaching Himself were at the point of being lost, but the grace of God could not leave His people without help and without a means of communicating with Himself. He gives Samuel,

that is to say prophecy, through which in sovereign grace He approaches man and communicates His mind. Samuel is the first of this long line of prophets who transmit God's word to a people whose unfaithfulness, without this provision, would have left them without resource (Acts 3:24; 2 Chronicles 35:18; Jeremiah 15:1).

Thus God reveals Himself personally to Samuel and makes him the depository of His word. This young boy is raised to the dignity of a friend of God and, like the man of experience and of faith which Abraham was, God hides nothing from him of what He was about to do. Until that moment Eli's teaching had instructed Samuel concerning the way to enter into communication with God (1 Samuel 3:9); now he is in direct relationship with the Lord who is entrusting His secrets to him. Samuel proves himself faithful respecting this trust and, like Paul with the Ephesians later (Acts 20:20), he kept back from Eli nothing that was profitable to him. Poor Eli - set aside and obliged to receive God's thoughts from the mouth of a young boy! What a humiliation for this aged man, whose path is sinking lower and lower, whereas the path of his pupil is rising and reaching regions that the feet of the high priest never attained! In 1 Samuel 1:1-28, Eli lacked discernment; in 1 Samuel 2:1-36, he lacked the moral courage to separate himself from evil; here, his eyes are dim and he cannot see, and nevertheless the lamp of God had not yet gone out - a striking image of his moral condition. And what is more, this leader of the simple proves himself to be dull of understanding. It is not until the third call that "Eli perceived that Jehovah was calling the boy." Yes, "dull of hearing": that is exactly what he had become. Samuel was simply ignorant, which is a thousand times better. When there is godliness, God remedies ignorance. If the new-born babe desires "the pure mental milk of the word," he will not be refused. Here on earth we know only in part and we will never know otherwise than only in part. That we are not responsible for; but it is a question of growth: "That by it ye may grow" (1 Peter 2:2), and our responsibility is to seek, to this end, spiritual food.

Here we find a feature of Eli's spiritual weakening that is not mentioned in the first two chapters: "For the iniquity which he hath known, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not" (1 Samuel 3:13). Eli knew the evil, and he had authority to repress it in his sons, but he did not use it. What profit was it to him that this authority had been entrusted to him by God? How often the spiritual weakening of the head of a family stems from his slackness when he should have maintained order and discipline in the sphere where his authority was meant to function? This is a great cause of ruin. Without doubt, like Lot, Eli was "distressed with the abandoned conversation [manner of life] of the godless," but like him, he displayed a sad forgetfulness of what was due to the Lord's holiness.

Samuel was holy in all his conduct. God entrusts a revelation to him; he administers this trust faithfully; and this is the means by which he receives a new revelation. So, we are told: Samuel grew; he continued to grow (1 Samuel 2:21; 1 Samuel 3:19). His spiritual development followed a walk which was gradually rising. "And Jehovah was with him, and let none of his words fall to the ground." Thus, all Samuel's words were preserved by Him who witnessed his speech. And so Samuel was the God's organ to express His mind, and he spoke "as oracles of God" because God was with him to preserve him. Thus he acquired the reputation of prophet in the presence of all Israel. One revelation leads to another: the Lord continued to appear to him at Shiloh and revealed Himself to him by His word (1 Samuel 3:21). So, Samuel grew both in personal knowledge of the Lord and in the knowledge of His revealed word. As for Eli, how comforting it is to see at our

chapter's close, the humble submission of this aged man to the judgment which he had merited. "It is Jehovah: let Him do what is good in His sight" (1 Samuel 3:18). God's will is good and his soul bows to it. May God grant us Eli's spirit in the presence of His discipline: the humility which precedes recovery, a broken heart which does not rise up against the will of God in an effort to resist it, but which accepts His will with all its consequences, because it is indeed "that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

04.04. 1 Samuel 4

1 Samuel 4:1-22 1 Samuel 4:1-22, 1 Samuel 5:1-12, 1 Samuel 6:1-21, 1 Samuel 7:1-17, 1 Samuel 8:1-22 SAMUEL, JUDGE AND PROPHET

1 Samuel 4:1-22 This chapter presents, not only the ruin of the priesthood, but also the ruin of the entire people; therefore judgment comes upon the one as well as upon the other. "And what Samuel had said happened to all Israel" (1 Samuel 4:1). Samuel's word, the prophetic word, had an infallible character. The judgment it pronounced would certainly come to pass.

"And Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and encamped beside Eben-ezer" (1 Samuel 4:1). Eben-ezer is mentioned here only in order to indicate to us the place where Israel pitched their camp, for it did not receive this name until later (1 Samuel 7:12). This place was at Mizpah (1 Samuel 7:6), a fact which is of great importance for appreciating the moral condition of the people. For Israel, the place of meeting before God was Gilgal under Joshua and Mizpah under the judges. At this time the name of Mizpah meant nothing to the affections of the people and was not even pronounced (cf. Judges 11:11; Judges 20:1; Judges 21:1; Judges 21:5). The natural consequence of forgetting God's presence is that the people do not consult Him. The immediate result of this is that "Israel was smitten before the Philistines" (1 Samuel 4:2).

They ask: "Why has Jehovah smitten us today before the Philistines?" They do not understand the cause of their defeat, having no conscience of their condition. In order to rise again after the blow that had leveled them, they attempt to associate the ark, God's throne, with their ruined state, as it had been associated with them at the beginning of their history. They do not dream of presenting themselves before God in order to learn from Him the reason why He had abandoned His people. They pull God to themselves, so to speak. The same thing may be seen today. Two Christianized nations fight against one another and each side says: God must be with us. The God who sits between the cherubim allows Himself to be led by Israel, but as Judge rather than Deliverer. He judges everything; first the priesthood, then the people, and finally their adversaries after His glory has departed from Israel. The people appear to highly acknowledge God's power; when the ark comes into the camp they raise such a great shout that "the earth shook." In the same way Christendom uses Christ's name in order to exalt itself in the midst of unjudged iniquity. The outward sign of God's presence is sufficient for this system which boasts: We have the ark. Israel thinks that God cannot abandon them without exposing Himself to shame. But God does exactly this: He exposes Himself to shame; He allows the world seemingly to become His conqueror. In reality, this scene is the accomplishment of God's word through Samuel, but God, delivered into the hands of enemies, is the One who judges. As it was with the ark, so it is with Christ. He who is rejected, despised, He to whom men did all that they would, is established by God as Judge of the living and of the dead.

What became of the triumphal shout in 1 Samuel 4:5? A "noise of ... tumult" replaces it. Israel is smitten, the priesthood is destroyed, shame and powerlessness are evident, and God's glory is delivered into the hands of the enemy! The piety of poor, guilty Eli shines out in this disaster. The

end of his career speaks to us of something yet besides God's judgment, however real and terrible His judgment may have been. With a self-judged heart he had humbly accepted God's judgment on himself and his sons (1 Samuel 3:18); now his thought is only for the ark of the Lord. "His heart trembled for the ark of God." (1 Samuel 4:13). When the messenger speaks of it, Eli falls from his seat and dies (1 Samuel 4:18). It is not the judgment on his family that leads to his death, but the dishonor inflicted on the Lord and His departure from the midst of His people.

Phinehas's wife's last moments also shine with a similar consoling light! The catastrophe brings her pregnancy to a premature end and causes her death, but in dying she calls her son Ichabod: "The glory is departed." In the person of her own son, she proclaims Israel's ruin and its consequences. The witnesses of the times of the end may be recognized by this feature. The dishonor done to God through our own unfaithfulness humbles us, and, instead of attempting to remedy the state of things this has provoked, we bow our heads under the judgment, for there we perceive the holiness of the Lord.

04.05. 1Samuel Ch 5 - 6:13

1 Samuel 5:1-12, 1 Samuel 6:1-13 On this account the ark, “the glory of God,” is now captive in His people’s enemies’ hands; but they cannot boast themselves in this. God is about to prove to them that nothing is more glorious than His glory humbled and captive. In this way, the humiliation of the cross glorified the Son of Man and God in Him (John 13:31). In the hands of Gentiles God is about to lay claim to His holiness in judgment. This judgment will be complete, falling on false gods, on men, and on the land of the Philistines. The ark, God’s testimony, which cannot be associated with the people’s unfaithfulness, can no more be submitted to idols. In fact, it can rest only where it is pleased to dwell in grace. God leaves Israel in judgment, but only in order to return to Israel on the entirely new footing of grace, as we shall see in what follows. This is not yet rest, for “the ark of [His] strength” would not enter into this rest until the the reign of Solomon, type of the reign of Christ.

We have said that the glory of God cannot be submitted to idols. Indeed, set this humiliated glory beside Dagon, as the men of Ashdod did, and the world’s idol will be overturned and broken. But this changes nothing about the worship that the world offers to its idol. It prefers its mutilated false gods, objects of disdain and derision, to the glory of God that makes it uncomfortable. “Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor any that come into Dagon’s house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day” (1 Samuel 5:5). Their superstitious practice itself remains as a permanent testimony to the degradation of their idol, and also proves that its judgment could bring them to God. The presence of the ark also draws judgment down on the men who had thought to prevail over God, as we have said. For the Philistines there is misery and death. Anguish, secret pain, a shameful sore, the result of divine wrath (cf. Deuteronomy 28:27) fall on them - “the cry of the city went up to heaven.” It went up to a heaven which was empty for them, while God was in their midst without their realizing it, judging them on earth. The result is, not that they turn to God, but that they send Him away, hoping to rid themselves of Him. At the same time we see here the egoism that characterizes the world. As long as Ashdod is undisturbed, what does it matter that Gath be tormented? As long as Gath is undisturbed, what does it matter that Ekron be tormented? They do not want to die, but that does not prevent death, accompanied by deadly dismay, from coming (1 Samuel 5:11-12). The counsel of the princes of the Philistines to the people’s question “What shall we do?” (1 Samuel 5:8) is therefore without result. The people then question the priests and the diviners “What shall we do with the ark of Jehovah?” (1 Samuel 6:2). They do not know what to do with the throne of God, the mercy-seat, the vessel of the mind of God! Animated by the same spirit, the Gadarenes prayed the Lord to withdraw from their borders. It makes them uncomfortable because it judges them. For them the question is how they shall send this disturbing guest away, not whether they ought to send it away. It does not occur to them to address themselves to Him, but their clergy must surely know the way of being rid of God. This clergy, at least, despite their extreme ignorance is candid. Acknowledging God’s hand in these plagues, they try to determine how to “give glory to the God of Israel.” They tell the people not to harden their hearts against Him; they recall His exploits in Egypt; and, finally, they suggest a

means of knowing whether it is really He who has caused this great evil or whether the thing was only accidental. All this denotes conscience in the absence of the light brought by revealed truth. God always takes account of conscience, even of an obscured conscience, and gives a clear answer. The men had been stricken with haemorrhoids, and the land itself devastated by mice (1 Samuel 6:5). Judgment was complete, as we have seen. At the counsel of the priests and diviners, they offer up golden haemorrhoids and golden mice as a trespass offering. A trespass offering - when they had made war against the people of God! when they had esteemed Dagon to be the master over the Sovereign God, the Creator of heaven and earth! An offering without the shedding of blood when atonement for sin was necessary! - But God takes account of the very least cry of conscience. He gives a clear answer, we have said. "The kine went straight forward on the way to Beth-shemesh; they went by the one high way, lowing as they went; and they turned not aside to the right hand or to the left" (1 Samuel 6:12). Such are the Lord's ways, always right! (Hosea 14:9).

God, the Judge, now in grace returns to His people. Only He is expecting them to acknowledge Him with humiliation.

04.06. 1 Samuel Ch 6:13-7:1

1 Samuel 6:13-21, 1 Samuel 7:1

God's public ways may be in judgment, as we have just seen, but His secret ways always bring Him back into the midst of His people in grace. The ark returned to Beth-shemesh without Israel feeling the need of it, or expressing any desire for it.

What a marvelous thing is this ark of the Lord! First of all, the ark is God's throne, His governmental presence in the midst of His people. Next, it is characterized by the mercy seat, symbol of Christ's work, the place of approach for a sinner received in grace and justified. Lastly, considered as a whole and considered in detail, it is the image of the person of Christ Himself. As the ark contained the tables of the law, so Christ said: "Thy law is within My heart." Like the ark of testimony, the Lord here on earth was the witness and the expression of all God's thoughts. As in the golden pot that contained the manna, in Him we find the union of perfect humanity - the bread come down from heaven in the wilderness - with divine glory. He was the mercy seat toward which the faces of the cherubim of glory were turned so that they might contemplate it, overshadowing it with their wings. Thus the ark was, above all, the image of Christ Himself, the Son of God and the Son of Man in a single person. The people of Beth-shemesh "rejoiced to see [the ark]" (1 Samuel 6:13). How could there fail to be joy, when, after having lost sight of His perfections, one is once again found in the presence of Him whose presence brings security, salvation, the feeling of God's presence, a moral beauty before which angels bow in worship? Thus, hardly had the ark come, but burnt offerings are offered once again and the Levites resume their service anew. The princes of the Philistines see this scene and return; a spectacle of this sort is interesting to them, but does not touch their heart and their conscience. But the joy elicited by the contemplation of grace is not everything. It is combined with respect and fear, if one is aware of being in God's presence. The God of grace judges according to the work of each one; the God of grace is holy. This is what the people of Beth-shemesh had forgotten. "They had looked into the ark of Jehovah" (1 Samuel 6:19). They abused the intimacy in which God desired, in grace, to present Himself to them. This is important to note. Because Jesus came down to us, our fleshly spirit is tempted to treat Him as a companion with whom we may do as we wish. Today people boast of familiarity with Jesus, and write books to show that spirituality consists in this. We do not have the right to call Him our Brother, but "He is not ashamed to call [us] brethren." This shows the difference clearly. What will my feelings be if a person of high degree condescends to associate me, an insignificant person, with Himself and is not ashamed of me in public when he would have every right to despise me? If I understand this condescension, my feelings will be deep and humble thankfulness, attachment, limitless devotion, and infinite respect for Him who does not fear to compromise His dignity by lifting me up to His level. This absence of respect and fear led the people of Beth-shemesh to look into the ark. There is little that better characterizes the spirit of the present time than this profane spirit. Men think themselves capable of distinguishing that which is proper to the human nature and that which is proper to the divine nature of the Savior and to fathom this mystery. This amounts to the same thing as looking into the ark which contained a secret known to God alone,

for, “no one knows the Son but the Father.” This attitude inevitably leads to lowering His humanity to the level of our sinful humanity. Men discuss the child Jesus’s education, the schools available to Him for learning the Scriptures, His scientific education and opinions, more or less conformed to those of His time, the reality of His temptation and His capacity to sin, etc. Remember, you profane Christians, that the Lord struck the people of Beth-shemesh. If you are not concerned about the Lord’s glory, God will show His concern for it and will not allow anyone to touch His ark with impunity. Soon, instead of the blessings of His presence, you will have to learn under His blows of judgment that He cannot tolerate anyone who fails to remove his shoes in order to approach Him. The men of Beth-shemesh said: “Who is able to stand before Jehovah, this holy God?” (1 Samuel 6:20). To their own detriment they knew this holiness which they had despised. Alas! instead of humbling themselves, they had only the thought, previously formulated by the Philistines, of removing this disturbing guest far from themselves: “To whom shall He go up from us?” “Come down,” they say to the inhabitants of Kirjath-jearim, “fetch it up to you” (1 Samuel 6:21); thus they lose all the blessings connected with the Lord’s presence. Others profit and understand that someone must be sanctified to keep watch over the ark: “The men of Kirjath-jearim ... hallowed Eleazar, [Abinadab’s] son, to keep the ark of the Lord” (1 Samuel 7:1). This trust was faithfully kept in the “fields of the wood” (Psalms 132:6). May we be faithful keepers of the ark of our God!

04.07. 1 Samuel 7

1 Samuel 7:1-17

If it pleases the Lord for His ark to return in grace into the midst of Israel, the moral state of this people must be brought into accordance with such a favor. "And it came to pass, from the day that the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years." Thus the ark was within Israel's territory, in a sanctified place, but God's communications with His people were not re-established. Twenty years passed by in waiting, whereas judgment had lasted only seven months (1 Samuel 6:1). The state that could re-establish the people's communion with God could not be produced except through repentance. How long does it take for this repentance to be manifested? Strange gods and Ashtaroth still remained in the midst of Israel while the ark was staying temporarily at Kirjath-jearim. Could the ark associate with the idols of Israel when it could not do so in Philistia? It takes thirty-four times as long as the duration of the judgment to bring Israel to reject such an outrageous sin. There must be a work of conscience corresponding to grace, as we see in the history of the prodigal son. It is a solemn thing, seen every day, that it takes a believer much longer to be restored than to deliver himself up to do evil.

Israel began to "[lament] after Jehovah" (1 Samuel 7:2) - this is already a favorable sign. They were lacking something, then; the Lord's presence had become necessary to them - the first symptom of a work of God in the soul of the people. Here Samuel serves as the Lord's mouthpiece (1 Samuel 7:3) to call the people to repentance: "Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, If ye return to Jehovah with all your heart, put away the strange gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and apply your hearts unto Jehovah, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines" (1 Samuel 7:3). The believer's return to the Lord is similar to his initial conversion. The soul begins by separating from idols or evil: "Ye turned to God from idols," it is said to the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1:9); then the soul cleaves to the Lord and serves Him: "to serve a living and true God." The result is deliverance; God is no longer obliged to discipline the believer. In this work the activity of Samuel, this faithful servant of God, is particularly remarkable and blessed. After having spoken to the people, he adds (1 Samuel 7:5): "Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray Jehovah for you." Gathering the people of God is the function of every servant of the Lord who understands his ministry. But beyond this, Samuel is an intercessor; prayer, the fruit of his intimacy with the Lord, characterizes him. Is it not said of him: "Moses and Aaron among His priests, and Samuel among them that call upon His name: they called unto Jehovah, and He answered them" (Psalms 99:6)?

Israel must be gathered at Mizpah. As Gilgal was the place of gathering under Joshua, the place of circumcision, of the judgment of the flesh, in order to obtain victory, so Mizpah is under the judges the usual place of gathering after the angel went up from Gilgal to Bochim, the place of weeping, where conclusive ruin is undeniably established. Mizpah is the place of repentance without which there is no victory. At Mizpah (1 Samuel 4:2) Israel under Eli had met only defeat, for they went there without a work of conscience which could have raised them up again. In ruin,

we must remember that Mizpah is just as precious as Gilgal, although much more humiliating; there we learn anew to put our confidence in nothing of man, but only in the Lord's strength.

"And they gathered together to Mizpah, and drew water, and poured it out before Jehovah, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against Jehovah." These things could take place only after what is reported in 1 Samuel 7:4 : "And the children of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and served Jehovah only." The fruits of repentance are different from the fruits of conversion; here we have three of them: "water poured out, that is to say, affliction combined with the realization of irremediable weakness before God (2 Samuel 14:14; Psalms 22:14); fasting, for in mourning one does not feed the flesh; and lastly, a true confession of evil: "We have sinned against the Lord."

These fruits are the result of Samuel's intercession for the people. Such too was the case with Peter when he fell: "I have prayed for thee," Jesus told him. On this basis the people can be restored: "Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpah."

"And the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together at Mizpah; and the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel" (1 Samuel 7:7). The gathering of the people cannot suit the enemy. The enemy doubtless does not understand the work of conscience which has produced the gathering, and does not see in this gathering anything but a power opposed to his own power, one which must be suppressed at any price. "And the children of Israel heard it, and were afraid of the Philistines." In 1 Samuel 4:7, when their conscience was yet unreached, Israel was unafraid, and it was the Philistines who were full of fear. Now, having experienced their weakness, the people are terrified, for they do not yet have the assurance that God is for them. In one sense, this fear is no doubt wretched, but it is good to see it on the path of restoration. Isn't this better than the "great shout" which Israel had raised previously that had made the earth tremble (1 Samuel 4:5)?

"And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry to Jehovah our God for us, that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines" (1 Samuel 7:8). They sense that their future and their salvation are dependent on Samuel's intercession. Samuel, their mediator, "took a sucking-lamb, and offered it as a whole burnt-offering to Jehovah"; for his office could not be effective except by virtue of an accepted sacrifice. On this basis, he could be the advocate of God's people. We, too, have an Advocate with the Father, and He is the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:1-2). "Samuel cried to Jehovah for Israel, and Jehovah answered him" (1 Samuel 7:9). God hears Samuel's request, which is based upon the burnt offering. God is for us and has given us all things, He who spared not His own Son but gave Him up for us. In 1 Samuel 7:10-11 the Lord strikes the enemies of His people and drives them out, so that His people need do nothing more than pursue a beaten adversary. Though it is true that help comes entirely from God, yet victory can not be complete without the deployment of the energy of faith.

Samuel takes account of this divine intervention. "Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, and said, Hitherto Jehovah has helped us" (1 Samuel 7:12). Eben-ezer, already mentioned in 1 Samuel 4:1, does not receive its name until after this victory. "Hitherto": this basis having been established, the enemy no longer attempts to raise his head. (1 Samuel 7:13). Restoration, for the moment at least, is complete.

We have seen Samuel as prophet, priest, intercessor, and judge: precious qualities in this man of God. His activity for the Lord and His people does not slacken: "Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpah" (places which characterized his activity according to God), "and judged Israel in all those places." Even at Ramah where his house was, he was occupied only with the well-being of the Lord's people. The Word adds: "And there he built an altar unto the Lord" (1 Samuel 7:17). The first expression of his service had been to worship before the Lord (1 Samuel 1:28); the worshipper's altar is the last expression of his service. Is not this life of faith fittingly framed by these two acts?

04.08. 1 Samuel 8

1 Samuel 8:1-22

“And it came to pass when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel. And the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abijah; they judged in Beer-sheba. And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted justice” (1 Samuel 8:1-3). The history of the judges, like that of the priesthood, ends in complete ruin. Samuel himself is lacking in spiritual discernment here. He makes his sons judges without any direction from the Lord, as though the function that God had entrusted to him could be transmitted to others, for there is no transmission of gifts or even of charges by succession. The elders of Israel with reason disapprove of Samuel’s sons’ conduct (1 Samuel 8:4), but they make this the occasion to ask for a king (1 Samuel 8:5): “Appoint us a king to judge us, like all the nations.” The evil they were complaining of does not push them toward the Lord, but toward the Gentiles; they seek human assistance to remedy man’s ruin, thinking that they can in this way escape their own misery as God’s people. Their desire for a king was, in reality, giving up the Lord, the denial of His direct government through the judges, but their capital sin was the request for a king like the nations. Was it not God’s counsel to give them a king according to His own heart, an Anointed whom He would have chosen for them Himself (1 Samuel 2:35; 1 Samuel 13:14)? Their desire for a king like all the nations was a renouncing of their title as God’s people and involved assimilation to the world. Due to their unfaithfulness, a system established by God was being jeopardized in their hands. Christendom on its path of apostasy has acted no differently when, instead of humbling itself and mourning, it has sought the world’s support in order to maintain itself.

Samuel, reproachable as he had been in the matter of his sons, had not, like Eli, honored them more than the Lord. The elders’ request: “Give us a king to judge us” (1 Samuel 8:6), displeased him. The despising of God’s direct government and of His glory affects him. In his affliction he has recourse to prayer (1 Samuel 8:6). May we follow this example daily in every circumstance! And the Lord says to Samuel: “Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the deeds that they have done since the day that I brought them out of Egypt even unto this day, in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods, so do they also unto thee” (1 Samuel 8:7-8). Precious encouragement given by God to His servant at the very moment when he was personally undergoing a discipline of which the elders of Israel had become the instruments. Nothing could be more consoling to his heart than the assurance of being, after all, on the Lord’s side, and now that the Lord had been rejected, the necessity of being rejected himself as well. Is it not an honor to share the shame that the world casts on our Lord in spurning Him? Is it astonishing that the world acts in the same way toward us? Even while He is disciplining him, God identifies Samuel with Himself, whereas the people, under an appearance of judging evil, were identifying themselves with the nations. It is better to be a humbled Samuel, disregarded, alone with a rejected God, than an Israel, armed with a powerful outward organization which gives them the

illusion of being able to do without God and act according to their own will, whereas they were in fact the slaves of the world and of Satan.

“And now hearken unto their voice; only, testify solemnly unto them, and declare unto them the manner of the king that shall reign over them” (1 Samuel 8:9). Samuel’s rejection qualifies him for a new office: he gives a very clear testimony to what would happen to the people. The king according to man’s heart would make them his instruments to accomplish his plans, an unbearable yoke, but one that they would be unable to shake off (1 Samuel 8:10-18). In the same way, the world entirely disowns Christians who seek its help and gives them nothing in exchange except a feeling of their wretchedness without any compensation whatsoever. The world does not grant its help unless one consents to serve it. This is not the easy yoke and the light burden of the bondservant of Christ, but the anguish of cruel slavery. The people who have been warned refuse to listen to Samuel’s voice and prefer to follow their own pathway; Samuel has the Lord alone as his resource, and he rehearses all the people’s words in His ears (1 Samuel 8:21).

Thus God has used discipline in order to strengthen His servant of whom He wishes to make an instrument of new blessings in that which follows. Having received this divine instruction, Samuel, who had established his sons without consulting the Lord, waits until God has told him: “Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king” (1 Samuel 8:22).

04.09. 1 Samuel 9

1 Samuel 9:1-27

1 Samuel 9:1-27, 1 Samuel 10:1-27, 1 Samuel 11:1-15, 1 Samuel 12:1-25, 1 Samuel 13:1-23, 1 Samuel 14:1-52, 1 Samuel 15:1-35 SAUL, OR THE KING ACCORDING TO THE FLESH

1 Samuel 9:1-27

Saul enters the scene. In these new circumstances Samuel's character shines with incomparable brilliance. God had said to him: "Make them a king"; Samuel still waits to establish this king until God points him out. This is the true character of a servant: dependence in obedience, such as was seen in the Lord at the death of Lazarus (John 11:6). This is all the more striking here as Samuel is rendering service in a matter which is repugnant to him, but if God is dealing in this way, how could Samuel do otherwise? God puts Himself at His people's service in order to choose a king according to man's principles for them. Indeed He says in Hosea 13:11 : "I gave thee a king in Mine anger, and took him away in My wrath," but if God so acts in judgment on His people, it is no less true that He also has a purpose of grace. "And he will save My people out of the hand of the Philistines; for I have looked upon My people, because their cry is come unto Me" (1 Samuel 9:16). On the other hand, this choice put Israel to the test. In the flesh they had asked for a king according to the flesh; neither God nor Samuel raised an obstacle to this request; on the contrary, God chooses the most excellent person that the flesh could desire, and Samuel acknowledges him as such: "On whom is all the desire of Israel set? Is it not on thee?" (1 Samuel 9:20).

Saul possesses all the natural qualities of a leader of the people. He is strong and valiant, handsome, tall, a choice man. (1 Samuel 9:1-2). His moral qualities are no less remarkable: he is subject and affectionate toward his father (1 Samuel 9:5), disposed to listen to the counsel of his inferiors (1 Samuel 9:10), little in his own eyes, whether it be in his tribe or in his family (1 Samuel 9:21). If the trial that God is about to make does not succeed with such a man, it is definitely because man's condition in general leaves no hope.

Let us add that without this trial of the king according to the flesh the ways of God toward David, His anointed, would not have been complete. What would have become of David's sufferings and affliction, the necessary prelude to his glory, if Saul had not been raised up?

Let us now return to Samuel's lovely character. In the preceding chapters he prays, he intercedes, he consults the Lord; here we see him in a relationship of even greater intimacy with God. In him, God realizes what we find in Psalms 32:8 : "I will instruct thee and teach thee the way in which thou shalt go; I will counsel thee with Mine eye upon thee." Whereas Saul is only a blind instrument in God's designs, Samuel is conscious of them, and is the confidant of His secret. "Now Jehovah had apprised Samuel one day before Saul came, saying, Tomorrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him prince over My people Israel" (1 Samuel 9:15). This communication is given to him without his request. Nothing comes from him; he receives the thoughts of God directly, without any intermediary: "Behold the man of

whom I spoke to thee! this man shall rule over My people” (1 Samuel 9:17). Samuel is conscious of his gift (1 Samuel 9:19), but it is in order to communicate the mind of God to Saul. Before Saul met him, Samuel had already appointed his portion beforehand (1 Samuel 9:23). There was no jealousy, when he might have resented the elders setting him aside; God’s will is enough for him, and he rejoices in it. The establishment of a king according to the flesh is an evil, but Samuel had learned in communion with the Lord not to oppose evil when God Himself did not oppose it: something that is certainly difficult to learn.

Notice again in 1 Samuel 9:1-27 how even the most insignificant events work together toward the establishment of God’s designs, of the goal He has in mind: the loss of the asses, Saul’s useless efforts in the land of Israel, the thought that came to his servant, the maidens at the well, Samuel’s presence in the city on that day, the peace offering - indeed, every step, every decision, every word of the prophet acting in communion with His God.

04.10. 1 Samuel 10

1 Samuel 10:1-27

Samuel anoints Saul as prince over God's inheritance and foretells the signs that will happen to him in the way in connection with his anointing as king. These signs were of great importance: Saul's entire future depended on how he would understand them. He needed only to meditate on them. Their meaning escapes his heart which is lacking in intelligence and spiritual discernment. In this regard, this passage is often a touchstone for our state. Notice that in this scene Saul is not left to himself - leaving him without excuse. Samuel tells him: "God is with thee" (1 Samuel 10:7), and later it says: "The Spirit of God came upon him" (1 Samuel 10:10).

Three signs are given to Saul; they occur in a God-given order.

First, there is Rachel's sepulcher in the border of Benjamin. Benjamin, the head of Saul's tribe, was born the day his mother died. In order to correspond to God's thoughts, Saul's history must start there. It was up to him to become the son of Jacob's right hand, the Benjamin of God, if man according to the flesh could attain to this place. Rachel's sepulcher could be the beginning of his kingship. Death, separating him from his entire past, could make way for a new life for him, a life issuing out of death in which he would walk freely as the Lord's anointed.

Passing onward, Saul would meet three men going up to God at Bethel. Bethel was the first stage of Jacob's journey, the place where God had promised the banished patriarch never to leave him. In the midst of Israel's ruin, God's faithfulness to His promises was thus manifested to the future king, so that he might govern his conduct according to that faithfulness. Saul should have seen that Bethel was assured to him, and that he could count on divine protection. Amid the sad circumstances in which the people found themselves, Saul meets worshippers of God, be they but three, going up where Jacob had worshipped Him, where He would be worshipped forever. At this time Bethel was the place of grace where God had revealed Himself, the center of Israel's religious life, the beginning and the end of the wanderings of its founder. Saul could and should have entered into relationship with those going to this place of blessing and, although so few in number, giving complete testimony (indicated by the number three) to the reality of the faith still remaining in Israel. They inquire of him; he who had nothing to give the prophet was to receive the necessary nourishment from them. Having found grace in their eyes, he ought to have joined these men of faith.

Finally, Saul would come to the hill of God, to the seat of His power, in actual fact in the hands of the Philistines, that is to say, invaded and dominated by the enemy. After meeting those in Israel who remained faithful to God at Bethel, Saul ought here to have taken account of the true state of the people, and that should have spoken to his conscience. But, in this same place, God was entering into relationship with Israel through the prophets. Divine resources were not lacking and, despite the Philistines, the Spirit could act in power and in grace. The troop of prophets and the little remnant worshipping God at Bethel ought to have opened his eyes and indicated the path to

the Lord's anointed, who could thus become the leader and deliverer of the people. It was due to the Spirit of God that Saul, joining these men, became His instrument for Israel, and that "God gave him another heart" (1 Samuel 10:6-9). The sign takes place; the Spirit of God comes upon Saul (1 Samuel 10:10). Through him God could once again have taken up the course of His relationship with Israel, but faith was not active, and the witnesses to this scene are not misled. Although Saul, changed into another man, prophesies, those who knew him beforehand have no confidence in him. "Is Saul also among the prophets?" And one of the same place answers: "But who is their father?" Does Saul have the same father as God's servants? The signs completed, Saul receives a new direction for action, for signs are not everything; the Word is also needed. He is directed to go down to Gilgal and to wait seven days until Samuel should come to him to show him what he is to do. Later on, we shall see the result of this order when, after two years, the king decides to go down to Gilgal (1 Samuel 13:1).

Samuel calls the people together before the Lord at Mizpah, but already the fair days of 1 Samuel 7:1-17 are over, for since the people had been unfaithful once again their relationship with the Lord was spoiled anew. In asking for a king they had rejected their God (1 Samuel 10:19). Alas! this seems to weigh less upon their conscience than when they were under the Philistines' yoke. Now their circumstances were outwardly happy and easy, but God was rejected. The people had demanded a king; far from hindering them, God had helped them in every way, in making the best choice possible for them according to man. What would the result be? When the office of king is instituted (1 Samuel 10:20-27), Saul demonstrates his humility and modesty (1 Samuel 10:23); he knows how to overlook an injury - lovely natural qualities which must be acknowledged but which in no way qualify him for accomplishing the work of God. When the ceremony is over, Saul goes to Gibeah. "And with him went the band, whose hearts God had touched. But the children of Belial said, How should this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no gifts." This is a good picture of the world: these children of Belial who had rejected God in order to demand a king despise that king when God sends him to them; but the true believers in the company of Samuel and later in the company of David, knowing the mind of God, accept as coming from Him the authority of a man who will manifest himself to be the most implacable enemy of the Lord's anointed. This is still our place in the world today; we recognize even the most ungodly authorities and obey them (except in case of conflict with the obedience due to God), because we accept the authority of God who has instituted them.

04.11. 1 Samuel 11

1 Samuel 11:1-15

Hardly has the office of king been established than Nahash the Ammonite comes on the scene, Israel's dreaded enemy, but not their great internal enemy like the Philistine encamped at the hill of God, about whom God had said, "And he will save My people out of the hand of the Philistines" (1 Samuel 9:16). In order to avoid combat, the men of Jabesh-Gilead propose an alliance with the enemy in exchange for their servitude. Nahash responds to this proposal only with scorn; such is all we can gain from our weak concessions to the world and from our lack of faith! The men of Jabesh do not even think of the deliverer whom God had just given them, for the people had not acknowledged Saul except in respect to those qualities which the flesh accepts: outward beauty and natural qualities.

Messengers from Jabesh announce to the all the tribes the extremity to which their city is reduced; Saul, by chance, is present. "The Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those words, and his anger was kindled greatly" (1 Samuel 11:6). This is a very serious thing to consider: without a work of the conscience, the Spirit of God, acting in power, does not save man. Saul under the influence of the Spirit had "another heart," was "turned into another man," and is later found reproved when he manifests the true depths of his natural heart. All these qualities of nature, and even the gift of prophecy conferred by the Spirit of God, have not made him a man of God! Balaam and Judas are dreadful examples of this; Samson, although his condition is somewhat doubtful, gives occasion for the same remarks; as does the unprofitable servant of the parable (Matthew 25:30).

Thus the Spirit of God comes on Saul, but I am inclined to believe that the ardent wrath of the flesh reveals his personal state; he threatens, instead of gaining confidence and appealing to faith: "Whoever comes not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen!" (1 Samuel 11:7). Be that as it may, "The fear of Jehovah fell on the people." Jabesh is delivered; Samuel renews the kingdom that had already been established in 1 Samuel 10:1-27, but which had now been proven. This renewing must take place at Gilgal (1 Samuel 11:14), the place of circumcision, where the flesh is cut off. Morally, Saul does not count for anything in this action. According to Samuel's injunction in 1 Samuel 10:8 his faith would later be put to the test at Gilgal. Saul shows his generosity, even acknowledging the Lord's hand in the deliverance granted to the people (1 Samuel 11:13). Thus God in His condescension toward the natural man is with him and grants the flesh the means and the help necessary in order to walk in His presence. In this chapter, we find the people (1 Samuel 11:11-12) distinguished from the true believers whose hearts God had touched (1 Samuel 10:26) and the children of Belial (1 Samuel 10:27). "The people" belong to neither the one nor the other. They disappear in the day when the heart is put to the test, but they speak openly in favor of Saul and against the children of Belial (1 Samuel 11:12) when they find it advantageous to be associated with the king. The whole nation is never on the side of a despised Saul (1 Samuel 10:27), or of a rejected David, as we shall see later. Today things are no different,

and even during the Millennium the unconverted nations will submit themselves to Christ only to attain some advantage.

04.12. 1 Samuel 12

1 Samuel 12:1-25 By renewing the kingdom Samuel's career as judge naturally comes to an end. 1 Samuel 12:1-25 is, so to speak, the testament of all his activity as Israel's leader. "I have hearkened," he says, "to your voice in all that ye said to me, and have made a king over you. And now behold, the king walks before you; and I am old and gray-headed; and behold, my sons are with you; and I have walked before you from my youth up to this day" (1 Samuel 12:1-2). Samuel had not been two-faced in his ways; in listening to the people, he had simply followed the Lord's commandment; therefore he could say a bit later: "Jehovah has set a king over you" (1 Samuel 12:13). In this we also see the lovely impartiality of a man who is in communion with God; he had forgotten the wrongs and the injustice of the people and the elders against himself personally and had renounced his official functions without a murmur, transferring them to a king who certainly was of less worth morally than himself. He says: "My sons are with you," thus putting in their rightful place those whom he had wrongfully set up in the past. This act, so natural in appearance, but one which had brought him a measure of discipline from his God, seems to me to be properly judged by this little phrase: "with you." His sons were false judges, whereas he himself, the true judge, had walked "before" the people. And now the king was walking before them. The last of the judges goes on to give his evaluation of the people's behavior and of God's ways toward them. "And now stand still, that I may plead with you before Jehovah of all the righteous acts of Jehovah which He did to you and to your fathers" (1 Samuel 12:7). But in order to speak thus, a man must be above reproach, and this fact is of the greatest practical importance for us. We can have no authority with regard to God's people if our actions are not in accord with our gifts and our words. But it is not only a question of conferred authority that counts; one cannot reach consciences without moral authority. The people are obliged to bear witness about Samuel that his life afforded no ground for reproach or criticism. Like the apostle Paul later on, he was manifested to the consciences of God's people. His moral authority was a thousand times more important than his official authority. Saul had the latter, and this did not prevent him from being reprov'd, even though this authority was established by God.

"It is Jehovah who appointed Moses and Aaron" (1 Samuel 12:6). To his own loss, Samuel had forgotten this for a moment when he appointed his sons on his own initiative. In the Church at present - and it is certainly appropriate to take note of this - there is no official appointment, but the gifts that are necessary remain in spite of the ruin, just as does the moral authority based on the practical holiness of the one exercising it.

Samuel's speech (1 Samuel 12:6-17) goes back to the deliverance from Egypt which had brought the people into Canaan, for this was the purpose in God's powerful intervention on their behalf. But in Canaan they had forgotten God and, instead of serving Him, they had worshipped idols. Oppressed by the enemy, they had cried out to the Lord who had delivered them by the judges, from Jerubbaal to Samuel, and had made them "[dwell] in safety" (1 Samuel 12:11). But now that Nahash, king of the children of Ammon, was threatening them, they had said to Samuel: "Nay, but a king shall reign over us; when Jehovah your God was your king" (1 Samuel 12:12).

Here the Spirit uncovers their hidden motives for asking for a king. At the bottom, it was not the reason which they had given to Samuel in 1 Samuel 8:5 : “Behold, thou art become old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways.” Man often colors his motives in the eyes of his fellow man in this way, but he cannot hide them from God or from His prophet. Fear of Nahash, and simply that, reigned in the depths of Israel’s heart, coupled with an absolute lack of faith and of confidence in God. The Lord was their king, but they preferred the help of a king such as the nations had and the security that he could afford them to the “wings of Jehovah,” in whose shadow they should have sought refuge, rejoicing.

Despite all this God condescends to their request, and thus their history in responsibility continues under another form of government: “Jehovah has set a king over you” (1 Samuel 12:13). Would Israel’s heart change under this new dispensation? That which follows reveals the answer. For the moment, it was a question of convicting them that “[their] wickedness [was] great, which [they had] done in the sight of Jehovah in asking for [them]selves a king” (1 Samuel 12:17). Samuel gives them signs of this in thunder and rain falling from heaven out of season; but at the same time he cries out and intercedes for them. Never throughout his whole career did this man of prayer slacken in his supplications.

Once again the conscience of the people is reached, but how many times had this not happened already? Witness the lovely stir at Mizpah in 1 Samuel 7:1-17. Here they say to Samuel: “Pray to Jehovah thy God for thy servants, that we die not; for we have added to all our sins the wickedness to ask for ourselves a king” (1 Samuel 12:19). The intercession of the man of God is their only resource; this is true, but the evil has been done and subsists; it is not according to God’s ways to re-plaster a cracked wall, to give a house in ruin an attractive appearance. One thing remains to them, our resource as well in the circumstances in which we live: there is the possibility of walking in the midst of ruin in a way that glorifies God. “Fear not,” Samuel tells the people, “ye have done all this wickedness; yet turn not aside from following Jehovah, and serve Jehovah with all your heart” (1 Samuel 12:20). If there are souls in the present day whose only purpose is to honor God and serve Him, their path will truly be light in the midst of the darkness that surrounds them. Moreover, these souls, depending on three things that ever abide, will find resources that ruin cannot exhaust nor diminish: “For Jehovah will not cast away His people for His great name’s sake; because it has pleased Jehovah to make you His people. Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against Jehovah in ceasing to pray for you; and I will teach you the good and right way” (1 Samuel 12:22-23). These things are the three pillars of the Christian life. Ruin does not change the grace of God which remains our assurance forever. The intercession of Christ, of which Samuel’s intercession is but a weak type, is able to bring us through all difficulties. Lastly, the Word, of which the prophet was the mouthpiece to the people, “[teaches] us that, having denied impiety and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and justly, and piously in the present course of things ... ” (Titus 2:12). In closing, Samuel says to the people: “Only fear Jehovah, and serve Him in truth, with all your heart; for see how great things He has done for you” (1 Samuel 12:24). May we not forget that the knowledge of His “great salvation” is the true means of fearing Him as He desires to be feared, and of serving Him as He desires to be served. May we also remember that the knowledge of the grace of God in no way weakens the responsibility of His people. “But if ye do wickedly, ye shall perish, both ye and your king.”

04.13. 1 Samuel 13

1 Samuel 13:1-23 Samuel's activity as judge having come to its close, the first verse of our chapter begins a new subject.

It is important to notice at the beginning of this new division of the book that Saul does not represent the flesh's premeditated opposition to the work of God, but much rather the efforts of the flesh to accomplish this work - the flesh introduced into a position of testimony. This makes Saul infinitely more responsible and his activity more guilty than if he entered the scene as an enemy of God and of His anointed. Christendom, of which we are part, occupies the same position, with the consequence that the teachings of these chapters are of solemn bearing in the present day.

1 Samuel 13:1-23 could be entitled: The foolishness and the weakness of the flesh. After a first victory, won by Jonathan (1 Samuel 13:3), a victory which we will consider once again in the next chapter in order to present a well-rounded picture of this man of God, the Philistines are moved. "Saul blew the trumpet throughout the land, saying, Let the Hebrews hear. And all Israel heard say, Saul has smitten the garrison of the Philistines, and Israel also has become odious to the Philistines. And the people were called together after Saul to Gilgal."

Addressing the Lord's people, the king calls them Hebrews. The Philistines or the enemy nations surrounding Israel spoke no differently (cf. 1 Samuel 14:11), and this title proves that Saul was trusting in the gathering of the nation as being equal to the Gentiles, and that he understood little better than the latter the people's relation with their God. It is more or less the same in our day, where men fail to apprehend the true relationship of the people of God, of the Church, to Christ. How can it be otherwise? Can the flesh understand the relationship of intimacy and affection that the Spirit has established between the Bridegroom and the bride? From this ignorance have issued all the so-called religious systems that constitute Christendom and that replace living relationships which the flesh cannot know.

Saul attributes Jonathan's victory, faith's victory, to himself (1 Samuel 13:4). When God acts through His instruments at the beginning of a revival, as was seen during the Reformation, and gains the victory over the enemy, all those who profit by this victory not belonging to the family of faith do not fail to attribute the victory to their own merit and vaunt themselves in it.

Never does the flesh seek to gather souls around Christ: it makes itself the center. This is how Saul acted in seeking to frighten the people by these words: "Israel also has become odious to the Philistines." In 1 Samuel 11:7 he had constrained the tribes to follow him by threats, here through fear. The result of this way of acting is to gather Israel after himself (1 Samuel 13:4), but the moral consequences are not long in following. Those who put themselves under the flesh's leadership in order to find some measure of security soon feel that they have no security at all. Their distress is undiminished; they follow Saul "trembling" (1 Samuel 13:7), Seeking shelter, they go over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead (1 Samuel 13:7), leaving the land properly called Canaan in order to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the enemy. This lack of faith

causes them to forget the only thing which was important: it was not Saul who dwelt in the midst of the people, and their cause was not resting in his hands.

Finally Saul came down to Gilgal, where Samuel had previously made an appointment with him in these terms: "Thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal; and, behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer up burnt offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings: seven days shalt thou wait, until I come to thee and inform thee what thou shalt do" (1 Samuel 10:8). The difficult circumstances he was passing through remind Saul of the necessity of following Samuel's directions. At the end of two years he remembers the prophet's injunction. Saul, we are told, "waited seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed." The flesh can imitate faith up to a certain point, but no further; the flesh draws back from the consequences of its own inactivity; nothing is more difficult or more impossible for the flesh than to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. Its patience is often impressive and may even impress Christians, but it ends at the moment when faith is required, the faith that does not reckon with difficulties or impossibilities, for faith cleaves to God who is above all these things. The natural man can walk a long time in a path of patience and in appearance act according to this principle, but he does not realize his own weakness and incapacity and, lacking a relationship with God, he cannot seek resources other than in himself when he is really put to the test.

After the seven days Samuel had not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattered from Saul (1 Samuel 13:8). The people did not find sufficient authority to guard them and defend them in the man who had gathered them through tactics of fear. Then Saul loses patience; he does not know the patience of faith which is "strengthened with all power according to the might of His glory." His patience stops where faith should begin. When the people scatter, when man's support fails him, everything fails this poor king. His flesh, driven to action, immediately usurps the place which belongs to the prophet, reversing and trampling under foot the order established by God. Saul says: "Bring hither to me the burnt offering and the peace offerings. And he offered up the burnt offering. And it came to pass, as soon as he had ended offering up the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came" (1 Samuel 13:9-10).

God's help arrives at the moment when the flesh has just attempted to come to its own rescue. What use is this help to him therefore? Saul is not an unbeliever and does not openly despise Israel's God; he knows that a sacrifice is necessary in order to approach Him; far from despising the prophet, he "went out to meet him, that he might salute him" (1 Samuel 13:10). But being a man according to the flesh, he was absolutely unable to act otherwise than he had done. Nevertheless, he is extremely responsible. "What hast thou done?" Samuel asks him - the same question that God had addressed to Cain! As always, the flesh has excellent reasons for acting, and consequently for disobeying: "Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou didst not come not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines were assembled at Michmash" (1 Samuel 13:11). The flesh has an excuse, even a pious excuse, for its disobedience; "The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to Jehovah" (1 Samuel 13:12). And Samuel tells Saul: "Thou hast done foolishly." Man's wisdom, reasonings, counsels, and decisions are foolishness to God, because they are disobedience. "Thou hast not kept the commandment of Jehovah thy God, which He commanded thee" (1 Samuel 13:13). Obedience is the first, the only characteristic of faith. Without it there is no faith. It is allied to dependence. Who could offer a sacrifice well-pleasing to God but Samuel, here a type

of Christ? This is why God responds to Saul's sacrifice by rejecting him as king! Kingship according to the flesh, responsible although established by God, has just proven not only that it is incapable of maintaining itself, but also that man has no other resource but grace. This is what God wanted to demonstrate. Then, He establishes kingship according to grace, after His own heart. "Jehovah has sought Him a man after His own heart, and Jehovah has appointed him ruler over His people" (1 Samuel 13:14).

Gilgal, the place where the flesh is judged, had become through Saul's unfaithfulness the place where the flesh was affirmed. Samuel leaves it and goes to Gibeah of Benjamin, the only place where, in the person of Jonathan (cf. 1 Samuel 13:2), faith is still maintained in Israel.

Saul appears insensible to the seriousness of his deed; he continues in the same path by numbering the people who are with him (1 Samuel 13:15). Ravagers out of the camp of the Philistines were invading the entire land of Israel, and the people had no weapons: "For the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make them swords or spears." And all Israel went down to the Philistines to sharpen their farming tools or to sharpen an ox goad. If we depend on the world to furnish our weapons, we will find ourselves resourceless for combatting it. Our weapon is the Word. How can we use it against the world, if we consent to give the world the right to teach the Word to us and to dispense the Word to us? In this way the world has the means in its hands to bring us into bondage, and it will not leave us any portion of this Word except that which poses no threat to itself. And just so, children of God are all too often found without arms in the face of enemies who attack their faith.

04.14. 1 Samuel 14

1 Samuel 14:1-52 This chapter is in absolute contrast with the preceding one. In Saul we have seen the foolishness and the weakness of the flesh; in Jonathan we find the wisdom and power of faith.

Jonathan's career (1 Samuel 13:2-3) had begun with a victory, but at that time he was still associated with Saul's military system; a thousand men were with him and two thousand with his father. Jonathan had overcome, but instead of being to the Lord's glory his victory had been advantageous to Saul. It is always so when it comes to our association with the religious world; it takes advantage of this association to attribute the results of our struggles to itself; thus the victory of faith is annulled and the combat must be entered into anew. In effect, this combat begins anew in 1 Samuel 14:1-52, but the first experience has not been lost on Jonathan. He says to his armorbearer: "Come and let us go over to the Philistines' garrison which is on the other side. But he did not tell his father," for faith does not expect any help from the world. By his individual action he separates himself from the political and religious world; from the religious world, for the priest, the ark, the ephod, and the altar were with Saul. But faith possesses God's secret, which neither Saul, nor the priest, nor the people possess. Jonathan keeps his secret to himself; he cannot depend on any man, whoever he may be. On the other hand, he associates himself in thought and in all his actions, with Israel. Saul appealed to the "Hebrews" (1 Samuel 13:3); Jonathan says: "Jehovah has delivered them into the hand of Israel" (1 Samuel 14:12). Jonathan makes great progress in 1 Samuel 14:1-52. His confidence is in God alone, in no way in himself. This is great faith, but we must seek the secret of his strength in his individual separation. The sharp rocks of Bozez and Seneh, raising their insurmountable peaks opposite Michmash and Gibeah, are nothing to faith. Faith, moreover, has a clear, distinct view of this world: "Come, and let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised" (1 Samuel 14:6); it has just as clear a view of what God is, that is to say, a Savior: "There is no restraint to Jehovah to save by many or by few."

Jonathan acts contrary to all the wisdom of the world; he waits for the Lord's direction; he is in no wise uncertain; he knows that on the path of faith we may be called to advance or to stand still: "If they say thus to us, Stand still until we come to you, than we will stay in our place, and we will not go up to them. And if they say thus, Come up to us, then we will go up; for Jehovah has given them into our hand; and this shall be the sign to us" (1 Samuel 14:9-10).

Jonathan fights without human weapons, obliged as he is to use his hands and feet in order to climb up before the Philistines (1 Samuel 14:13), and in this condition he wins God's victory. As for Saul, in appearance he lacked nothing, but in reality he was lacking everything. God was not with him. The priesthood which seemed to support him had previously been judged (1 Samuel 2:31; 1 Samuel 3:13); he himself had been rejected as king (1 Samuel 13:14). With him he had the army, that is to say, strength, but it was a strength that dissolved when the Philistines approached (1 Samuel 13:8), thus proving his weakness.

Jonathan was conscious of the judgment that the people deserved. "Perhaps," he says to his young man, "Jehovah will work for us"; but when he adds: "There is no restraint to Jehovah to save," he shows that he knows God's power and mercy as to this judgment.

Let us not forget Jonathan's companion. His faith is united with that of his leader, whose affection for the Lord and for His people he knows. His master's devotion is sufficient for this single-hearted man and replaces all reasoning for him. Are not his words lovely: "Do all that is in thy heart; turn thee; behold, I am with thee according to thy heart" (1 Samuel 14:7)?

Faith does not dissemble, does not fear to show itself, to expose its designs: "Behold, we will pass over to the men, and we will shew ourselves to them." While displaying a boldness which in the eyes of the world is pure recklessness, Jonathan is wary of a path of self-will and seeks a sign to indicate the will of God. "This shall be the sign to us" (1 Samuel 14:10).

How could the Philistines be anything but blind to the true character of men of faith? "Behold," they say, "the Hebrews come forth out of the holes where they had hid themselves." The world despises and mocks believers.

Thus Jonathan climbs up unarmed: in his mind, he is but the representative of the true Israel against the world. (1 Samuel 14:12). The weapons that his young man carries behind him only serve to affirm the Lord's victory. The enemies are terrified: the result of this victory - in appearance a victory over twenty men, but in reality over an entire people. It is often thus; we have only to enter into the conflict immediately before us, whether it be against one or against a thousand enemies, it matters little. God directs the results; they will go beyond all man's expectation and thoughts. "The watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked; and behold, the multitude melted away, and they went on slaying one another" (1 Samuel 14:16). In the presence of this extraordinary phenomenon Saul (1 Samuel 14:17-19), void of faith, nevertheless thinks of inquiring of the Lord, but he gives up this idea in face of the increasing tumult. Poor Saul! He was sacrificing to the Lord when he ought to have waited for the prophet to do so (1 Samuel 13:9), and now he esteems it useless to consult or seek the Lord when victory is at the door. In truth, in spite of all appearances he has not the least spark of faith. And whereas Jonathan's victory gathers the deserters of Israel (1 Samuel 14:21), separating them from the world which had brought them into bondage, and making of them soldiers in God's cause; whereas Jonathan's victory encourages the timid whose hearts have been reassured to pursue the enemy (1 Samuel 14:22), their king, who lacks even the elements of religion, does not know how to do anything but establish a carnal ordinance which deprives the people of God of a good portion of their strength. Ordinances established by the world of necessity weaken those who submit to them, for they always have a legal character: "Cursed be the man that eateth food until evening, and until I am avenged on mine enemies" (1 Samuel 14:24). "Cursed": isn't that the law? "That I may be avenged": isn't that the flesh and man? What a contrast to Jonathan who sees only the salvation of the Lord for His people in the victory! The result of Jonathan's faith is that the Lord saves and works a great salvation in Israel (1 Samuel 14:45). The result of Saul's ordinance is that the people were distressed and very faint (1 Samuel 14:24; 1 Samuel 14:28; 1 Samuel 14:31). The carnal ordinance is not long in bearing its consequences: the fast and weariness imposed on the people lead them to transgress the first principles of the Word of God; they slay sheep, and oxen, and calves on the ground and eat them with the blood (1 Samuel 14:32). Saul does not want things to go so far and does not

want Israel to act contrary to the divine ordinance. "Ye have acted perversely," he says (1 Samuel 14:33); "Sin not against Jehovah in eating with the blood" (1 Samuel 14:34). But can he by seeking to palliate it remedy the evil that he had incited? Then in the very place of this profanation Saul builds his first altar to Jehovah (1 Samuel 14:35), choosing to worship in the place where the Lord had been dishonored!

Jonathan had not heard the oath that Saul had forced the people to swear; faith is equally foreign to carnal ordinances as to the world's entire religious system, and so faith continues its work in the liberty of the Spirit, and benefitting from the encouragements that God gives, it drinks of the brook in the way" (Psalms 110:7).

How could Jonathan, who receives the help prepared by God for the weariness of the battle and avails himself of it, fail to censure that which is paralyzing the people, this disastrous ordinance, even if it has proceeded from his father's mouth? "My father has troubled the land." Yes, the intervention of the flesh is only a source of trouble and a hindrance to victory.

Saul begins by ordering the pursuit of the Philistines during the night in order to destroy them utterly. The priest who earlier had withdrawn his hand (1 Samuel 14:19) nevertheless has the courage to say: "Let us come near hither to God" (1 Samuel 14:36). Saul inquires of the Lord who does not answer him. God allows everything in this adventure to have extreme consequences and to lead to Saul's humiliation. He asks for "a perfect testimony" (1 Samuel 14:41); finally he receives it, but the response condemns all the king's actions. Saul himself sees nothing but Jonathan's condemnation! This is how the flesh interprets the Word of God. The Lord protects His faithful servant, whereas the king according to the flesh is judged. The people deliver Jonathan because they recognize that he had wrought with God (1 Samuel 14:44-46). The carnal man is capable of a certain heroism so as to maintain his religion and the ordinances that he has established. One may perhaps see him, as here, not sparing those closest to him, but at the bottom it is only an effort of Satan to destroy the servants of God. God watches over His own and saves them, causing that witness be borne to them even by the mouth of the assembly of Israel, whose authority asserts itself here against the pretensions of the flesh.

Despite all this, God acts by means of Saul without wearying, according to the promise that He had made (1 Samuel 9:16), and this does not prevent Saul from continuing to rely on the flesh in order to fight the Philistines: "When Saul saw any mighty man, or any valiant man, he took him to himself."

Thus 1 Samuel 15:1-52 teaches us that the flesh and faith, far from helping and assisting one another, can only enter into conflict and opposition one against the other.

04.15. 1 Samuel 15

1 Samuel 15:1-35 The concise depiction of Saul's reign ends with the 1 Samuel 14:52. 1 Samuel 15:1-35 we shall now speak of gives a sort of separate history because of its contents' importance. Here we find the reason for Saul's final rejection, a rejection making necessary the introduction of David - the king according to God.

We have seen that Saul represents the flesh professing to serve God, and, as such, engaged in His work. In order to prove its incapacity in these conditions, God has been putting it to the test in many ways ever since 1 Samuel 9:1-27. One final trial remains. What will the flesh, which pretends to act for God, do in the conflict with Amalek?

It was written: "Remember what Amalek did unto thee on the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; how he met thee on the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, all the feeble that lagged behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary, and he feared not God. And it shall be, when Jehovah thy God shall have given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land that Jehovah thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heavens; thou shalt not forget it" (Deuteronomy 25:17-19).

Now God had seen to it, in spite of all Saul's faults, that Israel had "rest ... round about." The hour had struck for Amalek, that cruel and cowardly enemy who had massacred those of Israel who straggled behind. The Lord had sworn that there would be war between Himself and Amalek from generation to generation (Exodus 17:16). Therefore whoever had God's glory and that of His people Israel at heart must, when the time was come, completely destroy and not spare Amalek who had lain in wait for the people of Israel when they had come up from Egypt (1 Samuel 15:2-3). "His latter end," according to the prophecy Balaam had been forced to utter, "shall be for destruction" (Numbers 24:20). Doubtless God had been able to use him as a rod to chasten His disobedient people (Numbers 14:39-45), but for all that, he remained the pre-eminent enemy, a type of Satan who from the beginning of the wilderness journey seeks to oppose the people of God. There is no truce in the Christian's conflict against him: the Christian is called upon to stand fast against the wiles of the devil and to fight against the spiritual powers of wickedness in the heavenlies (Ephesians 6:11-12). In this conflict Israel had once been the victor, after they had drunk the water from the rock - that is, after in figure they had tasted the presence of the Holy Spirit following the death of Christ. Led by Joshua, who represents Christ in the power of the Spirit, they had then been called upon to face this great enemy. Would the flesh be able to fill this role now, or would it prove that it was incapable of so doing? At the beginning, in appearance, the flesh displays its capacity to do so. At God's command Saul rises up, places himself at the head of the people, separates the Kenites who had shown themselves to be friends of God's people (Judges 4:11), and smites Amalek and all his people. Only he does not thoroughly execute God's command. This the flesh will never do. The flesh cannot remain inactive to the end when God bids it do so: we have the witness of this fact in the seven days at Gilgal (1 Samuel 13:8); nor can it be

active to the end, as our chapter's account witnesses. To fail to execute His commandment thoroughly, for the Lord is to fail to execute it at all. God declares: "It repenteth Me that I have set up Saul to be king; for he is turned away from following Me, and hath not fulfilled My words" (1 Samuel 15:11).

What deep sorrow for Samuel! Though knowing this man to be rejected, he intercedes for him all night long. Samuel, as we have often noticed, is always praying and interceding - for the disobedient, for the wicked, and for everyone. He mourns, he prays, but he obeys; this is peculiar to faith - the most absolute contrast with Saul's behavior. It says: Samuel "cried to Jehovah all night. And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning." The latter had in the meantime set up a monument, attributing his victory to himself, for the flesh, even when engaged in the work of God, cannot do this work for Him. As Samuel comes to meet him, Saul says: "Blessed art thou of Jehovah: I have fulfilled the word of Jehovah." How prompt he is to vaunt himself! In 1 Samuel 15:20 we shall see him excusing himself, and in 1 Samuel 15:24, accusing himself with the same quickness. This quickness is stamped on everything. But God is not to be bought off by words: "What means then," says Samuel, "this bleating of sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of oxen which I hear?" (1 Samuel 15:14). Saul, who had just said, "I have fulfilled the word of Jehovah," now acquits himself of the fault and transfers it to the people although he and the people (1 Samuel 15:9) had acted in accord. "They have brought them from the Amalekites, because the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto Jehovah thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed" (1 Samuel 15:15). In these few words we see Saul vaunting himself, accusing his accomplices, and coloring his disobedience with the name of service to the Lord. What blindness! Samuel will convict him of this; but first he reminds Saul that at the beginning he had been modest, little in his own eyes; that was his natural character, and God had blessed it. Why had he now rebelled against Jehovah's commandment? Saul answers: "I have indeed hearkened to the voice of Jehovah, and [I] have gone the way which Jehovah sent me, and [I] have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and [I] have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the devoted things, to sacrifice to Jehovah thy God in Gilgal" (1 Samuel 15:20-21) For Saul, sacrifice is better than obedience; but, "Has Jehovah delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in hearkening to the voice of Jehovah? Behold, obedience is better than sacrifice, attention than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and selfwill is as iniquity and idolatry" (1 Samuel 15:22-23). Sacrifice without obedience - solemn truth - is no better than idol worship. The first attribute of faith is obedience. Paul had received his apostleship "for obedience of faith among all the nations" (Romans 1:5). Moreover, there are many things that God prefers to sacrifice. "I delight in loving-kindness," He says, "and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6). "Go and learn," the Lord said to the Pharisees, "what that is - I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." (Matthew 9:13)

Obedience is what characterizes all the men of faith, from Abraham onward, the father of the faithful, who "obeyed; and he went out, not knowing where he was going."

Here are the results that Saul's disobedience brought upon him: "Because thou hast rejected the word of Jehovah, He hath also rejected thee from being king" (1 Samuel 15:23). In times past at Gilgal, the Lord had said to him through Samuel: "Thy kingdom shall not continue" (1 Samuel 13:14). Now the final blow has been struck: "God hath rejected thee."

How does Saul receive this sentence? He confesses his sin, but without humiliation, without contrition, still hoping to be able to avoid the consequences. "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of Jehovah, and thy words, for I feared the people, and hearkened to their voice." Always some excuse, but an astonishing quickness to confess the evil he had denied a few moments earlier. In all this there is no exercise of conscience. Saul prefers to plead his cowardice before the people as a mitigating circumstance than to take full responsibility for the sin. What a contrast to the exclamation: "I have sinned against Jehovah" out of David's mouth after his fall! Saul hopes thus to obtain pardon and be restored. It is too late; the sentence is conclusive, for God is God, and "the Hope of Israel will not lie nor repent." "I have sinned," says the poor king a second time; "honor me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel" (1 Samuel 15:30). To the end he has himself and his own reputation in view. Samuel does, in fact, honor him, but then leaves him. As long as God has not executed His sentence on the powers established by Himself, we are to acknowledge them.

"Saul worshipped Jehovah" without benefit to God or to himself. From now on God's sentence against Amalek is confided to Samuel's hands; it is he who hews Agag in pieces at Gilgal. Then he goes to Ramah, his father's house, but for him it is the place of weeping and mourning. Saul goes to his own house and from this point onward there is a complete separation between him and the prophet.

04.16. 1 Samuel 16

1 Samuel 16:1-23

1 Samuel 16:1-23, 1 Samuel 17:1-58, 1 Samuel 18:1-30, 1 Samuel 19:1-24, 1 Samuel 20:1-42, 1 Samuel 21:1-15, 1 Samuel 22:1-23, 1 Samuel 23:1-29, 1 Samuel 24:1-22, 1 Samuel 25:1-44, 1 Samuel 26:1-25, 1 Samuel 27:1-12, 1 Samuel 28:1-25, 1 Samuel 29:1-11, 1 Samuel 30:1-31, 1 Samuel 31:1-13 DAVID, THE KING ACCORDING TO GRACE 1 Samuel 16:1-23

Here the history of the true king according to God begins, the history of the king according to the flesh having been virtually terminated by his conclusive rejection.

1 Samuel 16:1-23, as we shall see, gives us a general idea of David's position before coming to the throne. But first of all, we will consider certain details which are very important for us of Samuel's character. When it is a question of human thoughts, even those of a judge and prophet, we find that they are no better than those of any other man. The Word affords us many examples of this. Here the question is not one of positive failures, but by his manner of thinking Samuel betrays a state that is not one of true communion with God. After Saul has been rejected Samuel continues to mourn for him to the point that God must reprove him: "How long wilt thou mourn for Saul?" (1 Samuel 16:1). Then instead of rejoicing that God has "provided [Himself] a king," he responds: "How shall I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me" (1 Samuel 16:2). How shall I go? - when it is God Himself telling him to go! Was it not likewise with God's servant Moses (Exodus 4:1-31) who, faced with the Lord's commands, raised objections based in appearance on humility (Exodus 3:11), on distrust of men (1 Samuel 4:1) and of himself (1 Samuel 4:10), but which, in short, beneath an admirable outward appearance hid unbelief and the mistrust of the natural heart?

Finally in 1 Samuel 16:6, seeing Eliab, Jesse's first-born, he says: "Surely Jehovah's anointed is before Him" (1 Samuel 16:6). Even this man of God is judging according to outward appearance, and God is obliged to reprove him, saying: "For it is not as man seeth; for man looketh upon the outward appearance, but Jehovah looketh upon the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). Samuel thus was here judging as a man, and his discernment was given over to the same outward qualities that Saul had possessed. With touching grace God condescends to reprove and instruct His servant on all these points. And so in the end faith predominates: "Samuel did what Jehovah said," and went ahead, counting on God's word to direct him. Once he had learned that the Lord looks at the heart, he proves himself faithful and his communion with the Lord is manifest, for he immediately judges that "Neither has Jehovah chosen" the other sons whom Jesse, their father, made to pass before the prophet. At last he anoints the only one of them whom the Lord had chosen. Once in the path of God, Samuel no longer fears. Whereas the elders of Bethlehem "trembled at his coming," he who beforehand had trembled now reassures them.

David appears on the scene. His character is remarkable from the beginning of his career. Forgotten of his father, who does not remember him except at Samuel's pressing request; despised of his brothers, of whom the eldest even taxes him with "pride" and "naughtiness of

heart” when the Spirit of God is stirring him to action (1 Samuel 17:28); and lastly, unknown to Saul, to whom his qualities are revealed (1 Samuel 16:18), who loves him greatly (1 Samuel 16:21) because of his goodness and because of the care with which he surrounds Saul, but who forgets his origin so completely that he later asks Abner whose son he is (1 Samuel 17:55). Such was David’s character in terms of his relationships. In appearance outwardly he “was ruddy, and of a lovely countenance and beautiful” (1 Samuel 16:12). This world offers different types of beauty. Saul was “choice and comely; and there was not among the children of Israel a comelier person than he.” Eliab also had a handsome appearance that captivated Samuel’s eyes, but such beauty alone is of no value except in men’s eyes. There is another kind of beauty that may be joined with outward beauty in men of faith, but that God esteems as being the reflection of character: the beauty of a pure soul or of simple faith, the outshining of a heart from which evil and sin are excluded, of a guileless heart. This is the beauty of the little child Moses of whom the Word says: He “was exceedingly lovely,” literally, “fair to God” (Acts 7:20). This is the beauty of Joseph, “of a beautiful form and of a beautiful countenance,” but a Nazarite among his brothers (Genesis 39:6); this is the beauty of Daniel (Daniel 1:4), humbly cleaving to his God in order to guard himself from the world’s defilement; and lastly, this is the beauty of David developed in the wilderness by the pastures for the sheep where in secret he experienced the strength and the glory of His God. But what is this moral beauty added to physical beauty, and yet always incomplete, in the presence of Christ’s beauty? He had no form nor comeliness, His visage was marred more than any man, but all the moral glory that filled Him shone upon His face and shed light all about Him. Grace was poured into His lips, and so it is said of Him: “Thou art fairer than the sons of men ... therefore God hath blessed Thee for ever” (Psalms 45:2). In all these men of faith, as in their perfect Model, true beauty is in reality nothing other than the shining forth of grace. David is the king according to grace and his name means “Beloved.” This character necessarily makes him a suffering man, an afflicted man here on earth, a true type of the Savior. But the one who knows Jesus finds in Him not only the perfection of the Humble Man and of the Man of Sorrows, but also other character traits, and primarily the beauty of strength. Like David, to his friends “a valiant man” (1 Samuel 16:18), the Lord is for His own the One who calms the sea and the storm, before whose majesty His enemies recoil and fall backward; who says, “I will,” and the thing is done; who binds the strong man and through His miracles spoils him of his goods.

Like David, He is “a man of war,” and if it is true that He will come to Zion, lowly as in former days and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass (Zechariah 9:9), it is just as true that He will gird His sword upon His thigh, a valiant Man, in His majesty and splendor, and that His right hand shall teach Him terrible things (Psalms 45:3-4), that He will sit as Overcomer on a white horse, followed by the armies of heaven, smiting the nations with the two-edged sword going forth from His mouth (Revelation 19:11-16).

Like David again, He is “prudent in matters” (1 Samuel 16:18 KJV), for “God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power” (Acts 10:38), and “the Spirit of Jehovah rest[s] upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah” (Isaiah 11:2).

Lastly, as “Jehovah [was] with him,” with how much more reason is He with Christ. Yes, indeed, “God was with Him” (Acts 10:38).

God's providence brings David to the king's court, but before he reigns his faith must be put to the test by all manner of sufferings. He must be the dependent man, the humbled man, despised, hated, persecuted; in the midst of this life of renuncements and strife he will experience that his God is sufficient for everything. Thus the Lord's anointed will be tried for many long years in order to manifest to the eyes of the people all the qualities of grace that constitute, according to God's mind, David's rights to Israel's throne and to glory. This grace triumphs in his feelings toward Saul, his relentless enemy.

Hardly is David called to the throne but what Saul's moral condition changes completely. Until that day the Spirit of God had been with the king according to the flesh, and this explains each of Saul's successes against the enemies of Israel. Now the Spirit of the Lord comes upon David (1 Samuel 16:13) and departs from Saul, who is left in the power of "an evil spirit from Jehovah" (1 Samuel 16:14). This is a judgment from God, a chastisement upon the king who becomes henceforth in this history that which he had not been previously: a type of the Antichrist. At the same time God demonstrates that His Spirit alone is capable of raising and dispelling the evil spirit, when David takes a harp and plays with his hand before Saul.

04.17. 1 Samuel 17

1 Samuel 17:1-58

1 Samuel 16:1-23 has provided us with a general description of David's character in his position as the Lord's anointed and, in a special manner, in his relationship with Saul. 1 Samuel 17:1-58 takes up, so to say, the description of his history from another point of view. This is why we have the seemingly superfluous repetition of his family relationship that we find in 1 Samuel 17:12-13.

We have before us now no longer the character but the career and activity of David, a type of Christ, from its beginning to its final and conclusive result, the complete victory over Goliath. In a word, the entire history of Christ, the Victor over Satan, is summarized in this period of David's activity. The Philistines had already been conquered many times, but not their leader, the giant Goliath. Sure of his strength, he presents himself before the assembled people and challenges them; and when he has succeeded in inspiring terror in those whom he wishes to subjugate, he cries out: "I have defied the ranks of Israel this day!" He does not know that it is not with Israel that he has to do, but with God, and that he is defying God Himself in defying His people. This is his downfall. As for David, he presents himself here (1 Samuel 17:17) as the one sent by his father to his brothers; his service begins with them. But God's purpose is a deliverance extending far beyond this limited circle. Joseph had done likewise (Genesis 37:14) and had become not only the savior of his brothers, but also the savior and master of Egypt.

David sets out on his mission, having already exercised a secret ministry in the wilderness where he kept the sheep. That is where he had smitten the lion and the bear, a type of Christ when He bound the strong man. Before entering into combat with the Philistine he had delivered his father's sheep when the enemy sought to snatch them away and devour them. Christ did the same during His lifetime; not one of the sheep that His Father had given Him had been lost. He bound the strong man so as to set at liberty those who had been bruised and to preach the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18-19). He stood alone in the breach, saying: "Let these go away." But He had much more to do than that, for He must abolish the power of the enemy himself.

Like Christ, David is here a true servant. He "[rises] up early in the morning" (1 Samuel 17:20) and takes his charge, so as to accomplish his father's will. Already anointed, he is the Spirit's man for this service, while at the same time maintaining his character of humility in the pastures of the sheep.

He comes into the camp, where his brothers accuse his confidence in God and his faith of being pride and naughtiness of heart (1 Samuel 17:28). We too can ever expect the same treatment ourselves in following the simple path of faith. Our relatives can no more understand our motives than the Lord's brothers could understand His. David answers Eliab: "What have I now done? Was it not laid upon me?" (1 Samuel 17:29). What had he done to deserve being insulted? Did he not have a reason for going down to his brothers, when the God of Israel was daily being insulted by the enemy?

David asks what will be done for the man who kills the Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel (1 Samuel 17:26). He learns that the king will enrich him with great riches, will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free. But it is not to obtain this reward that he enters the campaign; it is for God, for Israel's deliverance, to make the Lord known in all the earth, and that all the congregation should know how the Lord saves (1 Samuel 17:46-47). Doubtless his victory gives him, like Christ, great riches, a bride, and the liberation of his father's house, but this is the result rather than the purpose of his work.

David announces to Saul what he is going to accomplish (1 Samuel 17:32). The king, who can think of nothing but human methods, wants to provide him with his own armor; but David cannot go with weapons belonging to the flesh, and he has never even tried them. He wants no other weapons than those a shepherd uses to defend or regather his sheep. As for us, the Word is that weapon that faith alone can use; it overthrows Satan. Human labor can have no part in such a conflict. When he presents himself before the Philistine, although David is "a valiant man and a man of war" (1 Samuel 16:18), he does not look like a warrior. Even his beauty, the reflection of the Lord's grace, is disdained by Goliath (1 Samuel 17:42). He is here the representative of God whom the Philistine had defied. To glorify this God whom Satan had dishonored: such was David's purpose, and such was Christ's purpose. Their strength consisted of fighting in His name: "I come to thee in the name of Jehovah of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied" (1 Samuel 17:45). In David's spirit there was not a doubt about the results of the contest. "This day will Jehovah deliver thee up into my hand" (1 Samuel 17:46). Often when engaged in conflict we doubt; even a Jonathan is not sure of the result and says: "It may be" (1 Samuel 14:6); here, there is nothing of the kind; rather, there is absolute faith which has the secret of the Lord and counts upon great things. Here David is the true type of Christ, for he represents God before the enemy. With his first blow his sling strikes Goliath on the forehead; he falls, and David kills him with his own weapons (1 Samuel 17:51). Through death Christ overcame him who had the power of death, that is to say, the devil. Then the victor withdraws to his own tent (1 Samuel 17:54), carrying off the trophies of his victory, like Christ who has gone up to His own dwelling place, leading "captivity captive."

Goliath's defeat is also the Philistines' defeat; the world, like its leader, is now a conquered enemy; we may well take courage in facing it, even though, on the other hand, trouble and tribulation are our necessary portion.

Although he was relieved by Jesse's son, Saul does not know David's origin. "Whose son is this young man?" he asks Abner. Does this not recall the Jews' ignorance in John 7:1-53 about the origin of Christ and the place from which He had come? Saul does not know him any better when he presents himself, holding in his hands the sure earnest of victory.

04.18. 1 Samuel 18

1 Samuel 18:1-30 Here we enter the third period of Jonathan's history. In 1 Samuel 13:1-23, he had won a victory that was without profit for God's people. In 1 Samuel 14:1-52, a great deliverance was wrought by the energy of his faith, displayed in the fight against the enemy. Here Jonathan enters into a personal relationship with David, Goliath's conqueror. In type he is one who knows Christ as the One who has conquered Satan through death but who is nevertheless rejected by the world. This knowledge corresponds to the knowledge Christians have today, although Jonathan properly is the type of the remnant of Israel to whom the Lord will make Himself known before taking the kingdom, and who love Christ even though He is still rejected by the people.

Up to this point Jonathan had the character of a young man, strong in faith, who had fought with the enemy; now he goes further: his soul is bound up with David's soul when he hears him speak. He appreciates the moral beauty with which his words are impressed more than his own outward advantages; he finds in David a soul to whom his own soul answers; suddenly a special bond of love and fellowship develops between them, produced by the charm of David's words. The power of God having helped Jonathan, he might have been led to attribute some measure of strength to himself; he sees and hears David and immediately he realizes that he is nothing. Whatever he possesses is good only to present to the conqueror; he strips himself of that which he possesses in order to give it to David, the only one worthy in his estimation. Jonathan's robe and garments, tokens of his royal dignity, belong to David; his sword, the instrument of his victories, belongs to David; his bow and the belt of his strength belong to David, for all strength belongs to the son of Jesse (1 Samuel 18:4)! Not only does Jonathan give him everything, but he "loved him as his own soul" (1 Samuel 18:1). No longer are strength and energy at work in him, but rather the affections drawn forth by this all-powerful attractiveness, the perfect character of the Lord's anointed. To Jonathan's love the love of his friend responds. "Very pleasant wast thou unto me," David later cries out in his grief of heart on the dark day when his brother is taken away from him (2 Samuel 1:26).

Saul believes he has rights over David; he "would not let him return to his father's house" (1 Samuel 18:2), whereas Jonathan who has the intelligence of faith makes a covenant with David (1 Samuel 18:3), seeks his protection, and recognizes that there is no security except with him. Faith is the basis of Jonathan's love; he shows this clearly by saluting David as the true king. The continuation of 1 Samuel 18:1-30 presents the progress of David and of Saul; progress for good in the one, and progress for evil in the other. A feeling of animosity produced by Satan of necessity leads to other expressions of ill-will; it is enough that the tares are sown by the enemy in the wicked heart of the man for them to grow all by themselves and finally invade his entire being. "Saul was very wroth ... and he said, They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed the thousands; and what is there more for him but the kingdom?" (1 Samuel 18:8). This is not yet irritation against David, but rather irritation against men's opinion which was elevating David and lowering the king at the very moment when Jonathan's faith was sacrificing

everything for the beloved. This is because the flesh can never bear being nothing in Christ's presence. From this day onward Saul eyed David (1 Samuel 18:9). The next day the depth of his heart is revealed; the evil spirit comes upon him. When he was among the prophets he had been able to give the impression that he was dependent on the Spirit of God; delivered up to Satan, the fruits of his wicked heart are immediately seen, and this man who "prophesied in the midst of the house" casts his spear in order to "transfix David to the wall" (1 Samuel 18:10-11). In 1 Samuel 18:12, Saul was afraid of David and, being unable to endure his presence he "removed him from him" while giving him an apparent honor, for he made him "captain over a thousand." This honor - and this is what he desired - removes David from his sight, but delivers up the poor king to every suggestion of pride and hatred when he no longer has in his presence his servant, the model of humility and grace. Poor Saul! he deliberately deprives himself of the only person able to soothe him and serve him as a bulwark against the attacks of Satan.

Soon the king, who is already a murderer in his heart, becomes that in reality (1 Samuel 18:11), seeking in an insidious way to rid himself of the object of his hatred. He promises his daughter Merab to David, but this is only a sham. "Fight Jehovah's battles," Saul tells him, full of outward respect, while in the depths of his heart hatred is boiling and the desire to see "the hand of the Philistines ... upon him" (1 Samuel 18:17-19).

Michal, Saul's second daughter, loves David. Saul tells himself: "I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be upon him" (1 Samuel 18:21). In his thoughts this union is a new means of getting rid of his future son-in-law. He dissimulates and orders his servants to speak to David secretly, saying: "Behold, the king has delight in thee, and all his servants love thee" (1 Samuel 18:22). He pretends to feel affection toward him in order to push the son of Jesse to his destruction all the more surely.

David's great humility in face of the king's proposals only moves Saul further along in his wicked plan. Man's hatred and pride never could comprehend the humility and the love of Christ. The wiles of the adversary are finally foiled when David wins the victory and receives the king's daughter as his wife, because the destruction of the Lord's enemies is required of him in exchange for her. The result for Saul is that his fear increases and his hatred becomes continual enmity: "Saul was yet the more afraid of David; and Saul was David's enemy continually" (1 Samuel 18:29).

During this period we observe David's progress in every sphere and in every direction: "David went forth; whithersoever Saul sent him he prospered ... and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants" (1 Samuel 18:5). "Jehovah was with him ... and he went out and came in before the people. And David prospered in all his ways, and Jehovah was with him ... all Israel and Judah loved David, for he went out and came in before them" (1 Samuel 18:12-16). All these qualities of necessity made David esteemed; but we must not forget that human love has many different traits and that only one of these traits has value in the sight of God. The daughters of Israel, the people, and Saul's servants love David for his deliverances. Even Saul, at a given moment (1 Samuel 16:21), "loved [David] greatly," because of the relief that he brings him in his sufferings. Michal loves David according to nature - which does not hinder her from despising him later on (2 Samuel 6:16). Lastly, Jonathan loves him with the only love which is true, good, and enduring; he loves him as his own soul; he cherishes him for what David is in

himself.

Thus David succeeds better than all Saul's servants, and his name was much esteemed (1 Samuel 18:30); a lovely picture of the Lord at the beginning of His career (Luke 4:15)!

04.19. 1 Samuel 19

1 Samuel 19:1-24 In 1 Samuel 18:1-30 Saul had used roundabout ways to rid himself of the Lord's anointed; here he contrives a genuine conspiracy against him: "Saul spoke to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should slay David" (1 Samuel 19:1). Jonathan preaches grace to his father by presenting to him what David was, what David had done for him at the risk of his own life, and by reminding him that he himself, Saul, had at first rejoiced after he had witnessed these things: "Thou didst see it, and didst rejoice" (1 Samuel 19:5). How far superior was David's activity to all that Jonathan could do for him (and Jonathan was conscious of this), even though he loved David as his own soul!

Saul listens to Jonathan and swears: "As Jehovah liveth, he shall not be put to death!" (1 Samuel 19:6). By presenting grace to the heart of the natural man God allows his wickedness to be momentarily arrested in its development, but this is not conversion. Saul's murderous intention is changed, yet nevertheless he does not repent. He retracts his decision, makes a new resolution when faced with the exhortations of a man of faith, but hardly is this resolution made than he shows himself to be in no way free from his impulses and by his behavior proves that he is a miserable slave of Satan. As for David, he does not change. "He was in his presence as previously" (1 Samuel 19:7). The grace that has led him up to now remains impressed upon his person and upon his behavior. A fresh triumph of David's re-awakens the evil spirit that had taken control of Saul. As long as the believer does not trouble Satan by victories won over his followers his hostility remains asleep, as it were, but his mortal hatred soon awakens. We see this hatred against David at the very moment when the evil spirit seems to be subdued by the gracious relief which David procures for the king. A moment comes, then, when the only thing the believer can do is to flee, to escape like a bird out of the fowler's net. Now David's death is irrevocably decreed. Michal, motivated by her natural affection for David, comes to his help in her own way, God using here the human feelings that animated her (1 Samuel 19:11-17). This passage also reveals to us the fact that there was an image (a teraphim) in David's house. Certainly, David did not worship it, but its presence allows us to conclude that he put up with it. The teraphim was not an idol, properly speaking, and the Word is careful to distinguish the one from the other. (See Hosea 3:4; Zechariah 10:2; 1 Samuel 15:22-23; 2 Kings 23:24; Ezekiel 21:21; Genesis 31:19; Genesis 31:30; Genesis 31:32-35; Judges 17:3-5; Judges 18:17-18; Judges 18:20) The image (teraphim) is somewhat inferior to the idol; it is a sort of demi-god whose domain is the household; it is clothed with a certain importance, and is even consulted on occasion. Such superstitions quickly lead to true idols; this is exactly how Jacob judged the matter, when he told Laban to take back his gods (Genesis 31:32). Often the believer lacks the energy to banish these occasions of stumbling from his family, and each one of us must be earnestly mindful of this even though, like Jacob et David, we may not personally attribute to them any influence over our life. The image had evidently been introduced into David's household by Michal, Saul's daughter, who was thus a snare to the man of God.

Michal avoids her father's wrath by acting before him as though she were one of David's enemies, constrained by his threats to allow him to escape: "He said to me, Let me go; why should I kill thee?" (1 Samuel 19:17). How different her heart is from Jonathan's who openly, at his own risk and peril, took up the defense of the one whom he tenderly loved.

"David fled, and escaped, and came to Samuel to Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and dwelt in Naioth" (1 Samuel 19:18). David tells everything to Samuel, God's representative and prophet. He becomes his companion, and the two of them dwell together. Such is, for David, the result of this trial. This leads us to consider the Psalms that speak of David's afflictions. We assume that none of our readers are ignoring the fact that the Psalms are prophetic songs, describing the moral circumstances the remnant of Israel will pass through in the last days. This remnant will be sustained during the tribulation by the Spirit of Christ, of the One who has in grace passed through analogous circumstances, although much more terrible, because His walk of obedience, dependence, integrity, holiness, and love resulted but in death, and He could only be delivered "from the horns of the buffaloes." It is therefore natural to see David used as the principal organ to express prophetically the feelings of the remnant and of Christ. Is not his life, as we have already observed many times, a striking type of the life of the Messiah who was to come, and as such had David not passed through all the phases of rejection, humiliation, and persecution which except for death represent the Savior's sufferings? We are not saying this with the intention of entering more deeply into this subject, so often treated in detail by others, but to underscore the fact that the Psalms of David which carry us so high and so far into the prophetic future are in first line drawn from his personal experiences. In them, too, we can find a faithful expression of his heart's condition in the midst of trial, the results produced by God's discipline with regard to him, and the resources that were his when tribulation overtook him. From this restricted point of view only, as events progressively unfold we will consider the Psalms that are related to them. The account in this chapter has its counterpart in Psalms 59:1-17, inspired "when Saul sent, and they watched the house [of David] to kill him." While Saul's messengers, men of blood who were gathered against him, went round about the city during the night, David was raising his heart in supplication to the Lord. He was looking to Him for deliverance (Psalms 59:1-2), assured that He would be gracious toward him (Psalms 59:10), for they sought his life not "for [his] transgression, nor for [his] sin," but rather because he belonged to the Lord. For the moment he is not asking the Lord to slay his enemies (Psalms 59:11), to kill Saul, in order that David's people may not forget these things. The profane king must remain alive until the patience of the Lord's anointed shall have had its perfect work. Later God will consume the enemy in order to establish his reign.

Isn't it touching to see this man of God at the very moment when he is so closely pressed and when his life could be cut off entirely occupied with the Lord, with His designs, and with His deliverance. Indeed, he does not question either the love of God nor His will to deliver him. "But as for me, I will sing of Thy strength; yea, I will sing aloud of Thy loving-kindness in the morning" (Psalms 59:16). In the morning? when his enemies "howl like a dog" during the night of anguish, as they watch his house and go round about the city! Thus he was sure of deliverance because he counted on God, and he can add in this extreme peril in anticipation of this deliverance: "Thou hast been to me a high fortress and a refuge in the day of my trouble!" (Psalms 59:16).

Let us return to our chapter. In 1 Samuel 19:19-24, all Saul's efforts against David fail, and yet he has his messengers follow him, even when he finds refuge under his protector Samuel. Against their own will these instruments of the enemy experience the influence of the Spirit of God in whose power they prophesy, a serious warning which neither converts them nor saves them. Even Saul - and this not for the first time in his life - is here forced to prophesy by the Spirit of God. In 1 Samuel 18:10 he had done so by the evil spirit which had come upon him. God is able to speak through the mouth of a Saul who at other times is the mouthpiece of Satan; He can do the same through the mouth of a Balaam or of a Caiaphas. This only proves that God uses someone as an instrument if it suits Him; but it is necessary to distinguish between the quickening activity of the Holy Spirit and His various operations in power. Power may communicate a great knowledge of the Word and perhaps also the energy that uses this knowledge on behalf of others, but it never leads us to self-judgment and appropriation of Christ as the One answering to our needs. It gives neither repentance nor faith; there must be a work of the Spirit in the heart in order to reach the conscience, to give an awareness of sin, to lead a soul to God. Without this, there is no new life. The hearts of Saul and of his messengers were not changed, but God had come upon their spirits through prophecy in order to expose their foolishness and in order to save David, His beloved.

04.20. 1 Samuel 20

1 Samuel 20:1-42

“David fled from Naioth by Ramah, and came and said before Jonathan, What have I done? what is mine iniquity, and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeks my life?” (1 Samuel 20:1). Whereas the natural man remains under the terrible “What hast thou done?” once addressed to Cain (Genesis 4:10), the man who is justified by faith, persecuted without cause, can say like David: “What have I done?” But David could speak like this only at this point in his career. Later, when persecuted by his son Absalom, he could no longer say, “What have I done?” Still later, when he had committed the serious sin of numbering the people, he is obliged to confess to God while under His judgment: “I have sinned greatly in what I have done” (2 Samuel 24:10). Yet nevertheless, at the very moment when he was under discipline he is presented to us as a type of Christ standing in the breach in order to save his people, when he says: “Behold, it is I that have sinned, and it is I that have committed iniquity; but these sheep, what have they done?” (1 Samuel 20:17). But only One could say: “I do always the things that are pleasing to Him [that has sent Me]”; only One at the last moment of His career could receive the testimony from the mouth of the converted robber: “This man has done nothing amiss” (Luke 23:41).

David, who is such a precious type of Christ, also receives this public testimony before Saul through Jonathan’s mouth: “Why should he be put to death? what has he done?” (1 Samuel 20:32). What a privilege it is for the believer to have through the Holy Spirit the possibility of copying the Lord in this, as in every other thing. Only, in order to produce this fruit of righteousness the Lord never needed discipline as David did or as we do. All His afflictions were on the one hand the fruit and the witness of His grace toward us. They brought out on the other hand the absolute perfection in Him, whether in His life or in His death. In Him the meal offering, just as the burnt offering, caused an unmixed “sweet savor to the Lord” to rise.

We shall see more than once, even during this period of his life when David could say: “What have I done? that certain details of his behavior necessitate God’s intervention in discipline. Thus we find even here in 1 Samuel 20:6 a lack of truth which, although understandable, is no less to be condemned. In David the truth was below grace: it was reserved for the Word become flesh to bring into this world unmingled grace united to perfect truth. (Jonah 1:1-51).

Whereas David, the man of faith, knows perfectly well the danger to which his faithfulness exposed him and, seeing only a step between himself and death (1 Samuel 20:3), knows that his only resource is in God, Jonathan is still counting on the assistance that he believes he can give his friend (1 Samuel 20:2). He has a certain confidence in his father’s character; he wishes that the Lord might be with David as He had been with Saul (1 Samuel 20:13). He really does not reach a high level of spiritual intelligence nor of appreciation of the human heart. It is always so for the believer when he is associated with the world by any links whatsoever. Jonathan has still not understood that God has rejected Saul, even when on the other hand all his confidence is in David. Is he not assured of his power in the future and of his goodwill? “Thou shalt not cut off thy

kindness from my house forever, no, not when Jehovah cuts off the enemies of David, every one from the face of the earth" (1 Samuel 20:15). He continues to forget himself here in proclaiming that the kingdom belongs to his friend. And when is it that Jonathan chooses to commend himself to David's protection? At the moment when David is fleeing, his life exposed at every instant! Is it not the same for us? Have we not found our protector, our refuge, and all our hope in a rejected Christ?

It is beautiful to see this absence of egoism in Jonathan in presence of the one who would inherit all the rights that birth would appear to have conferred on Saul's son. Ah! this is because he loved David as his own soul; because from the beginning he had given power, authority, the kingdom - in a word, everything - to the son of Jesse. Saul cried out: "As long as the son of Jesse lives upon earth, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom" (1 Samuel 20:31), for to him his son's being established was more than all of David's glories. To him it was a shame to company with the true king: "Thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own shame and to the shame of thy mother's nakedness" (1 Samuel 20:30). Such words deeply wound Jonathan's heart; he leaps up at this insult, but he is grieved, not on account of the insult to himself and his mother, but "for David, because his father had done him shame" (1 Samuel 20:34). He loves David, dishonored and cursed by Saul, with the same ardor with which he had once loved him in the splendor of his youth and victory.

Jonathan comes to David's assistance in this extremity. In a last touching interview "they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded" (1 Samuel 20:41). How Jonathan's lovable and sympathetic character endears him to us; yet nevertheless he lacked one thing, one thing only; he did not have enough faith to follow the rejected king. His position, it is true, made such a step very difficult, but for faith difficulties ought not to count. Jonathan should have shared David's afflictions more fully than with his heart alone, and because he did not do so he was later obliged to share his father's defeat and ruin.

04.21. 1 Samuel 21

1 Samuel 21:1-15 In the preceding chapter David had shown himself to be somewhat below his usual quality of character. Here it is likewise, for he lies to Ahimelech and uses a ruse that is not to his honor in the presence of Achish. Yet nevertheless at Nob (1 Samuel 21:1-6) he presents us with one of the most important features of the rejected Messiah. This incident is noted in Matthew 12:1-8, Mark 2:23-28, and Luke 6:1-5. In the first of these passages the Lord having proclaimed that true rest is found in Himself (Matthew 11:28-30), leaves his disciples free to carry out an act permitted by the law (Deuteronomy 23:25), but which in the eyes of the Pharisees violated and profaned the Sabbath. The situation had been the same for David at Nob, for it was on a Sabbath day, the day when the shewbread was replaced (cf. Leviticus 24:8), that he presented himself before the priest. Now why did the Lord act in this way? It was because like David He Himself, the Beloved, had been rejected by the people whom the legal system ordained by God had proved unable to lead to recognize their Messiah. The Sabbath, sign of the covenant between God and His people, was thus being violated by the fact that the people were rejecting their God. There was no more rest under the old legal system. Henceforth the Father was obliged to work anew, and the Son Himself was working with Him. Man's Sabbath had ended, and the rejection of God in the person of His Son had as consequence the abandoning of the legal system of the Jews, the right of the Son of man to use the Sabbath as He saw fit, and the introduction of a new system in which He associated His disciples and companions with Himself. Christ having been rejected, as David had been, there was no more rest for the creature in this world, but rather a rest outside of this world based upon the work of redemption and which could be possessed through the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. A second fact accompanied David's rejection. He had Ahimelech give him the shewbread which only the priests were allowed to eat once it had been removed from the table. This bread taken from before God's presence was "in a manner common" (1 Samuel 21:5). In the presence of the rejection of His king, what value could the shewbread, which presented the true Israel in Christ to God, have in God's sight. So David could consider this bread profane. Sovereign grace rose above legal ordinances, for it was more important to feed David and his followers than to preserve that which had become old.

David asks for a weapon. Ahimelech has no arms other than Goliath's sword. This instrument of David's victory was kept behind the ephod wrapped in a cloth, looked after and set in a place of honor under the very eyes of God. Likewise the testimony of Christ's victory, death, by which He conquered the prince of death, has been carried as a memorial into the most holy place where Jesus has entered in by His own blood.

David said: "There is none like that" (1 Samuel 21:9). Let us not forget that, if David is a type of Christ, he is often also at the same time a type of believers. Like David, we go weaponless to meet the enemy, but one weapon alone is sufficient for us: the death of Christ and our death with Him. We find this in the sanctuary. There is none like it and Satan can do nothing against this weapon which has vanquished him.

Armed in this manner, David goes to Achish, the king of Gath (1 Samuel 21:10-15). Why then is he struck with fear as he presents himself before this king? It is because he was led there by his natural wisdom and not by the Lord. No more than Egypt for Abraham ought Philistia to be a refuge for David. Thinking to escape Saul in this way, he merely exchanges one enemy for another and finds dishonor and contempt. But it is very comforting to consider in the two psalms that are attributed to this point of his history the experiences that David had of which the historical account tells us nothing.

Psalms 56:1-13 was composed "when the Philistines took him in Gath." The weakness of his faith had caused him to seek refuge with Israel's enemies. What does he find there? Man, who instead of helping him oppresses him and would swallow him up (Psalms 56:1). He whom carnal fear had led to flee from Saul now learns what the flesh is. He whom confidence in man had made to go down to Achish now finds what man is. He finds only danger and threats. His enemies gather together, they hide themselves, marking his steps and lying in wait for his soul, wresting his words all day long, formulating their thoughts against him for evil; but he still has God. He has learned to trust completely in God: "In the day that I am afraid, I will confide in Thee" (Psalms 56:3). This is the great lesson that God had taught him. If God is for him, what can the flesh do to him? "In God I put my confidence: I will not fear; what can flesh do unto me?" (Psalms 56:4). What will man do to him? "In God have I put my confidence: I will not fear; what can man do unto me?" (Psalms 56:11). Now, delivered from death, he desires to be kept from falling in the future. Nothing makes our walk steady like trial, discipline, and the experiences that are related thereto: "For Thou hast delivered my soul from death; wilt thou not keep my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?" (Psalms 56:13).

Psalms 34:1-10 was composed "when [David] changed his behavior before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed." This psalm celebrates the Lord's tender care of the believer under trial and expresses David's confidence, flowing out of the fact that in his affliction, God had taken his cause in hand. This man of God in seeking help from Achish had had only a broken reed in hand. Now, instructed by God, he can say: "I sought Jehovah, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears" (Psalms 34:4). "This afflicted one called, and Jehovah heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles" (Psalms 34:6). He had learned the lesson that God was teaching him through His discipline. The experience he had just had enabled him to encourage others: "Taste and see that Jehovah is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him!" (Psalms 34:8).

Moreover he learned from experience that deception and lying could not procure good: "What man is he that desireth life, and loveth days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile" (Psalms 34:12-13).

David's experience at the court of Achish had been deeply humiliating, for the dignity which God had conferred upon him had been compromised by his behavior. His heart was broken and his spirit overwhelmed because of this, but under this discipline he had learned to know himself and to know the Lord in a more intimate way, and what more could he desire? "Jehovah is nigh to those that are of a broken heart, and saveth them that are of a contrite spirit" (Psalms 34:18).

Thus in his prophetic songs the soul of this man of God expresses what he had learned personally through the afflictions and the discipline which were necessary for him.

04.22. 1 Samuel 22

1 Samuel 22:1-23

“And David departed thence, and escaped to the cave of Adullam” (1 Samuel 22:1). That is where he composed the beautiful 142nd Psalm which expresses the feelings filling his soul in his solitude. “There is no man that knoweth me: refuge hath failed me; no man careth for my soul” (1 Samuel 22:4). “In the way wherein I walked have they hidden a snare for me” (1 Samuel 22:3). This is written when - what mockery - Saul had the audacity to accuse him, saying: “My son has stirred up my servant as a liar-in-wait against me” (1 Samuel 22:8). But David found, precisely because all human refuge failed him, a sure refuge for his soul: “I cried unto Thee, Jehovah, I said, Thou art my refuge” (Psalms 142:5). He could count on the God of Israel for deliverance from his persecutors, for they were stronger than he (1 Samuel 22:6). Could David ever regret being found at such an extremity, abandoned by all, since there it was that his soul knew and appreciated the sovereign refuge that is found in God? Thus the psalm ends with the assurance that filled his soul, for his time of solitude and of being forsaken would come to an end. “The righteous,” he says, “shall surround me” (1 Samuel 22:7).

After this pouring out of his soul, in that same cave of Adullam David receives the Lord's answer as the firstfruits of his confidence. He is no longer alone. “And his brethren and all his father's house heard it, and they went down thither to him” (1 Samuel 22:1). David, a type of the rejected Christ, becomes a center of attraction for his brothers. His family, all his relatives, gather themselves around him. They were for David, as for Christ, “the excellent of the earth.” They recognized the Lord's anointed in him, the one through whom the Lord would save His people, the instrument of grace in Israel. They knew that they, even as the head of their family, could expect nothing from the world but contempt and and persecution; so their only resource was to seek refuge in the one who from the human point of view was himself without resource. But another class of people also sought refuge with David in the cave of Adullam: “And every one in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one of embittered spirit collected round him; and he became a captain over them” (1 Samuel 22:2). Not only those related to him because they shared a common origin, but also such who had no such bond, joined David. Their common characteristic was that they had lost everything. Some were “in distress,” not knowing which way to turn; others were “in debt,” unable to pay; and finally, others were “of embittered spirit,” having sorrows for which there was no remedy, created by the state of things in Israel.

All these found a sure refuge with David as is found today with a rejected Christ. But they found much more. David is able to create, to form, the most wretched beings in his own image. The reflection of his moral beauty falls on those who have nothing to bring him but their misery. In the dark cave of Adullam the light shining forth from David shines on these four hundred men who surround him, and that which grace made of them in the day of tribulation will be recognized by all eyes, acclaimed by every mouth in the day of glory which is already approaching. All these outlaws will surround the king's throne and will be called “David's mighty men” (2 Samuel 23:8).

But that was not the full extent of the resources included in the cave of Adullam for the companions of the son of Jesse: Gad the prophet (1 Samuel 22:5), God's mouthpiece and the one who bore His testimony, was there with David. The revelation of God's mind, absent from Saul's court and from his people, found refuge there. Lastly, the king's murderous act against Nob drives Abiathar the priest to David (1 Samuel 22:20). Later he comes to him with the ephod in his hand (1 Samuel 23:6). The means of approaching God, of consulting Him at all times, of entering into fellowship with Him, is the happy privilege of these vagabond people whom the world dishonors and despises.

Dear reader, have you found refuge with the rejected Christ? A person doesn't do so until he is without resource and has lost all hope of helping himself. The world in this case will despise you, but not as much as you will despise yourself. And nonetheless you will lack nothing. The felt presence of the Lord Jesus experienced by your soul; the treasures of the Word placed at your disposition and known, as even a Jonathan clinging to Saul's court was never able to know them; and finally the means of approaching God, furnished by the priesthood of Christ who brings us into fellowship with Him: such are the benefits which our David dispenses during the time of His rejection.

Nothing more is wanting than that He be manifested in glory to the eyes of all, for already He is manifested as the center of His Assembly, even if this, as here, should consist of only four hundred faithful souls united around Him. In 1 Samuel 22:5, David obeys the word that Gad brings him: "Abide not in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah." Here he is then in the very territory of the enemy, but what does he have to fear and what can Saul do to him? The Lord is with him. What does it matter if he acts contrary to all human prudence? God has designs of grace and blessing in what He commands; our business is to obey.

Saul summons Ahimelech and accuses David of conspiring against himself and of lying in wait for him (1 Samuel 22:7-8; 1 Samuel 22:13). Ahimelech with noble frankness openly speaks the truth and bears witness to David, that peerless man, who is "faithful ... who is the king's son-in-law, and hath access to thy secret council, and is honorable in thy house." Surely this is no insulting word, but it is a severe lesson given to Saul. The delicacy of his feelings prevents Ahimelech from mentioning the lie that David had used to have the bread and sword given to him: a lie that would have compromised him in Saul's eyes. But it is this lie which finally leads to the ruin of the priest and all his house. David is well aware of this when he tells Abiathar: "I am accountable for all the lives of thy father's house" (1 Samuel 22:22). Thus he judges himself. But at the same time he is from God's side a type of the One who is the believer's safeguard: "Abide with me, fear not; for he that seeks my life seeks thy life; for with me thou art in safe keeping" (1 Samuel 22:23). This is a perfect compensation for what Abiathar and his father's house had to suffer for the sake of the Lord's anointed. This is where Psalms 52:1-9 comes in. David had learned that "Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul, and said unto him, David came to the house of Ahimelech." And so he announces judgment without mercy on the Edomite, Israel's sworn enemy. But that does not at all destroy the confidence and assurance of the man of God. Much to the contrary, against the dark background of this wickedness the believer's blessed portion stands out in all its splendor: "But as for me, I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I will confide in the loving-kindness of God for ever and ever. I will praise Thee for ever, because Thou hast done it; and I will wait on Thy name, before Thy godly ones, for it is good (Psalms 52:8-9).

04.23. 1 Samuel 23

1 Samuel 23:1-29 The Philistines fight against Keilah. David could have refrained from intervening and could have left the trouble of helping them up to Saul, but such abstention is far from the thoughts of this man of faith. Here the rejected David becomes a savior to Israel. He stands in the breach, but not without having consulted the Lord. Abiathar had not yet come down with the ephod; David was still lacking this means ordained by God for consulting Him. The outward resources may be beyond reach but access to God will never be, for this is free and wide open to all. David speaks with God as with a friend. Full of condescension, the Lord answers and - strikingly - in a manner more intimate and more detailed than when David consults Him with the ephod. He fills the heart of His beloved one with confidence and assurance. Whatever his companions may say (1 Samuel 23:3), David, acting on the word of God does not allow their fears to stop him, and he fights for the people of Israel even though they are the tool of his worst enemy. So it is with our salvation through Christ, wrought for us in our condition of enmity toward Him.

We find this truth, already perceived in the history of Jonathan, here again: that the fight of faith is waged outside of man's religious system which can only hinder it. On the rare occasions when he inquires of the Lord Saul does not receive an answer, or receives an answer by the lot which pronounces judgment on his entire behavior (1 Samuel 14:40). David without the outward aid of divine ordinances converses directly with his God. From this point onward we see David hounded, pursued, and betrayed, hiding in caves, in forests, endangered in cities, seeking refuge in strongholds, wandering on the mountains, on the hills, living in the wilderness of Judah, in that of Ziph, of Maon, of Paran, having no place to rest his head.

He enters Keilah. Saul in his terrible blindness can say: "God has cast him off into mine hand," although he had heard Samuel's solemn word: "[Jehovah] hath also rejected thee from being king!" (1 Samuel 15:23). What hardening of heart! The persecutor of the "beloved one" believes that he knows God and has Him on his side, but he does not know the God of Israel any better than he knows himself. So, just as it says in Psalms 2:4 : "He that dwelleth in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision"; so the Word answers here with well-deserved irony: "God did not give him into his hand" (1 Samuel 23:14). When the ephod is brought (1 Samuel 23:6) God answers by the ephod and David receives adequate direction. It is lovely to see him take on the character of a servant here. He, to whom the kingdom belonged, claims only the most humble place before God. "Jehovah, God of Israel, Thy servant hath heard for certain ... will Saul come down, as Thy servant hath heard? Jehovah, God of Israel, I beseech thee, tell Thy servant" (1 Samuel 23:10-11). In this, is he not a lovely type of Christ who, knowing that the Father had placed all things in His hands, came not to be served but to serve God and His own? In the wilderness of Ziph Jonathan comes to visit David (1 Samuel 23:16-18). On many an occasion Jonathan had proved, as we have seen, how dear David was to him. He had warned him of the danger that he was risking (1 Samuel 19:2), had spoken well of him to Saul (1 Samuel 19:4), had made a covenant with him, acknowledging his rights to the kingdom (1 Samuel 20:12-17), had borne shame and had suffered for him (1 Samuel 20:34); what then still remained for him to do? A

visit to David to reassure him of his affection? No. In the life of a man of faith there always comes a critical moment when he must break his ties with the old system according to the flesh which, in actual fact, is in the hands of the enemy of God. God is going to judge this political and religious system. Today the situation is the same in Christendom as it once was in Saul's world. That which is allied to the system will fall with it and will be involved, even if only outwardly, in its loss. Well as he loved David, Jonathan was walking in this old order of things, established around the king according to the flesh, that was going to disappear. What was there to do but leave it when it was raising hateful, direct opposition to the Lord's anointed? He needed to break off with his father's court, take his place with David, with those bankrupt men at Adullam, a humiliating position for a king's son; he needed to stay at Ziph with David, in his thoughts taking not the next place to him (1 Samuel 23:17), but like Abigail the place of a servant of the servants of his lord. Alas! Jonathan had a position to maintain, and whereas David returns to the wood Jonathan goes to his house! (1 Samuel 23:18).

Yet nevertheless God grants him the lovely privilege of encouraging David in his pathway. Jonathan, it says, "strengthened his hand in God" (1 Samuel 23:16). And what is more, he brings David the prophetic word: "Fear not; for the hand of Saul my father will not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel," but he adds: "and I shall be next to thee." When it is a matter of himself he completely loses the prophetic view, and this corresponds very well to the mixed-up condition of his soul.

Keilah would have betrayed David; Ziph positively betrays him and takes part in Saul's evil designs. There is the same hardening on part of the king, who uses the Lord's name to cover his own iniquity. "Blessed be ye of Jehovah; for ye have compassion upon me!" (1 Samuel 23:21). And speaking of David he says: "It is told me that he deals very subtly" (1 Samuel 23:22). Subtly! when the Lord whom he consulted was warning him against his enemy's ambushes! This phrase "very subtly" was a direct insult against the Lord though Saul was beyond being accountable for it! This is where Psalms 54:1-7 comes in, composed "when the Ziphites came, and said to Saul, "Is not David hiding himself with us?" In contrast to Saul who invokes the name of Jehovah, David, rejected from the midst of the people, without any apparent link to Jehovah, calls on the name of God: "O God, by Thy name save me, and by Thy strength do me justice" (Psalms 54:1). What God is as God is the resource of his soul. "Strangers," the Ziphites, had "risen up against" him, "the violent," Saul and his bands, "[seeking] after [his] life"; and all the while they were invoking the name of the Lord "they [had] not set God before them" (Psalms 54:3). But this God whom they did not know was David's helper (Psalms 54:4), and when his enemies would be destroyed and he himself be delivered from every distress, he would be the one to celebrate the name of Jehovah, the God of Israel whose relationship with His people would thus be re-established. In the wilderness of Maon David is in dire distress, but man's extremity is God's opportunity. He directs the events and counts the hours, the minutes, the seconds. All our times are in His hand. At the very last moment a messenger comes to inform Saul of an attack of the Philistines (1 Samuel 23:27), and the king abandons his pursuit. This is how our God shows Himself to be superior to the difficulties that seem bound to swallow us up.

Psalms 63:1-11 is a magnificent example of the intimate experiences of David's soul "when he was in the wilderness of Judah." He considers it a desolate place, for he remembers the sanctuary where he had contemplated God; but if there is thirst it is thirst for God, and he desires that the

power and the glory of the sanctuary accompany him in the wilderness and manifest themselves in his life here upon earth. The wilderness drives him to God and makes him desire that He manifest His character in the difficult circumstances through which he is passing. God answers his request by showing him his loving-kindness. His loving-kindness is His glory. David finds it to be more precious than life, preserved by the power of God from Saul's ambushes. And this power will continue to sustain him: "Thy right hand upholdeth me." The result of this knowledge of God in the wilderness is that David's soul "followeth hard after [Him]." Thus, his heart is bound more intimately, more practically to his God through the experiences of this desolate place. As for Saul, he will "be given over to the power of the sword," whereas the king, the Lord's anointed, anticipates rejoicing in God on the day when every mouth will be stopped, a joy which he already is tasting in the wilderness (Psalms 63:5; Psalms 63:7) so that his soul is satisfied.

04.24. 1 Samuel 24

1 Samuel 24:1-22

Saul, returned from his campaign against the Philistines, gathers three thousand chosen men to lay hold of David. Thus in the same pursuit he includes Israel's enemies and her savior. An outward zeal for safeguarding the people of God may very well ally itself with a veritable hatred for Christ.

Saul enters a cave located near the sheepfolds to relieve himself and rest. At the back of the cave with his little troop is the man whom Saul wrongly esteems to be his enemy. God's providence at this moment is delivering Saul, defenseless, into David's hands. David's companions in their ignorance conclude that God Himself is furnishing their master the occasion to avenge himself, but David's spiritual intelligence is not fooled. His character as the rejected king is that of grace and not of judgment (it is the same with Christ), and divine providence here offers grace an admirable occasion to manifest itself.

There is also another reason for David to refrain from drawing the sword. As long as God has not Himself executed the sentence pronounced upon Saul he still bears the name "the Lord's anointed." Whatever the evil may be, we have no right to destroy that which God allows to subsist. Doubtless there must be full separation between ourselves and evil, but we are not called to set the bounds of God's longsuffering. A spiritual Christian recognizes the authority which God has established even if it be enemy and apostate, and he leaves to God the care and the timing of executing judgement against it. Providential circumstances are not ordained to govern our conduct or to direct it, but to put our faith to the test. Such was the case with Moses at Pharaoh's court where God's providence had placed him. When the moment was come he refused to be part of that court and left Egypt, not fearing the king's wrath (Hebrews 11:1-40). It was faith that directed him and not the providential ways of God.

Nevertheless David cuts off the skirt of Saul's robe. This was a token intended to give the enemy proof of the grace which was sparing him. David's heart (not his conscience) reproaches him for even this act, for viewed outwardly, he had been lacking in the respect and deference due to the Lord's anointed although down deep he was full of grace toward his persecutor.

"And David checked his men with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul" (1 Samuel 24:7). His companions are formed by him and by his example, and in this way David's character is reflected in all those who surround him and who have acknowledged him as their leader. The skirt of this cut robe serves to vindicate before Saul the character of the servant whom he was misjudging and to open his eyes as to his own state: "For in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not, know and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in my hand, and I have not sinned against thee; yet thou liest in wait for my life to take it" (1 Samuel 24:11). Thus God often calls sinners through circumstances where His grace has preserved them by drawing their attention to the fact that their state deserved judgment. Nevertheless, if one hardens his heart

after this he must know that judgment will not be delayed. "Jehovah judge between me and thee, and Jehovah avenge me of thee" (1 Samuel 24:12). A lovely feature of the character of the man of God comes out here. In his own eyes he is less than Saul, less than nothing: "After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a single flea." In this vein Paul says of his dear Corinthians: "The ignoble things of the world, and the despised ... and things that are not" (1 Corinthians 1:28), and of himself: "Neither the planter is anything" (1 Corinthians 3:7). But those who are nothing in their own eyes are something in God's eyes, and this exalts and glorifies Him: "Jehovah therefore shall be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and do me justice in delivering me out of thy hand" (1 Samuel 24:15). "If God be for us, who against us?" The love of God for us: that is what glorifies Him!

"Saul lifted up his voice and wept" (1 Samuel 24:16). Seeing himself so miraculously preserved, he acknowledges (but for how long?) the grace and righteousness that are in David: "Thou art more righteous than I; for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil" (1 Samuel 24:17). He even acknowledges that the kingdom belongs to David: "And now behold, I know that thou shalt certainly be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thy hand" (1 Samuel 24:20). An reprobate heart - it is very serious to consider - may be softened in the presence of grace without being changed. God does not ask us for feelings, however righteous they may be; it is faith that counts, for faith alone is able to regenerate and save a sinner.

"Thou hast showed this day how that thou hast dealt well with me!" (1 Samuel 24:18). How different is this "this day" from the words of an Abigail who through faith says, even before David had proved it to her: "Evil has not been found in thee all thy days!" (1 Samuel 25:28).

Saul goes so far as to count on David to preserve his seed. David, a beautiful example of grace, "swore to Saul" (1 Samuel 24:22), for grace will not be limited. Will Saul know enough to avail himself of it? No: "Saul went home." Alas! godly Jonathan, his son, had done the same thing (1 Samuel 23:18). Whatever step the flesh may have taken, whatever truth the flesh may have acknowledged, there is always a point at which the flesh stops: the point where faith alone can act. Before "Come, follow me," even the most amiable flesh turns its back, perhaps with sadness, but it prefers the "great possessions" of its home above the shame of Him who has no place in this world to rest His head! (Matthew 19:22).

How sweet it is to witness David's feelings in Psalms 57:1-11 "when he fled from Saul in the cave." He knows that "God ... performeth" [The French says: "brings to a good conclusion"] all for him" (Psalms 57:2). His faith already takes hold of imminent deliverance: "He will send from the heavens and save me; He hath covered with reproach him that would swallow me up" (Psalms 57:3). "They have digged a pit before me; they are fallen into the midst thereof" (Psalms 57:6). This fixes his heart (Psalms 57:7) and prompts him to trust himself completely to the hands of Him who "hath sent forth His loving-kindness and His truth" in order to save him. Prepared in this way, he does not seek to avenge himself, but he commits himself to Him who has said: "Vengeance is mine ... saith the Lord." Thus on every occasion David is prepared by the Spirit of God to commit his cause into His hands, thus free to be occupied only with the Lord and with His praise. "My heart is fixed: I will sing, yea, I will sing psalms ... For Thy loving-kindness is great unto the heavens, and Thy truth unto the clouds!" (Psalms 57:7; Psalms 57:10).

04.25. 1 Samuel 25

1 Samuel 25:1-44

Samuel dies (1 Samuel 25:1), and his death is like a prelude to the last period of Saul's history. The faithful servant who had judged Israel during difficult times and who had performed the functions of the priesthood on her behalf in the midst of the collapse that had followed the ruin of the priesthood, the man whom God had chosen to anoint the king according to the flesh and then the king according to grace, the prophet before all - the first of the prophets - was no more. In the midst of these dark times the grace of God maintained communication with the people through the prophetic word. In all the important acts of his life Saul had met the prophet who came so that he might know God's thoughts, orders, counsels, and judgments. No doubt he had not listened to them, but he had been able to hear them. It is an immense privilege as well as an immense responsibility to have the divine word within reach, and Saul had enjoyed this privilege. Samuel himself during his lifetime had transmitted the Word to prophets raised up of God in order to teach others. Now these prophets themselves were no longer answering (1 Samuel 28:6; 1 Samuel 28:15). This whole dispensation had come to an end for Saul and for his people. The priesthood, destroyed by him, had sought refuge with the true king. God the prophet accompanied David in the wilderness and in the caves. Israel and her king were left like a disabled ship without pilot and without compass, driven toward the abyss in the darkness, while a new dawn was about to rise for the faithful. Is it surprising that Israel gathered together and mourned over Samuel? He who had interceded for them and even for their king ardently without respite was no longer. What was left for them? What terrible judgment when God withdraws His grace, resolutely despised! No other resource remained for Saul but to return to those things he had vomited forth (1 Samuel 28:7). Do we not find in him a picture of apostate Christendom returning to idolatry when God withdraws His Spirit of truth and leaves it as a prey to the lying spirit? But before we get occupied with Saul's last days God unfolds a new scene in our chapter. Nabal, a violent man who knows no restraint, despises and insults the Lord's anointed. This is one of the characteristics of the man of sin in the end times.

Nabal, we are told (1 Samuel 25:3), "was a Calebite." As a family trait these two men shared energy of nature, but this energy in the service of the flesh produces a Nabal, whereas in the service of faith it produces a Caleb, for one may yield one's members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness or to God as instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:13). The only effect of grace on such a man is to excite him to evil and rebellion. A Saul may sometimes allow himself to become softened (1 Samuel 24:17); a Nabal: never.

David and his companions continue dwelling in the wilderness of Judah, waiting on God for the hour and the signal for their deliverance, but there David has occasion to prove himself the protector of the weak, exposed to a thousand dangers during the night watches. "Neither was there aught missed by them" as long as they were with him (1 Samuel 25:7).

David's activity in grace is not limited to this. If like the Lord when here on earth he is depending upon man for some refreshment, he to whom by rights everything belongs brings to the sinner, to Nabal, in exchange for this, peace through his messengers. "Peace be to thee, and peace be to thy house, and peace be to all that thou hast!" (1 Samuel 25:6). Does Nabal want this peace after the so evident protection of his men and his flocks? For such grace and courtesy did not David have the right to ask for some proof of thankfulness? What does Nabal answer? "Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there are many servants nowadays that break away every man from his master. And shall I take my bread, and my water, and my flesh which I have killed for my shearers, and give it to men whom I know not whence they are?" (1 Samuel 25:10-11). This same expression later came forth from the mouth of the chief men in the presence of the Lord's work. "As to this man, we know not whence he is" (John 9:29). This is how man treated the rejected Jesus; he despises His sovereign grace without apprehending His power in judgment and without thinking that this judgment is at the door. Nabal speaks of his bread, of his water, of his meat, and of his goods as though they belonged to him, and this at the very moment when calamity is about to strike him personally along with all that belongs to him. When he should have been falling down on his knees before the one who voluntarily had become his servant, he rather disdainfully calls him a "servant who has broken away from his master"! Without a scruple and without thinking that it signified rejecting David personally, he rejects his messengers. "He that rejects you rejects Me; and he that rejects Me rejects Him that sent Me" (Luke 10:16). Their master had sent them to bless, and Nabal insults them (1 Samuel 25:14).

David is in danger of giving free vent to his indignation and of "avenging [himself] with [his] own hand" (1 Samuel 25:26; 1 Samuel 25:34). This is where, it seems to me, the experience of Psalm 35 is found: "They reward me evil for good" (Psalms 35:12; cf. 1 Samuel 25:21). "They speak not peace" (Psalms 35:20; cf. 1 Samuel 25:6). "I behaved myself as though he had been a friend, a brother to me" (Psalms 35:14). "Them that are wrongfully mine enemies" (Psalms 35:19; cf. 1 Samuel 25:26). But David had learned the lesson God wanted to teach him. Instead of defending his rights himself he commits his cause to the Lord: "Stir up Thyself, and awake for my right, for my cause, my God and Lord" (Psalms 35:23). "Let them be ashamed and brought to confusion together that rejoice at mine adversity" (Psalms 35:26), and he commits judgment to Him: "Let destruction come upon him unawares!" (Psalms 35:8).

Before having received this teaching from the mouth of godly Abigail, David had girded on his sword and had ordered his companions to do the same. He was getting ahead of the moment for vengeance; the hour of judgment had not yet struck; it would come through the means of One greater than David. Of Him it is said: "Gird Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O Mighty One, in Thy majesty and Thy splendor" (Psalms 45:3); but as long as David was a stranger in his inheritance it was still the time of grace.

Abigail's faith understood this. This weak woman, knowing what was appropriate to grace, becomes God's instrument to keep the greatest of His servants, the very anointed of the Lord himself, from evil. Only one Man - Grace in person, the grace of God which has appeared to all men - being infallible, never needed to be reminded of the feelings that befit the position that He had taken here on earth.

We can all learn in Abigail's school. One rarely finds a more disinterested affection based on the perfections her faith was discerning in David. When she learns that "evil is determined" against Nabal and against all his household she hastens to prepare everything that her husband had refused to David, and much more besides, without stinting, and she quickly goes to meet him. Oh! that souls who have heard that evil is decided against them might do the same. There is no time to lose: haste is essential; the avenger is already on His way. When the announcement of judgment is received as a divine testimony one hastens to escape it. This is faith. There is no other resource but to go to meet Him who is going to judge. Abigail had but one fear: that she might not meet David before his sword was drawn. She knew that then it would be too late. But she had no fear about the result of their meeting, for she knew the character of the one whom she would address.

"And when Abigail saw David, she hasted and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let the iniquity be!" (1 Samuel 25:23-24). Here again Abigail makes haste; she hastens to acknowledge David's lordship, his rights over her, and her own unworthiness. She supplicates him and thus recognizes that she is dependant on his good pleasure. Much more, in taking this attitude she, the woman of faith, recognizes herself as being guilty, taking on herself all the consequences of her association with Nabal. She does not come to plead her innocence, although she had had no knowledge of what had happened (1 Samuel 25:25). In David's presence she has no other wish but to find herself guilty, and she hastens to confess it for she knows David's grace.

She makes haste yet one more time toward the end of the chapter (1 Samuel 25:42). This is when she is called by David to become his companion in suffering (cf. 1 Samuel 27:3) and later to share his reign. "And David sent and communed with Abigail, to take her as his wife ... And Abigail hasted, and arose ... and she went after the messengers of David, and became his wife" (1 Samuel 25:39-42). No delay; she hastens to meet the one who loves her, to meet the king of grace; she does not postpone her departure for better times when David's throne would be made firm. She leaves everything without thinking for an instant of what she was leaving behind. And she even declares herself unworthy of such an honor; for hers is the most humble place. Such a destiny cannot on the other hand fill her with pride, for she understands that if the king's favor is calling her to share his sufferings so as to then raise her to the highest place, the service of the king must humble her to take the lowest place. "Behold, let thy handmaid be a bondwoman to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." What humility in this wife of the king! Only fellowship with grace, with Jesus, will enable us to abase ourselves in the dust like this, but just as Abigail abases herself, so the king increases in dignity and in majesty, and this is what his wife's heart desires.

Let us not forget, dear Christian readers, that one of faith's characteristics is to hasten. Abraham made haste when it was a matter of the Lord's service (Genesis 18:6-8); Zacchaeus did so when the Savior invited him to receive Him into his house (Luke 19:6); Mary did so when the Lord called her to come to Him (John 11:29). If it is a matter of Him and of His Person, can we ever hasten enough? But on the other hand, should we not keep ourselves from the haste that so often characterizes the flesh and the old man? "Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood" (Proverbs 1:16; Proverbs 6:18), "to strive" (Proverbs 25:8), "to be rich" (Proverbs 28:20; Proverbs 28:22). When it is a matter concerning ourselves, let us not do as the world, spoken of here, for it says elsewhere: "He that trusteth shall not make haste" (Isaiah 28:16; Romans 9:33).

She is admirable, this Abigail, for her appreciation of David. We find everything in her from her sense of her lord's dignity that impels her to bow down before him to the rapture that his beauty of character brings about. "My lord fights the battles of Jehovah, and evil has not been found in thee all thy days" (1 Samuel 25:28). How could her heart fail to be attracted by the sight of perfection in a man? Yet still, David, a type of Christ, is in himself only an imperfect man. Christ would never have been in danger of procuring justice for Himself. Only the grace of God preserves David when he had already resolved to leave none of his enemies alive. Abigail is the instrument used by God to cause him to retract his decision and to prevent him from losing the character of grace befitting to the Lord's anointed.

Everything Abigail says is the fruit of her communion with God's thoughts. It is not prophecy, but she knows what will happen to David because she knows what God thinks of him. "The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with Jehovah thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall He sling out from the hollow of the sling" (1 Samuel 25:29), and "Jehovah ... shall appoint thee ruler over Israel" (1 Samuel 25:30). Saul, the king of Israel, is in Abigail's estimation only "a man ... risen up to pursue [David] and to seek [his] life." In his antagonism against the son of Jesse he does not even merit the mention of his name.

It is easy to see that Abigail's words are not inspired by fear of what might happen to her household, but she is indignant at the evil that one has dared to wish on such a man; she desires that his character be preserved from dishonor; without reserve she admires the future king of Israel. And so David blesses her. He will indeed remember her according to her request. Her "Remember thy handmaid" finds an ear just as attentive as does much later the "Remember me" of the converted thief. David sends her back to her house with the peace which Nabal had not desired and with the assurance of his favor (1 Samuel 25:6; 1 Samuel 25:35). There she will patiently wait for the message of the beloved one calling her to himself. But during this time judgment overtakes Nabal. "He held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king." Such is man! Nabal substitutes himself for David and only thinks of treating himself well. He becomes drunk and is in no condition to know anything of what awaits him. His doom is fixed. When he does learn of it "his heart died within him, and he became as a stone." He is already dead before being actually stricken dead ten days later.

Men's fate hinges on this alternative: whether they despise Christ today during His rejection, or whether they esteem Him as God esteems Him and appeal to His grace which alone can "accept their person."

Happy David! He has found a wife according to his heart, a wife whom he blesses and whose wisdom he blesses (1 Samuel 25:33), a true helpmeet in the difficulties of his career. He blesses her for hindering him from doing evil which would have dishonored his God. Saul had blessed the Ziphites who had offered themselves to carry out his evil plans against David, and in the name of the Lord had hailed as deliverers those who would have helped him to make war against His anointed!

04.26. 1 Samuel 26

1 Samuel 26:1-25 The Ziphites reappear with their offers of betrayal. Without caring about the king's lack of righteousness and about the grace David had shown to him they turn to the one from whom they hope to obtain advantages or whose displeasure would be able to harm them. Such disdain for David's person and character are perhaps more terrible than Nabal's crude affront. The Ziphites are a true picture of the Christian world today. In appearance it welcomes Christ and in reality it betrays Him. The favors it covets cannot be given by Jesus; therefore they turn to the enemy to obtain them, "deny[ing] the Master that bought them" (2 Peter 2:1).

Saul has forgotten everything: the grace which spared him in the cave of En-gedi, his own words of repentance, and the generous oath that David had sworn to him to spare his seed. His old hatred rises again; a proposal from the Ziphites is enough to kindle the fire smoldering within him. Animosity against Christ may lie dormant in the natural man; some occasion revives it; then one sees that nothing is changed in the sinner's heart and that it is, as always, desperately wicked.

David sends spies and is informed of everything while Saul is still searching for him. There comes a time for the believer when a certain confidence in his enemies is no longer justified, when we must be on our guard and refrain from revealing to them our secrets which they would only use as weapons against us. We are not ignorant of their designs and, if the Word recommends that we be guileless as doves, it also at the same time exhorts us to be prudent as serpents. That is what characterizes David here and what characterized the Lord Himself when He was asked whether it was necessary to pay tribute to Caesar. But when it is a matter of confidence in God, all of David's prudence disappears. He advances boldly - the world would say "recklessly" - with Abishai alone into the midst of three thousand adversaries and fearlessly goes to seek out his enemy. Faith that feeds on difficulties grows through meeting them. The hill of Hachilah where David goes towards Saul is the witness of greater faith than was the cave of En-gedi where Saul inadvertently fell into David's hands. But however varied the circumstances may be in which faith is involved, the principles that direct faith are unchanging. Saul, although on the verge of judgment, remains the Lord's anointed to David as long as God has not given the final signal. For David to act otherwise toward him than in grace would be to deny his character all the more seriously since he had received the Lord's approbation at En-gedi. Abishai, David's companion, lays a snare for him here without even realizing it himself, and probably because of the very affection he bears for his master. Knowing that David will not avenge himself, Abishai offers to avenge him. (1 Samuel 26:8). Had this taken place, the rejected king's character of grace would have been entirely compromised once again. This is one of Satan's principal objects with regard to believers. If he can induce us to take our own interests in hand, to avenge ourselves, to demand our rights in this world, he makes us fall from faith because at the same time we become like the world we deny our confidence in God alone. David had been in danger of giving up this principle in the matter with Nabal, but he had learned his lesson; God had strengthened him and his own heart had no need to reproach him as at the "rocks of the wild goats." "Destroy him not," he says to Abishai, "for who can stretch forth his hand against Jehovah's anointed, and be guiltless?" (1 Samuel 26:9). This

unchanging principle follows him until just after Saul's death, when he has the pretended murderer of the king struck down: "How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thy hand to destroy Jehovah's anointed?" (2 Samuel 1:14). Thus until his last breath Saul remains inviolable for David, as being the Lord's anointed.

Often we fail where David triumphed. In the face of the persistent unrighteousness of men after having acted in grace once or twice this seems enough to us, and we think we are right to resist and protest against iniquity. If we walk with God we will learn very quickly that by protesting we move out of His pathway, and if we act contrary to this knowledge Satan will quickly make us his prey. The deep sleep that God had caused to fall on Saul and on all the camp might have given birth to the thought of taking advantage of such a moment. This was not so. God had sent this sleep to preserve His beloved and not to give him an occasion to avenge himself. God would save him in view of the work of grace He would call Him to accomplish toward Saul. Grace is reserved for David; judgment is reserved for the Lord. But David takes a token, as he had taken one in the cave. The spear and the cruse of water are two witnesses by which the events that had taken place are confirmed. The weapon that Saul had sought to use against David more than once is now found in David's hand. Would he use it against the Lord's anointed as he had once used Goliath's sword against this enemy of Israel? In no way. It is enough for David to take away from Saul that which he had used in his effort to harm David, to show the king that he was well aware of his weapons and that they were powerless against him.

Now David goes far away from sleeping Saul and puts "a great space ... between them" (1 Samuel 26:13). To have acted otherwise would have been blind confidence in man. Sometimes the world must see the distance that separates it from the children of God. If they do not distance themselves from the world they often support it in its illusion as to its condition. In speaking to Abner (1 Samuel 26:13-16), not without irony, David shows him that there is more interest and care for the world in a child of God than in those who pretend to support, help, or defend it. And now (1 Samuel 26:17-20) Saul is summoned to answer the one whom he is pursuing like "a partridge on the mountains." "Why?" "What have I done?" These questions elicit only silence. Before them every mouth will be closed forever. If it is the Lord who has stirred up Saul against David why does He deliver David from his hand? If it is men let them be cursed, those men who have driven David from his inheritance and compared him, the Lord's anointed, to idol worshippers, as later they compared Jesus to demons. This sin will not be forgiven them. But all that David asks is that his "blood [not] fall to the earth far from the face of Jehovah" (1 Samuel 26:20), that he may serve the Lord, and that his death be approved by Him in the very place from which the king of Israel is seeking to chase him. Just as Jesus later on, so David must suffer in Judah; this is why the word of the Lord had sent him there (1 Samuel 22:5), and if he must die to glorify the Lord, that is where he must die.

Saul says: "I have sinned ... I will no more do thee harm ... I have acted foolishly, and have erred exceedingly" (1 Samuel 26:21). How many times had he not already said or acknowledged that this was so? Did that change his ways in the least? Often we allow ourselves to be deceived by appearances when it is a matter of appreciating the condition of souls. David is not fooled. He confides in God alone and not at all in Saul's feelings. He returns his weapons to him, knowing that Saul can do nothing without God's will. The king's life had been precious to David, but David does not count on his life being precious to Saul. "And behold, as thy life was highly esteemed this

day in mine eyes, so let my life be highly esteemed in the eyes of Jehovah" (1 Samuel 26:24). He counts on the Lord. The life of David, a flea, a partridge on the mountains, is of great price in the eyes of Him who had chosen him, called him, and kept him as the apple of His eye. Thus God glorifies Himself in those who are little and weak.

What does Saul's blessing matter? He who had told the Ziphites: "Blessed be ye of Jehovah," can say to David: "Blessed be thou, my son David" (1 Samuel 26:25); he who had said: "Thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own shame" (1 Samuel 20:30), can well say: "Thou shalt certainly do great things, and shalt certainly prevail" (1 Samuel 26:25). Is Saul also among the prophets? All this has no more value in David's eyes than in the Lord's eyes. David is content with his God's approval and promises and that suffices him perfectly.

04.27. 1 Samuel 27

1 Samuel 27:1-12

“And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines; and Saul will despair of me to seek me any more within all the limits of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand” (1 Samuel 27:1).

Isn't it surprising to see David's weakness here after so many striking marks of divine protection? Just yesterday he had said, full of confidence: "Let my life be highly esteemed in the eyes of Jehovah, that He may deliver me out of all distress!" (1 Samuel 26:24). Today his courage is gone and he says: "I shall now one day perish by the hand of Saul." We must often experience that a great victory is apt to be followed by a great despondency. When God was with us, did we not happen to attribute something to ourselves? When David said to Saul: "Jehovah will render to every man his righteousness and his faithfulness" (1 Samuel 26:23), God alone knows whether or not there was some self-satisfaction in these words. Therefore God leaves us to ourselves (I am not saying, of course, that He forsakes us) in order to show us that we cannot have any confidence in the flesh. Thus we learn to probe "the division of soul and spirit" which is so subtle that in the fight of faith we are often unaware of the mixture of the two, and that gold which has been refined, or which appears to have been refined, still needs the crucible to be purified from every alloy. This clearly explains the weakness of believers at the very time when their faith has been shining so splendidly.

Elijah is a striking example of this (1 Kings 19:1-21). Heaven had been closed at his request, he had escaped the wrath of Ahab, had performed miracles, had vanquished the priests of Baal, had confronted an entire people, and now look at the great prophet of Israel who trembles and flees from a woman. Let us remember that having been used by God does not mean that we know ourselves yet, and let us remember that this self-knowledge is indispensable for us to appreciate grace. We often have this experience after times of special blessing. The enemy takes advantage of the situation to make us fall when, armed with God's power, we have illusions about our own strength, esteeming ourselves to be unassailable. Therefore a time of special favor and power is often an occasion for the flesh to act. Being introduced into the third heaven does not preserve us from this and the purpose of God's discipline, as we shall see, is to lead us to examine all this and many other things besides. Is it God who is commanding David to save himself in the land of the Philistines? Were not the experiences he had had at Achish's court sufficient (1 Samuel 21:11-15)? Was it God who had sent him there then? No, God through the mouth of Gad had then given him a positive commandment to go into the land of Judah (1 Samuel 22:5). Had this command been revoked? And why didn't he inquire of the Lord as he had done at Keilah (1 Samuel 23:1-13)? Headlong haste, discouragement, forgetfulness of God's word, seeking help from Israel's enemies, confidence in his own thoughts while neglecting to seek divine direction: all these weaknesses are concentrated in David here. The lovely walk of faith which had

characterized him seems to be annulled by a single false step. But it is a good thing for our souls to fathom these precipices. We cannot be the companions of Christ unless hold the beginning of our assurance firm to the end (Hebrews 3:14). For David to save himself by fleeing to Achish could in no way be a type of Christ. There was no altar for Abraham in Egypt; David's second stay among the Philistines did not inspire him with any psalm.

It is an exceedingly serious thing to consider that often one false step causes us to lose all the benefit of a long life of faith. One day while hiking high in the mountains my feet slipped toward a chasm; I was done for when the strong hand of my guide succeeded in holding me back - already disappearing over the edge. Without him I was lost, His hand saved me (that is grace), but in an instant I had measured and realized the terrible consequence of one wrong step.

Grace alone is able to prevent our fall, but often we must long experience the consequences of a walk which did not have the Lord's approval. This course delivers David from Saul's pursuit: "And it was told Saul that David was fled to Gath, and he sought no more for him" (1 Samuel 27:4). At what price? The following chapters inform us, and this chapter instructs us already. The stay at Gath gives rise to falsehood. Under pain of appearing to be their enemy the Philistines cannot be told that one has had to depart from Israel. Some success is had against the Geshurites, the Gerzites, and the Amalekites, but to openly declare one's self to be their adversary would be to expose one's self to many dangers. David is a guest of the Philistine who from this fact deems him brought into subjection: "He shall be my servant for ever (1 Samuel 27:12). How can one then make war against their race? One uses words that have a double meaning to hide one's real sympathies (1 Samuel 28:2). Just see how many serious consequences the search for the world's assistance brings with it! The Christian swamped by "social conventions" to which he is subjected loses his true character there and has no more effect on the consciences of those around him. He lives in fear of displeasing the world which is protecting him; he seeks like David to destroy all the witnesses who could come forward to give evidence of his hostility against the enemies of God's people; he no longer has a good conscience. Although he is a child of God he is following a path of hypocrisy.

"Achish trusted David." The world believes us and flatters itself to have broken the ties that united us to God's people (1 Samuel 27:12). David through God's grace will be restored and in what follows his behavior will awaken Achish to his deception. But how many Christians tangled in this net never awaken the world to their deception, lose their strength, their peace, and their joy there, sacrifice their testimony there, and finally leave this scene to go to be with the Lord feeling that they have been nothing for Him during their lifetime, nothing for Him who however has done everything for them!

04.28. 1 Samuel 28

1 Samuel 28:1-25 The day comes - David cannot escape this juncture of events - when the Philistines once again gather together their armies to go to war against Israel. David's false position in their midst will thus be made evident. Poor David! What to do? How can he draw back after having fooled the enemy about his enterprises and his sympathies? Let us remember that it is easier to enter a wrong pathway than to leave it. We shall see that God does not abandon David and that He saves him in spite of himself from the danger of fighting against God's people, but we shall also see how severe the discipline which he will have to endure will be. Is it surprising that Achish, deceived by David, is counting on him? This proof of confidence ought to cover the man of God with shame: "Know thou assuredly that thou shalt go out with me to the camp, thou and thy men" (1 Samuel 28:1). A wrong walk is not only deplorable for ourselves but it draws after us into evil those whom we are called upon to guide as well. David's answer is ambiguous like all of his behavior: "Thereby thou shalt know what thy servant can do" (1 Samuel 28:2). Later, alas! this will be only too evident when he attempts to vindicate himself before the king and the princes (1 Samuel 29:8). Achish, deceived, replies: "Therefore will I make thee keeper of my person for ever" (1 Samuel 28:2). Here then is the "beloved" being called upon to support Israel's hereditary enemy! This is his reward; he advances in dignity. He, the true king of Israel, becomes Achish's bodyguard. What a promotion, what an honor! Though a Christian is nothing in his own eyes, he is a king in God's sight; he is called upon to walk according to this dignity. If he receives the world's honors he loses his royal character, for he becomes a slave and has no part in his master's benefits except in the measure in which he is in bondage to him. In 1 Samuel 28:3, God's word returns to Samuel's death. As we have seen, this death left Saul and his people disabled. But Samuel's presence and Saul's profession of serving the Lord had resulted in Saul himself performing an act of purification: "Saul had put away the necromancers and the soothsayers out of the land." The enemy gathers together: Saul "was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled. And Saul inquired of Jehovah; but Jehovah did not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets" (1 Samuel 28:5-6). This position was more miserable than when Israel had followed enchantments and strange gods! At least these had given the appearance of answering Israel - an illusion no doubt, but an illusion which for the moment had raised their flagging spirits. Now: nothing but silence. The house that was swept had no statue, no ephod, and no teraphim (Hosea 3:4). What to do? Whom to consult? Whom to lean on? What uncertainty for Saul! Judgment is at the door: how can it be evaded? Oh! in this darkness where he is floundering, if even a feeble ray of light would show him a way out! Nothing is more wretched than his condition. He is aware of his inevitable fate and in his great anguish is seeking a means to escape it. Now Saul takes account of the horror of his condition. Death would be better, but death offers no shelter from the judgment which he sees steadily advancing toward him from afar and which he knows to be without pity.

"Seek me a woman that has a spirit of Python, that I may go to her and inquire of her" (1 Samuel 28:7). Christendom in our day is no different, about to be "spewed out" of the Lord's mouth. It is calling up spirits and indulging herself with satanic illusions, for at one and the same time there is

frightening reality and shameful illusion in these practices. The reality is that a demon puts itself at the disposal of the Pythoness; the illusion is that she is able to call up the dead. The demon only clothes itself with a shadowy appearance, for Jesus holds the keys of death and of Hades and no power but His own is able to open its doors. Satan himself cannot call up the dead. Those who have not believed and who have died are and remain “the spirits in prison.” God alone by making an exception can permit Samuel to come forth from the realm of the invisible and appear.

“When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice” (1 Samuel 28:12). This was not the result she had expected from her sorcery. The spirit that she knew was not there to clothe itself with an illusory form like those which she had had her followers witness. Before she can even call up the spirit a personage who greatly frightens her suddenly rises up before her. This is not just another appearance but a divine reality, “a god ascending out of the earth” (1 Samuel 28:13), an personage on whom her enchantments have no hold. It is Samuel himself, recognized by the king before whom he had walked for so long. The woman does not recognize Samuel, but Saul does. He alone, Israel’s head, was important enough to receive such an extraordinary vision. As for Saul, he cannot mistake the person, still less the words of Samuel. God who is not answering by the prophets posthumously answers one last time by Samuel, but only to ratify the judgment already pronounced.

Saul exposes his distress, his abandonment, his isolation, and the anguish of his soul (1 Samuel 28:15). It is too late; the measure is full; God has forgotten nothing; now He has become the enemy of Saul (1 Samuel 28:16) who has both God and the Philistines against him. And why? Saul did “not hearken to the voice of Jehovah” nor “execute His fierce anger upon Amalek” (1 Samuel 28:18). Moreover, beside the fact that he had “kept not ... the word of Jehovah” he had “inquired of the spirit of Python, asking counsel of it, and he asked not counsel of Jehovah” (1 Chronicles 10:13). Disobedience and independence characterize man without God, and in spite of all appearances Saul was one of these. Because of these things the death of Saul and of his sons was decreed as well as the defeat of Israel (1 Samuel 28:19). But yet another decision is announced to Saul, and this for the third time: “Jehovah has rent the kingdom out of thy hand, and given it to thy neighbor, to David” (1 Samuel 28:17). He had already heard this twice from Samuel’s mouth (1 Samuel 13:14; 1 Samuel 15:28), but David’s name had not yet been mentioned. Today he learns from the mouth of God what he in his hatred had long ago suspected (1 Samuel 24:21): his “neighbor” was this despised, hated, rejected David whom he himself had pursued, and this David is the chosen one, the anointed one, the beloved one who will have the place of honor and to whom the kingdom belongs! All that Saul had feared now rises up against him. No more pity, no more pardon. David, the king of grace himself, who had spared Saul so many times, had soothed him so often, who had returned him good for evil without tiring, could no longer from this moment onward present himself to Saul except as a judge.

Saul “fell straightway his full length on the earth, and was sore afraid because of the words of Samuel” (1 Samuel 28:20). It is only when man finds himself before his inevitable fate that he really appreciates all its bearing. Until then there is always room for some illusion which hides the horror of our future from us. The king has no strength; he is faint with hunger but will not eat; he finally accepts some material help from the hand of one who is reprobate just like himself (1 Samuel 28:20-25).

What a solemn picture of the end of the man, the king according to the flesh! All the principles of his activity are called to his remembrance and weighed in the balances of the sanctuary, are found to be only disobedience, independence, and enmity against God and against His anointed. Nothing, absolutely nothing of that which has led Saul can stand before God. All his motives, all his ways, become just so many objects of judgment.

04.29. 1 Samuel 29

1 Samuel 29:1-11 The armies of the Philistines and of Israel reach the place where they set themselves in battle formation. “David and his men passed on in the rearward with Achish,” for according to the king’s promise they have been made his bodyguards. The princes of the Philistines challenge this: “What are these Hebrews?” This is what always happens when a believer places himself in a false position by seeking the world’s protection. He cannot gain the world’s confidence unless perhaps the world is depending upon him like Achish because he has made God’s people abhor him and has given himself into bondage in this way. Moreover Achish, we must observe, has still other motives for confidence, and we cannot help but see in him a certain natural nobility, won over by the apparent uprightness of David’s character (Alas! it is not even apparently so in God’s sight). Achish defends David before the princes: “I have found nothing in him since the day of his falling away to me to this day” (1 Samuel 29:3). Achish bears testimony to him: “As Jehovah liveth, thou art upright, and thy going out and thy coming in with me in the camp is acceptable to me; for I have not found evil in thee since the day of thy coming to me to this day” (1 Samuel 29:6). A most favorable testimony, but one based on the fact that “David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel” (1 Samuel 29:3), had become and would remain the servant of Achish. Did David have a good conscience at having merited these praises? Was his heart really at ease before the high opinion of the uncircumcised king who was showing himself more noble and more honest than the Lord’s anointed? Could he receive this praise as he had once received that of Abigail (1 Samuel 25:28)?

However that might be, Achish’s confidence does not succeed in overcoming the distrust of the princes, for it was precisely David’s character of faithfulness which could move him to return to his old master. Not so long ago he had smitten his ten thousand Philistines, in this in accord with Saul who had smitten his thousand. Why should he be for Achish today rather than for Saul? The lack of a clear-cut position in regard to the world can only produce conclusions like these. Our very faithfulness in the past is turned against us. Achish is obliged to reckon with the opinion of the princes, a policy unknown to a faithful believer, for God’s mind, opinion, and will direct him. But God uses men’s mistrust to save His beloved from a more serious fall than when he went up against Nabal to avenge himself. “Now,” says Achish, “return, and go in peace, that thou displease not the lords of the Philistines” (1 Samuel 29:7). In the face of this animosity David (and this is one of the most humiliating points in his history) denies his faith and his character: “But what have I done? and what hast thou found in thy servant so long as I have been with thee to this day, that I should not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?” (1 Samuel 29:8). What have I done? David could say this in truth to Jonathan (1 Samuel 20:1) and to Saul himself (1 Samuel 26:18) but he could not in good conscience say this to Achish. Knowing nothing of David’s secret undertakings against Israel’s enemies, the Philistine king could not find him at fault. But it is his own people whom David is asking to fight against; his people whom he terms “the enemies of the king”!

Achish acknowledges yet more explicitly the purity of David's intentions: "I know that thou art acceptable to me, as an angel of God" (1 Samuel 29:9), but the conclusion is that he must return. "Depart," Achish tells David (1 Samuel 29:10). In sum, weighed in the same balance the opinion of the world surrounding him carries greater weight with Achish than the supposed integrity of David.

All of this shows us the abyss separating the family of God from the world, since even in respect to the child of God who is unfaithful to his calling the world is apprehensive and refuses his co-operation. This is only just. God makes us to feel, and it is grace on His part, that in this position we have nothing: neither the approval of God nor the favor of the world.

David returns back. What a helping hand the Lord has extended to him, although against his own will at the most critical moment of his entire life up until now! God has not abandoned him for a single instant. What grace! But what has become of the happy fellowship of heart with the Lord which had found expression in the songs of the sweet psalmist of Israel?

04.30. 1 Samuel 30

1 Samuel 30:1-31 A walk according to the thoughts of his natural heart had deprived David of fellowship with his God. In the path he was following he could not like Enoch have “the testimony that he had pleased God.” Left to himself he, one of the excellent of the earth, had been in danger of making shipwreck of the faith just like another and in danger of embracing the cause of his people’s worst enemies. Their leader recognized in him an upright and irreproachable character, but this was just one more danger for his soul. In the midst of these reefs when he would surely have gone down had he been left to his own strength, God, no longer able to lead him by His eye, had used the “bit and bridle” (Psalms 32:9) - that is to say, a series of circumstances contrary to the will of His servant - in order to preserve him from an irremediable fall. In 1 Samuel 30:1-31 we see how God restores David, using the discipline that his lack of holiness had made necessary. But there in the midst of this discipline God (and this is infinitely precious) could be with him. God who was absent in the day of Achish’s favor is now present in the midst of disaster. David is stricken in that which is dearest to him and this is a cause of great sorrow, but it produces the peaceable fruit of righteousness. How could we then regret that God’s hand weighed heavily on His servant? The character of this man of God, formed by discipline, is of great beauty and full of instruction for our souls. In David’s absence Amalek, no doubt in order to avenge themselves (cf. 1 Samuel 27:8), had seized Ziklag, David’s city (1 Samuel 27:6), and after having burned it had taken the entire population away captive with the spoil, but “they had put none to death.” What grace of God! In this cruel attack of a pitiless enemy all the captives had been spared. Thus God was judging His servant by measure and with a judgment which had his restoration as its object. Nevertheless the discipline must be felt deeply in order to bring forth its fruits: “David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep” (1 Samuel 30:4). Those dearest to David are among the captives: noble Abigail, linked by faith to her husband’s wandering life and sufferings, innocent of his conduct at the court of Achish, is taken into captivity. And to make the cup of bitterness overflow, the companions whom he had directed until now, full of vexation because of their sons and daughters, consider him responsible for this calamity, turn against him, and speak of stoning him (1 Samuel 30:6). But for the man of God discipline is a bitter cordial that strengthens his soul instead of weakening it. When he has lost everything David again finds God as his resource. He “strengthened himself in Jehovah his God” (1 Samuel 30:6). This faithful God known by him, who had helped him in times past in all his distresses, had not changed, and again today he finds Him to be the same as He was yesterday and will be for eternity. And David also finds again that which had previously characterized him. He “said to Abiathar ... Bring near to me, I pray thee, the ephod. And Abiathar brought the ephod near to David. And David inquired of Jehovah” (1 Samuel 30:7-8). As Samuel was the man of prayer and intercession, so David at the time of his strength was the dependant man who consulted and inquired of the Lord. He returns to this. The Lord who had refused to answer Saul answers David. “Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them? And He said to him, Pursue; for thou shalt assuredly overtake them, and shalt certainly recover” (1 Samuel 30:8).

Strengthened by this answer David takes up the pursuit without hesitation. At the torrent Besor two hundred men too weary to follow the troop stop and are left behind to guard the baggage. They lacked strength; nonetheless their function was useful to David and their brethren and should not be despised. The function of active combatants is highly visible and exposes us much more to spiritual pride than does a more humble position. David's companions prove this in what follows in this account by attributing to their own prowess the victory which was prepared for them and then granted by God alone (1 Samuel 30:22). An Egyptian slave left behind to die puts David on the enemy's track. One sees God's hand in this circumstance. Without this poor man dying of hunger the expedition would have failed miserably. When we strengthen ourselves in the Lord our God, what mighty help He accords us, and how unexpected! (1 Samuel 30:11-15).

While the enemy is eating, drinking, and dancing, "sudden destruction comes upon them." "David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken: and David recovered his two wives. And there was nothing missed by them, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil nor anything that they had taken: David brought all back" (1 Samuel 30:18-19) together with an abundance of spoils (1 Samuel 30:20). The trial is over; Discipline has borne its fruits; but by the grace of God it continues to bear yet more. See with what wisdom David, now restored, confronts the "wicked men, and men of Belial, of those that had gone with" him (1 Samuel 30:22), how he reproves them by giving the Lord all the place, all the merit: "Ye shall not do so, my brethren, with that which Jehovah has given us, who has preserved us, and given the troop that came against us into our hand" (1 Samuel 30:23). God distributes the various services among His own; He is the only judge of the activity that they display; He does not measure the reward according to the value of the gift but according to faithfulness in the administration of that which He entrusts to us. That is why the share of those who stay with the baggage is like the share of those who go down to the battle (1 Samuel 30:24). This principle established by David has become "a statute and an ordinance for Israel to this day" (1 Samuel 30:25). It was the principle of grace joined to righteousness that a restored David proclaimed, and how can we be surprised that its consequences have been lasting? In his prosperity (1 Samuel 30:26-31) David forgets none of those who had helped in the time of his adversity. He overwhelms them, and I see scarcely any but the Ziphites who were excluded and had no part in his generosity: those informers who had desired to deliver up the king of Israel. David's liberality gives all the faithful tangible proof that the Lord is with him and that it is good to accept him as master and to place one's self under his law - whereas infidelity toward Christ will one day, perhaps long afterward, bring its inevitable consequences. And in contrast, a glass of water given to David in the wilderness is recorded in the book of Him who values all our deeds according their usefulness, whether more or less, to Christ.

04.31. 1 Samuel 31

1 Samuel 31:13

According to the word of God spoken by Samuel (1 Samuel 28:19) Israel falls before the Philistines on Mount Gilboa. The three sons of Saul - Jonathan is one of them - perish. Saul is the last one remaining. He had been very much afraid at Samuel's announcement of judgment (1 Samuel 28:20), he had been afraid and his heart had greatly trembled at the presence of the Philistine army in the presence of the bare preparations for judgment (1 Samuel 28:5); how much more so when judgment is being executed: "He was much terrified by the archers" (1 Samuel 31:3). Thus from the moment when the sinner finds himself before God's judgment all his strength leaves him and gives place to terror. "It is a fearful thing falling into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31), when having made a profession of faith one has then given it up. Saul wishes to die in order to escape this nameless anguish and he only hurls himself into an agony of a quite different nature, into the torments of the invisible realm where the worm never dies and where the fire is never quenched.

"Draw thy sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me" (1 Samuel 31:4). The words "these uncircumcised" express even at the point of death his outward religion based on his disdain of those who were not Hebrews. As for Saul's circumcision, could it save him? Is it not rather circumcision of heart that God respects?

Saul and his armorbearer take their own lives in order to escape the enemy's abuse. The fear of God, had it been before their eyes, would have prevented them from doing so. A dead Saul does not feel the abuse but undergoes it nonetheless. The Philistines behead the king and may think that they have taken their revenge for the death of Goliath. Saul's armor is placed in the house of Ashtaroath (1 Samuel 31:10), apparently proclaiming the victory of their idols over the true God. A similar thing took place when the ark was taken. Israel flees, the enemy capture their cities and establish themselves there. Jabesh-Gilead, once saved by Saul (1 Samuel 11:1-15), shows pity upon the dead, but God remains silent as though indifferent to all this ruin; one might believe He had been overcome by man. This book is like the end of everything. Here we see the end of the priesthood, of the judges, of kingship according to man. Everything crumbles; God allows it, for this is exactly what is necessary. Everything must fall before David. Let him abide: that is enough. This defeat, this judgment, this ruin of man are for God the dawn of the reign of the beloved!

05.00.1. Meditations on the Second Book of Chronicles

Meditations on the Second Book of Chronicles from The Writings of H.L. Rossier

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05.01. 2 Chronicles 1

2 Chronicles 1:1-17 Solomon's Reign

2 Chronicles 1:1-17, 2 Chronicles 2:1-18, 2 Chronicles 3:1-17, 2 Chronicles 4:22, 2 Chronicles 5:1-14, 2 Chronicles 6:1-42, 2 Chronicles 7:1-22, 2 Chronicles 8:1-18, 2 Chronicles 9:1-31 The second book of Chronicles continues on from the first book without transition; originally they formed a single account in the Hebrew manuscripts. We have previously remarked the same thing in the second book of Kings about these artificial divisions which are not part of the inspired Word. In fact, the account of the Chronicles is a continuous one until the end of Solomon's reign (2 Chronicles 10:1-19), and if we are looking for a moral division in our subject, it will not properly be introduced until 2 Chronicles 11:1-23.

Let us recall a truth, already mentioned many times in First Chronicles: in Chronicles God gives us, in the form of types, an overview of His counsels concerning Christ's royalty, counsels prefigured in the history of David and Solomon. Solomon himself symbolizes the future reign of wisdom and peace that will be inaugurated by the Lord's coming. This is why, as we have noted in 1 Chronicles in the history of David, Solomon's reign does not present any failures in Chronicles and even with the greatest carefulness, one cannot discover there the least allusion to the king's faults. In the preceding book we have seen how Solomon was elevated to his father's throne before he was established on his own throne. These two facts speak very clearly to us of Christ's present heavenly kingdom and of His earthly kingdom which is yet to come. The account before us will present this latter to us, and here we will not find, as in Kings, a responsible and fallible sovereign, but rather the most perfect figure possible of a government of wisdom and of peace administered by the king according to the counsels of God.

2 Chronicles 1:1-17 A King According to God's Counsels

One cannot sufficiently emphasize, at the beginning of this book, that Solomon's reign in Chronicles has an entirely different character than that of Solomon in the book of Kings. His righteousness exercised in judgment on his father's enemies - Adonijah who had opposed David, Shimei who had insulted and mocked him, Joab whose acts of violence and unrighteousness he had tolerated without being able to rebuke them - all this is omitted in Chronicles (cf. 1 Kings 1:1-52, 1 Kings 2:1-46). The incident of the two prostitutes (1 Kings 3:16-28) is also passed over in complete silence, for if this scene shows us Solomon's wisdom, it shows us his wisdom in the service of righteousness in order to rule equitably. The king does not pursue the investigation further, and does not rebuke or cut off even the most guilty of these prostitutes. Chronicles does not present Solomon's reign according to the character we have just mentioned. It is above all a reign of peace, presided over by wisdom. It is no less true that during the millennium "every morning [He] will destroy all the wicked of the land," and that prostitution will be neither tolerated nor even mentioned; but peace will reign. It is this that constitutes the subject of the first chapters of this book. From the very first words of our chapter (2 Chronicles 1:1), Solomon is presented to us as strengthening himself in his kingdom, whereas in 1 Kings 2:46 the kingdom was established

in his hand after the judgment of all the personal enemies of David. Solomon strengthens himself here with his full personal authority, but nonetheless he remains the dependent man, for if he were not, he would not be the type of the True King according to God's counsels. "Ask of me," He is urged in Psalms 2:1-12, "and I will give Thee...for Thy possession the ends of the earth." This is why in our passage we find: "And Jehovah his God was with him, and magnified him exceedingly." So too, as long as He retains the kingdom, the Lord remains the dependent Man; when He shall have concluded its administration, He will faithfully give it up into the hands of the One who entrusted it to Him and "then the Son also Himself shall be placed in subjection to Him who put all things in subjection to Him" (1 Corinthians 15:28). Will any earthly kingdom ever resemble this marvelous reign during which for a period of a thousand years - without a single shortcoming, without one denial of justice, without any decrease of peace - Christ will reign over His earthly people and over all the nations?

Dear Christian reader, let's get used to considering the Lord in this way for His own sake, and not only for the resources which He gives to meet our needs. This is the most lofty form of contemplation to which we are called, for we are set, so to say, in the company of our God to take delight in the perfections of this adorable Person. How numerous are those passages of Scripture that reveal, not what we possess in virtue of the work of Christ, but rather, what Christ is for God in virtue of His own perfections. God opens heaven on this Man and says: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I have found My delight." And when He was obliged to close heaven to Him at the moment when He was making propitiation for our sins, He says: "But Thou art the Same, and Thy years shall have no end." And again: "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Thy kingdom: Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness; therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy companions." In virtue of the perfection of His obedience and His humiliation, God "highly exalted Him, and granted Him a name, that which is above every name." This Man is "the Firstborn of all creation"; He has all glory and all supremacy (Colossians 1:15-20). It is because He laid down His life that He might take it again that the Father loves Him. In all this we find nothing of that which He has done for us. But in virtue of His accomplished work we are made capable of taking an interest in His Person and all His perfections. Let us cultivate this intimacy. Doubtless for our souls the outstanding trait of this adorable character is summed up in these words: "He loved me, and gave Himself for me"; whatever knowledge I may gain about Him, it always brings me back to His love. Thus, when He is presented to us as "the Prince of the kings of the earth," we cry out: "To Him who loves us!" But what I want to say is that what He is in Himself is an unfailing source of joy for the believer. Nothing else so effectively takes him out of his natural egoism and out of the petty preoccupations of earth; he has found the source of his eternal bliss in a perfect Object, with whom he is in intimate and direct relationship. In verses 2 Chronicles 1:2-6, we have the scene at Gibeon, but without the imperfections which spoil its beauty in 1 Kings 3:1-4. In our passage the "only" which denotes a fault has disappeared: "Only the people sacrificed in high places"; "Only he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places." Here the scene is legitimate, if I may so express myself, and Gibeon is no longer "the great high place" (1 Kings 3:4); on the contrary, it is the place where "was God's tent of meeting which Moses the servant of Jehovah had made in the wilderness...and the brazen altar that Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made, was there before the tabernacle of Jehovah" (2 Chronicles 1:3-5). Not a shadow of anything that would discredit! Solomon sacrifices on the altar, the token of atonement, where the people could meet their God.

Was there anything that could be reproached in that? Not at all. No, doubtless the place was only provisional while awaiting the construction of the temple; doubtless also, God's throne, the ark, was not to be found there, for from this time on it was established in the city of David; but in Chronicles Solomon comes to Gibeon with his people to inaugurate the reign of peace which God could introduce on the basis of sacrifice. Indeed, Second Chronicles, as we have already seen, speaks to us much more of the reign of peace than of the reign of righteousness. In 2 Chronicles 1:7-12, Solomon asks God for wisdom, and here again our account differs significantly from that in Kings (1 Kings 3:5-15). In our passage, Solomon is not "a little child" who "know[s] not to go out and to come in." There is no question that First Chronicles refers to him as a little child, but as we have noted in studying that book, from a typical point of view his youth corresponds to the position Christ occupies in heaven on His Father's throne before the inauguration of His earthly kingdom. In Kings, Solomon is ignorant and lacks discernment "between good and bad" (1 Kings 3:9). In Chronicles this flaw has totally disappeared: the king says that he needs wisdom to go out and come in before the people and to govern them. For this he addresses the One who has made him king and upon whom he is entirely dependent; this will also be Christ's relationship as Man and King with His God. But what is still more striking is that in our passage the question of responsibility is completely omitted, in contrast to 1 Kings 3:14 : "If thou wilt walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments," says God, "then I will prolong thy days." In Chronicles, Solomon's responsibility is mentioned only once (1 Chronicles 28:7-10), to depict Christ's dependence as Man, and not in any way to suppose that he might be found at fault. The book of Kings is completely different (see 1 Kings 3:14; 1 Kings 2:2; 1 Kings 2:6; 1 Kings 2:9; 1 Kings 6:11). Again, let us note that in 1 Kings God said to Solomon: "Because thou hast asked this thing...behold, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart" (1 Kings 3:11-12). In 2 Chronicles God gives him wisdom and understanding "because this was in thy heart." A type of Christ, he receives these things as man, but his heart did not need to be fashioned to receive them.

We shall not fail to see new proofs at every step of the marvelous precision with which the inspired Word pursues its object.

2 Chronicles 1:14-17. In the fact that Solomon accumulated much silver and gold at Jerusalem, and that his merchants brought him horses from Egypt, "and so they brought them by their means, for all the kings of the Hittites and for the kings of Syria," some have thought to see proof of Solomon's unfaithfulness to the prescriptions of the law in Deuteronomy 17:16-17. The study of Chronicles causes us to reject such an interpretation. Here, Egypt is tributary to Solomon who treats it equitably. He lets foreign nations profit from the same advantages, and so it shall be under Christ's future reign. The same remark applies, as we shall see in 2 Chronicles 8:11, to Pharaoh's daughter.

05.02. 2 Chronicles 2

2 Chronicles 2:1-18 Solomon and Hiram (Hiram)

Here, as in all these chapters, we find King Solomon portrayed from the standpoint of the perfection of his reign. The nations are subject to him. The men to bear burdens, the stone cutters, and the overseers are taken exclusively from among the Canaanites living in the midst of Israel, whom the people had not succeeded in driving out (2 Chronicles 2:1-2; 2 Chronicles 2:17-18; 2 Chronicles 8:7-9): "But of the children of Israel, of them did Solomon make no bondmen for his work." Thus a condition of things is realized under this glorious reign which, on account of the unfaithfulness of the people, had never existed previously. All their former mingling with the Canaanites has disappeared, and from now on the Lord's people are a free people that cannot be brought into servitude. Meanwhile the strangers whom unfaithful Israel had not exterminated from their land in time past are the only ones subjected to bondage, while the nations, possessing the riches of the earth and personified by the king of Tyre, are accepted as collaborators in this great work.

Here Solomon explains to Hiram the meaning and significance of the construction of the temple, and he does so in a different way than in the book of Kings: "Behold, I build a house unto the name of Jehovah my God to dedicate it to Him, to burn before Him sweet incense, and for the continual arrangement of the showbread, and for the morning and evening burnt-offerings and on the sabbaths and on the new moons, and on the set feasts of Jehovah our God. This is an ordinance forever to Israel" (2 Chronicles 2:4). Here the temple is the place where God is to be approached in worship, a place open not only to Israel, but also to the nations whom Hiram represents. The temple is so much the place of worship in Solomon's mind, that only burnt offerings are mentioned here, without any reference to sin offerings; sweet incense of fragrant drugs, the symbol of praise, occupies the first place. When it is a question in Ezekiel 45:1-25 of the millennial service in the temple, whether for Israel, or for the "prince" of the house of David, Christ's viceroy on the earth, we find the sin offering, for all are in need of it. Here the thought is more general. Solomon declares to Hiram that this great house which he is building is dedicated to the God of Israel "for great is our God above all gods. But who is able to build Him a house, seeing the heavens and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him?" Thus, this sovereign God, this God who is supreme and omnipresent, cannot limit His kingdom to the people of Israel. As for Solomon himself, he knows that he is only a weak human likeness of the King according to God's counsels: "Who am I," he says, "that I should build Him a house?" Nevertheless he is there "to burn sacrifice before Him." He presents himself as king and priest, without any mediator; he himself offers pure incense, as the people's mediator, a select incense which rises with the smoke of the burnt offering, a perfect, well-pleasing odor to God, and "This is an ordinance forever to Israel."

Solomon entrusts to Hiram the direction of the work, while he himself is its executor, though confiding it into the hands of the nations. So it will be at the beginning of the millennium, according to what we are told about the temple in Zechariah 6:15 and about the walls of Jerusalem in Isaiah

60:10. The sustenance of Hiram's workers here depends entirely on the king: He is the one who offers and appoints it (2 Chronicles 2:10), and Hiram has nothing more to do than to receive it. It is otherwise in 1 Kings 5:9-11 where Hiram requests it and Solomon grants it.

Hiram (2 Chronicles 2:11) acknowledges in writing (That which is written is an abiding declaration and is always available for reference): "Jehovah loved His people" in establishing Solomon as king over them, and he blesses "Jehovah the God of Israel," but as Creator of the heavens and the earth - lovely picture of the praise of the nations who, in the age yet to come will submit themselves to the universal dominion of the Most High, Possessor of the heavens and the earth, represented by the true Son of David in the midst of His people Israel. Thus blessing will rise up to God Himself from those who, formerly idolaters, will be subjected to the dominion of Christ, the King of the nations.

Hiram is prompt to execute all that the king requires, and is prompt also to accept Solomon's gifts. In Chronicles we do not see him disdainfully calling the cities which Solomon gives him "Cabul" (cf. 1 Kings 9:13), and in this way the fault committed by Solomon in alienating the Lord's inheritance is passed over in silence. Here on part of the representative of the nations there is only thankfulness and voluntary submission; he is prompt to accept and to receive, for to refuse the gifts of such a king would be only pride and rebellion.

05.03. 2 Chronicles 3-5

2 Chronicles 2:1-18, 2 Chronicles 3:1-17, 2 Chronicles 4:1-22, 2 Chronicles 5:1-14, The Temple

2 Chronicles 3:1-17 and 2 Chronicles 4:1-22 correspond to 1 Kings 6:1-35 and 1 Kings 7:1-51, but with the difference that here the temple has a special significance. Whereas in Kings it is on the one hand the place where God dwells with His own, and on the other hand the center of His government in the midst of Israel, in Chronicles, as we have already noted, it is the place where one approaches God in order to worship Him, the “house of sacrifice” (2 Chronicles 7:12). In speaking of a place of approach we are not alluding to the sinner who comes by the blood of Christ to be justified before God; we are thinking of the worshipper who enters by that same way into the sanctuary. Thus in the Epistle to the Romans we see the sinner justified by Christ’s blood, whereas the Epistle to the Hebrews introduces us into the most holy place by that same way. The fact that the temple is presented as the place of approach explains all the details of this chapter. Here we again find the brazen altar and the veil (2 Chronicles 3:14; 2 Chronicles 4:1), omitted in the description of the temple in the book of Kings; on the other hand, the priests’ dwellings mentioned in Kings are missing in Chronicles. The prophet Ezekiel, who does not give us the typical picture but rather the actual description of Christ’s millennial reign, in his description of the temple (Ezekiel 40:1-49, Ezekiel 41:1-26, Ezekiel 42:1-20, Ezekiel 43:1-27, Ezekiel 44:1-31, Ezekiel 45:1-25) brings together the characters of the books of Kings and Chronicles. There we find the altar, the door of the sanctuary, the dwelling places of the priests, and the attributes of God’s government all together (Ezekiel 40:47; Ezekiel 41:22; Ezekiel 41:6; Ezekiel 41:18). In fact, Ezekiel’s temple sets forth Jehovah, Christ, dwelling in the midst of a people of priests, exercising His righteous government, and become the center of worship for both Israel and the nations; whereas the books of Kings and Chronicles, in order that we may better appreciate His glories, present them to us one after the other.

Other striking details confirm what we have just said. Chronicles mentions neither the sin offering nor the trespass offering; there the altar is solely the place of burnt offerings and peace offerings. Ezekiel, by contrast, insists upon the sin offering as the preparation for all the other offerings (Ezekiel 43:25-27), and then names them not omitting even one (Ezekiel 45:25). A few more words about the brazen altar: This altar of Solomon’s has a very important place in Chronicles. It is not the altar of the wilderness, kept at Gibeon, figure of the way in which God comes to meet the sinner and remains just while justifying him; but rather, it is the altar of burnt offering without which one may not approach Him. The dimensions of the altar at Gibeon are quite different from those of Solomon’s altar: the first is five cubits long, five cubits wide, and three cubits high. Solomon’s altar (2 Chronicles 4:1) is twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and ten cubits high. The two principal dimensions are exactly the same as those of the most holy place (2 Chronicles 3:8; 1 Kings 6:20; Ezekiel 41:4). The altar, Christ, is perfectly suited to the sanctuary; the glories of the most holy place correspond to the greatness and perfection of the sacrifice represented by the altar. Moreover, as we have said, the altar being especially the expression of worship here, it also has the same measurements as the sanctuary; without being perfect in all its dimensions, it is worthy,

in the highest degree, of the millennial scene which it represents.

Everything pertaining to Christ's millennial government and even to the emblems of this government is completely absent in Chronicles; for example, the house of the forest of Lebanon, seat of the throne of judgment, as well as the king's palace, and also the cherubim, special symbols of government which are found throughout the book of Kings, on the walls of the temple and even on the vessels of the courtyard.

Even when it is a question of Solomon's person and his deeds, the description which Chronicles gives is intentionally simplified. There the king is presented to us, not increasing in greatness, as in the book of Kings, but established on the throne according to God's counsels, endowed with perfect wisdom, surrounded by riches and glory. Not a single detail is given us about the exercise of his wisdom, whether in discerning evil, whether in judging, or whether in teaching that which is good by his words and writings (see 1 Kings 3:16-28; 1 Kings 4:29-34). Solomon is set before our eyes on his throne, in a posture, so to say, unchangeable; peace reigns, the counsels of God concerning His King are fulfilled, and this King Himself is God. This scene of peace and well-being has its starting point on Mount Moriah, a detail, let us carefully note, which is missing in the book of Kings: "And Solomon began to build the house of Jehovah at Jerusalem on mount Moriah, where he appeared to David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite" (2 Chronicles 3:1). It was at Moriah, first of all, that Abraham had offered Isaac on the altar and received him again in figure by resurrection; there, all that the holiness of God demanded had been provided. Next, it was at Moriah where, on the occasion of David's failure, grace gloried over judgment. Solomon's reign of peace is thus established after resurrection, on the principle of grace, just as the future reign of the risen Christ will be based entirely on the grace that triumphed at the cross. Following the sacrifice of Moriah and in virtue of the sovereign monarch's personal perfection, the latter may from this time forward enter his temple. The eternal gates will lift up their heads to let the King of glory pass. He will have a rich entry into His own kingdom. Only in Chronicles do we find the immense height of this porch (2 Chronicles 3:4; cf. Psalms 24:7; Psalms 24:9; Malachi 3:1; Haggai 2:7; 2 Peter 1:11; 2 Peter 1:17).

One more characteristic detail: here we see only palm trees and chains on the walls of the house; palm trees are the symbols of triumphant peace; the chains, which also ornament the pillars here, are not mentioned anywhere else except on the shoulder pieces and the breastplate of the high priest. They firmly unite the various parts and appear to symbolize the solidity of the bond uniting the people of God. There are no more partially opened flowers, symbol of a reign that is beginning to blossom out, as in the book of Kings; here the reign is definitely established; there are no more cherubim hidden under the gold of the walls; they appear only on the veil; there are no more secret thoughts, no more hidden counsels of God; they are now made manifest in the person of Christ, but fixed on the veil - His flesh delivered to death. In the most holy place, two cherubim standing with wings extended face "toward the house" (2 Chronicles 3:13), a fact mentioned only here, and contemplate the order of the people of God established from henceforth on. The pillars Jachin and Boaz ("He shall establish" and "In Him is strength") are essential to this scene, emblems of a reign established from this time on and dependent entirely on the power which is in Christ.

Another interesting detail: Solomon "made ten tables, and placed them in the temple, five on the right hand and five on the left" (2 Chronicles 4:8). 1 Kings 7:48 mentions only one. Is it not striking

to see the loaves of shewbread thus multiplied tenfold? Solomon is viewed as seated “on the throne of Jehovah” (1 Chronicles 29:23); Israel increases under his reign; they ever remain the same tribes, but infinitely increased in the eyes of God, who beholds them and governs them. The true Solomon, Christ Himself, is the author of this multiplication (2 Chronicles 4:8). In the millennium Israel will be complete, as presented to God by Christ, an offering well-pleasing to God. In 2 Chronicles 5:1-14 the ark is brought up from the city of David to the magnificent house which Solomon has prepared for it. The tabernacle and all its vessels, which were at Gibeon, rejoin the ark in the temple: thus the remembrance of the wilderness journey ever remains before God. We are not told of the vessels of the court; most importantly, we are not told of the brazen altar that was set up by Moses and where God in grace came to meet a sinful people. This wilderness altar is replaced by Solomon’s altar, itself corresponding to the altar David set up on the threshing-floor of Ornan. Solomon’s altar is mentioned in passing in the book of Kings only when all has been finished (1 Kings 8:22). Kings, as we have said, has another object in view than worship. The ark has at last found a place of rest, but the millennial scene, which these chapters pre-figure, is not the eternal, final rest for God’s throne. The staves have not disappeared, although their position denotes that the ark will no longer journey. The entire scene of millennial blessing described here will end when the new heavens and the new earth are established. The passage from 2 Chronicles 5:11-14 of our chapter is missing in the book of Kings: “And it came to pass when the priests were come out of the holy place (for all the priests that were present were hallowed without observing the courses; and the Levites the singers, all they of Asaph, of Heman, of Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, clad in byssus, with cymbals and lutes and harps, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them a hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets), - it came to pass when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one voice to be heard in praising and thanking Jehovah; and when they lifted up their voice with trumpets, and cymbals, and instruments of music, and praised Jehovah: For He is good, for His loving-kindness endureth forever; that then the house, the house of Jehovah, was filled with a cloud, and the priests could not stand to do their service because of the cloud; for the glory of Jehovah had filled the house of God.” This is the appropriate picture of millennial worship when the “song of triumph and praise” shall be sounded (cf. 2 Chronicles 20:22). There the Lord is praised “for He is good, for His loving-kindness endureth forever.” (As to this song, see also: 1 Chronicles 16:41; 2 Chronicles 7:3; 2 Chronicles 7:6; Psalms 106:1; Psalms 107:1; Psalms 118:1-29; Psalms 136:1-26; Jeremiah 33:11). All the instruments of music resound, just as in Psalms 150:1-6 which describes the same scene. Here we have properly the dedication of the altar (2 Chronicles 7:9) preceding the feast of tabernacles, but only Chronicles shows us the glory of the Lord filling the house twice. In fact, there were two feasts, one of seven days, the dedication of the altar, and one of eight days, the dedication of the house or the feast of tabernacles (2 Chronicles 7:9). Both are found here, with the same hymn and the same presence of God’s glory in His temple, a subject most appropriate to this book which speaks of worship and of the fulfillment of God’s counsels concerning His reign. In Chronicles the dedication of the altar takes the place of the great day of atonement (cf. Leviticus 23:26-36), while in Zechariah this day must precede the establishment of the messianic reign. Here it is not a question of afflicting their souls as on the day of atonement (Leviticus 16:29), but of rejoicing, for by means of the altar God’s loving-kindness which endures forever has ultimately brought the people to Himself. The song: “His loving-kindness endureth forever,” so characteristic of the beginning of the millennial reign, is repeated in this book of Chronicles both times when the glory

of Jehovah fills the temple; this hymn is completely absent in 1 Kings. The scene is much more complete here: the counsels of God as to the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth are in type at last accomplished. "The glory of Jehovah had filled the house of God " (cf. 1 Kings 8:11). The name of God often replaces that of Jehovah in these chapters, an allusion to His relationship with the nations which acknowledge the God of Israel as their God. In conclusion let us say that in the presence of all the differences in details between 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles, every believer will be convinced of the wisdom and divine order which invariably preside in these accounts. The smallest omission as well as every word added in the sacred text are the fruit of an overall plan destined to display the various glories of Christ. We are far from having exhausted the enumeration of these differences; others may discover additional differences with real profit for their souls.

05.04. 2 Chronicles 6-7

2 Chronicles 6:1-41, 2 Chronicles 7:1-22 Solomon's Prayer

Many important particulars differentiate this portion of our book from the corresponding chapter of Kings - 1 Kings 8. In the latter chapter, the feast, although prolonged for fourteen days, in actual fact corresponds only to the feast of tabernacles. It is called "the dedication of the house" (cf. 1 Kings 8:63); but on the eighth day, the great day of the feast, the king sent the people away (1 Kings 8:65-66). The passage in Chronicles goes much further: it insists on the fact that "on the eighth day they held a solemn assembly" (2 Chronicles 7:9); thus it introduces the type of ultimate general rest connected with the day of resurrection which the eighth day prefigures. In this way, the blessing is not restricted to the people of Israel alone, but belongs to all who have part in the day of resurrection. Our passage in Chronicles offers another very interesting observation: Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord, in the presence of the whole congregation of Israel, "and spread forth his hands. For Solomon had made a platform of bronze, five cubits long, and five cubits broad, and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court; and upon it he stood, and he kneeled down on his knees before the whole congregation of Israel" and spread forth his hands towards the heavens. The entire portion of this passage within the quotation marks is lacking in the book of Kings. The platform Solomon made and on which he stood in the presence of all the people had exactly the same dimensions as the brazen altar in Exodus 27:1. "And thou shalt make," the Lord had said to Moses, "the altar of acacia wood, five cubits the length, and five cubits the breadth; the altar shall be square; and the height thereof three cubits." The wilderness altar was, as we have already said, one of the vessels not mentioned as having been brought from Gibeon to the temple (2 Chronicles 5:5 & 1 Kings 8:4), for a new altar had been constructed there. But could the first altar be absolutely excluded? That was impossible! The altar of Moses represented solely the place where God could meet the sinner. A type of the cross, it was there that God could manifest Himself as righteous in justifying the guilty, and it was there that His love was in perfect accord with His righteousness to accomplish salvation. The brazen altar formed the basis of all of the Lord's relationships with his people; it was, so to speak, the first door of access to the sanctuary. Nevertheless our book passes over it in silence (not over its memorial, as we shall see) for the work introducing the reign of the King of peace is considered here as completely finished. The altar of the tabernacle, the altar of atonement, in Chronicles is merely the starting point for leading the people to the altar of the temple, that is to say, to the altar of worship, the essential characteristic of Solomon's altar in this book. Thus the first altar of bronze has disappeared, only to reappear here in form of a platform, as a pedestal on which Solomon is placed in the sight of all the people. The place where the sin offering was sacrificed becomes the place where Solomon - Christ - is glorified. "Now," says the Lord, speaking of the cross, "is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him" (John 13:31). This altar, representing final salvation forever for every believer - for for us there is no more sin offering: the cross of Christ henceforth remains void of its burden of iniquity - this altar has yet another meaning: it is the basis upon which the Son of man's glory is established. Because of His sacrifice the reins of government are placed

in His hands, and He is presented as the Leader of His people. But something else strikes us here: Solomon on his platform in reality is much more an intercessor, an advocate for Israel, than a king. There, on the platform he bows the knee and spreads forth his hands in supplication toward heaven. And remarkably, here he is not, as in 1 Kings 8:54-61, a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek, blessing God on behalf of the people and blessing the people on behalf of God, rising from before the altar to stand and bless: no, on his platform which once was an altar he assumes only the place of an intercessor, praying for the people who through their future conduct, their sin already to be seen, would bring to naught all God's counsels, if indeed His counsels could be brought to naught. This role that Solomon filled on behalf of Israel is the very role the Lord fills today on our behalf. "If any one sin, we have a patron with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours alone, but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2). His office as Advocate is based on the propitiation which He has accomplished, just as Solomon's intercession was inseparable from this platform, mysterious and marvelous figure of the altar. At the end of Solomon's prayer we find (2 Chronicles 6:41-42) these words which are absent in the book of Kings: "And now, arise, Jehovah Elohim, into Thy resting-place, Thou, and the ark of Thy strength: let Thy priests, Jehovah Elohim, be clothed with salvation, and let Thy saints rejoice in Thy goodness. Jehovah Elohim, turn not away the face of Thine Anointed: remember mercies to David Thy servant." These words are taken from Psalms 132:1-18. In this song, the object of David's afflictions was to find a habitation for the Mighty One of Jacob. This habitation had now been found, but in the imperfection which Solomon's request reveals. God in that Psalm then responds to the king's desire expressed in Chronicles. He shows him Zion, His house, His priesthood, His Anointed, as He sees them in their eternal perfection in answer to sufferings of Christ, the true David. God's rest is still to come, but here Solomon shows us that scene we anticipate.

Next in 2 Chronicles 7:1-22 we find in 2 Chronicles 7:1-3 and 2 Chronicles 7:6-7 a passage which is lacking in the book of Kings. "The fire came down from the heavens and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of Jehovah filled the house." God sets His seal and His approval on the inauguration of this reign of peace; His glory fills the house which has been prepared for Him; all the people bow themselves with their faces to the ground, and extol the Lord with worship and praise. This passage tallies with and admirably harmonizes with the character of the millennial worship, as presented in Chronicles!

2 Chronicles 7:12-22 differ little from the account of Kings. Nevertheless it should be noted that here, as in 2 Chronicles 1:7, the Lord's appearance to Solomon has a character perhaps more direct than in the book of Kings, for it is not said that God appeared to him "in a dream" (2 Chronicles 7:12). The house which the Lord had chosen is called "a house of sacrifice" according to its character as a place of worship which we have observed all through this book. God's free choice in grace is also emphasized more in our chapters: God chose Jerusalem, chose David, chose the house (2 Chronicles 6:6; 2 Chronicles 7:12). In response to the office of advocate and intercessor which Solomon had taken in the preceding chapter, God gives him a full answer (2 Chronicles 7:13-14) which is absent in Kings. The consequences of the responsibility of the people and their leaders are exposed completely in this passage, as they had been in Solomon's prayer, but also the certainty that, by virtue of this intercession, God would forgive their sin and heal their land. And He assures His Beloved by this single word, omitted in the book of Kings: "Now mine

eyes shall be open," etc. From the moment Solomon appears before God, the answer to his intercession is sure and, however delayed it must be on account of the people's unfaithfulness, it is no less real a fact granted at the request of the Lord's anointed. For the second time in these books, Solomon's responsibility is mentioned (2 Chronicles 7:17-18. See 1 Chronicles 28:7); but with the great difference that Chronicles in no way shows, as does the first book of Kings, that Solomon failed therein. Thus in our book his responsibility remains a responsibility to the glory of God, so that in type we see absolutely nothing lacking in the king of the counsels of God.

05.05. 2 Chronicles 8 - 9

2 Chronicles 8:1-18, 2 Chronicles 9:1-31 Solomon's Relations With the Nations

These two chapters describe King Solomon's relations with the Gentiles. 2 Chronicles 2:1-18 has already referred to the Canaanites and to Hiram, king of Tyre, but only in relation to the construction of the temple, the work to which all were called to contribute. The first event related is the peaceful conquest, taking possession of and subjugating all the cities of the surrounding nations. Here we find a detail which is very interesting for understanding Chronicles. The first book of Kings (2 Chronicles 9:11-14) tells us that Solomon gave Hiram, the king of Tyre, "twenty cities in the land of Galilee." Hiram despised this gift and called these cities the "land of Cabul" (good for nothing); and we have noted that if, on the one hand, the territory of the promised land never had any value for the world, on the other hand Solomon committed positive unfaithfulness in alienating Jehovah's land. As always in this book, Solomon's sin is passed over in silence. Such omissions, repeated over and over again, ought to show rationalists the futility of their criticisms in presence of a design of which they seem unconscious of. Instead of seeing Solomon giving cities to Hiram, in 2 Chronicles 8:2 we see the latter giving cities to Solomon. A day is coming when the world, which Tyre represents in the Word, will come with its riches and acknowledge itself tributary to Christ, and offer its finest cities as dwelling places for the children of Israel. Solomon fortifies them, surrounds them with walls, equips them with gates and bars - in a word, prepares them for defense. There, too, he concentrates his armed forces, not to use them for warfare, but, knowing the unsubmissive heart of the nations, he prepares this power so that peace can rule. During his long reign of forty years we never see Solomon engaged in any war of conquest, but the weight of his scepter must be felt so that the nations will submit. The Word tells us, speaking of Christ: "Thou shalt break them with a scepter of iron." During the millennium no nation will dare to lift the head in presence of the King, and He will have many other means, too, of making them feel the weight of His arm (see Zechariah 14:12-16).

All the Canaanites remaining in the land of Israel also are subjected to Solomon (2 Chronicles 8:7-10), whereas the children of Israel are men of war and free, but free to serve the King.

2 Chronicles 8:11 tells us of Solomon's relations with Pharaoh's daughter: "And Solomon brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the city of David to the house which he had built for her; for he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places are holy to which the ark of Jehovah has come." Many have thought that Solomon's union with the daughter of the king of Egypt was an act of unfaithfulness to the prescriptions of the law. Forgetfulness of the typical meaning of the Word may lead to such mistakes. Would we say that Joseph was unfaithful in marrying Asenath, the daughter of Potipherah, priest of On (Genesis 41:50)? that Moses was unfaithful in marrying Zipporah, daughter of the priest of Midian (Exodus 2:21)?

Always in their relations with the Canaanites, even long before Israel's entrance into the Promised Land, the Pharaohs had given their daughters to various kings of these countries. For the king of Egypt it was a means of subjecting them, for they paid tribute to Pharaoh in exchange for the

honor of being his sons-in-law. But never did the king of Egypt give his own daughter to the kings of the neighboring nations; to them he granted his concubines' daughters who had no right to the throne of Egypt and who were not of royal blood through their mothers. "The daughter of Pharaoh" was the daughter of the queen, his legitimate wife, and according to the Egyptian constitution she had the right to the throne in the absence of a son and heir. This daughter, the daughter of Pharaoh - not "one of his daughters" - was given to Solomon. Such a union was the affirmation of Solomon's eventual rights to the land of Egypt. It subjected Pharaoh's royalty to that of Israel's king who could thus become the ruler to whom Egypt must submit; evident proof that the most ancient of earth's kingdoms was consenting to submit to the yoke of Israel's great king. This fact has very real importance as one of the features of Christ's millennial dominion. A word added here is not found in the book of Kings: Solomon said, "My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places are holy to which the ark of Jehovah has come." A daughter of the nations, however ancient and powerful her people might be, could not live there where the ark had even momentarily dwelt. Despite the union of the King of Peace with the nations, they could not enjoy the same intimacy with him as the chosen people. The ark was Jehovah's throne in relation to Israel; God had never chosen Egypt, but He had chosen Israel as His inheritance, Jerusalem as His seat, the temple as His dwelling place, and David and Solomon to be the shepherds of His people. This people, today despised and rejected on account of their disobedience, will one day on account of the election by grace again find earthly blessing in Christ's kingdom, and in the Lord's presence. The great nations of the past, Egypt and Assyria, will receive a generous portion, but not that of absolute nearness (Isaiah 19:23-25); they will be called the Lord's people and the work of the Lord's hands, but not His inheritance, as is Israel. Doubtless the fierce oppressors of God's people in former days will have a place of privilege and blessing during Christ's reign, but it will be becoming to the glory of the King, once scorned and set at naught by the nations who oppressed His people, that His people receive highest honors in the presence of their former enemies. And will it not be the same for the faithful Church, when those of the synagogue of Satan will come to bow down at her feet and acknowledge that Jesus has loved her?

2 Chronicles 8:12-16 mention all the religious and priestly service as set before the eyes of the subjected nations and as having great importance for them. Everything is regulated according to the commandment of Moses and the ordinance of David. Sacrifices are offered ("as the duty of every day required"), but only the burnt offerings are mentioned. This is in accord with the design of the book, as we have already said more than once. This passage (2 Chronicles 8:13-16) is absent in the first book of Kings. In 2 Chronicles 8:17-18 we once again find the king of Tyre's contribution to the splendor of Solomon's reign. It is no longer just a matter of his collaboration in the work of the temple, but one of contributing to the outward opulence of this glorious reign under which gold was esteemed as stones in Jerusalem. In 2 Chronicles 9:1-31 the history of the queen of Sheba, so full of instruction and already dealt with in meditations on the book of Kings, closes the account of Solomon's intimate relations with the nations. We will limit ourselves to a few additional remarks.

Huram placed himself at Solomon's disposal out of affection for David, the king of grace, whom he had personally known; the Queen of Sheba is attracted by the wisdom and fame of the King, whose glorious and peaceful reign is the object of universal admiration. The word of others convinces her to come and see with her own eyes. She "heard of the fame of Solomon." 1 Kings

10:1 adds: "in connection with the name of Jehovah"; but here Solomon, seated "on the throne of Jehovah" (1 Chronicles 29:23), concentrates, so to say, the divine character in his person. We find the same thing in 2 Chronicles 9:8 : "Blessed be Jehovah thy God, who delighted in thee, to set thee on His throne, to be king to Jehovah thy God!" whereas 1 Kings 10:9, the corresponding passage, simply says, "to set thee on the throne of Israel." Thus it is Jehovah whom Solomon represents in Chronicles. One could multiply such details to show that they all work together, harmonizing in the smallest shades of difference in the picture given us here of Christ's millennial reign. The Queen of Sheba needed nothing beyond what she had heard to make her hasten to Jerusalem; nevertheless she "gave no credit to their words" until she had come and her eyes had seen (2 Chronicles 9:6). This will indeed be characteristic of believers in the days yet to come; their faith will spring from sight, whereas today, "Blessed they who have not seen and have believed" (John 20:29).

If the queen's joy was deep in presence of the splendors of this great reign, can her joy be compared to ours in the present day? Is it not said of us: "Whom, having not seen, ye love; on whom though not now looking, but believing, ye exult with joy unspeakable and filled with the glory" (1 Peter 1:8)?

All the details of this incomparable reign are of interest to the Queen of Sheba; she rejoices in all, sees all, enumerates all - from the apparel of his servants to the marvelous ramp built by Solomon to connect his palace with the temple. Every treasure flows to Jerusalem, the center to which the king was drawing the riches of the entire world. "All the kings of Arabia" and the governors of various districts bring him gold, spices (which played such a considerable role in oriental courts), precious stones, and rare sandalwood. Gold in particular, that emblem of divine righteousness, came from all parts; the very footstool of the throne was made of gold (2 Chronicles 9:18). The king's feet rested on pure gold when he sat on the throne of his kingdom. "Righteousness and judgment are the foundation of thy throne," Psalms 89:14 tells us (cf. Psalms 97:2); but it also adds: "loving-kindness and truth go before thy face." It was his presence which all the kings of the earth sought after, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart (2 Chronicles 9:23). "To behold the face of the king" was the supreme privilege; whoever was admitted to his presence could count himself happy. "Happy...thy servants," said the queen, "who stand continually before thee." "Blessed," it says again, "is the people that know the shout of joy: they walk, O Jehovah in the light of Thy countenance" (Psalms 89:15). To see the king's face is to be admitted to his intimacy. Supreme honor for the nations of the future, but so much the more our present day privilege! Ah, how such favor humbles us! We feel our nothingness before this glorious presence; we bow in the dust before such righteousness, wisdom and goodness. But here is what is said to us: "Happy", says the queen, "are these thy servants, who...hear thy wisdom." It is not the voice of great waters and loud thunder, but a voice more gentle than the myrrh-scented breeze; a voice that goes through us; the voice of the Beloved, of Jedidiah, the voice of love! All these sentiments come from seeking His face and being admitted to His presence. And as happened with the queen of Sheba, there will be no more spirit in us. There is wonder and worship in the presence of such wisdom, holiness, righteousness, and glory; a very humble love, for it immediately senses that it is not to be compared with this love; the whole heart is ecstatic and longs only to lose itself in the contemplation of its cherished object. Such were the thoughts of the Shulamite when she contemplated the most perfect of the sons of men. Her eyes saw the King in his beauty (Isaiah

33:17).

2 Chronicles 9:27-28, repeating what was told us in 2 Chronicles 1:15; 2 Chronicles 1:17 (cf. 1 Kings 10:27-29), describe the reign as it was established from its beginning and as in Chronicles it remains until the end. According to the character of this book, it has come up to all that God was expecting of it. One sees from 2 Chronicles 9:26 that Solomon's chariots and horses were not an infraction of the law of Moses (Deuteronomy 17:16), but a means of maintaining his reign of peace over all the nations: "He ruled over all the kings from the river as far as the land of the Philistines, and up to the border of Egypt" (2 Chronicles 9:26). These limits of the kingdom of Solomon in Israel correspond to those which God's counsels had assigned to His people in Joshua 1:4; they had never before been attained nor have they ever been since. They will only be realized, and that in even greater measure, in the future reign of Christ.

Thus in these chapters we have seen the Canaanites, Tyre, the kings of Arabia, all the kings from the River to the border of Egypt, the Queen of Sheba, and lastly, all the kings of the earth converging upon the court of the great king. Thus ends the history of Solomon, without any alloy whatsoever tarnishing the pure metal of his character as Chronicles presents it. If we have alluded to his love, let us recall however that this is here not so much the hallmark of his reign as are wisdom and peace, but that Jehovah is celebrated on account of His loving-kindness which endures forever. Even his righteousness is presented in Chronicles only in the government of the nations; his throne is described (2 Chronicles 9:17-19) because it has to do with the kingdom, but the house of the forest of Lebanon where the throne is found in its judicial character, is completely absent here (cf. 1 Kings 7:2-7). In that which is presented to us everything is perfect, and it is astonishing that writings of pious people can affirm the very opposite. No doubt this is because these persons confuse the books of Kings and Chronicles. As a type, the Word can go no further, but let us remember that it cannot give us a picture of perfection when it uses the first Adam as an example unless it passes over his imperfections and serious sins in absolute silence. At this point in our account we must notice the absolute omission in Chronicles of 1 Kings 11:1-40 : Solomon's sin which was not forgiven; his love for many foreign women; the idolatry of his old age; God's wrath aroused against him; the adversaries raised up against him, Hadad the Edomite, and Rezon the son of Eliada (1 Kings 11:14-25); the judgment pronounced on his kingdom (1 Kings 11:11); and lastly, Jeroboam's revolt. Now such omissions make the purpose and general thought of our book shine out before our eyes.

05.06. 2 Chronicles 10-12

2 Chronicles 10:1-19, 2 Chronicles 11:1-23, 2 Chronicles 12:1-16 Solomon's Successors The Era of the Prophets

2 Chronicles 10:1-19, 2 Chronicles 11:1-23, 2 Chronicles 12:1-16, 2 Chronicles 13:1-22, 2 Chronicles 14:1-15, 2 Chronicles 15:1-19, 2 Chronicles 16:1-14, 2 Chronicles 17:1-19, 2 Chronicles 18:1-34, 2 Chronicles 19:1-11, 2 Chronicles 20:1-37, 2 Chronicles 21:1-20, 2 Chronicles 22:1-12, 2 Chronicles 23:1-21, 2 Chronicles 24:1-27, 2 Chronicles 25:28, 2 Chronicles 26:1-23, 2 Chronicles 27:1-9, 2 Chronicles 28:1-27, 2 Chronicles 29:1-36, 2 Chronicles 30:1-27, 2 Chronicles 31:1-21, 2 Chronicles 32:1-33, 2 Chronicles 33:1-25, 2 Chronicles 34:1-33, 2 Chronicles 35:1-27, 2 Chronicles 36:1-23

2 Chronicles 10:1-19 marks the second division of Chronicles. Its first division has embraced the history of David and Solomon. Until the end of our book we now have the history of the kingdom of Judah, the counterpart of the kingdom of Israel taken up in the books of the Kings. But before studying Solomon's successors, we must give a brief exposition of what makes their history special.

We have said that Chronicles presents the picture of God's counsels with regard to the kingdom. These counsels have been accomplished in type, but only in type, under the reigns of David and Solomon. David, the suffering and rejected king, has become, in his Son, the king of peace, the king of glory who sits upon the throne of Jehovah. However, although Chronicles is careful to omit Solomon's faults entirely, he was not the true king according to God's counsels. The words "I will be his father, and he shall be My son" (2 Samuel 7:14) could not find their complete fulfillment in him. The decree "Thou art My Son; I this day have begotten thee" (Psalms 2:7), did not relate to him, but directed hope to One greater and more perfect than he. But, in order that this future Son might be "the offspring of David," David's line must be maintained until His appearing; this is why God had promised David "to give to him always a lamp, and to his sons" (2 Chronicles 21:7). Now, how was this lamp going to shine in the royal house until the appearing of the promised Son? How was it to pass through man's poisoned air and moral darkness without being extinguished - which would have made David's true Heir's appearing impossible? Satan understood this. If he could succeed in extinguishing the lamp, all of God's counsels concerning the "Just Ruler over men" would come to naught. But, despite all the enemy's efforts to suppress this light, the Son of David appeared in the world, won the victory over Satan, and became for the Church the Yea and Amen of all God's promises. Yet this subject, revealed in the New Testament, is not what is in question here; as we have seen, Chronicles deals only with the earthly kingdom of Christ over Israel and the nations. This kingdom was contested to the end by Satan. When the King whom the magi worshipped appeared as a small Child, the enemy sought to cut Him off through the murder of the children at Bethlehem. At the cross where he thought to make an end of Him, he could not prevent Him from being declared king of the Jews in sight of all by Pilate's inscription; and, when the enemy thought he was victorious, God resurrected His Anointed and made Him Lord and Christ

before the eyes of the whole house of Israel.

Let us return to our book. If for the reasons above it does not show us Satan's maneuvers during Solomon's reign, it speaks of them in an all the more striking manner during the subsequent reigns. The enemy seduces the king and his people to lead them into idolatry; he uses violence in an effort to destroy and wipe out the royal line. But God's watchful care reaches the people's conscience and, when everything seems lost, the Spirit's breath comes to revive the wick that is going out. There are situations where a Joram, an Ahaziah, an Ahaz are so reprobate that they are delivered up to consuming fire, for God Himself, always mindful of "good things," can no longer acknowledge any good in these kings, and everything, absolutely everything, must be judged. The lamp is extinguished; deepest darkness reigns; Satan triumphs, but only in appearance. God preserves a feeble shoot of this reprobate trunk in the person of Ahaziah - yes, but this single shoot spared from the murder of the royal race, is himself found to be a dry branch destined for the fire. Anew the entire line is annihilated. Is it completely destroyed now? No, there it is - reborn in the person of Joash, and the Spirit of God is once again able to find in him "good things." In this manner the royal succession continues, so that David's line is not wiped out by these reprobates (see Matthew 1:1-25). Thus Satan's struggle against God results in Satan's confusion. What, then, is the reason for his defeat? One thing explains it: the only thing that Satan, who knows so much, has never thought of nor could think of. The secret which he is ignorant of is grace, for his so cunning intelligence is completely impervious to love. This entire second portion of Chronicles could thus be entitled The history of grace in relation to the kingdom of Judah. When grace can revive the flame so as to maintain the light of testimony, it does not fail to do so; when, in the face of the willful hardening of heart of the kings, it can produce nothing, it still raises up to them a posterity from which it can expect some fruit.

Thus we shall witness Satan's desperate struggle against God's counsels and, at the same time, the triumph of grace. This entire period is summarized in the words of the prophet: "Who is a God like unto Thee, that forgiveth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in loving-kindness. He will yet again have compassion on us; He will tread under foot our iniquities: and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:18-19).

Nevertheless a time comes when the ruin appears irremediable, when in the struggle Satan's triumph seems assured. The kingdom sinks under waves of judgment; although, as we have seen in the genealogies (1 Chronicles 3:19; 1 Chronicles 3:24), feeble representatives of the royal line, without titles, without prerogatives, without authority and without a realm continue to exist. After them, the line - ever more obscure and brought low - perpetuates itself in silence until we reach a poor carpenter who becomes the reputed father of the "woman's Seed." Christ is born!

Thus nothing has been able to thwart God's counsels - neither Satan's efforts, nor the unfaithfulness of the kings. No doubt, these counsels have been hidden for a time until the coming of the Messiah, depicted beforehand in the person of Solomon. The throne remained empty, but empty only in appearance, until the King of righteousness and peace could sit on it. Here He is! This little Child, lowly, rejected from the time of His appearance, possesses every title to the kingdom. But see Him, hear Him! The crowds seek Him to make Him king; He hides Himself and withdraws; He forbids His disciples to speak of His kingdom. This is because before He receives it,

He has another mission, another service to accomplish. He declares Himself king before Pilate and this leads to His execution, but He goes to lay hold of a kingdom which is not of this world. He abandons all His rights - not reserving a single one of them - to the hands of His enemies; He is silent, like a sheep before its shearers. This is because He must carry out a completely different task, the immense work of redemption which leads Him to the cross.

Having accomplished this work, He receives, in resurrection, the heavenly sphere of the kingdom. Like Solomon of old He is seated on His Father's throne while waiting to be seated on His own throne. This moment will come for Him, the true King of Israel and of the nations, but it has not yet arrived. He awaits only a sign from His Father to take the reins of earthly government in hand. From the moment of His appearing as a little Child, there is no more need of a royal succession. Note: We say "succession" because we would not forget that the "prince" or viceroy of Ezekiel is of royal seed (cf. Ezekiel 46:1-18; Ezekiel 48:21). The King exists, the King lives, the King is enthroned in heaven today; soon He will be proclaimed Lord of all the earth and the offspring of David for His people Israel. But until His appearing, to maintain His line of descent, there is, as we have said, but one means: grace. This is why we have the remarkable peculiarity in Chronicles that everything, even in the worst of kings, that could be the fruit of grace, is carefully recorded. Everywhere that God can do so, He points it out. So, too, this account is not, as we find in Kings, the portrayal of responsible royalty, but the portrayal of the activity of grace in these men. The Spirit of God works even in the dreadfully hardened heart of a Manasseh in order to prolong the royal line of descent a little longer in an offspring (Josiah) who rules according to God's heart. Despite these momentary revivals, the ruin becomes increasingly accentuated. Differing in this from Kings and the prophet Jeremiah, Chronicles scarcely stoops to register Josiah's successors in a few verses before hastening to reach the end: the return from captivity, shining proof of God's grace toward this people. In order to accomplish the work of grace which would at last bring in the triumph of the kingdom in the person of Christ, it was necessary that the dispensation of the law, without being abolished, undergo an important modification. Under the kings, the system of law continued, for it did not end until Christ; the system of grace had not yet begun, for it finds its full expression at the cross; but during the period of the kings God intervened in an altogether new way in order to manifest His ways of grace under the system of law. He did this by having prophets appear. Not that this appearing was restricted to the system begun by the kings, for it became evident from the moment that Israel's history was characterized by ruin. Thus we see the first prophets (not mentioning Enoch, then Moses) appearing when the ruin was complete in Israel. In the book of Judges, when the entire people failed, we see the prophetess Deborah arising (Judges 4:4), and later a prophet (Judges 6:7-10). Later on, when the priesthood was in ruin Samuel was raised up as a prophet (1 Samuel 3:20). In the books of Kings and Chronicles, at last, when kingship failed, prophets appeared and multiplied beyond our ability to count them.

Note:

List of the prophets cited in the second book of Chronicles:

Nathan (2 Chronicles 9:29);

Ahijah the Shilonite (2 Chronicles 9:29; 2 Chronicles 10:15).

Iddo the seer (2 Chronicles 9:29; 2 Chronicles 12:15; 2 Chronicles 13:22).

Shemaiah the man of God (2 Chronicles 11:2; 2 Chronicles 12:5; 2 Chronicles 12:15).

Azariah the son of Oded (2 Chronicles 15:1), and Oded (v. 8).

Hanani the seer (2 Chronicles 16:7).

Micah (or Micaiah) the son of Imlah (2 Chronicles 18:7).

Jehu the son of Hanani, the seer (2 Chronicles 19:2; 2 Chronicles 20:34).

Jahaziel the son of Zechariah (2 Chronicles 20:14).

Eliezer the son of Dodavah (2 Chronicles 20:37).

Elijah the prophet (2 Chronicles 21:12).

Several prophets and Zechariah the son of Jehoiada (2 Chronicles 24:19-20). A man of God (2 Chronicles 25:7). A prophet (2 Chronicles 25:15).

Zechariah the seer (2 Chronicles 26:5).

Isaiah the son of Amoz (2 Chronicles 26:22; 2 Chronicles 32:32).

Oded (2 Chronicles 28:9).

Micah the Morasthite (Jeremiah 26:18).

Some seers (or prophets) (2 Chronicles 33:18-19, cf. 2 Kings 21:10).

Huldah the prophetess (2 Chronicles 34:22) Jeremiah (2 Chronicles 35:12; 2 Chronicles 35:1-27: 2 Chronicles 25:1-28; 2 Chronicles 36:12; 2 Chronicles 36:21).

Messengers and prophets (2 Chronicles 36:15-16); cf. Uriah the son of Shemaiah (Jeremiah 26:20).

They inaugurated a new dispensation of God, become necessary when all was ruined, when the law had shown itself powerless to rule and keep in check the corrupt nature of man; when even combined with mercy (when the tables of the law were given to Moses a second time) it had in no way improved this condition. It was then that God sent His prophets. On certain occasions they announce only impending judgment, the last effort of divine mercy to save the people, through fire as it were; on other much more numerous occasions they are sent to exhort, to restore, to console, to strengthen, to call to repentance, while at the same time bringing out the judicial consequences for those who do not give heed. Thus the prophet simultaneously has a ministry of grace and of judgment: of grace because the Lord is a God of goodness, of judgment because the people are placed under law and prophecy does not abolish the law. On the contrary, it rests on the law while at the same time loudly proclaiming that at the least little returning to God, the sinner will find mercy. It is no doubt an easing of the law: God grants the sinner all that is compatible with His holiness, but, on the other hand, He cannot deny His own character in face of man's responsibility. Prophecy does not abolish one iota of the law, but rather it accentuates, more than God had ever done up till now, the great fact that He loves mercy and forgiveness and takes account of the least indication of return towards Himself. "When the prophets come on the scene," a brother has said, "grace begins to shine anew." The very fact of their testimony was already grace toward a people

who had violated the law. If they came looking for fruit and found nothing but sour grapes, nonetheless they announced God's promises in grace to the elect - grace as a reparation of the things which the people had spoiled. The gospel, which came afterwards, speaks of new creation, of a new life, and not of a reparation. In Isaiah 58:13-14 we see the different character of the law and of prophecy in the way in which they present the Sabbath: "If thou..." says the prophet, "call the sabbath a delight, the holy day of Jehovah, honorable; and thou honor Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking idle words; then shalt thou delight thyself in Jehovah."

Thus a special characteristic of God is expressed by the prophets. It is not the law, given at Sinai, still less is it the grace revealed in the gospel. It is rather a God who, while He shows His indignation against sin, takes no pleasure in judgment and whose true character of grace will always triumph in the end; a God who says: "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people" when they have "received...double for all [their] sins." Under pure law judgment triumphs over iniquity; under prophecy, grace and mercy triumph when judgment has been executed; and finally under the gospel, grace is exalted over judgment because love and righteousness have kissed each other at the cross. The judgment executed on Christ has caused grace to triumph. Judgment fell on Him instead of on us - grace in its fullness, love, God Himself has been for us. The entire role of prophecy is expressed in the passage from the prophet Micah cited above (Micah 7:18-19). It is impossible, and this is what the prophet announces here, for God to deny Himself, whether with regard to His judgments, or whether with regard to His promises of grace.

Such is the role of the prophets in Chronicles. If at first they appear singly, as in the Judges and then under the reign of Saul, of David, and of Solomon, they then multiply in the measure in which iniquity grows in the kingdom. This is what the Lord expresses in Matthew 21:34-36. After the few servants at the beginning, of whom the husbandmen beat one, killed another, and stoned a third, the householder sent other servants, more than the first, and the husbandmen treated them in the same way. At last He sent His Son.

2 Chronicles 10:1-19, 2 Chronicles 11:1-23, 2 Chronicles 12:1-16

Rehoboam

Here we reach the dividing line in Chronicles separating the reign of David and Solomon from those of their successors. As we have said above, the subject we will take up will no longer present us the counsels of God regarding the kingdom, but rather the work of grace to maintain it until the appearance of the Messiah, in whom these counsels will be realized. Thus we have here the history - ordinarily distressing, sometimes comforting - of the kings of Judah, for the kings of Israel are not mentioned except in relation to Judah and Jerusalem. This is exactly the counterpart of the account in Kings.

It is a remarkable fact--and one confirming everything we have said particularly concerning David and Solomon, types of royalty according to God's counsels--that here the Word not only omits Solomon's sins at the end of his career, but it even omits their consequences, as it did earlier in the first book of Chronicles with the chastening that came on David because of Uriah: evident proof that David and Solomon occupy a special place in these books. The accession of Jeroboam to the throne and the division of the kingdom are here presented as the consequence of

Rehoboam's sin, and not that of his father; likewise, Ahijah's prophecy to Jeroboam is fulfilled, not because Solomon sinned, but because "[Rehoboam] hearkened not to the people" (2 Chronicles 10:15). Moreover, we see in this same passage referred to in 1 Kings 11:31-33, that God does not intend to hide Solomon's faults, but that rather the purpose of the Holy Spirit is to omit them. The establishment of Jeroboam the son of Nebat on the throne of Israel is also passed over in silence, which is important, for the history here is uniquely that of Judah, and not that of Israel (cf. 1 Kings 12:20). For the same reason our account omits Jeroboam's establishment of idolatry, the story of the old prophet, the illness of Abijah the son of Jeroboam, and Ahijah's prophecy on this occasion (1 Kings 12:25-33, 1 Kings 13:1-34, 1 Kings 14:1-20).

Rehoboam's history spans 2 Chronicles 10:1-19, 2 Chronicles 11:1-23, 2 Chronicles 12:1-16, whereas Kings summarizes it in a few verses (1 Kings 14:21-31); but - the detail is characteristic - this latter passage presents the darkest picture of the condition of the people, whereas our chapters record the good which grace produces in the king's heart, though it is said of him (2 Chronicles 12:14): "And he did evil, for he applied not his heart to seek Jehovah." 2 Chronicles 11:1-23 tells us two important facts: Rehoboam had thought to bring the ten tribes back under the yoke of obedience, but in doing so he would have been opposing God's governmental dealings with Judah. The prophet Shemaiah turns him from a decision which would have led to his ruin and would have had the most serious consequences for the tribe of Judah, on which the eyes of the Lord were still resting, despite His judgments. Grace acts in the hearts of the people; he listens to the exhortation and does not follow through on his dangerous plan. From henceforth Rehoboam's only task was to build a system of defense against the enemies from without, enemies who were his own people and who had formerly been under his governing authority. Rehoboam surrounds the territory of Judah and Benjamin with fortresses (2 Chronicles 11:5-12). His only duty was to preserve that which was left to him, but how could he do so when evil was already present within and ravaging the kingdom? However his responsibility to guard the people was in no way diminished by evil which was already irreparable. This principle is of great importance for us. Christendom's state of irremediable ruin in no way changes our obligation to defend souls against the harmful principles which are at work. We have the sad task of raising up strongholds against a world similar to the ten tribes, which called on the name of the Lord while giving themselves over to idolatry - against a world which decks itself out with the name of Christ while abandoning itself to its lusts. We are to make Christendom understand and feel that there is a separation between true Christians and mere professors whom God ranks with His enemies. This hostility brought on the conflict between Judah and Israel, and was bound up with the idolatrous worship which Jeroboam established and imposed on the ten tribes. Public and official maintenance of the worship of God in Judah had very blessed consequences: "The priests and the Levites that were in all Israel resorted to him out of all their districts; for the Levites left their suburbs and their possessions, and came to Judah and Jerusalem...and after them, those out of all the tribes of Israel that set their heart to seek Jehovah the God of Israel came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice to Jehovah the God of their fathers" (2 Chronicles 11:13-16). All those who had an undivided heart for God, even though they had been caught up for the moment in the revolt of the ten tribes, understand that their place is not in the midst of these tribes and they leave this defiled ground in order to come to Judah and settle there. This is how faithful testimony, holy separation from the world, produces fruit in believers who have hitherto been detained by their circumstances in a sphere which the Lord no longer acknowledges, and how they are moved to join their brothers who

gather around the Lord. If this gathering together soon lost its character, was it not because Judah and her kings abandoned the divine ground that they might themselves sacrifice to idols? Indeed, this testimony of separation from evil lasted only a short time: "For during three years they walked in the way of David and Solomon," and during this period "they strengthened the kingdom of Judah" (2 Chronicles 11:17). For three years! Why didn't they continue! This was the path of blessing for Judah and her king, and is it not likewise for us? Blessing might have been complete even amidst the ultimate humiliation inflicted on Israel. It proved to be only temporary. This momentary blessing through which the kingdom of Judah was strengthened and Israel established itself became a snare for Rehoboam. The flesh uses even God's favors as an occasion to depart from Him. "And it came to pass when the kingdom of Rehoboam was established, and when he had become strong, that he forsook the law of Jehovah, and all Israel with him" (2 Chronicles 12:1). It is enough that one man, commissioned by the Lord to shepherd His people, turn aside: his example will be followed by all the rest. What a responsibility for him! Chastening soon follows: "And it came to pass in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, because they had transgressed against Jehovah, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, with twelve hundred chariots and sixty thousand horsemen...and he took the fortified cities that belonged to Judah, and came to Jerusalem" (2 Chronicles 12:2-4). Judah did not fall prey to their brother Israel, against whose religion they rightfully defended themselves; they fell, a much deeper downfall, into the hands of a world from which God had once redeemed them by a strong hand and stretched-forth arm - and, as of old, they were brought under subjection to the king of Egypt.

God's purpose in chastening them is proclaimed in the prophecy of Shemaiah, the prophet: "That they may know My service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries" (2 Chronicles 12:8). They could henceforth compare their three years of liberty and free blessing with the bondage of Egypt. As a result of the words of Shemaiah, the prophet: "Ye have forsaken Me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak," there was a real work of conscience in the heart of the king and his princes, for they "humbled themselves; and they said, Jehovah is righteous," and this humbling of themselves preserved Judah from complete destruction. "And when Jehovah saw that they humbled themselves, the word of Jehovah came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves: I will not destroy them, but I will grant them a little deliverance; and My wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. Nevertheless they shall be his servants" (2 Chronicles 12:7). This is grace, but, I repeat, Judah is obliged to suffer the consequences of having abandoned the word of God. All this work of repentance, the fruit of grace, is lacking - and with just cause - in 1 Kings 14:1-33. We shall see this same thing constantly repeated in the course of this book.

What shame for Rehoboam! Solomon's beautiful temple has existed but thirty years when it is stripped of its ornaments and all its treasures. Their worship has lost the splendor of its past; Shishak, we are told, took all. All! but nevertheless one thing still remains: the altar is there, God is there. For faith, amid desolation and humiliation this was much more than all the gold taken away by the king of Egypt. Is it not the same today? Christians are called upon to assess everything they are lacking as a result of the Church's unfaithfulness; and they must add, The Lord is righteous; but they may also say, God is a God of grace and has not turned aside from us. We find a very touching word for our hearts here: When Rehoboam "humbled himself, the anger of Jehovah turned away from him, that He would not destroy him altogether; and also in Judah there were

good things” (2 Chronicles 12:12). Few things, perhaps - and this is exactly what this term gives us to understand - but in the final analysis, something that God could acknowledge. Final judgment was deferred because of these few favorable little things that were pleasing to God. Let us apply ourselves, each one individually, to maintain these good things before Him. May those around us notice some measure of devotion to Christ, some measure of love for Him, some measure of fear in the presence of His holiness, some measure of activity in His service. We may be sure that He will take it into account and that as long as it continues He will not remove the lamp from its place.

How fair our God is in His judgments, even in the presence of a state of which He says: “He did evil, for he applied not his heart to seek the Lord” (2 Chronicles 12:14). It is marvelous grace indeed that while not tolerating any evil at all, is pleased to acknowledge that which is good, and that discerns it when man’s eye is incapable of seeing it, whether within or without himself. Think of this with regard to 1 Kings 14:22-24 : “Judah did evil in the sight of Jehovah, and they provoked Him to jealousy with their sins which they committed more than all that their fathers had done. And they also built for themselves high places, and columns, and Asherahs on every high hill and under every green tree; and there were also sodomites in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations that Jehovah had dispossessed before the children of Israel.” Reading these words, we marvel all the more at God’s infinite goodness which, on account of a few righteous persons, was not willing entirely to destroy this people as He had once destroyed Sodom.

Let us mention yet one more detail before closing these chapters. The great number of Rehoboam’s wives and concubines is an imitation of Solomon’s sin which led to the ruin of his kingdom. It would seem that the relationship between the conduct of son and father ought to be mentioned. But nothing is said. In 2 Chronicles, Solomon, as we have often said, is looked at as being without fault, and judgment is directed toward Rehoboam alone. Nevertheless, even amidst this disorder and when Rehoboam raises the daughter of Absalom, the rebel, and Abijah, this woman’s son, to the first place, God is pleased to acknowledge that Rehoboam “dealt wisely” in dispersing his sons throughout all the lands of Judah in order to avoid discord in the kingdom (2 Chronicles 11:18-23). This is similar to the praise of “the unrighteous steward because he had done prudently” (Luke 16:8).

05.07. 2 Chronicles 13

2 Chronicles 13:1-22

Abijah The events related in this chapter are passed over in silence in 1 Kings 15:1-34. The latter limits itself to mentioning that there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of his life and that the same thing was so between Abijah and Jeroboam. It adds that Abijah “walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him; and his heart was not perfect with Jehovah his God, as the heart of David his father. But for David’s sake Jehovah his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him, and establishing Jerusalem; because David did that which was right in the sight of Jehovah, and turned not aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite” (1 Kings 15:3-5). In this passage, it is on account of David that God gives a godly successor to Abijah in the person of Asa, his son, and also on account of Jerusalem which God had chosen as the city of His Anointed. Here, there is nothing of the kind. As always, in this part of Chronicles it is grace ruling in spite of everything. At most, Abijah’s conduct is characterized in 2 Chronicles 13:21 as that in which he imitated King Solomon’s walk as the book of Kings reveals it to us: “But Abijah...took fourteen wives, and begot twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters.” The battle between Abijah and Jeroboam, omitted in the book of Kings, gives us serious, solemn instruction as to Abijah’s moral condition. Jeroboam, twice as strong as Abijah, had 800,000 chosen men against Judah’s 400,000. We find the same proportion in Luke 14:31 : “Or what king, going on his way to engage in war with another king, does not, sitting down first, take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him coming against him with twenty thousand?” Only Abijah does not sit down here to calculate. He counts on his religion which is the true one to resist Jeroboam with his false religion. His speech on Mount Zemaraim, for he had already invaded the territory of the ten tribes, proves it. The argument with which he opposes Jeroboam (2 Chronicles 13:5-12) is composed of five points in which Judah was perfectly justified:

1. The Lord’s covenant with Judah, through David, was for ever. God’s counsels concerning the royal line could never be reversed. Abijah was right to claim the unchangeable counsels of God against his enemy.
2. The ten tribes through their king were in open rebellion against the seed of David, the Lord’s Anointed: “But Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon the son of David, rose up and rebelled against his lord. And vain men, sons of Belial, gathered to him and strengthened themselves against Rehoboam the son of Solomon, and Rehoboam was young and faint-hearted, and did not show himself strong against them” (2 Chronicles 13:6-7).
3. Moreover, they were idolaters and were counting on their false gods to gain the victory: “And now ye think to show yourselves strong against the kingdom of Jehovah in the hand of the sons of David; and ye are a great multitude, and ye have with you the golden calves that Jeroboam made you for gods.” (2 Chronicles 13:8).

4. And furthermore, they had completely abandoned the worship of Jehovah; they had driven away the priests, and had established new ones according to their liking. "But as for us," Abijah adds, "Jehovah is our God, and we have not forsaken Him." All this condemned Israel and her king; all this was true.

5. Judah, for her part, had God at her head, and His priests, and His trumpets which were used to assemble the people; and in fact, what Jeroboam was doing was making war against God. Once again, all this was true. What was Judah lacking? Only this: Judah had the true religion, but without realizing her sin and disgrace. What she lacked was an awakened conscience. Is it not the same in our day? One may, for example, be a Protestant, have God's Word, have knowledge of the true God, understand perfectly what is lacking in Catholicism, that semi-idolatrous religion, be able to refute its errors victoriously, possess all the truths that make up Christianity - and nevertheless be very far from God, without strength to withstand the twenty thousand. One has not first sat down to deliberate upon his own forces. Everything that Abijah brought forth was insufficient and could not give him the victory. He lacked something: an affected conscience; the realization of his own guilt, not in comparison to others and their errors, but rather by himself having to do with God. The rest of this account bears this out. Jeroboam's 800,000 men are able to completely surround Abijah's 400,000 men. The result is that Judah is lost; it had to begin there. "And Judah looked back, and behold, they had the battle in front and behind; and they cried to Jehovah, and the priests sounded with the trumpets. And the men of Judah gave a shout" (2 Chronicles 13:14-15). It is only from this point: I am lost, that the loud-sounding trumpets can sound against the enemy (2 Chronicles 13:12). Instead of confiding in his trumpets against the adversaries it is necessary to cry out to God for himself, and it is only then that the trumpets can resound, that is to say, that the testimony can be effective. Salvation can only come from Him and not from even the most orthodox forms of religion. We must always begin with our own condition, not with that of others; we then find that the cross is our only resource and, having found this for ourselves, we can apply it to all those who have as urgent a need of it as we. "Out of the depths do I call upon Thee, Jehovah," says the Psalmist. "Lord, hear my voice; let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication. If Thou, Jah, shouldest mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared..." and only then does he cry: "Let Israel hope in Jehovah...He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities" (Psalms 130:1-8).

If this is so for the testimony, it is the same for the combat. From the moment we realize our lost condition and cry to the Lord, victory is ours. Judging others can not save ourselves; the secret of victory is in the conviction that sin robs us of all strength and makes us incapable of withstanding the enemy. This victory is not due to any effort on our part, since we are incapable; it can only come from God Himself: "God smote Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. And the children of Israel fled before Judah; and God delivered them into their hand" (2 Chronicles 13:15-16). From this moment on, the children of Judah no longer relied on their religion: "[They] were strengthened, because they relied upon Jehovah the God of their fathers" (2 Chronicles 13:18). From that moment on all Jeroboam's strength dwindled, "and Jehovah smote him, and he died" (2 Chronicles 13:20). The realization of their complete lack of power brings Abijah and his people something even more important than victory: they recover Bethel, Jeshanah, and Ephron - but especially Bethel, the place where the faithful God had given promises to Jacob. Indeed, the way to acquire God's promises is to begin by recognizing one's self to be lost and crying out to the

Lord. Our unfaithfulness has separated us from the place of promises, but if we acknowledge ourselves as lost and cry out to God, we will recover them all, for Christ has secured them for us, He, the Yea and Amen of all the promises of God. Without Bethel, Judah was morally decapitated, as it were. Moreover, Bethel was the place where one could not present himself before God without having buried his false gods (Genesis 35:2-4). It was therefore a momentary restoration of this poor people and their poor king - a very partial restoration, for Abijah still continued to follow a path (2 Chronicles 13:21) which had brought on the division of the kingdom.

05.08. 2 Chronicles 14

2 Chronicles 14:11-15 2 Chronicles 14:1-15, 2 Chronicles 15:1-19, 2 Chronicles 16:1-14

Asa 2 Chronicles 14:1-15 Rest and Strength

We come to the account of Asa's happy reign, introduced by the pure grace of God, as it is said in 1 Kings 15:4 : "But for David's sake Jehovah his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem" in the person of Asa. All is blessing for Asa in the first part of his reign - and we shall see the cause for this - but in 2 Chronicles 16:1-14 we shall also find the cause of his decline.

We find much piety in Asa. He removes every trace of idolatry from Judah, including the high places which the kings who preceded him and even Solomon had tolerated - although it is not the purpose of Chronicles to mention the fault of the latter. In 2 Chronicles 15:1-19 we shall see that Asa did not maintain this energetic attitude to the end. But in Judah he was the first king who, at the beginning of his reign, passed judgment on the high places and broke them down, whereas Jeroboam had made them a religious institution for the ten tribes, and had even established a special priesthood there (2 Chronicles 11:15) in opposition to the worship of the Lord at Jerusalem. This is always the consequence of abandoning God who has revealed Himself in His Word. Man can not live without religion: if he does not have the religion of the true God, he will invent a false religion to satisfy his conscience and answer to his instincts. Atheism itself is a religion which delivers man, bound hand and foot, to superstition, that is to say, to the worship of demons and to anarchy. When man's own will becomes his god, Satan masters him and triumphs. What trouble, what agitation, what despair, what fatal sorrow gets hold of the fool who has said in his heart, "There is no God!" And, on the other hand, what rest there is in separation from evil and in the worship of the holy God, the true God! The Word insists on this point here: "In his days the land was quiet ten years" (2 Chronicles 14:1). "The kingdom was quiet before him" (2 Chronicles 14:5). "The land had rest...Jehovah had given him rest" (2 Chronicles 14:6). "Jehovah...has given us rest on every side" (2 Chronicles 14:7).

How did Asa make use of this rest? He did not act like David who thought of resting while his own were in the field; on the contrary, he availed himself of this quiet which God granted him to defend himself against the enemy from without: "He said to Judah, Let us build these cities, and surround them with walls and towers, gates and bars, while the land is yet before us; for we have sought Jehovah our God, we have sought Him, and He has given us rest on every side. And they built and prospered" (2 Chronicles 14:6-7).

What instruction Asa's attitude gives us! When God gives us rest, it is so that we may concentrate all our activities to forearm ourselves against the attacks of the enemy. The latter will not be slow to return. Our means of defense and our fortresses are the Word and nothing but the Word. Let us use the time when we are not assailed by storms to ground ourselves in the Word and draw from it our strength to withstand. However, the fortified cities - entry to which is forbidden the enemy - are not enough; Asa possesses an army inured to war. "And Asa had an army that bore targets and

spears: out of Judah three hundred thousand; and out of Benjamin, that bore shields and drew the bow, two hundred and eighty thousand: all these, mighty men of valor" (2 Chronicles 14:8). To avoid defeat in battle it is necessary to bear arms on the right hand and on the left, and above all to know how to use the two-edged sword which is the Word of God. It is only thus that we may, after having overcome all, stand firm when conflict arises.

Then comes the attack of Zerah the Ethiopian, passed over in silence in the first book of Kings. What will Asa do? He is in the same situation as his father was in relation to Jeroboam (2 Chronicles 13:1-22); with 580,000 men he must fight Zerah who has a million at his command. But instead of relying like Abijah on the merits of his religion to win the battle, Asa first of all sits down and deliberates whether he with 10,000 men can withstand him who is coming against him with 20,000. The result of his deliberation leaves him no doubt; he goes out against the enemy. What, then, is the source of his confidence? His being right? His religion, giving him the assurance, as it gave his father Abijah, that God must be with him? That is not where Asa's secret lies. Asa is a man of faith, who has learned in God's presence that he can have no confidence in the flesh, but that there is strength outside himself to which he may ever resort. His daily connection with the temple of God at Jerusalem caused him to know this; before his eyes at the entrance of the sanctuary he had the column of Boaz which means: "In Him is strength!" And so with what assurance, when it came to combat, he addresses Jehovah: "Jehovah, it maketh no difference to Thee to help, whether there be much or no power: help us, O Jehovah our God, for we rely on Thee, and in Thy name have we come against this multitude. Jehovah, Thou art our God; let not man prevail against Thee" (2 Chronicles 14:11). It is in this spirit that Asa undertakes the struggle; he recognizes great strength in the enemy, none in himself, but he goes forth in the name of the Lord, depending on Him, and in no way disturbed by his own weakness, because therein the strength of God is displayed. This entire passage is the lesson of our strength; the most powerful enemy has no strength against God, and it requires only faith to make this experience. Satan himself was obliged to acknowledge this when his hatred attacked Christ: at the cross where he thought he was at last rid of Him, he met God's power in the weakness of God. The Ethiopians flee; "they could not revive." This was because Israel was not Asa's army but God's army: "They were crushed before Jehovah and before His army" (2 Chronicles 14:13). This victory of Asa's involved not only the defeat of the enemy, but also the positive conquest of cities, spoil, flocks, and riches (2 Chronicles 14:14-15). So for us every victory over the Enemy, based on self-judgment, is the source of new, precious acquisitions, drawn out of the treasure of the unfathomable riches of Christ.

After the victory, Asa and his people "returned to Jerusalem." There, in the city of God, close to Jehovah's temple, in fellowship with Him, they go on to renew their strength.

Secular history tells us nothing of this memorable combat. Zerah and his one million men are but a fable in the eyes of unbelievers. The monuments, so they tell us, do not mention this extraordinary combat. For the believer, this silence is very simple. Asa cannot claim his own victory over the Ethiopian; it is up to God, whose victory it is, to record it; therefore we cannot find this document save in the written Word. And do you think that Zerah would proclaim his defeat? Have you ever found an inscription of Egypt, Syria, Moab, or Assyria where their kings recorded a defeat? On their part there is absolute silence. Later the king of Moab will proclaim his victories (on the Moabite stone), but not the defeat that preceded them. Such is the confidence that we can place in

the authenticity of history written by man.

05.09. 2 Chronicles 15

2 Chronicles 15:1-19 Strength and Purification At this period of Asa's history, the prophet Azariah the son of Oded comes to encourage and exhort the king. The prophets of Judah, compared to those of Israel, are distinguished by their great number. Even Hosea and Amos, prophets of Israel, have a special mission for Judah. It is true that Elijah and Elisha, those great prophets, were sent exclusively to Israel, but their ministry was a very special one. When the prophets of Baal and the false prophets were multiplying, they performed miracles in the midst of an apostate people fallen into idolatry. Their miracles were given for unbelievers and not for those who worshipped the true God. We have remarked elsewhere that we rarely see a prophet of Judah performing a miracle such as, for example, that of Ahaz's sundial. The first prophets of Judah speak; their successors write their prophecies. Under Rehoboam, the prophet Shemaiah, under Abijah the prophet Iddo, under Asa other prophets are not yet writing; it is only beginning with the reign of Uzziah that the major and minor prophets with their writings appear. In Israel, Elijah is a prophet of judgment; Elisha brings grace in the midst of a scene that is judged; the prophets of Judah announce judgments, but exhort the king and the people to repentance so that they may find mercy, for they persist in grace. Only in their written prophecies do they predict a future day when the counsels of God concerning the kingdom will be accomplished; oral prophecy does not go so far, announcing events near at hand, whereas written prophecy has another range: "The scope of no prophecy of Scripture is had from its own particular interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20).

Here the prophecy of Azariah, or rather that of Oded his father whose messenger he is (2 Chronicles 15:8), bears the character of all spoken prophecy. It addresses the king first of all, then the two faithful tribes, Judah and Benjamin. Azariah presents the conditions of the covenant of law: "Jehovah is with you, while ye are with Him; and if ye seek Him He will be found of you, but if ye forsake Him He will forsake you" (2 Chronicles 15:2). It was necessary that this covenant be observed by both sides; on Jehovah's side it is always observed, for He is faithful, whereas Israel, if they were to be unfaithful, would of necessity fall under the judgment of God who must forsake them. Azariah then recalls the former days when all the people had been unfaithful; alluding particularly to the time of the Judges, when through Israel's disobedience the most complete disorder had reigned: "Now for a long while Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law, but in their trouble they turned to Jehovah the God of Israel, and sought Him, and He was found of them. And in those times there was no peace to him that went out, nor to him that came in, but great disturbances were amongst all the inhabitants of the countries. And nation was broken against nation, and city against city; for God disturbed them with all manner of distress" (2 Chronicles 15:3-6). God, the priesthood, and the law had disappeared, so to speak; every man had been a law to himself. It was the reign of iniquity. Then how many times the people in their anguish had cried out to the Lord and returned to Him! And each time they had found God to be a Deliverer. There is "no peace" in forsaking God - no rest, no peace for the wicked, says Isaiah - but trouble upon trouble; on the contrary, from the moment the king returns again, as Asa did, there was peace and rest (cf. 2 Chronicles 14:1).

Azariah does not speak of the ten tribes; he considers Judah and Benjamin the people of God; Israel is already conclusively given up as a testimony of the Lord, although centuries must yet pass before her final rejection.

After the exhortation we find encouragement: "But as for you, be firm and let not your hands be weak: for there is a reward for your deeds" (2 Chronicles 15:7). Do not we also, though we are under the regime of grace, need to pay heed to this exhortation? According to God's government, now hidden, but which exists no less in all its reality, there is a present reward, not only a future one, for our acts. This reward is peace, rest, and strength. This is what Asa had experienced, but the continuation of his history will show us just how much he needed to be exhorted - and all we together with him. As soon as Asa had heard the words of this prophecy, "he took courage." Here we find a new characteristic of strength, which does not consist, as previously, of victory over the Ethiopians, but rather in practical purification. Asa "put away the abominations out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities that he had taken from mount Ephraim" (2 Chronicles 15:8). So it must be for us too: Everything that is abominable in the sight of God, every defilement, must be resolutely banished from our lives so that we may enjoy unmingled fellowship with Him. This can only take place through the strength and energy of faith, that energy which the apostle Peter calls "virtue." The Christian life does not allow letting things go. The prophet tells us, "Be firm." We have at our disposal the strength, the power of the Spirit of God, based on His Word. We lack nothing; therefore let us make profitable use of our strength.

Asa does not confine himself, as he had done previously (2 Chronicles 14:3-5), to purifying the cities of Judah: he also put away the abominations "out of the cities that he had taken from mount Ephraim." After the king's victory God had enlarged his sphere of activity (2 Chronicles 14:14), and he was now responsible that the same principles of holiness be adopted there as in the territory of Judah. But that was not sufficient: Asa "renewed the altar of Jehovah" (2 Chronicles 15:8). I have no doubt that here it is a matter, as in many other passages, of renewing the sacrifices regularly offered on the altar according to the law. This altar, built by Solomon, was still whole and did not need to be renewed, as when ungodly Ahaz substituted another altar in its place (2 Kings 16:1-20). In brief, Jehovah's worship according to the prescriptions of the Word - this worship, already neglected under the preceding reigns - was re-established according to God's mind. Wherever we find true and energetic separation from the defilement of the world, it does not take long for the worship of God's children to resume its honored place.

Another result of Asa's faithfulness was the regathering of Israel: "And he assembled all Judah and Benjamin, and the strangers with them out of Ephraim and Manasseh, and out of Simeon; for they fell away to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that Jehovah his God was with him" (2 Chronicles 15:9). Worship having been re-established, Israel's unity is realized in the feeble measure befitting a time of division and ruin: the sight of God's favor manifested toward His faithful people acted upon the consciences of those who up till now had formed part of the ten tribes and who from their origin were found associated with Jeroboam's idolatry.

"And they assembled themselves at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa. And they sacrificed to Jehovah in that day, of the spoil that they had brought, seven hundred oxen and seven thousand sheep" (2 Chronicles 15:10-11). The results of the victory are here consecrated to the Lord, and so it should always be. If our successes lead us to depend on

ourselves, to be self-satisfied, to increase our own well-being, victory will become a snare for us and will turn us aside from God instead of bringing us closer to Him. The renewal of the covenant following the revival brought on by the prophetic word is accompanied by great joy, for they “sought [Jehovah] with all their heart; and He was found of them” (2 Chronicles 15:15). Every renewal of the covenant accompanies a true work of conscience in the people. They had broken the covenant, they acknowledge it and humble themselves, they return to it and feel the blessing immediately. It was likewise under Hezekiah, Joash, Ezra, and Nehemiah - however we must add that the covenant was violated anew each time, for the man who still does not know himself must learn what he is on the basis of responsibility. Be that as it may, joy is the result of every restoration, even of one that is partial and temporary. Jehovah “was found of them,” and never, even in the darkest moments of man’s history, has He hidden Himself from those who seek Him. To find the Lord! What a treasure! Why should they not rejoice! What rest when He is found! “Jehovah gave them rest round about.” In the preceding chapter we saw the strength that follows rest; in our present chapter we see the rest that follows strength, and so it is that in a faithful life, strength and rest are continually renewed, the one by the other.

Asa does not content himself with repelling evil publicly; he purifies his own house. These two things must be accomplished together, otherwise our Christian life will be only an empty show. “And also Maacah, the mother of Asa the king, he removed her from being queen, because she had made an idol for the Asherah; and Asa cut down her idol, and stamped it, and burned it in the valley Kidron” (2 Chronicles 15:16). Actually Maacah was Asa’s grandmother who had probably been called to be regent with the title of queen at the time of Abijah’s death. With what energy Asa passes over natural ties, making no allowance for them when the honor of his God is involved! Nothing stops him; he takes away all hope of Maacah’s exercising any influence whatever over God’s people, and in the sight of all treats her as an enemy of Jehovah. May we imitate him! We are altogether too apt to treat Satan cautiously when it is a matter of sin in our own families, and this often obliges us to do the same when it is a matter of the family of God. We excuse evil while at the same time blaming it; we try to avoid spreading it about in order, so we think, not to produce scandal; we put up with doctrines contrary to God’s Word and Christ’s honor to avoid offending those who are circulating them and who perhaps are close to us, and thus evil spreads and defiles many. If the people had seen Asa tolerating idolatry in his own house while condemning it everywhere else, would they not have been led to follow his example, or at least not to deal too carefully with it?

All these decisions were to Asa’s credit, yet nevertheless he failed in one detail which seemed insignificant. The Word tells us (2 Chronicles 14:5) that “he removed out of all the cities of Judah the high places,” but we learn in 2 Chronicles 15:17 that they “were not removed from Israel,” that is to say, I would believe, from the cities of Israel which he had conquered (2 Chronicles 15:8). This seemed to be of little importance, for he had removed all the abominations from these same cities. But when it is a matter of separation from evil, nothing is unimportant. Beyond doubt Asa’s heart is depicted as being “perfect all his days” (2 Chronicles 15:17), a heart that was intelligent concerning what was befitting the Lord’s holiness, but he failed to fully realize this in practice. This toleration of the high places was a grain of sand, compared to his overall activity, but a grain of sand can stop even the best constructed of machines; a flaw in an iron beam will cause the most solid bridge to break; and Judah’s full security was based on Asa’s scrupulous faithfulness to His

God. From this moment on, after ten years of rest and prosperity, we notice decline in this man of God. Up till now Asa's faithful conduct had been the magnet attracting not only Judah to the Lord, but also to a certain degree, Israel, at a time when without this conduct Ephraim's loose ways would have brought a corrupting element into the midst of the two tribes. In his zeal Asa had not been a pleasant man according to the flesh; his attitude toward his grandmother proves this, for he might have been content with removing her idol, without publicly proclaiming its fall. This was an honorable deed of Asa's; he knew that worldly amiability never wins hearts to God and that it only smiles at hearts that are carnal. Love is quite different from amiability; it comes from God and shines out from Him onto all men, passing through the heart of the one who loves Him. Amiability is a pleasant characteristic of the natural heart, has no divine source, and never produces anything for God.

What we have seen up to this point was the effect of grace in the king's heart. God had prepared him long ago so that he might be an instrument of blessing, a lamp at Jerusalem for David's sake. The following chapter will show us how this lamp loses its brightness.

05.10. 2 Chronicles 16

2 Chronicles 16:1-14 Asa's Decline

Up to this point, as we have seen, Asa's heart had been "perfect" in two directions. In presence of the enemy he had acknowledged that he was without strength, and he had relied on the Lord to find strength in Him. In presence of idolatry he had given proof of real energy to purify the land and re-establish the worship of the Lord in every place. In one point only, no doubt yielding to some political notion, he had dealt in a somewhat compromising way with the cities he had acquired in Israel and perhaps also with the Israelites who had joined Judah: "The high places were not removed from Israel." Cautions like this never have the results the Christian was hoping for. Our chapter immediately mentions the measures Baasha took against Judah in the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign. Note: This date may be a simple copyist's error. Baasha, deprived of several of his cities, built Ramah in order to prevent any contact from that time forth, "in order to let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah" (2 Chronicles 16:1). Unable to attack Asa without exposing himself to danger, he wanted in future to prevent his subjects from leaving him and joining God's testimony, and to prevent Asa from carrying out among his people what he considered to be a campaign of propaganda directed against himself and his influence. This principle occurs again and again: those who, like Baasha, still maintain a profession of true religion, though mixed with deadly errors, cannot tolerate near them a testimony which attracts souls. Alas! through a certain toleration of evil Asa presented an occasion for this hostility. Could not Baasha have thought: Asa claims to be closer to God than we are and yet he does the same things we do when they favor his ambitious views! Asa fears Baasha; since he has given way on one point, he can no longer esteem the world as a system with which he can make no compromise and from whom he can ask no aid. He is well aware of his lack of strength, as at the time of the Ethiopian's attack, but he no longer has the same assurance that all his strength is in God. The speck of dust in the machinery had done its work and, however insignificant it might appear, it had weakened Asa's confidence in Jehovah alone as the source of his strength. He turns to the king of Syria; he calls a power to his assistance that is allied with Ephraim and, consequently, his own enemy. This is diplomacy and, no doubt from the human point of view, good politics, just as maintaining the high places had been. So it has been time and again; one tries to break an alliance and win one of the adversaries to one's own side. When faith has grown weak, it seems easier to depend on man than simply to trust in the One who is our pillar "Boaz." What foolishness - especially for one who had once experienced this miraculous strength! At first Asa's unfaithfulness seems to bear excellent fruit. Ben-hadad accepts silver and gold brought out of the house of the Lord as tribute, breaks his alliance with Baasha and takes advantage of the occasion to smite the cities of Ephraim and make himself master of the store cities of Naphtali. Baasha leaves off building Ramah; Asa and his people carry its stones away to build fortresses against Israel. The king seems to have escaped a great disaster by following this path, but all the blessing of a walk of faith is lost to him, and he is going to make sad proof of this. Oh! how much happier he was when he felt himself to be without strength and yet withstood the innumerable army of Zerah!

Then Hanani the prophet is sent to Asa (2 Chronicles 16:7-10). Later Jehu, the son of this same Hanani, will be sent to Baasha to announce judgment without mercy (1 Kings 16:1-4). Here too Hanani announces judgment but, mourning and full of deep pity, he has to recognize that Asa's heart is no longer perfect before God. Judgment must begin at the house of God and with His people, for it is above all to those who serve Him that He shows He is a holy God. The principal accusation that Hanani brings is that Asa had not relied on the Lord: "Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on Jehovah thy God, therefore has the army of the king of Syria escaped out of thy hand. Were not the Ethiopians and the Libyans a huge army, with very many chariots and horsemen? but when thou didst rely on Jehovah, He delivered them into thy hand. For the eyes of Jehovah run to and fro through the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward Him" (2 Chronicles 16:7-9).

Asa had behaved foolishly in this; "From henceforth," the prophet adds, "thou shalt have wars." He had lost his strength; now he loses his rest, the two great blessings at the beginning of his reign. But instead of humbling himself at the word of God conveyed by the prophet, Asa becomes angry and puts Hanani in prison. Alas! Together with him, he was imprisoning his own conscience. The king's heart was no longer perfect; it had been with respect to idols, but not with respect to the world. One cannot hope for blessing when, even while maintaining one of the great principles of Christian holiness, one abandons the other. Joy, peace, and strength are lost. And much more: in seeking the help and friendship of the world, Asa became an enemy of the word of God in the person of the one who was its bearer. He sinks lower still: "Asa oppressed some of the people," no doubt those who were attached to the prophet and deplored the ways of this king who had been so faithful to the Lord till now. Oh! how true it is that one quickly goes downhill when the heart is no longer perfect before God! But God has not said everything yet. Precisely because he is dear to Him, Asa personally becomes the object of His discipline. In the thirty-ninth year of his reign for two years he was "diseased in his feet, until his disease was extremely great." Sad to say, this discipline did not produce fruit! Having lost communion with God, having rejected His word, angered against the prophet and those who are faithful to him, he falls into moral hardening: "Yet in his disease he did not seek Jehovah, but the physicians." That which had been inflicted on him to bring his heart closer to God is used as a pretext to depart even further. When it is a matter of his own health, he confides in weak, fallible instruments. The grace of God no longer speaks to his heart; There is no more place for repentance or humiliation, the fruit of grace. What a sad end - but this occurs more commonly than we would think - for a believer who was once so faithful!

"And they buried him in his own sepulchre, which he had excavated for himself in the city of David, and laid him in a bed filled with spices, a mixture of divers kinds prepared by the perfumer's art; and they made a very great burning for him" (2 Chronicles 16:14). In his death, although much incense was lavished on him, there was nothing of sweet-smelling savor for God. Spices serve to cover or to delay the putrefaction of a cadaver and the world's incense cannot take the place of God's favor. Is this not often so with Christians who have sought the favor of men? Men praise them after their death in proportion to the confidence they have placed in men and refused to God. Eulogies which would never be expressed around the casket of one who is faithful abound in proportion to the unfaithfulness mixed into his career. Such incense is only testimony given to a believer's weaknesses; and if the world appreciates these eulogies because they tend to vindicate it in its own opinion, nevertheless God rejects all this incense as a foul odor before Him!

05.11. 2 Chronicles 17

2 Chronicles 17:1-19 2 Chronicles 17:1-19, 2 Chronicles 18:1-34, 2 Chronicles 19:1-11, 2 Chronicles 20:1-37

JEHOSHAPHAT 2 Chronicles 17:1-19 The Teaching of the Law The reign of Jehoshaphat offers many instructive details. First, like his predecessors, he “strengthened himself against Israel.” The true means of being at peace with the adversary is by organizing resistance against him in an efficient way. From that moment on, Satan leaves us in peace, but we must never treat him as anything other than an adversary. Jehoshaphat’s subsequent history teaches us that he did not always retain this attitude, and this was very detrimental to him. To be at peace with the king of Israel while yet defending one’s self against him is quite different from seeking an alliance with him, as Jehoshaphat later did to his own confusion. At the beginning of his reign all was according to the mind of God: “And Jehovah was with Jehoshaphat, for he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto the Baals; but he sought the God of his father, and walked in His commandments, and not after the doings of Israel. And Jehovah established the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah gave gifts to Jehoshaphat; and he had riches and honor in abundance. And he took courage in the ways of Jehovah; moreover, he removed the high places and Asherahs out of Judah” (2 Chronicles 17:3-6). The first book of Kings (1 Kings 22:43) seems to say the opposite: “Only, the high places were not removed: the people offered and burned incense still on the high places.” This passage, which seems to be contradictory, appears to be confirmed even in our book which says: “Only the high places were not removed; and as yet the people had not directed their hearts to the God of their fathers” (2 Chronicles 20:33). This only proves that at the beginning of his reign Jehoshaphat undertook to abolish them and maintained this personally; but that the people, whose consciences had not been reached, quickly fell back into these idolatrous practices against which Jehoshaphat, weakened by his alliance with the king of Israel, was unable to exercise his authority so as to lead the people in the right way. So it had been with Asa, too: In 2 Chronicles 14:5 we have seen that he “removed out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the sun-images”; then, in 2 Chronicles 15:17 that “the high places were not removed from Israel.” Elsewhere again, he “put away the abominations out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities that he had taken from mount Ephraim” (2 Chronicles 15:8); then, in the first book of Kings (1 Kings 22:46) we learn that there were sodomites remaining in the days of Asa, and that Jehoshaphat “put [them] away from out of the land.” All this can easily be explained. Let us remember that God never contradicts Himself. Under the reign of these kings, purification had been only partial and temporary; evil sprang up again everywhere because the conscience of the people had never really been reached. But these 2 Chronicles 17:3-6 teach us yet another truth, in harmony with the character of Chronicles. This book which emphasizes grace as the only means of maintaining the royal line of descent, at the time of the complete decline of the kingdom always highlights the good which grace has produced, even if it be only for a moment, and shows that grace covers a multitude of sins. It is different when it is a matter of responsibility, as in the book of Kings. Then God reveals the evil in its full extent and shows us why it was necessary to execute

judgment.

Here then, Jehoshaphat's faithfulness is especially noted and God brings it out, not only to exalt His own grace, but also in order to show us the consequences of faithfulness and of returning to God. Strength and rest had been the outcome at the beginning of Asa's reign; the establishment of the kingdom, peace, riches, and honor were the consequences of Jehoshaphat's faithfulness (2 Chronicles 17:5). But Jehoshaphat does not stop at separating himself from evil; he has at heart the establishment of that which is good, and this can only be through understanding the mind of God. It was necessary that the law, the Word of God, should be taught in every place and that the people should become familiar with it. Princes, Levites, and priests busied themselves in this with great zeal everywhere (2 Chronicles 17:7-9). Israel, with its mixed religion, does not seem to have been won over by the understanding of the law which they saw in Judah, and in fact, the same thing takes place all the time. It is more difficult to convince those of the truth who, in the midst of their error, have preserved a few scraps of truth, for this understanding, mixed up though it be, maintains their illusion that they possess the truth. The nations, on the other hand, who had no ties or relationship with the people of God, are convinced by the power which the Word possesses, and submit themselves to him. They acknowledge the people of God; there were even Philistines who hastened to declare themselves tributary to the king of Judah (2 Chronicles 17:10-11). Likewise, when the Corinthians prophesied, unbelievers could be seen falling upon their faces and acknowledging that God was truly in the midst of the assembly (1 Corinthians 14:25). Faithfulness to the Word of God brought about the establishment of Jehoshaphat's kingdom. Besides all his prosperity, he possessed an immense army compared to that of Asa, his father. One of its leaders, Amasiah, "willingly offered himself to Jehovah" (2 Chronicles 17:16), and God testifies about him of this. This was no doubt one of the fruits of the teaching of the law in Judah. The need to dedicate one's self to the Lord springs up in the heart when one has tasted how good He is, and the revelation of this goodness is given us in the Word (1 Peter 2:2-3). Then one acknowledges His authority and knows that He has the right to expect the full consecration of our hearts.

05.12. 2 Chronicles 18

2 Chronicles 18:1-34 The Covenant with Ahab

We have little to say about this chapter which is the exact reproduction of 1 Kings 22:1-3, already meditated upon elsewhere.

Jehoshaphat's prosperity is a snare to him; for possessing earthly goods, even when given by God, easily orients our natural hearts towards the world and its alliances. Then, when our conscience reproves us of this unfaithfulness we try to quiet it by the thought that, after all, this world, like the ten tribes of old, has not denied the religious forms which it originally had. Thus Jehoshaphat allies himself by marriage to Ahab, the wicked king of Israel; no doubt, not that he contracts this union himself, but he allows it and perhaps causes his son Jehoram to contract it (2 Chronicles 21:6). Such alliances profoundly mar our spiritual vision: we begin by excusing those who are, in fact, the enemies of God and of His people; then we act in concert with them! Jehoshaphat suffers the consequences of his unfaithfulness; his disguise causes him to be mistaken for the king of Israel by the archers; they pursue him relentlessly; Jehoshaphat cries out; we see here to whom he cries out - a detail omitted in Kings; "Jehoshaphat cried out, and Jehovah helped him; and God diverted them from him" (2 Chronicles 18:31). This detail is characteristic of Chronicles. Jehoshaphat cries out to Jehovah as Abijah had done before him (2 Chronicles 13:14-15), for he realizes that God is his only resource. At this moment everything, absolutely everything - alliances, political motives, diplomacy, interests to which he has sacrificed that which was most precious, that is, fellowship with his God - all this loses its value and gives way before the prospect of death. His soul again finds the Lord whom he should never have forgotten in order to obtain worldly advantage. The "depths" swallow up Jehoshaphat; he cries out to his God. Ah! If He should mark iniquities, should He not deliver him up to death? Then the Lord, the ever-faithful God who cannot deny Himself, hears the cry of His servant. He stops the impetuous onrush of his enemies; without their becoming aware of it He changes the direction of their thoughts, doing this at the very moment when the royal garments Jehoshaphat is wearing draw every eye to him.

What are we to think of Ahab's egoism, exposing his ally to every danger in order to protect himself? If we seek the world's friendship, we will never reap anything other than egoism, for the world can only have its "I" as the center of its thoughts. It will never give us that which is contrary to its own interests. How could Jehoshaphat have been so foolish as to seek something other than that which God had given him freely: peace, riches, and honor? Weren't these gifts enough for him? Poor carnal heart of the believer, led to its ruin by vain imaginations, when in the presence of divine blessings it ought to have been crying out: "I lack nothing!" Nonetheless, as always in Chronicles, grace triumphs, even using Jehoshaphat's unfaithfulness. He had to come to this extremity to learn to know the love and deliverance and infinite resources of his God. Ahab, hidden from men's eyes under his borrowed clothing, does not escape God's eye or His judgment. An archer drawing a bow at a venture hits him. To the world it was chance, but that chance was God!

05.13. 2 Chronicles 19

2 Chronicles 19:1-11 Jehoshaphat and Jehu the Prophet The scenes described in chapters 19 and 20 are completely absent from the book of Kings, which takes up the thread of its narrative again at verses of 2 Chronicles 20:35-37 (1 Kings 22:49-50). Furthermore, it is important to note that Chronicles omits Jehoshaphat's second major act of unfaithfulness when, after having made an alliance with Ahab against the king of Syria, he again fell into the same sin, allying himself with Jehoram, the son of Ahab, against Moab (2 Kings 3:1-27). Thus, as usual in Chronicles, God omits as much as possible the sins of the kings of Judah which are stigmatized in the book of Kings. The words of verse 1 of our chapter (2 Chronicles 19:1): "And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem," historically come after the war against Moab, not mentioned here, but the Spirit of God in Chronicles connects them with the alliance with Ahab against the king of Syria.

After the great deliverance accorded to Jehoshaphat, he apparently enjoys a peace which his unfaithfulness certainly did not merit; yet God is a holy God and the moment comes when the king finds himself before His judgment seat and is obliged to acknowledge God's judgment on ways that offend His holiness. The prophet Jehu who comes out to meet him is the son of that Hanani who had prophesied to Asa, Jehoshaphat's father, when he had called Syria to his aid in resisting Baasha. Now the situation had changed and Jehoshaphat had relied on Israel to conquer Syria. Pure politics, ever opposed to God's thoughts! Be it this way or that, one relies on man according to the interests of the moment; and without hesitation one changes his alliance in order to fight his former allies. God is nowhere considered in these schemes. At best we see a faithful heart, like Jehoshaphat's, consulting Him after getting involved in a path of self-will. But at last the moment comes when God through the prophet's mouth expresses His disapproval of such a walk and the motives for it.

Jehu accuses Jehoshaphat of two things: "Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate Jehovah?" The second phrase is even more serious than the first. Loving the world involves associating one's self with it, becoming jointly liable with it in its enmity against God. "Adulteresses," says James, "know ye not that friendship with the world is enmity with God?" (James 4:4). "No servant can serve two masters," says Jesus, "for either he will hate the one and will love the other, or he will cleave to the one, and despise the other" (Luke 16:13). In spite of all our explanations and excuses, this is in fact how God considers things. Let us carefully hold on to this truth; may it prevent us from linking ourselves with the world under any pretext whatever, for whatever work, however attractive it may appear to be. If we pay no attention to these things, how shall we escape the judgment that will fall on the world? Grace, no doubt, can and will save us, but do we want to share the fate of Lot who was saved "but so as through the fire"? If it were only a question of our responsibility in the day of judgment, we would be lying among the dead; yet come what may, grace is pleased to see in the believer embarked on a wrong path anything that corresponds to its holiness and righteousness, and grace always takes account of this. This is the consoling thought continually recurring in Chronicles. Let us hear what the prophet says:

“Therefore is wrath upon thee from Jehovah. Nevertheless there are good things found in thee; for thou hast put away the Asherahs out of the land, and hast directed thy heart to seek God” (2 Chronicles 19:2-3). The Spirit of God had already presented this same truth in regard to Rehoboam (2 Chronicles 12:12). In seeking alliance with Ahab, Jehoshaphat had feared the Lord and had insisted on seeking Him, but this in no way excused him (2 Chronicles 18:6). It was only one point answering to God’s thoughts and He takes account of it. Must we not say, What a God is ours!

Jehoshaphat says nothing in reply to the prophet; he accepts the judgment, yet not without having learned his lesson. Instead of answering, he acts. He again takes up the task begun in Judah of teaching the people the law (2 Chronicles 17:7-9), a task so wretchedly interrupted by his relations with Ahab in 2 Chronicles 18:1-34. Now he applies himself to producing an awakening among the people and in all classes of the nation so that they may serve God and return to Him: “And Jehoshaphat dwelt in Jerusalem; and he went out again among the people from Beer-sheba to mount Ephraim, and brought them back to Jehovah the God of their fathers” (2 Chronicles 19:4). In order to maintain the character of a holy people consecrated to Jehovah (for his predominant thought is interest in God’s people) he establishes judges in Judah, city by city. “And he said to the judges, Take heed what ye do; for ye judge not for man, but for Jehovah, who will be with you in the matter of judgment. And now, let the terror of Jehovah be upon you; be careful what ye do, for there is no iniquity with Jehovah, nor respect of persons, nor taking of presents” (2 Chronicles 19:6-7). He who had so sadly walked in the ways of man (2 Chronicles 18:3), puts the judges under obligation to judge for Jehovah, not for man: proof that his conscience had been reached by the divine reproof. He to whom God had said, “Therefore is wrath upon thee,” says to the judges, “Let the terror of Jehovah be upon you!” because he himself had experienced it. Nothing is more powerful in exhorting our brethren than to have had dealings ourselves with God’s discipline, and to have learned our lesson to the end, that is, until there is full deliverance. So it was that the apostle Peter, who had only a short while previously denied his Savior, could say: “Ye denied the holy and righteous One.”

Often there is no need to express in words the fact that we have learned our lesson of God - deeds speak more forcefully than words to show our repentance. If “there is no iniquity with Jehovah, nor respect of persons,” can there be such with us? Thanks be to God, Jehoshaphat is now far from the alliance with Ahab or with Jehoram! The priests and the elders are engaged in this work of righteous government of the people: “And moreover in Jerusalem did Jehoshaphat set some of the Levites and priests, and of the chief fathers of Israel, for the judgment of Jehovah and for causes. - And they returned to Jerusalem. And he charged them saying, Thus shall ye do in the fear of Jehovah faithfully and with a perfect heart. And what cause soever comes to you of your brethren that dwell in their cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and ordinances, ye shall even warn them that they trespass not against Jehovah, and so wrath come upon you and upon your brethren: this do and ye shall not trespass...Be strong and do it, and Jehovah will be with the good” (2 Chronicles 19:8-11).

How beautiful are the king’s words which we have italicized! There had been wrath upon Jehoshaphat; he does not want it to be upon his people. Without murmuring he accepts God’s displeasure upon him so that Judah may be spared. This reminds us of David’s words at Ornan’s threshing floor (1 Chronicles 21:17). Such also was Christ’s character, only the Lord took the

judgment upon Himself, having merited only His Father's "good pleasure." Jehoshaphat took the judgment upon himself, as having merited God's wrath, and as having been the cause of the evil from which he wished to spare the people. In 2 Chronicles 19:11 the king introduces order into the government of the people: the chief priest for the matters of Jehovah; a prince of Judah for all the king's matters; the Levites over the people's matters. God is a God of order and is concerned that order be maintained in His house. This important truth is developed in the first epistle to the Corinthians. Disorder is contrary to our God's nature and we must carefully be on guard against it. Wherever we see it rising up among God's people we are responsible to intervene so that we can rightly lay claim to the character of the One to whom we belong. This order demands that every class of servants have its own place and function, recognized by all.

What the prophet said to Jehoshaphat found an echo in his conscience and in his heart. Notwithstanding the announcement of judgment, he was comforted by the Lord's encouragements: "There are good things found in thee...thou...hast directed thy heart to seek God." Now he can exhort his people to a vigorous, faithful walk, for he knows that "Jehovah will be with the good" (2 Chronicles 19:11).

05.14. 2 Chronicles 20

2 Chronicles 20:1-37

War Again In considering Jehoshaphat's reign as it has been presented to us up to this point, we see it characterized at first by special blessings as a consequence of the king's obedience. After having abolished the idols and the high places, he felt the need of instructing the people, and his faithfulness was rewarded by the submission of all the neighboring nations. But from the time of his unfaithfulness in forming an alliance with Ahab to make war on the king of Syria, the wrath of God must overtake him, and the prophet Jehu announces this to him. Jehoshaphat humbles himself under this judgment and by his deeds shows that he not only acknowledges its righteousness, but also that he desires to substitute God's order for the disorder in the life of the people. We do not have to wait long for the consequence of his return to God. It is not peace, but war. We may be sure we will expose ourselves to this when we return from a wrong path, for repentance - which makes us recover fellowship with God - cannot suit Satan whose desire is to separate us from Him. When Jehoshaphat's spiritual state had been prosperous, the enemy, reduced to silence, had been humbled; but he patiently waited, lying in wait until the moment when having committed an irreparable error, the king would incur Jehovah's anger and be lost. As always, Satan did not take account of God's grace which had found good things in Jehoshaphat, nor of the work which grace had produced in the king's conscience; he could not understand that God would make use of the inevitable judgment, unleashed by war, to establish his servant and break the snares of the enemy. So it has ever been. During the first centuries of the Church when, having left her first love, she was threatened with judgment that would remove her lamp from its place, she was thrown into a furnace and underwent tribulation for ten days. God permitted this in order to restore His Assembly; along with Philadelphia, Smyrna became the only church where the Lord had no need to pronounce further warnings. The situation is the same here: war breaks out, judgment is let loose, wrath runs its course, but we witness a completely different scene: that which grace produces in favor of the people and their king.

Let us look at the elements composing the enemy army. First, there was Moab. When we turn to 2 Kings 3:1-27 we learn the reason for Moab's hatred. Jehoshaphat had gone up against Moab with Jehoram, the king of Israel, and even though it seems that actually it was Israel alone that fought against Moab, Moab held a particular grudge against Judah. This is often the case; an alliance with the professing world becomes a disadvantage in particular to believers. Moab takes vengeance for the humiliation she has undergone, by attacking--not Israel--but Judah, comparatively so weak. But let us remember the primary reason for this hostility: Judah represented the true God and He it was who proud Moab, instigated by Satan, was targeting.

Moab's allies are the children of Ammon, whom David had once so humiliated and defeated, and a portion of Edom,* the very same Edom which had briefly become the ally of Jehoram and Jehoshaphat against Moab (2 Kings 3:9), and which was now Moab's ally against Jehoshaphat.

* Note: The Meunim or Maonites belonged to the territory of Edom, i.e. to mount Seir (2 Chronicles 20:10). Today there still exists a city called Maan to the east of the Wadi-el-Arabah in this region. At the time of Chronicles, besides, Edom was no longer a compact kingdom (1 Kings 22:47). As we have said, the attack of this confederation was the consequence of the king's error, an error which he had acknowledged by his actions, but whose inevitable result was God's judgment. We are also told (2 Chronicles 20:3): Jehoshaphat feared. But this godly king cannot stop there, although he had indeed merited God's judgment. He does the only thing possible: "[He] feared, and set himself to seek Jehovah." In seeking Jehovah, will he meet with wrath? In no way; he meets with grace, the main subject of this entire portion of our book. Meanwhile, while seeking the Lord, he "proclaimed a fast throughout Judah" (2 Chronicles 20:3); this is humiliation and brokenness in spirit, recognizing the righteousness of the blow which has been dealt to both him and his people but counting on a God who is rich in compassion. Judah gathers together in the same spirit "to ask help of Jehovah: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek Jehovah" (2 Chronicles 20:4). The spirit animating the king spreads, and the people follow his example. Then Jehoshaphat is able to present himself on behalf of them all before God in His temple.

He reminds the Lord that He is the God of their fathers, God in the heavens, whose power none can withstand, who rules over the nations and who had dispossessed them in order to give their kingdoms to His people. He returns to God's character as it was at the beginning - and God cannot change; this was Israel's security. Back then He had acknowledged their father Abraham as His friend. In the beginning they themselves had taken Him as their God, building Him a sanctuary. There God had accepted Solomon's supplication; considering, not Jehoshaphat, but the intercession of the king according to His counsels--the one He could not fail to hear. In times past in obedience to God they had spared Edom, mount Seir, but Seir in a time of declension had taken advantage of Judah's low condition to avenge themselves and return evil for good to them. Would God stand for this? Would He not judge them? Doubtless, if He were to take into account their present condition, it would be themselves, Judah, whom He ought to judge; but would He count all His past grace for nothing? Never! Nevertheless, it was in order for them to take the place before Him that their humiliation which was so right called for, as did also their faith. Jehoshaphat does not say as before (2 Chronicles 19:11): "Be strong and do it," but rather: "We have no might in presence of this great company which cometh against us, neither know we what to do." He reasons like his father Asa in the days when he was faithful (2 Chronicles 14:11), but he also knows, as did his father, that no force can withstand the Lord. His one and only resource thus is: "Our eyes are upon Thee!" Is this not the thought expressed in Psalms 123:1-4? "Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes are directed to Jehovah our God, until He be gracious unto us!"

All Judah, as later in Nehemiah's time, is present at this scene. "With their little ones, their wives, and their sons," they all associate themselves with Jehoshaphat's supplication. Then they receive the Spirit of God's wonderful answer through Jahaziel, the son of Zechariah: "Be attentive, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat! Thus saith Jehovah unto you: Fear not, nor be dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow go down against them: behold, they come up by the ascent of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the valley, before the wilderness of Jeruel. Ye shall not have to fight on this occasion: set yourselves, stand and see the salvation of Jehovah who is with you! Judah and

Jerusalem, fear not nor be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, and Jehovah will be with you” (2 Chronicles 20:15-17).

Isn't it remarkable that we find no reproach here, not even a remote allusion to the unfaithfulness of the people and their king? All is grace. Sin has been swallowed up, as it were, by grace. Ah! this reassuring word, twice repeated: “Fear not, nor be dismayed,” is breathed by the Spirit of Jesus. How often in the Gospels in the presence of sinful man, He would say, “Fear not.” He would have us trust in His power and goodness. His goodness is His glory, as He said to Moses and as we see in Psalms 63:1-11. Three times He encourages them with these words: “Go down, set yourselves, go out against them,” and twice He tells them, “Jehovah will be with you!”

God requires only one thing of His people: faith in His word. This must be evidenced before they receive what this word promises them. Faith must anticipate victory, for it is the confirmation of things not yet seen; it must count entirely on God without any confidence in man; faith must understand that this battle is not theirs, but the Lord's, that the battle is against Satan who would thwart God's counsels concerning His people. They had only to stand there to see the salvation of Jehovah, the very same expression which Moses had spoken to the people when they went out of Egypt (Exodus 14:13). As soon as the promise of salvation is given, it is a sure thing for faith although it has not yet been obtained. “He will swallow up death in victory,” says the prophet, and the apostle adds: “But thanks to God, who gives us the victory by our Lord Jesus Christ.” Then the king and the people fall on their faces before Jehovah to worship Him and the Levites stand up to praise Him (2 Chronicles 20:18-19).

After this thanksgiving for anticipated blessing the people go out toward the wilderness of Tekoa. Jehoshaphat stands before the people and says: “Believe in Jehovah your God, and ye shall be established; believe His prophets, and ye shall prosper!” The only thing necessary is faith; faith in God, faith in His Word, represented by the prophets. As of old, so it is today and so it ever shall be in a time of ruin: the Word is the supreme resource; it is to the Word that the people are always referred. In the face of fully equipped enemy troops, praise resounds a second time: “Give thanks to Jehovah; for His loving-kindness endureth for ever!” No other song recurs more frequently than this one in the Old Testament. Usually it is the proclamation of grace which alone can introduce the reign of glory, but here it is the song of triumph before the victory is won, because to faith this victory is sure. This triumph is from a source entirely divine: “Jehovah set liers-in-wait against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir.” Man has no part in it, whereas on other occasions he is called on to act and to fight. Just as at the beginning of their history, God today wants to cause His people to realize their own powerlessness and the power that fights for them. The enemies destroy one another and Judah sees their defeat from on high, just as we do when we enter the sanctuary of our mighty God; only in our chapter we see a conclusive victory, whereas faith alone realizes it today while we wait for the God of peace to bruise Satan under our feet. The “song of triumph” anticipated victory (2 Chronicles 20:22); now victory has come, and Judah celebrates it in the valley of Berachah, which means “blessing,” a picture of the place where God will be praised forever for the victory He has won for us. All this scene is in figure the accomplishment of God's counsels toward His people by the judgment of their enemies. After this the people return to Jerusalem with joy, Jehoshaphat at their head. All the instruments of praise, as in Psalms 150:1-6, celebrate Jehovah's triumph (2 Chronicles 20:28). This is the prelude to the rest that remains for the people of God: “And the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet; and his God gave him rest round

about” (2 Chronicles 20:30). “And the terror of God was on all the kingdoms of the lands, when they had heard that Jehovah fought against the enemies of Israel” (2 Chronicles 20:29). In all these details it is impossible not to recognize the portrayal of Christ’s future millennial reign and the events by which it will be introduced. Israel’s humiliation, being reduced to a feeble remnant, their return to God, the Lord’s direct intervention in their favor, the conclusive victory won by the Lord Himself over the enemy of the end times, the reign of peace this will introduce, the king of Israel himself leading his people to Jerusalem, the uninterrupted chords of joyful praise before God, and the kingdom’s final rest. Solomon’s reign sets us right into the midst of full millennial blessing; the end of Jehoshaphat’s reign describes the manner in which it will be established.

Let us note yet that we find the very same expressions at the beginning and at the end of Jehoshaphat’s reign: “And the terror of God was on all the kingdoms of the lands” (2 Chronicles 17:10; 2 Chronicles 20:29). In the beginning this terror was the fruit of the king’s faithfulness, fruit which could not endure; at the end it is the fruit of God’s faithfulness when everything on man’s side has failed, and this fruit endures forever. This entire scene, a type of the accomplishment of God’s counsels, because it is this, has no place in the book of Kings. In 2 Chronicles 20:31-37 we find, by contrast, a brief picture and a sort of summary of Jehoshaphat’s reign from the aspect of his responsibility, a picture differing from the usual perspective of Chronicles. This aspect seems to have the aim of introducing us to the terrible reigns of Jehoram and of Ahaziah where only their responsibility comes before us without the possibility of grace intervening, except to spare them an offshoot. And this is not on their account, but on account of the promises made to David and in view of the future reign of Christ. This passage turns back so as briefly to describe the events that took place under the reign of Ahaziah, king of Israel, and which preceded the victory over Moab described in our chapter. It corresponds to 1 Kings 22:42-44; 1 Kings 22:48. Under the regime of responsibility, Jehoshaphat failed to abolish the high places (1 Kings 22:33), whereas in 2 Chronicles 17:6 where he is presented under the regime of grace acting in his heart, the high places are removed. We have already explained this fancied contradiction. One more detail is added here: the state of Judah itself did not measure up to God’s thoughts: “The people had not directed their hearts to the God of their fathers” (2 Chronicles 20:33).

Lastly, our passage records a commercial alliance between Jehoshaphat and Ahaziah, but without the correlative statement which the first book of Kings (1 Kings 22:49) supplies. In this latter passage we see indeed that after the destruction of his fleet at Ezion-geber, Jehoshaphat, having understood the warning Jehovah gave him, refused to renew the enterprise with Ahaziah. Here, there is nothing of the kind. Only God’s judgment upon Jehoshaphat on the first occasion is recounted. If it were here a matter of the results of grace in the king’s heart, the special characteristic of Chronicles, Jehoshaphat’s refusal to enter into a new partnership could never have been omitted. The prophet Eliezer the son of Dodavah’s intervention, omitted in Kings, confirms the point we are seeking to bring out: that is, that this brief passage speaks only of responsibility and departs from the usual character of this book. Indeed, Eliezer pronounces judgment without the softening which we have observed in Jehu’s prophecy (2 Chronicles 19:3). He says: “Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, Jehovah has broken thy works,” and the ships were broken, and could not go to Tarshish. In all this Jehoshaphat was indeed very guilty. What need did he have of riches acquired at the price of alliance with the leader of a people whose judgment was already decreed, and concerning whom he knew God’s mind through his own

experience? Had not the Lord given him abundance of riches at the faithful beginning of his career (2 Chronicles 17:5; 2 Chronicles 18:1)? Why did he want to draw from another source? Poor Jehoshaphat! poor in God's sight since he neither appreciated nor valued the riches that God gives and found himself poor enough to covet the riches that God did not give!

All this is very instructive for us. If we have realized that we cannot associate with the world to fight God's enemy, are we any more authorized to seek such association to better our temporal situation? We will certainly fail to find what we are looking for. We cannot love God and "the mammon of unrighteousness" at the same time, for that would be serving two masters. It is not possible to love the one without hating the other; therefore we must choose and refuse resolutely any offer the world makes to this end, as Jehoshaphat did on this occasion in the book of Kings. We must understand that to seek for gain together with the world is no better than to attempt to fight evil at its side. This spirit is only too common among God's children. If they have any intelligence at all, they cannot think that they can cause the gospel to triumph by fighting against Satan together with his own slaves. But perhaps they do not view association with the world in order to satisfy their need of riches in the same way. May God preserve us from both these dangers! And if He judges it well to give riches to His servants, may they come from Him alone, so that they may not be used for themselves but be administered in the service of the Master to whom they belong.

05.15. 2 Chronicles 21

2 Chronicles 21:1-20

Jehoram The account of Jehoram's reign contained in 2 Kings 8:16-24 corresponds in substance to that which is said to us in 2 Chronicles 21:5-10 of this chapter, but except for these few verses all we are told about Jehoram here is new. We have spoken in Meditations on 2 Kings about the chronological difficulties raised with regard to this reign; these difficulties disappear before the fact that Jehoram was made regent during the lifetime of his father Jehoshaphat just as the latter, allying himself with Ahab, was seeking to reconquer Ramoth-Gilead, occupied by the king of Syria. This explains the expression in 2 Kings 8:16 : "And in the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab, king of Israel, Jehoshaphat being then king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, began to reign." It was during his regency that Jehoram exterminated his six brothers whom Jehoshaphat had established in the fortified cities of Judah (2 Chronicles 21:3). The date is confirmed by what is said in 2 Chronicles 21:4 : "Jehoram established himself" (or rose up) over the kingdom of his father and strengthened himself"; it is confirmed again by the fact that the writing of Elijah, who had not yet been taken up to heaven, mentions the murder of Jehoram's brothers (2 Chronicles 21:13). These details confirm the perfect accuracy of the biblical account.

We have said above that the reigns of Jehoram and of Ahaziah, his son, offer not a single feature which does not call for final judgment on Judah. Nevertheless the Lord remains faithful to His promises and does not destroy "the house of David, because of the covenant that He had made with David, and as He had promised to give to him always a lamp, and to his sons" (2 Chronicles 21:7). The revolt of Libnah, a priestly city (2 Chronicles 21:10), seems to indicate that at least the priesthood in Judah protested against the king's abominations. The reason for this revolt is given us: Jehoram "had forsaken Jehovah the God of his fathers." The royal house was spared only in view of the future heir who was to descend from it.

However, we do not have to wait long for the consequences of Jehoram's revolting conduct. Edom, until then tributary to Judah and which had no king but rather a governor (1 Kings 22:47), revolts, "and they set a king over themselves" (2 Chronicles 21:8). Jehoram fights them successfully, but his victory is fruitless, for "unto this day" Edom has remained free from Judah's yoke.

"Moreover, he made high places on the mountains of Judah"; this was far worse than failing to destroy the existing high places, as several of his predecessors had done: Jehoram creates and establishes them, something no king of Judah had ever done before him. Much more, he promoted fornication at Jerusalem and "compelled Judah thereto" (2 Chronicles 21:11). What a scene! This was voluntarily forsaking God for idolatry; in a word, this was apostasy and completely forgetting God's holiness, to which Jehoram preferred corruption and defilement.

Up until now we have seen the role of the prophets of Judah in rebuking, exhorting, encouraging, and filling hearts with fear at the imminent judgments of Jehovah. Now these precious helpers are

not there. Only “a writing...from Elijah,” prophet of Israel and prophet of judgment, reaches king Jehoram. Elijah had watched the first acts of this reign of violence and had written against the king. This writing, preserved after the prophet’s rapture, gets to Jehoram. “Thus saith Jehovah, the God of David thy father: Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, but hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication, like the fornications of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren, thy father’s house who were better than thyself: behold, Jehovah will smite with a great stroke thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy substance, and thyself with sore sicknesses, with a disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day” (2 Chronicles 21:12-15). The three facts enumerated by Elijah to justify God’s judgment are: abandoning Jehovah, corruption, and violence - all that characterizes man’s sin on account of which God had once destroyed the world by the flood. But God is patient toward His people: He speaks only of personal judgment on the king. Jehoram is stricken in his bowels which fall out by reason of this terrible sickness, and he dies “in cruel sufferings.” Thus Elijah’s prophecy is accomplished to the letter. Jehoram had chosen “the way of the kings of Israel”; he is condemned by a prophet of Israel, the only public witness who remained in the midst of the idolatry of the ten tribes and their king.

Defections continue. Not only Edom, but also the Philistines and the Arabians rise up against Judah; these nations overrun her territory as well as Jerusalem, plundering the king’s treasure, carrying away his sons and his wives, and massacring the former, just as he himself had massacred his brothers. All that is left of his family is a single offshoot, Jehoahaz, otherwise known as Ahaziah, for the Lord wanted to preserve a lamp for David and his sons. Jehoram died “without being regretted”; no aromatic spices are burned for him as had been done for Asa. Although he is buried in the city of David, the honor of sharing the sepulchers of the kings is refused him at his burial.

What will become of the lamp which God is yet preserving for David?

05.16. 2 Chronicles 22

2 Chronicles 22:1-12

Ahaziah

Most of the details of this chapter are also found in 2 Kings 8:25-29; 2 Kings 9:27-28; 2 Kings 10:13-14; 2 Kings 11:1-3.

Jehoram was the eldest of Jehoshaphat's sons; up to this point the kingly line, so to say, followed the normal path, but no descendant was left to Jehoram except his youngest son, Ahaziah. The inhabitants of Jerusalem make him king; thus divine order is encroached upon on every side. The lamp is about to go out, but God who had spoken through the prophets cannot lie. Did He not say, in speaking of Jerusalem: "There will I cause the horn of David to bud forth; I have ordained a lamp for Mine anointed" (Psalms 132:17). Alas! what a lamp was this offshoot of kings! Spared amidst a scene of murder and carnage, witness of God's terrible judgments on his father, should he not have lifted up his eyes to Jehovah and re-established contact with the God of Israel? Instead of this, he yields to all the bad influences surrounding him, without heeding the warnings from on high; he confides in his mother, Athaliah, daughter of Omri, an ambitious and cruel woman. "[She] was his counselor to do wickedly" (2 Chronicles 22:3); as counselors he takes those of the house of Ahab who lead him "to his destruction." On their advice he forms an alliance with Joram, the son of Ahab. Ramoth-Gilead, a possession of Israel, had remained under the power of the king of Syria ever since Ahab's vain undertaking to recover it, in company of Jehoshaphat, Ahaziah's grandfather. Ahaziah does not hesitate to help the wicked (cf. 2 Chronicles 19:2), so estranged is his heart from the fear of the Lord.

But, if for Jehoshaphat it was a mistake, extenuated by the zeal he otherwise demonstrated for the Lord, this sin, shamelessly repeated despite the condemnation pronounced on Jehoshaphat by the prophet, here no longer has any extenuating circumstances. Joram, the king of Israel, wounded by the Syrians withdraws to Jezreel to be healed of his wounds. Ahaziah comes there to visit him and there he meets his end: "But his coming to Joram was from God the complete ruin of Ahaziah." He goes out with him "against Jehu the son of Nimshi, whom Jehovah had anointed to cut off the house of Ahab." Joram dies, the sons of the brothers of Ahaziah and the princes of Judah are massacred by Jehu; Ahaziah flees to Samaria in an attempt to hide himself. He is discovered, chased, and wounded; he escapes to Megiddo, where he is once again discovered, brought to Jehu, and put to death (2 Chronicles 22:9; cf. 2 Kings 9:27-28). His servants convey his body to Jerusalem where he was buried in the sepulchers of the kings, his fathers, for they said: "He is the son of Jehoshaphat, who sought Jehovah with all his heart" (2 Chronicles 22:9). The only testimony that can be accorded him, the only reason Jehovah refrains from delivering him up to the dogs like Ahab, is that God remembers his grandfather. It is on his account that grace is granted to this unworthy descendant, even though that grace is shown in his death, for his life had come to an end under God's judgment. And now still another terrible scene of murder unfolds. Jehoram had massacred his brothers; Judah's enemies massacred all of Jehoram's sons but

Ahaziah; Jehu kills Ahaziah and massacres all the sons of his brothers; finally Athaliah exterminates all the royal seed in order that she alone might rule. And despite it all, the lamp of the Lord's Anointed is not extinguished. In the midst of this scene of murder God preserves a feeble nursling who in the first part of his reign is a type of the expected Messiah. Preserved, as Jesus later would be at the time of the massacre of the infants at Bethlehem; hidden from every eye, as Jesus at the time of the flight to Egypt - thus Joash is presented to us. He arises in the purity of his childhood out of a condemned race, the only offshoot upon whose shoulder is laid the key of David, a root out of a dry ground; brought up from his youth under the eye of God in His temple, he appears to us like the One who said: "Did ye not know that I ought to be occupied in my Father's business?" Thus Joash begins his career. But let us note, he is at the same time the type of the Lord taking in His hands the reins of government of His kingdom. In the seventh year, the sabbatical year, the year of rest for the earth, he appears before the eyes of all. Until that moment Joash had been hidden for six years in the house of God, just as the Lord is hidden before His future manifestation. When the doors of the temple open, when He comes forth out of heaven which until then contains Him, He will be at once avenged on those who conspired against Him and universally proclaimed the true King of His people, the only One with the right to wear the crown.

05.17. 2 Chronicles 23

2 Chronicles 23:1-21 2 Chronicles 23:1-21, 2 Chronicles 24:1-27

JOASH 2 Chronicles 23:1-21 The Accession of Joash to the Throne No other reign affords a more absolute contrast between its beginning and its end than that of Joash in Chronicles. One particular detail, contrasting with all we have noticed up to this point, is that in the history of Joash the evil is mentioned more often than the good, whereas the second book of Kings omits a portion of it. The explanation of this fact is simple: The beginning of the reign of Joash is presented to us as an attempt to accomplish God's counsels as to the kingdom. Will he prove himself worthy of the divine favor resting upon him? If so, the king according to God's counsels will be called Joash. As we shall learn, this was not the case, but the beginnings of this reign were so favored that they seemed close to fulfilling the thoughts of God.

Another point is brought to light in our chapter. The proclamation of the kingdom does not take place without the Levitical priesthood being re-established in all its functions (2 Chronicles 23:1-9), for it is inseparable from the kingdom according to God's counsels and is subordinated to it. Moreover, the high priesthood in the person of Jehoiada is intimately associated with the kingdom and this association is one of the remarkable features of Chronicles, although the kingdom and the priesthood are not here invested in the same person as they will be when Christ "shall be a priest upon His throne" (Zechariah 6:13). Here the entire Levitical priesthood is present at the anointing and coronation of the king (2 Chronicles 23:8). All the captains also unite at this solemn ceremony; and all the people are present, too. Every man bears David's weapons (2 Chronicles 23:9) and thus the reign of Joash is directly related to that of David, who was rejected in former days.

"And all the congregation made a covenant with the king in the house of God. And [Jehoiada] said to them, Behold, the king's son shall reign, as Jehovah has said of the sons of David" (2 Chronicles 23:3). After this the entire priestly service is reinstated (2 Chronicles 23:18-19), and the king, who has been given the crown and the testimony-the king, whose reign of righteousness accomplishes all that is written in the law-sits on the throne of his kingdom. He reigns "as Jehovah has said of the sons of David"; he is "the king's son"; he is the Anointed, acclaimed by all with the cry: Long live the king! He is really in type the Prince of life! This glorious scene is established only through vengeance. Athaliah, that idolatrous usurper of the kingdom who had thought to put an end to David's family forever, falls before the revived kingdom together with all the idolatry she had instituted. In the same way, the Antichrist, a murderer, persecutor and idolater, will fall along with all his power before the revived kingdom at the refreshing dawn of the miraculous reign of the Son of David. Rejoicing and singing are the happy accompaniment of this scene.

05.18. 2 Chronicles 24

2 Chronicles 24:1-27 The Reign of Joash

“For the wicked Athaliah and her sons had devastated the house of God; and also all the hallowed things of the house of Jehovah had they employed for the Baals” (2 Chronicles 24:7). Joash’s first concern was to restore the temple, and he sent the priests and the Levites through the cities of Judah in order to collect the money necessary for this work. The tribute ordained by Moses in the wilderness for the building of the tabernacle (Exodus 30:11-16; Exodus 35:4-9; Exodus 35:20-29) was to be employed for the restoration of the temple, but the Levites did not hasten the matter; the breaches were not repaired, and the gifts no doubt were used to support the priesthood. In all this, Joash adhered to the Word alone. Circumstances had changed since the years in the wilderness. Moses had ordained a tribute for the construction of the tabernacle; the tabernacle had disappeared and had given place to a temple. Was it necessary to adhere to the original ordinance that had been given in quite different circumstances? Moreover, the temple had been defiled, despoiled of all its treasures, and partially destroyed. Was it really necessary to go to so much trouble to repair it? Couldn’t Moses’ tribute be used to support the Levites? Doubtless Joash was surrounded by people who reasoned in this way, but all this was not according to God, even though a godly high priest did not oppose it. His opinion had no value for Joash; and the young king rebuked the old high priest, for the Word of God was of greater authority for him than the thoughts of the most eminent of men. That which the Word commands must be used the way the Word designates; it is not possible--without becoming unfaithful--to make any change in divine regulations. The natural heart’s unbelief would term these ordinances outdated, but that they are not, for the Word is unchangeable and eternal. Work on the house is not the same thing as helping the servants who labor for the Lord and who are worthy of their wages; there was the tithe for the Levites, but each has its place, and for Joash the most urgent thing was to repair the breaches in the house. He proved himself here to be more of a true Levite than the Levites themselves; he followed the steps of the One who said: “The zeal of Thy house hath devoured Me.” Is there no voice for us in these things? Should not our time, our resources, and our efforts be employed to cement those bonds, today destroyed, that join together the precious materials of God’s building, His Assembly? Is it of no importance to God whether the place of habitation where He dwells on earth through the Spirit be to the honor or dishonor of its divine Host? It is our responsibility to repair the breaches, to exert our zeal and energy so that God may be honored by the union cemented between His children, the only remedy for complete ruin. There is only one house of God: everything being built besides it has no value for Him. What resources are being expended uselessly on what are merely human houses. Likewise, the gifts collected by the Levites were of no use to Jehovah and were being expended in vain.

Henceforth it was necessary that the tribute of Moses be used entirely for repairs to the house of God. The king (not Jehoiada, as in the book of Kings) commands that a chest be set at the door of the house of Jehovah to collect the offerings. When all the work is completed, what remains is used to make utensils of gold and silver for the temple (2 Chronicles 24:14). This passage does

not contradict 2 Kings 12:13 which simply tells us that while the work was in progress silver was not used for anything else.

All is beautiful, all is pure at the beginning of this reign. As is customary in Chronicles, the high places, spared by Joash (2 Kings 12:3), are passed over in silence. As long as the kingdom represents that of the promised Messiah, as it were, this book views it as pure and without reproach; but all changes: a scene of grief and horror is about to open before our eyes. The entire passage 2 Chronicles 24:15-22 is lacking in the book of Kings.

Jehoiada dies and is buried "in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward God and toward his house" (2 Chronicles 24:16) - fresh proof of the intimate connection between the kingdom and the priesthood in Chronicles.

After this death, everything changes. Joash demonstrates himself unworthy of answering to God's thoughts concerning the kingdom. His safety and his strength had been in his connection with the priesthood, and when it disappeared, everything collapsed. Henceforth "the princes of Judah" became the king's counselors through flattery: "[they] made obeisance to the king: then the king hearkened to them" (2 Chronicles 24:17). In gaining control of the spirit of Joash they had in view only the re-establishment of idolatry in Judah. Two paths lay open before Joash: to remain faithful to the house of God where he had spent the years of his youth, and associate himself with the servants of Jehovah, or to take the world's side and seek the friendship of those who govern it. He abandons the first course and chooses the second; the natural heart is always inclined toward those who flatter it, and the princes of this world are Satan's instruments to lead men astray to idols. And so the people "forsook the house of Jehovah the God of their fathers, and served the Asherahs and idols." And now we see prophets again appearing. What proof of God's longsuffering as long as there remains a glimmer of hope for the people! "And He sent prophets among them to bring them again to Jehovah, and they testified against them; but they would not give ear. And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest; and he stood up above the people and said unto them, Thus saith God: Wherefore do ye transgress the commandments of Jehovah? And ye cannot prosper; for ye have forsaken Jehovah, and He hath forsaken you" (2 Chronicles 24:19-20).

Joash has forgotten everything: his deep affection and respect for the memory of the high priest; the love he owed the son of such a servant, and so much the more as this son was the bearer of God's word to turn the people and their king from their evil ways. What dreadful havoc unfaithfulness can bring about in just a few moments in a heart that has opened its door to it! Would there be anything astonishing about the great men and the people conspiring against the priesthood they take umbrage at and against the prophet who exhorts them? - but no, Zechariah the son of Jehoiada is stoned "at the command of the king in the court of the house of Jehovah." Our hearts revolt at such ingratitude and cruelty. "And king Joash remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son" (2 Chronicles 24:22).

One wonders how such a thing could be possible on part of a king whose beginnings announced a righteous, irreproachable reign. We have given several reasons in our study of 2 Kings, but here these reasons are not given. This reign foundered in crime and violence. Blinded by Satan, the king's heart falls prey to this terrible enemy as soon as he turns his back on the priesthood and the house of Jehovah. In taking control of Joash, Satan thought to bring God's counsels to naught. In

this despite all his efforts he has been, is, and will continue to be fooled, for God has Christ in view, and the fall of a Joash does not destroy His counsels. Still, judgment must be executed against evil. The cry of vengeance out of the mouth of the dying prophet: "Jehovah see and require it!" (2 Chronicles 24:22) is the cry of the violated law. Christ and His blood speak better things than Abel or Zechariah: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." On the cross He intercedes for transgressors and His blood says: Grace! grace! Stephen, who suffers the same fate as Zechariah, cries: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge"; but here, I repeat, we find ourselves under the rule of the law, even though the ministry of the prophets had modified its character. The fact that Zechariah is slain in the court "between the temple and the altar" makes the king's sin infinitely worse. God on His throne between the cherubim is witness to this scene, whereas at the beginning of this reign, Athaliah, that wicked woman, had been forcibly removed from the temple court so as to be put to death in the king's house. Joab, smitten when he took hold of the horns of the altar, was not before the ark which David had brought to Zion.

2 Chronicles 24:23-27. The attack of Hazael, whose motive is not given in 2 Kings, is here the answer to Zechariah's cry for vengeance. All the princes of the people who had conspired against the prophet to put him to death receive the just chastisement of their iniquity (2 Chronicles 24:23). These verses correspond, though with many differences, to 2 Kings 12:17-21. Thus we find here that the army of the Syrians came to Jerusalem "with a small company of men" to the shame of the "very great army" of Joash (2 Chronicles 24:24). They take everything and send the spoil to Damascus. In 2 Kings Joash tries to escape from the enemy by giving Hazael all the holy things and the gold of the temple and that of the king's house. Our passage does not mention this fact except with these words: "the greatness of the burdens laid upon him" (2 Chronicles 24:27). After the tribute is paid, Hazael withdraws from Jerusalem. In our passage he re-enters it and "executed judgment upon Joash" (2 Chronicles 24:24). It is probable that between these two events, Joash had rebelled against the king of Syria, for here there is no mention of spoil, but rather of vengeance executed against the princes of the people and the king. Joash is left by the enemy "in great diseases," the consequences, no doubt, of all his distresses, but above all of God's judgment which pursues him. And moreover, his own servants conspire against this one who had allied himself with conspirators. The avenging sword of a holy God strikes him: a Moabite and an Ammonite, two idolators, are the murderers of this king who had re-established the worship of idols. The blood of the righteous is avenged; Joash does not even have the honor of being buried in the sepulchres of the kings - similar in this respect to ungodly Jehoram who suffered the same fate (2 Chronicles 21:20); solemn example of a judgment executed even in death, for the Lord shows men that He wants to be feared!

05.19. 2 Chronicles 25

2 Chronicles 25:1-28

Amaziah

Amaziah succeeds Joash his father. God in His patience would, so to say, ever begin to test the kingdom anew. Will this reign turn out better than the preceding one? No, the very same history repeats itself. At first there is faithfulness and the fear of God, but then there is a resounding fall. Amaziah “did what was right in the sight of Jehovah, yet not with a perfect heart” (2 Chronicles 25:2). Something was lacking in his piety and 2 Kings 14:3-4 informs us about this. He did not abolish the high places although he did not himself sacrifice there, but the people sacrificed there; and this revealed a sinful indifference in Amaziah with regard to the condition of the nation for which he was responsible. Let us repeat here that in Chronicles God in His grace mentions as little as possible the fact that the high places were tolerated. It is as though He had resolved to occupy us only with the things produced in the heart by grace, and not to insist upon a weakness in the godly kings which often stemmed from a lack of moral authority and energy to repress the idolatrous tendencies of their people.

One other thing by contrast is found to be to the praise of Amaziah; he follows the example given by Joash, his father, in the days of his youth and prosperity. The Word, represented at that time by “the book of Moses,” is binding upon him and this is what directs his decisions. If he does away with his father’s murderers as Solomon had once done with David’s enemies, he does not put their sons to death, for he did “according to that which is written in the law in the book of Moses, wherein Jehovah commanded saying, The fathers shall not die for the children, nor shall the children die for the fathers, but every man shall die for his own sin” (2 Chronicles 25:4; cf. Deuteronomy 24:16). But this was not the entire Word, and to produce a faithful walk the entire Word is necessary. The same Moses had said in Numbers 33:52 : “All their high places shall ye lay waste.” How often the lack of submission to certain parts of the divine word spoils and corrupts the testimony in an otherwise faithful Christian life. Who can tell us that this tolerance of one of the practices of idolatry--perhaps the least hateful of them - did not have something to do with the shocking defection exemplified in Amaziah’s career? For the moment his life had not yet sunk into evil; but we find in Amaziah a conscience little exercised about association with Israel, already given over to judgment. Doubtless finding his army small in number (and there was indeed an immense difference between his military strength and that of Jehoshaphat: 2 Chronicles 17:12-19), he hires 100,000 volunteers from Israel as paid mercenaries for one hundred talents of silver. There was no longer a positive direction, an express Scripture passage, which should have governed the king’s conduct as to this, but rather the communion of thoughts with God and the example of blessings linked with faith. Should he not have known that the Lord could “save by many or by few”? Had not Asa, with the same sized army as Amaziah had, destroyed Zerah’s million men? (2 Chronicles 14:8-9). To sum things up, our faults in such cases always come from a lack of confidence in God and a blind confidence in human resources. Amaziah had neglected to

consult Jehovah, but He does not leave him without exhortations. A prophet, a man of God, comes to him to warn him. Whereas the ten tribes are left to themselves, God reveals His thoughts by His prophets there where a people which still acknowledges Him is found. He exhorts, warns, and announces judgments for disobedience, but all this is mingled with grace. The prophet does not abolish the law in any way, but on the contrary, depends on it; the law and prophecy are presented as having equal authority. Indeed, Amaziah depends on the law of Moses in 2 Chronicles 25:4 and in 2 Chronicles 25:10 it is at the prophet's word that he changes his conduct. Had he hardened himself, the system of law not having been abolished, he would have incurred judgment without mercy; but the prophet's word of reproof is full of grace and gentleness: "O king, let not the host of Israel go with thee; for Jehovah is not with Israel, with all the children of Ephraim. But if thou wilt go, do it; be strong for the battle: God will make thee fall before the enemy, for there is with God power to help and to cast down" (2 Chronicles 25:7-8). Amaziah listens to the prophet, but so that he may remember this serious warning, God wishes that his act of self-will bear certain bitter fruits. First of all the question is raised: "But what is to be done for the hundred talents which I have given to the troop of Israel?" This act of obedience would involve a loss of money, but this was a loss which he would have avoided if he had not without consulting the Lord committed himself to a path that dishonored Him. How much material or moral sorrow the simple path of faith will spare us! No doubt, certain difficulties will always be met in this path, but these trials are not mingled with any bitterness, as we see in the epistle to the Philippians - what am I saying? - no bitterness? They are the occasion of unmingled joy. Certainly the apostle had met with nothing but difficulties along his pathway, and the epistle to the Philippians enumerates a great number of these: his chains, his material needs, the hatred of those who sought to add affliction to his bonds, the lack of harmony among the dear children of God, the enemies of the cross of Christ walking in the Christian pathway, each seeking his own interest, and many other things; but he was sustained above all his trials, for they were fellowship in the sufferings of Christ and not the chastening of his conduct.

What shall we do? asks Amaziah. The prophet answers: "Jehovah is able to give thee much more than this." The king has nothing to do but to believe that God is willing to give to him, but his faith will of necessity be put to the test. Will his faith emerge victorious? He puts up with being obliged to renounce the "hundred talents which [he had] given to the troop of Israel" without gaining any profit from them. He sees the anger of the men of Ephraim flaring up against Judah, for they regarded their dismissal as an offense (2 Chronicles 25:10). He passes through still other trials: "But those of the troop that Amaziah had sent back, that they should not go with him to battle, fell upon the cities of Judah from Samaria as far as Beth-horon, and smote three thousand of them, and took much spoil" (2 Chronicles 25:13). If Amaziah's faith wins a signal victory over the Edomites, as the prophet had told him, nevertheless he must as discipline be beaten in another quarter by these very men in whom he had placed his confidence. Has Amaziah learned his lesson? Has he humbled himself before God in on the one hand winning a victory, the fruit of God's free grace, and in on the other hand suffering a defeat, the fruit of his independence? The continuation of his history shows us that in reality humiliation was foreign to him. The victory puffs him up; he credits himself with the defeat of the Edomites and forgets God. Shame on him! He forgets God so completely "that he brought the gods of the children of Seir, and set them up to be his gods, and bowed himself down before them, and burned incense to them" (2 Chronicles 25:14). He worships the very same gods who had not delivered their people from his hand! This time the wrath of God is kindled against him decidedly, yet still He sends a prophet to him to

endeavor one more time to bring him to repentance. "Why dost thou seek after the gods of a people who have not delivered their own people out of thy hand?" Is not this "why" touching? Will Amaziah perhaps humble himself and acknowledge his guilt? This "why" is opening a door of repentance to him. This effort to restore him is very much a part of the prophet's merciful calling! Amaziah had listened to the first prophet, but without a deep conviction of the evil path in which he was involved; what will he now respond to the second prophet? Instead of taking account of God's wrath against himself, his own wrath is kindled against the man of God. "Hast thou been made the king's counsellor?" How do you dare speak to me? "Forbear; why shouldst thou be smitten?" Pride speaks through the mouth of the king. His victory over Edom has only nursed the high opinion he has of himself. Certainly, he can do without the prophet and his questions - he who could do without the Lord! Indeed, the man of God withdraws, but not without pronouncing these solemn words: "I know that God has determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened to my counsel." This sentence does not stop Amaziah; there are times when a heart, hardened of its own accord, is left to itself - when a man is delivered over to Satan who uses him as a plaything. Pride at having conquered Edom and bitter resentment against Ephraim which had pillaged the cities of Judah gives birth in Amaziah's heart to a plan to provoke the king of Israel and to avenge himself against him. He completely rejects the idea of discipline on part of God toward himself, for a spirit of vengeance is never consistent with a humble heart. Joash, the king of Israel, responds to this challenge with a fable, illustrating the fact that once already Jehu had trodden Judah under foot - Judah which had sought alliances through marriage with the family of the king at Samaria. Amaziah "would not hear"; this hardening came from God, as was once the case with Pharaoh. He is smitten, taken prisoner, and brought to Jerusalem. The wall of Jerusalem is destroyed between the gate of Ephraim and the corner gate; the city itself, the temple treasures, and the treasures of the king are taken as spoil. Amaziah lives for fifteen more years after the death of Joash, but without any evidence of a return to God. And what a solemn occurrence! From the time that he turned aside from following the Lord, a conspiracy hatched against him simmers for many years until one day it breaks out. In the face of this conspiracy the king flees to Lachish. Why did he not seek refuge with the One whom he had offended? Such a decision could still have suspended judgment, for this was the only refuge where judgment had no access, and even the best fortified city could not prevent God's wrath from reaching the king.

Up until this point, except for two absolutely perverse reigns, the kings begin with God, whose grace is present to encourage them to persevere in this path; but their end is unlike their beginning: it leads to shipwreck. We have not yet reached the period of the revivals when we will find the more comforting picture of kings who learn to count exclusively on grace.

05.20. 2 Chronicles 26

2 Chronicles 26:1-23

Uzziah The second book of Kings mentions the contents of this chapter only very briefly. See 2 Kings 14:21-22 and 2 Kings 15:1-7.

We find the same principle at work in the reign of Uzziah (Azariah) as in the reigns of Joash and Amaziah: the grace of God establishes a new king, blesses him abundantly at the beginning of his reign, and then for one reason or another this reign ends in moral disaster and the judgment that is its consequence. As usual, Chronicles presents the beginning of this reign without mentioning the blot of the high places.

Uzziah built Elath (or Elath), a city situated near Ezion-Geber on the eastern arm of the Red Sea, which had once belonged to Solomon (2 Chronicles 8:17) and which had then passed into the hands of Edom. The beginning of this reign was excellent in every aspect. "He sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God; and in the days that he sought Jehovah, God made him to prosper" (2 Chronicles 26:5). This Zechariah does not appear in any other passage; it is certain that he was of the priestly line; moreover, he had understanding in the visions of God; he was therefore a prophet and moreover a seer - not all prophets necessarily having this character. Often they sought the truth in their own writings, studying them and gaining understanding, but they were not necessarily able to explain the visions of God. Joseph had this gift, and Daniel was in the same position as Zechariah; he had "understanding in all visions and dreams" (Daniel 1:17), and moreover, in line with the example of other prophets, he understood God's thoughts through studying their writings (Daniel 9:2).

Understanding in the visions of God enables us to teach and exhort others. Prophecy is not necessarily a revelation of new things; this is certainly not its character in our days when the Holy Scriptures give us the complete revelation of God's mind; nevertheless today's prophet possesses an understanding in the mysteries of God (the things which were hidden but are hidden no longer, being now revealed in the Word). This understanding makes him capable of edifying, comforting, and exhorting (1 Corinthians 14:3). This was precisely what was needed by the kings of Judah who passed through times of ruin, such as we today pass through also. This is what Zechariah did. Under his ministry Uzziah sought the Lord and prospered. Like him, we must pay careful attention to the Word of God and to the mysteries it reveals to us. If we diligently seek to understand them, like Uzziah, we will enter upon an era of spiritual prosperity. Only, let us not forget that this prosperity itself brings us into conflict with the enemy. The most desperate enemies were those at the gates of Judah. In those difficult times the Philistines had taken possession of part of Israel's territory and stood their ground there. We can compare this enemy to nominal Christendom, established without right within the confines of the people of God. What are we to do about them? The same thing that Uzziah did when he broke down the walls of the Philistines and built cities in their midst. In the interests of the people of God we ought likewise to prove the emptiness of Christendom's pretensions and lift high the divine principles of the Word as the only way of

withstanding it.

After this, Uzziah is able to carry on the war beyond his borders. "God helped him against the Philistines, and against the Arabians that dwelt in Gur-Baal, and the Maonites [Edomites]. And the Ammonites gave gifts to Uzziah: and his name spread abroad to the entrance of Egypt; for he became exceedingly strong" (2 Chronicles 26:7-8)! Applying this to the gospel's conquests, we usually find the same pattern. It begins like Gideon and so many others within a restricted circle, often the circle of the family, and then spreads beyond. Andrew first of all brought his brother Simon to Jesus; the delivered demoniac tells his own house what great things God had done for him; the apostles preach at Jerusalem; from there, the Gospel spreads to Samaria, then to Caesarea among the Gentile proselytes, and finally, through Paul, to the nations. If after having been converted we are faithful in our immediate circle, we may be certain that the Lord will extend our limits.

"And Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the corner gate, and at the valley gate, and at the angle, and fortified them" (2 Chronicles 26:9). Towers are built to defend the gates. Two of these towers face the valley of Hinnom, where Joash, king of Israel, had broken down the wall after having conquered Amaziah (2 Chronicles 25:23). Uzziah also fortified the "corner gate," a weak and exposed part of Jerusalem's fortifications by which one might gain access to the temple and capture it. In other words, Uzziah was not content simply to rebuild that which the enemy had destroyed but sought to secure God's temple from any attack. All this demanded very earnest labor; let us apply ourselves to do the same. It is not enough to fight the enemy without; we must care for the Assembly of God.

"And he built towers in the desert and digged many cisterns; for he had much cattle, both in the lowland and on the plateau, husbandmen also and vinedressers on the mountains and in Carmel; for he loved husbandry" (2 Chronicles 26:10). Besides having to fight enemies from without and within and make Jehovah's city secure, he also had to face many other dangers. The watchtowers in the wilderness were used not only to alert against wild animals, but more importantly, to signal the presence of those who would pillage the flocks. One of the king's functions was to fill the office of shepherd and protect the sheep. This solicitude for the flocks confided to his care is shown in yet another manner: Uzziah dug many wells in order to provide drinking water for his men and his cattle. The patriarchs had done likewise, in particular Isaac, that great digger of wells and great seeker of living water. He knew that without this living water, neither man nor beast could survive - a striking image of the Word of God which the enemy always seeks to steal from us (proved by all the attacks which he directs against it), as in former days the Philistines blocked up the wells dug by Abraham and filled them with earth (Genesis 26:15).

We are also told - a very rare thing in Scripture - that Uzziah "loved husbandry." He showed an interest in the flocks and their pasturelands, in the laborers toiling to harvest "the precious fruit of the earth," the wheat which gives food and strength, and in the vinedressers laboring to bring joy to the heart of man overwhelmed with troubles.

All this activity in no way hindered the king's constant concern for his army, for perfecting offensive weaponry, and at Jerusalem, machinery for defense (2 Chronicles 26:11-15).

Such solicitude for all branches of government and administration, such expertise in organization we find but little in the history of the kings, except in that of Solomon. Thus, despite the painful contrast between the kingdom's present and past, despite its division and humiliation, despite its enemies without and within, the Lord was pleased to sketch anew the history of the king according to His counsels in order to show that the ruin would not prevent him from growing up "before Him as a tender sapling, and as a root out of dry ground" (Isaiah 53:2). The Lord was with Uzziah: "His name spread far abroad; for he was marvelously helped, till he became strong" (2 Chronicles 26:15).

Up to this point not a single defect, not a single weakness is pointed out in this king's life (the book of Kings, which has an entirely different object, does mention some). If he had continued thus, Israel's Deliverer would have been found at last! Alas! the hour of shipwreck is striking! "But when he became strong, his heart was lifted up to his downfall" (2 Chronicles 26:16). Uzziah's pride was feeding on the blessings he had received and he lifts himself up against the very One to whom he owed his exaltation. Usurping the right of burning incense on the golden altar, a right belonging to the priests alone, he enters into Jehovah's temple into which only those who had been sanctified to exercise priestly functions were allowed to penetrate. When Korah rebelled (Numbers 16:36-40), the brazen censers of those who had conspired against Moses had been beaten into plates to cover the brazen altar: a figure indicating in a striking way that since the natural man's pretensions to make his offering acceptable to God have no other place than the altar for sin offering, they must be nailed to the cross of Christ. Only one offering and one intercession were valid in themselves without need of atonement: only one was acknowledged as being effective: that of Aaron with his censer (Numbers 16:47). The priests - and we ourselves - could not be consecrated to God and fulfil their role of intercessors except by virtue of the sacrifice and the blood put on the mercy seat (Leviticus 8:24-28). Our High Priest intercedes by virtue of His personal perfection, and yet He did not assume this priestly office until after His death and resurrection. As it was with intercession, so also with praise: it was the privilege of the priests alone and the high priest was their leader. This applies to us Christians, too. By virtue of redemption we are a priestly family and no one outside this family, not even a King Uzziah, can take our place in the worship rendered to God. All this seems to have been without importance to the king blinded by his pride. Had he perhaps imbibed the idea for his profane act from that which his father did when he burned incense to the gods of Edom? (2 Chronicles 25:14). The priests could do nothing other than to set themselves against such an act. They had been sanctified, placed under the sprinkling of the blood which had been poured out at the brazen altar, anointed with the anointing oil so that they might present themselves before God as worshippers and intercessors. Is it not the same for us Christians? Purified from all sin by the blood of the cross, anointed by the Holy Spirit of promise, set apart for God, we can present ourselves in the sanctuary to worship, having our golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of saints.

Uzziah, rebuked by the priests, is enraged. In considering him carefully, we find with him and with his predecessors and their counselors a certain jealousy against the priesthood according to God - the source of all kinds of evil actions (see 2 Chronicles 24:17-22; 2 Chronicles 25:14). It cannot suit the man in the flesh to be excluded from God's presence and from His worship and to be unable to form some kind of link in a chain that can connect God with the fallen creature. This is the reason for the religious world's animosity against the children of God who cannot share in nor

acknowledge what it calls its worship. On account of this transgression immediate judgment falls on Uzziah. Like Miriam, Aaron's sister, who being a prophetess, had wished to make herself equal to him who was king in Jeshurun and a prophet as no other ever was - like Gehazi who, despising God's glory and that of His prophet, was stricken with the defilement from which a Gentile had been healed - like Joab, outraging Jehovah by the murder of Abner and seeing leprosy afflict his family forever (Numbers 12:10; 2 Kings 5:27; 2 Samuel 3:29): so the king is stricken with leprosy for having disregarded God's holiness. He himself with vain remorse at his act and conscious of his uncleanness hastens to go out from the presence of Jehovah under the chastisement which has been inflicted upon him. There is no remission for him, as there had been for Miriam; the king, chosen to accomplish God's counsels, is declared unclean forever, banished from His presence, excluded from His house, separated from the people over whom he had been consecrated king, isolated in a separate house, incapable of governing, a living dead man, obliged to confer the government upon his son Jotham (2 Chronicles 26:21). The divine curse rests on this man who at the beginning of his reign had done that which was right in the eyes of the Lord and had sought Him until the day when he lifted himself up. He is even deprived of the tomb of the kings, his fathers; he is buried in their burial ground, but not in their sepulcher. Sovereign expression of God's displeasure: even at their death these kings, like Jehoram, like Joash, are deprived of the honors of burial. In the year that king Uzziah died, Isaiah the prophet had a vision. In the presence of the Lord seated on a throne high and lifted up, His train filling the temple, this man of God said: "Woe unto me! for I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5). It was not only Uzziah who was unclean and defiled in the presence of the Lord; so also was the prophet. Isaiah saw the glory of Christ (John 12:41), the true, the only King according to God's counsels who was never touched by defilement, the only One whose presence judges every defilement: in His presence the prophet accepts judgment, and even more, pronounces it upon himself. Moreover, he condemns the condition of the people, of this people of unclean lips in the midst of whom he was dwelling. Thus everything was lost on part of the kingdom, the people, and the prophet. The seventh woe (see the first six woes in Isaiah 5:1-30), the fullness of the curse, was pronounced! What was left?

There remains that which the entire account of Chronicles aims to bring out. Firstly, the King, the true King, Jehovah of hosts, who sums up in Himself all the perfections of the future kingdom and in whom all the counsels of God are accomplished - and then grace; grace based upon the sacrifice of the Victim consumed on the altar of God. Thus the prophet's iniquity was removed and his sin was purged (Isaiah 6:7). It seems that in the history of Uzziah this great truth is particularly brought to light: Grace based on sacrifice is the only resource of the best of kings and of the greatest of prophets. The statement of this truth leads us to remark that the judgments pronounced on the kings in this book do not necessarily imply their future eternal lot. What is shown us in Chronicles is God's government with regard to the earth and His counsels with regard to the earthly kingdom, but not His counsels with regard to Christ's heavenly glory and the eternal blessings which are the portion of the elect. A king stricken with leprosy, driven out from the presence of God, excluded from the sepulchers of the kings, has lost every right to the privileges of the kingdom upon earth, but God's grace with regard to heaven is not frustrated by these judgments. We find many similar examples, beginning with that of Solomon so as the book of Kings presents him. This remark is important in order to keep our thoughts within the limits which

the Word assigns them and to prevent them from pitting one truth against another: truths which taken out of their context would cease to be truths. It is perfectly true that such an idolatrous and murderous king can be lost eternally, but it is just as true that another king, faithful at the beginning but then become a transgressor and judged severely on earth, may be saved as through the fire. In everything we are called upon to avoid confusing the truths which the Word of God presents, and this is doubly necessary when we are dealing with the Old Testament which presents man's responsibility and the results of God's government here below.

05.21. 2 Chronicles 27

2 Chronicles 27:1-9

Jotham In 2 Chronicles 27:1-9 Jotham personally is without reproach: "He did what was right in the sight of Jehovah, according to all that his father Uzziah had done; only he entered not into the temple of Jehovah" (2 Chronicles 27:2). The Word compares his reign at its beginning to that of Uzziah who was so "marvelously helped"; his reign differs from it in that he does not imitate the pride of his father who wanted to usurp the holy priesthood's place in the temple. Uzziah had begun his career by taking heed to the prophetic word and he had prospered, but he had forsaken the Word when in his prosperity he had put his confidence in himself and had become puffed up. Jotham was well aware of the consequences of his father's behavior and took care not to follow the same path. It is a great blessing to have eyes and ears attentive to the Lord's ways. "The fear of God" properly consists of this, and we can say that this fear characterized Jotham's life. Through Zechariah, his father might perhaps have had more understanding in the visions of God had he entered into the knowledge of divine revelation sooner. Yet, precious as this knowledge was, it had not prevented Uzziah from a very serious fall. It is all-important for us to remember this truth. Jotham carefully avoided that which had caused his father's ruin, that is, disobedience to the Word of God which he nevertheless knew so well; he "prepared his ways before Jehovah his God"; he walked uprightly according to the word of the prophet Micah who began to prophesy under his reign: "Is Jehovah impatient? are these His doings? Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?" (Micah 2:7). We are also told that "Jotham became strong." Uzziah, likewise, at the beginning of his reign "became exceeding strong" (2 Chronicles 26:8). Strength always accompanies obedience; but it becomes a snare when we consider it as our strength. This is what happened to Uzziah: "He was marvelously helped, till he became strong" (2 Chronicles 26:15). In contrast to Uzziah, Jotham saw his strength fully maintained, because he "prepared his ways before Jehovah his God." Psalms 50:1-23 tells us: "To him that ordereth his way will I show the salvation of God." To prepare one's way is to fashion it after an unchangeable model, just as one sets a clock according to a regulator. Jotham prepared his way according to the thoughts God had expressed concerning His Anointed; he sought to be like this God-given model and he succeeded. As usual, that which was lacking in him with regard to the Lord's service is not given us in Chronicles, but the book of Kings tells us: "Only, the high places were not removed: the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places" (2 Kings 15:35). Doubtless Jotham, who prepared his ways, had no fellowship with the high places, but he lacked the necessary authority to forbid them to the people. Here we clearly see that if the king's moral condition was good, that of the people was bad: "The people still acted corruptly" (2 Chronicles 27:2). We see the same thing in 2 Kings 15:1-38 : "The people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places." Thus it was primarily the condition of the people that provoked the Lord's displeasure and necessitated His discipline. The book of Micah as well as Psalms 50:1-23 already quoted, expose this throughout. The state of the people is in question in the prophet, not that of the king. Micah began to prophesy under Jotham and tells us of the people, of their leaders - chief men and

princes - of their prophets, without even mentioning the king. Read Micah 1:9; Micah 2:2-3; Micah 2:8-10; Micah 3:1-2; Micah 3:5-12; Micah 6:2-5; Micah 7:2-3; Micah 7:18; everywhere you will find the state of the people presented as the principal cause of judgment. This will be what characterizes prophecy from this point onward until the end. Prophecy will address itself to the people and lay bare their condition. Up to this point the numerous prophets mentioned in Chronicles address themselves to the king; but when prophecy, proclaimed under the kings, is written rather than spoken, it presents the condition of the people themselves and the powers that constitute the people. In that day the people were no longer excusable. In presence of Jotham's godliness and faithful walk, should not their conscience have spoken to them? The opposite took place.

Jotham's godliness is shown in a very interesting way in the defense of the house of God. Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:9) had built towers to protect the city; Jotham built towers to protect the temple. "He...built the upper gate of the house of Jehovah, and on the wall of Ophel he built much" (2 Chronicles 27:3). Ophel, situated in the southwest of Jerusalem, connected the king's gardens, etc. with the temple. Jotham completed the defensive works Uzziah had neglected: "He built cities in the hill-country of Judah, and in the forests he built castles and towers" (2 Chronicles 27:4). Lastly, he made war against the king of the children of Ammon who doubtless (cf. 2 Chronicles 26:8), were refusing to recognize Judah's suzerainty. During the three years following Jotham's victory they paid him a heavy tribute. His strength had its source in his godliness, and godliness was precious enough to him to keep him from exalting himself.

Chronicles intentionally omits a fact reported in 2 Kings 15:37 : "In those days Jehovah began to send against Judah Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah." This fact is connected with Judah's sin; it is against Judah that God sends these enemies, and not against Jotham; but in Chronicles the beauty of this reign would have been weakened if the aggression of Israel and Syria could have been interpreted as being due to some unfaithfulness in the king. In the midst of the ruins of the kingdom in Judah our hearts are made glad at Jotham's example. Let us imitate him and prepare our ways before our God!

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