EXPLORE THE BOOK

A Basic and Broadly Interpretative Course of Bible Study from Genesis to Revelation

J. SIDLOW BAXTER

VOLUME THREE

POETICAL BOOKS (JOB TO SONG OF SOLOMON)

ISAIAH, JEREMIAH, LAMENTATIONS

CONTENTS OF VOLUME THREE

THE POETICAL BOOKS

THE BOOK OF JOB

THE BOOK OF PSALMS

THE PROVERBS

ECCLESIASTES

SONG OF SOLOMON

Lesson Number 51

Parallelism, where one clause answers to another, pertains to the genius of Hebrew poetry, the rhythm and rhyme of thought taking the place of those of words, one member of the parallelism corresponding to another in sentiment, and sometimes in terms. To discover and develop this correspondence or juxtaposition often gives the clue to exposition. In some cases one member of a complex parallelism is left unexpressed and wanting; but, being implied, must be supplied to make the whole complete; and this is one form of the enigmas, or "dark sayings of the wise," to be solved by study.

—Arthur T. Pierson, D.D.

THE POETICAL BOOKS

A Glance Backward

THE SEVENTEEN *historical* books which comprise the first part of the Old Testament now lie behind us. A much smaller and very different group of books lies before us, consisting of the five *poetical* books—Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. In these we shall find ample vistas of interest opening up to us: but before we press forward we ought perhaps to glance backward over the trodden way. We have come through some magnificent scenery, though there have been ugly breaks, and unforgettable scenes of desolation. Over sunlit hilltops, and through gloomy valleys, and by many windings of the way, we have passed, at length, through the eventful story of God's dealings with Israel up to the time of expulsion from Canaan. The writings of the Hebrew prophets, when we come to them, will be found to turn new light on Israel's past and future; but the actual historical records, in the first seventeen books of Scripture, we have now thoughtfully examined; and there are certain dominant features which we ought to retain securely in our memory.

The seventeen historical books, as we have seen, are divided into five and twelve. In the first five (Genesis to Deuteronomy) we have seen Israel's *preparation* for Canaan. In the remaining twelve (Joshua to Esther) we have seen Israel's *occupation* of Canaan, ending with the nation's failure and exile. The twelve may be further divided into nine and three. In the first nine (Joshua to 2 Chronicles) the whole nation is in Canaan. In the remaining three (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther), only a very small remnant is in the land. Let us firmly fix it in mind, then, that in these three groups of *five* and *nine* and *three*, we have—

PREPARATION — (Genesis to Deuteronomy)
OCCUPATION — (Joshua to 2 Chronicles)
DISPOSSESSION — (Ezra to Esther).

We have seen also, how each of the books, thus far, may be represented by some particular word which expresses its distinctive feature. We may be wise, at this point, to look back over these and make sure that we have learned them. For instance, we saw that the central significance of 2 Samuel, the book of David's forty years' reign, is really expressed in the word *confirmation*. By this we mean that following upon the transition from Theocracy to monarchy, which we have in the *First* Book of Samuel, and following the rejection of the throne of Saul, God now accepts and *confirms* the throne in Israel, in the great covenant with David. In the case of the other books the distinguishing words speak for themselves—

Genesis	— Destitution.
Exodus	— Deliverance.
Leviticus	— Dedication.
Numbers	— Direction.
Deuteronomy	— Destination.

Joshua	— Possession.
Judges, Ruth	— Declension.
1 Samuel	— Transition.
2 Samuel	— Confirmation.
1 Kings	— Disruption.
2 Kings	— Dispersion.
1 & 2 Chronicles	— Retrospection.
Ezra	— Restoration.
Nehemiah	— Reconstruction.
Esther	— Preservation.

The Poetical Books

We turn, then, to the "Poetical Books"; but before we examine them separately, we ought to note certain characteristics which belong to them collectively.

The seventeen books which lie behind us are *historical*. These five poetical books are *experiential*. The seventeen historical books are concerned with a *nation*, as such. These five poetical books are concerned with *individuals*, as such. The seventeen have to do with *the Hebrew race*. These five have to do with *the human heart*.

These five so-called "poetical books" are *not the only poetry* in the Old Testament Scriptures. There are stretches of unexcellable poetry in the writings of the prophets, which we shall come to later. This, however, does not affect the fact that these five—Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon—are distinctively the poetical *group*.

We ought clearly to understand, also, that the term "poetical" refers only to their *form*. It must not be thought to imply that they are simply the product of human imagination. There is glorious poetry here; but there is nothing of the merely fanciful or unreal. These books portray real human experience, and grapple with profound problems, and express big realities. Especially do they concern themselves with the experiences of the *godly*, in the varying vicissitudes of this changeful life which is ours under the sun. Moreover, experiences which are here dealt with were permitted to come to men in order that they might be as guides for the godly ever afterward. These experiences are here recorded and interpreted for us by the Spirit of inspiration through "holy men of old" who spoke and wrote "as they were moved" by Him. Thus, in these poetical books we have a most precious treasury of spiritual truth.

Spiritual Progress

There is another thing which we ought to note before we pass on to consider these poetical books separately, and that is *the spiritual progress* which they collectively express; for, after all, what we are most concerned about is to grasp their spiritual meaning. As we have said before, we believe that God overruled in the arranging of the *order* in which the books of our Bible now appear, as much as He overruled in their original inspiration. The beauty of a perfect spiritual progress is seen in these five poetical books; and we cannot alter their present arrangement without spoiling this.

In the Book of Job we see *the death of the self-life*. Through the fires of affliction and a new vision of God, Job is brought to the end of himself. He sees himself as God sees him. The self-life, with its self-goodness and self-reason and self-religion and self-everything, is laid bare and laid low. The man who at first is said to have been the best man on earth (i. 8), is found at last

on his face before God, exclaiming, "I abhor myself in dust and ashes!" (xlii. 6).

Next, in the Psalms we see *the new life in God*, expressing itself in praise and prayer, in adoration and supplication and intercession, in faith and hope and love, in fear and joy and song and sigh, and in every frame that godly hearts know.

Then come the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. In Proverbs we are in God's school, learning a heavenly but practical wisdom for life on earth; while in Ecclesiastes we are taught not to set our affection on anything under the sun, but to let our treasure be on high. Finally, the Song of Songs completes the progress by symbolically expressing the sweet intimacy of communion with Christ in all the fulness of His love. In these five books, then, we have the death of the old life in self, the flame of the new life in God, the practical disciplining of the soul in the school of God, the weaning of the heart from worldly desires, and the rapture of communion with the heavenly Bridegroom. Is not this a beautiful spiritual progress?

It is well to learn, too, that this beautiful progress in the order of the poetical books is the necessary order in true Christian experience. That which the Song of Solomon represents *can never* be experienced until that which is represented in the Book of Job has been experienced. Death is peaceful enough; but *dying* is hard. The self-life never dies without a struggle; but the "nevertheless afterward" makes rich compensation!

Or, to put it in another way, in the words of one who simply calls himself anonymously "A Bondservant of Christ": "The first step in the spiritual life is to abhor equally one's badness and one's goodness; the second step is to live by the faith of the Son of God, that is, to live in the energy of the faith by which the Messiah lived; the third step is the subjection of the will to Christ, the Wisdom of God; the fourth step is deliverance from the spirit of this present world; and the climax is the joy unspeakable of union and companionship with Christ."

Leading Ideas

We have seen how, in the seventeen historical books which we have now studied, the distinctive feature of each book is so clear that it may be expressed in a single word. Similarly with each

of these five poetical books, the ruling idea may be concentrated into a single phrase.

The Book of Job	— Blessing through Suffering.
The Psalms	— Praise through Prayer.
The Proverbs	— Prudence through Precept.
Ecclesiastes	— Verity through Vanity.
Song of Solomon	— Bliss through Union.

HEBREW POETRY

We ought to say a word here about the *nature* of Hebrew poetry, as it is different from our own in certain marked ways. Much of our modern poetry is couched in *rhyme* or parallelism of sound. Besides this, there is *rhythm*, or parallelism of time. In rhyme we get the pleasure of *phonetic* agreement. In rhythm we get the pleasure of *metric* agreement. There are many who would say that rhyme is not necessary to poetry. Some of our greatest English poetry is written in so-called "blank verse," or rhythm without rhyme. Certainly, rhyme and rhythm do not in themselves constitute real poetry, which, at heart, consists in the quadruple genius of insight, imagination, analogy, and expression; yet they are bound up with it in a subtle intimacy; and although *rhyme* is considered to be quite unnecessary by many, felicity of *rhythm* seems to be one of the generally accepted canons by which English poetry is judged.

Now in Hebrew poetry there is neither the sound parallelism of rhyme nor the time parallelism of rhythm, but there is parallelism of *ideas*. This parallelism of ideas is in three kinds—completive, contrastive, and constructive.

By *COMPLETIVE* parallels we mean those in which the second member of the parallel concurs with the first, and develops it to an intended further point. Take the following as examples:

The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree;
He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

(Ps. xcii. 12.)

God is our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble.

(Ps. xlvi. 1.)

The law of the Lord is perfect,
restoring the soul;
The testimony of the Lord is sure,
making wise the simple.

(Ps. xix. 7.)

Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing;
Thou hast loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness.

(Ps. xxx. 11.)

It will be seen at once that in each of these couplets the sense of the second member is in close affinity with that of the first. Yet this close affinity is not actual identity. The similarity is not synonymity. Other than being mere empty repetition, the second member colours, enriches, develops, completes the first. Take the following example of *triple* parallelism, from the first verse of the first of the psalms—

O, the happiness of the man
Who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly;
And standeth not in the way of sinners;
And sitteth not in the seat of the scornful.

The opening exclamation here belongs to each line of the succeeding triplet. In each of the three lines which make up the triplet there are three *word*-members which correspond with each other and mark a completive progress, thus—

walketh	*counsel*	*ungodly*
standeth	*way*	*sinners*
sitteth	*seat*	*scornful.*

The development here is almost too obvious to need comment. The *walking*, in line one, which speaks of no more than being on friendly terms, gives place to *standing*, in line two, which implies a closer intimacy, while this in turn gives place to *sitting*, in line three, which speaks of a permanent connection. Again, in the first line the word "counsel" simply betokens general advice, whereas the word "way," in the second line, indicates a chosen course of conduct, and the word "seat," in the third line, implies a set condition of mind. Yet again, in line one, the word

"ungodly" describes the *negatively* wicked, while in the next line the word "sinners" describes the *positively* wicked, and in the last line the word "scornful" describes the *contemptuously* wicked.

Take now a few examples of *CONTRASTIVE* parallels. The Book of Proverbs abounds in these.

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart;
And lean not upon thine own understanding.
(Prov. iii. 5.)

Faithful are the wounds of a friend;
But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.
(Prov. xxvii. 6.)

Weeping may endure in the evening;
But singing cometh in the morning.
(Ps. xxx. 5.)

The house of the wicked shall be overthrown;
But the tent of the upright shall flourish.
(Prov. xiv. 11.)

Many sorrows shall be to the wicked;
But he that trusteth in Jehovah, mercy shall encompass him.
(Ps. xxxii. 10.)

It will be seen at once that in each of the above parallels the second member is set in contrast with the first. In some cases these parallels are not strictly *antithetic*—as, for instance, in the first of the above examples, where the second line is really simply the *negative* of the first—but the second member is always *contrastive* in its terms. It will be seen also that in some of these contrastive parallels there is progress of thought, even as in the *completive* parallels. Take, for instance, the fourth of the above examples. In the first line we have the word "house," telling us that the *strongest* structure of the wicked shall perish; whereas in the second line we have the word "tent," telling us that the *lightest* structure of the upright shall endure. There is a careful choosing of words in each parallel. Note the following four-line stanza in which we have not merely a contrastive parallel between

two single lines, as in the above examples, but between two completive parallels.

Yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be;
Thou shalt look for his place and it shall not be found;
But the meek shall possess the land,
And delight themselves in abundant prosperity.
(Ps. xxxvii. 10, 11.)

Again, in the following example we have a *succession* of contrastive parallels.

Behold, My servants shall eat;
But ye shall be famished.
Behold, My servants shall drink;
But ye shall be thirsty.
Behold, My servants shall rejoice;
But ye shall be confounded. (Isa. lxv. 13.)

Take now the following examples of *CONSTRUCTIVE* parallelism, in which successive parallels are built up together into structural form until they unitedly express one complete idea.

The eye that mocketh at his father,
And despiseth to obey his mother;
The ravens of the valley shall pick it out,
And the young vultures shall eat it. (Prov. xxx. 17.)

In these four lines the one subject is the "eye"; and it takes both pairs of lines (for the four lines are in two pairs—two completive parallels) to express the one complete idea about it.

Turn to Psalm xxi. for another example. Here the four-line stanza is again made up of two completive parallels which are built together to express the one complete idea.

In Thy strength, O Jehovah, the king shall rejoice;
And in Thy salvation how greatly shall he exult!
The desire of his heart Thou hast granted him;
And the request of his lips Thou hast not denied.
(Ps. xxi. 1, 2.)

The beautiful development in the above lines will be immediately apparent. The word "strength," in the first line, is developed into "salvation" in the second; and the word "rejoice," in the first line, gives place to "exult" in the second. The "desire of the heart," in the third line, becomes the "request of the lips" in the fourth; and the clause "Thou hast granted," in the third line, is turned to "Thou hast not denied" in the fourth line (the last expression being a heightened form of emphasis, in Hebrew usage, just as the words, "The Lord will not hold him guiltless," are really an emphatic way of saying that the Lord *will most certainly* hold the person guilty).

And now take a further example of this constructive parallelism, in which two *contrastive* couplets are built together.

These trust in chariots, and these in horses;
But we boast the name of Jehovah our God.
They are bowed down, yea are fallen:
But we are arisen and stand upright.

(Ps. xx. 7, 8.)

Turning away from the Poetical Books just for a moment, take the following example of constructive parallelism from a well-known passage in the prophet Isaiah.

Seek ye Jehovah while He may be found;
Call ye upon Him while He is near:
Let the wicked forsake his way,
And the unrighteous man his thoughts;
And return to Jehovah, for He will have mercy;
And to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

(Isa. lv. 6, 7.)

Here are three completive parallels going together to constitute a united whole. Note the progress in each of the completive parallels, and the progress running through the whole structure. In the first line men are simply exhorted to "seek," and are simply told that Jehovah may be "found." In the second line men are exhorted to "call," and are correspondingly assured that Jehovah is actually "near." In the third line it is the "*wicked*" man (the *positive* committer of wrong) who is exhorted

to forsake his "*way*" (or habitual behaviour). In the fourth line it is the "*unrighteous*" man (the *negative* omitter of right) who is exhorted to forsake the very "*thought*" of wrong. In the fifth line men are exhorted to return to "Jehovah," and are promised "mercy." In the sixth line men are the more encouraged to return because Jehovah is "*our* God," and will "*abundantly* forgive." Surely this is a beauty of progress which cannot but appeal to our minds.

Of course, under this heading of *constructive* parallels, we ought to mention that there are several varieties of such structures. For instance, there is *introverted* parallelism. A striking example of this kind of structure is provided in Psalm cxxxv. 15–18.

The idols of the heathen are silver and gold,
The work of men's hands.
They have mouths but they speak not;
They have eyes but they see not;
They have ears but they hear not;
Neither is there any breath in their mouths;
They who make them are like unto them;
So are all they who put their trust in them.

It will be seen here that the first line corresponds with the last; for in the first line we read of "the idols of the heathen," and in the last line we have simply another name for the heathen, namely, "they who put their trust in them (idols)." Then, it will be seen that the line next to the first corresponds with the line next to the last; for both speak about the *making* of the idols (in the one case the making, and in the other case the makers). Further, it will be noted that the line next but one to the first corresponds with the line next but one to the last; for the one says that the idols have no speech in their mouths, and the other says that they have no breath in their mouths. Finally, the two middle lines agree; for in the one line the idols are said to have eyes without any faculty of vision, and in the other line the idols are said to have ears without any faculty of hearing.

Take a simpler case of this introverted parallelism, from Hosea xiii. 14:—

I will ransom them from the power of the grave;
From death I will redeem them;
O death, I will be thy plague;
I will be thy destruction, O grave.

Here the first and last lines go together, and the two inner lines go with each other. Take just one more instance, from Psalm li. 1.

Have mercy upon me, O God,
According to Thy loving-kindness;
According to the multitude of Thy tender mercies
Blot out my transgression.

Perhaps we ought to say that these three kinds of parallelism —completive, contrastive, and constructive—have usually been called "synonymous," "antithetic," and "synthetic." These names, in our own judgment, are open to objection. Those parallels which are called "synonymous" are rarely if ever really synonymous, inasmuch as the second member of the parallel almost invariably amplifies or diversifies the first; while in some of those which are called "antithetic" the second member is not really in opposition to the first in idea, although contrastive in its *terms*. So we prefer to call the three main kinds of Hebrew poetic parallelism by the more accurate terms—"completive," "contrastive," "constructive": and these three should be carefully remembered.

To understand this Hebrew parallelism is not only poetically interesting; it is important in the *interpretation* of Scripture. The corresponding members in each parallel throw light upon each other. Obscure words are often explained thereby, inasmuch as the same idea usually lies at the foundation of both members of the parallel. Sometimes the one member expresses the idea figuratively, while the other expresses it literally. Sometimes the one member expresses the idea positively, while the other expresses it negatively. Sometimes the one member expresses the idea in what to us seems obscure phraseology, while the other expresses it in words which are too clear to admit any possible doubt. For instance, when we read: "The Lord is in His holy temple," we may find ourselves asking: "*Which* temple—earthly or heavenly?"

But when we interpret the statement in its poetic parallel we see that it is the heavenly temple which is meant.

The Lord is in His holy temple;
The Lord, His throne is in heaven.
(Ps. xi. 4.)

It happens that in this instance we know on *historical* grounds that the reference is to God's heavenly abode; for it is practically certain that the earthly temple at Jerusalem was not built when these words were written. None the less, however, this instance illustrates what we are saying about the interpretative value of parallelism.

Take a more difficult case—that of Psalm x. 4, which reads: "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek *after God*: God *is* not in all his thoughts." The italicised words in our Authorised Version, "*after God*," and "*is*," do not come in the original. They have been inserted to make the statement read coherently in English; and then the verse has had to be made to end with the words: "God is not in all his thoughts." Now the verse, in the original, runs thus: "The wicked, in the height of his scorn—will not requite—no God—all his thoughts." There is really nothing about "not seeking after God," as in our Authorised Version. Does not this text yield up its true sense when it is interpreted by its parallels?—

The wicked in his haughty scorn—
"He will not requite,"
"There is no God"—
These are all his thoughts.

Thus paralleled we see the outward scorn and the inward thoughts of the wicked. We see, also, how the wicked man's denial of Divine judgment, in the words "He will not requite," leads on by an easy step to his final delusion that "There is no God."

We must speak just one further word about this Hebrew poetry of parallel ideas. Its peculiar genius makes it wonderfully suitable for *translation into any language.* Nothing is harder than to translate other kinds of poetry from one language into another;

but this Hebrew poetry can be reproduced in any language without any necessary diminution of its beauty or force. When we try to translate rhyme or rhythm from one language into another we are up against almost insuperable obstacles. If, for instance, I want to translate two rhymed lines of eight syllables each from English into Greek, the one line ending with the word "God," and the other line ending with the word "trod," I find that the Greek word for God is *Theos*, which is a word of two syllables, unlike our English word "God"; and the Greek word for "trod" is *periēpatēsen*, a word of no less than six syllables, instead of one, and thus hopelessly different from our English word "trod"; so that at once, with these two words, my rhyme and my rhythm are both alike ruined.

There are no such difficulties in the translating of Hebrew poetic parallel. The five-fold group of the poetical writings which we now come to in our study of the Holy Scriptures were meant to be a book of prayer and praise and precept for all men, the Book of the Psalms in particular being, as it were, a Prayer Book for all generations; and in gracious wisdom, therefore, the Spirit of inspiration so ordered it that the kind of poetry which should clothe these prayers and praises should be a *universal* poetry. We may well thank God for this wise *pre*vision and rich *pro*vision; and, further, we may discern in it yet one more indication of the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures.

What do you think of the following?—

Even a *tree* hath hope.
If it be hewn down it will sprout anew,
The young shoot thereof will not fail;
Though in the earth its root waxed old,
Or in the ground its stock should die,
Yet at the scent of water it will spring,
And shoot forth boughs like a new plant.
But a *man* dies and is cut off.
Yea, when men die, they are gone;
Ebbs away the water from the sea;
And the stream decays and dries;
So when men lie down they rise not;
Till the skies vanish they never wake,
Nor are they roused from their sleep.

Behold of wrong I cry, but am not heard,
I cry for help, but there is no judgment.
He hath stripped me of my glory,
And taken my crown from my head.
He hath broken me down on every side,
And uprooted my hope like a tree.
He hath also kindled his wrath against me,
And counted me among His adversaries.
His troops advance on me together,
And cast up their way against me,
And encamp round about my tent.
He hath put my brethren far from me.
Even my confidants are estranged from me.
My kinsfolk, too, have failed,
My familiar friends have forgotten me.
I call my servant, but he gives no answer,
I have to entreat him with my mouth.
Even young children despise me;
If I arise, they talk against me.

. . . . .

Have pity, have pity on me, O my friends,
For the hand of God hath touched me!

. . . . .

Oh, that my words were written!
That they were inscribed in a book!
That with an iron stylus and lead
They were graven in the rock for ever!
For I know it: my REDEEMER liveth,
And at last on earth shall stand up;
And though my skin may be destroyed,
Yet in my flesh shall I see God,
Whom I shall see FOR MYSELF,
And *my* eyes shall see (not just another's)
My reins (longings) burn within me (i.e. for the day)

. . . . .

Is not that alluring poetry? It is from the Book of Job, the first of the poetical books, which we shall now inspect in the ensuing group of studies.

THE BOOK OF JOB (1)

Lesson Number 52

NOTE.—For this study read the whole Book of Job through once, marking Job's protestations of innocence and his expressions of perplexity concerning God.

"We cannot understand the meaning of many trials; God does not explain them. To explain a trial would be to destroy its object, which is that of calling forth simple faith and implicit obedience. If we knew why the Lord sent us this or that trial, it would thereby cease to be a trial either of faith or of patience."

—*Alfred Edersheim, D.D.*

THE BOOK OF JOB (I)

ALTHOUGH the Book of Genesis comes first in our Bible, it may not have been the first to be written. There are grounds for believing that the Book of Job is of an even earlier date. In fact, this Book of Job may be the oldest book in the world.

Yet despite the changing scenery of the forty centuries which have elapsed since the author of this old-world epic laid down his pen, can we find anywhere a more poignantly up-to-date treatise on the pathos of human experience?

Moreover, besides thus blending antiquity with enduring reality, the Book of Job is characterised by a transcendent literary excellence. Dr. Richard G. Moulton, an acknowledged literary authority, declares it to be his belief that if a jury of persons well instructed in literature were empanelled to pronounce as to which is the greatest poem in the world's great literatures, the large majority would give their verdict for the Book of Job. It is a literary masterpiece.

Subject and Method

The subject here is that ever-present problem—*the mystery of suffering*, but specially as concerns the godly. We have already referred to the elasticity of Hebrew poetry, and its freedom from any hard-and-fast metrical uniformity. This is particularly advantageous in the treatment of such a variable subject as suffering. To quote Dr. Moulton: "The philosophical discussion (of suffering) is also a dramatic debate; with rise and fall of passion, varieties of personal interest, quick changes in the movement of thought; while a background of nature, ever present, makes a climax in a whirlwind which ushers us into the supernatural. Interest of rhetoric is added for emphasis: the argument is swayed out of its course by sustained outbursts of verbal workmanship such as are wont to rouse assemblies of men to strong feeling."

The different aspects of this grave and sensitive subject are introduced by the different speakers as the dialogue proceeds;

while representative mental attitudes toward it are successively exhibited in Job's three friends—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, with the addition of Elihu the Buzite, a younger man, who speaks later, when Job and his three fellow-patriarchs have apparently exhausted their discussion in an agreement to differ. The poem then winds up in a Divine intervention expressed in language of the utmost majesty and impressiveness.

It is a pity that in our Authorised Version this mighty poem is not reproduced in its poetic form. The Revised Version, however, restores the parallelism for the English reader, and is a real help in our reading the poetical books of Scripture. In this Book of Job, the poem commences at chapter iii. Chapters i. and ii. are not poetry, but an *historical prologue* to the poem. The poem ends at chapter xlii. 6, with Job's words—

> I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear;
> But now mine eye seeth Thee:
> Wherefore I abhor myself
> And repent in dust and ashes.

The final eleven verses of the book are not poetry, but an *historical epilogue* to the poem. Thus, this book of Job may be fitly called "A Dramatic Poem framed in an Epic Story."

Object and Message

In a general sense the design of this book is "to justify the ways of God to man," by correcting certain misconceptions which arise from men's imperfect knowledge: but the *special* object is to show that there is a benevolent Divine purpose running through the sufferings of the godly, and that life's bitterest enigmas are reconcilable with this benevolent Divine purpose, did we but know all the facts. Could Job but have seen into the counsels of heaven just before his trial came, as *we* are permitted to glimpse into them, in the prologue to the poem; and could Job but have foreknown the outcome of his ordeal, as *God* foreknew it, and as *we* now see it in the epilogue to the poem, how differently would he have reacted to it all!

But then that is just the point which gives the whole book its

meaning for us—Job did *not* know; and, simple as this point may seem, it is through failure to appreciate its significance that most readers miss the message of the book. Get the picture. Between the prologue, which shows how Job's trial *originated* in the counsels of heaven, and the epilogue, which shows how Job's trial *eventuated* in enrichment and blessing, we have a group of patriarchal wiseacres theorising and dogmatising from incomplete premises and deficient data. They knew nothing about the counsels of heaven which had preceded Job's trial; and they knew nothing about the coming epilogue of compensation. They were philosophising in the dark. It is in this that the book has its message to us. We are meant to see that there *was* an explanation, even though Job and his friends did not know it, so that when baffling affliction comes to ourselves we may believe that the same holds good in our own case—that there is, indeed, a purpose for it in the counsels of heaven, and a foreknown outcome of blessing.

Job not meant to know

The fact is, Job was *not meant* to know the explanation of his trial; and on this simple fact everything hangs. If Job *had* known, there would have been no place for faith; and the man could never have come forth as gold purified in the fire. We are meant to understand that there are some things which God cannot reveal to us at present, inasmuch as the very revealing of them would thwart His purposes for our good. The Scriptures are as wise in their *reservations* as they are in their *revelations*. Enough is revealed to make faith intelligent. Enough is reserved to give faith scope for development.

In this, we repeat, lies the message of the book—that there *was* an explanation, but that Job did not know it and *was not meant* to know it. Because of failure to appreciate this adequately the book has been said to present a problem without a solution. Certainly, if we misjudge the subject of the book to be the problem of suffering *as a whole*, then the book *does* present a problem without a solution: but when we see that the subject is really *one aspect only* of that problem—namely: why do the *godly* suffer?—then the book is far from being a problem without a solution. The solution is found in the explanation of the *prologue*

and the consummation of the *epilogue*. This solution, we admit, is not the *final* solution even of this one aspect of suffering. It is an *interim* solution, in which the godly heart may find rest until the full and final solution is given in a day yet to be. The purpose of the book is to show that the final solution is as yet withheld, and that an interim solution is provided, namely, that suffering fulfils a Divine purpose and exercises a gracious ministry in the godly. *Behind* all the suffering of the godly is a high purpose of God, and *beyond* it all is an "afterwards" of glorious enrichment. Such suffering, as we learn from this Book of Job, is not judicial, but remedial; not punitive, but corrective; not retributive, but disciplinary; not a penalty, but a ministry. This is the interim solution. The final solution will be given in that promised day when, instead of seeing through a glass darkly, we shall see "face to face" and shall "know even as we *are* known."

BLESSING THROUGH SUFFERING

The central message of Job, then, may be expressed as: "*BLESSING THROUGH SUFFERING.*" Through bitter calamity comes blessed discovery. "Self" is slain and God is known through trial. The book is a grand illustration of Paul's words: "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. viii. 28), and of that other word, in Hebrews xii. 11: "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." As the late Dr. J. L. Porter says: "All things—the sorest trials, the bitterest persecutions, the private sorrows that sometimes wring the very heart, and seem calculated to surpass patience, and to quench hope—all these, under the guidance of a God infinite in wisdom and in power, co-operate for the real, because the eternal, welfare of God's people. This is the grand lesson taught by the Book of Job." As William Cowper's well-known couplet puts it—

Behind a frowning providence
God hides a smiling face.

We may now set all this out in the following outline:

THE BOOK OF JOB

BLESSING THROUGH SUFFERING.

PROLOGUE (i.–ii.)	DIALOGUE (iii.–xlii. 6)	EPILOGUE (xlii. 7–17)
	JOB: OPENING LAMENTATION (iii)	
JOB—*his piety in prosperity* (i. 1–5)	FIRST TRIAD Eliphaz v Job iv.–vii. Bildad v Job viii.–x. Zophar v Job xi.–xiv.	JOB—*his proven integrity.* (xlii. 7)
SATAN—*his lie and malignity* (i. 6–19)	SECOND TRIAD Eliphaz v Job xv.–xvii. Bildad v Job xviii.–xix. Zophar v Job xx.–xxi.	FRIENDS—*their rebuked perversity* (xlii. 8)
JOB—*his piety in adversity* (i. 20–2)	THIRD TRIAD Eliphaz v Job xxii.–xxiv. Bildad v Job xxv.–xxxi. Elihu speaks xxxii.–xxxvii.	JOB—*his ended captivity* (xlii. 10)
SATAN—*his further malignity* (ii. 1–8)		FAMILY—*their restored society* (xlii. 11)
JOB—*his piety in extremity* (ii. 9–13)	*GOD: CLOSING INTERVENTION* (xxxviii-xli)	JOB—*his final prosperity* (xlii. 12–17)

Fact or Fiction?

It has been argued by some that the Book of Job is not a narrative of historical fact, and that Job himself was not a real person. Others have held the book to be *partly* historical and partly otherwise, that is, a fiction elaborated around a *nucleus* of facts, like the historical plays of Shakespeare or the historical romances of Sir Walter Scott. Job himself, according to this latter theory, was probably enough a real person, though the Job whom we see in the story is a fictional development of the real person who bore that name. The objections to the historical nature of the book, however, are far from convincing.

Supposed numerical artificiality

One such objection is the supposed *numerical artificiality* of Job's possessions—his 7,000 sheep and 3,000 camels and 1,000 oxen and 500 she-asses, and his having exactly double these figures after his trial. Yet surely these round numbers are not only credible, but just such as might be expected in the describing of a very wealthy man's possessions, and just such as, in

fact, commonly occur in the enumeration of herds, flocks, tribes, towns and armies. Job's possessions were such that he was "the greatest of all the men of the east"; and, therefore, in the giving of the totals of his livestock, it would have been trivial for the writer to give an odd ten or fifty, or even an odd hundred in figures running into thousands. The round figures which are given are obviously intended to be taken as approximate, and, as such, are quite compatible with actual fact.

The recurrence of the numbers 7 and 3—in the 7 sons and 3 daughters, the 7,000 sheep and 3,000 camels, and the 3 "friends" who sat with Job for 7 days and nights, have been said to suggest symbolic significance rather than actual fact. Yet all must admit that each of these figures, considered by itself, is such as seems *likely* to be true; and even if these figures *did* contain some symbolic significance, that would not render them historically untrue any more than Jacob's twelve sons become unhistorical because of the Scriptural prominence and symbolic significance of the number twelve.

Satan's Interviews with the Lord

Another objection to the historicity of the book has been found in its description of *Satan's interviews with the Lord*. Could such really have taken place as here described? Well, obviously, since any real knowledge which men possess of the invisible realm can only come by supernatural revelation, it follows that the dealing between God and Satan as here described must either have been Divinely revealed or was a pure invention on the part of the writer. If it was the latter, what shall we say of all the other places in the Scriptures where similar disclosures are recorded? Are these, too, fictitious? However, we shall consider this point more fully when we speak of the prologue to the poem, in our next study.

Poetry and Profundity

Yet another objection to the historicity of the book has been found in its very *poetry and profundity*. It is urged that a dialogue clothed in such grand poetry, and marked by such elaborate structure, could not have been carried on in the spontaneous way here indicated. It has been replied to this that nothing is more

remarkable among the Shemitic nations of western Asia than the prevalence of poetic imagination and expression, going with an equally remarkable faculty for pouring forth well-reasoned addresses more or less extemporaneously.

Surely, however, the true reply is that the speeches in the dialogue were probably *not* extemporaneous. There are indications that the interview between Job and his friends continued for a considerable period. They sat in solemn silence for a whole week to begin with (ii. 13), which certainly suggests the opposite of haste! Then, although the speeches are long and contain invectives and reproaches which would almost certainly have occasioned interruptions in any extemporaneous discussion, each speaker is heard without interruption to the end; and the same is true of each reply. Surely, if there was a seven days' pause for consideration *before* the speeches, there would be pauses for reflection *between* the speeches! Moreover, it does not in the least imperil the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures to say that perhaps we largely owe the grand *poetry* of the book to the anonymous *author*, who himself may have been inspired to clothe these weighty addresses in their present rich, poetic garb.

The witness of Scripture

But the historicity of the Book of Job is decisively settled by the testimony of other Scriptures. In Ezekiel xiv. 14, God Himself is represented as saying: "Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it (Jerusalem), they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God." We have the same in verses 16, 18, and 20. Now Noah and Daniel were certainly historical figures; and is it thinkable that in such words God would use the example of two men who were real and a third who was a mere fiction? Would God speak about a mere feigned person as "delivering his own soul"? Let those answer in the affirmative who will; but to our own judgment these solemn words leave no doubt about the historicity of Job.

Then again, in the Epistle of James, chapter v. 11, the apostle writes: "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." Now if James was not a writer inspired by the Holy

Spirit he may have been deceived: but if he was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as we believe he was, then his reference to Job means that Job was indeed a real person; for if Job were merely a fictitious character it is unthinkable that the Holy Spirit would have lifted him up as an *example* to us. If the person held up as an example be unreal, then there is no real example! Such a model is useless to us; for men are not incited to patient endurance by the patient endurance of somebody who never existed! Moreover, to hold up such an one *as* an example, would surely be unworthy of God. We do well to take it as settled, then, that Job was a real person, and that the Book of Job is really historical.

THE BOOK OF JOB (2)

Lesson Number 53

NOTE.—For this second study in Job read the first two chapters twice, also chapter xlii. 7–17.

Then let us cheerfu' acquiesce;
Nor make our scanty pleasures less,
By pining at our state;
And, even should misfortunes come,
I here wha sit hae met wi' some,
An's thankfu' for them yet.
They gie the wit of age to youth;
They let us ken oursel',
They make us see the naked truth,
The real guid and ill.
Though losses and crosses be lessons right severe,
There's wit there, ye'll get there, ye'll find nae other where.

—*Robert Burns in "Epistle to Davie."*

THE BOOK OF JOB (2)

THE PROLOGUE

THERE is an alternating movement in the prologue to the Book of Job, thus—

JOB—*his piety in prosperity* (i. 1–5).

SATAN—*his lie and malignity* (i. 6–19).

JOB—*his piety in adversity* (i. 20–2).

SATAN—*his further malignity* (ii. 1–8).

JOB—*his piety in extremity* (ii. 9–13).

We shall speak of the character and behaviour of Job a little later, in the light of the conclusion to the poem; but we must pause here to consider the references to Satan.

Satan and God

The interviewing between Satan and God, which we find described in this prologue to the Book of Job, is certainly, on the face of it, one of the strangest bits in the Bible. To some minds it has seemed to give ground for what is perhaps the strongest of the several arguments against the historicity of the Book of Job. Could such interviews really have taken place as here described? The answer to this question is certainly vital, for the truth and value of the whole book depend upon it, as a little reflection will show.

Obviously, as we remarked in our last lesson, since any real knowledge which men possess of the invisible realm can only come by supernatural revelation, it follows that the dealing between God and Satan as here described must either have been Divinely revealed, or else was a pure invention on the part of the writer. There is no middle choice; therefore the reliability of the whole book either stands or falls by it.

If it was by Divine revelation, then the dealing between God and Satan actually occurred, even though, of course, the description of it is *anthropopathic*, that is, pictured to us in terms of human action and speech so as to make it understandable to the human mind.

If, on the other hand, it was a pure invention by the author, the whole book is really reduced to meaninglessness; for Job's trial—which is the subject of the whole book—is said to have *originated* in this dealing between God and Satan; so that if this dealing in the invisible realm never took place, but was a mere invention, then *why* Job suffered is absolutely unknown, for it did *not* so originate; it loses any special significance to us; the Divine intervention at the *end* of the book becomes equally fictitious; and the whole book becomes a matter of mere human imagination.

There is no middle choice, we repeat. The book stands or falls on whether this dealing between God and Satan *was* or was *not* a Divine revealing of what actually took place. The vital question, then, is: *Was* it a Divine revelation of what really happened? —and the answer to that question, in the light of other Scriptures, is surely "*Yes.*"

Is not God again and again represented to us, with similar anthropomorphism, as seated on a throne, surrounded by cherubim and seraphim, ministered to by the angel hosts, and conducting His government through their instrumentality? Is not Satan represented as having access to God, as the "accuser of the brethren," in Revelation xii. 10? And do we not see Satan standing in the Lord's presence to accuse Joshua, in Zechariah iii. 1, 2? And are there not still other passages which show us that Satan has indeed a permitted, though limited, power of sifting or testing the Lord's people? See Luke xxii. 31, 32, and 1 Corinthians v. 5, and 1 Timothy i. 20, and 2 Timothy ii. 26.

Perhaps, however, the most striking corroboration of the Satan passages in Job is found in our Lord's word to Simon Peter, in Luke xxii. 31, the more accurate translation of which is: "Simon, Simon, behold, *Satan hath obtained you, by asking that he might sift you as wheat.*" Note, too, our Lord's further word—"But *I have prayed for thee* that thy faith may not utterly fail." Both verbs—Satan's having obtained, and Christ's having prayed,

—are in the Greek tense which indicates an act already past, as though Christ himself had taken part in some such transaction as those described in Job and Zechariah, and had prevailed against the Accuser and Tempter.

With all these instances before us, need we doubt the reality of the Satan passages in Job i. and ii.? To do so calls other Scriptures equally into question, and even the words of the Lord Jesus himself. We believe that these interviews actually took place between God and Satan, that the fact and purport of them was Divinely revealed, that they are anthropopathically described to us, and that they supply us with the primary explanation of Job's trial. But besides this, these interviews are so described as to furnish us with certain most precious and enlightening facts; and some of these we will now consider.

Arresting Implications

Accepting, then, that these colloquies in heaven took place as recorded in the prologue, we note certain arresting truths concerning Satan.

We see that *Satan is accountable to God.* Does it seem strange that Satan should have access to God as here recorded? To see it in that light is to miss the real implication. Are we not to infer from this passage that angel intelligences must gather periodically to the great white throne to give account? These "sons of God" come to "present themselves" before Jehovah; not to participate in the governmental deliberations of the Divine Mind, but to render account, as servants of the Crown, concerning their respective ministrations. Satan also must give account. The point here is not that Satan has the privilege of access, but that he is compelled to come. He, no less than other creatures, is subject to the Divine authority, however unwillingly. His appearing before the throne is neither a privilege from God nor a presumption of his own, but a compelling ruling of the Most High which the arch-rebel dare not and cannot evade. To be brought thus and exposed before the white fire of that awful throne, what intense torture to that naked, malignant spirit!

Second, we see here that *even the dark mind of Satan is an open book to God.* It might sound at first as though God's words,

"Hast thou considered my servant Job . . .?" were a provocation or incitement to Satan. No; God knew what was already there in that evil-designing mind, just as he knew all Satan's goings to and fro before ever he asked, "Whence comest thou?" The questions are asked, not because God does not know, but to compel confession on the part of Satan. More literally translated, God's question is: "Hast thou set thine heart on (or against) my servant Job because there is none like him. . . .?" Satan's reply immediately revealed that he *had*, and that he believed his lack of success was because God had hedged Job in too protectedly. It is good to reflect that God knows all that is in Satan's mind, at all times, against any of the saints.

Third, we see from this passage that *Satan is behind the evils that curse the earth.* In reply to the question, "Whence comest thou?" he says: "From going to and fro in the earth. . . ." It seems clear that Satan has a special activity towards this earth. Genesis attributes the origin of sin in humanity to him, and the Scriptures make it progressively plainer that he is largely behind the evils that afflict our race. Satan's words: "going to and fro" and "walking up and down" indicate his restless and unintermittent activity. His sinister genius is ever erupting malevolent stratagems. He knows nothing of the joyous peace which inheres in loyal and beneficent service. The ban of Cain is upon him, that of vagabond restlessness. This perpetual motion of unrest is ever the mark of the evil, banished from God. See Isaiah lvii. 20, 21; Matthew xii. 43. But besides restlessness, there is perpetual purpose of evil in Satan's peregrinations. He is "the god of this age" who blinds the minds of the unbelieving. We never get very far in dealing with social problems or in preaching or in praying until we realise that behind the world's evils is the energising and organising mind of a personal devil.

Fourth, we see from Satan's words and doings in this prologue that *the evil one is neither omnipresent nor omniscient.* Many of the Lord's people seem to have a vague sort of idea that Satan is everywhere; but he is nothing of the kind. He may move with almost lightning-like rapidity, maybe, but none the less he is a created and therefore *local* being. He is only in one place at a time. At the risk of its sounding rather crudely put, we mean that if the personal Satan himself is this moment engaged in one particular part of this world, say Africa, he is not in any other

part, say Australia or America. Many Christians seem to think that Satan himself is somehow always hovering about them in a shadowy sort of way; but they are wrong. While there may be many invisible spirit-agencies operating in alliance with Satan upon human beings, he himself is a restricted, localised being. With characteristic insight, John Bunyan, in his *Pilgrim's Progress*, has recognised this; for although Pilgrim encounters all manner of enemies on the road to the celestial city, he only encounters the dread Apollyon himself once. Nor must we think that Satan is *omniscient*—as many seem hazily to imagine. God can see into all our minds; but Satan cannot; he is not God. Here is comfort for the saints! Satan could not see clearly into Job's mind. He thought he knew what was there, but he was mistaken, and was defeated. Satan can indeed take possession of a human mind, as he did of Judas's, and as he does with many a spiritist medium, either directly or through some other evil spirit, and either intermittently or continually; but that is because there has been permission granted from the human side, in response to deceptive temptation. He cannot read my mind, much less force access, unless I let him. If this were not so, the dignity of human personality would not exist. Let us never forget it—Satan is neither everywhere nor all-knowing. We *dare not* underrate him; but it is also bad strategy to *overrate* him.

Fifth, we note, in this prologue to the Book of Job, that *Satan can do nothing without the Divine permission.* His machinations are under the perpetual surveillance of the Almighty. He is as free and restless as the restless, raging waters of the swelling seas—and at the same time just as bound. "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed" (Job xxxviii. 11). It is because Satan can do nothing without such permission that God is able again and again to overrule his doings to the ultimate good of those whom he would ruin.

Sixth, let us also be quick to learn from this prologue that *in every such permission there is a definite limitation.* The first limitation is: "Only upon himself put not forth thine hand" (i. 12). Then, when Job has sublimely survived the test, there is a further permission, but also a further limitation: "Behold, he is in thine hand; but touch not his life" (ii. 6). Here again is comfort for the saints. Satan has absolutely no power against a saint beyond what God allows, any more than Pilate had against

Christ (John xix. 11). If God set a limit to Satan's power in the trying of Job, then he will do likewise in the case of others, especially those who are less able to withstand the adversary's assaults. See 1 Corinthians x. 13 for the classic New Testament pronouncement on this.

Finally, let us learn afresh from this prologue that *God's eyes are ever on his own people, and especially so in times of trial.* God's question to Satan was: "Hast thou set thine heart against my servant Job . . .?" The very question indicates that God also had Job in his thought. Note how God particularises Job by name, dilates on Job's godly character, commends his piety, and evinces special regard for him by calling him "My servant." So is it with *all* God's Jobs. Lowell's words come to mind—

Careless seems the great Avenger,
History's pages but record
One death grapple in the darkness,
'Twixt old systems and the Word;
Truth for ever on the scaffold,
Wrong for ever on the throne;
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadows,
Keeping watch upon his own.

An Alternative Theory

Perhaps we ought to mention here that there is an alternative theory concerning the "sons of God" who come to "present themselves before Jehovah" in Job i. 6 and ii. 1. There are those who hold that these were not angels, but the *godly men* of that time. We need to remember the high antiquity of this Book of Job. Its language, tone, style, the manners, customs, institutions and the general mode of life described in it, all indicate that it belongs to Patriarchal times, possibly long enough before the Exodus. In those times God revealed Himself in visible form to men far more than was the case later; and it is argued that the coming of these "sons of God" before Jehovah was the gathering of godly patriarchs to the place of Divine manifestation, for the purpose of worship. For instance, Mr. George Rapkin, in his book on Genesis, says—

"We have, in the Book of Job, the statement in chapters i. 6 and ii. 1, 'The Sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord.' The expression here for 'sons of God' is the same as in the Hebrew of Genesis vi. 2, namely, *beni ha Elohim*. It has been concluded by scholars that Moses was the author of the Book of Job, and that he (Job) lived in the Patriarchal period, probably before the Flood. Here, again, is the expression, 'the presence of the Lord.' Now can it be assumed that the angels are not always in His presence? But these *beni ha Elohim* were not always there, and came at certain seasons for this purpose.

"The story of Job opens by telling of a devout father, who, when he knew his children were feasting, offered sacrifice for them, lest they should have blasphemed God. Then came the day of appearing before God, and of Satan being granted the permission to harass the father.

"The 'sons of God' were the godly men of the time who came for worship in the presence of the Lord. They came before the Lord just as David later urged the congregation to do, when urging thanksgiving. Coming before the Lord and entering His presence is not so striking when we find the Bible speaking of men and congregations doing this. Nimrod is said to have been a 'mighty hunter before the Lord,' but we do not stretch our fanciful imagination to the extent of saying he must have been an angel. Now Job and his sons, with other righteous men, were the sons of God who presented themselves before the Lord for the act of worship and sacrifice, the father then acting as the head, or priest, of the family worship and sacrifice."

Mr. Rapkin is by no means alone in holding this view. It is surprising how much may be said for it. As we have remarked, the Book of Job is perhaps the oldest in the Bible, going back to earliest times when there seem to have been visible and set manifestations of the Divine presence among men, in connection with worship. These sons of God in Job came before such a "presence of Jehovah," and it was from the same "presence" that Satan went forth. It is just the same expression as in Genesis iv. 16, where we read that "Cain went out from the presence of

Jehovah"; and just the same as with Jonah who fled from "the presence of Jehovah" (Jonah i. 3, 10).

Now no one would say that either Cain or Jonah were going out from some audience with God *in heaven*! They were both, quite definitely, on earth; and they passed out from some visible presence of God on earth (which incidentally gives the lie to those who stupidly make out that Jonah thought he could escape from the *general* presence of God. Jonah's own words in verse 9 should have shown them otherwise). Similarly, so it is claimed, the "sons of God" in Job were not angels coming before God *in heaven*, but godly men coming before Him *on earth*.

It is also urged that these "sons of God" in Job came into the presence of Jehovah *voluntarily*, inasmuch as it says that they came to "*present* themselves" before Him. And it is still further pointed out that they are said to have come before "*Jehovah*," the name "Jehovah" being especially a name of God toward *man*. And there are other arguments as well.

After careful thought we ourselves incline to the other and more usual view of the prologue. But the crucial fact, whichever view we take, is that there was *a definite interview between Satan and God concerning Job*, in which, all unsuspected by Job and his fellows, lay the origin and the explanation of his fiery trial.

THE BOOK OF JOB (3)

Lesson Number 54

NOTE.—For this study read chapters iii. to xxxi. (in the Revised Version preferably, or in some modern translation where the poetic parallelism is shown).

But before reading those chapters again read the study herewith, then read the chapters, checking off in them what we have said in our summaries of the speeches by Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar.

Be still, my soul; the Lord is on Thy side.
Bear patiently the cross of grief or shame.
Leave to thy God to order and provide;
In every change He faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul; thy best, thy heavenly Friend
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

Be still, my soul; thy God doth undertake
To guide the future as He hath the past.
Thy hope, thy confidence, let nothing shake;
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.
Be still, my soul; the waves and winds still know
His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below.

—*Katherine von Schlegel.*

THE BOOK OF JOB (3)

THE DIALOGUE

WE COME now to the main body of the book, that is, to the poetic dialogue or debate. It moves before us with something of dramatic form, in successive rounds or triads. There are six speakers—Job, the three friends, a younger man named Elihu, and God.

The centre-problem is: Why does Job suffer? This necessarily involves the question of human suffering as a whole. Job's three friends seek to interpret Job's case in particular by their conception of providence in general. The results are far from satisfactory. Then, at the point of pathetic deadlock, Elihu suddenly speaks up and elaborately submits at least one important proposition which has hitherto been quite overlooked. Deep darkness, however, still remains. Finally, the voice of God Himself breaks in from a tornado, bringing the discussion to a majestic yet unexpected climax.

Now if we are to appreciate the living message of this old dramatic dialogue, there are two main things we must do. First, we must catch the main significance of the discussion itself. Second, we must watch the remarkable process going on in Job the sufferer. What, then, is the main significance of the discussion? We shall most quickly get at this by referring, not to Job's own speeches, but to the other speakers and their respective viewpoints.

Take first Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They speak to the debate, one after another, in the order in which we have here named them, presumably because this is the order of seniority (though all three were definitely old men: see xxxii. 6). They come from far to console Job (ii. 11–13); but, as the dialogue develops, their condoling turns to condemning, and Job's suffering is thereby aggravated to a point of almost unendurable poignancy. What, then, is the philosophy and argument of these men?

Eliphaz

To begin with, let us glance quickly again through the three speeches of Eliphaz, the eldest and wisest. An observant reader will soon notice the peculiarity which distinguishes Eliphaz from Bildad and Zophar, namely, that he rests his philosophy of life on a two-fold basis—(*a*) on general observation, and (*b*) on a supposed special spiritual illumination. As to the first of these, see the recurrence of "I have seen" in chapters iv. 8; v. 3, 27; xv. 17. As to the second, see his reference to a secret vision, in chapter iv. 12–16, and his reference to a special wisdom handed down from his Temanite predecessors, in chapter xv. 18, 19, R.V. So we may say, in a word, that Eliphaz bases his argument on *EXPERIENCE*.

His three speeches may be easily summarised. The first occupies chapters iv. and v. It is in four parts. In the opening verses he commends Job's former piety (iv. 3–7). Then, in the main body of his speech, he declares what he has learned by observation (iv. 8–v. 7), namely, that suffering is always the direct outcome of sin, and is God's judgment on it. Next he avows what his own pious reaction would be if he himself were in such a trouble as Job's (v. 8–16). Finally, he applies all this to Job in a poetically arresting appeal which begins, "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth" (v. 17–27).

His second speech occupies chapter xv. Its tone is much severer. It is much shorter than the first. In point of argument it marks no advance on the first speech. It is in two parts. Verses 2–16 are a venerable rebuke. Verses 17–35 are an even more insistent declaration than in the first speech of what he has "seen" and learned.

His third speech fills chapter xxii. Again there is no advance in argument. It is the old theory, with its necessary corollary that Job must have sinned. It is in three parts. In verses 1–9 he outrightly condemns Job, especially so in verses 5–9, where he flatly contradicts his own commendation of Job in the first speech. Next, in verses 10–20, he draws his hard and fast conclusion about Job, beginning with that unmistakable "Therefore . . ." Job is in reality a hypocrite (see verse 13). Finally, in verses 21–30, there comes Eliphaz's parting appeal, beginning with, "Acquaint now thyself with Him and be at peace."

So much for the disquisitions of Eliphaz. This man and his views may be summed up in the following fourfold way:

1. He rests his philosophy of life peculiarly on his own observation and experience (iv. 8, 12; v. 3, 27).
2. He is committed to a fixed theory, with a much too narrow and rigid view of Providence (v. 3–7, 12–16; xv. 20–35).
3. This rigid and inadequate theory finds focal expression in chapter iv. 7, at the beginning of his first speech: "Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright cut off?"
4. This theory, as applied to Job, finds focus in chapter v. 17: "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty." *Job suffers because he has sinned.*

Bildad

Take now the speeches of Bildad. They occur in chapters viii., xviii., and xxv. respectively. They do not have the same air of courtesy as those of Eliphaz. Bildad is the forthright declaimer rather than the reflective reasoner. His opening speech is noticeably severer than that of Eliphaz, though this may be because Job had already uttered his first reply to Eliphaz before Bildad spoke.

Unlike Eliphaz, who rests his philosophy of life on his own observation and experience, Bildad rests on *tradition.* See chapter viii. 8–10. See also chapter xviii., where practically his whole speech (verses 5–20) seems to be but a succession of traditional maxims or proverbs drawn from "the wisdom of the *Beni Kedem*" (or sons of the east: 1 Kings iv. 30). So, then, in Bildad we have the voice of *TRADITION.*

His three speeches are easily epitomised. The first is an appeal; the second is a rebuke; the third is an evasion. They occur in chapters viii., xviii., and xxv.

The first comes in chapter viii. It is an appeal, and is in three parts. Verses 2–7 are an appeal to *appearances*, that is, to the sudden deaths of Job's children as indicating Divine judgment on them for sin (verse 4), and to Job's further trouble as therefore indicating that Job himself cannot be "pure and upright"

(verses 5, 6). Note the three "ifs" in verses 4, 5, 6, which mark Bildad's reasoning from these appearances. Next, verses 8–19, the main body of the speech, are an appeal to *tradition*; and finally, verses 20–2 are really an appeal to Job's own intelligence, the force of which is: "God will not cast away a perfect man" (verse 20), and therefore "He will yet fill *thy* mouth with laughter" (verse 21), if *thou* art such a man.

Bildad's second speech comes in chapter xviii. In point of argument it marks no advance on the first. It is simply reaffirmation in fiercer form. In fact it contains no actual *reasoning* at all, but rather consists of proverb-quoting. It is a rebuke, and is in two parts. Verses 1–4 are a rebuke in the form of indignant personal questions. Verses 5–21 are a rebuke in the form of traditional moral maxims. Note the determined "Yea" and "Surely" at the beginning and the ending of the second part (verses 5 and 21).

Bildad's third speech comes in chapter xxv., which has only six verses. It is simply a few sententious couplets, and is really an evasion. It completely shirks Job's preceding challenge (xxiv.) as to the fact that it is the wicked and not the righteous who are often the more prosperous. It simply touches on two well-worn topics again—the all-holy majesty of God (verses 2, 3), and the sinfulness of man (verses 4–6). Its closing words—"The stars are not pure in His sight, how much less man?"—are merely an evasive truism as applied to Job; for Job had never claimed to be without sin, but only that his sins had not been such as to account for his trouble.

These, then, are the contributions of Bildad. We may sum up this man and his views thus:

1. His outlook on life is moulded and limited peculiarly by tradition (viii. 8; xviii. 5–20).
2. Like Eliphaz, he is committed to a far too rigid view of Providence (viii. 11–19; xviii. 5, etc.).
3. This circumscribed theory finds focal expression in chapter viii. 20: "God will not cast away a perfect man; neither will He uphold evil-doers."
4. This theory as applied to Job finds focus in chapter viii. 6: "If thou wert pure and upright, surely now God would awake for thee." *Job is a hypocrite.*

Zophar

And now, what about Zophar? Unless, as some scholars think, chapters xxvii. (from verse 7) and xxviii. should be attributed to him, he speaks only twice to the debate, for in the third round his place is taken by Elihu. The two speeches occur in chapters xi. and xx. Zophar is less courteous and more drastic than either Eliphaz or Bildad. This may be due in part to the fact that by the time he entered the argument Job had already answered both the other two, contradicting their philosophy, and upholding his own innocence with increasing tenacity. Zophar's opening words denote that he already feels aggravated (xi. 2, 3).

Zophar, like the other two, has his distinguishing feature. Eliphaz, as we have seen, bases his view on observation and experience. Bildad rests on tradition. But Zophar is content with mere *ASSUMPTION*. There is at least reasoned deduction in Eliphaz, and intelligent orthodoxy in Bildad, but this man Zophar assumes and pronounces with a finality which would make even Job's daring to differ a sin. He is the pure dogmatist. From beginning to end of his speeches there is not a semblance of *reasoning*. There is not a semblance of Eliphaz's "I have seen," or of Bildad's "Enquire, I pray thee, of the former age." Zophar's word is a dogmatic "Know thou." It occurs in both his speeches, and in both cases right at the beginning of his main proposition. See chapters xi. 6 and xx. 4 (the latter reads as a question in our English versions, but the Hebrew is simply, "Know thou").

Zophar's first speech (xi.) is in three parts. Verses 1–6 are *a condemnation of Job*—for verbosity (verse 2), presumption verses 3, 4), sinfulness (verses 5, 6). Next, verses 7–12 are *a vindication of God*—as above human understanding (verses 7–9), above human interference (verse 10), above human deception and evasion (verses 11, 12). Finally, verses 13–20 are *an admonition to repentance*—the alternatives being repentance and restoration (verses 13–19), or impenitence and death (verse 20).

Zophar's second speech comes in chapter xx. It is throughout a vehement though covert denunciation of Job as a deservedly punished evil-doer and hypocrite. It falls into three parts. Verses 1–3 give the *introduction*, i.e. Zophar is provoked. Then verses 4–28 give the *proposition*, i.e. the prosperity of the wicked is shortlived. Finally, verse 29 gives the *application*, which is

meant to be taken by Job himself, i.e. that Job is suffering the portion of "*a wicked man.*"

We may sum up Zophar and his views thus:

1. He is a religious dogmatist (xi. 6; xx. 4).
2. Like Eliphaz and Bildad, he is mentally cramped by a much too rigid view of Providence (xi. 13–20; xx. 5, etc.).
3. His narrow dogmatism finds focal expression in chapter xx. 5: "The triumphing of the wicked is short. . . ."
4. This theory, applied to Job, finds concentration in chapter xi. 6: "Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth."

The Three Compared and Contrasted

Compare and contrast these three men. Take first the points of difference. Eliphaz rests his view of things on *observation*; Bildad rests on *tradition*; Zophar rests on *assumption*. Eliphaz is the religious *moralist*. Bildad is the religious *legalist*. Zophar is the religious *dogmatist*. Eliphaz is the *apologist*. Bildad is the *lecturer*. Zophar is the *bigot*; he is full of convictions, but they are assumptions, not reasoned conclusions. In a rough sort of way, we have in Eliphaz the voice of philosophy; in Bildad the voice of history; and in Zophar the voice of orthodoxy; but none is able to give satisfying answer to a problem like Job's. These three men may be represented largely, perhaps, by the three words, "IF," "MUST," "IS." Eliphaz takes the hypothetical attitude that *if* Job were not sinful, this trouble would not have come. Bildad takes the inferential attitude that Job *must* be sinful seeing that the trouble has indeed come. Zophar begins with the assumption that Job *is* a sinful man and deserves his affliction.

Take now the points of similarity. (1) All these three men are committed to what is substantially the same fixed theory of life, namely, that calamity is always the direct outcome of sin, and that the Divine favour or disfavour is indicated by a man's material prosperity or adversity. (2) They all therefore have a far too narrow and rigid view of Providence; yet they are so sure that their view is right that they look on resistance to it as resistance to God: see chapter xi. 5, for instance. (3) They all want

to prove that goodness and wickedness are always rewarded and punished *in this present life*: they are all silent concerning human destiny and Divine retribution in a life beyond this present one. Their philosophy and doctrine have no horizon beyond this earth. (4) From the standpoint of argument they are all absolutely static. Although there is marked advance in the thinking of Job himself, there is no advance at all on the part of these three "friends," except in the *expression* of their views. (5) They all fail to give any real or convincing answer to Job, as is recognised by those who witness the debate: see chapter xxxii. 3, 5, 11, 12. (6) They all condemn Job; for on their philosophy, they must either justify Job at God's expense or justify God at Job's; and, understandably, they choose the latter (xxxii. 3).

Job Versus the Trio

So far as mere argument is concerned, Job undoubtedly has the better of it. Admittedly, he gives way here and there to passionate and reckless utterances which he afterwards regrets and confesses to have been rash; but these were simply wrung from him in moments of terrible intensity when, in addition to his already extreme mental and physical suffering, he was goaded to exasperation by the stubborn unfairness and lack of real sympathy on the part of the three professed sympathisers.

Job is suffering far too keenly to aim at any mere victory of argument. He would gladly lose the argument if thereby he could get at the truth. Yet his very suffering gives a realism to his arguing and questioning which is lacking from the speeches of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, and which these men cannot withstand.

Glance back over the three rounds or cycles of the dialogue. In the first round the three friends are one in the contention that God always prospers the upright and punishes the perverse. Job's reply is that his own experience proves their argument defective, for he himself is upright and yet is afflicted.

In the second round Eliphaz insists that it is *only* the wicked who suffer. Bildad insists that the wicked *always* suffer. Zophar insists that any seeming prosperity of the wicked is *shortlived*. Job replies to each. Observation shows that it is *not* only the wicked who suffer: the righteous suffer as well. Nor do the

wicked *always* suffer; many seem to escape. Nor is the prosperity of the wicked always shortlived; for it often continues until death and extends to the children who are left.

In the third round Eliphaz merely restates the old theory, though with more vehemence. Bildad re-endorses it, but only in a few evasive platitudes. Job's answer is a protracted and solemnly passionate protestation of innocence. Zophar is silent.

Thus the discussion exhausts itself in a sheer deadlock; and there is an arresting significance in this very fact. It has been discerningly observed that this historic debate in the Book of Job is "the first recorded struggle of a new experience with an established orthodox belief." It is "the first fierce collision" of a new fact of experience with the accepted creed which "will not stretch to cover it." The orthodox formula of the trio on the one hand, and Job's experience on the other, were simply irreconcilable. Job knew that although he was a sinner, as all men are sinners, he had been conscientiously upright according to the light given to him, and that he was utterly sincere in his protestation to the three friends; and he therefore felt (as others of us have felt in other connections perhaps) that no creed can be true or adequate if it contradicts that which is deepest and truest and most native in our human constitution. The verdict of God Himself later comes down on Job's side. Thus the book brings home to us the fact that experience is an essential factor in the interpreting of revealed truth.

So much, then, for the interchanges between Job and the trio. The argument is broken off inconclusively and disappointingly. But there are two other voices which now speak to the debate and bring it to a majestic finale. These we shall consider in our next two studies.

THE BOOK OF JOB (4)

Lesson Number 55

NOTE.—For this study read the speech of Elihu in chapters xxxii. to xxxvii. Then read our interpretation of it herewith, and go through the speech again, checking off what we have said in this study.

Not oft mid busy servings
  Life's deepest truths are learned;
Not oft mid noisy strivings
  The Spirit's voice discerned.
Not in life's crowded places,
  Where jostling cares intrude,
But, in life's lonely spaces,
  God speaks in solitude.

The solitude of illness—
  The loneness, ling'ring drear,
'Tis oft predestined stillness,
  The voice of Heav'n to hear.
Old age—sad isolation
  When friends of yore are gone,
Oft brings most revelation
  Of the abiding One.

Affliction's deprivation—
  Blind eyes, deaf ears, spent powers,
Ah, painful separation
  To lonely, trying hours!
The loneness when heart breaketh,
  And none on earth can ease;
Ah, most of all God speaketh
  In solitudes like these.

The prophet's lone vocation,
  Some heavenly call pursued,
The far-flung mission station—
  These bring their solitude.
Thrice-blessed heart-break places,
  Where lone and drear we plod!
For in life's loneliest spaces
  We most discover—*GOD.*

—*J. S. B.*

THE BOOK OF JOB (4)

A New Voice—Elihu

THE LAST verse of chapter xxxi. marks a major break—"The words of Job are ended." Chapter xxxii. introduces a harangue by a new speaker, Elihu. He is a much younger man than the others (verse 6). He has evidently heard all the debate, and has held his tongue until now in deference to seniority (verses 4, 6, 7). Now, however, as he hears Job still stubbornly justifying himself while the trio increasingly condemn him without being able to answer him, he cannot stand by any longer silently biting his lip. He must now speak (verses 2, 3, 5); and he breaks forth in a spirit of "Elihu to the rescue." Albeit, the rescue is not so easy as Elihu has presupposed, though he certainly contributes a valuable corrective to the discussion. There is one aspect of the problem which has been overlooked, and it is to this that our new speaker calls attention.

Elihu's discourse, which fills no less than six chapters, has been criticised as verbose and as the speech of a conceited young man, disrespectful in its tone and adding nothing to the argument. A more careful reading refutes this unkindly misjudgment. It is the most courteous speech of the debate, and undoubtedly surpasses all the preceding speeches in spiritual grasp. It moves on a higher level than the speeches of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. What is most of all important, however, in relation to the problem under discussion, is that it introduces three new factors. First, there is a new *approach*. Second, there is a new *answer*. Third, there is a new *appeal*.

A New Approach.

Elihu accepts Job's position that any true wisdom in man comes only by inspiration from God, but he has become convinced that such wisdom is not given only to the aged (xxxii. 9). There is "a spirit in man" capable of receiving inspiration (verse 8), and Elihu believes that he himself is now receiving such

inspiration (xxxiii. 4; xxxvi. 2–4). But more than this, Elihu believes that he is so inspired as to fulfil Job's longing for a daysman between God and himself, to whom he could set out his case. In pathetic desperation Job had lamented the lack of such a daysman (ix. 33), and his own inability to gain an interview with God (xxiii. 3–7); and, in fact, his last words before Elihu breaks in are—

> "Oh that I had one to hear me! (Lo, here is my signature; let the Almighty answer me), and that I had the indictment which mine adversary hath written! Surely I would carry it upon my shoulder; I would bind it unto me as a crown. I would declare unto Him the number of my steps; as a prince would I go near unto Him" (xxxi. 35–7).

Elihu believes himself to be so inspired as to be the answer to this longing of Job. Note his remarkable words in chapter xxxiii. 6—

> "Behold, I am according to thy wish in God's stead. I also am formed of clay."

Thus Elihu claims a special inspiration from God, yet can take Job's part also as being of the same clay. This is a quite different approach from that of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar with their hard and fast philosophy and their treatment of Job's problem as detached onlookers. *They* had wished to be *judges*; whereas *Elihu* would be a *brother*. He would seek to sit with Job in the fellowship of human sympathy, yet at the same time speak the real truth from *God's* side. Such is the new approach.

A New Answer.

Elihu's answer reaches its full statement in chapters xxxvi. and xxxvii.; but glance first at what leads up to that, in chapters xxxiii. to xxxv.

God is greater than man, and therefore man has no right or authority to require an explanation of Him (xxxiii. 12, 13). There must of necessity be some things which God does that are incomprehensible to man. Yet God *does* speak to men if they

will listen (verses 14–16), with a view to restraining and rescuing them from evil (verses 17, 18). Moreover, God not only speaks, He *chastises* (verses 19–22), and this, if only there were one to interpret it, is always with a view to healing and restoring men (verses 23–8). This covers the very experiences through which Job was passing. What he has lacked is an interpreter; and it seems clear that Elihu considers himself the required interpreter (verses 29–33). Job's suffering is *educational*. God is dealing with him to some higher issue. This is in chapter xxxiii.; and obviously it touches a higher level than the other speeches.

It is followed, in chapter xxxiv., by the argument that God's government, besides being sovereign and gracious (as in xxxiii.) must necessarily be absolutely righteous and impartial (verses 10–19). It is also perfect in its discernment (verse 23), which makes quite superfluous Job's demands for an audience with God, in which to state his case (verse 23). God knows all the facts absolutely. Special trial is unnecessary. It is just because of this that some of God's doings seem mysterious (verses 24–6). Yet they are always with good moral purpose (verses 27–30).

And so Elihu moves to the final development of his answer to Job, in chapters xxxvi. and xxxvii. And what *is* it which makes his answer new and distinctive? It is this: He sees a different and superior *purpose* in suffering from that which Eliphaz and Bildad and Zophar have seen. It is a much higher and more spiritual purpose. The other speakers have all been bound hand and foot by the theory that suffering is necessarily the punishment of past sinning. Elihu sees beyond that, to a truer and wider meaning. Suffering is not exclusively punitive; it is also *corrective*. It is not only penal; it is *moral*. It does not only come to requite a man; it comes to *restore* a man. It does not always come just to chastise; it often comes to *chasten*. It is not only the judge's rod; it is the shepherd's goad.

See how this new interpretation of Elihu runs through his discourse, reaching its full expression in chapters xxxvi. and xxxvii. See how through suffering man is restrained and refined and restored.

RESTRAINED.

"He (God) openeth the ears of men,
And sealeth their instruction,

That He may *withdraw man from his (evil) purpose*
And hide pride from man.
He keepeth back his soul from the pit,
And his life from perishing by the sword."

(xxxiii. 16–18.)

CHASTENED.

"He is also *chastened* with pain upon his bed,
And with continual strife in his bones,
So that his life abhorreth bread,
And his soul dainty meat."

(xxxiii. 19–20.)

RESTORED.

"If but there be with him . . . an interpreter,
To show unto a man what is right for him,
Then He is gracious unto him, and saith,
Deliver him from going down to the pit,
I have found a ransom.
His flesh shall be fresher than a child's;
He returneth to the days of his youth;
He prayeth unto God, and He is favourable,
So that he seeth His (God's) face with joy,
For He restoreth to man his righteousness.
He singeth before men and saith,
I have sinned and perverted the right,
And it profited me not.
He hath saved my soul from going to the pit,
And my life shall behold the light."

(xxxiii. 23–8.)

Ere he ends this first part of his speech, and pauses to give Job chance to interpose any comment (verses 31–3), Elihu rounds off this threefold view of suffering with the summary reiteration—

"Lo, all these things doth God work,
Twice, yea thrice, with a man,
To bring back his soul from the pit,
That he may be enlightened with the light
of the living."

Next, in chapter xxxiv., Elihu goes on to argue that in thus afflicting men, God ever acts with absolute righteousness, impartiality and discernment.

"Far be it from God to do wickedness,
And from the Almighty to commit iniquity . . .
Shall One that hateth right govern?
And wilt thou (Job) condemn Him (God) that
is just and mighty?
Is it fit to say to a king, Thou art vile?
Or to nobles, Ye are wicked?
How much less to Him that respecteth not the
persons of princes,
Nor regardeth the rich more than the poor?
For they all are the work of God's hands."

(verses 10, 17–19.)

"For His eyes are on the ways of a man,
And He beholdeth all his goings.
There is no darkness nor shadow of death
Where workers of iniquity may hide (from Him);
For He needeth not further to consider a man,
That he (i.e., a man) should go before God in
judgment (i.e. as Job wished to do)."

(verses 21–3.)

Elihu then makes the case that on this principle affliction comes even to the mighty men of the earth, and that it only continues to the point of complete destruction where there is refusal toward God.

"He breaketh in pieces mighty men, in ways
past finding out,
And setteth others in their stead."

(verse 24.)

"Because they turned from following Him,
And *would not heed* any of His ways."

(verse 27.)

Had there been repentance on the part of any of these persons, the outcome would have been different; but all of those who had perished had refused to learn by affliction.

> "For hath any (of them) said unto God,
> I have borne chastisement, I offend no more;
> That which I see not, teach Thou me,
> And if I have done iniquity I will do it no more?" (verses 31, 32.)

Then Elihu turns to Job and asks him if, in view of all this, he considers himself better qualified than God to decide such recompense.

> "Should God's recompence be according to *thy* mind,
> Seeing thou refusest them (God's judgments)?
> For thou must choose, and not I;
> Therefore say what *thou* knowest (i.e. better than God)." (verse 33.)

This is a hint to Job to submit to God's dealings as chastening with a good purpose, rather than to be all the while rebelling against them as unrighteous punishments. God is trying to teach Job something, and the suffering is being prolonged by Job's resentful unsubmissiveness.

In chapter xxxv. Elihu continues his answer by submitting that Job's appeals and protestations to God are not acknowledged because they are not in a right spirit. Many others suffer on for the same reason. Read verses 9 to 12, culminating with,

> "There they cry, but He doth not answer,
> Because of the pride of (those) evil-doers."

As for Job himself, how can *he* expect answer or explanation from God when he insists that God cannot even be found or approached and that He treats Job as an enemy?

> "Surely God will not hear vanity,
> Neither will the Almighty regard it;
> How much less (thee, Job) when thou sayest
> Thou seest Him not?" (xxxv. 13, 14.)

In chapters xxxvi. and xxxvii. Elihu brings his theory to its final expression. Once again he emphasises that affliction, other than being always judicial, is often remedial.

"Behold, God is mighty and despiseth not any;
He is mighty in strength of understanding.
He preserveth not the life of the wicked,
But giveth to the afflicted their right.
He withdraweth not His eyes from the upright,
But (exalts them) with kings on the throne;
He setteth them for ever and they are exalted.
If they (others of them) be bound in fetters
And be taken in the cords of affliction,
He (thus) showeth them their . . . transgressions,
That they have behaved themselves proudly.
He (thus) openeth their ear to instruction,
And commandeth that they return from iniquity.
If they hearken and serve Him
They spend their days in prosperity,
And their years in pleasantness.
But if they hearken not they shall perish . . .
And they shall die without knowledge."

(xxxvi. 5–12.)

This is stated again later, and is directly applied to the case of Job—

"He saveth the afflicted *by* his affliction
And openeth their ear in adversity.
Yea, He would have led *thee* out of distress
Into a broad place where is no straitness."

(verses 15, 16.)

But, as Elihu now complains, Job, instead of learning by affliction, has "fulfilled the judgment of the wicked" (i.e. has displayed the same attitude toward God as the wicked). That is why Divine judgment *still* afflicts him (verse 17). And Elihu warns Job that his affliction may even lead to death if there is no change of mind—

"Because there is wrath, beware,
Lest He *take thee away* with His stroke;
Then a great ransom cannot deliver thee.
Will thy riches suffice (then) . . .
Or all the forces of thy strength? . . .
Take heed! Regard not iniquity,
For this thou hast chosen (i.e. to murmur)
rather than (submission to) affliction."

(verses 18–21.)

Lastly, at verse 26 and running right through chapter xxxvii., Elihu brings his harangue to a dramatic and poetic climax by referring to a gathering storm which he graphically describes and uses to illustrate his thesis, namely, that affliction is educative as well as retributive, disciplinary as well as destructive.

"Yea, He ladeth the thick cloud with moisture,
He spreadeth out the cloud of His lightning,
And it is turned about by His guidance,
That they may do what He commandeth them
Upon the face of the habitable world,
Whether it be for *correction* or for (the sake of)
the earth."

(xxxvii. 11–13.)

A New Appeal.

So much, then, for Elihu's new answer. We have given rather more space to it than we at first intended; but perhaps we ought not to begrudge that, for it is important to see clearly the special point of it (which many readers seem strangely to miss), and any further reducing of our key-quotations would have been prejudicial to the clearness of our presentation of it.

Mark now the new *appeal* which goes with Elihu's new approach and new answer. The appeal of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar (if "appeal" it could be called) finally amounted to, "Own up, and cease being a hypocrite." The appeal of Elihu has nothing of that in it. It is an appeal for a new attitude in Job toward his affliction. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar had kept harping on some supposed wicked behaviour *in the past*. Elihu is concerned with a wrong attitude *in the present*. He does not discuss whether Job has

committed grievous sin in the past. He accepts Job's protestation of innocence, and his point is that although Job's protestation of innocence may be genuine enough, his present attitude and spirit are wrong. Job's suffering may not be for past sin at all. His suffering is more probably a chastening with some ultimately good purpose; but Job is thwarting his own good by his impossible attitude.

So, then, in line with his philosophy of affliction as being corrective and educative rather than judicial and punitive, Elihu's appeal is for a teachable *humility* on Job's part. This is where Job has mainly failed. As with others who have not been heard by God because their motive was wrong (xxxv. 12), so even Job's requestings and protestings, earnest though they have been, have sprung from a wrong motive, namely, pride—a pride which has been self-righteously occupied with the vindicating of Job himself even to the point of impugning *God's* righteousness. God will not hear such "vanity" (xxxv. 13). Job needs to realise his own impotence and ignorance (xxxvii. 14–24). This is certainly discerning.

But Elihu's appeal is also for submissive *patience*. All God's judgments proceed from His absolute understanding (xxxiv. 21–3), and are both right (verses 10–12) and resistless (verses 13–20, 29). Therefore it is wisdom in a man to submit and have patience to learn. As he says in chapter xxxv. 15, "The cause is before Him; therefore *wait thou for Him*" (see R.V. margin). This also is discerning.

Yet again, Elihu's appeal is for Job to have *faith in God Himself* rather than in some demanded explanation. The true wisdom is to have faith in God Himself despite the lack of all explanation, seeing that God is all-knowing and all-righteous (xxxvi. 5, etc.). His closing word is, "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find Him out; He is excellent in power; and in judgment and plenteous justice He will not afflict. *Let men therefore fear Him*" (xxxvii. 23, 24). This also is discerning.

What then?

What then of Elihu's speech in total and in fine? What we have said will have substantiated that it moves on a higher level than the preceding speeches. There is ampler spiritual grasp

and truer spiritual insight. Admittedly, here and there Elihu is somewhat *incorrect*, as when he says that God is unaffected either by man's sin or uprightness (xxxv. 6, 7). The complete Scripture revelation shows that God's heart of love is indeed affected. Here and there, also, Elihu is *inadequate*, as when he says that a true response to affliction always brings restoration to prosperity (xxxiii. 23–30). But there are also *strikingly true* things, as when he charges Job, not with suffering because of sinning (as the other three speakers had said), but with sinning because of his suffering! (xxxiii. 8–11; xxxiv. 36, 37; xxxv. 15, 16).

Elihu's philosophy of suffering certainly does not cover all the ground; and, of course, so far as Job's sufferings in particular were concerned Elihu was just as ignorant of their real cause (i.e. the slander of Satan and the challenge of Jehovah) as the other speakers in the dialogue. Yet his view of suffering is undoubtedly nearer the truth than anything submitted by Eliphaz, Bildad or Zophar; and especially is he bordering on tremendous truth when, at the end of his speech, he advocates that faith in God Himself is better even than an explanation. It is at this point, significantly enough, as we shall soon see, that Jehovah Himself breaks in by a whirlwind voice from the storm which has been gathering over the land toward the end of Elihu's speech.

Yes, Elihu's was a great theme. In fact it was *too* great for him. He was not equal to it. A more-than-human voice needed to speak now; and it *did* speak. In our next and final study on the Book of Job we shall hear the last and greatest Speaker of all.

THE BOOK OF JOB (5)

Lesson Number 56

NOTE.—For this final study in the Book of Job read chapters xxxviii. to xlii. Appreciate the magnificent sweep and poetry even if the purport is not so clear at first. Ask and try to answer the question: What is the purpose of this speech of Jehovah?

Then read the ensuing study, and go through the speech again, checking off our comments upon it. This will prove really rewarding.

He never fails the soul that trusts in Him;
Tho' disappointments come and hope burns dim,
He never fails.
Tho' trials surge like stormy seas around,
Tho' testings fierce like ambushed foes abound,
Yet this my soul, with millions more has found,
He never fails; He *never* fails.

He never fails the soul that trusts in Him;
Tho' angry skies with thunder-clouds grow grim,
He never fails.
Tho' icy blasts life's fairest flow'rs lay low,
Tho' earthly springs of joy all cease to flow,
Yet still 'tis true, with millions more I know,
He never fails; He *never* fails.

He never fails the soul that trusts in Him;
Tho' sorrow's cup should overflow the brim,
He never fails.
Tho' oft the pilgrim way seems rough and long,
I yet shall stand amid yon white-robed throng,
And there I'll sing, with millions more, this song—
He never fails; He *never* fails.

—*J. S. B.*

THE BOOK OF JOB (5)

THE VOICE FROM THE WHIRLWIND

SUDDENLY, in chapters xxxviii. to xli., the profound but pathetic dialogue is brought to a climax by the interposition of God Himself, speaking out of a whirlwind. "Then the *LORD* answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said . . ." The storm had spread itself across the skies while Elihu was speaking, and eventually had silenced him. The five men are now struck dumb with awe as that voice "like the sound of many waters" breaks upon them from the whirling air.

Now obviously if there is one point more than another in this ancient poem-drama of Job where everything depends on whether it is genuinely historical or only fictional, it is at this terrific crisis-point. Either it really *is* God Himself who speaks, or it is only God impersonatedly and pretendedly. If the former, then it is alive with vital significances. If merely the latter, then all we have to do is to admire the imaginative genius of the human composer, or else feel anger at his irreverence in thus "pretending" God.

That is why it was so important, in our first study on the Book of Job, to settle whether it is really and fully true, or only at best a fictional elaboration around some mere nucleus of fact. We need not go over the *pros* and *cons* again here. We have submitted that the only view of the book which does justice to the data is that which accepts it as a record of what genuinely happened, given to us in superb poetical rendering. This means that in these climax chapters, xxxviii. to xlii., it is indeed the Eternal One who speaks with that awesome voice out of the tornado.

And what is it that the Voice Divine says? Well, when we read these chapters through the first time, all the while expecting to come upon some mighty paragraph which gives Job at last and once for all the Divine solution of his problem, we are unconcealably disappointed. There is not even the slightest move to explain Job's suffering or to dissolve the problem of providence

provoked by it! (Incidentally, we may observe that this, in conjunction with other factors, is a pretty sure corroboration that it really *is* God who here speaks. Had it been no more than the voice of God as pretended by a clever human composer, it is practically certain that *some* climactic explanation would have been attempted, according with chapters i. and ii., so that the debate should not be left argumentatively unresolved, as it now is.)

Another thing which strikes us disappointingly is that this Divine interposition is not even an argument. It is rather a series of interrogations. The language, the poetry, the rich imagery, the universal sweep of ideas and illustrations—all these certainly eclipse everything that has preceded, and probably they are unsurpassed in all literature, ancient or modern: but there is neither explanation nor argument! Why? Well, we shall see.

We have given short but careful analyses of the speeches by Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, and have tried to show, by selected quotations, the new aspect represented in the ample dissertation of Elihu; but there is scarcely need for an analysis of this overawing climax-speech from the whirlwind in order to find its drift and purpose. Not that it is *without* orderly progress. A careful rereading will show that its subject and course are as follows—

(Here see outline on page 73.)

One senses an intended touch of kindly ludicrousness here and there in the way that the contrast between Jehovah and Job is brought out, as for instance in chapter xxxviii. 19–21:

> "Where is the way to the dwelling of light?
> And as for darkness where is the place thereof? . . .
> Doubtless thou knowest, for thou wast then born,
> And the number of thy days is great!"

In fact this latter couplet serves to indicate the intended irony underlying the whole address. Job, of course, is as old as the Almighty, or at least coeval with creation, or else he could not presume, as he *has* done, to arraign the moral government of the Creator. But the irony is benevolent throughout, not sarcastic. The Divine purpose is to humble Job, but not to mock him or even humiliate him (and there is a wide difference between being

humbled and being humiliated!). There is a sublime majesty and dignity going with a conversational condescension all through the speech.

One cannot but be arrested, also, by the references in this speech to living creatures of peculiar features or habits. The ostrich is cited, not just on account of its gorgeous wings, however, but rather because of certain innate stupidities; and we are told that these very stupidities are "because God hath deprived her of wisdom" in certain ways. The lion, the wild ass, the crocodile —why are such fierce and untamable and fearsome creatures referred to? Job would need no explaining on that point. The distinctive features and peculiarities of the various creatures are determined and conferred by the wisdom and power of God. Some of these differentia are not attractive to us human beings nor are they what *we* should have chosen if we had been in charge of things. They are the more significant for that very reason, because they show us that nature is not ordered according to *our* thought, and yet the whole description shows that it is ordered well and for a grand, total result of life far beyond anything which *we* could have imagined.

Job would both sense the underlying irony of the speech and see the general purpose of it, just as we ourselves do. By simply exposing Job's profound ignorance of God's *natural* government it shows his utter incapacity to pass judgment on that which is far more incomprehensible and mysterious, God's *moral* government.

Yes, Job would grasp this; yet even so we are still left asking what is the special significance of this whirlwind address so far as the *sufferings* of Job were concerned. As we have said, it is superlative poetry, magnificent description, profound comprehension; yet it is not an explanation of Job's affliction, nor an answer to his questioning, nor a solution to the problem of suffering, nor does it contain even a promise that Job's affliction would end in renewed prosperity. What then *is* its significance in relation to this man's adversity? An unreflective reading of it may easily *miss* its significance and cause disappointment.

Well, the first significance of it is that Job was *not meant* to know the explanation of his sufferings. Had Job been told the

real explanation, i.e. the slander of Satan and the challenge of Jehovah, he certainly would have opened his eyes wide with astonishment, yet at the same time the whole purpose of his trial would have been nullified thereby. Had he been told this strange origin of his calamities (as described in the prologue) and assured of the rewarding outcome of his ordeal (as described in the epilogue), then obviously his whole reaction would have been affected. His fortitude would have been artificial. There would have been no real test of character. Nor would there have been any place for the genuine exercise and education of faith. On this simple fact everything hangs in our understanding of the book. By means of the prologue we ourselves are *shown* the explanation of Job's sufferings before ever they began, so that when the explanation is *withheld* from Job we may appreciate at once that an explanation *could* have been given, easily enough, if God had so willed. As we now read the record of this august speech from the whirlwind, with its wonderful exhibition of the transcendence, immanence and providence of God, yet its absence of explanation concerning Job's problem, we are meant to learn the lesson that there are *some* things about human suffering which God cannot possibly explain to us without destroying the very purpose which they are designed to fulfil. *That* is the first significance of this speech from the whirlwind.

And its second significance is its indication of the Divine *concern* in Job's affairs. Although that aerial voice from the cyclone did not vouchsafe an explanation, it evinced that God had been watching, hearing, caring. Job would immediately realise this with a sudden, new vividness. What tumult of emotion and rush of regret that he had allowed Eliphaz and Bildad and Zophar to aggravate him into saying rash things about the unconcern of God! Under the power of that dread voice he now knew in a flash, and without any telling, how wrong they had been. Yet deeper than all else, the speaking of that hitherto silent Heaven meant to Job that God felt concern and sympathy! Job and his grief meant enough to God to cause Him to speak! Doubtless this is one of the main reasons why, in the overruling purpose of God, this story of Job was preserved—that men might know through it the fact of this Divine concern and sympathy, particularly so until the crowning demonstration of it should be given in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But there is a third and even deeper significance in this speech from the storm-cloud, and once again it arises from the strange-seeming absence of any explanation to Job. The Divine purpose is to bring Job to the point where he rests in *God Himself*, apart from explanations. If only Job can be brought there, where he trusts God as being absolutely righteous and benevolent over against *all* unexplained adversities, then Satan's slanderous libel (in the prologue) is proved false, and the devil is defeated. Job *does* get there, as chapter xlii. shows; and *we* are meant to get there too. Baffling enigmas abound in the life of even the godliest Christians. In the final analysis faith is to trust God Himself over against all seeming contradictions, and in the absence of all present explanations. This is not mere *blind* faith. We have the completed Scripture revelation, throwing much light on the mystery of human sin and suffering—of its origin, of Satanic activity behind it, of its being Divinely overruled, and of its eventual abolition. Most wonderful of all, God has shown us, in Christ, how He Himself suffers *with* us. Faith, therefore, has much to encourage it. Yet even so, there are the still-clinging curtains of what are to us impenetrable mysteries. There are things which God cannot divulge to us at present. Over against the much that is revealed is the much that is as yet unrevealed. The victory of faith is to rest with full confidence in God Himself.

And we must mention one further significance in that speech from the whirlwind. Clearly, the Divine purpose is to bring Job to *the end of himself*—to the end of his own self-righteousness, self-vindication, self-wisdom, self-everything, so that he may find his all in God. This is indicated by an interesting fact. The speech from the whirlwind is divided into two parts by an interlude half-way through, in which God directly addresses Job, and Job replies. See chapter xl. 1–5.

> "Moreover the Lord answered Job, and said,
> Can he who cavils contend with the Almighty?
> He that argueth with God let him answer it.
> Then Job answered the Lord, and said,
> Behold, I am of small account: what shall I answer Thee?
> I lay mine hand upon my mouth.
> Once have I spoken, and I will not answer;
> Yea twice, but I will proceed no further."

Job is learning his lesson, but he has not yet learned it fully enough. Had he done so, the speech from the whirlwind would have terminated at this point. There is a spiritual breaking-down process going on in Job. Going with the outward speech from the whirlwind is the inward illumination of God's Holy Spirit. Job is coming to see God in a new way; and he is coming to see himself in a new way too. He sees himself of "small account" against the mighty background of the universe and the Divine infinity, and he says, "What shall *I* answer *THEE*?" "I lay mine hand on my mouth." Yes, Job is learning his lesson. He is bowed in confession. Yet his contrition is not full enough; so the speech from the whirlwind continues; and it continues until Job breaks in, with an uttermost convictedness and convincedness, at the opening of chapter xlii.

Unfortunately, the first six verses of chapter xlii., which are the crisis-climax of the whole book, are generally misunderstood because they are all attributed to Job instead of being distributed between Job and God. The chapter begins, "Then Job answered the Lord, and said . . ." This easily enough gives the impression that all the verses up to verse 6 are the words of Job, whereas they should be read as follows—

JOB

"I know that Thou canst do all things,
And that no purpose of Thine can be restrained."

VOICE FROM WHIRLWIND

"Who is this that hideth counsel without knowledge?"

JOB

"Therefore have I uttered that which I understood not,
Things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.
Hear, I beseech Thee, and I will speak."

VOICE FROM WHIRLWIND

"I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto Me."

JOB

"I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear,
But now mine eye seeth Thee.
Wherefore I abhor myself (or loathe my words),
And repent in dust and ashes."

These, then, are the main significances of the speech from the whirlwind: Job was *not meant* to know the explanation of his sufferings; but God was concerned and *sympathetic*; the Divine purpose was that Job should rest in *God Himself*, apart from explanations; also that Job should come to the end of his *self-ism* and find his all in God. When these significances are perceived, the august and prolonged interruption from the whirlwind assumes wonderful meaning, not only for Job, but for ourselves as well.

JEHOVAH VERSUS JOB

A CHALLENGE BASED ON CONTRAST

The infinite creative and controlling power of Jehovah versus the littleness, ignorance and impotence of Job.

1. IN RELATION TO THE EARTH (xxxviii. 1–18).

Its creation	verses 4–7.
The oceans	,, 8–11.
The morning	,, 12–15.
Hid sources	,, 16–18.

2. IN RELATION TO THE HEAVENS (xxxviii. 19–38).

Light and dark	verses 19–21.
The elements	,, 22–30.
Stars and Zodiac	,, 31–2.
Laws of nature	,, 33–8.

3. IN RELATION TO LIVING BEINGS (xxxviii. 39–xxxix.).

Beast and bird of prey	verses 39–41.
Beasts preyed upon	,, 1–12.
Bird and beast of beauty	,, 13–25.
Two fiercest vultures	,, 26–30.

4. IN RELATION TO SPECIAL CASES (xl.–xlii. 6).

Proud wicked-doers	verses 6–14.
Behemoth (hippopotamus)	,, 15–24.
Leviathan (crocodile)	chapter xli.
Job himself (in reply)	chapter xlii. 1–6.

Job himself as a study.

In these reflections on the Book of Job, we have not considered Job himself as a separate character-study. We have been more concerned to set forth the meaning and message of the *book* as such. But before we conclude this final study on Job we ought to get at least a silhouette of the man himself. In this epic story and poem we see a man of exemplary integrity progressively stripped of all those dearest possessions and most sacred confidences with which men clothe their souls, until he stands as a consciously naked soul before his Maker.

First he loses all his *wealth.* All in a few hours, by a few swift, fell strokes, he passes from plenty to poverty. Then he loses all his *children.* By one awful, complex blow, he is bereaved of all his seven sons and three daughters. Next he loses his *health.* He becomes so repulsive outwardly that his closest kin will not come near him, and so tortured by inward discomfort that his existence is a continual burden. Next he loses the fellowship of his *wife.* Frenzied by the terrible spectacle of her husband, she exclaims, "Curse God and die!" The cord of co-believing snaps between wife and husband; and thus a terrible loneliness is added to Job's other losses. Next he loses the sympathy of his three sagest friends. Sympathy turns to censure; and instead of consoling they unite in condemning, until poor Job cries out, "Have pity upon me, O ye my friends!"

But besides all these more external losses there is a terrible stripping process going on inside the man's very soul and spirit. His extreme adversity strips away even his sense of *self-worth.* Earlier he has been able to say, "Naked came I forth . . . and naked shall I return," and in that statement he has recognised the worth of his own personality as being more than all his possessions. But later he longs supremely to be blotted out. Next he loses the sense of God's bona fide relationship to him. No longer can he say, "The Lord gave; the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord." In those words there was a perception of graciousness blended with the Divine sovereignty. But later he can only ask in bitterness of soul, "Why hast Thou set me as a target for Thee?" Lastly he seems to lose even the conviction of the goodness of the *Divine government.* Earlier he has been able to say, "Shall we receive good at the hand of the

Lord, and not evil?" But that earlier recognition of sovereign good breaks down as the debate moves on, and Job is desolate indeed.

All these things with which men mentally and spiritually clothe themselves are now gone; and we stand watching the naked spirit of this man. There are but two final realities left. *God* is left. *Self* is left. But both are problems. God is a problem because Job can neither understand Him nor find Him. Self is a problem because Job cannot escape himself. God and himself are final certainties; but there is no place of meeting.

What then? Job *must* find God. It has been truly observed that Job's speeches, in their deepest utterances, are not so much an answer to Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar as the wail of a desolate soul to a God who could not be found, from a self which could not be escaped, and an anguish which could not be explained. For these heart-wrung cries and questions see chapters ix. 2, 3, 32, 33; xiv. 7–10, 14, 15; xvi. 18–21; xix. 23–7; xxiii. 3, 4; xxxi. 35–7.

And this stripped and naked soul *finds* God! Although a sinner in the sense that all men are, he is no hypocrite such as his "miserable comforters" have alleged. He is a sincere soul in an agony of desire really to know God, and God cannot deny him. God speaks from the storm. The voice does not argue. It simply makes vivid the majesty and sublimity of the Divine government. The result is an overpowering sense of the infinite wisdom, power, holiness and goodness of God. In a way which only those can understand who have experienced sudden Divine enlightenment at conversion or in some never-to-be-forgotten spiritual crisis, Job sees and understands God as he never had before, and he cries out,

"I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear,
But now mine eye seeth Thee!"

And with this new discovery of God, there comes to him, as is invariably the case, a new knowledge of his own heart; so that he now says,

"Wherefore I abhor myself (or, my words),
And repent in dust and ashes."

Thank God, the voice from heaven which spoke to Job has now found a better vehicle of expression than that long-ago whirlwind. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us in His SON." Let all who "suffer according to the will of God" (1 Pet. iv. 19) bathe their weary hearts in the revealing and comforting consolations of the New Testament. Not everything is revealed to us yet by a long way; but enough is now revealed to make faith intelligent despite persisting dark problems. What is still unrevealed is reserved in order to give faith scope for development. If Job could say it, then certainly *we* can, with far fuller reason—"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (xiii. 15).

Epilogue and Final Reflections

We need not add much concerning the brief epilogue (xlii. 7–17). The poetry ends with verse 6, and the epilogue is in prose. It reads quite simply, and there are no points needing explanation to the general reader. But there *are* certain points of spiritual significance which ought not to be missed.

The first significance, of course, is that there *is* an epilogue. It is a "happy ever after" ending, too, such as is quite out of fashion with modern fiction writers; but it is a sequel of real fact, and no mere fairy-tale. Job is vindicated and rewarded. And because this is a real account of God's dealings with a man, its meaning is profound. Job, remember, is a Divinely intended object-lesson through which we are meant to apprehend certain great truths pertaining to the trials of the godly. In the Job of the epilogue we see that for the godly sufferer there is a "nevertheless afterward" of compensation and reward. It may not come in this present life-time, as Job's did; but come it surely will. In Job's case it *had* to come in this life-time in order to fill out the object-lesson for us; but human life has a larger context than the present three-score years and ten; and we must read this epilogue in the light of that "better land" beyond earth's sunsets, or with those precious promises before us which tell of our Lord's second coming and millennial kingdom.

The next thing that catches the eye is the Divine rebuke of *Job's three "comforters."* God's wrath is kindled against them

(verse 7). Why? Because they have more nearly wrecked Job's soul than even the devil himself. When Satan had done his worst, it could still be written, "In all this did not Job sin with his lips" (ii. 10); but as the three "friends" prosecuted their pious misrepresentations of both God and Job, the poor sufferer was simply driven into sinning with his lips. Mark well: Satan has no more dangerous tools than those who, under the guise of piety, and in the name of religious orthodoxy, offer false comfort or give untrue impressions of God. Far better be silent in the presence of suffering than say what is wrong.

Implication concerning Inspiration

And further, we note here the implication concerning *the inspiration of the Scriptures*. In this epilogue God says to Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, "Ye have not spoken of Me the thing that is right." This can only mean that the speeches of those three men were not Divinely inspired. There are some impossible people who say, "Oh, if the Bible is verbally inspired as you teach, then one ought to be able to open the Bible anywhere and say of any verse on any page, 'This is the word of God, and must be obeyed.'" Such an attitude is utterly stupid. Words of wicked men like Ahab, and even of Satan, are recorded in Scripture, and all that inspiration involves in such cases is the accuracy of what is reported. Even so, in the Book of Job, we obviously cannot take any or every statement made by Eliphaz, Bildad or Zophar and say, "That is Divinely inspired." The *record* of their speeches is inspired, but not what they say. Of course, there is much that is elevated and true enough in their speeches, but it is only men who are speaking; and some of their statements are definitely wrong, as God Himself now says in the epilogue. What we ought to grasp clearly is that this is no argument whatever against the verbal inspiration of the Bible; for although the speeches of the five men in this Book of Job may not be inspired, the whole book is an inspired record of real doings and sayings, with a Divine purpose in view. In this true and vital sense the epic story and poem is an inspired book, and has a Divine message for us.

We pass by other points of interest, to mention the New Testament comment on this Book of Job. In James v. 11 we

read, "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, how that the Lord is full of pity and merciful." That is the ultimate fact about this Book of Job—"the end (or point aimed at) of the LORD." We are only meant to see Job that we may see beyond him to *God*, to the God who is sovereign throughout the universe, Satan included, and whose sovereignty is one of gracious purpose toward man. And we are meant to see that although there are some things which God cannot make plain to us yet, the gracious purpose of God toward us interpenetrates and persists through the most painful mysteries of our earthly experience.

Look again at Job: see how for the godly sufferer "Paradise Lost" becomes "Paradise Regained." See the three main features of the epilogue—transformation, vindication, restoration. First, there is the *transformation* of Job as regards his own character, for he comes forth as "gold tried in the fire." Second, there is the *vindication* of Job before his friends, for God calls him "My servant" and makes him a priest to them (verse 8). Third, there is the *restoration* to Job of all his former prosperity, and indeed far more, for "the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before" (verse 10). Yes, the "end of the Lord" is very gracious. Let every godly sufferer "rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him."

Is Job a latent Parable?

Such, then, is the Book of Job. Take just one further, parting glance back over the whole book—prologue, dialogue, epilogue. The whole is an inspired record of what actually happened. Yet can it be that *behind* the literal facts and direct significances there is a mystic parable of the human *race* as such? The Job of that prologue and the Satan of malicious design, do they speak of Eden and what man was at first? The suffering Job of the potsherd and the ashes, does he speak to us of humanity as it is at present? The purified and reinstated Job of the epilogue, does he speak of the humanity that is yet to be? This, at any rate, is true: there are latent meanings in the written word of God which are deeper and more wonderful than the wisest of men have yet discovered.

SOME TEST QUESTIONS ON JOB

1. What order of spiritual progress do the Poetical Books collectively express? And could you state in a single phrase the ruling idea in the Book of Job?

2. What are the three kinds of parallelism in Hebrew poetry? And which parts of the Book of Job are respectively poetry and prose?

3. What are the main objections to the historicity of the Book of Job, and what are the answers to those objections?

4. Give two Scripture references which seem to settle conclusively that the book is genuinely historical.

5. Summarise the object and message of the book in a few lines.

6. If the interviews between God and Satan are fiction and not fact, why is the book reduced to meaninglessness?

7. What are the main points of contrast between Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar?

8. What are the points of similarity between Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar?

9. Describe briefly the new approach and the new answer and the new appeal of Elihu.

10. What are the four main divisions in the speech of Jehovah? The first is: In relation to the earth (xxxviii. 1–18).

11. What is the main significance of the speech from the whirlwind?

12. What bearing does the Lord's rebuke of Eliphaz and Bildad and Zophar have on the inspiration of the Bible?

THE BOOK OF PSALMS (1)

Lesson Number 57

NOTE.—For this study read psalms i. to xli., noting how many are ascribed to David. Read them in the Revised Version, and appreciate the thought-parallels of their poetic form. Read each psalm through at least twice.

I wonder at the hardihood with which such persons undertake to talk about God. In a treatise addressed to infidels they begin with a chapter proving the existence of God from the works of Nature . . . this only gives their readers grounds for thinking that the proofs of our religion are very weak. . . . It is a remarkable fact that no canonical writer has ever used Nature to prove God.

—*Pascal.* "*Pensées,*" IV, 242, 243.

THE BOOK OF PSALMS (I)

WHAT words can adequately introduce this Book of Psalms to us? Who shall say how much it has meant to godly hearts down the years? Here is poetry which more than vies with that of Milton and Shakespeare, yet it is the poetry of downright reality; and, as "the body is more than the raiment," so here, the reality is greater than the poetry which expresses it. Here, too, is strong theology—not, however, any merely theoretic theology, but the practical theology of vivid human experience; and, as "the life is more than meat," so is concrete experience more than abstract doctrine. It is this, fundamentally, which has made the Book of Psalms such a treasure to the godly.

"Hymns to the gods of Greece have been preserved," says C. J. Ellicott, "but how vast is their difference from the Psalms! Let the reader compare one of those translated by Shelley, with any song out of the Psalter. Pretty compliments and well-turned flatteries intended to propitiate he will find, set, indeed, in melodious verse that celebrates the birth of gods and demi-gods; but no wrestling in prayer with tearful eyes and downcast head, and the full assurance of faith, such as has made the Psalms for all time the expression of the devotional feelings of men."

This Book of Psalms is a limpid lake which reflects every mood of man's changeful sky. It is a river of consolation which, though swollen with many tears, never fails to gladden the fainting. It is a garden of flowers which never lose their fragrance, though some of the roses have sharp thorns. It is a stringed instrument which registers every note of praise and prayer, of triumph and trouble, of gladness and sadness, of hope and fear, and unites them all in the full multi-chord of human experience.

John Calvin said: "This book I am wont to style an anatomy of all parts of the soul; for no one will discover in himself a single feeling whereof the image is not reflected in this mirror. Nay, all griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, anxieties—in short, all those tumultuous agitations wherewith the minds

of men are wont to be tossed—the Holy Ghost hath here represented to the life."

Spiritual Value

We may say, then, that the first great value of this Book of Psalms is that it provides for our emotions and feelings the same kind of guidance as the other Scriptures provide for our faith and actions. Ambrose of Milan said: "Although all Scripture breatheth the grace of God, yet sweet beyond all others is the Book of Psalms. History instructs, the Law teaches, Prophecy announces, rebukes, chastens, Morality persuades; but in the Book of Psalms we have the fruit of all these, and a kind of medicine for the salvation of men."

Ever since they were written, the Psalms have played a large part in the life of God's people. The old-time Hebrews used them in the temple worship; and the Jews of today still use them in the synagogue. The Christians of New Testament times sang them (as we see from Col. iii. 16, and Jas. v. 13); and all denominations of Christendom use them today.

But above all, they have ever been precious to the *individual.* In this Book of Psalms the tempted and tested gain fortitude from pilgrims of yesterday, whose feet have bled along the same thorny pathway. Here the suffering and sorrowing find a fellowship of sympathy which takes the bitterness out of their tears. Here the persecuted and the forsaken find reassurance in their time of need. Here the weeping penitent finds that which suits the broken and the contrite heart. Yea, here the Christian believer discerns the figure of His Lord, moving among the psalms of David as truly as among the seven golden candlestands of the Apocalypse. To all the godly these Psalms are an unmatched treasury of devotion, of comfort, of sympathy, and of gladdening reassurance. They are the sighings and singings of "men of like passions" with ourselves; yet the very breath of heaven is in them.

With the sixty-six books of the Bible before us, must we not reverently acknowledge that the Holy Spirit has vouchsafed to us no more precious bequeathment than this "Book of Psalms"?

The word "psalm" comes to us from the Greek word *psalmos* (plural, *psalmoi*), which meant "a poem to be sung to a stringed

instrument." It was in the third century B.C., in the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek, that this word *Psalmoi* was first used as the general title for this collection of Hebrew poems; and from there, per the Latin Vulgate, the name reappears in our English version.

This name is certainly appropriate, for many of these poems are undoubtedly *odes*, or poems written to be set to music, as is shown by the fact that fifty-five of them are addressed to "the chief musician," that is, to the choir-leader, or precentor, of the Hebrew religious worship. Many of them are *lyrics*, or poems expressing the individual emotions of the poet, and intended for accompaniment by the lyre or harp or "stringed instruments," as we see in those which have the word *Neginoth* attached to them. It is because of this that the Book of Psalms is known almost equally as well as the Psalter, from the Greek word *psalter*, that is, a harp or stringed instrument.

The usual Hebrew name for the book is *Tehillim*, which means "Praises." Another Hebrew title is *Tephiloth*, that is, "Prayers" —a title taken from such verses as psalm lxxii. 20, where we read: "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended." Neither of these titles, however, is strictly descriptive of all these poems, though taken both together they well express their spiritual nature, which our own title, "Psalms," fails to do. Still, seeing that both the praises and the prayers were poems to be set to song, we come back to the title "Psalms." Moreover, besides being equally applicable to all these poems, this title, "Psalms," is endorsed by New Testament usage (Luke xx. 42; Acts i. 20; xiii. 33).

Collection and Formation

The Book of Psalms is obviously a *collection*. The superscriptions in the Hebrew text ascribe seventy-three of them to David; twelve to Asaph, who was one of the heads of David's choir at Jerusalem (see 1 Chron. vi. 39; xv. 17, 19; xvi. 5; see also 2 Chron. xxix. 30); eleven to the sons of Korah, or rather twelve, since it is pretty clear that the superscription to psalm xlii. covers xliii. as well; one to Heman the Ezrahite; one to Ethan the Ezrahite; and one to Moses. This makes a total of exactly one hundred. The other fifty are left anonymous.

Either by a single editor or by several, these poems, written by different persons at different times, were brought together into one volume; and probably the formation of the collection was gradual. It is likely that a first collection of the Davidic psalms was made soon after David's death, that the Korahite group were added a little later, and the Asaph group still later, with a number of further, anonymous psalms; while probably Ezra the scribe had much to do with the bringing of them into their present arrangement.

They are in five groups, the end of each group being marked by a doxology, or special ascription of praise to God. These doxologies are not integral to the psalms at the end of which they occur, but are simply appended to mark off the group divisions.

The five groups are—(1) i.–xli.; (2) xlii.–lxxii.; (3) lxxiii.–lxxxix.; (4) xc.–cvi.; (5) cvii.–cl.

The first two groups are mainly Davidic; the third mainly Asaphian; the fourth mainly anonymous, or "orphan" psalms, as the Rabbis call those which lack inscriptions; and the fifth partly Davidic and partly anonymous.

It seems likely that the first group was collected by Solomon, the second group by the Korahite Levites, the third by Hezekiah, the fourth and fifth by Ezra and Nehemiah. Thus, the formation and completion of our "Book of Psalms" took over five hundred years.

A Poetic Pentateuch

The fivefold division of the Book of Psalms makes it a kind of poetic *Pentateuch.* From the time of Ezra downwards, and coinciding with the first appearing of synagogues among the now-scattered Jews, there arose a system of commenting upon and explaining the meaning of the Hebrew scriptures. This doubtless arose from the necessity of expounding the Hebrew Law to congregations of Jews in which many did not, or might not, understand the language in which it was read. At first the commentaries were merely oral and extempore; but later they became crystallised into definite form, and still later were made permanent in writing. When they assumed this definite and written shape they became known as the *Midrashim* (plural of *midrash,*

which means "investigation" or "interpretation"). Now the Midrash, or Jewish comment, on the first verse of the first psalm speaks of the fivefold division of the Psalms in these words: "Moses gave to the Israelites the five books of the Law, and as a counterpart to these, David gave them the Psalms, which consist of five books." In modern times, also, the Hebrew scholar Delitzsch, has said: "The Psalter is also a Pentateuch, the echo of the Mosaic Pentateuch, from the heart of Israel. It is the fivefold book of the congregation to Jehovah, as the Law is the fivefold book of Jehovah to the congregation."

There are those who have seen an even closer correspondence between the Book of Psalms and the Pentateuch, the five groups of the psalms corresponding in order, by affinity of subject, with Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The first group, corresponding with Genesis, has much to say about *man*. The second group, corresponding with Exodus, has much to say about *deliverance*. The third group, corresponding with Leviticus, has its emphasis in the Asaph psalms, upon the *sanctuary*. The fourth group, corresponding with Numbers, and beginning with Psalm xc., the prayer of Moses, stresses the time when unrest and wandering will cease in the coming worldwide kingdom when the nations shall bow to God's King. The fifth group, corresponding with Deuteronomy, has much of thanksgiving for the Divine faithfulness, and lays much emphasis upon the word of the Lord, as, for instance, in the longest of all the psalms, which has for its theme the written word of the Lord. We suggest to the student that here, at least, is a very interesting field for exploration.

Spiritual Message

The central spiritual message of this Book of Psalms may be said to be *PRAISE THROUGH PRAYER*. Again and again, in individual psalms, we see how sighing is turned into singing through praying; while if we take the book as a whole, we see this idea moving forward ever more definitely until the whole book is wound up in the five "Hallelujah" psalms with which it closes, each of which begins and ends with the exclamation, "*Praise ye the Lord!*"

It may help the eye if we now put down our findings thus far compactly, as follows:—

THE BOOK OF PSALMS

THE BOOK OF DEVOTION

PRAISE THROUGH PRAYER		
FIRST GROUP (i.–xli.)	Mainly Davidic	Suggests Genesis
SECOND GROUP (xlii.–lxxii.)	Mainly Davidic	,, Exodus
THIRD GROUP (lxxiii.–lxxxix.)	Mainly Asaphian	,, Leviticus
FOURTH GROUP (xc.–cvi.)	Mainly Anonymous	,, Numbers
FIFTH GROUP (cvii.–cl.)	Partly Davidic and partly anonymous	,, Deuteronomy

In our next lessons we shall consider together the inscriptions which go with the psalms, the different groups of psalms, and certain of the psalms in particular as being representative of the whole. Meanwhile, let us get this general outlay of the collection well in mind, thanking God for such a matchless treasury, and praying that the Holy Spirit may give us eyes to see wonderful things therein.

There are two opposite extremes which we should ever avoid in our study of the Bible. We should guard, on the one hand, against being *fanciful*, and seeing what is not there. We should guard, on the other hand, against being *mechanical*, and missing what is actually there in latent or hidden form. Some minds have an imaginative spiritualising faculty which tends to bring a magical streak into the Bible. Others are so suspicious of anything beyond the literal wording that the Scriptures can no more reveal their latent treasures than our Lord would say a single word to the inquisitive but gross-hearted king Herod. It is the precious function of the Holy Spirit to anoint our inward eyes that we may clearly see what is *really there* for us in the Word of God.

THE BOOK OF PSALMS (2)

Lesson Number 58

NOTE.—For this study read psalms xlii. to lxxii., noting again that they are mainly Davidic. Read them in the Revised Version. Note specially the doxology at the end of psalm lxxii. indicating the end of the second main group of psalms. Read each psalm twice.

The Word of God, notwithstanding its Divine origin and authorship, is also a human product, and to be studied as literature. It pleased God to use a book as the medium of His Self-Revelation, and human minds, tongues and pens as instruments of conception and expression. All this must qualify and modify the result, and makes needful to fix, as far as may be, the reasonable limits within which to subject such joint product of God's authorship and man's agency to reverent criticism as a form of literature.

—*Arthur T. Pierson, D.D.*

THE BOOK OF PSALMS (2)

PSALM INSCRIPTIONS

WHO, IN reading the psalms, has not been interested, and probably puzzled, by the inscriptions which are affixed to some of them? When were these inscriptions affixed? and what do the strange-sounding Hebrew words mean which occur in some of them? The matter of these inscriptions is a somewhat complex, yet singularly interesting one; and we ought to say a little about it here, because if we would appreciate to the full the force and beauty in some of the psalms, we need to appreciate the inscriptions which go with them.

First of all, let us reduce the seemingly complex part of the subject to simplicity. Of the one hundred and fifty psalms which make up the book, only *thirty-four* are without any title whatever. These are psalms i., ii., x., xxxiii., xliii., lxxi., xci., xciii., xciv., xcv., xcvi., xcvii., xcix., civ., cv., cvi., cvii., cxi., cxii., cxiii., cxiv., cxv., cxvi., cxvii., cxviii., cxix., cxxxv., cxxxvi., cxxxvii., cxlvi., cxlvii., cxlviii., cxlix., cl.

Next, there are *fifty-two* psalms with only meagre titles such as "A Psalm of David," "A Psalm of Asaph," "A Prayer of David," "A Psalm for Solomon," "A Psalm for the Sons of Korah." These are psalms xi., xiii., xiv., xv., xvii., xix., xx., xxi., xxiii., xxiv., xxv., xxvi., xxvii., xxviii., xxix., xxxi., xxxv., xxxvi., xxxvii., xl., xli., xlvii., xlviii., xlix., l., lxiv., lxv., lxvi., lxviii., lxxii., lxxiii., lxxix., lxxxii., lxxxiii., lxxxv., lxxxvi., lxxxvii., xc., xcviii., c., ci., ciii., cviii., cix., cx., cxxxviii., cxxxix., cxl., cxli., cxliii., cxliv., cxlv.

Next, there are *fourteen* psalms with inscriptions explaining their *historical connection*, such as "A Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom, his Son." These are psalms iii., vii., xviii., xxx., xxxiv., li., lii., liv., lvi., lvii., lix., lx., lxiii., cxlii.

Next, there are *thirty-nine* psalms which have what we can only call, at the moment, *special-word* inscriptions, such as, "A Song upon Alamoth," or "To the chief muscian, on *Neginoth*

upon *Sheminith.*" These are psalms iv., v., vi., vii., viii., ix., xii., xvi., xxii., xxxii., xxxix., xlii., xliv., xlv., xlvi., lii., liii., liv., lv., lvi., lvii., lviii., lix., lx., lxi., lxii., lxvii., lxix., lxxiv., lxxv., lxxvi., lxxvii., lxxviii., lxxx., lxxxi., lxxxiv., lxxxviii., lxxxix., cxlii. (But see our footnote on page 97.)

Next, there are *four* psalms which express *purpose*, such as "A Psalm or Song for the Sabbath day." These are psalms xxxviii., lxx., xcii., cii.

Next, there are *fifteen* psalms following consecutively upon each other, each bearing the title, "*A Song of Degrees.*" These are psalms cxx. to cxxxiv.

This, then, is how the one hundred and fifty psalms are made up—

Psalms without inscriptions	34
Psalms with simple inscriptions	52
Psalms with historical inscriptions	14
Psalms with inscriptions denoting purpose . . .	4
Psalms entitled "Songs of Degrees"	15
Psalms with special-word inscriptions—39 (less 8 of these which also bear *historical* inscriptions and are included with the 14 such given above)	31
	150

When were the Inscriptions Affixed?

The *antiquity* of the inscriptions attached to the psalms is undoubted. They were in existence when the Septuagint translation was made in the third century B.C., and must have been so for a good while *before* that, since the meaning of those which we have called "special-word" inscriptions had already by that time gradually become lost, as is evidenced by the fact that the Septuagint translators did not attempt to translate these words, but simply let them stand untranslated in the inscriptions. Their antiquity is thus thrown back easily to the fifth century B.C., that is, to the time of Ezra, who, it is generally agreed, made a recension, or revisal, of the Scriptures as existing in his day, and therefore had much to do with bringing the Book of Psalms into its present form. Are we then going to say that *Ezra* affixed

all or most of these psalm-inscriptions? I think not; especially in view of the fact that Hebrew lyrical compositions from earliest times have come down to us with inscriptions attached to them. What is more likely than that the psalm-inscriptions came down to Ezra along with the psalms themselves? Indeed, a detailed study of them reveals every likelihood of their having been a part of the primitive sacred text. That they were so is certainly our own belief.

A Puzzle—

This brings us to a matter of intriguing interest, namely, the *significance* of these inscriptions. It is an admitted fact that the key to them has been lost for over two thousand two hundred years. Bishop Jebb, who issued a monumental work on the Psalms, in 1846, regretted that "so great are the difficulties attending this enquiry, that in many instances little more than conjectures can be offered." The late Dr. E. W. Bullinger said: "No subject of Biblical study has appeared to be more incapable of solution." That great Hebraist, Franz Delitzsch, said of these so-called psalm "titles": "The Septuagint found them already in existence, and did not understand them. . . . The key to their comprehension must have been lost very early." Many other such quotations could be given. Some scholars, as, for instance, the late Bishop Perowne, resort to arguing that the titles are of no necessary authority, and are merely the expression of conjecture or tradition.

—and a Solution

But it may now be said with confidence that *the long-lost key has been discovered!*—and it so simply unlocks the psalm-inscriptions that one marvels at its having lain so long overlooked. When we go back to the ancient Hebrew manuscripts we find that there are no breaks or spaces separating the psalms from each other such as there are in our modern Bible. The only mark of division between them is the number in the margin. The inscriptions, therefore, which have always been more or less gratuitously assumed to be the titles of the psalms *following* them, might just as truly be footnotes to the psalms *preceding* them. Yet, strangely enough, the former has been so taken for granted that the latter has remained apparently unsuspected

until quite recently. It was at the beginning of the present century that the late Dr. James W. Thirtle, LL.D., found what is undoubtedly, in our own judgment, the key to the psalm-inscriptions, by asking whether, instead of being *super*-scriptions to the psalms which follow them, they might be *sub*-scriptions, either wholly or in part, to the psalms which precede them. Is there, anywhere outside the Book of Psalms, a psalm standing by itself from which we can learn what was the Hebrew practice in this connection? There is; and it is in the third chapter of the prophet Habakkuk. In that composition of Habakkuk we find—

1. The *Super*scription—"A Prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, upon *Shigionoth*" (verse 1).
2. The "Prayer," or Psalm, itself—from verses 2 to 19.
3. The *Sub*scription—"To the Chief Musician upon *Neginoth*."

We find the same three-fold arrangement in Isaiah xxxviii. 9–20, in king Hezekiah's Psalm of Praise and Thanksgiving for his recovery from sickness, as follows—

1. The *Superscription*—"The writing of Hezekiah, king of Judah, when he had been sick and was recovered of his sickness" (verse 9).
2. The "*Song*," or Psalm, itself—from verse 10 down to verse 20.
3. The *Sub*-scription—"Therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments, all the days of our life, in the house of Jehovah."

These two instances give the key to the inscriptions found in the Book of Psalms. As an outcome of the Babylonian Exile, detailed knowledge of the original temple worship became obscured; and by the middle or end of the third century B.C., when the Septuagint Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures was made into Greek, it had become quite lost. Since there was no space-break between the psalms, there was nothing to tell the Septuagint translators whether the inscriptions *between* some of them belonged to what went before or what came after; and, because *some* of them were almost certainly titles to what followed, the Septuagint translators erroneously assumed that *all* of them

were, with the result that all these inscriptions have been handed down, ever since, as psalm "titles," and now appear as such in our English Bible.

It is because of this that many readers of the psalms have noticed that some of these so-called "titles" have little or nothing to do with the psalms over which they stand; while some of our commentators venture the remark that certain of these titles actually seem more appropriate to the psalms which precede them than to those at the head of which they appear!

Inscriptions which need dividing

With the two instances of Habakkuk and Hezekiah before us, then, we shall find that in the case of those psalms which have titles, in our English version, many of these titles must be divided. The first part of the title must be treated as the *sub*-scription of the psalm which goes before; and the remaining words, such as, "A Psalm of David," will remain as the *super*-scription of the psalm which follows—just as the words, "A Prayer of Habakkuk," head the composition in Habakkuk iii.

As an example take psalms iv., v., and vi. In each case the first words of the title are not *really* a part of the title at all, but a sub-script to the psalm which goes before; and the simple title to each of these three psalms is: "A Psalm of David."

Now as soon as we get this key in our hands, the special words used in some of these sub-scripts light up with new significance.

Shoshannim and Gittith

Take the two words, *Shoshannim* and *Gittith*. The former means "lilies," and belongs at the end of psalms xliv. and lxviii. (not at the beginning of psalms xlv. and lxix., as in our English version). The latter means "wine-presses," and belongs at the end of psalms vii., lxxx., and lxxxiii. (not at the beginning of viii., lxxxi., and lxxxiv., as now in our Bible). The "lilies" speak of Springtime; and the "wine-presses" speak of Autumn; for the universal symbol of Spring is *flowers*, and that of the Autumn is *fruit*. Now the *first* of the annual sacred "feasts" in the Jewish calendar was the feast of the *Passover* which came in the *Spring*; while the last of these feasts was the feast of *Tabernacles*, which

came in the Autumn; and these psalms which bear the *Shoshannim* and *Gittith* sub-scripts are meant to be associated respectively with these two feasts. The Passover feast commemorated *redemption* and *deliverance*. The feast of Tabernacles commemorated the Divine *preservation* of Israel, when, after the deliverance from Egypt, God "made the children of Israel to dwell *safely* (the Hebrew form of the verb is emphatic) in booths" (Lev. xxiii. 43). Read these *Shoshannim* and *Gittith* psalms again now in the light of this, and see their relevance.

Muth-labben

But again, take the expression *Muth-labben*. In our English version it comes as the caption to psalm ix., thus—"To the Chief Musician upon *Muth-labben*. A Psalm of David," but we must divide this inscription so that the words, "To the Chief Musician upon *Muth-labben*," are sub-joined to psalm viii., leaving the simple title, "A Psalm of David," at the head of psalm ix.

What, then, does *Muth-labben* mean? All concur that *muth* means "death," and that *ben* is the Hebrew for "son"; so that the natural meaning of the compound term is, "Death of (or for) the son." But it is pointed out that *ben* may probably be *beyn*, written without the long vowel, the omission of the vowel sign being frequent in Hebrew; and in this case the expression *muth-labbeyn* would mean, "death to the one coming between." In fact, this is how the inscription reads in the ancient Jewish Targum—"To praise, relating to the death of the man who went out between the camps." Does that suggest anything? Why, of course, it suggests Goliath; for in 1 Samuel xvii., 4, 23, Goliath is actually called the "*man between the two hosts*," though we do not see this in our English version because the Hebrew term is translated as "a champion." Read psalm viii. again now in the light of this sub-script, and see in it the celebration of David's great victory over Goliath.

But for a fuller and most fascinating treatment of these psalm-inscriptions see Dr. James W. Thirtle's *The Titles of the Psalms*, and Dr. E. W. Bullinger's *The Chief Musician*. Having drawn attention to what we believe is the true key, we must here content ourselves by giving the following meanings of the special Hebrew words which are found in the different inscriptions.

Words	*Meanings*	*Where*
Aiieleth-Shahar	The hind of the morning (*meaning the day dawn*).	end of Ps. xxi.
Alamot	The singing maidens, or the maidens' choir.	end of Ps. xlv.
Al-Tashchith	Destroy not.	end of Pss. lvi., lvii., lviii., lxxiv.
Gittith	Winepresses.	end of Pss. vii., lxxx., lxxxiii.
Jeduthun (see footnote)	" Praise-giver "; name of one of the three Directors of Temple worship (1 Chron. xvi. 41, 42; xxv. 1–6; 2 Chron. v. 12).	end of Pss. xxxviii., lxi., lxxvi.
Jonath-Elem-Rechokim	The dove of the distant woods. (*Note: David is the dove, in flight from Absalom.*)	end of Ps. lv.
Mahalath (*should be M'choloth*)	The great Dancing.	end of Ps. lii.
Mahalath-Leannoth	Dancings with shoutings.	end of Ps. lxxxvii.
Maschi	Instruction, understanding.	Pss. xxxii., xlii., xliv., xlv., lii., liii., liv., lv., lxxiv., lxxviii., lxxxviii., xxxix., cxlii.
Michtam	Engraven (indicating emphasis and permanence).	Pss. xvi., lvi., lvii., lviii., lix., lx.
Muth-labben	Death of the Champion.	end of Ps. viii.
Neginoth	(*pl. of Neginah*) Stringed instruments.	end of Pss. iii., v., liii., liv., lx., lxvi., lxxv.
Nehiloth (*should be Nahaloth*)	Inheritances.	end of Ps. iv.
Sheminith	Probably the eighth group or division (*in the procession bringing back the Ark. See* 1 Chron. xxiv. 1, 5; xxvi. 1, 12).	end of Pss. v., xi.
Shiggaion	A crying aloud (*either of grief or joy*).	Ps. vii., title.
Shoshannim	Lilies.	end of Pss. xliv., lxviii.
Shoshannim-Eduth	(*also Shushan-Eduth*) Lilies of testimony.	end of Pss. lix., lxxix.

Note: As *Jeduthun* refers to a person, a Levite chief singer, perhaps our analysis on pages 91 and 92 should have placed the psalms addressed to him with the "meagre-titles" group rather than with those having "special-word" inscriptions.

THE BOOK OF PSALMS (3)

Lesson Number 59

NOTE.—For this study read psalms lxxiii. to lxxxix., and psalms cxx. to cxxiv., the latter group being the "Songs of Degrees." Use the Revised Version.

In the Old Testament we have an interpretation of human need; and the New Testament is a revelation of the Divine supply. In the Old we have unveilings of the human heart. In the New we have the unveiling of the heart of God, and the way in which He has answered humanity's need in Christ.

—*G. Campbell Morgan.*

THE BOOK OF PSALMS (3)

GROUPS OF PSALMS

WE CANNOT read thoughtfully through the Book of Psalms without observing that certain of the psalms fall into distinctive classes or *groups*. Although the psalms comprising any one of these groups may be irregularly separated from each other, they clearly belong together by similarity of subject-matter, or by some other distinguishing characteristic.

The Songs of Degrees

First we take that group of fifteen psalms known as the "Songs of Degrees." Unlike the other groups which we shall mention, these "Songs of Degrees" *do* run consecutively. They are psalms cxx. to cxxxiv. Each one of these psalms is entitled, "A Song of Degrees."

To what does this title refer? An old Jewish notion was that these fifteen psalms were so called because they were sung, each in order, on the fifteen steps of the Temple; but the difficulty is to prove that there ever *were* fifteen steps to the Temple!

Luther took the title as meaning "A Song in the higher choir," while Calvin thought it meant that these psalms were sung in a higher key. Bishop Jebb's idea was that these psalms were so called because they were sung in connection with the "going up" of the Ark to Mount Zion. Other outstanding scholars, taking the Hebrew word as meaning *ascents* rather than "degrees," have supposed that a gradation, or series of ascents, in the poetic parallelism of these psalms is indicated, in which each line of a parallel carries the meaning of its predecessor a degree further or an ascent higher; but the difficulty about this supposed explanation is that not all these fifteen psalms possess this feature, while *other* psalms, besides these fifteen, *do* have this feature! Others again have suggested that these fifteen psalms were associated with Israel's going up to the three annual feasts at Jerusalem; but as one scholar points out, the majority of these

psalms have, as it seems, "nothing at all" to do with pilgrimages! Yet again, the modern school makes all these psalms post-exilic, and says that they were songs of the exiles returning from the Babylonian captivity! Others spiritualise the psalms, and interpret them as referring to the Church; but the psalms themselves speak only of Israel, Judah, Jerusalem and Zion!

So there we are! Suggestions are plentiful; but does any one of those which we have mentioned commend itself as being the true explanation?

What, then, of these fifteen "Songs of Degrees"? Is there a really satisfactory solution? There is. Nor need we go outside the Bible, to Tradition or to the Fathers or to human ingenuity. The explanation, as Drs. Thirtle and Bullinger have shown, is inside the Bible itself.

The first thing to note is that the title, "A Song of Degrees," has the definite article, in the Hebrew, before that word "Degrees," and should therefore read: "A Song of *THE* Degrees." This at once suggests that certain well-known "degrees" are alluded to. Are there, then, any such mentioned in the Bible? There are: and they are the *only* "degrees" of which the Bible tells us. These were the degrees on the great sun-dial of King Ahaz, at Jerusalem. Like other such royal sun-dials of long-ago, the sun-dial of Ahaz would be an elaborate and conspicuous edifice, with its scores of steps mounting up like a long, straight stairway, to a considerable height, and on which, step by step, or degree by degree, the shadow would be registered from the gnomon.

Are we told anything special about this sun-dial of Ahaz? We are: something *very* special. It was on this sun-dial, in the reign of Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, that the shadow went back ten "degrees" or "steps," as a sign that fifteen years were to be added to Hezekiah's life! This supernatural happening is recorded in 2 Kings xx. 8–11 (which, please look up), where the word "degrees" is certainly given emphasis by repetition.

Is there any likelihood, then, that the "Songs of the Degrees" relate to Hezekiah and the degrees on the sun-dial of Ahaz? There is. To begin with, we know that Hezekiah was the godliest of Judah's kings (2 Kings xviii. 5, 6) and that he was just the man, considered from a spiritual point of view, to write such pieces as the "Songs of the Degrees." Secondly, we know that Hezekiah

was very interested in psalms and spiritual songs. It was he who restored the Temple worship (2 Chron. xxix.), taking great care that all was done "according to the commandment of David" (verse 25), and "with the instruments ordained by David" (verse 27), and "with the words of David" (verse 30).

It is generally agreed by scholars that Hezekiah had a large part in shaping the Book of Psalms into its present form; and we know that the same is also true of the Book of Proverbs (Prov. xxv. 1). But, thirdly, Hezekiah was himself a psalm-writer; for in Isaiah xxxviii., beginning at verse 9, we find one of the psalms which he wrote. What is still more striking is the reference, in that chapter, to a set of "songs" composed by Hezekiah. What "songs" could these be? It seems almost certain, from their connection, that they were the "Songs of Degrees" which now appear in our Book of Psalms; for in verse 9 we are told that the psalm there recorded was a "writing of Hezekiah, king of Judah, *when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness*" (the sickness in connection with which the shadow went back ten degrees: see verse 8); and at the end of that psalm Hezekiah says: "The Lord was ready to save me. Therefore we will sing *my songs* to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord" (verse 20).

Is still further evidence required? Then let us note that the number of the "Songs of the Degrees" is *fifteen*; and the number of the years which were added to Hezekiah's life is also *fifteen*. The shadow went back *ten* degrees on the sun-dial; and *ten* of the "Songs of the Degrees" are left anonymous, while the remaining five are *not* left so, four being attributed to David, and one to Solomon. Reasons are not lacking why Hezekiah should leave the ten by himself without name. A proper sense of humility would be enough, apart from anything else; and it may be that since the "songs" were known quite well to be Hezekiah's, the putting of his name with them was deemed to be quite unnecessary. It went without saying that they were his. He himself spoke of them as "*MY* Songs"—as though, even then, they were already well-known.

That they were carefully *arranged* into their present order is clear. There are five groups of three psalms each. In each group two are by Hezekiah, and one by David or Solomon. In each

trio the first psalm is one of *trouble*; the second, one of *trust*; and third, one of *triumph.*

But, added to all that we have said, the completing evidence that these fifteen "Songs of the Degrees" did indeed relate to Hezekiah and the degrees on the sun-dial, is the correspondence between their contents and the historical account, in Kings and Chronicles, of Hezekiah's illness and the siege of Jerusalem at that time by the Assyrian king. This, however, is a study all in itself; and we must leave the interested student to consult Bullinger's book, *The Chief Musician*, or, better still, to trace out the correspondence independently.

The Messianic Psalms

Running through the Book of Psalms there is a remarkable prophetic element; and many of the psalms can never be worthily appreciated apart from a recognition of this. The New Testament warrants our speaking so, for not only is the Book of Psalms quoted more frequently in the New Testament than any other book of the Old Testament, but most of the quotations from it are on prophetic lines.

The most noteworthy feature about this prophetic content of the psalms is found in what are known as the *Messianic* psalms —psalms, that is, which, besides having a real reference to the time in which they were written, have their ultimate explanation and fulfilment in Christ.

Three themes are covered by the prophetic psalms—(1) the humiliation and exaltation of the Messiah; (2) the sorrows and eventual deliverance of Israel; (3) the future blessing of all the nations through Israel's reigning Messiah.

The principal Messianic psalms are: ii., viii., xvi., xxii., xxiii., xxiv., xl., xli., xlv., lxviii., lxix., lxxii., lxxxvii., lxxxix., cii., cx., cxviii. In these and others we have Christ's birth, betrayal, agony, death, resurrection, ascension, coming again in glory, and world-wide reign, all pictured with inspired vividness. It has been observed that there are more prophetic statements on this theme of themes in the psalms "than in the Book of Isaiah or in any of the other prophetic books."

Here, in these psalms, we find some of our Lord's prayers

pre-written, and some of the very expressions by which He vented His sufferings, not to mention other adumbrations of His humiliation which are found over and over again. Quite apart from anything else, these Messianic psalms, when read in the light of the New Testament, constitute an unanswerable testimony to the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures.

Take psalm xxii. for instance. Could there be a more amazing fore-enactment of our Lord's death on the Cross than we find described in this psalm? It opens with the very words which our Lord used in the fourth of His seven utterances from the Cross—"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Through the human writer of this psalm the pre-incarnate Christ Himself actually speaks as though He were already on that never-to-be-forgotten Cross. He speaks of Himself, in the first person, as "despised" and "scorned" and taunted by the words, "He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver Him: let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him"—and these are some of the very words used at Calvary by the Jewish leaders, who certainly did not obligingly express themselves thus in order to effect the artificial fulfilment of a prophecy which was written against themselves! Perhaps most astounding of all, the psalm goes on to say: "The assembly of the wicked have enclosed Me: they pierced My hands and My feet. I may tell all My bones: they (the wicked) look and stare upon Me. They part My garments among them, and cast lots upon My vesture." When we remember that these words were written hundreds of years before our Lord's incarnation, and that death by crucifixion was then a thing unknown (being introduced later by the Romans), we cannot but wonder at the psalmist's language here, about the piercing of the hands and feet. He is a strangely blind reader of the psalms who can only see here the human David describing some unheard-of experience in his own life; for David was never reduced to the crucifixion-extremity portrayed in this psalm; and besides this, as we well know, the parting of the garments, and the gambling away of the vesture, were literally fulfilled while our Saviour was hanging on the Cross!

Take psalm lxxii. Its title is simply "A Psalm for (or concerning) Solomon"; but we cannot read it discerningly without exclaiming: "A greater than Solomon is here!" It paints in rich colours the glories of Messiah's kingdom. In an earlier study we have seen

how God's covenant with David concerning his "son" was to have a primary fulfilment in Solomon, and its ultimate fulfilment in Christ (see on 2 Sam. vii.). Agreeing with this, we find that in this seventy-second psalm the blessings of Solomon's reign are sublimated into a prophetic picture of the coming kingdom under Christ. Note the four great facts about it:

1. Its character—"righteousness" (verses 2–7).
2. Its extent—"to the ends of the earth" (verses 8–11).
3. Its prosperity—"abundance" (verse 16. See R.V.).
4. Its duration—"as long as the sun" (verse 17).

These Messianic psalms are a rich study in their varied witness to Christ. They witness to His *person*, as the Son of God (ii. 7; xlv. 6, 7; cii. 25–7); as the Son of man (viii. 4–6, etc.); and as the Son of David (lxxxix. 3, 4, 27, 29). They witness to His *offices*, as Prophet (xxii. 22, 25; xl. 9, 10); as Priest (cx. 4); as King (ii., xxiv., etc.). It is to be noted that such references as psalms xlv. 6, 7, and cii. 25–7 carry the implication of our Lord's essential deity, especially so in the light of Hebrews i. 8–14. In the Messianic psalms, then, we have a treasure of pure gold.

Other Psalm-groups

We ought just to note two or three other groups of psalms. There are the *Hallelujah* psalms, of which there are ten, and they are psalms cvi., cxi., cxii., cxiii., cxxxv., and cxlvi. to cl. The special characteristic of these is that each of them begins with the expression "Hallelu-Jah" (given in our English Version as "Praise ye the Lord"); and all but two of them (cxi. and cxii.) also *end* with "Hallelu-Jah." This expression of praise occupied a place as a choral refrain in Hebrew worship corresponding with the *Gloria Patria* of Christian worship.

Then there are the *Penitential* psalms. These are seven in number—psalms vi., xxxii., xxxviii., xxxix., li., cii., cxliii.—though, of course, there are lesser penitential passages in other psalms besides these.

Then there are pairs and trios and smaller groups which go together by reason of their *complementariness to each other*. Take psalms xxii., xxiii., and xxiv. These make a trinity in unity.

Psalm xxii. is the psalm of the *suffering Saviour.* Psalm xxiii. is the psalm of the *living Shepherd.* Psalm xxiv. is the psalm of the *exalted Sovereign.* In these three psalms we have the Cross, the Crook, and the Crown! Further: these three psalms strikingly correspond with the three outstanding New Testament references to our Lord's "shepherd" work. In John x. He is the *"good"* Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep—*as in Psalm xxii.* In Hebrews xiii. 20, 21, He is the *"great"* Shepherd, who, being brought again from the dead, perfects that which concerns His flock—*as in psalm xxiii.* In 1 Peter v. 4, He is the *"chief"* Shepherd, who is to reappear in glory, bringing crowns of reward—*and going with psalm xxiv.* Thus, in psalms xxii., xxiii., and xxiv. we have the "good," the "great" and the "chief" Shepherd —a sublimely beautiful, triune forepicturing of the Lord Jesus as the true Shepherd of His people.

Take psalms xlvi., xlvii., and xlviii. These are not usually included with the Messianic psalms, yet knowing the latent prophetic import of the Psalter it is easy to see in these three psalms a striking triple foreview of the Messianic reign which is yet to be. In psalm xlvi. we have the *coming* of the kingdom—through great tribulation. In psalm xlvii. we have the *range* of the kingdom—even "all the earth." In psalm xlviii. we have the *centre* of the kingdom—even Zion, the "city of our God." Look up these three psalms, and see whether these things be so or not.

Or take psalms xc. and xci. The former is attributed to Moses, and the latter is presumed to be from the same hand. These two great poems make a wonderful exposition of Moses' parting words, in Deuteronomy xxxiii. 27—"The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." In psalm xc. we have the "eternal God"; and in psalm xci. we have the "everlasting arms." Further examples might be given, but the above will suffice to show what highways and byways of pleasant and instructive discovery lie everywhere around us in this peerless Book of the Psalms.

We recall the advice of an old preacher to a young friend just starting in the ministry. "My young brother, if you would have your spiritual life rich, and your preaching powerful, learn well the psalms of David and the epistles of Paul."

THE BOOK OF PSALMS (4)

Lesson Number 60

NOTE.—Read now psalms xc. to cxix. Mark the doxology at the end of psalm cvi., indicating the break between the fourth and fifth main groups of the psalms.

Love can forbear, and Love can forgive . . . but Love can never be reconciled to an unlovely object. . . . He can never therefore be reconciled to your sin, because sin itself is incapable of being altered; but He may be reconciled to your person, because that may be restored.

—*Traherne, "Centuries of Meditation,"* II, 30.

THE BOOK OF PSALMS (4)

The Imprecatory Psalms

HERE and there in the Psalter, like jagged thorns in a chain of roses, there occur certain psalms which express vehement anger and imprecation against enemies and evil-doers. These are known as the "Imprecatory Psalms." There are also occasional shorter passages of a similar nature elsewhere in the psalms. These imprecatory psalms and passages have been a sore perplexity to many a reader. The imprecatory psalms are xxxv., lviii., lix. lxix., lxxxiii., cix., cxxxvii. The lesser passages are: v. 10; vi. 10; xxviii. 4; xxxi. 17, 18; xl. 14, 15; xli. 10; lv. 9 and 15; lxx. 2, 3; lxxi. 13; lxxix. 6 and 12; cxxix. 5–8; cxl. 9, 10; cxli. 10; cxlix. 7–9. To some minds, these imprecatory psalms and passages are perhaps a more difficult obstacle than any other in the way of a settled confidence in the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures. What then shall we say about them?

First of all, we shall not hesitate to say that, for our own part, we have never found these psalms and passages to be the difficulty which they are supposed to be. We may be thought hard or superficial or both, by a certain type of mind, for saying this so unhesitatingly: but we are not in the least perturbed by that; for, having thoughtfully pondered the circumstances, we are persuaded that it is the objection itself which is superficial, being mainly the expression of sentiment rather than of sound logic and careful reasoning. Let us briefly analyse the objection, and seek an answer.

There seem to be four elements in the objection. These imprecatory psalms are said to be (1) contrary to the higher feelings of human nature, such as the common sentiments of compassion within us; (2) against the dictates of even natural religion, which shows us that God sends His rain upon both the just and the unjust, and does good to the worst of men; (3) utterly contrary to the teaching and spirit of the New Testament, which teaches love to enemies and forgiveness of injuries; (4) inconsistent with the psalmists' own profession of ardent trust in God.

Certain supposed explanations of these psalms have been put forward which, in our own judgment, would have been better left unsaid. For instance, it has been argued that many of the passages which, in our English version, express imprecatory desire are in the future tense in the Hebrew, and should therefore be translated simply as declaring what will happen, and not what the psalmist *wishes* or prays might happen. But this argument offers no solution of those other passages where the verb is in the imperative, such as psalm lv. 9—"Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues." Nor does it cancel out such statements as "Happy shall he be who taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones!" Quite apart from other weaknesses, therefore, *this* argument is obviously inadequate.

Again, it has been argued that these imprecatory sentiments are peculiar to the old dispensation. This argument, however, while it attempts to limit the difficulty, certainly does not remove it; for what is essentially bad at one period must be so always. Moreover, under the old dispensation, God emphatically inculcated kindness, not only to widows and orphans, but to the stranger, and the Egyptian, and the slave who was of foreign birth. Moreover, the attitude found in the imprecatory psalms is also found in the New Testament; as, for instance, in Paul's words: "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil. The Lord reward him according to his works!" (2 Tim. iv. 14). See, also, for a most solemn execration, Galations i. 8, 9.

Yet again, it has been argued that the imprecations in the psalms only call down *temporal* calamities, and not such as affect the soul in the beyond. We are relieved to find that this certainly seems to be so; yet the *principle* remains the same whether the anathemas relate to the present life only or to the hereafter. If the *attitude* expressed in the imprecatory psalms is wrong, then it is wrong whatever the imprecations themselves may be: and that is the real difficulty.

Can we, then, justify these imprecatory psalms and passages without resorting to artificial "explanations"? I think we can. There are certain facts concerning them which seem to have been either overlooked or insufficiently emphasised, and which we ought to note at the outset.

First: it seems to be a fairly well-established principle of Scripture interpretation that the first mention of any given

subject provides the key to all that is afterwards said about it. Many instances of this could be given did space permit. Now as it is with other classes of texts in the Scriptures, so here, the first of these imprecatory verses gives the key to all those that follow. It is psalm v. 10, where David says: "Destroy Thou them, O God; let them fall by their own counsels. Cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions; for they have rebelled against Thee." The imprecation here is against rebellious transgressors; and it is against them solely *because* they are such, as we see from the last clause—"for (or because) they have rebelled against Thee." In other words, the imprecation is against ungodly wicked-doers *as such*. David's words here are those of a man who sees sin in its real nature as rebellion against God. They are the words of a man who has identified himself with God against sin, and who hates sin because God hates it. It is the attitude crystallised in psalm cxxxix.—"Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against Thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies."

This, we repeat, is the attitude in the first of the imprecatory verses; and it is important to grasp this, for it at once clears the psalmist's *motive*. It is not, like many other human imprecations, the evil wish of a bad man against a good man whose goodness condemns him. Nor is it the evil wish of an ambitious man against some other, either bad or good, who stands in his way. It has nothing to do with jealousy or spite or ambition. The imprecation is not against these men simply as men, *but as evil-doers*. Now a careful examination of all the imprecatory passages shows that two thirds of them are specifically against evil-doers as such; and even in the remainder the same motive seems to be there by implication. While we are far from saying that this fact alone clears up these imprecatory passages, we stress its initial importance as at any rate clearing their *motive*.

Another fact which should be noted is, that out of the twenty-one instances of imprecation which we have cited, sixteen are from David, who, be it remembered, was a *theocratic* king. Unlike Saul, David ever had a keen sense of theocratic responsibility. This reveals itself in the fact that, despite personal delinquencies, he never set himself above the Law or tried to pervert it to his own use. As a theocratic king, he knew that he was anointed

by *God*, that he ruled *for* God, and that he was directly *responsible* to God. In an earlier study (on 1 Kings ii.) we have seen how, on his very death-bed, David, conscious of this theocratic responsibility, charged Solomon to inflict punishment on certain wrong-doers whom he himself had neglected to punish earlier: and this death-bed charge to Solomon parallels with the imprecatory verses in the Davidic psalms. In these verses, David is speaking out of the consciousness of his theocratic kingship. Those who were fighting him, betraying him, contriving his downfall, were assaulting *God*; for he, David, was *Jehovah's anointed*! There are many indications of this in the Davidic psalms; but to pick out two or three such from the imprecatory psalms themselves, we would point to psalms lix. 11 and lxix. 6 and xl. 9, 10. While again we are far from saying that this fact alone clears up these imprecatory passages, we stress its importance as making clear their *standpoint*, which is not merely personal but theocratic. These Davidic imprecations are uttered from the standpoint of public justice and not of private vengeance.

As for the five imprecatory passages which are *not* Davidic, these are in each case *national* and not personal. They are psalms lxxxiii.; cxxxvii.; lxxix. 6 and 12; cxxix. 5–8, cxlix. 7–9.

Yet another fact which should be carefully noted about these imprecatory passages is one which concerns the *spirit* in which they were written. It is asked: "Why did not the psalmist show a spirit of kindness to those who were maltreating him?" The answer is that he had *already done so*, and it had been abused. Here and there in the imprecatory psalms we come across such words as, "They rewarded me evil for good"; "I restored that which I took not away"; "They have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love" (xxxv. 12; lxix. 4; cix. 5).

There are many people who seem incapable of distinguishing between *forgiving* and *condoning*. It is Christian and beautiful to forgive acts of wrong against oneself; but when forgiveness is taken advantage of, and wrong-doing impenitently persisted in, continued forgiving degenerates into the *condoning* of that which calls for condemnation. We should distinguish between forgiving a wrong *act* and condoning a wrong *attitude*. Some years ago I witnessed the reunion of a husband and wife, after a separation of eighteen years due to the husband's immorality. It was beautiful to see the wife's forgiveness of the husband's

wrongs. A little later, however, it was found that the evil-minded fellow was still hypocritically continuing in his immoral ways while simultaneously professing ardent love for the woman whose life he had already so cruelly blighted. What was the Christian thing for that wife to do? To condone such vile sin? Is any passage in the imprecatory psalms too strong for such behaviour? This distinction between forgiving and condoning ought to be borne in mind in the reading of the imprecatory psalms. While once again this does not clear up the whole difficulty of these imprecatory psalms, it is important as justifying their *spirit.*

Surely, then, it is true to say that at least there are reasonable grounds on which we may sympathetically appreciate the *motive,* and the *standpoint,* and the *spirit* of the so-called "imprecatory" psalms. This prepares us for what, in our own judgment, is decisive in their favour.

Having in mind their motive, standpoint, and spirit, we honestly believe that they are fundamentally in accord with the truest and highest instincts of human nature, and with the teachings of Christianity.

There are certain crimes which by their very extremeness call forth the intense indignation of all right-thinking men and women. The dastardly outrages committed by such monsters as Ahab, Herod, Xerxes I, Antiochus Epiphanes, Nero, the Fouquier Tinvilles and the Carriers of the French Revolution—can any normal-minded man or woman read of such outrages without experiencing reactions of vehement condemnation and imprecation? The revolting circumstances and diabolical cruelty of Hitler's recent persecution of the Jews; the gloating savagery of the Nazis in systematically dive-bombing and machine-gunning the helpless and unoffending women and children of Belgium and France; their sickening brutality in purposely mangling the bodies of terror-stricken refugees beneath the iron rollers of their tanks; their fiendishly destructive spite against cities like Belgrade; their inhuman hardness in gunning life-boats, and hospital ships, and even wrecked seamen struggling for very life in the water; their organised lying and treachery and murderous trickery—can we think of these diabolical atrocities without experiencing, not only revulsion, but an instinctive upflaming of intense indignation and imprecation? Is it to be wondered at that when the Nazis utterly scorned all humanitarian considerations

and persisted in their calculated cruelty to defenceless civilians, the people of Britain were gradually exasperated to cry out that the cities of Germany should be given a dosing of the same sort of suffering (thus echoing the very sentiment of Psalm cxxxvii.)? Such misdeeds as those which I have mentioned, whether long past or recent, shock the innate moral sense of human nature in a way which no lapse of time diminishes. Common conscience demands reparation. We feel that if such deeds were to go unpunished the moral constitution of the very universe would be violated; and we are relieved when we hear that retribution has been inflicted.

Such a reaction, we affirm, is native to our very nature; and nothing so clearly shows it to be so than to analyse it. A first constituent in it is an intuitive *anger* against the wrong—not merely the sort of mental disapproval which comes after reflection and reasoning, but a spontaneous upsurge of protestation which is as instinctive as it is instantaneous. A second ingredient is that of *sympathy*—immediate sympathy with the victim or victims of such cruelties. By our very nature we side at once with the injured party. And again there is a perturbing consciousness of *desire*—a desire springing from that sense of justice which is inherent in our moral constitution, that righteous retribution shall square things out. This is no mere cry for revenge, for the ill-deed may not have been against ourselves. Nor is it a shortlived emotion, for reflection only serves to confirm it. Even if we ourselves are the doers of the wrong we experience this; for while on the one hand we may seek to avoid the pain of the penalty, we long, on the other hand, for the mental relief which comes of knowing that the penalty has been borne.

Argue as we will, this imprecatory reaction against outstanding wrongs springs from what has been called "an original principle of our nature." The same feelings, at least in kind, are aroused whether the perpetrator is someone who lives today or someone who lived centuries ago, whether he lives in our own locality or away at the antipodes; and this at once proves that the imprecatory reaction does not spring merely from any personal malice toward the wrong-doer.

How this bears on the imprecatory psalms will be obvious. That which is an irrepressible instinct of our moral nature we cannot pronounce to be wrong without impugning the God who

made us. And if such imprecation against blatant atrocities or vile outrages springs from our native instincts and feelings, may there not be circumstances in which it is right to *express* it by lip or pen? We know of at least one thoughtful man whose qualms about the imprecatory psalms have been forever cured by his own native reaction to the atrocities committed by the Nazis, for he found himself venting his sheer indignation in terms equally forcible as those in the imprecatory psalms! He now knows, by the teaching of his own moral constitution, whether it is right or not to feel and to express imprecation against such wrong-doers! Let anyone without prejudice examine the circumstances which called forth, or are thought to have called forth, the sterner imprecations found in the psalms, and there will be found nothing in them which contravenes either the truest instincts of human nature or the teachings of Christianity.

But there is something else to be added which puts these imprecatory psalms in an altogether new light. Careful examination shows that there is a supernatural *predictive* element in them. This prophetic seal settles it that they are Divinely inspired. The late Dean Farrar, who, with remarkable literary brilliance, popularised many rash ideas about the Scriptures, contemptuously sneered, "Can the casuistry be anything but gross which would palm off such passages as the very utterance of God?" But though canons to the right of us and deans to the left of us volley and thunder their doubts, it still remains that the seal of prophecy is the seal of *God*. Read carefully the following words of the late Bishop William Alexander:

"It may be plausible to deny, not without bitter indignation, the Messianic application of the 110th psalm, or the subjectively Messianic character of the 69th or 109th psalm, on the ground that imprecation can never issue from those gentle lips; that images of war and carnage have nothing in common with the Messiah of the New Testament. Yet, after all, who uttered the sentence, 'Those Mine enemies who would not that I should reign over them, bring hither and slay before Me'? Who is to say, 'Depart from Me, ye cursed,' 'Depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity,' in the words of the 69th psalm?

"No passage in the Psalms has given more offence than that which comes at the close of the tender 'Super flumina' (By the rivers of Babylon):

"'O daughter of Babylon! who art to be destroyed,
Happy he who shall reward thee as thou hast rewarded us;
Happy he who will take and dash thy babes against the rock.'

"But for the attentive student, the doom of Babylon hangs in the air of prophecy. We close the Psalter for a time, and after many days, as we draw near to the end of the whole volume of revelation, we are startled by a new echo of the words in the old 137th psalm, 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen. *Reward her even as she rewarded you;* and double unto her double according to her works.'"

Yes, after all these centuries there is still a remaining prophetic significance in the words, relating to something even yet to happen. But even if we hark back to the long-ago fall of the actual ancient Babylon, we find that there was a startling fulfilment of the strangely prophetic import of the psalmist's words; for, as things eventuated, such were the terrible doings at the overthrow of Babylon, that he would have been a kind friend, truly enough, who had dashed the little ones against the rock and thus saved them from a fate even worse! Bishop Alexander aptly adds: "Unless it is wrong and incredible that God should punish terribly, it is not wrong or incredible that His Son should give warning of it in the most vivid and impressive way." Let it never be forgotten, then, that there is this prophetic strain latently present in the so-called imprecatory psalms; and let it never be forgotten that whatever men may think or say, the prophetic seal on Scripture is the seal of God Himself.

To sum up: The imprecatory psalms are sound in their *motive*, in their *standpoint*, in their *spirit*. They express a constitutional moral sense of human nature, and not an individual desire for revenge. The supernatural predictive element in them seals them as genuinely inspired. There are also passages in the New Testament which fully correspond. We therefore deduce that objections to these psalms arise from the sentimental susceptibilities of human nature rather than from logical reasoning. But when sentiment disagrees with sound logic, sentiment is wrong and must be firmly restrained.

THE BOOK OF PSALMS (5)

Lesson Number 61

NOTE.—Before this final study in the Psalms read psalms cxx. to cl. Use the Revised Version. Read each psalm twice. Study carefully psalm cxxxix. along with our notes on it in this study.

Compared with this, how poor religion's pride,
In all the pomp of method, and of art,
When men display to congregations wide
Devotion's every grace, except the heart!
The Power, incensed, the pageant will desert,
The pompous strain, the sacerdotal stole:
But, haply, in some cottage far apart,
May hear, well pleased, the language of the soul;
And in His book of life the inmates poor enrol.

—*Robert Burns, "The Cotter's Saturday Night."*

THE BOOK OF PSALMS (5)

Individual Psalms

BEFORE we leave this Book of Psalms we ought just to glance at a few of the psalms separately. Not only do many readers fail to appreciate the glorious poetry of the psalms, as we have lamented in an earlier lesson, but they also read them too casually to perceive the structural beauty which many of them possess.

Psalm cxxxix.

Turn to psalm cxxxix. Here is a poem the literary excellence of which is only equalled by the majesty and sublimity of its spiritual message. Far from being a mere string of loosely connected verses, it is a methodically constructed composition. This may be traced quite easily even in our Authorised Version, although it does not set out the psalm in its poetic form. The twenty-four verses of the psalm run in four strophes of six verses each. In the first six verses we have the Divine *omniscience.* In the second six we have the Divine *omnipresence.* In the third six we have the Divine *omnipotence.* In the final six we have the psalmist's reaction to these lofty considerations, ending with an earnest prayer; for his contemplation of the Divine attributes brings him to his knees in adoration and fervent entreaty.

Take the first six verses on the Divine *omniscience.* The first verse reads: "O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known. . . ." There is some kind of ellipsis here in the original. Instead of filling it with the pronoun "me," as in our English versions, perhaps we ought to read it: "O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known my heart." This makes a true parallel between the opening sentence of the psalm and its closing prayer—"Search *me*, O God, and know *my heart.*" It is not indispensable to read the first verse thus in order to see the development in these first six verses, but it brings out even more clearly their sequence and completeness, speaking, as they do, of heart, thoughts, actions, and words. These verses, then, tell us that the omniscient God knows—

MY HEART—"O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known my heart" (verse 1).

MY THOUGHTS—"Thou understandest my thought afar off" (verse 2).

MY ACTIONS—"Thou . . . art acquainted with all my ways" (verse 3).

MY WORDS—"Not a word in my tongue, but Thou knowest it altogether" (verse 4).

This covers the whole moral man, the whole of our inner and outer life. The Divine omniscience is here viewed, not as a mere theological or philosophical abstraction, but as an arresting reality bearing upon our whole individual life and being. It is not surprising that in verses 5 and 6 the inspired poet, subdued to reverent wonder, should add: "Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me: it is high, I cannot attain unto it."

And now read the *second* strophe, covering the second group of six verses. Here we have the Divine *omnipresence*; and it is expressed in five extremes. First there is the extreme of *height*: "If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there" (verse 8). Next there is the extreme of *depth*: "If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there!" (verse 8). Note David's exclamation of surprise, his "behold!" that God is in the depth of Sheol as well as in the height of heaven. Next come the two extremes of *east* and *west*: "If I take the wings of the morning"—a poetic reference to the sunrise, and therefore to the east; "or dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea"—a reference to the Mediterranean Sea, and therefore to the west; "even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me" (verses 9, 10). Finally comes the extreme of *darkness*: "If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me" (verse 11). Note the emphasis here—"If I say *surely* the darkness shall cover me." Dense darkness is considered the surest of all coverings. Wherever a man may hide in the daylight, he can be seen if any should chance that way; but the darkness is such a screen as no mortal eye can see through. Height, depth, east, west, light, darkness—God is present in them all.

And now read the *third* strophe, covering the third group of

six verses. Here we have the Divine *omnipotence* (verses 13–18). Here the royal poet speaks with delicate skill concerning the mystery of human birth and life, beholding in man the crown of creative achievement, and at the same time the evidence of the Divine omnipotence. We must leave these verses to the student's private reading. They express with striking vividness the marvel of the human constitution. The complexity, delicacy, intricacy, and exquisite mechanism of the human system are such as inspire the psalmist with a sense of awe, in which he would have ourselves also join. As we ponder the power, the thought, the love, the care, which God exercises toward man, toward men as individuals, toward each of ourselves, do we not find ourselves joining with David in the words by which he closes this third strophe?—"How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand. When I awake I am still with Thee."

And now read the *final* six verses of the psalm. David has reflected on the Divine attributes of omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence; he has recognised the *spirituality* of God (verse 7), the *love* of God (verse 17), and now he reflects on the *holiness* of God (verse 19), which, translated more literally, reads: "Oh, if thou wouldst smite the wicked, O God! (Ye men of violence depart from me!) for they rebel against Thee with wicked deeds, and lift up against Thee vainly." Such a view of God as David has had means a clean break with sin. Hence his strong words here against sin in others and his intense concern about sin in himself: and hence the prayer with which the psalm closes. David's contemplation of God has brought him to his knees in prayer. So should it be with each of ourselves. However, what we are particularly concerned with just here is the structural beauty of this grand psalm; and perhaps we have said sufficient to exhibit at least something of this.

Psalm xxiii.

Turn now to another favourite psalm, the twenty-third. The opening words, "I shall not want" are the key to the whole. The Prayer Book version brings out the full force—"The Lord is my shepherd, therefore can I *lack nothing*." Unlock the verses of

this psalm with this key, and how beautifully do they open up to us! "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures"—so I shall not lack *provision.* "He leadeth me beside the still waters" —so I shall not lack *peace.* "He restoreth my soul"—so I shall not lack *restoration* if I faint or fail. "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness"—I shall not lack *guidance.* "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil"—I shall not lack *courage* in the dark hour. "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me"—so I shall not lack true *comfort.* "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies"—I shall not lack *protection, preservation, and honour.* "Thou anointest my head with oil"—I shall never lack *joy,* of which the oil is a symbol. "My cup runneth over"—I shall never lack fulness of *blessing.* "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life"—I shall not lack the Divine *favour* as long as I live on earth. "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever"—I shall not lack a *heavenly home* when my earthly journeyings are done.

This twenty-third psalm begins, "The Lord is my shepherd." The little copula, "is," does not come in the Hebrew. That is why it is put in italics in our Authorised Version. The Hebrew simply says: "Jehovah my shepherd." Should not the words be read as an exclamation of joyous discovery?—"Jehovah—my Shepherd!" This exclamation, in the Hebrew, is *Jehovah-raah,* and this is very significant. In the Old Testament we find seven instances of compound Jehovistic titles. They are as follows:

Jehovah-jireh—"The Lord will provide" (Gen. xxii. 13–14).
Jehovah-rapha—"The Lord that healeth" (Exod. xv. 26).
Jehovah-shalom—"The Lord our peace" (Judges vi. 24).
Jehovah-tsidkenu—"The Lord our righteousness" (Jer. xxiii. 6).
Jehovah-shammah—"The Lord ever-present" (Ezek. xlviii. 35).
Jehovah-nissi—"The Lord our banner" (Exod. xvii. 8–15).
Jehovah-raah—"The Lord my shepherd" (Ps. xxiii. 1).

It is an impressive fact that all these seven wonderful Divine provisions which are indicated in these seven compound Jehovistic names are gathered up in this twenty-third psalm.

Jehovah-jireh (The Lord will provide)—"I shall lack nothing";
Jehovah-rapha (The Lord that healeth)—"He restoreth my soul";

Jehovah-shalom (The Lord our peace)—"He leadeth me beside the still waters";
Jehovah-tsidkenu (The Lord our righteousness)—"He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness";
Jehovah-shammah (The Lord ever-present)—"I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me";
Jehovah-nissi (The Lord our banner)—"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies";
Jehovah-raah (The Lord my shepherd)—"The Lord is my Shepherd."

Other Examples

To close with, here are a few further examples, given more briefly.

Take psalm xlv. This psalm is a Royal Marriage Hymn. Its title is: "A Song of Loves"; and, as we shall see later, it is the Scripture key which unlocks to us the mystic meaning of the Song of Solomon. The first chapter of the Hebrews epistle tells us, also, that this psalm has reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. The psalm has three parts to it—(1) a brief exordium or preface —verse 1; (2) an Address to the royal bridegroom—verses 2 to 9; (3) an Address to the royal bride—verses 10 to 17. In the address to the royal bridegroom we have four sub-divisions—(*a*) in verse 2, the beauty of his person; (*b*) in verses 3 to 5, the valour of his conquests; (*c*) in verse 6, the stability of his kingdom; (*d*) in verses 7 to 9, the gladness of his marriage. Similarly, in the address to the royal bride we find four sub-divisions—(*a*) in verses 10 and 11, an appeal for complete devotion; (*b*) in verse 12, a promise of high honour; (*c*) in verses 13 to 15, a eulogy of the bride's charms; (*d*) in verses 16 and 17, a pledge of unceasing Divine favour.

Take psalm xc.—the "Prayer of Moses, the man of God." It is in three clear parts—(1) the Divine sovereignty and human history—see verses 1–6; (2) the Divine severity and human iniquity—see verses 7–11; (3) the human appeal for compassion and favour—see verses 12–17.

Or again, take psalm xix. Dr. Moulton's title for this psalm is: "The Heavens above; the Law within." It is the psalm of

Science and Religion. Here the two are shown to be fundamentally one. In masterly paragraphs this brief but majestic psalm handles this much-controverted subject, and with an understanding and clear vision unsurpassed by any modern scholarship. The first fourteen lines are devoted to the revelation of God in *the works of Nature.* The next fourteen lines are devoted to the revelation of God in *the words of Scripture.* Then, after these equally balanced parts, the psalm closes with the prayer: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer." In part 1 the psalmist's name for God is *El,* "the Mighty One." In part 2 he changes to the name *Jehovah,* which is distinctively the redemption name of Deity (indicated in our English version by the word LORD, in capitals). This name Jehovah is used seven times in the latter part of the psalm, but the name El not once. The psalmist chooses with intelligence and care. The name of God in the realm of Science is El, or Elohim. The name of God in the realm of religion is Jehovah. The God of Science and the God of Religion are not two different deities, but one and the same God—the only true God, who is both the God of creation and the God of redemption.

Yet again, take psalm iii., and see how its three "Selahs" divide it up into (1) Trouble, (2) Trust, and (3) Triumph. Or turn to psalm xxxviii., and see how its twenty-two verses are exactly halved between (1) the plague within, and (2) the foes without.

Then there is that wonderful psalm cxix., which is in twenty-two sections—one section for each of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, in order; each section consisting of sixteen lines, with the sixteen lines going in eight parallel pairs or couplets, and each of the eight couplets of the section beginning with the same letter of the alphabet. Or see psalm cxi., which, after the opening "Hallelujah," has twenty-two lines, each line beginning with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, so that the twenty-two initial letters of the lines run consecutively right through the alphabet. (There are eight of these Alphabetic or Acrostic psalms —ix., xxv., xxxiv., xxxvii., cxi., cxii., cxix., cxlv.)

The most familiar psalms may often surprise us with new beauties. To go back yet once more to psalm xxiii., it has been suggested that there is a beautiful triple message in it, inasmuch as we have three metaphorical figures in it—

(1) The Shepherd and the sheep (verses 1, 2).
(2) The Guide and the traveller (verses 3, 4).
(3) The Host and the guest (verses 5, 6).

Look the precious old psalm up again, and see whether the above analysis will stand the test of a careful study.

Look up psalms xlii. and xliii., and see whether you think these two ought to go together as one. Certainly the one title seems to cover them both. Their subject-matter, also, seems akin. But what is most suggestive is the recurring of the refrain—

Why art thou cast down, O my soul?
And why art thou disquieted within me?
Hope thou in God;
For I shall yet praise Him,
Who is the health of my countenance,
And my God.

It will be seen that this refrain comes in the *middle* of psalm xlii., and again at the *end*; and yet *again* at the end of psalm xliii.

These two psalms prescribe a lovely cure for depression. See the psalmist's diagnosis—"cast down" and "disquieted." Then see him expose the causes and symptoms: interrupted communion with God (1, 2); misunderstanding by others (3); unhelpful brooding over the past (4). Then see him indicate the treatment to effect recovery: the determination to remember God (6); new confidence in His sympathy, faithfulness, presence (7, 8); and a resolve to pray the matter through (8, 9). The prayer itself is psalm xliii. Thus fear gives place to hope, and sighing to singing.

There we must stop. We commend this exhaustless treasury of the psalms once again to the prayerful exploration of every Christian. The joy and enrichment which these precious poems of human experience and Divine inspiration have brought to the people of God down through the ages can never be measured or expressed. To God be the praise and thanksgiving!

DO YOU KNOW THE ANSWERS?

1. What is the origin and meaning of the title, "Psalms"?
2. What, in a sentence, is the general spiritual value or purpose of the Book of Psalms?
3. What are the so-called "orphan" psalms, and how many are there?
4. Of the hundred psalms which have their authors' names, how many did David write, and who wrote the others?
5. Can you give six of the special Hebrew inscription-words and their meanings?
6. Give reasons why some of the psalm-inscriptions should be taken as *sub*-scriptions to the psalms which precede them rather than as superscriptions to those which follow.
7. Which are the five main groupings of the psalms?
8. Which are the "Songs of the Degrees," and what reasons are there for thinking they were compiled by Hezekiah in relation to the sun-dial of king Ahaz?
9. Can you cite ten of the Messianic psalms?
10. In what way do psalms xxii., xxiii., and xxiv. make a trio?
11. Can you give four considerations in justification of the so-called "imprecatory" psalms?
12. Can you show by a general analysis that psalm cxxxix. is a methodical composition?

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

Lesson Number 62

NOTE.—For this study read the whole Book of Proverbs through, but not too many chapters at once. With successions of maxims such as (mainly) we have here, overloading is the enemy of remembering. Read the book according to the following grouping: First read twice through chapters i. to ix., which are all on the extolling of "Wisdom." Then read twice through chapters x. to xxiv., which consist of 375 proverbs (x.–xxii. 16), and 16 epigrams (xxii. 17–xxiv.) on various matters. Then read twice through chapters xxv. to xxxi., which consist of proverb-clusters, the Sayings of Agur (xxx.), the Oracle of Lemuel's Mother (xxxi. 1–9), and the Acrostic on the Virtuous Woman (xxxi. 10–31).

A proverb is a wise saying in which a few words are chosen instead of many, with a design to condense wisdom into a brief form both to aid memory and stimulate study. Hence proverbs are not only "wise sayings," but "dark sayings"—parables, in which wisdom is disguised in a figurative or enigmatic form like a deep well, from which instruction is to be drawn, or a rich mine, from which it is to be dug. Only profound meditation will reveal what is hidden in these moral and spiritual maxims.

—*Arthur T. Pierson, D.D.*

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

OUR BIBLE is both a book and a library. It is a book inasmuch as it is a diversity in *unity*, all its sixty-six parts combining to make one progressive whole. It is a library in the sense that it is a unity in diversity, with its different groups of books given up to the principal different branches of knowledge. Not only do we have history and politics and poetry and prophecy and devotional literature; we also have here that distinctive order or learning and teaching which goes by the name of *philosophy*. This we find in Job and Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

This library must not be measured merely by number of words, but by its depth of truth, by its breadth and fulness, by its superiority and finality. The Bible may seem very small against the imposing shelves of many a large library; yet with this one volume in our hand we may stand within the largest library on earth and truthfully say that all the tens of thousands of books therein collected cannot teach us more about the fundamental realities of the universe and of human life than we learn in these Scriptures. To struggle through hundreds of the profoundest and most erudite of other books, whether ancient or modern, and yet remain ignorant of *this* book, is infinite deprivation; whereas to know no other volume but this is to be made wise unto salvation, and to be furnished with a knowledge of fundamental realities which comes to us stamped with Divine certainty.

Prudence Through Precept

So, with growing appreciation of the varied treasure which we possess in our Bible "library," we now turn on from the devotional passion of the Psalms to the practical wisdom of the Proverbs.

As a preliminary, we note right away that the Proverbs are meant to be to our *practical* life what the Psalms are to our devotional life. This is their general significance. Here are pointed precepts for practical prudence. Here are laws from heaven for

life on earth. Here are counsels from above for conduct here below. Here are the words of the wise on the ways of the world. Here is homely wit for the daily walk; but it is human wit shot through with Divine wisdom; and he who is well versed in it will be soundly guided and safely guarded. We may put it that the general message of this Book of Proverbs is *Prudence through Precept.*

Genius of the Proverb

The English word "proverb" means a brief saying in the stead of many words (*pro* = for; *verba* = words). In popular usage it signifies any pithy, sententious saying or terse maxim. The Hebrew word, however, which we translate as "proverbs" (*mishle*) has a much wider meaning, and is used of many discourses, sentences, and expressions which would not be classed as proverbs in English today. This accounts for the fact that not all the writings in the "Book of Proverbs" are proverbs in the usual English sense. The larger part of them, however, *are* true proverbs, and are proverbs of the highest order, too.

The genius of the proverb lies in its shrewd concentration of a truth or of some sagacious counsel in a terse and striking way, so that it catches on, and becomes easier to remember than to forget. A proverb does not argue: it assumes. Its purpose is not to explain a matter, but to give pointed expression to it. An aphorism or proverb has several ways of catching on to the mind and the memory. It may do so by elegance of diction, by the beauty of a rhetorical figure, by its oracle-like brevity, or by its smart focusing of a poignant truth. It is not surprising, therefore, that the use of the proverb has figured largely in every nation, more so in the past than in the present era of widespread systematic education, and most of all among Oriental peoples, to whose mental cast the proverb seems peculiarly adapted.

Who Wrote the Proverbs?

There can be little doubt that the bulk of the Proverbs are from Solomon. The book opens with the words, "The proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel." Likewise, chapter x. begins, "The proverbs of Solomon." Yet again, chapter xxv. begins, "These are also the proverbs of Solomon, which the men

of Hezekiah, king of Judah, copied out." The book itself, therefore, testifies to Solomonic authorship. In 1 Kings iv. 32 we are told that among his diverse writings Solomon "spake three thousand proverbs." What then is more likely, in view of this and the claim of the book itself, than that this Book of Proverbs is in the main from Solomon, and was arranged substantially in its present form during the reign of Hezekiah, at which time, also, the Thirteen Sayings of Agur (xxx.) and the Oracle of Lemuel's Mother (xxxi.) were appended? Arguments for the composite authorship of the book are based on unconvincing assumptions; though the work of different hands here and there may admittedly be perceived as contributing to the arrangement of the work in its present completed form.

Analysis

The Book of Proverbs is in three main divisions. These are indicated by the three places, already referred to, where the book ascribes the authorship to Solomon. These are chapters i. 1; x. 1; and xxv. 1. The first nine chapters are a little book in themselves, all devoted to one theme, namely, the extolling of Wisdom. In these chapters we do not find "proverbs," in our common English sense of the word, but *sonnets*, by which we mean a short poem devoted to one particular theme and moulded into some special form. (According to strict definition, a sonnet, in English, consists of fourteen lines, after the Italian pattern; and still more strictly, the fourteen lines originally consisted of an octave and a sextet expressing two phases of the same thought. The essential distinction of the sonnet, however, does not really lie in the mere number of its lines, but in the moulding of thought to a special form. In these first nine chapters of Proverbs there are fifteen sonnets and two monologues.)

Then, in chapters x. to xxiv. we have a long run of proverbs proper—three hundred and seventy-five aphorisms in couplets, followed by sixteen epigrams and sayings which commence at chapter xxii. 17.

Finally, beginning at chapter xxv., we have seven epigrams and proverb-clusters, fifty-five couplets, thirteen sayings of Agur, and the oracle of Lemuel's mother, ending with the acrostic on the Virtuous Woman.

In our Authorised Version there is nothing to indicate to the ordinary reader where the different sonnets and epigrams begin or end; nor is it very much better in the Revised Version, although the paragraph marks are certainly a help. We shall do well to call a literary specialist to our aid, and let him pick out for us the fifteen sonnets in Book 1, and the various epigrams in Books 2 and 3. In the following analysis, therefore, while the three main headings are our own, we have followed Dr. R. G. Moulton's *Modern Reader's Bible* in the details given under these headings. It will be good for us to go carefully through this analysis, marking off the different sonnets and epigrams in our study Bibles for future reference. (*See next page.*)

Although in this present scheme of studies we devote only one chapter to the Book of Proverbs, let not this be thought to indicate that we deem it comparatively unimportant. The briefness of our treatment is due simply and solely to the nature of the book. To deal with it more fully would involve more or less our dealing separately with its hundreds of sententious sayings and sagacious aphorisms, an undertaking which obviously would require a book all to itself. What we are here seeking to do is to exhibit the genius of the proverbs as a species, the main groupings of them in this *book* of proverbs, and the rich value of the complex collection which is here preserved for us. After that, the only thorough way to study and know the book is to read it again and again, slowly and reflectively, and not too much at a time, letting its pithy contrasts and parallels rivet themselves in the mind. They who know the book well in that way will have "wit and wisdom" for every situation.

Structural Method

First, learn to appreciate the main features of proverb *structure*. Most common is the *contrastive* proverb, which catches the mind and emphasises a truth by the compact presentation of some striking contrast. Proverbs of this type may be known at once by the almost invariable "but" which starts the second line or member of the proverb; as in—

A merry heart doeth good like a medicine;
But a broken spirit drieth the bones.

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

THE BOOK OF PRACTICAL WISDOM

PRUDENCE THROUGH PRECEPT

BOOK 1. SONNETS EXTOLLING WISDOM (i.–ix.).

15 SONNETS. Introduction (i. 1–9); Enticements of Sinners (i. 10–19); Wisdom the Deliverer (ii. 1–22); The Reward of Piety (iii. 1–10); Wisdom the Supreme Prize (iii. 11–20); Wisdom and Security (iii. 21–6); Wisdom and Perversity (iii. 27–35); Tradition of Wisdom (iv. 1–9); The Two Paths (iv. 10–19); Wisdom and Health (iv. 20–7); The Strange Woman (v. 1–23); Suretyship (vi. 1–5); The Sluggard (vi. 6–11); The Discord Sower (vi. 12–19); Adultery (vi. 20–35); House of Wisdom versus that of Folly (a sonnet quartette: ix.).

2 MONOLOGUES. Wisdom's Warning (i. 20–33); Wisdom and the Strange Woman (vii.–viii.).

BOOK 2. MAXIMS ENJOINING PRUDENCE (x.–xxiv.).

375 PROVERBS or aphorisms in the form of contrastive or completive or comparative couplets (x. 1–xxii. 16).

16 EPIGRAMS. Introduction (xxii. 17–21); Mixed Epigrams (xxii. 22–29); Awe before Appetite (xxiii. 1–3); Fleetingness of Riches (xxiii. 4–5); Evil Hospitality (xxiii. 6–8); Mixed Epigrams (xxiii. 9–18); Gluttony (xxiii. 19–21); Three Sayings (xxiii. 22–5); Whoredom (xxiii. 26–8); Wine and Woe (xxiii. 29–35); Mixed Epigrams (xxiv. 1–10); Duty of Rescue (xxiv. 11–12); Wisdom and Honey (xxiv. 13–14); Four Epigrams (xxiv. 15–22); Respect of Persons (xxiv. 23–5); Three Sayings (xxiv. 26–9); The Field of the Slothful (xxiv. 30–4).

BOOK 3. MORE MAXIMS ON PRUDENCE (xxv.–xxxi.).

7 EPIGRAMS and Proverb-clusters. The King (xxv. 1–7); Various (xxv. 8–xxvi. 2); On Fools (xxvi. 3–12); The Sluggard (xxvi. 13–16); Social Pests (xxvi. 17–26); Various (xxvi. 27–xxvii. 22); Good Husbandry (xxvii. 23–7).

55 PROVERBS or aphorisms in the form of contrastive or completive or comparative couplets (xxviii.–xxix.).

THE THIRTEEN SAYINGS OF AGUR (xxx.).

THE ORACLE OF LEMUEL'S MOTHER (xxxi. 1–9).

AN ACROSTIC ON THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN (xxxi. 10–31).

It has been said that antithesis, or contrast, is the very life-blood of the proverb.

Then there are many proverbs of the *completive* type, in which the second line or member of the proverb agrees with the first, and adds to it, or carries the thought of it to some further point. These may usually be known by the "and" which leads the second line or member of the proverb; as in—

Commit thy works unto the Lord;
And thy thoughts shall be established.

Then again, there are those proverbs which are *comparative* in their structure. Some of these are very striking in their figures of comparison; and not infrequently they may be at once known by the "than" which leads the second line or member; as in—

Better is a little with righteousness,
Than great revenues without right.

Imagery and Analogy

One should not miss the sheer poetic pleasure of the rich and clever and varied imagery of the proverbs. Many of the analogies are apt and "knowing" to a degree. Who can miss the grim humour of the proverb which likens a "fair woman without discretion" to a "jewel of gold in a swine's snout"? Or what masculine nature can help feeling a twinge of knowing sympathy with that other proverb which likens the tongue of a nagging woman to "a continual dropping in a very rainy day"? Was there ever a more delightful simile than—"As cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country"? Who can forget such analogies and pictures as we find on page after page of the proverbs?—the sluggard who is like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes of his employer; the offended brother who is harder to win than a strong city; the coming of poverty like "an armed man" upon the slothful; the likening of wise reproof to an earring of gold on an obedient ear; of boastfulness to wind and clouds without rain; of conscience to a lamp of God in man; the picture of riches flying away on wings like those of an eagle; the contrasting of the faithful wounds given by a friend with

the profuse kisses of an enemy; not to mention many more such instances. Quite apart from the moral and spiritual value of the proverbs, the wit and imagery which we find in them are a tonic to the mind, unless we are without a single streak of humour and poetry in our make-up.

Proverb Cameos

Running through the practical philosophy of the proverbs is a keen aliveness to the perpetual struggle which goes on between good and evil for the upper hand in men's lives. It is because of this that the proverbs retain a vivid up-to-dateness even though much of their language relates to a simple state of society far removed from our modern western world. Some of the cameo pictures of social types which abound in the proverbs might have been carved out for us this morning. They stand out; they live on; they are as characteristic as any of Dickens' characters, and as typical as any of the figures in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, even though presented in far fewer words. The following quotation picks a few of them out for us: "There is the prating fool, winking with his eye; the practical joker, as dangerous as a madman casting firebrands about; the talebearer, and the man who 'harps upon a matter,' separating chief friends; the whisperer whose words are like dainty morsels going down into the innermost parts of the belly; the backbiting tongue, drawing gloomy looks all around as surely as the north wind brings rain; the false boaster, compared to wind and clouds without rain; the haste to be rich; the liberal man that scattereth and yet increaseth, while others are withholding only to come to want; the speculator holding back his corn amid the curses of the people; the man of wandering life, like a restless bird; the unsocial man that separateth himself, foregoing wisdom for the sake of his own private desire; the cheerfulness that is a continual feast"—and so on. What pages of immortal interest there are in these proverbs!

How to Read

Our "*NOTE*" at the beginning of this present study says, "Read the whole Book of Proverbs through, *but not too many chapters at once.*" The intelligence of that advice will be at once

apparent. These chapters of proverbs are not meant to be read in the way one reads narrative chapters (as in the historical books), or full cycles of debate (as in the Job dialogue), or complete poems (as in the Book of the Psalms), or progressive argument (as in Ecclesiastes). They are meant to be read lingeringly, ponderingly, memorisingly. Not, however, that the memorising of them is to be a forced work, like the memorising of rules in the learning of a language. Proverbs are meant so to aid the memory as to be difficult to forget. It is wonderful how these Scripture proverbs light up with significant wisdom, and how unforgettably they engrave themselves in the mind when they are read musingly and fairly often. Take chapter iii. 5—

> Trust in Jehovah with all thine heart;
> And lean not on thine own understanding.

How reasonable it seems to "lean on our own understanding"! Is not man's intellect his distinguishing superiority? Was it not implanted by God, to be a lamp of guidance? Is there not then something strange-sounding in this proverbial counsel? Maybe at a glance there is; but when we reflect on it as set off against "Trust in Jehovah . . ." it opens up with sage spiritual meaning. That intellectual faculty which crowns man as being "in the image of God" was never meant to make men *independent* of God, but to make possible co-operative *fellowship* with God. Now that Adam's posterity is a fallen race, man's highest faculty can be his deepest snare, the more so as there is an active deceiver "going to and fro in the earth". And so we might go on, as this little proverb goes on opening up big reflections to us.

We are reluctant to leave the book without displaying the facets of at least one captivating jewel from this manifold casket. Take the last chapter, with its acrostic on the "virtuous woman." Never was a worthier ode sung in praise of wifely virtue. It consists of twenty-two couplets, corresponding with its twenty-two verses in our own translation (more clearly shown in R.V.). Each of the twenty-two couplets begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, so that the twenty-two run right through the alphabet in proper order. The special features may be set out like the manuscript notes of an address.

MRS. "FAR-ABOVE-RUBIES"

Proverbs xxxi. 10–31

She is a Good Woman	
She works diligently	"She worketh willingly with her hands" (vv. 13, 15, 19)
She contrives prudently	"She considereth . . . and (then) buyeth" (v. 16). Also vv. 22 and 24
She behaves uprightly	"Strength and honour are her clothing" (v. 25)
She is a Good Wife	
She seeks husband's good	"She will do him good all the days of her life" (v. 12)
She keeps his confidence	"The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her" (v. 11)
She aids his prosperity	"Her husband is known . . . among the elders of the land" (vv. 23, 24)
She is a Good Mother	
She clothes family wisely	"All her household are clothed with scarlet" (v. 21)
She feeds household well	"She riseth and giveth meat to her household" (v. 15). Also v. 27
She shops sensibly	"She bringeth her food from far" (rather than get inferior near by) (vv. 14 and 18)
She is a Good Neighbour	
She helps the poor	"She stretcheth out her hand to the poor" (v. 20)
She uplifts the needy	"She reacheth forth her hands to the needy" (v. 20)
She speaks graciously	"In her tongue is the law of kindness" (v. 26)

Her value—"Her price is far above rubies."
Her praise—"Her children arise and call her blessed."
Her pre-eminence—"But thou excellest them all."
Her secret—"A woman that feareth the Lord."

Perhaps we ought just to add that the New Testament enables us to fill in the complete picture of this acrostic heroine of the Proverbs. Mrs. "Far-above-rubies" lives at "Godly House," the Way of Holiness, Blessing-town. The house is built on the Rock of Ages, over which the Way of Holiness runs, leading to the Celestial City. The house overlooks the boundless sea of "the riches of grace"; and as it is built foursquare on the Rock, the "Sun of Righteousness" is always shining in through one or more of the windows, which are "Pray without ceasing," "Rejoice evermore," "In everything give thanks," and "Quench not the Spirit." The house is built with the "exceeding great and precious promises" of the Scriptures, "Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone." The rooms are lighted with "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The house is well furnished with "every good and perfect gift from above." The servants of the house are "Goodness and Mercy"; and they are such faithful servants that they follow Mrs. "Far-above-rubies" all the days of her life. The wholesome diet of the house is the Bread of Life and the Water of Life, and the grapes of Eshcol, and the milk and honey and corn and wine of Canaan; and truly their mouths are "satisfied with good things"! In the garden of the house there grows "the fruit of the Spirit"—"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance"; and the fragrant aroma which is exhaled from these fruits and flowers of the garden pervades the whole atmosphere of the place. Yes, this is where Mrs. "Far-above-rubies" lives.

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES (1)

Lesson Number 63

NOTE.—For this study read the whole twelve chapters of Ecclesiastes at one sitting, so as to follow the several arguments through. Then read them a second time, noting the writer's interim conclusions at the end of chapters ii., v., and viii., and his final conclusion at the end of chapter xii.

Ecclesiastes is an inspired confession of failure and pessimism, when God is excluded, when man lives under the sun, and forgets the larger part, which is always over the sun, the eternal and abiding things. If you want to know what a man of great privilege, and of great learning and great wisdom can come to, read this record of a man who has put God out of count in his actual life.

—*G. Campbell Morgan, D.D*

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES (1)

THE BOOK of Ecclesiastes is a *sermon*. There is the announcement of a theme, a brief introduction, a developing of the theme, and a practical application in conclusion. The theme is: What is the chief good? The standpoint is that of natural reason. We are meant to see where the quest for the chief good leads us when conducted simply on the ground of natural experience, observation, and induction. In the opening verse (and six times later) the author styles himself *Koheleth*, which is translated as "The Preacher" (though perhaps the Hebrew term rather conveys the idea of "Master of Assemblies," or "Teacher"). Our title, "Ecclesiastes," comes from *Ecclesiastes*, the Latin form of the Greek word for a preacher.

Who Was the Preacher?

Who was this preacher-author of Ecclesiastes? Dispite all that has been said to the contrary, we resolutely hold that he was Solomon. We have read the arguments which have been put forward for a post-Exile authorship, and we are not impressed by them. An able summary of these has been given by the late Charles A. Fox in his book on Ecclesiastes. There is a certain plausibility about them; yet an evident superficiality. The first argument is based on certain philological niceties. Words and forms occur in Ecclesiastes, it is said, which are found only in post-exilic writings. But these Aramaic words are proved by other scholars to have been in common use among the nations around Israel long before then; and we know that the widely-read Solomon would have all the available literature of that age at his command, not to mention his familiarity with foreigners through marriage and diplomacy.

The argument that "the whole social state" described in Ecclesiastes does not agree with that of Solomon's time, is similarly unimpressive. The references given are chapters iv. 1, 3, 5, 6; vii. 26, 28; viii. 3, 4, 5, 8; ix. 9, 11, 14, 15; x. 4, 6, 7, 16, 18, 19, 20. We have examined these; and there is not one

thing mentioned in them which might not have been frequently seen *in* or appropriately said *to* the society of Solomon's time, either in Israel or among the surrounding peoples.

Another, and surely puerile argument is that whereas Solomon gives his name to Proverbs and the Song of Songs, he does not give it to Ecclesiastes; and that the writer only says "I *was* King over Israel in Jerusalem," implying that at the time of writing he was king no more—as though, if a man of today were telling us of something that happened a few years ago, and said: "I was a married man at the time," it would imply that he could be no longer married at the time of speaking! To ourselves it is childishly obvious that Solomon used the past tense simply because he was describing an experiment which he had made in the past, but after he had come to the throne. How *else* could he have expressed himself?

And, as for the argument that Solomon's *personal history* precludes him from the authorship, why surely the very opposite is the truth! His super-normal wisdom, going with his love of fleshly pleasures, his wealth, and his opportunities to make just such an experiment as he describes in Ecclesiastes, his literary gifts, and what we know of his later years, all mark out Solomon as the author.

See what the book itself says about its authorship in chapters i. 1, 12, 16; ii. 9; xii. 9. Let anyone read this clear testimony of the author himself, with unbiased mind, and surely the conclusion will be that it is King Solomon who is here speaking to us, and not some unidentified rabbi of six centuries later, writing in a feigned name and indulging a "dramatic *impersonation*" of Solomon!

What is the Sermon?

The preacher's text is: "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity"; and the question which he propounds is: "What profit hath man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?" This question suggests at the outset that the sermon is to be the expounding of a *quest*; and such it proves to be, when we read through it. Ecclesiastes is *the quest of the natural man for the chief good.* It is not easy, in our English translation, to pick out the true links and breaks in the thesis; and at first, indeed, it may seem impossible to systematise it into logical periods: but after a little

patient reading and re-reading we begin to see that there are orderly movements in a planned progress.

In the first two chapters the "preacher" tells us how he sought the chief good by *PERSONAL EXPERIMENT*. First of all he sought it by *wisdom* (i. 12–18); but he found that this striving after the true good *by*, or *in*, natural wisdom was "vexation of spirit" (literally, a striving after wind), for there was always something which eluded him (i. 15); and with increased knowledge came increased sorrow (i. 18). So next he turned to conduct his quest in *pleasure* or folly (ii. 1–11); but here again he found that both physical and aesthetic gratifications alike were "vanity," or emptiness to his *soul*. Whereupon, he found that wisdom excels folly even "as light excelleth darkness" (ii. 13), but that life itself is vanity inasmuch as the same event, even death, overtakes both the wise man and the fool—a point on which he enlarges (ii. 15–23). His conclusion is: "There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour" (ii. 24); and he perceives that "this is from the hand of God."

Next, in chapters iii., iv., and v., Koheleth pursues his quest by *GENERAL OBSERVATION* of the world and of human affairs. Here, on the one hand, he finds himself up against what seems to be an impenetrable mystery of *Divine providence*, namely, an apparently immutable forefixedness of all happenings which is as inexorable as it is inscrutable (iii.), and from which it is easy to recoil into a kind of religious fatalism. On the other hand he finds *human* society disfigured by injustices, inequalities, enigmas, and superficialities (iv.), from which he can only turn away saying: "Surely this also is vanity and a striving after the wind." As the preacher ponders the resistless round of the Divine providence, on the one hand, and the ironies of human possession and ambition and position, on the other hand, he can only counsel us (read chapter v.) to maintain a prudential observance of religion in view of the one (verses 1–7) and not to set our hearts on the other (verses 10–12). He then comes to the same conclusion as he had come to when seeking the chief good in wisdom and pleasure—"Behold, that which I have said holds good, that it is well for a man to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labours wherein he laboureth under the sun, through the brief day of his life which God hath given him; for this is his portion" (verse 18).

Next, in chapters vi., vii. and viii., Koheleth renews his quest in the realm of *PRACTICAL MORALITY*. The secret he is after must surely lie in "the golden mean," in finding the true centre of conduct, in achieving the even balance between things, the proper poise in behaviour, the correct middle-course of *expediency*. In chapter vi. he points out that though a man have riches, wealth, and honour, he cannot enjoy it unless God permits him to do so (verse 2); and, moreover, all the labour of man for his mouth cannot satisfy his *soul* (not "appetite," as in the Authorised Version). Therefore, "Who knoweth *what* is good for a man in this life?" (verse 12). Surely the answer is to be found in an expedient course of behaviour. So, beginning with the aphorism, "A good name is better than precious ointment" (vii. 1), the preacher presses along this further route of inquiry. But, alas, *is* the true good to be found here?— for he has seen righteous men perish in their righteousness, and wicked men live long in their wickedness (vii. 15); the best of men are still sinners (vii. 20); the best of men are spoken against (vii. 21, 22); and there are not a few other equally discouraging anomalies (see chapter viii.). More and more the preacher is being driven to see the necessity for God (vii. 13, 14, 18; viii. 12, 13, 17); yet once again he concludes, as before, that "a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat and to drink, and to be merry; and that this should accompany him in his labour all the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun" (viii. 15).

Finally, in chapters ix. to xii., we have the quest *REVIEWED AND CONCLUDED*. Looking back over the way he has come, the preacher now says: "For all this I laid to my heart, even to explore all this, *that the righteous and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God*" (ix. 1). With these words he commences a review, after which he submits his final conclusion. First, he faces us once more with the fact that "All things come alike to all" (ix. 2). Then, in view of this, he reaffirms that the true good is not to be found in *pleasure*, or the absorptions of this present life (ix. 3–12); nor in human *wisdom* (ix. 13–18), though wisdom is admittedly superior to folly; nor in expedient *behaviour* (x. 1–xi. 8), because of the many anomalies which exist (x. 5–7), and because of the inevitable end (xi. 8).

What, then? Why, this—the highest good at present open to man is a wise, temperate, grateful use and enjoyment of the

present life (xi. 9, 10), combined with a steadfast faith in God and in the life to come (xii. 1–7). This is what the preacher says:

"*Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh; for youth and prime of life are vanity.*

"*Remember also Thy Creator in the days of thy youth, or ever the evil days come, and the years draw nigh when thou shalt say: I have no pleasure in them . . . and the dust return to the earth, as it was, and the spirit to God who gave it.*"

In the above quotation, the words, "But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment," have been gravely misunderstood. They have been taken in an ironic sense, as though the preacher, immediately after encouraging the young man to get the best out of life, mocks him with the threat of retribution for so living. That is not the true sense of the words at all. We get the sense more truly by changing the "but" into "and"—"*and* know thou that for all these things . . ." The fact of a righteous judgment hereafter is mentioned not as a scare but as a comfort, because it is then and there that the ironies and enigmas which make this present life vanity, even to the righteous and the wise, will be answered by a final explanation, restitution, and compensation. It is an anticipation of Paul's word in Romans viii. 20, that although the creation has been made "subject to vanity," it has been thus subjected "in *hope*." Admittedly, the thought of that final judgment is meant *also* to be a deterrent to folly and sin; but the main thought here is that of *hope* in it; and that is why the preacher, having mentioned it, immediately adds, "Therefore, remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh." It is important, also, to realise that the advice to "eat and drink and enjoy," in Ecclesiastes, has nothing of Epicureanism or godless, fleshly indulgence in it. It is simply a periphrasis for living in a legitimate comfort and prosperity (see Jer. xxii. 15), due to Jehovah's bountifulness.

So, then, this present life of man beneath the sun, when considered by itself, or when lived for as an end in itself, is vanity;

and the preacher therefore, in his final paragraph, comes right back to where he was when he began—"Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity" (xii. 8). It is the thought of that final judgment, and that life beyond, which gives the grand significance to life; and the preacher therefore winds up to his solemn, weighty, wise, and inspired conclusion—

"LET US HEAR THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER: FEAR GOD, AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS; FOR THIS IS THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN. FOR GOD SHALL BRING EVERY WORK INTO JUDGMENT, WITH EVERY SECRET THING, WHETHER IT BE GOOD OR EVIL" (xii. 13, 14).

ECCLESIASTES: THE QUEST FOR THE CHIEF GOOD

INTRODUCTION I. 1–11

1. THE QUEST BY PERSONAL EXPERIMENT (i.–ii.).

THE SEARCH IN WISDOM (i. 12–18).
THE SEARCH IN PLEASURE (ii. 1–11).
COMPARISON OF THE TWO (ii. 12–23).
AD INTERIM CONCLUSION (ii. 24–6).

2. THE QUEST BY GENERAL OBSERVATION (iii.–v.).

FOREFIXEDNESS OF THE NATURAL ORDER (iii.).
ILLS AND ENIGMAS OF HUMAN SOCIETY (iv.).
ADVICE IN VIEW OF THE FOREGOING (v. 1–17).
SECOND AD INTERIM CONCLUSION (v. 18–20).

3. THE QUEST BY PRACTICAL MORALITY (vi.–viii.).

MATERIAL THINGS CANNOT SATISFY THE SOUL (vi.).
SO EXPEDIENT MORALITY ADVOCATED (vii. 1–viii. 8).
BUT THERE ARE STRANGE ANOMALIES (viii. 9–14).
THIRD AD INTERIM CONCLUSION (viii. 15–17).

4. THE QUEST REVIEWED AND CONCLUDED (ix.–xii.).

THE BIG EVIL REMAINS—ONE EVENT TO ALL (ix. 1–6).
MIRTH, WISDOM, MORALS, ALL FARE SAME (ix. 7–xi. 8).
TRUE GOOD—A WISE ENJOYMENT OF PRESENT (xi. 9., 10).
GOING WITH FAITH IN GOD AND LIFE BEYOND (xii. 1–7).

FINAL CONCLUSION, xii. 13–14.

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES (2)

Lesson Number 64

NOTE.—For this further study in Ecclesiastes read the book through once more, carefully checking off the analysis given in our first study.

No investigation of Scripture, in its various parts and separate texts, however important, must impair the sense of the supreme value of its united witness. There is not a form of evil doctrine or practice that may not claim apparent sanction and support from isolated passages; but nothing erroneous or vicious can ever find countenance from the Word of God when the whole united testimony of Scripture is weighed against it. Partial examination will result in partial views of truth which are necessarily imperfect; only careful comparison will show the complete mind of God.

—Arthur T. Pierson, D.D.

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES (2)

THIS BOOK of Ecclesiastes has been a much misunderstood book. Pessimists have found material in it to bolster up their doleful hypotheses. Sceptics have claimed support from it for their contention of non-survival after death. Others have quoted it as confirming the theory of soul-sleep between the death of the body and the yet future resurrection. Besides these, many sound and sincere believers have felt it to be an unspiritually-minded composition, contradictory to the principles of the New Testament, and awkward to harmonise with belief in the full inspiration of the Bible. It is the more needful, therefore, that we should clearly grasp its real message, and understand its peculiarities.

Misapprehensions such as those just mentioned come about through a wrong way of reading. People read the chapters simply as a string of verses in which each verse is a more or less independent pronouncement, instead of carefully perceiving that the verses and paragraphs and chapters and sections are the component parts of a cumulative treatise. Ecclesiastes is not the only part of Scripture which is wronged by this kind of reading; but it suffers the more by it because when the links in the chain of reasoning are thus wrenched apart they lend themselves to an easy misunderstanding. Those interpretations of this or that or the other verse, which contradict the design and drift and declaration of the book as a whole, are wrong.

Pessimism?

Is the Ecclesiastes view of life *pessimistic*? The answer to this question must obviously be found in the message of the book as a whole, and not in a few passages here and there. Admittedly, there is a persistent ground-tone of sadness in the discourse, because the larger part of it has to do with some of the most sombre realities in human life: but the facing up to these is not pessimism. Rather is it a brave honesty.

Follow the process of the preacher's reasoning right through. He steadily faces up to all the dark enigmas; and although at

first he sees only tantalising ironies and wearying repetitions, as he steadily gazes he perceives that through the fixed operations of nature and the permitted distortions of human society there moves an all-embracing Divine control (iii. 17; ix. 1) making toward a future restitution (xii. 14). After each recoil from things "under the sun," God is recognised, as a careful reading of the book will show (ii. 24–6; iii. 10–14; v. 19; viii. 17; ix. 1), until at last the author sees through present "vanity" to the final *verity*. He sees that since God has "set eternity" in men's hearts (iii. 11, R.V.), men can never be really satisfied by the things of this present life "under the sun" (v. 10–12; vi. 7). Indeed, he perceives that God has actually allowed the enigmas of the present order to remain so that men might be exercised thereby, and caused to think on higher things (ii. 25; iii. 10; vii. 14).

It is thus that the writer gradually reaches his final conclusion, and lands us at the very antipodes of pessimism, namely, that if we honour and obey God we may enjoy the good things of this life with a thoroughly easy conscience, and look forward, also, to a time when the other things—the ills and wrongs—shall be put right (iii. 17; viii. 5–12; xi. 9; xii. 14).

This, we repeat, is the very opposite of pessimism, with its melancholy idea that life is but a deepening shadow, an ill unrelieved by hope, a problem without a solution. Here, in Ecclesiastes, the wise philosopher has discovered that although the Creator has subjected this present life to "vanity," He has subjected it thus in *hope*. There is a warm light shining through the mystery. There is much to comfort and gladden us in the present: and beyond the question mark which overhangs much of the present is the exclamation mark of a final Divine solution.

Scepticism?

The Book of Ecclesiastes has been charged with *scepticism*. One unfriendly scholar goes so far as to call it "The Canticle of Scepticism"; but it is the scholar himself who is the sceptic, and not Koheleth. There is a certain class of scholars who only see what they *want* to see; and these would not be persuaded even though Koheleth himself were to come back from the grave to assure them. Apart from these, the mistaken idea that scepticism taints Ecclesiastes arises from that superficial way of reading

which we have already mentioned, in which verses are regarded in isolation from their context and the conclusion of the book as a whole.

Koheleth is supposed to be sceptical concerning *the present running of things*, in such passages as chapters i. 8, 12–18; iii. 9; viii. 16, 17. A closer examination of these references, however, and a relating of them to the whole argument, shows otherwise. Underlying all Koheleth's animadversions is an unwavering confidence in the justice and wisdom of a governing Providence, as we have seen; and such belief is the opposite of scepticism. Koheleth does not doubt the ultimate, though the mysteries of the present have caused him grave reflection: and even on these mysteries of the present he does not *theorise*, either sceptically or otherwise, his purpose being concerned with the practical, as distinguished from the metaphysical or theological. Further, although poignantly impressed by the ignorance and limitedness of man, he does not deny to men the power of reaching any certitude or mastering any verity, for he is no agnostic. When he declares the "vanity" of human wisdom and knowledge, he means that since human reason has such strict limits, and is utterly incapable of penetrating the present mysteries of Providence, perfect intellectual satisfaction is impossible by that means. The wise thing is a hearty acquiescence, with trust in God; and this certainly is not scepticism.

Again, Ecclesiastes is said to be sceptical about *life after death*. We are referred to chapter iii. 19–21 (which look up). But this passage, other than denying survival, actually implies it when taken carefully with the context. Verses 19 and 20 tell us that physically men suffer the same end as the lower animals, and "all go unto one place," namely, the earth. If we were limited to these verses we might well infer that the writer did not believe in the continuance of life beyond the grave; but it will be noticed that verse 19 is linked on to what goes before, by the conjunctive "for." If, then, we look back to verse 17, we find that it was just *because* men and beasts seemed to perish alike that the writer found refuge in the thought of a life beyond. Verse 17 reads: "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time *THERE* (i.e.—with God, in the beyond) for every purpose and every work." Look now at verse 21 (in R.V.). If by the "spirit" here is meant the *ego* of man, life after death is at once implied,

in contrast with the spirit of the beast, which perishes in the earth. If less than this is meant, there is still *no denial* of life after death.

So is it with chapter ix. 3–6 (which please look up). These verses must be read in connection with verse 10, where we are told of a *Sheol* to which humans go beyond the present life. When the author says in this tenth verse, "There is no work nor device nor knowledge nor wisdom in *Sheol* whither thou goest," he means merely that there these things come to an end *in the sense in which they are known and pursued on earth.* He by no means necessarily implies a cessation of consciousness; for his words must be interpreted in the light of the final pronouncement (xii. 7) to which he is now hastening, namely, that at death the body returns to the earth, and *the spirit returns to God*—which surely teaches, in view of the predicted Judgment in the beyond (xii. 14), a survival of the individual soul as such, and not any mere vague absorption. Admittedly, in Ecclesiastes, the life beyond is only touched on in its negative aspect, for fuller revelation on the subject is as yet awaited; but the *fact* of a life beyond is clearly believed in; so that to allege scepticism here is wrong.

Inspiration?

As we have remarked, there are those who seem to find this Book of Ecclesiastes awkward to harmonise with belief in the full inspiration of the Bible. This is due, once again, to the reading of it without due appreciation of the fact that the whole book is one sustained argument, with various incidental inferences, three *ad interim* conclusions (which mark off, respectively, the first three of the four main parts of the argument), and a final conclusion. There are indeed verses and paragraphs which, taken by themselves, seem contradictory to the teachings of the New Testament; but these become quite harmonious if we pay heed to three things—(1) their place in the progress of the argument, (2) the standpoint of the argument as a whole, (3) the nature of inspiration.

First, then, the tentative conclusions which Koheleth records in the course of his dissertation should all be read carefully *in connection with their setting, and especially in the light of the final conclusion.* For instance, take that troublesome passage about men and beasts apparently dying alike, in chapter iii. 19–22. We

may perhaps ask: "Since the writer of Ecclesiastes is so definite, in his final conclusion, that the human spirit lives on after the death of the body, and returns upwards to God, why does he not say so here in chapter iii.?" The answer is that the stage of the argument required this as-yet unsatisfying statement. We are meant to follow the processes of the man's mind in his great quest, if the final conclusion is to mean to us what is intended. That this is so is surely indicated also by the fact that he twice prefaces these verses with "I said in mine heart"—to show that he refers to what he thought at an earlier time.

Second, we must keep in mind *the standpoint of the treatise as a whole.* This is the book of man "under the sun." It is written from the standpoint of human reason. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the writer is led to adopt this standpoint so that we may be shown where a proper exercise of human reason and intuition will lead us, if we will honestly follow. Despite the limitations of human reason, and despite the dark enigmas which scourge the present order of things, human reason, if it be really honest with all the data, will show us the vanity of living merely for earthly things, and will conduct us to a reverent faith in God, a keeping of His commandments, and belief in a judgment beyond. Certainly, the final conclusion of the writer is true and great, though, of course, there is nothing of our precious New Testament Gospel in it; but inasmuch as the purpose of inspiration here is to teach us lessons by exhibiting the *process* of human reasoning toward that final conclusion, we must not assume that all the incidental inferences and sayings of the reasoner are recorded as independent pronouncements of inspiration.

This brings us to our third point. We need to be clear as to *the nature of inspiration.* Not long ago, a minister of very modern ideas said to me: "If the whole Bible is inspired, as you say, then you ought to be able to open it at any page, and take any verse you hit on as an inspired precept to be obeyed." Did anybody ever hear such unreasonable stupidity? Even the old rationalists like Tom Paine and Bob Ingersol did not so unjustly injure the Bible. Considerable parts of the Bible are *history,* without doctrine or precept. In such parts, inspiration fulfils its purpose by simply guaranteeing the veracity of the narrative. Besides this, again and again in the Scriptures, the utterances of various persons are reported simply as such, including those of theorisers

like Zophar, of wicked men like Ahab, and even of the devil himself—and which were certainly never intended to be taken as Divinely inspired. All that inspiration involves in such cases is the veracity of the report. Similarly, in the case of Ecclesiastes, we are given to see the processes of thought by which an enquiring soul arrived at a great and true conclusion; but this does not necessarily mean that all the incidental inferences and minor conclusions are inspired.

Besides this, let it be remembered that revelation is *progressive*; and it is this which explains the absence of more positive teaching in Ecclesiastes concerning the after-life. As to the *fact* of a life beyond, and of a righteous judgment there, Ecclesiastes rings true and clear; but as to the nature, course, and details of that life, nothing is said. Had our author been tapping Egyptian or other heathen mythological sources, he need have been at no loss for colourful details of Sheol and its denizens; but he is held by a sacred reticence. No rein is given to imagination. He speaks only as he is moved. At this stage of Divine revelation, life beyond is disclosed only in its negative aspect, as the place where earthly works and devices and knowledge and wisdom come to an end (ix. 10). To elucidate the *positive* aspects of the life beyond, further revelation was needed; and, thank God, further revelation has been given, disclosing the continuance of conscious life between death of the body and its resurrection (Isa. xiv. 9–11; Matt. xxii. 32; Mark ix. 43–8; Luke xvi. 19–31; John xi. 26; 2 Cor. v. 6–8; Phil. i. 21–3; Rev. vi. 9–11), along with many other precious and vital unveilings in many other passages.

When rightly understood, there is nothing in Ecclesiastes which *contradicts* later revelation regarding the after-life or any other matter. When it is read today by ourselves, its place in the progress of Scripture revelation should be carefully borne in mind.

Purpose and Message

In view of what we have just said, some practical-minded student may perhaps ask: "If fuller revelation comes later, why go back to Ecclesiastes?" The answer to that question lies in *the central purpose and message* of the book. Above all else Ecclesiastes would teach us the emptiness of everything apart from God. That word "vanity" which recurs throughout the book does not mean merely foolish pride, but the emptiness, in its final result,

of all life lived for this world alone. This book would wean us from love of the world. It says to us all, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world: for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John ii. 15–17). It says to us: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. vi. 19–21). Yes, Ecclesiastes says to every Christian: "Set your affection on things above; not on things on the earth" (Col. iii. 2).

Make no mistake, we need Ecclesiastes in our Bible. Do not listen to those who think they know better, and would exclude it as being of inferior moral quality. Do not be misled even by those very spiritual friends who aver that the sentiments of Koheleth are unspiritual. It is a Divine kindness which includes Ecclesiastes within the compass of Holy Writ. One of the saddest ironies is the proud folly by which successive generations of human beings commit the same sins, repeat the same big blunders, fall prey to the same ensnaring stupidities, and suffer the same agonising disillusionments, as those who have lived and died before them; all because they will not take to heart such a testimony as that of Koheleth. We are reminded of a rather grim little poem entitled, "Sympathetic Lines of a Father to a Daughter in Bed with Mumps", from which we cull the following wistfully philosophical rhymes—

Thus generations come and go,
From youth to age they wiser grow;
Yet as they pass they all relate
They learn their lessons just too late.
Our junior wisecracks dodge the truth
That dense old parents once were youth,
That present youth must older grow,
Oft haunted by, "I told you so",
And all their youthful bombast rue
When *they* as parents suffer too!

When they as parents suffer too,
As with strange certainty they do,
They marvel at the self-sure ways
The *next* relay of youth displays.
They hear the same old arguments
Arrayed in fresh accoutrements—
The times are different, so are we,
Just let us have *our* way, and see.
For artful Nature oft repays
Her rebels in ironic ways.

Thus generations, as they go,
Perpetuate the tale of woe.
They will not learn from yesterday,
But choose to learn the harder way—
Experience shall be teacher, please;
And well he teaches—but what fees!
What fees he charges those he schools
Before he makes wise men of fools!
How oft his scholars have confessed,
"Ah yes, poor Dad and Mum knew best"!

Each generation soon is past,
So sure at first, so sad at last.
As ranks of youth successive rise,
Each thinks, "We are supremely wise".
They each a lot more knowledge know,
And yet a bit less wisdom show.
O sanguine youth, God's word revere—
Honour your parents while they're here;
And you will find in later days
What handsome dividends it pays!

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES (3)

Lesson Number 65

NOTE.—For this final study in Ecclesiastes read again the first two chapters and the last two, contrasting the regrets in the first two with the advice in the last two.

Truth shall retire,
Bestruck with slanderous darts, and works of faith
Rarely be found; so shall the world go on,
To good malignant, to bad men benign,
Under her own weight groaning, till the day
Appear of respiration to the just,
And vengeance to the wicked, at return
Of Him, . . . thy Saviour and thy Lord;
Last in the clouds of Heaven to be revealed
In glory of the Father.

—*Milton, "Paradise Lost,"* xii. 535.

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES (3)

THERE are other weighty considerations pertaining to this Book of Ecclesiastes which we ought at least briefly to reflect upon, before we turn to the Song of Songs. They will help us to appreciate more truly its rich spiritual values.

A Challenge to Faith

There is certainly a challenge to *faith*. Koheleth argues his way through disillusionments and doubts to a point where he rises into the clear shining of a reasoned faith in the Divine justice and wisdom and goodness. If he, with his much more imperfect knowledge than ours, rose above the depressing disappointments of human experience and found composure in a faith which conquered mistrust, how much more should we Christian believers, who stand in the full rays of Gospel revelation! Never for a moment should we give way to misgivings concerning the dealings of Providence. With the Divine love-pledges of the Bethlehem manger and the Cross of Calvary and the empty tomb of that first Easter morning before us, how can we longer doubt the goodness of God's fundamental purpose in the universe and for the human race? Strange and hurting inequalities and enigmas and tragedies there certainly are in plenty everywhere around us; yet even the sum-total of these cannot outweigh the profound and reassuring significance of the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection of God's Son, our Saviour. As one of the old Puritans used to say, we should "never let what we do *not* know destroy our faith in what we *do* know." However many things there are which are still mysterious to us, they do not destroy the reality and meaning of those things which actually *are*, and which we *know*. Over against all the sufferings and problems and mysteries of man's earthly lot is the fact of CHRIST. He is a real fact; and He is the Divine guarantee of a coming daybreak which will bring a full and final answer. With unswerving trust, let us "commit

the keeping of our souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator" (1 Pet. iv. 19).

Sensible Resignation

But Koheleth would teach us also to have the attitude of sensible *resignation*. It is no use fretting and fighting and fuming against the established order of nature. It is simply dashing our silly heads against the rocks of stubborn facts which all our hot tempers can never alter. If we will consider thoughtfully, there are enough indications to show us that a Divine super-control operates everywhere. We get glimpses of an unmistakable logic about things. Strange, half-deciphered unities appear, running through the history of the past and the happenings of the present, which in contemplative moments suddenly become luminous to the mind, giving coherence to everything. We see with an unmistakable convincingness that there is a Divine harmony behind earth's discords, and a settled goal beyond the disturbing disorders of the present. The controlling presence of a good Divine purpose in the universe becomes the one, obvious key which fits all the chambers of the lock. A hundred coincidences all suddenly fit together and show us that there is a unifying benevolent purpose underlying and overruling all that is providentially permitted. It is to this that Koheleth approximates. First he sees that life is full of "vanities" which *mock* men. Then he sees that these "vanities" are *meant* to mock men. Then he sees that these "vanities" are not just meant to mock men cruelly, but with a *benign purpose*, namely, to lead men to seek their true happiness in God Himself. He sees that these things are "from the hand of God." (ii. 24). And he sees that these things are allowed because God "hath set eternity" in men's hearts (iii. 11), and seeks to lead them to a true view of life in relation to material things. All this is indeed discerning, and is a true voice of wisdom to us.

It is well to pick out and ponder the ten "vanities" which Koheleth sees as occasioning the ironies and frustrations of human life, and which make so much of human life "vexation or a striving after wind". What agonising disillusionments men and women would spare themselves if only they would pause and ponder these ten "vanities" of Koheleth!

The Ten "Vanities"

ii. 15–16.	The "vanity" of human wisdom,	*Wise and foolish alike have one end, death.*
ii. 19–21.	The "vanity" of human labour,	*Worker no better than shirker in the end.*
ii. 26.	The "vanity" of human purpose,	*Altho' man proposes it is God who disposes.*
iv. 4.	The "vanity" of human rivalry,	*Much success brings envy more than joy.*
iv. 7.	The "vanity" of human avarice,	*"Much" feeds lust for "more," yet oft eludes.*
iv. 16.	The "vanity" of human fame,	*Is brief, uncertain, and soon forgotten.*
v. 10.	The "vanity" of human insatiety,	*Money does not satisfy. Increase only feeds others.*
vi. 9.	The "vanity" of human coveting,	*Often gain cannot be enjoyed, despite desire.*
vii. 6.	The "vanity" of human frivolity,	*It only camouflages the inevitable sad end.*
viii. 10, 14.	The "vanity" of human awards,	*Bad often honoured. Good and bad get wrong deserts.*

Yet again, this Book of Ecclesiastes should teach us the need of further Divine *revelation.* This is one of the things it is undoubtedly *meant* to show us. The mental struggles of this man, Koheleth, are a lesson for all time, and point to the need for supernatural light to be given from heaven. Natural religion and man-made faiths are not enough. Human reason can take us so far and no farther. Even the Mosaic Law, with its Ten Commandments and its high social ethics, cannot give us that which we most need to know and possess. This Book of Ecclesiastes cries out for Him who said: "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father," and, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

Authorship Significances

Always in our reading of Ecclesiastes we should keep in mind that *Solomon* is the author. It gives such added force to many of the sentiments which are expressed. Is the book the product

of a late repentance? Many think so. Is Solomon seeking to atone for past follies, and to warn others from his own bitter experience? Perhaps so. When he speaks about an "old and foolish king" and a "poor and wise youth" who follows him by usurping the throne (iv. 13–16), is he speaking, with prophetic prescience, of himself, soon now to pass away, and of the scheming usurper, Jeroboam, who thereupon sets himself up as king over ten of the Israel tribes? When he speaks so bitterly of woman, in chapter vii. 26–9, and says that the seductress is "more bitter than death," and that he has not found one true woman "in a thousand," is he recalling his countless wives and concubines? Oh, that the gifted Solomon who began so wisely should have had to write such a book as this! What intensity it gives to his doctrine of the "vanity" or emptiness of everything, apart from God! We can never read it without being reminded of the poet Byron's words, written shortly before his premature death, after a life lived wholly for the world and its pleasures—

My days are in the yellow leaf,
The flowers and fruits of love are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone!

The fire that on my bosom preys
Is lone as some volcanic isle;
No torch is kindled at its blaze—
A funeral pile.

The hope, the fear, the jealous care,
The exalted portion of the pain
And power of love I cannot share,
But wear the chain.

The Cause and Cure of Pessimism

This Book of Ecclesiastes suggests a sermon on *the cause and cure of pessimism*. We have shown that in its final conclusion the book is *not* pessimistic; but it may be freely granted that many of the sentiments expressed in the argumentative processes of the book *are*. They are the sombre surveyings of eyes which

selfish sinning has filmed and dulled; yet although these eyes cannot see very far, they are seeing more truly and steadily than when they were bright and young and inflamed with wine. *Whence*, then, the lines of pessimism in Koheleth's review?

There are three causes. First, he views life *selfishly rather than socially*. He has lived to get, instead of to give; and he has found what all such persons find, namely, that the more one lives for self, the less do earthly things satisfy. When one lives just to "get," the more one gets the less one really has. It is a true paradox that the more one gives the more one gets. And those who do most for others do most for themselves. Koheleth had been a great social mixer, but only outwardly. Inwardly he had been an isolationist. He had been wrapped up in his own selfishness, viewing all others simply in relation to his own self-gratification. To live so, whatever our social status may be, sooner or later brings an ironic sense of having had no real joys at all, and makes the late Lord Beaconsfield's famous words seem all too true—"Youth is a mistake, manhood a struggle, and old age a regret."

But second, Koheleth views life as *apart from God rather than as controlled by Him*. God is scarcely mentioned, and even then only distantly. All seems in the hands of men (iv. 1–3). One of the main reasons for the pessimism about human life and history which is so prevalent in our own times is that God is pushed more and more away from it by our twentieth-century industrialisation and urbanisation, and by popular science with its evolutionary jargon about the "origin of species" and the "survival of the fittest" and the "reign of natural law" and the "impossibility of miracles" and the *a priori* rejection of everything "supernatural." When the universe becomes, as W. T. Stead put it, "the empty eye-socket of a dead deity," it is never long before pessimism rules human philosophy.

And third, Koheleth views human life as *bounded by the grave rather than as having destiny beyond*. Man dies as the beast, he says; and this is his greatest problem of all. "For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them. As the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; and man hath no pre-eminence above the beasts: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again" (iii. 19, 20). What then is the use of life's

struggle? It may be said, indeed it *is* being said by some today, that we must take an unselfish view, and be willing to play our little part and then pass out, finding satisfaction in the thought that humanity is gradually progressing to a perfect age. That might sound better if we could only be *sure* that such a perfect humanity was really evolving. But we are *not* sure. And besides, scientists tell us that at the present rate of evolution, by the time that the prospective perfect race has emerged, the conditions on this planet will not allow human beings to live here at all! The sun is gradually losing its heat. Or it is gradually getting too hot in relation to the earth. Taking the long view, we must inevitably perish either by extreme cold or by extreme heat! Perhaps it is not so surprising that one or two scientists have recently averred that the best thing for our earth is that some stray planet should collide with it and finish it *that* way!

But coming back to Koheleth's gloomy observation that men and beasts die alike; some perhaps would say, "Why should the thought of death worry men? Why not live simply in the present and enjoy it?" The answer is that although the beasts can and *do* live simply in the present, man simply *cannot* do so, the reason being that God has "set eternity" in the human heart (iii. 11). There is that in man's constitution which simply cannot be satisfied merely with the present and the material, however much another part of him may be mesmerised by the things of time and sense. Man simply cannot live merely in and for the present. He has a capacity for things intellectual and spiritual, and a consciousness that projects itself into the future. Yet over against this is the stark fact which was so perturbing to Koheleth, that men and beasts seem to die alike.

What then? Well, *Koheleth was wrong.* No man can have a true view of life who looks at it selfishly rather than socially, and apart from God, and as bounded by the grave. And when all the available data are considered, no man *needs* to view it as Koheleth did. Nor did Koheleth himself so view it at the time when he wrote his treatise; for it must be remembered that he was describing how he had thought *earlier* (as his use of the past tense all through the book indicates).

Koheleth's final conclusion is right. It is *fully* right, as far as it goes; but it is far from adequate. That is, it is far from adequate

as a motive and power to inspire human conduct. We can learn very much from what he has told us; but as we have said, we need to turn on through the pages of holy writ and see how much more its developing revelation from God has to say to us. We must turn on to the pages of the prophets and find there whole continents of further truth and wonderful new horizons spreading out before us. And most of all, we must turn on to the New Testament, to the crown of Divine revelation, even the incarnate Son of God Himself.

Oh, what a different view of life we get when we see it through the eyes of the Lord Jesus! With Him there is no viewing of life selfishly rather than socially. None was ever so social-minded as the Son of Man. There was pure "otherism" and absolutely no egoism. He "went about doing good." He was the best of all mixers. He was at home in every circle, for wherever He was, He was there to forget Himself in the good of others. And with Him there was no viewing of human life as apart from God. He saw the Father's hand everywhere. Everything was significant of good purpose and of faithful Divine supervision. And with Him there was no viewing of life as bounded by the grave. The very opposite! It is there, beyond the mortal present, that the vast issues of our life are. There is no "vanity of vanities" with Jesus! He comes to declare *the reality of realities*, that there is a Divine meaning and purpose running all through our human life. Even the Cross, if it be the Father's will, is the pathway to a throne. There is benevolent purpose everywhere in the universe. We may trust God. We may know His love and presence in our lives. Life is not a mockery. God is *LOVE*. Behind every frowning providence there is a smiling face. God is not only Creator, King, and Judge: He is the *FATHER*!

But we must add one word more, lest even now we give a wrong impression about this Book of Ecclesiastes. True enough, so far as life after death and certain other big matters are concerned, we need to pass on from its pages to the further and fuller unfoldings of Scripture revelation: yet this fact does not detract from its importance. Strange as the remark may seem to some, we do not hesitate to say that if there is one book more than another in the Old Testament which we would like to send for special consideration to millions of our fellow-countrymen today, it is Ecclesiastes. And though it may sound still stranger, if

there is one Old Testament book more than another which many *Christians* of today need to read and pray over, it is Ecclesiastes.

Would that the people of our time had learned the central lesson of this little suite of essays from the quill of disillusioned Solomon, namely, that a life lived for self and the world, and without God, is "vanity," and that nothing "under the sun" can ever really satisfy the human heart! Would that many who call themselves Christians had learned that same truth: "Set your affection . . . not on things on the earth"! Certainly, it is only when we have really learned the "*vanity of vanities*" in Ecclesiastes that we can appreciate the mystic message of the "*Song of Songs*" in the book which follows.

Meanwhile, perhaps we cannot more fittingly end these reflections on Ecclesiastes than by quoting some lines from Scotland's Robbie Burns.

> It's no in titles nor in rank:
> It's no in wealth like Lon'on bank,
> To purchase peace and rest;
> It's no in making muckle mair;
> It's no in books; it's no in lear;
> To make us truly blest;
> If happiness hae not her seat
> And centre in the breast,
> We may be wise, or rich, or great,
> But never can be blest;
> Nae treasures, nor pleasures, could make us happy lang:
> The heart aye's the part aye that makes us right or wrang.
>
> —ROBERT BURNS, *in "Epistle to Davie."*

THE SONG OF SOLOMON (1)

Lesson Number 66

NOTE.—For this study in the Song of Solomon read the whole book through twice, in the Revised Version.

O happy love!—where love like this is found!
O heart-felt raptures! bliss beyond compare!
I've pacèd much this weary, mortal round,
And sage experience bids me this declare—
"If Heaven a draught of heavenly pleasure spare,
One cordial in this melancholy vale,
'Tis when a youthful, loving, modest pair,
In either's arms breathe out the tender tale,
Beneath the milk-white thorn that scents the evening gale."

—ROBERT BURNS, *in "The Cotter's Saturday Night."*

THE SONG OF SOLOMON (1)

"THE SONG of songs, which is Solomon's"—such are the introductory words to this exquisite composition. Fitly is it called the Song of Songs, for it is on the theme of themes—*love*. Its literary excellence is such as to make it well worthy of the gifted king to whom it is attributed. It bears clear marks of having come down to us from the Solomonic period; and there seems to be no weighty reason why we should not accept it as being actually from the pen of the royal author whose name it bears.

Interpretation

But the question of first concern is the *interpretation* of this love-poem. It has been truly said that "Nowhere in Scripture does the unspiritual mind tread upon ground so mysterious and incomprehensible as in this book, while the saintliest men and women of the ages have found it a source of pure and exquisite delight." What, then, shall we say about it? Is it just a poem of human love and nothing more, or has it a spiritual meaning and a Divine message for us? If the latter, then what *is* the spiritual meaning and Divine message? "There is no book of Scripture on which more commentaries have been written and more diversities of opinion expressed than this short poem of eight chapters"—so says a learned expositor. We shall be wise, therefore, to avoid adding unprofitably to an already liberally discussed subject. Fortunately, in the process of the long-continued discussion certain broad facts have gradually emerged with increasing clearness, all converging toward the same result; so that we are now in a position to sum up and draw fairly mature conclusions.

Three theories of interpretation have been advanced—the naturalistic, the allegorical, and the typical.

Naturalistic Theory.

The *naturalistic* theory would have it that the book is simply a collection of erotic songs, or idylls of love, put together on the

ground of literary merit, and without any allegorical or typical meaning, though possibly intended to describe ideal human love. This theory leaves the inclusion of the book in the sacred canon an inexplicable anomaly. When we remember how the Hebrews venerated their sacred Scriptures, and how careful they were that only inspired writings should be included in the canon, we cannot believe that the Song of Songs should have been given its decided place in the Scriptures simply on the ground of literary merit. Not one of the books is there simply as a piece of literature. Each has its place because of its religious character or its special connection with the peculiar national position of the Hebrew people. The very canonicity of the poem, therefore, argues its spiritual significance.

Allegorical Theory.

At the other extreme is the *allegorical* theory, which ignores as of no concern whether the poem has any historical foundation in a real love-suit between Solomon and Shulamith, and treats the whole as a purely figurative and mystical fiction. To read some of the absurd and fanciful expositions associated with this theory, such as that the hair of the bride represents the mass of the nations converted to Christianity, is too much for a God-given sense of humour, and brings the whole theory into disrepute.

Typical Interpretation.

Coming between the naturalistic and allegorical theories is the *typical* interpretation, which recognises the distinctive elements in each of the other two without going to the extreme of either. The writing has an historical basis; but in harmony with the rest of Scripture, it also has a religious purpose and a spiritual content. An ideal human love is represented, to lead the soul into the thought of fellowship with God. Fundamentally, the facts are historical; but they are lifted up into the region of poetry for a religious purpose; the facts are idealised and given, by the Spirit of inspiration, a spiritual meaning.

We need not be deterred from a chastened perception of typical significances in Scripture because of the foolish extremes to which fanciful allegorisers have gone. Again and again, in the Scriptures.

metaphors based upon the marriage relationship are used of Israel's relationship with God, and of the Church's relationship with Christ, and of the individual soul's communion with God. The use of the marriage metaphor is noticeably prominent in Paul and John; and we may well ask if they would thus have used the metaphor had not the Old Testament Scriptures already familiarised the people of God with it. A true interpretation of the poem, therefore, will recognise in it a duality in unity; for while it is primarily the expression of "pure marital love as ordained of God in creation, and the vindication of that love as against both ascetism and lust," the deeper and larger meaning has reference to the heavenly Lover and His bride, the Church.

The Scriptural Key

Has the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Scriptures, provided anywhere a key which really fits the lock and opens up to us the mystic doors of this love-poem in such a way as to assure us that we are rightly interpreting it? I think we may reverently say that He has. Accepting it as a principle of Biblical exegesis that scripture is to be explained by scripture, we believe that the key to the Song of Solomon is psalm xlv.

We get a prefatory hint of this in the *title* of this psalm, which is: "A Song of Loves" (the earlier part of the title as it appears in our English version belongs to the preceding psalm, as we explained in a former lesson on the Titles of the Psalms).

When we look at this "Song of Loves" we find that it is a song of *royal* love. In fact it is a royal *marriage* hymn; and it refers to *Solomon*. But while the primary reference is to Solomon, the ultimate reference is to Christ, as is conclusively settled by Hebrews i. 7, 8. Thus, as Solomon is a type of Christ in his wisdom and riches and fame, so here, in this forty-fifth psalm, he is a type in this marriage union. This at once does away with the supposed difficulty that in the Song of Songs such an one as Solomon cannot fittingly be thought of as a type of the heavenly Bridegroom. Moreover, on the very face of it, this forty-fifth psalm is just such as goes with the Song of Solomon. It might almost have been written to be read with it, as a kind of complement or epilogue, setting the crown on the happy issue of the love-suit.

After the brief preface in verse 1, the psalm divides into two equal parts—(1) an address to the royal bridegroom, in verses 2 to 9; (2) an address to the royal bride, in verses 10 to 17. In each of these two parts we find four sub-divisions. In the address to the royal bridegroom we have—(*a*) in verse 2, the beauty of his person; (*b*) in verses 3 to 5, the valour of his conquests; (*c*) in verse 6, the stability of his kingdom; (*d*) in verses 7 to 9, the gladness of his marriage. Similarly in the address to the royal bride, we have—(*a*) in verses 10 and 11, an appeal for complete devotion; (*b*) in verse 12, a promise of high honour; (*c*) in verses 13 to 15, a eulogy of the bride's charms; (*d*) in verses 16 and 17, a pledge of unceasing Divine favour.

A comparison of this psalm with the Song of Solomon will show us certain striking correspondences such as that between the newly married queen's evident longing towards her now distant Lebanon home, and the exhortation to her, in verse 10 of the psalm: "Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house." But without going further into this here, we shall accept it, in the light of psalm xlv., that the love-suit in the Song of Songs is between Solomon and Shulamith, and that this exquisite love-suit is a most sacred type of the spiritual union between Christ and His Church.

Moreover, there is truth in the observation that "What so many of God's people (right down the course of the years) have recognised (in the Song of Solomon) must be substantially the mind of the Spirit."

There is a theory, though it has never been widely held, that the love-suit in Solomon's Song is between some anonymous shepherd and Shulamith, and that Solomon is a type of the World, against whose allurements the bride eventually proves true to her shepherd-lover. This view is carefully set out by E. W. Bullinger in his *Companion Bible*, and we have carefully examined it; but it is so obviously artificial, and so distorts the poem, that it stands at once discredited, and gives the greater reason for believing that the love-suit here, as in psalm xlv., is between the royal Solomon and this maid of the mountains.

Thus, if the Song of Solomon spoke to Israel, it speaks in an even more profound and beautiful way to the spiritually-quickened members of the true Church, concerning their relationship with

the heavenly Bridegroom—of which relationship Paul was speaking when he wrote to the Ephesians: "Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. v. 25–7).

That the love of the Divine Bridegroom should "follow the analogies of the marriage relation," in this Song of Solomon, "seems evil only to minds so ascetic that marital desire itself seems to them unholy." The book has been a source of exquisite delight to the saintliest men and women of the ages.

We see here, then, in hallowed type, the Lord Jesus and His mystic bride, the Church; and, therefore, by a warrantable appropriation, each Christian believer may claim a true individual application.

Central Message

It is this mystic presence of Christ and the Church in the Song of Songs which gives it its deepest wonder and inmost meaning. It is this which has made it unutterably precious to the inner circle of the Lord's lovers; and it is from this that there comes to us its central *message,* namely: Such is the union between Christ and His redeemed people, when realised in its deepest and tenderest meanings, that it can only be expressed to us under the figure of an ideal marriage union. This is true whether we think of this union as between Christ and His people collectively, as the *Church,* or between Christ and His people individually, as the redeemed and sanctified *members* of that Church.

Various figures are used in Scripture to express the various aspects of this wondrous union. Christ is the Head and we are the body; for it is a *living* union. Christ is the Foundation and we are the building; for it is a *lasting* union. Christ is the Vine and we are the branches; for it is a *fruitful* union. Christ is the Firstborn and we are His brethren; for it is a union of *joint-heirship.* But the sublimest and tenderest meaning of this union can only be expressed—and even then imperfectly—by that most sacred of all human relationships, marriage. Christ is the Bridegroom and we are the bride; for in the truest sense our union with Him is a *loving* union. This is the wonderful meaning which lies at the

heart of Solomon's Song: and thus the Song of Solomon is the sheer opposite of Ecclesiastes; for in Ecclesiastes this present vain world is found too small ever to fill and satisfy the human heart, whereas in Solomon's Song the heart is filled and satisfied by Christ.

The Climax

What, then, is the *climax* of this ideal espousal? It is the joy of mutual possession, as expressed in chapter ii. 16—"*My Beloved is mine, and I am His.*" This, also, is the quintessence of that holy joy which the Christian saint finds in His spiritual union with the adorable Son of God. It is the assurance of possessing and being possessed. Each one of us, as the Lord's redeemed, may unhesitatingly take these words on our lips as applying to ourselves—"My Beloved is mine, and I am His."

In my little book, *His Part and Ours*, I have spoken of the cords which bind our Beloved to us and us to Him. On the one hand, *He* is bound to *us* by (1) the unbreakable cord of His own *promise*, (2) the unseverable cord of an eternal *covenant*, (3) the golden cord of the Divine *love*, (4) the proven cord of our own *experience*. On the other hand, *we* are bound to *Him* by (1) the old cord of *creation*, (2) the red cord of *redemption*, (3) the strong cord of *election*, (4) the new cord of our own *choice*. Seven out of these eight precious bands are those which our Lord Himself has tied; and even the eighth is really the work of His Holy Spirit within our hearts. These love-cords will last for evermore: blessed be His dear Name!

To some it may seem that the language of Solomon's Song is too intimate or extravagant to express the communion of the saints with the heavenly Bridegroom; yet it is a fact that the most ardent lovers of the Lord have here found a relief of expression such as could be found nowhere else. There is a rapture of communion with Christ which no ordinary phraseology can utter. Take the following words of Samuel Rutherford—

> "*Every day we see some new beauty in Christ, His love hath neither brim nor bottom. If there were ten thousand thousand millions of worlds, and as many heavens full of men and angels, Christ would not be pinched to supply all our wants, and to fill us all. This soul of ours hath love and cannot but love some*

fair one; and oh, what a fair One, what an only One, what an excellent, lovely, ravishing One is Jesus! All men speak well of Christ who have been at Him. Men and angels who know Him will say more than I now do; and think more of Him than even they can say. Oh for arms to embrace Him!"

Or take these further words, from that lovable old character, John Fawcett, the author of the hymn, "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love"—

"O blessed Jesus, Thy love is wonderful. The experimental sense of it sweetens all the bitterness of life, and disarms death of its terrors. When I am favoured with the light of Thy countenance and the sense of Thy love, my soul is filled and satisfied. Thou art to me the full ocean of never-failing delights and satisfaction. Through all the ages of a blissful eternity I humbly hope to proclaim the wonders of redeeming love, and tell to listening angels what that love has done for my soul."

Or turn to the hymnbook. See, again and again, in its pages, the same eager, affectionate language. Take the following well-known verses from hymns by Charles Wesley, Antoinette Bourignon, F. W. Faber, and C. E. Mudie, respectively:—

O Love Divine, how sweet Thou art!
When shall I find my willing heart
  All taken up by Thee?
I thirst, I faint, I die to prove
The fulness of redeeming love,
  The love of Christ to me.

. . . . .

Thee I can love, and Thee alone,
With pure delight and inward bliss;
To know Thou makest me Thine own,
Oh, what a happiness is this!

Nothing on earth do I desire
But thy pure love within my breast;
This, only this, will I require,
And freely give up all the rest.

. . . .

O Jesus, Jesus, dearest Lord,
  Thy sacred name I say
For very love within my heart
  A thousand times a day.

I love Thee so, I know not how
  My raptures to control;
Thy love is like a burning fire
  Within my very soul.

Oh, light in darkness! joy in grief!
  Oh, wealth beyond all worth!
Jesus, my love, to have Thee mine
  Is heaven begun on earth.

. . . .

I lift my heart to Thee,
  Saviour Divine;
For Thou art all to me,
  And I am Thine.
Is there a closer bond
  On earth than this,
That my Beloved's mine,
  And I am His?

Truly, there is a rapture of communion with Christ which no ordinary phraseology can utter. There is an inner circle of our Lord's disciples in which the love of God is so "shed abroad" that those who experience it must say with Bernard of Clairvaux, "The love of Jesus, what it is, none but His loved ones know". And should not the response of our own hearts be that which is expressed in a further verse of Mr. Mudie's hymn?—

To Thee, Thou bleeding Lamb,
  I all things owe;
All that I have and am,
  And all I know.
All that I have is now
  No longer mine;
And I am not my own,
  Lord, I am Thine.

THE SONG OF SOLOMON (2)

Lesson Number 67

NOTE.—For this study read right through the book again, marking a separating break at the end of each of the following verses: II. 7; III. 5; V. 1; vi. 3; vii. 10; viii. 4.

"We see in burning-glasses, where the beams of the sun meet in one, how forcible they are, because there is a union of the beams in a little point. Let it be our labour that all the beams of our love may meet in Christ, that He may be our Beloved. As all streams meet in the great ocean, so let all our loves meet in Christ. We cannot bestow our love and our affections better than upon Christ. It is a happiness that we have such affections as joy, delight, and love, planted in us by God; and what a happiness is it that we should have such an excellent Object to fill those affections, yea, to transcend, and more than satisfy them!"

—*Richard Sibbes.*

THE SONG OF SOLOMON (2)

Its Literary Form

THE SONG of Solomon, as we have said, is a poem. It will be well, however, if we now amplify that definition, and say that it is really *several* short poems combined into one. This does not detract either from its literary appeal or its spiritual meaning, for these several poemettes, or idyl fragments, obviously belong together as different aspects of the same love-suit.

According to Dr. Richard G. Moulton's *Modern Reader's Bible*, the Song of Solomon is "*A Suite of Seven Idyls.*" These, the titles of which we have reworded somewhat, are as follows:

Idyl 1. *The Royal Wedding Lived Over Again* (i. 1–ii. 7).
,, 2. *The Bride's Courtship Reminiscences* (ii. 8–iii. 5).
,, 3. *The Occasion of the Betrothal Recalled* (iii. 6–v. 1).
,, 4. *The Bride's Troubled Dream Related* (v. 2–vi. 3).
,, 5. *The King's Meditation on His Bride* (vi. 4–vii. 10).
,, 6. *The Bride Longs to See Her Old Home* (vii. 11–viii. 4).
,, 7. *The Renewal of Love at Lebanon* (viii. 5–viii. 14).

Perhaps that word, "idyl," calls for comment. It comes from the Greek *eidullion*, which means "a little picture." Historically, its use in connection with poetry comes down from the great Sicilian poet, Theocritus (third century B.C.). The idyls of Theocritus were pictures of the ordinary, open-air shepherd life of the people of Sicily: and from that time until the present, literary usage has reserved the word "idyl" for that which is pastoral or homely as in contrast with that which is epic, heroic or dramatic. An idyl, then, is a short pictorial poem on some pastoral or homely subject; a short descriptive or narrative poem, especially one which gives to familiar or everyday scenes a tinge of romance.

To say that the Song of Solomon is a cluster of idyls may seem quite unimportant at first. What does it matter whichever particular form of poetry it is in? Actually, however, it is of very *real* concern to classify the technical form of this work; for upon this depends the very *interpretation* of the story which the poem

intends to convey. A moment's reflection will make this clear. If we take the poem as *dramatic*, rather than idyllic, then the Song of Solomon is a *consecutive story*: that which comes in chapter ii. is later in point of time than that which comes in chapter i.; that which comes in chapter iii. is later in point of time than that which comes in chapter ii., and so on. Drama presents a story; and therefore dramatic action can never go back. If, then, we take the Song of Solomon as dramatic, our interpretation will be correspondingly affected.

On the other hand, if we see in the Song of Solomon a cluster of lyric idyls, then our interpretation will not be restricted by any necessary adherence to sequence; for these lyric idyls may, with perfect propriety, pick on different parts of the story, passing from the later to the earlier, without restriction as to the order of time.

Hear Dr. Moulton again: "Those who hold that Solomon's Song is a drama find the plot of that drama to consist in a struggle between king Solomon and a humble shepherd wooer for the love of the fair Shulamite woman, Solomon in the end giving way, and the heroine and her humble wooer becoming united. To me this result seems to be wrung out of the words of the poem with a good deal of straining. On the other hand, if we allow the work the wider range of lyric idyls, there needs no straining of interpretation to arrive at a story which is certainly not less interesting than the other. For by this interpretation we are able to identify the humble lover with Solomon himself. The story becomes this: King Solomon, with a courtly retinue visiting the royal vineyards upon Mount Lebanon, comes by surprise upon the fair Shulamite. She flies from them. Solomon visits her in the disguise of a shepherd, and so wins her love. He then comes in all his royal state, and calls her to leave Lebanon and become his queen. They are in the act of being wedded in the royal palace when the poem opens."

It is wonderful how this Song of Solomon lights up with added beauties when it is set out in this seven-fold idyllic form, with each separate idyl arranged to full poetic effect. It is quite impossible for us to give all seven thus set out here; but with much gratitude to Dr. Moulton, whose great work we wholeheartedly recommend, we will take the liberty of here reproducing (abridged) his presentation of Idyls one, five and seven.

IDYL I (i. 1–ii. 7)

THE WEDDING DAY

Outside the Palace. The Bridal Procession approaches: the Royal Bridegroom leading the Bride, followed by an Attendant Chorus of Daughters of Jerusalem.

THE BRIDE

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth:
For thy love is better than wine (etc.).

A pause is made at the threshold of the Palace.

THE BRIDE (*to the Bridegroom*)

Draw me—

ATTENDANT CHORUS

We will run after thee.

The Bridegroom lifts the Bride across the threshold.

THE BRIDE

The king hath brought me into his chambers.

ATTENDANT CHORUS

We will be glad and rejoice in thee,
We will make mention of thy love more than of wine.

THE BRIDE

In uprightness do they love thee.

Inside the Palace. The Bride addresses her Attendant Chorus.

THE BRIDE

I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem,
As the tents of Kedar (etc.).

The Bride and Bridegroom whisper reminiscences of their courtship: how she sought to penetrate his disguise and he answered mysteriously.

THE BRIDE (verse 7).

THE BRIDEGROOM (verse 8).

The Procession from the Banqueting House to the Bridal Chamber.

THE BRIDEGROOM (verses 9–11).

THE BRIDE (verses 12–14).

THE BRIDEGROOM (verse 15).

THE BRIDE (i. 16–ii. 1).
THE BRIDEGROOM (ii. 2).
THE BRIDE (ii. 3–6).
REFRAIN (ii. 7).

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
By the roes, and by the hinds of the field,
That ye stir not up, nor awaken love,
Until it please.

IDYL V (vi. 4–vii. 10)

THE KING'S MEDITATION ON HIS BRIDE

THE KING MUSES ON HER BEAUTY

Thou are beautiful, my love, as Tirzah,
Comely as Jerusalem,
Terrible as an army with banners.
Turn away thine eyes from me,
For they have overcome me.
Thy hair is as a flock of goats
That lie along the side of Gilead.
(etc. to end of vi. 9)

THE MUSING BECOMES (IN DRAMATIC FORM) A REMINISCENCE OF THE FIRST MEETING

(*a*) *Surprise of the Court*

"Who is she that looketh forth as the morning,
"Fair as the moon, pure as the sun,
"Terrible as an army with banners?"

(*b*) *Surprise of the Shulamite*

"I went down into the garden of nuts,
"To see the green plants of the valley . . .
"Or ever I was aware, my soul set me
"Among the chariots of my princely people".

(*c*) *Cry of the Royal Court*

"Return, return, O Shulamite;
"Return, return, that we may look on thee".

(d) Confusion of the Shulamite

"Why will ye look upon the Shulamite
"As upon the dance of Mahanaim?"

THE KING RESUMES HIS MUSING ON THE BRIDE'S BEAUTY

How beautiful are thy feet in sandals,
O prince's daughter!
The joints of thy thighs are like jewels,
The work of a cunning workman. . . .
(and so, to verse 9)

IDYL VII (viii. 5–14)

THE RENEWAL OF LOVE IN THE VINEYARD OF LEBANON

Arrival of Royal Pair (unattended) at place where they first met.

Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness,
Leaning upon her beloved?

KING SOLOMON

Under the apple tree I awakened thee:
There thy mother was in travail with thee,
There was she in travail that brought thee forth.

THE BRIDE

Set me as a seal upon thine heart,
As a seal upon thine arm:
For love is strong as death;
Jealousy is cruel as the grave;
The flashes thereof are flashes of fire,
A very flame of the LORD.
Many waters cannot quench love,
Neither can the floods drown it:
If a man would give all the substance of
his house for love,
It would utterly be contemned.

The Bride recalls riddling speeches of her Brothers when she was a child: she understands them now.

"We have a little sister" (etc.)
(*Here read verses* 8, 9 *and* 10.)

The Bride renews her vows to her husband: Solomon shall be the landlord of her heart as he is the landlord of her home.

THE BRIDE

Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon;
He let out the vineyard unto keepers;
Everyone for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand pieces of silver.

My vineyard, which is mine, is before me:
Thou, O Solomon, shalt have the thousand,
And those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred.

The Escort heard approaching to conduct them back from Lebanon: there is just time for a final embrace.

KING SOLOMON

Thou that dwellest in the gardens,
The companions hearken for thy voice:
Cause me to hear it.

THE BRIDE

Make haste, my beloved,
And be thou like to a roe or to a young hart
Upon the mountains of spices.

To see these idyls presented in this way enhances their interest, and clarifies their sense. It adds to their literary charm, and at the same time helps our perception of their spiritual meaning; for let us most of all remember that the Lord Jesus and His bride, the Church, are mystically present everywhere in this sevenfold poem; and anything which helps us in our understanding of this is important.

In our next and final study in the Song of Solomon, we shall summarise the seven idyls, each in turn, and then give certain instances of spiritual lessons which are to be found in them. Meanwhile, we cannot do better than to close this present study by once again recommending the reader to get Dr. Richard G. Moulton's *Modern Reader's Bible*—if and when circumstances allow.

THE SONG OF SOLOMON (3)

Lesson Number 68

NOTE.—For this study read again the seven idyls which constitute the full poem, but read them separately, along with the brief comments which we have made on them.

No angel's tongue above
Could e'er express His love;
Nor harp of sweetest sound
Like his dear voice be found.
No lustrous seraph there
Could e'er with Him compare—
The fairest of the fair
is Jesus.

Sweet wonder, all Divine,
That He should now be mine!
The rapture, who shall tell,
Where He has cast His spell?
Perfection's crown is He,
The sum of bliss to me,
My endless heaven to be
is Jesus.

—*J. S. B.*

THE SONG OF SOLOMON (3)

The Seven Parts

HAVING now noted the composite and idyllic form of this exquisite composition, and having seen two of the seven idyls set out so as to show the underlying incidents to which the poetry refers, let us sum up the seven idyls in turn. Modern and western readers should guard against mentally picturing the wooing and wedding here as being according to occidental form and custom.

Idyl 1 (i. 1–ii. 7).

Here, in vivid touches, is the royal marriage. The bridal procession reaches the palace. The royal bridegroom, according to customary ceremony, lifts the bride over the threshold (i. 4), whereupon the attendant "daughters of Jerusalem" break into chorus—"We will be glad, and rejoice in thee. We will make mention of thy love more than of wine" (i. 4). Inside the palace, the bride, whose marriage raises her from rustic obscurity to the throne of the land, gracefully excuses her country complexion to her more artificial, city-bred wedding-maidens (i. 5, 6); though, of course, that for which she modestly apologises is, in Solomon's eyes, part of her superlative charm. The two lovers now exchange whispered reminiscences of their courtship (i. 7, 8), after which comes the procession from the banqueting house to the bridal chamber. Here the bride and bridegroom are heard exchanging affectionate appreciations of each other (i. 9–ii. 6), until the poet's refrain (ii. 7) draws the curtain on that final picture of the happy day—

> I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
> By the roes, and by the hinds of the field,
> That ye stir not up, nor awaken love,
> Until it please.

Idyl 2 (ii. 8–iii. 5).

In this second idyl, the bride indulges in reminiscences of the courtship days. She re-lives that unforgettable day in the fair springtime, when her princely lover first came to her mountain home, and when their love had its beginning (ii. 8–14). As she thinks upon her new-found lover's ardent words at that time, she also recalls how the harsh voices of her brothers had interrupted with the cry that the foxes had got into the vineyard (ii. 15). After this there follow the reminiscences of a happy dream in which she found her lost lover (iii. 1–4); and then the second idyl closes with the same refrain as that which closed the first (iii. 5).

Idyl 3 (iii. 6–v. 1).

In this superb song the day of the betrothal is re-lived. Already king Solomon, in shepherd disguise, has wooed and won the fair heroine; but now he comes in state (iii. 6–11). Having arrived, he pours out his love to the Shulamite (iv. 1–5). The maiden's momentary interruption of modest embarrassment before such ardent praises is given in verse 6; and after this comes the actual proposal of marriage (iv. 7–15). Solomon invites her to leave Lebanon (verse 8), for she has ravished his heart (verse 9). Her rustic fragrance is better to him than all manner of "spices"—the more artificial perfumery of the city maidens (iv. 10). Yet while she is away amid her country surroundings she is like "a garden shut up" and inaccessible (verse 12). So, under this metaphor of a garden shut up—a delicate symbol of maidenhood—marriage is proposed; and, under the same metaphor the beautiful Shulamite accepts, in the words of verse 16—

> Let my beloved come into his garden,
> And eat his pleasant fruits.

Solomon's joyous response is (in v. 1): "I am come into my garden, my sister, my bride." This idyl then closes with a final touch from the poet (in v. 1)—

> Eat, O friends;
> Drink, yea, drink abundantly of love.

Idyl 4 (v. 2–vi. 3).

Idyl 4 relates a troubled dream of the bride. She dreams that her beloved comes to her in the night, seeking admission. She hesitates. There is a little delay while she quickly attends to her personal appearance, and dips her hands in the myrrh (v. 3). In that pause, her beloved withdraws himself; and when she opens the door he is gone (v. 6). She wanders forth in the night, seeking her lost lover (v. 7). The watchmen find her. They smite and wound and insult her (v. 7). In her troubled dreaming she now fancies herself accosting the chorus of bridesmaids, to whom she pours out her grief (v. 8). To them she gives a description of her beloved which is surely a masterpiece of language, unexcelled for choiceness (v. 10–16). Her rapturous eulogy of his charms has the effect of lifting her dream out of its troubled darkness and bringing it to a happy issue. She finds where her beloved has gone (vi. 2), and is relieved to awake with a song upon her lips (vi. 3).

Idyl 5 (vi. 4–vii. 10).

This is a meditation of the king upon his bride. It is both passionate and rapturous. In the first part (vi. 4–9), the king muses on her beauty. The language is richly expressive. At verse 10 the meditation seems to become a reminiscence, and may well refer to the first meeting of Solomon and Shulamith. We seem to hear, in verse 10, the words of surprise and praise from the royal party when they unexpectedly came upon the maiden.

> Who is she that looketh forth as the morning,
> Fair as the moon, pure as the sun,
> Terrible as an army with banners?

The next six lines may well express the feelings of the maiden, sensitive under the admiring gaze of the royal party (verses 11, 12).

The next couplet (verse 13) may well fit the royal party as the maiden flees from them—

> Return, return, O Shulamite;
> Return, return, that we may look upon thee.

And the next couplet gives the response, either spoken or unspoken, of the maiden—

Why will ye look upon the Shulamite,
As upon the dance at Mahanaim?

The king's meditation is then resumed (at vii. 1) and runs on to the closing refrain (vii. 10).

Idyl 6 (vii. 11–viii. 4).

There is but one voice in this, the shortest of these lyrics. It is that of the bride. Amid the palace splendours she yearns to see the country home on Mount Lebanon again. In these choice stanzas she makes tender appeal that she and her husband should visit it, and there renew their love (vii. 11–viii. 3). This idyl then closes with a snatch from an earlier refrain (viii. 4).

Idyl 7 (viii. 5–14).

Here is the renewal of love in the Lebanon vineyard. In the opening couplet the royal pair reach the spot where they had first met: "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?" Solomon speaks (verse 5); then his bride (verses 6, 7). The bride now recalls remarks of her brothers which had puzzled her in younger years, and which she now understands (verses 8–10). And now she renews her love-vow to Solomon under the figure of a vineyard and its landlord. The voices of the escort are now heard. There is but time for a last word of love; and the poem ends.

Spiritual Lessons

When once the mystic presence of Christ and the Church is seen in this Song of Solomon, it simply abounds with precious spiritual applications. The little space which here remains to us allows merely a fractional illustration of this.

Turn to the beginning of Idyl 4 (v. 2). Here we have the bride's reminiscence of a love-dream. Her beloved comes to her, gently appealing for admission: "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled; for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." The spouse allows self-considerations to delay her response: "I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?" When she eventually opens the door, her dear one has gone away; and with anguished heart she must now seek

him through the night, must weep for him, and suffer at the hands of the city watchmen, before she finds him again. Oh, how often has that very thing happened in our own experience! Self-interests have delayed our response to Christ when He has come in some special way to enrich the heart: and when we have afterwards sought the blessing, our Beloved has withdrawn Himself, night has surrounded us, fears have beset us, and we have waded through pools of tears before we have found Him. Well have we understood at such times the truth of those lines from the hymn book—

Our midnight is Thy smile withdrawn;
Our noontide is Thy gracious dawn.

Oh that we may be quick to the voice of our heavenly Bridegroom!—that we may make eager response to Him!—that we may not forfeit His choicest secrets and blessings! The Scofield Bible note on the bride's delay is well worth prayerful reflection: "The bride is satisfied with her washed feet while the Bridegroom, His 'head filled with dew,' and His 'locks with the drops of the night,' is toiling for others. The state of the bride is not one of sin, but of neglect of service. She is preoccupied with the graces and perfections which she has in Christ through the Spirit (1 Cor. xii. 4–11; Gal. v. 22, 23). It is mysticism, unbalanced by the activities of the Christian warfare. Her feet are washed, her hands drop with sweet-smelling myrrh; but He has gone on, and now she must seek Him."

But now let us turn up just one other such instance in the Song of Solomon. We will limit ourselves to one verse only. It is chapter ii. 14. Here the royal lover addresses Shulammith thus: "O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret of the stairs; let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice; and thy countenance is comely." Read these same words now as coming from the lips of Christ to His own; and observe the beautiful progress of thought in them.

First, we have the bride's *character*, as it is in the estimation of the bridegroom. He calls her "My dove," a metaphor which means to express gentleness, tenderness, comeliness, and purity (see v. 2 and vi. 9). Although, in themselves, Christ's people are deeply unworthy and are defiled by sin, yet, in Him, they are made beautiful. Covered by His perfect righteousness, they

are "accepted in the Beloved." Sanctified by the love of God, which is shed within them by the Holy Spirit, they are made "blameless and harmless."

Next, note the bride's *safety*. The dove is "in the clefts of the rock." The rock-doves, as the reader may know, actually do live in the clefts of the rock, safe from the storms, which, whatever else they may destroy, cannot shake the immovable rock. Interpreted in the light of other Scriptures, the "rock" in this fourteenth verse of chapter ii. is Christ Himself. He is the "Rock of Ages," cleft for us; and we are hidden in Him, hidden, as it were, in the riven side of Christ who died to make us His own.

See, further, the bride's position of *privilege*. She is said to be "in the secret of the stairs" (omit the italicised word "places," in the Authorised Version). This "secret of the stairs" speaks of access and ascent. Not only is our true life "hid with Christ in God" (Col. iii. 3), and not only are we personally safe in the clefts of the Rock, but we have the secret of ascent and the privilege of access (Eph. ii. 18; Heb. x. 19–22).

Just once again, see the bride's *belovedness* to her royal lover. He says: "Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." The spiritually-minded Christian reads these words, and hears them falling, not merely from the lips of Solomon to the maid of Lebanon, but from the lips of the Son of God to those whom He has bought with His own precious blood; for it is written that "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it . . . that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church . . . holy and without blemish" (Eph. v. 25–7).

This Song of Solomon abounds with similarly tender correspondences between the royal love-suit of long ago and the far more wonderful union of Christ and the Church. Again and again, as we read it prayerfully and adoringly, we find ourselves softly singing Charles Wesley's lines—

O Love divine, how sweet Thou art!
When shall I find my willing heart
  All taken up by Thee?
I thirst, I faint, I die to prove
The fulness of redeeming love—
  The love of Christ to me.

CAN YOU MANAGE THESE?

1. What is the genius of the proverb, and what the general purpose of the *Book* of Proverbs?
2. What is the threefold division of the Book of Proverbs?
3. Can you give three proverbs exemplifying, respectively, contrastive, completive, and comparative structure?
4. Indicate the four main parts or movements in the quest or argument of Ecclesiastes.
5. Inasmuch as Ecclesiastes consists of argumentative processes not every word can be picked on as being in itself an inspired precept: but how then does that fact bear on the inspiration of the Bible?
6. In what way is the Book of Ecclesiastes a challenge to faith?
7. What are the ten "vanities" mentioned in the Book of Ecclesiastes?
8. What were the three sources of Koheleth's pessimism?
9. What are the three theories of interpretation regarding the Song of Solomon?
10. Which psalm seems to be the Scripture key to the typical meaning of the Song of Solomon?
11. What would you say is the central message of the Song of Solomon?
12. Which are the seven idyls of which the complete suite is composed?
13. Why is it important to decide whether the form of the Song of Solomon is dramatic or idyllic?
14. Answer the objection that Solomon cannot be a type of Christ in the Song of Songs because of his personal unsuitability.
15. Give one specimen of the spiritual applications (to Christ and His people) which may be made from the Song of Solomon.

THE BOOKS OF THE PROPHETS

Lesson Number 69

By whatever process it has come to be, teachers and disciples far and wide now regard the Old Testament from an angle totally different (I use the words deliberately) from that taken by our Lord Jesus Christ, alike before and after His resurrection from the dead. To Him, tempted, teaching, suffering, dying, risen, "*it is written*" was a formula of infinite import. The principle this expressed lay at the heart of His teaching. It is not too much to say that it belonged to the pulse, to the vital breath, of His message to others, and, what is mysteriously yet more, to His certainty about Himself.

—*Sir Robert Anderson*

THE BOOKS OF THE PROPHETS

INTRODUCTORY

IN OUR progressive study of the Bible, we have now reached the final group of writings in the Old Testament. Twenty-two books now lie behind us. A further seventeen stretch before us, namely, the seventeen books of the Prophets. These we shall find to be an arresting concentration of inspired doctrine and prediction.

A Backward Look

It is well that just here we should look back for a moment over the ground which we have already traversed. We did this at the beginning of the Poetical Books, but we ought to do the same again here. The first group of writings in the Old Testament, as we have seen, is comprised of seventeen *historical* books. These are the books running from Genesis to Esther. This group of seventeen sub-groups itself into five and twelve. The first five, Genesis to Deuteronomy, clearly belong together. They are all from the pen of Moses, and they all have to do with Israel's *preparation* for Canaan. The remaining twelve, Joshua to Esther, equally clearly belong together. They are from different pens, but they all have to do with Israel's *occupation* of Canaan. Thus, at the beginning of the Old Testament, we have a group of *seventeen* books which are all *historical*, and which are divided into two sub-groups of five and twelve.

The twelve may be further divided into nine and three, for in the first nine, which are pre-exilic (Joshua to II Chronicles) the Davidic kingdom is still in the land, whereas in the remaining three (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther) only the post-exilic "Remnant" is back in the land.

And now, as we come to the third and final group of books in the Old Testament, we find a further group of *seventeen* which are *prophetical*. What is more, we find that these, like the foregoing seventeen historical books, are divided into five and twelve, i.e. the five writings of the "Major" Prophets, and the twelve so-called

"Minor" Prophets. And the twelve may be still further divided into nine and three, for in the first nine, which are pre-exilic (Hosea to Zephaniah) the Davidic kingdom is still in the land, whereas in the remaining three (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) only the post-exilic "Remnant" is back in the land.

As we have pointed out before, the division of the seventeen prophetical books into "Major" and "Minor" is no artificial distinction. In the former we find all the basic ethical features of Old Testament prophecy and of Messianic prediction. In Isaiah the coming Messiah is seen both as the suffering Saviour and as the ultimate Sovereign who reigns in world empire. In Jeremiah, where we also have Jehovah's full case against Israel, He is the righteous "Branch" of David, and the ultimate restorer of the judged and dispersed people. In Ezekiel, looking beyond intermediate judgments, we see Him as the perfect Shepherd-King in whose glorious reign the ideal temple of the future is to be erected. In Daniel, who gives us the most particularised programme of times and events in their successive order, we see the Messiah "cut off" without throne or kingdom, yet standing up at last as universal Emperor on the ruins of the crashed Gentile world-system.

The twelve writings grouped as the "Minor Prophets", though they amplify various aspects, do not determine the main shape of Messianic prophecy. They conform to the general frame already formed for us in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.

Coming *between* the seventeen historical books and the seventeen prophetical books, we have the five-fold group of the "poetical" books, which are neither historical nor prophetical, but *experiential.* Thus, the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament are grouped as follows:

HISTORICAL	EXPERIENTIAL	PROPHETICAL
SEVENTEEN 5 + 9 + 3	FIVE	SEVENTEEN 5 + 9 + 3

It is well, also, at this point, to let our eye travel back over the distinctive features of the books which we have studied. We have found, up to this point, that the distinctive feature of each

book in the Old Testament is so pronounced that we may denote it by a single word or phrase.

Genesis	— *Destitution* (through the sin of man).
Exodus	— *Deliverance* (through the power of God).
Leviticus	— *Dedication* (accepted through atonement).
Numbers	— *Direction* (by the Divine guidance).
Deuteronomy	— *Destination* (by the Divine faithfulness).

Joshua	— *Possession* (Israel occupies the land).
Judges, Ruth	— *Declension* (Israel betrays her trust).
1 Samuel	— *Transition* (Theocracy now a Monarchy).
2 Samuel	— *Confirmation* (Davidic throne confirmed).
1 Kings	— *Disruption* (break-away of ten tribes).
2 Kings	— *Dispersion* (both kingdoms into exile).
Chronicles	— *Recapitulation* (Adam down to the Exile).
Ezra	— *Restoration* (Remnant returns to Judæa).
Nehemiah	— *Reconstruction* (Jerusalem wall rebuilt).
Esther	— *Preservation* (of the *non*-returned Jews).

Book of Job	— *Blessing through Suffering* (self-life dies).
The Psalms	— *Praise through Prayer* (the new life in God).
The Proverbs	— *Prudence through Precept* (in Wisdom's school).
Ecclesiastes	— *Verity through Vanity* (world cannot satisfy).
Song of Songs	— *Bliss through Union* (Christ fully satisfies).

We cannot stress too strongly the practical usefulness of getting such a synopsis as that given above firmly fixed in the mind and memory. The interest, not to say the intelligibility, of the books of Scripture which still lie before us depends in considerable degree upon our grasp of that which now lies behind us. To learn and retain the above summary is to have an advantageous background. The main movements of the Scripture story are kept vivid to the mind. The gist of the message is given fixity. In fact, unless we have well learned the foregoing, large tracts in the writings of the Prophets, to which we now come, will be almost like words without meaning; for, whatever else may be true of the Prophets, this is true, that primarily they were men who spoke to their own times, and whose messages are coloured by the history of the chosen people, Israel. So much, then, for the way by which we have already travelled.

And now, before we look at each of these prophetical books by itself, let us anticipate the whole seventeen as a *group*. In our English version they do not appear in their chronological order; but it is most important that we should see and learn them in their chronological order, because our understanding of them is in no small degree bound up with rightly relating them to the day and the circumstances in which they were spoken and written. Here, then, they are, in their chronological order (according to Ussher's dating), with the Assyrian captivity of the ten-tribed northern kingdom, and the Babylonian captivity of Judah, the southern kingdom, shown in relation to them.

CHRONOLOGICAL GROUPING OF OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS

Prophets of northern kingdom (Israel).	Jonah	B.C. 862	(down to perhaps 830).
	Amos	787	
	Hosea	785–725	
Prophets of southern kingdom (Judah).	Obadiah	887	
	Joel	800	
	Isaiah	760–698	—Here Israel, northern kingdom, goes into
	Micah	750–710	Assyrian captivity (721 B.C.).
	Nahum	713	
	Habakkuk	626	
	Zephaniah	630	
	Jeremiah	629–588	
	Lamentations		—Here Judah, southern kingdom, goes into Babylonian captivity (587 B.C.).
Prophets during and after Exile.	Ezekiel	595–574	
	Daniel	607–534	
	Haggai	520	—Here the "Remnant" returns to Jerusalem
	Zechariah	520–518	and Judæa (from 536 B.C.).
	Malachi	397	

From these dates, given in relation to the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, we see that the Prophets were a succession of messengers raised up for a special period—a period of declension and apostasy. It has been truly said that they were primarily "revivalists and patriots" who spoke on behalf of God to the heart and conscience of the nation: but their deeper significance is that they were specially raised up and inspired of God to transmit a message of warning and entreaty ere the stroke of Divine judgment laid the two Hebrew kingdoms low beneath the heel of their heathen captors.

It will be noted, too, that Jeremiah's tear-drenched elegy, the "Lamentations," marks Judah's actual plunge into the night of the Babylonian exile. (We have read the arguments which some modern scholars have put forward for the much later date and

the composite authorship of the "Lamentations," and are convinced that they are wrong.)

Once more, it should always be borne in mind that the last three of the seventeen *prophetical* books (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) should be read with the last three of the seventeen *historical* books (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther), for in both cases the three books are *post*-exilic. Haggai and Zechariah and Malachi, that is, are the prophets of the returned "Remnant."

And now, for the sake of even greater clearness, we ought perhaps to set out the line of prophets in relation to the kings during whose reigns they conducted their ministries. In the following lists the prophets whose names are given in italics are the non-writing prophets, or prophets of whose writings nothing has come down to us. The numbers in brackets give the years that the different kings reigned.

Also, in the following catalogue the reason why the kings of Judah are spaced out a little in several places is to show, as nearly as possible, the kings of the two lines, respectively, who reigned at the same time as each other, or whose reigns overlapped.

THE PROPHETS IN RELATION TO THE KINGS

Saul	(40)	*Samuel, Nathan, Gad, and Ahijah.*
David	(40)	
Solomon	(40)	

JUDAH			ISRAEL		
Rehoboam	(17)	*Shemaiah* (2 Chron. xii.)	Jeroboam	(22)	*Ahijah* (1 Kings xi., xiv.)
Abijam	(3)		Nadab	(2)	
Asa	(41)	*Azariah* (2 Chron. xv.) *Hanani* (1 Chron. xvi.)	Baasha	(24)	*Jehu* (1 Kings xvi. 2 Chron. xix.)
			Ela	(2)	
			Zimri	(one week)	
Jehoshaphat	(25)		Omri	(12)	
Jehoram	(8)		Ahab	(22)	*Elijah, and Micaiah* (1 Kings. xiv. 22).
Ahaziah	(1)	OBADIAH ?	Ahaziah	(2)	
Athaliah	(6)		Jehoram	(12)	
Joash	(40)	JOEL ?	Jehu	(28)	*Elisha.*
			Jehoahaz	(17)	
Amaziah	(29)		Joash	(16)	JONAH
Azariah (Uzziah)	(52)	ISAIAH and MICAH.	Jeroboam 2	(41)	and AMOS.
			(interregnum)	(12)	
Jotham	(16)		Zechariah	(½ year)	HOSEA.
			Shallum	(1 month)	
			Menahem	(10)	
Ahaz	(16)		Pekahiah	(2)	
Hezekiah	(29)		Pekah	(20)	
Manasseh	(55)	NAHUM.	Hoshea	(9)	
Amon	(2)	ZEPHANIAH,			
Josiah	(31)	HABAKKUK,			
Jehoahaz (3 mths.)		*Huldah.*			
Jehoiakim	(11)	JEREMIAH.			
Jehoiachin (3 mths.)					
Zedekiah	(11)				

NOTE—

(1) We must be careful not to think that the above-named prophets were the *only* prophets of Judah and Israel. The truth is very much otherwise. Ever since Samuel's days there had been an organised prophetic order with prophet schools up and down the land. This accounts for the fact that besides the above-named prophets, unnamed prophets are again and again referred to (see 1 Kings xiii. 1, 11, 18; xviii. 4; xx. 13, 22, 35; xxii. 6, etc.).

(2) It should be borne in mind that although the above prophets whose names are given in italics are classed as non-writing prophets, they are only so classed because no writings of theirs have come down to us. It seems *probable* that many of them *did* write, because it is *certain* that a number of them did, whose writings, nevertheless, have not been preserved to us. See, for instance, references to the writings of Nathan (2 Chron. ix. 29), of Gad (1 Chron. xxix. 29), of Ahijah (2 Chron. ix. 29), of Jehu (2 Chron. xx. 34), of Shemaiah (2 Chron. xii. 15), of Oded (2 Chron. xv. 8), of Iddo (2 Chron. xiii. 22).

PROPHECY AND THE PROPHETS

Lesson Number 70

THE PROPHETIC ELEMENT IN SCRIPTURE

This is one of seven elements which together constitute the whole body of the Word of God, namely: History, Biography, Prophecy, Ethics, Devotion, Messianic Revelation and Spiritual guidance. This prophetic element pervades all the rest. It is the *eye* of Scripture, with supernatural vision—backsight, insight and foresight, or power to see into the past, present and future. It is, therefore, the miracle of utterance, as other miracles are wonders of power, and evinces omniscience, as they do omnipotence, thus reflecting the image of the glory of God.

—*Arthur T. Pierson, D.D.*

PROPHECY AND THE PROPHETS

BEFORE delving into these writings of the Hebrew prophets, we ought to have a clear understanding as to the nature of prophecy and the significance of the prophetic order in Israel.

Prophecy Not Merely Prediction

To begin with, prophecy is not merely *prediction*. The common idea today is that prophecy is wholly a matter of foretelling the future, but that idea is erroneous. It is founded on a wrong etymology; for the *pro* in "prophet" is not that which means *beforehand*, as in the word "provide," but that which means *in place of*, as in the word "pronoun." The remainder of the word "prophet" is from the Greek *phemi*, which means *to speak*. So, then, a prophet is one who speaks in place of another. Thus, when Moses quailed at the thought of being sent to Israel in Egypt, on account of his supposed inability as a speaker, God said to him: "See, I have made thee a god unto Pharaoh; and Aaron thy brother shall be thy *prophet*" (Exod. vii. 1). Aaron was to be his brother's prophet in that he was to speak in his name, and *in place of him*.

It is well to realise, then, that while all prediction is prophecy, not all prophecy is prediction. Prophecy may concern the past or the present as well as the future. In the former case it is an inspired *forth*-telling; in the latter, it is an inspired *fore*-telling. Prophecy in the *non*-predictive sense is a declaring of truth, on any given subject, received by direct inspiration from God. Prophecy in the *predictive* sense is a declaring of the future such as is impossible to the unaided wisdom of man, and which can only come by direct inspiration from God.

Prophecy a Product of Inspiration

We would stress the fact that prophecy, in the Scripture sense, is the product and expression of a direct and special *inspiration* from God. The Hebrew word for a prophet is *nabhi*, which derives from a word meaning to boil up or boil forth, like some hot

spring or fountain, thus suggesting a pouring forth of words from fervent animation or Divine inspiration. The very name "prophet," therefore, indicates the supernormal constraint under which the prophets wrote and spoke. Their constant refrain is "Thus saith the LORD." Unlike the teachers of the Gentiles, these Hebrew prophets came before the people, not to present "moral discourses, metaphysical treatises, or philosophical reasonings," as an old writer puts it, but "to make known the will of One above them, and to express higher thoughts and purposes than their own." They spoke "not as from man to men, but as those entrusted with direct authority from God to speak in His name to sinful men."

This, of course, prompts the question: What was the *nature* of the inspiration under which the prophets wrote and spoke? In the words of 2 Peter i. 21, these "holy men of God" were "moved by the Holy Ghost"; and the Greek word which is here translated as "moved," means to be borne along, or even driven along. Thus, Weymouth translates it as "impelled," and Moffatt as "carried along." The same word is used in Acts xxvii. 15, 17, to describe how the ship on which Paul was a passenger was "driven along" by the tempestuous wind, Euroclydon. It is a strong word, therefore; and it certainly teaches that the inspiration of the prophets was a most definite supernatural work wrought in them, by which they spoke *direct from God.* The *Twentieth Century New Testament,* in fact, uses those very words, "direct from God," to give the sense of this verb, thus: "No prophetic teaching ever came in the old days at the mere wish of man; but men, moved by the Holy Spirit, spoke direct from God." That which the Holy Spirit wrought in the prophets was an inspiration in all respects fully adequate to the end in view, namely, the transmission, without error, of truth Divinely revealed to them.

What Inspiration Implies

The prophets were far from being infallible in themselves, nor did they live in a state of *perpetual* inspiration which gave infallibility to *all* their words and actions. This is strikingly illustrated in the case of the prophet Nathan, who at first commended David's purpose to build a temple to the Lord, but was afterwards sent back with a Divine message to David *not* to build it. In his earlier commendation of David's project, Nathan had gone

so far as to say: "Go, do all that is in thine heart, for the Lord is with thee"; notwithstanding, he had been expressing merely his own human judgment in the matter, and had to be corrected of God. Moreover, it is noteworthy that when God sent Nathan back to David, the prophet was instructed to begin with: "Thus saith the LORD." It was a clear case of "Thus saith Nathan," at first, versus "Thus saith the LORD" afterward (see 2 Sam. vii.).

Yet in all their transmissions of special or direct communications from God, the inspiration of the prophets by the Holy Spirit was such as to render them infallible as vehicles of the Divine message. It was this being "moved," impelled, borne along, inspired, by the Divine Spirit which both constrained and authorised them to speak in the name of Deity, and to say: "Thus saith the LORD." When they *thus* spoke, they were *infallible*. This was the result secured by the supernatural work of inspiration. The *fact* that this inerrancy was secured in these human vehicles of the Divine message is far more important than curious speculations as to the *ways* by which the Holy Spirit wrought it. It is the reality of it, and not merely the psychology of it, which is the vital thing. As the late Dr. Kitto observes, "How far this object was secured by direct suggestion, by negative control, or by an elevating influence upon their natural powers, is a question of little practical importance to those holding the only essential doctrine—that the inspiration was in all respects such as rendered those who received it incapable of error. Any inspiration beyond this could not be needed; any less than this would be worthless."

Inspiration and the Prophet Himself

It may be asked: What was the condition of *the prophet himself* while under the influence of inspiration? Did he retain normal possession of his natural faculties, so as to be master of himself as at ordinary times? Or were his natural powers rendered inoperative for the time being, either by a supernatural ecstasy or by a state of abnormal passivity? Perhaps we cannot better answer this than by quoting from an article by C. Von Orelli.

"This inspiration is not such that it suppresses the human consciousness of the recipient, so that he would receive the word

of God in the state of sleep or trance. But rather the recipient is in possession of his full consciousness, and is able afterward to give a clear account of what happened. Nor is the individuality of the prophet eliminated by this Divine inspiration. The individual peculiarity of the prophet is a prime factor in the form in which the revelation *comes* to him. In the one prophet we find a preponderance of visions; another prophet has no visions. But the visions of the future which the prophet sees are given in the forms and the colour which have been furnished by his own consciousness. All the more, the form in which the prophet *gives expression* to his word of God is determined by his personal talents and gifts as also by his experiences."

The early Christian apologists, living amid paganism, were well warranted in pointing to the contrast between the frenzied hysteria of pagan pseudo-inspiration and the dignity, self-possession, and active intelligence of the Hebrew prophets.

THE PROPHETS AS A CLASS

In a former study we have seen that the origin of the prophetic order in Israel dates back to Samuel. Of course, there were those in Israel, even before Samuel's time, on whom the mantle of prophecy had fallen (Num. xi. 25; Judges vi. 8). Moses himself is called a prophet (Deut. xviii. 18). But before Samuel there was no organised prophetic *office* in Israel. It was Samuel who originated the "schools" of the prophets, and thus, also, the prophetic *order*. In this sense he is "the first of the prophets"—a distinction which the New Testament clearly recognises, in Acts iii. 24; xiii. 20; and Hebrews xi. 32. From Samuel's time the "schools of the prophets" were planted up and down the land (2 Kings ii. 3, 5); and it was from these that there came, in due course, such men as Isaiah and his compeers, who, as their writings show, were men of education.

It is in connection with Samuel that we first find mention of any such colony of prophets; and this was at Ramah (1 Sam. xix. 20). Thereafter, in other places, bands of youths seem to have gathered around experienced and accredited prophets, forming small colonies around them, learning from them, and seeking to imbibe their spirit.

But besides this, it is clear that the Holy Spirit Himself frequently operated in supernatural ways through these "schools of the prophets," and among these "sons of the prophets." They were centres of religious life, where "communion with God was sought by prayer and meditation, and where the recollection of the great deeds of God in the past seemed to prepare for the reception of new revelations" from Him. These schools, moreover, were centres of theocratic ideas and ideals from which consecrated young men went out to exert considerable influence in the nation, and to hold up the torch of Divine truth amid the dark days of apostasy. It seems likely, too, that sacred music and poetry were cultivated at these schools, and that sacred traditions were here treasured and transmitted both orally and in writing. It was in these colonies of devout young students that the Holy Spirit found a unique opportunity to express the mind of God to the nation through prepared vessels. It was in this way that there grew up in Israel a recognised prophetic *order.*

The Prophets in Relation to Priests and Levites

Thus, we have now marked, in the course of Israel's national history, the rise of five distinct orders—Priests, Levites, Judges, Kings, Prophets. This will immediately prompt the question to some minds: What was the relationship of the prophetic order to the priests and Levites? In the law of Moses we find the priesthood and the Levitical order clearly instituted; but there is no such institution of a prophetic office, though there certainly is a promise that from time to time God would send prophets when they were needed (Deut. xviii. 18, 19). What, then, of the relationship between the new order of the prophets and the long-established order of priests and Levites? The following answer is worth carefully remembering.

"The office of the prophet was extraordinary rather than ordinary. As His ordinary servants and teachers, God appointed the priests and Levites. They taught what the Law, as it stood, enjoined; and they performed the sacred rites which it demanded. But when, under this more formal teaching, the nation slumbered; when they came to rest on the mere letter of the Law; when they misapprehended its real character; or when they turned away from it—then appeared the prophet, to rouse, to

excite, to warn the people, and to call them back to the real purport of their own institutions."

Yet although they were *extra*ordinary ministers of God, the prophets did not stand apart from the Law, or in any way act independently of it. They were neither to add to it nor to "diminish ought from it," any more than were the people themselves. We find, therefore, that "prophecy always takes its *ground* in the Law, to which it refers, from which it derives its sanction, and with which it is fully impressed and saturated. There is no chapter in the prophets in which there are not several references to the Law. The care of the prophets was to explain it, bring it home to the hearts of the people, and to preserve it vital in its *spirit*. It was, indeed, also their duty to point to future advancement, and to announce the dawn of better light, when the ever-living spirit of the Law should break through its hitherto imperfect forms, and make for itself another, more complete: but, for their own times, they thought not of altering any of the laws in question, even as to their form, and much less as to their spirit. For all change, for all essential development, they directed the view of their countrymen forward to the time of the Messiah, who Himself came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfil it, superseding its ritual symbols only by accomplishing all they were designed to shadow forth."

But we would emphasise that the *vital* distinction between the ordinary teachers of Israel and these *extra*ordinary teachers, the prophets, lay in the fact of which we have already spoken, namely, that the prophets were the subjects of a special Divine inspiration.

Finally, it is worth noting that, as 1 Samuel ix. 9 tells us, in earlier times prophets in Israel were called "seers." It says: "He that is now called a prophet was beforetime called a seer." The older name, "seer," however, although used far less than the name "prophet," persists right on to the time of the captivities (2 Chron. xxxiii. 18; xxxv. 15), and is used as synonymous with "prophet" (2 Sam. xxiv. 11; 2 Chron. xvi. 7, 10). This older name "seer" is noteworthy as indicating that which lay behind the inspired utterance of the prophet. He was a "seer"—a man supernaturally enabled to "see" things which lay beyond ordinary human knowledge. It is wise to note, however, that although a prophet is said to have "seen" some given matter, it does not

mean necessarily that he must have seen it in the form of an optical vision, with his natural eyes. The prophet could "see" *words*, with his *inner* eyes (see Isa. ii. 1—"The *word* which Isaiah *saw*"). Similarly, when we are told that God *spoke* to the prophet, we are not necessarily to understand that there must have been a voice which could be heard by the physical ear. The vital thing in each case is that the prophet must have been able to distinguish sharply the Divine communication from his own personal consciousness. Only thus could there be either the authority or the compulsion to speak as the mouthpiece of God.

We need not speculate concerning the *modes* by which the Holy Spirit communicated special truth to these men—whether by dream, vision, voice, sign, or by a direct inward impact upon the mind. Mystery about such revelation and inspiration there assuredly is; but this in no wise discounts the proven facts which proclaim the *reality* of it.

TWELVE "SPIES" TO SEARCH THE LAND

Can they bring a good report?

1. What are the seven main book-groupings of the Old Testament?
2. Can you express in a single word or phrase the distinctive feature of each Old Testament book from Genesis to the Song of Solomon?
3. The books of the Prophets in our Old Testament are not in their chronological order. Could you give them in their chronological order—first, those to the northern kingdom (Israel), then those to the southern kingdom (Judah), then those during and after the Exile?
4. With which three *historical* books of the Old Testament should Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi be read?
5. Could you cite indications that some of the prophets whose names have come down to us, but without any writings from them, *did* write?
6. What is the etymological meaning of our word, "prophet"? What is the Hebrew word for a prophet? And what is prophecy in the non-predictive sense?
7. Illustrate from Nathan that although the Old Testament writings of the prophets are Divinely inspired, the prophets themselves were far from being infallible or perpetually inspired.
8. From what point of history do the prophets as a school or class begin? The first-mentioned *colony* of prophets—where was it, and with whom specially connected?
9. What, briefly, would you say was the relation of the prophets to the priests and Levites?
10. What, briefly, would you say was the mental condition of the prophet himself while under the influence of inspiration?
11. What was the older name for a prophet in Israel, and what does it signify?
12. At what date did the ten-tribed kingdom go into captivity, and to which nation? And at what date did Judah go into captivity, and to which nation?

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET ISAIAH (1)

Lesson Number 71

NOTE.—For this study read the whole Book of Isaiah through, marking any reference which Isaiah makes to himself and to his times. Note also that the four chapters xxxvi. to xxxix. are an historical interlude between the two main parts of the book.

According to the old tradition, the prophet *Isaiah* was sawn asunder. Of the truth of the tradition we cannot be sure, but we know that one of the earliest feats of the Higher Criticism was to perform the like operation upon his prophecy. So much is the theory of a divided prophecy gaining ground, that no one must make any pretension to scholarship if he hesitates to accept the double authorship of Isaiah. From chapter xl. to the close was written, we are told with tiresome iteration, not by Isaiah, but by a prophet of the Exile—the *Great Unknown.* By the way, it is remarkable how many *unknown* great men flourished among the Jews, and remained unknown to their posterity, until, in these enterprising days, the Higher Critics arose and discovered them, brought them into light *with the exception of their names.* How wondrously modest, how self-effacing, these writers had been! and how strangely unmindful of their best men had the people been! True, we know they did not always receive the God-sent messengers; they killed the prophets, and stoned them that were sent unto them. But *killing* a man is a different thing from *ignoring* a man. You cannot well put a man to death without recognising the fact that he had existence.

—*Archibald McCaig, LL.D.*

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH (1)

WHAT Beethoven is in the realm of music, what Shakespeare is in the realm of literature, what Spurgeon was among the Victorian preachers, that is Isaiah among the prophets. As a writer he transcends all his prophet compeers; and it is fitting that the matchless contribution from his pen should stand as leader to the seventeen prophetical books. All who have any sense of literary appreciation must be impressed by the combined excellences of Isaiah's style—its grandeur and dignity, its energy and liveliness, its profusion of imagery, its vividness of description, its forceful play on words, its dramatic and rhetorical touches, and last, but not least, its wonderful variety. If we were here making a literary study of Isaiah, we might find fascinating occupation in classifying the abundant examples of these literary excellences; but as our purpose is with spiritual meaning rather than literary merit we must not digress into this tempting "By-path Meadow"!

The *social status* of Isaiah seems to have been high. He had familiar interviews with kings Ahaz and Hezekiah (vii., xxxvii., etc.). He was historiographer at the Judæan court in Jotham's reign, and wrote accounts of the reigns of Uzziah and Hezekiah (2 Chron. xxvi. 22; xxxii. 32). His "book" bears throughout the stamp of a well-educated man. Nothing is known of his father, Amoz. Isaiah himself was a married man (vii. 3) and had two sons *Shear-jashub* ("A-remnant-shall-return"), and *Maher-shalal-hash-baz* ("Haste-ye-haste-ye-to-the-spoil"). His wife also possessed the gift of prophecy (viii. 3).

The *period* of Isaiah's ministry lay "in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah (i. 1). Therefore, even if he only commenced his prophetic career near the end of Uzziah's reign he continued for some sixty years. Allow say five years under Uzziah; add the sixteen years each of Jotham and Ahaz; then the first fourteen years of Hezekiah (when Isaiah announced the further fifteen years of life to Hezekiah; 2 Kings xviii. 2; xx. 6). This gives fifty-one years; and Isaiah evidently

lived on after this. Jewish tradition says that he lived into the reign of Manasseh, under whom he suffered a horrible martyrdom for resisting that wicked king's doings, being placed in the hollowed trunk of a tree, and then "sawn asunder." It is thought that Hebrews xi. 37 alludes to this.

The *character* of Isaiah claims note. See his *boldness*, whether to king or people. He never stoops to curry favour. See his ardent *patriotism*. He is the enemy of all that is against the best interests of his nation. Yet equally there is a *tenderness*, and a *sympathy* which reaches out to other nations, uncramped by any narrow race-egoism. There is also a stormy *indignation* expressing itself in sarcasm and satire; but this is offset by a deep *reverence* and *spirituality*. The usual title for God is "The Holy One"; and there is a vivid sense of the majesty of God. Outward forms of religion are nothing without inward reality. Read through the book again, underscoring where these qualities speak. Boldness, patriotism, tenderness, broad sympathy, stormy indignation at hypocrisy, with deep spirituality and a profound sense of the Divine majesty—oh, these are grand qualities, and just such as need restoring to the preaching of our day!

The Times of Isaiah

When Isaiah came to the fore in Judah, the ten-tribed northern kingdom (Israel) was nearing its destruction by Assyria, after its apostate career of some two hundred years, under no less than nineteen kings, of eight different families. Against the fierce menace of the Assyrian emperor, Tiglath-Pileser II, effort was made among the nations of Palestine and Syria to form a confederacy under the leadership of Damascus, capital of Syria (Syria must not be confused with *A*ssyria, the far greater power, of which the capital was Nineveh). Ahaz, king of Judah, would not join this confederacy. So Syria and Israel invaded Judah, to coerce Ahaz, and dealt heavy blows (2 Kings xvi.; 2 Chron. xxviii.). Ahaz then humbly craved the aid of the great Assyrian, who marched forth a great army which overthrew Syria and Israel; but Judah thereby became vassal to Assyria.

A little later, Tiglath-Pileser's successor, Shalmaneser IV, determined on the final destruction of Israel. After a three years' siege Samaria fell (2 Kings xvii. 4–6). Israel was "carried

away into Assyria," and the ten-tribes were distributed through "the cities of the Medes." Isaiah would then be between fifty and sixty years old.

Judah remained vassal to Assyria till the reign of Hezekiah who rebelled (2 Kings xviii.). This move would be supported by Isaiah who ever advocated reliance on Jehovah, and freedom from foreign alliances. There were other voices, however, to which Hezekiah listened. These urged alliance with Egypt, the one power equal to Assyria (Isa. xxx. 2–4). When the Assyrian monarch (now Sennacherib) came to lay low the rebellious Jews Egypt failed to send aid, Judæa was overrun, and Hezekiah was forced to buy off the Assyrian with much gold and silver, and become vassal again (2 Kings xviii. 13–16). But Judah's intrigues with Egypt continued; and Sennacherib soon came back. While his main force cut off Egypt from Judah he sent a smaller force to threaten and if possible seize Jerusalem (Isa. xxxvi.; xxxvii.). At last Hezekiah fell back on Isaiah's advice. The result we well know. A mighty disaster befell the Assyrian army, from which Sennacherib never recovered. Judah was freed from threat of invasion, and enjoyed a good spell of peace.

Such were Isaiah's times. If this brief memorandum is kept in mind, passages which seem obscure will become vividly intelligible.

The "Book" of Isaiah

Until a hundred years ago Isaiah's authorship of the book which bears his name was unquestioned. Then a theory stole in among rationalistically inclined Bible scholars, that chapters xl.–lxvi. were from a different writer, at the end of the Babylonian captivity, some two hundred years after Isaiah. But this theory of dual authorship did not long appease the dissective mania of more modern critics. Ewald discovered seven authors in the book. Yet even seven soon became inadequate for some of the dissectors. Thanks to the ingenious insight of the modern school, the theory of composite authorship has been elaborated into a perfect complexus. Professor Cheyne wrote: "It is becoming more and more certain that the present form of the prophetic Scriptures is due to a literary class (the so-called Sopherim, 'scribes' or 'Scripturists') whose principal function was collecting *and supplementing* the scattered records of prophetic revelation. *They wrote, they recast, they edited.* . . ." In the *Cambridge*

Bible for Schools and Colleges Professor Skinner wrote: "The book which bears the name of Isaiah is in reality a collection of prophetic oracles, showing manifest traces of composite authorship, and having a complicated literary history behind it. Not much less than two thirds of its bulk consists of anonymous prophecies . . . to this class belongs first of all the whole of the latter part of the book . . . but even when we confine our attention to chapters i.–xxxix. we still find abundant evidence of great diversity of authorship." So there we are!—our "Book of Isaiah" is a sheer patchwork from a combination of anonymous authors whose number no one knows!

But is this *really* so? The plurality of authorship has been argued on three grounds—(1) differences of vocabulary; (2) differences of ideas and forms of expression; (3) differences in historical references. All agree that the book is in two main parts (i.–xxxix. versus xl.–lxvi.), and that these two have a different "feel" from each other. Yet the difference is no greater than that between other writings from one author. As is now well proven, several writings from one author often differ strikingly in all three ways mentioned above, simply according to difference of subject. If Isaiah's modern critics applied their methods to the writings of present-day authors they would be a laughing-stock. Fortunately for them, Isaiah is not here to reprove them; but their superficiality has been exposed by other modern scholars who have checked their so-called "findings."

Plural Authorship Argued from Vocabulary

In the earlier phases of the controversy stress was laid on difference of *vocabulary*. Dr. Driver supported his "two Isaiahs" theory by words which he said occurred *only* in the second part of the book; but the late John Urquhart so exposed his mistakes as to reduce his argument to contempt. The word *bachar*, "to choose," was one such word, but it was replied that it came four times in the first part: so Dr. Driver then explained that it was only in the sense of God's choosing Israel that it only came in the second part. Even then he overlooked that it occurs in that very sense in chapter xiv. 1.

Tehillah—"praise," and *halal*—"to praise," were said to come only in the second part; yet *halal* comes in chapter xxxviii. 18,

translated as "celebrate"! Even in part two it only comes twice! *Tehillah* comes nine times in part two, and it is clear why, namely, that it accords with the writer's new subject. This same word, simply for the same reason, comes more often in the Book of Psalms than in all the other books of the Old Testament together. Dr. Driver wanted to show that these words were *late* words which only a writer long after Isaiah would use; but, as we have shown, *halal* comes in the first part of the book, which he allows came from the real Isaiah; and as for *tehillah*, it comes no less than six times in the first group of the psalms (i.–xli.), which group, as all critics agree, contains probably the oldest psalms in the Psalter! *Tehillah* also occurs away back even in Deuteronomy (x. 21; xxvi. 19), in places which only extreme acrobatics of criticism can make post-exilic!

We can only glance at one more specimen, so we pick from the end of Dr. Driver's list. He says that *pa-er*, which, in its reflexive form means "to deck oneself" or "to glory," comes in chapters xliv. 23; xlix. 3; lv. 5; lx. 7, 9, 13 21; lxi. 3, and that, its use is "especially of Jehovah either glorifying Israel or glorifying Himself in Israel." He admits that it comes once in Isaiah proper (i.–xxxix.), in chapter x. 15, but only in its use of "the axe" as "*boasting itself*" against its user. This is hair-splitting if you like! But there is more than this. Once again Dr. Driver was careless. The word comes in chapter iii. 20, used exactly as in the second part of the book! Compare chapter iii. with lxi. 3. The latter verse speaks of "beauty for ashes"; and the word "beauty" here is a form of *pa-er*, meaning, literally, a headdress, or garland. In chapter iii. 20 it is used in exactly the same sense, only it is translated as "bonnets."

We say no more. Dr. Driver was singled out because he was considered a brilliant champion of this linguistic argument. Such tissue-paper expedients have so crumpled up that another eminent critic, Professor Cheyne, has had to say: "My own opinion is that the peculiar expressions of the latter prophecies are, on the whole, not such as to necessitate a different linguistic stage from the historical Isaiah; and that, consequently, the decision of the critical question will mainly depend on other than purely linguistic questions."

But we may now turn round on the critics, and say that if Isaiah *was* the author of the whole book, there will be linguistic

evidences of it. Such evidences there are in abundance. The late Professor T. R. Birks of Cambridge found them so numerous that he limited himself just to words beginning with *aleph*, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. We have not room to detail these here. He cites forty of them, all arguing the falsity of any supposed duality or plurality of authorship based on vocabulary. Even by the grudging admission of the critics themselves, the facts point the other way; and all who know how jealous our modern scholars are not to concede a point to the more conservative school will realise that such admission really means that on linguistic grounds the evidence is in favour of *one author for the whole book.*

On this question of vocabulary and style I cannot do better than append the following quotation from a pamphlet by the late Dr. T. W. Fawthrop, which he sent to me for this purpose, shortly before his passing.

"We all agree that there are the differences, but these do not necessarily demand another authorship. Isaiah is versatile, and doubtless had several styles. His long experience would give him fluency of expression, and these later prophecies belong to his quiet years of retirement, at the close of his political career. Now if Isaiah, after writing his account of Sennacherib's invasion, had retired from active life, and spent about twenty years in restful meditation, and then reappeared in literary life with his mind filled with Messianic prophecy, and a deeper spirituality, is it not highly probable that this later thought would be presented in different style and language? Compare the sermons of a busy preacher, in a populous working-class district, with those preached in life's later retirement of quiet thought, balanced conclusions, and deeper spirituality.

"Consider again the different style of authors. Would anyone have thought that *The Pickwick Papers* and *The Tale of Two Cities* were both from the pen of Charles Dickens; or *The Lord of the Isles* and *Kenilworth* by Sir Walter Scott? But all the differences in the Book of Isaiah are consistent with his authorship. The author sorrows in his retirement over an erring nation, and our all-beneficent Heavenly Father grants him visions of restoration. The first part of the book ends in Exile, causing gloom to the faithful expecting redemption, so the second part tells of the Restoration and the triumphs of Messiah's kingdom, to remove

the shadows. There is a unity running through both parts. Disappointing history merges into prophetic promise. There is a resemblance to our three historical Gospels, and the Master's conversations in St. John's Gospel. The mellowness of the second part shows it belongs to the prophet's later years.

"When the Book of Isaiah was compiled, what induced the scholars to add part II to part I? Although the closing verses of the Book of Amos refer to the doom of Edom (Amos ix. 12), and the twenty-one verses of the Book of Obadiah continue about Edom, the scholars have not added them to the Book of Amos. Why? It is because they knew them to be by another prophet. Why add part II to Isaiah? Because they knew the second part was also his; they knew no second Isaiah. All antiquity, and all Hebrew (Jewish) scholars, know but one Isaiah.

"The two parts of Isaiah have likenesses as well as differences. When the destructive critics have parted the supposed authors at the end of chapter xxxix, their theories require portions of part I to be transferred to part II, and of part II to part I. For if Isaiah's prophecies end with the Exile, then all relating to the Fall of Babylon, and later than the Exile, found in part I, must be transferred to part II. There is much to transfer.

"But are these critics, by their rules, able to detect the different authors? We cannot do it today. Tate and Brady together wrote the hymn, 'As pants the hart for cooling streams,' who is going to tell us how much is by Tate, and how much by Brady? Sir W. Robertson Nicoll tells of Robert Louis Stevenson collaborating with Lloyd Osborne in a certain novel. Professor Neil, of Cambridge, was confident that he could detect the parts which each had written. When his decisions were taken to the one who had arranged the novel, Neil was wrong in nearly every decision. But if the critics fail in modern literature, what of 2,650 years ago? We shall have need of better proof before we swear allegiance to Isaiah II."

Plural Authorship Argued from Ideas

But plural authorship is also said to be indicated by *differences of ideas and forms of expression.* Kuenen says: "There are diversities of language and style which compel us to distinguish the author of chapters xl.–lxvi. from Isaiah himself. The Deutero-

Isaiah uses a certain number of words foreign to Isaiah, or rather which are employed by him in a different sense. Thus Jehovah, for the Deutero-Isaiah, is He who *formed* Israel (xliii. 1, etc.). He is the *creator* (xliii. 1, 15); the *saviour* (xlv. 15, etc.); the *redeemer* (xli. 14, etc.); the *comforter* (li. 12) of Israel; He *has mercy* on His people (xlix. 10). In the authentic prophecies of Isaiah, Jehovah bears none of these names, any more than one finds the expressions *as nothing* (xl. 17, etc.); *all flesh* (xlix. 26, etc.); and a multitude of others."

Will it seem too strange to believe?—each of these words *is* used in the first thirty-nine chapters, with just the same *idea* as in the later chapters! We have not space to show this in each case. Take simply the *first*, as evidence of our honesty about the others. The Hebrew word here for "formed" is *yatsar*. Turn now, in the first part of the book, to chapter xxvii. 11, where the same word and idea occur—"*He that formed them* will show them no favour." Is it surprising that we should distrust the dicta of such men?

There is really no need to give further instances. The critics themselves have been obliged to make the almost humorous plea that the "Deutero-Isaiah" (or Isaiahs) *copied the style* of the real Isaiah! Cheyne says: "The 'Great Unnamed,' if a different writer from Isaiah, often imitated his style and knew his prophecies by heart"! L. Seinecke says: "No other prophet has so maintained the spirit of Isaiah as the author of chapters xl.–lxvi. With no other do we find his *characteristic manner of speaking* so well reproduced"! Orelli says that the author of the second part, if not Isaiah, has "assumed his form." Other examples might be given; but is there need? This badly battered argument of the critics has been floored and "counted out" by those who backed it!

No one has ever denied that certain words and phrases *do* occur more often in chapters xl.–lxvi. than in chapters i.–xxxix., but the obvious explanation lies in change of subject. The first part is mainly upbraidings for sin, and warnings of coming judgment. In the second part the judgment is seen as having fallen, and Israel is felled to the ground. The message is now one of comfort and hope and healing. How could there *not* be noticeable differences in the thoughts expressed and the words used? Not one of these differences is incompatible with the older view

of *one author for the whole book.* As a matter of fact, the Hebrew in the second part of the book is irreconcilable with a late exilic date. An author born and bred in Babylonia would have given us a writing as clearly marked by Aramaisms as those of Daniel and Ezekiel, whereas the language of Isaiah xl.–lxvi. is among the purest Hebrew in the Old Testament.

The supposed difference of ideas in the two parts of the book is sometimes put in another way. It is said that the theology in the second part is more advanced. In reply to this we quote Dr. Fawthrop again.

"All students note this advanced theology, but the destructive critics can only account for it on the lines of evolutionary and chronological progress. We maintain that the days of Isaiah were much more likely to attain to this excellence, than the decadent days of the Exile. As Dr. Orr points out, it is unlikely that a prophet of the rank of the writer of the second part of Isaiah would arise in the days of Ezra, or Nehemiah. But if these later chapters were the product of Isaiah's retirement from public life, then the marked advance in spirituality can be accounted for by his study, meditation, prayer and growth in grace. The lapse of twenty years would bring new visions of God, and deeper understanding of His Word. How different is the forceful, buoyant style of the young preacher, from the thoughtful maturity of life's latest years! Did not St. John, a son of thunder (Boanerges), ripen into the disciple of love?

"As to the magnificence of the picture, in Isaiah liii., of the suffering Servant of Jehovah dying for humanity, it is the climax of prophecy. The prophet minutely foretells the sufferings of Jesus, who lived seven hundred years later. The Jews admit this, although they adopt various subterfuges to avoid the acceptance of Him as Messiah. But the Ethiopian eunuch was assured by Philip the Evangelist, that Isaiah referred to Jesus Christ (Acts viii. 32–5). How could the name of the prophet of such mighty utterance have been permitted to vanish away? Well might Ewald describe him as "The Great Unknown." How can we think of him as some nameless wanderer, whom, for the lack of a better name, we call the second Isaiah! Better far is it to visualise Isaiah meditating on his own sufferings, his appeals spurned, and himself despised, his martyrdom drawing near; then he is given

for his support the greater visions of the sufferings of the Man of Sorrows, the highest and holiest prophecy of redemption, and the dawn of the Messianic kingdom of the Christ who is to be."

Author's Note

Parts of these studies in the *authorship* of the Book of Isaiah were written in the nineteen-thirties. Some of the names of Higher Critical scholars mentioned in them have quickly receded and already begin to seem "yesterdayish"; but it is to be remembered that their conclusions and positions are still the intellectual "fashion" in many theological seminaries, so that the arguments here submitted against them are still as needed as ever.

I think it is true to say that "Modernism" as a *school* has been well and truly answered, and that as a *phase* it is passing, if not now past; but that as a *spirit* and *attitude* it lingers still and seems like doing so for some time. The so-called "Neo-Orthodoxy" associated with Barth and Brunner, and to a considerable degree including leaders like Tillich, Niebuhr, Kraemer and Edwin Lewis, has sounded the death-knell on the older form of Modernism; yet that older form of it, which will always be associated in our minds with the so-styled "Higher Criticism," has left a miserable residuum of doubt concerning the literal veracity of the Bible, and a stolid disinclination to accept the definitely supernatural in Scripture. We cannot but have this in mind through all our ensuing studies in the Old Testament prophets. My own reading convinces me that the leaders of the "Neo-Orthodoxy" *assume*, generally speaking, the results of the more radical "Higher Criticism." The Higher Critics argued. The Neo-Orthodox assume. The former attacked the historical facts of the Christian faith; the latter now by-pass them as not vitally necessary to Christian faith. There is a brilliantly presented new emphasis, but the inner attitude of mind toward the Bible and the historical facts of Christianity and the miraculous is practically the same as that of the older Modernism.

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH (2)

Lesson Number 72

NOTE.—For this second study of Isaiah read the whole book through once again, this time marking all Isaiah's historical and geographical references.

The Old Testament literature falls into two main periods: that composed before and during the Babylonian Exile, and that which falls after the Exile. But even between these two periods the differences of language are comparatively slight, so that it is often difficult or impossible to say on linguistic grounds alone whether a particular chapter is pre- or post-exilic, and scholars of the first rank often hold the most contrary opinions on these points.

—Thomas Hunter Weir

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH (2)

Plural Authorship Argued from Historical References

THE COMPOSITE authorship of our "Book of Isaiah" has been argued most of all on the ground of its *divergent historical references*. The big contention is that the standpoint of the writer, or writers, in chapters xl.–lxvi. is that of an exile, or exiles, in Babylonia, writing after Jerusalem and the temple had for years lain in ruins. This brings us to one of the most serious defaults in the "modern" school of higher criticism. The purpose underlying much of the arguing for the composite authorship of the book is the eliminating of the supernatural from it. Not a few of the moderns evidently disbelieve in supernatural prediction, and, therefore, to them, it is not allowable that Isaiah should speak of an event long before its occurrence. Thus, when they come to any passage which is predictive they immediately assign it to an origin late enough to nullify this supernatural element. We do not assert this without qualification of *all* those critics who have questioned the unity of the book; there are shades and grades; but it is true of *many*; and it is because of this that in still more recent days not only has there been argued a different authorship for the second part of the book (xl.–lxvi.) from that of the first part, but even the first part has been represented as a veritable mosaic from a variety of anonymous writers. Let us not wrap it up—this is the motive, and the arguments about differences of style and ideas are merely props to supply a seemingly scholarly support.

Do we seem to be unkindly misrepresenting the scholars in question? Then let us hear what some of their own representatives say. Knobel says: "Isaiah, at the Assyrian epoch, was not able to announce the deliverance from the captivity, by Cyrus, seeing that in his time that captivity had no existence." Vatke says: "At the time of Isaiah the kingdom of the Chaldeans had as yet no existence; it began to exist only in 625 B.C., how then would the prophet have been able to represent it as near to its decline?" Noldeke says: "A prophecy in which Cyrus is called

by his name is not naturally the work of Isaiah, who could not know in advance either the exile of the people to Babylon, or the deliverance from that exile by Cyrus." Some of our British and American critics have adopted a more apologetic attitude, perhaps, yet they really take the same position. Professor Skinner, for instance, says of Isaiah xiii. and xiv. that they cannot be from Isaiah himself because they refer to what is future, and then adds: "On the principle that the prophet always addresses himself primarily to the circumstances of his own time, we must assign these chapters to the closing years of the Babylonian captivity."

Hostility to the Supernatural.

We know now where we are! It is this *hostility to supernatural prediction* which underlies the more rabid higher criticism. The one answer is to exhibit the plentiful and unanswerable evidence of fulfilled prediction throughout the Scriptures. This has been done again and again by able students, and it is neither needful nor possible to cover all that ground again here: it would require a volume to itself! One only needs to read a work like *Keith on Prophecy*, not to mention more recent works on the same line, to know how full and final the argument is. Moreover, among the moderns themselves, the more thorough and straightforward are obliged to recognise that not even the late-dating of chapters xl.–lxvi. can quite expunge supernatural prediction. Thus, Professor G. A. Smith agrees that chapter liii. "as a prophecy of Jesus Christ is surely as great a marvel if you date it from the Exile as if you date it from the age of Isaiah."

So, then, with the more outright critics, the position is, that since supernatural prediction is *a priori* out of the question, those passages which refer to events and circumstances later than Isaiah's own time must be by a later author. In order to bolster up this position they try to make out that the whole scenery of chapters xl. to lxvi. is Exilic and not Isaian.

Now to those of us who believe in the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures, the miracle of prediction presents no difficulty whatever: but what of the *scenery* of chapters xl. to lxvi.? That is something that should be settled. Does it favour a Babylonian origin or a Judæan and Isaian?

Geographical and Historical Background

Now without a doubt, the first thing that strikes the mind of a careful reader is that the local background is *the same in both parts of the book*; the next thing is that this common background is *Palestinian and not Babylonian*. We here give references indicating that this is so in *both* parts of the book; for, in more recent days, as we have already mentioned, many passages in the *first* part of the book (i.–xxxix.) have been assigned to the late, exilic date, as well as chapters xl.–lxvi.

Perhaps we scarcely need point out the many references to *Lebanon*, with its mighty cedars (ii. 13; x. 34; xiv. 8; xxix. 17; xxxiii. 9; xxxv. 2; xxxvii. 24; xl. 16; lx. 13). Let the *trees* to which the book refers bear their testimony—"cedars," "oaks," "firs," "pines," "box trees," "sycamores," "cypresses," "shittah trees," "olives," "vines," "myrtles" (i. 8, 30; ii. 13; iii. 14; v. 1–10; vi. 13; vii. 23; ix. 10; xiv. 8; xvi. 8–10; xvii. 6; xxiv. 7, 13; xxvii. 2; xxxii. 12; xxxiv. 4; xxxvi. 16, 17; xxxvii. 24, 30; xli. 19; xliv. 14; lv. 13; lx. 13; lxi. 5; lxv. 21). All of these trees are Palestinian, or at any rate Syrian. And with this put the fact that there is not one single mention of the palm tree, which was the chief tree of Babylonia. Note, too, that in the above references, each of these trees is mentioned in the *second* part of the book, except for the sycamore and olive. Bashan, Sharon and Carmel are mentioned (ii. 13; xxxiii. 9; xxxv. 2; xxxvii. 24; lxv. 10). The water spoken of is that of "fountains," "streams," "pools" or reservoirs and "springs" (xxx. 25; xxxiii. 21; xxxiv. 9; xxxv. 6, 7; xli. 18; xlii. 15; xlix. 10; lvii. 6; lviii. 11)—all common to Palestine; whereas the great river Euphrates, the glory of Babylon, is only mentioned anonymously in one passage, and that passage is one which, so far as I know, all critics agree to be a genuine prophecy of *Isaiah himself* (vii. 20; viii. 7). But read again—of "rocks" and "ragged rocks" and "clefts in the rocks" and "holes in the rocks" (ii. 10, 19, 21; vii. 19; xxxiii. 16; xlii. 22; lvii. 5)—utterly out of keeping with Babylon! Mountains, forests, woods, wild beasts of the forests—the mention of these, too, but adds to the Palestinian scenery which is everywhere in evidence (ii. 14; ix. 18; x. 18, 34; xiii. 4; xl. 12; xlii. 11; liv. 10; lv. 12, 13; lvi. 9; lix. 11, etc.).

Is it surprising that some of the critics themselves have had

to admit the force of all this against the so-called "Babylonian standpoint" of chapters xl.–lxvi.? Cheyne says: "Some passages of Isaiah II are in various degrees really favourable to the theory of a Palestinian origin. Thus in chapter lvii. 6, the reference to torrent-beds is altogether inapplicable to the alluvial plains of Babylonia; and equally so is that to subterranian 'holes' in chapter xlii. 22; and though no doubt Babylonia was more wooded in ancient times than it is at present, it is certain that the trees mentioned in chapter xli. 19 were not for the most part natives of that country, while the date-palm, the commonest of all the Babylonian trees, is not once referred to."

But if the scenery is thus Palestinian, what of the *historical* allusions? Well, how shall we reconcile such a passage as chapter lvii. with the supposed Babylonian standpoint of chapters xl.–lxvi.? Take verses 4 to 7—

> *"Are ye not children of transgression, a seed of falsehood, enflaming yourselves with idols under every green tree, slaying the children in the valleys under the cliffs of the rocks? Among the smooth stones of the stream (or torrent) is thy portion; they, they are thy lot; even to them hast thou poured a drink-offering. . . . Upon a high and lofty mountain hast thou set thy bed: even thither wentest thou up to offer sacrifice."*

"Rocks," "valleys," "high mountains," stony-bedded "torrents" —where were these to be found on the flat stretches of Babylonia? And what of verse 9?—

> *"And thou wentest to the king with ointment, and didst increase thy perfumes, and didst send thy messengers far off, and didst debase thyself even unto hell."*

This is no picture of the Jews in exile. Judah here is still a *kingdom*—an anxious little kingdom sending ambassadors to seek alliances with foreign powers, and debasing herself thereby. Does it not at once suggest the times of Ahaz and Hezekiah, the very time when Isaiah himself lived? So strong is the indication of Palestinian origin in such passages that one by one these chapters have been slowly conceded to the older view of pre-exilic authorship. Here, again, a closer study shows that the real facts are in favour of *one author for the whole book.*

Positive Arguments for Isaian Authorship

Finally, we sum up very briefly the evidences for Isaiah's authorship of the whole book. These may be grouped as external and internal. As for the *external* evidences, we put first the witness of the *Septuagint.* This standard version of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, remember, was made in the third century B.C., yet as early as that it ascribes the whole book to Isaiah. We cannot think this was merely an uncritical convenience, for the same version is careful not to ascribe all the psalms to David, though it would have been a similar convenience to give his name to the whole book, as being its main author.

Next, we take the apochryphal book of *Ecclesiasticus,* written by Jesus, the son of Sirach, which also dates back to the third century B.C. He distinctly ascribes chapters xl.–lxvi. to Isaiah; and his witness is weighty, for he is declared to have been a man of "great diligence and wisdom" and of "great learning." He certainly speaks for all the learned Jews of his time.

Next we hear *Josephus,* the famous Jewish historian of the first century A.D. His testimony is striking. He reports this decree of Cyrus: "Thus saith Cyrus the king: Since God Almighty hath appointed me to be king of the habitable earth, I believe that He is that God whom the nation of the Israelites worship; for, indeed, He foretold my name by the prophets, and that I should build Him a house at Jerusalem, in the country of Judæa." Josephus adds: "This was well known to Cyrus by his reading the book which Isaiah left behind him of his prophecies." It may be said that we should not give too much credence to Josephus here; but his word certainly fits with the decree of Cyrus which is given both at the end of 2 Chronicles and in the first verses of Ezra, wherein Cyrus says: "Jehovah, God of heaven . . . hath charged me to build Him an house at Jerusalem which is in Judah." But how did Cyrus know that Jehovah had "*charged*" him? Say that Isaiah wrote the prophecies which bear his name, and the answer is clear.

Most of all, there is the witness of *the New Testament.* Quite apart from references to other parts of Isaiah, there are nine places where the New Testament refers to the *second* part (xl.–lxvi.) and attributes the authorship to him. Critics have tried to nullify the force of these by suggesting that Isaiah's name is only

mentioned by way of reference, without the point of strict authorship being in mind at all. Deny the unique inspiration of the New Testament, and you are at liberty to claim this—though you must also explain, as one has put it, "how this uninspired New Testament stands peerless amid all the literature of the Christian ages." But if the New Testament be indeed the inspired word of God its witness on this point is final.

Both parts of Isaiah are quoted by St. John (xii. 38–40), and accredited to the one Isaiah; from part II, "That the saying of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled which he spake, 'Lord, who hath believed our report?'" (Isa. liii. 1); from part I, "Therefore they could not believe because that Isaiah said again, 'He hath blinded their eyes,'" (Isa. vi. 9). Notice, "Isaiah said again," not another, either first or second Isaiah, but the same. Then Jesus *puts the two sayings together*, exclaiming, "These things said Isaiah, when *he* saw His glory," not, when *they* saw (John xii. 41).

But now we return to certain *internal* proofs that Isaiah wrote the whole book. Here, first, we mention *similarity of quality and genius throughout the book.* Not only is the genius which expresses itself in the disputed chapters equal to that in the undisputed, but it is genius of exactly the same kind. This has had to be acknowledged even by those who have doubted Isaiah's authorship of the latter part. How could they but acknowledge it with chapters xl., xliii., li., lii., liii., lxiii., and other such sublime passages before them?

Second, there is *similarity of language and constructions.* To demonstrate this would require an expert, elaborate treatise which we are not able to furnish; but it will be enough to array some of the specialists who vouch for it—Delitzsch, Professors T. R. Birks and Stanley Leathes, Dr. William Kay, of *The Speaker's Commentary*, Dean Payne Smith, Dr. S. Davidson, in his *Introduction to the Old Testament*, and T. K. Cheyne, whose verdict against the linguistic argument for a plural authorship has been already noted.

Next, we mention *similarity of ideas.* It would take pages to exhibit this with adequacy. We can but give a few leading examples. The dominant thought of the Divine holiness, with the favourite title for God as "The Holy One of Israel" (twelve times in the first part, thirteen in the second, and only five

times in the rest of the Old Testament); the thought of the Divine *power*, of God as "the Mighty One of Israel"; the entering of the high and holy One into covenant with Israel; their having rebelled and broken the covenant; their being cast off yet not wholly forsaken; the "remnant," the "return," the calling of the Gentiles, the coming King and His reign of righteousness—these are all recurrent in both parts of the book.

There is also a clear *similarity of images*. We think of "light" and "darkness," of "blindness" and "deafness," of humanity as "the flower that fadeth," of the "rod" and the "stem," or "sprout," as applied to the Messiah; the "stakes" and "cords" of the tent as used of Jerusalem; the "wolf" and the "lamb" dwelling together in the future kingdom, and there being no "hurting or destroying" in all God's "holy mountain"—these, not to mention others, are all found in both parts of the book.

There are also correspondences between the two parts by way of *repetition*. Noteworthy instances of this are picked out in the *Pulpit Commentary*. In chapter xi. 7 we read: "The lion shall eat straw like the ox." We have the same in chapter lxv. 25. These are other references—chapters i. 13 with lxvi. 3; i. 29 with lxvi. 17; xi. 9 with lxv. 25; xiv. 24 with xlvi. 10; xvi. 11 with lxiii. 15; xxiv. 19, 20 with li. 6; xxiv. 23 with lx. 19; xxv. 8 with lxv. 19; xxvi. 1 with lx. 18; xxvii. 1 with li. 9.

But there is one other point which we must mention. To our mind it absolutely settles the matter. *There are quotations from the second part of Isaiah by other Old Testament prophets who wrote before the Exile*, and these, of course, prove that the second part of Isaiah must *already* have been written! All agree that the first two chapters of Zephaniah were written years before the Exile: yet Zephaniah ii. 15 is a quotation from the words of Isaiah xlvii. 8–11. The prophet Nahum was only a few years later than Isaiah himself; yet in Nahum i. 15 we find an appropriation of Isaiah lii. 7. The prophet Jeremiah was later, yet he was pre-exilic; and can we mistake the derivation of his phraseology in chapter xxxi. 35 from Isaiah li. 15? It is futile to suggest that instead of these three prophets having quoted from Isaiah, the anonymous "second" Isaiah (or Isaiahs) quoted from *them*; for the words are unmistakably Isaiah's *style*, and in each case they occur in *obvious sequence* and as *natural parts* in the progress of the passages in Isaiah where they occur, whereas in the other

three prophets the connection is less intimate and spontaneous. With this topstone of evidence, the case for Isaiah's authorship is, to our own judgment, complete. We believe that the book is one, and that it was written by the Isaiah who prophesied "in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah."

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH (3)

Lesson Number 73

NOTE.—For this third instalment on Isaiah read the first thirty-five chapters afresh, marking the main breaks in subject which by now will be making themselves clear.

Human philosophy starts with a question. The Bible starts with an assumption: "In the beginning *God*". The deduction from that assumption is that all wisdom is in God; that in the last analysis there is no such thing as a riddle of the universe. When philosophy has wrought its way round the circle, it will arrive where these men start—GOD.

—*G. Campbell Morgan, D.D.*

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH (3)

WE ARE now ready to explore this Book of Isaiah. Its main arrangement cannot easily be forgotten. As there are sixty-six books in the Bible, so there are sixty-six chapters in this Book of Isaiah as it appears in our English version; and as the sixty-six books of the Bible are divided into the thirty-nine of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven of the New, so the sixty-six chapters of Isaiah are divided into thirty-nine and twenty-seven. Moreover, as the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament are mainly occupied with the Law, and the judgment which comes on those who disobey it, so the first thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah are mainly occupied with the thought of judgment on the covenant people because of their disobedience to the Law; and as the twenty-seven books of the New Testament are mainly occupied with the message of Divine grace, and the salvation which it brings, so the last twenty-seven chapters of Isaiah are a message of Divine grace and comfort, and of coming salvation. Thus, the Book of Isaiah is a kind of Bible all in itself.

So much for the main arrangement; but is there any methodical *sub*dividing of the two main parts? To be quite frank, it may be that some of us, on reading this book for the first time or two, thought it almost impossible to resolve its many chapters into orderly and progressive groups. Yet method and progress there certainly are. It is quite fascinating to see how the book opens to a patient and observant eye. Let us pick our way through it, and note down what we find.

We start at the opening words of chapter i. The august introduction here makes it clear that this is the *true* beginning (not chapter vi., as some have suggested)—

"HEAR, O HEAVENS, AND GIVE EAR, O EARTH,"
"FOR JEHOVAH HATH SPOKEN"

This chapter is the initial indictment; and we note that it is addressed to *Judah and Jerusalem* (verses 1, 8, 21, 26, 27).

Chapters ii.–vi.

Next, we note that chapters ii. to v. are obviously linked together; *first*, by the fact that, whereas the opening words of chapter ii. indicate a new vision, the opening words of the other chapters indicate continuity; *second*, because all these chapters are about the same subject, namely, the "day of Jehovah" (ii. 11, 12, 17, 20; iii. 7, 18; iv. 1, 2; v. 30); *third*, because they all directly concern *Judah and Jerusalem* (ii. 1, 3, 6; iii. 1, 8, 16; iv. 3–5; v. 3). We also note that this section closes with six "WOES" (v. 8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22).

Chapter vi. clearly stands apart as to its subject. It is a striking flash of autobiography. The prophet's new vision here is not of his nation, but of God Himself; and it is meant to prepare him for larger prophetic ministry. There is a new *vision* (verses 1–5), a new *unction* (verses 6, 7), and a new *commission* (verses 9, 10). But the big thing here is that Isaiah saw Jehovah as *KING*. The high point is the awed exclamation: *"Mine eyes have seen the King—Jehovah of Hosts!"* If we may anticipate the coming chapters just for a moment, we are going to see that from this point Isaiah's prophetic range wonderfully widens out; but it was first needful that he should see Jehovah as King of all nations, so as to sense vividly and be able to declare forcefully that behind and above and beyond all the convulsions of which he was to prophesy was the sovereign grip and purpose of the universal Emperor, Jehovah. The *immediate* reference of this sixth chapter, however, is again to *Judah and Jerusalem* (verses 5, 9–13); so that at any rate we may now mark off the first six chapters of Isaiah as going together, in that they all *directly concern Judah*, and in that their main subject is the *"day of Jehovah."*

Chapters vii.–xii.

We pass on to chapter vii. and those which follow. Here we find six chapters which refer mainly to *Israel* (the northern, ten-tribed kingdom, of which Samaria was the capital). See how chapter vii. begins—"It came to pass . . . that Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of *Israel*, went up toward Jerusalem to war against it. . . ." See also verse 2, where the name "Ephraim" is an alternative for Israel. Now

glance through the whole chapter again: it is all about Israel. To any reader who may be using the "Scofield Bible" we can only say that the inserted heading at verse 17 is surely wrong which says that the subsequent verses predict an invasion of *Judah.* Context and circumstances alike are so plain that it seems strange for such a mis-heading to occur. Syria and *Israel* are the invaders (verses 1, 2). It is *Israel* that is to be "broken that it be not a people" (verse 8). King Ahaz of Judah, who is besieged by Syria and Israel, is told that the land (Syria and *Israel*) before the two kings of which he is afraid, shall be forsaken (verse 16, see R.V.). The whole message is one of comfort to the besieged Ahaz (verses 3–16); but what strange comfort to be suddenly told, without any reason for the transition, that a far more deadly trouble was coming to Judah than anything just said of Israel!

No, at verse 17 it is the king of *Israel* who is now addressed directly. The wording makes this clear: "The Lord shall bring upon thee and upon thy people, and upon thy father's house, days that have not come, from the day that *Ephraim departed from Judah*: even the king of *Assyria.*" In other words, there were days coming on Israel such as had not been since the ten-tribes set up as a separate kingdom; and the trouble was coming from *Assyria.* Now we well know that it was *Israel* which was destroyed by Assyria, not Judah; for although Assyria was also allowed to trouble Judah, Jehovah intervened, Assyria sustained a crippling reverse, and Judah was spared.

Chapter viii., which continues the same subject, makes it even clearer that it is Israel which is here spoken of. See verse 4: "The spoil of *Samaria* shall be taken away before the king of Assyria." See also verse 6, where the people who "rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son" certainly are not Judah! See also verse 7; and note verse 8 which clearly says that Assyria would, indeed, also "overflow" into Judah, exactly as Micah i. 9 says (see our comment on that verse), and thus distinguishing Judah from the words just uttered about Israel. The remainder of chapter viii. speaks of the "confederacy" which Syria and Israel wished to force on Judah (see our introductory remarks on the Times of Isaiah); but Israel comes to the fore again towards the end, and in chapter ix.

The connection between chapters viii. and ix. makes the main reference to Israel clearer still. It is a pity that the translation

here in our Authorised Version is so confusing. Read it in the Revised Version. The last line of chapter viii. should really be the first of chapter ix., and instead of reading, "they shall be driven to darkness" (note the italicised words, showing that the translators felt difficulty here) it should read: "Yet the thick darkness shall be driven away." Thus, the last verse of chapter viii. and the first verse of chapter ix. should read—

And they shall look upward,
And they shall look earthward,
And behold distress and darkness,
Even the gloom of anguish.
Yet the darkness shall be driven away,
And there shall be gloom no more
to her that was in anguish.
As in former time He brought to contempt
The land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtali,
So in the latter time He hath made it glorious,
The tract by the sea, the region beyond Jordan,
Galilee of the nations. . . .

Observe, above, the mention of "Zebulon" and "Naphtali" and "Galilee," showing again that the reference is to *Israel*, not Judah. The reference to Israel is addedly clarified in the verses which follow (see verses 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 21).

Chapter x. continues the same prophecy. Among other things, this is shown by the solemn refrain, "For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still" (ix. 12, 17, 21; x. 4). In verses 5 to 34 the prophet breaks away to address *Assyria*, the power which was to destroy *Israel* and also afflict Judah (verses 11, 12). In the end Assyria herself should be destroyed. This leads to chapters xi. and xii. which describe the coming reign of the Messiah, in which the "outcasts of Israel" and the "dispersed of Judah" should be reunited (xi. 12).

We must pause here, at the end of chapter xii., for a mere glance at the opening words of chapter xiii. tells us that we there break away to a different subject. Looking back over chapters vii. to xii. we see that, just as chapters i.–vi. were mainly concerned with *Judah*, ending (in vi.) with a wonderful vision of Jehovah as the reigning King in heaven, so chapters vii.–xii. are mainly concerned with *Israel*, ending with a glorious vision of Jehovah

as the reigning King on earth, in the Messianic kingdom which is yet to be. Nor must we omit to add that in chapters vii. to xii., just as in chapters i. to vi., we find recurrent references to the "day of Jehovah" (vii. 18, 20, 21, 23; x. 20, 27; xi. 10, 11; xii. 1, 4). Thus we may now say that the first six chapters concern the "day of Jehovah" mainly in relation to *Judah*, and the next six chapters the "day of Jehovah" mainly in relation to *Israel*.

Chapters xiii.–xxiii.

The remaining chapters in this first part of Isaiah group themselves with little difficulty. Chapters xiii. to xxiii. clearly belong together, for they are a succession of "*burdens*," all but one (that of the "Valley of Vision") being on the surrounding *Gentile* nations, as follows—

xiii.–xiv. 27	The burden of	Babylon.
xiv. 28–32	,,	Philistia.
xv.–xvi.	,,	Moab.
xvii.–xviii.	,,	Damascus.
xix.–xx.	,,	Egypt.
xxi. 1–10	,,	Desert of sea.
xxi. 11, 12	,,	Dumah (Edom).
xxi. 13–17	,,	Arabia.
xxii.	,,	Valley of Vision.
xxiii.	,,	Tyre.

Note also in these chapters the "day of Jehovah" (xiii. 6, 9, 13; xiv. 3; xvii. 4, 7, 9; xix. 16, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24; xx. 6, xxii, 12, 20, 25; xxiii. 15).

Chapters xxiv.–xxvii.

And now, in chapters xxiv. to xxvii. we have the "day of Jehovah" in relation to *the whole world*. That the language here does in reality embrace the whole earth is agreed by all expositors. Mark specially chapters xxiv. 1, 4, 5, 16, 19, 20, 21; xxv. 6, 7, xxvi, 21; xxvii. 1. See *now* how Isaiah's grasp is immensifying, and how necessary was that overawing vision in chapter vi.!—first of all the message was to *Judah*, then to *Israel*, then to all the surrounding *Gentile* nations, and now it is to *the whole world*!

There is no mistaking the subject in these four chapters: once again it is the "day of Jehovah" (xxiv. 21; xxv. 9; xxvi. 1; xxvii. 1, 2, 12, 13).

Chapters xxviii.–xxxiii.

The next six chapters (xxviii. to xxxiii.) group themselves off equally sharply. They consist of six "*woes.*" These all specially concern Jerusalem, which is ever the centre of all God's earth-dealings. Even though the first "woe" (xxviii.) turns its opening words on the "drunkards of Ephraim," these are but used as a warning to Judah. The words, "They also," in verse 7 (compare verse 14) swing the "woe" round on Judah. And although the last of these "woes" speaks anonymously of Assyria, as the "spoiler," yet the message is clearly to Jerusalem. Thus, the six "woes" of chapter v. on Jerusalem are now paralleled by these further six. The city of highest privilege is the city of heaviest responsibility! These are the six "woes"—

xxviii.	Drunkards of Ephraim and Judah.
xxix. 1	Hypocrites (verse 13) of Ariel.
xxix. 15	Evil schemers of Jerusalem.
xxx.	The revolters against Jehovah.
xxxi.	The Unholy Alliance-makers.
xxxiii.	The Assyrian Spoiler.

Notice the phrase, "the day of Jehovah" several times again in these "woe" chapters (xxviii. 5; xxix. 18; xxx. 23; xxxi. 7).

Chapters xxxiv.–xxxv.

Finally, in chapters xxxiv. and xxxv., we have the climactic prophetic outburst in this first part of Isaiah. They depict Jehovah's *world-vengeance* and *Zion's restoration.* Note chapter xxxiv. 8—"It is the day of Jehovah's vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion." Although in this thirty-fourth chapter the fury is unleashed against Edom, in particular, yet it is perfectly clear that Edom is here used typically. See how the chapter begins—"Come near, ye *nations,* to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the *earth* hear, and all that is therein; the *world,* and all things that come forth of it. For the indignation of Jehovah is upon *all nations.* . . ." Isaiah here not only embraces

all nations of the earth, he reaches right on to the end of history. Then, after this awful picture of vengeance, with its dark and lurid hues, he brings us to the tranquil, triumphant, and delectable picture of the final kingdom, in chapter xxxv. It is the picture of final grace and glory after sin and judgment. In chapter xxxiv we are in the "great tribulation" at the end of the present age. In chapter xxxv we are in the Millennium!

How remarkable, then, is the expanding development in this first part of Isaiah! Glance back quickly through these thirty-five chapters again. In the first six we are limited to Judah. But after the transforming vision of Jehovah as King of all nations and ages, in chapter vi, the prophecies reach out more and more, until they have comprehended all nations and all history! If in the first six chapters we are confined to Judah, in the next six we reach out to the ten-tribed kingdom of Israel. Then, in the next group (xiii to xxiii) all the main kingdoms of Isaiah's day are girdled. Then, in the next four chapters (xxiv to xxvii) the whole world is revolving before the eye of prophecy. Next, in chapters xxviii to xxxiii, it is Jerusalem which becomes the focus-point as being the centre of all Jehovah's dealings and controversy with our race. While finally, in chapter xxxiv, we are plunged into the "great tribulation" at the end of the present age, and then brought through to the lovely climax of the Millennium, in chapter xxxv! Is not that a wonderful expansion, development, progress, design? And does it not argue *one* human author behind the whole of it, even as it also indicates the one *Divine* Author behind the human?

An historical addendum.

At the end of the prophecies in this first part of Isaiah, there is an historical addendum of four chapters (xxxvi.–xxxix.). We cannot discuss the contents of these here, but we do want *this* fact to be grasped, that these four historical chapters are an evidently designed *transition* from the first part of the book to the second. The first two of these chapters are about the invasion of Judah by *Assyria* (after which time Assyria declines to her doom). The remaining two are about Hezekiah's illness, recovery, and contact with *Babylon*—which new world-power now begins to fill the scene. Thus these four chapters are a clearly intended

transition from chapters i.–xxxv., in which *Assyria* is the dominant world-power, to chapters xl.–lxvi., in which *Babylon* is the dominant world-power.

So, then, we may now set out our findings in the first part of Isaiah as follows—

i.–vi. The Day of Jehovah, and Judah.
vii.–xii. The Day of Jehovah, and Israel.
xiii.–xxiii. The ten burdens on the Nations.
xxiv.–xxvii. The "Day," and the whole world.
xxviii.–xxxiii. The six "woes" upon Jerusalem.
xxxiv.–xxxv. The final wrath: Zion restored.
xxxvi.–xxxix. Historical transition to part II.

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH (4)

Lesson Number 74

NOTE.—For this final study in Isaiah read chapters xl. to lxvi. again, marking carefully all references to Jehovah's "Servant" and those also which seem to refer to Him even though He is not actually referred to as the "Servant."

Men talk of the Divine history of the human race, but there is no such history. The Old Testament is the Divine history of *the family of Abraham.* The call of Abraham was chronologically the central point between the creation of Adam and the Cross of Christ, and yet the story of all the ages from Adam to Abraham is dismissed in eleven chapters. And if, during the history of Israel, the light of revelation rested for a time upon heathen nations, it was because the favoured nation was temporarily in captivity. But God took up the Hebrew race that they might be a centre and channel of blessing to the world. It was owing to their pride that they came to regard themselves as the only objects of Divine benevolence.

—*Sir Robert Anderson*

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH (4)

THE FIRST thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah have opened up encouragingly. What of the remaining twenty-seven? Do we find similarly clear arrangement in these? We do. In fact there is something more than arrangement merely: there is a most significant grouping. These chapters (xl.–lxvi.) which make up the second part of the book, by their very grouping proclaim a truth of utter importance and preciousness.

These twenty-seven chapters are a poem. They are a *Messianic* poem. Their ever-recurrent subject is the coming Christ, the redemption of Israel, and the ultimate consummation. The chapters are not detachable from each other: they go together to form the greatest Messianic poem in the Bible.

The twenty-seven chapters are arranged in three groups of nine chapters each, the end of each group being marked off by the same solemn refrain. Thus, at the end of the first nine (xlviii. 22) we read: "There is no peace, saith Jehovah, unto the wicked." Then, at the end of the second nine (lvii. 21) we read: "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." Finally, at the end of the third nine (lxvi. 24) we have this again, but in amplified form: "Their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh."

Whoever made the present arrangement into chapters, there can be little doubt that this tripartition of these twenty-seven chapters was definitely intended. But there is something deeper than merely human intention. There is Divine design. By common consent the greatest of all Old Testament passages concerning the atonement of Christ is Isaiah liii.; and is it not luminously significant that this immortal "Lamb" chapter is the middle chapter of the middle nine? At the very centre of this tremendous Messianic poem God has put the *LAMB*. He is the crux, the focus, the centre, the heart. Let us keep the Lamb where God has put Him—in the centre! Christ as the *Lamb* of God must be central in our faith and hope and love, in our preaching and teaching and witness-bearing, in our thought and prayer

and Bible-study, even as God has made Him the centre of prophecy and history and redemption.

But we owe a closer look at these three nine-fold groups before we pass on. Each group has its own unmistakable emphasis. In the first group it is the *supremacy* of Jehovah. In the second group it is the "*Servant*" of Jehovah. In the third group it is the *challenge* of Jehovah.

Take the first group (xl.–xlviii.), where the stress is on the *supremacy* of Jehovah. There is clear progress of thought. In the first two chapters of this group (xl., xli.) Jehovah is seen as supreme in His *attributes* of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Note, for instance, great passages like chapters xl. 12–28; xli. 4, etc., and 21–9. Next, in chapters xlii.–xlv., we have the supremacy of Jehovah in *redemption*. See chapters xlii. 5–9, 13–16; xliii. 1, 3, 10, 11, 12, 25; xlv. 5–8, 15–17, 20–2. Finally, in chapters xlvi.–xlviii., we see the supremacy of Jehovah in *judgment*. These three chapters are about judgment on Babylon and its gods, Bel, Nebo, etc. But note the further marked reference to the supremacy of Jehovah, in chapters xlvi. 5, 9, 10; xlvii. 4; xlviii. 12–14, 20–2.

And now take the second group (xlix.–lvii.), where the stress is on the "*Servant*" of Jehovah. The "Servant" has been mentioned before, in the earlier group, but is now brought into fuller prominence. In chapters xlix.–l. the reference, without a doubt, is primarily to the elect nation, Israel; though even here there is a latent, ultimate reference to Christ. But from chapter lii. 13 to the end of chapter liii. there is a breaking through into clear, full, glorious reference to the personal Messiah-Redeemer who was to come. Springing from this, in chapters liv. and lv. we have the restoration of the nation Israel, and the reigning of the Christ (lv. 4, etc.) as Davidic leader and commander. This group then closes, in chapters lvi., lvii., with an urgent appeal and a renewal of promise.

Finally, in the third group (lviii.–lxvi.) we have the *challenge* of Jehovah. There is a threefold presentation. First, there is the challenge in view of *present default* (lviii., lix.). Then there is the challenge in view of the simply *epochal prospects* rising up before Israel (lx.–lxv.). Chapter lxvi. winds up the wonderful poem with a closing challenge of final promise and warning.

Perhaps we ought now to set out in flat analysis both parts of this book of Isaiah. The central message is that *Jehovah is supreme Ruler and only Saviour.* In part one the key chapter is the sixth, where we have the prophet's vision of Jehovah as King. In part two the key chapter is the fifty-third, where we see the Lamb, first suffering and then triumphing.

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

JEHOVAH, SUPREME RULER AND ONLY SAVIOUR

ORACLES OF RETRIBUTION AND RESTITUTION

(i.–xxxix.)

i.–vi. The Day of Jehovah, and JUDAH.
vii.–xii. The Day of Jehovah, and ISRAEL.
xiii.–xxiii. The ten burdens on the NATIONS.
xxiv.–xxvii. The "Day" and the whole WORLD.
xxviii.–xxxiii. The six "woes" upon JERUSALEM.
xxxiv.–xxxv. The final wrath: ZION RESTORED.
xxxvi.–xxxix. Historical addendum to part one.

ORACLES OF REDEMPTION AND CONSUMMATION

(xl.–lxvi.)

GROUP 1. THE SUPREMACY OF JEHOVAH (xl.–xlviii.).
Jehovah supreme in attributes (xl.–xli.).
Jehovah supreme in redemption (xlii.–xlv.).
Jehovah supreme in punishment (xlvi.–xlviii.).

GROUP 2. THE "SERVANT" OF JEHOVAH (xlix.–lvii.).
Firstly Israel: finally Christ (xlix.–liii.).
Israel restored: Christ reigns (liv.–lv.).
Thus, present urge and promise (lvi.–lvii.).

GROUP 3. THE CHALLENGE OF JEHOVAH (lviii.–lxvi.).
In view of present wrong-doing (lviii.–lix.).
In view of future great events (lx.–lxv.).
Final challenge, promise, warning (lxvi.).

There is a noteworthy parallel between the two parts of Isaiah and chapters iv. and v. of the Book of Revelation. The whole movement in the first five chapters of Revelation is to put the Lamb on the throne. In chapter iv. we have an august unveiling of the THRONE. In chapter v. we see the LAMB in the throne. So is it with the two parts of Isaiah. In the first thirty-nine chapters we see the THRONE, with Jehovah as supreme Ruler. In the remaining twenty-seven chapters we see the LAMB in the throne, expressing the truth that Jehovah is the only Saviour.

The "Servant" of Jehovah

Isaiah's doctrine of Jehovah's "*Servant*" is arresting; but certain passages in it will have perplexed some of us. The difficulty is to decide whether this figure of the "Servant" refers to Christ or to the nation Israel. The following remarks may be helpful.

Biblical scholarship now fully appreciates that the prophetic writings usually have their *first* meaning, at least, in connection with the times when they originated. Here and there, undoubtedly, are predictions which directly overleap the centuries; but usually the prophet's message has a clear first reference to his own time. Thus, in the miracle of inspiration, it often occurs that a passage may have both a present and a future reference, the one patent, the other latent. The phraseology is more than can be fairly limited to the immediate historical occasion: it assumes an amplitude which anticipates far greater issues of which the immediate historical occasion is but a foreshadowing.

It is not surprising, therefore, that in the "Servant" prophecies there should seem an alternation of reference between Israel and Christ; for the corporate Israel itself was a standing *type* of Christ—Israel, that is, abstracted from its grievous failures, and viewed in the light of its Divine mission. That the prophet sometimes means the *nation* when he speaks of the "Servant" is made clear in such places as chapter xlix. 3. But there are four special places where the prophet so strongly *individualises* the "Servant" that no candid reader can take them merely as poetic personifications of the nation. These are chapters xlii. 1–7; xlix. 5, 6; l. 4–10; lii. 13–liii. 12.

The prophet's own thought-process would seem to be as follows His conception of the *nation* as "Servant" of Jehovah would inhere in the very fact of Israel's unique election in Jehovah's redemptive purpose for the human race. But as the nation's unfaithfulness and pre-revealed dispersion more and more pressed on his consciousness there would come the inescapable necessity of abstracting the idea of the true Israel from the actual; and thus, in the second stage of his thought, the "Servant" is no longer the actual, but the *ideal* Israel, represented by the godly "remnant" *within* the nation. Yet even here his mind does not find final rest. Peering ahead, as it were, and failing to glimpse even this ideal Israel collectively achieving the Divinely-intended high destiny, his mind is led on, both by human longing and Divine guiding, not only to idealise, but to *individualise* the true Israel, to draw its portrait in the features of a Person, a "Servant" of Jehovah who should be the perfect flower, the final embodiment, and the personal Head of the elect nation. Hence the seeming ambiguity in certain passages, and the clear transition from the nation to the Person in the "Servant" passages taken as a whole. In this connection it is helpful to look up the New Testament appropriations of the "Servant" passages as referring definitely to Christ.

The Fifty-third Chapter

It is generally agreed that the last three verses of the preceding chapter really belong to this fifty-third chapter. It is the most extraordinary of all the "Servant" passages—and the most precious. This is one of the places where the inspired prophet so strongly individualises the "Servant" that no unprejudiced student can see merely a poetic personification of the nation. Even here we need not deny to the critics that there may have been a primary and more superficial reference to the exiled nation; but the truer, deeper, fuller, and final reference to Christ is so emphatic that none but the wilfully blind can fail to see it.

It has been truly said that "the prolonged description of chapter liii. suits only one figure in all human history—the Man of Calvary." The following twelve points absolutely confirm this, for in their totality they cannot possibly be applied to any other. (1) He comes in utter lowliness—"a root out of a dry ground", etc. (2) He is "despised and rejected of men," etc. (3) He suffered

for the sins and in the place of others—"He was wounded for our transgressions," etc. (4) It was God Himself who caused the suffering to be vicarious—"The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." (5) There was an absolute resignation under the vicarious suffering—"He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth," etc. (6) He died as a felon—"He was taken from prison and from judgment." (7) He was cut off prematurely—"He was cut off out of the land of the living," etc. (8) Yet He was personally guiltless—"He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth." (9) And He was to live on after His sufferings—"He shall see His seed; He shall prolong His days." (10) Jehovah's pleasure was then to prosper in His hand—"The pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in His hand." (11) He was to enter into mighty triumph after His suffering—"He shall divide the spoil with the strong", etc. (12) By all this, and by "justifying many" through His death and living again, He was to "see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied."

As trait after trait is contributed, can we possibly write any other name under this amazing portrait than *JESUS OF NAZARETH*? And can we fail to marvel at the miracle of inspiration in this prophetic anticipation of the Man of Sorrows, when we reflect that it was written probably seven hundred years B.C.?

But look at this wonder-chapter again. Right at the heart of it we read: "*He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter*"; and on each side of this central declaration there is a seven-fold setting forth of *vicarious* suffering. In the verses that go before, it is from the *human* standpoint. In the verses which follow, it is from the *Divine* standpoint. Go through the verses, and pick these out, beginning at verse 4—"*He* hath borne *our* griefs." No wonder this chapter means so much to those of us who have fixed our hope for ever on Calvary!

Other Great Chapters

Our space is almost done; but we would whet the appetite of each reader for the study of the many other great chapters in Isaiah. How they open up to the mind which prayerfully concentrates on them! If we may pick out just one instance, take another of the "Servant" chapters—chapter xlii. This, with the two chapters which follow it, is really a great sermon which Isaiah

preached on the sovereign grace of Jehovah in redemption. See how the chapter opens up. In verses 1 to 4 we have the Servant *described*. In verses 5 to 9 we have the Servant *addressed*. In verses 10 to 20 we have a declaration of what Jehovah will *do* through His Servant. And in verses 21 to the end we have Isaiah's own *appeal* to his countrymen. When verse 21 says: "Jehovah is well pleased for *His* righteousness' sake," the "His" refers to the Servant, of course. It was *Christ* who should "magnify the law, and make it glorious." Going back to the opening verses, also, note the connection between verses 3 and 4. Verse 3 says: "A *glimmering* wick shall He not quench." Verse 4 uses the same word, and says: "*HE* (Christ) shall not glimmer till He has established righteousness in the earth."

Translation Snags

We are so keen that these great chapters of Isaiah shall be appreciated to the full that we return, in closing, to urge the use of a modern translation along with the Authorised Version. Certainly there are translation snags in the Authorised Version which wreck the sense of some grand passages. Take, for instance, chapter ix. 5–7. Verse 5 reads: "For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire." Read thus it conveys little or no sense, and certainly it has no intelligible connection with what follows—"For unto us a Child is born," etc. But read it now as it should be, and see what a magnificent prediction we have. "All the armour of the armed men in the onslaught, and the garments rolled in blood, shall be for burning, shall be fuel for the fire; for (and this is *why* all the implements of war shall at last become fuel for the fire) unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with judgment and with righteousness, from henceforth for ever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts shall perform this."

Here we must leave Isaiah; and we do so with the longing prayer that soon the above words may leap into their Millennial fulfilment. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

ARE THESE QUESTIONS ON ISAIAH ENJOYABLE OR TROUBLESOME TO YOU?

1. During which reigns did Isaiah prophesy? Name the Judæan kings, and then say how this bears on the *duration* of Isaiah's ministry.
2. How do we know that Isaiah's social status was high, that he was well-educated, that he was married and a father?
3. What big event happened to the northern kingdom (Israel) when Isaiah was between fifty and sixty years old?
4. What are the three grounds on which the Book of Isaiah is nowadays claimed to be a composite production of two or several or even many different contributors?
5. Could you show just briefly, giving an example or two, that the above-mentioned "three grounds" of the higher critical argument for plural authorship may be refuted?
6. What would you say, in a sentence or two, is the main purpose of the rationalist Higher Critics in arguing for a plural authorship of the book?
7. Could you mention any references which show that the geography of the second part of Isaiah (chapters xl. to lxvi.) is Palestinian and not Babylonian?
8. Could you name four witnesses, outside the Book of Isaiah, which testify that the whole is from the pen of the one Isaiah? (The first of the four is a famous translation, third century B.C.)
9. Could you give three lines of indication *inside* the Book of Isaiah which also confirm that both parts are from the one author?
10. In what way do the prophets Zephaniah and Nahum coincidentally yet conclusively prove that the one Isaiah is the author of the whole work?
11. Give in broad outline the structure of the Book of Isaiah, showing how the prophecies in part one are developingly expansive, and showing how in part two there is a threefold grouping?
12. Could you give nine points in Isaiah liii. which together show that it can be fully applicable to only one Person in all history, namely, our Lord Jesus Christ?

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH (1)

Lesson Number 75

NOTE.—For this study read the whole Book of Jeremiah right through. Do not try to read it quickly through at one sitting. Read it grouped as follows:

First, chapters i. to xx., noting that all the prophecies therein are undated.

Second, chapters xxi. to xxxix., noting that these are more or less particular and dated.

Third, chapter xl. to the end of the book, making a break at the end of chapter xliv., before the prophecies on the Gentile nations begin.

While God's government of the world has undergone several changes, which we, following the example of Paul, term dispensations, still these dispensations, vary as they may in laws and conditions, are ever constant to one main object. They all combine to prove that in no conceivable circumstances is man able to preserve or recover his integrity, and to save himself from corruption; that his sole hope lies in a direct interposition of the Eternal, and so wondrous infusion of the Holy Spirit that an entire change is wrought in his nature.

—*Pember, "The Great Prophecies of the Centuries"*

THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH (1)

JEREMIAH is one of the bravest, tenderest, and most pathetic figures in history; and his book of prophecies is one which everybody should read. Indeed, there is good reason why we should read the prophecies of Jeremiah with much thoughtfulness just now, for there is no little correspondence between the fateful days of this noble prophet and our own.

We have already remarked that these books of the prophets should be read in close connection with the times and circumstances in which they were written. This is especially so in the case of Jeremiah. The man and his message and his times are inseparably bound together, and must be interpreted together. In an earlier study we spoke of the Second Book of the Kings as "the most tragic national record ever written"; and the most tragic part of that tragic record is the final part, which covers the period in which Jeremiah lived. It was some eighty or a hundred years after Isaiah's death that Jeremiah exercised his ministry, a ministry which continued for well over forty years, during the reigns of Judah's last five kings (i. 1–3). One has but to name these kings—Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah—to realise the darkness of those days. The late Dr. Moorehead's words are apt and true: "It was Jeremiah's lot to prophesy at a time when all things in Judah were rushing down to the final and mournful catastrophe; when political excitement was at its height; when the worst passions swayed the various parties; and the most fatal counsels prevailed; . . . to see his own people, whom he loved with the tenderness of a woman, plunge over the precipice into the wide, weltering ruin." Jeremiah was the prophet of Judah's midnight hour.

Jeremiah Himself

The man himself is a rich subject for study. He blends in his character, to a degree of striking fineness, feminine tenderness with masculine strength, nervous sensitiveness with transparent simplicity, so that his nature reveals its reactions to outside

goings-on as sharply as the limpid waters of Alpine lakes reflect every mood of the changeable skies above them. I know of no man who reveals a truer heart-likeness to Jesus Himself than does Jeremiah, in his suffering sympathy both with God and men, in his unretaliating forbearance, his yearning concern for his fellows, his guileless motive, his humility, his willingness for self-sacrifice, and his utter faithfulness, even to the point of unsparing severity in denunciation. All disappointed, disappreciated, disregarded, misunderstood, misrepresented, and persecuted Christian workers today, sticking on at their work, but with a leaden weight at the heart and a choke of grief in the throat, should turn aside again and again to commune with the heroic great-heart of these pages. Indeed, we cannot properly study this Book of Jeremiah without studying Jeremiah himself; for the man is as much the book as the prophecies which he uttered.

No man ever shrank from publicity as did Jeremiah; yet singularly enough, it is this man who, of all the prophets, gives us the fullest revelation of his own character. This is because the man and his message are in such passionate oneness under such tragic circumstances. Jeremiah's nature was such that he simply could not be merely a *transmitter*, able to detach his own feelings from that which he was commissioned to declare. With an intensity of love and sympathy, he himself lived and felt and suffered in his message. His own heart-strings vibrated to every major and every minor chord. The man and his message were one.

We believe that there was Divine design in this. Jeremiah was a man raised up specially for such a time as that in which he lived. Indeed, we are told this with significant emphasis in chapter i. 5—"Before I formed thee . . . I knew thee; and before thou camest forth . . . I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." Thus, Jeremiah was specially fitted for his sad but noble task. The Holy Spirit would have us look at this *man*, as well as hear his words.

And what is it that impresses us first about Jeremiah as we read through these chapters? It is *his suffering sympathy*. His sorest inward trial was the tearing of his heart between two rival sympathies—on the one hand, a sympathy with God such as few men have entered into, and on the other hand a grieving, yearning, loving sympathy with his fellow-countrymen, which

made him suffer with them. In all their afflictions he himself was afflicted. Somehow, in his relation to God, Jeremiah was a prophet, and something more; and similarly, in his ardent identification of himself with his people he was a patriot, and something more. He entered both into the life of his people and into that of Jehovah. He did not merely speak *for* God; he felt *with* Him: and he did not merely speak to the people; he felt with *them*. In the earlier chapters it seems as if, at times, these two sympathies offset each other to a point of fine balance. We seem to sense that the prophet's sympathy is at first so poignantly with his people that he could almost side against the threatened chastisements of God as too severe (see iv. 10, 19, 20; x. 23–5; xiv. 7–13, 19–22). But gradually we note a change. As Jeremiah himself spends his noble love and pleadings in vain upon this obdurate people, as he suffers their derisive mockery, discovers their thankless plots against his own life, and undergoes the ignominious punishments which they inflict on him, he is gradually forced to identify his own judgment with God's. Indeed, he is actually driven by their cruel treachery to cry out that God shall punish them—not at all out of a spirit of revenge, but from a sense of outraged justice and kindness (see xi. 19, 20; xviii. 18–23; xx. 10–12; xxxii. 16–23; xlii. 20–2). Jeremiah's own suffering through this struggle of dual sympathy within his heart is seen in passages such as chapters iv. 19; viii. 21; ix. 1; xv. 10, 18; xx. 14–18; xxiii. 9, etc.

But further, we cannot fail to be impressed by Jeremiah's *patient perseverance*. Only pure love and goodness persevere as graciously as this man did, through such a protracted and forlorn ministry. Most of the other prophets do seem to have produced a measure of reform. Although Isaiah asked, "Who hath believed our report?" how plainly is his influence seen in Hezekiah's reign! But through forty years Jeremiah never once saw any grateful response. He stood alone, as God's spokesman, unheeded, humiliated, yet bravely persistent. Love alone keeps a man thus persevering in face of such discouragements. "Love suffereth long, and is kind . . . beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." And remember that the persevering love of *God* is struggling to express itself through this lonely, lovely man; for he has become so sympathetically one with God and with his message that he himself,

as it were, *becomes* the message. Every prediction of coming judgment is soaked in tears: every pleading is punctuated with sobs. Jeremiah becomes an object-lesson for all time, of the persevering love of God. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan truly says: "In the story of Jeremiah's shrinking and pain and tears we have a picture of a man in such perfect fellowship with God that through him God was able to reveal His own suffering in the presence of sin."

We can mention only one other characteristic, namely, *his utter faithfulness.* His sensitive nature shrank from certain aspects of the tragic ministry which was committed to him. He pours out his heart in touching appeal against having to pronounce such fearful retributions. His own heart feels the pain of the judgments which are coming on his kinsmen. He suffers with them. He feels he cannot drag his leaden steps to declare these woes of God upon them. Yet through all the years he faithfully declares the whole counsel of God to his unrepenting generation. Yes, "Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth, in the land of Benjamin" (i. 1), is a noble figure and a rewarding study. Never did he lose that native simplicity of heart with which he first responded to the Lord—"Ah, Lord God, behold I cannot speak; for I am a child" (i. 6); and he persevered with heroic faithfulness right to the bitter end.

Jeremiah's Prophecies

It is quite clear that the chapters and messages in this Book of Jeremiah are not arranged in chronological order. Chapters xxxv. and xxxvi., for instance, are earlier in point of time than chapter xxi.; and so on. For the most part it would seem as though little attention was paid to chronological order in the compilation of our prophet's writings. Is there, then, arrangement according to *subject*? It scarcely seems so. Writers on this book seem to be agreed that it cannot be reduced to any logical analysis. Of course, we can pick out the different chapters which belong to the reigns of the different kings, and make our own classification in that way, grouping those chapters which belong to the reign of Josiah, and those which belong to the reign of Jehoiakim, and so on. But what of the book as it now stands? Is there any sign of orderly purpose in its actual present

arrangement? I think there is; and it is an orderly arrangement which is quite easy to remember.

To begin with; this much is clear, that chapters i. to xxxix. are all *before the fall of Jerusalem.* First, then, let us look at these thirty-nine chapters. Is there any indication of order in these? There is. Take them just as they stand. In chapter i. we have the prophet's call and commission, which is introductory to the whole book. Then, next, we note that all the chapters from ii. to xx. are a series of prophecies which are *general and undated.* The only time-mark in all these chapters is a very general one in chapter iii. 6—"In the days of Josiah," which simply indicates that at any rate the first six chapters were Jeremiah's earliest prophesyings. It is probable, indeed, that the first *twelve* chapters fall in Josiah's reign, and that all of these first *twenty* chapters fall in the earlier years of Jeremiah's ministry. This section ends with an account of the reaction and result at the close of this first phase of Jeremiah's ministry—opposition and persecution. See chapter xx. Also note that the "Pashur" of chapter xx. 1 is not the same as "Pashur, the son of Melchiah" in chapter xxi. 1.

Next, we observe that all the prophecies in chapters xxi. to xxxix. are *particular and dated.* They are clearly stated to have occurred in connection with this or that or the other historical event, or at such and such a time (see the opening words of the chapters). Lest it should be thought that chapters xxii. and xxiii. are an exception to this, we point out that both these chapters continue the prophecy commenced in chapter xxi. Look this up carefully to verify it. Note that chapter xxii. (which obviously continues chapter xxi.) speaks of all the last four of Judah's kings—Jehoahaz (Shallum) in verse 11; Jehoiakim in verse 18; Jehoiachin (Coniah) in verse 24; and Zedekiah (to whom the whole prophecy is addressed); see chapter xxi. 3 with chapter xxii. 1. These evil kings were the false "shepherds" who led the people astray: and it is with this in mind that chapter xxiii. begins: "Woe be unto the shepherds that destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture! saith Jehovah." Now note in chapter xxiii. false pastors (verses 1, 2), false prophets (verse 9), false priests (verse 11).

Perhaps we ought just to add that, similarly, chapters xxx. and xxxi. continue chapter xxix. In chapter xxix. Jeremiah

addresses the first batch of *captives* who had been deported from Judah to Babylon (some years before the final siege and fall of Jerusalem). Then, in chapter xxx. he is instructed to commit the foregoing to written form for preservation. That the captives and the captivity are still in mind is clear from the link between chapter xxix. 31 ("Send to all them of the *captivity* . . .") and chapter xxx. 3 ("I will bring again the *captivity* . . ." etc.).

So, then, the first thirty-nine chapters cleave into two clear groups: chapters i. to xx., prophecies *general and undated*; chapters xxi. to xxxix., prophecies *particular and dated.*

As for the remaining chapters, the arrangement is simple and clear. In chapters xl. to xliv. we have Jeremiah's ministry to the Jews *after the fall of* Jerusalem, first in Judæa (xl.–xlii.), then in Egypt (xliii.–xliv.).

Chapters xlv. to li. are plainly a group all by themselves, being Jeremiah's collected prophecies on the surrounding *Gentile nations* —nine of them (on chapter xlv. see next lesson). And, finally, chapter lii. is an historical appendix and conclusion to the whole book, in which we see the last of Judah's kings dragged from his throne, blinded, humiliated, and carried captive, the city sacked, the temple burned, and Jeremiah's word fulfilled to the last degree.

The *central thought* of the book may be expressed by bringing together the two recurrent expressions, "I will punish" and "I will restore." While there is present failure through the sin of man, there shall be final triumph through the love of God. There is *wrath to the full*, but there is *love to the end.* Jeremiah's message is crystallised in chapter xxvi. 12, 13—"The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard. Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God; and the Lord will repent Him of the evil that He hath pronounced against you." This was a clear and gracious eleventh-hour offer, but it was not responded to.

The key to the whole book is found in chapters xxx. and xxxi., especially in chapter xxx. 15–18: "Because thy sins are become immense I have done these things unto thee. . . . Yet all they that devour thee shall be devoured. . . . For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord."

THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

INTRODUCTION—Jeremiah commissioned (i).

PROPHECIES, GENERAL AND UNDATED (ii.–xx.).

First message, ii. 1–iii. 5; second message, iii. 6–vi. 30; third message (at Temple gate), vii. 1–x. 25; fourth message (the broken covenant), xi. 1–xii. 17; fifth message (sign of linen girdle), xiii. 1–27; sixth message (on the drought), xiv. 1–xv. 21; seventh message (sign of the unmarried prophet), xvi. 1–xvii. 18); eighth message (at city gates), xvii. 19–27; ninth message (the potter's vessel), xviii. 1–23; tenth message (the earthen vessel), xix.; result, xx.

PROPHECIES, PARTICULAR AND DATED (xxi.–xxxix.).

First (to Zedekiah), xxi.–xxiii.; second (after first deportation), xxiv.; third (fourth year of Jehoiakim: The coming Babylonian captivity), xxv.; third (early reign of Jehoiakim), xxvi.; fourth (early reign of Jehoiakim), xxvii.–xxviii.; fifth (to captives of first deportation), xxix.–xxxi.; sixth (tenth year Zedekiah), xxxii.–xxxiii.; seventh (during Babylonian siege), xxxiv.; eighth (days of Jehoiakim), xxxv.; ninth (fourth year Jehoiakim), xxxvi.; tenth (siege), xxxvii.; result xxxviii.–xxxix.

PROPHECIES AFTER FALL OF JERUSALEM (xl.–xliv.).

Babylonian kindly treatment of Jeremiah (xl. 1–6); ill-doings in land of Judæa (xl. 7–xli. 18); Jeremiah's message to remnant in the land (xlii. 1–22); Jeremiah carried down to Egypt (xliii. 1–7); first prophetic message in Egypt (xliii. 8–13); second prophetic message to Jewish refugees in Egypt (xliv. 1–30); result—further rejection of the message by Jewish refugees.

PROPHECIES UPON GENTILE NATIONS (xlv.–li.).

Preceded by a prefatory note to Baruch the faithful scribe who wrote them (xlv.); first (against Egypt), xlvi. 1–28; second (against the Philistines) xlvii. 1–7; third (against Moab), xlviii. 1–47; fourth (against the Ammonites), xlix. 1–6; fifth (against Edom), xlix. 7–22; sixth (against Damascus), xlix. 23–7; seventh (against Kedar and Hazor), xlix. 28–33; eighth (against Elam), xlix. 34–9; ninth (against Babylon and Chaldea), l. 1–li. 64.

CONCLUSION—Jerusalem overthrown (lii.).

THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH (2)

Lesson Number 76

NOTE.—For this second study in Jeremiah read the whole book through again, marking off its main divisions as given in our preceding lesson; and making careful note of the following:

(1) All references to Jeremiah himself, in which there are many precious spiritual teachings;

(2) All those passages which tell of the coming Messiah and of Israel's final restoration;

(3) Chapter xxv., which gives us the starting-point of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry, and other pivotal facts, as we shall also show in the ensuing study.

The Bible shows that all righteousness is rooted in religion. If we destroy man's relationship to God, and his consciousness of Him, we destroy the possibility of man's right relationship with his fellow-man. That is what the world has lost sight of so largely. Perhaps it may come back through blood and misery and tears in these appalling days.

—*G. Campbell Morgan, D.D.*

THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH (2)

THIS Book of Jeremiah "grows" on us the more we read it. Having seen its general lay-out, we really must tarry, even though briefly, to appreciate some of its main features.

Basic and Vital Lessons

Basic and vital lessons lie before us on these pages. To begin with, here is the solemn truth, vehemently emphasised and tragically illustrated, that *all national deterioration and disaster is due fundamentally to the disregarding and disobeying of God.* Read again Jeremiah's opening impeachment of the Jewish nation, in chapter ii., noting specially verses 8, 19, and 35.

> *"The priests said not, Where is Jehovah? And they that handle the Law knew Me not. The rulers also transgressed against Me; and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit."*
>
> *"Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee. Know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast forsaken Jehovah thy God, and that My fear is not in thee, saith the Lord, Jehovah of hosts."*
>
> *"Yet thou sayest: I am innocent; surely His anger is turned away from me. Behold I will enter into judgment with thee."*

In the first of these verses we see the spiritual breakdown among the *leaders* of the nation. In the second we see the inevitable entailment of such breakdown, namely, wickedness and bitterness. In the third we see the blindness which this process begets: sin gradually ceases to be recognised as such, and innocence is professed even amid wrongdoing and defilement.

When once the national downgrade has set in, it is not easy to check the momentum. The wrong which is indulged in by those in authority soon becomes the fashion among the people at large. We only need to turn on to Jeremiah's second message

for an illustration of this. See chapter v. 31—"The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; *and My people love to have it so.*"

Moreover, the nation and people that dishonour God by *denying* Him usually degenerate into *defying* Him. How clearly this is demonstrated in the later chapters of Jeremiah! The king himself burns God's message in the fire (xxxvi. 27); the princes put Jeremiah into a dungeon (xxxviii. 4); and as for the nation as a whole there is a defiant deafness to all appeal (xxxvii. 2). This downgrade process has one inevitable end. Corrupt leadership inoculates the whole nation with moral poison; and inward, moral failure issues in outward, national ruin.

You cannot rightly explain the history of any nation if you leave God out of the picture. Judah's politicians were busy explaining that the kingdom's troubles were due to a geographical dilemma—Egypt to the south, and Assyria to the east; but Jeremiah's message was that the nation's calamities were judgments of God for her iniquities. The miserable policy of Judah's leaders was to try and play off Egypt and Assyria against each other, or, when this seemed too precarious, to make an alliance with one of them as a safeguard against the other. Jeremiah denounced such wretched expedients (ii. 18, 19, 36; xxxvii. 7), and declared that the country's lamentable condition was due to the people's apostasy from the true God.

Sin is still in the world, and God is still God; and therefore history repeats itself. Our politicians are still floundering about among second causes. The fundamental cause of all our troubles is that God is forgotten. We discuss policy instead of putting away sin. It is the same today as it was in Jeremiah's time. When will nations learn that national decay and ruin are, at root, due to failure towards God? Jeremiah's message may well be heeded by our leaders today.

But we must add a word more. This Book of Jeremiah reveals to us *the process of the Divine judgment in national life.* Speaking of Jeremiah's days, Dr. G. C. Morgan says: "We read the history merely and say: What an unfortunate succession of kings; how singularly these people failed to produce statesmen who were able to cope with the political situation! This lonely figure, observing the race to ruin, said: The failure of your kings and the failure

of your policy prove that the hand of God is upon you in judgment. It is He who breaks down the power of your king. It is He who will bring to nought your intrigue with Egypt, and hand your city over to the Assyrian who is already at your gates." Yes, and we know that Jeremiah was right. The judgment of the Almighty on the nation was operating through these things which, to sin-warped little human minds were simply (as men call them) "*misfortunes.*" When sin has quenched the vision of God, it also renders the mind incapable of seeing the operations of Divine judgment in the things which are permitted to happen.

So it was then. So it is today. Events moved on and vindicated Jeremiah. So do events move on and vindicate God's Jeremiahs among men today. The great lessons of this Book of Jeremiah speak to all peoples in all ages. Where sin has destroyed the vision of God, men think that the calamities which are permitted to come upon them are indications that God has abandoned interest in them; but where the vision of God is clear, as it was with Jeremiah, the things which are permitted to happen are seen in their true significance; and these very calamities are seen to be the evidences that *God has not abandoned His throne*!

There is another lesson in this book, too, which stands out prominently, and which should be very comforting to all sincere Christian workers today. *God does not reckon the worth of service for Himself merely in terms of success.* Nor must we, on our part, judge the blessing of God upon us merely by the degree of success that comes to us. Judged by that standard, where is Jeremiah? We must learn to be faithful even where we cannot be successful —as Jeremiah was, so conspicuously. This lesson has special relevance to the Lord's witnesses today. We are almost—if not quite—at that point in the history of Christendom which corresponds to the time of Jeremiah in the history of Judah—the eleventh hour, the hour leading to the midnight zero of the final apostasy under "the Man of Sin," and the final outbreak of the Divine judgment at Armageddon. This being so, or very probably so, we may find that people in general are less and less inclined to hear our message, and are more inclined to resist and persecute us. Let us then recognise the hour in which we witness for God; and let us take great comfort and encouragement from Jeremiah, who, through nearly half a century of discouragement, bravely kept on.

Messianic and Restoration Passages

Jeremiah's mission was to a people who had shut their eyes and ears until they had become blind and deaf. Their sins were "bound" upon them. Judicial blindness and deafness had become an accomplished fact. They *would not* hear in their prosperity (xxii. 21). They *cannot* hear now in their adversity (vi. 10). In one sense they were past praying for; and three times it is said, "Pray not for this people" (vii. 16; xi. 14; xiv. 11). God's awful word, in chapter xv. 1, is: "Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth." The point is that the sentence of judgment was now irrevocable. As at Kadesh-barnea of old (Num. xiv.), so was it now again, in Jeremiah's time—that generation was doomed. Because of this, Jeremiah's message was largely one of coming judgment.

But the sad ministry of this prophet carries a golden promise at its heart. The Everlasting Love, though veiled by these gathering and passing thunder-clouds, shines through, again and again, in simply dazzling promises. No passages, even among the rapturous rhapsodies of Isaiah, surpass some of the glorious promises of restoration and consummation which are found in these pages of Jeremiah. Like almost-blinding sunbursts from a cloud-draped heaven they recur through the book. See the following passages again: chapters xxiii. 3–8; xxx. 1–10, 17–22; xxxi. 1–14, 31–40; xxxii. 37–44; xxxiii. 14–26; iii. 16–18; xii. 14–15; xvi. 14, 15.

Right at the heart of this book, then, there is a *GOSPEL*—good news of *great days yet to come*! "For, lo, the days come that I will bring again the captivity of My people. . . . I will cause them to return to the land, and they shall possess it . . . and I will raise up unto them David, their King" (xxx.). This is a scene of millennial blessedness. The *people* are to be regathered. The *land* is to be repossessed. The *Messiah-King* is to reign; and the glory of His reign shall *never end*!

It is as plain as can be that these Messianic and millennial predictions are not merely florid poetical exaggerations of events which are now past; and it is equally clear that if they are to be taken at their face value they have not yet had their fulfilment. They look on to the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ,

and His coming reign on earth in a world-wide empire centred at Jerusalem. These great "restoration" passages should be studied collaterally, and memorised, and enjoyed by all the Lord's people.

Also, it is in connection with these "restoration" promises that we first come across *the manifesto of a wonderful "NEW COVENANT"* which God was going to make with Judah and Israel. Read onward from chapter xxxi. 31—one of the most remarkable paragraphs in Old Testament prophecy. Jeremiah saw that if there was to be any hope of salvation for his people, it could not be by a return merely to the old system on the basis of the covenant made through Moses: and he learned that there was to be this wonderful "new" covenant. It was to be a covenant of grace, not law. Instead of being an outward command demanding obedience, it should be an inward renewal providing holy desire and motive. It should be deep-grounded in forgiveness, and would produce a complete change in Israel. The new covenant was to centre in a perfect Ruler who was to come—the Son of David.

The promised One has now indeed appeared. The "new covenant" has been sealed with His own redeeming blood. But the application of all the wonderful provisions in it for the covenant people awaits the time when they shall "look on Him whom they pierced," and acclaim Him their Messiah-Saviour-King. Jeremiah was not given to see this present, intervening age of the Church; but he clearly saw the kingdom glories beyond it. At the moment when "out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings," announcing Judah's doom, he saw "a rainbow round about the throne" (Rev. iv.)—the rainbow of a new promise, a new covenant, every line rich with hope and beauty!

The Babylon Doom-song

The final prophecy of the book is on the doom of Babylon It runs through one hundred and ten verses, and is the longest single prophecy in the book. It is an arresting article, and has been fulfilled to the letter. Such prophecy and fulfilment, of course, is proof absolute of inspiration; and it is not surprising, therefore, that this Babylon doom-song has attracted the subtle attentions of our modernist scholars, who would fain post-date it

so as to eliminate the presence of supernatural prediction. Their effort is to argue that Jeremiah could not have been the writer because (as they put it) its "standpoint" is later than his day, by which they mean (in Dr. Driver's words) that "the destruction of the Temple is presupposed, the Jews are in exile, suffering for their sins," and so on.

But there are three facts which completely smash this "higher critical" contention. *First:* even the critics themselves have to admit that no prophecy in the whole book bears more clearly the literary characteristics of Jeremiah. Graf, for instance, says: "The style presents all the characters of the special style of that prophet." *Second:* no prophecy in the whole book is more significantly authenticated than this one. It begins with: "The word that the Lord spake against Babylon . . . *by Jeremiah* the prophet"; and it ends with: "Thus far are the words *of Jeremiah.*" Thus it is clasped by a double guarantee. And then, to complete a "threefold cord" of evidence, it is carefully dated—the fourth year of Zedekiah (see li. 59–63), that is, seven years before the fall of Jerusalem. *Third:* there are parts of this prophecy which look far beyond the end of the captivity in Babylonia. See chapter l. 14–16, where the destruction of the walls and foundations of Babylon is foretold. This demolition, not to mention other items in the prediction, did not occur at the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus at the end of the predicted captivity; it happened over five hundred years after that! But would the critics now argue that because the "standpoint" here "*presupposes*" this destruction of Babylon's walls, the prophecy was not written until five hundred years after the Exile, when our own Christian era had begun? Presumably, that is what the "standpoint" theory would require!

This "standpoint" theory of the critics is nonsense. Are there not great predictions in this book, and in the other scriptures, which overleap the centuries right on to the Millennium? And are we therefore to infer that because their "standpoint" is in the Millennium, the *writer* is also millennial—and therefore not yet born? Nay, as one writer has said, the "standpoint" of all true prophecy is "the standpoint of *omniscience*"—of God Himself. In other words, Jeremiah's Babylon prophecy, like all other true prophecy, was *the inspired word of God.*

A Pivotal Chapter

Chapter xxv. should be carefully re-inspected. First, it marks for us precisely the starting-point of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry (verse 3). Second, it definitely predicts the seventy years' servitude to Babylon, a full twenty years in advance (verse 11, with date in verse 1). Third, it clearly shows that chapters xlvi. to li.—Jeremiah's batch of prophecies on the Gentile nations—were already in "book" form (verses 13, 17–26), here in "the fourth year of Jehoiakim," twenty years before the Exile, even though they are now placed right at the *end* of the "Book of Jeremiah" as it has come down to us.

Chapter xxv. also explains, incidentally, why that tiny *forty-fifth* chapter, addressed to Baruch, comes where it does. Writers on Jeremiah seem to have taken it for granted that *this* little chapter, at least, is quite out of its proper place. Certainly it cannot be an addendum to what precedes it, in chapters xliii. and xliv., for in those two chapters we are with the aged Jeremiah in Egypt, some time after the fall of Jerusalem, whereas this forty-fifth chapter is dated away back "in the fourth year of Jehoiakim." But is this forty-fifth chapter connected with the prophecies on the Gentile nations, which come *after* it? It is; and surely the connection is disclosed in chapter xxv. The prophecy in chapter xxv., which, as we have just seen, mentions the "*book*" of Jeremiah's prophecies on the Gentile peoples as being already written, is dated, "*the fourth year of Jehoiakim.*" Probably this "book" of prophecies on the Gentiles was written actually in that year. Who was the scribe? *Baruch* was Jeremiah's scribe, or writer (xxxvi. 4, 17; xliii. 6, etc.). It would be he who wrote out this "book" of prophecies on the Gentile nations. See now how chapter xlv. begins: "The word that Jeremiah the prophet spake unto Baruch, the son of Neriah, *when he had written these words in a book*, at the mouth of Jeremiah, in *the fourth year of Jehoiakim.*" Is not the connection too clear to doubt? When it says he wrote "*these* words" it means those that *follow*, in the prophecies on the Gentile kingdoms; for verse 4 speaks of judgment coming on "the whole earth" (not just "this whole land" as in A.V.), and verse 5 speaks of evil coming on "all flesh"—referring, surely, to the world-prophecies which follow. After all, then, chapter xlv. is in its right place—as a prefatory note to chapters xlvi.–li.

Typical Significance of Jeremiah

We close with a final word about Jeremiah himself. It would almost seem as though a kind of *typical* significance clings to this meek, brave, faithful, suffering prophet of tears, in the experiences which came to him, and in the emotions which were wrought within him. See chapters ix. 1; xi. 19; xiii. 17; xv. 16–21; xx. 10; xxvi. 11–15; xxxvii. 15, 16; xxxviii. 6; Lamentations iii. 1–14. Certainly, no figure that moves before us anywhere in the Bible comes nearer to expressing the sorrowing, patient, gracious love of Christ over those He suffers to save than does Jeremiah. Most of us, I fear, cannot ever read the story of this man without inward self-rebuke that we ourselves fall so short of this generous-hearted, meek-spirited heroism. If Jeremiah is not actually a type of Christ, he is certainly an advance reflection of Him.

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan truly says: "We have read this prophecy very carelessly if we have simply seen in it the sorrows of a man, *'Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!'* Can we find anything to match that? We have already done so. We have travelled through the centuries until we have stood upon the slopes of Olivet with a Man more lonely than Jeremiah, and have seen Him looking at Jerusalem, and have heard Him pronounce its doom, weeping as He did so. That is the fulfilment of the prophecy of Jeremiah. . . . The interpretation of Jeremiah's suffering is to be found in the suffering of Jesus; and the interpretation of the suffering of Jesus is to be found *in the suffering of God.*"

Mark well then, this remarkable man, Jeremiah; and as the mind lingers appraisingly upon him let the heart's prayer be—

Teach me, O Lord, to serve as Thou deservest,
To give, and not to count the cost;
To fight and not to heed the wounds;
To toil, and not to seek for rest;
To labour and not to ask any reward,
Save only of knowing that I do Thy will.

THE LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH

Lesson Number 77

NOTE.—For this study read the whole of this poem-dirge, "Lamentations," through twice, noting that each chapter has 22 verses in it, except the middle chapter, which has exactly three times that number. Try to pick out carefully when it is Jehovah speaking, when Jerusalem, and when Jeremiah.

Behold therefore the goodness and the severity of God . . .

Romans xi. 2.

Desperate tides of the whole world's anguish
Forced through the channel of a single heart.

Frederick Myers in "St. Paul."

There is a budding morrow in midnight.

Keats.

Poets learn in sorrow what they teach in song.

Anon.

THE LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH

"O JERUSALEM, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate!" Such was the tear-drenched plaint of the Man of Sorrows over the impenitent city which was soon to crucify its Messiah-King: but six hundred years before then, those words were anticipated and adumbrated, in more elaborate form, by the brave but broken-hearted prophet, Jeremiah, in his five-fold poem, the "Lamentations."

Authorship

That this little scroll which we call the "Lamentations" is indeed the work of Jeremiah we do not for one moment doubt, even though no author's name is attached to it in the Hebrew original. We have just read the learned T. K. Cheyne's argument against Jeremiah's authorship of it; but the very weakness of his case confirms our own adherence to the older view. Dr. Cheyne himself is obliged to say of chapter iii. that "if we take the poem literally, it points to Jeremiah more distinctly than to any other known individual"; and he cannot escape the admission that even the other chapters are characterised by "expressions and ideas familiar to us in Jeremiah." His case, like that of the other modern critics who have shared his view, rests on unconvincing minutiæ in the text, and on the fact that the fifth lament is not in the acrostic form (which we will mention presently) of the other four. The way our modern school of literary Biblical critics have often professed to discover variant authorship in variant forms of expression is, in our own judgment, unworthy of serious scholarship. That much of it is disguised guess-work is shown by the way in which the results of the different literary critics clash with each other.

Right through these five elegies or lamentations we descry the hand and the heart of Jeremiah: nor is there any tenable alternative to Jeremiah's authorship. Jewish tradition, as far back

as we can go, ascribes the authorship to him. The historian Josephus confirms it. The Massoretic editors of the Hebrew Scriptures undoubtedly believed it. Later Jewish and Christian scholarship endorsed it. *We* therefore accept it. That the writing of the book was contemporaneous with the sufferings which it describes is transparently evident; and that being so, then as C. J. Ellicott says, "There is absolutely no other writer living at the time to whom it can be ascribed with the slightest shadow of probability." Into the many parallel traits between the Lamentations and the Book of Jeremiah we cannot go here. Ellicott's Commentary has a fine little paragraph which can be looked up in this connection, and which, to our own judgment, is conclusive as to the fact that this weeping prophet of the "Lamentations" is none other than Jeremiah.

Characteristics

This pathetic little five-fold poem, the Lamentations, has been called "an elegy written in a graveyard." It is a memorial dirge written on the destruction and humiliation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. It is a cloudburst of grief, a river of tears, a sea of sobs. In the Jewish grouping of the Old Testament Scriptures it is one of the five *Megilloth*, or "Rolls." The five are the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther; and they were called the "Rolls" because each of them was written on a roll for reading at Jewish festivals—the Song of Songs at the Passover, Ruth at the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost, Ecclesiastes at the Feast of Tabernacles, Esther at the Feast of Purim, and Lamentations at the anniversary of the destruction of Jerusalem.

But further, this five-fold poem is built up in an *acrostic* form. Even the reader of our English version has a slight clue to this in the fact that all the chapters except the middle one have the same number of verses, that is, twenty-two, while the middle chapter has exactly three times the number of each of the others, that is, sixty-six. This is because there are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet; and the verses of these five elegies (each elegy being represented by one complete chapter in our English version) run successively through the alphabet, each verse beginning, in order, with one of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew

alphabet. The reason why the third elegy (iii.) has sixty-six verses instead of twenty-two is that it runs in *triplets* of verses, each of the *first three* verses beginning with the first letter of the alphabet, each of the *next three* verses beginning with the second letter of the alphabet, each of the *next three* verses beginning with the third letter of the alphabet, and so on, thus taking sixty-six verses to run through the full twenty-two letters. The acrostic lettering is not continued in the fifth and shortest of these elegies, but the number of the verses is still twenty-two. We will give examples of this acrostic arrangement after we have briefly examined the structure of these five elegies as a whole.

Structure and Analysis

The structure of this quintuple poem is remarkable. These five elegies are not unconnected digits: they belong together, and make one complete poetic quintuplet. When this is clearly seen it gives a final indication that all five are from the one author.

The two *outer* poemettes—the first and the fifth, correspond. The two *inner* ones—the second and the fourth, correspond. The *middle* one—the third, which is the most elaborate in conception and the most finished in execution, is three times the size of the others, and stands at the centre like a great throne draped with mourning.

Take the first of the five (i.). The subject here is *Jerusalem's plight.* The little piece is in two parts. Notice that verses 1 to 11 are all in the *third* person—"she," "her," "the city," "Jerusalem," "Judah." This is because in these verses it is the prophet himself who is speaking *about* the city. At verse 12 there is a change. All the verses from 12 to 22 are in the *first* person—"my," "me," "I." This is because in these verses the *city* is represented as speaking *of itself.* This first chapter, then, is the elegy of "Jerusalem's Plight." In verses 1 to 11 *the prophet describes it.* Then, in verses 12 to 22, *the city bemoans it.*

Look now at the second lament (ii.). The subject here is *Jehovah's anger.* All the way through, the emphasis is on the fact that Jerusalem's humiliation has been brought about by Jehovah Himself. The expressions, "The Lord hath" and "He

hath," occur no less than thirty times, not to mention verbs like "He burned," "He slew," "He poured out," all emphasising this fact that Jerusalem's discomfiture was *the Lord's* doing. This second lament, like the first, is in two parts. In verses 1 to 12 Jehovah's anger is *described*. Then, at verse 13, there is a change from the third person to the second, and the anger-smitten city itself is *exhorted*.

Pass on now to the third and central elegy (iii.). Here, at the heart of this five-fold memorial, we have *the prophet's own sorrow*. So sensitively is his own spirit identified with his people, so afflicted is he in all their afflictions, that in some verses it could be either the prophet himself, or the personified nation speaking; the words are so true of both. The background throughout, however, is that of Jeremiah's own personal suffering. This third dirge, like the former two, is in two parts. In verses 1 to 39 we have *affliction* (verses 1–21), *but with hope* (verses 22–39). In the remaining verses, 40 to 66, we have a resultant *prayer-appeal* to God—national (verses 40–51) and personal (verses 52–66). As already mentioned, the verses or stanzas of this third elegy run in triads. The first three verses all begin with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The next three verses all begin with the second letter of the alphabet; and so on. Thus, in the first part of this third elegy (verses 1–39) we cover the first thirteen letters of the alphabet, and in the second part (40–66) the other nine.

This brings us to the *fourth* poemette. Here we are back to twenty-two verses. The subject, as in the second poemette, is *Jehovah's anger*, but with this difference, that whereas in the second acrostic the Lord's anger is *described*, in this fourth one it is explained, or *defended*. It is because of Jerusalem's sin. Verse 6, which is the centre verse of the first part of the chapter, says: "For the iniquity (not 'punishment' as in A.V.) of the daughter of My people is greater than the sin of Sodom." Verse 13 further explains that the vengeance is "For the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, that have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her," etc. This fourth acrostic, like the others, is in two parts. In verses 1 to 11 we have *a series of contrasts* between the Zion that was and the Zion that now is. In verses 12 to 22 we have the thoughts and actions of the *onlooking Gentile nations* about it.

And now, glance at the last of these five laments. Although having twenty-two verses, and thus corresponding with the Hebrew alphabet, like its predecessors, it is not an acrostic. Also, although it has twenty-two verses, it is shorter than the others with twenty-two, which is because its verses are short couplets, and not long-lined triplets such as mainly make up the other laments. It is throughout a *prayer*, and the speaker is *Jerusalem*. In the first eighteen verses the plea springs from Jerusalem's pitiful plight. In the remaining four verses the appeal is to Jehovah's abiding sovereignty and faithfulness. So then—

THE BOOK OF THE LAMENTATIONS

Lament 1 *Jerusalem's Plight*	Lament 2 *Jehovah's Anger*	Lament 3 *Jeremiah's Grief*	Lament 4 *Jehovah's Anger*	Lament 5 *Jerusalem's Prayer*
THE PROPHET BEWAILS IT (1–11).	THE ANGER DESCRIBED (1–12).	AFFLICTION, YET HOPE (1–39).	CONTRASTS—AND WHY (1–11).	PLEA: ZION IS STRICKEN (1–18).
THE CITY BEMOANS IT (12–22).	THE CITY EXHORTED (13–22).	PLEA: NATIONAL, PERSONAL (40–66).	ONLOOKERS—KINGS, EDOM (12–22).	PLEA: JEHOVAH CAN RESTORE

Hebrew Elegiac Poetry

Although, as we pointed out in an earlier study, the parallelism in Hebrew poetry is one of ideas rather than of rhyme or rhythm, there does seem indication that rhythm was used to some extent. A certain peculiar metre seems to have been reserved for poems of mournful reflection such as we have in the "Lamentations." The first feature of this is the unusual length of the line, to give a slow, solemn movement. A second feature is the breaking of the lengthy line into two unequal parts, the first part being about the same length as one normal line in any average Hebrew lyric, and the second part much shorter, almost like another line abbreviated, and "seeming to suggest," as Professor W. F. Adeney puts it, "that the weary thought is waking up and hurrying to its conclusion." Often the effect of this is impaired in translation; yet in our English version it often comes through with unmistakable force. Take just a couple of examples:

Her princes are become like harts—that find no pasture,
And they are gone without strength—before the pursuer (i. 6).

Jehovah's mercies! We are not consumed—for His mercies fail not;
They are new every morning—great is Thy faithfulness (iii. 22).

Examples of this funereal metre are scattered through the poetry of the Old Testament. Some are to be found in the Psalms. An early specimen among the prophets is given by Amos, who, after announcing that he is to utter a *lamentation* over Israel, puts it into the elegiac couplet—

The Virgin daughter of Israel is fallen—she shall no more rise;
She is cast down upon her land—there is none to raise her up.

A remarkable instance is Isaiah's sudden transition to elegiac form in chapter xiv. 4, for his ironic lament over Babylon and Lucifer—

How hath the oppressor ceased—the golden city ceased!
Jehovah hath broken the staff of the wicked—the sceptre of the rulers, etc.

Simply now, as specimens of the rest, we set out the first three verses of the first and of the third of Jeremiah's "Lamentations."

A *How doth the city sit solitary—that was full of people!*
How is she become as a widow—that was great among nations!
Princess among the provinces—how is she become tributary!

B *She weepeth sore in the night—and her tears are on her cheeks;*
There is no comforter for her—out of all her lovers;
All her friends dealt treacherously by her—are become her enemies.

C *Judah is removed because of affliction—and through much servitude;*
She dwelleth among the heathen—she findeth not rest;
All her persecutors have overtaken her—amid (her) straits.

A *I am the man that hath seen affliction—by the rod of His wrath.*

A *He hath led me and caused me to walk in darkness—and not in light.*

A *Surely against me He turneth His hand again and again—all the day.*

B *My flesh and my skin hath He made old—He hath broken my bones.*

B *He hath builded against me—and set round me gall and travail.*

B *He hath made me to dwell in dark places—as the dead of old.*

C *He hath hedged me about, I go not out—He hath made my chain heavy.*

C *Yea, when I cry and call for help—He shutteth out my prayer.*

C *He hath hedged my way with hewn stone—hath made my paths crooked.*

It may seem strange to us modern westerners that such passionate sentiments as we have in these "Lamentations" should be put into the artificial form of alphabetic acrostics. It may seem to give a touch of unreality. A little reflection, however, will convince us otherwise. These elegies were probably meant for liturgical use rather than for merely private reading; and the acrostic arrangement is an expedient to aid the memory. There is another value, too, in the acrostic scheme: it indicates self-possession amid deep emotion on the part of the writer: what he writes is the product of reflection and deliberation. Moreover, such is the genius of these "Lamentations" that, although they are within this acrostic framework, the underlying thought remains uncramped, unforced, and spontaneous. Pain, pathos, genius, inspiration and beauty, are all here, in these "Lamentations" of Jeremiah.

Our space is done, and we have scarcely touched on the spiritual significances of this little book. One very tender truth here is that *God suffers with those whom He chastises.* This is immortally objectified in Jeremiah, who had become so sympathetically

one with God, and at the same time with his countrymen, that he suffered a double agony in his own heart. No truth is more affecting than that God still loves and suffers with those whom He is obliged in righteousness to smite.

The heart of the poem, both literally and spiritually, is the middle passage of the middle chapter. Five times that word "hope" occurs. Affliction does its humbling work (verse 20). The sufferer grasps its meaning, and cries out, "*I have HOPE*" (verse 21). The new hope is in God alone, as the context shows. This is emphasised again as the poem closes—"THOU, O LORD, REMAINEST" (v. 19). The final prayer of the poem will yet be fulfilled—"*Renew our days as of old*" (v. 21); and Zion will be supreme among the nations; for although God's covenant people may suffer the fiercest fires of affliction and persecution, yet, like the burning bush of Horeb, they are not consumed! They can sing, through the years, the words of Lamentations iii. 22, "*It is of Jehovah's mercies that we are not consumed!*" Nor shall they be consumed, but shall be preserved until David's greater Son shall take the throne and reign gloriously in Jerusalem. Then will their troubles be over for ever.

We must add a final word. If we are earnest disciples of our Lord, we cannot study this little fivefold poem, the "Lamentations", as something merely objective, historical, and far removed from ourselves. It certainly does concern what is now distant; yet in a spiritual sense it is poignantly up-to-date. God is the same today as ever in His dealings with nations and individuals. High calling, flaunted by low living, inevitably issues in deep suffering. Election is never indulgent favouritism, whether in relation to Israel or to the members of the true Church today. Since the Divine Sinbearer bore all the sin of all believers, God never *punishes* His born-again children when they sin. The legal aspect was comprehensively dealt with at Calvary. The relationship is now that of Father and child, rather than that of Judge and culprit. Yet the sins of Christian believers bring grievous *chastisings* and *chastenings* upon them; and we may well heed Paul's appeal in Ephesians iv. 1, "*Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called*".

TRY TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS ON JEREMIAH AND LAMENTATIONS

1. Name the kings through whose reigns Jeremiah prophesied, and say what was the catastrophe to which the kingdom of Judah was heading.
2. Mention three outstanding and most exemplary characteristics of Jeremiah personally which reveal themselves through his ministry.
3. Which passage would you say gives the key to the whole book, or focalises its message?
4. Which are the four main parts into which the Book of Jeremiah falls? Simply give the headings to these groups of chapters.
5. Can you cite four great Messianic prophecies in the Book of Jeremiah?
6. Which is the longest single chapter in the book, and where does it occur?
7. Mention three facts which prove that the prophecy on Babylon is a genuine prophecy of Jeremiah, and not a writing of later date.
8. Why is chapter xxv. of special, pivotal importance?
9. In what way can Jeremiah himself be said to be a kind of typical figure?
10. What catastrophic event does the elegy, "Lamentations," bemoan?
11. Show broadly the subject-arrangement of the five "laments" which make up the full poem.
12. What acrostic features are found in "Lamentations"?