

The Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter No. 128

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In this Issue:

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|---|-------------------------|
| Page 1 Editorial | Brother Russell Gregory |
| Page 2. Waiting. Exhortation. | Brother Leo Dreifuss. |
| Page 3. Letter regarding the Gulf situation. | Brother Harold Dawson. |
| Page 3. Some observations on some of the Parables of Jesus. | Brother Phil Parry. |
| Page 6. Parables of the Kingdom of Heaven. | Brother Russell Gregory |
| Page 8. 'Chat Section' | Brother Harold Dawson. |
| Page 11. The Two Sons of God. Chapter Ten. | Brother Edward Turney. |

Editorial

Dear Brethren and Sisters and Friends, Greetings in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is with great joy we report the baptism of Mrs Wendy Hancock on the 3rd of January and with much pleasure we extend to her, on behalf of all of like precious faith, the right hand of fellowship, welcoming her into our midst to rejoice with us in the glorious hope which our heavenly Father has graciously given to all who believe and obey His dear Son. May the grace of God be with you, Wendy, and your fellowship be with the Father and the Son for evermore.

At the time of writing news of war in the Gulf is coming through. It is difficult to see what lies ahead or how events will develop in the next few weeks. War is so hateful and can only bring pain, suffering, misery and hard-ship to all involved. We are surrounded by people showing great emotion so let us be constant in our love for God and never lose sight of whose we are and whom we serve. It is our Lord Jesus Christ who said "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven:"

Thank you for your letters. Many of you have written concerning the parables of Jesus and this issue of the C.L. gives a variety of thought. There are three parables of the Kingdom of heaven which have not been covered – Matthew 22:2-14, Matthew 25:1-13, and Matthew 25:14-30. Would anyone like to offer an essay one any of these? Your contributions will be most welcome.

With sincere Love to all, in the Master's service,

Russell Gregory.

WAITING

We all have had, and still are having experiences in our daily lives of waiting in suspense. Waiting for the result of a medical examination and wondering what that result would be. Students waiting for the day when the exam results are published, usually at a fixed date. Or waiting for some visitor to call, be it a friend whom we look forward to meeting, or for somebody bringing us news about something or somebody, or even somebody whom we have to, but don't like to meet and are wishing to get it over with. Or even waiting for some dreaded appointment we wish to get behind us.

But have we ever thought of faithful men and women in the Bible sharing such experiences? You see, the Bible tells us only of important events, but very little about people's everyday lives, their everyday drudgery in their homes, or in their fields. Events in the Bible are just like illuminated landmarks of their lives, and we are apt to overlook that these events are often separated by years, or decades of ordinary, everyday happenings.

Take, for example, Abraham and Sarah. How many years was Abraham waiting for the fulfilment of God's promise of a son? It must indeed have been a great test of faith for both of them, especially in view of the fact that they were both getting old and Sarah well beyond child bearing age in the natural order of things. True, in taking Hagar, Sarah's servant girl, to wife, he may have committed a somewhat imprudent act. It certainly had grave consequences later, the effect of which are written to this day, as the wars between Jews and Arabs, because that was where the Israel/Arab conflict had its origin.

And next, let us think about Jacob and Joseph. What grief it must have been to ageing Jacob when he thought that Joseph was dead. The time between Joseph's disappearance and the first journey into Egypt of his brothers must have been over twenty years. And worse to come! They returned without Simeon! So Jacob, as he thought, had lost two sons. We are not told what time elapsed between their arrival back from the first journey into Egypt and their departure for the second journey, nor do we know how long they were away for either journey, but in view of transport in those days being by the leisurely pace of camels and donkeys, that may have taken months. And the total time Jacob was without Simeon possibly two years.

And think of the anguish Jacob must have suffered during his ten sons' second journey to Egypt. Another son lost, or at least wondering what had become of him. Would they return at all, or might they be imprisoned, or even executed as spies? With transport in those days you couldn't fix your mind on a certain date when they were due to return, nor were there any postal communications. The only way of finding out the whereabouts was by messenger, or somebody who might have seen them. But let us also think about the happy ending after their second return, when not only Simeon was home again but there was the unexpected good news about Joseph being still alive, and more - his position under Pharaoh which must have been something like that of prime-minister in our day.

And what about Joseph being in prison for a crime he didn't commit? And just think of this - when he interpreted the chief butler's dream he hoped that after his release he would mention him to Pharaoh. Surely his hopes must have risen and he must have felt quite elated, I am sure, of the thought that at last release from prison might be in sight. But as happens so often, folks promise the moon, and when they get what they wanted, think no more about it. It took two dreams by Pharaoh to remind the butler of his promise. And two years of suspense, hope, and hopes dashed, for Joseph.

And what about our Lord Jesus? He knew what would happen right from the start. How He must have dreaded the night of His arrest, followed by the day of His crucifixion. I am sure He must have wished many times for it to be all over. And His case was much worse than any of ours, for we don't know what is going to befall us in the future. Jesus did, and what is more. He could have called for legions of angels to save Him, but declined out of sheer love to do His Father's will and to redeem mankind, all who would accept Him, from bondage to sin and to pay the redemptive price.

And what of us? We are waiting in faith the day of the Master's return, be it in our life time, or at our resurrection. In one sense this kind of waiting is different from all others; we know it will come but we don't know when. Our case is somewhat similar to Abraham's. He knew through faith, a son would be born to him, but he didn't know when.

So when we wait in suspense again, let us take heart that we are not the only ones tempted in like fashion. It happened all before and probably will happen to the end of our probation. And God has never tempted anybody above that which he is able to bear.

Brother Leo Dreifuss.

Concerning the Middle East situation, the following letter was written 18th November 1990:-

To us who have confidence and faith in the Word of God, and have a special hope in relation to the promises made by God as delivered in the early chapters of Genesis, we are indeed living in stirring times. It is not wise to be dogmatic about these signs of the times, however significant they may appear, but with vast and awesome power vested in the hands of men to erase humanity from the face of the earth and with Israel geographically close to events happening before our eyes, it may be that the “peace and safety” cry could be near.

Any attack launched to liberate Kuwait will quite likely weld the Arab nations together against their common foe and enemy, Israel, as well as America, Britain and other nations arraigned is Saudi Arabia opposing Iraq; and the third world war could be triggered. Israel, too, is an enigma in the equation and has been producing nuclear weapons in her factories beneath the Negev desert for many years.

The stage is being set for the showdown between Israel and the Arabs which has been brewing since Israel was established as a political entity in May 1948. God said to Abraham “To thee (and thy seed) will I give the land” not to the descendants of Hagar. “In Isaac shall thy seed be called” of which seed was Christ; and if we are Christ’s, then are we Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promises of God.

The return of Jesus Christ is to save humanity, especially Spiritual Israel and contemporary Israel in the land at the time of His coming, from total annihilation. And Iraq is but a pawn in the greater issue of God’s Kingdom being established on earth to replace human failure with divine success, God has appointed a day for the restitution of all things under Christ, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. That day looks to be very near. May we all have a part then, a crown of righteousness that will never fade away.

Brother Harold Dawson.

Some Observations on Some of the Parables of Jesus

It was some little time after John Baptist was cast into prison that the Lord Jesus Christ began to preach saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Matthew 4:12-17. It should be very clear that Jesus was speaking of the Kingdom of heaven and not of His Body - The Church. The Sermon on the Mount is a guide to this, Matthew 5:3, “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.” Verse 10, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.” It should be noted from Matthew 13 that Jesus does not liken His first parable of the Sower to the Kingdom of heaven, as with the following six. This is understandable from His own statement that the seed sown is good seed because it is the word of the Kingdom, but it is not all good ground on which that word falls. Hence Jesus speaks of the various degrees of effects it produces when He explains the parable to His disciples in the order of which He gave it.

1. Fowls of the air = The wicked one (adverse doctrine) corrupting the mind before understanding could be effective.

2. Stony ground = Good news accepted with joy but no root to withstand tribulation and persecution which arises because of the word. And by and by is offended as a result.

3. He that receives while among thorns = Hears the message but the care of this world and deceitfulness of riches (Not being rich enough in faith) choke the message of the Kingdom and the result is unfruitful.

4. The good ground receives the good seed which is “the word of the Kingdom,” and in understanding it, beareth much fruit. What then is the result of this ‘seed-word’ being sown on good ground and growing

unto increased fruition? They are the children of the Kingdom. They are not the good seed sown by the son of man, but the ultimate result of that sowing. No other kind of seed sown but good; hence, only one kind of plant could be expected - the firstfruits to God and the Lamb.

Now, if as Jesus said, "The Kingdom of heaven is at hand," then we must be living in the age when the word of the Kingdom is being sown and people are re-acting to it. This is the "New Covenant Age" which Jesus introduced by His shed blood and we do not read of any other Covenant replacing it until God is "All in All" when Jesus will have put down all rule, authority and power, for He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet. (1 Corinthians 15:25). The Kingdom will then be delivered up by Jesus to God even the Father and Jesus Himself will be subject to Him that in the first place put all things under Him. (Incidentally, how can this support Trinitarianism?). In view of this, I am of the opinion that some of these parables of Matthew 13 extend beyond the actual second coming of Christ into His Kingdom reign of a thousand years, at the end of which in support of 1 Corinthians 15:24,25, He will gather out of it all things that offend, and they which do iniquity. (Matthew 13:41,42 & 49,50).

With the parable of the Sower we ended with the result, "The children of the Kingdom" the dead and the living "in Christ" at His coming, raised incorruptible and changed, in that order. What is their work from then on? They live and reign with Christ a thousand years, being the children of the Kingdom, the field or world which Jesus is Heir to and which He is come to claim as His to reign over in judgement and righteousness. What does He do? He disperses like seed, His agents who have used their talents to become children of the Kingdom, and they are given authority accordingly over certain areas to preach and teach the Word of the Kingdom, "The Everlasting Gospel," to them that dwell on earth. This is the difference I see in the first parable of the Sower, and the parable of the Wheat and Tares which are being observed as living people, wheat and tares allowed to continue existence until the time of harvest. In the first parable there is only one Sower and He sows good seed, "The Word of the Kingdom," which results only in "The Children of God, or Children of the Kingdom." In the parable of the Wheat and Tares it involves two sowers and two types of seed representing living agents, one good and the other evil, but it is not these agents that the servants of the householder are viewing and passing remarks to him about, but the unexpected results of the work of his agents whose work was the teaching of righteousness and observance of the Law going forth of Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. Who then are these servants of the householder? They cannot be the results from the first parable - "The Children of the Kingdom," viewing themselves as the wheat among the tares, so they must be the angels whom Jesus said some would witness ascending and descending on the Son of man. John 1:51; they are looking out upon the field or the Kingdom of their Lord, the householder, knowing that He had sent forth or sowed "the children of the Kingdom" for the purpose of increasing through the operation of belief and faith in Him, more fruitful wheat, like unto "the children of the Kingdom" of the first resurrection. The way I see the parable then, is that the servants of the householder are looking at children, not at seed to be sown. They see the Wheat struggling to survive among Tares in order that they also may become fruitful and inherit the Kingdom in its fullness and glory, with the children of the first resurrection. The Wicked One had also planted his agents or seed - his children, in the field of the householder and their work was to detract or hinder the growth of righteousness, but their rooting out by the angels would also endanger and check the full fruition of the Wheat, hence the word of the householder, "Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers. Gather ye together the tares/ and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn." Matthew 13:37-43. Also compare Isaiah 61 and Daniel 12:3.

The parable of the net is on similar lines and concerns those whom Jesus had made fishers of men and had drawn people unto Him as in a great net, but as there were also wicked surrounding them it was necessary for the angels to sever the wicked from among the just, and cast the wicked into the furnace of fire. It should be noted again that this parable concerns living people, not the resurrection of the dead.

The parable of the leaven is quite clear to me providing I accept the key Jesus supplies. This key is the statement He makes, "The Kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven." Now, we know that the word of the Kingdom is not leaven, but it works in a similar way in order to achieve that intended. Whether it be for good result or a bad, in this case Jesus likened its working as for a good result. What then does the three measures of meal represent? It must be like the field or the world which has to be worked on in order to absorb the teaching of the spirit word of the Kingdom which is "Life" that the whole may be a Oneness unto Life. As Jesus said, "The Kingdom cometh not with observation (or outward show)," but by inward

working, even as leaven works throughout the meal until the whole is leavened. This fact rules out completely the theory of the three measures of meal being the early church of Christ and the leaven in this parable being the false doctrine and vain traditions entering in. If this were so, there would be no church of Christ left once the whole was leavened, and this cannot be, seeing that the Apostle speaks of a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. (Ephesians 5:25-32). Jesus spoke to His disciples, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees," using leaven in this case as false doctrine and vain tradition. In another place the Apostle exhorts the believers to purge out the old leaven that they might be a new lump. (1 Corinthians 5:7,8). In the parable there is no purging out of leaven mentioned, but a putting in of leaven, so that the three measures of meal may become a fully leavened lump and likened unto the Kingdom of heaven - not a completely Apostatised Ecclesiastical Personification of the abominations of the earth. In all these parables and there intended meaning we must look for a likeness of the Kingdom of heaven.

Those things Jesus exhorted His followers to seek first were the virtues of the Kingdom and God's Righteousness - the leaven of His teaching in this case as Paul said to the Philippians, (2:13) "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do His good pleasure." Seven is regarded as a number signifying completeness, and I note that the seven parables of Matthew 13 all end with a completely good result, as only the working out of the word of God can bring. I can only view the leaven of this parable therefore, as the word of God in Spirit power working out the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations. Colossians 1:25-29. Ephesians 1:9-14. I think where we read Revelation 10:7, the leavening of the whole of the three measures will be complete.

There is of course, the parable of the Pearl of great price of which we have to be careful in the way we interpret it, for this must be done in the way Jesus meant it to His disciples whom He addressed with the question, "Have ye understood all these things? With the reply, "Yea, Lord." My own understanding may not come up to theirs, but I will give just a brief explanation of what scripture teaches me. Christ Himself is the pearl of great price. In Him is gathered all the glory of the Father, the fullness of the Godhead. The glory of the attributes of God is expressed in His character. He came as the Light of the world. The righteousness of Christ, as a pure, white pearl, has no defect, no stain. No work of man can improve the great and precious gift of God. It is without flaw. In Christ are "hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." He is "made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." (Colossians 2:3 and 1 Corinthians 1:30.) He is all that can satisfy our needs and longings, for this world and for the world to come. He is so precious that in comparison all else may be accounted loss. The Light of God shone into the darkness of the world, and "the darkness comprehended it not." John 1:5 & 11. But not all were found indifferent to the gift of Heaven. The merchantman in the parable represents a class who were sincerely desiring truth. Among the Jews there were those who were seeking for that which they had not. Dissatisfied with the religious rulers and formal teachers under whom they laboured, they longed for that which was spiritual and uplifting. Isaiah 55:1-3. Many had been longing and praying for light from heaven; and when Christ was revealed, the poor and humble of spirit received Him with gladness. In the parable, the pearl is not represented as a gift. The merchantman bought it at the price of all that he had. Many question the meaning of this, since Christ is represented in the scriptures as a gift. He is a gift, but only to those who first associate themselves with His death and give themselves wholly to God as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable. When we thus give ourselves wholly to Him, Christ, with all the treasure of heaven, gives Himself to us. We obtain the Pearl of great price.

Much could be said. Let us seek that we may find - and so also run that we may obtain the Prize.

Brother Phil Parry (13.12.1990)

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" - John 14:27.

PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Jesus said to His disciples “Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven.” A little earlier He had been addressing the multitudes from the boat by the sea shore and of the eight parables Jesus gave on this day the first five He told to all the multitudes but the last three to His disciples only.

The first of these parables we know as the Parable of the Sower and one we have no need to expound in detail, suffice it to say that the Sower is Jesus Christ, the good seed is the gospel message He preached, the ground is men’s hearts who hear the message, but this is not a picture of the future Kingdom when Jesus Christ is reigning in all the earth but a picture of the past two thousand years, the Christian Era, as we call it.

While Jesus did not say this was a parable of the Kingdom of heaven He did say it was necessary to understand this parable in order to understand the others, (See Mark 4:13), of which He then proceeded to give seven: The Seed growing secretly, (recorded only in Mark’s Gospel); The Wheat and Tares; The Mustard Seed; The Leaven; The Treasure; The Pearl of great price; and the Dragnet.

Let us consider them in this order. Mark 4:26 - 29, “And he said, So is the Kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and he should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear, but when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.”

This parable has much in common with the parable of the Sower but here only the good seed is considered. It is of note that the man does nothing from seed time till harvest while “the earth bringeth forth fruit of itself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.” This illustrates that the period covered from the sowing of the seed till the harvest is called the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of heaven.

The nation of Israel was the first Kingdom of God - a political, or temporal Kingdom, but that ceased to be God’s Kingdom owing to man’s refusal to acknowledge His laws, therefore, in due time He dispossessed them. The period covered by this parable of Jesus cannot be the future Kingdom of heaven for here the “man” (Jesus Christ) does nothing from seed time till harvest, but in the Kingdom to come Jesus Christ and His elect will take a very active role in human affairs. Therefore this parable relates to the present Christian Era, the time in which God is looking for people in whom He can dwell by faith; a spiritual Kingdom as Paul declares, “Know ye not that ye are the temples of the living God?” 1 Corinthians 3:16. At harvest these are the first fruits unto God. (James 1:18).

The next parable is similar in some respects. Matthew 13:24-30, “The Kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while he slept, his enemies came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field; from whence then has it tares? He said unto them An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him. Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow to harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers. Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn.”

In explaining this parable to His disciples Jesus said that the wheat sown was the sons of the Kingdom, that is, those who had received the gospel message into good hearts and are become the children of God by adoption (Galatians 4:5). In His prayer recorded in John 17:18,20 Jesus said “As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world... neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word...” The “good seed” of the parable of the Sower now includes those who spread the gospel message, who share in the work of preaching, who have entered into His labours.

The significant point of this parable is that tares are so much like wheat that it is very difficult to tell them apart before harvest. The servants of the house-holder wanted to gather out the tares before due time

but were told not to do so. Sorting the tares from the wheat was work for the angels, the servants being unable to be sure they would not damage the wheat. On one occasion the disciples came to Jesus reporting of one who was working miracles in His Name “but followeth not with us.” Jesus said “Forbid them not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in My Name, that can lightly speak evil of me.” Mark 9:39. And again, Matthew 15:13, Jesus said, “Every plant my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up,” to which He added, “Let them alone...” From these events it seems clear that Jesus is saying it is not our place to oppose those who do not go along with us, but we should be content to set an example of willing disciples, sowing the seed of the gospel where we are able. When the time is ready “the Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity.” Matthew 13:41.

So who then are the “Tares” but those who follow men’s philosophies and doctrines, who teach for doctrines the commandments of men. “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.” (Matthew 15:8,9). And again, “Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you: Depart from me, ye that work iniquity” – (Matthew 7:21 – 23).

Next, Matthew 13:31. “The Kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a great tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.” On reading this a quotation from the words of Jesus comes to mind - “If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed...” (Matthew 17:20). But what is the connection, what has this parable to tell us about faith? A reading of Hebrews chapter 11 can indeed show how great faith can become, but the view I wish to suggest is very different in the case of this parable, for here is something un-natural and wrong with the growth of the seed. The normal height of mustard is about three to four feet while in very luxuriant conditions it may reach a height of ten or even fifteen feet. However, a tree of fifteen feet or so could not be described as great. But this mustard seed had grown into a great tree - abnormal growth for any mustard seed. This sort of growth could well describe the Roman Catholic Church and faith in the Papacy. A faith in man’s doctrines making the word of God of none effect as did the Pharisees and Sadducees before them and whom they emulate. The birds that lodge in the branches of this great tree are there to pluck up any true doctrine that may be found. Again, we have a picture of man bringing to failure the Kingdom of God, replacing faith in the true gospel with faith in something monstrous. “When the Son of man cometh shall he find faith on the earth?” Possibly very little indeed.

The parable of the leaven is in similar vein. Matthew 13:33, “The Kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.” The three measures of meal are the three years it took Jesus Christ to preach the gospel message, and it is this gospel message the established Church took and to which she added her own doctrines of leaven just as the Jews of old had done to the law. “Beware of the doctrines of the Pharisees and the Sadducees” was the warning of Jesus to His disciples when they had forgotten to take bread with them. Matthew 16:6. It is a warning for us that we do not partake of the wrong bread, however good it may appear to be. The Mother of harlots introduced leaven into the gospel of Christ centuries ago and since then all her harlot offspring have retained some of her teachings. Is there one single true doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church? And is there one single sect or denomination that has not retained at least one of those doctrines? Surely we see the whole leavened, for man has corrupted God’s way until people no longer know right from wrong.

The next three parables. The Treasure, The Pearl of great price, and the dragnet, Jesus spoke only to His disciples, and they relate more to the interests of the Redeemed than to the Orthodox Church.

Matthew 13:44, “The Kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.” This treasure was found by someone who was not looking for it, who hides it again while he goes and sells all that he had in order to buy not only the treasure but the field in which the treasure is hidden. This can only relate to Christ Jesus who “for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame...” Hebrews 12:2, for the treasure was already in the field, or the world, when He came across it, even His elect, His Bride to be, for whom He gave His life so willingly and freely. The “Treasure” was not taken out of the world (field)

even as Jesus expressed in His prayer of John 17:11, “And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee.” Verse 15, “I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil.”

Regarding the next parable, verse 46, “Again the Kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it,” the significant difference between this and the parable of the hidden treasure is that in this case the merchant was seeking. The search continued until a pearl was found beyond compare. It was so valuable that he wished to own nothing else, so he sold all that he had in order to possess that one pearl. Jesus Christ never went looking for goodly pearls. He already possessed the greatest pearl of all – eternal life. He was the only begotten Son of God and eternal life was already His (though He could have lost it by foolishness). It is man who needs to seek goodly pearls and there is for man a pearl of great price which he can take possession of, a pearl that is of more value than life itself. We find it by God’s grace and favour, through seeking His wisdom and mercy, by becoming disciples of Jesus Christ, and the price we pay is that of giving up all for His sake who gave up all for us. “He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.” Matthew 10:39. “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” Philippians 3:8,9.

Finally Matthew 13:47-50, “The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and they shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

This parable is of special interest for us because it concerns our immediate future. We are now at the end of the Christian era, the end of man’s failure to follow God’s laws and Christian principles. As Jeremiah said, “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” Jeremiah 10:23. And now “the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign for ever and ever.” Revelations 11:15.

“Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.” 1 John 3:1 - 3.

Brother Russell Gregory.

“CHAT SECTION”

We see surely the beginning of “Armageddon.” “Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision’s for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.” Joel 3:14. (How apt). Israel is the real issue; and they are armed ‘to the teeth’ with nuclear weapons. At any time the Middle East can erupt in flames and all flesh could perish. Jesus Christ’s return, because and for the elects’ sake, will be needed to “shorten” the days. I believe, and surely we all do, the fulfilment of Ezekiel 38 and 39 is due. We may see the return of Christ at any time now - may we then turn our faith to sight and find an answer of peace from our Lord.

I am sure readers will not fail to see these letters and essays on the parables as a desire by the writers to be helpful and constructive.

Brother Harold Dawson,

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Sister Evelyn Linggood writes: “The parable of the leaven must have been a contentious subject over a century ago for Grattan Guinness in his book “The Approaching End of the Age” mentions that it was in his day, and yet both history and scripture favour the view put forward rather than the other. (He favoured the view, by the way, that the leaven is a scriptural symbol of corruption or defilement). ...there are only two instances where leaven is used in connection with sacrifices and they are Leviticus 7:13 and 23:17... as I understand it it was at the feast of weeks that these were offered, they evidently represented... imperfect human beings contrasted to the perfection of Christ signified by unleavened bread. In Amos 4:4,5 the sinning Israelites were to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven thus admitting their sin in worshipping the calf at Bethel which had been set up in Jeroboam’s reign.”

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Brother Leo Dreifuss writes: “Now concerning the disagreement on the article about the parables of Christ, I don’t know what the disagreement is, but I suspect it was about the leaven. I have not heard the view before that this particular parable has to do with the apostate church, and I don’t think it was intended that way. True, leaven represented impurity, malice and wickedness, but it doesn’t follow that it is intended to mean this every time it appears. We must always be careful not to overlook the simple obvious, literal meaning. This parable, to my mind, simply illustrates the speed with which the Kingdom grows from a very small beginning. This is the only way the audience to whom it was addressed can have understood it. The prophecy about the church going astray came later with Paul’s epistles and the Revelation.”

* * *

Sister Evelyn writes again: “I believe Jesus was not speaking of the future Kingdom of God but Christ’s spiritual Kingdom, the Church, which Paul describes in Colossians 1:13. This is the true believers present position and was the position of the newly formed Church which had pure doctrine but over the centuries it has become corrupt as we see Christendom to be in this day and age, but out of this there are still believers of the original truth as preached by Jesus and the Apostles, and these are described in other parables, and we trust we are in this category.

I wrote the article years ago and not without a great deal of thought and recourse to Scripture, and nowhere could I find that the symbol of leaven was used in a good sense, so why should Jesus go against the written word and use it in a good sense?”

* * *

Brother Horace Taylor writes: The parable of the leaven sets forth the progress of the Kingdom of God, but rather in its hidden workings than in its manifest results.

Leaven being in Scripture used as (not always) the penetrating power of evil and being interpreted as the corruption which overspread the visible church. But this is evidently a misconception of the leading thought of the parable, which is a likeness of the Kingdom of heaven, and of that Kingdom in its inscrutable working. One figure does not always stand for the same thing in Scripture. Evil is like a roaring lion, 1 Peter 5:8, yet this does not hinder the same title from being applied to Christ “the Lion of the tribe of Judah.” When leaven is a sign of evil its fermenting sourness is regarded, when of good, its penetrating energy. Observe also how the leaven is at once different from and yet acting upon the lump, for the woman took it from elsewhere to mingle it therein, and even such is the Kingdom, not of this world, not the unfolding of any power which already existed in the world, but a new power brought into the world from above, not a philosophy but a revelation. This leaven moreover, was long time hidden, so in the individual application of this parable, every child of the Kingdom is born from above, born of the Spirit, not of man, but of God. A passing word of the Gospel has been written in the heart, the Holy Spirit had awakened thought, a sense of need, a desire after Christ, a craving for pardon. That winged word has changed the man’s heart and life, and eternal destiny. The leavening process goes on till the whole is leavened, for such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ mortifying the works of the flesh and their earthly members, and drawing up the mind to high and heavenly standards. The Apostle may confide that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6).

Not the unfolding of any power which already existed in the world, but a new power brought into the world from above. “Thou sawest till a stone was cut out without hands...” Daniel 2:34, and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth, (verse 35).

“And I saw an angel come down from heaven having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand and he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand years.” Revelation 20.”

Comment: If the 1000 years of ‘Binding’ is during the millennial reign, i.e. the same period of 1000 years posterior to the returned Christ, it must be for the benefit of those who accepted Christ prior to His return – i.e. who chose to accept the Gospel message though tempted to reject it. I feel it cannot be another 1000 years after the Millennial reign of Christ as God will then be “all in all, and the former things will have passed away.”

Brother Harold.

* * *

Brother Russell Gregory writes: There are differences of opinion regarding the interpretation of the parables of the Kingdom of heaven. The pivotal point is whether or not the parables continue into the future Kingdom age. The following considerations show they do not.

1. I believe a new Gospel will be preached soon after the elect of this age are taken away. The Everlasting Gospel referred to in Revelation 14:6.
2. Another covenant will be part of this new Gospel message, see Isaiah 55.
3. In the future Kingdom the will of God will be done on the earth as it is now done in heaven. There is no “treasure” to be bought for this has already been purchased.
4. Satan will be bound a thousand years (Revelation 20:2). Satan, or the Devil being man’s will as opposed to God’s will. Man’s will will not be allowed to hold sway over God’s will. Will there be “bad fish” caught in the net during this thousand years?
5. The parable of the Wheat and Tares ends with the binding of the Tares, and then the Wheat gathered into the barn. This is at Jesus’ second coming. However in His explanation of the parable Jesus goes further - to the time when the Tares are burnt – after the millennium age. Will there be “Tares” growing during the future Kingdom age?
6. There will be no “seeking goodly pearls” during the future reign of Jesus Christ, for “they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.” Hebrews 8:11. Also Jeremiah 31:31-34. (Hebrews 10:16,17 fulfils this only in part.)
7. To suppose the future Kingdom of heaven is anything like that which has gone before is to not appreciate the great changes that are to be brought about. These can be best illustrated by relating some of the things which will not be: e.g., there will be no armed forces anywhere in the world, which also means there will be no arms and munitions factories. There will be no police forces and no security forces. There will be no hospitals, doctors, nurses, nor medicines, and no research laboratories. There will be no oppression, violence or abuse of any kind. There will be no theft and no dishonesty. Where sin may occur it will not be allowed to cause evil to others. Where evil may occur (see note below) it will be divinely controlled and used as a cautioning influence. What is left is righteousness, peace, love, joy, goodness, and happiness everywhere.

I do not see that the parables of the Kingdom of heaven can correspond to this picture of the Millennial Age. The Kingdom of heaven Jesus Christ was illustrating in His parables was in many ways similar to the historic Kingdom of Israel, with all its faults, for they, too, were the Kingdom of heaven, at least up until about 600 B.C. when King Zedekiah “did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the Lord.... Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the Lord which He had hallowed in Jerusalem...” Even after this time, God, in His great mercy, patience and longsuffering, gave the nation of Israel yet another chance to reform under Ezra and Nehemiah, but this again failed because of man’s selfishness. So it was that God, in due time, sent His Son into the world and through Him started afresh with a spiritual Kingdom, inviting people everywhere to come into

fellowship with Him. But here again Christendom made all the same mistakes as Israel before them, eventually taking over the Kingdom of heaven and substituting false doctrines and teaching errors, making the word of God of none effect until Christianity is as we see it today - wholly leavened.

Note: There are two aspects of evil. 1) The sin that people commit causes evil to others. 2) Natural disasters also are evils from which mankind suffers - draught, storm, floods, earthquakes, etc. It is these which are here referred to which will be divinely controlled as a cautioning influence, such as we read in Zechariah 14:16-19, where rain will be withheld from those who fail to go up to worship the Lord at Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles.

THE TWO SONS OF GOD

Chapter Ten

Who, or What, was the Serpent that Tempted Eve?

To present a fair digest of what has been written on this question would require the transcription of many folios. By common readers, that is, by the great mass of professing Christians, the account in Genesis is passed over almost without enquiry; only a few pause to give their doubts and difficulties fair play. In the majority of cases, where the narrative of the temptation is taken in a literal sense, the strangeness of a speaking brute, an acutely reasoning beast, an ably argumentative reptile, is got over by the conclusion that nothing is too hard for the Almighty. But we ought not to solve, or rather evade, a dark problem of moral science by considering, or simply looking at it from the point of view of what God can do. It is safe to say that the exercise of divine power never conflicts in the smallest degree with divine wisdom. While it is always easy enough to fall back upon infinite power, it is by no means easy in every instance to recognise infinite wisdom in the manner of its use. To rest satisfied with the mere assent that the All-powerful is alike All-wise, is to avoid the exercise of our senses, and not to learn to discern between good and evil. It is the wisdom rather than the might of God's doings in the moral and physical world that we should ever seek. The blind may stand in awe of power, but understanding is requisite to love as well as to fear God.

Our views on this subject have undergone a change. Like many others, we had never called in question the propriety of a strictly literal meaning of the account of the serpent conversing with Eve and beguiling her. That had been taken for granted, and the consequences only had been more particularly dwelt upon. It is the recent consideration of these consequences that has given rise to new suggestions, and offered serious obstacles against the literal view of the case.

No class of believers in revealed religion has sought more than the class represented in these pages to show that the only Tempter is the lust of the flesh. The personality of the Devil has been more than ridiculed: it has been proved to be a blot on Divine goodness, wisdom, and power. Attention has been specially directed to the words of James, "When a man is tempted he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed." This great fact has lately come back with fresh force, demanding a wider application than before. Its previous use, however, was all but universal. We do not recollect more than two cases to which it has not been applied as the sole cause of temptation, namely, the temptation of our first parents in Eden, and the temptation of Christ in the wilderness. And in both these scenes it has been partially acknowledged. This inner tempter now claims full sway. In our present judgement he needs neither rival nor helper. The question which presses is this. If the lusts of the flesh, ever since the earliest transgression, have been sufficient to entice, to draw away, and to destroy, why not in the first instance also? But if the lusts were not then strong enough without an external intelligence, why are they now strong enough, seeing that such intelligence, whether beast or angel, has no visible or known intercourse with man? In advocating the complete application of the principle, though room is only left in our belief for its more extended use in the trials of the first and second Adams, it is not improbable that we shall be accused of sapping the foundation of Wisdom's House, and of cutting another mooring from the rock of Faith. The word change is peculiarly detestable to some minds, and frequently not more so to any than to those who pride themselves on

innovations the most radical. Such manifestations are indicative of a deeply rooted selfishness. The voice seems to cry, "Change by me, or no change." But the student of truth, whether natural or revealed, whether written in the rocks and flowers of the ocean, or inscribed by the finger of God on tables of stone, will utterly forget himself, acknowledge his past errors, and still press onward, (*Chapter Ten was written in Jersey, October 1873. Subsequent thought has favoured the article, and we shall write more in detail hereafter.) rejoicing in humility in the discovery of the footprints of Divine wisdom.

The language of Oriental peoples is sometimes so highly figurative as to baffle any attempt to read it word for word in its adaptation to plain matter of fact. The object of parable and symbol is, we believe, to indicate a great truth rather than express it in all its varied details; and while leaving many particulars concealed, still to portray the whole with more force than could be achieved by simple unfigurative discourse.

Coming to the subject itself, it will be necessary to establish several things before we can venture to read the account of the transaction of the serpent in Genesis altogether in a metaphorical sense. First, that sin is represented in the Scriptures by a serpent. Second, that the ways of a natural serpent and the ways of sin are similar. Third, that a serpent would be recognised by mankind in general as a fit symbol of danger and destruction. To the order in which these propositions are confirmed, there can be no valid objection. We propose to speak of the last first and the first last.

That the serpent has universally signified danger and destruction does not seem difficult to show. From Bryant, and Serpent Worship, we learn that this reptile was interwoven with nearly all the religious mysteries and ancient forms of worship. In almost every place there is some story of a remarkable serpent, just as in almost all countries there is a tradition of a great deluge. In some instances the creature is pictured with a human head. Chimera is portrayed by Hesiod as a dark-eyed female in the upper, and as a horrid serpent in the lower part. Homer describes it with a lion's head, a goat's body, and a dragon's tail. In both these figures an element of danger is visible. "The myth seems to have belonged to Asia minor, as gigantic carvings of the Chimera (on the rocks) are there found. The rationalistic account of the Chimera is, that it represented a mountain in Syria, whose top was the resort of lions, its middle of goats, and the marshy ground at the bottom of which abounded with serpents." The same element of danger is apparent in this symbol. The fact of the serpent having been an object of worship does not damage this idea, but rather supports it, for many objects of heathen worship have been sources of fear and conciliation, not of adoration and love. Danger to life from its very beginning seems to be figured in Phoenician Mythology by a serpent encircling an egg. The Greek legend of Medusa having her hair turned to serpents says it was for violating the Temple of Minerva. The serpent strangled by Hercules in his cradle seems to be of similar import to the serpent and the egg. The badge of Esculapius was a staff entwined by a serpent, typical of his power over disease. And Paul in Corinthians appears to allude to a serpent, in saying "the sting of death is sin."

The resemblance between the habits of the serpent and the sensual faculties of man, uncontrolled by God's laws, is readily observed. The manner of the serpent is to allure and fascinate its prey by its strong magnetic force before destroying it. This is the best possible symbol of sensual desire, which also, like the serpent, bewilders the eye of the understanding by its many coils and sinuosities. It is, therefore, said to be more "subtle" than any beast of the field; and the Scripture regarding man's heart as the seat of the affections and lusts, declares it to be deceitful and desperately wicked, and asks, who can know it?

The literal reading of the temptation of Eve conveys something like an idea that the reptile was more intellectual than the woman, and so got the advantage of her in argument and persuasion. But no such comparative superiority could be established without a miracle; and, if due regard be paid to the mental constitution of man, there is no need for such miracle, not to speak of the astonishing supposition of God working a miracle for the temptation of man.

Sin is represented in scripture language by a serpent. "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." There is no difference of opinion as to who is here intended by the woman's seed. He who was "made of a woman" fulfils the prophecy. It is hardly needful to remark that, whenever Christ performs this act. He does not crush the head of a literal serpent. By His death sin is put away, and the future abolition of death among the children of Adam will be the full accomplishment of this ancient prediction. The denunciation of the

Pharisees by John and Jesus is further proof. “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers.” A viper is one of the most venomous kind. The Pharisees were not literal serpents; but their cunning, their fascinating manners, the deadly poison of their traditions, making of none effect the word of God, were as much to be dreaded in a spiritual as vipers in a natural sense. The head of the mystery of iniquity is symbolized by a serpent. “That old serpent, the Devil and Satan.” Now, the Devil and Satan are not, and never were, a literal serpent. Diabolos and Satan are names for sin in various forms, and for any person or thing adverse to God or man. The Devil and Satan are states of mind embodied in individuals and in communities.

The Hebrew word for serpent closely resembles the Hebrew word for liar, or deceiver, and the Samaritan copy has the word liar instead of the word serpent. This seems to agree with Jesus’ saying recorded in John: “He was a liar from the beginning.” But to put the word liar in the places in Genesis where the serpent occurs, does not make good sense; it mixes the literal and the allegorical in such a manner as to mar the account, while if it be received as strictly literal the insertion of liar would make still worse of it. We prefer to take the verse in John as explanatory of the allegory in Moses.

Dr Adam Clarke was perplexed with the serpent. He writes: “Who was the serpent? of what kind? In what way did he seduce the first happy pair?” These are questions which remain yet to be answered. The whole account is either a simple narrative of facts, or it is an allegory. Again, “if it is an allegory, no attempt should be made to explain it.” We are surprised at this remark coming from such a learned and independent mind. An allegory is designed to instruct, or it is nothing worth; and we ought to do our best to comprehend it.

The apostle Paul in Galatians, says, “this Agar is Mount Sinai, in Arabia.” It also appears to us correct to say this serpent is the sensual desires of the flesh. The colloquy attributed to the woman and the serpent, is just the sort of experience common to mankind when wavering between a known command and an inclination to break through the self-denial and restraint which are required to keep it. When Adam and Eve had actually transgressed they were the serpent just as much as the Pharisees whom John and Jesus styled serpents; and all their posterity, strictly speaking, are “the seed of the serpent.” It is only when Christ comes into the world, in the nature of this seed, but God’s Son, that “the seed of the woman” is seen. The fact that many of the serpent’s seed are adopted into the family of “the woman’s seed” helps rather than hurts this view of the case. Treating the matter as an allegory, the prostration of the serpent and his eating the dust would be understood to answer to the moral and legal degradation of Adam and Eve.

Having presented what we wrote a year ago, we now proceed to a further investigation of “the Fall.” Let it be distinctly understood that the view now exhibited in nowise alters the design; that is to say, whether we regard the account as literal or figurative the lesson taught by it is the same namely, how sin and death came into the world. Far be it from us to deny that there were two persons named Adam and Eve; that there was a garden in Eden; that, among others, there were two trees called “the tree of life” and “the tree of knowledge of good and evil;” that there were beasts, birds, and fishes; that “the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made.” No: the literal truth of none of these things would we call in question; but we contend that several of the objects mentioned may be taken with much more reason as symbols of states of mind, results to be attained, and consequences to follow, than as literally performing and bestowing the things specified.

First of all, What was the tree of life? To this question there is no reply in the Scriptures. “Tree of Life” is found in Genesis three times (2:9; 3:22,24) and four times in Proverbs (3:18, 11:30, 13:12, 15:4); but we do not meet the phrase again till we come to Revelation, when it occurs three times (2:7, 22:2,14): in all, “tree of life” is mentioned in the Scriptures ten times. In seven out of the ten, namely, in Proverbs and Revelation, the phrase is used in a figurative sense, undoubtedly. Is there, then, any proof that in Genesis it is not also used figuratively? For our part we see none. There is no tree in the world known to possess the actual qualities which theologians ascribe to “the tree of life.” Cruden says, “it was so called because it was a natural means of preserving man’s life, and freeing him from all infirmities, diseases, and decays during his abode on earth, and also a sacramental pledge of his continuance in that life upon condition of his perfect obedience.” Any tree the Almighty chose to select for the purpose of teaching obedience would avail, and while obedience lasted the promise of life would be made good; but this does not need the belief that the tree itself possessed the power to confer immunity from decay, and the ultimate bestowment of eternal life; nor, on the other hand, is it requisite to suppose that the tree called “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”

contained within itself, as a natural property, the faculty of imparting a knowledge of good and evil. To estimate these two trees thus seems to amount to the bringing in of an unnecessary miracle, and to the setting up of something in nature contrary to nature itself. A miracle will, indeed, bridge over the chasm, however wide, but the Creator never constructs such means of passage when ordinary modes are adequate. We repeat, that any fruit-bearing trees would answer the end, and with regard to posterity the picture appears to us to be a most striking representation of the manner in which the death of man entered our world. If a conjecture be allowable, we would suggest the vine as the probable "tree of life." The real "Tree of Life" styled Himself "The Vine," "I am the Vine." The olive tree is a world-wide emblem of peace; but nobody dreams that, either by drinking olive oil, or by eating olives, peace is secured. Two trees would be a more tangible means of impressing upon the undeveloped minds of the first human pair God's lesson than an abstract command. The observance or neglect of duty would be well portrayed, but there would be no occasion to impute miraculous results to the trees so employed. Philo and Josephus, both Jewish historians, state that their nation took the narrative allegorically, but we need not endorse all the fancies of Philo on the subject.

Many learned men among the moderns in "the Church," and out of it, have considered the story figurative too. This view does seem to us, after some thought, to be quite rational and to combine the two advantages of teaching the truth of history, and of avoiding useless miracles and things which jar upon "reason's ear." The apocalyptic "tree of life" is certainly none other than Christ Himself. To eat of the tree is a figurative expression, signifying to be made deathless, like Christ.

The trees of Ezekiel, standing on either bank of the water of life that "flows fast by the oracle of God," yielding their monthly fruit, and shedding their healing leaves, while, probably, setting forth topographical transformations, will hardly be imagined to be literally feeding the wants and curing the diseases of mankind; but as "trees of righteousness," or immortal kings and priests governing the world's affairs, standing in new Mosaic order in their courses, new moons and Sabbaths, enforcing wise laws, stimulating obedience, and enlightening the darkness of men, they may be beautifully pictured as trees which do not fade, and whose leaves are ever green. There is, indeed, no book which abounds more in figure than the Bible. Figure was the common medium of instruction adopted by Moses, the Prophets, and Christ. "Give ear, O ye heavens hear, O earth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew," was the manner of Moses' address to the assembled rulers and people. "Ho to the multitude of many people, which make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters, but God shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind." Thus speaks Isaiah. (1) To this the reader may add for himself the parables of Christ and the imagery of John.

"The flaming sword which turned every way" is not once spoken of, except in the third chapter of Genesis. Fancy this phenomenon at Eden's gate. When was it removed? When did Adam and his wife lose their desire to return? Had their descendants also no wish to enter? How can these questions be answered? A "flaming sword" is a most striking emblem of God's displeasure; just as the vermilion cavalry of Zechariah charging out of the myrtle woods by night, and "the fiery stream" of Daniel, are thrilling images of God's judgements, but to learn their design it is not imperative to take the statements literatim. God is as unapproachable today as He was six thousand years ago to wicked men. To them He is always a "flaming sword." "Our God," says the apostle, "is a consuming fire." He is also now, as then, and will ever be, "The Tree of Life," from which all access is barred save through Christ, who is the Way. If we take a bird's-eye view of Eden, its inhabitants, and phenomena, we must be struck with the combination of reality and symbol. Let us assign to each its proper place, observe the particular fitness of their mingled use, and extract a meaning from the whole in concord with each several part without a single jar.

Divers speculations have been formed touching the serpent, prior and subsequent to his supposed degradation. Some have conjectured a species not now to be found - extinct as the Dodo; others have fancied the beast had wings and feet. But all this is mere guess work. In spite of all these imaginary definitions and consequent imperfections, the organisation of the serpent is truly marvellous "What zoology and anatomy," says Beard, "have unfolded of the nature of serpents, amounts to this: that their parts are as exquisitely adjusted to the form of their whole, and to their habits and sphere of life, as is the organisation of any animal which, in the terms of absolute comparison, we call superior to them. It is true that the serpent has no limbs; yet it can out-climb the monkey, out-swim the fish, out-leap the jerboa, and, suddenly loosing

the coils of its crouching spiral, it can spring so high into the air, as to seize a bird upon the wing; thus all those creatures fall its prey. The serpent has neither hands nor claws: yet it can out-wrestle the athlete, and crush the tiger in the embraces of its overlapping folds. Far from licking up its food as it glides along, the serpent lifts up its crushed prey, and presents it grasped, as in a death coil, to its gaping mouth. It is truly wonderful to see the work of hands, feet, and fins, performed by a mere modification of its vertebrate column." Let us hear Professor Owen: "The long segments of the vertebrae of both the head and the trunk, although developed according to common vertebrae type, are modified for express ends and functions in the several vertebrate species, and in a greater degree, for example, in the serpent than in man. The squamous principle of suture is here carried to an extreme. The cranial segments of the skull are sheathed one within' the other, and the bone in each, being of greatest density and thickness, supplies a special provision against the dangers to which it would be subject, from falling bodies and the tread of heavy beasts. The whole organisation of the serpent is replete with such instances of design, in relation to the needs of their apodal (footless) vermiform character: just as the snake-like eel is compensated by analogous modifications among fishes, and the snake-like centipede among insects." (Lecture on the Power of God, as manifested in His Animal Creation). The conclusion to be drawn from this is, not that the serpent is an accursed cripple in the animal kingdom, but that he is highly perfect and marvellously elaborate, in comparison with all the rest of the animals. We have therefore, no fact agreeing with the notion of cursing and degradation, while we have, as shown above, many facts to prove his organic superiority. Hence, we may infer that the Mosaic account is figurative, not literal.

(1) Loweth's translation.

These remarks will probably be sufficient to convey our ideas, and to start afresh some, who care for such matters, in the consideration of the Mosaic narrative.

The Temptation of Christ Re-considered.

The process of learning and unlearning seems almost necessarily concurrent to the end of life. While we are collecting truths with one hand, we are throwing away errors with the other. It is well, when men have courage enough, to discard what they once thought to be true, as soon as they discover it to be false. The danger is that we may be too conservative, and, from fear of change and pride of comprehensive foresight, hold to useless notions, which always clog the wheels of progress. On the other side mere love of novelty is very hazardous. There are undoubtedly certain landmarks and boundaries eternally fixed; these should be our guides. In all branches of truth they are few and simple when we find them.

This article is headed "the Temptations of Christ Reconsidered," because it is well known what view we ourselves have expressed heretofore of this remarkable transaction; and because the sequel will not agree therewith in some respects. Many of our readers are acquainted also with certain explanations given of the temptation of Christ in works which have been before the public for some years. One states that an angel was the person who urged Jesus to work miracles in His own favour. Another has affirmed, what always appeared to us fanciful enough, if not contrary to sound inference, namely, the probability that a Roman emperor was "the tempter." Both these authorities, like ourselves, are as far as possible from the supposition that "the tempter" was the Devil of popular theology. This Devil is called the Accuser: but it will be seen that Christ's "tempter" did not accuse anyone. He, or it, only tried to cause Christ to fall or to cross over the right line. This is the meaning of Diabolos, or devil. This devil is termed Satan, which simply means adversary. Though that which tempted Jesus was not an accuser, still it was unquestionably an adversary to Him.

We are now inclined to dismiss the idea that Christ's tempter was outside Himself. We see no necessity to believe that there was either an angel, a Roman emperor, or any other person present, prompting the Son of God to sin against His Father; but let us by no means be thought to do away with the necessity of the temptation. We maintain that Christ was tempted in all points like unto us, that this was needful, in order to show that man can obey God, as well as to gain the victory over sin and ultimately destroy it; but what we have to speak of is the way in which this was accomplished. A true conclusion is not always reached by one path of search. Vessels steer from various points of the compass into the same harbour, and calculators arrive at identical results by different reckonings. A ship may sail round about without occasion, and an arithmetician may employ more figures than are requisite to work out a problem, but the end is uniform. So

it seems with regard to the temptation of Jesus; we have traversed unnecessary waters, and made useless calculations to obtain a result which we might have arrived at by a shorter road, avoiding at the same time many obstacles, the explanation or removal of which is demanded of us, a demand not easy to satisfy.

The first record of the temptation is given by Matthew in chapter 4, verse 1 to 11. Mark has only two verses on the subject, 12 and 13 of chapter 1. Luke in chapter 4 speaks of the temptation from the first to the thirteenth verse. John makes no allusion to the affair. The amount of testimony, therefore, is very small, nevertheless it is not without variation. A particular is mentioned by Luke, not noticed by Mark and Matthew, and so forth. The best mode, we think is to present the three narratives in their respective order, and carefully consider every word of each; by this plan we are sure to detect an obstacle, however small it may be, if such exist. This is similar to pounding a substance in a mortar; it must be cast out as unfit for use if the whole will not pulverize, as this furnishes proof that some foreign ingredient is present, or that we are vainly endeavouring to reduce to one consistence that which cannot be so treated.

The account of the Temptation given by Matthew, in chapter 4, is as follows:-

1. Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil.
2. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered.
3. And when the tempter came to him, he said. If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.
4. But he answered and said. It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.
5. The devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,
6. And saith unto him. If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written. He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.
7. Jesus said unto him. It is written again/ Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.
8. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;
9. And he saith unto him. All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.
10. Then said Jesus unto him. Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written. Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.
11. Then the devil leaveth him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

The Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1) was the influence which led, or drove, Jesus away into the wilderness. "Led up," is the expression used by Matthew; that is, led up from the river Jordan, in which. He had just been immersed by John. Jesus had, therefore, not far to go to reach the wilderness; He was in it, in fact, already; but was now to be carried farther up, away from the dwellings of men, to sojourn in those parts occupied by "wild beasts." Mark 1:13. It was the wilderness of Judea where the Son of God was put to the proof. The country extends along the Jordan, and the Dead Sea to the east of Jerusalem. The meaning of our word wilderness is not exactly that of the original, which denotes a mountainous, rough, and thinly settled country, but not altogether destitute of inhabitants; emphatically, "a desert place apart;" no food, only the stones of the wilderness. Jesus was here forty days and forty nights, like Moses in the Mount. In both instances a miracle was performed by God, for the human body could not survive a fifth part of that time without sustenance. The Father, it would seem, kept His Son alive, enduring all the time the cravings of hunger. In the Divine judgement it was needful to protract the trial. Let it be remembered that Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit, that is, able to perform anything He might choose. The question now arises: Who, or what, was

the tempter, or Trier of His fidelity? “Orthodoxy” answers, the devil, the prince of the fallen angels. To discuss this reply is not our present intention; (2) suffice it to say, that the very existence of such a monster appears to be an insufferable blot on Omnipotence.

(2) Those who are curious to see a full examination of the subject may read “Diabolism.”

Human nature, which was the nature of Jesus, has two sides. Man is a dual being, composed of sentiments and propensities; but none of these are bad; although there is not one that may not lead to sin. They may be compared to many lines, diverging from a centre to a circumference. Whenever any one of those lines crosses the outer circle, transgression has taken place. The sentiment of devotion exercising itself within the prescribed radius is true worship; if it overstep the line, it becomes idolatry. Love, the strongest passion of the heart, is pure and honourable within the given circle; beyond, it is fornication and adultery. If, then, that which has the greatest power to cause the commission of crime in its most abhorrent shape, is clean, holy, and good, within certain limits, it is not needful to apply the argument in detail to all the less powerful passions. We will content ourselves at present by saying, that whoever preaches the doctrine that the desires of man’s nature are inherently bad makes the Creator the author of all sin.

But to return to Jesus famishing in the wilderness. Why should we bring in a second person, called the devil, whether man or angel? Diabolos, as we have said, means that causing to cross over, from *dia* through, or over, and *ballo* to throw or cause to pass. Now, suppose Jesus had made stones into bread, what would have been the true reason for that action? Would it not be the hunger gnawing at his vitals? Unquestionably so. Would this cause have been sufficient of it self to induce the miracle? Quite sufficient; for without intense hunger there had been no thought of providing Himself with food. It has been well said by Newton, that when one sufficient cause has been found to account for an effect, no other should be sought for. Who, in the trial of Christ, will contend that hunger, biting for forty days and forty nights, was not cause enough to tempt Him who had the power to change stones into bread and eat thereof? And if this is an all-sufficient cause, why should we seek another?

But it will be asked, could hunger be called Diabolos? We answer in the affirmative, for the reason before given, viz., that it was hunger that might have thrown, or caused Jesus to pass over the line. Was hunger wicked? If so, then God created wickedness. Is that wicked which may lead to wickedness? Then it were wicked to be hungry. The apostle Paul sometimes used the word sin when he speaks of natural desires; this is convenient, because those desires do lead to sin when they are not restrained. This is the only sense in which sin can be said to dwell in us. It is what is called metonymy, or the putting of one thing for another, as “this bread is my body;” that is, stands for, or represents my body. “This cup is the new testament in my blood;” that is, the wine in this cup represents my blood. No mode of expression is more common in any language. The most homely illustration, perhaps, is found in the saying, “the kettle boils;” the water is understood. As the bread stands for the body, the wine for the blood, and the kettle for the water, so sin stands for the desires; but it no more follows that the desires are really sin than that the bread is really the body, the wine the blood, or the kettle really the water.

No matter what is the cause of our passing over, or transgressing, a command of God, that is diabolos or devil; and “the devil” which tried Christ was hunger. Now let the account of this great trial be read in this light, and we do not think it will sound at all strange. We shall certainly avoid some difficulties, for, to construe it in a rigid literal sense, the Holy Spirit seems to be co-operating with the Prince of Darkness to the eternal peril of His well-beloved Son; nor is this more than modified, if we suppose some less powerful personage to be the tempter. As for a “Roman Emperor,” we should find it hard to admit the idea that one contemporary with Christ was so intelligent in the Jewish Scriptures as the questioner of Jesus; besides, there are other strong objections. The trial would take this natural shape in the Lord’s mind. In the lonely, foodless wilderness, hunger visits Him, and urges thus: “If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.” The starving man reflects, looks wistfully, and at length. He speaks: “I am God’s Son, and I have power to make the stones into bread; but, why did my Father bring me into this desert place, where there is no meat? Was it not to try me? If I yield to hunger shall I not commit sin? Yes, ‘it is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.’ Though hungry as the grave my Father can sustain me; He has given me great powers, and I can use them; but no, to obey and perish rather than disobey and live, is my resolve.” At this crisis the trial is removed, but only to recur in another form, for men are weaker at some points than others. But before we proceed to notice the

next attempt, let us observe the beautiful lesson taught by this trial - implicit reliance on God; full confidence, like that of a little child in its father's word, - "My Father said it, and He will do it." Here is the very essence of Godliness - to love and trust our Heavenly Father. Ah, this is simple, indeed, but grander far than any creed or philosophy!

A fresh scene opens. We have a view of "the holy city," Jerusalem. We look towards the Temple, and raising our eyes, behold Jesus standing on the top of the highest porch, which is called Solomon's. "The Temple was surrounded with porches fifty-five feet broad and seventy-five high. The porch on the south side was sixty-seven feet broad and hundred and fifty high. From the top of this to the bottom of the valley below was more than seven hundred feet, and Josephus remarked that one could scarcely look down without dizziness." Matthew says, "the devil taketh him up into the holy city and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple." Popular notions would fancy the Son of God carried through the air, and perched bird-like on some giddy point, the Devil, invisible to men, standing at his side suggesting self-destruction, in pious phrase, but Reason has no need of such help to interpret the account; she prefers to be left to the record and herself to find, in accordance with human experience, a solution of the matter. Having therefore dismissed the obtrusive "Gentleman in black," and all others of whatever rank, or hue, she stands to meditate upon the scene. The term "taketh him up" signifies in the original to accompany, not to compel. Yonder walks the Son of God, buried in intensive thought, incited by wild ambition; He paces and turns, turns and paces; looks over the parapet into the abyss, so deep that the light fades into chilling shadow. Ambition now whispers, "Cast thyself down; for it is written. He will give His angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bare thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." To perform this feat of leaping from the pinnacle or porch, and swooping like an eagle across the deep valley, in the sight of all the city, was exactly the kind of imagination that would spring from the possession of power to do it unhurt. "But wherefore" to Himself said Jesus, "should I do this thing?" The passage indeed is written of me; but to leap hence were to tempt my Father; to uselessly provoke Him to shield me from harm, to find the pride of display, and to work no good thing. My answer therefore is from the same scripture, 'It is written again. Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.' Thus Jesus again overcomes His natural inclination, and is strengthened thereby. The diabolos or devil, in this instance, was love of grand display, which, if followed would have occasioned Him to fall in a literal as well as in a spiritual sense.

The next scene is enacted on "an exceeding high mountain;" but we do not know what mountain this was. There is no difficulty, however, in supposing Jesus to be in such a situation. He loved seclusion and solitude; with a vast poetic mind. He oft retired to weep and pray for men, more particularly for the loved city of which He was born King. It may well be, that while thus apart. He stood on some lofty mountain top, which commanded a spacious view; like Moses of old, on the summit of Nebo, scanning with eager eye "the land of far distances." Such a position, too, would give wings to the mind; more fleet than the lightning. His fancy would encircle the world of which He was also born Sovereign. Could He not truly say, "I am monarch of all I survey." A small extension of that wonderful and mysterious force which He possessed, would have banished the Jewish Sanhedrin, and kept even the legions of Caesar at bay. Would not these reflections evoke a keen desire for immediate universal empire? And to succumb to this wish, may aptly enough be described as doing homage. Temporal glory was the diabolos or devil in this new scene. To 'gratify this was indeed to be "master of the situation," but what would follow? That which ever follows pride, namely, abasement. Jesus perceiving this desire to be adverse to His Father's will, exclaimed at once, "Get thee behind me, Satan, for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." Thus nobly with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, He vanquished the lust of power. To this passion, it has been said of some that they were slaves. Alexander wept, so we are told, because there was not another world to conquer. Some fall down and idolise gold, believing that it can procure them all they covet. In the present picture. Power is the diabolos or tempter, and in the case of Jesus it must have been very strong.

This then brings us to the end of Matthew's account of the temptation of Christ, and it is for the reader to judge for himself of the reasonableness of the interpretation given. He will at all events observe how well it agrees with the language of the apostle James. "Let no man (and Jesus was a man), say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God... every man (does not this include Jesus?) every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust," or desire. We think this one statement will, on reflection, be found sufficiently inclusive and exclusive: it includes every real cause of wrong-doing and excludes the need of any personal

devil, whether man or angel. Having done with Matthew's account, we will turn to those of Mark and Luke, but they will not detain us long. Mark writes as follows:-

“And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. And he was there in the wilderness forty days tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts, and the angels ministered unto him.” Mark 1:12-13.

Matthew notices the angels, but says nothing about the wild beasts. Those angels, or messengers ministered unto Jesus, that is, supplied His wants; but who they were we know not.

Luke speaks of the devil showing Jesus “all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.” Literally is not intended here. What but thought, which out-strips the lightning's flash, could bring this picture to the eye? But –thought could present it, for whether to Sirius, or the farthest star, distance to thought is annihilated, it flies to and fro baffling all measurement of its speed; and such thought would spring up in the contemplative situation assigned to Christ, “an exceeding high mountain,”

The last thing calling for remark in Luke's narrative, is the ending of the temptation and the departure of the devil for a season. How shall we harmonize the departure of the devil with our present interpretation? James will, we think, effect this. “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7). Is a person alluded to here? By no means. James had said before that lust, or desire, is the tempter. Resist lust, or desire, therefore, and it will flee from you, though not altogether; only for “a season.” So it was with “the man Christ Jesus,” for after these special trials He must have felt others also. Desire then, or that causing to fall, may verily be styled the diabolos, which being resisted departs only to return with every fresh circumstance to arouse it. Here we leave the subject, having advanced enough to be understood; but let it not be supposed that we have anathemas in store for those who look at the matter in another aspect. The object unquestionably is the same, namely, trial in order to perfection of faith, and for an example to us who strive to become sons of God harmless or sincere, blameless or holy, and therefore without rebuke.

Edward Turney

To be continued...