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Is the Middle East Conflict related to Bible prophecy?

"And the Lord shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and heal it: and they shall return even to the Lord, and he shall be entreated them, and shall heal them. In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land. -- whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance." -Isaiah 19:22-25.

WHEN and how will this prophecy of Isaiah be fulfilled? The passage on which our question is based is really only a part of a section of the Book of Isaiah devoted to predictions as to the final end of all the nations. Commencing with Isaiah 13, the Prophet mentions, first, the "burden" or "doom" of Babylon (in which is included Assyria; these two kingdoms being viewed as successive stages of one and the same power). Then follow the "dooms" predicted for Philistia, Moab, and Damascus, leading up to the doom of Egypt, which is portrayed in the chapter to which our question relates.

Aside from such partial fulfillments as may or may not have occurred, its complete fulfillment is still future. When, in the future, shall it be? Precisely when, we cannot say. It will be "in that day" -- the day long promised. It will be early in that day. How will the prophecy be fulfilled? We are not sure.

On May 14, 1948, the British mandate was terminated and the Jewish State of Israel was proclaimed. Since then that nation, both its people and its land, has been making the headlines. As all our readers know, this has been especially true in recent months.

What is God's Plan for Israel? And why should it interest both Jews and Gentiles? We answer: God's Plan for Israel is an important feature of God's Plan for all mankind. Israel is the nation it has pleased God to choose. They are His chosen people -- chosen, not for favoritism, but for service -- to be the channel through whom his blessings are yet destined to flow to all mankind.

GOD'S SELECTION OF ABRAHAM

To get the record straight we must refer back to the first Book of the Bible. There, in Genesis 12:1-3, we read of the promise made by God to Abraham, whose name at that time was Abram:

"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee [and in thy seed - Gen. 22:18] shall all families of the earth be blessed."

There is no question but that God has fulfilled a part of this promise, namely, to make the name of Abram great.

This selection of Abram did not go to his head, as so wonderful a promise might easily have done, but, lest it should have that effect on his offspring, the children of Israel were expressly informed that it was not because they were a great nation, but for the exact opposite reason that they were chosen. Note the words of Moses on this point, found in Deuteronomy 7:7:

"The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the, fewest of all people."

Very early in our investigation we discover that, supplementing the promise that Abraham and his seed should be God's channel of blessing to mankind, God made a specific promise that Abraham and his seed should inherit land. No sooner has he obeyed God's command and journeyed to the land to which God guided him than he is promised, by God himself:

"Unto thy seed will I give this land." - Genesis 12:7.

In later chapters this promise is amplified:

"Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed [for 100 years? No!] for ever ...

"Arise, walk through the land, in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee . . . and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession. " - Genesis 13:14-17; 17:8.

How has the promise progressed, it is asked? First, we note that it was not realized by Abraham personally. However, it was confirmed to his son, Isaac (Gen. 26:23, 24); and again, to Isaac's son, Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel. (Gen. 28:10-15; 32:28; 35:9-15.) Thereafter the promise passed to Israel's twelve sons and to the nation of which they were the tribal heads,

After their experience with slavery in Egypt, and deliverance therefrom at the hand of Moses, the children of Israel were led into Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. Here in this, the land of promise, they dwelt for centuries, and experienced the special favor of God. With them He dealt as he dealt with no other nation. (Psa. 147:19, 20.) According to His promises, detailed in Leviticus 26, he blessed them in basket and in store when they sought to walk in his counsels. He also graciously chastised them when they deflected from the paths of truth and righteousness, so that their national conscience might be kept tender. While they walked in His statutes, he sent them rain in due season and blessed their crops. Their enemies fled from them.

On the other hand, when as a nation they departed from the ways of God, exactly the reverse conditions were permitted to come upon them. Rain was withheld. Crops failed. They were defeated in battle. Those not slain were taken captive. And then, since this treatment proved unavailing, the "seven times" of punishment, predicted in Leviticus 26 began to take effect.

GENTILE TIMES

While it may be questioned if, in this Leviticus chapter, the expression "seven times" has any chronological significance, history has shown that such was, indeed, to be the case. Israel was to become subject to Gentile rule, for a long period of time. The length of that period was to be the same as that covered by two of the prophecies contained in the Book of Daniel. One of these was that of the great image seen in his dream by the Babylonian monarch, Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2); the other was that of Daniel's own vision of four wild beasts (Dan. 7). The meaning of these two prophecies is not left to surmise. Each is interpreted in the Scriptures themselves to represent four Gentile World Empires: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, which in one form or another have held sway over the earth from that day to this.

A remarkable scale for measuring the duration of the periods indicated in the two prophecies has been furnished in the Old Testament. It is known as the year-day scale; that is, a day in prophecy stands as a symbol for a year. A year, sometimes called a time and reckoned as containing 360 days, stands as a symbol for 360 years. This scale is subject to minor modifications, depending on whether lunar, calendar, or solar years are intended. Such minor modifications are, of course, important, and must not be overlooked when students are seeking precise computations. Suffice it to say now that, using the year-day scale, "Gentile Times" are seen to extend over the long period of 2,520 years.

That the year-day scale is a God given key, becomes abundantly evident when we find that by its use not only the prophecy of Nebuchadnezzar's image, and that of Daniel's four beasts, but all other related time prophecies are readily unlocked.

So far as Israel is concerned, the characteristics of this long period are three in number:

1. Jewish loss of dominion and independence, and their subjugation to and suffering under Gentile conquerors.
2. Dispersion of the Jews.
3. Desolation of their land.

The period of "Gentile Times" would affect three factors in Israel's national life:

1. The land.
2. The throne.
3. The temple.

Insofar as the land was concerned, this period would extend from the desolation of their land by Babylon to the restoration of the Jews back to Palestine.

Insofar as their throne was concerned, it would extend from the fall of Zedekiah, their last king to the restoration of the throne under Shiloh.

And, insofar as the temple was concerned, it would extend from the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem to the re-establishment of the worship of God on Mount Zion.

Stated very concisely, we may say that immediately prior to the commencement of "Gentile Times" the Jewish monarchy was recognized by God, and that immediately after the close of that long period God's Kingdom is scheduled to be established on earth.

ISRAEL'S DOUBLE

Another very striking set of prophecies concerning Israel's experiences ought not to go unnoticed, even in so brief a discussion as this. We refer to what is three times designated in the Scriptures as Israel's double.

From the time she became a nation, at Jacob's death, Israel had enjoyed God's favor continuously, until for reasons all too apparent his favor towards her was, of necessity, withdrawn. Whatever the length of this period of favor, for an equal period of time would she be required to experience his disfavor. Only when this period of disfavor had run its course, would He be ready to take her back into favor again. Let us read the testimony of three Prophets on this matter:

1. Jeremiah in Chapter 16, verses 14 and 15, says that the days will come when God will accomplish such a wonderful deliverance for Israel that his former miraculous deliverance of her from Egyptian bondage at the hand of Moses, would fade into insignificance. Then, in verse 18, he adds this further statement:

"First I will recompense their iniquity and their sin *double*."

2. Zechariah, in Chapter 9, verses 9-12 (Zech. 9:9-12), predicts the coming of Messiah and then, speaking for Jehovah, addresses Israel in these remarkable words:

"Turn ye to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope. Even today do I declare that I will render *double* unto thee."

Here the word "double" is translated from the Hebrew word *mishneh as* in the prophecy by Jeremiah. It signifies a second portion; a repetition.

3. A third Prophet, Isaiah, testifies concerning the matter in these words:

"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her appointed time is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord's hand *double for* all her sins." - Isa. 40:1-2 (margin).

Here the Hebrew word translated "double" is *kephel*, which signifies double, in the sense of a thing having been folded in the middle.

In connection with these three prophecies it has been well observed: "The student of prophecy should notice that the Prophets vary their standpoints of utterance, sometimes speaking of future things as future, and sometimes assuming a position future, and speaking from that assumed standpoint."

No better illustration of this principle of different prophetic standpoints can be given than the three prophecies related to Israel's double already noticed. Jeremiah foretold that the days *would come* when God would scatter them among all nations, and that when they had received double, he would gather them again by a more mighty display of power on their behalf than when they came out of Egyptian bondage. Zechariah speaks as though living at the time of Messiah's

offering himself to Israel as their king, and tells us that there, *in that very day*, their double began to count. Isaiah takes his position still further down the stream of time, and as though living at the very end of the period, announces the message of comfort to Israel that her double is *completed*.

That these three Prophets lived hundreds of years apart, and wrote things quite contrary to Israel's expectations, only serves to increase the force and value of their utterances.

One other Scripture bears directly on this phase of our subject. It is found in Psalm 102:13, and reads:

"Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion; for the time to favor her, yea, the set time, is come."

Evidently the same spirit which operated in Jeremiah, Zechariah, and Isaiah, inspired the words of the Psalmist. The time to favor Zion, "yea, the set time, is come." When is that to be?

As in the case of "Gentile Times," so also in reference to Israel's double of disfavor, these great time prophecies are not to be measured from any one particular year to another, but from one era to another. This is so, because the rise and fall of nations must, in the very nature of the case, cover more or less extended eras. The fall of Israel and Judah covered a period of 160 years, culminating in the overthrow of their last king, Zedekiah. It should not surprise us then, if we find their restoration extending over a number of years, or decades, or even longer periods. What we should be on the lookout for is not a thunderbolt from the skies, but a *noticeable change* in the *trend* of events. We should be watching and intelligently reading the signs of the times, and noting how they fit in with the prophetic forecasts.

ISRAEL'S MESSIAH

Now we want to go back to Abraham, and notice a point or two intentionally omitted earlier. Notice first that the promise was not confirmed to all of Abraham's children -- not to Ishmael, for example, but to Isaac only.

Again, not all of Isaac's children constituted the seed of promise. Esau was by-passed in favor of Jacob.

Even in the case of Jacob, while none of his twelve sons was excluded from God's promise of an inheritance in the *land*, yet on his deathbed Jacob saw, and predicted, that the *throne*, as distinguished from the land, was to be limited to the tribe of Judah. Moreover, within the tribe of Judah, Jacob's deathbed prediction narrowed down the throne-promise to one individual. Genesis 49:10:

"The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."

Doubtless it was this same great one to whom Ezekiel referred, when he addressed Zedekiah:

"Thou profane, wicked prince of Israel... Thus saith the Lord God; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown:... I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him." - Eze. 21:25-27.

In other words, the original promise to Abraham, when closely examined, is seen to contain much more than at first appeared, much more, doubtless, than Abraham himself realized. It is composed

of two parts. The one is to the natural seed of Abraham, the nation of Israel. To them God promised an inheritance in the land. That promise will yet be kept. Not only so, but through them God's blessing of everlasting life and all earthly favors will be channeled to the Gentiles in due time.

But there was another part to the promise, also sure of fulfillment. It is to be the inheritance of one worthy of the honor, namely, Israel's great Messiah.

Moses had seen this. In Deuteronomy 18:15-19 he declares:

"The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet ... like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken."

David, in Psalm 110:1, spoke of the future Messiah as his Lord, that is, his superior, as one evidently destined to be a greater king than himself, while in Psa. 110:4 he declares that, in vision, he heard God himself addressing this great Messiah as a priest, occupying a much higher station than the high priest Aaron, a priest who would function not for a few brief years and then, because of death, be compelled to resign the office to a successor, but one who would serve for an entire Age; a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek was both a priest and a king, whose exalted station even Abraham recognized, in that he did him homage, paid him tithes, and from him received a blessing.

This great prophet, priest, and king, is not a man like Moses, Melchizedek or David, but a highly exalted spirit being, the very Son of God himself. He it is whom the great Jehovah delights to honor. Of him it is written in the second Psalm:

'Jehovah said unto me, Thou art my Son; ... Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession."

RESTORATION OF ISRAEL

Earlier we suggested that we should be watching and intelligently reading the signs of the times, and noting how they are fitting in with the prophetic forecasts. So far as Israel is concerned, these signs, according to the unanimous testimony of the Old Testament prophets, should be looked for in three main directions, namely:

1. Restoration of the land.
2. Restoration to the land.
3. Restoration to God.

The land is to be recovered from the state of desolation in which it has lain during the long period of Gentile rule. As Isaiah expresses it, in that wonderful 35th chapter of his:

"The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose, . . . in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert."

Is this sign in evidence today? Is the land, in fact, being restored? He would be blind, indeed, who could not see this sign. Restoration of the land, admittedly, is far from complete, but the economic growth of the country in recent times, along both agricultural and industrial lines, has

been nothing short of miraculous; and this, too, notwithstanding the hardships and difficulties which beset the nation of Israel under present conditions.

And what of the second sign? Are there any indications that the people of Israel are being restored to the land? Yes, indeed, there are. Even as far back as 1878, nearly 107 years ago, the year of the famous Berlin Congress, faithful watchers realized that a change in the status of Israel was taking place. That conference, with the war that preceded it, was without doubt a most marked stage in the downfall of the Ottoman power—a stage in the dismemberment of the Turkish Empire, which was destined to be completely broken up at the end of World War I.

Then, too, it was surely no mere coincidence that when the British General Allenby, without firing a shot, captured Jerusalem from the Turks, the date of that event, perhaps one of the most important in Israel's national life, namely, December 9, 1917, should prove to be exactly 1335 lunar years from the starting point of the Mohammedan calendar. Daniel, in the 12th chapter of his Book, has something to say about a symbolic period of 1335 days. While Allenby's capture of Jerusalem may not have been a complete and final fulfillment of Daniel's forecast, it is certainly most remarkable, to say the least, that this event took place, exactly 1335 lunar years from the birthday of that particular Gentile power which, for so long, had desolated the Holy Land, and trodden down Jerusalem.

JACOB'S TROUBLE

But what of the third sign mentioned? Is there any evidence that not only is the restoration of the land in progress; not only is the nation being regathered to that land; but that the hearts of the people of Israel, as a nation, are returning to the God of their fathers?

It must be admitted, that while there are, indeed, some signs in this direction, they are not very pronounced. The economic progress of the country, both in relation to the land and the people, is still largely secular. With all due respect to the few devout souls in Israel, there is little of the faith of Abraham to be seen in Israel today.

This state of affairs should not surprise us. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah—each has cautioned us to expect exactly what we see in progress today. Briefly summarizing their forecasts, first, there was to be the regathering of a representative remnant of Israel, not in the faith of Abraham, but in unbelief. This is now taking place. But what follows? After a brief interval of prosperity there comes a time of anguish. To quote Jeremiah 30:7, "it is the time of Jacob's trouble." What is it, according to the united testimony of the four Prophets named, that occasions this dark hour which threatens to fall on Israel in the nighttime of her sad history? It is nothing more nor less than a gathering of envious nations against her, graphically described in Ezekiel 38:1-13. In these verses the chief actors in this yet future struggle in Palestine are named. However, we may not be too sure of our identifications. But one thing is quite definite, the battle will not end in triumph for Israel's enemies. Does one ask: "Why not?" I answer: Because it is the set time for Israel's deliverance. God himself, represented by Israel's great Messiah, will intervene. Of this there is no question, for, after telling us that it is the time of Jacob's trouble, Jeremiah goes on to say: "But he shall be saved out of it." According to Zechariah 14:2, 3, God will go forth and fight against Israel's enemies as he fought in the day of battle. Isaiah, too, speaks in a similar vein. - Isa. 28:21.

That will indeed be a great and wonderful day in Israel's history, an hour of triumph such as they have never known before, greater even than when they came out of Egypt; greater than when they

triumphed over Pharaoh and his host at the Red Sea; greater than when they entered the Promised Land and the walls of Jericho fell down before them.

There is, however, something greater, more solemn and more blessed, than mere deliverance and triumph over their enemies that Israel is to experience. And that is God's final conquest over them, i.e., Israel.

On former occasions, when God had given them the victory over their enemies, it was not long before they became proud in heart and rebelled against the Rock of their salvation. But this will never be true of them again. For he, their great Messiah, who comes to conquer their foes, comes also to subdue their hearts. Hence, great as their triumph will be when they return from the victory, their glorious day of triumph will end in self-abasement and tears. How this wonderful change will be brought about, how the stubborn heart of unbelieving and gainsaying Israel will at last be broken, we are told in Zechariah 12:10:

"I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication;"

or, as Jeremiah speaking as the Lord's mouthpiece expresses the matter:

"I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord,

"But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying: Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." - Jeremiah 31:31-34.

EGYPT'S NATIONAL PRESERVATION ASSURED

Nor will this be true of Israel only. No! It will be true also of Egypt and Assyria (present-day Iraq). As Dr. Arthur W. Kac noted in a recent article:

"Many of the nations in the ancient world have disappeared forever in accordance with Biblical prophecy, but in the case of Egypt we have a definite assurance in God's Word that her national life shall not be extinguished. On the contrary, God has a future for Egypt. The passage in Jeremiah painting a gloomy picture of the destruction of Egypt at *'the hand of the people of the north'* concludes with this significant statement: *'And afterwards it [i. e. Egypt] shall be inhabited, as in the days of old, saith Jehovah'* - Jeremiah 46:26.

EGYPT'S SPIRITUAL REGENERATION

"Since God has decreed that Egypt shall not perish from the earth, the purpose of the many afflictions heaped upon her is not merely to punish her, but to rid her of her vain pride, to cause her to forsake the errors of her ways, to give up her false doctrines and philosophies, and to come to a saving knowledge of Jehovah and place her trust in him. That this is the aim which God seeks to accomplish through his judgments upon Egypt may be seen from the frequency with which the

phrase *'and they shall know that I am Jehovah'* occurs in the Egypt passages in the Bible. *'And all the inhabitants of Egypt shall know that I am Jehovah'* - Ezekiel 29:6; *'And they shall know that I am Jehovah, when I have set a fire in Egypt, and all her helpers are destroyed'* - Ezekiel 30:8; *'Thus will I execute judgments upon Egypt, and they shall know that I am Jehovah'* - Ezekiel 30:19; *'When I shall make the land of Egypt desolate and waste, a land of destitute of that whereof it was full, when I shall smite all them that dwell therein, then shall they know that I am Jehovah'* - Ezekiel 32:15; *Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, saith; Behold, I will punish Amon of No [name of the supreme god of the Egyptians], and Pharaoh, and Egypt, with her gods, and her kings; even Pharaoh, and them that trust in him'* - Jeremiah 46:25. The true purpose of chastisement of Egypt is nowhere expressed better than in the following passage in Isaiah: *'And Jehovah will smite Egypt, smiting and healing, and they shall return unto Jehovah, and he will be entreated of them, and will heal them'* - Isaiah 19:22.

"Egypt's conversion to the God of Israel is more fully described in the second half of the nineteenth chapter of Isaiah: *'In that day shall there be an altar to Jehovah in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to Jehovah. And Jehovah shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know Jehovah in that day'* - Isaiah 19:19, 21.

"That the Egyptian people have never fully experienced the kind of spiritual transformation spoken of in Isaiah 19:19-22 is quite certain. This may be easily seen from an examination of the concluding passage of this chapter in Isaiah describing the striking changes which are to take place in Egypt's international relations as a result of her spiritual regeneration.

A NEW DAY FOR THE NEAR EAST

"In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrians shall come into Egypt; and the Egyptians shall worship with Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth. For that Jehovah of hosts hath blessed them, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance' - Isaiah 19:23-25. When that day comes there will be a highway between Egypt and Iraq; the two nations will mix and mingle freely and unite as friends instead of being divided as enemies. This newly found friendship and cooperation between Egypt and Iraq will be reinforced by a covenant with Israel, who at that time will be a blessing not only to the Middle East but to the whole world."

ALL MANKIND TO BE BLESSED

Yes! All mankind will then be blessed through Israel as God promised to Abraham. The Prophet Isaiah tells us this in Chapter 2, verse 4 (Isa. 2:4). So also the Prophet Micah states in Chapter 4, verses 1-3 (Micah 4:1-3):

"In the last days it shall come to pass that the mountain or kingdom] of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains [that is, overruling all other kingdoms], and it shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

"As many nations shall come, and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways and we will walk in his paths. . .'" "And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

- P. L. Read

Our High Calling

"I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." - Philipians 3:14

HOW fitting is the term, "the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," as pertains to the calling or special favor of this, present Age of Grace-the invitation to footstep followers of Christ to joint heirship with Him. Not to angels was such a call given, nor to holy men of old whose faithfulness was indeed highly meritorious did such great favor come a call to glory, honor, and immortality. How high a calling it is! Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world to be sharers with Him in all the Father had designed to give the Son of power, glory, majesty, and in the uplift of Adam and his race! Partakers with Him of the divine nature -- a favor higher than Which God could not give to any one! Who could aspire to such favor without the clearest assurance from God's Word that so high a calling was indeed placed within the reach of redeemed men and women now? Verily no man may take such honor to himself. Well may such favored ones say. "Thou hast called us to a station we could ne'er by merit win."

And who are they to whom this great favor is shown? Hearken to the rating given them in the Word: "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence." - I Cor. 1:26-29.

Consider, then, the strata from which these called of God are taken, and the high standard set before them, requiring of them attainment of a high degree of sanctification, even cleansing "from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord calling them to a growth in love akin to the knowledge -- surpassing love of Christ. It is indeed a call of a very high character, to a very exalted dignity and station. Consistently, therefore, the transformation of character required must be very high. Nevertheless, a completed and glorified Church will yet be a witness to the practical possibility of every high ideal set before those who would win the prize of this high calling of God in Christ Jesus. How could we think otherwise of those requirements if God is to be recognized as consistent and practical? If He is able to work in us to will according to this, His good pleasure, and He does so work in receptive, minds, shall we not believe Him able to work in us to do that will, high though it be? If this be not so, how meaningless and impractical are the confident' statements of Paul in his prayer for the Ephesian brethren, assuring them that beyond all those large blessings asked for in that prayer, that God "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." - Eph. 3:20.

What is Paul showing in such great petitions as we find in this prayer, closing it with this final burst of largeness, if he is not showing that the highest of aims, of thinking, of hoped for attainments, should characterize every sincere heart among God's people:

Surely we should gather from this prayer an inspiration toward greater and greater things in Christian life, a drawing of our hearts upward and onward toward the ultimate goal, even that of being "filled with all the fulness of God." Can we say as in the presence of God, "I shall be satisfied with Thy likeness," unless so high an attainment has really gripped our spirit, and given

an assured reality to our faith? Out of the heart are the issues of life, therefore if the Spirit of God has filled the heart with such desires as these, then that heart will assuredly be occupied with high principles, high aspirations, and- Christlike love. The thoughts will be centered in these things. Then as such an one thinketh in his heart, such he will become in character. Such will love deeply, live in the heavenlies, be heaven-minded, find a special delight in- the great and rich spiritual verities of Christian life.

In that gem of literature, the thirteenth of First Corinthians, how fundamental and supremely important Paul makes the quality of love. Faith is -assuredly important, hope also, but of faith, hope, and love, lie says, "the greatest of these is love." Is he not thinking in much the same trend when he writes, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." (Phil. 4:8.) Well did the Apostle know, that the habit of thought determines the development of character, and that when the mind is exercised in the cultivation of such high, constructive thoughts, the mind of Christ soon becomes manifest.

HEART PURITY THE GREAT ESSENTIAL

We must live in love if we would grow into the loveliness of Christ's character. No one can make any progress in real spiritual knowledge unless he lives in the love of Christ. The great verities of Christian life are never seen by those who miss this life of love; for there are great verities of divine revelation which no measure of mere intellectual knowledge can impart. It is not by mere mental acuteness that true spirituality is determined but by the manifest evidence of a *rich* possession of the Holy Spirit, which can be as remarkably manifest in the unlettered in earthly wisdom, as in the more able-minded students of the Word. Heart purity is the *best* evidence of being spiritually minded and spiritually developed, for it is written, "The pure in heart will *see* God." "The impure in heart," one has said, "see everything but God." Yes, heart-likeness to God and devotion to Him unquestionably determine the degree of spiritual understanding, for the reason that God has made it the imperative requirement antecedent to heart illumination. Our conduct, therefore, much more effectively than our preaching, will bear testimony to the degree of spiritual light and life possessed.

Let us note a few of the fundamental principles all must recognize and fervently desire to follow. "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples because ye have love one for another." "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His." These are unchanging principles of divine judgment. "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature," is also a principle of relationship to Christ as true in the case of the less alert intellectually as of those more analytically endowed; for: while various ramifications of Bible teaching may be but dimly comprehended by some, fundamentals may be grasped with clearness by the most illiterate of the truly spiritual children of God. These things being true, surely it is an outstanding evidence of the Lord's loving care over His Church through all the long centuries of this Gospel .Age, that so universally, and through so many voices; the spirit of the truth, if not its perfect letter, has been placed highest among the things required of the Christian. What love is revealed in this, that the practical understanding and application of these are within the reach of the "not many wise" whom God in grace has called into this high fellowship with His Son; and how truly "His Plan His wisdom shows" in. making love the principal thing, and the daily life the best evidence of the Holy Spirit's operations.

That there are dispensational unfoldings peculiar, to the progressive stages of Church history, who can doubt? The light that shines in the dark place until the Kingdom Day has fully dawned, is indeed a lamp in the pathway of the saints, and unto the sure word of prophecy we do well to

take heed lest we live unaware of the special visitations of light and privilege that belong to our own day. But regardless of the particular day in which God's people have their tests of faith and character, love ever remains the principal thing, and associated with that love there are fixed and vital facts which are always "present truth." *To* be established in these facts of truth is therefore the supreme objective before all who desire to attain the prize of our high, wonderful, calling in Christ Jesus. So important has this been in the view of the Lord and Head of the Church, that throughout the Age, while He has seen fit to allow many of His faithful servants to be measurably confused doctrinally, He has never left Himself without the witness of, His all inclusive redeeming love, nor permitted true brotherly love to depart from the Church which is His Body, and in which no schism can exist. How truly, then, has it been said in bygone days by one who knew God's love, though not all His Plan as it may be seen today: "The heart is the depository and source of all that affect; life. Here are the finest organs of spiritual vision. There are seals covering the deeper truths of God that no light or fire of intellectual genius can dissolve-hidden riches that no labor of learned research can find. But those seals melt like snow beneath the warm breathings of the heart; and the wine and honey of heaven drop into the bosom of the humble and contrite spirit."

A HOPE ANCHORED FAST TO ETERNAL VERITIES

Recognizing, then, that it is only in a rich possession of Christ's love that divine favor can be continued to the individual, and that the life is conformed to the greatness of our high calling standards, this writer continues:

"We will need to widen the practical boundaries of our love till it touches the same expansive limits of God's love and purpose for all. He who mined the golden ore of His Father's love, and minted it into common coin and threw it in lavish handfuls among men, bids us perpetuate that beneficence in unstinted measure. He came to teach that God is near and tender, and that the things He loves to see in exercise are mercy and justice -- humility and love -- to have a heart that never hardens, a temper that never tires, and a touch that never hurts."

"Thou Son of God! fill up the blurred and blotted sketch which our clumsy hands have drawn of a divine life, with the fulness of Thy perfect picture. We feel the beauty which we have not realized; robe us in Thine own unutterable height of beauty."

Our high calling! Higher than the utmost reaches of earth's greatness: more stupendous than the limitless amazing splendor of a star-studded heaven-the uttermost bounds of God's willingness and power to bestow favor upon the subjects of His deepest affection! To this we are called of God, and to this He is abundantly able to bring us.

So great a favor requires a high degree of faith, a strong gripping trust in the immutable promises of God, likewise a high-reaching hope, a blessed hope anchoring us fast to the eternal realities beyond the veil, and above all-love, a divine love received through saving faith, filling the life with untiring devotion to God, and shedding its beams of loving kindness where'er it touches other lives. And now abideth high persistent faith, a high and purifying hope; then best, and highest of all, the love by which is fulfilled the perfect standard and ideal of life: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with *all* thy strength, and . . . Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." - Mark 12:30, 31.

- J. J. Blackburn.

Three Ways of Disobedience.

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 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 the Father abideth for ever." - 1 John 2:15-17.

THE life-work of a Christian consists in keeping his sacrifice on the altar; that is, keeping his own will constantly subordinated to God's will. This was the "cup" of Christ and this is the "cup" of His disciple. Faithfulness in "drinking this cup," submitting "under the mighty hand of God," will result in a transformation into Godlikeness and a consequent resurrection upon the divine plane of existence. To prevent the saint of God from attaining his goal, "ten thousand foes arise," and from the Scriptures we learn that these utilize *three lines of approach*, all of which, however, have the same objective, namely, to cause self-will to again assert itself, and thus disobedience to God's will result. These are brought to our attention by St. John in our heading text, where in words of remarkable comprehensiveness he has summed up the three ways by which sin (disobedience to God's will) seeks to penetrate the Christian's armor. These three means of entry are:

1. Lust of the flesh -- gratification of the lower senses.
2. Lust of the eye -- desire for the things of sight.
3. Pride of life-lust of the mind -- exaltation of self.

These are the three motivating causes of all sin. By one or another of these, every intelligent being can be tested completely. They embrace all the possibilities of temptation, all the ways by which the creature can be separated from the Creator; for "every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death." (James 1:14, 15.) The word "lust" is here used in the sense of strong desire or craving, and does not necessarily refer to desire for immoral things. The senses and the eye and the mind are God's creation and components of man's faculties by reason of God willing it so. Of themselves they are good and to be used properly, but the Apostle John's words call attention to the fact that it is through these good things that evil does always approach, "and no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" and "we are not ignorant of his devices." (2 Cor. 11:14; 2: 11.) Thus that which is good can become a source of evil to us, and it is the recognition of this truth that has caused men and women to mortify themselves in all manner of ascetic pursuits, as regards clothing, diet, abstinence, etc., in their endeavor to lead godly lives. This undue emphasis on trivial things results in a "form of godliness," dependent upon one's personal decision as to what is good and what is evil. In its extreme form this develops into Pharisaism, that self-righteousness so abominable to the Lord. The question is not, What is good and what is evil, but, Is it the Lord's will? We are not called upon to go through our Christian life constantly classifying all things into these two categories, as this were beyond our wisdom; for "the heart is deceitful above all things" and "there is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is death." Evil, of course, is to be instantly rejected, but evil, as such, is not always recognizable. On the other hand, that which is good can also become a snare unto us. The ultimate touchstone to determine our proper choice is an affirmative answer to the question, Is it in obedience to God's will? The attitude of the Psalmist alone will guide us safely through: "I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart." (Psa. 40:8.) Let us consider some Scriptural illustrations of the above thoughts.

THE ORIGINAL TEMPTATION

The truth of the Apostle John's words is markedly verified in the account of the fall of man recorded in Genesis 3. Obedience to God was the condition under which Adam and Eve could continue in his favor and blessing. Abundant provision had been arranged for their welfare. No good thing was withheld to make their life replete with joy except one, and that for a time only. Access to the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" was denied them under penalty of death. But in the words of the sixth verse: "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. "

Here we recognize the triumvirate of evil:

1. Lust of the flesh-"the tree was good for food."
2. Lust of the eye-" the tree was pleasant to the eyes."
3. Lust of the mind-" a tree to be desired to make one wise."

Thus does that which is good in itself become a snare and the occasion. for disobedience to God. How often since has man failed to recognize the Tempter and followed the appeal of his own heart into sin, for the approach is ever by one or the other of the three ways of disobedience.

Note the method of the Adversary. It is always the same. There is first a questioning of God's love; the subtle suggestion that the commandment was arbitrarily imposed: "Hath God said, Ye shall not eat?" Surely he cannot love you if he denies you this fruit. No mention is made of all God's many gifts and proofs of love. These are carefully kept out of sight. The thing denied is alone fixed upon and made the occasion for questioning God's love. This is the fundamental lie; the indirect suggestion that the Creator's command is due to his limitation in love toward his creature - God is *not* love! Every other lie is possible after this. With what subtleness is the temptation opened - by a simple question as to God! Yet doubt arises and how awful are the results. Another has well said: "*If* we question what God does, we judge God; we get out of our place, and put him out of his. A really humble soul never judges God. It may not have peace or joy, but at least it will not judge God; submitting, rather, to his sovereign will; tempted to question, yet not questioning. Such a soul has broken through the snare. It is safe, for it will not entertain questions as to God's ways."

God's way being questioned, his love doubted, the next step is the denial of God's truth. "Ye shall not surely die." Truth is rejected; God is made out a liar; his place in man's trust is assailed and what follows is inevitable. For God's love and truth being denied, the next step is to take God's place openly. "Ye shall be as gods." How subtly has the poison of the first suggestion spread! God has lost his character in the heart of men. Self may now therefore seek to be "as God"; so entirely is spiritual perception gone when we begin to doubt him. Disobedience follows as a matter of course. "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil. heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." - Heb. 3:12.

CHRIST'S TEMPTATION

Let us now consider the temptations of our Master as recorded in Matt. 4:1-11, remembering that He was "tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin." (Heb. 4:15.) Again does the Tempter seek access through the evil trio

1. Lust of the flesh -- Command these stones be made bread (cater to thy necessities).
2. Lust of the eye -- Cast thyself from the temple pinnacle (an ostentatious display will accomplish your purpose speedily).
3. Lust of the mind -- World kingdom shall be yours (exaltation of self).

Manifestly the objective in all three temptations was one and the same, namely, to bring about Christ's violation of his covenant with God at Jordan., "Not my will but thine, O God, be done" - in one word, *disobedience*. Satan's appeal is not through the grosser forms of evil, for such would have proved unavailing, but is clothed in a subtler form. There is the suggestion to use divine power for the necessities of the flesh, a seemingly justifiable course in view of our Master's forty-day fast. Then the suggestion to utilize a spectacular method of calling attention to Himself and so to His message, with Scripture wrested in seeming confirmation. Thirdly, the appeal to the mind through the gift of world dominion with its immediate possibility of a reign of good on behalf of all mankind. These were indeed powerful suggestions with a direct appeal to the perfect flesh and eye and mind of the Master; but here was One who unlike Adam, could see beyond the creature (the visible form of temptation) and discern the Tempter.

Note how in our Master's case, the Adversary reversed his procedure in Eden. There he questioned God's love; next, his truth; and finally exalted man to equality with God. Now he says in substance: "God's love for you is unquestionable; therefore it is appropriate that you exercise the power given you for your obvious necessity. " Again, It is proper for you to utilize this spectacular method to call attention to your mission, for does not the unassailable Word declare: '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.' Again, "I am willing to submit to the divine purpose of setting up a world-kingdom under your jurisdiction; and to expedite matters am willing to turn over all the kingdoms to you now, with one qualification -you must recognize me as your superior."

With what firmness did our Lord reject all these overtures, discerning instantly that his obedience to God's will was on trial. "Hallelujah! what a Savior!" But the record of history reveals how these same temptations proved efficacious in bringing about the great Apostasy; and even in smaller spheres have the Adversary's delusions been successful. Through seeming righteous methods, all for the furtherance of God's Kingdom, men have succumbed to their own wills, and sad is the record of disobedience.

CAIN-BALAAM-KORAH

As further illustrative of the Apostle John's words we consider next Jude 11: "Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Salaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core."

Here in reference to a class in his day, Jude cites the record of several Old Testament characters whose evil course can be similarly placed in juxtaposition with the words of our article text:

1. Lust of the eye -- the "way of Cain" (Jealousy-envy).
2. Lust of the flesh -- "Error of Balaam for reward."
3. Lust of the mind -- Rebellion of Korah (exaltation of self).

Their evil course is thus witnessed to us as Scriptural examples of forms of disobedience which can be a snare to others, including ourselves also.

The record of Cain, found in Genesis 4, reveals an attitude which bears out St. John's words: "His works were evil and his brother's righteous. " (1 John 3:12.) The sight of his eyes did but enrage him; he craved the position of acceptance which was Abel's, and instead of determining the reasons for Abel's favor and conforming himself thereto, he opposed his own will to the will of God and thus despised his dominion. This was the first step in his downward "way." Soon, abandoning all self-control, he gave free reign to his evil passions until they led him, under the guidance of "the wicked one," to imbrue his hands with his brother's blood. Afterwards he boldly set at nought the authority of his Maker, and called in question his right to sit in judgment upon his conduct. Such is the *way of Cain*; a brother-murderer.

The record of Balaam is found in the Book of Numbers, Chapters 22, 23, 24, and 31. The story is familiar to all and reveals that attitude of mind which for purposes of gain will endeavor to circumvent the divine will. The Prophet Balaam showed a certain outward and official respect for the commands of God, while in his heart he utterly rejected his dominion. In obedience to the positive divine command, he at first refused to go with the messengers of Balak. Afterwards tempted by the promise of more glittering rewards, he sought to change the divine purpose, notwithstanding the clearest manifestation of the divine displeasure. To cure the "madness of the Prophet" the dumb ass spake (2 Pet. 2:15, 1.6), but to no avail, for we read the astonishing answer to the angel: "If *it displease thee*, I will get me back again." (Num. 22:34.) For the second time he is permitted to go on, and ultimately meets his end by the sword. This is the "error of Balaam," and teaches us that once having been instructed in the Lord's will, we must implicitly remain obedient thereto. If for purposes of gain we should in any way seek permission to do our own wills, we shall but emulate the "madness" of Balaam; for while God will not change his will, neither will he circumvent ours, and we shall find the circumstances to permit us to go our own way, the way of self-delusion; but "the end thereof is the way of death. " - Prov. 14:12.

The gainsaying or rebellion of Korah does likewise have its lessons for us. The account is found in Numbers 16 and reveals the consequence of exaltation of self, namely, destruction. Korah and his followers were truly princes in Israel, and God acknowledged the holiness of their offerings (Num. 16:38); nevertheless, disobedience to the divine arrangement crept in through the "lust of the mind" or self-exaltation. It is possibly this same type of delusion which will ensnare the disobedient at the close of the Millennial reign, for we read in Revelation 20:9 that this class compassed the camp of the saints (the Ancient Worthies - then Princes in the earth) as if in rebellion against their long jurisdiction. It is quite possible that the Adversary, then loosed for a season, will deceive this class by intimating that they are quite capable of continuing on their own without the further necessity of submission to these Judges of the earth. But like Korah and his company, these shall also meet divine judgment, and again the penalty for self-exaltation will be death. For "pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

"MY SOUL, BE ON THY GUARD"

With these examples before us and many others which could be cited, how does it behoove us to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." (Rom. 13:14.) To withstand the darts of the Adversary will require all the fortitude and faith we possess. Seeking to bring about disobedience to God's will through these three lines of approach are the Christian's three great enemies: the world, the Adversary, and the flesh. To offset the world and its love we have God and his love. To offset the Adversary, the "liar from the beginning," "who abode not in the truth," we have the Son, God's Truth, who was manifested that he might destroy the works of the Devil. To offset the flesh or self-will, that greatest of enemies, the one within the fortress, we have the Holy Spirit; and if we "walk in the Spirit, we shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh." (Gal. 5:16.) Brethren, let us take heed to our ways, for "the heart is deceitful above all things" and the way of self-will is easy to enter upon. An intellectual grasp of religious truth is no bar to the exaltation of self, but alas, can sometimes actually stimulate self-glorification. This may not be obvious to us, but will be quite discernible to those about us. For it is true that self can reveal itself in our works, in our service, in our choice of hymns, in our conduct in study meetings, in our testimonies, in our discourses, in our writings, yes, even in our prayers! What a subtle adversary is this, for while "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord," self-will, which begets disobedience, may conquer when all else fails. Let us diligently examine ourselves, prove ourselves, whether our every course of action is motivated by full obedience to God's will; that none of self has crept in any where to mar our fellowship with him, but that in all things we emulate the blessed example of our Master, who delighted in the Father's will and was obedient in all things, even unto the death of the cross. "For the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of the Father abideth forever." Therefore, dearly beloved, "keep yourselves in the love of God" by faithful obedience even unto death.

"Oh, what a struggle wakes within,
When in the spirit's solitude,
The tempting, treacherous thoughts of sin,
In all their luring smiles intrude!

"Tis then, my Father! then I feel
My nature's weakness, and, oppressed,
Like a poor trembling child I steal
To Thee, for safety and for rest.

"Beneath Thy Shadow let me live!
Be Thou my Friend-my Father be!
I bend in dust -- I pray, forgive
The erring child that flies to Thee!"

- *W. J. Siekman.*

The Father of the Faithful.

Genesis 20, 21.

"Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." - Gal. 4:30.

AS WE come again to review some of the incidents in the life of Abraham, we find him "journeying toward the south country," and sojourning in Gerar, "the capital of a race of men who had dispossessed the original inhabitants of the land, and were gradually passing from the condition of wandering shepherd life into that of a settled and warlike nation; afterwards to be known by the Hebrews by the dreaded name, Philistines: a title which, in fact, gave to the whole land its name of Palestine. Their chieftain bore the official title of Abimelech, 'My Father the King.'" There are two distinct points worthy of note in connection with Abraham's experiences in this place. First, the moral degradation to which he subjected himself in the eyes of the world; and secondly, the moral dignity which belonged to him in the sight of God. Abraham feared the men of Gerar. He judged that the fear of God was not in that place, and knowing that Sarah was a beautiful woman, he feared they would kill him (verse 11), seemingly forgetting that God was always with *hint*. He was evidently more occupied with the men of Gerar than with the One who was the great God over all. Forgetting God's power to protect him, he resorted to the same stratagem which he adopted years before in Egypt. By taking his eyes off God he lost his center in Him for the time being, and gave way to worldly methods.

The record tells us that "Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister." In the experiences of God's faithful prophets of old there is a lesson we may well ponder with respect to their strength of character, their uprightness, their moral integrity under certain tests, and their utter weakness and failure under others. Abraham had given evidence of living on a very elevated plane in his experiences with Lot; but now "in his contact with people on the outside, the "sin of unbelief" crept in, and he stooped to the practice of deception. While it is true that Sarah was his sister in a certain sense-she was the daughter of his father, but not of his mother-yet Abraham said this to convey a false impression. Sarah was much more his wife than his sister. He had made a secret agreement with Sarah in their early years that at every place whither they came, she would say, He is my brother. This evidenced a lack of faith which should have been overcome during the years of their witnessing the hand of God in their experiences. We are strong only as we cling to God. So long as Abraham was in the path of God's appointment nothing could harm him. If he had simply trusted God, the men of Gerar would not have interfered. Who can harm those who are the subjects of His "unslumbering guardianship"? Abraham would then have reaped the rewards of faith, and also maintained his own dignity as a man of faith. God graciously passes over our lack of faith in our early days, when faith is yet a germ; but it is unbecoming in maturer years, and especially in the one who was to be the "father of the faithful."

DISHONORING GOD BY OUR CONDUCT

The experience that came to Abraham and Sarah as a result of this deception must have been most distressing to both of them, and a lesson to them as well, for the king sent and took Sarah. Abimelech commends himself to us as a man of noble character. Having been warned of God in a dream, he "rose early in the morning," desiring to undo any wrong and to restore Sarah to her husband. Note also how gentle his "reproof" to Sarah. (Verse 16.) Doubtless among those tribes Abraham was known as a servant of Jehovah, and they would judge the character, of God, whom they could not see, by the ways and conduct of His servant. Alas that Abimelech was able to

rebuke him: "What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done."

How often do the children of God thus dishonor Him by lack of faith, unbelief, and as a consequence lower themselves in the eyes of the world, failing to manifest that living faith that elevates one above the world and above their thoughts! We find Abraham here exposing himself to the rebuke and reproach of the men of the world because of what he had done under the power of unbelief. The king of Gerar knew Abraham had done wrong and reproved him for it. While Abraham was an upright and honorable man by nature, yet nature's uprightness and honor cannot be trusted; they are liable to give at any moment. "It is faith only which can impart a truly elevated moral tone, because it connects the soul in living power with God, the only source of true morality."

But there is another point of much interest and value to us. Abraham stood condemned before the men of the world, but how did he appear before God? Let us note the amazing difference: God appears to Abimelech and tells him that Abraham is a prophet, that He had protected Sarah, and that Abraham would pray for him, and as a result of his prayers. Abimelech would be spared. Surely there is a touching lesson here for us in our weakness. God sees His people only in *Christ*; hence they are "without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing." The world sees not the "robe of righteousness," but God sees nought else. When Balak sought to curse the seed of Abraham, God said, "I have not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither have I seen perverseness in Israel." Thus in Abraham's case -- he lowered himself in the eyes of Abimelech, who rebuked him, but when God dealt with the matter He said to Abimelech, "Behold thou art but a dead man"; but of Abraham He said, "He is t prophet and he shall pray for thee." Yes, with all "the integrity of his heart and the innocency of his hands," Abimelech was but a dead man; and more than that, he was a debtor to the prayers of the erring and inconsistent child of God for the restoration of the health of his household. God may often discipline and chastise His child, but when the enemy brings suit against him, God pleads his cause: "Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm." "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of Mine eye." "It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?" "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." He hides His children in His pavilion, protects and shields them; and in His patience and forgiveness, and in His love, as consuming fire, He cleanses t hem of concealed and hidden sin.

THE PROMISE FULFILLED

Doubtless the Lord was preparing Abraham and Sarah for the blessing He was about to bring to them in the birth of Isaac. "The Lord visited Sarah as lie had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as He had spoken." (22:1.) It is impossible to trust God too implicitly. Not one word of His promises fail. "The counsel of the Lord standeth forever; the thoughts of His heart to all generations." (Psa. 33:11.) But we must be prepared to wait God's time. "At the set time" Isaac was born. Thirty years before, God had promised Abraham a seed-that He would "make of him a great nation." Had Abraham known then that he was to wait thirty years, his heart would have failed. God in His gracious love did not make known to him the time until -those years were nearly spent. "And Sarah bare Abraham a son in his old age." Sarah's laughter of incredulity at the first intimation that she was to have a child, was now exchanged for the laughter of fulfilled hope.

The peace of Abraham's home was for a time apparently unbroken; but the dislike which Sarah had manifested for Hagar some years before had never been wholly extinguished. Nor was it possible for Hagar to forget the hard treatment she had received from Sarah that had driven her forth to fare as best she might in the desert.

We are told that "The child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the day that Isaac was weaned." But amid all the joy of that happy occasion one shadow fell over the scene, for "Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking." Then Sarah's slumbering jealousy was awakened. Ishmael was fourteen years old at the time of Isaac's birth, and it is hardly to be wondered at that he should be severely disappointed that, whereas he had been the undisputed heir, he was now being superseded by this child. And so he "mocked" him, or as stated by the Apostle (Gal. 4:29) he "persecuted" him. Perhaps this was not the first time Sarah had seen this disposition of Ishmael toward her son, and she saw no reason for standing it longer. She said to Abraham, "Cast out the bond woman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac."

We recall St. Paul's explanation of this matter, wherein he says: "Which things are, an allegory: for these are two covenants." (Gal. 4:22-31.) The Jews in the Apostle's day prided themselves on being the descendants of Abraham and considered it impossible that any but themselves could be children of God and heirs of the promise. And when large numbers of the Gentiles accepted Christ under the early preaching of the Gospel, the Jews who like Ishmael were born after the flesh, persecuted those who, like Isaac, were children of the promise, of the spirit. Hagar, the slave, was a fit one to represent the spirit of legalism and bondage -- a seeking to obtain life by the observance of the Law. Hagar, as the Apostle explains, "is Mount Sinai," or the Law Covenant, "which gendereth to bondage," while Sarah, the free woman, represents the Covenant of Grace. Her children are the children of faith, the children of the promise, and are free. There was not room in Abraham's tent for the two women and their children; so legalism, which insists on the performance of the outward rite of circumcision, etc., cannot exist with faith, which accepts the finished work of Christ. The Apostle exhorts the Galatian brethren, "Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free."

Ishmael was of no use whatever, so far as God's promise was concerned. He did afford something for nature's affections to twine around, thus making a more difficult task for Abraham to perform afterwards. Nature can never do anything for God. "The Lord must 'visit,' and the Lord must 'do,' and faith must wait, and nature must be still-yea must be entirely set aside as a dead, worthless thing; and then the divine glory can shine out, and faith find in that outshining all its rich and sweet reward. This wondrous faith! It brings into our present all the power of God's future, and feeds upon God's promise as a present reality. By its power, the soul is kept banging upon God when every outward thing seems to be against it."

REGENERATION, THE INTRODUCTION OF A NEW NATURE

Isaac proved to be in the household of Abraham what the begetting of the spirit is in the believer. It was not *Ishmael changed*, but it was a new child. The son of the bondwoman could never be anything else but that. On the contrary, Isaac's position and character, his standing and prospects, were all from the Lord. Regeneration is not a change of the old nature, but the introduction of a new. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." It is the beginning of a new creature by the operation of the Holy Spirit, founded upon the accomplished redemption of Christ.

Nor does the introduction of this new nature alter the true, *essential character* of the old. There is the full display of its evil character in opposition to- the new element. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other. There they are in all their distinctness, and the one is only thrown into relief by' the other. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." The Apostle goes on to say, "It is not subject to the law of God, *neither*

indeed can be." Again, "Ye have put off the old man." He does not say ye have improved or are seeking to improve the old man, but ye have put it off. There is a very. great difference between seeking to mend an old garment, and casting it aside altogether and putting on a new one.

Passages might easily be multiplied to prove the un soundness of the theory that the new nature is merely a gradual improvement of the old; and to prove that the new life, which we have in union with our risen Lord, can be attained only if the old is kept under our feet in the power of that new life. The birth of Isaac did not improve -Ishmael, but only brought out his real opposition to the child of promise. He might have gone on very quietly and orderly till Isaac made his appearance; but then he showed what he was, by persecuting and mocking at the child of resurrection. What then was the remedy? To make Ishmael better? By no means; but to "Cast out the bondwoman and her son." Here was the only remedy.

"Now the error into which the Galatian churches fell, was the introduction of that which addressed itself to nature. 'Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.' Here salvation was made to depend upon something that man could be, or man could do, or man could keep. This was upsetting the whole glorious fabric of redemption, which, as the believer knows, rests exclusively upon what Christ is, and what He has done. To make salvation dependent, in the most remote manner, upon anything in, or done by, man, is to set it entirely aside. In other words, Ishmael must be entirely cast out, and all Abraham's hopes be made to depend upon what God had done and given in the person of Isaac. This, it is needless to say, leaves man nothing to glory in. If present or future blessedness were made to depend upon even a divine' change wrought in nature, flesh might glory. Though my nature were improved, it would be something of *one*, and thus God would not have all the glory. But when I am introduced into a new creation, I find it is all of God designed, matured, developed by Himself alone. God is the actor, and I am a worshiper; He is the blesser, and I am the blessed; He is 'the better,' and I am 'the less' (Heb. 7:7); He is the giver, and I am the receiver."

SUFFERING-THE PRICE OF SUPREME FAITH

Abraham had many tests during his life. He was first called to leave his own country and kindred, and his father's house. Later his father was taken from him.. His experiences with his nephew, Lot, were most grievous. And now he is called to give up his son, whom he loved, for we read that when Sarah asked him to cast out the bondwoman and her son that "the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight, because of his son." The discipline through which the Patriarch was called to pass was but the trial of faith. Faith is the expression of our inner life; and it cannot be exercised in its highest form so long as there is any hidden sin or iniquity,, no matter how small, in our heart. We must be rid of every clinging inconsistency, for it is this that paralyzes the action: of faith. It is impossible to exercise faith except as our heart is pure, and our walk one of holiness before God.

Many have longed for a faith like that which Abraham had-a faith that staggered 'not through unbelief; a faith to which God could not give a denial; a faith that could open and shut heaven, and to which all things are possible. But there is a price to be paid for such faith. Are we willing to pay the price-the price of suffering? -- the cost of rending from our hearts all that would hinder the operation of this faith; "the cost of seeing one cherished idol after another cast out; the cost of being stripped even to nakedness of all the dear delights in which the flesh may have found pleasure." We hardly realize all that this means, but it is revealed step by step -- measured out according to our strength by Him who knows our frame and remembers that we are dust. We need not dread the pruning-knife, for it is in the hand of One who loves us infinitely, and who is seeking results that will fill our hearts with gratitude and praise.

The final separation from Abraham of all that would hinder from the exercise of a supreme faith was brought about by the birth of the long-promised seed, and led up to the crisis with which we are now dealing. "The thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight." But the Lord said unto Abraham, "Let it not be grievous in thy sight, because of the lad, and because of the bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said. unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called." In obedience to the Lord's command, "Abraham rose early in the morning," and sent Hagar and her child from his home, bidding them a last farewell. He must have suffered keenly in this experience, but one more weight was laid aside, and one more step taken in his preparation for the supreme victory of his faith, which was to follow, for which his entire life had been a preparation.

"Hast thou not seen, in retrospective life,
That will of God which caused thee bitterest strife
Hath turned to sweetness-while the thing He gave
To suit **thy** will grew darker than the grave?

"There's rest supreme for souls that choose His will;
A blest security from every ill.
The things God chooses for us never fail!
They have their anchorage within the veil."

- *Contributed.*

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