Notes on 2 Chronicles

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2 Chronicles

2 Chronicles 1-2:3

We have seen that the first book of Chronicles has for its great object the setting aside of the fleshly choice of man in the kingdom for the man of God's choice — David. Nevertheless there was a purpose of God brought out by David's request to build the house of Jehovah. God meant it for another very near to David, but who was not David — not for him who had served Him so faithfully in suffering, but for the son about to reign in glory. The second book of Chronicles accordingly shows us the son come to the throne, and the temple accordingly built. But although there was this difference between David and his son — the combined types of our Lord Jesus Christ in His sufferings and His glory — nevertheless, we should greatly err if we supposed that David had not before God a better portion than his son. Faith is better than its own results, and if we could have heaven without the pathway of faith upon earth, we should never be so blest as we hope to be. It is here that we know God as none in heaven ever can know Him. When we go to heaven, we shall not lose this, but have it in its perfection. Thus God gives us the best place everywhere — the best place on earth, the best place in heaven — and this not because we deserve anything, but because Christ does.

But it is Christ suffering first, and this has the priority. First must He suffer, and then must He be raised from the dead. His glory is the consequence of His sufferings. I do not speak, of course, of His personal external glory. That is another thing. I speak of the glory that He takes

as man, for this is what brings us in, although it could not have been, had He not been God. But still, what belongs to God in itself, is incapable of being a matter of gift to man. It is impossible for anyone to become God. Jesus was God. He was God as the Word before He was the Man Christ Jesus — God from eternity to eternity. But here we are speaking of the type of the Lord as man and as king — in this, too, son — the son of the true beloved. But then it was David (which means “beloved”), not Solomon. Solomon was the man of peace that flowed from the special object of Jehovah’s love. Hence, therefore, as David enjoyed the love of God and His complacency in a way that Solomon did not, in a deeper and fuller way, in his sorrows and sufferings upon the earth in the path of faith, so also did David own God and cleave to God in a deeper way than Solomon ever did. This was remarkably shown by what we see in the earlier verses of this second book of Chronicles.

The ark characterizes David; the brazen altar, Solomon. The difference is manifest. The ark was what no human eye saw, but it was nearest to God. The brazen altar was a great sight. It was there that the thousand bullocks were sacrificed. It was there that the people could witness a great and holy sight. But still, the one was before the people; the other was before God. This makes a mighty difference; and you will find just the same difference now between two Christians, one of whom is spiritual and the other unspiritual. It is not that they do not both love the Lord Jesus, for he is no Christian who loves Him not. “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha.” But although there be no difference, at bottom, in the fact of love, still there is a very great difference in the measure of it; and

the grand difference shows itself in this — that the unspiritual man loves the Lord because of what He is to him; the spiritual man appreciates what He is to God. This is no loss to himself, but very great gain, because what we are before God is very much more than what we are before men.

Hence, therefore, the ark was very dear to David — much dearer than his throne. Solomon, I have no doubt, greatly valued his throne; but he valued also the altar of God. I say not that he did not value the ark, but after all it is “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”; and when we find men occupied with any one thing more than another, we may be sure that that object has the heart, because we are always characterized by what we seek. And hence the importance of our words. So the Lord teaches in Matthew 12. Our words, if we are honest, are the expression of the mind. I do not speak of dishonest people; but when people are sincere — and it is hoped that Christians, at any rate, seek with all their hearts thus to be — the mouth discloses the state of the heart; and therefore when we speak of ourselves, it is evident what is before us. When we are filled with the Lord Jesus, the mouth will not fail in its testimony; but it is the appreciation of Christ in His nearness to God rather than in His immediate bearing upon ourselves that marks the difference between spirituality and the want of it.

“And so Solomon went up thither to the brazen altar before Jehovah which was at the tabernacle of the congregation” (2 Chr. 1:6) just as the ark was brought up to the place which David had prepared for it — “and he offered a thousand burnt offerings upon it.” There all

the congregation met God. It was the place of approach to God — not the place where God revealed Himself, but the place where man approached as near as he could to God. Nevertheless, God owns this, for it was good, though it was not the best — not the more excellent way.

“In that night did God appear unto Solomon, and said unto him, Ask what I shall give thee. And Solomon said unto God, Thou hast showed great mercy unto David my father.” Just as Moses and Joshua make up a compound type of Christ in the beginning of the history, so David and Solomon, now when the kingdom is set up. He therefore lays all the stress upon David.

“And hast made me to reign in his stead. Now, O Jehovah God, let thy promise unto David my father be established for Thou hast made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude. Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this Thy people, that is so great?” This was excellent. He did value the people; and he valued the people not because they were his people, but because they were God’s people. It makes all the difference new.

Suppose in our relationship to the Church of God we regard any people as our people, we shall always be jealous about them — always be afraid of their listening to anybody but ourselves — always be anxious to mould and fashion their opinions according to our own, perhaps very narrow, minds. At any rate, no man — I care not how great — no man contains all the gifts; and this is not the order of God for His Church. The principle of God is directly the contrary. All things are ours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas; and therefore

anything that hinders the action of all the gifts that God gives for God's people is false in principle; and God's people ought to hold themselves not only free, but bound to seek profit from all that God gives for their good, because they are God's people. They do not belong to any man. It matters not how owned and honoured of God he might be, still the more honoured the more he would feel they are God's people.

And this is the very point that Peter so earnestly presses. It is rather badly given in our version. I will just draw attention to it for a moment. In the last chapter of his first epistle, Peter says to the elders, "Feed the flock of God." That is the point that keeps us right. They are God's flock, and we must take care what we do with God's flock. We must take care that we have a right mind and a right object as to God's flock. "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre but of a ready mind; neither as being lords" — not "over God's heritage." You observe the word "God's" is put in by the translators. It does not mean God's heritage at all. The flock is God's flock, but the point in the third verse is not at all that question, but what they were not to do. They were to feed the flock of God. That is the positive side. But here we have the negative side. "Neither as lording it over their own heritage" would be really the idea; that is, not treating it as a thing belonging to them — "neither as being lords over their own belongings" — if I may paraphrase the verse — "but as being ensamples to the flock." That is, they were not to treat them as their own. This gives the force of the exhortation to the elders. They were to feed them as God's flock; they were

not to lord over them as their own belongings — their own heritage.

Now, Solomon entered into this in his measure. He did not regard the people as his people, his to govern, his to serve God in, but God's people entrusted to him. This gives seriousness; and, further. it exercises conscience. So he asked for wisdom, for surely be needed it. Had it been his own people, he might have had wisdom enough; but, being God's people, he required wisdom from God; and therefore this is what he asked — not wealth or length of years. So God, accepting this request of Solomon's heart, says, "Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge My people, over whom I have made thee king."

How wonderful the grace of God! "My people." He was not ashamed of it. We shall see how poor and failing they were, but they were God's people. Then it was a question of an earthly people — now of a heavenly — and our responsibility is as much greater than Israel's as the heavens are above the earth. I mean that, as to our place now, we are put on a different rule — under a different regime altogether! — "wisdom and knowledge are granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like."

And hence, therefore, we find that the Apostle feels the need of a new kind of wisdom; and God grants it and gives it, not merely to him; but we all need it, each in his

place and for his mission. And where is that wisdom, and what? “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” Hence, therefore, we have got a wholly different kind of wisdom. Solomon’s wisdom was exercised from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grew on the wall. It was of the earth; it had to do with the human heart as well as all objects that were here below. And so we find it most divinely exercised in the book of Proverbs, which is a matchless collection of divine wisdom in earthly things. But it is another kind of wisdom that we find, now that Christ has been revealed and has taken His place in heaven, because the question is not what suits the earth, but what suits heaven — what suits the Lord Jesus glorified at the right hand of God. The Church is the body of Christ at the right hand of God.

“Then Solomon came from his journey to the high place that was at Gibeon to Jerusalem from before the tabernacle of the congregation, and reigned over Israel. And Solomon gathered chariots and horsemen: and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, which he placed in the chariot cities, and with the king at Jerusalem. And the king made silver and gold at Jerusalem as plenteous as stones, and cedar trees made he as the sycamore trees that are in the vale for abundance.” There was the grandest witness of magnificence that ever was found in any city upon earth. Not even Augustus’s finding Rome brick and making it marble, was to be compared with Solomon. “And Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt, and linen yarn: the king’s merchants received the linen yarn at a price. And they fetched up and brought forth out of Egypt a chariot for six hundred shekels of silver, and an horse for an hundred and fifty: and so

brought they out horses for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Syria, by their means."

That is, we find everything here related, but not so as to manifest his faults. We knew very well that these horses, and, above all, the multiplying of his wives, became a great snare to Solomon; but the object of Chronicles is not to mention the king's responsibility and the ways in which he broke down, so much as to bear witness to his being the witness of God's purpose. In Kings, as I have already shown, we have the question of responsibility, in Chronicles, of divine counsel. That is the difference between the two books. They are not a mere repetition of each other. There is a sensible difference in the way in which even the same events are recorded; but this was not the will of man, but really the power of God, and God's wisdom. And as David was hindered from the thought of his heart in building a temple, which was reserved for Solomon, so the Spirit of God soon lets us know that the grand point for which Solomon indeed reigns was the building of Jehovah's house. "And Solomon determined to build an house for the name of Jehovah, and an house for his kingdom. And Solomon told out threescore and ten thousand men to bear burdens, and fourscore thousand to hew in the mountain, and three thousand and six hundred to oversee them. And Solomon sent to Huram the king of Tyre, saying, As thou didst deal with David my father, and didst send him cedars to build him an house to dwell therein, even so deal with me." 2 Chronicles 2:1-3.

So it will be in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus by-and-by. He, the head of Israel, will make use of the Gentiles; and the Gentiles, represented here by the king of Tyre, will bring of all their means, their wealth, their glory, in

allegiance to the King of kings and Lord of lords. But it would be a great mistake to confound the character of that day with the principle of this. I know there are many dear children of God who think that it is for the glory of God to have architecture of a grand and imposing description, and music of the finest character to please the ear, and all things accordingly; but this is really the Jewish method of honouring God, and not the Christian one. On the contrary, that which is proper to us is prayer and singing in the Spirit and in the understanding; and whatever is not characterized by the Holy Ghost, and is not taken up directly by the Spirit to witness for the Lord Jesus Christ — whatever is not of faith now — is a total failure.

Hence, mere imagery to represent truth, although an admirable thing in Jewish days, is altogether out of season in the present. It is going back to the nursery after we have attained our majority. It is playing at children again in divine things, which was exactly what the children of Israel were. They were in their minority, and they had the picture books that were suitable for the nursery. It was God's nursery then, but it is a great mistake to go back to the nursery now; and this is exactly the mistake of ritualism in every form and in every measure. It is the greatest blunder to suppose that, because a thing is in the Bible, therefore it is always of the same authority. If that were the case, we ought to offer our he-goats and our bullocks much more; for there was, after all, a much more important witness to the sacrifice of Christ in these than in any other portion of the Jewish economy, as, indeed, they were before it. They were not merely the temporary institution of Israel; they were practiced by the faithful

ever since sin came into the world. There would be very much more plausible ground, therefore, for an argument in favour of material sacrifices than for the mere splendour of the temple, or even the more modified show of the tabernacle. But the truth is, for us the true holy place is in the heavens; and it is, therefore, through the rent veil that we draw nigh, if we draw nigh to God at all; and any thought of an earthly holy place or sanctuary is a retrogression from Christianity to Judaism. I mention this because it is of all practical importance; and no Christian ought, therefore, to shrink from fairly looking at these things in the face. Is it not true? Is it not the very object of the Holy Ghost to bring even the Jews out of this? — not to lead the Gentiles back into it. Ritualism is the reversal of the instruction of the epistle to the Hebrews. It is apostasy in fact — apostasy from the truth of God that is revealed there — and therefore I hold that ritualism is not a mere harmless power Nor do I at all agree with those that say, Well, I can worship God as well in a cathedral as in a hut. I answer that I cannot worship Him at all where show suited to the world is the object, and that wherever I can be in unison with the crucified and rejected Saviour is the true place for a man of faith.

2 Chronicles 2:4-3

Now, Solomon represents a wholly different state of things; and persons may ask, Then is there no type here? To be sure there is, but it is not the type of Christianity. It is the type of the millennial kingdom; it is the type of what God is going to do. And if persons were to say to me, Do you mean to say that there will never be anything grand for this world? is all the world to be only

for the devil — only for unbelief and flesh? I say, No, I maintain what God means; and there I differ entirely from my good friends the dissenters in this particular — that they do not look for this future dealing of God for the earth. They regard the present as being the closing term of God with the world. Now I believe the contrary. I believe that the present time is God's calling a people for heaven — calling a people on heavenly principles for Christ, founded on the cross, who are waiting for the glory. These are the two terms of Christian existence. Our starting point is the cross, and our terminus is the glory of the Lord Jesus. We are bound by, and we are now between, those two points. We are strangers and pilgrims. The cross has separated us from the world, and we are waiting for the Lord to bring us into His own heavenly abode — the mansions in the Father's house.

But when the Lord comes and takes the Church, has He done with everything? Is that all? Does not God mean to bless the world? Does not He mean to bless Israel? Does He not mean to bless the nations? I am sure of it. It is not to me a question at all. Persons may say, Well, we must not be too bold; we must not be too confident of what we do not know But I think we ought to be confident of what we know, and I do not expect persons to be confident of what they do not knew. On the contrary, I advise them not to be. Yet I suppose that every Christian is confident about something. Is he not confident of his own sins, to begin with? Is he not confident of the Saviour? Very well, then he cannot speak too boldly of both, for I do not sympathize with those that are very sure of salvation and do not feel their sinfulness. I think it is a dangerous kind of confidence.

If I am true before God in the feeling of my sins, I am privileged to be equally sure of the blessedness of my salvation, because He is a Saviour for the lost; and I cannot exaggerate either. But if you admit that principle as to so all-important a thing as the sins that expose you to hell, and the salvation that will bring you to heaven — if we are confident about that, we might well be confident about anything. There is nothing so hard as that — nothing. There is nothing that required such an immense conquering of difficulties as the delivering us from hell and the bringing us to heaven; and Jesus has undertaken both, and will as surely as He has accomplished the one, so the other.

But there must be an immense gap in the thoughts of any Christian — I care not who he is, or what — if he thinks that the Lord is merely going to bring people out of the world to heaven. Has He made the world for nothing? Was the world made merely to be the football of Satan? Is it merely the sport of the enemy of God? No, He means to wrest this world from the enemy's grasp, and He means to make this world a happy world; for the poor political quacks of the world have proved their total futility, and their inability to remedy the present state of disorder. He is the true physician in every sense, and the great wonder-worker; and He will heal the world of all its plagues and evils that are now showing themselves as we know, to be incurable distempers, but not so to Him. The mischief is not that man cannot heal them, but that man pretends to heal them; for I quite admit that it is no disrespect to any man to say that he cannot heal this poor sin-stricken world. No doubt about it, but the pretension to do it is bad, and that is just where man shows his folly — pretending to do what only God can,

and what God does through the suffering of His own Messiah.

Here is the joy to me — that this glorious state of the world by-and-by is not to be apart from the cross any more than Solomon is from David. Solomon reigns in David's stead, and the reign of Solomon is the necessary complement of the sufferings of David. The two are bound up together in the most remarkable manner, and give us this complete type which I have been endeavouring to show. But then it is the type not of a people taken up to heaven after suffering upon earth, but the type of the power and glory of God that will shine from the heavens upon the earth. And therefore you see the true answer to people who reason. And it has always been a great question among theologians whether the future state of blessedness is to be on the earth which is to be metamorphosed or sublimated into a heavenly state, or whether the people of God in their risen condition are to be in heaven.

Now, I say both are true — not exactly that the earth will ever become heaven, but that all the saints that have suffered from the beginning of the world till the Lord returns, from Abel downward, will be a heavenly people. And therefore it is quite a mistake to suppose that because now the Church is heavenly in its calling, therefore the saints that are departed will not be heavenly too. It was true, the heavenly calling was not revealed to them; and they were not blest, as we are, with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ. But they are the saints of the high places; they are the saints of the heavenlies too. They shall judge the world; they shall judge angels, just as truly as we. They will be caught up to meet the Lord, and we shall be with

them, and they with us, in the presence of God. I do not mean to say that there will be no distinctions. That, again, is another mistake; but I maintain that this is the truth of Scripture most plainly.

But then God means to convert Israel, and this is the reason for which Israel is now kept — kept in spite of their unbelief, kept in spite of their hostility. They are the great fomenters of all infidelity. There is hardly a wicked thought of modern infidels, no matter who they may be, but what is but the evolution of the old infidelity of Spinoza and other infamous Jews of past days. The Jews have always been the keenest and the subtlest weavers of the web of infidelity. Well now, in spite of all that, God watches over them. They are in the house — the city of refuge.1 They are not permitted to be destroyed, although they deserve it. The avenger of blood must have destroyed them otherwise. They are kept there till “the death of the high priest which is anointed with… oil.” When the Lord leaves His present place of priest in heaven — when He terminates that character of priesthood which He now occupies — then the blood-stained one will return to the land of his possession. That is the future that is for Israel by-and-by. There will no doubt be a sifting out of the guilty. There will be not only the manslayer that is innocent of murder by the grace of God, but there will be the murderer that will be put to death, because there will be a judgment. He will stand before the congregation for judgment. The Lord will destroy some of those murderers — kill them before His face, as it is said in the Gospel. They are to be slain before Him. But others grace will count, because they are converted, and because they confess their sin. Grace will justify them. This is the double type

of the one guilty, and the other not, who might be in the city of refuge.

I refer to this here because it is so intimately connected with the subject of this book — the type of the kingdom, the grand kingdom that the Son of David will bring in in that day for the earth. And there is the grand mistake of Popery, for instance, in using all these scriptures for the Church now. These scriptures suppose power — suppose the exercise of earthly righteousness, as I shall show presently. That is not the character of the Church. The character of the Church is to be persecuted, not to exercise power. The character of the Church is to have heavenly and not earthly glory; so Popery has been guilty of the greatest possible departure from it. But not Popery only. It is a natural snare to the heart, because natural people like to be comfortable in this world; people like to be something. No wonder. It is exactly what the heart would covet, and this is what requires a great deal of faith to judge and to refuse.

Well then, Solomon is seen here not only at the head of Israel, but also controlling the Gentiles and making use of them as the servants of these great purposes; and so he demands timber in abundance. “Even to prepare me timber in abundance: for the house which I am about to build [shall be] wonderful great. And, behold, I will give to thy servants, the hewers that cut timber, twenty thousand measures of beaten wheat, and twenty thousand measures of barley, and twenty thousand baths of wine, and twenty thousand baths of oil.”

Then in the 3rd chapter. “Solomon began to build the house of Jehovah at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where [Jehovah] appeared unto David his father in the place

that David had prepared in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite." v. 1.

There again you observe the link. The glory is built upon the suffering. It was there that the sacrifice was offered; it was there that the destroying angel's hand was stayed. It was on mount Moriah. It was there, too, on the threshing-Door of the Gentile, because there must be that link. You see, it was by the hands of lawless men that the Jews crucified their own Messiah. And, accordingly, it was on the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, the enemy that had been in possession of Jerusalem. We find the wonderful wisdom of God which marks this type. So the house, then, is prepared with all magnificence; but into all its details I do not pretend to go.

It is always a great thing, in looking at Scripture, never to go beyond what you knew. That gives you firmness, because a person who pretends to know more than he does, must, after all, if he is an honest man, admit it to some extent. He can hardly pretend to honesty if he disguises it. But it is a great thing not to go beyond our measure, because then we can speak distinctly; whereas, otherwise, at the very best we must be somewhat ambiguous, or — what is a very great fault in dealing with the Word of God — rash. Oh, it is a serious thing to impute to God what God does not say, and to run the risk of making the God of truth appear a liar. And so it must be, where men guess instead of waiting to learn; but then we must always wait to learn, and I believe that where we have the faith to wait God will give us to learn.

I abstain, therefore, purposely in this case from saying some things that I have a judgment about, but that are not necessary. There is only one point of deep interest that I will speak of, and that is the distinction between the cherubim here and the cherubim of the ark in the tabernacle. When the ark was brought into the temple here, the wings of the cherubim looked out toward the house; that is, instead of locking “inward” — which is a mistake in our version — they really looked outward. In the tabernacle, on the contrary, the cherubs looked upon the blood that was upon the mercy seat. All their attention was occupied with that. The cherubim were the emblems of God’s judicial authority. Now this is just exactly the difference. Righteousness now is so perfectly satisfied that it has no other task than to proclaim the greatness of the victory that Christ has won for us — no other work, as far as we are concerned, but to clothe us with the best robe. How precious for us! The righteousness of God is that which preserves, for no sword is in the hand there. In the garden of Eden the cherubs had a flaming sword. It was to guard and keep off man. But in the tabernacle the cherubs are simply the witnesses of what grace has done. They have nothing to do. They are guarding, not guarding man from it, but maintaining guard, as it were, even over the perfection of what grace has done for sinful man. But in the temple it is another thing. There the cherubs, or witnesses of the judicial power of God, look outward. It is now a question of righteous governing.

That is not the case now in the gospel. Righteousness does not govern. In the Millennium, righteousness will reign through grace. That is a totally different state of things. I do not mean as to the work of Christ, because

that is the same work no matter when or where. The work of Christ is always grace reigning through righteousness. But I am speaking now of the character of the millennial reign; and I say that the great distinctive feature then will be not grace reigning, but righteousness. “A king shall reign in righteousness,” and “princes are to rule in judgment.” That is the point of it; and hence, therefore, as we see in this very case of Solomon, so he acted. It was on that principle that he slew Joab — on that principle also that he dealt with Shimei who had been spared during the time of David, the man of grace, the witness of grace. But under Solomon it could not be. It was perfectly right that they should die. It was not a mistake; it was a right thing; it was according to the principle that was then established; just as when the Lord Jesus was here upon earth, He said, “I am not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save.” But when He comes in glory, He will destroy; and it will be as right then to destroy, as now it is His glory to save.

Hence, then, we must distinguish. If we do not do so, the Word of God will be a mass of confusion to us, or we shall make fearful confusion with it, which is exactly what people do. That is, they do not rightly divide the word of truth. Now, if we only understand the Scriptures, everything will be in its place — everything in its due season and order. That is what I am endeavouring to help Christians to by the suggestions that I am making upon these books; that is, to help them to apply rightly the precious Word of God, whether it be typical or anything else.

I say, then, that the cherubs look outward; they look to the house, and that is the great point. It is the old house,

because it was the sign of the judicial power of God that was going everywhere throughout the earth with its centre in Jerusalem. But God's power was now dealing from that centre outside; and, although there was an inner circle of Israel, the circumference of blessing was the earth itself — I might say the universe, only we are here looking simply at the earth.

And further, let us note that there were two pillars, the sign of divine stability. This kingdom, when it shall be in the hands of the Lord Jesus, will not be a mere type, but a reality. It will never dissolve through the weakness of man. It shall not be left to others. Hence, therefore, as the witness of it, there were two pillars — Jachin and Boaz. These show as a figure, but only as a witness. "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established."

2 Chronicles 4-6

So in the next chapter (4) we find all the appurtenances — the altar and the sea of brass, and the pots and shovels and basins — for everything has its place. And, further, all the golden vessels were made by Solomon. Huram, a Gentile, might be entrusted with the outside vessels; but "Solomon made all the vessels that were for the house of God" (v. 19). They were under his own superintendence directly as it became him.

"Thus," it is said in chapter 5, "all the work that Solomon made for the house of Jehovah was finished: and Solomon brought in [all] the things that David his father had dedicated; and the silver, and the gold, and all the instruments, put he among the treasures of the house of God." v. 1.

And then comes the assembling of the elders of Israel and the bringing up of the ark, for that remains unchanged — “Jesus Christ [is] the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever” — the grand central witness of the Lord Jesus. The ark of the tabernacle is the ark of the temple. The cherubs may differ, but not the ark itself. “And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of Jehovah unto his place, to the oracle of the house, into the most holy [place, even] under the wings of the cherubim: for the cherubim spread forth [their] wings over the place of the ark and the cherubim covered the ark and the staves thereof above. And they drew out the staves [of the ark], that the ends of the staves were seen from the ark before the oracle: but they were not seen without. And there it is unto this day. [There was] nothing in the ark save the two tables which Moses put [therein] at Horeb, when Jehovah made [a covenant] with the children of Israel, when they came out of Egypt.” vv. 7-10.

This is very striking. Aaron’s rod was not there now; neither do we find the pot of manna, but only the tables of stone. Why this difference? Why do we find the former in the tabernacle, and not in the temple? The reason is the change from the present dealings of God in grace, and the future dealings of God in judgment. The authority of God must govern now as always. The man that shrinks from the authority of God’s Word is not born of God, for what are we born for but to obey? And if to obey, to obey whom but God? We may have our duty with our parents, with our sovereign, and the like, with all lawful authority; but whomsoever we obey, the great One that we have to obey is God Himself. And this gives us a limit, therefore, and shows us where we are not to

obey. It is never right to disobey, save where we are to obey God rather than men — for there may be such a collision — and we must then take the consequence. The great point of the Christian is in everything to find the point of obedience. That is his place, and what is to govern. Hence, therefore, always, whether it is the heavenly people or the earthly with tables of stone, there must be the expression of God's authority over His people. They are found now, and they will be found in the kingdom; and the kingdom of God will be indeed a most grand expression of the authority of God over the earth, because the nation and kingdom that will not serve — that goes not up to Jerusalem, to the people and city of His choice — will be visited by His judgments. God will maintain righteousness all over the world. There will be only one Sovereign then; and although there may be different kings, they will be all the servants of God or they will be destroyed at once if they are not.

But it is a different state of things now. We have now to do with the authority of God. We must always have that in whatever shape it comes; and we have now the authority of God expressed in God's Word. But, further, there was the pot of manna, and there was the rod — the witness of the rejected Christ glorified; for that is the meaning of the hidden manna — Christ that came down in humiliation, that is now gone up glorified on high. That is what we know. You will understand why it could not be then. At that time He would have left the heavenly glory and taken the earth; and, therefore, there would be no sense in it then. This, then, is of importance. As the One who came down is the manna from heaven and went back to heaven, so the pot of

manna is in the ark in the most holy place, in the sanctuary of God. Second, while Christ is there on high, He is acting as the priest. And the rod of Aaron that budded was the witness of the unfailing priesthood of Christ which alone can bear fruit. The other rods were powerless and lifeless. The human priest is good for nothing; but this divine priest — this Son of God that became man, and entered upon His priesthood on high — is good for everything; and so, accordingly, the stick or rod that was dead bore fruit at once. All fruitfulness then is inseparable from the priesthood of Christ, and there is nothing which destroys fruit to God more than the substitution of an earthly dead priest for the true living one in the presence of God.

Well, you observe, that is not the point now, because the Lord will then be taking His place as King. That will be a permanent one; and although I do not deny that He will be priest — for He is to sit as a priest upon His throne when He takes His place by-and-by — still He will be no longer a hidden one. It is no longer a rod hidden in the most holy place out of the sight of man. He will be then displayed. Every eye will see Him. We must leave room, therefore, for the different dispensations of God.

Then we find the glory of the house. The glory of Jehovah filled it, just as He filled it at the time when the priests were consecrated; for there is a remarkable analogy between these two events. When the high priest was consecrated, and the priests, then the glory of Jehovah filled the tabernacle; and new, when the king consecrates the house, the Jehovah-glory comes down again. I am referring, of course, to the 9th of Leviticus, and comparing it with this. How has that been accomplished? Why, it is true now, and the glory of the

Lord fills the Church in connection with the priesthood of Christ as truly as it will fill the house of God by-and-by — the great centre of Israel's worship under the King. In short, the glory of God is given in answer to priesthood as well as the kingdom or kingship.

What is the meaning of Pentecost? There we find God's coming down to dwell in connection with priesthood, just as, by-and-by, God will dwell in connection with the kingdom. The one is visible, it is true; the other is not so. There was a visible sign of Jehovah's presence in the Holy Ghost being given to us, but of nothing more. But during the kingdom there will be a visible glory on mount Zion, and the world will know it. The most distant nations will hear of it. There will be a testimony everywhere of the glory of Jehovah in connection with the people that He blesses.

So, in the 6th chapter we have Solomon's grand outpouring of his heart to the Lord, in which he spreads before Jehovah this new state of things that he so well understood. "The king turned his face and blessed the whole congregation of Israel" — for it is not the priest now; it is the king. A remarkable change. In the previous days it was the priest. We too have the priest in these days; we have Christ. He is never called our King. It is a great mistake to speak of the Lord as our King. He is the King, but He is the King of Israel; He is the King of the nations. He is never called the King of the Church. King is not the relationship of the Lord to the Church or to the saint. The one verse in Revelation 16 that seems to give it, I have already explained. It means "king of nations," not of "saints"; and a very important error it is to be expunged. There is no doubt of it. There is not a scholar who knows anything at all about these matters

who would not agree with me. But anyone — whether he is Roman Catholic, or Tractarian, or anything else — would agree with me in this; and he would not require to be told it because every scholar knows it. The notion of "king of saints" is very unscriptural; and it is a very important mistake because the proper notion of the relation of a king to his people is one of distance and of graduated ranks in the kingdom. The word "king" implies graduated ranks, all having their place and their measure of nearness or of distance; and, consequently, there are all kinds of relative distances among themselves.

That is not the case in the Church of God, because the least Christian is as much a member of Christ's body as the greatest. You see the fact of the membership of the body puts aside all these questions of relative or different distances. In the kingdom there will be these differences. And this is the reason why so many people misunderstand the Church of God. Take Scotland. That is a very Bible-reading people, and yet there is not a people in Europe that goes more wrong about "the King of the Church." It was the great cry at the time that the Free Church came into existence. They thought that the matter which was in dispute at the time between them interfered with Christ's rights as King of the Church. That was the grand thing, and, as loyal men, they naturally stood up for the King. That was the idea. I do not say this because I do not sympathize with their fidelity. It is not that. I have the greatest sympathy with their fidelity; but they do not understand the vitality of our relationship to Christ. Our relationship is not that of a people to a king, but of members of a body to the Head of the body. Christ and the Church make one body, and

that makes all the difference to the Christian, because it shows that we are brought into a new place altogether, and that this place is one not of relative, but of absolute nearness. That is the reason why Peter, where he is not speaking about the body at all, says that “Christ suffered, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God.” That is what puts aside earthly priesthood, because if I have an earthly priest between me and God I am not absolutely near; and if I am absolutely near, I have no earthly priest. And so the assertion of an earthly priesthood is absolutely contradicted by the assertion of the plain simple truth of the gospel. It is not that the Lord Jesus Christ is not entitled to command us, because the head governs the body. There is not a member of my body but what is governed by my head, much more than people are governed by a king or queen, because, I am sorry to say, they do not obey very heartily; and they are rather refractory at the present day. But that is not the case with the members of the body; they must obey. And so it is with Christ and the Church. The obedience is one of the most intimate kind. The Spirit of God is given to maintain that union between the Head and the body.

However, I do not mean to illustrate it more. It is enough at the present time to refer lo it. It is a very important practical matter, for you will find that if you give up as your grand thought in your relationship that you are a member of Christ’s body, and sink into the place of a people governed by the king, you will get into distance; you will get into earthly thoughts of it. You will. practically, become a Jew instead of a Christian, because that is the relationship of the Jew. But the relationship of a Christian is a totally different one; and the substitution of the Jewish relationship for the Christian one,

unconsciously Judaizes the Church instead of preserving us in our own proper relationship to God. And I suppose that all here are aware that the accomplishment of our duty always depends upon our relationship — always depends upon the sense and attention that we give to our relationship. For instance, a wife has a totally different relationship from a daughter or from a mother; and each person does his own duty only as he is true to his own relationship. There is the great moment of it, and I do most earnestly entreat every Christian to search and see in the Word of God whether these things be not so.

Well, then, Solomon blesses the whole of the congregation of Israel, and all of them stood. “And he said, Blessed [be] Jehovah God of Israel, who hath with His hands fulfilled [that] which He spake with His mouth to my father David, saying, Since the day that I brought forth My people out of the land of Egypt I chose no city among all the tribes of Israel to build a house in, that My name might be there; neither chose I any man to be a ruler over My people Israel: but I have chosen Jerusalem, that My name might be there; and have chosen David to be over My people Israel.” 2 Chronicles 6:4-6.

He recounts how God had chosen from the beginning, and how as He chose Jerusalem, and not any other city, to be the metropolis; so also He chose David’s house and no other family, and of David’s family He chose Solomon himself. Everything depends upon the election of God; there is nothing good that is not founded upon God’s election — nothing. The whole blessedness and strength of the believer depends upon it; and that is what delivers a person from self. I do not mean by that, that one ought

to put election before an unconverted soul. Far from it. That would be, indeed, to add to his misery, if he feels his misery. But the moment-a soul receives Christ, then I can tell him that he is the chosen of God; and an immense strength and encouragement it is to his heart that he knows that it is not his own will, else it would be weak; and it is not his own choice, else he might flatter himself that it was good, but that it was God's grace and God's election that accounts for his being brought who never deserved it.

Solomon, therefore, struck the right note when he touched this great point of election. And, on the other hand, he shows how God, having taken this house to dwell in, could be always prayed to — always looked to in every trouble. No matter what might be the sin or the affliction — whether it was personal or national — God was there to be prayed to. And so we find Israel did. Even if they were out of the land, they looked to it as a witness of this great truth. But just think of the folly of Christians taking up such things. Just think of the folly of a Christian turning to the east because a Jew did it, or doing anything else of the sort, just as if the God who is revealed to us is in the east more than any other spot of the earth. Never was there such insensate folly as that which has been prevalent in Christendom. No, we belong to heaven, and we look there if we look anywhere; but that, alas! is just where people do not look.

2 Chronicles 7-12

But in the next chapter (7), after he makes an end of praying, the fire comes down. For we read: "Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came

down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of Jehovah filled the house. And the priests could not enter into the house of Jehovah, because the glory of Jehovah had filled Jehovah's house." And so there is nothing but worship according to their measure. "And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of Jehovah upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised Jehovah, [saying], For [He is] good; for His mercy [endureth] for ever. Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before Jehovah. And king Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty and two thousand oxen" — the nation was so very great that a thousand would not do now — "and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep: so the king and all the people dedicated the house of God."

And this was most admirable in its season. The admirable thing then for an earthly people was to pour out all the wealth of the earth at the feet of God. The admirable thing now for a heavenly people is to count whatever we have as nothing for the sake of Christ. That is, it is suffering now. As the Apostle Paul said, "What things were gain to me [as a Jew], I counted loss for Christ." He counted them dung; and not only did he so begin, but, as he adds, "and I do count them." He counted them so when he began, and he counted them so still. There is many a man that counts them so at first; but he begins to like them afterward. But it was not so with Paul — "I counted," and "I do count." It is a great thing to make a good start and to continue accordingly. So did Paul, but so has not done the Church of God. The Church of God began well, but where are we now?

So “Solomon finished the house of Jehovah, and the king’s house: and all that came into Solomon’s heart to make in the house of Jehovah, and in his own house, he prosperously affected.” And then Jehovah appears to him again and confirms what he has done. “I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to Myself for a house of sacrifice.’’ And so He not only says this, but “now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that My name may be there for ever: and Mine eyes and Mine heart shall be there perpetually.” Now I take that as it plainly means. You will tell me, Well, the Gentiles are there now; some of the most wicked of the Gentiles are there now. But faith can wait. It need not be in a hurry. “He that believeth shall not make haste,” and, therefore, as sure as God has spoken it, Jerusalem will be recovered — not by foolish crusaders, not by the power of man, but by the power of God. He means to have the glory to Himself. The whole idea of the crusades was a fundamental mistake from beginning to end, and arose from Christians fancying that they were Jews, taking the place of God’s people and, consequently, denying Israel’s place. The greatest enemies the Jews had were those same crusaders who fought against the Turks. The place of the true Christian is the very contrary. We ought to be the shelter of the Jew; we ought to be a sort of city of refuge to the Jew, till the day comes for the Jew to enter upon his heritage. We ought always to plead the rights of Israel as we know the wrongs of Israel. We ought to mourn deeply the unbelief of Israel; but, at the same time, we ought to protect them and show them all kindness for the fathers’ sake.” The Church of God can afford to do so. If we were an earthly people, we might be a little jealous of those who are going to be put in the highest earthly places; but the heavenly people have no

need for it. And that is what delivers Christians from foolish vanity in competing with the Gentile, and from jealousy as we think about the Jew.

So, the next chapter shows us Solomon after he had built all. Here we have the grand object of Solomon's coming to the throne. It was this great type of the kingdom. "And it came to pass at the end of twenty years, wherein Solomon had built the house of Jehovah, and his own house, that the cities which Huram had restored to Solomon, Solomon built them, and caused the children of Israel to dwell there. And Solomon went to Hamath-zobah, and prevailed against it. And he built Tadmor in the wilderness, and all the store cities, which he built in Hamath. Also he built Beth-horon the upper, and Beth-horon the nether, fenced cities, with walls, gates and bars; and Baalath, and all the store cities that Solomon had, and all the chariot cities, and the cities of the horsemen, and all that Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, and in Lebanon, and throughout all the land of his dominion. [As for] all the people [that were] left of the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which [were] not of Israel, [but] of their children, who were left after them in the land, whom the children of Israel consumed not, them did Solomon make to pay tribute until this day." 2 Chronicles 8:1-8.

Thus we have every kind of right exercised and the restoration of what had been wrong. "But of the children of Israel did Solomon make no servants for his work." A very remarkable statement. He made the Gentiles servants. The Jews will, then, be lords upon the earth, not slaves. The Gentiles will be obliged to take the place of the tail when Israel are at the head, according to the

prophet And all this beautiful order we find carried out socially and in a family order, and religiously, throughout the chapter.

But further (2 Chronicles 9), it was impossible that the fame of Solomon, the type of Christ, could be within such narrow bounds. The queen of Sheba herself comes, not merely to share in royal pomp — not merely to enter into what, alas! we know to be frivolous and most transient — but to hear the wisdom of Solomon. The Lord Jesus Himself singles her out. It was a queenly errand on which she came — most worthy — and indeed her rank gave the greater lustre to it. But the object put additional lustre on herself. She came to hear king Solomon, and she was in no way disappointed.

“When the queen of Sheba had seen the wisdom of Solomon” (that is the attractive object), “and the house that he had built, and the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel; his cup-bearers also, and their apparel” (for even the least and lowest things bore the stamp of his royal grandeur) — “and his ascent by which he went up into the house of Jehovah” — (for this was the grandest of all) — “there was no more spirit in her. And she said to the king, [It was] a true report which I heard in mine own land of thine acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not their words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen; and behold, the one half of the greatness of thy wisdom was not told me: thou exceedest the fame that I heard. Happy [are] thy men, and happy [are] these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and hear thy wisdom.” vv. 1-7.

That made a great impression upon her. “Blessed be Jehovah thy God, which delighted in thee to set thee on His throne [to be] king for Jehovah thy God: because thy God loved Israel, to establish them for ever, therefore made He thee king over them, to do judgment and justice.”

This may seem somewhat strong; but we can, I think, appreciate the delight of God in tracing such a remarkable witness to the future glory of His own Son. No doubt it was true — most true — and what is divine will bear inspection. What is human fades the more we look into it. But the glory which God puts forth is the more seen to be perfect the more it is approached and understood. But still, for all that, whatever might be true of Solomon was only a shadow of Christ — of what Christ will be on the earth. Remember, I am not speaking of what is still higher. I admit that there is a deeper glory in the heavens; and we must carefully remember that the same millennial day will see the Church glorified in heaven, and the Jew blessed upon the earth, and the nations also. All will be under Christ. Consequently, it is not a question of their asserting heavenly glory exclusively, or earthly glory exclusively, but both, each in their own and for their object. That is the truth. And you will always find if you look at mistakes or at heresy (which is the same thing), that there is always a part of the truth, and that part is set against another part; but the full truth of God is never possessed about anything until it puts everything else in its place.

I am persuaded that what I have now said on the kingdom is the only right thought of it — that the kingdom, in short, according to our Lord’s own

intimation to Nicodemus, consists of heavenly things as well as earthly things. Nicodemus thought only of the earthly things, and the Lord assured him that there must be new birth to possess even the earthly things. If I have told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" It was useless. But there are heavenly things as well as earthly, and they are not confounded or changed into one another. The earthly does not become heavenly, nor does the heavenly become earthly. They are both separate parts; and that is the meaning of a very important scripture in Ephesians 1 — "That in the dispensation of the fulness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; even in Him: in whom also we have obtained an inheritance." vv. 10, 11. There is the double order of the future inheritance. There are the heavenly things which we shall have, as risen from the dead and glorified with Christ; and there will be the earthly things, the head of which will be the Jews as the people of the Lord Jesus Christ; but the Church, which is His body, will share the heavenly things.

Then the rest of the chapter follows it up, for while the queen of Sheba gives the king a royal present suitable to her station and her means, the king, I need not say, was not to be behind her in nobleness of generosity; and the greatness of his throne is described, and the vastness of his shipping as well, and the abundance that was the result for all the people, even as it is said, he "made silver and gold in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar trees made he as the sycamore trees that are in the vale for abundance. And Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt" and "he reigned over all the kings from the river

unto the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt." You know that when Joshua has the word given at the beginning, the Euphrates is the extreme boundary. The Jordan was the proper one. Some of the tribes coveted what was on the other side, and so much the worse for them. They did not gain by it, but lost. But the Euphrates is the extreme limit, and that awaits the Lord Jesus.

In the next chapter (2 Chronicles 10) we find what, alas! is in all human types — failure. Rehoboam the king, the son of Solomon, inherits not his father's wisdom, but whatever was foolish and wrong in Solomon. For Rehoboam took counsel not with the men of experience who might have helped his youth, but with the young men who only urged on his impetuosity. "He forsook the counsel which the old men gave him, and took counsel with the young men that were brought up with him that stood before him. And he said unto them, What advice give ye that we may return answer to this people, which have spoken to me, saying, Ease somewhat the yoke that thy father did put upon us? And the young men that were brought up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou answer the people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou [it] somewhat lighter for us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little [finger] shall be thicker than my father's loins For whereas my father put a heavy yoke upon you, I will put more to your yoke: my father chastised you with whips, but I [will chastise you] with scorpions. So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, as the king bade, saying, Come again to me on the third day. And the king answered them roughly; and king Rehoboam forsook the counsel of the old men, and

answered them after the advice of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add thereto: my father chastised you with whips, but I [will chastise] you with scorpions" (vv. 8-14), according to his own foolish word; and the consequence was that God chastised him, for he rent away ten out of the twelve tribes and gave them over to his enemy Jeroboam, the son of Nebat.

Rehoboam would fight (2 Chronicles 11), but God hinders him. It was his fault, and it did not become him to fight. God never hindered the other kings, that I recollect, from fighting with Israel similarly; but Rehoboam must not fight. He that is guilty of a fault is not the man that can well or righteously reprove another. At any rate, he must be thoroughly brought down about his own fault before he is in a moral condition to do it. Rehoboam was, therefore, disciplined of the Lord in that his hands were tied and he was not permitted even to punish his rebellious subjects; but he has the sorrow of seeing his people leaving him, although there were the priests and Levites for a while, and faithful Israelites, who still resorted to Jerusalem to sacrifice there.

He was not left without some consolation from hearts in whom allegiance to the king shall not die away. "He loved Maachah," it is said, "the daughter of Absalom, above all his wives and his concubines: (for he took eighteen wives, and three-score concubines; and begat twenty and eight sons and three-score daughters. And Rehoboam made Abijah, the son of Maachah, the chief, [to be] ruler among his brethren: for [he thought] to make him king. And he dealt wisely, and dispersed of all his children throughout all the countries of Judah and

Benjamin, unto every fenced city: and he gave them victual in abundance. And he desired many wives." vv. 21-23.

"And it came to pass when Rehoboam had established the kingdom and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of Jehovah, and all Israel with him" (2 Chronicles 12) — for such is the manner of men, not so quick to follow in good, but so ready in evil. And so God sent an unexpected enemy upon him in the person of the king of Egypt, who took away the treasures that Solomon had amassed. Such was the righteous government of God, so that poor king Rehoboam was driven to make shields of brass instead of shields of gold, which were now being carried down into Egypt. "And when he humbled himself, the wrath of Jehovah turned from him that He would not destroy him altogether: and also in Judah things went well." How gracious of the Lord! Every little act of repentance brought its blessing.

2 Chronicles 13-20

Abijah follows (chap. 13), and he sets the battle in array against Jeroboam, and calls upon the men of Israel to follow. "But Jeroboam caused an ambushment," and, in consequence, we find Judah looking back; but they cried unto Jehovah, and He was with them; and "God smote Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. And the children of Israel fled before Judah, and God delivered them into their hand," in spite of all their prudent arrangements and their numerous host. "So there fell down slain of Israel five hundred thousand chosen men." The slaughter was prodigious; and not only so, but Abijah pursues his advantage and takes cities from

them, so that Jeroboam never recovered strength again. Jehovah was against him.

Thus we see that God, after reproving the fault of Rehoboam by tying up his hands, was pleased to judge the fault of Jeroboam with a complete destruction of his men of war — the very thing in which he prided himself. God's government is always righteous. I am speaking now of His providential ways; and, I say, they are always wise and good.

Then in 2 Chronicles 14 we have Asa. "And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of Jehovah his God: for he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves: and commanded Judah to seek Jehovah God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment. And he took away out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the images: and the kingdom was quiet before him. And he built fenced cities in Judah." And, further, we find that he was blest of God in his day of trial when the Ethiopians came against him. "And Asa cried unto Jehovah his God, and said, Jehovah, [it is] nothing with Thee to help, whether with many or with them that have no power: help us, O Jehovah our God, for we rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go against this multitude. O Jehovah, Thou [art] our God; let not man prevail against Thee. So Jehovah smote the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled. And Asa and the people that [were] with him pursued them into Gerar: and the Ethiopians were overthrown, that they could not recover themselves; for they were destroyed before Jehovah, and before His host; and they carried away very much spoil. And they smote all the cities round about Gerar; for the fear of

Jehovah came upon them; and they spoiled all the cities; for there was exceeding much spoil in them."

Nevertheless, Asa has a warning from Azariah, who says, "Jehovah is with you, while ye be with Him; and if ye seek Him, He will be found of you; but if ye forsake Him, He will forsake you. Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God and without a teaching priest, and without law. But when they in their trouble did turn unto Jehovah, God of Israel, and sought Him, He was found of them. And in those times [there was] no peace to him that went out, nor to him that came in, but great vexations [were] upon all the inhabitants of the countries. And nation was destroyed of nation, and city of city: for God did vex them with all adversity. Be ye strong, therefore, and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall be rewarded" (2 Chronicles 15). Asa takes courage from this for the time, and puts away still more of the abominations out of Judah and Benjamin. And, further, he even put down his mother from being queen — no doubt a most serious trial to the son, but she was an idolatress. "And Asa cut down her idol, and stamped it, and burned it at the brook Kidron. But the high places were not taken away out of Israel: nevertheless, the heart of Asa was perfect all his days." He was sincere, upright. "And he brought into the house of God the things that his father had dedicated, and that he himself had dedicated, silver, and gold, and vessels."

But Asa's day of failure comes (2 Chronicles 16). When Baasha, king of Israel, came up against Judah, and built Ramah in order to hinder the Israelites from going up to the temple, Asa makes a league with Syria. He has recourse to Ben-hadad and says, "There is a league between me and thee, as there was between my father

and thy father; behold, I have sent thee silver and gold; go, break thy league with Baasha, king of Israel, that he may depart from me." Ben-hadad accordingly stopped the building of Ramah by the king of Israel. "And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa, king of Judah, and said unto him, Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on Jehovah thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thy hand."

How remarkable is the government of God. Whatever wrong step we do to accomplish an end, not only does it not accomplish it, but it brings its own chastening with it. The very thing we least desire comes upon us. God would not only have hindered Israel, but Syria. Instead of this, the host of the king of Syria escaped out of his hands. The consequence was that, convicted of his folly as well as of his sin, Asa was wroth with the seer and put him in a prison house; and as one evil leads on to another, Asa oppressed some of the people at the same time. But God oppressed him, or, at any rate, chastised him, for he was diseased in his feet; and the same unbelief that sent him to Ben-hadad sent him now to men when he ought to have looked to Jehovah. We must remember that the grand point in Israel was that they had God to care for them. It was not like the case of men now who look to God to bless the means that are at hand; but in Israel there was a special testimony of God's being looked to in every trouble; and in this, Asa, although he had been a faithful man, failed seriously, and very solemnly too, at the close. I do not say that he was not a man of God, but I do say that there was great and grievous failure.

Jehoshaphat his son reigns (2 Chronicles 17). And here we find very beautiful grace and piety. I should say that

piety more particularly is what characterizes this good son. He was a man, too, whose heart was toward the Lord. Jehoshaphat is established by Jehovah in the kingdom, and all Judah brought him presents; and he had riches and honour in abundance. But although all this is true, “His heart was lifted up in the ways of Jehovah: moreover, he took away the high places and groves out of Judah.” Nevertheless, there was no removing of all the evil. There was a greater fidelity than had been found before. “And they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of Jehovah with them, and went about through all the cities of Judah and taught the people.” It was a very important thing. “And the fear of Jehovah fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah.” There was a great moral effect produced.

Still there was, as we see in the next chapter (2 Chronicles 18), a feebleness in Jehoshaphat that showed itself in this way, that he made affinity not with Syria, but with Israel. This was a grievous sin in the sight of God; for although it was an enormous thing to form a league with the Gentiles offensive and defensive, it was a most serious thing to take ground with an idolater. I do not speak of making use of the Gentiles. That was right. But Israel stood in a peculiar position (with its golden calves set up in Bethel and Dan) so that Jehoshaphat’s affinity with Ahab its king was in a certain sense more guilty than a league with Syria. Why? Because they were the people of God in an idolatrous state. It is just the same thing now in tampering with Romanism, because the gravamen of the guilt of Romanism is not merely because Romanists are idolaters, but because they are idolaters, professing Christ, and baptized in His name.

That is what makes them much more guilty in the sight of God than any heathens who have not heard His name and glory.

So it is in this case then. Jehoshaphat having formed this league comes into nothing but trouble through it; though, apparently, there might be an outward prosperity. A messenger is sent to him (2 Chronicles 19) who warns him solemnly but in vain. He suffers the consequence of it. The king of Israel was smitten. The king of Judah returns and dwells at Jerusalem.

God, however, graciously met his faith when greatly tried, as we find in the 20th chapter, where the Moabites and Ammonites and others came; and a beautiful instance of the piety of faith is shown us here in this way — for I shall only mention one single feature in this mere sketch of these chapters. It is that in going forth they went singing the song of victory. It was not like the Greek who raised his paean to frighten the enemy; but here it was the piety that ventured and counted upon the Lord. How blessed is faith, in the people of God! The consequence need scarcely be told. “The children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy [them]; and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another.” So when the men of Judah came, there was nothing to do but to reap the fruits. And well might they call it the valley of Berachah — the valley of praise. “For there they blessed Jehovah: therefore the name of the same place was called the valley of Berachah unto this day.”

So then ends the course of Jehoshaphat with one solitary tale more; namely, the attempt to join with “Ahaziah,

king of Israel, who did very wickedly. And he joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish: And they made the ships in Ezion-gaber. Then Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, Jehovah hath broken thy works. And the ships were broken, and they were not able to go to Tarshish (2 Chronicles 20:35-37).

What a contrast with Jehoshaphat's going forth and the victory made ready to his hand by the Lord God. And this is all instructive to us. May the Lord keep us true to His name and glory!

2 Chronicles 21-25

We have seen, then, the sad fruits of a pious man's joining himself with one who is untrue to God — a union which always turns to God's dishonour and the injury of him who loves God, as we find in Jehoshaphat himself. And this, too, not merely that he united with Ahaziah, but where he united even for commercial purposes — one of the most important points for a saint, not only for a Christian, but for a saint before Christianity, where his testimony was separation to God. But the separation of a Christian is of another order — higher and deeper and closer — yet not so external as the Jews'. We might even feel at liberty — as we know the Apostle puts the case — to dine with an infidel. "If thou be disposed to go" — we must take care how we go, and why. Now this might, to the outward eye, seem the very contrary of separateness, and many mistakes are often made in the thoughts of men who judge by outward appearance. But the separation of a Christian is really deeper, although it may not strike the eye as a Jew's. We shall see further

proofs of the same evil, for it is a growing one, as the state of Judah became worse and worse before its judgment.

Jehoshaphat's son, Jehoram, reigns in his father's stead. "Now when Jehoram was risen up to the kingdom, he strengthened himself, and slew all his brethren with the sword." 2 Chronicles 21:4. Such did not Jehoshaphat. Howbeit, although he went even farther than his father in alliance with evil — "for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife: for he wrought that which was evil in the eyes of Jehovah" — yet, "Jehovah would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that He had made with David." Hence, therefore, we find that when the Edomites revolted, and Jehoram went forth, he smote them. Nevertheless, God chastised him, for "the same time did Libnah revolt under his hand, because he had forsaken Jehovah God of his fathers."

We see in all this history how much turns upon the king. It was no question of the people now, for they had completely failed long ago. There is a new trial. Suppose the blessing turns upon — not the people, for, it might be said, there are enormous probabilities against their fidelity; but take the family of a faithful man, take the family of the most faithful man in the deep distresses of evil, David, the progenitor of the Messiah — perhaps, if it turns upon that family, one might be found faithful! Not so; there is unfaithfulness everywhere. There was only one faithful witness, and He was not yet come; but those who preceded Him, and who ought to have been the witnesses of the coming Messiah in truth, only precipitated the downfall, first, of Israel as a whole, then of Judah that remained. Hence, Jehoram, we find, "made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the

inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication, and compelled Judah [thereto].” For this was part of the wickedness of heathenism — that it made men more immoral than they would have been on principle and as a matter of honour to their gods.

God sent him now a writing from Elijah the prophet, saying, “Thus saith Jehovah God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, but hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father’s house, which were better than thyself: behold, with a great plague will Jehovah smite thy people and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods: and thou [shalt have] great sickness.” And so he was to die, and outward troubles came upon him. “Jehovah stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines and of the Arabians.” In fine, “Jehovah smote him in his bowels with an incurable disease,” and thus he died. “And his people made no burning for him like the burning of his fathers.” He had gone on in sin, and he died in sorrow and shame. Such was the end of a son of David, really and literally the son of Jehoshaphat (“Jehovah is judge”).

“And the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah, his youngest son, king in his stead” (2 Chronicles 22). And “he reigned,... he also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab.” His mother was that infamous Athaliah, the daughter of Omri. “His mother was his counsellor to do wickedly.” “He walked also after their counsel, and went with Jehoram, the son of Ahab, king of Israel to war.” That is, the first evil begun by a pious king continues.

The practice of his son is far from pious, for the bad example of a good man has immense influence, especially with those who are not good. It hardens them, and therefore works deep and ineradicable mischief. “The destruction of Ahaziah was of God,” as we are told, “by coming to Joram: for when he was come, he went out with Jehoram against Jehu.” And thus he came under the same judgment.

Athaliah, in resentment, now enters upon a most cruel project — the destruction of the royal seed — for she was an idolatress, and she hated the word and the purpose of God. Who but she could have done it so well; for she had all power, apparently, and she had no conscience. Nay, further, hatred and bitterness filled her heart against the true God and the house of David, although she was herself a mother of that house; but still, what will not hatred of God do in reversing all the affections of nature?

So Athaliah, when she saw that her son was dead, “arose and destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah.” But God watched her and led Jehoshabeath, the daughter of the king, to take Joash, a child, from among the king’s sons that were slain, and secretly bring him up. “And he was with them hid in the house of God six years,” just as the Lord Jesus is now taken away from the midst of the wicked people who slew Him. For it was not merely a murderous intent as against Joash; but the Lord, as we know, was crucified by the hands of lawless men, and now He is hid in the house of God; but He will as surely come forth from that hiding place as Joash did.

When the seventh year came — the complete time according to the ways of God — “in the seventh year

Jehoiada strengthened himself" (2 Chronicles 23). He was the priest. The priest is prominent while the king is hidden. How truly it is so now in our Lord's case — in His own Person combining both the high priest that is in action and the King that will be by-and-by. And then in this chapter we have further, the most animated picture of this stirring scene — the young king now seated on his throne when the due moment was come. The trusty servants that were prepared by the high priest, and finally, the last of her, the murderous queen mother, king-destroyer, Athaliah, and the jubilant cries of Israel. When she comes forth, she comes forth crying "Treason," but in truth it was she who had been guilty of both treason and murder to the full; but we see the purpose of God. There cannot be a more lively proof of how thoroughly we may trust Him, for never seemed a more helpless object than this young king Joash before Athaliah. Never were the fortunes of a king of Judah at a lower ebb; but men have said not untruly that "man's extremity is God's opportunity." This only furnishes the occasion to show the supremacy of God. Nothing can hinder His purpose. How truly, therefore, we should trust Him as well as His purpose. He has a purpose about us, and He Himself has a love to our souls. Why should we not always trust Him?

If Joash was brought thus prosperously to the throne through a sea of royal blood, and if judgment inaugurated the judgment of enemies, and if idolatry was put down, and if all new was apparently so bright and hopeful for the king of Judah, it was but for a passing season. "And Joash did what was right in the sight of Jehovah all the days of Jehoiada the priest" (chap. 24). Yes, but it was more the influence of

Jehoiada than faith in the living God. An influence, sooner or later, must fail. The influence of man is not the faith of God's elect.

Jehoiada then passes away, after the king had called him to task; for such was his zeal for a little while. Flesh may be even more zealous than faith, but then there is this difference: faith continues; the effort of flesh is transient. It may begin well, but the question is whether it continues. Its continuance is always the grand proof of what is divine. Joash did not continue according to his beginnings; for we are told that after his fair effort in behalf of the neglected repairs of the house of Jehovah, he relaxed, though this is given more elsewhere than here. But here, even, we find the influences, the malignant influences, of the princes of Judah. "The king hearkened unto them,'' it is said, after the death of Jehoiada. "And they left the house of Jehovah, God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass." Nevertheless, God still testified by His prophets, and more particularly by Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest. "And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones, at the commandment of the king."

What ingratitude! What perfidy toward the son of his own near relative and the guardian of his own life! "Thus Joash the king," says the Spirit of God most touchingly, "remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son. And when he died he said, Jehovah look upon it and require it." And so He did, for "it came to pass at the end of the year that the host of Syria came up against him, and they came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the

people, and sent all the spoil of them unto the king of Damascus. For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men." It was not, therefore, might or power; it was God. "And Jehovah delivered a great host into their hand, because they had forsaken the Jehovah God of their fathers." What was a host against Jehovah guiding His people. but now even a small company overwhelms the great host of Judah. "So they executed Judgment against Joash." Nor was this all, for he was left in great disease, and his own servants conspired against him who had shed the blood of Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, and they "slew him on his bed, and he died: and they buried him in the city of David, but they buried him not in the sepulchres of the kings."

Thus we see a downward progress. In the former case they made no burning for Jehoram, as they did for his fathers. Now, they do not even bury Joash in the sepulchres of the kings. And if God gives the names of the conspirators, it was not that He had any complacency in them, though their act might not be without righteous judgment. He lets us know that they were those who had not the feeling of Israel, but the heart of an enemy under an Israelitish name; for Zabad was the son of Shimeath, an Ammonitess, and Jozabad, the son of Shimrith, a Moabitess. On the mother's side, the stock was evil, and a mother has enormous influence for good or evil.

Amaziah follows. "And he did that which was right in the sight of Jehovah, but not with a perfect heart" (2 Chronicles 25). "Now it came to pass when the kingdom was established to him, that he slew his servants that had killed the king, his father. But he slew not their children, but did as it is written in the law in the book of

Moses, where Jehovah commanded, saying, The fathers shall not die for the children, neither shall the children die for the fathers, but every man shall die for his own sin. Moreover, Amaziah gathered Judah together, and made them captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds." Thus he strengthened himself after a human sort. He also had a hired army. Mercenaries served him — a strange thing for a king of Judah. "But there came a man of God to him, saying, O king, let not the army of Israel go with thee." For these mercenaries were Israel. How fallen were both — Judah to hire, and Israel to be hired. The only thing they agreed in was indifference to God. What a state for God's people, and do you suppose that it is a strange thing?

Do you suppose that it is different now? Do you think that Christendom is in a better state as Christendom, than Israel was then as Israel? I do not believe so. We, all of us, feel that the ancient bodies are fallen into idolatry — not more truly Israel into the worship of the calves and of Baal, and all the other abominations, than Greek church or Roman into the worship, the one of pictures and the other of images. What difference? Both are idols — equally idols. But it is not merely so; if the Word of God be possessed (as, thanks be to God, it is) in Protestantism, if not in the same way in the older bodies, nevertheless denominationalism has eaten out the heart of the children of God. and their energies go forth in mere efforts, benevolent, excellent; but meanwhile the glory of God is unthought of. It is work now, not Christ; or if there be a thought, it hardly goes beyond the salvation of souls. The glory of God and those that are saved are forgotten. It is not only that we need, therefore' a call to the unconverted; we need a

call to the converted now. It is they more especially that fail to answer to the glory of God, just as Judah did here.

And here we find them joining, and this is one of the greatest snares of the present day. People fancy such wonders are to be done because there is a desire after union. Yes, but a union with abominations, a union with infidelity, a union with sacerdotalism, a union with anything under the sun, provided people only unite in good faith. Where is God? Where is the truth?

Where is the grace of God? Where is the place of the Holy Ghost in all this? Not thought of. I say this only because I believe that many persons read these books of scripture without practical profit; or, if they do take any, they fasten upon merely the good points, forgetting that God has a question about the evil, and in a day of evil it is a bad sign to flatter ourselves that we are cleaving to the good, for invariably, where there is evil there must be repentance; and there cannot be a worse sign than putting off, therefore, the solemn lesson that God is reading us about sin. I do not say that to throw it at others, but to take my full share myself; because I am fully persuaded that where there is the strongest desire even to be separated from evil, there will be the deepest feeling of the evil. There was nobody who felt the evil of Israel so much as Daniel, though there was no one who was more personally separate from it. And yet he always says “we.” He does not say “you.” He does not say, “It is your sin,” but “our sin.” It is “we have sinned.” He held to the unity of the people of God. We ought to hold to the unity of the Church.

And so, in the same way, it is no use for people to say, I have nothing to do with Popery; I have nothing to do

with the Greek church; I have nothing to do with ritualism or the like. That is an improper way to speak. We have a great deal to do with them, because all this is done under the name of Christ. It is like a vast company that has got a common share; and we are partners in the firm unless, indeed, we cut the connection; that is, unless we renounce utterly all the shame and sin of the thing before God, but, at the same time, bear the burden of it. Suppose we have renounced the company in matters of action; we ought to feel the shame and the grief of it if we have any love in our souls for them, or any care for the glory of the Lord. I conceive, therefore, that those who read these sad tales of Israel's, and above all, of Judah's, sin, without making a personal application to Christendom — to the state of God's people now — are putting aside a most solemn admonition that God gives for the conscience, and a sign and token too of the analogy between what is new and what was then. The only difference is that we have incomparably greater privileges and, therefore, a deeper responsibility.

Further, the Word of God is explicit that the Lord Jesus is about to return in judgment; and when He does judge, where will His sternest judgment be? On the heathen? On the Jew? No, on Christendom! I grant you that Jerusalem will be the scene of the tremendous judgment of God; but then Jerusalem was the birthplace of Christianity, as well as the capital of Judaism; and I have not the slightest doubt that at that moment when the Lord returns in judgment the same men will have acquired headship over Christendom as well as over the Jews. Things are coming to that now. Ritualism will soon land Christendom into acknowledgment of Judaism.

What an amalgam! A hateful amalgam, not merely an amalgam of unfaithful Christians, but even of Judaism along with Christianity, because the false prophet who is destroyed at the end will be setting himself up in the temple of God, and will be acknowledged in Christendom as well as by the Jews. This is a tremendous catastrophe to look onward to, and I have no doubt of it; and this shows, therefore, how truly the wickedness of Israel portends also not only their future wickedness, but that which is found in Christendom. All will be united in this dreadful union at the close.

Well then 2 Chronicles 25 shows us the end of Amaziah after his unholy union with Israel — bought to their own shame, but to his greater shame who could employ them — and the end is strife between the two who had unlawfully joined. And further, Judah who ought to have been the more faithful, as they had the truth in a way that Israel had not, are put to flight before the men of Israel.

What confusion when God was obliged to be against His people — when God was morally compelled to smite even those who had most of His sympathies, but now the more guilty, just because they had more light!

2 Chronicles 26-29

Then follows Uzziah (chap. 26). “And he did that which was right in the sight of Jehovah, according to all that his father Amaziah did. And he sought God in the days of Zechariah who had understanding in the visions of God: and as long as he sought Jehovah, God made him to prosper. And he went forth and warred against the Philistines, and break down the wall of Gath, and the wall of Jabneh, and the wall of Ashdod, and built cities

about Ashdod, and among the Philistines. And God helped him against the Philistines, and against the Arabians that dwelt in Gur-Baal, and the Mehunims. And the Ammonites gave gifts to Uzziah: and his name spread abroad even to the entering in of Egypt; for he strengthened himself exceedingly. Moreover, Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the corner gate, and at the valley gate, and at the turning of the wall, and fortified them. Also he built towers in the desert, and digged many wells: for he had much cattle, both in the low country, and in the plains: husbandmen and vine dressers in the mountains, and in Carmel: for he loved husbandry. Moreover, Uzziah had a host of fighting men" — a standing army.

All this, no doubt, looked fair. "But when he was strong his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against Jehovah his God, and went into the temple of Jehovah to burn incense upon the altar of incense. And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of Jehovah, that were valiant men: and they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah to burn incense unto Jehovah, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from Jehovah, God. Then Uzziah was wroth," and although he stood with a censor in his hand, even at that moment, "the leprosy rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of Jehovah from beside the incense altar. And Azariah, the chief priest, and all the priests, locked upon him, and behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because

Jehovah had smitten him." It was a signal judgment, even in this day of weakness and unfaithfulness. So he lived a leper to the day of his death.

His son Jotham (2 Chronicles 27) follows in the right way in a measure as his father did. He entered not into the temple of Jehovah as his father had done; but the people did yet corruptly. However, he builds and wars and becomes mighty, because he prepared his ways before Jehovah his God.

Jotham dies, and Ahaz succeeds him — an impious son who "walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim" (2 Chronicles 28). Not satisfied with that, he, even as we know, brought down the pattern of a new altar from Damascus into the very house of God; but God smote him. "Pekah, the son of Remaliah, slew in Judah an hundred and twenty thousand in one day, which were all valiant men; because they had forsaken Jehovah God of their fathers." And so we find further sorrows without end upon Ahaz, so that in the extremity of his distress he sends for a little help to the king of Assyria, only to add to his sorrows.

I need not dwell upon this, though it is one of the most important points in the history of Judah; for it was the great crisis when the magnificent burst of prophecy came from God. Isaiah had began, no doubt, before, in the days of Uzziah and Jotham; but it was in Ahaz's time that the prophecy of Emmanuel was given; yea, it was to Ahaz himself. What grace! that a wicked man should bring forth from God the distinctest pledge of the glory of the Messiah! Yet, so it was. How completely God moves above the evil of man! And if God be so to the

evil, what is He not to the righteous? How should we not then ever confide in His love?

Ahaz, after a most distressful as well as guilty reign, comes to his end; and Hezekiah reigns in his stead (2 Chronicles 29). Here we have a man of faith — a man of singular confidence in the Lord — and Hezekiah "in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of Jehovah and repaired them." There was no time lost. In the first year and the first month! "And he brought in the priests and the Levites and gathered them together into the east street, and said unto them, Hear me, ye Levites, sanctify now yourselves, and sanctify the house of Jehovah God of your fathers, and carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place. For our fathers have trespassed, and done that which was evil in the eyes of Jehovah our God, and have forsaken Him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of Jehovah, and turned their backs. Also they have shut up the doors of the porch, and put out the lamps, and have not burned incense nor offered burnt offerings in the holy place unto the God of Israel. Wherefore the wrath of Jehovah was upon Judah and Jerusalem, and He hath delivered them to trouble, to astonishment, and to hissing, as ye see with your eyes. For, lo, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this. Now it is in mine heart to make a covenant with Jehovah God of Israel, that His fierce wrath may turn away from us. My sons, be not now negligent: for Jehovah hath chosen you to stand before Him, to serve Him, and that ye should minister unto Him, and burn incense."

What a state! Yet there was the law; but such was the practice. The people of today wonder at the departure in Christendom since the time of the apostles. The departure was not so easy under Israel, because Israel's worship consisted so very much of external observances; and they might be done even by unconverted men. But in the Church everything depends upon the Spirit of God, and therefore the departure is incomparably more easy in the Church than it was under Israel. Yet people wonder that the Church has gone astray. To what purpose have they read their Bibles, and why has God given us this most solemn departure in Israel but to warn us of ours? Has He not in the New Testament put forward prophecy after prophecy of the departure that He saw at hand? "Otherwise thou shalt be cut off." What did it depend upon? On what condition? Except the Gentile continued in the goodness of God, he should be cut off like the Jew. Has the Gentile continued in the goodness of God? Is Protestant devotion and the splitting up of the Church of God without a care? Is Popish or Greek idolatry continuing in the goodness of God? The Gentile has not continued in the goodness of God, and must be cut off no less than Israel and Judah.

Well, here was a pious man; and what a mercy to think that God raises up individuals in Christendom, as He did in Israel. But you will observe this: no piety of Jehoshaphat, no faith of Hezekiah, turned the current of evil. There is a stay: they find a footing in the midst of the current and they resist it. They are sustained of God, but the current of evil still passes on till it ends in the gulf of judgment. And so we find now. Hezekiah no doubt gave a fair and beautiful promise of a better day. But it was only the morning cloud and passing dew; so he calls

upon them not to be negligent, and the Levites answer to his call to cleanse the house of Jehovah.

This was the great thing. It was not merely personal cleansing, but cleansing the house of Jehovah. The house of Jehovah answers to our being gathered together. It is not enough to be personally pure; we ought to be pure in our associations; we ought to be pure in our worship. If there is anything in which we ought to be pure, it is in the worship of God. I cannot understand the piety of persons that are content with what they know is wrong in the worship of God. It seems to me sadly inconsistent, to say the least. I know there are difficulties. Faith always has difficulties but faith always surmounts them. So it was with Hezekiah. No doubt it seemed a very strange thing to be blaming everybody for so long a time; but he did not think of that, and I am persuaded that Hezekiah was not a high-minded, but a most lowly man. It is a mere stigma and calumny to call faith proud. The world always dues. Christians ought not to do so; they ought to know better.

So they began on the first day of the first month. What alacrity! “Now they began on the first day of the first month to sanctify, and on the eighth day of the month came they to the porch of Jehovah: so they sanctified the house of Jehovah in eight days; and in the sixteenth day of the first month they made an end.” v. 17. Then they went unto Hezekiah the king and told him. Hezekiah prepares accordingly. “Then Hezekiah the king rose early, and gathered the rulers of the city and went up to the house of Jehovah.” It is all the same stamp. It was a man filled with a sense of the glory of God, and there was not a moment to be lost. If I want to obey, why should I not begin at once? What am I waiting for? “And

they brought seven bullocks, and seven rams, and seven lambs, and, seven he-goats, for a sin offering for the kingdom, and for the sanctuary and for Judah. And he commanded the priests, the sons of Aaron, to offer them on the altar of Jehovah. So they killed the bullocks, and the priests received the blood and sprinkled it on the altar: likewise, when they had killed the rams they sprinkled the blood upon the altar: they killed also the lambs and they sprinkled the blood upon the altar. And they brought forth the he-goats for the sin offering before the king and the congregation; and they laid their hands upon them. And the priests killed them, and they made reconciliation with their blood upon the altar, to make an atonement for all Israel: for the king commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for all Israel."

Let me call your attention to what is said here — "for all Israel," as we also have it in the 21st verse — "for the kingdom, and for the sanctuary, and for Judah." Not for Judah only, but for the whole nation, Israel and Judah. This is a fine action of Hezekiah's faith. Personally pure and devoted in his own sphere, his heart went out toward all that belonged to God. They might be idolaters, but he makes an atonement. The more, therefore, they needed the atonement, the mare they needed that others should feel for them if they felt not for themselves and for God.

And so we should feel now. We ought not to care merely for the Christians that we }new. Surely we ought to love them; but our hearts ought always, in private and in public, to take in the whole Church of God. We are never right if we do not. There is sectarian leaven in our hearts if we do not go out toward all that are of God. So

with Hezekiah. It was for all Israel — for the king commanded. It was the king, you see. The priests, no doubt, did not think about it. They were so accustomed merely to offer up sacrifices for Judah that they, no doubt, never thought about “all Israel”; but the king did. “The king commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for all Israel.” And everything was done in its proper order. There was no neglect of what was seemly or decent. “And he set the Levites in the house of Jehovah with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king’s seer, and Nathan the prophet; for so was the commandment of Jehovah by His prophets. And the Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt offering upon the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of Jehovah began also with the trumpets, and with the instruments ordained by David king of Israel. And all the congregation worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded, and all this continued until the burnt offering was finished. And when they had made an end of offering, the king and all that were present with him bowed themselves, and worshipped. Moreover, Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praises unto Jehovah with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped.”

And thus all was done in beautiful order and, as we are told in the last verses, “the service of the house of Jehovah was set in order. And Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people: for the thing was done suddenly.” But it was none the worse for

that. There had been nothing like this since the days of king Solomon; so long had care for the house of God fallen into disuse.

2 Chronicles 30-31

But Hezekiah was not content with this (chap. 30). “He sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh that they should come to the house of Jehovah at Jerusalem to keep the passover unto Jehovah God of Israel.” This seemed, no doubt, a very bold thing, and I have not a doubt that they considered that the king was behaving in a very presumptuous manner. What business had he to send to all Israel? He was only the king of Judah! Why should he not be content with his own people? He was proselyting. They did not like it. They thought it was exceedingly improper to be taking away the Israelites to Jerusalem. But Hezekiah was thinking of God. Hezekiah was filled with a sense of what was due to the claims of Jehovah. Jehovah had set His house in one place for all Israel.

Now there is nothing that gives a person such boldness as this, and nothing, also, that sets love to work so earnestly as this. If we are merely contending for doctrines of our own, it does seem rather strong to expect other people to receive them. If it is merely my own doctrine, I had better make myself happy with my own affairs. But if it is God’s grace, if it is God’s worship, if it is God’s way, has it not a claim upon all that are God’s? The moment you see that, you can go forward; and you can appeal to the conscience of all that belong to God, that they should be faithful to God’s own will and Word. And what I want the children of God to see now clearly, and all the children of God as far as He is

pleased to give it efficacy, is that they are set not merely upon something better than what other people have, but upon what is God's will, because that must be the best of all; and inasmuch as they have got the Bock of God, they can see and are responsible to find this out for themselves. Anything that is herein has a claim upon a child of God — and more particularly as regards the worship of God. I grant you that in human things what is of man has a claim; but not so in divine things. "Render, therefore, to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

I think it was in this spirit, therefore, not trying to be a Caesar over Israel, or even recalling Israelites to their allegiance to himself, which perhaps he might have done, that Hezekiah so acted. He was a man of faith, and he knew well that it was of God, the rending of the ten tribes from the house of David; and therefore he did not ask the tribes for himself, but he did ask them for God. He sent out "to all Israel and Judah" (chap. 30). And so should we do now. We ought not to desire the world. Let men, if they will, seek the world and the pretended worship of the world. Let them seek "the masses," as they say. Let them have the masses if they will, and if the masses are weak enough to follow them. But the business of faith is to call upon all who have faith in the name of the Lord, and to get them to follow His Word. So did Hezekiah now, according to what God gave him. "And the thing pleased the king and all the congregation." What I call your attention particularly to is this: nobody thought of all this for all these years — nobody thought of it but Hezekiah. The more you draw near to God, the more you love the people of God. It was because God was so great in Hezekiah's eyes that the

people of God were so dear to Hezekiah; and so he claimed them for God, and called them to come out from their abominations. “They established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel from Beer-sheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the passover unto Jehovah God of Israel at Jerusalem: for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written!” How quickly people departed from what was written!

“So the posts went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king, saying, Ye children of Israel” — not merely, “Ye children of Judah,” but “Ye children of Israel” — “turn again unto Jehovah God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and He will return to the remnant of you that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria. And be not ye like your fathers and like your brethren which trespassed against Jehovah God of their fathers, who therefore gave them up to desolation as ye see. Now, be ye not stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto Jehovah, and enter into His sanctuary, which He hath sanctified for ever.” God’s principles do not change. It is all a mistake that because the apostles are gone, the apostles’ truth is gone. Not so; it abides, and forever. It is always binding on the people of God. So here with the sanctuary in Jerusalem. “So the posts passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh even unto Zebulun: but they laughed them to scorn and mocked them.”

As it was then, so it is now. The more true, the more it be according to God, so the more is the contempt of men who have chosen to blend the world with Christ. “Nevertheless, divers of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem.”

In the most unlikely and distant quarters, and where no one could possibly look for them, there are those that have humbled themselves and have come. “Also in Judah the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king, and of the princes, by the word of Jehovah.” And there they assembled. “And they arose and took away the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for incense took they away and cast them into the brook Kidron. Then they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the second month, and the priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves, and brought in the burnt offerings into the house of Jehovah, and they stood in their place” — because this was in consequence of some not being ready. The priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently. The second month was the gracious provision that God made in the case of uncleanness in the wilderness, as we may see in Numbers 9:10, 11.

How good is the word of the Lord! They must keep the passover; but, on the other hand, they could not keep it if they were unclean. This provision came in, therefore, when they were consciously unclean, that they might purify themselves and keep it so new. But there is no lowering the standard. There ought to be consideration for the weakness, and there is given them time to learn; but the standard must not be lowered. And so we find, further, that “the children of Israel that were present at Jerusalem kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness: and the Levites and the priests praised Jehovah day by day, singing with loud instruments unto Jehovah. And Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites”; and, in fact, there was a happy and a holy time come, “for Hezekiah king of

Judah did give to the congregation a thousand bullocks and seven thousand sheep; and the princes gave to the congregation a thousand bullocks and ten thousand sheep: and a great number of priests sanctified themselves. And all the congregation of Judah, with the priests and the Levites, and all the congregation that came out of Israel, and the strangers that came out of the land of Israel, and that dwelt in Judah, rejoiced. So there was great joy in Jerusalem."

In the next chapter (2 Chronicles 31), we find that this faithfulness on the part of the Jews of Judah gave a great impulse to their fidelity. True faithfulness always flows from faith, and if we are right in the worship of God, we shall seek to be right in our walk. A low worship always goes with a low walk. It would be an awful thing and most condemnatory if there was carelessness of God's worship and a want of care of our personal ways and walk. We have to see to that. "Then all the children of Israel returned, every man to his own possession, into their own cities. And Hezekiah appointed the courses of the priests," for he was not content with what he had done. He carries out the work still more fully. And we are told in the end of the 31st chapter, "Thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought that which was good and right and truth before Jehovah his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered."

2 Chronicles 32-36

But now we find the Assyrian (chap. 32). "And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib was come, and that he

was purposed to fight against Jerusalem, he took counsel with his princes and his mighty men to stop the waters of the fountains which were without the city: and they did help him. So there was gathered much people together, who stopped all the fountains, and the brook that ran through the midst of the land, saying, Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water. Also he strengthened himself, and built up all the wall that was broken, and raised it up to the towers, and another wall without, and repaired Millo in the city of David, and made darts and shields in abundance. And he set captains of war over the people, and gathered them together to him in the street of the gate of the city, and spake comfortably to them, saying, Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him: with him is an arm of flesh; but with us is Jehovah our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah." vv. 2-8.

So Sennacherib sends his servants with a most insulting message, and these letters and oral insults were meant to alarm and stir up the people even against the king. "For this cause Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz prayed and cried to heaven. And Jehovah sent an angel which cut off all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he was come into the house of his god, they that came forth of his own bowels slow him there with the sword. Thus Jehovah saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib."

We are told very briefly, also, of the sickness of Hezekiah and of the Lord's marvelous recovery of him. "But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up", and even this good king thus brings wrath upon Israel. Again, it is the king that decides all. How blessed when there is a king reigning in righteousness, when all will be decided in favour of the people, without a flaw. That is the purpose of God, and these kings on whom the burden rested then were the witnesses of the King that is coming, for I trust that all here believe that the Lord Jesus will not only be exalted in heaven, but in the earth. It is a great failure in the faith of any man, and a sad gap in the creed of those who do not believe that the Lord Jesus is going to reign over the earth. What has God made the earth for? For the devil? It would look like it if the Lord is not going to reign, for Satan has had it in his own way ever since sin came into the world [of course, within limits]. Is the earth for Satan even in the midst of God's people? Oh, no! All things were made for Christ. All things are by Him. In all things He will have the pre-eminence.

In the dispensation of the fullness of times, all will be gathered under the headship of Christ — not merely things in heaven, but things on earth — and then will be the blessed time which people vainly hope for now — the time when nation will not war against nation, and when men will learn war no more.

There will be such a day; but it is reserved for Christ, not for the Church. It is reserved for Christ when the Church is out of the world. In fact, so far from the Church correcting the world. she has not been able to keep her own purity. The Church has sold herself to the

world, and is now merely like all unfaithful spouses that have betrayed their true husbands. Now the world is tired of her, and is beating her away with shame and scorn. This is going on in all lands. The days are fast coming when there will not be a land in the world where the Church — for which Christ gave Himself — is not cast off. I do not say that to excuse the world, but I do say it to take the shame of it to ourselves. For, undoubtedly, had the Church walked in purity, she would never have sought the world's glory, nor have been in the world's embraces, and would never have been exposed to the world's casting her off as a wretched and corrupt woman.

Well (2 Chronicles 33), Manasseh follows this pious king who new has been called to sleep. The ways of Manasseh were first, a most painful outburst of all abomination, yet of the mercy of God at the last. For this very Manasseh, after his sin — after he had made Judah and Jerusalem to sin and do worse than the heathen — is taken by the king of Assyria and carried to Babylon, and there taught with thorns. But in affliction he humbles himself before the God of his fathers and prays to Him; and God heard and brought him back again. "Then Manasseh knew that Jehovah He was God" v. 13. This is a history most peculiar. Others, alas! had begun well and ended ill. He began as ill as any had ever done, and worse than any before; but he had a blessed end. He took away the strange gods and idols which he had himself set up, and the altars that he had made; and he repaired the altar and offered peace offerings and thank offerings, and commanded Judah to serve Jehovah. And "so Manasseh slept with his fathers, and they buried him in his own house; and Amon his son reigned in his

stead." But Amon did that which was evil, according to his father's beginning, not according to his end; "and his servants conspired against him and slow him in his own house, and made his son Josiah king in his stead."

Josiah was a king as remarkable for conscientious service to God as any man that ever reigned in Judah. How remarkable — not, alas! that a pious king should have an impious son, but that an impious father should have a pious son. This indeed was grace.

Josiah, then, and his reformation is brought before us (2 Chronicles 34). He was young when he began to reign — only eight years old — and "in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek alter the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images. And they brake down the altars of Baalim in his presence, and the images that were on high above them, he cut down: and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images, he brake in pieces, and made dust of them, and strewed it upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them. And he burnt the bones of the priests upon their altars" — nothing could be more thorough-going than this action against the false gods — "and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. And so did he in the cities of Manasseh and Ephraim and Simeon, even unto Naphtali, with their mattocks round about. And when he had broken down the altars and the groves, and had beaten the graven images into powder, and cut down all the idols throughout all the land of Israel, he returned to Jerusalem."

For, you observe, he goes beyond his own sphere. He goes out into “the cities of Manasseh and Ephraim and Simeon, even unto Naphtali.”

There is amazing vigour in this young king. “And in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land, and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of Jehovah his God.” And God shows him signal mercy, for there it was that the priest Hilkiah found the book of the law of Jehovah given to Moses. “And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of Jehovah. And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan.” The king hears of it and, just as I have said, his conscience is the remarkable part of this good king; for when he hears the words of Jehovah, he rends his clothes. Had he not been pious? Had he not been faithful? Yes, but he forgot the things that were behind, and he pressed toward those that were before. He did not think of the good that he had done, but of the evil that, alas! was still around him, and of the good that he had not done and that remained before him.

So he sends, saying, “Go, enquire of Jehovah for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the bock that is found, for great is the wrath of Jehovah that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of Jehovah, to do after all that is written in this bock.” And God answers his desires. “And Hilkiah, and they that the king had appointed, went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvath,” and she gives the answer from Jehovah, and the king acts upon it, and humbles himself before the Lord. “And he caused all that were

present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers."

He too keeps a passover (2 Chronicles 35). He kept it, as we are told, on the fourteenth day of the first month, for now things are more in order as far as this was concerned. The preparations were made more orderly than in the hurried preparations of king Hezekiah, which they were obliged to keep in the second month. This chapter gives us a full account of this striking passover. There was no passover, we are told, like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet. Of Hezekiah's it was said there had been none such since the days of Solomon; but of Josiah's it is said, "since the days of Samuel." We have to go up to earlier times to find with what to compare it. The reformation, therefore, was remarkably complete in appearance. Alas! what was beneath the surface was corrupt and vile — not in Josiah, nor in certain godly ones that gathered in sympathy round the king, but in the mass of the people — and Josiah himself shows, after this, the usual failure of man, for he goes out unbidden against the king of Egypt when he had come against Charchemish. And, though he is warned by Pharaoh that he does not wish to fight with him, Josiah would not turn back. "He disguised himself that he might fight with him, and hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo. And the archers shot at king Josiah; and the king said to his servants, Have me away, for I am sore wounded. His servants therefore took him out of that chariot, and put him in the second chariot that he had. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died, and was buried in one of

the sepulchres of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah." Yet not they only; there was one heart more true than any — Jeremiah. Jeremiah knew from the Lord that there was buried the last worthy representative of the house of David. All that followed was only a shame and a scandal. It was but the filling up of the measure of their sins that they might he carried away into Babylon. Josiah was taken from the evil to come. "Jeremiah lamented for Josiah; and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day, and made them an ordinance in Israel; and behold they are written in the Lamentations."

"Then the people of the land took Jehoahaz" — for, indeed, it could not be said to be God now in any sense. "The people of the land took Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah, and made him king in his father's stead in Jerusalem. Jehoahaz was twenty and three years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem" (2 Chronicles 36). And his brother, or near relative at any rate, Eliakim, was made king, with his name changed to Jehoiakim. But as the king of Egypt made him king, so the king of Babylon unmade him; for he comes up and carries him to Babylon, and sets up Jehoiachin his son in his stead. And he too did what was evil and was brought to Babylon; and Zedekiah his brother, as we are told, was made king over Judah and Jerusalem. He brings the disasters of Jerusalem to their last crisis, for he it was who was sworn by the oath of Jehovah, and broke it, and gave the awful spectacle before the world, that a heathen had more respect for the name of Jehovah than the king of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar trusted that that name, at least,- would have moral weight. Zedekiah

feared it less than Nebuchadnezzar. Impossible, therefore, that God should allow such a stain to remain upon the throne and the house of David; so destruction came to the uttermost, and the last portion of Judah was swept away by the Chaldees, and the land must enjoy her sabbaths, “for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath to fulfil threescore and ten years.” And thus we see them back in captivity till God raises up Cyrus to make the way back for a remnant of Judah.

1 The Jews who believed and were baptized on the day of Pentecost availed themselves of the provision of God’s way of escape — the city of refuge. They saved themselves from the judgment hanging over the nation. Their land was defiled with innocent blood and bears the inscription, “Aceldama, that is the field of blood” unto this day. The Apostle Paul uses the same figure when he says, “we... who have fled for refuge” (Heb. 6:18). In another sense the unbelieving Jews are providentially preserved for future judgment; as when Cain had a mark put upon him, lest any finding him should kill him. Then when Christ comes out of heaven, having ceased to exercise His Aaronic type priesthood on high, He will come forth in His Melchisedec character of priesthood; and Israel will return to the land of their inheritance in peace and prosperity. The writer of these articles on Chronicles gives further exposition on the cities of refuge in his Lectures on the Pentateuch. — Editor of Christian Truth.