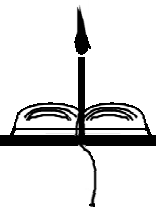
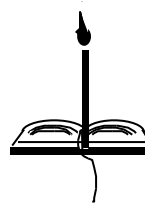


"Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord... Isaiah 1:18

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Old Testament Study: Exodus 18



Moses, Jethro, and Zipporah,
by C. H. Mackintosh (1820-1896)

¹When Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father in law, heard of all that God had done for Moses, and for Israel his people, and that the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt; ²then Jethro, Moses' father in law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her back, ³and her two sons; of which the name of the one was Gershom; for he said, "I have been an alien in a strange land": ⁴And the name of the other was Eliezer; for "the God of my father," said he, "was mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh": ⁵And Jethro, Moses' father in law, came with his sons and his wife unto Moses into the wilderness, where he encamped at the mount of God: ⁶And he said unto Moses, "I thy father in law Jethro am come unto thee, and thy wife, and her two sons with her."

⁷And Moses went out to meet his father in law, and did obeisance, and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare; and they came into the tent. ⁸And Moses told his father in law all that the LORD had done unto Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, and all the travail that had come upon them by the way, and how the LORD delivered them.

⁹And Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the LORD had done to Israel, whom he had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians. ¹⁰And Jethro said, "Blessed be the Lord, who hath delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of Pharaoh, who hath delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. ¹¹Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods: for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly he was above them." ¹²And Jethro, Moses' father in law, took a burnt

offering and sacrifices for God: and Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father in law before God. (Exodus 18:1-12, KJV).

We here arrive at the close of a very marked division of the book of Exodus. We have seen God, in the exercise of His perfect grace, visiting and redeeming His people; bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt; delivering them, first, from the hand of Pharaoh, and then from the hand of Amalek. Furthermore, we have seen, in the manna, a type of Christ come down from heaven; in the rock, a type of Christ smitten for His people; and in the gushing stream, a type of the Spirit given. Then follows, in striking and beautiful order, a picture of the future glory, divided into its three grand departments, namely, the Jew, the Gentile, and the Church of God.

During the period of Moses' rejection by his brethren, he was taken apart and presented with a bride—the companion of his rejection. We were led to see, at the opening of this book, the character of Moses' relationship with this bride. He was **“a husband by blood”** to her (see Ex. 4:25-26). This is precisely what Christ is to the Church. Her connection with Him is founded upon death and resurrection; and she is called to fellowship with His sufferings. It is, as we know, during the period of Israel's unbelief, and of Christ's rejection, that the Church is called out; and when the Church is complete, according to the divine counsels, when the **“fulness of the Gentiles is come in”** (see Rom. 11:25), Israel shall again be brought into notice. Thus it was with Zipporah and Israel of old. Moses had sent her back, during the period of his mission to Israel, and when the latter were brought forth as a fully delivered people, we find that Jethro, Zipporah and her two sons return to Moses, as we read in Exodus 18:1-12.

This is a deeply-interesting scene. The whole congregation assembled, in triumph, before the Lord—the Gentile presenting sacrifice—and in addition, to complete the picture, the bride of the deliverer, together with the children whom God had given him, are all introduced. It is, in short, a singularly striking foreshadowing of the coming kingdom. **“The Lord**

will give grace and glory” (Ps. 84:11). We have already seen, in what we have travelled over of this book, very much of the actings of **“grace”**; and here we have, from the pencil of the Holy Ghost, a beautiful picture of **“glory”**, a picture which must be regarded as peculiarly important, as exhibiting the varied fields in which that glory shall be manifested.

“The Jew”, *“the Gentile”*, and *“the Church of God”* are scriptural distinctions which can never be overlooked without marring that perfect range of truth which God has revealed in His holy Word. They have existed ever since the mystery of the Church was fully developed by the ministry of the apostle Paul, and they shall exist throughout the millennial age. Hence, every spiritual student of Scripture will give them their due place in his mind.

The apostle expressly teaches us, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, that the mystery of the Church had not been made known, in other ages, to the sons of men, as it was revealed to him. But, though not directly revealed, it had been shadowed forth in one way or another; as, for example, in Joseph's marriage with an Egyptian, and in Moses' marriage with an Ethiopian. The type or shadow of a truth is a very different thing from a direct and positive revelation of it. The great mystery of the Church was not revealed until Christ, in heavenly glory, revealed it to Saul of Tarsus. Hence, all who look for the full unfolding of this mystery in the law, the prophets, or the psalms, will find themselves engaged in unintelligent labor. When, however, they find it distinctly revealed in the Epistle to the Ephesians, they will be able, with interest and profit, to trace its foreshadowings in Old Testament Scripture.

Thus we have, in the opening of our chapter, a millennial scene. All the fields of glory lie open in vision before us. *“The Jew”* stands forth as the great earthly witness of Jehovah's faithfulness, His mercy, and His power. This is what the Jew has been in bygone ages, it is what he is now, and what he will be, world without end. *“The Gentile”* reads, in the book of God's dealings with the Jew, his deepest lessons. He traces the marvelous history of that peculiar and elect people—**“a people terrible from their beginning hitherto”** (Isa. 18:2). He

sees thrones and empires overturned—nations shaken to their center—everyone and everything compelled to give way, in order to establish the supremacy of that people on whom Jehovah has set His love. **“Now I know,”** Jethro (as *“the Gentile”*) says, **“that the Lord is greater than all gods: for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly he was above them”** (vs. 11). Such is the confession of *“the Gentile”* when the wondrous page of Jewish history lies open before him.

Lastly, *“The Church of God”* collectively, as prefigured by Zipporah, and the members thereof individually, as seen in Zipporah’s sons, are presented as occupying the most intimate relationship with the deliverer. All this is perfect in its way. We may be asked for our proofs. The answer is, **“I speak as unto wise men; judge ye what I say”** (1 Cor. 10:15). We can never build a doctrine upon a type; but when a doctrine is revealed, a type thereof may be discerned with accuracy and studied with profit. In every case a spiritual mind is essentially necessary, either to understand the doctrine or discern the type. **“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”** (1 Cor. 2:14).

Jethro’s Advice

¹³And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses sat to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening. ¹⁴And when Moses’ father in law saw all that he did to the people, he said, “What is this thing that thou doest to the people? Why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even?”

¹⁵And Moses said unto his father in law, “Because the people come unto me to enquire of God: ¹⁶When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws.” ¹

¹⁷And Moses’ father in law said unto him, “The thing that thou doest is not good. ¹⁸Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone. ¹⁹Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God: ²⁰And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. ²¹Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: ²²And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee. ²³If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace.”

²⁴So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said. ²⁵And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. ²⁶And they judged the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves.

²⁷And Moses let his father in law depart; and he went his way into his own land. (Exodus 18:13-27, KJV).

From verse 13 to the end of our chapter, we have the appointment of rulers who were to assist Moses in the management of the affairs of the congregation. This was the suggestion of Jethro, who feared that Moses would **“wear away”** in consequence of his labors. In connection with this, it may be profitable to look at the appointment of the seventy elders in Numbers 11. Here we find the spirit of Moses crushed beneath the ponderous responsibility which devolved upon him, and he gives utterance to the anguish of his heart in the fol-

lowing accents. **“And Moses said unto the Lord, ‘Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? And wherefore have I not found favor in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? Have I conceived all this people? Have I begotten them that thou shouldest say unto me, “Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers?”... I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favor in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness”** (Num. 11:11-15).

In all this we see Moses evidently retiring from a post of honor. If God were pleased to make him the sole instrument in managing the assembly, it was only so much the more dignity and privilege conferred upon him. True, the responsibility was immense; but faith would own that God was amply sufficient for that. Here, however, the heart of Moses failed him (blessed servant as he was), and he says, **“I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me.”** But he was not asked to bear them alone; for God was with him. They were not too heavy for God. It was He that was bearing them; Moses was but the instrument. He might just as well have spoken of his rod as bearing the people; for what was he but a mere instrument in God’s hand, as the rod was in his? It is here the servants of Christ constantly fail; and the failure is all the more dangerous because it wears the appearance of humility. It seems like distrust of oneself and deep lowliness of spirit to shrink from heavy responsibility; but all we need to inquire is, has God imposed that responsibility? If so, He will assuredly be with me in sustaining it; and having Him with me, I can sustain anything. With Him the weight of a mountain is nothing; without Him the weight of a feather is overwhelming. It is a totally different thing if a man, in the vanity of his mind, thrust himself forward and take a burden upon his shoulder which God never intended him to bear, and, therefore, never fitted him to bear it; we may then, surely, expect to see him crushed beneath the weight; but if God lays

it upon him. He will qualify and strengthen him to carry it.

It is never the fruit of humility to depart from a divinely-appointed post. On the contrary, the deepest humility will express itself by remaining there in simple dependence upon God. It is a sure evidence of being occupied about self when we shrink from service on the ground of inability. God does not call us into service on the ground of our ability, but of His own; hence, unless I am filled with thoughts about myself, or with positive distrust of Him, I need not relinquish any position of service or testimony because of the heavy responsibilities attaching thereto. All power belongs to God, and it is quite the same whether that power acts through one agent or through seventy; the power is still the same: but if one agent refuse the dignity, it is only so much the worse for him. God will not force people to abide in a place of honor, if they cannot trust Him to sustain them there. The way lies always open to them to step down from their dignity, and sink into the place where base unbelief is sure to put us.

Thus it was with Moses. He complained of the burden, and the burden was speedily removed; but with it the high honor of being allowed to carry it. **“And the Lord said unto Moses, ‘Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee. And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone”** (Num. 9:16-17). There was no fresh power introduced. It was the same Spirit, whether in one or in seventy. There was no more value or virtue in the flesh of seventy men than in the flesh of one man. **“It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing”** (John 6:63). There was nothing, in the way of power, gained; but a great deal, in the way of dignity, lost by this movement on the part of Moses.

In the after part of Numbers 11, we find Moses giving utterance to accents of unbelief, which called forth from the

Lord a sharp rebuke. **“Is the Lord’s hand waxed short? Thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not”** (Num. 11:23). If my reader will compare vss. 11-15 with vss. 21-22, he will see a marked and solemn connection. The man who shrinks from responsibility on the ground of his own feebleness, is in great danger of calling in question the fullness and sufficiency of God’s resources. This entire scene teaches a most valuable lesson to every servant of Christ who may be tempted to feel himself alone or overburdened in his work. Let such an one bear in mind that, where the Holy Ghost is working, one instrument is as good and as efficient as seventy; and where He is not working, seventy are of no more value than one. It all depends upon the energy of the Holy Ghost. With Him one man can do all, endure all, sustain all. Without Him seventy men can do nothing. Let the lonely servant remember, for the comfort and encouragement of his sinking heart, that, provided he has the presence and power of the Holy Ghost with him, he need not complain of his burden, nor sigh for a division of labor. If God honor a man by giving him a great deal of work to do, let him rejoice therein and not murmur; for if he murmur, he can very speedily lose his honor. God is at no loss for instruments. He could, from the stones, raise up children unto Abraham; and He can raise up, from the same, the needed agents to carry on His glorious work.

Oh, for a heart to serve Him! A patient, humble, self-emptied, devoted heart! A heart ready to serve in company, ready to serve alone, a heart so filled with love to Christ that it will find its joy—its chief joy—in serving Him, let the sphere or character of service be what it may. This assuredly is the special need of the day in which our lot is cast. May the Holy Ghost stir up our hearts to a deeper sense of the exceeding preciousness of the name of Jesus, and enable us to yield a fuller, clearer, more unequivocal response to the change—less love of His heart.

This article is taken from: Mackintosh, C. H. *Notes on the Book of Exodus*. London: George Morrish, 1858. A PDF file of this book can be downloaded, free of charge, at <http://www.ClassicChristianLibrary.com>



A Classic Study: Job 1:6

[Here we continue a reprint of a small portion of Joseph Caryl’s study in Job. Mr. Caryl wrote twelve volumes on the book of Job. His study is a great example of how deep one can dig into the truths of the Bible.]

Job 1:6 - The Sons of God, and Satan, by Joseph Caryl (1666)

“Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them.

Having thus given some light about these six verses in general, I shall open the particulars.

“Now there was a day...”: The Jewish Rabbins trouble themselves much to find out what day this was. They say it was the first day of the year. Others that it was the Sabbath day. But I account it a disadvantage to a clear truth when it is proved by an obscure text. The Sabbath has proof enough before the law, though this be spared. The holy Spirit has told us only that there was a day, or a certain time.

“...when the sons of God...”: In Gen. 6:2, the posterity of Seth (who were the visible Church at the time) are called the *sons of God*. The unanimous consent of all expositors (I have met with) is, that here the sons of God are the good Angels, so also they are called in Job 38:7 of this book. Some it may be will object against this exposition that of the Apostle in Heb. 1:5: **“To which of the Angels said he at any time, thou are my son?”** How then do you interpret here, that the sons of God are the Angels, when as the Apostle has expressed, *to which of the Angels*, etc.

I answer that the *Angels* are not the *sons of God*, as the Apostle there expresses, they are *not the sons of God*, by *eternal*

generation; but they are the *sons of God* by *temporal creation*, for so he speaks there, **“To which of the Angels said he, ‘thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee?’”** They are not the *begotten sons of God*, but they are the *created sons of God*. And the *Angels* are called the *sons of God* in three respects.

First, because of their great and mighty power, therefore in Eph. 1:21, they are called, *Principalities and powers; far above principalities and powers, and might and dominions*, that is, far above all Angels. They are called the *sons of God*, because they are like God in power and dignity.

Then again they are called the *sons of God*, because they serve God as *sons*, cheerfully, willingly, readily. They do not obey as slaves, as servants, as the best of servants, they obey better than the best of servants, they obey *as children*: they go about their work with *filial and son-like* cheerfulness and delight.

Thirdly, they are called *sons*, because of the great *privilege* that God does vouchsafe them, He uses them as His children, as his *sons*, they are His *courtiers*, they are near Him, always attending Him, and continually see His face. They have the privilege of *sons*.

“...came to present themselves before the Lord.” Not that the *Angels* are at any time out of the presence of God, for Christ expressed that, **“Their Angels do always behold the face of my Father”** (Matt. 18:10). But they are then said to come and present themselves before God, when they come upon some special business, or upon some special occasion. As it is with us here upon the Earth, we are never out of the presence of God, for **“Whither shall I go from Thy presence?”** (Ps. 139). Yet when we come to pray and are in other holy duties we are said to *present ourselves before God*, and to *draw near to God*, and God is said to *draw near to us* at such a time, and yet God is ever with us, and we ever with Him. So when it is said here, that the **“Angels came and presented themselves before the Lord”**, it notes only this, their readiness, either to give an account of what they had done, or to receive directions from God what to do. The Angels are most willing to go about the service

and work of God, and that is all that is here meant by their presenting themselves before the Lord, for otherwise they are ever in His presence, as in Luke 1:19: **“The Angel answered and said, ‘I am Gabriel that stand in the presence of God, and am sent to speak unto Thee.’”** *I am Gabriel that stand*, he speaks in the present tense, even now while I am speaking to Thee, *I stand in the presence of God*. The Angel while he goes into the world, is not absent from God, he beholds the face of God *always*. The Schoolmen have an odd distinction, they say there are *assisting Angels* and there are *ministering Angels*: Those Angels that are assistants stand always before God and never are sent out about the world upon any occasion. Others are ministering spirits, as in Heb. 1:14: **“Are they not ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who are the heirs of salvation?”** This is School doctrine. But there needs no such distinction of some to be assisting or attending and some to be ministering Angels, for wheresoever they are, they are always in the presence of God: and their presenting themselves before God, notes only their preparedness to attend the Lord’s service in whatsoever He shall employ them.

“...and Satan came also among them”: That is, the chief of the evil Angels, as it is conceived. The word *Satan* signifies an *Adversary*, and so it is often times applied to men; as concerning Solomon, it is said that while he did walk exactly with God, **“there was neither adversary nor evil occurrent”** (I Kings 5:4); the word in the original is, “there was no *Satan* in his kingdom”; and in I Kings 11:14, it is said, **“The Lord stirred up Satan an Adversary against Solomon”**; and that *accusation* which those wretches in Ezra 4:6 sent against the building of Jerusalem, is called *sitna*: **“they sent an accusation (*sitna*)”**, or an opposing letter. It comes from the same root; any kind of opposition is called *sitna* from Satan, who is an opposer. It is sometimes used more generally concerning any opposition, as the Angel that came to oppose Balaam in Num. 22:34: **“I knew not (*said Baalam*) that there was an adversary that stood in the way.”**

But how can it be said that Satan should come among the

sons of God? I said before that it was but an alluding speech to the dealings of men in their sessions and assemblies, and there is no necessity to make every particular of it hold. We may conceive it thus.

“Satan came also among them”: It is not said that the sons of God and Satan, came and presented themselves before the Lord; Satan did not join himself in with them. Satan did not offer himself for any good service; but thither he came being to ordered by the overruling power of God.

But can Satan come into the presence of God?

No otherwise than a blind man can come into the Sun: he comes into the Sun and the Sun shines upon him, but he sees not the Sun. Satan comes so into the presence of God, that he is always seen of God; he is never so in the presence of God as to see God. It is questioned whether the lapsed Angels ever saw God at all while they stood, because if they had seen God, it is conceived that vision would have been their confirmation. But it is more certain that the lapsed Angels since their fall never saw God, nor ever shall, though it be said here Satan came among the sons of God. You know what the Apostle Jude teaches: **“That the devils kept not their place, but are reserved in chains of darkness against the judgement of the great day”** (Jude 1:6). We shall open that afterward, when we come to speak of his compassing the earth, how he does compass the earth, and yet is reserved in chains of darkness. But I say there is his seat, there is his place, and all that is spoken of him in this does not infer any the least glimpse or fruition of God or communion with the Angels. In regard of his nature, he is full spirit; but in regard of his sin, he is a miserable spirit; he has lost his excellency, though he has not lost his nature. And being a spirit, he has power to pass and repass, to go up and down the world, to ascend and descend at his pleasure (as good Angels may and can) when God does permit him.

We see here the good Angels are called the *sons of God*; in this learn the privilege of believers: they partake with the Angels in this title; the Apostle says: **“Behold what manner of love the Father hath showed that we should be called the sons of God”** (I John 3:1). If you would know

what manner of love it is, it is as great as the Angels in Heaven have. Christ took not upon Him the nature of Angels but has given us the honor of Angels. Fallen Angels could not share with us in the benefit of redemption, but we share with the Angels that stand in the privilege of Son-ship. We are the sons of God as well as they, and in somewhat beyond them: they are created sons, but we are adopted sons.

“...came and presented themselves before God”: This should teach us to imitate Angels. This we pray for, **“That the will of God should be done on Earth, as it is done in Heaven.”** The Angels always present themselves; they always stand before God, ready to do His will. We should be ever in the presence of God in this sense, that is, presenting ourselves, standing as in the presence of God, ready to take and receive instruction, to do His will, whatever it is, like Paul: **“Lord what wilt thou have me to do?”** (Acts 9:6). This is the presenting of the soul before God.

Then consider here, who Satan was. Satan was as good in his Creation, as any of those who are called the sons of God. They are called the sons of God, and he is now called nothing but Satan, an adversary. His condition was once as good as theirs.

Note hence, *There is no created excellency, but if it be left to itself, will quickly undo itself.*

These Angels were as good at the first as any of those that were here called the sons of God. They were not confirmed, they stood upon their own bottom; they fell and had no tempter at all; they turned about upon the freedom of their own will, and **“left their habitation”** (Jude 1:6). *There is no trusting to any estate out of Christ.*

Further note this, what was the difference between those sons of God and this Satan? Only sin: one was as good as the other in the creation; nothing else made an Angel a Devil, but only sin. *Sin despoils the creature of all its comfort and honor at once.*

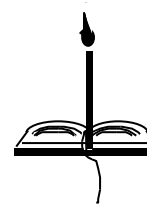
Again note this, the Angel falling and becoming sinful has his name presently changed. He is called Satan, an Adversary: an adversary to God; an adversary to man.

He that is wicked himself will quickly be an adversary, an opposer of all goodness: no sooner a sinner, but a Satan.

Lastly, note this: *To be an opposer of good is to be conformable to the devil.*

The devil is the Adversary, the Satan, and so proportionably as anyone is an opposer of good, so much of Satan, so much of the devil he has in him. Therefore Christ said to a chief Apostle, when he did oppose him in that greatest good of all, the working out of our redemption in dying for us, **“Get thee behind me Satan”** (Matt. 16:23). All opposition of goodness is a spice of the devil. So the Apostle Paul, in Acts 13:10, when he speaks to Elymas the sorcerer, said: **“O thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all goodness.”** To be an enemy of goodness is to be the child of the devil; it is the very character of the devil. He is a Satan in respect of all goodness and good persons.

And surely (my brothers) if this be a character of the devil, and to be conformable unto Satan, how conspicuous is that conformity in this age? How many thousands bear this mark of the devil, not only in their hands closely, but in their foreheads openly? How many visible walking Satans are there among us, enemies of all goodness, oppressors of all righteousness, opposers of our peace, opposers of our liberty, opposers of the Gospel, opposers of Christ? These are all as so many Satans in the world, so many enemies. Now is a time that Satans are let loose in the world; the devil now if ever works mightily in the hearts and spirits, in the hands and tongues of these children of disobedience. It becomes us then, that as there are many adversaries and opposers of goodness, to show ourselves friends and patrons of goodness. Christ has many challengers, let Him find some Champions. Now it is time to raise your spirits, not only to love the truth, but to maintain the truth; as it is the height of wickedness, not only to do evil, but to oppose good, so it is the height of holiness, not only to do good, but to oppose evil. This is just to be on the contrary point to Satan, he does wickedness and opposes good, let us do good and oppose all evil. To be a Satan against Satan, is the glory of a Christian. Now set yourselves against the satans, be adversaries to the Adversary and all his adherents, so shall you approve yourselves the friends of Christ.



New Testament Study: Matthew 26:31-45

Matthew 26:31-35 - Preparation for Jesus' Arrest

³¹Then Jesus told them, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written:

**“I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’**

³²But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

³³Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”

³⁴“Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”

³⁵But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same.

During the evening and night of the Last Supper, Jesus was to spend His time in prayer at Gethsemane, to prepare for the suffering He was about to endure. Before that, Jesus wanted to apprise the disciples of the trials they would face, presumably so that they also would spend the time in prayer: **“Then Jesus told them, ‘This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered”’”** (vs. 31). “The intimacy of the Last Supper is shortly to be replaced by disloyalty and cowardice” [Carson, 540].

On this occasion, Jesus is very specific about the time of the suffering; it is **“this very night.”** “He has during more than six months repeatedly foretold that He should be put to

death in Jerusalem and rise again (see 16:21; 17:22ff; 20:18ff). At the close of His public teaching, He declared that He should at the Passover be delivered up and crucified (see 26:2). Now He is perfectly definite as to the time" [Broadus, 533].

Jesus' charge is serious; they would **"fall away"**. The Greek words here used suggest a forsaking of Christ, possibly even an apostasy or renunciation of one's belief. And this **"falling away"** was not to be an isolated stumbling, they would **"all"**, to a man, fall away.

Jesus was certain this would occur. There is no wiggle-room in His words: **"This very night you will..."** In fact, the isolation and forsaking of the Messiah during His sufferings was predicted in the Old Testament. Jesus cites one of the prophetic statements: **"I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered"** (vs. 31, taken from Zech. 13:7). Isaiah (in the amazing prophetic chapter Isaiah 53) also alludes to Jesus' isolation during His suffering, telling us none of His followers would defend Him: **"By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested?"** (Isaiah 53:8). And what if the disciples, rather than **"scattering"**, stood with Jesus and **"protested"** His innocence, His sinlessness. What if Peter had got up, and preached to the mob about the significance of the suffering and death of Jesus, as it was happening? Would not this have served to open their hearts to the promptings of the Spirit of God, as they watched Jesus die for them? What if the disciples had prophesied aloud the resurrection of Christ to the throngs that had gathered, before it occurred? Would not many of the throng have been inclined to worship Jesus as their Savior after His resurrection, having been told beforehand of the significance of His death, and the surety of His resurrection? Yet instead, they denied Him, disowned Him, and **"fell away"**.

By citing the prophecy of the **"striking"** and the **"scattering"**, Jesus is letting the disciples know that the horrible things that were about to occur, were to be all part of God's plan, foreknown to Jesus Himself. "What the Lord

knew by immediate prevision, He nevertheless connects with a prophetic word: partly for the sake of the disciples, partly on account of His relation to the law; and further to prove that the course of His suffering was not contrary to Old Testament predictions, but that the carnal notions of the Jews as to a Messiah exempt from suffering were in direct contradiction to the Old Testament" [Lange, 478]. "In laying out in advance much of the tragedy of the coming hours, [this passage] shows that Jesus is not a blind victim of fate but a voluntary sacrifice; and simultaneously He is preparing His disciples for their dark night of doubt" [Carson, 540]. "His agonizing trials came not on Him by surprise or accident; all was foreknown and forearranged. The very prospect of all our life trials would crush us long before they came; but Christ had that sublime magnanimity that enabled Him to look at them in all their enormity in the distance, approach them without a faltering step, enter them with a spirit of unconquerable loyalty to Heaven, and pass through them with the moral energy of a God" [Thomas, 500].

To console them, Jesus lets the disciples know that all will end well: **"But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee"** (vs. 32). Despite the predicted **"falling away"**, Jesus, in His grace and forgiveness, says that He will meet them after His death and resurrection. "Both His knowledge and His purpose stretched beyond His death; that He should rise, knew that He should meet them after His resurrection. He speaks of all with most unquestioned certainty" [Thomas, 501]. This prophecy was directly fulfilled when Jesus gave the disciples the Great Commission in Galilee (see Matt. 28:16ff).

The exactitude, and imminence of their Lord's prediction of their **"falling away"** should have put the disciples on guard, and should have incited the disciples to prayer and deep reflection. Instead, they rejected that what Jesus prophesied would occur. Peter spoke up: **"Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will"** (vs. 33). "Since he did not know [or fully understand] what he would be called upon to go through, it was a thoughtless and foolish boast,

but it reflects the deep-seated loyalty in the heart of this disciple and his determination at the time he spoke to be faithful, whatever the circumstances” [Morris, 665]. But Jesus had said **“all”**, and He meant **“all”**, even Peter. Peter’s reply to Jesus was quite presumptuous, given that Peter earlier professed Jesus to be **“Messiah. The Son of the living God”** (Matt. 16:16). The words, “No, Lord” should never be spoken together. Peter would learn that Jesus knew his heart better than he himself did.

Jesus contradicts Peter’s prideful (almost boasting) statement, **“Even if all fall away...”**, by informing Peter that indeed he would fall away in a more shameful way than the other disciples: **“Truly I tell you, Jesus answered, ‘this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times’”** (vs. 34). Peter would sink far lower than he thought capable of himself. “In the best of men there may sleep certain elements of depravity, which, if roused by powerful temptation, would prompt them to actions, the very thought of which a few minutes before would make them shudder” [Thomas, 501].

This is a specific prediction, not a vague forecast. It was to happen **“This very night, before the rooster crows”**. The specificity should have given Peter pause, and caused him to stop and reflect. Instead, Peter doubles down: **“But Peter declared, ‘Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.’”** (vs. 35). To Peter’s credit, I believe that he was ready to actually die with Christ. Peter demonstrates this by drawing his sword, and even beginning to fight with it when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus (see John 18:10). Peter imagined possibly dying for Christ, in a blaze of glory, in a brave fight against the soldiers. Peter did not, however, imagine the way it would actually turn out: Jesus rebuking him for drawing his sword; Jesus voluntarily going to His death. Peter, I am sure, was caught off-guard by this, and the unexpectedness of Jesus’ voluntary surrender, led to (I believe) his denials and his disowning of His Lord. Sometimes, yea even most times, I dare say, God does not work things as we

planned them. We need to be prepared to stand firm with our Lord when this happens.

We tend to fault Peter specifically, because of his outspoken vehemence, but he was not alone in faultily professing future bravery: **“And all the other disciples said the same”** (vs. 35). All of the disciples said that they would stand by Jesus, and all, to a man, fell away. Jesus faced His suffering entirely alone. And sadly, Jesus also faced the preparation for His suffering, in prayer, all alone, as we see in the next section.

Matthew 26:36-46 - Prayer at Gethsemane

³⁶Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, **“Sit here while I go over there and pray.”** ³⁷He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸Then he said to them, **“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”**

³⁹Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, **“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”**

⁴⁰Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. **“Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?”** he asked Peter. ⁴¹**“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”**

⁴²He went away a second time and prayed, **“My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”**

⁴³When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

⁴⁵Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, **“Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has**

come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

After the Last Supper concluded, Jesus and His disciples headed to the Mount of Olives (see vs. 30). Specifically, they went to Gethsemane: **“Then Jesus went with His disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and He said to them, ‘Sit here while I go over there and pray”**” (vs. 36). Acting as a type of Jesus, King David also went to pray on the Mount of Olives, when one of his most trusted friends, Ahithopel, betrayed him (see II Sam. 15:30-31; Ps. 41:9).

Jesus, as we see in this passage, went to the Mount of Olives, specifically the Garden of Gethsemane, to pray concerning the coming hours of suffering. In my opinion, and the opinion of many others, this is one of the most significant passages in the Bible. We learn much from it: we learn about the humanity of Christ, about the depth of prayer needed to face serious trials, about surrendering to God’s will, about being watchful in times of trouble. There is also much that we do not fully understand about what happened in Gethsemane: what was the source and manifestation of Jesus’ distress? At what point did Christ’s physical and spiritual suffering for our sins begin; was it here at Gethsemane? What was the nature of the need that Jesus had for companionship as He faced what was coming? What was the nature of the struggle between the two persons of the Holy Trinity? Despite the mysteries, we are blessed and enriched to have this passage in the Bible. It provides much food for meditation, and deep thought. “It is a passage which undoubtedly contains deep and mysterious things. We ought to read it with reverence and wonder, for there is much in it which we cannot fully comprehend” [Ryle, 361]. “Here we come to the Holy of Holies of our Lord’s life on earth. This is a mystery like that which Moses saw when the bush burned with fire, and was not consumed. No man can rightly expound such a passage as this; it is a subject for prayerful, heart-broken meditation, more than for human language. May the Holy Spirit graciously reveal to us all that

be can be permitted to see of the King beneath the olive-trees in the garden of Gethsemane!” [Spurgeon, 461].

The eleven disciples at the Last Supper all went with Jesus to Gethsemane. Jesus separated Himself with the three closest disciples (Peter, John and James): **“He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with Him, and He began to be sorrowful and troubled”** (vs. 37). Implied here is that Jesus had a need and desire to be with His closest human companions during His time of trouble. He pours His soul out to them: **“Then He said to them, ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with Me”**” (vs. 38). In this, Jesus displays traits of humanity. “Urged by the social instincts of His [adopted] nature, Jesus sought the presence and sympathy of His friends in the dark hour of sorrow.... This is natural, this is right. Man is made to help man, is bound to help man. God frequently helps man through man” [Thomas, 503]. It is significant that the three disciples who saw Jesus in His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration (see Matt. 17:1-9), should be called to support Jesus in His time of suffering.

In Gethsemane, Jesus **“began to be sorrowful and troubled”** and told His close disciples that His **“soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.”** What was the source and cause of this deep and overwhelming sorrow? Was it just the anticipation of the excruciating physical pain that He was to suffer? I think it was more than that, though that was certainly part of it (in His incarnation as a human, Jesus was to suffer great physical pain). Jesus was not only to face great physical pain, but He was also to bear the spiritual burden of every sin ever committed and ever to be committed by those he was dying for. Jesus was facing the death due to all sinners, even those who had committed the most heinous of sins. We cannot imagine the burden that Jesus was beginning to bear—in conscience, in physical pain and anguish, in being literally God-forsaken—that such a death brings, especially to one who is Himself sinless. The number and heinousness of all sins is unimaginable, and this guilt and shame was all put on Jesus in

the hours of His sufferings. This, I believe, was why His **“soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.”** “Thousands have endured the most agonizing sufferings of body, and died without a groan, and so, no doubt, might our Lord. But the real weight that bowed down the heart of Jesus, was the weight of the sin of the world, which seems to have now pressed down upon Him with peculiar force” [Ryle, 361-362]. “Jesus went to His death knowing that it was His Father’s will that He face death completely alone ([hence the cry, **‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’** in Matt. 27:46]) as the sacrificial, wrath-averting Passover Lamb. As His death was unique, so also His anguish; and our best response to it is hushed worship” [Carson, 543].

Notice the wording here: Jesus **“began to be sorrowful and troubled”** (vs. 37). Could it be that it was here, at Gethsemane, that Jesus was beginning to bear the burden of our sins, that the **“overwhelming sorrow”** was the sorrow of a conscience bearing sin?

Properly, and as we should, Jesus goes to pray when His **“soul is overwhelmed”**: **“Going a little farther, He fell with His face to the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will.’”** Jesus’ bodily attitude during His praying reflected the extent to which His soul was overwhelmed: **“...He fell with His face to the ground, and prayed.”**

Interestingly, Jesus had foreknowledge that He was to bear our sins and to die for us very soon; He expressed as much not long beforehand, when He told the disciples that **“this very night”** they would fall away, and that **“after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”** (vss. 31-32). Yet, Jesus prayed anyway that the **“cup”** be taken from Him. At times we pray, even though we know God’s desired outcome. This is okay. Prayer is at times a struggle to get our own spirits in line with God’s will: A wrestling with God, as Jacob did.

That Jesus prayed this prayer, that the **“cup”** be taken away, teaches us that Jesus could have walked away from dying for us, and God could have, if He desired, stopped the whole thing to save His Son. This should emphasize to us what a great gift to us the death and resurrection of Jesus was. As we should already know, Jesus’ sacrifice was a great and magnificent gift to us, the greatest and most magnificent gift ever given from anyone being to another. It is the crowning proof that God loves us, as we have been told by John: **“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life”** (John 3:16). Paul echoes this: **“He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things”** (Rom. 8:32).

The words **“...if it is possible...”** in Jesus’ prayer are significant. Jesus did not mean **“if it is possible”** in the sense of questioning the possibility that God had the power to cause Jesus to escape the crucifixion. Certainly, God the Father, and Jesus Himself, had the physical power to escape any Roman guard or prison. The words **“...if it is possible...”** were spoken within the implied context that both God the Father, and Jesus, wanted to save mankind; they were agreed in the desire, based on their love for us, to free us from the punishment we deserve for our sins. Jesus in His anguish, in those hours at Gethsemane, was asking, essentially, for another mechanism that the redemption and salvation of mankind could be achieved. And so, in the end, what we learn from the fact that Jesus did go on to sacrifice Himself for us, is that this was the only way to effect our salvation.

Jesus’ use of the **“cup”** enlightens us a bit on what exactly the cause of Jesus’ anguish was. The word **“cup”** was used multiple times to denote a portion of God’s wrath (see Isa. 51:17; Ezek. 23:33; Ps. 11:6, in the KJV). So, Jesus, in His time of anguish, did not want to face the wrath of God, which was falling on Him because He was bearing our sins. As stated earlier in this article, I don’t think that any of us humans can

know or imagine what the bearing of all the sins of mankind feels like—the extent of the physical, spiritual, and soulful pain of the entire **“cup”** of God’s wrath is unimaginable to us. We should not be surprised that Jesus asked for another way for the goal, common to the Father and Jesus, of human redemption and salvation to be achieved.

Note also that the use of the word **“cup”** points back to the Sacrament of Holy Communion. As we take the **“cup”** to remember the pouring out of Jesus’ blood for us during Communion, we should also remember His anguish in Gethsemane, and the choice that Jesus made to go ahead and bear the full **“cup”** of God’s wrath on Golgotha.

The end of Jesus’ prayer to the Father in Gethsemane was, as the end to all of ours anytime and anywhere should be: **“Yet not as I will, but as You will”** (vs. 39). “This was the vital part of His petition, its true essence; for much as His human nature shrank from the ‘cup’, still more did He shrink from any thought of acting contrary to His Father’s will” [Spurgeon, 463]. There’s so much to learn from Jesus’ prayers at Gethsemane, not least of which is that our prayers should be earnest, but in the end submissive to God’s will.

“Then He returned to His disciples and found them sleeping. ‘Couldn’t you men keep watch with Me for one hour?’ He asked Peter” (vs. 40). Jesus had been praying about an **“hour”** at that point. It was no doubt an intense, lengthy prayer, the gist of which we have been given in vs. 39.

To me, one of the most heartbreaking moments in the Bible is when Jesus returns from this intense prayer, and finds Peter, John, and James **“sleeping”**. Our Lord desired their support and companionship during His time of overwhelming anguish, and they were **“sleeping”**. “It is one of the saddest things in the Gospel accounts that in this critical time, when Jesus was so disturbed in the face of the ordeal that confronted Him, and when He had appealed to the three who were closest to Him on earth to watch with Him, they were so far from understanding the situation that they went to sleep” [Morris, 669].

Jesus directly addresses Peter, when He asks about the three of them sleeping. Rightly so. It was Peter who led the disciples in the protestation about them falling away (see vs. 33, 35). “They had professed their loyalty and their readiness even to die for Jesus. But when the first test came, they were tired and lacked the strength *to watch* with Jesus even for *one hour*” [Morris, 569].

Jesus advises: **“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”** (vs. 42). Given Jesus’ previous warnings about the disciples falling away—that very night, even—they should have been on guard, and spiritually prepared. “Watching and praying were enjoined for a special purpose: **‘that ye enter not into temptation’**. He knew what sore temptations were about to assail them, so he would have them doubly armed by—**‘watching unto prayer’**” [Spurgeon, 478]. “*Watch*—Act the sentinel, look about you, observe the perils that threaten and the foes that surround; and *Pray*—look above you, ever realize your dependence upon God for guidance, protection, and support” [Thomas, 504]. “Watchfulness sees temptation coming; prayer gives strength to withstand it” [*Pulpit Comm.*, 527]. The failure of Peter, John, and James to **“watch and pray”** quite probably directly led to their falling away, and even disowning Jesus, after His arrest.

Jesus poetically summarizes the struggle that Peter, John, and James were having: **“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”** (vs. 41). “The apostles had shown a certain readiness of spirit when they offered to die with Christ; but the flesh, the material and lower nature, represses the higher impulse, checks the will, and prevents it from carrying out that which it is prompted to perform” [*Pulpit Comm.*, 527]. Indeed, we all encounter this struggle between the willing spirit and the weak flesh. It is a universal Christian condition. “Spiritual eagerness is often accompanied by carnal weakness—a danger amply experienced by successive generations of Christians” [Carson, 544]. The Apostle Paul speaks of this battle in Romans 7, especially in this passage: **“I do not understand what I do. For**

what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do... As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing... So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me” (Rom. 7:15, 17-19, 21).

There is some sympathy implied in the statement by Jesus to the disciples about the willing spirit and the weak flesh, for Jesus Himself was at that time in the midst of a flesh vs. spirit battle. “Christ Himself is included in this declaration, with the difference that He gave as high and pre-eminent an example of its truth, as the disciples afforded a low and ignoble one: He, in the willingness of the spirit, yielding Himself to the Father’s will to suffer and die, but weighed down by the weakness of the flesh; they, having professed, and really having, a willing spirit to suffer with Him, but, even in the one hour’s watching, overcome by the burden of drowsiness” [Schaff, in Lange, 480]. Jesus overcame His spirit vs. flesh battle by His deep, fervent, and lengthy prayer, with **“Yet not as I will, but as the Father wills”** as the foundation and emphasis.

Jesus went away again, prayed the same prayer, returned and found the three sleeping. This time, He did not wake them, resembling how the pull of the Holy Spirit on us lessens as we ourselves fall away. And then again, a third time, Jesus prayed the same prayer: the three prayer sessions paralleling the three temptations in the desert (see Matt. 4), as well as the three denials of Christ by Peter.

After the third time praying, Jesus roused the disciples, in preparation for His arrest, saying: **“Rise! Let us go!”** (vs. 46). The result of Jesus’ prayer was that He willingly, without hesitation, went to His death. “After His prayer, all the terrific excitement seemed to pass away; the inner storm subsided, the clouds broke, and the sun shone; a halcyon calm-

ness came over Him, and His soul rose to an energy equal to His fate. He rose from His devotions with a new power, went to His drowsy disciples, and said, **‘Rise, let us be going,’** and began His way, with a firm and majestic step, to the cross” [Thomas, 504].

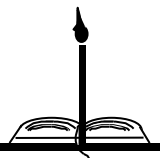
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All of these books, except Carson, and Morris, can be downloaded free of charge from:

<http://www.ClassicChristianLibrary.com>

A Topical Study: The Bible



The Bible: An Introduction, by Horatius Bonar

“All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full,” said the wisest of the wise (in Eccl. 1:7). We might add to this, and say, “All the rivers come out of the sea, yet the sea is not empty.” All the books in the world have, more or less directly, come out of the Bible, yet the Bible is not empty. It is as full as at the first. Let us not be afraid of exhausting it.

There is but *one* book that would bear such study. Let us be thankful that our world does contain such a book. It must be superhuman, supernatural. Blessed be God that there is at least one thing thoroughly superhuman, supernatural in this world; something which stands out from and above “the laws of nature”; something visible and audible to link us with Him whose face we see not and whose voice we hear not. What a blank would there be here, if this one fragment of the divine, now venerable, both with wisdom and age, were to disappear from the midst of us; or, what is the same thing, the discovery were to be made that this ancient volume is not the unearthly thing which men have deemed it, but, at the highest estimate, a mere fragment from the great block of human thought,—perhaps, according to another estimate, a mere relic of superstition.

“Bring the Book,” said Sir Walter Scott, upon his death-bed, to Lockhart. “What book?” asked Lockhart. “What Book?” replied the dying novelist, “there is but *one* Book.” Yes; there is but one Book, and we shall one day know this, when that which is human shall pass away (like the mists from some Lebanon peak), and leave that which is divine to stand out and to shine out alone in its unhidden grandeur.

God is now recalling humanity to the book which was written for it. By the very attacks made on it by enemies, as

well as by the studies of its friends, He is bringing us back to this one volume, as the light shining in a dark place. That we may know the past, the present, and the future, He is bidding us betake ourselves to it.

Let us read it, let us study it, let us love it, let us reverence it.

It will guide, it will cheer, it will enlighten, it will make wise, it will purify.

It will lead us into all truth. It will deliver us from the fermenting errors of the day. It will save us from the intellectual dreams of a vain philosophy, from the vitiated taste of a sensational literature, from the specious novelties of spiritual mysticism, from the pretentious sentimentalisms of men who soar above all creeds and abhor the name of “law”, from Broad Churchism, and High Churchism, and no Churchism. It will lead us into light and love, into liberty and unity, imparting strength and gladness.

This Book is “the *word* of God.” It contains “the words of God,” but it is “the word of God,” the thing that God hath spoken to man. Being *the word* of God, that which it contains must be *the words* of God.

Each word of God is true, and as divine as it is true. But are there not various readings, so that at times we are uncertain which is the authentic word? Yes; but these cases are few, and doubtful cases do not invalidate those that are not doubtful, of which latter more than nine-tenths of the Bible is composed. The doubtful readings make us far more secure as to all the rest. These are various readings in Homer and Cicero, but the occurrence of these does not prove that the rest are not really the very words of Homer and Cicero.

But are not there words of wicked men, nay, of Satan himself, in the Bible; how can I say that it contains nothing but the words of God? I did not say this. But I say that even the words of the wicked are inserted in it by God, for a wise purpose; and in interpreting such words we are to consider what that purpose is, so that taking the passage as a whole we shall extract the truth of God from it, nay, discover also how the

words of the ungodly are made to illustrate the truth of God. No word is set down in the Bible save by the authority of God. This is our security and joy.

But are there not variations in the narratives, as in Kings and Chronicles, as in the Gospels; nay, as in the very words said to be spoken at our Lord's baptism. Yes; variations, but not inconsistencies, and these variations are introduced by the Holy Spirit on purpose to bring out all the aspects of the scene. These variations from the exact original words are not by chance or without a purpose. The Spirit was the author of the original words, he is the author of the variations also. Has he not a right to vary his own words when he sees fit; and when he varies them shall he be accused of inaccuracy? Shall the fact of the variation be used as an argument against the verbal inspiration of Scripture, as a proof that the original words were not worth the exact reporting? If the variation were a *contradiction*, the reasoning would hold good; but as this is not alleged, the accusation fails to pieces, for it is a pure sophism to deduce from a *variation* the same conclusions as from a *contradiction*; and it is as arbitrary as it is absurd to deny a writer the liberty of setting his own words in different lights, nay, and to found upon the fact of his doing so a charge or a suspicion that he never spoke or wrote any such words at all. So long as we can show that we have *divine authority for the variations*, we need not shrink from acknowledging these, or suppose that the consequences of such an acknowledgement must be a relinquishment of the full inspiration of Scripture.

Suppose I am arguing with a friend concerning something which I did and spoke, am I not at liberty at one time to cite my original words, at another time to vary them so as to give point to them or force to my argument. And because I thus explain myself in varying language, shall it be said that I never really used the very words, or that it is of no consequence to know whether the words were really mine, when the very object of the discussion is to get at the original words and their true meaning? Yes; we have divine au-

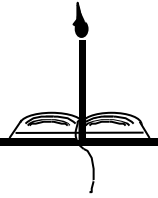
thority for the variations in the different narratives; and, having that, we have divine security for words of Scripture, *quite as much so as if there had been no variation at all*. This becomes all the stronger when it happens, as is admitted in the present case, that the aim of the writer is really to present the varying truth to us, that he can have no object in misrepresenting it or misreporting himself, nay, that his character is such as to place him above all suspicion, both in regard to truthfulness and wisdom.

I take this Book, then, as "the one Book," the Book of God, as truly such as Calvin's "Institutes" or Hooker's "Policy" are the books of men. And why men should write books for their fellow-men, and God not write one Book for his creatures to tell them of himself, I do not understand. It seems to me the most natural of all things. The utter silence of God to the creatures which he has made would surely be so unnatural as to be incredible. That God should *speak* is what we might expect; that he should be *mute* is beyond all belief. That he should speak in words of his own choosing is what we should above all things desire, for then we should know that his thoughts were really presented to us, that he should speak in words of man's choosing (if such a thing could be), is altogether undesirable and unlikely, for then we should not know whether the language and the thought were in the least coincident; nay, we should feel that we had gotten an incorrect and untrustworthy volume, that we had been cheated and betrayed, that instead of bread we had got a stone, and instead of an egg we had got a scorpion.

This Book is the Book of light and truth. The old Latin poet Horace says, *Verborum vetus interit aetas*, —or, *Words die of old age*—but the divine volume, with its true words, like the light which is its emblem, remains forever perfect, and forever young.

This article is taken from: Bonar, Horatius. *Light and Truth, Old Testament*. London: James Nisbet & Co., 1881. A PDF file of this book can be downloaded, free of charge, at <http://www.ClassicChristianLibrary.com>

A Study in Wisdom: Proverbs 1:1-9



Proverbs 1:1-9 – Introduction to the Book of Proverbs, by Scott Sperling

¹The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

- ²for gaining wisdom and instruction;
for understanding words of insight;
- ³for receiving instruction in prudent behavior,
doing what is right and just and fair;
- ⁴for giving prudence to those who are simple,
knowledge and discretion to the young –
- ⁵let the wise listen and add to their learning,
and let the discerning get guidance –
- ⁶for understanding proverbs and parables,
the sayings and riddles of the wise.

⁷The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

- ⁸Listen, my son, to your father's instruction
and do not forsake your mother's teaching.
- ⁹They are a garland to grace your head
and a chain to adorn your neck.

The writer of the Book of Proverbs introduces the book himself: **“The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel”** (vs. 1). These are the **“proverbs”** of **“Solomon”**. **“A ‘proverb’** is a pithy sentence, concisely expressing some well-established truth susceptible of various illustrations and applications” [Fausset]. Solomon himself tells us the purpose of the proverbs: **“...for gaining wisdom and instruction;**

for understanding words of insight; for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young – let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance” (vss. 2-5).

This book has value because it deals with ordinary life, with situations that crop up in our day-to-day existence. “The Book of Proverbs gives us the application of that wisdom which created the heavens and the earth, to the details of life in this world of confusion and evil. God deigns to apply His wisdom to the circumstances of our practical life, and to show us, with His own intelligence, the consequences of all the ways in which man may walk.” [Darby]. The Bible not only teaches of the heavenly realm, but also teaches practical living. It not only enriches the spirit, but also imparts instruction in living as a person in this fallen world. The Bible as a whole is the one-stop manual for living on earth. “Those who read David’s psalms, especially those towards the latter end, would be tempted to think that religion is all rapture and consists in nothing but the ecstasies and transports of devotion; and doubtless there is a time for them, and if there be a heaven upon earth it is in them: but, while we are on earth, we cannot be wholly taken up with them. We have a life to live in the flesh, must have a conversation in the world, and into that we must now be taught to carry our religion” [Henry].

In Solomon’s book of proverbs, there is a wide-range of advice, for a wide cross-section of the populace. This book has something for everyone. “All ranks and classes have their word in season. The sovereign on the throne is instructed as from God. The principles of national prosperity or decay are laid open. The rich are warned of their besetting temptations. The poor are cheered in their worldly humiliation. Wise rules are given for self-government. [The book] bridles the injurious tongue, corrects the wanton eye, and ties the unjust hand in chains. It prevents sloth; chastises all absurd desires;

teaches prudence; raises man's courage; and represents temperance and chastity after such a fashion, that we cannot but have them in veneration. To come to important matters so often mismanaged – the blessing or curse of the marriage ordinance is vividly portrayed. Sound principles of family order and discipline are inculcated. Domestic economy is displayed in its adorning consistency. Nay – even the minute courtesies of daily life are regulated. Self-denying consideration of others, and liberal distribution are enforced. All this diversified instruction is based upon the principles of true godliness. Thus if the Psalms bring the glow upon the heart, the Proverbs make the face to shine” [Bridges, Intro.]

The actual word translated “**proverb**” is *maschal*, which comes from the word meaning “comparison” in Hebrew [Fausset]. And as we will see, most of the proverbs in this book involve a comparison of one sort or another, using the Hebrew poetical feature of *parallelism*. Parallelism in Hebrew writing is somewhat similar to metaphors and similes in English, but is more wide-ranging. Parallelism may involve a statement, and then another statement that is a metaphor of the first; it may involve two statements which are opposites, thus reinforcing each other; it may involve statements that build on each other; it may involve statements that build up to an overarching concluding statement; etc. In all cases, one part of the proverb comments on another part, in a parallel fashion, thus giving guidance to the true meaning of the whole proverb. The point is that the parallel statements are synergetic, so that the meaning of the multiple statements imparts an idea that is greater than the individual statements by themselves. The parallel statements may, at first glance, be referring to unrelated subjects, but on further inspection and meditation, the relationship is discerned, and the teaching conveyed.

Teaching in this way is effective. “By similitudes, drawn from the visible parts of nature, a truth in the understanding is, as it were, reflected by the imagination. We are enabled to see something like color and shape in a notion, and to discov-

er a scheme of thoughts traced out upon matter.” [J. Addison, cited in Bridges, Intro.]. “The peculiar charm and power of the proverbs are due to a combination of many elements... Often there is something to startle at first; and yet, on closer inspection, that which seemed paradox, turns out to be only intenser truth... Much matter is pressed into little room, that it may keep, and carry. Wisdom, in this portable form, acts an important part in human life.” [Arnot, chap. II]. The parallelism not only provides an effective way to teach a truth, it also, in that form, makes it easier to remember the teaching; thus we take to heart the teaching; it becomes part of our being.

The author of this, as is told us in verse 1, is primarily “**Solomon son of David, king of Israel**”. I say “primarily” because chapters 30 and 31 are attributed to others (Agur and Lemuel, of whom we know very little). We know Solomon well from his exploits documented elsewhere in the Bible (see I Kings, chapters 2 through 11). He demonstrated his wisdom as he ruled as “**king of Israel**”. Solomon valued wisdom greatly. Early in his reign, the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream (I Kings 3:5ff). God told Solomon he could ask for whatever he wanted God to give him. Solomon answered: “**So, give Your servant a discerning heart to govern Your people and to distinguish between right and wrong**” (I Kings 3:9). God was greatly pleased with Solomon's request, and so answered that He would make Solomon the wisest of all: “**I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be**” (I Kings 3:12). And certainly, the fact that Solomon asked for wisdom in the first place, demonstrated that he already possessed a good deal of it.

God was true to His promise. Solomon became known throughout the world for his wisdom (see I Kings 3:28; 4:34). We are told that Solomon spoke three-thousand proverbs (I Kings 4:32), out of which were chosen some for inclusion here in this book. “Now here we find what good use

[Solomon] made of the wisdom God gave him; he not only governed himself and his kingdom with it, but he gave rules of wisdom to others also, and transmitted them to posterity. Thus must we trade with the talents with which we are entrusted, according as they are” [Henry].

Late in his life, Solomon, sadly and ironically, turned away from the wisdom that he taught. He fell, by the influence of his foreign wives, into idolatry and worship of false gods (see I Kings 11). By this, we can take warning: even the most wise can fall, ignoring teaching that he himself gave. But let us not think any worse of Solomon’s inspired teaching, just because Solomon the man was weak and stumbled. His teaching was inspired by the Holy Spirit, who guided his hand. All men of God have weaknesses, but this does not mean that their teaching should be ignored (otherwise, there would be no teachers of the word of God, for all have sinned). “Let us all learn not to think the worse of good instructions though we have them from those who do not themselves altogether live up to them” [Henry].

As we mentioned, in verses 2 through 6, Solomon summarizes the purpose and value of this book: **“...for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight; for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young – let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance.”** First, **“for gaining wisdom and instruction.”** We are all born without a shred of wisdom, and so we all need, at some point, **“instruction”**. The first instruction we receive is from our parents, and so, godly moral instruction from parents is crucial to development of a child, because the child is essentially a blank slate, to begin with.

These proverbs will provide **“words of insight”**, **“instruction in prudent behavior”**, and instruction in **“doing what is right and just and fair”** (vss. 2-3). The phrase **“for understanding words of insight”** denotes the

knowledge needed to understand wise instruction. **“Instruction in prudent behavior”** is teaching on how to live wisely, day-to-day; how to make prudent decisions that improve one’s life. Instruction in **“doing what is right and just and fair”**, of course, denotes moral instruction; how to live a righteous, moral life, and treat others in a godly manner. So, we expect to get a wide range of advice in this book.

Solomon next summarizes the target audiences for his instruction in wisdom: the **“simple”**, the **“young”**, and even the **“wise”**, and **“discerning”** (vss. 4-5). The **“simple”** denotes those who are easily influenced, in a good or bad way; thus they are ripe for being led astray, and so, can benefit all the more from solid instruction. Though simplicity may seem a not-so-desirable state, to be **“simple”** is much better than being smug and already deceived into errant knowledge, or a bad philosophy. The **“young”**, of course, are also ripe for learning. “Youth is the learning age, it catches at instructions, receives impressions, and retains what is then received; it is therefore of great consequence that the mind be then seasoned well, nor can it receive a better tincture than from Solomon’s proverbs” [Henry].

These proverbs, ironically, are also for the **“wise”** and **“discerning”**, those whom we may think need no instruction. But the truly **“wise”** know that there is always room to **“add to their learning”** (vs. 5). Learning does not stop. Increasing wisdom, and improving moral behavior entails a lifelong process of improvement. And certainly, as we move through various stages of life, we need instruction to navigate the changing issues and problems we encounter. So, in summary, this book is for everyone. “Here is not only milk for babes, but strong meat for strong men. This book will not only make the foolish and bad wise and good, but the wise and good wiser and better” [Henry].

As we grow in wisdom, through these proverbs, we will understand life more and more, even **“understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the**

wise” (vs. 6). Increased wisdom facilitates yet further learning and understanding. Through deeper study of the Bible, we understand things that were previously **“riddles”** to us. The Bible is a well of instruction with no bottom: there are always new layers of insight, and depths of spiritual knowledge to dig deeper into.

The word translated **“riddles”** here, was translated **“dark sayings”** in the KJV. These are sayings that are, at first glance, opaque in their darkness. Many proverbs are like this: obscure at first. “The obscurity attendant on **‘these words of the wise, and their dark sayings’** (vs. 6), is not altogether without its uses. It whets the understanding, excites an appetite for knowledge, and keeps alive the attention by the labor of the investigation, giving an increased pleasure to the discovery of truth, by having called forth our efforts to attain it” [Nicholls, chap. II]. “The dark sayings of fools and triflers are not worth a thought; but the **‘dark sayings of the wise’** are worthy to be studied till we obtain a complete knowledge of their meaning; for they are dark at first hearing only, on account of the sublimity of their views, and the force of their manner of expression, which contains much useful instruction in small compass” [Lawson].

To begin the recitation of the actual proverbs, Solomon starts with what I would call the proverb of all proverbs: **“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction”** (vs. 7). This proverb defines the basis of all true wisdom to be **“the fear of the LORD”**. It is **“the beginning of knowledge”**, the foundation of all true knowledge, a prerequisite to acquiring wisdom. If you do not have a fear of the Lord, there’s no point in reading further in the book of Proverbs. “Of all things that are to be known, this is most evident, that *God is to be feared*, to be revered, served, and worshipped; this is so the beginning of knowledge that those know nothing who do not know this” [Henry]. David agreed with Solomon: **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow His pre-**

cepts have good understanding. To Him belongs eternal praise” (David, in Ps. 111:10). Job tells us that this assertion comes from God Himself: **“And [God] said to the human race, ‘The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding’”** (Job 28:28). In a way, Solomon avers that the fear of God is also the end of all knowledge, in his conclusion to the book of Ecclesiastes: **“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil”** (Eccl. 12:13-14).

But what exactly is the **“fear of the LORD”**? The phrase **“fear of the LORD”**, as used in the Bible, does involve our concept of “fear” or “terror”, to some extent (especially in that we should fear the consequences of disobeying God), but also denotes the utmost respect for, and faith in, God and His works. **“The fear of the Lord”** is an expression of frequent occurrence throughout the Scriptures. It has various shades of meaning, marked by the circumstances in which it is found; but in the main it implies a right state of heart toward God, as opposed to the alienation of an unconverted man. Though the word is **‘fear’**, it does not exclude a filial confidence, and a conscious peace. There may be such love as shall cast all the torment out of the fear, and yet leave full bodied, in a human heart, the reverential awe which creatures owe to the Highest One... What God is inspires awe; what God has done for His people commands affection... The whole of this complicated and reciprocal relation is often indicated in Scripture by the brief expression, **“The fear of God”** [Arnot, chap. III].

Solomon’s assertion that the fear of the Lord is the **“beginning”** of knowledge, sets his definition of what knowledge is in contrast to the world’s definition of what knowledge is. The world proclaims someone as “knowledgeable” if he or she has had a certain level of education and learning. For example, the world would say that any

college professor is a knowledgeable person. Solomon (by the Holy Spirit) tells us that one who lacks the **“fear of the LORD”** cannot be defined as “knowledgeable”, no matter how much book-learning he or she has, because the **“fear of the LORD”** is the absolute **“beginning of knowledge”**. “He who pursues *any* description of knowledge, however good and honorable in itself, while he forgets God, is according to this book, emphatically a **‘fool’**. He may be admired by men, as a very prodigy of science, or philosophy, or literature, and may be adorned with all the titles of human honor, and send down his name to future ages with a halo of the light of this world around it; but in the eye of God, he stands the object of deep and merited condemnation; and, while eulogized and extolled on earth, is pitied and deplored in heaven” [Wardlaw].

This proverb involves a *parallelism*, as most of the proverbs do in this book. The primary characteristic of a wise man (**“fear of the LORD”**) is contrasted with a primary characteristic of a fool: **“...fools despise wisdom and instruction”**. The word **“fool”** is used quite a lot in this book, and here Solomon gives us the defining characteristic of a fool: someone who **“despises wisdom and instruction”**. Such a person will ever and always be a fool. If you desire **“wisdom”** (not **“despise”** it), and seek out and heed **“instruction”**, there is hope for you to become wise, and escape fool-dom; but to perennially **“despise”** wise advice, as found in the book of Proverbs, and to close one’s ears to **“instruction”** will doom one to a life of being a **“fool”**.

Next, there is advice to young people about the source of most knowledge and wisdom that young people attain: **“Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. They are a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck”** (vss. 8-9). The speaker in this proverb is a hypothetical parent, addressing his **“son”** (i.e., this is not limited advice addressed only to Solomon’s son).

For most young people, the primary source of advice and instruction is the parents. The parents, by their actions and words, have the greatest influence over the course of a person’s life. Parents naturally have the desire that their children live good lives, and so, instinctively parents will offer sound instruction, as best they can. The child’s responsibility is to **“listen”** to the instruction of parents, and to **“not forsake”** their teaching. There is also an implied responsibility here upon parents, to do all they can to offer up sound instruction and teaching. From verse 7, we learn that the cornerstone of all teaching offered up to children must be to inculcate into them a **“fear of the LORD”**.

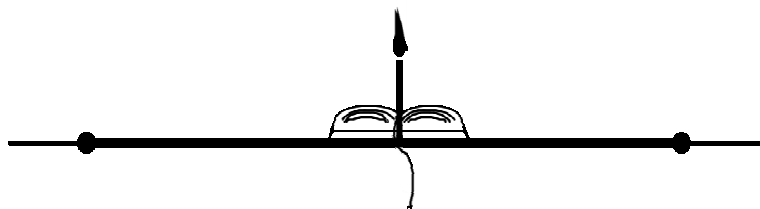
The incentive for heeding the instruction and teaching of the parents is given in verse 9: **“They are a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.”** The **“garland”** and **“chain”** are bestowals of beauty and honor. Youth naturally chase after the tokens of beauty and honor, chase after the **“garlands”**, and gold or silver **“chains”** of adornment. Solomon is saying that the instruction and teaching of the parents inculcates honor and beauty into those who heed it: The honor and beauty becomes built into the person. Even the worldly understand this. Plato spoke truth when he said: “Neither gold nor precious stone so glitters as the prudent mind of a pious person” [Plato, cited in Trapp].

Note the poetic structure of verses 8 and 9. There are two sets of couplets, each of which employs *parallelism* internally (the second line of the couplet parallel to the first), and then the couplets themselves are parallel to each other (the entire second couplet parallel to the first couplet). In the first couplet, the **“mother’s teaching”** is parallel to the **“father’s instruction”**, emphasizing that guidance of children is the responsibility of both parents. In the second couplet, the **“chain”** adorning the neck, is parallel to the **“garland”** gracing the head, implying that there are multiple benefits of heeding the guidance of the parents: both honor and beauty.

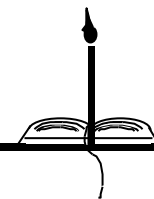
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A Meditation: The Spiritual Chemist



A Meditation Upon a Sundial and a Clock by William Spurstowe (1666)

These two artificial measures of time give one and the same account of its motions, but in a very differing, if not contrary, manner. The *Clock* does it by a motion of its own; but the *Sundial*, while itself is fixed, by an extrinsic motion of the sun upon those lines drawn upon it *effects* the same thing.

And this occasioned me to think in what a differing way the same services and duties of Religion are done by those that profess it. Some, like *Clocks*, have a spring of motions in themselves, and the weight that quickens and actuates it is love: They pray, confer, exercise holiness in the conversation in a progressive manner, salvation being nearer to them than when they first believed. Others again are like *Sundials*, that are as useless posts in a gloomy day, and are destitute of all principles of motion. The sun moves upon them, but they stand still; the Spirit comes upon them, as it did on Saul, but themselves are not in the least moved by those duties that others may think they profit by.

There is a light and shine which passes upon their gifts and abilities that may render them useful as well as visible to others, but it effects no alteration in their hearts to the bettering of themselves. What divine visions and prophecies did Balaam both see and utter concerning Israel? And how remarkable is the preface which he sets before them? *The man whose eyes are open has said*, yet his heart is fixed to his lust of covetousness, and he is so far from taking the least step to-

wards their tents, which with admiration he beholds to be goodly, as that he gives Balack counsel how to destroy them. Let not then any rest in a bare illumination or transient work of the Spirit upon them, as if such things would be sufficient evidences of the goodness of their condition. Light may make a good head, but it is heat and motion that must make a good heart, without which all profession of religion is but an unsavory carcass.

Be wise therefore, O Christians, and build not the foundation of your eternal happiness upon such uncertain principles. May not the Spirit *assist* where it never *inhabits*? May it not *move* upon him, whom it never *quicken*s? Were not many *workers of iniquity*, who were *workers of miracles*? Were not many famous for their *prophecies*, who were infamous for their *profaneness*? Are not such things made by Christ, the plea of many in the last day for their admittance into heaven, whom He will not know? Why then should any be so foolish to make that a plea to the judge which he knows beforehand will be rejected?

The best way to discern our condition, is not to argue the goodness of it from the light which the Spirit darts in upon us, but by the motions which it produces in us. As many as are the Sons of God are led by the Spirit of God in a constant way of progression, from grace to grace, from virtue to virtue. Such light, as it is sudden in its *eruptions*, so it is also in its *interruptions*; the one oft times are as speedy and momentarily as the other. Look therefore to the *attractions* of the Spirit by which you are moved, and drawn to walk in holy ways, rather than to such *motions* of the Spirit, which pass only upon you, but do not beget any motion or stirring in you.

This article is taken from: Spurstowe, William. *The Spiritual Chymist: or, Six Decads of Divine Meditations on Several Subjects*. London: Philip Chetwind, 1666. A PDF file of this book can be downloaded, free of charge, at <http://www.ClassicChristianLibrary.com>

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For readability's sake, some of the classic articles have been edited, so that they use modern English. Very occasionally, they are edited in other ways, also. Every attempt is made to maintain the author's original meaning. If such editing irks you, I apologize.

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**The Christian Life:
First Suffering, Then Glory**

"Suffering and glory were conjoined in the case of the Master, and will also be conjoined in the case of the disciple; first the cross, then the crown; first the battle, then the victory; first the toil and heat of the day, then the rest. But the glory will be so transcendentally great that the sufferings will be completely forgotten; or rather, we will bless God for them, as being the prelude to the glory."

-- *Paton Gloag* (1884)

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