

Vol. XXVII

September, 1948

No. 9

STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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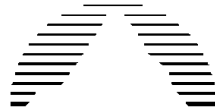
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow in their influence upon God's people around the world, through their clarity, careful exposition, and Christ-centeredness.

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CHRISTIAN HOMES

Many of those who look no farther than the temporal happiness of individuals and the welfare of the State are not insensible of the importance and value of domestic relationships, realizing that the family is but the unit of the nation. No matter how excellent the constitution and laws of a country may be, or what its material resources, they are insufficient and ineffectual, unless a sure foundation for social order and public virtue be laid in the healthy regulation and wise discipline of its families. The nation is but the aggregate of individuals comprising it; and unless there are good fathers and mothers, good sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, there will be no good citizens. It is because our home life has so sadly deteriorated that social decay is now so far advanced, nor can it be arrested until parents once again properly discharge their responsibility. We have no hesitation in saying that the future welfare of Britain (and the U.S.A. too) is more seriously menaced by the relaxation of family government and the breakdown of home life than by any governmental incompetence or foreign hostility.

Home! How much that one word used to convey! It is still one of the most precious in the English language unto some of us. Much more so when to all its natural attractions are added the hallowed associations which gather around a *Christian* home. Is not our favourite concept of heaven embodied in that blessed expression, "my Father's House" (Joh 14:2). Because the Christian is not his own, but bought with a price (1Co 6:19-20), he is to aim at glorifying God in every relation of life. No matter what station he occupies, or wherever he be, he is to serve as a witness for Christ. Next to the church of God, his own home should be the sphere of his most manifest devotedness unto Him. All its arrangements should bear the stamp of his heavenly calling. All its affairs should be so ordered that everyone entering it should feel, "God is here!" The supreme aim of family life should be *household piety*, everything else being subordinated thereto.

It is in the home our *real* characters are most manifested and best known. Out in the world, a certain measure of restraint is placed upon both our corruptions and our graces; but in the home, we are freer to act naturally, and it is there that our worst and best sides alike are exhibited the plainest. As a close observer and one of wide experience said, "I can never form a correct judgment of a man from seeing or hearing him in a religious meeting. He may seem a very spiritual person there, and say very beautiful things, but let me go home with him, and there I learn the actual state of the case." He may indeed pray like a saint in the church, but unless his home be governed according to the Word of God, and his own conduct be regulated by the spirit of Christ, he fails to witness for him in that most important and influential sphere.

The reality and extent of "a work of grace" in the soul are most clearly revealed amid the petty trials of home life. In the Scriptures, we find some of its most eminent characters subjected to that severe test. For example, the Lord gave as the reason for the intimate confidences He was about to make unto Abraham, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD" (Gen 18:19): thus his home life was as pleasing unto God as was his public. Nor are the Scriptures less explicit in showing us the disastrous consequences which attend a believer's unfaithfulness in this relation. A notable case in point is the fearful ruin of Eli's family: "I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not" (1Sa 3:13). The state of a *preacher's home* is likewise made the test of his character: he is disqualified from the sacred office, unless he be "one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity," adding, "(For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)" (1Ti 3:4-5).

"What have they seen in *thine* house?" (2Ki 20:15). Have you observed, my reader, how much in the Scriptures is in the interrogatory form? How frequently the Lord used that method of teaching, both with His disciples, the masses, and His enemies! It is a most definite and searching form of instruction. A considerable part of God's Word is made up of questions; and it is our wisdom not only to thoughtfully and prayerfully ponder them, but to regard the same as being addressed *to us* individually—and thereby bare our hearts to their penetrating power. This we should do with the "Where art thou?" of Genesis 3:9, right through the Scriptures to the "wherefore didst thou marvel?" of Revelation 17:7. The one now before us was uttered by way of *rebuke* unto Hezekiah's vanity, who—in a spirit of pride and ostentation—had shown the messengers from Babylon the treasures of his palace.

"What have they seen in *thine* house?" Let each of us take that inquiry home to himself and herself. What do visitors, especially those who spend a night under your roof, behold in thy home? Do they see a household which is well ordered, everything regulated according to God's Word; or do they behold a scene

of confusion and turmoil? Do the furnishings of your home bespeak a heart which is dead to the world? Is there a noticeable absence of that carnal luxury and fleshly display which mark those whose affections are set upon things below? On the other hand, is there that cleanliness and tidiness everywhere which honours the Lord? Nothing is more incongruous for one who professes to be a stranger and pilgrim (1Pe 2:11) here than to behold him or her endeavouring to outshine their godless neighbours in that which ministers to “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1Jo 2:16). Equally so do neglect and dirt indicate that something is wrong with the heart, and mar a Christian’s testimony.

“What have they seen in *thine* house?” Do they behold a husband “under petticoat government,” or one who takes his proper place at the head of the home? The household must have a leader; and God has committed rule to the husband, and holds *him* responsible for its management. It is no valid excuse for him to say that he is the breadwinner, and therefore, he leaves the wife to run the house. Not that he is to be a tyrant, but firm, asserting his authority, ruling in holy love. Yet unless the wife fully co-operates, much of his effort will be unavailing. Not only does God require her to be subject unto her husband’s will (Eph 5:22, 24), but to loyally support and further him—unless his requirements manifestly clash with the Bible. He is necessarily absent from the home most of the day, and therefore, it largely devolves upon her to “train up” their children “in the way [they] should go” (Pro 22:6).

“*What* have they seen in *thine* house?” Little or nothing to distinguish it from the worldlings?—or everything in it aiming at the glory of God? The husband and wife conducting themselves as “being heirs together of the grace of life” (1Pe 3:7)? The children brought up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph 6:4) and “in subjection with all gravity” (1Ti 3:4)—or utterly spoiled, unruly, and a trial to those who have to endure their presence? Do visitors behold an example of parental piety, of salutary discipline maintained, evidences on every side that their hearts are set upon something higher than the baubles of earth? Do they see the family altar? Do they behold the Sabbath day—duly honoured—all unnecessary cooking avoided? If they do not, they will rightly suspect the genuineness of your Christian profession! If those things be absent, be not surprised if your children abandon religion as they grow older, having no confidence in what they were reared. God search every one of us with this important question.



THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

57. 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:15-16

It strikes one as somewhat strange that in the three "Pastoral Epistles" (which should receive special attention from all ministers of the Gospel!), there is no record of a single prayer which their author offered for either of their recipients, though they were his own "sons" in the Faith. He did indeed inform Timothy that "without ceasing" he had "remembrance of him in his prayers night and day" (2Ti 1:3), but no mention is made of any particular requests that he offered to God on his behalf. Probably several practical lessons may be learned from that silence. But may we not see in this omission a lovely delicacy of spirit? Had the apostle specified that he was begging God to strengthen this or that grace or to equip him for the discharge of certain duties, it had possibly conveyed the impression that Timothy was defective in the one or remiss in the other. Hence the absence of what might be regarded as casting reflection upon his spirituality. But while no petitionary prayers on his behalf are recorded, two most blessed doxologies are contained in the first epistle, thereby inculcating an essential ministerial duty, and setting before this young servant of Christ an admirable example which he did well to emulate.

"Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1Ti 1:17). "Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen" (1Ti 6:15-16). We do not propose to treat these two prayers singly, but rather couple them together, for they both partake of the same character, are found in the same epistle, and obviously have much in common. Moreover, it would be placing too great a tax upon the readers' patience were we to draw out our comments upon them so as to devote two articles unto them, though we shall not be able to quite complete our remarks thereon in this one. In our contemplation of them, we shall point out first their distinctive *nature*; second, consider the *Object* to which they are addressed; third, ponder their *substance*. They are of a most elevated character, and therefore, one requires to be in a truly spiritual frame in order to appreciate their sublime contents, and to make a personal use of the same.

In the opening article of this series, we pointed out that for the purpose of general classification, the prayers of Scripture may be described as those of humiliation, those of supplication, and those of adoration. The first are expressions of repentance and consist of confessions of sin. The second are expressions of faith, wherein we make requests of God to supply the needs of ourselves or of others. The third are expressions of veneration and love, wherein we are occupied with the perfections of God Himself, and pour out our hearts in worship before Him. The last are *doxologies*, which consist of a magnifying of the divine Being, a celebrating of His excellency. Both of the passages quoted above partake of this nature. In them, God is adored for what He is in Himself. We often request the Lord, "Teach us to pray," when we ought to entreat Him to cause us to make a better use of what He has already taught us. He has graciously furnished us with all necessary instruction—both in His own recorded prayers and in those of His apostles. In them, He has plainly revealed that our hearts should be engaged with God Himself, contemplating His wondrous attributes and seeking His glory, and not be thinking solely of ourselves and the supply of our wants.

In that prayer which Christ has given His disciples, He has supplied a perfect model. In it, He has taught us not only that it is our privilege to ask for those things which are needful for ourselves and fellow-believers, but also to ascribe unto God those excellencies which pertain unto Himself. The due consideration that He is "Our Father which art in heaven" (Mat 6:9) and the expression of the fervent desire, "Hallowed be thy name," take precedence of a presentation of our own personal requests; while "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever" (Mat 6:13) is to be heartily acknowledged, and a sense of the same remain upon our souls at the conclusion of our petitions. To praise and adore God for what He is in Himself is an essential part of our duty. It is required that we respond to that call, "Stand up and bless the LORD your God for ever and ever: and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise" (Neh 9:5). *That* is the chief end of worship: not to benefit ourselves, but to honour God. Many of our petitions begin and end with self, and therefore, in no wise honour God; but "whoso offereth praise glorifieth me" (Psa 50:23) is His own declaration. Praise is to be offered unto Him not because He needs it, but because He is entitled to the same, and because it is a testification of our reverence, faith, and love for Him.

The hearts of the apostles being fully taken with the glory of God, their mouths and pens frequently gave expression thereto. How often Paul breaks forth in the midst of an argument or discussion to bless God. Thus in Romans 1, when charging the heathen for having changed the glory of the incorruptible God into that of the creature, he, with holy horror at such dishonour done to the great God, interjects "who is blessed for ever. Amen" (Rom 1:25). So in chapter nine, when, after mentioning the Deity of Christ, the apostle added, "who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen" (Rom 9:5). When concluding his discussion of election and reprobation, he is filled with awe and adoration at the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, and at the absolute independency and the inscrutability of His sovereignty, then ends with "to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom 11:36). So too he concludes the epistle: "To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen" (Rom 16:27). At the beginning of the Galatian epistle, having mentioned the Father, he at once adds, "to whom be glory for ever and ever" (Gal 1:5). In Ephesians, he began with "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 1:3), and ends the third chapter with a fuller doxology. In Philippians, "Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Phi 4:20).

It was upon a narration of his conversion that Paul broke out in the first of the two doxologies which are here engaging our attention, while it was his mentioning "the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Ti 6:14) which was the immediate occasion of the latter. So too at the close of his letter to the Hebrews, after mentioning Christ, he added "to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Heb 13:21). In like manner, Peter's heart was so full that he began his first epistle with "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope" (1Pe 1:3). In the fourth chapter, he utters praise "that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (1Pe 4:11); while in the fifth chapter, he adores the God of all grace, thus, "To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (1Pe 5:11). The spirit of Jude was also elevated to such a height that he concluded with "To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen" (Jude :25). While John, at the beginning of the Revelation, follows the salutation from God the Father, the Spirit, and Jesus Christ with "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (Rev 1:5-6).

What fervour of heart, elevation of spirit, homage of soul, do such utterances breathe. What an example do they set before all the servants of God to exalt and magnify Him both in their own affections and before the saints! How they rebuke the formality of the modern pulpit and the coldness which now prevails in the pew. How they give point to that injunction, "Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name" (Psa 29:2)—that is, for what He is in Himself, and not simply for His benefits. It is a duty incumbent upon us not only to return thanks unto God for His mercies, but to magnify Him for the excellence of His nature and the glory of His name. The ebullitions of praise quoted above are abstracted from all blessings received, being spontaneous celebrations of the divine perfections. They were tributes due unto God Himself. How little of this venerating of the divine Majesty is now heard! Sad indeed, is it, a mark of the low level of spirituality now obtaining in the gatherings of the Lord's people, that they do not more resound with His praises. The absence of such evinces a grievous lack of a sense of God's excellency and the coldness of our affections—"for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Mat 12:34), as from its straitness, the lips are silent!

When the soul be in a healthy condition, it cannot but exclaim, "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name (Psa 103:1). Yet how rarely do we now hear such language as this: "Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all" (1Ch 29:10-11). The praises rendered to God by His saints are so acceptable and delightful to Him that they are termed a "habitation" to Him (Psa 22:3); and let it be noted that that was what supported the Lord Jesus: though the nation treated Him as a "worm" (Psa 22:6)—yet no matter, so long as *Thou* art praised! Not only is praise due unto God, but it is fitting for us. Believers are "an holy priesthood" (1Pe 2:5), and therefore, are they to bring offerings unto God. The offerings they present must accord with the nature of their priesthood; and since the one be spiritual, so must be the other, and therefore are the churches enjoined: "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name" (Heb 13:15).

Not only should God be worshipped by us collectively in the assembly, but by the saint individually in private. "I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore" (Psa 86:12). A gracious soul cannot really contemplate God without exulting in Him and exclaiming, "Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Exo 15:11). If our hearts were more engaged with the divine Being and our minds meditated upon His wondrous character, there would be more admiring of the same and sounding forth of His worth. "I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth" (Psa 34:1). If such were the case with us, we should be lifted above the petty trials of this life and forget our minor aches and pains. Praising and adoring God is the noblest part of the saint's work on earth, as it will be his chief employ in heaven. The unregenerate are blind to the divine beauty and incapable of perceiving His glory, much more so of rejoicing in the same. But those who behold Him with the eyes of faith as He is revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ cannot but be at a loss for words to express their veneration and admiration of Him.

"Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1Ti 1:17); "Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen" (1Ti 6:15-16). Who is it that is thus celebrated in these verses? Different answers have been returned. Some, in view of John 1:18, say it is the Father; others, influenced by the context, regard it as the Son. While it be plain from John 5:23 that the incarnate Son is *entitled* to equal honour and homage as the Father; and while Revelation 5:12-13, compared with 4:11, makes it clear that in heaven He actually *receives* the same, yet some of the expressions made use of in these doxologies scarcely appear applicable to the God-man Mediator. He is neither invisible, nor unapproachable. Moreover, it is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, which, in His times, shall show or demonstrate "who is the blessed and only Potentate" (1Ti 6:15). On the other hand, we would not personally restrict these ascriptions of worship unto the Father; rather do we regard them as having *the Godhead* itself in view.

It seems to the writer that these doxologies contemplate the triune Jehovah, the Godhead itself without distinction of Persons, yet not viewed abstractedly; but rather as revealed in and through the Mediator, the Lord Jesus. Admittedly, that conducts us into deep waters, where it behoves us to move with the utmost circumspection, and express ourselves in holy fear and trembling. The finite mind is utterly incapable of forming any concept of the essence of God in its absolute nature, infinity, and blessedness. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit exist, and co-exist, in a manner quite incomprehensible to us. The unity of the divine essence and the trinity of Persons therein is inconceivable. We must go to the Scriptures for any proper ideas of the same. There we have the doctrine stated, but no explanation is furnished. The triune God is the great "I am": "Him which is, and which was, and which is to come" (Rev 1:4). Abstracted from all beings and things, He is of Himself and from Himself alone, self-existent, self-sufficient. But the *doctrine of the Trinity* is a revelation which God has given us concerning His nature, persons, and perfections in Christ. The Eternal Three can only be known to us in Their covenant transactions, and as They stand related to us in the Lord Jesus. We have nothing whatever to do with an absolute God, but with God as made known by that One, "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col 2:9).

Christ is "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15)—not simply of the Father, but of the Godhead. The Lord Jesus is "God [the triune God]...manifest in the flesh" (1Ti 3:16). In Him, the blessed Trinity is declared and made known to Their uttermost discovery. He is the Fellow of the Lord of hosts. He is "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person" (Heb 1:3). Christ is the Medium and Mirror in which we behold Him, worshipping God in the acknowledgment of His Persons. Not that the Three Persons are swallowed up in Christ, but that Their persons and perfections are revealed in and through Him. All thoughts of the Godhead apart from Christ—and without the consideration of Him as God-man—lead only to the contemplation of absolute Deity, and leave us without any view of the ineffable subject as it is declared in the Gospel. Only as we view the Eternal Three as They stand related to us in Christ can we form any right concepts of Them. The divine Persons have manifested Themselves in the distinctive acts of Their wills toward us, in Their purpose respecting us, in the salvation planned for us before time, and its accomplishment *in Christ*. The Father's everlasting love to us is in Christ (Eph 1:3-4); and the Spirit's office and work in us is from Christ: making Him precious to us, conforming us to Him, and maintaining our communion with Him. When Christ was openly declared at His baptism, then was the whole Trinity manifest.

Turning now more directly to the substance or contents of these doxologies, we are taught by the same how we are to conceive of the Glorious One, and the worship which is due to Him for His excellency. A close comparison of the two prayers reveals that the same essential perfections of Deity are extolled in both of them, though various terms are employed, the one serving to amplify and cast light upon the other. Thus, we conceive that “the King eternal” of 1 Timothy 1:17 signifies the same as the fuller expression, “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” of 1 Timothy 6:16. The “immortal” of 1 Timothy 1:17 is clearly parallel with “who only hath immortality” of 1 Timothy 6:16. The “invisible” of 1 Timothy 1:17 is explained as “dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen” (1Ti 6:16). “The only wise God” in the former has no balancing clause in the latter. The one closes with “be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen” (1Ti 1:17); the other, with “to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen” (1Ti 1:16). Let us now endeavour to contemplate these several perfections of the Godhead, begging Him for girded minds and enlarged hearts.

“Now unto the King eternal”: “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.” That very expression, “the King *eternal*,” at once intimates it is the *essential* perfections of Deity which are here being celebrated. Therein our thoughts are lifted far above all dispensational relations or temporal administrations. Jesus Christ is indeed the “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (Rev 19:16), but considered as God-man He has not been so eternally, for His humanity had no existence ere time began; nor was He vested with such dominion during the days of His flesh. It was after His resurrection—as the reward of His unparalleled humiliation and suffering, and in testification of His meritorious and finished work—that God so highly honoured the Son of man; and that He declared, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Mat 28:18). What has just been pointed out in no wise militates against the fact that because Christ was the Son of God incarnate, from the moment of His birth worship was due to Him; and that during the days of His public ministry, He was entitled to obedience and subjection; yet it was subsequent to the completion of His earthly mission that God crowned Him with glory and honour. Hence, it is Deity as such which is here owned and magnified as “the King eternal.”

“The blessed and only Potentate.” The reference is to the Godhead itself, without distinction of Persons. God Himself, the Triune God, is the source of all blessedness and felicity, God is self-sufficient, infinitely blessed and happy in Himself, and nothing can impair or disturb His serenity and sublimity. “The blessed and only Potentate.” God’s blessedness and *dominion* are necessarily conjoined, for the glory of God especially appears in His unrivalled sovereignty and supremacy, whereby He rules over all. It is His distinct honour that He has no equal, “For who in the heaven can be compared unto the LORD?” (Psa 89:6). He is the “*only* Potentate,” for all subordinate, derivative authority is from Him: “By me kings reign, and princes decree justice” (Pro 8:15); “There is no [magisterial] power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom 13:1). When Pilate said to the Saviour, “Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?” He answered, “Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above” (Joh 19:10-11). “His kingdom ruleth over all” (Psa 103:19), “and none can stay his hand” (Dan 4:35).

“The King eternal.” He is “the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity” (Isa 57:15). He is “high” in the excellency and transcendency of His being, “lofty” in His independency and dominion. Inhabiting eternity when none of His creatures had a being, dwelling all alone in His self-sufficiency. It brings real and solid peace unto a gracious soul to realize that God is upon the Throne of the universe, directing its affairs both small and great, and working all things after the counsel of His own will. As the believer views Him thus, he is constrained to say, “Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high, Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!” (Psa 113:5-6). If our hearts were more occupied with the King eternal, we should be less perturbed by what is happening in the world. Nay, more, if our renewed minds were truly engaged with the high and lofty One, our language would be, “I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever...I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty” (Psa 145:1, 5). How the elevated spirit and exalted worship of the Old Testament saints should put present-day Christians to shame!



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

37. Jericho

“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days” (Heb 11:30). In our last, we contemplated the daring and obedience of Israel’s faith on this memorable occasion, and now we turn to observe the *discipline* of it. We have reference to Joshua 6:10, where we learn that the people were commanded, “Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I bid you shout.” That injunction constituted a very real test of their morale. For all that host of Israel to preserve strict silence as they journeyed around Jericho’s walls was a severe restraint upon their natural inclinations—the more so that no explanation for the same was furnished them. There are times when to preserve silence is far harder than for us to express what is on our minds. The tongue is an unruly member (Jam 3:5-8), yet God requires us to control the exercise of it; and there are occasions when to be mute is a manifestation of grace which is honouring to Him. Such was the case when fire from the Lord devoured the presumptuous sons of Aaron, and their father “held his peace” (Lev 10:3); and when David was sorely chastised by God, and he was “dumb” and “opened not [his] mouth” (Psa 39:9).

How often are the sinews of faith cut by the injudicious and unfriendly criticisms of those who pose as our Christian friends, who so far from encouraging us to adhere strictly to our Rule, would have us conform to this world! How often is the servant of Christ hindered by the God-dishonouring counsels and carnal suggestions of church members when he seeks to employ none but spiritual weapons! How much mischief is wrought by those who are perpetually talking about the difficulties confronting us! The soldiers of Christ must be trained: faith must be disciplined—each one in the ranks of the Lord’s hosts must learn there is “a time to keep silence, and a time to speak” (Ecc 3:7). The children of Israel must neither make any sally upon this garrison of the Canaanites, nor employ the customary war-cries of assailants; but, instead, preserve a solemn silence as in sacred procession they encompassed the city. That might have conveyed the impression that they were lacking in spirit and zeal, thereby rendering them increasingly despicable in the sight of their enemies, yet that was the manner in which they were required to conduct themselves. God delights to make use of contemptible instruments and means, that the glory may be His alone.

We turn next to consider the *patience* of their faith, which was conspicuously evidenced here. The walls of Jericho did not fall down the first day nor the sixth that Israel marched around them, but only “after they were compassed about seven days” (Heb 11:30). Nor did they fall the first time they were encompassed on the seventh day, but not until after seven circuits had been made on that day. No less than thirteen journeys around them were completed before the power of God was displayed. Why so?—to test their patience, as well as their courage and obedience. They must be kept waiting on the Lord. “As promised, deliverances must be expected in God’s way, so they must be expected in God’s time”—Matthew Henry (1662-1714). Israel were required to carry out the orders they had received, to persevere in the performance of duty, and leave the issue with the Lord. The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, but to those who are steadfast and persistent. “It is good [though we may not think so at the time] that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation [deliverance] of the LORD” (Lam 3:26).

Observe how one Scripture throws light upon another: Hebrew 11:30 does not tell us that Israel encompassed Jericho seven times on the seventh day, nor does Joshua 6 inform us that they did so “by faith.” As pointed out previously, neither the priests nor the people received any assurance from Joshua that success would attend their efforts: they are seen there simply complying strictly and patiently with the instructions they had been given. But in Hebrew 11, the Holy Spirit discloses to us that they acted *in faith*. But how could that be, seeing they had no promise to rest upon? We wonder if that question presents any difficulty to the reader. We hope not, for it is a mistake to suppose there can be no faith in God unless we have some definite word from Him to warrant it. So far as Scripture acquaints us, when Abraham was told to sacrifice Isaac upon the altar, he received no promise that he would be restored to him again; nevertheless, it was “by faith” he offered Isaac, “accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead” (Heb 11:19). David had no promise that he would slay Goliath, yet he had full confidence that God would enable him to do so. Daniel had no guarantee of deliverance from the lions, yet he “believed in his God” for protection from them (Dan 6:23).

Faith has to do with a *known* God, with One who is a living reality to the soul, with One who can be counted upon to undertake for us. It is God in His revealed character, as made known to us in His Word, God in Christ in covenant relation to us, who is the Object of faith. True, a definite promise makes it easier to act faith, yet is not the Promiser greater than the promises, as the Giver is to all His gifts! And when we are unable to locate a promise which precisely meets our particular case, that should not deter us from having implicit confidence in God Himself. When David was guilty of the terrible sins of adultery and murder, there was no sacrifice under the law available for such crimes, but he had recourse to the known mercy of God (Psa 51:1)—the infinite mercy of an infinite God; nor was he confounded. So with Israel before Jericho. They had for years been supernaturally fed in the wilderness, and unfailingly guided by the pillar of cloud and fire. They had witnessed the miracle-working power of Jehovah acting on their behalf in opening a way for them through the Jordan. And now they confidently counted upon His showing Himself strong in their behalf in overthrowing this mighty citadel.

Yes, it was “by faith” in the daring and obedience of faith they acted, trusting God to work for them. But He was pleased to put their faith to a severe proof: they were required to exercise the “patience of hope” (1Th 1:3), to persevere in the course God had appointed, expecting Him to honour the same. Yea, to repeat their performance again and again, and still without the least sign of their efforts being rewarded. Why so?—to make it the more evident that the conquest of Canaan was of the Lord and not of them. Each fruitless journey around the city made it increasingly apparent that their enemies were to be overcome not by their power, but by God’s. What a lesson is there here for each of us. “My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him” (Psa 62:5). “And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you. . . blessed are all they that wait for him” (Isa 30:18). But is it not at that very point most of us fail the worst? How easily we become discouraged if our efforts do not meet with prompt success, or if our prayers be not speedily answered! How impatient is the flesh!

“For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise” (Heb 10:36). Indeed we have, for each of us is very prone to say of the Lord, as his mother said of Sisera, “Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots?” (Jdg 5:28). Speaking to His disciples, the Lord Jesus declared, “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luk 18:1). How much we need to take that word to heart! How often have we “fainted” when victory was almost in sight! We become discouraged when our “Jericho” does not fall the first or second time it is encompassed. Most of us find it much harder to *wait* than to believe; yet we prove by painful experience that our fretful impatience accomplishes no good, nor speeds the desired event a single moment. Let us be more definite and earnest in begging the Holy Spirit to work this grace of patience in us, and to be “watching thereunto with all perseverance” (Eph 6:18), assured that “in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal 6:9).

Consider for a moment *the assurance* of their faith—a striking proof of which was given by them in what is recorded in Joshua 6:20. There we are told, “So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat.” Twice over in that verse does the Holy Spirit record that which was so honouring to the Lord. During all their circuits of the city, they had been bidden to maintain a complete silence, but when their obedience and patience had been fully tested, they were ordered to “shout,” for said their leader, “the LORD hath given you the city” (Jos 6:16). But mark it well, that shout must be made while the powerful walls still stood intact! It was therefore a shout of faith, of confidence in God, of full assurance that He would appear in their behalf and recompense their “patient continuance in well doing” (Rom 2:7). That shout signified their strong persuasion that victory was certain. That is what assurance consists of: an unshakable belief that God will make good His Word, a steadfast reliance that He will reward “them that diligently seek him” (Heb 11:6).

That concerted and loud shout of Israel *before* the actual event was one of confident expectation. By such assurance, God is greatly glorified. Though Abraham was about a hundred years old and his wife’s womb dead, when he received promise of a son, he was “fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform” (Rom 4:21). When the son of the woman of Shunem died, so strong was her faith that, though none had previously been restored to life, she confidently expected her son to be revived (2Ki 4)—her actions in verse 21 and her words in verse 23 evince the same. Of our Lord’s mother, it is said, “And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord” (Luk 1:45). To the distressed mariners, Paul said, “Be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me” (Act 27:25). What examples are these of the heart’s full reliance upon God

while outward appearances were quite unpromising! When Dr. Robert Moffatt (1795-1883), the missionary who had laboured for years among the Bechuanas without seeing a single seal to his ministry, received a letter from friends in England who wished to make him a present, asking him to specify what it should be, he answered, "A communion set"! Months after, when it arrived, more than a dozen converted natives sat down with him to remember the Lord's death. Say not "How wonderful," but "How deplorable I do not trust Him more fully."

Take note of the *renunciation* of their faith. Israel's being forbidden to seize the spoils of war, and being told that the silver and gold must be "consecrated unto the LORD" (Jos 6:18-19), teaches us that real faith takes no credit unto its subject, but ascribes all the honour of its performances unto the Giver. Faith precludes all boasting and self-congratulation (Eph 2:8-9). Faith belongs to those who are "poor in spirit" (Mat 5:3). So far from promoting Laodicean self-esteem, it humbles us into the dust, causing us to look away from self unto God. It is a self-emptying grace, moving us to stretch forth the beggar's hand. Consequently, it takes no praise to itself, but gives the whole unto its Bestower. Its language is "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake" (Psa 115:1). Blessedly was this exemplified by Abraham. When the Lord gave him the victory over Chedorlaomer, and the king of Sodom invited him to take the spoils unto himself, Abraham answered, "I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD... That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet... lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich" (Gen 14:22-23)!

Finally, behold the *triumph* of faith. "And it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city" (Jos 6:20). Nothing can stand before faith: the most formidable obstacles give way to it. "All things are possible to him that believeth" (Mar 9:23) as the whole of Hebrew 11 clearly shows. The language of an expectant faith is, "Through God we shall do valiantly: for he it is that shall tread down our enemies" (Psa 60:12), because faith looks away from self, with all its infirmities and limitations, unto the Almighty. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1Jo 5:4): when it is in exercise, the world can neither enthrall nor intimidate, for it elevates the heart above the creature. Israel's capture of Jericho is recorded for the encouragement of the saints of all generations, and our lengthy consideration of the same will have been in vain, unless it has put new life into us as it has demonstrated afresh the invincibility of God's purpose, the sufficiency of His power, and His readiness to put it forth on the behalf of those who render implicit obedience to His revealed will and count upon His rewarding the same.

"And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword" (Jos 6:21). For several centuries, the longsuffering of God had waited, because "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen 15:16). Forty years previously, in the first year of the Exodus, the Lord had solemnly threatened them, bringing the sword of Israel to the borders of Canaan; and then withdrawing His hand for a time, giving them a further respite. But the period of waiting was now over. That united shout from Israel was the sign that the Lord would tarry no longer, that the day of His wrath was come. All the guilty inhabitants of Jericho were made a solemn and awful sacrifice to the divine justice. "The Canaanites were ripe for destruction, and the Lord was pleased, instead of destroying them by a pestilence, a famine, an earthquake, a devastating fire from heaven, to employ the Israelites as the executioners of His vengeance, both for their warning and instruction, and for that of all who read these records. Had an angel been commissioned to slay them (as one did Sennacherib's army: 2 Kings 19:35), who would have charged Him with iniquity or cruelty? In all public calamities, infants are involved and tens of thousands die with great agony every year.

"Now either God is not the agent in these calamities, which opinion—though often implied in man's reasonings on these subjects—is not far from atheism; or they must consist with the most perfect justice and goodness. What injustice then could there be in ordering the destruction of a guilty race by the sword of His people? Or what injustice can be charged on them while executing His express commission, as ratified by undeniable miracles? It is evident that the hand of God would be far more noticed in these uncommon events than if He had destroyed His enemies by the ordinary course of second causes. The malignity of sin, with the indignation of God against sinners and His power and determination to inflict condign punishment on them would be far more conspicuous and impressive. In short, every man who by reading the account of these awful judgments, in any age or place, has been led to a deeper sense of the evil of sin, and warned to repent and seek mercy from the Lord—will to eternal ages glorify the divine Wisdom

and goodness tested, in the very dispensations which embolden the blasphemies of the impenitent and unbelieving”—Thomas Scott (1747-1821). “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God” (Rom 11:22): the latter is as truly a divine perfection as is the former.

In Joshua 6:22-25, we see how the promise given to Rahab in Joshua 2:14, 19 was made good: “By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace” (Heb 11:31). Therein we behold the mercy of God unto those who really turn to and believe in Him. The inhabitants of Canaan had heard of Jehovah’s drying up the waters of the Red Sea, and of Israel’s destroying of Sihon and Og, but Rahab alone believed “that the LORD hath given you the land” (Jos 2:9). She evidenced her faith by receiving the two spies with good will, and sheltering those servants of God from their foes at the hazard of her own life (illustrating the principle that faith ever requires self-denial), and by a strict compliance with their instructions. The blessed consequence and sequel was that she “perished not with them that believed not” (Heb 11:31). The preservation of her house, which was “upon the town wall” (Jos 2:15), was as manifest a miracle as was the falling down of all other parts of it, and typified the eternal security of those who trust in the Lord.

Let us now briefly epitomize some of the many important lessons inculcated and illustrated by the contents of Joshua 6. 1. Closed doors and high walls are no insuperable obstacle when God be for us and with us: Acts 12:10 (verse 1). 2. Faith is to behold that which is invisible to sight and reason: John 8:56; Hebrews 11:1 (verse 2). 3. Divine promises do not render needless the discharge of responsibility (verse 3). 4. God pours contempt on human pride by appointing means which are contemptible in the eyes of the world (verse 4). 5. Encouragements (verse 5) are not to be bandied about promiscuously, but given to the diligent and faithful (verse 16). 6. The “ark,” in which was the Law, and the “trumpets” of jubilee, which announced the Gospel, tells of the preacher’s twofold work (verse 6). 7. The rank and file of God’s people are required to support and hearten His ministers (verse 7). 8. The Lord’s presence with them (Mat 28:20) is what is to animate and regulate His ministers (verse 7). 9. The position of honour is reserved for the ark and the priests: Hebrews 13:7, 17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 (verse 9). 10. Muffle not the Gospel trumpet and let it give forth no uncertain sound: 1 Corinthians 14:8 (verse 9). 11. We must be “swift to hear, slow to speak”: James 1:19; 1 Peter 3:15 (verse 10). 12. All murmuring against God and unwarrantable criticisms of His servants must be suppressed (verse 10).

13. God takes note of and appreciates thoroughness, the completing of each task assigned (verse 11). 14. Punctuality, diligence, whole-heartedness, must ever characterize the servant of Christ (verse 12). 15. Though no visible results appear, the priests must blow their trumpets “continually” (verse 13). 16. Patience and perseverance are called for in the discharge of all our God-given duties (verse 14). 17. The more trying and difficult the task, the more earnestly should we set ourselves to it (verse 15). 18. When success is delayed, our efforts are to be increased and not diminished (verse 15). 19. We must not be discouraged over the lack of early success, but let patience have her perfect work (verse 15). 20. God’s promise is to be faithfully relied upon during the time when there is no indication of its fulfilment (verse 16). 21. Though saints as such have no commission to speak in public, yet their mouths are to utter the Lord’s praise (verse 16). 22. It is implicit confidence in Himself which the Lord ever delights to honour—“when” (verse 16). 23. The whole world lieth in the Wicked One and is under the wrath of God (verse 17). 24. We bring trouble upon ourselves when we set our affection on earthly things (verse 18). 25. God never confounds those who trust and obey Him (verse 18). 26. The most unlikely means are used by God in the doing of great things (verse 20). 27. Eternal destruction is the portion of all out of Christ (verse 21), eternal security of those who trust Him (verses 22-23). 28. Build not again the things you have destroyed or renounced: Galatians 2:18 (verse 26; compare Psa 85:8).



THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

21. *The Holy Bible*

23. *Its numerics.* As the Creator has been pleased to provide an endless variety in Nature, which appeals to widely different tastes and temperaments—both as it respects objects for the eye, sounds for the ear, scents for the nose, and flavours for the palate—so He has deigned to supply many different kinds of evidence for the inspiration of His Word, which are suited to all kinds of minds. As one man prefers this dish or flower to that, so one investigator will be more impressed and convinced by a particular line of demonstration than another. It is with that fact in mind we have prepared these articles and multiplied their divisions. All of them will not appeal with equal potency and pertinency to the same reader: what strikes one most forcibly may seem jejune¹ to another, while what one finds unimpressive may settle the matter for another. Thus with the line we are about to take up. Some may deem it fanciful and unsatisfactory, while others will not only find it interesting and instructive, but weighty and conclusive.²

Our present argument may be briefly stated thus: as there are innumerable evidences of mathematical design in God's works of creation, we should naturally look for the same in His Word. If the One who "tellecth the number of the stars" (Psa 147:4), who "bringeth out their host *by number*" (Isa 40:26), who "weigheth the waters *by measure*" (Job 28:25), should vouchsafe to grant the sons of men a written revelation, it is to be expected that it will bear similar evidences of numerical significance and exactitude. If the heavenly bodies move with such unfailing regularity that an eclipse can be calculated centuries in advance of its occurrence, and if all of our chronometers be set by the motion of the sun, which never varies the fraction of second, then it is to be anticipated that similar phenomena will appear in the Holy Scriptures. Nor is such an expectation disappointed: rather does receive abundant confirmation and illustration. Everywhere in the Bible there are to be found the same evidences of a supreme Mathematical Mind as appears to the careful observer in the material realm.

Those marks of mathematical design are seen both in the general and in the particular. For example, twelve is the number of rule or government. Thus, the only theocracy or nation immediately governed by God, and in whose midst He set up His throne, comprised twelve tribes; and when Christ established his spiritual kingdom upon earth, He ordained twelve apostles to be his ambassadors. Now both Scripture and common observation tell us that God has set in the heavens "two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night" (Gen 1:16). In perfect accord with that fact, day and night alike have twelve hours, each hour consisting of sixty minutes (12 x 5), with twelve months for the year. From the remotest ages of antiquity, astronomers have divided the stellar heavens into the "twelve signs of the Zodiac"; so too the vast circle of the heavens has been divided into 360 degrees or 12 x 30. But why should *twelve* thus pervade the heavens? Why not ten or fourteen? Man can give no reason. But Scripture supplies the explanation: "the heavens do *rule*" (Dan 4:26), and twelve is the number which stands for that!

The very *structure* of the Bible evinces numerical design and arrangement. First we have the five books of the Pentateuch, like basal blocks. They are surmounted by the twelve historical books—Joshua to Esther. Next follow the five "poetical"—Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon. Then come the five major prophets, succeeded by the twelve minor ones. Above these are the five historical books of

¹ **jejune** – not interesting or satisfying; dull or empty.

² Much of Pink's article is helpful and Biblically sound. However, the editor believes that a word of caution regarding Bible-numerics is appropriate. John J. Davis and David Martyn Lloyd-Jones express sound, Biblical judgment in this matter:

"The study of Biblical numbers can be a very rewarding and satisfying venture provided it is done within the limits of sound hermeneutics. Any attempt to construct an elaborate system of interpretation based solely on the occurrence or non-occurrence of certain numbers can be very dangerous. There is a definite place for the study of the use of symbolic numbers and their theological implications. But the interpreter must beware that he be not carried away with this approach and lose sight of the all-important literal uses of numbers. In this age of semantic and theological confusion, let us who handle the Word of God do so with power and simplicity, both of which are results of the Spirit's leadership." (John J. Davis, "Biblical Numerics," *Grace Journal* Vol. 5:3, 43 [Winona, Indiana: Grace Seminary, 1964])

"I have seen many people completely side-tracked by Numerics. It is a very interesting subject. There is deep meaning in the numbers that are used in the Bible—no question about that! But what the devil does is to encourage this interest unduly. Christians read many books about it, and in the end they are able to prove almost anything. They put down certain numbers corresponding to certain particular letters, and they make their additions and their subtractions, and spend the whole of their time in playing with biblical numbers. It is a very real snare." (D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Warfare: An Exposition of Ephesians 6:10 to 13* [Edinburgh; Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976], 187)

the New Testament, then the twenty-one Epistles (by five writers!); and over all, like a crowning dome, the Apocalypse. It will be seen that five is the number which occurs most frequently, appearing conspicuously at four points: at the beginning of the Old Testament and at the beginning of the New Testament; the other two in the centre of the Bible! Nor will the student of Scripture be surprised at this when he discovers that the numerical significance of that number is divine *grace*. Hence five is the dominant number in the Tabernacle; and hence too, the five great offerings of Leviticus 1-6. "This mathematical law, pervading the Book, is at least a hint of the mathematical mind of the Author, who reveals the same regard to the symmetry of number and form in the material universe"—*The Bible and Spiritual Life*, Dr. Arthur. T. Pierson (1837-1911).

Before passing from the more general to the particular, let us point out that Bible numerics assure us of the integrity of the Canon of Scripture. How so? The very number of its books intimates the Canon is complete. The Old Testament has in it 39, or 3×13 , and three is the number of manifestation and thirteen of apostasy: its dominant theme being the *apostasy* of man and of Israel. The New Testament has just 27 books, or the cube of three: $3 \times 3 \times 3$, and three is the number of God and of manifestation—God fully and finally manifested in the incarnate and risen Christ. Now take out a single book or add one (like "Asher"), and that significance will disappear! But as it is in Nature, so with the Bible: its wonders and perfections, especially in minutiae, are only perceptible to the studious investigator. When examined under the microscope, the flakes of snow and even the scales of the herring (as the writer recently saw for himself) are formed and arranged after perfect geometrical patterns. In like manner, the number of times a word or an object is found in the Bible is always in strict harmony with the meaning possessed by that numeral.

As others before us have pointed out, *four* is the number of the world or earth. The fourth day of Genesis 1 saw the material creation completed—the fifth and sixth being devoted to furnishing and peopling the earth. It is divided into four quarters: north, east, south, west. It has four seasons: spring, summer, autumn, and winter. The fourth clause in the Family Prayer is: "Thy will be done in *earth*" (Mat 6:10). Four Gospels present our Lord's earthly ministry. *Five*, which is $4 + 1$ (God coming to the aid of the creature), is the number of *grace*. The fifth day's work in Genesis 1 illustrates: "life" and "God blessed them" occurring for the first time. When Joseph signified his peculiar favour unto the beloved Benjamin, his "mess was five times so much" as that of any of his brethren (Gen 43:34); and while he provided change of raiment for them, he gave "five changes of raiment" to Benjamin (Gen 45:22). The fifth clause in the Family Prayer is "Give us this day" (Mat 6:11), etc. The fiftieth year was that of "jubilee." Six is the number of man, for he was made on the sixth day, and see Revelation 13:18. There were six cities of refuge for the manslayer (Num 35:13). In the Bible, there are six words for "man"—four in the Old Testament and two in the New. Our Lord was crucified by men and for men at "the sixth hour"!

Seven, as is well known, is the number of perfection: how exceedingly striking then that, in Matthew 1:17, the Holy Spirit informs us there were "fourteen generations" from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the Babylonish captivity, and fourteen from the captivity till Christ: or forty-two in all. And forty-two is 7×6 : the forty-second generation from Abraham being the perfect Man! Stand in holy awe, my reader, before such divine handiwork. *Eight* signifies a new beginning. It was Noah, "the eighth person" (2Pe 2:5), who stepped out of the ark on to the earth to begin a new order of things. Circumcision was to be administered on the eighth day (Gen 17:12). On the eighth day, Israel's priests entered upon their service (Lev 8:33 and 9:1). On that day, the leper was cleansed (Lev 14:10-11), and the Nazarite was restored (Num 6:2, 10, 13). Just eight penmen were employed by God on the New Testament. Thirteen is the number of revolt or apostasy: "Twelve years they served Chedorloamer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled" (Gen 14:4). Note Esther 3:13! In Mark 7:21-22, our Lord enumerated thirteen features of man's apostate heart. The "dragon," the arch-apostate, is mentioned just thirteen times in the New Testament. Much of the above has been culled in *Numbers in Scripture: Its Supernatural Design and Significance in Scripture*, by E. W. Bullinger (1837-1913)—unobtainable.³

The same meaning appears in their multiples. Thus, one of the significations of two is that of witness (Joh 8:17; Rev 11:3); and fourteen speaks of perfect or complete witness, as in Nehemiah 8:4, the fourteen

³ In Pink's day, Bullinger's book had become scarce but has now been reprinted in numerous editions. It is online at http://philologos.org/_eb-nis. However, Bible-numerics is a controversial subject, and the editor encourages readers to approach both the subject and Bullinger with much caution. Though a learned scholar, Bullinger was known as an ultra-dispensationalist because he taught that the Gospels and Acts were under the dispensation of Law. He also taught that the church did not begin until Acts 28:28.

epistles of Paul. Fifteen (5 x 3) is a manifestation of grace: 2 Kings 20:6; Leviticus 23:6, 34, 39. Ten is the number of responsibility (Gen 18:32, 24:55; Exo 34:28); and therefore, when Christ graciously fed the multitude, they were required to partake in an orderly manner—"make them sit down by fifties [5 x 10] in a company" (Luk 9:14). Jude is the twenty-sixth book (13 x 2) in the New Testament and its obvious theme is *apostasy*, witnessing unto and against it: verses 4-8, 11-13, 24—a fitting prelude to the Revelation. When the Jews treated Paul as an apostate, they laid upon him "forty stripes *save one*"—39 or 13 x 3 (2Co 11:24)! Thus, all through the Scriptures, numbers are not used haphazardly, but with design. Not only so, but though they are employed by no less than forty penmen, yet always with *uniform precision*; which can only be accounted for on the ground that all were inspired by one and the same Spirit.

24. *Its reserve.* Had the Bible been of human origin—a fraud passed off upon the world—exactly the opposite had been the case. When human writers take up matters of extraordinary interest, they deal with them dramatically rather than prosaically, and in a manner which will appeal to lovers of the sensational. But there is nothing like that in the Scriptures: instead, a holy constraint rests upon its scribes. When secular writers arouse curiosity, they endeavour to satisfy it; whereas the sacred penmen lift not a finger to remove the veil from off the mysteries of which they treat. They never draw upon their imagination, nor indulge in that speculation which is so prominent in the authors and disciples of all heathen religions. That can only be accounted for on the ground that the Holy Spirit suppressed their natural proclivities. The divine inspiration of the Bible appears not only in what is said, but equally in what is not said. Its silences are as eloquent as its speech. No explanation is given of the *modus* of the three Persons in the Godhead—in marked contrast to the presumptuous reasonings of not a few theologians, who sought to be wise above what is written.

How scanty the information furnished on many things upon which the human heart craves light! In the historical portions, men and nations appear abruptly, raising the curtain of oblivion, stepping to the front of the stage for a brief moment, and then disappearing into the unknown. It is full of gaps which human authors would have filled in. How often we wish the Evangelists had been more communicative. Had they been left to their own wisdom, the Gospels had been much fuller and lengthier! No description is given of the bodily appearance of Christ: they say not a word about His stature, complexion, or features. What is yet more remarkable—except for one brief statement concerning Him as a boy of twelve—the first thirty years of our Lord's life are passed over in complete silence, which is very different from the fabled accounts of the Apocryphal writers! There is not the least gratifying of idle curiosity in the Bible, but a noticeable repressing of the same. Nothing is told us of the experiences of the soul—either redeemed or reprobate—immediately after death, and little about the Eternal State. The Scriptures are not for entertainment, but are given for practical and spiritual ends.

While Holy Writ makes known many facts unto us, it does so no further than they contribute to the design of the Holy Spirit and are for our moral instruction. Very little information is furnished, and sometimes none at all, concerning the amanuenses of God—we do not even know who wrote the books of Ruth and Esther. No account is given of the closing hours of Peter, Paul, and John. It is not thus with uninspired historians and biographers! How natural for the apostle John to have spoken of our Lord's mother in terms of adulation, yet not a word does he utter which affords the least support to the sickly sentimentality and blasphemous idolatry of the Popish Mariolatry. Only once is she mentioned after Christ's ascension, and then at a prayer meeting: not as the object of supplication, but taking her place among brethren and sisters as a supplicant (Act 1:14)! Frequent mention is made in the Gospels of "the devils" or "demons," yet nowhere are we told anything about who or what they are. There are many matters of which we should welcome information, but the Bible is silent thereon, because such knowledge respected not our duty, nor would it have promoted personal piety. But nothing concerning our well-being is omitted. An account is given of how the human race became infected with the virus of sin, but not a word on the origin of evil.

25. *Its ingenuousness.* Had the historical portions of the Old Testament been a spurious production, how vastly different had been their contents! Each of the books was written by a son of Abraham, yet nowhere do we find his posterity flattered. So far from extolling the virtues of the Jewish nation, it is uniformly portrayed as an ungrateful, rebellious, and sinful people. There is scarcely a book in the Old Testament which does not relate that which is most unfavourable and highly disgraceful to them. Nowhere do we find their bravery eulogized, and never are their victories ascribed either to their valour or military genius. Success is always attributed unto Jehovah their God. In like manner, their defeats are referred unto Him, as withholding His power because their evil conduct had justly displeased Him. Their defeats are accounted for neither by misfortune nor bad generalship, but to their own wickedness restraining a holy God

from showing Himself strong in their behalf. Now such a God is not the creation of the human mind, nor are such historians actuated by the common principles of human nature. Time after time, Israel's subjugation by heathen nations is faithfully chronicled.

The Jewish historians have also impartially recorded the numerous backslidings and spiritual declensions of their own people. One of the outstanding truths of the Old Testament is the unity of God, that beside Him there is none else, that all others are false gods, and that the paying of any homage to them is the sin of all sins. Yet the idolatry of Israel is frankly and repeatedly recorded. The guilt of some of their leading men is mentioned, as that of Aaron and Solomon. Nor is there the slightest attempt made to excuse such appalling wickedness: instead, it is openly censured and roundly condemned. Nor do the writers spare *themselves* or omit that which is to their discredit. Moses concealed not the reflection cast upon his own tribe (Gen 34:30; 49:5), nor the incest of his parents (Exo 6:20), or the rebellion of his sister (Num 12:1). He failed not to set down his own faults and failings, but frankly tells us of his disinclination to respond to Jehovah's call (Exo 4:10-14), his murmuring against God (Num 11:11-14), his lack of faith after so many divine interpositions on his behalf (Num 11:13), and the Lord's displeasure against him because of his disobedience (Num 27:12-14). Such unsparring fidelity is found not in those who are left free to follow the bent of their own hearts.

The same unusual feature is found in the New Testament. John the Baptist is presented as a most eminent personage: miraculously born, the Lord's forerunner, accorded the high honour of baptizing Him. Where had human wisdom and sentiment placed him among the Saviour's followers? Surely, as the most distinguished and favoured of His attendants, set at His right hand. Whereas he was granted no familiar discourse with Him, but was treated with apparent neglect, suffered to be cast into prison through no fault of his own, and left there unvisited. See him harassed with unbelief, doubting whether or no He was the true Messiah. Had his character been the invention of fraud, nothing had been said of his lapse of faith. The same shocking unbelief is recorded of the apostles, who not only basely deserted Christ in the hour of His crisis, but had no expectation of His rising from the dead; nay, when informed that He had done so, were full of scepticism. A spurious history had omitted such glaring blemishes. But the Bible characters are painted in the colours of truth and nature, and in the unrivalled honesty of its penmen, we have yet another evidence that they wrote by divine inspiration and not by natural impulse.

26. *Its majestic tone.* If God be the Author of the Bible, we should naturally expect to find in it a loftiness of tone and majesty of diction which surpasses all human productions. And such is indeed the case, especially in those portions of it which more especially treat of the divine perfections. Amidst great plainness of speech and homeliness of expression, adapted to the meanest capacity, there is often an elevation of spirit and grandeur of language which not only command attention, but fill with reverent awe. Thus, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken" (Isa 1:2). "The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble" (Psa 99:1). It would be the height of presumption for any creature to speak thus, yet perfectly fitting for the Almighty to do so. When the Son of God became incarnate, the people who heard Him declared that "he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Mat 7:29); and the very officers sent to arrest Him testified that "never man spake like this man" (Joh 7:46). The same qualities mark God's written Word. It possesses a sovereign majesty which is unrivalled and inimitable.

Though the contents of the Bible be not presented pompously or bombastically, but calmly and with becoming dignity, yet there is an unmistakable elevation of style and an august solemnity of diction which is without parallel. God speaks therein, and reveals the glory of His excellence. His supremacy, His omniscience, His holiness, His immutability, His faithfulness, His goodness and grace, are set forth in a manner worthy of Himself—yet at the same time, admirably suited to our weakness. The most laborious efforts of scholars and rhetoricians are insipid in comparison with those passages which are particularly designed to convey to us due apprehensions of the One with whom we have to do. "It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in" (Isa 40:22). Yet, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young" (Isa 40:11).

Space permits us to adduce but one other specimen. "O LORD my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty. Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain: Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind: Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming

fire: Who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever. Thou coveredst it with the deep as with a garment: the waters stood above the mountains. At thy rebuke they fled; at the voice of thy thunder they hasted away” (Psa 104:1-7). Where shall we find in human compositions anything so chaste, so elevated, so sublime!



SLEEPY SAINTS

What an anomaly! Drowsing on the verge of eternity! A Christian is one who, in contrast to the unregenerate, has been awakened from the sleep of death in trespasses and sins, made to realize the unspeakable awfulness of endless misery in hell and the ineffable joy of everlasting bliss in heaven; and thereby brought to recognize the seriousness and solemnity of life. A Christian is one who has been taught experientially the worthlessness of all mundane things and the preciousness of divine things. He has turned his back on Vanity Fair and has started out on his journey to the Celestial City. He has been quickened into newness of life and supplied with the most powerful incentives to “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phi 3:14). Nevertheless, it is sadly possible for him to suffer a relapse, for his zeal to abate (Ti 2:14), his graces to languish, for him to leave his first love (Rev 2:4), and become weary of well-doing (Gal 6:9; 2Th 3:13). Yea, unless he be very much on his guard, drowsiness *will* steal over him, and he will fall asleep. Corruptions still indwell in him, and sin has a stupefying effect. He is yet in this evil world, and it exerts an enervating influence. Satan seeks to devour him, and unless resisted, steadfastly will hypnotize him. Thus, the menace of this spiritual “sleeping sickness” is very real.

Slumbering saints! What an incongruity! Taking their ease while threatened by danger. Lazing instead of fighting “the good fight of faith” (1Ti 6:12). Trifling away opportunities to glorify their Saviour, instead of redeeming the time (Eph 5:16; Col 4:5): rusting, instead of wearing out in His service. We speak with wonderment and horror of Nero fiddling while Rome was burning; but far more startling and reprehensible is a careless Christian who has departed from God, bewitched by a world which is doomed to eternal destruction. Such a travesty and tragedy is far from being exceptional. Both observation and the teaching of Scripture prove it to be a common occurrence. Such passages as the following make it only too evident that the people of God are thus overcome. “It is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed” (Rom 13:11). “Awake to righteousness, and sin not” (1Co 15:34). “Awake thou that sleepest” (Eph 5:14). Each of those clamant calls is made to the saints. So, too, is that exhortation addressed to them, “Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.” (1Th 5:5-6).

Our Lord gave warning of the same phenomenon in Matthew 25:1-13, which points some very searching lessons upon the subject now before us. We do not propose to give an exposition of those verses; still less, waste time on canvassing the conflicting theorizings of men thereon. Instead of indulging in useless speculations upon what has been termed the “prophetic” application of that passage, we intend to dwell upon what is of far more practical importance and profit to the Christian’s walk. First, let it be duly noted that this parable of the Virgins was delivered by Christ not to a promiscuous multitude, but to His own disciples: it was *to them* that He said, “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” (Mat 25:13). Therein He exhorted His followers to maintain an attitude of the utmost alertness and diligence, to be on their guard against a sudden surprisal, to see to it that they were in a constant state of readiness to welcome and entertain Him at His appearing. In that thirteenth verse, Christ clearly indicated the principal design of this parable—namely, to enforce the Christian duty of watchfulness, particularly against the tendency and danger of moral drowsiness and spiritual apathy in the performance of our duties.

Second, we would here earnestly warn the reader against placing any restrictions on the words of Holy Writ. In the light of the Analogy of Faith—that is, the general tenor of Scripture—it is quite unwarrantable for us to *limit* the words, “wherein the Son of man cometh” to His ultimate appearing at the end of this age or world. It is our duty to make use of the Concordance and carefully observe the different senses in which the “coming” of Christ is referred to in the Word, and distinguish between them. For example, the communications of grace to God’s people in the administration of His Word and ordinances is spoken of thus, “He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth” (Psa 72:6, and compare Deu 32:2). Again, there was a judicial coming of the Lord in the destruction of Jerusalem, when He made good the threat, “What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others” (Mark 12:9)—He came not literally in Person, but instrumentally by the Romans! Then there is also a “coming” of Christ to His people in the renewed manifestations of His love: “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will *come* unto him, and make our abode with him” (Joh 14:23).

Christ has come to His people *vicariously*: as He declared unto the apostles, “I will not leave you comfortless: *I will come to you*” (Joh 14:18)—where, according to the preceding verses, the principal reference is plainly to the public descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Again, Christ often visits His people in the chariot of *His providence*: sometimes favourably; at others, adversely, as in “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else *I will come* unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick” (Rev 2:5, and compare verse 16). Again, He “comes” *instrumentally* by the ministry of the Gospel: “And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And *came* and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh” (Eph 2:16-17, and compare Luk 10:16). Again, He comes *spiritually* to those who yearn for and seek after fellowship with Him: “I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20). Finally, He will come literally and visibly (Act 1:11; Rev 1:7). Thus, it is a serious mistake to jumble together the communicative, judicial, manifestative, vicarious, providential, instrumental, and spiritual “comings” of Christ; as it also is to *restrict* to His second advent every verse where it speaks of His “coming” or appearing.

In like manner, it is equally wrong for us to limit our Lord’s “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” (Mat 25:13) to a “looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Ti 2:13). Most of the other seven things mentioned above are *not* to be excluded therefrom. We are to be on the *qui vive* (or alert) for His approaches to us in the means of grace, attentive to His appearings before us in providence, recognize Him in the ministry of the Gospel, and expectantly wait His visits of intimate fellowship. The Christian’s continuance in this world is the period of both his “watching” and his “waiting” for removal therefrom; and since he knows not whether that will be by death or by his being caught up to meet the Lord in the air, he is to be prepared for either event—if he be so for the former, he will be for the latter. This call for him to “watch” signifies that he is to “keep [his] heart with all diligence” (Pro 4:23), “keep [himself] from idols” (1Jo 5:21), “keep [himself] in the love of God” (Jude 21), “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: [knowing that though] the spirit indeed is willing...the flesh is weak” (Mat 26:41). In a word, that exhortation requires us to attend to the interests of our souls with unremitting diligence and circumspection.

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom” (Mat 25:1). This is not said to be a similitude of the attitude of “the Bride” toward her Bridegroom, for the scope of it is wider, taking in the whole sphere of Christian profession. Hence in what follows, the “virgins” are divided into two groups—the regenerate and the unregenerate. Thus, it would have been inaccurate to designate the whole of them “the Bride”! It is therefore a discriminating parable, like that of the wheat and tares, and that of the good and bad fish in Matthew 13. If it be asked, Why should Christ address such a parable unto the apostles, the answer is, Because there was a Judas among them! It is outside our present scope to consider the “foolish” virgins: suffice it to say that externally, they differed not from the “wise” ones. They represent not the irreligious and immoral, but unsaved church members—those who have “escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the [not “their”!] Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2Pe 2:20), but who have never experienced a miracle of grace in their hearts. Though having lamps in their hands, they had no oil “in their vessels” (Mat 25:3-4)—no grace in their souls! This calls for writer and reader to make honest and careful examination of themselves, to “give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2Pe 1:10).

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins.” Many and varied are the figures used to describe the disciples of Christ. They are spoken of as salt, as lights, as sheep, as living stones, as kings and priests. When complete, and in its corporeal capacity, the Church is referred to as the Lamb’s “Wife”; but individually, they are termed “the virgins her companions” (Psa 45:14, and compare Song 8:13; Rev 1:9). They are called “virgins” for the purity of their faith: for none—no matter how pleasing is his personality or irreproachable his outward conduct—who is fundamentally unsound is to be regarded as a Christian. Thus the apostle, when expostulating with a local church for giving a hearing to false teachers—told them, “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have [ministerially] espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2Co 11:2). Again: they are called “virgins” for the purity of their worship. God is a jealous God and will not brook any rival; and therefore, we find all through Scripture that idolatry is expressed as harlotry—hence the vile and corrupt Papacy is designated, “THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS” (Rev 17:5). Once more: they are called “virgins” for the purity of their walk, refusing friendship and fellowship with the adulterous world, and cleaving to Christ—“they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth” (Rev 14:4).

The saints are expressly bidden *to go forth* to meet the Bridegroom. “Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals” (Song 3:11)—an exceedingly interesting and blessed verse which we must not dwell upon. It is the antitypical Solomon, the Prince of Peace, who is here in view. His “mother” is the natural Israel, from whom according to the flesh He sprang—a figure of the spiritual Israel, in whose hearts He is “formed” (Gal 4:19). The “day of his espousals” was when Israel entered into a solemn covenant with the Lord (Jer 2:2, and see Exo 24:3-8 for the historical reference)—adumbrating our marital union with Christ, when we “gave [our] own selves to the Lord” (2Co 8:5) and were “joined unto the Lord” (1Co 6:17), crowning Him the King of our hearts and lives. Here the “daughters of Jerusalem”—the same as the “virgins”—are bidden to “behold” their majestic and glorious King: to attentively consider the excellency of His person, to be engaged with His perfections, to admire and adore the One who is “altogether lovely” (Song 5:16). But in order thereto, there must be active effort on their part. Not to the dilatory does Christ reveal Himself (Song 3:1).

“Which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.” The taking of their lamps signifies making an open profession of their faith. They were not secret disciples, hiding their light under a bushel, but those who were unashamed to be known as the followers of Christ. Luke 12:35-36 serves to explain this force of the figure: “Let your loins be girded about, and your *lights* [more literally] burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord.” Of His forerunner, Christ said, “He was a burning and a shining light” (Joh 5:35). But other thoughts are suggested and things implied by these virgins taking their lamps. It tells us they availed themselves of suitable means, making provision against the darkness which they would encounter. The principal means for the Christian is the Word, which is “a light [same Greek word as in Luk 12:35 and Joh 5:35] that shineth in a dark place” (2Pe 1:19). It also shows they had no intention of going to sleep, but purposed to remain vigilant; which renders more searching what follows. It also intimates they were sensible of the difficulty of their task. Only one who, after a full day’s work, has sat out the night by a sick bed knows how hard it is to keep alert throughout the long hours of darkness.

It needs to be clearly realized by the believer that the Word is supplied him not only as “bread” to feed upon, a “sword” for him to employ in repulsing the attacks of his enemies, but also as an illuminator: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet” (Psa 119:105), revealing those paths in which I must walk if I would meet with the eternal Lover of my soul. “And went forth to meet the bridegroom” (Mat 25:1). *That* must ever be our object in the use of means and attendance upon the administration of the divine ordinances. That going forth to meet the Lord is to be understood as expressing both external and internal action. Externally, it signifies separation from the world, especially its pleasures, for Christ will not be met with while we waste our time engaging in them. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers...come out from among them” (2Co 6:14-17) must be heeded if we would “meet the bridegroom” (Mat 25:1). More particularly, their going forth denoted a turning of their backs upon the apostate ecclesiastical system: Christ had informed His disciples that he had abandoned a Judaism which had rejected Him (Mat 23:37-38), so if they would meet with Him, they too must “go forth therefore unto him without the camp” (Heb 13:13). The same is true now.

If the Christian would meet with and have blessed fellowship with Christ, he must not only walk in separation from all intimacy with the profane world, but turn his back on every section of the religious world which gives not Christ the pre-eminence. That calls for the denying of self and “bearing his reproach” (Heb 13:13). Our readiness so to do will depend upon how highly we esteem Him. *Internally*, it signified the activity of their affections. It imports their delight in Him, that He was the Object of their desires and expectations. It connotes the exercise of their graces upon Christ, an outgoing of the whole soul after Him; such a going out after Him as David had: “One thing [supremely] have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD [the place of communion] all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD” (Psa 27:4). There can be no soul-satisfying beholding of His excellency, unless there be deep longing for and earnest seeking after Him, which is what is purported by the “went forth to *meet* the bridegroom!” (Mat 25:1).



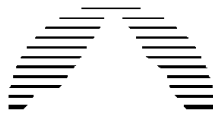
SATAN'S SIEVE

Luke 22:31-32

If it be asked, Why did not Christ prevent what He foresaw, and could hinder? I answer: 1. The grace of God is not debtor to any man—God cannot be unrighteous in suffering that which He is not bound or obliged to hinder. 2. God would not suffer evil in or upon His children if He did not know how to bring good out of evil, yea, the greatest good out of the greatest evil. God suffers temptations to take place for many good reasons, but here I shall only name from Simon's case. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1Co 10:12). Here we may remark that those whom God advances to the greatest excellencies, Satan assaults with the greatest violence. As the sun beats hottest upon the rising bank, so is Satan's envy leveled most against those whom God hath advanced above others—either in grace or honour. God had no sooner marked out Job for his uprightness, but Satan marked him out for envy and mischief. When Joshua stood before the angel of the Lord, Satan stood at his right hand to resist him (Zec 3:1). Yea, he set upon Christ with all his forces (Mat 4:1-11).

Why does God permit this? 1. For the trial and so for the honour of His graces in them. "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1Pe 1:6-7). Thus He turned Satan loose upon Job. As a cutler taking a sword and striking it against an anvil knows what metal it is made of, so God knows what metal His servants are made of; and what Satan can do, what he would do, and what he shall do. By this means, God designs the advancement of His own glory, in the victory of faith in the issue: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown" (Jam 1:12). 2. God's grace is increased in His children by being exercised. Temptation is a school for training Christ's soldiers: as a sword glisters by using, which would rust in the scabbard. Exercise is good for our spiritual health; especially such as God designs for high and honourable service—He will have them well tried; as we dig low when we have a mind to build high.

The above is a brief extract from a sermon by Ralph Erskine (1685-1752), 1742.



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