

THE INCARNATION AND BIRTH OF CHRIST

NO. 57

A SERMON DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, DECEMBER 23, 1855,
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AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK.

*“But you, Bethlehem Ephratah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah,
Yet out of You shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings
forth are from of old, from everlasting.”*
Micah 5:2

THIS is the season of the year when, whether we wish it or not, we are compelled to think of the birth of Christ. I hold it to be one of the greatest absurdities under Heaven to think that there is any religion in keeping Christmas Day. There are no probabilities whatever that our Savior Jesus Christ was born on that day and the observance of it is purely of Popish origin. Doubtless those who are Catholics have a right to hallow it, but I do not see how consistent Protestants can account it in the least sacred.

However, I wish there were ten or a dozen Christmas days in the year—for there is work enough in the world and a little more rest would not hurt laboring people. Christmas Day is really a gift to us, particularly as it enables us to assemble round the family hearth and meet our friends once more. Still, although we do not fall exactly in the track of other people, I see no harm in thinking of the incarnation and birth of the Lord Jesus. We do not wish to be classed with those—

*“Who with more care keep holiday
The wrong, than others the right way.”*

The old Puritans made a parade of *work* on Christmas day, just to show that they protested against the observance of it. But we believe they entered that protest so completely, that we are willing, as their descendants, to take the good accidentally conferred by the day and leave its superstitions to the superstitious.

To proceed at once to what we have to say to you: we notice, first, *who it was that sent Christ forth*. God the Father here speaks and says, “Out of You shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel.” Secondly, *where did He come to at the time of His incarnation*. Thirdly, *what did He come for*—“To be ruler in Israel.” Fourthly, *had He ever come before?* Yes, He had. “Whose goings forth are from of old from everlasting.”

First then, WHO SENT JESUS CHRIST? The answer is returned to us by the words of the text. “Out of you,” says Jehovah, speaking by the mouth of Micah, “out of you shall He come forth unto *Me*.” It is a sweet thought that Jesus Christ did not come forth without His Father’s permission, authority, consent and assistance. He was sent of the Father that He might be the Savior of men. We are, alas, too apt to forget that while there are distinctions as to the Persons in the Trinity, there are no distinctions of *honor*—and we do very frequently ascribe the honor of our salvation, or at least the depths of its mercy and the extremity of its benevolence, more to Jesus Christ than we do to the Father. This is a very great mistake.

What if Jesus came? Did not His Father send Him? If He were made a child, did not the Holy Spirit beget Him? If He spoke wondrously, did not His Father pour grace into His lips that He might be an able minister of the New Covenant? If His Father did forsake Him when He drank the bitter cup of gall did He not love Him still? And did He not, by-and-by, after three days, raise Him from the dead and at last receive Him up on high, leading captivity captive?

Ah, Beloved, He who knows the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as he should know them, never sets One before another. He is not more thankful to One than the other, he sees them at Bethlehem, at Gethsemane and on Calvary all equally engaged in the work of salvation. “He shall come forth unto *Me*.” O Christian, have you put your confidence in the Man Christ Jesus? Have you placed your reliance solely on Him? And are you united with Him? Then believe that you are united unto the God of Heaven, since to the Man Christ Jesus you are brother and hold closest fellowship. You are

linked thereby with God the Eternal and “the Ancient of days” is your Father and your Friend. “He shall come forth unto *Me*.”

Did you never see the depth of love there was in the heart of Jehovah, when God the Father equipped His Son for the great enterprise of mercy? There had been a sad day in Heaven once before, when Satan fell and dragged with him a third of the stars of Heaven and when the Son of God launching from His great right hand the Omnipotent thunders, dashed the rebellious crew to the pit of perdition. But if we could conceive a grief in Heaven—that must have been a sadder day when the Son of the Most High left His Father’s bosom—where He had lain from before all worlds.

“Go,” says the Father, “and Your Father’s blessing on Your head!” Then comes the unrobing. How do angels crowd around to see the Son of God take off His robes! He laid aside His crown, He said, “My Father, I am Lord over all, blessed forever. But I will lay My crown aside and be as mortal men are.” He strips Himself of His bright vest of glory. “Father,” He says, “I will wear a robe of clay, just such as men wear.” Then He takes off all those jewels wherewith He was glorified. He lays aside His starry mantles and robes of light to dress Himself in the simple garments of the peasant of Galilee. What a solemn disrobing that must have been!

And next, can you picture the dismissal! The angels attend the Savior through the streets, until they approach the doors. An angel cries, “Lift up your heads, O you gates and be you lifted up you everlasting doors and let the King of Glory through!” Oh, methinks the angels must have wept when they lost the company of Jesus—when the Sun of Heaven bereaved them of all its light. But they went after Him. They descended with Him. And when His spirit entered into flesh and He became a Babe, He was attended by that mighty host of angels who after they had been with Him to Bethlehem’s manger and seen Him safely laid on His mother’s breast—in their journey upwards appeared to the shepherds and told them that He was born king of the Jews!

The Father sent Him! Contemplate that subject! Let your soul get hold of it and in every period of His life think that He suffered what the *Father* willed—that every step of His life was marked with the approval of the great I AM. Let every thought that you have of Jesus be also connected with the eternal, ever-blessed God, for “He,” says Jehovah, “shall come forth to Me.” Who sent Him, then? The answer is His Father.

Now, secondly, WHERE DID HE COME TO? A word or two concerning Bethlehem. It seemed meet and right that our Savior should be born in Bethlehem and that because of Bethlehem’s history, Bethlehem’s name and Bethlehem’s position—*little in Judah*.

First, it seemed necessary that Christ should be born in Bethlehem, *because of Bethlehem’s history*. Dear to every Israelite was the little village of Bethlehem. Jerusalem might outshine it in splendor, for there stood the temple, the glory of the whole earth and “beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth was Mount Zion.” Yet around Bethlehem there clustered a number of incidents which always made it a pleasant resting place to every Jewish mind. Even the Christian cannot help loving Bethlehem.

The first mention, I think, that we have of Bethlehem is a sorrowful one. There Rachel died. If you turn to the 35th of Genesis you will find it said in the 16th verse—“And they journeyed from Bethel and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath. And Rachel travailed and she had hard labor. And it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the mid-wife said unto her, Fear not, you shall have this son also. And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni. But his father called him Benjamin. And Rachel died and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave, that is the pillar of Rachel’s grave unto this day.”

A singular incident this—almost prophetic. Might not Mary have called her own son Jesus, her Benoni, for He was to be the Child of Sorrow? Simeon said to her—“Yes a sword shall pierce through your own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” But while she might have called Him Benoni, what did God His Father call Him? Benjamin, the son of My right hand. Benoni was He as a man. Benjamin as to His Godhead. This little incident seems to be almost a prophecy that Benoni—Benjamin, the Lord Jesus, should be born in Bethlehem.

But another woman makes this place celebrated. That woman’s name was Naomi. There lived at Bethlehem in after days, when, perhaps, the stone that Jacob’s fondness had raised had been covered with moss and its inscription obliterated, another woman named Naomi. She, too, was a daughter of joy and yet a daughter of bitterness. Naomi was a woman whom the Lord had loved and blessed but she had to go to a strange land and she said, “Call me not Naomi (pleasant) but let my name be called Mara (bitter) for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.”

Yet was she not alone amid all her losses, for there cleaved unto her Ruth the Moabitess, whose Gentile blood should unite with the pure untainted stream of the Jew and should thus bring forth the Lord our Savior, the great King both of Jews and Gentiles. That very beautiful book of Ruth had all its scenery laid in Bethlehem. It was at Bethlehem that Ruth went forth to glean in the fields of Boaz. It was there that Boaz looked upon her and she bowed herself before her lord. It was there her marriage was celebrated. And in the streets of Bethlehem did Boaz and Ruth receive a blessing which made them fruitful, so that Boaz became the father of Obed and Obed the father of Jesse—and Jesse the father of David.

That last fact gilds Bethlehem with glory—the fact that David was born there—the mighty hero who smote the Philistine giant, who led the discontented of his land away from the tyranny of their monarch and who afterwards, by a full consent of a willing people, was crowned king of Israel and Judah. Bethlehem was a royal city, because the kings were there brought forth. Little as Bethlehem was it was much to be esteemed because it was like certain principalities which we have in Europe, which are celebrated for nothing but for bringing forth the consorts of the royal families of England. It was right, then, from history, that Bethlehem should be the birthplace of Christ.

But again: *there is something in the name of the place.* “Bethlehem Ephratah.” The word *Bethlehem* has a double meaning. It signifies “the house of bread” and “the house of war.” Ought not Jesus Christ to be born in “the house of bread”? He is the Bread of His people, on which they feed. As our fathers ate manna in the wilderness, so do we live on Jesus here below. Famished by the world, we cannot feed on its shadows. Its husks may gratify the swinish taste of worldlings, for they are swine but we need something more substantial. In that blest bread of Heaven, made of the bruised body of our Lord Jesus and baked in the furnace of His agonies, we find a blessed food.

No food like Jesus to the desponding soul or to the strongest saint. The very meanest of the family of God goes to Bethlehem for His bread—and the strongest man, who eats strong meat, goes to Bethlehem for it. House of Bread! Where could come our nourishment but from you? We have tried Sinai but on her rugged steeps there grow no fruits and her thorny heights yield no corn whereon we may feed. We have repaired even to Tabor itself, where Christ was transfigured and yet there we have not been able to eat His flesh and drink His blood. But Bethlehem, you house of bread, rightly were you called, for there the Bread of Life was first handed down for man to eat.

And it is also called “the house of war.” Because Christ is to a man “the house of bread” or else “the house of war.” While He is food to the righteous He causes war to the wicked, according to His own words—“think not that I am come to send peace on the earth; I am not come to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, the daughter against her mother and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.”

Sinner, if you do not know Bethlehem as “the house of bread,” it shall be to you a “house of war.” If from the lips of Jesus you do never drink sweet honey—if you are not like the bee, which sips sweet luscious liquor from the Rose of Sharon, then out of the selfsame mouth there shall go forth against you a two-edged sword! And that mouth from which the *righteous* draw their bread, shall be to you the mouth of *destruction* and the cause of your ill. Jesus of Bethlehem, house of bread and house of war, we trust we know You as our bread. Oh, that some who are now at war with You might hear in their hearts, as well as in their ears the song—

***“Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.”***

And now for that word *Ephratah*. That was the old name of the place which the Jews retained and loved. The meaning of it is, “fruitfulness,” or “abundance.” Ah, well was Jesus born in the house of fruitfulness, for where comes my fruitfulness and your fruitfulness, my Brothers and Sisters, but from Bethlehem? Our poor barren hearts never produced one fruit or flower till they were watered with the Savior’s blood. It is His incarnation which fattens the soil of our hearts. There had been pricking thorns on all the ground—and mortal poisons, before He came—but our fruitfulness comes from Him. “I am like a green fir tree. From You is my fruit found.” “All my springs are in You.”

If we are like trees planted by the rivers of water, bringing forth our fruit in our season, it is not because we were naturally fruitful, but because of the rivers of water by which we were planted. It is Jesus that makes us fruitful “If a man abide in Me,” He says, “and My words abide in him, he shall bring forth much fruit.” Glorious Bethlehem Ephratah! Rightly named! Fruitful house of bread—the house of abundant provision for the people of God!

We notice, next, *the position of Bethlehem*. It is said to be “little among the thousands of Judah.” Why is this? Because Jesus Christ always goes among little ones. He was born in the little one “among the thousands of Judah.” Not Bashan’s high hill, not on Hebron’s royal mount, not in Jerusalem’s palaces, but in the humble, yet illustrious, village of Bethlehem. There is a passage in Zechariah which teaches us a lesson—it is said that the man on the red horse stood among the myrtle trees. Now the myrtle trees grow at the bottom of the hill—and the man on the red horse always rides there. He does not ride on the mountaintop. He rides among the humble in heart.

“With this man will I dwell, says the Lord. With him who is of a humble and contrite spirit and who trembles at My Word.” There are some little ones here this morning—“little among the thousands of Judah.” No one ever heard your name, did they? If you were buried and had your name on your tombstone, it would never be noticed. Those who pass by would say, “It is nothing to me. I never knew him.” You do not know much of yourself, or think much of yourself. You can scarcely read, perhaps. Or if you have some talents and ability, you are despised among men. Or, if you are not despised by them, you despise yourself. You are one of the little ones. Well, Christ is always born in Bethlehem among the little ones.

Big hearts never get Christ inside of them. Christ lies not in great hearts, but in little ones. Mighty and proud spirits never have Jesus Christ, for He comes in at low doors. He will not come in at high ones. He who has a broken heart and a low spirit, shall have the Savior, but none else. He heals not the prince and the king, but “the broken in heart and He binds up their wounds.” Sweet thought! He is the Christ of the little ones. “You, Bethlehem Ephratah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah yet out of you shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel.”

We cannot pass away from this without another thought here, which is, how “*wonderfully mysterious was that Providence which brought Jesus Christ’s mother to Bethlehem at the very time when she was to be delivered!*” His parents were residing at Nazareth. And what should they want to travel at that time for? Naturally they would have remained at home. It was not at all likely that His mother would have taken a journey to Bethlehem while in so peculiar a condition. But Caesar Augustus issues a decree that they are to be taxed. Very well, then, let them be taxed at Nazareth. No. It pleases him that they should all go to their city.

But why should Caesar Augustus think of it just at that particular time? Simply because, while man devises his way, the king’s heart is in the hand of your Lord. Why, what a thousand chances—as the world has it—met together to bring about this event! First of all, Caesar quarreled with Herod. One of the Herods was deposed. Caesar says “I shall tax Judea and make it a province, instead of having it for a separate kingdom.” Well, it must be done.

But when is it to be done? This taxing, it is said, was first commenced when Cyreneus was governor. But why is the census to be taken at *that* particular period—suppose—December? Why not have had it last October? And why could not the people be taxed where they were living? Was not their money just as good there as anywhere else? It was Caesar’s whim, but it was God’s decree. Oh, we love the sublime doctrine of eternal absolute predestination. Some have doubted its being consistent with the free agency of man. We know well it is so and we never saw any difficulty in the subject. We believe metaphysicians have made difficulties. We see none ourselves. It is for us to believe that man does as he pleases, yet notwithstanding he always does as God decrees. If Judas betrays Christ, “thereunto he was appointed.” And if Pharaoh hardens his heart, yet, “for this purpose have I raised you up, for to show forth My power in you.”

Man does as he wills, but God makes him do as he wills, too. No, not only is the will of man under the absolute predestination of Jehovah—but all things, great or little, are of Him. Well has the good poet said, “Doubtless the sailing of a cloud has Providence as its pilot. Doubtless the root of an oak is gnarled for a special purpose, God compasses all things, mantling the globe like air.” There is nothing great or little that is not from Him. The summer dust moves in its orbit, guided by the same hand which rolls the stars along. The dewdrops have their father and trickle on the rose leaf as God bids them. Yes, the sear leaves of the forest, when hurled along by the tempest, have their allotted position where they shall fall, nor can they go beyond it.

In the great and in the little, there is God—God in everything, working all things according to the counsel of His own will. And though man seeks to go against his Maker, yet he cannot. God has bound the sea with a barrier of sand and if the sea mount up wave after wave, yet it shall not exceed its allotted channel. Everything is of God. And unto Him who guides the stars and wings sparrows, who rules planets and yet moves atoms, who speaks thunders and yet whispers zephyrs, unto Him be glory. For there is God in everything,

This brings us to the third point—WHAT DID JESUS COME FOR? He came to be “ruler in Israel.” A very singular thing is this, that Jesus Christ was said to have been “born the King of the Jews.” Very few have ever been “born king.” Men are born princes, but they are seldom born kings. I do not think you can find an instance in history where any infant was born king. He was the prince of Wales, perhaps. And he had to wait a number of years—till his father died and then they manufactured him into a king by putting a crown on his head and a sacred chrism and other silly things. But he was not *born* a king. I remember no one who was born a king except Jesus. And there is emphatic meaning in that verse that we sing—

***“Born your people to deliver
Born a child and yet a King.”***

The moment that He came on earth He was a king. He did not wait till His majority that He might take His empire—but as soon as His eye greeted the sunshine He was a king. From the moment that His little hands grasped anything, they grasped a scepter. As soon as His pulse beat and His blood began to flow, His heart beat royally and His pulse beat an imperial measure and His blood flowed in a kingly current. He was born a king. He came “to be ruler in Israel.” “Ah,” says one, “then He came in vain, for little did He exercise His rule—‘He came unto His own and His own received Him not’—He came to Israel and He was not their ruler, but He was ‘despised and rejected of men,’ cast off by them all and forsaken by Israel, unto whom He came.”

Yes, but “They are not all Israel who are of Israel.” Neither because they are the seed of Abraham shall they all be called. Ah, no! He is not ruler of Israel after the *flesh*, but He is the ruler of Israel after the *spirit*. Many such have obeyed Him. Did not the Apostles bow before Him and own Him as their King? And now, does not Israel salute Him as their Ruler? Do not all the seed of Abraham after the spirit, even all the faithful, for He is “the father of the faithful,” acknowledge that unto Christ belongs the shields of the mighty, for He is the King of the whole earth? Does He not rule over Israel? Yes, verily He does and those who are not ruled over by Christ are not of Israel. He came to be a ruler over Israel.

My Brother, have you submitted to the sway of Jesus? Is He ruler in your heart, or is He not? We may know Israel by this—Christ is come into their hearts, to be ruler over them. “Oh,” says one, “I do as I please, I was never in bondage to any man.” Ah, then you base the rule of Christ. “Oh,” says another, “I submit myself to my minister, to my clergyman, or to my priest and I think that what he tells me is enough, for he is my ruler.” Do you? Ah, Poor slave, you know not your dignity—for nobody is your lawful ruler but the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Yes,” says another, “I have professed His religion and I am His follower.” But does He rule in your hearts? Does He command your will? Does He guide your judgment? Do you ever seek counsel at His handling your difficulties? Are you desirous to honor Him and to put crowns upon His heads? Is He your ruler? If so then you are one of Israel, for it is written, “He shall come to be ruler in Israel.” Blessed Lord Jesus! You are ruler in Your people’s hearts and You ever shall be. We want no other ruler save You and we will submit to none other.

We are free, because we are the servants of Christ. We are at liberty because He is our ruler and we know no bondage and no slavery, because Jesus Christ alone is Monarch of our hearts. He came “to be ruler in Israel,” and mark you—that mission of His is not quite fulfilled yet and shall not be till the latter-day glories. In a little while you shall see Christ come again, to be Ruler over His people Israel and Ruler over them not only as spiritual Israel but even as natural Israel, for the Jews shall be restored to their land and the tribes of Jacob shall yet sing in the halls of their temple. Unto God there shall yet again be offered Hebrew songs of praise and the heart of the unbelieving Jew shall be melted at the feet of the true Messiah.

In a short time, He who at His birth was hailed King of the Jews by Easterns and at His death was written King of the Jews by a Western, shall be called King of the Jews everywhere—yes, King of the Jews and Gentiles also—in that universal monarchy whose dominion shall be co-extensive with the habitable globe and whose duration shall be coeval with time itself. He came to be a Ruler in Israel and a Ruler most decidedly He shall be, when He shall reign among His people with His ancients gloriously.

And now, the last thing is, DID JESUS CHRIST EVER COME BEFORE? We answer, yes. For our text says, “Whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting.” First, Christ has had His goings forth in His God-head, “from everlasting.” He has not been a secret and a silent Person up to this moment. That new-born Child there has worked

wonders long ere now. That Infant slumbering in His mother's arms is the infant of today but it is the Ancient of eternity. That Child who is there has not made His appearance on the stage of this world—His name is not yet written in the calendar of the circumcised—but still though you wish it not, “His goings forth have been of old, from everlasting.”

Of old He went forth as our Covenant Head in election, “according as He has chosen us in Him, before the foundation of the world”—

*“Christ be My first elect, He said,
Then chose our souls in Christ our Head.”*

He had goings forth for His people, as their Representative before the throne even before they were begotten in the world. It was from everlasting that His mighty fingers grasped the pen, the stylus of ages and wrote His own name, the name of the eternal Son of God. It was from everlasting that He signed the compact with His Father that He would pay blood for blood, wound for wound, suffering for suffering, agony for agony and death for death on the behalf of His people. It was from everlasting that He gave Himself up, without a murmuring word, that from the crown of His head to the sole of His foot He might sweat blood, that He might be spit upon, pierced, mocked, rent asunder, suffer the pain of death and the agonies of the Cross.

His goings forth as our Surety were from everlasting. Pause, my Soul, and wonder! You had goings forth in the Person of Jesus from everlasting. Not only when you were born into the world did Christ love you, but His delights were with the sons of men before there were any sons of men! Often did He think of them, from everlasting to everlasting He had set His affliction upon them. What? Believer, has He been so long about your salvation and will He not accomplish it? Has He from everlasting been going forth to save me and will He lose me now? What? Has He had me in His hand, as His precious jewel and will He now let me slip between His precious fingers? Did He choose me before the mountains were brought forth, or the channels of the deep scooped out and will He lose me now? Impossible!—

*“My name from the palms of His hands
Eternity cannot erase.
Impressed on His heart it remains,
In marks of indelible grace.”*

I am sure He would not love me so long and then leave off loving me. If He intended to be tired of me, He would have been tired of me long before now. If He had not loved me with a love as deep as Hell and as unutterable as the grave, if He had not given His whole heart to me, I am sure He would have turned from me long ago. He knew what I would be and He has had time enough to consider it—but I am His choice and that is the end of it. And unworthy as I am, it is not mine to grumble if He is but contented with me. And He is contented with me—He must be contented with me—for He has known me long enough to know my faults.

He knew me before I knew myself—yes, He knew me before I *was* myself. Long before my members were fashioned they were written in His book, “when as yet there were none of them.” His eyes of affection were set on them. He knew how badly I would act towards Him and yet He has continued to love me—

*“His love in times past forbids me to think,
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink.”*

No. Since “His goings forth were of old from everlasting,” they will be “to everlasting.”

Secondly, we believe that Christ *has come forth of old, even to men, so that men have beheld Him*. I will not stop to tell you that it was Jesus who walked in the garden of Eden in the cool of the day, for His delights were with the sons of men. Nor will I detain you by pointing out all the various ways in which Christ came forth to His people in the form of the Angel of the Covenant, the Paschal Lamb, the Brazen Serpent, the Burning Bush and ten thousand types with which the sacred history is so replete.

But I will rather point you to four occasions when Jesus Christ our Lord has appeared on earth as a man, before His great incarnation for our salvation. And, first, I beg to refer you to the 18th chapter of Genesis, where Jesus Christ appeared to *Abraham*, of whom we read, “The Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day. And he lift up his eyes and looked and lo, three men stood by him. And when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door and bowed himself toward the ground.”

But whom did he bow to? He said “My Lord,” only to one of them. There was one man between the other two, the most conspicuous for His glory, for He was the God-man Christ. The other two were created angels who for a time had

assumed the appearance of men. But this was the Man Christ Jesus. “And he said, My Lord, if now I have found favor in Your sight, pass not away, I pray You, from Your servant. Let a little water, I pray You, be fetched and wash Your feet and rest yourselves under the tree.”

You will notice that this majestic Man, this glorious Person, stayed behind to talk with Abraham. In the 22nd verse it is said—“And the men turned their faces from there and went towards Sodom”—that is, two of them, as you will see in the next chapter, “but Abraham stood yet before the Lord.” You will notice that this man, the Lord, held sweet fellowship with Abraham and allowed Abraham to plead for the city He was about to destroy. He was in the positive form of man—so that when He walked the streets of Judea it was not the first time that He was a man—He was so before, in “the plain of Mamre, in the heat of the day.”

There is another instance—His appearing to *Jacob*, which you have recorded in the 32nd chapter of Genesis and the 24th verse. All his family were gone, “And Jacob was left alone and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when He saw that He prevailed not against him, He touched the hollow of his thigh. And the hollow of Jacob’s thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with Him. And He said, Let me go, for the day breaks. And he said, I will not let You go, unless You bless me. And He said unto him, What is your name? And he said, Jacob. And He said, Your name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince have you power with God.” This was a Man and yet God. “For as a prince have you power with God and with men and have prevailed.” And Jacob knew that this man was God, for he says in the 30th verse: “for I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved.”

Another instance you will find in the book of *Joshua*. When Joshua had crossed the narrow stream of Jordan and had entered the promised land and was about to drive out the Canaanites, lo! this mighty man-God appeared to Joshua. In the 5th chapter, at the 13th verse, we read—“And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked and, behold, there stood a man over against him with His sword drawn in His hand and Joshua went unto Him and (like a brave warrior, as he was,) said unto Him, Are you for us, or for our adversaries? And He said, No, but as Captain of the host of the LORD am I now come.” And Joshua saw at once that there was divinity in Him—for Joshua fell on his face to the earth and did worship and said to Him, “What says *my LORD* unto His servant?” Now, if this had been a created angel he would have reproved Joshua and said, “I am one of your fellow servants.” But no—“the Captain of the LORD’S host said unto Joshua, Loose your shoe from your foot; for the place whereon you stand is holy. And Joshua did so.”

Another remarkable instance is that recorded in the third chapter of the book of Daniel, where we read the account of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego being cast into the fiery furnace, which was so fierce that it destroyed the men who threw them in. Suddenly the king said to his counselors—“Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.” How should Nebuchadnezzar know that? Only that there was something so noble and majestic in the way in which that wondrous Man bore Himself. And some awful influence about Him, who so marvelously broke the consuming teeth of that biting and devouring flame, so that it could not so much as singe the children of God. Nebuchadnezzar recognized His humanity. He did not say, “I see three men and an angel,” but he said, “I see four positive men and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.” You see then, what is meant by His goings forth being “from everlasting.”

Observe for a moment here, that each of these four great occurrences happened to the saints when they there engaged in very eminent duty, or when they were about to be engaged in it. Jesus Christ does not appear to His saints every day. He did not come to see Jacob till He was in affliction. He did not visit Joshua before he was about to be engaged in a righteous war. It is only in extraordinary seasons that Christ thus manifests Himself to His people. When Abraham interceded for Sodom, Jesus was with Him, for one of the highest and noblest employments of a Christian is that of intercession. And it is when he is so engaged that he will be likely to obtain a sight of Christ. Jacob was engaged in wrestling and that is a part of a Christian’s duty to which some of you never did attain—consequently, you do not have many visits from Jesus.

It was when Joshua was exercising bravery that the Lord met him. So with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—they were in the high places of persecution, on account of their adherence to duty, when He came to them and said, “I will be with you, passing through the fire.” There are certain peculiar places we must enter to meet with the Lord. We must be

in great trouble, like Jacob. We must be in great labor, like Joshua. We must have great intercessory faith, like Abraham. We must be firm in the performance of duty, like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego or else we shall not know Him “whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting.” Or, if we know Him, we shall not be able to “comprehend with all the saints what is the height, depth, length and breadth of the love of Christ, which passes knowledge.”

Sweet Lord Jesus! You whose goings forth were of old, even from everlasting, You have not left Your goings forth yet. Oh, that You would go forth this day to cheer the faint, to help the weary, to bind up our wounds, to comfort our distresses! Go forth, we beseech You, to conquer sinners, to subdue hard hearts—to break the iron gates of sinners’ lusts and cut the iron bars of their sins in pieces! O Jesus! Go forth, and when You go forth, come to me! Am I a hardened sinner? Come to me. I want You—

*“Oh, let Your Grace my heart subdue;
I would be led in triumph, too.
A willing captive to my Lord,
To sing the honors of Your Word.”*

Poor Sinner! Christ has not left going forth yet. And when He goes forth, recollect He goes to Bethlehem. Have you a Bethlehem in your heart? Are you little? He will go forth to you yet. Go home and seek Him by earnest prayer. If you have been made to weep on account of sin and think yourself too little to be noticed, go home, little one! Jesus comes to little ones. His goings forth were of old and He is going forth now. He will come to your poor old house. He will come to your poor wretched heart. He will come, though you are in poverty and clothed in rags—though you are destitute, tormented and afflicted—He will come, for His goings forth have been of old from everlasting. Trust Him, trust Him, trust Him! And He will go forth to abide in your heart forever.

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