

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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## THE SONG OF SONGS

BEING

LECTURES ON THE SONG OF SOLOMON.

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FIRST SERIES.

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\* \* In this book the writer will aim, by grace, at presenting divine nourishment for the spiritual affections, just as in "Pentecostal Times" he deals chiefly with truth for the spiritual mind and the exercised conscience.

# PENTECOSTAL TIMES

BEING

A COURSE OF EXPOSITORY LECTURES

ON

## THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

*First Series*

“ And when the day of PENTECOST was fully come . . .  
they were all filled with the HOLY GHOST.”—Acts ii. 1, 4.

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## PREFACE.

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**T**HE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, above other portions of Holy Scripture, affords the divine warrant and model for expository teaching. The early chapters of the book, as well as the thirteenth, are largely made up of quotations from Scripture, with the divine exposition and application of them to the time and circumstances of that day.

The work of the modern expounder is to point out what that divine exposition means, and seek wisely to make application of it to the present time and circumstances. This is the work which, looking for the guidance of the Holy Ghost, we have endeavoured to do in our present Lectures. They are strictly expository, and aim at giving in plain, clear language the meaning of that brief portion of the sacred narrative with which they are occupied, and applying it to the time and circumstances in which we now find the professing church and the saints of God.

The following Lectures were originally written for a class of students attending the Edinburgh University, who assembled at the writer's house weekly for the study of the Scriptures and prayer ; and this may account for the more frequent reference to critical authorities than some may relish, for, in the circumstances, we felt bound to do our work in view of the best sources of information as to the criticism and exegesis of the sacred text. While we think that this need not offend or hinder the profit of the simple reader, it may make the exposition all the more interesting and edifying to students and other thoughtful young men.

On looking back to youthful days, it strikes one that a book like this, giving a lucid account of the Spirit's testimony, would have been of considerable help in imparting a scriptural view of the genesis of the Church of God, and of scriptural Christianity, and that it would have been regarded as a real boon and blessing ; for, basing everything as it does on the solid rock of positive Scripture, it might have saved one from the entanglement and hindrance to spiritual blessing of many opinions and usages for which there is no divine warrant.

But whether read by the educated or by the uneducated, the Holy Ghost alone can give the divinely-anointed eye to perceive the truth so that it may

prove edifying to the spiritual man. The Pentecostal times of which we write were produced by the coming and working of the Comforter; and spiritual intelligence in the truth, as well as conversion, joyous worship, and self-sacrifice of these early days can be enjoyed by us now, only by the gracious working of "that one and the self-same Spirit."

What St. Paul wrote to the Church of God at Corinth holds good still—"And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect; yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory; which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth

all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Cor. ii. 4-12).

The EDIFICATION of believers has been kept constantly in view. The Spirit says, "Let all things be done unto edifying," and teaches us to aim at this beyond all things, in such a scripture as 1 Cor. xiv. and other parts of the Apostles' writings. Indeed the Holy Scripture, as a whole, contemplates very specially the profiting of the saints—"that the church may receive edifying." Our present contribution towards their edification is so small, that the questions might be asked, Why not wait until you have written on the whole book of the Acts? Why present such a tiny instalment of your exposition? Not exactly because we think with an ancient writer that "a great book is a great evil;" but rather because we hope, if the Lord will, to continue to issue a series of similar Bible Lectures; and though these volumes may be small in bulk, it is hoped they will be at least "a *cup* of cold water to a disciple in the

name of a disciple," and given from love to our great "Lord and Master." It has been our endeavour to make our present work a cup of *cold* water. If, in these eastern lands, a disciple received even this small gift of which our Lord speaks, it would cost the giver a little self-sacrifice, for to be a cup of *cold* water it would have to be drawn fresh from the well; for it could hardly be termed *cold*, if taken from the water-pot standing in the heated atmosphere of the house.

One would justly dread anything like *effort* in divine things, or the want of a flow of spiritual power as well as simplicity; but "attendance to reading," painstaking industry, with diligent and careful research, need not lead to any such evils, but should rather tend to supply a real want. For does it not frequently happen that when one consults books on Scripture in the hope of finding a difficulty solved or a text explained, he finds neither help nor solution, because of the want of the requisite study, labour, and pains in writing it? Having the Holy Ghost leading the soul to esteem "the word of Christ" more than our necessary food, the greatest labour would be a luxury and no effort. It is a real joy to be taught in the truth by the Spirit of God, and a happy

privilege to write and publish it for the edification of one's fellow-Christians: for while the salvation of sinners is generally accomplished through their *ears*, the edification of believers is largely given them through their *eyes*. God meant it to be so, else why give us the Holy Scriptures *to read*?

It is very specially by BOOKS that the Lord is instructing and forming His saints. We do well to keep before us the important fact, that a whole library of sixty-six divinely-inspired Books has been given by Him for this very purpose. Besides this, men "full of faith and of the Holy Ghost," and books full of clear Scripture truth, are Christ's means for edifying and blessing His Church; and, as in these "perilous times" of the last days, when the Church has been broken to pieces and the saints scattered, their chief means of spiritual help and divine sustenance must be the Holy Scriptures and books of God-taught teachers: they themselves cannot now go in and out freely among "all saints" as they did in the early days of Christianity, and but for their books the best of Christ's gifts would be shut out from ministering to the majority of God's children. Books appear to be a compensation in view of the broken-up condition of the Church, which tends selfishly to confiscate, for the furtherance of petty

sectarian interests, gifts which the Lord gave for the maintenance of His own great interests and the benefit of the whole "church of God." Through this folly and selfishness of men, great injury has been inflicted on the "members of Christ," and were it not that Christian publications, fraught with "the gospel of the glory of Christ," are now going everywhere preaching the Word, multitudes of Christ's sheep would have little or no pasture.

There needs to be, we fully admit, the additional personal action with the word on the saints, of the living "man of God,"—the man divinely-gifted and furnished for the crisis, and burning with a devotedness that makes Christ's interests paramount, before believers will be so moulded into "the image of Christ" as to be fitted for their places in the witnessing and warrior-company who, equipped in "the whole armour of God," are resolutely cutting their way through the world with their faces towards the Captain of their salvation in the heavenly glory; yet, where "the man of God" cannot go, his books may be made eminently useful in giving a good start and much help in "the full knowledge of Christ."

"But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore He saith, When He ascended up on

high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.) And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. iv. 7-16).

1 CAMBRIDGE STREET, CASTLE TERRACE,  
*Edinburgh, March 1876.*

# CONTENTS.



## LECTURE I.

|                                   | PAGE |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST . . . . . | 1    |

## LECTURE II.

|                                      |    |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| WAITING FOR THE HOLY GHOST . . . . . | 29 |
|--------------------------------------|----|

## LECTURE III.

|                                       |    |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| THE COMING OF THE COMFORTER . . . . . | 47 |
|---------------------------------------|----|

## LECTURE IV.

|  |    |
|--|----|
| JESUS THE NAZAREAN PROVED TO BE THE<br>MESSIAH . . . . . | 86 |
|--|----|

## LECTURE V.

|                                     |     |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| THE FORMING OF THE CHURCH . . . . . | 118 |
|-------------------------------------|-----|

## LECTURE VI.

|                                     |     |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| THE WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH . . . . . | 139 |
|-------------------------------------|-----|

## LECTURE VII.

|                                   |     |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| THE CURE OF THE CRIPPLE . . . . . | 161 |
|-----------------------------------|-----|

|   |      |     |
|---|------|-----|
| LECTURE VIII.                                 |      |     |
| THE NATION CHALLENGED TO REPENT . . .         | PAGE | 174 |
| LECTURE IX.                                   |      |     |
| THE APOSTLES BEFORE THE COUNCIL . . .         |      | 192 |
| LECTURE X.                                    |      |     |
| JESUS THE STONE OF SALVATION . . .            |      | 205 |
| LECTURE XI.                                   |      |     |
| JESUS THE HEAD OF THE CORNER . . .            |      | 218 |
| LECTURE XII.                                  |      |     |
| THE BOLDNESS OF THE WITNESSES . . .           |      | 234 |
| LECTURE XIII.                                 |      |     |
| THE CHURCH'S APPEAL TO GOD . . .              |      | 249 |
| APPENDIX.                                     |      |     |
| MEDITATIONS ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES . . . |      | 289 |

LECTURES.



# THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

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## LECTURE I.

### THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

**T**HE narrative of the "Acts of the Apostles" extends from about A.D. 30-64. It cannot be ascertained with accuracy when it was written, but it is likely that the time of its composition was the period intervening between A.D. 70 and 80.

The writer of the "Acts" was Luke, a person belonging to the medical profession, for St. Paul (*of whom he was the companion*) styles him the "beloved physician." Luke was the writer of the gospel which is called by his name, and which was no doubt written to fit into the world-wide mission to men which this narrative of "the Acts" records.

His work was written in two volumes: vol. 1, THE GOSPEL; vol. 2, THE ACTS. The beginning of Acts refers to his "former treatise," that is, the

Gospel by Luke. Former treatise is literally "*first word*," or discourse, or division. The Acts is his *second word*, or division, both in the order of its composition and because it springs out of the first; for had there not been the narrative contained in the Gospel, there could not have been the Acts of the Apostles, for the Gospel describes all that Jesus, anointed with the Holy Ghost, began both to do and teach, and the Acts what He did and taught by the Holy Ghost through His apostles. But the Lord says, that had He not gone to heaven and been glorified, the Holy Ghost would not have come. The Gospel by Luke gives the beginning, of which the Acts is a continuation. Jesus did not cease (but continued) to do and teach after His ascension to heaven. He acted in, with, and for the apostles and the Church, after His ascension, and does so still (ch. i. 24; ii. 33; vii. 55, 59).

I. THE FORTY DAYS.—"*All that Jesus began*," etc., means that there was a full and complete account given, although not *all* things absolutely had been recorded. John xxi. 25 shows this would not have been possible. It is in the plural "*all things*." The name "*Theophilus*" means a friend of God, and as it points to a real man, it is unlikely that it has the force of "*Christian reader*" (Luke

i. 4). Some have thought Theophilus must have been a high official, from the title "Most Excellent" being given by the writer; for the same epithet is applied in this book as usual to the Roman governors (chap. xxiii. 26; xxiv. 3; xxvi. 25).

"*Until the day.*" The ascension ends the Gospel and begins the Acts. It is the point of contact and transition of both Gospel and Acts (Luke xxiv. 50, 51).

"*He was taken up.*" This was the act of God the Father, for "God hath raised up His Son Jesus, and given Him glory" (1 Peter i.) He was taken up and back to heaven because of God's delight in Him, in that He had laid down His life for His glory and in obedience, as the man who perfectly did His will on earth (John xx. 17). God gave His only begotten Son, and God took Him up to Himself as the one who died for sin, and He set Him at His own right hand. In this we see man in an entirely new place, as risen and ascending into heaven. Man was made for earth, and earth for man (Gen. i.); but now man dies, rises, and ascends to heaven, and this risen and ascended "Man Christ Jesus" becomes there the new starting-point of the dealings of God. He in death made an end of the old creation to the glory of God, and so, the work being finished, He was raised and

glorified as the new man and head of the new creation. Instead then of this book being the Acts of the Apostles, it is the record of God's acts for man and in man, the narrative of God displaying fresh glory in men in the power of the Holy Ghost. This is the reason why the resurrection and ascension are brought in by Luke here a second time, because they were necessary as showing the ground-work or starting-point of this unfolding of the grace and ways of God in man.

“*After that He by the Holy Ghost had given commandments (charged) the apostles whom He had chosen.*” *After that He had given commandments* is one word in Greek, the exact meaning of which is *having charged* or *commanded*. The word “was taken up” (for it is one in Greek), being at the end of the verse, would lead us to infer that this specifically referred to the *charge* given on the day of the ascension. The next verse appears to go back to the *forty* days in which He had appeared to His disciples. It was also by the power of the Holy Ghost that He gave this charge. Jesus, who was “anointed with the Holy Ghost,” in virtue of the Holy Ghost who was with Him still in resurrection, gave commandments to His chosen apostles, whether it were during the “forty days” or the very day of the ascension. And this is interesting,

that, as Jesus spake and acted by the Holy Ghost as the risen Man, so shall we who believe in Him. The risen Lord here gives the disciples commandments in connection with the new position He assumes. In John xx. 22 Jesus had said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," and this associated them with Him risen, and was the capacity and intelligence of the new nature; but now by that same Holy Ghost He gave them commandments to wait for His coming as the clothing of power. "He gave them *an earnest of Pentecost.*"

"*He presented Himself alive*" (verse 3), or showed Himself. "To whom also He presented Himself living after He had suffered, with many proofs" (Acts x. 41; Rom. vi. 13, 16, 19; Rom. xii. 2; 2 Cor. xi. 2). We read of Him thus presenting Himself. So John xx. 19, 26, "Came Jesus and stood in the midst, and said unto them, Peace be unto you." Also xxi. 1, 14, "This now is the third time that Jesus showed Himself to His disciples, after that He was risen from the dead." "By many (infallible) proofs." There is no word for "infallible" in the Greek, but it is really included in the meaning of the word, which is used by Plato and Aristotle for the very strongest proof of which a subject is susceptible. The proofs were presented to the eye, the ear, and the touch. He

gave them such signs and evidences, that He who had been crucified was with them alive, that they might be perfectly assured of it (see Luke xxiv. 42, 43; Acts x. 40, 41).

“*Forty days.*” If we look at the Gospel by Luke, ch. xxiv., it seems to flow on in one continuous narration, and on this some have asserted that it seems to contradict Acts i., for in Luke the ascension seems to be on the day of resurrection. But here we have the same writer’s pen telling us that the interval was forty days.

The fact that Jesus showed Himself alive to His disciples after His resurrection shows the importance of this for our faith. If they were to be witnesses to Him until the time of His ascension, they must have it proved to them that He rose from the dead and was alive; and the apostle Paul shows the deep importance of establishing the resurrection of Christ, that faith may have a firm basis on which to rest (1 Cor. xv. 14, 17). It would seem that the main “proofs” referred to of His resurrection were pointed to in this general statement, that “He was seen of them through a period of forty days, and that He was speaking of the things which concern the kingdom of God.” Alford thinks that the participles carry with them a ratiocinative force in dependence on the word

translated "proofs." Christ appeared only from time to time, not constantly, for those forty days. "Being seen of them through forty days," is the force of the Greek. He could say, "Lo, I am with you all the days," but it was only by a preternatural or miraculous manifestation of His presence that He could make Himself be seen by them. Only disciples saw Him; the world did not see Him during those forty days, and never will do so until the day of His appearing, when "every eye shall see Him." *Speaking concerning the Kingdom of God*"—not of the Church. This was left for the still higher glory of His ascension and session at the right hand of God; and He gave it by the apostle Paul (Eph. iii.; Col. i.) The prediction that God was to have a kingdom that would rule over all kingdoms was largely treated of by the Old Testament prophets (Dan. ii.) This was no doubt the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of the heavens, which has been going on since Pentecost in a mysterious way, but when Jesus returns will go on in open manifestation. Resurrection having made Him in power the vessel of the sure mercies of David (Acts xiii.), He sent His disciples afresh to call Israel to receive Him as Prince and Saviour, whom they had rejected as Messiah living on earth.

II. THE COMMAND TO TARRY AT JERUSALEM.—  
“*Being assembled together.*” This was the last meeting between Christ and His disciples. The word used indicates that all the disciples were present, and that their assembling was deeply important; and its solemnity and importance arose not merely from its being the final meeting, or that they should then witness the taking up of their risen Lord, but because He gave them His last instructions, and communicated His intentions regarding them. He gave them His command at this meeting to remain in Jerusalem.

“*Commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem.*” The word here is different from verse 2. Here it is a peremptory injunction such as a military leader would give. Had they not been so commanded, they would have felt naturally inclined to leave Jerusalem, the place where their Lord had been taken by wicked hands and crucified. His mind regarding them was that they should not be parted or divided by any cause. The word used implies that they were not to allow themselves to be either drawn or driven from Jerusalem, until the promise was realised. “From Jerusalem not to be parted,” is the order of the words. Remember every soul the weighty saying, “Go when Jesus calls thee, hasten when He draws

thee, pause when He restrains thee." Jerusalem was the scene of their failure—it was where their Master had been slain—and hence the place of greatest danger for them ; but they were enjoined to wait in that very spot, that the Spirit's power in them might convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, and show the power of love triumphing over the hatred of their Lord's deadly foes. The place of tragedy must be made the place of triumph.

"*But to await the promise of the Father.*" The word in the Greek implies that they were to wait for the fulfilment of it. The promise of the Father is the promise given by Him, not merely in the Old Testament predictions but also through Christ Himself, as He immediately states (see Luke xxiv. 49 ; John xiv. 16, xv. 26, xvi. 7, 13), "Which, said He, ye have heard of Me"—was this specifically in Luke xxiv. 49, "Behold I send *the promise of my Father* unto you"—unless it were the same as this. It may be safer to refer it to such passages as Luke xii. 11, 12, and to His farewell discourse in St. John's Gospel, xiv.-xvi.

"*For John truly baptized with water ; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence*" (verse 5). In Matthew iii. 11, John the Baptist says, "I indeed baptize you with water

unto repentance, but He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." The twofold testimony by John was *this*, and that He was the Lamb of God. He, having suffered as God's Lamb and risen from the dead, announces the certainty of His fulfilment of John's testimony and the Father's promise: only the "fire," or "the wrath of the Lamb," is still in abeyance. As John's work was to baptize with water, so Christ would fulfil His word in baptizing with the Holy Ghost. This was not the new birth, for the apostles were already born again, and had been associated with Christ risen and on the earth by His breathing on them as the last Adam, and saying, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." But they were still enjoined to wait for this baptism of the Holy Ghost, which should be the fulfilment of the promise of the Father and of His own promise. In John xx. 22 the receiving of the Holy Ghost was for forming the intelligence of the new man, that in this spiritual intelligence they might wait for the gift of the Holy Ghost Himself sent down from above.

This baptism of the Holy Ghost is the power that goes forth in testimony, and leads to the blessing of others. The order is to be observed (John xx. 22 is first), for we must have the capacity and spiritual intelligence, before we have

a basis in ourselves for that power of the Holy Ghost that carries forth the witness of the Lord Jesus for the blessing of others. We read of a *cup* and a *baptism* in connection with Christ's suffering—the *cup* being the symbol of the *inward*, the *baptism* referring to the *outward*. So in John xx. 22 we have the inward symbolised in His *breathing* into them and saying, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost;" and in Acts i. 5, "Ye shall be *baptized* with the Holy Ghost," we have that which is outward; and the second chapter downwards verifies this by the accompaniments, manifestations, and effects which flowed from this baptism. Besides, as 1 Cor. xii. 12, 13 shows, it resulted in a new and great unity—the Church of God; for in the power of one Spirit we have all been baptized into *one body*. It was termed a "*baptism*," says Alford, "because it was the *beginning* of a new period of spiritual influence totally unlike any which had preceded." The Lord "Jesus baptized not, but His disciples" before His death; but here He intimates that He was about to do so on His ascension to heaven. "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost" by Me "not many days hence." The number of the days being left in uncertainty quickened and sustained a daily expectation, and also exercised their faith and drew out their prayers.

*When they therefore were come together*, they asked Him saying, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" The assembled apostles asked Him this question, which in its substance and also its time had been suggested by our Lord's own words, for He had been speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, and He had just said, "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost *not many days hence.*"

If we refer to such a scripture as Joel ii., we shall find the restoring of the kingdom to Israel and the outpouring of the Spirit connected. Their expectations of the kingdom being restored to Israel were justified by such prophecies as Isa. i. 26, ix. 7; Jer. xxiii. 6, xxxiii. 15, 17; Dan. vii. 13, 14; Hos. iii. 4, 5; Amos. ix. 11; Zech. ix. 9.

That the kingdom had departed from Israel they knew; for the Romans were in authority and the Jews were paying tribute, and this in Roman money bearing Cæsar's image and superscription (Matt. xvii. 27, xxii. 19-21), and their Lord had suffered the death of the cross, a Roman form of public execution, and Roman soldiers had guarded His sepulchre. The glory had departed. Was He now to restore the kingdom to Israel? ("Having come together," or "being come together," does not refer to an assembling, other than that of verse

4, for the context gives the impression of one continued conversation.) The Lord does not say to them that they were wrong in looking for a restoration of the kingdom to Israel. He tacitly admits the propriety of their expectation, but He tells them that the immediate object of the coming of the Holy Ghost and His baptism was to make them His witnesses.

The stress of their question lay in the words, "*at this time*," which are prefixed for emphasis: "*at this time* art Thou to restore the kingdom to Israel?" The fact was taken for granted; the *time* alone was the subject of their inquiry. This question shows that, notwithstanding the blessing given on the resurrection day in the Holy Ghost, they did not have any perception of the ways of God in grace that were to come for them, when baptized with the Holy Ghost; but their question was the occasion of further divine instructions. Imperfect inquiries, if addressed to our Lord, bring out His own divine answers, and instruction and guidance are the result.

"*It is not yours to know times and seasons, which the Father has placed in His own authority*" (verse 7). "The promise of the Father" had been spoken of by Christ, and now when they connect this with the establishing of "the kingdom of the

Father," and ask regarding the time of it, He tells them it is not their province or privilege to know "times and seasons," for the measures and the fit moments that had to do with earthly changes were in the sole control of Him to whom all belonged (compare Matt. xxiv. 36 ; Mark xiii. 32). *Times* and *seasons* are not synonymes, but generic and specific terms, the one denoting intervals and periods, the other points and junctures, like *era* and *epoch* in modern English. In chapter vii. 17, 20, we have both—"As the *time* of the promise drew nigh ;" "In which *season* Moses was born." The Lord's answer was a kindly repulse, but one which led to this further instruction regarding the divine reserve, that the Father had placed them under His own authority ; and consequently there is a definite time known to Him for the introduction of His kingdom, and the thing itself is sure. And, besides, while it would be wrong to pry into things unrevealed, it would be equally wrong not to search into all that is revealed. Whenever it is *written* by God, we are expected to "search the *Scriptures*" (Dan. ix. 2 ; 1 Pet. i. 11). "*Searching* what or what manner of *time*, the Spirit which was in them did signify." Cf. Rev. xiii. 8 ; Deut. xxix. 29.

Bengel thought that, although the apostles did not then know, they would come to know as the suc-

cessive revelations of God were unfolded, and that we have now in the Book of Revelation both times and seasons so given that it could be told when the kingdom of God would be introduced ; but it is a striking proof of the generality of our Lord's answer that this great scholar calculated from the Apocalypse that the millennium would commence in the year 1836.

There is truth in the remark of another German author, that the apostles were to be less prophets of the future than witnesses of the past. It might be better to say witnesses of Christ in the past and the present. We may know that such and such events will take place, for God has revealed them ; and we may also be able very accurately to trace the order and consecution of them, but to give dates (as some did, 1866 and other years) is always dangerous when writing on the coming kingdom.

There is a fixed date, known only to the Father, for the taking up of the saints ; a fixed date for the commencement of the judgments indicated by the seals, trumpets, and vials of Revelation ; a fixed date for the coming of the Son of Man in His glory ; for the judgment of the nations, and the setting up of the kingdom of God in manifested power and glory on the earth ; and a fixed date for making Jerusalem the earthly metro-

polis of that kingdom, and Israel "the head and not the tail," the regal centre of the Father's kingdom on the earth (Isa. ii. 2-5), but no such dates have been revealed to us. The Lord does not find any fault with the apostles' expectation, or that they anticipated for Israel a place of high privilege with regard to the expected kingdom. The *fact* He allowed, the date had been reserved; but the fact of His having told them that it was dated went to confirm their expectation. It is to mistake the meaning of our Lord's reply to affirm that it implies a condemnation of their expectation of a glorious Messianic kingdom upon the earth, with Israel for a centre. Our Lord only repressed their curiosity as to *the time* when it should be established, and turned their attention to their more immediate privilege and duty.

"*But ye will receive power, the Holy Ghost having come upon you*" (verse 8). The seventh verse ends with "His own *power*" in our English version, and this verse begins with "*Ye shall receive power.*" But the words in the Greek are different, and it should have been made to appear. The former is *authority*, the latter *power*, in the sense of ability or energy. They occur together in Luke iv. 36, "With *authority* and *power* he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they obey him;" and ix. 1,

“*He gave them power and authority.*” It was not yet the time for the kingdom in manifested power, but the time for their witness-bearing to Christ Himself by the power of the Spirit. The kingdom is in a mysterious form in the power of the present Spirit, and in that sense we are translated into it (Col. i. 13); but the great work that should occupy His followers until His return in glory was witness-bearing by the Holy Ghost’s power. When Revelation (the book that introduces the kingdom of God in manifestation) opens, the saints are seen as *kings* and priests unto God and His Father; but when Acts, the book of testimony to an absent Christ, opens, the apostles are empowered to be witnesses (and the word thus translated is our word *martyrs*). They needed power in the Spirit to qualify them for such a witness-bearing as should be a suitable sequel to the life and death of Christ. If His testimony ended in *martyrdom*, they were to look for a similar end, and as a rule they so terminated their course, and for any witness of a *crucified* and *martyred* Christ to die a natural and not a violent death is *unnatural*.

“But” indicates the contrast between what they might not know and what they might experience. They might not know the times of the *future*, but they would be fitted by the coming of the Holy

Ghost for the work of the *present*. United by the Holy Ghost to Christ in the heavenly glory, to whom all power in heaven and earth is given, they would be made equal to the great business of the Christian life to be witnesses to Him. The great *promise* of Christ was spiritual power by the coming of the Holy Ghost upon them; the great *work* for which it would qualify, and to which it would lead, was to be witnesses to Christ; the places and order indicated are *Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria*, and to the uttermost parts of the earth, to which the arrangement of the ACTS answers (see as an example of the successive steps, Acts viii. 1, 4, 5, 27). Before Christ's resurrection they had been commanded by Him not to enter the cities of the Samaritans (Matt. x. 5, 6); but on the coming of the Holy Spirit they were commissioned by Him to go not only to the Samaritans but also to the ends of the earth (Acts xiii. 47). The Holy Ghost was their power, who also wrought power within them. The new nature is weak, the Holy Ghost is its power. In Luke xxiv. 49, "Until ye be *endued with power* from on high," means spiritual power given in the Holy Ghost. It would include all power which they were enabled to manifest in connection with their important mission as His witnesses.

The promise is *power*, and that by the gift of the Holy Ghost, He Himself in person coming to them in accordance with the Father's and the Son's promise. "But ye shall receive power, the Holy Ghost coming upon you." This was their power—not learning, science, philosophy, and eloquence, but "the Holy Ghost coming upon them." This is the very thing which this book of THE ACTS illustrates, for it records the supernatural energy with which they bore witness to the Lord Jesus, and the results following (see chaps. ii., iii., iv. 8-13, 31 ; v. 29-33).

"*In Jerusalem*" their witness begins—beginning at Jerusalem (Luke xxiv. 47 ; Acts. ii., iii. 1, vi. 7). Then on the martyrdom of Stephen (vi. 8, viii. 3) the disciples were scattered over *Judea*, while the apostles abode still at *Jerusalem*. Then they go to *Samaria* on hearing of the gospel work, and there they testify (Acts viii. 4-40) ; then the apostle of the *Gentiles* is called (Acts ix.), and Peter preaches in the house of Cornelius (chap. x.) ; but the great mission to the uttermost parts of the earth was formally sent forth from Antioch (Acts xiii.) The apostles seem to have lingered over Jerusalem as their centre for about eight years. What a contrast to the commission given them in Matt. x. 5, 6, when Christ was presenting Himself as Messiah

to Israel! "Go not into the way of the *Gentiles*, and into any city of the *Samaritans* enter ye not; but go ye rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Now their commission is, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark xvi. 16), for now Jehovah's word to His servant is about to be made good: "I will also give thee for a light unto the *Gentiles*, that thou mayest be my salvation *to the ends of the earth*" (Isa. xlix. 6).

III. THE ASCENSION. — Their mission was founded on their having seen their Lord in life, in death, in resurrection, and as He was taken up into heaven.

"And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight" (verse 9). Having finished all His communications with His apostles, He was taken up while they were looking upon His blessed person, so that they were witnesses of a real rising of their Divine Master before their eyes: and it took place gradually. He did not vanish from their view as on another occasion (Luke xxiv. 31), but was lifted up from the earth; and as they looked, a cloud, whether dark as at Sinai (Ex. xix. 16), or, which is more likely, bright with celestial

glory, as on the night of the transfiguration (Matt. xvii. 5), caught Him up and away from their eyes. This was evidently the well-known cloud of glory which had accompanied Israel out of Egypt, and dwelt over the tabernacle and in the temple as the chariot of Jehovah (see Ex. xvi. 10 ; xix. 16 ; xxiv. 15, 18 ; xxxiii. 9 ; xl. 34, 38). "Was taken up" describes the commencement of the ascension ; "and caught him up and away from their eyes" describes its close, so far as they were concerned. The cloud, as the chariot of the glory, caught Him away while they were still gazing upon Him ; and if none of them had seen Him rise from the grave, they all saw Him rise from earth to heaven.

Luke in his Gospel gives some things in his account of the ascension not repeated here ; but this is the fullest and most distinct account of this important event ; and in both places it is described in a single verse. In Luke xxiv. 50, we read, "And He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them ; and it came to pass while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." He had been rejected and crucified by the wicked hands of His own people at Jerusalem ; and now in resurrection He led them outside the camp, that He might bless them, and He parted

from them at Bethany where he had been so deeply loved, to have them remember in the place of love and devotedness that His hands were still, lifted up to bless them. This was holy priestly service, and as the Mediator and High Priest in the heavens, He is still carrying on His priesthood in blessing in the Holy Ghost. This was a sample of the work for which He ever lives at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, in the true tabernacle, and as He was blessing He ascended to the temple in the heavens ; for as the Gospel by Luke had opened with a priest of the family of Levi in the temple of Jerusalem, it now closes with the risen Lord as the Great High Priest ascending to the temple of the heavens. Christianity supersedes Judaism, the Spirit takes the place of ordinances, and the association of believers is with the Son in the heavens, not with the servant on the earth.

He was "*carried up*," says Luke in the Gospel. Says a beloved brother, The expression implies that some conveyance waited Him. And indeed He had been thus waited on from very old time. When exhibited and spoken of as "the glory," "the Angel of God," "the Angel of His presence," or "the Lord" (Ex. xiv., xxiii ; Isa. lxiii.), the cloud conveys Him hither and thither. It first

took Him at the head of the redeemed people to lead them in the way (Ex. xiii.) It then carried Him between the camps of Israel and Egypt, that He might be light to the one and darkness to the other, and out of it so look as to trouble the Egyptians (Ex. xiv.) At times it brought Him to take His seat in judgment upon his trespassing and murmuring congregation (Ex. xvi. ; Num. xiv., xvi., xx.), and after all this it took Him to fill His place in the temple (2 Chron. v.), as it had before in like manner borne Him to fill the same place in the tabernacle (Ex. xl.) Thus did the cloudy chariot wait on Him of old (Ps. civ. 3), and when the sin of the people had disturbed His rest in the midst of them, the cherubim bear Him away (Ezek. i.) ; and the cherubim was called "the chariot of the cherubims" (1 Chron. xxviii. 18). Thus He was attended on all these occasions by His appointed chariot, and so is He now. He is "*carried up.*" It is the risen Son of Man who is now carried up to His place on high. It is not merely "the appearance of a man," but one whose manhood has been assured and verified. As such He now ascends. *The glory has taken His abiding form,* and as the glorified Man it is that we from henceforth in the book of God see Him. In the vision of the prophet He is after this, as the

glorified Man brought with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of days to receive His kingdom (Dan. vii.) As such he stands in the eye of another prophet in the midst of the golden candlesticks (Rev. i.) As such He tells us Himself that He will hereafter be seen sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven (Matt. xxvi.) ; and as such, when all the judgment is past, His name will be made excellent in all the earth (Ps. viii. ; Heb. ii.)

“ *And as they were gazing into heaven as he was going, lo, also two men stood by them in white clothing, who also said, Men of Galilee, why do ye stand looking into heaven? This Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven shall thus come in the manner in which ye have beheld Him going into heaven* ” (verse 10). In these verses we have the *going* and the *coming* of the Lord Jesus. They were gazing up into heaven after the Lord with a lingering look, and no doubt feeling for the moment His absence, and longing for Him to descend, when they found that two heavenly messengers in lustrous raiment, white with preternatural effulgence, had taken their stand beside them, who assured them He would return. Why stand ye looking into heaven? Is it that you expect your Lord to come back? We are here to assure you of that

glorious event, and it will happen in the manner in which ye have seen Him going into heaven. They were not rebuked for gazing into heaven, but rather encouraged to do that very thing in their spirits ; and when they go forth to preach they tell of His coming in glory, and that the right Christian attitude is "to wait for His Son from heaven, even Jesus." The sudden visitants were in the form of men, but undoubtedly they were angels and not men—not even Moses and Elias who spake of the *Exodus* about to be accomplished by Him at Jerusalem, when with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration—but not unlikely the two angels who were in the grave of Jesus (Matt. xxviii. 2 ; John xx. 12 ; Mark xvi. 5 ; Luke xxiv. 4), who were then competent witnesses that He was withdrawn from the grave and alive, and who would now form competent witnesses of His return when withdrawn from earth to heaven. The Lord had just told His disciples that they were to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost and be His witnesses, and until that was done they could not anticipate His return ; but they were assured by the angels, as they had been by the Lord Himself, during His public ministry, that He would return, and as the testimony here given on the moment of His ascension, let us look at it for a little :—

1. *The same Jesus* who was crucified and raised from the dead will return.

2. *He will come again in like manner*, with power and great glory—with clouds. “Behold! He cometh *with clouds*” (Rev. i. 7; Dan. vii.; Luke xxi. 27; Mark xiii. 26, xiv. 62; Matt. xxiv. 30, xxvi. 64).

3. *It will be a visible as well as a personal coming.* “As ye have *seen Him* going into heaven.” Personally, gloriously, visibly, we are told by the angels our Lord shall come again; and we are given to believe it will be to the same spot, “the mount called Olivet” (v. 12), for the Holy Ghost speaking in Zechariah, says, “His feet shall stand in that day upon *the Mount of Olives*, which is before Jerusalem on the east” (Zech. xiv. 4). “This makes for the personal coming in glory,” wrote the late Dr. Chalmers. The heavens here were opened, and the risen Jesus entered through them to His glorious seat at the right hand of God, and immediately angels began to descend upon the Son of man (John i. 51), to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation (Heb. i. 14); and the angels evidently looked themselves for the return of Christ, for the precision of their language indicates it. We hear nothing more of the two men; they may have entered the cloud and

disappeared as suddenly as did Moses and Elias on the transfiguration mount (Mark ix. 8).

Says Bengel, "Between His ascension and His coming in glory, no event intervenes equal in importance to each of these two events. Therefore these two are joined together, and it accords with the majesty of Christ, that during the whole period between His ascension and His advent He should without intermission be expected."

The Lord's coming again is looked at here in its broad general aspect, as known in the prophets ; not in the specific and particularised way revealed by Paul. It is the coming of the Son of man in glory to judge the world in righteousness that is spoken of by the angels, His manifestation beneath the heavens and seen by the world. The knowledge of an ascended and coming Christ formed ever the termini and elements of their teaching. This is the true foundation of Christianity, that the Christ who accomplished the work of redemption has risen and ascended to heaven after the work of expiation for sin had been finished : and His place in heavenly glory is now ours as believers, being united by the Holy Ghost to the Second Man, the last Adam. We are not of earth but of heaven, are seated in Him in heavenly places, and waiting to be seated *with* Him in the glory of heaven.

John xx. gives us (1) a place with Christ as Son ; (2) peace announced ; (3) the Holy Ghost associating with Him as risen ; but in Acts i. there is the promise of the Spirit, who baptizes us into union with Him ascended to heaven.

## LECTURE II.

### WAITING FOR THE HOLY GHOST.

I. **T**HE RETURN OF THE DISCIPLES FROM THE MOUNT OF OLIVES TO THE CITY OF JERUSALEM IS WHAT TOOK PLACE IMMEDIATELY AFTER THEY HAD WITNESSED THE ASCENSION OF THEIR LORD.—“ *Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the Mount called Olivet, which is from [near] Jerusalem [being distant] a Sabbath day’s journey*” (verse 12). This tells us with sufficient precision that the Ascension took place from the Mount of Olives. Luke gives the particular place on that Mount from which Jesus ascended when he says—“ He led them out *as far as to Bethany*” (Luke xxiv. 50), and we learn that “Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem about *fifteen furlongs off*” (John xi. 18); while in this place we are told that the Mount of Olives was a Sabbath day’s journey from the Holy City, or less than three quarters of a mile, while the most likely spot from which the Ascension took place was in or near Bethany, on the eastern slope of the hill, and nearly two miles from Jerusalem.

But if this spot be disputed, and the summit of Olivet and not the declivity be claimed for the Ascension, as old tradition mentioned by Eusebius does, there is nothing in the Greek to forbid it; for it may be taken thus:—"He led them out as far as towards Bethany:" but, as it more naturally means, "as far as *to* Bethany," we incline to believe that that village, or its immediate neighbourhood, was the scene of the Ascension of our Lord.

"A remarkable place was the Mount of Olives (Acts i. 12), and Bethany especially so in respect of all those things which are recorded in John xi. 1, *et seqq.* (as to the raising of Lazarus); xii. 1, *et seqq.* (the anointing of Bethany); Luke xix. 29, *et seqq.* (the royal entry into Jerusalem from Bethany); Matt. xxi. 17 (His lodging at Bethany during Passion week); xxiv. 3 (His prophecy on the Mount of Olives as to the end of Jerusalem and of the world); Luke xxii. 39 (His agony in Gethsemane, which is at the side of Olivet); Zech. xiv. 4 ('His feet shall stand in that day on the Mount of Olives,') from which it appears that the same Mount is to be the scene of His return as of His Ascension." The Mount of Ascension is not far from the scene of His Agony and the Mount of His Crucifixion: so near together, too, are the sufferings and the glory of the servants of Christ.

How great the contrast, from witnessing their risen Lord taken up into heaven and being in the company of angels, to return to the hostile city, "where our Lord was crucified." But in this they were acting in obedience to His parting command, "*Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high*" (Luke xxiv. 49). They might therefore return thither without fear: for when we have "the Word of Christ" to guide us, we need not fear to do what He bids us. And on their return they did not feel sad, but joyful. The Lord had been taken from them "while He blessed them," and that blessing was not the pronouncing of an empty form, but had proved to them a divine reality; for (Luke xxiv. 52) we read— "And they worshipped Him, and *returned to Jerusalem with great joy*, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God!" "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?" asked the angels. "We are worshipping Him," might have been their reply; for the steadfast gaze of a fervent and loving heart after an ascended and glorified Jesus is the truest worship. "Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called [the Mount] of Olives, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey off, and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God."

II. THE MEETING FOR PRAYER.—“ *And when they were come into [the city], they went up to the upper chamber where they were staying, both Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James, son of Alpheus, and Simon the Zealot, and Jude [the brother] of James. These gave themselves all with one accord to continual prayer, with [several] women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, with his brethren* ” (verses 13, 14). Their public life was continual praise and blessing in the temple : their private life was continual prayer. They did not separate, but waited with one accord in the upper room of one of the private residences of the company in the preparatory exercise of prayer. They went back into the upper chamber, where they usually sojourned, probably the one where they ate the last Passover and the first Supper with their Lord, and the one in which He had appeared to them on the eve of the resurrection day, and on the following Lord’s day (John xx. 19, 26). Their time was spent in worshipping in the temple at the hours of prayer when all the people went, and continuing together in prayer in this upper chamber when they returned.

We have here the fourth list of the apostles given, and in some respects it is different from all the others (Matt. x. 2-4 ; Mark iii. 16-19 ; Luke

vi. 14-16). It is sad to think that on this opening of "the book of life of the slain Lamb," there is one name wanting that once was there, and the close of this chapter tells of its awful blotting out. It was always the last name on the Gospel lists, but here it is removed. Peter is always first on these lists, and he is first in this fourth list, for though he had fallen foully next to Judas, yet he fell with a heart still true to Christ, and had been graciously restored in soul as well as to his apostleship by his loving Master (John xxi. 15-18).

The Eleven are here enumerated by name as a necessary part of the history, and as giving them a prominence as the immediate apostles of our Lord ; and the filling up of their number comes in fittingly, as they were to address themselves as a centre to the twelve tribes of the house of Israel, and work upon the world through them, for "salvation is of the Jews."

*They continued "with one accord,"* which was no doubt due to their realising their love and loyalty to the One Master, their expectation of the promise of "the Father," and their fear of a common danger, and perhaps above all to their having been breathed into by their risen Lord, so that they had all one life in the Spirit—a risen life in their risen Lord. This 14th verse gives us an account of

how they waited for the gift of the Spirit to enable them to act on others with power, as they had received the Holy Ghost at Christ's word (John xx. 22), giving them a prelibation of Pentecost in spiritual capacity, life, joy, and understanding. This word, "*with-one-accord*," occurs eleven times in THE ACTS, and nowhere else save once in Rom. xv. 6. It peculiarly suits the subject of this book—the Spirit gave them one mind about Christ; the devil made his people of one mind against them and their witness: pity it is this decision was not kept up! (Acts ii. 1; iii. 12; iv. 24; v. 12; vii. 57; viii. 6; xiii. 17; xv. 25; xviii. 12; xix. 29). "These all continued"—*men* are referred to—and it is rare to see all the men of a congregation at the prayer-meeting: far more rare to see men continuing to attend. The women generally preponderate at meetings for prayer, and in everything connected with religion. "The women" here are likely such at least as those mentioned in Luke xxiv. 10, who were at the sepulchre, "Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary, the mother of James, and *other women*:" possibly some of those women were the wives of some of the men present, for these are referred to in 1 Cor. ix. 5. "Have we not power to lead about a sister, *a wife*, as well as other *apostles*, and the *brethren* of the Lord?"—The

very parties here named. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is the only woman expressly named : and we hear no more of her in the New Testament. A silent protest against the Mariolatry of the Church of Rome is this fact, that Mary is never named after Pentecost—never once heard of in the Church of God ! Women are mentioned as accompanying our Lord from Galilee, witnessing His crucifixion, watching His burial, rejoicing in His resurrection, and waiting for the gift of His Spirit (Luke viii. 2, 3 ; xxiii. 55 ; xxiv. 1 ; Matt. xxvii. 55, 56 ; Mark xv. 47 ; xvi. 1 ; John xix. 25 ; xx. 16 ; Acts i. 14). The “brethren” of Jesus are spoken of in connection with His mother in this place, and as distinguished from the apostles ; and from this we may infer that they were brothers in the ordinary sense, and none of them apostles. Besides, it is likely they were now believers in Christ, although formerly (John vii. 5) they were not, but living in the world. It is an interesting fact that those most nearly related to Christ were among those who waited in prayer and praise for His promised gift of the Holy Spirit.

### III. THE APPOINTMENT OF A NEW APOSTLE.—

We have now to consider the action of the disciples in filling up the vacancy occasioned by the

apostasy and death of Judas. "And in those days Peter standing up in the midst of the disciples said (the crowd of names [who were] together [was] about one hundred and twenty)" (verses 15-26). We are not told on which of the ten days between the Ascension and Pentecost the event to be recorded took place, but it would seem from the increased number gathered around the apostle to have been shortly before Pentecost. The number of 120 is all that attended that meeting, and not all Christ's disciples. This is no contradiction of the fact that there were about 500 brethren who saw Jesus risen, at once, which may have been in Galilee, where most of His disciples were. Peter's Christ-given pre-eminency (Matt. xvi. 18, 19) begins now to appear; and he acts in accordance with the Lord's injunction—"When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Standing up in the midst of the disciples, he addressed them and suggested the necessity of a new apostle; but he does not consider himself competent to elect—nor do the others, even acting collectively, or with the concurrence of the other disciples. From the peculiar force with which Peter brings out the particular scriptures which apply to the case, we see the opening of his understanding by the risen Lord to understand the scriptures by the receiving of the Holy Ghost to that effect:—

“Brethren, it was necessary that the scripture should have been fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became guide to those who took Jesus; for he was numbered amongst us and had received a part in this service. This man then indeed got a field with the reward of iniquity, and, having fallen down headlong, burst in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known to all the dwellers of Jerusalem; so that that field was called in their own dialect *Aceldama*, that is, field of blood. For it is written in the Book of Psalms, Let his homestead become desolate, and let there be no dweller in it; and let another take his overseership. It is necessary therefore that of the men who have assembled with us all the time in which the Lord Jesus came in and went out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day in which He was taken up from us, one of these should be a witness with us of His resurrection. And they appointed two, Joseph who was called Barsabas, who had been surnamed *Justus*, and *Matthias*. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, knower of the hearts of all, show which one of these two Thou hast chosen to receive the lot of this service and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell to go to

his own place. And they gave lots on them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

There are many points in this passage that might be noted. The scope of it is that the gap occasioned in the apostolate by the departure of Judas must be filled up, and Peter refers to Scripture as the ground for it. "It was necessary that this scripture (Ps. xli. 9, lxix., cix.) should have been fulfilled." In these Psalms the Holy Ghost "spake by the mouth of David"—they were inspired predictions of which he was the penman (Peter and Luke assure us)—and they were "*concerning Judas.*" Christ and Judas are in those Psalms; and in Judas those curses and imprecations of the Holy One were fulfilled. It is not mere man praying for vengeance on his fellow-man, but the pronouncing of the sentence of judicial righteousness by Him who has been appointed judge of quick and dead. Thus did Peter, expressing neither wrath, doubt, lamentation, nor sentence, calmly consider the deed of the betrayer, and in all the confidence which was given him by his knowledge of that divine counsel which embraces even the wicked, looks upon it only as an event which "must needs" have taken place. This way of considering the matter he had learned

from Him who had died and risen again (Matt. xxvi. 24, 54, 56 ; John xiii. 18 ; xvii. 12 ; Luke xxiv. 26, 46), and his interpretation of Scripture is right, for it is derived from the instruction of the Lord (Luke xxiv. 45, 46). The mild and almost negative way in which Peter refers to Judas' crime of treachery—"who was guide to them who took Jesus," may have been due in part to his own painful recollection of denial and defecation. A sense of our own failures will moderate our language in speaking of even the grossest sinner. "*Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.*"

"*Concerning Judas*" we have the following things stated :—

1. "*Who was guide to them that took Jesus*" (v. 16).
2. "*He was numbered with us*" (v. 17) : he was one of the twelve apostles.
3. "*He had obtained part of this ministry*" (v. 17), viz. apostleship.
4. "*This (man) then indeed got a field with the reward of iniquity*" (v. 18).
5. "*He having fallen down headlong, burst in the midst of [his body], and all his bowels gushed out*" (v. 18).
6. *Judas "went and hanged himself"* (Matt. xxvii. 5).

7. "*From which [apostleship] Judas transgressing fell, to go to his own place*" (Acts i. 25).

The account here given is not contradictory, but supplementary, of that given by Matthew, chap. xxvii. 3-10, "Then Judas, which had betrayed Him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. (Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of Him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value, and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.)" In Matthew he perishes by his own hand : here he seems to die as if by accident or divine judgment (Acts i. 18). Then again, in Matthew, the chief priests purchased the field

of blood with the pieces of silver which Judas, in a fit of remorse, threw down in the temple : here it appears as if he purchased it. This is only an apparent discrepancy—nor do we need to have recourse to the supposition that Judas began the purchase and the chief priests completed it—for Peter is simply and broadly stating the fact that he acquired a field by the wages of iniquity—*i.e.*, that was all he got for betraying Christ ; that he hanged himself in the potter's field, and the rope or branch of the tree from which it was suspended breaking, he fell on his face, and all his bowels gushed out. And the place where he so ignominiously terminated his covetous and traitorous career was subsequently acquired for the burial of strangers, and became the perpetual monument of his infamy as traitor and suicide, being known henceforth as "*Aceldama*, or, The Field of Blood." And (v. 20) Scripture referred to this—"For it is written in the Book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein : and his office let another take ;" Ps. cix. speaks of *one* enemy, Ps. lxix. of many (Judas and all impenitent betrayers and murderers of Christ) : the antichrist of the end of the age and his people are symbolised.

*" Wherefore of these men which have companied*

*with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that He was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection*” (verses 21, 22). The words “must be ordained,” are an interpolation, there being for them no equivalent in the Greek. “One of those should be a witness with us of His resurrection,” is the true translation. “It is necessary therefore” is how the address runs : and this is the pith of the apostle’s argument, and the proposition he makes to the assembled disciples. The qualifications of an apostle referred to by him are, that he must have been familiar with the Lord from the starting-point of His public life when baptized by John until the day of His ascension, and that he must be able specially to bear witness of His resurrection. “*It is necessary,*” said Peter, that a new apostle be appointed, and that he should be “*one of those*” now described.

*The result* is in verses 23-25. We read that they appointed two, “Joseph, who was called Barsabas, who had been surnamed Justus, and Matthias,” prayed, and referred the choice to the Lord Jesus — “Show which one of these two *Thou hast chosen.*” Only Christ could choose an apostle — no man could. “They gave lots on them, and the lot fell

on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

From this we gather that the company of 120 nominated two men who answered to the qualifications. 2. They prayed. 3. They referred the choice to the Lord Jesus (John vi. 70; xiii. 18; xv. 16). 4. They used the Jewish mode of showing the mind of God—the lot: this was because the promise of the Father, the Holy Ghost, had not been yet given: and there is no recourse to the lot after Pentecost, it not being in accordance with the "ministration of the Spirit."

It is more than likely that Peter not only gave the address before the appointment, but also prayed; for in addressing his glorified Master as "knower of the hearts of all men," and appealing to Him to show which of the two He had chosen, he was acting as he had done in John xxi. 17.

The reference to Judas is solemn—"from which Judas, transgressing, fell to go to his own place"—not only his own field, Aceldama, which was to be his scaffold, but "*to his own place*" in eternity!—the place that suited his character and the deeds done in the body. Every soul arriving in "sheel" has its own appointed place; but Judas' dreadful place, to which he has for ever gone and from which he will never return, is *his own place*, which

he acquired for himself and made himself worthy of. Our character in time Christward decides our place and destiny for eternity!

It has been gravely questioned whether this action of filling up the gap created in the apostolate by the apostasy of Judas by the appointment of Matthias was justified and sanctioned by Christ; and one has gone so far as to designate this choice as "an echo of the natural officiousness and impetuosity of Peter." Stier also puts seven bold questions as to the warrantableness of it. Nevertheless we conclude from this narrative that it was a proper thing to be done; and the Twelve Apostles needed to be complete before the descent of the Holy Ghost; and the call of Saul was *ektromal* or exceptional, a thing entirely by itself: and he was never numbered with the twelve. "He was not one of the twelve at all, but an additional apostle for the Gentiles, as the twelve were the apostles of the Circumcision."

"The Spirit of God in this very book (Acts vi. 2) sanctions the choice that was made that day, and never alludes to Paul as the necessary twelfth apostle. To do so would be, in my judgment, to weaken, if not ruin, the truth of God. Paul was not one of the twelve. It is of all consequence that he should be allowed to retain a special place

who had a special work. All was wisely ordered. They prayed, and said—‘Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two *Thou hast chosen.*’ Man never chooses an apostle; apostles did not, could not, elect an apostle; the LORD alone *chose*; and so they gave forth their lots after a Jewish fashion. *The twelve apostles* were clearly, as it seems to me, in relation to the twelve tribes of Israel, and ‘they gave forth lots for them;’ that is, for Joseph and Matthias. This was sanctioned of God in the Old Testament when Israel was before Him (1 Chron. xxiv. and xxv.; Lev. xvi. 8; Num. xxxiv. 13; John xiv. 2, xviii. 2), as it will be sanctioned when Israel returns on the scene in the latter day (Ezek. xlv.) No doubt when the Church of God was in being, the lot disappears [because guided of the Holy Ghost]; but the assembly of God was not yet formed.”

It was in due order that the lot should be used in Israel, for the choice of Matthias was in Israel, not in the Church; but it would be out of order to do such a thing in the Church placed in the immediate guidance of the Holy Ghost.

Nor can this choice of an apostle by Christ Himself, and shown by the lot in Israel before Pentecost, be a precedent or warrant for choosing ministers or office-bearers in the Church of God.

It was an exceptional action done in an old covenant way before the Church began, and can form no guide for our action now. Moreover this was not *popular election*, but purely *Christ-election*—“THOU, LORD, knower of the hearts of all, show which one of these two THOU HAST CHOSEN” (verse 24). “The lot is cast into the lap, *but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord*” (Prov. xvi. 33); “and they gave lots on them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and *he was numbered with the eleven apostles.*”

## LECTURE III.

### THE COMING OF THE COMFORTER.

**W**E have seen, in our last Lecture on Acts i., what were the antecedents of the coming of the Holy Ghost and the founding of the CHURCH ; we have now to consider, in this chapter, the advent of the Comforter and the consequent founding of the Church itself.

We have considered the great event of the Ascension after Christ had given His Apostles His final commandments, instructions, and promises.

Then we had the return of the disciples to Jerusalem, their united waiting there in the expressed spirit of dependence and prayerful expectancy, and the completion of the apostolic number Twelve by the appointment of Matthias.

In this chapter (ii.) we have the narrative of the most remarkable event of New Testament history since the Ascension of Christ—THE COMING OF THE HOLY GHOST, and the consequent forming of the Church of God.

I. THE DAY OF PENTECOST.—“*And when the day of Pentecost was now accomplishing, they were all together in one place*” (verse 1). “The day of Pentecost was come, and running its course of fulfilment as a feast.” Counting from the second day of the Passover, it is almost certain that the day of Pentecost was the first day of the week—the Lord’s day : He rose from the dead as the Second Man—the last Adam, and breathed into His disciples “His risen life in the power of the Holy Ghost,” on the first day of the week ; and it was on the first day of the week He fulfilled His promise to baptize them with the Holy Ghost and with power to be His witnesses unto others, and to come, possess, and fill the habitation prepared for Him by Christ’s work of redemption.

The three great feasts of the Jews were *Passover*, *Pentecost*, and *Tabernacles* (Lev. xxiii.) Pentecost, or the feast of (seven) weeks, was celebrated on the fiftieth day after the first day of the Passover ; it was the harvest festival in Israel (Lev. xxiii. 15-22) ; the feast of “ingathering ;” and was appropriate as being the occasion when, from Christ, as the corn of wheat that fell into the ground and died, on that day began the presage of a plentiful harvest of quickened and converted souls.

The disciples "were all together in one place," but whether it were in the temple or a private house is not stated; but it is likely to have been the upper room where they met for prayer. One writer would fain infer it must have been in the temple because the multitude is mentioned (ver. 6), and also because we would then have "the solemn inauguration of the Church in the sanctuary of the Old Covenant:" but this is only man's idea of propriety. The principal thing to note is, that, as Christ enjoined them not to become parted (ch. i. 4), they kept together in *one place with one accord*. And this was the place of weakness, prayerfulness, and dependency—the only place and the true condition for spiritual power to reach believing souls. "When I am weak, then am I strong."

"Man's weakness waiting upon God,  
Its end can never miss."

The coming of the *sound* from heaven heralded the coming of "THE COMFORTER." It came "*suddenly*." Not that they were not expecting the promised baptism of the Spirit: it was precisely what they were waiting for so prayerfully; but He came suddenly and sovereignly at His own time, and in His own way and manner. "*Suddenly!*" So also shall Christ be revealed when coming to judgment

(Matt. xxiv. 39 ; 1 Thess. v. 3.) “*From heaven.*” The Spirit came from above, in His own power, to possess and fill the habitation prepared for Him by redemption. Redemption prepares us for being the habitation of God in the Spirit. *A sound*: the giving of the law was with the sound of the trumpet, exceeding loud : so this *sound* of the Spirit’s coming was as of a rushing mighty wind. We have here only the fact of its power. “It filled all the house where they were sitting,” viz. the *sound* symbolising the Spirit filling the house of God as the glory filled the tabernacle and the temple of the Lord under the Old Covenant. Was it so that this very loud penetrating *sound*, which filled all the house in which the disciples were assembled, was heard in the city, as verse 6 would appear to indicate ?

But besides sound there was *light*: the *eye* as well as the *ear* was appealed to. “And there appeared to them parted tongues as if of fire, and they sat upon each of them” (ver. 3). There were tongues, and they were of the appearance of fire, and parted ; and they sat on each of them. But this was no more *fire* than the sound was *wind*. And the appearance was not electrical ;—nor was it forked lightning ;—nor were the disciples in a trance, and thought they saw tongues of fire. It

was a supernatural and miraculous occurrence, and a real and divine thing (Luke xxiv. 49).

The sound, being "*like that of a mighty rushing wind,*" was indicative of the presence and irresistible energy of the Holy Ghost come to earth—baptizing with house-filling power the waiting disciples, who were now "endued with power from on high," where the glorified Son of man has had given Him "all power in heaven and on earth:" and the tongues being "*like as of fire,*" was emblematical of the fact that the "power from on high," in the gift of the Holy Ghost, was intelligent power in connection with witness-bearing to Christ, who on the cross had passed through the fire of the divine judgment of sin that the testimony of God in grace might be founded on righteousness. "This is the wonderful way in which God now speaks by the Holy Ghost: whatever the mercy, whatever the proved weakness, need, and guilt of man, there is not, nor can be, the least compromise of holiness. God can never sanction the evil of man. Hence the Spirit of God was thus pleased to mark the character of His presence even though given of the grace of God," but founded on the righteousness of God. The gospel from the throne of God is intolerant of evil!

When the Spirit descended on Christ at His

baptism, it was in form "like to a dove," which was characteristic of His Messiahship, a testimony unto the grace of the Lord, who was not to make His voice heard in the street, nor to break the bruised reed, nor to quench the smoking flax. In Revelation we read of the "seven Spirits of God" sent forth into all the earth in connection with the throne of God and the judgment of the earth. But here the manner of the Spirit's presence is "tongues:"—not for government but for witness-bearing—"parted tongues" also, showing that God was thinking of the Gentile as well as the Jew, and not yet making mankind of one language, but meeting man where he was, in the place of the judgment of his sin, by pouring His grace through all the tongues of the world, and thereby giving a practical illustration of "mercy rejoicing against judgment;" for God's Spirit had come down to give His testimony in grace to His Son through the very sign of that which reminded of the judgment of man's pride (Gen. xi.) "It (the parted tongue) sat upon each of them."

*"And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (verse 4).*

The emblematic power filled all the house where they were sitting, and now they were all filled

with the Holy Ghost. The house was all filled : the disciples were all filled : and this was to tell us that the Holy Ghost's presence fills the assembly of God, and that He Himself is present there, that they may all be filled with His presence and power. His filling all the house is not, we see, equivalent to His filling all the saints, though in grace they were all then filled, for we who have the Holy Ghost are not always filled but need the exhortation, "*Be filled with the Spirit ;*" but He personally is dwelling abidingly in the sphere of the Church as a constant resident come in grace to dwell there ; and, as being present, He is ever ready to fill all saints, as well as to enable them to know, feel, do, or bear.

" *With the Holy Ghost :*" not with what men call "the influence," or "the influences of the Holy Ghost," but "*with the Holy Ghost*" Himself personally. Hence it could be asked, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" "What! Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, and which ye have of God ; and ye are not your own?"

When our Lord taught His disciples to pray, in Luke xi. 1-13, He ends with these words: "*How much more shall your heavenly Father give the*

Holy Spirit *to them that ask Him?*” They had asked (Acts i. 14), and now they received the gift of the Holy Ghost (ii. 4), and immediately used that gift for the purpose for which it was given, for “they began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” The Spirit had been promised as their power in testifying to Christ (i. 5); and, now that they are by His coming divinely associated with Him glorified, they began to speak. It may be they celebrated God’s praises, as the mighty wonder-worker, in such strains as Psalm cxviii.: “The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner: this is the LORD’S doing; it is *marvellous* in our eyes.” And the listeners said, “We do hear them speak in our tongues the *wonderful* works of God.”

“*All filled:*” not only the apostles, but all the waiting company, men and women. This expression, “filled with the Holy Ghost,” is often employed by Luke (see Acts iv. 8, 31; vi. 3, 5; vii. 55; ix. 17; xi. 24; xiii. 9, 52; Luke i. 15, 41, 67; iv. 1). Men and women had been “filled with the Holy Ghost,” for special purposes, such as Bezaleel (Exod. xxxv. 30, 31); John the Baptist (Luke i. 15); Elizabeth (Luke i. 41); Zecharias (Luke i. 67); the Lord Jesus (Luke xii. 1). But here they were all filled simultaneously by the

Holy Ghost come down from Christ glorified (John vii. 39), as His gift to them, and to make them His permanent dwelling-place. "The Holy Ghost was *not yet*" when Christ was here ; but when "glorified" He was and is. He came, and He has ever since remained : said Christ, "He shall give you another Comforter, that *He may abide with you for ever*" (John xiv. 16).

By the expressions, "*baptism,*" "*outpouring,*" and "*filling,*" of the Spirit, men seem to intend one and the same thing ; but we are taught here and elsewhere that they mean *three* things. It is important, considering the general confusion regarding the Holy Ghost, to linger over the subject a little longer, and endeavour to make it precise and clear. There *was* an *outpouring* on the day of Pentecost ; by it the *baptism* of the waiting disciples into one body with the glorified Man, their Head in Heaven, was accomplished, and into that once-baptized body every believer is brought by the one Spirit, and drinks into that one, now present, Spirit in that body the Church, and according to his drinking he is "FILLED with the Spirit:" the measure of fulness depends on his drinking in the Spirit by receiving His testimony to the glorified Jesus ; by study of the Word, meditation, and prayer (see John vii. 37-39 ; also John iv. 10-14).

In John iii. 5 we have the IMPLANTING of the well of living water: in John iv. 14, the SPRINGING UP of the well perennially; in John vii. 38, THE OUTFLOW of "rivers of living water" from the divine well within—the Holy Ghost dwelling in connection with the life of the glorified Christ in the temples of our bodies.

In John vii. 37, what Jesus means by coming unto Him and drinking is explained in verse 38, and both are referred on to the glorifying of Jesus and the giving of the Holy Ghost in verse 38. The disciples thirsted; they came to Jesus and drank of Him: they believed on Him as the risen One, who, when glorified, would send that other Comforter, the Holy Ghost, and they waited in prayer (Acts i.) until the day of Pentecost was fully come (Acts ii.), and then the Holy Ghost was gifted to the glorified Son by the Father, who, "having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost," shed Him down (Acts ii. 33). And the disciples being filled with the Holy Ghost, according as the Scripture says, out of them flowed "rivers of living water," in divine testimony to the exalted Jesus; and the results were conviction and conversion of thousands, and the baptizing by the Spirit of all believers into one body (Acts ii. 41-47; 1 Cor. xii. 12). The outflow was consequent on

the *outpouring*, the *baptism* (Acts i. 5 ; ii. 2), and the *filling* (Acts ii. 4). We have

1. THE OUTPOURING. "*Suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of a rushing mighty wind*" (Acts ii. 2).

2. THE BAPTISM. "*It filled all the house where they were sitting*" (Acts ii. 2 ; 1 Cor. xii. 12, 13).

3. THE FILLING. "*And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost*" (Acts ii. 4 ; 1 Cor. iii. 16 ; vi. 19 ; Eph. v. 18).

I have given these few jottings on the subject with some detail and precision, to show that the outpouring and baptism of the Holy Ghost having been accomplished according to the Lord's promise and the Old Testament (partially at least), and the Spirit being now *with us*, and dwelling *in us*, our privilege is so to drink into a come and *present* Holy Spirit that we may "*be filled with the Spirit,*" that in us may spring up wells of worship heavenward, and out of us flow rivers of living water (streams of believed Scripture and the Holy Ghost, like Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost) *manward*, in divine testimony to the glorified Lord Jesus, as earth-rejected and heaven-accepted.

The great discourse of our Lord about the coming Comforter is found in John xiv.-xvi. In chap. xiv. 16, He says, "And I will pray the Father, and He

shall give you another Comforter, that He may *abide with you for ever*;" and having come, and being the *ever-abiding* Spirit, the great thing with us should be to acknowledge this all-important *divine fact that we have the Holy Ghost*, and let our whole thinking, feeling, and acting be not only in keeping with the presence of such a glorious Person, but the result of His active energy.

If we and all Christians were only realising our deep, constant responsibility as being all already possessed of the Holy Ghost (instead of acting in unbelief by praying for the coming of the Spirit, as if Christ had never fulfilled His promise and sent Him, and as if He were not in each individual believer in Christ), we would so enjoy Christ by a *present Spirit*, that we should be so "filled with the Spirit" that out of us would "flow rivers of living water." We should not be ignoring the leading facts of this dispensation, the *absence of Christ* and the *presence of the Spirit*, and praying for "another baptism of the Holy Ghost"—a prayer that by no possibility can be answered, or "an outpouring of the Holy Ghost," which can only be given after this present age has run its course and the millennium has begun: for the next *outpouring of the Holy Ghost* that we are warranted by Holy Scripture in expecting will be at the second advent of Christ to reign

as King of all the earth (Zech. xii. 10 ; Joel ii. 28-32).

It may be said to me, "When you admit that although Christian people may express themselves differently on Scripture topics, and especially about prayer in regard to the Holy Ghost, they generally mean the right thing : why be so finical about mere words?"

I would reply that the Holy Ghost Himself exhorts, "Hold fast the *form of sound words*" (see also Eccles. v. 2) ; and we desire to do this, and more especially in regard to such an important subject as the great fact of *His presence on earth* in the believer, and in and with the Church of God. It is not called *honouring* but rather *tempting* God on the part of Israel, when in conduct and words they uttered the unbelieving cry, "*Is the LORD among us or not?*" (Exod. xvii.) There was nothing but rock and desert all around ; but though they had no water, this did not argue that Jehovah was not among them : their privilege was to believe His word that He had come down to deliver them from the land of slavery, and take them up out of that land into a land flowing with milk and honey ; and that being with them He could bring water from the rock in Horeb for them (as He did) rather than His grace should not be displayed, and His word made good.

And although everything seems to tell us of rocks and desert land throughout the churches of Christendom, we are not to ignore the fact that the Comforter is still here or that He will abide with us for ever ; and we must not, by our words or deeds, give utterance to the wail of unbelief, "*Is the LORD among us or not ?*" What are pleadings and wrestlings with God for the sending down of the Holy Ghost but ignoring *the fact that He is here*, that He came as God's gift, like Christ, unasked, and that He remains, notwithstanding that the professing Church has become little better than a mass of corruption, and the world is refusing and resisting His testimony to the absent Christ ?

What power we should have in our meetings for prayer if, instead of coming together to pray for the Holy Ghost to come (as if He had anew to be sent out from heaven), we were all going out to it, after sitting before the Lord and meditating on the blessed gifts God had given us—His Son to die for us—His Spirit to dwell in us ; and, while we gave Him thanks, charged ourselves in the court of conscience, and before "God, the Judge of all," with our sins in not being other persons than we are, and in not doing better than we have done, seeing that God has already done the very best He can do for us ! *Then* might we expect to make a record

of *such meetings* in the Scripture phraseology, "*they were all filled* with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak," etc.

In the present state of general unbelief among Christians in the great FACT of the Holy Spirit's presence, I would still add a sentence or two :

Would he not be regarded as a very strange specimen of a Christian who should speak and pray as if the Christ of God had never been sent and never lived and died on this earth? And ought he not to be regarded as equally strange who, after what we read in the Acts and the Epistles, should speak and pray as if the Holy Ghost had not been sent from the Father and the Son, and as if He were not now dwelling upon the earth in the bodies of all believers and in the Church of the living God?

If Christians only *realised the fact* stated in the words, "*What! know ye not that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?*" it would do a thousand times more for them than praying for the "out-pouring" or "baptism of the Holy Ghost," as if He had left the earth, and His absence or presence were dependent on their prayers! We cannot pray too much for the *working* of the Spirit, though we may not pray for His coming. We are entirely

dependent on the Holy Ghost for the conversion of souls, and for the building up of saints ; and we should agonise in prayers for the Holy Ghost to accomplish both. Alas ! He may be resisted, grieved, or quenched : let us ever pray that we may be so fully in His mind that He may work unhindered in and through all believers in Christ.

It is the general ignoring of the presence of the Holy Ghost, and His special working among saints and sinners in our day, that we deplore ; and we would suggest that much of the general deadness among believers may be due to this, that they cannot recite with sincerity (and as those who are in His fellowship in their thoughts, words, and ways) that part of the creed they profess to own—“ I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY GHOST.”

“ *Began to speak with other tongues* ” can mean only that they spoke languages different from their own, which they had not previously learned. All began involuntarily, as it were, to pour out in a flow of words the sweet-swelling joy of the power of the Divine life. It was not in the ears of the listeners, but in the mouths of the speakers, that the miracle took origin ; and this was in fulfilment of the Lord’s promise (Mark xvi. 17) : “ They shall speak with *new* tongues.” It does not appear (as is generally thought) that the tongues were given

for facilitating the preaching of the Gospel—at least we have no historical account of it. It was a prominent sign-gift to the world; and, no doubt, it was intended to symbolise the forth-speaking of God by His Spirit regarding the glory of His Son to all nations—a sign that the witness-bearing of the Spirit now beginning was to be addressed “*to every creature*” (Mark xvi. 17). A Church was to be gathered out of all nations, and the enthroned Christ is yet to sway the sceptre in the age to come over all nations and kindreds and tongues. We read of tongues divided in judgment at Babel, tongues united in grace at Pentecost, and tongues ascribing salvation to God and the Lamb in view of the millennial glory (Rev. v. 9, 10).

“*As the Spirit gave them utterance*” means “as the Spirit gave them to speak forth.” They were only the mouthpieces of the Holy Ghost, and what they uttered was not their own, but gift and inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Their speaking was free, varied, and with boldness, and in that particular tongue which the Spirit, for the time being, enabled them to use (chap. ii. 14-36).

“*Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, pious men, from every nation of those under heaven.*” (verse 5; ch. iv. 12; Col. i. 23). As the gift of tongues was meant for the world, the Lord had

provided witnesses in those pious Jews who were then dwelling at Jerusalem from all the nations under heaven. They are said to be "*devout men,*" to show that the miracle was attested not by light and curious listeners, but by men of piety and moral weight who were competent and trustworthy witnesses. They were men like those persons mentioned in Luke ii. 25-28, believers in the Old Testament prophecies, and waiting for the consolation of Israel, but much concerned and exercised in mind at all that had happened in Jerusalem so recently "*concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people*" (Luke xxiv. 19).

"*Out of every nation under heaven*" can hardly be regarded as the language of hyperbole, when men compare it with the statements of Philo and Josephus—that there were Jews then settled in every country upon earth. They were likely such as had come up for the feast then being held, and were, as the narrative shows, foreign-speaking Jews from the countries mentioned. All were Jews whether residents or sojourners; not any Gentiles: and that they should be made witnesses of the miracle, and partakers of Christ through the gospel, was indicative of the order and method of God in sending salvation to the nations: for the Jews, accord-

ing to God's ancient oracles, are to be the source of blessing to the whole earth: "God be merciful to us (*Jews*) and bless us (*Jews*), that so Thy way may be known upon the earth, *Thy saving health among all nations*" (Ps. lxxvii.)

"*Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.*" Many sound critics would read according to the margin, "When this voice was made" or happened—referring voice to the sound in verse 2. It certainly does have the meaning of voice, as in John iii. 8, "Thou hearest the sound (*voice*) thereof;" also Matt. xxiv. 31; Rev. v. 11, vi. 1, ix. 9, xiv. 2, xviii. 22. It is never used in classical Greek for rumour or report. We read in John xii. 28, "Then came there a voice from heaven," and it said to Jesus, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." But to the people it only "thundered." So, possibly, the sound as of a rushing mighty wind might be heard over the city, and following it up to where it "struck in," the multitude of foreign Jews and others (even the scoffers, v. 13) would be drawn to the house where the disciples were assembled, and on coming amongst them they heard them speaking in the dialects of the countries from whence they came, and they were confounded at

the strange and miraculous phenomenon. The cause of their perplexity is forcibly given in the original, and reads thus : "*Because they heard each one in his own dialect, them speaking.*" Probably now in the open air.

"*And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Are not all these who speak Galileans ?*" (ver. 7). They were in an ecstasy, beside themselves with wonder, and, marvelling, expressed their astonishment in questionings, the one of the other, such as we have here. They were not literally all Galileans ; but most of the apostles were, who were no doubt the principal speakers on the occasion.

"*And how [then] hear we [them] every man in our own tongue [dialect] wherein we were born ?*" (ver. 8). This is a further expression of their surprise : If these speakers are all Galileans, how then can they speak in our languages, and they seem among them to have all the tongues and dialects of every one of the nations here represented ; not only our languages, but they speak, as it were, our very mother tongue, with as great facility and accuracy, and with the same accent as we do ourselves ! "It was the Saviour of them all who had taught these Galileans the languages of the world in order to proclaim His salvation" (*Stier*). The expression

“our own dialect wherein we were born,” proves to demonstration that the miracle was a real one—that those Galileans were speaking a diversity of languages, such as those of the nations hereafter named. “If the terms used in this narrative do not express diversity of language in the obvious and proper sense, it is impossible for that idea to be clothed in words at all.”

*“Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in [inhabitants of] Mesopotamia, and in Judea and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt and in the parts [regions] of Lybia about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome [the Romans sojourning here], Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our own tongues the wonderful works [great deeds] of God?”* (verses 9-12).

The nations and tongues are here enumerated, the names following each other in a certain geographical order, beginning from the north-east and then proceeding to the west and south, with Jerusalem as a centre. This list embraces as many as fifteen countries, from which “devout men,” “Jews or proselytes,” were present, and they all heard the divinely-gifted disciples speaking in their own languages and dialects. That Galileans, accustomed to speak the Aramaic or Syro-Chal-

dean language, should, one or other of them, be speaking in all the languages of those countries whence the devout Jews came, amazed and confounded them.

II. THE WONDERFUL WORKS OF GOD.—“*The Wonderful Works of God.*” What are they? Neither text nor context tell us, in so many words; but surely we may gather from the specimen of this Pentecostal speaking, which Peter’s sermon furnishes in the subsequent part of this chapter, as well as his later discourses when “filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts iii. iv. v.), as well as the purport of Stephen’s address (also “full of the Holy Ghost,” ch. vii.), that “the magnificent things of God” spoken were His interventions in grace, and more especially His “wonderful works” in Christ Jesus: for, said He, “Ye shall be witnesses unto me.” A man who is filled with the Holy Ghost “cannot but speak the things which he has seen and heard” about Jesus Christ: “*He shall testify of me.*”

Beautiful is the discriminating contrast drawn by one, of the Lord’s speaking in His Old Testament and New Testament temples. The tabernacle is set up in Exodus xl., the Old Testament house of God. Jehovah enters it and adopts it.

The cloud rests on it, and the glory enters into it. So is it, though in another form, in the New Testament house of Acts ii. The Holy Ghost as a rushing mighty wind enters into it, and cloven tongues like as of fire sit upon it. This is the Lord adopting this latter house as He had adopted the former. The house is now a *living* house, and the Lord *personally* enters it, bringing with Him His gifts, symbolised by the cloven fiery tongues. The house of old had been material, and thus but a *shadowy* house, and Jehovah had entered it as the *glory*, the *expression* or effulgence of the Divine presence.

We have however, in connection with these things that are kindred in the two houses, to mark a strong contrast.

As soon as Jehovah had seated Himself in the Old Testament house, He speaks, as we find in the opening chapter of Leviticus, which immediately follows Exodus xl. But He speaks as one who was seated there to be worshipped, or reconciled. If His people apprehend Him in any measure of His divine worthiness, they might accordingly bring Him a burnt or a meat-offering. If they valued communion with Him, they might bring Him a peace-offering. If they found their conscience defiled by reason of any transgression or

shortcoming, He was there to receive a sin or a trespass offering that the breach might be repaired, and atonement or reconciliation perfected. He therefore announces the offerings and the sacrifices, and delivers the laws of them elaborately and distinctly as soon as ever He has taken His seat in His sanctuary. This is so.

From the New Testament house the Spirit speaks, in like manner, as soon as He has entered it. Through the vessels which He had now filled, He speaks as the Lord of old had spoken from the tabernacle of the congregation (Lev. i. 1); but here is the contrast. He speaks of "*the wonderful works of God.*" It is not again of what man was required to do, either as a worshipper or a confessor, as when the Lord had spoken from the former house; but of *what God had already done on behalf of man.* Peter's words are a sample of this, and they rehearse God's wonderful works in Christ; how He had approved Him in the days of His flesh; how, by His counsel, He had been delivered up to death; how He had then raised Him from the dead, exalted Him to His own right hand in heaven, and made Him both Lord and Christ.

These are among "the wonderful works of God," which the Spirit, through His vessel, was rehearsing; the works of God in grace to sinners, such as

the ministry, death, resurrection, and glory of the Saviour of men. This is what the Lord of the temple was now doing. He was not speaking of what either thankful worshippers or convicted saints had to do ; but of what He, the God of salvation, had already done. Very fitting surely it is, that the Blessed One should be worshipped and satisfied—served by our sacrifices and praise, and sought unto by our confession and humiliation. Through the eternal ages of glory it will be the grateful as well as the fitting business of His ransomed creation to worship Him. But still, if there be the good thing, there is the more excellent thing even with God. In redemption He shines as with fuller glory than in creation, and as He has said Himself, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” So is it a higher, a New Testament thing, in contrast with that which was Old Testament, to find Him preaching or publishing His deeds of grace for us rather than announcing His rights to us and His demands from us.

God had given His law in one language to one nation, but He gave His gospel in all languages to all nations.

III. WHAT MEANETH THIS?—“*And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying [and said] one*

to another, *What meaneth this [what can this be]? Others, mocking, said, These men [they] are full of new [sweet] wine*" (verses 12, 13).

The effect was twofold amazement, while utterly at a loss what it could be that should produce such an unusual phenomenon; and while the mockery of light-minded scoffers attributed it to the effect of wine, the more devout in this state of continued uncertainty, hearing the wonderful works of God spoken, went on questioning as to the strange occurrence of the different tongues. What is this supposed to signify?—What will this turn out to be? The scoffers, probably native Jews who did not know the foreign languages, heard only men in an ecstatic state pouring forth sounds which were not understood by them, and rashly spoke of the whole thing as a drunken effusion. "The world likes to tarnish shining objects, and to drag those that are exalted down to the dust" (*Schiller*).

This was prophetic of the way men would receive the Spirit's testimony to Christ—with amazement and inquiry which might conduct to salvation; and with the perversity of a "natural" mind that, comprehending not the things of the Spirit of God, counts them "foolishness and a theme for scoffing." "The world begins here with *ridicule*, then afterwards it proceeds to *questioning*, ch. iv. 7; to

*threats*, v. 17 ; to *imprisoning*, ch. v. 18 ; to *inflicting stripes*, v. 40 ; to *murder*, ch. vii. 58." Such is the natural course of scoffing at the work of the Holy Spirit.

To this day, when anything extraordinary occurs by the action of the Holy Ghost, natural men will not hear of its being divine, but will have it that the supernatural effects are brought about by natural causes. "The Spirit's agents are too mean for the natural man, *Galileans*, v. 7 ; the Spirit's witness is too mighty for him, v. 8-11 ; the Spirit's purpose is too lofty for him, v. 12 ; and the Spirit's source is too profound for him, v. 13."

But God in His government is "over all," and although curiosity had assembled the multitude, thousands (scoffers no doubt amongst them) were ultimately subdued by the word and Spirit of God. It is a bad sign when the preaching of Christ produces no movement, no wonder, no opposition.

When the law was given, the people fled in terror (Heb. xii. 18-24) ; when the gospel was preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, they are drawn together in earnest inquiry ; but it is God's way to make men see the incompetency of reason in reference to the comprehension of revelation, and to confess themselves at a

stand-still before He conducts them to salvation. It is only when "*What meaneth this?*" is changed into "*What must we do?*" v. 37, that the way of salvation is opened, v. 38. The gospel has been all along to some "the savour of life unto life," and to others "the savour of death unto death" (2 Cor. ii. 16). The men who mocked beneath the cross at Golgotha were, it is likely, the men who mocked before the presence of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost!

"*But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea [Jewish men], and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words. For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing [for] it is but the third hour of the day*" (vers. 14, 15). The apostles, having been appointed and empowered by the coming of the Holy Spirit to act as Christ's witnesses, now feel impelled to address the multitude in defence of the work of God by the outpouring of His Spirit. "Ye shall be witnesses unto me *in Jerusalem,*" said the Lord ere He ascended, and the amazement and inquiry of the devout men, and the scoffing of the others, give them an occasion to deliver their testimony in the city of "His betrayers and murderers." "The apostles always found an opportunity, and never lost one." "In season, out of season," in the house, or as now in the open air,

they used the freest and therefore so much the more effective mode of setting forth the truth. They now presented themselves in a body to the multitude, and Peter stands forth as their leader and spokesman, and lifting up his voice, *speaks forth* with singular boldness, compared with his conduct on the night when Jesus was taken.

“And said unto them” should be *spake forth*: inasmuch as this speech is most solemn and ardent, and yet at the same time sober. It is the same word used by Paul in Acts xxvi. 25, “*I speak forth* the words of truth and soberness.”

“*Ye men.*” Peter’s address consists of three parts, each beginning with this expression (vers. 14, 22, 29). The men of Judea and dwellers at Jerusalem, whether sojourners or residents, are now addressed by Peter with a tact, boldness, wisdom, and gentleness, which were evidently the fruit of the Spirit of God. His great aim, as well as that of his fellow-apostles, was to witness to his Saviour and accomplish the repentance and salvation of his hearers; but in order to make a clear beginning he must remove the aspersion cast upon them. The mockers had said, “These men are filled with new wine,” and Peter mildly refutes the slanderous charge in a calm and convincing manner—1st, Peter *stands up*, and the eleven stand around him,

and his *forth speaking* would sufficiently vindicate him and those *standing* with him. But 2*d*, He asserts that they are not drunken as they supposed. The thing was absurd on the face of it ; for it was not yet nine o'clock in the morning, and "they that be drunken are drunken in the night" (1 Thess. v. 7), and as this was the first hour of prayer, according to pious usage, the Jews were not expected to eat or drink until it was over, and on feast-days such as Pentecost, not until mid-day. The hour was both too early and too sacred for so great a number of people to be filled with new wine ; therefore "these are not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but filled with the Spirit."

"Drunkenness (whether it be the gross vice of the inebriate, or the internal vice of the fanatic) darkens the mind ; but *in these men* the mind is clear, and their glance penetrates the mysteries of the divine word and ways (ver. 16). Drunkenness enchains the passions ; but *these men* continue to be gentle and self-possessed" (ver. 14). "*As ye think,*" or assume, is the Spirit's method of bearing testimony against mistaken mockery! "In this assumed explanation of these phenomena you are mistaken." It is due to God and His work calmly to explain where our conduct may appear doubtful and be likely to do injury to the cause of Christ, but it

would be wrong to vindicate ourselves. If we are true to the honour of our Lord, we may confidently leave the keeping of our character in His holy hands.

“*Be this known unto you*” looks onwards to the course and consummation of the apostle’s address (14-39). This form of expression occurs four times in the Acts of the Apostles (ii. 14 ; iv. 10 ; xiii. 38 ; xxviii. 28).

1st, “*Be it known unto you that God hath made that Jesus whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ*” (ii. 36).

2d, “*Be it known unto you that all power in heaven and on earth—power to heal and power to save—is in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead*”—“the Stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is now become the head of the corner” (iv. 10-12).

3d, “*Be it known unto you that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by Him all who believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses*” (xiii. 38, 39).

4th, “*Be it known therefore unto you that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and they will hear it*” (xxviii. 28).

SALVATION TO JEW AND GENTILE through a dead and risen and exalted Christ is the burden of the Acts of the Apostles : and “ *Be this known unto you* ” is the witness of the Spirit sent down from a glorified Christ.

IV. THAT WHICH WAS SPOKEN BY THE PROPHET JOEL.—“ *But this is that which was spoken through the prophet Joel* (ver. 16). Then follows the positive explanation that this was not intoxication but inspiration, according to God’s promise in a prophecy 800 years old : it is “ being filled with the Spirit, and speaking as He gave them utterance.”

Luke gives us here the first sample of the preaching of the gospel by the apostles, with which the foundation of Christian preaching as well as of the Church itself appears to be closely connected. We discover already in this first sermon all the peculiarities of apostolic preaching ; it contains no reflections or deductions concerning the doctrine of Christ, no proposition of new and unknown doctrines ; it simply and entirely consists of the proclamation of *historical facts*. The apostles appear here as the witnesses of that which they had seen, the resurrection of Jesus forming the central point of their testimony. It is true that in the after development of the Church it was impossible to confine preaching to this historical an-

nouncement only ; it gradually became invested with the additional office of building up believers in knowledge. But nevertheless the simple testimony to the great works of God, as Peter here delivers it, should never be wanting in preaching to those whose hearts are not yet penetrated by the word of truth (*Olshausen*).

*“ And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh : and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams : And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit : and they shall prophesy : And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath ; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke : The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come : And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved ”* (vers. 17-21).

In addressing them as “ men of Judea and inhabitants of Jerusalem ” he keeps, in the first place, within narrower limits than he afterwards goes to when he has the nation and its hopes before him, as in ver. 22, when he addresses them as “ *men of Israel ;* ” for he is about to quote a portion of Joel’s

prophecy, and he takes exactly this ground of Peter's, for the Jews, properly so called, and Jews alone, stand in the foreground in Joel's prophecy: so admirably perfect is the word of God in every detail.

The point he presses upon them is this, that the outpouring of the Spirit with its attendant wonders was that for which one of their own prophets should have prepared them. "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;" it was not the complete fulfilment of the prediction, for the portentous things (not to be *allegorised*, as is done by Stier and others) accompanying the outpouring of the Spirit did not happen on the day of Pentecost; but Peter said not that it was the *fulfilment* of Joel, but "*This is that which was spoken;*" it was of that nature. The outpouring of the Spirit was the portion of the prophecy referred to as answering the inquiry, "What meaneth this? or is this the effect of sweet wine?" No; this is of the character of that which was spoken by Joel. This is only the first-fruits of the Spirit "of my Spirit," ἀπὸ), to make us "a kind of first-fruits of His creatures" (James i. 18); and the mighty literal fulfilment by the outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh, and the blessing of Israel and the whole world after the judgment of the nations, are yet in the future.

All that Peter gives us of Joel is the fact that the Spirit had been poured out. Neither the wonders nor sights attendant on the day of the Lord, nor the day itself, had yet come. Joel says "*afterwards*;" but for that word Peter by the Spirit says "*in the last days*," and so takes in a distinct testimony. The restoration and blessing of the people will be before the outpouring. There was a remnant in the land at Pentecost, and on them the Spirit was poured out, with the warning of signs and wonders before the terrible day of the Lord comes; but, Israel rejecting this, Paul is called, and testifies to Christ the Son in heaven, which was the ground for the final resisting of the testimony of God by the Spirit in Stephen. The remnant of Jews became the nucleus of the Church of God for the heavens; and so the great and notable day of the Lord is in abeyance as long as the Church is here. A good writer on Joel says—

"The gift of the Spirit in the days of Acts ii., according to this prophecy, was not followed by those judgments on which the darkened sun and moon and the falling stars are thus solemnly to wait and to give witness. Such was not the history in Acts after the gift of the Spirit there. Why? Israel was not obedient. These judgments will be in favour of Israel. They will light

upon the head of the oppressor, and close the day of Israel's tribulation. But they did not follow the gift of the Spirit in Acts ii., as they are spoken of in Joel ii.; and again I say because Israel was not then repentant and obedient. 'If ye will not believe, neither will ye be established,' is a standing oracle, in the case of the nations (Isa. vii. 9). And being then unbelieving, refusing (even to the slaying of Stephen) the testimony of the then given Spirit, the nation was not delivered nor established.

The Spirit therefore given at that Pentecost led on in a very different direction. He became the baptizer of an elect people, Jewish or Gentile, into a body destined to heaven, and to be the bride of the Lamb in the day of the glory, when again the Spirit will be given. The remnant in Israel under that gift will be so led in faith, repentance, and obedience, as to let the full amount of this prophecy of Joel spend itself in the behalf of the nations.

But I must say a little more on Joel ii. and Acts ii.

In what a profound and interesting manner the Spirit in an apostle fills out the word of the Spirit in a prophet! Many an instance of this could be given, as we generally know. But I am now looking only at Peter's commentary on Joel

—that is, at Peter's word in Acts ii. on Joel's word in chapter ii.

Joel tells us of the Spirit, the river of God, as we will call it. He traces it in its course or current through the sons and daughters, the old men and the young men, the servants and handmaids of Israel ; he speaks of it in its rich abundant flowing, and the fruitfulness it imparts.

Peter admits all this. In the day of Pentecost, as he was preaching at Jerusalem, he looks at that same river of God, charmed as it were at the wealth and fruitfulness of it, as it was at that moment under his eye, taking its course through God's assembly. But then he does more than this, and more than Joel had done. He traces this river backward and forward—backward to its source and forward to its mouth.

He traces it to its source, and does so very carefully. This occupies him in his discourse on this great occasion. He tells us of Jesus—ministering, crucified, risen, and ascended ; how He had served in grace and power here on earth ; how men with wicked hands had crucified Him ; how God had raised Him from the dead ; and how He was now exalted at the right hand of God in the heavens. These things he proves diligently and carefully from Scripture, and then having thus followed the

Lord Jesus through life and death, and the resurrection up to heaven, there in Him—the ascended and glorified Man—he discovers the source of this mighty river.

He traces it likewise onward to the end or issue of its course. He tells us that it is to reach to the children of that generation, and also to all that are afar off, even to as many as the Lord shall call.

What a commentary by an apostle on a prophet is this! What an enlargement of heart and understanding in the way of God is given to us in it! In what an affecting and yet in what a wondrous and glorious way is Jesus brought in as having connection with the river of God! He becomes the source of it as soon as He who had once been the serving, crucified, rejected One, became the ascended One. Just as we learn from John vii. This same river is there tracked in its course through the bellies of the saints. But it is declared that it could not then begin to flow, for Jesus was not then glorified. Here, in Acts ii., it has begun to take its course, because Jesus has now been glorified.

*“And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be saved”* (verse 21)—that is, before that great and notable day of

the Lord come ; for when it has come, “ *all Israel shall be saved* ;” “ for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance as the Lord hath said, and in the *remnant* whom the Lord shall call ” (Joel ii. 32). “ *Whosoever shall call* ” refers to such calling as this chapter records. The great facts of the *outpouring* of the Spirit, and *the calling* and salvation of *the remnant*, are here fixed on by the apostle. We have an example of this elective application or inchoate fulfilling of ancient predictions in Heb. x. 15-18. The portion of the prophecy that does not apply is quoted as well as that which does. “ The Holy Ghost also is a witness to us ” (*here, to this one point*) . . . “ their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.” Here we have a precious *application* of Joel in the outpouring, prophesying, calling, salvation : “ And it shall be that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be saved ;” he shall escape the judgments coming on the nations by being made safe, and knowing JESUS as a risen Saviour he shall be *saved from his sins* (Matt. i. 21.) The whole of Joel ii. has yet to be fulfilled in detail in connection with the deliverance and blessing of God’s ancient people ; but we who believe have now a present Spirit and a free salvation !

## LECTURE IV.

JESUS THE NAZARÆAN PROVED TO BE THE MESSIAH.

WE NOW COME TO THE APOSTLE'S PROOF SPEAKING BY THE HOLY GHOST, THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST.—“*Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus the Nazaræan, a man borne witness to by God to you by works of power and wonders and signs, which God wrought by Him in your midst, as ye yourselves know—Him, given up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye, by [the] hand of lawless [men] have crucified and slain*” (verses 22, 23).

I. HIS LIFE ON EARTH.—“*Men of Israel,*” while it takes in the general hopes of the nation, proves their common guilt. “The whole nation of the Jews,” is here charged with slaying their Messiah, “Jesus the Nazaræan.” Peter had just finished his quotation from Joel with “whosoever shall call upon the name of the *Lord* shall be saved.” But what Lord is referred to? Just the very Jesus

whom they had slain, and whom he goes on to prove to be their Messiah, and who is now alive, and has been made both Lord and Christ at the right hand of God. There is a beautiful continuity and unity running through his discourse on till He is exalted to the right hand of God, and constituted both Lord and Christ, and from this Anointed One is shed down the Holy Ghost, producing the effects which they now see and hear. The Holy Ghost, like a thread of gold, is continually seen in connection with Christ, so that the great occurrence of the day, the gift of the Holy Ghost, is kept prominently before the minds of the listeners in connection with the object He is come to bear witness to—the risen Lord and Christ in the glory of God. God does not again commit His witness-bearing to man's agency. His one *agent* in Christian testimony in testifying to Christ is the Holy Ghost, and Peter and his brethren are taken possession of by Him and employed to express it as His *instruments*. "Jesus the Nazaraean" is the first word of Peter's discourse after rebutting the charge of the scoffers and explaining the strange occurrence. Jesus is the ever-beginning and never-ending theme of all the discourses of all the apostles as well as of other Spirit-filled men. "They preached Him without variation, and they always

won souls" (iii. 6, 13; iv. 10; vi. 14; xxii. 8; xxvi. 9).

In this verse we have God's witness to Jesus in His life, in the next verse in His death, then the following in His resurrection, and onwards to His exaltation.

"*A man.*" "Hear these words," respecting "*the man* Christ Jesus." "The Word was made flesh." "God was manifest in the flesh." By the power and action of the Holy Ghost Jesus was conceived in the womb of the Virgin, and of her substance, and was born *holy*; not made innocent and upright only like Adam, still less like Adam's sons conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity. He is designated (in Luke, that displays Him specifically *as man*), "*That Holy Thing,*" when the question is not about His divinity but His humanity: "That Holy Thing *which shall be born* of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke i. 35). "God sent forth His Son *made of a woman*" (Gal. iv. 4). From His conception and all through, the Holy Ghost bears witness that Christ's was real but "*holy*" humanity in a sense not said of any other; not merely that the Holy Ghost was poured out upon Him, but that He was that Holy Thing born of His mother, and called the Son of God. When "error pours abroad" on this vital subject, it is

necessary to state this clearly and definitely. And it is also of all importance to get hold of the simple but weighty difference of the Spirit's work in rendering the humanity holy for its union with the person of the Son ; and then in due time anointing Him as *man* with power for His service on earth.

“*Jesus the Nazarean, a man borne witness to by God,*” refers to His life as the Anointed One rather than to His birth as the Holy One. “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth *with the Holy Ghost and with power*, who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed with the devil” (Acts x. 38). He came to destroy the works of the devil, and this anointing with the Holy Ghost was for the testimony and display in man of God's power over Satan and His works. Peter refers to this when he says, “A man borne witness to by God by works of power, and wonders and signs which God wrought by Him in your midst, as ye yourselves know.” The witness was borne to them *subjectively*, *objectively* to Jesus as its subject. This, if gone into, would lead us into the consideration of all our Lord's miracles, detailed and undetailed.

Peter goes on to show the confounded multitude, that although they slew their Messiah, God had raised Him from the dead and exalted Him by His right hand, and that, as the Ascended Man, God

was still to continue to work in their midst by His Spirit, displaying His power through His disciples as they now see and hear.

“*A man from God*” is the way some read the Greek, and refer it to the divine *origin* or divine *mission* of Jesus ; but Peter would never have barely named Him “a man from God.” “The whole connection of the passage would, besides, be broken by this rendering—that connection being, that the Man Jesus of Nazareth was *by God* demonstrated, *by God* wrought in among you, *by God’s counsel* delivered to death, *by God* raised up (which raising up is argued on till v. 32, then taken up again), *by God* (v. 36) finally made Lord and Christ. This was the process of argument then with the Jews—proceeding on the identity of a man whom they had seen and known, and then mounting up from His works, His death, and His resurrection, *to His glorification*,—ALL THE PURPOSE AND DOING OF GOD. But if His divine *origin*, or even divine *mission*, be stated at the outset, we break this climaterical sequence, and lose the power of the argument” (*Alford*).

We have here the progress of our Lord through humiliation to glory, and this is “the ordinance and doing of the GOD OF ISRAEL.” *It is all God’s doing throughout.*

“*In the midst of you,*” appeals to the publicity of the Son of Man amongst men, who had shown Himself, according to Moses, to be a prophet “*before all the people*” (Luke xxiv. 19). “*As yourselves know,*” is a direct appeal to themselves as “men of Israel.”

II. JESUS CRUCIFIED AND SLAIN.—“*Him* given up.” “*Him* God raised up” (Acts x. 40). “*Him* hath God exalted (v. 31). Peter always keeps “*Him*” in the foreground. This attests the presence of the Comforter, for Jesus said, “When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, *He shall testify of Me. And ye also shall bear witness* because ye have been with Me from the beginning” (John xv. 26, 27).

“Him given up or surrendered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” His counsel is His defined Plan, His Will ; His Foreknowledge is His omniscient acquaintance with all the things about Jesus which His counsel had settled, and His will permitted. Foreknowledge is His foreknowledge of the evil of man (elect according to the foreknowledge of God (1 Pet. i. 1), *i.e.* of man’s utter evil), for in the cross man shows himself wholly and hopelessly evil. God knew of His people’s rejection of their Messiah, of Judas’

treachery and surrender of His Master to the chief priests, and of their giving Him over and forcing Him on the hand of such lawless ones (heathens "*without law*") as Pilate and the Gentile soldiery (iv. 27), and His counsel determined all accordingly ; and when man was doing his worst against His Son, He was doing His best for man through the death of His Son, so that what was only heartless lawless murder on the part of His nation and of men was on God's part, and on Jesus' part, propitiation for their sins.

This comes out further on : *here* all is for conviction by proof against them (as "re-prove" means, John xvi. 8) ; "*Him . . . having nailed, ye slew.*" He charges them "who knew the law" with despatching or making away with their Messiah, even though it was done "by the hand of the lawless," *i.e.* heathen men, and by their mode of punishing their malefactors—*crucifixion*. There had been a "*counsel and deed of them*" (Luke xxiii. 51), as well as a "*counsel and foreknowledge of God.*" God counselled and acted sovereignly for His own glory and man's redemption : the Jews counselled and acted under responsibility, and for the gratification of their malice and hatred, and God is without blame, while they are without excuse. Their guilt was neither caused nor nullified by God's deter-

minate counsel and foreknowledge. "Even Chrysostom refers to the analogy of Joseph's case (comparing Gen. xlv. 8 with l. 20), as showing how consistent, both in Scripture and experience, are the doctrines of God's sovereignty and that of human freedom and responsibility." There was a *human* as well as a *divine* decree carried into execution when Jesus suffered and died, and for that "*counsel and deed of them*" the Holy Ghost by Peter holds the "*men of Israel*" responsible. The witness of man to Jesus is borne in *nailing of Him up*: the naked harshness and unworthiness of the deed being expressed in a word, expressing the mere mechanical act; in strong contrast to the witness borne by God in grace to them by powers, wonders, and signs, wrought in their midst in Jesus.

Although not all those persons who mocked the apostles on the day of Pentecost at the third hour may have, at the same hour on Good Friday, exclaimed "Crucify Him!" (Mark xv. 13, 25); nevertheless the blood-guiltiness of the whole nation continued to cling to all who had not truly repented, yea, even we ourselves have abundant reason to make the confession: "I have, Blessed Jesus, by my sins which are as the sand of the sea, been the cause of all Thy pains, Thy misery, and Thy shame" (*Besser*).

III. JESUS THE RISEN ONE.—“*Whom God has raised up, having loosed the pains of death, inasmuch as it was not possible He should be held by its power*” (verse 26).

“By the *hand of lawless ones*,” the “men of Israel” had crucified and made away with Jesus the Nazarean. We are now to hear what has been done for Him by the “*hand of God* :” “Whom God hath raised up.” This shows God’s approval of the man whom the nation had rejected. Peter shows himself a true “witness of the resurrection.” He uniformly gives this testimony : “Whom God hath raised from the dead” (iii. 15) ; “whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead” (iv. 10) ; “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom ye slew and hanged on a tree” (v. 40) ; “Him God raised up the third day” (x. 40). Hitherto the apostles had not spoken publicly of the resurrection of Jesus ; now that the Holy Ghost in power rests on them, Peter stands forth the first public witness of His resurrection. This is the theme which he now elaborately, argumentatively, historically, and Scripturally treats of, on to verse 32. First *the fact* of the resurrection is borne witness to by him in name of all the rest (24-32) ; second, he views it in the *light of prophecy* : “*The Lord is risen indeed*” (Luke xxiv. 34) ; the fact is incontestable ; He

hath appeared unto Simon and others, and the prophetic testimony showed "it behoved Christ to rise" (Luke xxiv. 44)—it was absolutely necessary ; "for it was not possible He should be holden of death."

"Having loosed the pains of death." *Loosing pains* is an unusual combination, perhaps arising from *pains* in the Septuagint, meaning both *cord* and *sorrow* (comp. Isa. xiii. 8 ; Ps. xviii. 5). The word *pains* refers to pains of parturition, used often in the Scripture for intense but temporary suffering (Isa. xxvi. 17 ; John xvi. 21, etc.). The sufferings of Christ on Calvary were most intense—labour-pangs of soul, when He said, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" This however does not seem to be the force of labour-pangs of death—for this was of dying or going out of life—but pains of death or labour-pangs of death means the pains of death in the bringing from death the birth into life ; and surely the *figurative* language is easily understood to mean Christ coming into "newness of life" from death—"the firstborn from the dead" (Col. i. 18) ; "the first-begotten of the dead" (Rev. i. 5).

It is a mistake in Stier, and the Germans generally, to take it *literally*, and say "To every ordinary undeveloped soul hades is in general a place for

regeneration in bitter labour-pangs." This *does not mean* that Christ entered the kingdom of the dead as a conqueror, and His "soul living in the spirit, burst asunder for itself, and hence for all, the fetters of the great prison-house ; and the kingdom of those who were under the earth received the glad tidings of the gospel earlier, and more directly even, than for the upper world !"

Stier says further, "This is the great *loosing* which took place ; this is Christ's descent to hell, the secret turning-point of His history, the root and actual starting-point of His resurrection."

But it is quite a mistaken view. It is certainly not "the great loosing which took place" of "the pains of death ;" for he makes Christ loose those pains for Himself and all others, whereas Peter speaks of God "*loosing the pains of death*" in connection with Christ. "Loosing the pains of death" is figurative language, descriptive of the act of God "according to the working of His mighty power *which He wrought in Christ when he raised Him from the dead*" (Eph. i. 19, 20). The pains of death were loosed by God when the "*first-born from the dead*" was taken out of death and raised. "He was put to death in the flesh and quickened by the Spirit:" and we are now "*begotten again to a living hope by His resurrection*" (1 Peter i. 3).

“*Inasmuch as it was not possible that He should be held by its power.*” The “*not possible*” depends for its proof on the “*for*” of the next verse, leading on to the necessity that the prophetic word containing the reasons of the impossibility should be fulfilled ; that the purpose of God should be accomplished ; that the Son (to whom it was given to have life in Himself) should, in the power of life in victory, come out from the dark womb of death. It was not possible that “the *Resurrection and the Life*” should be permanently held in captivity by *Death*. Hence we find the expression *once, once-for-all*, so often used as to the death of Christ (Rom. vi. 10). “In that He died, He died unto sin *once, i.e. once-for-all.*” “CHRIST, having been raised from among the dead, dieth no more : *death hath dominion over Him no more*” (Rom. vi. 9).

IV. THE TESTIMONY OF DAVID.—“*For David says as concerning Him, I foresaw the Lord continually before me, because He is at my right hand that I may not be moved. Therefore has my heart rejoiced, and my tongue exulted ; yea more, my flesh also shall dwell in hope [or free of care] ; for Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades, nor wilt Thou suffer Thy Gracious One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the paths of life, Thou wilt*

*fill me with joy with Thy countenance*" (verses 25-28).

This is quoted from Ps. xvi. 8-11. "For David says in allusion to Him." *Foresaw* refers to place, not time: I saw Him before me. "If any trouble come, *I will stand before you*," said a Mohammedan to a Christian teacher in Beyrout the other day. She had been kind to his children, whom she taught, and he would be her protector in the time of trouble—"I will stand before *you*." "At my right hand" is expressive of nearness for security and protection (Ps. lxxiii. 23; cxxi. 5). "If God be for us, who can be against us?" "The Lord is *at hand*" (Philip. iv. 5); nothing can move me (Ps. xvi. 8). I am quite secure; I will not and cannot alter; I cannot yield and be overthrown. . . . This was indeed "the path of life," though as yet unmanifested in possible power (Rom. i. 4). "Those who have the Lord always before their face in this world shall stand before His face in the other; they on whose right hand the Lord now is shall then be placed on His right hand" (*Starke*).

"Heart—tongue—flesh" are expressive of the whole nature. There is no passage of Scripture that so nearly resembles this as 1 Thess. v. 23. The preserving blameless which the apostle desires for his readers in respect of *all three parts of their*

*being*, David here (or Christ rather) expresses as a confident expectation. This is the ground of His security, that it is impossible for Him, who is the obedient and dependent One, to fall a prey to death.

Joy and hopeful confidence in God are cherished and pervade the whole nature, and there is complete assurance that the soul should not be abandoned to Hades (the place of the departed, without reference to happiness or misery), nor the Holy Gracious One see corruption (ver. 27). Christ is the One in whom all the Father's good pleasure rests. Soul and body should not be left separated; nor should the Holy One—said of Him as to the body—experience dissolution. “As when on the cross not one of his bones was to be broken, so in the grave no fibre of His body was to perish.”

*Thou hast made known to me the paths of life; thou wilt fill me with joy with Thy countenance* (Heb. v. 7; ix. 12, 24). “Made known to me;” no one had trodden it before. The Jehovah-guided path of the trusting, obedient, dependent man was first made known to His “Holy One.” “Jehovah would show Him the path of life through death and beyond death. How blessedly He did so! It led up to brighter joys than Israel's blessing, among whom He had come to sojourn. There indeed the excellent of the earth could not follow

Him (John xiii. 33, 36 ; xxi. 19). He must first dry up the water of Jordan for them, and make it the path of life for them also after He was gone. For that path, since it led through death, must lead, if it was indeed the path of life, to what was beyond it—the presence of Him in whose presence there is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand pleasures for evermore. Such is the blessed issue and result of the Lord's path across the world, where He took His place among the saints, and trod in confidence in Jehovah (into whose hands He committed His Spirit)—the path which, if He took *us* up, must lead through death—and then found the path again in resurrection, and so, as man, up to Him with whom is fulness of joy. The Spirit of holiness marked the life of the Son of God all through. He was declared to be such with power by resurrection ; but, being man passed up into the presence of God, the holy confiding life found its perfect joy—there He is (blessed be God, and the name of that Blessed One who has trod this path) our forerunner.”

*“ Men-brethren, let it be allowed to speak with freedom to you concerning the patriarch David, that he has both died and been buried, and his monument is amongst us unto this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn to him with*

*an oath of the fruit of his loins to set upon his throne; he seeing [it] before spake concerning the resurrection of Christ, that neither has he been left in Hades, nor his flesh seen corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof all we are witnesses”* (verses 29-32).

The 16th Psalm, part of which has been quoted, is, as we have seen, “the Psalm of confidence in God that goes right through life, death, and resurrection. It was seen in Jesus, and clearly not applicable to David. Of all whom a Jew could have put forward to claim the language of such a psalm, David would perhaps have been the uppermost one in their hearts.” But Peter now argues that it was far beyond David. He could speak with confidence of David, for they all admitted his death and burial, and that his sepulchre was still among them, containing the very body of David which had been abandoned to corruption (1 Kings ii. 10; 2 Sam. v. 7). (So also Paul in chapter xiii. 35-37.) He being a prophet (this 16th Psalm being therefore prophetic), and knowing God’s promise with an oath (2 Sam. vii. 12, 13) that He would set the fruit of his loins upon his throne (Ps. cxxxii. 11),—seeing this before, spake this in Ps. xvi. of the resurrection of the Messias. Then Peter applies this to JESUS, the facts regarding

whom applied to Him and to no one else ; and declares that he and the other Apostles were all witnesses that this Messiah, of whom the patriarch-prophet spoke, was none other than Jesus of Nazareth whom they had crucified. “ *This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof all we are witnesses*” (see also v. 32 ; x. 41 ; 1 Cor. xv. 15). Thus powerfully did the Apostles bear witness to his resurrection in the power of the Holy Ghost come upon them. The Messiah, according to the patriarch-prophet, was to be raised from the dead without seeing corruption. Jesus was thus raised by God, and all we are His witnesses.

V. THE CULMINATING POINT OF PETER'S ARGUMENT.—“ *Having therefore been exalted by the right hand of God, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this which ye behold and hear*” (verse 33).

The man of the 16th Psalm having been proved not to be the writer but the Messiah, and identified with Jesus the Nazaræan, His exaltation is mentioned and the results flowing from it. The sure mercies of David are in the hands of his illustrious descendant now exalted by God's right hand to God's right hand in the heavens (1 Peter iii. 22 ; Eph. i. 20-22). We have here—

1. Jesus, exalted by the right hand of God,
2. Having received of the Father the promised Holy Ghost,
3. Has poured the Holy Spirit out on this day of Pentecost.

The scene they have witnessed, and all they have heard, so strange, new, and startling, can be accounted for only by the ascension of Jesus and the consequent descent of the Holy Ghost. It had been said, John vii., "The Holy Ghost was not yet, because that Jesus was not yet glorified:" but, now that He has been glorified, the Holy Ghost has come and is manifesting His presence and power. Man has gone up into the glory of God in righteousness, and been glorified at God's right hand; and God has come down in power to testify to the glory of God accomplished in Christ in the cross, every question of man's evil and Satan's power having been settled. The entire question is for ever closed, and it is no longer man on his responsibility—like Adam who had to be tested—but Man, already tested and seen to be absolutely obedient and absolutely loving the Father, takes his place in the person of Jesus in the glory of God, and the Holy Ghost comes down to reveal all this: and all the gracious consequences of redemption accomplished flow out to us in the grace and power of the Spirit.

“*Having received of the Father the promise of the Spirit.*” This tells us that the ascended Man, Jesus Christ, received the Holy Ghost in a new place and in an altogether new manner. “Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated lawlessness : therefore God, Thy God, has anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows” (Heb. i. 9). The promised Spirit has been received by Christ as Man on high when He fills all things with the power of redemption. Heaven has been prepared for His saints by His blood with which He has entered there ; and by the same blood a dwelling-place has been prepared for God on earth, which the Holy Ghost, as sent by Christ, now comes in His stead to fill. When the Son came down, a body was prepared for Him, and that body was filled with the Holy Ghost ; and so the Holy Ghost now fills the saints—the Church the body prepared—the suited dwelling-place on earth. He is true to the redemption of Christ, and He comes down and dwells where the blood has cleansed. He also acts in power and shows Himself present ; and in this place it is more as acting in accordance with John xvi. 7—reproving the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, because of their wickedly rejecting and crucifying Christ. “He hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear.” All is ac-

counted for by the fact of Christ having poured out the Holy Spirit.

*“For David has not ascended into the heavens. But he says himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I have put Thine enemies [to be] the footstool of my feet”* (34, 35 ; Josh. x. 24). Peter now quotes the 110th Psalm, to show that it was as necessary that Messiah should sit at the right hand of God as to be raised from the dead. David is not ascended into the heavens, but he speaks of One whom he calls his Lord, to whom Jehovah assigns this high privilege, the Messiah, David’s Son, whom they had seen ascending to the heavens. By God’s right hand raised, He is set down as the glorified Man at God’s right hand in the heavens—the place of honour, power, and glory.

*“Let the whole house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made Him, this Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ”* (verse 36).

The last word carrying conviction to them reads thus : “That both Lord and Christ hath God made Him—*this Jesus whom ye have crucified.*” “The sting of the speech is put at the end” (*Bengel*). This was the hook with which, as a true fisher of men, he reached their hearts. The decision is left to the whole house of Israel (for all has gone upon

proofs and sayings belonging to *Israel* and to *all Israel*); let it know for certain that this is the only possible conclusion, and there can be no avoiding the acceptance of it. And "*God has made*" is the ground-tone of the discourse. God has conferred on the Crucified One, Lordship and Messiahship in the Heavens, and He owns Him there as invested with both dignities after having been rejected of His nation and crucified.

Thus the proof was complete. Their psalms found their counterpart in the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus, the Messiah. God had made Him "both Lord and Christ;" for the testimony is very gradual, and the wisdom of God in this we may well admire and profit by. In meeting the Jews God condescended to put forth the glory of His own Son in the way that most of all attached itself to their ancient testimonies and their expectations. They looked for a Messiah. But apparently all was lost; for they had refused Him; and they might have supposed that the loss was irretrievable. Not so: God had raised Him from the dead. *He* had shown Himself therefore against what they had done; but their hope itself was secure in the risen Jesus whom God had made to be Lord and Christ. Jesus, spite of all they had done, had in nowise given up His title

as the CHRIST: God had made Him such. After they had done their worst, and He had suffered His worst, God owned Him thus according to His own word at His own right hand. Other glories will open there too; but "JESUS CHRIST of the seed of David," as Paul says, was to be raised from the dead according to His gospel. Timothy was to remember this (2 Tim. ii.); and Paul can descend to show the connection of the glorious person of the Lord Jesus with the Jew on earth as he loved for his own relationship to behold Him in heavenly glory. Thus the link with the expectations of the earthly people, though broken by death, is reset for ever by resurrection.

VI. THE PEOPLE'S QUESTION AND THE APOSTLE'S ANSWER.—"*And having heard it, they were pricked in heart, and said to Peter and the other apostles, What shall we do, men-brethren?*" (verse 37).

They were stung with compunction, surprised, grieved, and seized with alarm at the personal application of Peter's discourse. If God has raised and set on His right hand in the heavens their Messiah whom they crucified, and made Him Lord as well as Christ, what shall become of them? shall they not be crushed as "enemies" beneath His feet? They have been guilty of murder, blas-

phemy, and treason, and they express their conviction, compunction, and perplexity by the urgent question, "What shall we do?"—both as a matter of duty and *means of safety*. "The beginning of true conversion is made when men have come to this question." This was the first genuine Christian inquiry-meeting, and the intense eagerness of the convicted multitude is evinced by their crowding around and speaking to all the apostles. There was no need to urge them to remain to be spoken with about their souls—no forcing them to stay, or pressing them to tell their condition or state their difficulties; they thrust themselves and their sad state on the attention of the apostles, and compel them to undertake the function of directors of their spiritual inquiry. Says Bengel truly, "If the hearers in our day were to signify on the spot what were their feelings at heart, the edification of all would be much more sure and abundant." There is a real work of grace when the people stay spontaneously to inquire under conviction and alarm. "What meaneth this" now? Ah! the Exalted One has poured out this which ye now see and hear.

The question, "What shall we do?" being urged, gives the apostle the opportunity to set out in the wisdom of God a very weighty application of the

truth for the soul that hears the gospel. "*Repent,*" says he, a far deeper thing than mere compunction or alarm of conscience—this they had already, and it leads to that which he desired for them.

"*And Peter said to them, Repent, and be baptized each one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (verse 38).

He does not call on them simply to believe, although without faith there will be no real repentance Godward. But he says, "*Repent;*" and it is remarkable that John the Baptist, JESUS, and Peter, should begin their ministry saying "*Repent*" (Matt. iii. 2 ; iv. 17). Repentance as well as baptism are here enjoined ; and remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost are assured to them. And it is also noteworthy that repentance is enjoined on those very men who seem almost frantic with conviction and terror, seeing their guilt as to Jesus in the presence of the God of Israel, who had exalted Him to His own right hand. Hence compunction or alarm about sin's consequences is not repentance : still less is repentance a mere change of mind. It is remarkable that *repentance* and not *faith* should be here demanded (although we may say that where there is one, by the power of God there must be the other). It was not so

with the heathen jailer—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" is the word to him. Why the difference? May it not be that the Jews had had not only the law but the gospel and Christ Himself in His living personal ministry, and they had abused their privileges, refused the gospel, rejected and crucified their Messiah; and there must, in their circumstances, be a judging of all this as distinctly wrong, and a judging of themselves as utterly depraved, guilty, and lost, that they could have done such enormous wickedness, sinning as they had done against such an amazing amount of light, love, grace, and privileges? On account of the peculiar circumstances, as another well says, "the apostle lets them know that there is a judgment of self that goes far below any outburst of grief—any consciousness and hatred even of the deepest act of evil, as undoubtedly the crucifying of Jesus was. Repentance is the abandonment of self altogether, the judgment of what we are in the light of God. And this was to be marked, therefore, not only by the negative sign of giving themselves up as altogether evil before God, but by receiving the rejected and crucified Man the Lord Jesus. Hence to be baptized each one of them in His name for the remission of sins follows—and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

What was needed here was the thorough humbling of those proud Jews: hence repentance, or that which treats man as utterly good-for-nothing, is put forward and urgently pressed. "Repent, and be baptized each one of you in the name of Jesus"—the very Man you rejected and crucified. There is no blessing for any outside of Him—no hope for your souls. Grace reigns; their hearts are touched; they are brought down and made willing to receive and endorse God's testimony and sentence against themselves, and to bow to His Christ. He spares not for their crying out, but sends in the ploughshare still deeper, knowing that "the deeper the furrow, the stronger the stock;" and also the "abundance of grace" in Christ; for he can say from his own experience of that grace, "Be baptized *every one of you* in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." The more grace is proclaimed the more we can afford to urge; and the more those who hear us can afford to bear a thoroughgoing sound repentance. It is always a great blessing if souls see themselves at their conversion as evil, vile, and lost in the sight of God, especially if a full gospel be given: for the greater the sense of the Lord's grace, if there be not also a *commensurate* sounding of the conscience before God, the greater the danger, and more particularly

for the young ; for whom a most painful process of humbling remains another day.

“ Be baptized each one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” When we believe in Christ we have the forgiveness of sins as an eternal thing before God ; but the administrative washing away of sins as for the Church on the earth is by baptism. Ananias said to Saul, “ Arise, and get baptized, and have thy sins washed away, calling on His name ” (Acts xxii. 16). Then again Peter, in his first Epistle, ch. iii. 21, shows that it is in figure the thing is done—“ *Which figure also now saves you [even] baptism, not a putting away of filth of flesh, but the demand as before God of a good conscience by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*” To this agrees Paul (Col. ii. 12, 13): “ Buried with Him *by baptism,*” “ raised with Him,” “ quickened together with Him, *having forgiven us all trespasses.*” Baptism means death going on to resurrection. As connected with forgiveness, it is the means outward and administrative—the mark of all sheep entering Christ’s flock since Pentecost. Paul washed off his sins there and then when baptized : so when those Jews confessed the name of Jesus in their baptism, believing, they had by the very act of baptism God’s outward symbolic sign of the whole old sinner-state done

with, and a new state as quickened together with Christ begun.

Alford says—"The Apostles and early Christians were *not thus baptized*, because (ch. i. 5) they had received the BAPTISM OF THE HOLY GHOST, the *thing signified*, which superseded that by water, the *outward and visible*" (?) Though this explanation be more than doubtful, yet it is remarkable that the Twelve Apostles and pre-Pentecost believers were not baptized at Pentecost with Christian baptism. But the Jews being now treated as the nations on the ground of mercy alone (Rom. xi. 31), they must come into the Church by Baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus for the remission of sins. They must thereby give a public witness that all their rest and confidence for their souls lay in Jesus whom they had crucified! And when thus manifestly made the object of their trust, they were to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost; "*and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*" The receiving of the Holy Ghost is thus distinct from faith and repentance, and in point of fact follows both.

"Surely," says one, "when they repented, it was not without the Holy Ghost. When they received the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and found in Him remission, and were baptized thereon—baptized in

His name—which of course would be altogether worthless in these souls now before the Apostle unless they believed in His name, it will not be doubted that the Holy Ghost must have given them repentance and faith in His name. Therefore it is evident that the reception of the Holy Ghost, as here spoken of, has nothing whatever to do with the bringing men to believe and to repent. It is a subsequent operation ; it is an additional separate blessing. It is a privilege founded on faith already actively working in the heart. The gift of the Holy Ghost thus follows faith, and is in no way at the same instant, still less is it the same act. It supposes faith already existing, not unbelief ; for the Holy Ghost, though He may quicken (and He does most surely), is never *given* to an unbeliever. The Holy Ghost is said to seal the believer ; but He is the seal of *faith*, not of unbelief.” The waiting company of apostles and saints at Pentecost were for years believers in Christ, previous to the coming of the Holy Ghost to seal them and be in them, so that it could be said, “They were all filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts ii. 4) ; and Peter assures the awakened thousands of the same gift of the Spirit on their repenting, believing on the name of Christ, and confessing Him in baptism. Repentance and faith are invariably found together ;

but the gift of the Holy Ghost—Himself coming to dwell in us—is consequent on them both.

*“For the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD your God shall call”* (verse 39). The promise of the Holy Ghost in Joel is *for you and for your children* (Rom. ix. 4). The promise of the Spirit was specially given to the Jews and their offspring, and also to as many as the Lord should call—not of the dispersion, but of the nations. The Jews and their immediate children were reckoned one, and the children were circumcised; but this may also refer to children in the sense of posterity (Acts xiii. 53). We incline to this large view, because the promise looks onwards to “the world to come.” The contrast to “His blood be on us and on our children” is striking (Matt. xxvii. 25). The promise is also to those afar off, and those defined by as many as Jehovah our God shall call.

It is very certain Peter did not yet know the application of this to the called Gentiles—saved as Gentiles without becoming Jews—viz., “that [they who are of] the nations should be joint-heirs, and a joint-body, and a joint-partaker of His promise in Christ Jesus by the glad tidings (Eph. iii. 6); for when Peter was sent to Cornelius (Acts xxviii. 34), he would not have gone but for the

vision of the sheet let down from heaven. In the called Church of God peculiar to this dispensation there is neither Jew nor Gentile, for both Jew and Gentile are baptized by the Holy Ghost into one body in Christ.

And with many other words did he testify and exhort, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation." The amount and nature of Peter's discourse is hereby indicated. He used many more words, besides the summary of his discourse already given ; and he testified, using argument and solemn affirmation (as in Acts viii. 25, x. 42, xviii. 8, xx. 21, xxiii. 24, xxiv. 11, xxviii. 23) ; and he exhorted them, summoned, commanded, and persuaded.

They testified as to what their hearers should believe, and exhorted them to believe it. The truth must be given again and again, and pressed home until the desired effect is produced. The purport was, Be saved from this untoward, or crooked, or intractable generation (Deut. xxxii. 5 ; Luke iii. 5 ; Philip. ii. 15 ; 1 Peter ii. 18 ; Eph. ii. 5). It is not "save yourselves," as Luke xxiii. 35, 37, and 39, but *be saved*—to wit, in the way just indicated in verse 38, "Repent and be baptized every one of you for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." This separation was founded on a real moral work in

individual souls. There was the real work, "repent," publicly demonstrated by reception into the new household of God. This is a following up of Joel (ver. 21), "Whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be saved." Calling is not prayer to be saved, but confession of and trust in that saving name. It follows preaching, hearing, and faith (Rom. x. 14). There is in it no such idea as wrestling with God in prayer for salvation.

## LECTURE V.

### THE FORMING OF THE CHURCH.

HOW they received the Word first meets us. *“Then they that [gladly] received his word were baptized, and the same day there were added [unto them] about three thousand souls”* (verse 41).

Great numbers of Peter's hearers gave a full reception to the Word preached, accepted and received it as true. The word *“gladly”* is said by critics not to have been in the original text, but *“a later addition, intended to add to the force of the text, and is wanting in important manuscripts, in ancient versions, and Church Fathers: hence Lachmann, Tischendorf, and Alford cancel it.”* *“Those who had accepted his word”* is how it reads. *“Word”* is translated *“saying”* in 1 Tim. i. 15. *“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief,”* said Paul. And how did he receive the word or saying when the voice said, *“I am Jesus whom*

thou persecutest"? Was it "*gladly*" or *sadly*? Very sadly indeed, as befitted his case (see Acts ix.) So here the absence of "*gladly*" is in season with the circumstances; for they were Jerusalem sinners who had had every evidence that Jesus was the Christ, and yet they had rejected and crucified Him; and, on their alarm, on hearing that God had exalted Him to His throne, and made Him both Lord and Christ, he had just exhorted them to "repent;" and one would expect their reception of the word by faith to be with that gravity and penitence which would be in keeping with such circumstances. They were very bright and happy after having believed, as the subsequent narrative shows. "He that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and *anon with joy* receiveth it: yet hath he not root in himself," etc. (Matt. xiii. 20). "Those who received his word *were baptized*:" and no doubt had remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost wherever there was true faith and repentance. Baptism was the public reception of them as having these into the house of God—the new "house" over which Christ is set in the heavens—the Christian family of faith which he had just begun to gather, and to make "an habitation of God in the Spirit," consequent

on His "having purged our sins and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."

"And there was added that day about three thousand souls." This was an amazing draught of fishes on the part of Peter as a fisher of men (Matt. iv. 19). They were said to be added to the original nucleus of about one hundred and twenty ; for, though the smaller number, they were the Church ; because upon them had descended the Holy Ghost, baptizing them into one body in association with Christ in the heavens, though they did not then know the height of their privilege nor the greatness of their blessing. Three thousand souls ! How great the efficacy of the gospel, and how great still ! Three thousand souls in a day were a precious prize for the rejoicing of Jesus, as they were a great public testimony to His having been made "both Lord and Christ," and having given the promised Holy Ghost. The best proof of a Holy Ghost ministry is converted souls. Luke says "*names*" (Acts i. 15), here "*souls*;" in chap. iv. 4, "*men*;" "*the number of the men* had become about five thousand." How speedily the eleven men of chapter i. had increased to five thousand ! God had prepared the people ; for the thing was done suddenly (2 Chron. xxix. 36) And ought we not to look for the repetition of the

sudden and simultaneous conversion of souls, that Christ's glory in the heavens, and the Holy Ghost's presence on earth, may be demonstrably attested?

II. THE ELEMENTS OF A STRONG CHURCH.—*And they persevered in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, in breaking of bread and prayers*" (verse 42).

That is how it reads ; for the things named go in pairs—"teaching and fellowship,"—"breaking of bread and prayers." They continued steadfastly "in the four principal attributes of a spiritual community."

(1.) *Teaching*.—In our version it is called "doctrine ;" but it does not mean the doctrine taught, but the teaching of it. After being brought into the new association there was a need of instruction ; and the apostles were pre-eminently those that God vouchsafed in the infant days of His assembly. Inasmuch as it was of the utmost importance that all should be thoroughly established in the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ, they had a place peculiar to themselves, as above all others chosen of the Lord to lay the foundations of His house, and to direct and administer in His name, as we see through the New Testament. It is of all importance that young believers should have "the apostles' teaching," by having the doc-

trine they taught communicated in all its Scriptural purity, "the faith once for all delivered to the saints!"

(2.) *Fellowship*—"*Community*: the living together as one family, and having things in common."—(Alf.) The word is comprehensive of community, communion, communication (Rom. xv. 26 ; 1 Cor. i. 9 ; x. 16 (twice) ; 2 Cor. vi. 14 ; viii. 14 ; ix. 13 ; xiii. 14 ; Gal. ii. 9 ; Eph. iii. 9 ; Philip. i. 5 ; ii. 1 ; iii. 10 ; Phil. 6 ; Heb. xiii. 16 ; 1 John i. 3 (twice), 6, 7).

This fellowship was the fruit of the apostles' teaching. So we read in 1 John i., that that apostle writes all about the life manifested, that the saints might have fellowship with him and the other apostles, and have their joy full ; and he writes, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." It was a community of life in the Spirit, and formed and maintained by the teachings of the apostles. There are certain teachings in Christendom which form distinct fellowships, such as Calvinistic, and Arminian or Pelagian. One set of professing Christians has one set of teaching, and another another ; and they have also different ecclesiastical polities ; and by these teachings of theirs they isolate themselves from each other's fellowship, and have fellowship or things in common only with those who are of

the same opinions. This results from giving up the apostles' teaching, and adopting in part their own; for were all believers adhering to the apostles' teaching they would persevere in the apostles' fellowship: they would be all moulded by the word and Spirit into one in their minds, hearts, and ways; for the gift of the Holy Ghost is not to produce moral change only but to act in connection with Christ risen and glorified in such power as to set aside all the motives that individualise those who receive it by uniting them as one soul and in one mind. All are baptized by one Spirit into one body, and all are made to drink into one Spirit.

This was the experienced condition in the apostles' days, for all who believed got their teaching; and when other teachings threatened to come in, they were put down by apostolic teaching, that the souls of the saints should stand by faith and not by mere authority. "Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy; for by faith ye stand." That is, instead of putting the Corinthians right by authority, he wrote an epistle full of suited teaching, that he might set their souls right; for he well knew that, if souls are not put right, there is no good resulting from authoritatively putting things right in the Church. They must be put right by apostolic teaching; which,

reaching their faith, they will stand in faith and not by force. Church authority domineering over faith can never produce the apostles' fellowship. There is a divine order: first, apostles' teaching, then fellowship. We get a common mind by being taught in the apostles' doctrine as people having faith, as the mouth that receives that divine truth which flows from the Father and the Son in the power of the Holy Ghost, and makes us enjoy community in everything.

(3.) *Breaking of Bread.*—“Next followed the breaking of bread, the formal expression of Christian fellowship, and the special outward sign of remembering Him to whose death they owed all;” for the interpretation of it as meaning the celebration of the Lord's Supper has been the prevalent one in ancient and modern times, though I doubt not it was associated for some time with the love-feast, as it seems in this chapter further on very distinctly to have been connected therewith; and it was so until they were separated by the Apostle Paul, as in 1 Cor. xi.; and then it came out more as a Church ordinance to be partaken of in a public assembly, for they were commanded to wait for one another, and to take the Lord's Supper all together as a Church, and not one after the other, in a straggling manner, or in little companies thrown

together by position in life, riches, poverty, or other circumstances.

“They adhered, also, to the religious meals of which the Lord’s Supper was the conclusion,” says a German. Barely to render “*the breaking of bread*”—the breaking of bread in the eucharist, *as now understood*—would be to violate historical truth. The Holy Communion was at first, and for some time, till abuses put an end to the practice, “*inseparably connected with the agapæ or love-feasts of the Christians, and unknown as a separate ordinance;*” thus Alford, *in loco*. But were we granting that it was even so, yet in this verse we believe that the Lord’s Supper is specially intended by “*the breaking of bread.*” “The *continuance* in this, shows that on the first Lord’s-day the first Lord’s Supper was celebrated.”

(4.) *Prayers.* Finally, but closely following the Lord’s Supper, come “the prayers,” which still showed that, however great might be the grace of God, they were in the place of danger and needed dependence here below. These prayers were no doubt public, social, and private—in the Jewish temple (verse 46), in the Christian assembly, and in the closet. They went at the appointed times of prayer to the temple; and they had prayers among themselves regularly, and no doubt after

the Lord's Supper. No times or forms were yet made for Christian prayers: they were "praying in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. xv. 5, 6). The first Christians persevered continuously, as the word imports, in all these four elements of a fresh, living, and strong Christian life. How few continue in the full tale—the four in their adequate proportions. One set go in strong for "doctrine," another for "prayers," various sets make "fellowship very prominent," and some the "breaking of bread;" but what is wanted is that Christians should equally persevere in all. Of the Pentecost Church we read; "*They persevered in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, in breaking of bread, and prayers.*"

FELLOWSHIP.—In tracing the word fellowship through the New Testament Scriptures, the results appear to admit of being tabulated under the following classification:—

1. *The fellowship of the Christian community* (Acts ii. 42; 1 John i. 3; Gal. ii. 9).
2. *The fellowship with the Father and the Son* (1 John i. 3, 6).
3. *The fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord* (1 Cor. i. 9; Philip. iii. 10. See also the verb 1 Pet. iv. 13; Heb. ii. 14).

4. *The fellowship of the blood and body of Christ* (1 Cor. x. 16, 17).

5. *The fellowship of the Spirit* (Philip. ii. 1; Phil. 6; 1 John i. 7; 2 Cor. xiii. 14).

6. *The fellowship of Christian beneficence* (Rom. xv. 26, verb 27; 2 Cor. viii. 4; ix. 13; Philip. i. 5; Heb. xiii. 16; verb Gal. vi. 6; Philip. iv. 15).

7. *The fellowship of incongruity* (2 Cor. vi. 14-18; verb 2 John 11; 1 Tim. v. 22).

Each of these heads would form a fine theme; but our plan does not admit of our following this out; but we will consider a little more fully this nearly-formed *fellowship of the Christian community*.—From Acts ii. 42, one would, at first sight, incline to designate this “the *apostles’* fellowship;” but, on looking more narrowly into the construction of the verse, we find that the word *apostles’* is attached, properly speaking, only to the word *doctrine*; and there are obviously four things contained in the verse—(1.) The apostles’ doctrine; (2.) Fellowship of Christians; (3.) Breaking of bread; and (4.) Prayers; and these, in their due proportion, when “steadfastly continued” in, form the elements of a healthy and vigorous Christian community.

Nevertheless the expression in 1 John i. 3, “that ye may have *fellowship with us*,” might warrant the epithet, *apostles’* fellowship; for

although the Church is "God's building," and Christ builds His Church, the apostles were appointed by Christ as the medium, and the Holy Ghost sent from Christ employed them as the instruments for the formation of the new and Christian fellowship which He formed consequent on the glorification of Christ. The apostle John told that he had written all about the manifested Life that we might have fellowship with him, as also with the other apostles. Their writings in the Gospels, as well as their preaching and teaching, were the means of continuing and extending the Christian community formed. The Holy Ghost used them in laying instrumentally the foundation of the Christian house in which He dwells, and over which the Christ, the son of the living God, is Head.

This is a new house of God : and the coming of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost formed this heavenly fellowship. Christ had said to His disciples, when far from Jerusalem, in Cæsarea Philippi, after experiencing such rejection by "His own" as to prove that the old "fellowship"—the nation of the Jews—would not receive Him, "*On this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it ;*" and He promised to give the Holy Ghost, who was to form it con-

sequent upon His death and glorification ; and having gone to the right hand of God, He sent Him : and this "fellowship" was formed by the Holy Ghost joining together the waiting disciples to their risen and glorified Head in heaven ; for union to Christ, so that it can be said, "He that is joined to the Lord is *one Spirit*," can only be in the power of the Holy Ghost as sent from the throne of a glorified Christ.

And is there not an analogy between the way in which Israel was formed into a nation and the formation of the Church? They were under the shelter of the blood of the lamb in Egypt, and were passed over on the day of judgment (and so Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed for us) ; and as Israel's hosts were given practically to realise their redemption from Egypt by being brought through the opened Red Sea, and were all baptized unto Moses—identified with him as their divinely-appointed leader,—and this outward or sacramental baptism made *a nation* of them—they being thus joined to their divinely-given head, so the disciples, who had stood by the cross, heard the lips of the risen Jesus speak peace to them in resurrection, as He showed them His hands and His side, and breathed on them, and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." "When the

day of Pentecost was fully come," they received the Holy Ghost and were all baptized into one body by the Spirit come down from heaven, and were thereby united to and identified with their divinely-given Head in heaven, the Captain of their salvation, the glorified Jesus, and became the redeemed body of Christ, His spiritual "house," His "holy nation."

And this "fellowship" is a spiritual unity ; "for as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body being many are one body, *so also is the Christ*. For by one Spirit are we all *baptized into one body*, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." This is the Holy Spirit's account of the forming of this divine fellowship. The coming of the Holy Ghost is a new fact and an immense spiritual blessing ; and the results of His operations when present are such as enduing with power to testify for Christ and the gospel of God ; to baptize all believers into one body ; to indwell believers, be with and in the saints of God, the unction, the seal, the earnest ; and being in all who believe, there is one pervading Spirit as the link of unity between Christ in heaven and the Church on earth ; and being "all one in Christ Jesus," they are all

one with each other—all being in the Spirit, and together “the body of Christ and members in particular.”

And this fellowship of Christians having the Holy Ghost has power to add to its numbers. The Holy Ghost is Christ's *agent* in upholding His testimony, but believers are His *instruments*, and in a way that is most supernatural, yet to all appearance natural ; the fellowship seems self-propagated and perpetuated. Christ had promised the Holy Ghost : when Christ was seated at God's right hand, He came : those who had life—the waiting disciples (on whom He had previously breathed and said, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost,” when the receiving time came) *received* Him along with the rest of the one hundred and twenty ; and out of them flowed rivers of living water (word and Spirit) in bold and decided testimony to the Christ of glory, who had been rejected and crucified by men, but exalted to God's right hand : and although we cannot have, as we do not need, a fresh outpouring of the Holy Ghost (for if a thing is poured out, it is) as if He were to be re-given by Christ ; yet in a lower sense, now that the Spirit has come to abide with the Church for ever, we have a right to expect, as a normal experience, that we should have a continual outflowing of the Holy Ghost

from the bellies of believers, for "this spake he of the Spirit which they who believe on him should receive:" and the Apostle Paul speaks of ministering the Spirit (Gal. iii.) There was an outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost: He was given, once for all, as the gift of God the Father and the Son; but, being come down, it is for continuous outflowing; and this going forth from the saints, along with the testimony of God to His Christ, and reaching "the hearing of faith" so that sins are forgiven and a knowledge of redemption imparted, the Holy Ghost is communicated, and the hearers are added, as on the day of Pentecost the three thousand were, to this new and holy fellowship, the communion of saints; and thus the Church of God is increased with living members, the holy temple in the Lord groweth increasingly, and they are conscious of holy living fellowship such as is peculiar to Christianity.

This fellowship is divine in its origin, formation, and continuance: it is formed outside the wicked and religious world; it is inclusive of all believers; it is pervaded by the Spirit of life, love, grace, joy, and spiritual power; and has a practical care for the welfare of all its members; and in its normal condition is submissive to the Holy Ghost, and, keeping itself pure, has an awe-inspiring influence on the world (Acts ii. iv. v. vii.)

*“And fear was upon every soul, and many wonders and signs took place through the apostles’ means”* (verse 43).

This dread was a reverential astonishment at the effect produced by the outpouring of the Spirit.

When God is present with His people, especially in granting special favour or in executing special judgment on their behalf, fear is experienced (Acts v. 5, xix. 17). As when the fear and dread of the children of Israel fell on the nations of Canaan, Rahab said to the spies, “Your terror is fallen upon us.” So when the mysterious hand from the Unseen traced the doom of Babylon on the plaster of the wall over against the candlestick, the king and all his guests were terror-struck, for God was near. It is also said, “Israel shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days” (Hos. iii. 5). And this verse tells that at Pentecost even the impenitent were struck with fear at the whole occurrence, and especially at the great numbers who had been converted, and at all that they had seen and heard. They felt

——“How awful goodness is.”

A holy dread overpowered them, for they were unconsciously led to acknowledge the finger of God, and they felt His power. They may also tempo-

rarily have had a presentiment of that "wrath to come" which was to overtake the obstinate enemies of God. While the narrative before us refers to this circumstance, it also states a fact which deepened the feeling of dread produced by the Pentecostal event, namely, that many miracles were wrought by the apostles; these are not, however, to be understood as having been restricted to that particular day (*Dr. Lechler*).

Fear, or a reverent awe, must also have been upon the believers, as is ordinarily the case when He is felt to be near by His wonderful works. "It is a characteristic of the works of God that they fill us with awe."

### III. ALL TOGETHER, AND ALL THINGS COMMON.

—"*And all that believed were together, and had all things common, and sold their possessions and substance, and distributed them to all, according as any one might have need*" (verses 44, 45). "And all that believed were together. At what a wide distance alas! are we removed from that unity at the present day" (*Bengel*). Such was the unity of feeling and affection in the infant Church, that, notwithstanding their numerical increase, they seemed to constitute a single household with identity of interest and even of possession. "All that

believed *were together*." The same expression, *together*, is used in chap. i. 15 ; ii. 1 ; iii. 1. The sense is that they continually assembled together though so large a company : they did so in the temple court at the hour of prayer ; and they were all together as one company of people wherever they might be. Alford says it is not "joined together in fraternal love," as Calvin has it, but that they were all together in an assembly. Whether they all assembled at one time is not absolutely necessary to the statement that they were all together ; for a whole Church may be said to meet though many may be absent, provided they meet on the principle of including all. There were not many churches, only one in Jerusalem at this time : not as now, Latin, Greek, Protestant !

"*And had all things common*," etc.—"This peculiar feature is found in Jerusalem, beautiful and blessed in its season, but I have no doubt special to the Jerusalem condition of the Church of God. We can easily understand it. In the first place, all that composed the Church were at that time in the same place. We can feel readily therefore that there would be a real and strong family feeling, but I doubt whether their mutual affections then rose higher than the sense of their being God's family. They really did constitute the body

of Christ ; they were baptized by one Spirit into one body, but to be that one body and to know that such they were are two different things. The development was reserved for another and still weightier witness of the glory of the Lord Jesus. But having in its strength the sense of family relationship, the wonderful victory of grace over selfish interests was the fruit of it. If he or she belonged to the household of God, this was the governing thought—not one's own possessions. Grace gives without seeking a return ; but grace, on the other side, seeks not its own things but those of Christ."

There was no law demanding this except the law of love, love to Christ and to all the holy brethren ; but it seems (ch. iv. 32) to have been the universal custom to be on the principle of having a common stock. It does not seem that "they possessed all in common," but "held all their real estate and personal property as a trust for the use of fellow-believers." It seems to have been a *continuation* and extension of the community in which our Lord and His disciples had lived (John xii. 6 ; 13, 29) before. This showed the power of love to bring out spontaneously what law could not do. For when Jesus commanded the young ruler—"If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to

the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven : and come and follow Me" (Matt. xx. 21); "he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions," and would not do it. But here they "sold their possessions and substance, and distributed them to all as every man had need," without any command, but as the outflow of love to brethren in Christ. And the love of God could not be demonstrated except by such a spirit of Christlike self-sacrifice : for, "Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 John iii. 17, 18).

The spirit of this Christian communism is still to actuate us, though a common stock for all who claim to be Christians now would be a great evil. We come into the Church at conversion, carrying all our property with us to be administered by us as under responsibility to Christ, and for the greatest glory of His name, and the relief of His poor saints. One would covet the superior blessedness of being always a giver, remembering "the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts xx. 35); but even he condescended to take the less

blessed place of being a receiver when here below; for we read of "certain women" named, and many others, who ministered to Him of their substance (Luke viii. 3): and will He not say when on the throne of earth—"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye did it unto Me"? (Matt. xxv. 40).

On this a German has a few pithy sentences, contrasting this divine communism with modern communism: "That Christian communism said, All that is mine is thine! The unchristian communism of our day says, All that is thine is mine! Those early Christians said, Take all that I have! The modern communists exclaim, Deliver up all that thou hast! That holy community of goods proceeded from love to the poor: but that which is now proclaimed is the result of a hatred to the rich."

## LECTURE VI.

### THE WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH.

**A**ND every day, being constantly in the temple with one accord, and breaking bread in [the] house, they received their food with gladness and simplicity of heart," etc. (verse 46).

They persevered in attending the temple, for that was the centre of worship in Israel; "and there was by no means a manifest severance of the tie with Judaism, at least with the circumstances of its worship. We know that the cross does make a breach, and an inseparable one, with all that is of the first man; but the power of old habits with the joy that overflowed their souls made them for the moment to be, I may say, better Jews. They continued daily with one accord in the temple. Along with it was joined this new element of breaking bread at home; not 'from house to house' as if it were a migratory service."

"Thus these two features were seen to meet together in the Pentecostal Church, the retaining of Jewish religious habits in going up to the temple

for prayer, and at the same time the observance of that which was properly Christian, the breaking of bread at home. No wonder the new-found joy overflowed, and they were found 'eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.' There is no reason to confound the breaking of bread with eating their meat. They are two different things. We find the religious life, so to speak, expressed in their going up to the temple and in their breaking bread at home. We find the effect upon their natural life in their eating 'their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people.' There is the same double character."

It was a transition time in their habits and religious worship: they were still both Jews and Christians. God had called them out of Judaism to Christ and Christianity, but they seemed not fully to have understood it, as He does not formally command them to leave it, but left them to the moral action of the truth and Spirit of God, and the rude teaching of the persecution of the Jews, who very soon began to resent a testimony beyond their measure, and a connection with the God of Israel, such as gathered them out into a separate company. Though God forebore with them in much long-suffering in their transition, still it would be altogether wrong in us to be frequent-

ing the Jewish worship at the synagogue in the morning, as they did the temple-worship, and going to worship as Christians at night. Christian worship should be that which can be in spirit and in truth. What even apostles did in going into Jewish worship in the earliest infancy of the Church would be wrong in us to do, being possessed of clearer light from having now the completed revelation of God. We are not to follow what apostles did if their actions are not in keeping with their writings ; for not every act of an apostle, but “ every scripture is God-breathed ” (2 Tim. iii. 16) ; and we find that these writings (such as Galatians and Hebrews) teach explicitly that Christianity is the contrast of Judaism, and that the two worships cannot coexist. “ *We have an altar whereof they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle* ” (Heb. xiii. 10).

It may be asked, After the Church had been fully set up, and ordered so as to have the Lord's Supper at one place and at one time, for all the Christians in the city or town, would two or three be warranted still to have it at home, or in any private or sectional way ? Certainly not ; for as it expresses the unity of the body of Christ, it cannot be the Lord's Supper at all, unless it is partaken of on the principle of the unity of the one body being maintained ; but if it is to be had in any ir-

regular or more private manner now, such should be publicly intimated in the ordinary Christian assembly, so that all appearance of schism in the body may be avoided.

If we had no other Scripture than this to guide us, we might conclude, without doing violence to the narrative, that the early disciples observed the "breaking of bread" daily at home at the close of their evening meal, and that the Lord's Supper was as free to any two or three believers to have, as was the meal that ordinarily preceded or followed it. But this happened under the "apostles' doctrine," or teaching of "The Twelve," when their highest conception of the Church was that of a Christian family; but when Paul's "revelation of the mystery, Christ and the Church" was taught, Paul's "doctrine" of the "one body" regulated it, as he teaches in 1 Cor. xi. 33, "*When ye come together to eat, wait for one another.*"

We have been seeing and hearing not a little of "the revival of God's work" in our day; but to enjoy and retain spiritual vitality, freshness, fervour, and power, we require to be kept in living contact with CHRIST HIMSELF, and this can be done only as our minds are freshly nourished by the Holy Ghost with the truths of the Holy Scriptures.

If we study the word with prayer, faith, and dependence, and get the knowledge of Christ in His person, life, death, Headship, and glory, we shall have the elements of vitality and freshness within our reach ; but in the Lord's Supper we are brought very solemnly in contact with Christ in His death, and thereby the desires and affections are drawn forth towards Him in a manner and with an intensity of fervour and spiritual enjoyment that will lead to the happy and spontaneous outflow of thanksgiving, adoration, and praise.

If the open-meeting of the Apostolic Church with the Lord's Supper as its centre were restored, it would be the true means for conserving a revived Christianity, and deepening the fervour and spirituality of the saints. Young Christians would be mightily helped if they found themselves every Lord's-day in the midst of an assembly of believers, where the one object before them was Christ Himself in His dying love.

In order to give those who are young in the divine life an inkling of the worship-meeting of primitive times, we have drawn the following plain principles from the Word of God, and we believe they are such as they will never need to unlearn, for they are things which are undoubtedly according to the Scriptures :—

I. That the coming together of believers every Lord's day, for partaking of the Lord's Supper, and for praising, thanking, and worshipping God, should hold a prominent place in the assembly. The full proper worship of the Church of God is found in Scripture connected with remembering the Lord's death (Acts xx. 7 ; 1 Cor. xi. 17-34 ; Heb. x. 25).

II. That faith in the Lord Jesus forms the only ground for being at the Lord's table ; and while all believers should be there, due precaution should be taken to keep back the unconverted—and even Christians who are not walking in holiness, as Christians ought (1 Cor. v.)

III. That, as the Lord's Supper is a disciples' feast, and not a sacrifice, there is no place for any one acting as priest, either as to offering sacrifice or mediating for others. Christ Himself presided at the institution of the Supper, and there is not a line in Scripture informing us that He has given up that place, or to warrant any one to presume to occupy it. When assembled "*to His name*" as His saints are now, while in *bodily* presence He is absent, faith hears His voice saying, "*Where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them ;*" "I am your Master ; all ye are brethren." "Let all things be done unto edifying" (1 Cor. xiv. 26).

IV. That, as we read of the Pentecostal saints, that they (1) continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and (2) fellowship, and (3) in breaking of bread, and (4) in prayers (Acts ii. 42)—Christians who are not abiding in all these four elements of Christian profession lay themselves open to the charge of not walking in truth, and hence to the action of brotherly admonition ; and they should be dealt with lovingly and faithfully, for the glory of Christ and their own good ; and none but believers, and believers assembling regularly at the Lord's table, are fit persons to take any part in the worship of God in the assemblies of His saints.

V. That the gathering at the Lord's table is not an assembling of Christians for the sake of one another but for the Lord Jesus, to confess Christ, show forth His death, have their hearts filled with Him, and "worship the Father in spirit and in truth." It is to Christ only, and not to Christians, we are gathered, and where He is in the true holiest, and not to any earthly Zion ; and our great aim should be to have Christ uppermost in all our hearts, and not to be thinking of ourselves or of one another ; far less judging whether this one or that one ought to be present at the table. (That should be done and settled beforehand.)

VI. That, although there should be freedom of action for the Holy Ghost using whom He will in doing anything at the Lord's table, yet the table is not a place for confession of sins, supplication for mercies, or for preaching or teaching, but for worship, thanksgiving, adoration, and praise; and all the teaching that would seem proper on such an occasion is that which would unfold simply to the eye of faith the person and work of Christ, the graces and glories, the death and dying love of our adorable Lord Jesus. Man should be hidden, Christ alone appear. We want to be occupied with Him alone at His table, and not with our own edification; and all that would lead on our hearts to praise Him more would be in place; all else, even though precious truth, would generally be found to be an intrusion at the Lord's table. Christ is our exclusive Centre of gathering—Christ our one object when at His table. We come together to meet with Him, who says, "Where two or three are gathered together in *my name*, there am I in the midst of them." The worship of God, presented by a "holy priesthood, who offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter ii. 5), is the great thing there, though, as a result, nourishment is granted to the saints for growing up into Christ in all things (Eph. iv. 11-14).

VII. In coming to the Lord's table, and there breaking with others that "*one loaf*," we manifest our membership in "*the body of Christ*;" we by no means witness to our own special association (as if the Lord's table were the table of a party with some distinctive name), but to the general truth of the oneness of the body of Christ; and our association in the breaking of bread is the outward expression of this blessed reality. Meeting thus, saints assemble on ground that admits of all believers, gathered to Christ alone, being there; and if they are not, they could not then say that any human barriers had been erected to prevent them.

There is no membership but of Christ, for "we are members of His body" (Eph. v. 30)—"members of Christ" (1 Cor. vi. 15); and the Holy Scriptures speak of no other membership, unless it be that which springs out of this—"members one of another" (Eph. iv. 25); and, therefore, there can be no human membership of anything on earth as a term of communion at the Lord's table; but saints assemble simply on the ground of being constituents of a unity already formed, and existing—"the unity of the Spirit" (Eph. iv. 3)—and all Christ's members are free to come together for the breaking of bread; only they must satisfy the assembly that they are Christ's; for although

grace gathers us to Christ, holiness must be preserved; for the Church is the "habitation of God in the Spirit" (Eph. ii. 22); and to admit of evil were a denial of Christ in His person, and of the whole work accomplished in His death, as well as of the presence of the Holy Ghost. The Lord Jesus is the "Holy One," and "let him that nameth the name of the *Lord depart from iniquity*" (2 Tim. ii. 19).

It will therefore appear clear that the unsaved, however religious, and obviously those who are frequenting theatres, races, circuses, operas, dancings, public-houses, or making companions of the ungodly, or who are living loosely in any way, are excluded by the Holy Ghost in the Holy Scriptures from the fellowship of the Church of God (2 Cor. vi. 14-18).

All God's children in any given place, if walking in holiness, ought to be present together at the Lord's table every Lord's day; and none but children of God should be at the table, although unsaved persons may be present in the place of meeting as spectators and hearers (1 Cor. xiv. 14-18).

The present object of Christ's death is not fully attained unless we COME TOGETHER "*on the first day of the week to break bread*" (Acts xx. 7), for He

died "that he should gather together in one the children of God" (John xi. 52). *Coming together* for breaking of bread, worship, and mutual edification, is mentioned seven times in 1 Cor. xi. 17, 18, 20, 33, 34; xiv. 23, 26.

Reading the Bible at home, or hearing a lecture or sermon, as a substitute for the worship of the Church, is unscriptural. "Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Heb. x. 25).

"The revival of God's work" is carried forward to its proper goal only when it leads us to worship him in accordance with His own principles (as we have indicated them in the foregoing propositions); for His provisions of grace are surely not intended to terminate with the blessing of the creature, but to lead to the glory of the Creator and the exaltation of the all-glorious name of our Saviour-God. The great awakening at Pentecost resulted in an incorporative unity, for "*all that believed were together,*" "and they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts ii. 42-44); and an awakening that is really of the Lord, and that will continue, will always lead, if not interfered with, to a similar issue.

In the apostles' time the young converts were

not sent back either to the heathen temples or the Jewish synagogues, to be exposed to the idolatrous teaching and influence of the priests of heathenism, or to the Judaising teaching and influence of the Scribes and Rabbis of Judaism; but, as divinely called-out saints, they were diligently gathered together in an assembly by themselves as soon as they were converted; and—being all live coals—when collected into one, they made a bright warm fire, which gave spiritual light and heat to one another, and to the world around them; and from this holy divine society of the one “Church of the living God,” as their centre and home, they went out, in the power of the Holy Ghost, to spread the knowledge of the saving name of Jesus; and they were marvellously blessed in the conversion of souls.

The great open-meeting of all believers for true and Spirit-led worship, mutual edification, and the observance of the Lord’s Supper, having fallen into desuetude throughout Christendom, we plead for its restoration in the name of our dishonoured Lord, and on behalf of His much-injured saints. Meetings for evangelists to preach the gospel to the world, and meetings for true and Spirit-taught ministers to teach the saints are right; but it is wrong to omit the great scriptural meeting of apostolic times, the assembling of the Church

as such, "*on the first day of the week,*" for the breaking of bread and the worship of God.

We are happy to find an attempt being made at present towards having an *open-meeting* among believers on all other days save the Lord's day: but it seems strange to stop it on that day, seeing that *the great open-meeting of Christianity*, according to Scripture, is the assembling of the saints "ON THE FIRST DAY of the week" for the breaking of bread and the worship of God; and no human substitute for it will nourish and perpetuate the spiritual vitality of the children of God. Let all believers, renouncing sectarian practices and human expediency, and acting in the spirit of "*love to all saints,*" and on the ground of the divine principle of being "*members of Christ,*" "come together" for worship on the divine footing of being of the "one body" of Christ, and they will verify His promise—"there am I in the midst of them."

Our meaning will be made plain if you bring our modern churches face to face with the First Epistle to the Corinthians, for they will there see an assembling of the saints in the unity and freedom of the communion of the Holy Ghost, which finds no counterpart within their limits.\*

\* We refer Christian teachers to Lange's *Commentary* to see that we are not singular in expressing ourselves thus.

The testimony in our day is sadly out of proportion to the blessing. Many souls have been converted ; but how few are gathered to the name of Jesus outside of everything that He does not own or allow ! Every saved soul should be there in proof of his love and faithfulness to Christ. It is not Christianlike to take His benefits and not think of His glory. "Were there not ten cleansed ? but where are the nine ?" (Luke xvii. 17.) "These

In vol. vi. N. T., on 1st Corinthians, p. 303, we find the following :—" *Primitive Christian Worship*.—Of this, as observed at Corinth, we have a vivid picture afforded us in this chapter (xiv.) Indeed, it is the only one extant of the kind giving us a clear and instructive glimpse into the nature and working of Church life in those early times. The first thing that strikes us is the absence of all fixed order. No hint is given of the superintendence of any individual or class of persons regulating the services in the Church assemblies even where the mention of such would most naturally be made—as in the case of the disorders spoken of in verses 26-34. The exercises seems to have gone on spontaneously—very much as is now the case in many social gatherings, where 'the meeting,' as the saying is, 'is thrown open.'"

This is a very striking extract from *Lange*. His writers go by what they find in the original Scriptures ; and here we are told that in the worship-meeting of the early Church there was :

1. " *The absence of all fixed order ;* "

things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David. . . . *Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it ; for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name*" (Rev. iii. 7, 8).

Christ is the centre of worship in heaven !

Christ the rejected One here amongst men :

None other Name of salvation is given ;

Sound it, believers, again and again !

2. "*No hint is given of the superintendence of any individual or class of persons regulating the services in the Church assemblies ;*" and,

3. "*The exercises seem to have gone on spontaneously, very much as is now the case where the meeting is thrown open.*"

The Word says,—“ Let all things be done decently and in order.” It would not be decent, nor in order, for the head of a house to be subject to the rules of the children. If you ask—Where then am I to worship ? Where Christ’s presence is—that is, where there is a people gathered to His name (Matt. xviii. 20) ; where there is “ *the absence of all fixed order ;*” where there is “ *no superintendence of any individual or class of persons regulating the services in the church assemblies ;*” and where the worship “ *goes on spontaneously,*” or rather, under the sovereign control of the present Spirit. If you worship on other principles, and according to a system ordered by man, and where the services are regulated and conducted by a special class of men—priests, clergymen, or ministers—it is not worship after the pattern found in the New Testament ; and it is a shame for any saved soul to go on with

Christ is the Sacrifice ! Christ is the Altar !

Christ is the mercy-seat sprinkled with blood !  
Come, ye desponding ones, fear not nor falter,  
Christ is our Peace in the presence of God.

Christ is the Victim divinely appointed,  
Spotless, accepted, attested by fire ;  
Christ our Melchisedec, robed and anointed,  
Royal and priestly His seamless attire.

One only Sacrifice, one only Altar,  
One only mercy-seat God doth allow ;  
Dream not, O man ! His decretal to alter,  
Sealed with the blood of the Holiest now :

One only Offering God hath appointed—  
Stretching His hand, He withheld not the knife !  
One only Priest He hath crown'd and anointed,  
Jesus ! the Way, and the Truth, and the Life !

Jesus ! the centre of worship in heaven !  
Jesus ! despised and rejected of men !  
None other Name of salvation is given—  
Worthy is Jesus, the Lamb that was slain !

“ *Gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God,*” describe the spirit in which they lived in their family and social intercourse. The people who had been in the depths of mourning because of their sins, were on the mountain-top of exultation, that which was not “ *from the beginning,*” and which is not “ according to the Scriptures,” and cannot be countenanced by Christ’s presence ; being, as it is, a dishonour to His holy name.

and not a sinister thought passed through their minds, which were full of joyful exultation, simplicity, and praise to God. Their hearts were full of Christ, and the Spirit who gave and maintained the feeling of oneness, so shed abroad the love of God in their hearts that they were dwelling in God and God in them, and brimful of living praise. This describes the spirit and life of young believers as we now see them. They are full of the spiritual exuberance of a new-found joy ; there is transparent simplicity in their social intercourse, and they are in their normal state of happiness when they are "*praising God.*" Their whole life is a life of praise to God and love to "all saints ;" and were evil thoughts contrary to "the simplicity that is in Christ" not imparted, they would love "all the holy brethren," and be "praising God" with all believers in one Spirit-filled, love-pervaded assembly. Woe be to that man who teaches sectarianism, and thereby sows discord among brethren !

"*And having favour with all the people.*" This is generally the effect first produced by any prodigy of goodness. It was so with the Lord (Luke ii. 52) ; and this great outpouring of the Spirit and conversion of souls. We have seen it repeated in our day in the work of God : but how soon all is changed, and it ends in persecution, imprisonment, and murder !

DAILY ADDING TOGETHER.—“*And the Lord added to [the Church] daily those that were to be saved*” (verse 47).

I put the words “the Church,” which literally means “the assembly,” within brackets, because they tell us that “correct criticism, as well as external evidence, requires that the words should be rejected as an explanatory gloss ;” and “the words translated ‘together’ in next verse, brought back to their place, and the meaning which it bears in this passage (see verse 44)—viz. *together*, in the sense of making up *one sum*, one body assembled in one place.” Probably we should read, “The Lord added together daily such as should be saved.”

The sense is substantially the same as assembly ; and hence, in Acts iv. 23, it is said of Peter and John they went to their own company. There was now a new association to which they belonged, distinct from the old congregation of Israel ; and this beyond a question is formally called *the Church* in chap. v. 11, not as if it were *then* called into being, but most evidently as subsisting and known. It is clear then, that, independently of the phrase in chap. ii. 47, “the assembly,” in a New Testament sense, did in fact begin at Pentecost, as is confessed even by Pearson, Whitby, and others. The great fact stated is, “the Lord added together” in one

Church such as should be saved ; and whatever stones the Lord builds into the spiritual house shall never be taken out : all His building stands : much that man builds is wood, hay, and stubble. The place into which the Lord puts saved ones now is the Church. "Such as should be saved" are the remnant in Israel that God was sparing. It is a class of persons of whom the Seventy speak as the remnant the prophets describe. This very word was used. It was this class of persons whom God was saving : they were saved without doubt as to their souls, but it is not a state but a well-known class. Compare Luke xiii. 23 : "Are the SODSOMENOI (that class), few?" The Jews discussed this point much, but Christ took them from the mental to the moral question—*Will you?*

The Lord added to them, to the Church, daily those who were to be saved from the judgments that should fall on the nation which had rejected the Son of God, their Messiah, and, thank God! from yet deeper ruin. God brought them into the Church—thus owned of Him by the promise of the Holy Ghost—those whom He spared in Israel. A new order of things had commenced, marked by the presence of the Holy Ghost. Here was found the presence and the house of God, although the

old order of things still existed until the execution of judgment on it. "The Church was formed therefore by the power of the Holy Ghost, come down from heaven, on the testimony that Jesus, who had been rejected, was raised up to heaven, being made of God both Lord and Christ. It was composed of the Jewish remnant who were to be spared (the *Sodsomenoi*), with the reserve of bringing in Gentiles whenever God should call them."

Coincident with the Holy Ghost's presence we have the Church; and this agrees with 1 Cor. xii. 13, where it is said that "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body;" that is to say, the formation of the body depends upon the baptism of the Spirit.\* Acts i. shows that the baptism of the

\* Is this baptism of the Holy Spirit continuous?

The effect of this baptism is a continuous thing. The baptism of the Holy Ghost was on the day of Pentecost. The Comforter *came*; He cannot come twice in this order of things, because He was to dwell for ever.

The pouring out of the Spirit is what happened on the day of Pentecost (so Peter tells us), but individuals receive it on believing in Christ's work for the remission of sins. That giving of the Holy Ghost to the individual is the unction and the sealing, and becomes the earnest.

As to a person subsequent to Pentecost being baptized with the Holy Ghost, I should not say so, but I would rather say he was introduced into an already baptized body, but by receiving the Holy Ghost by which he is

Spirit had *not* taken place ; Acts ii. shows that it *had* ; and immediately the fact is apparent that the Church was there as a thing actually found upon the earth, to which "*such as should be saved*" were being added by the Lord—that is, the Lord now had a house upon the earth. The stones were there before, *living stones* : but they were separate ; there was no building of God in this sense here

united to the Head—Christ. Baptism is not employed as to the individual reception. Acts xi. 17 and 1 Cor. xii. are the nearest to applying it to an individual or individuals ; but it is not actually used. But the receiving of the Holy Ghost is equivalent, they having what was originally treated as baptism of the Holy Ghost, and are looked at, as *they are*, as partakers of the same thing. The sum of the gathered disciples were baptized on the day of Pentecost. An individual receives the same Holy Ghost, and is a member of this same body, and is one, and is looked at as one of the baptized body. Acts i. 5 tells us when ; but Acts ii. 38 tells them that on repentance, and baptism for the remission of sins, they will receive this same Holy Ghost ; so did Cornelius. Thus they were incorporated, and were the same as those to whom the Holy Ghost was first given ; and that continued when all the first were gone, for the Comforter was to abide for ever.

As to 1 Cor. x., there is a certain general analogy, but that was baptism with water, the sacramental assembly or house of God. It is only in verses 16, 17, we come to the inner circle of the body.

below. The Lord now acts upon his own words, "Upon this rock I will build my Church." He brings the living stones together ; He builds them into one and the same house, the house of God, and this not by faith merely, but by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, as this chapter shows.

Abundance of scriptures show that it was *not merely for testimony* the Holy Ghost was given. He is the Spirit of adoption : the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. I know that God dwells in me by it, and I in Him ; that I am in Christ and Christ in me ; the body is dead, and the Spirit is life. A thousand precious things concerning my state with God and the Father depend on the Holy Ghost dwelling in me, and my consciousness of these things abounding as life through Him. He is the Comforter come down withal, on which all our condition depends. He is sent by the Father in Christ's name, and by Christ from the Father—one giving conscious relationship as sons, the other knowledge of Christ's glorifying and its consequences ; and a great deal more than all this, for He is the power of all good here. No doubt, therefore, He is the power of testimony, and so the Lord plainly declares (Acts i.) and Pentecost witnessed to it. The word itself is the sword of the Spirit. All true power and wisdom so flows into us. All truth is revealed, communicated as revealed, and received by the Holy Ghost.

As to 1 Cor. xii. 12, 13, it is the aorist (ἐβαπτισθημεν), and therefore says nothing but of the fact : it is continuous, if we speak of individuals receiving the Holy Ghost.

## LECTURE VII.

### THE CURE OF THE CRIPPLE.

WE have now to consider the miraculous restoration of the lame man at the gate of the temple by the power of the name of Jesus.

I. THE HOUR OF PRAYER.—“*Peter and John went up [together] into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour*” (Acts iii. 1). The hours of prayer among the Jews were “evening, morning, and at noon” (Ps. lv. 17)—the third, sixth, and ninth, hours (Dan. vi. 10), or with us 9, 12, and 3 o’clock. The third and ninth hours coincided with the times of offering the morning and evening sacrifices. The apostles, as well as the rest of the Christians at that period, still frequented the temple; for although they were called out from the “untoward generation,” they did not yet regard themselves as anything beyond a godly “company,” in the midst of “the nation of the Jews,” owning Jesus as both “Lord and Christ”

on high. They were indeed the newly-formed Church of which Christ spake when he said to Peter, "On this rock I will build *my Church*;" but they knew it intelligently, by divine teaching, only at a later period. We find in the Acts the gradual transition from Judaism to Christianity; and the apostles as well as others frequenting both sets of services. This transition took place gradually, as trial, revelation, and faith increased.

Of the impropriety of now doing as the apostles and early Christians then did, we have already spoken: for the cross sealed the doom of Jewish worship under law, and apostolic teaching has now formally told the saints to leave it: "Wherefore also Jesus, that He might sanctify the people by His own blood, suffered without the gate; *therefore let us go forth unto Him without the camp*, bearing His reproach" (see Heb. xiii. 10-16). Spiritual intelligence in the full revelation of God will tell us that some things done even by apostles are not to be imitated by us, though we may not say they were improper in them—not having God's completed revelation. The relationship in which we stand determines our privileges, duties, and responsibilities, and the light of revelation guides us in our conduct in connection with our day and sphere.

II. THE LAME BEGGAR AT THE GATE OF THE TEMPLE.—“*And a certain man who was lame from his mother’s womb was being carried, whom they placed every day at the gate of the temple called Beautiful, to ask alms of those who were going into the temple; who seeing Peter and John about to enter into the temple, asked to receive alms.*” This is a sample of the “many wonders and signs done by the apostles” (ii. 43). It was a real miracle—“a wonder”—that a man born lame, needing to be carried, should be made to walk. He was laid daily as a beggar at the Beautiful gate of the temple. Whether this was *Nicanor’s gate*, the gate *Susan*, or *Huldah*, must remain uncertain; but it was at one of the temple gates where he was laid, that he might ask to receive alms of the people in the thoroughfare of the worshippers at a season when they might feel their hearts most affected, and their hands more readily opened in charity. “Placed every day” there, he would be notorious, and this made the miracle more generally known (ver. 10). The fact of their having this beggar at all at their temple gate was an evidence, as well as a type, of the impotent and beggared condition of the nation. When things were right in Israel, there were no beggars. In the days of Christ and His apostles they were rife, for the

nation was a moral ruin. When God's fear had left them, they ceased to care for man. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart; and thy neighbour as thyself." "Who is my neighbour?" The man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves who robbed him, wounded him, and left him for dead—that abject wretch is your neighbour, and you give him the go-by. The people ought not to have had beggars in God's good land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

This beggar addressed himself to the apostles; but though they were possessed of the healing power of Christ, his expectations were bounded by the receiving of "*alms*." He had become reconciled to his sad lot, and all he looked for was mere maintenance. This is like a despairing sinner who has become reconciled to his state, and, hopeless of being able to get out of it: he makes the wants of the body and temporal things generally his only business; never rising to the higher conception that Christ is able to save sinners and deliver from the dire bondage of a fallen and corrupt nature. The more miserable the man, the more is Christ's power displayed.

Gossner says sweetly, "This man is an image of natural inability. We must be carried as long as

our feet are without strength. But He who lays us at the most beautiful gate of the temple, which is called *Jesus Christ*, has in truth carried us to the gate of life and of the power of God. We shall then be assuredly healed."

III. THE STEADFAST LOOK.—“*And Peter looking steadfastly upon him with John, said, Look on us*” (verse 3). “And Peter fastening his eyes upon him.” “Great is the power of a steadfast gaze :” ch. xiii. 9, “Saul set his eyes on Elymas” (Beng.) The soul may go forth through the eyes. Peter set his eyes on this man for Christ, no doubt drawn out to him by the Holy Ghost, who was to have him cured of his lameness, that He might use him as a walking announcement to “the people of the Jews,” that Christ, though in heaven, was still working as their healer and the forgiver of their sins—the marks of the true Messiah promised to the fathers. It happens still in the case of those who are led by the Spirit, that they “fasten their eyes” on one person rather than another, as vessels of mercy, and objects of the Saviour’s grace and power. And if we were thoroughly under the power of the Holy Ghost, we should be always led by the Spirit to fix on the very persons God intends to bless ; and, by His divine guid-

ance, to say and do exactly what we ought in the circumstances, instead of merely firing blank cartridge and beating the air, as is too often the case. No doubt Peter's heart, as well as John's, felt for this poor helpless man in his pitiable condition ; and they set their eyes on him with all that commiseration which love teaches the heart to feel for Christ's sake. But why this cripple was cured rather than others, Christ would teach was an expression of divine sovereignty in conferring the blessings of health and cure, as well as the benefits of grace (Luke iv.) ; and that God might be glorified in him (John ix.) But in fastening their eyes on this hopeless object of compassion, they continued to display the grace of Christ, who, though He was the one who had made the sun stand still, had been, as they may have remembered, Himself made to stand still at a blind beggar's cry for mercy (Luke xviii. 35-43). Those who are not living like the Master, don't fasten their eyes on those who appeal to them for aid ; but give a careless glance at them, look hastily elsewhere, and pass on, neither giving a word of grace nor an alms. Peter, on the contrary, under the power of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. viii.), both looked fixedly on the lame beggar, and said to him, "*Look on us.*"

“*And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something from them*” (verse 5) ; but he little expected the boon which they conferred. “It is even a good deal when people look on ministers, expecting to ‘*receive something,*’ for, as a rule, they have not even that vague hope. Alas ! how often it may occur, that poor awakened and hungering souls look on their teacher, expecting to ‘*receive something,*’ and are sent empty away.” The effect of Peter’s word was to turn his eyes upon the apostles with hope and confidence. He was fixed and intent, and gazed on them with eyes and mind. Thus shall the nation in its helplessness look on its Saviour, and get a deliverance beyond all expectation, not being maintained merely, but set up afresh under Christ, their risen and glorified Messiah, under the new covenant, with all its spiritual as well as temporal blessing, and enjoying, as a revived nation on the earth, in connection with their King, “the sure mercies of David” (Jer. xxxi. 31 ; Ez. xxxvii. ; Dan. xii. ; Rom. xi. ; Isa. lv.)

IV. IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST.—“*But Peter said, Silver and gold I have not ; but what I have this give I to thee : In the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, rise up and walk*” (verse 6). The man’s

expectation of receiving money was disappointed by Peter's word, "*Silver and gold I have not;*" but he gives him a far better gift, and one which he never durst have asked for. The apostles, like their Master, were poor in earthly good, but rich in heavenly power and grace.

Christianity is just the contrast of Judaism. The latter was temporal peace, prosperity and plenty in God's earthly inheritance. The Christian state is to be blessed "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ;" but as to their lot in this world, poverty, pilgrimage, and persecution, with an inheritance in reversion in heaven (1 Pet. i.)

The great error of the Church has been to reverse this and assume the world now. This has been done most fully by Rome, although all the Churches are more or less infected by this plague of worldliness. It is said that Thomas Aquinas, visiting the Pope when large sums of money were counted, the Pope remarked to him, "Peter has no longer to say, 'Silver and gold have I none.' "Neither can he now say (added Thomas) 'Rise up and walk.'"

There is much moral force in this remark: for the Church's inefficiency has always been in proportion to her temporal prosperity. And what is

true of the Church as a whole is true of individuals. Many a successful merchant can look back to a time when he had grace and power working in his soul, and ability to do efficient work for God, which too much absorption with the world has robbed him of, and left him like a withered leaf.

The Lord had given His disciples power to cure diseases, when He called them to the apostleship (Matt. x.), and He had also reassured them of that power after His resurrection (Mark xvi. 17, 18); and this was the spiritual resource to which Peter referred when he said, "*What I have, this give I to thee.*"

They had been recently endued with the power of the Spirit coming upon them to bear witness to the once despised and crucified, but now risen, Jesus of Nazareth; and as the Holy Ghost was come down to display His glory and maintain His honour before men, Peter's heart being set on the Spirit's object, he felt he could count on the Spirit's power with him in using the precious name of Jesus; and so, addressing the lame man, he says — "*In the name of Jesus the Nazarene, rise up and walk.*"

"In the name of Jesus" is an expression which can be rendered by no equivalent logical paraphrase. In

using His name the works were wrought as if He were there in person, doing them "by the power of God." The works were "*through*" the apostles, "but only as His instruments, by the divine agency of the Holy Ghost." Peter was in possession of a name of grace and power that is above every name, and which he now employed to impart a vitality, power, and strength to the feet of this lame beggar which they had never known before. And there was on Peter's part an *act* also as well as a *word*.

*"And having taken hold of him by the right hand, he raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankle-bones were made strong"* (verse 7). Peter's faith in Jesus' name was firm, and he acts with that energy which evinced his belief that the man would be cured. He had looked intently on him, and made him look on him and John; then he uses the name of Jesus, and the man submits to it; lastly, he grasps the man by his right hand, lifting him up, and he rises at once by the divine energy communicated.

"In that moment the crippled limbs were touched as if they had been subjected to an electric shock. They were strengthened and restored by the Almighty power of God. The man leaps up with an elasticity hitherto unknown to

himself. He can do that which he had never learned to do from the time of his birth—he can stand and he can walk. This is another aspect in which the miracle should be viewed. This was the moment when the spark of faith was kindled. The word gave healing to his body by giving faith to his soul.”

V. WALKING AND LEAPING AND PRAISING GOD.”  
—“ *And leaping up he stood and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God ; and all the people saw him walking and praising God. And they recognised him, that it was he who sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him* ” (verses 8-10).

“He stood and *walked*.” “Whither? Naturally with the two apostles into the temple. And feeling more and more exultant in his *walking*—his fresh, never-learned acquirements—he could in no way either stand still or sit down, but began to jump and leap ‘like a hart’ (Isa. xxxv. 6), loudly and heartily praising God for giving him this soundness in the name of Jesus of Nazareth.”

With all his heart he could repeat Ps. ciii.  
“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits ; who forgiveth all thine iniquities ;

who *healeth* all thy diseases." Body and soul he rejoiced in the living God; and the apostles did not repress the exuberance of his emotion, nor forbid the demonstrativeness of his joy in "leaping and praising God." What is the fruit of true nature or of faith Christianity allows, but what is pretended and assumed it exposes and disallows.

The miracle was public and notorious, for "all the people" who had assembled in the temple courts as worshippers that afternoon, "saw him walking and praising God;" and the multitude gathered by the miracle were the congregation that God had assembled to hear Peter's sermon. As the miracle of the tongues drew together a vast concourse at the time of the morning sacrifice to hear Peter's first sermon on the day of Pentecost, so this other wonder drew the people together at the time of the evening sacrifice to hear another testimony to Israel from the same apostle's lips.

"And they recognised him, that it was he who sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple." The great point here was the identification of the man on whom the miracle of healing had been shown. "They recognised him." He was well and widely known to them. The effect upon them was to fill them with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him, for they knew that his

cure could be accounted for only by referring it to the power of God. He was a living, walking, leaping, praising manifestation of the grace and power of Jesus of Nazareth ; and his overflowing gratitude in praising God must have added to the awe and amazement with which they beheld him, as it gave evidence that grace had won his heart at the same time that power had reached and cured his feet.

“ *And as he held Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico which is called Solomon’s, greatly wondering* ” (verse 11). The healed cripple held Peter and John fast—clung to them as his *physicians*, and no doubt told the inquiring wondering crowd, that they were the men who had healed him. A great circle of wondering people collected around them in that same Solomon’s porch, where Jesus walked and preached after healing the man who was born blind (John x.) Peter, with this “exceedingly amazed” congregation before him, and the healed cripple beside him as the immediate occasion of his discourse, began to preach what might justly be termed a Jewish sermon, with Jesus of Nazareth as its subject. It consists first of an instruction regarding the author of the miracle, then an exhortation to repentance and conversion.

## LECTURE VIII.

### THE NATION CHALLENGED TO REPENT.

PETER'S address to his countrymen arose naturally out of the healing of the mendicant cripple.—“*And Peter, seeing it, answered the people, Men of Israel, why are ye astonished at this? or why do ye gaze on us, as if we had by our own power or piety made him to walk?*” Peter answered their amazement and earnest inquiring gaze. He addresses them as Men of Israel, and his whole sermon regards them as on that ground. He did not so much object to their wonder, as at their wondering at them, as though they were the source of the miracle. He at once removes the false impression as he had done in the preceding chapter (verses 14, 15); and he is precise in stating that they were wrong in thinking that they by their own power or piety had made the cripple to walk. “There had been neither *magical craft* nor any other supposed means of working miracles, nor is it because of any meritorious efficacy, so as to have obtained this for him on our own account.” Those

who claim to be Peter's successors teach that though it may be God's power that works, it is the piety of the saints that procures the desired benefit; and while we would not be caught by the superstitions of Rome, let us avoid an exaggerated way of speaking of successful servants of the Lord, such as indicates that they are more in our minds than the Master whom they serve. It was of Simon the sorcerer they said, "*This man is the great power of God.*" Although Peter was a man of both power and piety of no ordinary sort by the grace of the Holy Ghost, yet these had nothing to do with the working of the miracle, and hence he promptly turns away the gaze of the wondering crowd from him and John to Jesus, God's glorified servant.

I. PETER REFERS THE CURE OF THE CRIPPLE TO THE GLORIFIED JESUS.—*The God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant, Jesus, whom ye delivered up and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, when he had judged that He should be let go. But ye denied the holy and righteous One, and demanded that a man [that was] a murderer should be granted to you. But the originator of life ye slew, whom God raised up from among [the] dead, whereof we are witnesses: and by faith in His name, His name has made*

*this man strong whom ye behold and know : and the faith which is by Him has given him this complete soundness in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I know that ye did it in ignorance, as also your rulers; but God has thus fulfilled what He had announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets that His Christ should suffer”* (verses 13-18).

“The God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob,” shows that he is addressing the “Men of Israel,” in such a way as to bring home the guilt of rejecting their Messiah most vividly. “The God of our fathers has glorified His Servant Jesus.”

“Behold my *Servant* whom I have chosen” (Isa. xlii. 1). He “glorified” Him after His death and resurrection, by setting Him at His own right hand. Some refer this glorifying to His life on earth (John xii. 28 ; 2 Pet. i. 17). Others refer it to the present miracle specially, or to the whole of His exaltation, or to both conjointly. It seems to us to be the historic fact of setting the rejected Jesus at His right hand ; although this miracle, and all the testimony borne by the Apostles, linked themselves with Jesus in the glory of God, and gave honour to His name. “God glorified His *Servant* Jesus.” This is what God says—it is not Son. We know Him (and the Spirit of God, who wrote this book, infinitely better knew Him) to be

the Son of God. But we must always hold to what God says ; and the testimony of God did not yet, and especially in dealing with the Jews, set forth all the glory of Christ. It was gradually brought out ; and the more that man's unbelief grew, so much the more God's maintenance of the Lord's glory was manifested." Their delivering up of Jesus, and denying Him in the presence of Pilate, when he judged He should be loosed, and desiring a murderer instead, and killed the Prince of life, only showed what they were ; but God has glorified Him ; and His name through faith, now, is honoured by God working miracles, such as the healing of this cripple. It is striking what grace will do. Peter, the very man who had denied his Lord, now charges the men of Israel with that sin. But he had met the Lord in resurrection, and had his soul restored, and so conscious is he of his nothingness, that he disclaims all power or piety, but at the same time so conscious of the forgiving love of Jesus blotting out his sins, that he can boldly challenge the "Men of Israel" with denying their Messiah. Even Pilate would have let Him go ; but they denied the Holy and the Just, in the presence of Pilate. Messiah and Barabbas being set before them, they desired Satan's *Son of the Father* and denied God's ; they preferred the destroyer of

life to the *originator* of life. The Prince of life ye slew : God raised Him from the dead. The contrasts are very marked, and everything tells against the "Men of Israel." (We have considered all this more at length in chapter ii.) "And by faith in His name, His name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know ; and the faith which is by Him has given him this complete soundness in the presence of you all" (v. 16). This assigns the cause for the miraculous effect which they were looking upon. It was the name of this Lord of life, faith in His name; the faith which is by Him, that had given this man strength and perfect soundness (1 Pet. i. 21). The apostle seems full of the all-powerful name of Jesus, and of faith in His name. There was nothing before his mind but the glorious name of Jesus, and he cannot but speak of Him. The apostles were the witnesses of Christ's resurrection ; the "Men of Israel" were eye-witnesses of the effect of the glorious power of His name in the case of a healed cripple now before them. They had denied and slain Him *through unbelief* ; His name, now that He is exalted, is seen to be all-powerful *through faith* in it. Thus, they were reprov'd and convicted of sin in denying and slaying their Messiah.

But Peter continues firmly yet kindly to carry

forward conviction in their minds; "And now I know that ye did it in ignorance, as also your rulers." Paul was himself an instance of this Jewish ignorance, the veil being upon the heart in the reading of Moses, and he speaks in the synagogue of Antioch in the same manner as Peter here: "Because they knew Him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath day. They have fulfilled them in condemning Him" (Acts xiii. 27).

"Ye did it in ignorance, as also your rulers." One is sometimes inclined to be too severe with men for opposing Christ and persecuting Christians, and not to give sufficient place to "ignorance." Saul of Tarsus was as conscientious in seeking to destroy the Church as he was afterwards in building it up; but he tells us, "I did it *ignorantly in unbelief*." Ignorance may lessen though it does not cancel guilt. There is as determined opposition to Christ to-day as in the times of His apostles, and much of it, one would hope, is from ignorance and in unbelief: for to sin wilfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth removes a man from the sphere of "ignorance" to that of malice and enmity, for which there is "*no more sacrifice for sins*" (Heb. x.) Jesus had said on the cross, "Father, forgive them, *for they know not what*

*they do* ;” and this their ignorance, pleaded by the Redeemer on the cross, is precisely what the Holy Ghost now admits. This intercession of the Lord on the cross provided that, instead of judgment being instantly executed because of their unparalleled wickedness in denying and slaying “the Just One,” full free absolute forgiveness should be proclaimed to them on condition of their repentance. And it is a national forgiveness of which the apostle is speaking, and a restoration of their forfeited national blessings, even including the return of Jesus Himself, and the setting up of His kingdom in power and glory.

Their rejection of their Messiah led to the fulfilment of “all things spoken by the prophets, *that Christ should suffer*” (Isa. liii. 6 ; Luke xxiv. 46). The verb “*to suffer*,” as in chap. i. 3, indicates “*a definite single act*.” “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” “God announced before that Christ should suffer;” hence they ought to have known it, seeing that God, *by His prophets*, had said before “that His Anointed one should suffer.” Theirs was guilty ignorance, but still pardonable on condition of their repentance. Guilty of the ten thousand talents (Matt. xviii. 23-35), the Great King remits it them—sending them the message of mercy that calls them to repentance.

This is the purport of what we have now to consider of Peter's second sermon.

## II. REPENTANCE AND CONVERSION PREACHED.—

*“Repent then and be converted for the blotting out of your sins, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and He may send Jesus Christ who was foreordained for you, whom heaven indeed must receive till the time of the restoring of all things, of which God has spoken by the mouth of His holy prophets since the world began”* (verses 19-21).

This passage presents Israel's repentance and conversion as the precursor of—

1. The nation's forgiveness of sins.
2. Times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, “the great season of joy and rest which it was understood the coming of the Messiah in His glory was to bring with it.”
3. The sending of Jesus from the heavens.
4. The restoring of all things of which God has spoken by His holy prophets.

Christ had instructed them to preach repentance and remission of sins, in His name to all nations, “beginning at Jerusalem,” the chief city of “the nation of the Jews,” and the guiltiest of all the nations of the earth (Luke xxiv. 47).

Peter is addressing them as “Men of Israel,” in

reference to Israel's blessing as such. All that had taken place as yet might have been only the commencement of a repentant remnant in Israel, that, had the nation, as such, joined them now, at Peter's word, in repenting of their sin in regard to their Messiah, it would have been all blotted out, and times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord would have come; and the glorified Jesus having come, the times of restoring of all things in their favour as a nation would have come, and thus the predicted kingdom of the Messiah would have gone on, with the converted Jewish nation as its centre and Christ as their King, subjugating and reigning over all nations—they enjoying righteousness, peace under His glorious reign, and every earthly blessing as foretold by the prophets. This is what Peter meant, and precisely what the Spirit said by his lips, as God lingered in mercy over His sinful nation, "a people laden with iniquity."

But why should this be so, some may ask, when God knew that they would not repent and be converted? Why, they might also ask, was Jesus presented as their Messiah before His crucifixion? and why were they laid under solemn responsibility, on pain of destruction as a nation, to receive Him, and yet He had destined Him to die as a sacrifice for sin? "*Known unto God* are all

His works from the beginning of the world ;” but His purpose and grace, as well as perfect knowledge, do not set aside man’s responsibility, nor the sincerity of God in making offers to men in such a passage as this. Man had to be openly tested that God might be openly vindicated. They had the unbelieving heart at enmity with God, which preferred a murderer to the Just One, and they had rejected and crucified Him. When they had refused Him in His life-ministry, God raised Him to His throne, and through that very death proposed in His grace forgiveness on their repentance ; and here He suspends that and all the blessings the prophets spoke of, and the sending of Jesus Himself on their repentance : and all would have been given them had they repented, and the millennial glory would have been immediately introduced. But on the definitive refusal of this, when preached to them with the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven—culminating in the stoning of Stephen—a heavenly glory was opened, and a reserve of grace was exhibited in connection with this refused but glorified Man that God had purposed in Christ to bestow before the world was, but which could not have been manifested but for their refusing to repent and be converted.

This is what Romans xi. teaches ; but it does not close without telling us that though Israel's blessings are now held in abeyance during this Church-gathering period, a time is coming when the Deliverer will come to Zion and turn away ungodliness from Jacob. "*So all Israel*" (as Israel, not as brought into the Church, for there will then be no Church on earth to bring them into) "*shall be saved,*" although "the wrath has now come upon them to the uttermost." The setting up of Christ's kingdom and glory on the earth is still suspended on the fulfilment of this word of St. Peter, which we are now looking at. It will begin with Israel's repentance and forgiveness at the second coming of Christ, and continue for a thousand years (Rev. xx.)

III. STRANGE DOCTRINES.—Strange doctrines are sometimes taught from verse 21—(1), That it refers to the present, and the times of refreshing are such as men feel when they have repented and been converted. But this cannot be the meaning, for the word "shall come," signifies a definite *arrival*, one and the same for all, not a mere occurrence, and they are dependent on the Lord Jesus being sent, and men on the earth having "the presence of the Lord." "*Until*" (ἄχρι): Not *during*,

as the advocates of *the present spiritual sense* of the passage wish to render it, but "UNTIL" (Alford). (2), The doctrine of universal restoration is also taught from the expression, "the times of the restitution of *all things*;" but this cannot be, for the prophets did not mean, by this restoring of all things, all men: it refers to the glorious restoration of all things in the millennial age—the *Palin-genesia*, which is the theme of all the prophets from the beginning. They looked over the present period, and prophesied of these times of the kingdom and glory of the Messiah. (3), It is taught also that "whom heaven indeed must receive," means that Christ receives or takes possession of heaven; but this is unsuited to the sense and forced, and heaven is the subject, for the heaven receives Him meanwhile because the earth has rejected Him; but on the repentance of Israel He will come again, and then the earth will receive Him as the King of Glory. (4), Then again others make restoration *fulfilment*, and link "*which*" with "*all things*," and refer it to what is going on now: but "*which*" refers to "*times*," not to "*all things*." To render "*restitution*" by "*fulfilment*" is, says Alford, "*against all precedent*." (So also Dr. Lechler in "Lange's Commentary.") "The times of refreshing" are to be regarded *subjectively*;

“the times of restitution of all things” *objectively*: the one refers to the effect on *persons*, the other to the effect on *things*. Both will take place in the future, and the coming of them is dependent on Israel’s repentance and conversion *as a nation* (Ps. lxvii. ; Isa. ii.)

“By Israel’s rejection of their Messiah, as now proposed to them in Peter’s preaching, and definitively in the case of Stephen, the way was prepared for the revelation of ‘the mystery,’ till then necessarily concealed, that the period of Christ’s rejection by Israel and the earth should be occupied in the calling and formation by the Holy Ghost of ‘THE CHURCH’—the elect Body or Bride of Christ—to be the vessel of His sympathies and sharer of His rejection by the world, while He sits on the Father’s throne on high; and also to be the sharer of His glory when He shall ‘take to Him His great power and reign.’”

IV. JESUS THE PROPHET SPOKEN OF BY MOSES.  
—“*Moses indeed said, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up to you out of your brethren like me: him shall ye hear in everything whatever he shall say to you; and it shall be that whatsoever soul shall not hear that prophet shall be destroyed from among the people. And, indeed, all the pro-*

*phets, from Samuel, and those in succession after [him], as many as have spoken, have announced also these days. Ye are [the] sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God appointed to our fathers, saying to Abraham, And in thy Seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. To you first, God having raised up His servant, has sent Him, blessing you in turning every one of you from your wickedness" (verses 22-26).*

Peter now confirms what he has said by reference to prophetic testimony from Moses downwards.

*"Moses indeed said" (in Deut. xviii. 15, 18, 19) — "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up to you out of your brethren like me" (verse 22).*

The Lord applies this to Himself in John (v. 45-47), when He says to the Jews: "Moses, in whom ye trust, will accuse you: for if ye believed Moses ye would also believe me: *for he wrote of me.*" Philip had no doubt this *writing* in his mind when he said to Nathanael—"We have found Him of whom Moses in the law *did write*, Jesus of Nazareth (John i. 45). The people also, by asking John the Baptist, "Art thou *that prophet?*" showed that this prophecy was never understood to have been fulfilled by the raising up of any intervening prophet between Moses and Jesus. He was the

Prophet Moses spoke of, as Peter now confirms it to us by his quoting in substance Moses' words. And like Moses He was a Prophet mighty in word and deed—a Mediator, Deliverer, Lawgiver, and Founder of a new dispensation, although as far superior to Moses as the Son is to the servant (Heb. iii. 1-6). Christ had been raised up in being sent to His own as their Messiah, the Word made flesh: for He “was made of the seed of David according to the flesh” (Rom. i. 3).

Now this great Prophet and Deliverer was come; and so Peter sets before them, not only the coming, the Blessor's arrival and rejection in their midst, but the awfulness of trifling with it. Whoever would not bow to Him and hearken to His Word was to be cut off, according to their own Moses' declaration—“And it shall be that whatsoever soul shall not hear that prophet shall be destroyed from among the people.” All the prophets from Samuel, the next great prophet to Moses, and all his successors, have all announced the coming of those days. They were the sons of the prophets and of the covenant made to Abraham—“*In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed*” (Gen. xii. 3, xviii. 18, xxii. 18). They were the very parties who had a hereditary interest in all that their prophets had spoken of blessings to Israel, natural heirs of

the promises of the covenant made with their father Abraham. The "SEED" was now come—"He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy SEED, which is CHRIST" (Gal. iii. 16). They, as "sons of the covenant" had now presented to them the Christ raised up of God, and it was for them to declare themselves; and they had done so in the most awful way, having denied, rejected, and slain Him; but at His intercession God was willing to pardon it all, did they only repent and become converted, for the blotting out of their sins.

V. "TO THE JEW FIRST."—"To you first, God having raised up His servant Jesus, hath sent Him blessing you, in turning every one of you from your wickedness" (verse 26). "To you first," for they had precedence as the natural heirs, "sons of the prophets and of the covenant" (verse 25). Neither Peter nor his hearers yet knew of any other way for the Gentiles to be blessed, except as coming in under the wing of the Jews; and this was the sort of thing Peter here contemplated—not the Church in which there is neither Jew nor Greek (though the believing Jews were now indeed added to the Church for salvation).

"Having raised up His servant Jesus." This re-

fers to the raising up in the flesh, doubtless ; but as He had spoken of God raising Him up from the dead, the whole of God's act in raising Him up from Mary's womb to the throne of glory would now be before Peter's mind, and the minds of many of his hearers ; for He was originally sent to bless them (Matt. i. 21) ; and now that He is at the throne of God, and the Holy Ghost has come down from Him to the earth, the work of blessing in turning His people from their wickedness is still being carried on. As Christ in person preached repentance and conversion, so does Peter now preach repentance and conversion in the power of the Holy Ghost.

“Thus we have an appeal to the nation as such ; for in all this, it will be observed, he does not speak a word to them of the Lord Jesus as Head of the Church ; we have no hint of this truth yet to anybody. Nay, we have not Jesus spoken of, even in the same height as in the preceding chapter ii. We have Him in heaven it is true ; but about to return and bring in earthly power, blessing, and glory, if Israel only turned with repentance to Him. Such was the testimony of Peter. It was a true word ; and it remains true. When Israel shall turn in heart to the Lord, He who secretly works this in grace will return publicly to

them. When they shall say, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of Jehovah," the Messiah will come in fulness of blessing. The heavens will retain Him no more, but will give Him up, who will fill earth as well as heaven with glory. No word of God perishes ; all abides perfectly true. Meanwhile, other and deeper counsels have been brought to light by the unbelief of Israel."

Persisting in their unbelief and rejection of their Messiah, even in His ascension-glory, "the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost." Because of unbelief they were broken off "from their own olive-tree" of promise, as God's favoured people ; and "believers" of this present period "are grafted in." The Church has been called out and united to her heavenly Head in glory ; and the Gentiles, who compose it (as well as the Jews), have "become partakers of His promise *in Christ by the gospel*," instead of sharing the promise made to Abraham, by means of the repentant and converted nation of the Jews under their returned Messiah when reigning in His glory.

## LECTURE IX.

### THE APOSTLES BEFORE THE COUNCIL.

IN the third chapter the people had been exhorted to repent, that they might as a nation be forgiven, and that all that had been spoken by the prophets of blessing to them and to the whole earth might have its fulfilment: but just as the apostles had brought them to this point, and they were waiting for their repentance, a company came forth upon them from the hierarchical authorities in the temple, and a stop was put to the further preaching by the arrest of the preachers.

There had been a great accession of individuals to the apostles' fellowship, but now an opportunity is to be given the nation through its rulers to receive or reject the testimony of Jesus.

I. THE ARREST.—The hostility of the nation to the preaching of Christ with the Holy Ghost appears for the first time since Pentecost, instead of its repentance: “*And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and captain of the temple and*

*the Sadducees came upon them, being distressed on account of their teaching the people, and preaching by Jesus the resurrection from among [the] dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in ward till the morrow: for it was already evening"*(verses 1-3).

It is "*speaking to the people*"—not preaching fine orations over their heads—that converts souls in thousands from the world to Christ (verse 4), and at the same time calls forth the hostility of the hierarchy and the unbelieving world, who refuse to bow before the name of Jesus, humble themselves in repentance and confession, and accept forgiveness of their sins. The parties who came upon them were "*the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees:*" but they were chiefly, if not all, belonging to the Jewish hierarchy.

The priestly chiefs, with the leader of the Levitical guard of the temple, and the elders and rulers, are believed to have been generally Sadducean at that time (Acts v. 17) ; and (as in our day Broad Church views) seem to have become the prevailing party—they having got rid of Christ, as they had thought ; for though the Sadducees were fewer in number, their influence was very great, just as now with Rationalists. Josephus says: "Their opinions were received by few but by those of the greatest dignity."

The Pharisees were the chief adversaries of a living Christ, because He exposed their traditions, superstitions, and hypocrisy; the Sadducees were the chief opponents of the preaching of a risen Christ, because if it were proved that He rose from the dead, the doctrine of the resurrection and a future state of rewards and punishments were thereby proved, and their creed shown to be false. And of this preaching of Peter the resurrection of Jesus had been the central theme. The priests were distressed at their teaching the people without any authorisation, being common men and not masters in Israel; and the Sadducees were distressed because of their preaching through Jesus as an example of the resurrection from the dead.

Baumgarten says, "The priests were displeased that men who had proceeded from no school should nevertheless take upon themselves the task of public teaching, and should, by so doing, appear to derogate from the dignity of the priestly office (Mal. ii. 7). On the contrary, the captain of the temple, instead of inquiring into the cause of the phenomenon, allows himself to be carried away by appearances, and sees, in the excitement which the presence of the apostles had caused among the people, symptoms of danger to public tranquillity. And, finally, the Sadducees, who ought to have

been converted from the error of infidelity by the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, remained firm in their unbelief, and wished to put that conflicting testimony to silence. These men, of whom the greater part held office, and were of repute in Israel, had, before all others, a call to take to heart the mighty wonder and its impressive significance, and to lead the people along the path pointed out by the apostles. But instead of fulfilling the duties of their station in Israel, they clung each one to his own prejudices, and allowed personal considerations to triumph over all that their rank and position demanded of them. Abusing the influence that had been given them, they cast the apostles in prison."

Calvin says, "The moment evangelical truth rises, Satan rises to meet it in all possible ways, and puts everything in motion to kill it in the bud."

"The cross always accompanies the true gospel," says Jonas.

Starke says truly, "When Christ accomplishes a good work through His apostles, Satan also soon presents himself, attended by his apostles, who belong both to the laity and clergy. In any attempt to inflict an injury on true Christianity, Pharisaic priests are willing to avail themselves of the aid even of Herodians or Sadducees (Matt.

xxii. 15, 16). Pride, self-interest, and envy, teach men to hate the truth on account of its friends, and to hate its friends on account of the truth."

"*And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold.*" Such is the experience of the gospel; it offers mercy to the world, and receives evil in return (Ps. cix. 6). This is the course adopted by the ungodly and hypocritical; they resort, not to arguments, but to violence and carnal weapons. When they have no arguments they inflict blows; when they have no proofs they produce fetters.

What drew out all this opposition? Especially the word respecting Jesus the Risen One. The world is willing to endure moral lectures, or even abstract evangelical truth. But when Jesus Christ, personally, the Crucified and Risen One, is proclaimed, the opposition of the natural heart is aroused. And yet all that is precious to the believing heart is found in Christ personally. In the "hold," Peter might now reflect on his words to Jesus, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee into prison" (Luke xxii. 33); the time had in part come of which Christ had spoken to him, "Thou shalt follow me afterwards" (John xiii. 36). This was the first night in prison for the two apostles of Christ, Peter and John:—all for being "witnesses of His resurrection." "*For it was already evening.*"

Hence, if it were about six o'clock, and they began to preach shortly after three, chapter iii. can only contain an outline of Peter's address ; the preaching must have gone on for more than two hours ; and the result of that preaching was most blessed in its effect on the hearers, though it led to the arrest and imprisonment of the apostles : "*the word of God is not bound ;*" and thousands of souls were converted.

"*But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men had become about five thousand*" (verse 4). The last number we read of was "about three thousand souls" (ii. 41). Subsequently, after other accessions (chaps. v. 14, vi. 1, 7), they became several myriads : chap. xxi. 20, "Thou seest how many *myriads* of Jews there are who believe." The number of the *men* here is said to have been about five thousand, which takes in the whole of the men who had been added to the Church since the day of Pentecost ; and supposing the women and children were as many, about ten thousand would now be professing faith in Christ.

The truth may be oppressed, but it cannot be suppressed : "*Many believed*" the word about Jesus and were saved. *Believed!* why should this not be enough now to tell that the soul has passed from death to life? Dr. J. A. Alexander says

well : "This is one of the standing scriptural expressions for the saving change described in modern religious phraseology as *getting religion, becoming pious, becoming a Christian, or obtaining a hope*, with respect to all which innovations on the Primitive Church dialect, it may well be said, '*the old is better :*' they *believed.*"

Why should not the priestly party rejoice that such a great work of grace was making a stir at their temple gates? Because (1) it was not under their direction and control; and (2) because it brought in a new religion that gave life from the dead in connection with a risen Saviour, and a religion of vitality and reality was distasteful to dead, formal, Sadducean ecclesiastics, as it is to such to this day.

II. THE EXAMINATION.—"*And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, were gathered together at Jerusalem, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of high priestly family; and having placed them in the midst, they inquired, in what power, and in what name, have ye done this?*" (verses 5-7).

"When an injury may be inflicted on Jesus and the Church, the ungodly are always ready to as-

semble: they are willing to dispense with sleep and all other comforts."—*Starke*.

This was now a time of unusual importance. The Sanhedrim, the great national council, meets early in the morning to try the preachers of Jesus and the resurrection, and who were working wonders in His name in Israel. We have four of the council mentioned by name. Of these, the first two are Annas and Caiaphas—names evidently of no good omen, for it was while these two high priests were in authority that the gospel had begun its course (Luke iii. 2), and had ended so shamefully for Israel in the death of Jesus (John xviii. 13; Matt. xxvi. 3). The question to be decided was the grave one, Whether the apostles were to be regarded as prophets of God or seducers to idolatry (Deut. xiii., also xviii.); and the Sanhedrim was the proper court to try them. It was composed of (1) high priests; (2) elders of the people; and (3) scribes. The generic name for the whole of them was "rulers." The sitting seems to have been held in the city, not in the temple: "in Jerusalem."

"*In what power, and in what name, have ye done this?*" Evidently they had been listening to Peter's discourse, or else they had received a full report of it, for in asking that question they use

two of his most prominent words, *power* and *name* (chap. iii. 6, 12, 16). It has been started as an objection, Why, when they were so annoyed at the preaching, do they not inquire with regard to it but of the miracle out of which as an occasion it sprang?

They knew that the miracle had been wrought: it was indeed publicly known; and the healed cripple was before them. They asked by what *power*, and by what *name*, that they might lay a snare for them, and if they had used the name of Jesus for Jehovah construe it into a perverting to idolatry (Deut. xiii.), since they thought that the name of Jehovah and Jesus could be shown to be distinct; and thus they had got here the established test of false prophecy. This seems to account for the Sanhedrim proceeding at once to the question of the miracle, little thinking what turn the Spirit of Jesus in Peter would give the saving name. "By what power" does not refer to authority, but *power* in its literal meaning. "*Name*" has the same meaning as in chap. iii. 6, 16. How solemn for the apostles to stand before the same godless men, and on the same spot, as Jesus had stood two months before! How literally they were His witnesses"! This high-priestly interrogator, in the very question, "Have you done this?"

testifies to the great deed done, and that *these* people did it, and also the name and power by which it was done! Besides, they do not affirm so boldly as before that in performing the miracle the name of a man had been substituted for that of God, after all that had happened (John x. 33, xix. 7).

### III. PETER'S ANSWER BEFORE THE COUNCIL.

—“*Then Peter, filled with [the] Holy Spirit, said to them, Rulers of the people and elders of Israel, if we this day are called on to answer as to the good deed [done] to the infirm man, how he has been cured, be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazarean, whom ye have crucified, whom God has raised from among [the] dead, by Him this man stands here before you sound [in body]*” (verses 8-10).

The apostle Peter now, as a prisoner, gets an opportunity to preach to the Sanhedrim, what he never could have got them to hear had Satan not stirred them up to arrest him; so the enemy here outwits himself; and the nation in the persons of its heads are brought face to face with their wicked deed in refusing the Christ of God, and have an opportunity of repenting unto salvation.

The condition of the apostle is noteworthy—*“Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost,”* at that very moment and for his exigency as Christ’s witness. *“The power which was dwelling in him put itself forth,”* says Bengel. He did not come from heaven to fill him; but, having come once for all from heaven to form the Church and abide in it, He at present filled Peter for this important witness-bearing with all needed wisdom, propriety of speech, and boldness as He had done before (chap. ii. 4), and did afterwards (chap. iv. 31). There was the habitual fulness of the Spirit (*πλήρης*), *full*, as Acts vi. 3, 5, Stephen *full* of faith, and of the Holy Ghost; and the special or transitory *being filled* (*πλησθεῖς*) as here: and this was for a special purpose; and in Peter’s case it was very sweet, as being the fulfilment of his Master’s words. *“They shall deliver you up to the councils.”* *“It shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.”* *“The Spirit of your Father speaketh in you.”* This was evidently *“the Holy Ghost bearing witness,”* for He combines the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove—the courage of the lion and the patience of the lamb. Both how and what ye shall speak were given him. He addresses them with respect, as the rulers of the people and elders of Israel, recognising them in their official dignity.

His testimony was in substance—1. That a good deed, not an injury, had been done to an impotent man; 2. That the man had indeed been cured, saved, as the word is, and he himself being present was the living witness of it; 3. That the power to heal and to save was in Jesus of Nazareth, the dead and risen one (verses 10, 12); 4. That outside of this saving name there is none other. “If we this day”—have we lived to see the day when men shall be called in question for their good deeds! “A good deed done to an impotent man,” are we to be questioned for that! Jesus had said to the angry Jews in Solomon’s porch, “Many good works have I shown to you, for which of these works do ye stone me?” (John x. 32). Here Peter says in effect, “Surely it is permitted by the rulers to do good in Israel?” (Matt. xii. 12). “Through whom he is made whole”—is *saved*, is the word. (He means it not in the sense of the double saving of soul and body, but only of the body.)

“*Be it known*” to you all, and to all the people of Israel, etc. This expression, as we have already said, is peculiar to the Acts, and it occurs repeatedly (chapter ii. 14, 36; iv. 10; xiii. 38; xxviii. 28). This is the great word of the Gospel, “Be it known to you” that there is healing and salvation in the name of Jesus. They are charged with

crucifying Him : God has raised Him from the dead. “ *In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazareean, doth this man stand before you whole.*” What a solemn contrast!—“ *Whom ye crucified.*”

“ *Whom God raised from the dead :*” this is continued, while reference is made to Christ as the *Stone* of former Scriptures—

“ *This is the stone which has been set at nought by you the builders :*

“ *Which is become the head of the corner. And salvation is in none other : for neither is there another name under heaven which is given among men by which we must be saved*” (verses 11, 12).

## LECTURE X.

### JESUS THE STONE OF SALVATION.

**H**E is the stone which has been set at nought by you the builders, which is become the head of the corner (Acts iv. 11). I think it may be profitable to linger over this passage, and to give a little of the history of this despised and rejected STONE as we find it in Scripture. Mention of it occurs in all parts of the Word of God from Genesis to Revelation. We find it in Moses, and the Psalms, and the Prophets, as well as in the Evangelists, the Acts, the Epistles, and the Apocalypse. Let us consider—

#### I. THE PLACE WHENCE THE STONE IS TAKEN.—

We have the first mention of the STONE in Genesis xlix. 24, where Jacob is speaking to Joseph and blessing him (verse 22): “Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall. The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him and hated him. But his bow abode in strength, and the arms

of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob (from thence is the Shepherd, THE STONE of Israel"). In this, the first mention of it, it comes before us in a parenthetical kind of way. It is only an obscure hint we get of it. But now that Christ has come, died, risen again, and gone into heaven, and that the Holy Ghost has come down, and now that the apostles have been sent out to preach in the power of the Spirit, and that miracles are being wrought, we find the apostle saying openly, "*He is the stone* which has been set at nought by you the builders, which is become the head of the corner."

In Genesis it is not easy, at first sight, to ascertain the reason why it should be mentioned. But I think, when you find in the history of Joseph so beautiful a type of Jesus in his sorrows and trials, and in his subsequent exaltation and glory, you will see how appropriate it is that it should begin from this.

"Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall." This gives us the idea of great fruitfulness. The vine planted near the well is refreshed in its roots by the well's moisture, and its branches, which are fresh and vigorous, are trained so that the tendrils may climb up and hang on either side

of the wall. Its fruitfulness comes from being near the well, and its fruitfulness appears by its running all over the wall, and hanging down its clusters of rich luscious grapes even on the other side. This tells of Joseph's glories ; but they were preceded by the deepest trials. "The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him and hated him." Joseph was evil-entreated of his brethren, and hated of them, because God had given him dreams of glory and exaltation over them ; and also because he had told of their bad conduct to their father : and he had been cast into a pit, drawn out, and then sold into Egypt (Gen. xxxvii.) But his "bow abode in strength ;" and the reason is, because "the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob (*from thence is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel*) ; even by the God of thy Father, who shall help thee, and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee."

This reveals to us the Lord Jesus Christ, and points to the quarry, if we may so speak, of death and resurrection, out of which "the STONE of Israel" was to be taken. It was from a condition of deepest humiliation that the hated and rejected JESUS rose to the highest height of glory, just as Joseph was cast into the pit and then into the prison in Egypt, and from thence was raised up to

take the highest place in the administration of that ancient kingdom. JESUS, like Joseph, has been raised from the lowest depths of humiliation to God's right hand, the place of glory and honour and power. "*From thence*," from a condition like this, of utter rejection and degradation, the Stone of salvation has been taken. It is out of death and resurrection that we, as well as God's Israel, get the STONE of salvation. But this Stone is mentioned again when we come to the prophets. We find in Isaiah xxviii. 16—

II. THE STONE IS PRESENTED AS A FOUNDATION.  
—“Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion *for a foundation* a STONE, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a *sure foundation*: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place.” They had been saying, “We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us, for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves.” But He shows them that this is *no foundation*, for He will lay judgment to

the line and righteousness to the plummet, and their agreement with hell should not stand. His judgment would sweep all away; but He says, "*Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation.*"

How many there are who are making lies their refuge, and who are acting as if they had made an agreement with hell, so that the overflowing scourge should not overtake them! Am I on to this foundation? or am I resting on any work of my own? is a needful question to put to one's self when so many are resting in "the refuge of lies." Nothing that pertains to me will stand before the hailstorm and the overflowing flood of wrath: all is sand. Have I under me God's "*sure foundation*"? Let me not be like the foolish man who built his house on the sand, and when the storms came and the winds blew, it fell, because it was built upon the sand; but be on this sure foundation, and be like the wise man who built his house *on the rock*. O beloved! let us not rest unless we feel the Rock under us; for nothing else will prove the Stone of salvation.

It was to His erring Israel that the Lord so warmly commended this stone; and to Israel it was first and primarily presented for their accept-

ance as a foundation for spiritual blessing and world-wide prosperity. But we know from the Gospels He was not accepted by the builders. In Matthew's Gospel Messiah is presented as son of Abraham and son of David, according to one prophet, then another and another. His royalty is traced in the beginning of that Gospel (ch. i.); then Micah is cited for His birth as their ruler (ch. ii.); then He is presented as the light from Galilee, according to Isaiah (ch. iv.); then as the King that was to come to Zion, "Behold the King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass" (ch. xxi.) He was thus presented to Israel in a variety of ways, and at different times, and commended to them as "*a sure foundation*" when the nation lay in ruins; for everything had given way, and the Romans were in possession of their land; but He was rejected as their Messiah-King, and they said, "We have no king but Cæsar." How sad! Here was their Messiah, whom God had commended to them as the foundation-stone of Israel—by angels, by His forerunner, by His living voice from heaven, and yet He is rejected!

"JESUS OF NAZARETH" was "*a man approved of God* by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him" (Acts ii. 22). He was a "*tried stone*."

(1.) The Lord Jesus was *tried by Satan*, first in the wilderness forty days, and then again just before entering on His last sufferings—at the first by *temptation*, at the last by *terror*!

(2.) He was *tried also by man*. The Scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians (Matt. xxii.) all came to Him, and they tried what was in Him, and found nothing but perfect holiness, obedience to His Father's will, goodness to men, and devotedness to God's glory. He was without sin; "holy" when born, and holy in life; and He offered Himself "without spot unto God." And even the Roman judge who condemned Him washed his hands of His blood, and said, "I find no fault at all in Him."

(3.) And He was *tried by God*, when on the cross of Calvary; in the midst of the preternatural darkness, He laid our sins on Him, and hid His face from Him, for the first and the only time; and He was thus tried as our sin-bearer, to see if He could still glorify the Father, and He did so perfectly; for even then "He trusted in God," and said, "My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?" "Not My will but Thine be done," was His language of perfect submission; and on Calvary He said, "*Father*, into Thy hands I commit my spirit." His life and death formed one blessed

*whole* of obedience and love ; and God's "good pleasure" was in Him in life and death. "This is my beloved Son, *in whom I am well pleased,*" was His testimony at Jordan's river and again on "the Holy Mount," and this was the voice of His act in raising Him from the dead. Jesus is indeed a "*tried stone.*"

And then He is "a *precious corner-stone, a sure foundation.*" God only knows how "precious" is His Christ, and He commends Him. He is precious as the Son of God ; precious as the Christ of God, the Word made flesh ; precious in His spotless life of goodness ; precious in His sin-atonement death of shame ; precious as the risen, living Priest within the veil ; precious as "the head Stone of the corner" in the heavenly glory : "To you who believe, *He is precious.*"

And it is as a *tried stone, a precious corner-stone,* that He is presented as a "*sure foundation*" for *salvation* : "Neither is there salvation in any other." How very few are sure of their salvation by knowing that Christ is to them on God's part "a sure foundation ;" who know that He has shed His blood for them, and that they are resting on Him, and that He is made unto them of God "wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption !" and represented when "preached to

them with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." Do we know it? Ah! blessed be God there are many who do know Him in His love and grace, in His death and resurrection, and in the power of His precious blood as He is revealed in the Scriptures, and as the Holy Ghost has revealed Him in our hearts. Knowing Him thus we can say, He is indeed "a *sure* foundation;" the only foundation: "*For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ*" (1 Cor. iii. 11). "And salvation is in none other. For there is none other name given under heaven among men whereby they must be saved" (Acts iv. 12). He is a "*sure foundation*," and resting in that name you cannot be lost, for He is called *Jesus* "because He *saves His people from their sins*" (Matt. i. 21).

There is none other foundation for pardon, life, and glory; but He is a "sure foundation," and once on Him, we "shall not make haste" hence (Isa. xxviii. 16). We have in the Epistles "He that believeth on Him shall not be ashamed or confounded" (Rom. x.; 1 Pet. ii.) The believer will never be able to say, I have trusted in the blood of Christ to cleanse me, and I am not washed from my sins: I have trusted Him as my righteousness, and I am not clothed: I have trusted in Jesus as my life, and am yet dead: I have trusted

Him for salvation, and am still lost. Ah, no! God says "*Thou shalt be saved. Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed.*"

He that is on the *sure* foundation-stone, Christ, shall never be moved whatever transpire. When we see professors going down-hill and practising sin, 1 John iii. 6-10 (though he that is in Christ can never be lost), then we begin to ask on what foundation were these persons building? Not God's "*sure foundation,*" for, if they ever had a real hold of Christ by a living faith, would they stumble on the stone and be broken? But he that is on Christ is on a rock, and shall never be moved; for He is the rock of our salvation, "and His work is perfect."

III. THIS STONE WAS "SET AT NOUGHT."—Christ was *refused* of the Jewish builders, even although "*approved of God*" and commended by Him. Though "*chosen of God and precious,*" the Lord Jesus was "*disallowed, indeed, of men.*" They went forth in multitudes to look at God's Stone of salvation, and they deliberately refused Him and cast Him aside with scorn, saying, "*Not this man, but Barabbas;*" "*Away with Him, let Him be crucified.*" Man has ever disallowed God's will in all He has set up for blessing, as said Stephen when

recounting God's various dealings in grace with Israel, "*Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost.*"

Jesus, anointed of the Holy Ghost, ever going about doing good, and "*approved of God,*" has also been "*despised and rejected of men.*" They only had the desires of their hearts when they saw Jesus nailed to the cross: God had His heart's wish when He set Him upon His throne in the heavens! We have seen this STONE in humiliation, and in His life presented to Israel; and re-presented when preached to them, "with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." Psalm cxviii. tells the result, for there God, who knew the end from the beginning, speaks (as if it had already taken place) of Him as the *rejected Stone*:—" *The Stone which the builders refused.*" The STONE has been "REFUSED" after being presented in all its preciousness, in all its strength and suitableness, and commended by God Himself! Truly He "endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself."

In such circumstances this Scripture is referred to by our Lord Himself in Matthew xxi. 42—"Jesus said unto them, *Did ye never read in the Scripture?*" (We are expected to be reading it; and see what pains God has taken to set before man the preciousness of Jesus by putting so many passages about Him in His word; and yet people

think it a trouble to turn up the Bible and take out the precious things He has put in it.) Christ expects us to know the word, for He says, "Have ye never read in the Scripture, *The stone which the builders rejected?*" etc.

What was He speaking of when He asked this question? He was giving them the parable of the householder who planted a vineyard and hedged it round about, and put a wine-press in it, and let it out to husbandmen. This was a picture of God's sending Him as His last resource for their recovery and blessing as a nation. "*But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir, come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him*" (Matt. xxi. 37-39). Then He applies it, and says, in effect, "This is just what you are about to do to me." And it has now been done; for "of the Just One" they have been the "*betrayers and murderers*" (Acts vii. 52). For when He was taken before Pilate, and he would have let Him go, because he could find no cause of death in Him, they cried, "Crucify Him! crucify Him!" "They caught Him, and *cast Him out, and killed Him.*" No doubt GOD took the opportunity

of man's wickedness in nailing Him to the cross to lay our sins upon Him there ; but that did not alter the fact of the enormity of their wickedness.

The apostle Peter refers to this again in his first epistle, and calls Him "*the Stone which the builders disallowed.*" Now that he speaks to the council of the Jews about the healing of the impotent man, he says, "He is the stone which was *set at nought of you the builders*, which has become the head of the corner." "*The Stone of Israel*" was set at nought by these Jewish builders ! God would have Christ His promised foundation-stone laid in Zion, and would have them to build upon it ; and they "*disallowed*" Him. They would not have Him on any terms ; but when presented, they cried, "*Away with Him ! away with Him ! Let Him be crucified !*" And the apostle Peter, in writing his first epistle, alludes to it thus :—"*The stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner ; and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the Word, being disobedient, whereunto also they were appointed.*" They were appointed to stumble, being "disobedient." "*But unto you who believe He is precious.*"

## LECTURE XI.

### THE HEAD OF THE CORNER.

WE still speak of Jesus Christ the Nazaræan as “the STONE disallowed indeed of men,” but as now—

I. “BECOME THE HEAD OF THE CORNER.”—God would have Him there because He delighted in Him, and He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in glory. *Man gave Him a cross and “open shame.” God gave Him a throne and the highest glory.* Israel would not have this STONE of salvation when He was presented to the nation before the cross ; nor would they have Him when He was preached in the power of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven ; for it was when Peter was thus preaching that he and John were arrested and put in prison, and it was when Stephen was testifying to all God’s interventions in grace, and their refusing and resisting Him in everything He set up for blessing, that they *stoned* and killed him !

They disallowed Him when He was preached to

them as "*the head of the corner.*" They would not have Christ either in life or as raised from the dead and exalted to heaven. But God would have His Son! He will not let men set Him at nought without giving the fullest manifestation of His delight in Him, whatever man does to prevent His purpose being fulfilled. When he charges them with their wicked rejection and crucifixion of Him, he testifies of Him as "a man approved of God; . . . whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death;" and now the Holy Ghost has descended that He may be preached as "*the head stone of the corner.*" Man set Him at nought in His life and death—and He was the stone of shame—a refuse stone on earth; but He is now the exalted Stone, "*the head stone of the corner*" in glory! and "*the gospel of the glory of Christ*" is "*the gospel of God.*" When presented in grace it is as the Stone of salvation for our souls; our sins were laid on Him on Calvary, and He bore them there; and now in this "day of salvation" which God has made by exalting Him, He is preached in the power of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. "And salvation is in none other, for neither is there *another name* under heaven which is given among men whereby we must be saved." What name? The name written over the Lord Jesus on the cross, as

“*The stone disallowed of men,*” “*Jesus of Nazareth,* whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead.” “We must be saved” by believing on this “*disallowed*” Stone. Since he has been rejected by His nation, He has been preached to all the world as God’s salvation. “We preach *Christ crucified,* to the Jews a stumbling-stone, and to the Greeks foolishness” (1 Cor. i. 23). If you do not see Jesus as the “*disallowed*” but God-exalted Stone, you do not see Him as a Saviour. Peter and the rest of the apostles preached Him thus on the day of Pentecost and onwards: “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified *both Lord and Christ,*” i.e. “*head stone of the corner.*”

Paul very definitely declares His resurrection and glory, as in Acts xiii.; and when he speaks of Him as “*raised up again,*” he says, “Be it known unto you that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him all that believe are justified from all things.” Man, because he hated righteousness, nailed Jesus to the cross; God, because He loves righteousness, and would display it in Christ, raised Him to His throne; and while “grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life,” God is saving righteously, and declaring righteousness in justify-

ing the ungodly. Grace calls the lost, washes from sin, and justifies the ungodly through the "*disallowed*" Stone, *the slain Christ*; while it likewise quickens, raises together, and seats together in the heavens, in the *exalted and glorified Christ*. He was once the rejected Christ on earth, but He is now the accepted and *glorified Christ* in the heavens; and it is through the preaching of this rejected and disallowed but *God-glorified* STONE, that God is now saving sinners who believe in Him. Beloved, are you disallowing Him, or are you receiving Him by faith, and trusting in Him as your only Stone of salvation? Are you taking Him for your soul's salvation, or are you refusing Him whom God has raised up and exalted? The majority refuse Him and are "*not saved!*" Oh! see to it that you refuse Him not, lest the wrath come upon you to the uttermost; but take Him as your "*sure foundation,*" for salvation, preciousness, life, and glory (Ps. cxviii.)

Peter in his first epistle refers to the foundation-stone as laid in Zion and rejected by the "*disobedient;*" but after his quotation of Isa. xxviii. 16, ending with—"*He that believeth on Him shall not be confounded,*" he adds, "*Unto you therefore which believe He is precious;*" or, as the literal meaning is, "*the preciousness.*" Faith takes in God's estimate

of Christ; and by this divine inlet all that He is in His person, obedience, life, blood, death, and resurrection: all that He is in His finished work: all that He is as everliving One, "the chief corner-stone" in heavenly glory, flows into us (and God's foundation-stone was tried to the uttermost because He could bear it, and glorified to the uttermost because He deserved it); for we, and the "precious" Stone of grace and glory are *one*: for "*unto you who believe is the preciousness.*" Faith is the Holy Ghost's channel by which He makes His preciousness flow into you, so that you become "*precious*" "living stones!" All that is known on earth of the Lord Jesus, now that He has been made *Head of the corner*" in glory, is known by faith alone; and what a reality faith gives us in giving us the knowledge of oneness with Him in the heavenly glory! He in us and we in Him!

II. JESUS IS NOW IN GLORY, "A LIVING STONE."—By coming unto whom we become "*living stones*," and "are built up a *spiritual house*." This leads us to the confession of Peter, as you find it in Matt. xvi., where that apostle confesses Jesus as "the Christ, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD." He is the Head of Life, etc.: the Father reveals Him as such: and "Jesus answered, Thou art Peter, and

upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Peter delights in this word "*living*" (a Father-revealed word about Christ), and in his epistle he calls Him "A LIVING STONE," and he calls us who are built upon Him "LIVING STONES." Christ has been received up into heaven "as the Son of the *living* God," in the power of life, manifested in the resurrection which declared Him to be such (Rev. i. 5); and it is on Him as the living Stone in the heavenly glory "the Church of God" is built; a glorious Christ in risen life, that has vanquished death and hell, is the stable foundation of "the Church of God." Peter came by faith and the Father's revelation to this "living Stone," and participated of the nature of the Christ—the Rock;—and hence Christ says, "Thou art Peter," *i.e.* a rock-man, "and on this rock will I build my church;" and Peter, remembering this, admits now the disallowance of the Stone, and encourages all to be "coming" to Him as to a living stone, that, being all *Peters* or living stones, they may be built up a spiritual house. This advance with the Holy Ghost is beautiful. That same Peter who, with decision and strength, denied that the Lord should ever be rejected, delights in the thought of the "disallowed" Stone, and with decision and

strength he takes Him up as such, and tells us that we shall never build on Him aright if we do not build on Him *as* a "disallowed" Stone. As such, He tells us that pilgrimage and persecution must be our lot.

"To whom coming, as unto a *living stone*." He is raised from the dead, and is set as the "head stone of the corner" in the glory of God; and He is there permanently as the "LIVING STONE," as He himself says, "I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of death and of hades" (Rev. i. 18). It is this *living* Christ, whom John saw invested with all authority, that Peter presents to us, and says, "*To whom coming, as unto a living stone*, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as *living stones*, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." The holy house of God is being built of "living stones," in spite of man's disallowance of the Living Stone which God himself had laid as the chief cornerstone. And we become *living* stones and precious stones by coming to the Stone of life—the risen and glorified Christ—raised from the dead by the glory of God the Father, and made "Head of the corner." We are made alive with the life of the liv-

ing glorified Christ; disallowed on earth, but accepted in heaven. How great the privilege, dignity, and glory! How great the love that places us in Him! Have you become a living stone, or have you but a name to live while you are dead?—a dead stone, a stone not in contact with the “Living Stone”—not in the building, not on the rock, but on the sand! Let all come to the Living Stone, and be built up a spiritual house, for it is only by doing so that all His “*preciousness*” flows into us, and He is “*our life*.” “*Our life is hid with Christ in God; and when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then ye shall also appear with Him in glory*” (Col. iii. 3).

III. THE STONE FALLING IN JUDGMENT is also part of the divine history of this “*disallowed*” Stone. He shall fall in judgment both on nations and on individuals. He came into our world in love and grace; “He was despised and rejected of men,” and sent out of it by the cross and the grave. But He has been taken up by God to His throne of righteousness; and He shall yet descend from heaven in judgment to take vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel, and to crush ecclesiastical and political apostasy. “Whosoever shall fall on this stone

shall be broken ; but *on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*" This is the awful doom that is momentarily hanging over the despisers and rejecters of God's Christ! God will not suffer Christ to be always the "*disallowed*" and "*refused*" One. He is now the absent Righteous One, because men have cast Him out, but He is coming again, and it will be for judgment! Daniel speaks of the different kingdoms that were to be set up; the Babylonian, the Medo-Persian, the Grecian, and the Roman; and when the last-named kingdom shall be resuscitated under the immediate inspiration and direction of Satan, as we read in Rev. xiii., then Christ shall come in judgment on these ten toes of the image, and the whole image shall be broken in pieces. Christ, the Stone of rejection, is exalted to the throne of God in heaven, and that Stone will one day fall from the highest heaven, descending in awful judgment upon the avowedly anti-christian world, in a state of hopeless rebellion and apostasy from God. He shall come in His own glory, and in the glory of His Father, and of the holy angels. He will descend in terrible majesty, and in ineffable glory: and we read that He will trample His enemies in His fury—He will stain all His raiment (Isa. lxiii.) He will come in person to judgment, as the august rider on the

white horse, as we have it in Revelation xix. This is the judgment of war on the apostate nations, led on against God and His Christ by "the beast and the false prophet:" "And I saw heaven opened, and behold *a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He doth judge and make war.* His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns; and He had a name written, that no man knew but He Himself: and He was *clothed with a vesture dipped in blood*: and his name is called the Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed Him, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He might *smite the nations*" (verses 11-15). If that is said to refer to the gospel, it is certainly very strange gospel! Folly could hardly go farther than to try to make out that such predictions of unsparing wrath contain "the gospel of the *grace* of God." It is wrath! consuming wrath, "wrath unto the uttermost"—the full cup of God's vengeance on an utterly apostate world! The New Testament has its Book of Joshua as well as the Old; and that is the Book of Revelation, which give the judgments of God and the wars of the Lamb and His armies in taking the inheritance of the earth out of the hands of Satan and his rebel

hosts. And just as surely as earth's nations, in their proudest rebellion and in the height of their glory (like the Babylonian king), shall have the Stone upon them, breaking them in pieces, and scattering them in atoms as the chaff of the summer threshing-floor (Dan. ii.), so surely will it fall on *individual* unbelievers in wrath and crushing! Christ is Judge as well as Life-giver; and if you will not have Him as your Life, you must have Him as your Judge! And so we read in such a passage as Matt. xxi. 44, "Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but *on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*"

Oh! pause and think of this awful word: it is not mine, it is the word of the all-precious Christ, who came into this world to suffer and die for sinners,—the word of Him who said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He warns every man that, if he rejects Him as a Saviour, He will "grind Him to powder."

He is preached now for salvation, life, and preciousness; but, if refused, He will descend on His rejecters in wrath, judgment, and crushing! Which will you have, O unsaved one? Delay not in your decision;—say not that you cannot settle it just yet; if you continue in unbelief it is settled for you by "the word of Christ" that unsparing

judgment is your portion, "for he that believeth not *shall be damned.*" "IT SHALL GRIND HIM TO POWDER."

In Switzerland, among the great Alps, there was in one place, some time ago, a huge mass partially detached from the mountain, and there was just below this a village that had been threatened by it with impending destruction for I do not know how long, perhaps for centuries. And there were people living on in the doomed village, and when any one spoke to them of their danger they said, "Oh! it has not come yet; it did not come in our fathers' days, and it will last all our time also." But one day the great mass began to move; the villagers saw it and fled, but those who delayed to take their effects with them were crushed to death in the ruins of their buried homes! O dear unsaved one! remember Jesus' word, "*On whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder.*" How foolish, you may say, of those Swiss people to dally, delay, and be destroyed. But how much more foolish it is to hear of Christ, in all His preciousness and loveliness, His death for sin and His life in heaven, and yet not to receive him for life, salvation, and glory! What have you been doing all your days, if not yet saved, by being built on this foundation-stone? How

often you have heard of this Stone of salvation! We have nothing else to do but to tell you of Christ—of the sufferings and glories of Christ; and all who have received our word will rejoice with us in the fact that the once disallowed Stone is now the accepted Stone in heaven, and will soon be displayed as the reigning Stone in glory. “To whom coming, as unto a LIVING STONE, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as LIVING STONES, are built up a spiritual house” (1 Peter ii. 4, 5).

IV. THE STONE BECOMES A GREAT MOUNTAIN, AND FILLS THE WHOLE EARTH.—We have now to contemplate THE STONE in GLORY. After “THE STONE that was cut out of the mountain without hands” had “broken to pieces” the whole “image” of Dan. ii., representing the whole course of empire in the four great world-kings, so that “no place was found for them,” it is added, “and THE STONE that smote the image *became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.*” This is explained at verse 44, “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a *kingdom*, that shall never be destroyed; and it shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces, and shall consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.” “A great mountain,” at

verse 35, is the "kingdom" of the God of heaven—which fills the whole earth, and stands for ever; and which Rev. xi. 15 tells us is given at the sounding of the seventh trumpet into the hands of Christ. "Great voices" in heaven announce this,—"*The world-kingdom* of our Lord and His Christ is come, and He shall reign for ever and ever." All the prophets point to this, and declare its universality, and glory, and blessedness; while the Apocalypse tells us how it will be introduced, who they are that shall be associated with Christ in the administration of it, and that it will last a thousand years (Rev. xx.) Christ will fall in judgment on the nations, and utterly annihilate their power; and then, being here in person, God will judge the habitable world in righteousness (according to Ps. lxxii.), by that Man whom He hath appointed, whereof He hath given assurance unto all men in that He hath raised Him from the dead" (Acts xvii. 31). The knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall then cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. "O let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon the earth" (Ps. lxxvii. 4). This will be the day of the earth's millennial glory, when "the Stone of Israel" will be "brought again into the world," and they shall be built upon

Him as the very centre and seat of government, worship, and blessing for the whole earth. God has determined, spite of man's refusal, to have Zion founded securely in life, salvation, government, and glory, on this precious *Corner-Stone*. "This is the Lord's doing, and marvellous in our eyes," Isa. ii. 1-5, xi., xii., lix., lx., lxi., lxii., lxv., lxvi.; Zech. xiv.; Rev. xi. xii., etc. The "disallowed" Stone will be the GLORIFIED STONE by-and-by; He will be the enthroned STONE, like the jasper or the sardine (Rev. iv.) What a history does Jesus, "the Stone of Israel," go through! Pierced by the archers,—lifted up by the God of Israel,—offered as a foundation,—disallowed of men, but so precious all the time to God that He has exalted Him to His own right hand,—at length brought forth in power and glory to smite the image, and then to shine in glory as the enthroned Stone for ever and ever.

He is "*the Chief Corner-Stone*" in grace, and He will be displayed as "*the Head of the corner*" in glory. And Rev. xxi. shows us, under the symbol of a heavenly city, our place and glory with Christ when He is displayed in His glory. The holy city descends from heaven, having the glory of God, and its sheen is said to be "like a stone most precious, as a *jasper-stone*, crystal clear;" and "the

building of its wall was of jasper." The enthroned Lamb was seen as a jasper-stone, for He displays the divine glory, and the lustre of the whole city is "like a stone most precious, as a jasper-stone, crystal clear;" "and the foundations of the city were garnished with *all manner of precious stones*; the first foundation *jasper*." Every character of beauty is brought out, according to the power of the various stones to reflect the light falling on them. We become precious stones in being united to the Precious Stone of God, and we shall shine with dazzling glory when the Lamb takes the throne, and is the light of the golden city. In every variety of spiritual beauty shall we shine around Him in the day when the world-kingdom shall be His; and the different rays of His glory, which His people shall reflect, are indicated by these precious stones. The Lamb is the light of the heavenly city, and all the saints of God shall shine in the dazzling blaze of His glory, as gems and precious stones sparkle in the light of the summer sun.

## LECTURE XII.

### THE BOLDNESS OF THE WITNESSES.

**A**FTER the address of Peter before the Council, they were nonplussed; for the accused boldly become the accusers, and commit the very offence for which they had been arrested.

I. THE BOLDNESS OF PETER AND JOHN.—“*But seeing the boldness of Peter and John, and perceiving that they were unlettered and uninstructed men, they wondered, and they recognised them that they were with Jesus*” (iv. 13).

The Spirit of God so filled the apostles that they spoke forth fearlessly the words of incrimination, and also those of salvation. They had charged on the Jewish builders the guilt of refusing the God-given Stone which had been made Head of the corner, and the only *Stone* of salvation. “Salvation is in none other; for neither is there another name under heaven, which is given among men, by which we must be saved” (verse 12). Jesus is not only a free Saviour, but He is an exclusive Saviour.

This was bold speaking for "unlettered and common men" to address to the great and learned Council of the nation. This boldness was of a spiritual kind ; not the offensive rudeness of coarse and low natures, but the holy spiritual earnestness of believing disciples of Christ, who, filled with the Holy Ghost for the occasion, giving them to realise their union with Him in His power and glory at the throne of God, spoke as those who were fully assured of the truth and importance of their message, the divine glory of their exalted Lord, and the guilt and misery of those who had so sinfully rejected Him, and were now threatening to arrest the onward progress of His gospel, even when "preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." The proof of being filled with the Spirit is, that those so filled invariably speak of the Lord Jesus ; they exalt "the name that is above every name ;" and, while convincing of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come, there is also a testimony given to salvation through that name. Four things are noticeable here :—

(1.) The Council saw the boldness of Peter and John ; it had been obvious in their speech. (2.) They perceived that they were unlettered and unprofessional men of the lower order—not men who had had any formal training in rabbinical learning,

or who had gone through any of their schools of learning, or had been prepared for the teacher's work in the ordinary way; and their speech, no doubt, showed that they were untutored men, and yet they had spoken with a "freedom of speech," a cogency, pungency, and personal application, as well as a telling force, that had taken their judges by surprise. (3.) They were struck with wonder; they marvelled at this unusual phenomenon, "their wonder sharpened their intellects," and their whole bearing made them give particular attention to them. (4.) They recognised them as persons that were with Jesus. They had said of Jesus, "How knoweth this man *letters*, having never *learned*?" (John vii. 15). The Sanhedrim had had Jesus before them, and given sentence against Him; now He is again before them in the persons and preaching of the apostles, who proclaim His name as the only Saviour in the power and by the authority of the Holy Ghost: will they reject Him afresh now that He has been raised from the dead, set at God's right hand, and is preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven? That were to "do despite to the Spirit of grace."

(It is an interesting study to trace the word translated "*boldness*;" it occurs in the following places:—Mark viii. 32; John vii. 4, 13, 26; x.

24; xi. 14, 54; xvi. 25, 29; xviii. 20; Acts ii. 29; iv. 13, 29, 31; xxviii. 31; 2 Cor. iii. 12; vii. 4; Eph. iii. 12; vi. 19; Philip. i. 20; Col. ii. 13; Philem. 8; Heb. iii. 6; iv. 16; x. 19; Heb. x. 35; 1 John ii. 28; iii. 21; iv. 17; v. 14).

“*And beholding the man who had been healed stand with them, they had nothing to reply*” (verse 14). The man who had never stood before *stood* with Peter and John “with firm ankle,” a *standing* miracle before the Sanhedrim of the healing power of the name of Jesus; and they had therefore nothing, though they wished it much (verse 21), to say against it. At verse 16, they themselves say, “*We cannot deny it.*” But will they believe? No; they will confer with one another rather than believe God and acknowledge the saving name of Jesus. How often has their evil example been followed!

II. THE THREATENING OF THE COUNCIL.—“*But having commanded them to go out of the Council, they conferred with one another, saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed an evident miracle has come to pass through their means is manifest to all that inhabit Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But that it be not further spread among the people, let us therefore threaten them severely no longer to*

*speak to any man in this name*" (verses 15-17). How very small the great men of Israel now appear when setting themselves against Jesus and the preaching of His evangelists! And yet great and learned men are repeating their folly among ourselves up to this very hour. "*These men!*" Blind ecclesiastics always feel annoyed at the men,—"*these men;*" and do not know what to do with them. But they overlook the name of Jesus, whereby wonders are still wrought, and are not so anxious to know what to do with the salvation it brings them. Herein lay their whole difficulty; mind and conscience, public knowledge of the fact of the miracle having been wrought, and they themselves not able to deny it—the whole case against them—yet they would not bow to the name of Jesus and confess Him as their own and the nation's Saviour. The hostile *will* of man is the great barrier to divine blessing. They are determined not to believe in Jesus themselves, and they resolve on using all the weight of their position to check the further spread of the gospel.

How little wise worldly men, even the highest in religious position, know of the vital power of Christianity, and that they may as well command the waves of the sea not to spread farther, as to think by the severest threats and prohibitions to

stay the further spread of the preaching of salvation in the name of Jesus. The whole of the influence of the heads of Israel—the men in the highest places of authority and learning in the nation, take council to stop the evangelistic preaching of the apostles—and yet the preaching of that saving name is going on with more vigour and earnestness than ever after the lapse of eighteen hundred years! Might statesmen, learned men, able theologians, and wise ecclesiastics, not be expected to learn from the past that it is utterly in vain to prevent the spread of the saving efficacy of the name of Jesus?

Threatening with punishment and forbidding to speak in that name will not stop men who are filled with the Holy Ghost from proclaiming the saving virtues of the all-glorious CHRIST. The most sagacious precautionary measures they may adopt will be found futile to hinder the onward progress of the salvation of God. They cannot hinder the work that is inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. The word of God is not bound. The Holy Ghost has come from heaven to glorify Jesus on earth, and He will do it, spite of man.

*“And having called them, they charged them not to speak at all, or teach, in the name of Jesus”* (verse 18). Here the supreme Council of Israel set themselves

against that salvation-bringing name without which none can be saved, by which "we must be saved, if saved at all, for there is not salvation in any other." They charged them not to speak of that name in ordinary intercourse, nor preach it publicly; "*not to speak at all, or teach, in the name of Jesus.*" Do as much good quietly as you can, but stop using the name of Jesus. Men can tolerate good works and pious observances, but not the saving name of the crucified, risen, and exalted Jesus, who has been made both Lord and Christ.

It is sad work when men, high in place and authority in Church or State, try to silence by means of threats and violence what they cannot gainsay, or put down by argument or Scripture. But this is going on in many places at this hour; there never was more means taken to prevent such unauthorised men as Peter and John from preaching Jesus than at present; and the opposition becomes more virulent daily, and the measures employed by secret societies and all sorts of godless expedients, "*that it spread no further*"—that it be kept from encroaching on the established order, and prevented from exercising its legitimate influence and doing its full God-appointed work—are being multiplied; but all in vain. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

III. THE REPLY OF PETER AND JOHN.—We have now to consider the reply of the apostles to the Council's charge, "*not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus.*" "*But Peter and John answering said to them, If it be righteous before God to listen to you rather than to God, judge ye; for, as for us, we cannot refrain from speaking of the things which we have seen and heard*" (Acts iv. 19, 20). "The powers that be are ordained of God," and ought to be obeyed in all things pertaining to their legitimate sphere; but when they travel beyond their sphere, as the Council clearly did in this instance, they are not to be obeyed, because it would involve disobedience to God. The Christian is never allowed to be lawless or disobedient—never to do his own will. The apostles realised their position, saw the dilemma, and put it to the consciences of their judges whether it could be righteous to listen to them rather than to God. They put it to them and say, "judge ye;" but whatever might be their judgment (and reason and conscience are not the final arbiters of duty, but God's word), they felt it to be their duty to hearken unto God rather than to man.

There is much said in our day about the necessary spiritual independence of the Church from the control of the civil power in all spiritual causes:

and here we see that this was the principle on which the apostles took their stand ; and claimed to own a higher authority than the State. They would listen to God rather than to men. A divine commission had been given them by Christ, and the Holy Ghost had come to enable them to perform it : a human prohibition had come in their way, and that which made it peculiarly trying that it proceeded from those who professed to be acting for God in Israel.

Christ had said unto them, "Preach the gospel to all the world—to every creature—beginning at Jerusalem ;" and immediately before being "taken up," when, "through the Holy Ghost He gave them commandments," He had said specifically (Acts i. 8), "But ye will receive power, the Holy Spirit having come upon you, and ye shall be My witnesses, both *in Jerusalem* and in all Judæa and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." God's will must be done in defiance of man's prohibition, and they can suffer the hostile will of those in authority, and commit themselves, like their Master, to Him that judgeth righteously. If the Council had been as purely set on listening to God as the apostles were, there had been no collision ; and all the state prohibitions of the Church's spiritual action when doing God's will have been due to their not

acting in accordance with the mind of God. The apostles were so clear in their minds and consciences about the rightness of their conduct, that they answered in a resolute and manly way, laying the matter for decision on the consciences of the Sanhedrim ; but men who act habitually in violation of rectitude have their consciences "seared with a hot iron." The Council's conscience is dull of hearing such an appeal. Men who are set on doing wrong will do it in the face of reason, conscience, and the word of God ; while men who are led by God's Spirit, and thus walking in the Spirit, determined by grace to do right, will do it in the face of all opposition. "For, as for us, we cannot refrain from speaking of the things which we have seen and heard."

When men are filled with the Spirit, and are divinely assured by God's word that they are doing God's will in testifying the gospel of His grace, they do not mind opposition. "The righteous is bold as a lion." We refuse to obey men for the sake of God.

Compare Luther's words at the Diet of Worms, 1521 : "Unless I am overpowered and convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures, or by other public, distinct, and obvious arguments and reasons, and unless I am thus fully satisfied respect-

ing the passages of Scripture which I have hitherto adduced, insomuch that my conscience is taken captive by the Word of God, I neither can nor will retract anything, well knowing that it is neither safe nor advisable to do aught in opposition to the conscience. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me! Amen."

How blessed when men are so filled with the Spirit and love to Christ, the truth, and the souls of men, that they cannot refrain from speaking the things they have seen and heard! There was a well of living water springing up into everlasting life within Peter and John; and "rivers of living water" must flow out of them. How could they refrain from telling all they knew of the Christ with whom they had such intimate fellowship, and to witness to whom they had received the Holy Ghost so recently, and were being filled with the Spirit even while they addressed the Council!

The things which we have *seen* and *heard* (Acts i. 8, 22; ii. 32; iii. 15) must be spoken, or we should be unfaithful to our trust. Have we seen Jesus? Then it will be visible in our testimony for Him. Have we heard "the voice of His mouth"? Then with the mouth shall we confess His name, and beseech others in His stead to be reconciled to God.

IV. THE DISMISSAL OF THE APOSTLES BY THE COUNCIL.—“*But they having further threatened them let them go, finding no way how they might punish them, on account of the people, because that all glorified God for what had taken place; for the man on whom the sign of healing had taken place was above forty years old*” (verses 21; 22).

The heads of Israel ought to have believed the Gospel and submitted themselves to its power, instead of committing the positive and great sin of forbidding the apostles to preach it. But they showed a fatal obstinacy in rejecting the counsel of God and threatening His servants; for in thus acting they were deposed from the honourable place of acting with authority, as having delegated power from the God of Israel, and were under the fear of the people whose rulers they were, and who ought to have been afraid of them (Rom. xiii.) This was a deterioration in their power like that symbolised in Daniel ii. by the “iron mixed with the miry clay.” God is represented as giving power to the King of Babylon, and that power as coming direct from God is symbolised by “gold.” When the image is spoken of, it is said of that sovereign “Thou art that head of gold.” The rulers in Israel were bound so to govern and do justice that they should have carried out the

judgment of God, and not to have feared the people, but feared God whose servants they were. But this refraining from punishing the apostles on account of the people; proved conclusively that they were acting for themselves and not for the God of Israel.

Whenever the government of a country acts in this manner it is not a golden one, but "iron and miry clay;" for it looks rather to the people than to God. The divine element is out of the rulers when they regard the country as the fountain of authority, and when they consult the temper of the people and act so as to please them, holding their places, instead of judging righteous judgment. It was a sign of extreme feebleness to threaten, instead of punishing, if they deemed them worthy of punishment; especially when we consider that they had charged their judges with the greatest crime of which they could have been proved guilty—the crucifixion of their Messiah. They wished to punish; they only "further threatened them" and "let them go, finding no way to punish them, on account of the people, because that all glorified God for what had taken place."

The people were sounder in their judgment than their rulers; and they gave them unmistakable indications of their mind, for they glorified God

on account of the miracle ; and by the expression of this feeling among the people God sheltered His servants for the time being from the punishment the Sanhedrim were so anxious to inflict. And the rulers came in for the hearing of such a sermon as they had little expected ; and their placing the apostles before them had not only left their consciences without excuse, in refusing the testimony of God, but had given more public notoriety to that testimony, for it would be known throughout the whole city of Jerusalem that the apostles had been tried, and let off formally by the great Council of the Jews, without punishment, when testifying to their Messiah, so lately crucified by them, and now raised to the right hand of God, and there made both Lord and Christ.

The opposition to the witness-bearing of the apostles had not yet extended to the people, for, just as it is said of the Lord Himself, "the common people heard Him gladly," so it might have been said of their preaching. And so is it still. The great truths of God would be received by the spiritual among the people, if those who are in places of authority did not interpose to interdict the reception of them, and speak and write against it. In our day the ecclesiastical heads in Christ-

edom are doing their utmost to prejudice the minds of the people against the full and clear Scripture testimony to the glorified Christ; and where they cannot punish they give threatening and *further-threatening* either of the withdrawalment of ecclesiastical privileges or of temporal advantages if the truth be not renounced! These authorities of to-day are just as truly opposed to the full gospel of Christ and the position it gives believers, before God and in this world, as were the Sanhedrim when they "*further-threatened*" the apostles and discharged them.

There was solid ground for the continued expression of the feeling of the people: "*for the man on whom this sign of healing had taken place was above forty years old*" (verse 22). He had been well known; he was above forty years old; and there could be no error or deception about his cure, for he had been lame from his birth; and now he—a man beyond middle life—was standing before the Council on feet that had never borne his weight before. All men were satisfied of the wonderful cure, and continued to glorify God on account of it, as a gracious intervention of his power—a "*miracle of healing.*"

## LECTURE XIII.

### THE CHURCH'S APPEAL TO GOD.

I. **T**HE APOSTLES' RETURN TO THEIR OWN COMPANY; AND THEIR REPORT.—On being released, the apostles Peter and John return to their own company. The narrative runs as follows :—

*“And having been let go, they came to their own [company], and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them”* (verse 23). Had matters been as they ought to have been with the heads of the nation, they would have had a very different report to give from that which, we learn from the previous context, they must have given.

We need to be thrown ourselves into the circumstances of the apostles and their converts (as we certainly will be into their difficulties, if faithful) to appreciate the awful impression this opposition of the Sanhedrim to their glorified Master, and the Messiah of their nation, must have made

upon them. They had had every assurance that Jesus was the Christ ; they had been His disciples in life, and were His personally-commissioned witnesses in resurrection ; they had been endued with power from on high, the Pentecostal baptism of the Spirit having come ; and they were preaching the Gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, God accompanying their testimony with divine and supernatural success ; the mighty work of repentance and salvation had been accompanied also with “wonders and signs ;” in connection with the healing of the cripple the nation had been summoned to repent ; and when they were in the act of proclaiming the remission of sins, the return of Jesus, and the introduction of times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, and the restoring of all things of which God had spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets, if only the nation would repent and be converted, they were arrested and cast into prison ; brought before the high council of Israel, to whom they had boldly testified concerning their Messiah, and that “salvation is in none other ;” and now, instead of faith, repentance, and the reception of their testimony on the part of Israel, the very heads of their nation, “the chief priests and elders,” had not only definitively refused their Messiah, but for-

bidden them to preach or teach in His name ; and had dismissed them with reiterated and multiplied threatenings to desist from fulfilling the divine commission entrusted to them by their risen Lord, for the discharge of which they had received the Holy Ghost, and were filled with His presence and power.

Are not the heavens to rule? Has not God raised up His servant Jesus, and set Him on His own right hand in the heavens, and made Him "both Lord and Christ"? Is God's purpose to bless the world, by sending back Jesus to judge the habitable earth in righteousness, as God's King, set on His holy hill of Zion, to be frustrated, or indefinitely postponed? Such might have been the questionings of these witnesses ; and as they "reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them," we need not wonder that they and "their own" were so solemnly impressed by the tidings that they felt their only resource was in prayer to God, as the godly had found it in Israel, in former periods, in times of national crisis. (Exodus xxxii., xxxiii. ; 2 Chron. xx. ; Isaiah xxxvii.)

*"And having been let go, they came to their own" friends, who were, no doubt, assembled in prayer in the well-known "upper room," where the Spirit*

had descended (ch. i. 14, ii. 1) at Pentecost, and where they were so soon to receive further sensible tokens of His continued presence with them. There was now a recognised community of believers in Christ within the holy city ; and the two disciples naturally repair "to their own company." This divine Ecclesia, with the more than Shekinah-glory, the person of the Holy Ghost, tabernacling among them, was God's centre ; and the disciples left the presence of the established order that had risen up against them, and found their association in the outside place, with the rejected Christ, and with all the faithful saints in Jerusalem who valued being with God and the Holy Ghost's new testimony to the glorified Christ above the favour of men, or the temporal advantages that might have accrued to them from continuing to go on with the God-forsaken order of things. The power of God's grace had gathered them to this new centre, and the Holy Ghost's presence and blessing now sustained them in it. Living souls, full of the Holy Ghost and faith, draw to living souls ; and Christ, known in their midst, makes that spot where they assemble to be holy ground, the happiest place on earth ; the place to which all Christ-loving and loyal hearts gravitate, that they may praise and worship their common

Lord. There is something even in the very words which tells us this : “ *Having been let go, they came to their own company.*” When we feel in the freest circumstances—all restraint removed—where do we naturally go, if spiritual, but to the assembly of God’s saints? for our Lord has said, “Where two or three are gathered together unto My name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. xviii. 20). The Holy Spirit draws me “to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight” (Ps. xvi. 3).

II. THE SOLEMN PRAYER AND THE IMMEDIATE ANSWER.—“ *And they, having heard it, lifted up their voice with one accord to God, and said, LORD, Thou art the God\* who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them; who hast said by the mouth of Thy servant David, Why have [the] nations raged haughtily and [the] peoples meditated vain things? The kings of the earth were there, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ. For in truth against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou hadst anointed, both Herod and Pontius*

\* If with some we omit “God,” we should read “Thou art He who made.”

Pilate, with [the] nations and peoples of Israel, have been gathered together in this city, to do whatever Thy hand and Thy counsel had determined before should come to pass. And now, Lord, look upon their threatenings, and give to Thy bondsmen with all boldness to speak Thy word, in that Thou stretchest out Thy hand to heal, and that signs and wonders take place through the name of Thy holy servant Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place wherein they were assembled shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke the word of God with boldness" (ver. 24-31).

The effect on the gathered saints of the report of the opposition, and the threatenings of the leaders of the Jews, was to draw forth their dependence on God, and the expression of it in prayer. There were but few assembled, but the report of the doings of the Council would go forth in a short time throughout the entire Christian community. The apostles, and those who were with them, feeling deeply the solemn character of the crisis, and the gravity of the situation, lift up their voice with one accord to God, and addressing Him as Jehovah, they pray, both in view of His power and His counsel, as witnessed in creation and expressed in revelation. The apostles gave their report: one of

the company led in prayer, all the others praying with him in the Holy Ghost.

There was no such thing as the singing of the second psalm, and the application of it made by Peter in prayer, as has been alleged ; neither was this a form of common prayer in use in the Jerusalem Church, for "in this way you would improperly transfer to the primitive Church the usage of a later time." They needed no formula of prayer then, for they had the Spirit in power, and He was all-sufficient, both to sustain them and to give them the proper sentiments and form of words to use in their prayers. Nature in distress needs no form in which to express itself, — neither does grace ; and here it must have been the Spirit-given prayer of the moment they uttered, for they refer in it to "their threatenings," as if spread out by them at that time as they prayed in the Holy Ghost.

It has been well said, "the most effective weapons which the Church can employ in distress and persecution are prayers and tears." If the prayer of a righteous man availeth much, the prayer of many righteous men, when offered with one accord, availeth still more.

III. GOD, THE CREATOR, IS ACKNOWLEDGED.—

There is a mighty power in the souls of the saints, when in their extremities they feel they can "commit their souls in well-doing to a faithful Creator" (1 Pet. iv. 19). Here they do so,—“Thou art the God who made the heaven and the earth, and the sea, and all that is in them.” With the Omnipotent Creator for us, who can be against us?

Met, as they now were, in their divine mission to proclaim the Lordship of Christ and demand of the nation repentance and submission to His name, by the hostile opposition of the lords who were then ruling in Israel, they appeal to God in His character of universal Lord,\* the God who made the universe, and rules over all creatures ; and if

\* Lord here is *δισπόρης*, *Master*, occurring, as applied to God and to Christ, elsewhere, in Luke ii. 29 ; 2 Peter ii. 1 ; Jude 4 ; Rev. vi. 10. To men, 1 Tim. vi. 1, 2 ; 2 Tim. ii. 21 ; 1 Pet. ii. 18 ; it is used as opposed to a servant, the head of a family, having supreme authority therein ; and when applied to God it signifies His Lordship and supreme authority. In the LXX. it stands for the three words, *Adonai* (Gen. xv. 2, 8) ; *Elohim* (Job v. 8) ; *Jehovah* (Prov. xxix. 26) ; and in profane authors it is applied to kings and emperors (Jos. Ant. I. iii. 1 ; Herodian. I. vi. 4 ; Xen. Cyr. I. iii. 18). With God as *Despot* we have the only desirable form of government, for He is All-wise, All-good, and All-powerful. And this must be the rule, we are told, of “the world to come” (1 Cor. xv. 24, etc.)

those who exercise authority in Israel, were assuming a minatory aspect towards His servants, they now appeal from their tribunal to the throne of Him by whom kings rule and princes decree justice, and whence they derive their authority, and leave Him to judge between them. They were sure that the Judge of all the earth must do right, and judge righteous judgment; and moreover, if He were Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, He could give effect to His will by the power of His hand, and they might calmly confide in Him.

It was in this manner they prayed in "the times of old," when, as in Jer. xxxii. 17, they said, "Ah, Lord God! behold, Thou hast made the heaven and the earth by Thy great power and stretched-out arm, and there is nothing too hard for Thee." And again, in Neh. ix. 6, "Thou, even Thou, art LORD alone: Thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and Thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth Thee." These were trying times for their fathers, and now they, the godly remnant so recently called out to witness for God and His Christ in the face of national de-

fection and opposition, call on God in the same solemn way, laying hold on Him as the Creator and universal Lord. As when Hezekiah laid the threatenings of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, before "the God of Israel," saying, "Thou art the God, even Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth ; Thou hast made heaven and earth" (Isa. xxxvii. 16, 17) ; even so do the poor remnant in Israel, who have separated themselves to the name of Jesus from the apostate nation of the Jews, now pray in their time of deep trial, with the strength and confidence of faith.

Heaven, earth, and sea, with all that they contain, came forth into being obedient to the will and word of the omnipotent Creator ; and if they obeyed His voice and did His will, He is able to do all things ; and the will of man, let him be ever so high in place or authority, ought not to be set against the will of God ; and they were strong in faith, giving glory to God because assured that they were doing His will who created the heavens and the earth. Oh, what strength we gather in the time of trouble as we stand beneath the mighty dome of Night, and gaze aloft into the glorious heavens laden with the rich fruitage of the calm, sparkling stars ; or walk forth on the summer eve and listen to the roll of the great ocean waves as

they break on the rocky shore ; or let the mind take in the thought that these waters girdle the great globe with all its teeming objects, animate and inanimate ; and that He who called them into being by His word is still upholding them in being by His power, and that these are but part of His works, for worlds on worlds, still veiled from human eyes by their unmeasurable distances, people the (to us) illimitable depths of space ; and He is "God over all, blessed for ever ;" and the God of creation being the God of our salvation, we have nothing short of omnipotence on our side : and Scripture in its first and last books, Genesis and the Apocalypse, gives special prominence to this great doctrine that on opening our Bibles as well as on closing them we may be reminded that we are "sons and daughters of *the* LORD *Almighty.*"

IV.—GOD THE REVEALER IS ACKNOWLEDGED.—

*"Who hast said by the mouth of thy servant David, Why have the nations raged haughtily, and the peoples meditated vain things?"*\* *"Who hast made,"*

\* The reading here, most likely, should be "Who by the Holy Spirit (through the mouth of Thy servant David, our father) hast said." This is the eighth prophecy expounded in this book.

and "who hast *said*," bring before us the God of *creation* and the Author of *revelation*. The living, personal God, the Maker of heaven and earth—not the God of the pantheist—is the God who inspired holy men of old to communicate His truth, and embody in the prophetic Word His counsel regarding the Person, kingdom, and government of the Messiah; and David,\* we are here told, was the Lord's instrument to foretell the hostile confederacy of nations, peoples, kings, and rulers that should combine against His Christ. There had been and still is a hostile gathering of men against the Lord and against His Christ; but now a friendly gathering of His followers confronts them and boldly stands up for Him. This is the work of God's Holy Spirit.

*"The kings of the earth were there, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord, and against*

\* The Second Psalm is exclusively a prophecy of Christ, and cannot be applied to David or any other king, even in a secondary way. It is repeatedly quoted in the New Testament—verses 1, 2 in this place—by some of the apostles or others; the 7th verse by Paul (Acts xiii. 33; Heb. i. 5); the 9th verse by John (Rev. ii. 26, 27; xii. 5; xix. 15). It furnishes the two appellations of the Lord, the *Messiah* and the *Son of God*. It is "suffering and glory" that we get here—the rage of man against the Lord's Anointed, but the Lord's triumphant exaltation of Him.

*His Christ,*" etc. (verses 26-28).\*—The horse, in its intractable condition—spirited, and refusing to be managed by the rider—is the source of the figure "raging," which is here applied to "the nations," and which refers to the Romans; and "the peoples" ("the plural, in allusion to the twelve tribes") designate the Jews. Indeed, we have in the prayer itself an explanation of the matter, given us in these words: "For in truth, against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou hadst anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the nations and peoples of Israel, have been gathered together† in this city, to do whatever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before should come to pass." This must refer to their opposition to Christ, which led to his crucifixion, and which he will punish when "He comes in His kingdom. And this universal hostility must have appeared to the community the more to be dreaded the more they looked upon a

\* The present prayer answers to the Second Psalm, as a comparison shows:—

The kings——Herod.

The rulers——Pontius Pilate.

The nations——The Romans.

The peoples——The peoples of Israel.

† "In this city" is an addition which is undoubtedly genuine, and is inserted by Lach., Tisch., and Alf. It answers to "upon Thy holy hill of Zion" (Ps. ii. 6).

world thus opposed, not as an *unorganised mass* of individuals, but saw in the front of the hostile array those who were set to be heads of nations and lands—the princes and potentates of the earth :” “*Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the nations, and peoples of Israel, have been gathered together.*”

It is remarkable how entirely they forget themselves in this prayer, and are absorbed with Christ and His great interests. “The apostles were so thoroughly engrossed with the Person of Christ and His affairs their own individual concerns were thrown into the background, and it was so exclusively Christ’s cause which appeared to them intrinsically important, that they saw even in their own sufferings nothing but persecutions directed against Christ. Their prayer, therefore, concerned itself only about him ; and their desires looked exclusively to this, that they might be enabled to glorify Him.” This shows the work of the Spirit of God, for it is His office to glorify Christ : “He shall glorify Me, for he shall take of Mine and show it unto you.” And the spiritual *sense*—the spirit of wisdom that was in them by the Holy Ghost—showed itself in the appropriate way in which they fixed upon the text with which the Second Psalm opens to form the basis of their appeal in prayer to God with regard to the rulers

of their nation, for no quotation could have been found that could have described so vividly the awful situation, and the utter impotency of the world to overthrow God's purpose concerning His Son. It surely teaches us that true spirituality will show itself in the Divine skill with which we can weave Holy Scripture into the body of our prayers ; and also that Christ be uppermost, and self nowhere.

Then the folly of the opposition of men to Christ and His cause is seen in this, that in all that transpired they were but carrying out the Divine counsel. "The hostility of the world is so little able to overthrow God's plan, that it is compelled to become the means of accomplishing it."

The confederacy which is here described was formed, as we have already said, when Jesus was crucified ; and He will punish it when He returns in His kingdom (see Luke xix.) It is still, in principle, existent—being the course of this world, already judged, but spared through Divine long-suffering. It will be fully developed in all its forms of evil in "the last days"—those days which the Psalms so generally belong to. It acts on the old desire and lie of the serpent (Gen. iii. 5). It would dethrone God. For the present, however, He that sits in the heavens laughs at it all ; as was expressed by the angel rolling away the stone,

and sitting on it, while he put the sentence of death into the hearts of its keepers (Matt. xxviii.) What was all that but the Lord telling the confederacy which had crucified Jesus that He had them all in derision? In like spirit the Lord Jesus, from the heavens, challenged Saul, the persecuting zealot, in Acts ix. 3.

But there is much more than this present laughter; for the decree of God, touching the Christ, is the great counter-scheme, and will of course prevail. And while, for the present, the judgment of Rev. xix. 15, xii. 5, is not fulfilled, nor the establishment of Christ's earthly triumph and royalty in Zion, when the heathen shall be given Him for an inheritance, the government of God turns suffering to spiritual blessing, and restrains the wrath of enemies, and under our Father's hand we learn patience.

The psalm tells of triumph over all opposition by unsparing judgment, and kings are called to submit before the coming judgment of the earth. Those who object that Psalm ii. cannot be Messianic, because it is not applicable to the Christian conceptions of the Messiah, do not take into account that although the kingdom of Messiah is spoken of in this and other Psalms, it is in abeyance because of the rejection of Christ, and that

we have Him now as Saviour and Head of His body the Church, who, after this period of the world's hostility and rejection is ended, will come as Executor of wrath and vengeance, and judge the world in righteousness. He is Saviour and Judge. He is God's King; but being rejected, the kingdom is postponed, and heavenly glory opens, which is now the home we look for after we have passed the time of our sojourning here in fear, and not the earthly centre of Zion with God's King reigning there.

That will come when the Church is gone, but it is now in abeyance, and our place is to be in the midst of this hostile world looking for our Lord to come and take us out of it to Himself; but while He tarries in the heavens we are to be outside this hostile confederacy, suffering persecution for His name, and committing the keeping of our souls to God in well-doing as to a faithful Creator, casting all our care upon Him. This is what the Christian community now do.

The Christian community now see by means of this prophetic lamp the hand of God and the accomplishment of His *counsel* in all the sad history of the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus; and from this they take courage in the present emergency when menaced by "the chief priests and

elders of the people," and forbidden to preach and teach at all in the name of Jesus. Creation, Revelation, and Providence, all confirm their faith in God and His Christ, and give them a spiritual conviction that, with God on their side, they need not fear what all the powers of the world can do against them. They have only to have perfect faith in Him, and He will take the whole matter so entirely into his own hands, that, like Jehoshaphat's army of old, they will have nothing left them to do but to gather the spoils of a God-given victory (2 Chron. xx. 26). Then comes the brief petition-part of their prayer:—

V. WHAT THEY PRAY FOR.—*And\* now, Lord, look upon their threatenings, and give to Thy bondsmen † with all boldness to speak Thy word in that Thou stretchest out Thy hand to heal, and that signs*

\* The first phrase in Greek (*καὶ τὰ νῦν*), mechanically copied, would be, *and the (things) now*; which may be an elliptical expression meaning, "and now (as to) the things which have been mentioned."—*Alex.*

† "Bondsmen," really *slaves*, *δοῦλοι*, a co-relative of *δεσπότης* (v. 24); David is called *ὁ παῖς* (v. 25); but the Lord Jesus is distinguished from him by the additional word *ἅγιος*, *holy*. But when they speak of themselves they say *δοῦλοι*, *slaves* or *bondsmen*. This shows at once their reverence and subjection. See Ps. xi. iv.; xxxiv. 15; Jer. xxxii. 18, 19; Amos ix. 4-8.

*and wonders take place through the name of Thy holy servant Jesus* (verses 29, 30).

There are here three things requested, (1) boldness to speak, and (2) the hand of God with them to heal, and that signs and wonders might take place at the same time that they beseech Him (3) to look upon their threatenings.

One cannot but observe the meekness and gentleness of Christ in this Christian community, in that they do not ask for any punishment on their enemies, only that God would look upon their threatenings, "according to His watchful providence, His restraining power, and His protecting care." Look upon their *threatenings*, for they had not been few (v. 17, 21). Although the threatenings of the Sanhedrim were like a sword suspended over the heads of the apostles, they do not pray for wrath or vengeance upon their adversaries, for they had heard how their Saviour had prayed: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do;" and they had just been seeing the fruit of that prayer of His on the cross in the forgiveness and salvation of thousands of Jerusalem sinners; and knowing their commission (Luke xxiv. 47), and that through His name even these hostile rulers might be saved, they were in spiritual sympathy with the Saviour-God and His exalted Son,

and could not have prayed for vengeance like the souls under the altar, who will be all right in praying thus in a day of judgment (Rev. vi. 10).

For the present "mercy rejoiceth against judgment," and we have such privileges in Christ that now, and to faith, we have our portion already without needing to wait and pray for the destruction of our enemies. "Grace reigns," and instead of cherishing revengeful feelings, we lift up holy hands to God without wrath or doubting (1 Tim. ii.); and the very Peter of this crisis teaches us by the example of Christ—"who when suffering threatened not"—how to act in perfect grace towards those who may oppose us for our testimony or our Christian walk (1 Pet. ii. 11-28). Even Michael the Archangel reads us a lesson not to "despise dominions," or "speak evil of dignities." For when he contended with the devil, and disputed about the body of Moses—I suppose as to the justice of his having it raised for the transfiguration before Christ had died and abolished death, and got it out of His domain—he merely says, "The Lord rebuke thee," and brings against him no railing accusation.\*

\* *In what spirit should the Christian mention his enemies in his prayers?* (1) Without fear or dread; for he prays to the King of all kings ("if God be for us," etc.

“ *With all boldness to speak Thy word.*” Not only that they might not be intimidated by the declared opposition of their rulers, seeing that no combination of power can prevail against the Lord and His Anointed ; but with a spiritual energy which gives power and edge to the word spoken by men full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, even when there is no declared opposition to them or it. The preaching of some men is as different from that of others as night is from day, even when both may be nearly equal in the amount of truth spoken : for the one is speaking from intellect and memory, the other “ in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” Spiritual boldness in declaring God’s testimony may sometimes be found in those who are utterly destitute of all natural courage, and whose nature makes them so shy that they would have blushed and felt put out, in unconverted days, if a child had looked them straight in the face ; and this is the God-given boldness for Christ which can alone be bestowed by being filled with the Holy Ghost.

Rom. viii. 31), verses 25-28. (2) Without wrath and hatred, for his prayers are directed against *that which is evil*, not against evil *men* (ver. 29). (3) Without pride and defiance ; for he prays not so much with regard to his personal affairs as to the cause of God (verses 29, 30).—*Lange.*

It has been well remarked, "They do not ask that they may be allowed to give over speaking, much less that others may be sent in their stead ; for they were sure of their call to the office." (*Thy Word*, ch. x. 36 ; Heb. iv. 12.)

They were certainly not intimidated by the threatenings of the rulers, who to save their places and their own importance had forbidden them to preach or teach in the name of Jesus : for they pray for *all boldness*—boldness of the most absolute degree and of every sort—to speak the word of God about His Son, the very thing forbidden. The apostle Paul, though so great a preacher of the Word, frequently desires the brethren to pray for him—that, as he writes, Eph. vi. 19, "utterance may be given unto me that I may open my mouth boldly (or with *boldness*) to make known the mystery of the Gospel . . . . that I may be *bold* in it as I ought to speak." This is deeply expressive of his sense of dependence on the Holy Ghost to continue this spiritual power and energy in his soul despite continual opposition. And in preaching, this divine boldness is half the victory : for it makes us confident in the Lord, like Jehoshaphat's host who went against their enemies with a choir of singers unto the Lord, "and that they should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out

before the army, and to say, Praise the Lord ; for His mercy endureth for ever" (2 Chron. xx.) There must be that holy, Spirit-given courage in preaching Christ that makes us feel within us a tone of triumph as we speak a "Thanks be unto God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ"—if we are so in the enjoyment of God's power in preaching His Word that a savour of Christ shall be felt, and the truth be laid with convicting energy on the souls of men. "Clothed with power from on high" is what their Lord had promised them : and for this they now prayed.

*And that signs and wonders may be done* (verse 30). This formed a third petition of their prayer: they seek the continuance of miraculous powers as the external signs of their divine commission. In Mark's Gospel we have this commission given, and these signs connected with it thus:—"And He said to them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the glad tidings to all the creation. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved, and he that disbelieves shall be condemned. And these signs shall follow those that have believed : in my name shall they cast out demons ; they shall speak with new tongues ; they shall take up serpents, and if they should drink any deadly thing it shall not injure them ; *they shall lay hands upon the infirm, and*

*they shall be well.* The Lord, therefore, after He had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat at the right hand of God. And they going forth preached everywhere, *the Lord working with [them], and confirming the word by the signs following upon it*" (Mark xv. 15-20).

By the Holy Spirit they were now better instructed and guided into the truth of their Lord being exalted a Prince and a Saviour than to ask Him for fire from heaven on those who were opposed to Him (Luke ix. 54); for, now that He had been exalted, they had been taught that He was not in Elijah-testimony but in Elisha-power to work deeds of mercy and not send tokens of judgment. They would have their boldness increased by seeing the Lord's hand with them, healing, as He had promised; and for this they prayed—"And that signs and wonders take place *through* the name of thy holy servant Jesus." That indicates *the power* by which they expected them to be accomplished. We have read "in the name of Jesus," chap. iii. 6, and again, iv. 10, 18; but this is *through* His name. *In that Thou stretchest forth Thy hand for healing*—a continuance of similar healing power is one of the items in their prayer.

## VI. THE ANSWER TO THEIR PRAYER.—*And when*

*they had prayed, the place in which they were assembled shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and spake the word of God with boldness.*

Their prayer was answered: (1) the place shook: this *physical* effect was a wonder of itself (see Exod. xix. 18; Ps. lxxviii. 8); for the omnipotent God was *there* in the person of the Holy Ghost—showing His presence *with* them besides being *in* them (for the Holy Spirit is now on earth with the Church, as well as in the bodies of the individual saints): (2) “*they were all filled with the Holy Ghost,*” and the result was immediately seen in this particular: (3) “*they spoke the word of God with boldness.*” This was the permanent moral effect. The same *sign* was not given, “for that first baptism by the Holy Ghost was not to be repeated;” but the shaking of the place was given—the sign of His continued presence, and in token of His ability to control all visible objects and persons, and impart to them power to continue their work and testimony to the name of Jesus. “They were *assembled*” when this happened: it was the assembly of God. Their being all filled with the Holy Ghost was a fresh thing. But some would say if they had the Holy Ghost they could not be more filled than they were: but the language implies a fresh and renewed filling, although the Holy Ghost did not

come afresh from heaven to do it. If one might reverently refer to a steam-engine, by way of giving a memorable illustration of this : there is steam in it, but it is standing still ; but when the steam is up it is so filled that it works with power : there was nothing fresh put in ; but that which was in it was applied with a fresh power. So of the Holy Ghost : He is there with all power and all ability to empower them to heal and to speak ; but, on the prayer, that power was applied. The form of the words shows it was personal ; *the Holy Spirit* Himself—not an influence of the Spirit, nor yet “new illapses of the Spirit” (see chap. i. 8 ; ii. 33, 38 ; ix. 31 ; x. 45). Filled with the Holy Spirit “they did speak the word of God with boldness.” The case having been appealed to God, He now hereby sensibly declared His approval of their conduct.

VII. GREAT POWER AND GREAT GRACE. *And the heart and soul of the multitude of those that believed were one ; and not one said that anything of what he possessed was his own, but all things were common to them ; and with great power did the apostles give witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. For neither was there any one in want among them ; for as many as were owners of land or houses, selling them, brought the price of what was sold, and laid*

it at the feet of the apostles ; and distribution was made to each according as any one might have need.

And Joseph, who had been surnamed Barnabas by the apostles (which is, being interpreted, Son of Consolation), a Levite,—Cyprian by birth, being possessed of land, having sold [it], brought the money and laid it at the feet of the apostles (verses 32-37).

The multitude of them who believed (notwithstanding that they were more than seven thousand in number) were of one heart and one soul : there was the most complete consciousness of unity and concord by the indwelling and powerful inworking of the "one Spirit." This was "the unity of the Spirit ;" and though it was so large they had no difficulty in keeping it, when they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, who so absorbed them that nature and flesh were quiescent. We read of no moment like this in the after-history of the Church ; for this was the day of the Spirit's full power in producing unity in belief and action, self-abnegation and powerful testimony against the world to a risen and victorious Christ, very much akin to the moment when the host of Jehovah encompassed Jericho of old, and the power of God, in original and unhindered strength, was openly

manifested in connection with their apparently feeble testimony. The Church never enjoyed the same open manifestation of divine power after the sin of Ananias and Sapphira ; just as Israel never had the same open manifestation of power with them that made the walls of Jericho fall down flat after the sin of Achan and the defeat of Ai.

The power of God had been displayed on behalf of His assembly in making the opposition of the Sanhedrim come to nought, and in enabling the whole Spirit-filled Church to move onwards as one man in world-conquering power with their witness-bearing to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus ; and now the Spirit gives us a glimpse of the state of the Church after its deliverance from the time of the averting of the first external danger that threatened its overthrow. "The Church of the living God," the vessel of divine testimony to a risen and glorified Christ,—“the pillar and mainstay of the truth”—could not be destroyed by the hostile action of men in the highest places of power and influence, for God was with them. As the Captain of the Lord's Host appeared to Joshua at Gilgal, so did the Holy Ghost give tokens of His presence with the Lord's new host of Spirit-led warriors. Like their Lord they had been “anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power ;”

and therefore "with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all."

Filled with the Holy Ghost and with power, they showed it in the following ways : (1) In their cordial and intense experience of the consciousness of an inner unity—"And the heart and soul of the multitude of those that believed were one ;" (2) in the brotherly love that cared and sacrificed for others, and which was such an opposite thing to the natural selfishness of man, that it was given (verse 34) as an evidence of "the grace of God"—"And not one said that anything of what he possessed was his own, but all things were common to them ;" (3) in the great power with which the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus—a token that the prayer of verse 29 continued to be answered ; "and with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus ;" "and (4) great grace was upon them all," the great grace of God—the divine favour which delights to impart all blessings that divine benevolence for Christ's sake could bestow. This is a statement that has a bearing upon the unity and testimony (for grace alone produced these), and very specially on the self-sacrificing beneficence of the believers, as verse 34 would lead us to in-

fer; "*for* neither was there any one in want among them; for as many as were owners of land or houses, selling them, brought the price of what was sold, and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any one might have need." Impelled by "great grace," their fraternal love was so strong that there was a mutual care for each other among them, that constrained all the owners of lands and houses to sell them that their poorer brethren might not be in want.

There was not one that said that anything of what he possessed was his own, but all things were common to them; yet, as we have already explained on chapter ii. 44, the community of goods was but a spiritual realisation in the Holy Ghost, and not so complete and absolute as an external thing that it abolished the actual possession of all personal property. For "*he possessed*" is said of each holder of property. The community of goods was chiefly in this, that "not one said that anything of what he possessed *was his own.*" There was such a flow of self-sacrificing liberality that they were actuated by the spiritual understanding that "all things were common to them;" and the owners of property sold it as the law of love prompted and the

necessity of their poorer brethren required : the more conversions of men of property the more sales.\*

When Luke continues his description of the action of the Christians in verses 34, 35, the main feature is evidently the provision which was made for the needy. The work was performed with so much liberality and success that no one suffered (verse 34). The wants of every individual were supplied (verse 35). This result was due to the sale of property on the part of *all* the members of the Church (*ἅσασιν*) who were owners of lands or houses. The funds which were thus obtained were laid at the feet of the apostles (who sat when they taught) ; that is to say, the funds were entrusted to them as the almoners of the Church.

There is here, however, "a slightly different

\* Was it so that the Holy Ghost prompted the Jerusalem Christians to sell their property and use it for the purposes of Christian benevolence, and thus be their own executors, before the Romans came and devastated the city? This is worthy of consideration. It is a mark of wisdom when believers convert their property into Christian beneficence and administer it with their own hands, seeing that the world and the works that are therein are to be burned up. This is Peter's argument in his Second Epistle when enforcing a good Christian life—that we may have "an abundant entrance" at last "into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," like a ship going into harbour in full sail and colours flying

development from the second chapter. There we find what might seem a greater freeness, and perhaps to some eyes a more striking simplicity. But all is in season, and it seems to me that, while the devotedness was the same (and the Spirit of God takes pains to show that it was the same, spite of largely increased numbers by the continued mighty action of the Holy Ghost), still, with this advance of numbers, simplicity could not be kept up in the same apparent manner. The distribution made to each before was more direct and immediate; now it takes effect through the apostles.”—*W. Kelly*.

The reality and consciousness of unity in the Spirit and Christian brotherhood were in these days so practical, when the Church was at its best, that it led to such tender interest even in the bodies of the saints, which are represented in 1 Cor. vi. as the “members of Christ,” and “temples of the Holy Ghost,” that owners of property sold their “lands and houses,” that they should be furnished with food and raiment, and that there should not be “any one in want among them.”

This *selling* grace of liberality—common to all owners of property in the Jerusalem Church—seems to have so little illustration in modern times, that the selling of an estate for religious purposes (as when Robert Haldane sold the beautiful pro-

perty of Airthrey and used the proceeds in missions at home and abroad) is looked upon with astonishment, as something uncalled-for and extraordinary, whereas it is here recorded that this was the normal rule of Christian beneficence among all men of property in these Pentecostal days. This would be at once a more dignified and more scriptural way of raising funds than the miserable and degrading expedient, so generally adopted in modern times, of Christians holding bazaars for religious or benevolent purposes. If the great people who generally figure in connection with these world-shows were following the example of their brethren the Christian nobility and gentry of Jerusalem, and selling their "*lands and houses*," there would be no necessity for bazaaring to "spoil the Egyptians" for any scriptural object connected with Christian beneficence. But instead of adopting this Christian method, how sad it is to observe that the professing Church of our day will grub with naked hands through the entire length of the "miry places" of "this present evil world," if it can raise only a few hundred pounds for its own selfish purposes of church or chapel building, or the promotion of its charities or philanthropies!\* What a contrast

\* Some may say, "You are doing us an injustice, for at bazaars we sell our property for good objects, and that is

have we in this to the Spirit-filled Pentecostal assembly of God ; when "great grace was upon

just what they did in the Jerusalem Church." I do not object to the quiet, private, unobtrusive, and shop-like sale of such articles as are made by Christians, who can thus turn their industry into money if they are so minded (though I do not read that the widows came round Dorcas and showed the garments that she had *sold*) ; but I do object to the public and ordinary raffle-ended bazaar, because it is entirely unscriptural in its principle and worldly in its spirit and administration. As ordinarily conducted, no one can deny that bazaars are "of the earth, earthy," and unfit scenes for "members of Christ."

Supposing that, in this fourth chapter of Acts, instead of the edifying record given us of Spirit-produced benevolence within the Church, we had found it narrated that the Apostles, on being discharged by the Council, had had recourse to the worldly expedient of holding a great public bazaar in the Court of the Temple, or some other prominent place, to raise funds for the poor saints, and that we had read in this record that Peter's wife and her mother, Mary the mother of Jesus, Martha and Mary of Bethany, Chuza, the wife of Herod's steward, and other of the well-known women that followed Jesus in the time of his ministry, had had their several stalls at the great Pentecostal bazaar, and had been very successful in raising money, would not the insertion of such a paragraph have appeared so infinitely below the moral dignity of the Church of the Pentecost period that it would have discredited the whole of the apostolic narrative in the eyes of all right-hearted men ? And if the general Christian conscience would

them all," and when, as a consequence, "*as many as were owners of lands or houses, selling them, brought the price of what was sold and laid it at the feet of the apostles, and distribution was made to each according as any one might have need.*" There could scarcely be a stronger expression of the love and unity which prevailed in the Christian assembly, when it was not confined to sentiment or language but extended to the interchange of social advantages and the sale of "lands and houses."

One very fervent brother, Joses, surnamed by the apostles Barnabas,\* which is by interpretation

have discarded as a fiction a narrative containing such a record, seeing that the Church is one, and we are linked to the Jerusalem Church by the one Spirit, ought we to make a Church history to-day that could not be read but with shame and blushing side by side with the Church history of the Acts of the Apostles? It is only unbelief in the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church that allows professing Christians to do now what they would be shocked to read had it been embodied in the narrative of these\* Pentecostal days. It tells its own sad tale of how low the professing Church has sunk, when even ministers and real Christians are found promoting bazaars, concerts, and other worldly entertainments.

\* Barnabas is here said to be by interpretation a son of consolation. But בֶּרֶךְ נְבוֹאָה is literally *son of prophetic discourse*, or exhortation, "literally *υἱὸς προφητείας* ; he was counted among the prophets (ch. xiii. 1) ; but *προφ.* in-

son of consolation, is mentioned by Luke as a notable instance of a man possessed of selling grace. It is all the more noteworthy that he was a Levite born in the island of Cyprus; and, as a Levite, he had likely no property in Palestine; although he might have had a little, for the Levites were allowed a little territory around the forty-eight cities which were assigned to them (Num. xxxv. 1-8; Lev. xxv. 32). But Levites were not put in possession of any division of the land when Canaan was divided to the tribes of Israel; the offerings of the Lord were to be their portion, as they attended to the service of His sanctuary. Having received grace, Barnabas gave up his property for the benefit of the poor; and although we are not told what was the peculiarity of his voluntary

cludes *παράκλησις*, an edifying discourse (ch. xiii. 15; 1 Cor. xiv. 3), thus accounting for the translation in the text." The reason for giving him this surname, no doubt, was that he had the manifestation of the Spirit in a highly developed prophetic gift. He seems to have been one of the most gifted of the prophets, for when tidings came to the ears of the Church which was at Jerusalem that there had been blessing in the Gospel at Antioch, "they sent forth *Barnabas*, that he should go as far as Antioch; who, when he came and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and *exhorted* them all that with purpose of heart they should cleave unto the Lord . . . and much people was added unto the Lord" (Acts xi. 19-26).

self-impoverishment, yet we may be very sure that there was some decided trait of genuine heartiness of love about it that made it very striking, and called for this one special mention of him by name among all the good and true of the property class in the assembly at Jerusalem : a complete contrast to the sad tale of Ananias and Sapphira. Farther on in this narrative the Spirit records of Barnabas, "*He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.*"

I weep as I read of the days  
 When all who believed were as one,  
 Yet, Lord, in my heart are the ways,—  
 Thou endest what Thou hast begun.  
 It is vain to lament o'er the past,  
 To sigh for the time that is o'er ;  
 But thou wilt unite us at last,  
 Unite us to sunder no more.

How blest, in the flowings of grace,  
 Thy saints "of one heart and one soul !"  
 Yea, gather'd to Thee in one place,  
 Thy Spirit their only control !  
 It is sad to look round on the change !  
 Oh ! how can I choose but to weep ?  
 Afar on the mountains they range,  
 The beautiful flock of Thy sheep !  
 Ah ! once they were happy and free !  
 Not one had a claim of his own !

Their voices gave witness to Thee,  
Thou Shepherd ! Thou Chief Corner-stone :  
They reposed in Thy pastures so green,  
They drank of the waters of life ;  
And walking in truth they were seen,  
Afar from division and strife.

O Saviour ! in pity look down,  
Behold the extent of our grief !  
The clouds of calamity frown,  
Thy coming is certain relief !  
We are watching, expectant for Thee !  
The dangers are thickening fast ;  
Lord Jesus, we pant to be free !  
Our Refuge art Thou from the blast.

No more would we weep for the days,  
Or sigh for the hours that are gone,  
By grace we would chant to Thy praise,  
The *glory* is hastening on !  
To lament o'er the ruin is vain,  
The time for repairing is o'er ;  
Unalter'd Thy Word doth remain,  
Our Portion art Thou evermore !

MEDITATIONS  
ON THE  
ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

*(Translated from "Il Dispensatore.")*

\* \* The following "Meditations" are coming out monthly in the Italian periodical "*Il Dispensatore.*" They came into our hands after the greater part of our Lectures was written, so that we could not well avail ourselves of any quotations from them ; but we are sure that we consult the interests of our readers when we give them the opportunity, after reading our exposition, of deepening the lucidity of their conception of these early days of the assembly of God, by perusing the clear brief sketch of the contents of the Pentecostal narrative which the writer of these "Meditations" (J. N. D.) presents. It is, we believe, his most recent writing on "the Acts."

MEDITATIONS ON  
THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

INTRODUCTION.

**T**HE Acts of the Apostles are a continuation of the Gospel of Luke, and are written by the same Evangelist. The discourses, whether of Peter or of Paul, have their source in the heavenly commission which is found at the end of that Gospel. It is not necessary, I hope, to say that the whole is given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, because each of the Evangelists has been employed by God to present us with a different aspect of the history of the Lord; and has accomplished, with the help of the Spirit, the work assigned to him by God. For example, in Matthew we find much more the dispensations of God, and the Lord, as Emmanuel in the midst of Israel, on the earth. In Luke, after the two first chapters, we have the Son of Man, and the ways of God in grace, and the blessings of the present time. And again, in Matthew, the ascension of the Lord is not

recounted, and the commission given to the apostles comes from a risen Jesus, and is addressed to the Gentiles as though the residue of the Jews were already received in grace. The Lord, in Luke, is about to ascend into heaven, and goes there while speaking to them, blessing them with a heavenly blessing; and the commission is addressed to all, first to the Jews, then to the Gentiles. The disciples were to begin at Jerusalem; and this work, the accomplishment of their mission, is what is found recounted in Acts.

Let us follow the course of this story, which is essentially the history of the activity of the apostles Peter and Paul; the first among the Jews, and in the foundation of the Church at Jerusalem, and the other among the Gentiles, although he always addressed himself first to the Jews. The first was one of His eleven disciples, who had followed the Lord on the earth till the cloud received Him and took Him from their sight. The last, Paul, an open enemy to the name of Christ, and converted in sovereign grace while he was occupied in the destruction, if possible, of that name, only saw Him in the glory, and went out to call the Gentiles to the faith — marvellous witness of the sovereign grace of God, and of a glory which renders a magnificent testimony to the perfect and accepted work

of Christ, to which believers are led by faith in Him and in His work. Both these two great apostles laid the same foundation of the salvation preached, that there is but one Saviour and one work by which we may be saved.

Now the grand and important fact, on which all the story depends, is the descent of the Holy Spirit.

Doubtless in all Biblical history the responsibility of man is found, as well as the ways of God, through the deeds and the weakness of man ; but nevertheless the presence of the Holy Spirit on the earth, sent by the Father and by the Son of Man, and dwelling in the faithful and in the house of God, is of immense importance.

It is only when God has accomplished redemption that He comes to dwell in the midst of men. He did not dwell with Adam in his innocence, nor with Abraham, nor with any, till He had brought Israel out of Egypt, and had rescued them from the hands of the King of Egypt, in whose hands they were prisoners ; then He came to dwell in their midst in the cloud ; and the tabernacle was filled with His glory.

Thus, as soon as the Son of Man is gone into heaven, to sit down at the right hand of God, having accomplished the work of redemption, the

Holy Spirit descends according to His promise of the Comforter, and the baptism of the Spirit is realised. Sent from the Father, He cries, "Abba, Father," in the hearts of those who have received Him. Sent by the Son from the Father, He reveals the glory of Him, the Man in heaven ; and, more than that, forms the body of Christ joining the members to the Head, so that he "that is joined to the Lord is one spirit," dwelling in the believer, and also in the universal congregation of believers, so that they are together the habitation of God. It is evident that this truth is of immense importance ; the spiritual liberty given the child of God, the unity of the assembly of God, and the union of the children of God, all depend on the presence of the Spirit, as it is all founded on the work of the Saviour on the cross. Then this truth reveals the state of the external Church, where He dwells, because she has grieved the Spirit, and has lived, and has acted, altogether in a manner contrary to what He would have had her do, so much so that the judgment of God is ready to fall upon her.

Since I have spoken of the descent of the Holy Spirit, it must be understood that the "new birth" is not implied here (though that may be accomplished by the same Spirit) but the personal

coming of the Spirit, when the Son of Man ascended into heaven. The Holy Spirit has worked divinely since the foundation of the world ; He it was who moved upon the face of the waters, who inspired the prophets, who has been the immediate instrument of all that God has done on the earth and in the heavens ; but He only came here below when the Son of Man went to sit down at the right hand of God (John vii. 37, 39), and is only received when we believe (Eph. i. 13 ; Gal. iv. 6). This is seen also clearly elsewhere ; we are sealed when we have believed, and especially when we have believed in the value of the blood of Christ. Washed in this precious blood we are fit to be the habitation of the Spirit of God. "Know ye not," says the apostle Paul, "that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit which ye have from God?" As when the leper was cleansed and purified under the law, he was first washed with water, then sprinkled with blood, then anointed with oil (Lev. xiv. 8, 9 and 14-18)—clear figure of our purification by means of the word of God when we are converted and born again, then of the sprinkling of the blood of Christ, and finally, of the anointing of the Holy Spirit by which we are sealed for the day of final redemption.

Also all gifts, the exercise of which is found in

the Church, are the manifestation of the Holy Spirit who works there. But here, in the Acts, the exposition of the operations of the Spirit is not found, but the fact itself of His coming in order to work.

#### CHAPTER I.

Let us now come to the examination of the narrative itself. This begins with the great truth of which we have already spoken. The disciples were to wait at Jerusalem for the baptism of the Holy Ghost. We shall find again the proof of another precious truth. The Lord, after His resurrection, gave commissions to His disciples by the Holy Ghost. We shall not lose the Holy Ghost when we are raised again; truth perhaps simple, but which makes us feel how great will be our capacity for happiness in that state. Now a great portion of our spiritual strength is employed to enable us to walk in integrity, in spite of the flesh and the temptations of the enemy; but *then* neither the one nor the other will exist. All the power of the Spirit in us will be employed in rendering us fit for the infinite felicity we shall find there. We shall enjoy it according to the strength of the Spirit, as Christ gave gifts by the Spirit to His disciples after His resurrection.

Remark now the intimacy of the Lord with His disciples ; He spoke of the things belonging to the kingdom of God. Christ is now glorified, but His heart, full of divine love, is not removed, is not any the farther away from His own. When He appeared to Saul, He said, "*I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.*" He speaks with Ananias, with authority it is true, but as with a friend, opening His heart respecting Saul, and sending Ananias to speak to him.

He was not ashamed to call His disciples friends on the earth ; He is not ashamed to treat them as friends now. Immense blessing ! To feel that the Lord of glory is near to us, that He holds us as friends and loved ones, and that He can feel compassion also for our infirmities.

The disciples expected still the visible kingdom of the Lord in Israel ; their hearts were still Jewish. They quite believed that He had risen again, but expected that their hopes of the restoration of Israel as a nation would be realised by the Lord, now that He had come out of the sepulchre. The Lord did not tell them that the kingdom would not be restored to Israel ; but that it did not concern them to know the times and seasons which the Father had put in His own power. The kingdom shall be restored to Israel—*when*, is not revealed.

The Son of Man will come in an hour when He is not expected. He sits at the right hand of the Father till His enemies shall be made His footstool. In the meantime He gathers His co-heirs, those who are content to suffer with Him ; and caught up into glory we shall reign with Him. It is not revealed then, it was not revealed to the disciples, the hour of the Saviour's return ; but they should receive, said the Lord, not many days hence, the power of the Holy Ghost, which should come on them, and they should be witnesses to Him in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and in the uttermost parts of the earth. And having said these things, He was taken up, while they beheld, and a cloud received Him, and took Him away out of their sight. They were to be eye-witnesses as far as this point of His heavenly glory. The Holy Ghost was sent afterwards (see John xv. 26, 27). We shall find later that Saul saw Him in His celestial glory for the first time, of which thing He was to be the special witness. Now the Holy Ghost has rendered clear testimony to this glory, as we shall see in the discourses in the Acts, and again it may be seen in the epistles of Peter and elsewhere.

But here is found, before the coming of the Holy Ghost, a very remarkable testimony rendered

by means of angels. The disciples had their eyes fixed on the heavens while Jesus was going there. That was very natural. The beloved Saviour, given back to them from the grave, was, apparently at least, abandoning them again, for heaven it is true, which ought to have strengthened their faith. He had left a promise of the power of the Spirit, which, however, had not yet come ; and therefore the consciousness and direction of this power, which was to reveal all the truth, was wanting to them. He had gone away ; and what should they do ? They must wait.

And as their eyes were then fixed on the heavens, behold two men by appearance, but in reality angels, stood beside them, asking why they looked up into heaven, and making them the revelation of His return. A fact very remarkable, since the Lord had, after the last supper, made known to the disciples that He was going to the Father ; and the first consolation He gave His disciples was that He would come again, and take them to Himself in the Father's house, where He was going to prepare them a place ; then He speaks of the presence of the Comforter which was to be accomplished. There He speaks of His coming to introduce His own into the Father's house ; here, of His glorious appearing, when He will make

Himself seen from the place where He has gone. There He himself speaks of the special privilege of His own according to His personal affection which He had for them ; He wished to console them, His heart had need of them, He desired to have them near to Himself, in the same glory, so that they might see His glory, but specially that where He was, there they might be also. Here it is His return in glory, which would be like His going away.

This was the disciples' first consolation, once they were deprived of His presence. Then another Comforter would be given to dwell with them here below meanwhile. But whether in the declaration on the part of the Lord in His love, or in the revelation made by the angels, the first thing in the Saviour's heart, and in the revelations of God, is that He will come again. Immense is the gift of the Spirit during His absence, and for ever immense is the nature of the state in which redemption has placed the assembly of God here below ; but its hope is, and the height of its joy will be, to see the Saviour as He is ; to be always with Him, like Him ; to see and to be for ever with Him who has loved us, and has washed us from our sins in His own blood,—to see Him face to face !

Greatest blessing, too great for us, if not the

fruit of something still greater—the cross and the sufferings of the Son of God.

Once this blessed Saviour has done that, and the Son of God has been made sin for us, and has died as a man on the cross, nothing is too great ; it will only be the fruit of the travail of His soul. He shall be satisfied ; His love shall be satisfied in our happiness and in our presence with Him. Look only at Zeph. iii. 17, where the love and the glory are inferior to this : “The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty ; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy ; He will rest in His love ; He will joy over thee with singing.” The Father will rest in His love, and in the accomplishment of all His counsels for the glory of His Son ; showing, at the same time, in the ages to come, the excellence of the riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

Such is our expectation.

The disciples return to Jerusalem, and live there together in an upper chamber. They persevered with one consent in supplication and prayer, with the women, and with Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brethren. But the effect of the promise of the Father is only found in the second chapter. All that we have at the end of this first chapter is connected with a Jewish situation ; that is,

with the condition of the disciples before the coming of the Spirit, yet possessing an understanding which had been opened by the Lord to understand the word. They had not the power of the Spirit, but intelligence of the word ; because their standing was in relation with Christ raised up from the dead ; they were enlightened by the divine light communicated to them after His resurrection.

These verses accord perfectly with verses 14-48 of Luke xxiv. Then comes the promise of the Spirit, the accomplishment of which is found in chapter ii.

The well-known active energy of Peter employs the knowledge given by the Lord, applying Psalm cix. to Judas, whose office, says the psalm, another should take. They drew lots, according to Jewish custom, leaving the decision in the hands of God. Matthias is chosen and added to the eleven apostles. Verses 13-19 are a parenthesis. The Sabbath-day's journey, the lots, and all the circumstances, show clearly the actual state of the disciples and the thought of the Holy Ghost on this step. They work with intelligence of the word of the Old Testament ; but the Spirit had not yet come. It is important for us to understand the difference. The Spirit gives now intelligence (1 Cor. ii. 14) ; but this is not of itself power.

The Lord is faithful to lead His own in the path of truth. His grace is sufficient, His strength is made perfect in weakness, and also always gives us the strength necessary to accomplish His will ; but the power of the Spirit is another thing. Now we are specially called to follow His word, although we may be feeble (see what is said to the Church of Philadelphia, Rev. iii.)

It is impossible for Christ to fail us in our obedience, and His strength is sufficient for us. Faithful to His word, while we wait for Him in weakness we shall be pillars in the temple of His God, when He sees the hour of glory. Yet the Holy Ghost dwells in the faithful, sealed with Him by the Father, according to His promise.

## CHAPTER II.

But the great event of which we have spoken now claims our attention—the immense fact of the coming of the Holy Ghost to dwell with the disciples of Jesus, in each, and in the midst of all together. Thus in 1 Cor. iii. 16 the Church, as a universal assembly, is the temple of God ; and then in 1 Cor. vi. 19 the body of the faithful is the temple of God. All those who, steadfast to

Jesus, habitually gathered together, were thus assembled on the day of Pentecost. We have seen, chap. i. 14, that they continued with one accord in prayer while waiting for the Comforter, promised according to the word of Jesus.

Suddenly an impetuous wind is felt, filling all the house where they sat ; as the cloud filled the tabernacle, so that the priests could not enter there (1 Kings viii. 11). But now men themselves composed the tabernacle where God disdained not to dwell. The blood of Jesus had purified them, and rendered them fit to be the habitation of God through the Spirit (in Spirit) (Eph. ii. 22). Marvellous truth, fruit of accomplished redemption! and blessed knowledge that a Man, much more than a man, sits at the right hand of God (John vii. 39). But how beautiful is this truth, this divine fact, that—such is the effect of the death and of the blood of Christ, and of our reconciliation and purification—instead of driving away the priests by His presence, God, in grace, makes us His habitation! What a contrast between the law and the gospel!

But, besides this, a marvellous testimony is found in this fact to the grace of God. The presence of the Holy Ghost depended on the sitting of the Man Jesus at the right hand of God,—de-

monstration and fruit of the accomplishment of the work of redemption. Now this could not be limited to the Jewish people. This presence was in itself a testimony to that accomplishment, and the earnest of our inheritance, Christ being dead for all, and ascended into glory, thus announcing to all the gospel of His glory. For the moment, the patience of God fulfilled the work of grace among the Jews, people of the promises ; but the gospel which should be preached was for the whole world.

When the judgment of God fell on man at the tower of Babel, it dispersed them, confounding their speech ; but God took Abraham, separating him from his country, and from his father's house, to have a seed and then a people for Himself. During many years God endured the iniquity and unfaithfulness of this people, sending prophets, till no further remedy could be found ; at last, He sent His own Son, and they, as we know, rejected and crucified Him. Then the nation is put aside till the sovereign grace of God—His Church, the fulness of the Gentiles being gathered out—commences anew on the footing of the new covenant, and of the presence of the Messiah on the earth.

In the meantime He gathers together the heirs of Christ—the celestial assembly. Thus, although

for a moment the Spirit had separated in the midst of the Jews, spared as a nation by the intercession of Christ on the cross, till they should have rejected a glorified Christ in the same way that they had a crucified Christ come in humiliation ; and also to gather together all those among this people that had ears to hear—it is shown by the Spirit how the God of grace was ready to overstep the limits of the chosen people, and surmount the judgment of Babel, speaking to all the people in their own tongue—highest testimony of grace towards the world !

The barriers remained, but God surmounted them—passed over them—in order to announce the Saviour's grace and salvation unto the whole world. We also see this special gift every time that God intervenes anew, as in Samaria and in the house of Cornelius. In fact it was impossible that a glorified Saviour should be only the Jewish Saviour. The history of this people was, when they had rejected the Saviour, finished, save by grace ; and the eternal redemption of God could not be for the Jews alone.

The visible character that the Holy Ghost takes corresponds to this work. When it descended on Christ, the Spirit was like unto a dove—symbol of the meekness and sweet tranquillity of Him of

whom it was written, "He shall not strive nor cry; neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory" (Matt. xii. 19, 20). But to the disciples He said—"That which I say in the darkness, tell it in the light; and that which ye have heard in the ear, proclaim it on the house-tops."

The Spirit came then as an impetuous wind, filling all the house, and as cloven tongues of fire. The partition was symbolical of the diverse languages, the fire of the penetrating power of the word of God, discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart. It seems to us, that not only the apostles, but all the one hundred and twenty, were invested with this power. They were all together, and the explanation given by Peter of the prophecy of Joel confirms the matter (ch. i. 14, 15; ii. 1, 17).

They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak in strange tongues, according as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now at Jerusalem men of all countries were present, and the rumour of what had happened brought them together. This great crowd was astonished to hear each his own dialect, speaking together and say-

ing—"Are not all these Galileans? How then do we hear each his own tongue?" They were in doubt, saying, "What meaneth this?" Others, cavilling, said, "They are full of new wine." These were especially the Jews, always prone to incredulity.

To these Peter replies, speaking firmly in their mother tongue, and makes them understand that this was what Joel had said, prophesying that these things should happen in the last days. It is clear, on reading Joel, I doubt not, that the Holy Ghost will be poured out anew when Israel is re-established in its own land. It will then be the rain of the latter season. Remark that verse 30 of Joel ii. should come before those preceding. These things will happen before the terrible day of the Lord comes; but the blessings are after that day.

Peter says, in a general way, "in the last days," and speaks of judgment as yet to come, as in fact was the case.

But what is important in his discourse is the presentation to the consciences of the Jews of their actual position; because, whatever grace may be, God is always clear and positive in the declaration and in the exposure of the sins of those souls where grace works. In short, this was

their position ; they had outraged and crucified Him whom God had set at His right hand, His own Son. Him they had put to death, and God had raised Him up, besides what had been demonstrated by the power manifested in His works. Horrible position ! and we say it not only for the Jews but for all men. Their Messiah, foundation of all their hopes, rejected ; the Son of God put to death—a rupture which seemed irreparable between God and man ; and on man's side it was in fact irreparable.

All was lost. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, and mankind had refused it. Sin was there ; transgression against the law was already there ; God had come in grace, and man had not received Him. Now He had gone back into heaven, but, blessed be His name, the counsels of God were not frustrated. Far from that, they were accomplished. Grace had won the victory ; and where man had manifested his enmity against God, God had manifested His love towards man, and accomplished the work for the salvation of believers in Christ. “ Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye, by hand of lawless [men] crucified and slew.”

God has made use of the iniquity and enmity of

man to accomplish the work of redemption. The enmity of man and the love of God were contrasted in the same fact on the cross, in the glorious manifestation that His love surpassed and surmounted the enmity of man. Woe to him who neglects and refuses this immense grace, this work alone efficacious for salvation !

Peter declares that God has raised Christ from the dead, fully testifying that His justice had been satisfied ; for the work that the Saviour has accomplished, He has exalted Him to His own right hand (John xiii. 31, 32 ; xvii. 4, 5), testifying to the value of His work, of what He merited by it, and of the glory (save His seat at the right hand of the Father, which belonged to Him as the only-begotten Son) which He has acquired for us ; and having received from the Father the promised Spirit, He had sent it, of which they saw and heard the effect. And He was to sit there in the heavens till all His enemies should be made His footstool.

Let us remark here, what we have already observed, that Christ, exalted as a man to the right hand of God, has received the Holy Ghost anew, in order to give it to believers. God only dwells with mankind in consequence of redemption. He did not dwell with Adam innocent, nor with

Abraham ; but as soon as Israel was set free from slavery to Egypt by means of a redemption, though external, God comes to dwell in the cloud in the midst of the people, and His glory filled the tabernacle (Exod. xxix. 46). Thus, in a way less visible, but much more precious—eternal redemption being accomplished—He dwells, in the person of the Holy Ghost, in the midst of His people. And Christ being glorified as a man—proof of the accomplishment and of the full effect of this glorious redemption—He receives the Holy Ghost from the Father, and pours it out on His own.

The Spirit unites them individually with Himself, and gives them the consciousness of being sons of God ; and it is the power which operates in believers for the glorifying of Christ here below, and to work in order to accomplish the counsels of God in His assembly, till it shall be caught up to be with Jesus, and like Him, in glory. The believer and the universal assembly are both a temple where the Holy Ghost dwells. Grace has come, and God dwells there where the work and the blood of Christ have rendered it possible, in a world which has rejected Him.

The house of Israel (and later on, the Gentile world) was to know certainly, from this sign, that God had made the Man Jesus, whom Israel had

rejected, both Lord and Christ. Pricked in the heart, and feeling their horrible position in having cast out the Christ, those who heard, demanded, "What must we do?" But, as soon as this effect of the Spirit in their hearts was found, it was easy to give the answer; the work of salvation was accomplished; Christ had been given for their sins; cleansing was already made; they had only to repent, and to recognise the Saviour, in order to have remission of their sins; and, baptized in His name (so that He might be acknowledged in His death), they should receive the Holy Ghost; because the promise was for them and for their children, and for as many as the Lord God should call.

All those, then, that received the word of Peter were baptized, and three thousand persons were added. Here we must distinguish between the operation of grace in the Holy Ghost in the heart in making it receive Christ, and the gift of the Spirit when we have acknowledged Him as Saviour, and as the means of the remission of our sins. The Spirit works in us, makes us feel our sins, the need of a Saviour and of the blood of Christ; and, after we have believed in His work on the cross, we are sealed of God by the gift of the Holy Ghost, who comes to dwell in us.

We have the same thing in the prodigal son in Luke xv. The work of God was done in the far country, and he sets out towards his father, uncertain how he would be received. The work of God was formed in him—he repents, confesses his sins, and spoke of being a hired servant in his father's house. He was not yet clothed with the best garment, had not the ring on his finger, nor the shoes on his feet. He meets his father in his rags; but, from the moment the father has fallen on his neck and kissed him, he dares not speak of being a hired servant. Though he confesses his sins, yet it was no longer time for that. He was not yet fit to enter into the house; rags do not suit well the house of God. But then he is clothed with the best robe of Christ Himself (a robe which was never a part of what had been given to him by his father, which did not belong to Adam innocent); and he is fit to enter into the house with all the honour which the father can put on him. And he is conscious of being recognised as a son, and of having the favour of his father.

It is the same thing with the soul. The Holy Ghost operates in us, produces the need, and we are born of God; and then, convinced of sin, we find Christ the Saviour, and by Him remission of

our sins for ever ; and, finally, we are sealed with the Holy Ghost. "Because ye are sons," says the Apostle, "God has sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. iv. 6). There true liberty is found, and the love of God is poured into our hearts. Our bodies have become temples of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. vi. 19).

It is very important, then, to distinguish between the operation of the Holy Ghost which produces faith, giving power to the word in the conscience, and the habitation of the Holy Ghost in us consequent on, and sealing, the faith which we have.

It is one thing to build a house, and another thing to live in it when it is built. But how we ought to be living in the holiness of this consecration—for we are born of God, and in our bodies dwells the Holy Ghost as in a temple ! The fruits of His presence are beautifully manifested. Here, it is not the power that carries the word of God into the consciences of the whole world, announcing Christ, grace and salvation ; it is the power over self, dismissing self-love, active in love, thinking of others rather than of one's self.

Beautiful is the picture that the Spirit gives of the moral effects of this dwelling of the Holy Ghost in the heart. These effects were of two kinds—piety, or the love of religion ; and then

practical love among the disciples. First persevering in the truth, and in the communion of the apostles, they remained attached to those who had been the channels of the testimony of God to their hearts, who had been the true ambassadors of God ; it was true unity, working by the power of the Holy Ghost, of which the apostles were the vessels ; and then, in the continual commemoration of the death of Christ, there was a yet more ample expression of unity—that of all the body of Christ. They broke bread together, and also persevered in prayer. Beautiful realisation and expression of the unity of the Spirit, abolishing all differences, because, by the power of the Spirit, all hearts were lifted up above all circumstances, above the things of this weak world. Hearts were not here below, but with Christ at the right hand of God in heaven.

Those who believed by the word of the apostles were one with the Father in the Son, according to John\* xvii. 21. Also, the effect of this power which governed all human sentiments, produced itself in the world around them—a holy fear filled all hearts. The world has acknowledged the unfolding of a power not of this world, lifting hearts above the motives that governed it. The presence of God among the disciples was felt by all ; and

that was also manifested by the miracles and wonderful signs worked by the hands of the apostles. God was there in the person of the Holy Ghost, according to the promise of Jesus.

In the second place, practical love was fully realised. They were all together as brethren, the family of God; all the members of the family participating in common the blessings of the Father, none saying, This is mine. If one had more than another, he possessed love's privilege to give to him who had need of it. But this was not enforced; it was not the right of him who was in need; otherwise it would not have been the fruit of love. "Whilst it remained," says Peter, "was it not thine own? and when thou hadst sold it, was it not in thy power?" No; it was full love that felt the duty, as a son of God, not to leave a brother in want. It was the free activity of love, produced by the powerful working of the Spirit of God. As soon as it becomes obligatory, it loses all its value, all its own nature. To take away from another is not to give. The one is self-love; the other is divine love for others. The thought of rendering it obligatory, shows that no love is there.

But to return to our subject. What a magnificent picture of the first meeting of Christians, of

the assembly of God, as He established it in the beginning! To think of others, and not of one's self—divine love accomplished in human hearts. It is quite possible that this cannot be realised literally now; Christians are scattered everywhere; the apostles, at whose feet to cast the gifts and the possessions, are no more; but the true Christian can still perfectly well work according to the principles that filled the hearts of these blessed members of Christ. The word of God supposes the existence of both rich and poor (1 Tim. vi. 17-19). But this does not hinder me from using in love, as a steward of God, all I possess for the good of the members of Christ. The duty of the man to sustain his own family always remains valid; but what in love he can, the faithful Christian is obliged to do; and what he possesses of this world's goods, entrusted to him by God, he must give for the good of all, and especially for the family of God.

But fraternal love was not all. Their hearts were bound together in the worship and adoration of God. At this time the Gentiles had not yet been introduced into the assembly; and the disciples as Jews still followed their old habits. The patience of God still endured the Jewish system, while gathering out from among the people

those who were to be saved. God was ready to take Judaism off the earth, and transfer the remnant of the Jews, whom grace had brought into faith, to the Christian assembly. They united still the Jewish and the Christian worship. They went up daily in common accord to the temple to adore Jehovah; then in their own houses they broke bread, taking the Lord's Supper daily in full confidence of the love of God. They ate their meat with joy and simplicity of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people.

The fruits of the Holy Ghost and the manifestation of His power often attract the hearts of the people; and thus God opens a door to the word, and the hearts of many are truly converted. However, though the testimony be accepted, yet it does not follow that souls are converted. The crowd which followed Jesus afterwards cried, "Crucify Him." But this general favour for the moment stopped opposition, and those that had ears to hear grew in the knowledge of the truth. The truth can only be truly received by grace; but the fruits of the Spirit work powerfully on the natural heart. Every one can understand the love and the abnegation of self, and God makes use of this to spread the testimony of the gospel.

What we are studying here is beautifully pre-

sented in type in the bells and pomegranates that adorned the garment of Aaron when he entered into the holy place. "And *beneath* upon the hem of it, thou shalt make pomegranates of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, round about the hem thereof; and bells of gold between them round about: a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, upon the hem of the robe round about" (Exod. xxviii. 33-35). But now he has lost the right of so entering there for his children; but I speak of what was at first, before they sinned.

### CHAPTER III.

The third chapter of the Acts is remarkable in the ways of God. The declaration is not found, as in the second, of a present introduction into the blessings of the remission of sins, of those who repent and confess the name of Jesus,—nor of the gift of the Holy Ghost. Peter shows, as in all his other discourses, that the death of Christ was the effect of the thoughts of God, though He was put to death by wicked hands; but rather as the accomplishment of prophecy than as the fruit of the counsels of God. The Spirit descends in virtue of the proclamation by the gospel of God's ways with Israel.

The Lord, interceding on the cross for the people, had said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." His prayer was heard, and the judgment of God suspended, in the design of presenting repentance to the people once more.

God knew well that the Jews, hard of heart, would not receive the merciful voice of the long-suffering of God ; and had warned those who had ears to hear (ii. 40) to save themselves from this untoward generation. But He would not come to judge till everything possible had been done, and they had rejected a glorified Christ, as they had rejected a Christ come in humiliation here below. The Spirit therefore by the mouth of Peter, starting from the intercession of Christ, proposes repentance to the people, saying, that then Christ would return. The apostle enters more particularly into the sin of the Jews, and presents the facts with great power to their consciences.

It may seem strange that the apostle should speak of the repentance of all the people, and of sparing them, when the Christian assembly had already commenced, and he had warned them to avoid the judgment which was ready to fall on a people which had crucified the Lord of glory.

But God knew well that the rulers of the people would render His grace vain ; and reject the testi-

mony of a glorified Christ, as they had put to death a Christ present in grace. He prosecuted His counsels according to His own knowledge, but He did not carry out the judgment of His government till everything possible had been done to spare men, inviting them to repentance.

Thus Abraham was told that his seed must descend into Egypt, because the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet accomplished (Gen. xv. 16). And Jeremiah (vii.-xiv., and in other places) does precisely what Peter does ; he says clearly, by his prophetic knowledge, that the people and the vessels of the temple would go into Babylon, at the same time exhorting the people to repent, and that thus doing they would be spared. And it is laid down as a principle, that when Jehovah had pronounced the condemnation of a people or of a city, if that people or that city should repent of its wickedness, He would turn away from the judgment that He had pronounced (Jer. xviii. 7-11). Thus then the apostle exhorts the people to repent, and Christ would return.

Going up to the temple the apostles, Peter and John, had healed a man lame from his birth, who asked alms at the gate called "Beautiful." The man goes up together with the apostles, leaping and praising God. A crowd naturally gathers, as

the man was well known. Peter takes advantage of the occasion to put before the eyes of the people what had been done. It was not by his own power. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of their fathers, had raised up His servant Jesus, whom they had put to death.

Horrible position! what open opposition! fatal—if grace had not been there among the people of God.

It is thus that Peter always presents the truth. They had rejected Him, and God had recognised and glorified Him. And here he enters much more particularly into their sin, more than in chapter ii. He presents the facts with great power to their consciences. They had betrayed the Lord, and denied Him in the presence of Pilate when he had decided to let him go. They had denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer, and killed the Prince of life. But God had raised Him up—once more opposition between the people and God. The name of the risen Saviour at the right hand of God had given to the cripple the perfect health in which they saw him. And here the Spirit responds in grace to the Lord's intercession; and the apostle attributes to ignorance the terrible fact of having rejected the Lord, whether on the part of the rulers or of the people.

That which had been foreordained by God was now accomplished—the sufferings of Christ announced before by their prophets; and if they repented, Jesus would come back; God would send Him from heaven. Those times of blessing that would be fulfilled on the earth by His presence they would have; times that might come on the Lord's side, but for which the repentance of Israel was absolutely necessary, and for which it is still necessary. This always remains true. Their house, said the Lord, should be left unto them desolate until they should say, "Blessed be He that cometh in the name of Jehovah" (Matt. xxiii. 38), quoting Psalm cxviii.

When Israel repents the Lord will come, and it will own that He whom they had rejected was the Lord Himself; and it will be full of sorrow and shame, but shall be pardoned and liberated; and all the blessings of which the prophets have spoken shall be fulfilled. Meanwhile heaven retained Jesus hid from the eyes of men.

But Peter presents this repentance to the Jews, and the promised return besides.

But before he could finish his discourse the rulers of the Jews arrive, take possession of the apostles, and throw them into prison. Jesus glorified is refused as completely as Jesus in humilia-

tion. All is finished for Israel, with respect to its responsibility—the marvellous patience of God, and the grace that had made intercession for the beloved people on the cross. Nothing more could be done; it only remained to carry out the judgment of a people who would not have grace. Such is the history alas! of the natural man.

Let us mark this, that here the Holy Ghost is not offered, as in the discourse in the preceding chapter, which began the new order of the ways of God; but he speaks of the return of Christ Himself to accomplish all that the prophets had said. The presence of the Holy Ghost distinguishes the time between the first and the second coming of Jesus—the present interval. I do not say that the Spirit will not be poured out after the second coming; but the coming and presence of Jesus distinguish that period, and His absence the present, as moreover the presence of another Comforter instead of Him. And this reveals to us a Christ glorified in the heavens, makes Him the object of a living faith, unites us to Him, makes us understand that we are children of God, joint-heirs with Christ, that we are in Him and He in us, and makes of us members of His body, while we wait for Him to take us to Himself. The love of God, too, is shed abroad in our hearts.

Although Peter never speaks of the rapture of the saints to be with Jesus, yet we may turn to verses 11, 12, 13, of 1 Peter i, where we find the testimony of the prophets, that of the Holy Ghost come down from heaven, and the accomplishment of the promises, happening on the appearing of Jesus—the three things which appear here. It is not a question of gathering believers to Christ, nor of the coming of the Holy Ghost; we find ourselves entirely on Jewish ground. And God having first raised up His servant Jesus, He had sent Him to bless them (that is, down here in the world); and, as they would not receive Him, repentance was offered them. But the rulers interposed, resisting the Holy Ghost, just as they had refused Christ on the earth, thus sealing their own judgment. The final sentence will be found in the history of Stephen.

Another truth is introduced here, which is not wanting in importance in the ways of God; though it may not be equal in importance to the moral state of men which led them to reject the Lord come in grace. After this moment the throne and the government of God cannot be found on the earth. The providence of God watches over all; not even a little bird falls to the ground without His hand. But this throne does not exist on the

earth, and will no more exist till the Lord Jesus, the Son of David, establishes it, till He comes to whom it belongs. The throne of God, between the cherubim, was taken away from Jerusalem when the Jews were led away captive into Babylon ; but a little remnant of the Jews were brought back to Jerusalem, in order to present to them again their true King, the Son of David, Jesus of Nazareth. But they would not receive Him. Thenceforward the kingdom of God is changed to the kingdom of heaven ; the King is in heaven, and the kingdom is like the grain of wheat, which, once sown, springs and grows, without man's hand being applied to it (Mark iv. 26). Christ works ; without His grace nothing would be done ; but He does not appear. He sits on the throne of God, and has not taken His own throne ; He will take it when He returns.

Thrones are perfectly established by God : the Christian recognises fully the authority of princes and governors as ordinances of God, and submits to them. But it is not the immediate kingdom of God. From the captivity of Babylon till the coming of Christ, are the times of the Gentiles ; and God gathers the joint-heirs of Christ, who are not of this world, as He was not. They are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in

Christ ; they will reign with Him in glory, joint-heirs by grace of the inheritance of God.

There are two great subjects in the Bible after personal salvation : the divine government of the world, with the Jews as centre under Christ ; and the sovereign grace that has given those who are content to suffer with Him the same glory that Christ enjoys as man, predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He may be the first-born among many brethren. Already we enjoy the same relationship with His God and Father. "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Already children and heirs here below, when Christ comes we shall rejoice with heavenly joy with Him, and we shall reign with Him.

The Jews, and with them the Gentiles on the earth, will enjoy the peace and blessings resulting from the reign of Christ. Chapter ii., though it does not go any farther than to the presence of the Spirit here below, speaks of the first and heavenly position ; chapter iii. of the second. The word of God in chapter ii. brings forth its fruit in gathering souls for God's assembly, and for heavenly glory. In chapter iii. the call to repentance is refused on the authority of the people ; and the Lord sits

at the right hand of God in heaven till His enemies are made His footstool.

Thus the work of God goes on here below. The reign of Christ on the earth is deferred because of the unbelief of the Jews ; and the presence of the Spirit, Christ being in heaven, to gather together the heavenly citizens, and to put them into a new, eternal, and celestial relationship with God—this is the foundation of the history recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. The following chapters unfold the progress of the work, its difficulties, and their causes.

“Unto you first, God, having raised up his Son [servant] Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.”

#### CHAPTER IV.

What we read in this chapter is very sad, but full of instruction. The state of Israel is frightful, and the contrast to the apostles and to all the believers, marvellous. There is ecclesiastical authority and hatred of the truth and of the Lord on one side, and the presence and power of God on the other. Authority, depending on public opinion, is timorous at this juncture ; and for a moment, by this means, held in check by the hand

of God ; and the courage of faith, given by God, is sustained by the powerful presence of the Holy Ghost.

The priests deliberately resist the action of the Holy Ghost, though admitting that the power of God had been manifested. Is it not frightful ! Of what audacity, of what malice, is the heart of man capable when abandoned by God and left to its own hatred against Him ! “The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes. For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful” (Psalm xxxvi. 1, 2) ; and for what follows, see also Luke xii. 1-12. Horrible and vain opposition, for the word of God will be fulfilled in spite of men. If we suffer, it is our glory. Our portion is to be found in Psalm xxvii., and then in Psalm xxxvii. “Fret not thyself—trust in the Lord—delight thyself also in the Lord—commit thy way unto the Lord—rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him—cease from anger, and forsake wrath ; fret not thyself in any wise to do evil.”

We shall see the path of the apostles ; what courage, what tranquillity, what clearness of judgment, doing exactly what became servants of God, those who, in the testimony of God, represented

Him on the earth ! Doubtless an extraordinary power was displayed in them, but the principle is just the same for us all. Moreover the word did not remain without effect ; the number of men who had believed became about five thousand.

We have seen that the chief-priests had put the apostles in prison. The morning come, they meet at Jerusalem, and make the apostles appear before them. They demand by what power and in what name they had done the miracle. The old story is again repeated ; official authority opposed to the power of God. Thus the high priest and the rulers of the people demanded of the Lord by what authority He worked. But what madness, what hardness of heart, what lack of conscience ! A miracle had evidently been performed by the apostles ; it was known by the people, and they could not deny it. It is God Himself who works ; but they will not allow the knowledge of it to spread among the people. It was not convenient that the power of God should be manifested outside their office ; for if divine power operated outside their office, they could no longer secure authority to themselves. But it was not for them to command God ; and not only this, but they were directly opposed to that power which was of God.

In such cases, absence of all conscience is always found ; as when the Lord did not reply to their questions, but, in His divine wisdom, asked them what the baptism of John was. And they, fearing the people, dared not say that it was not of God, because public opinion was against them. They were forced to acknowledge their incapacity ; evidently then the Lord was not bound to account to them for what He had just before done.

Here something more is found. What the apostles had done was an act of power, and not of authority ; and the priests place themselves in open opposition to God. They would have suppressed His power if they had been able ; otherwise they were humiliated. This was necessary, for the miracle had been performed in the name of Him whom they had crucified. They were adversaries of God, and adversaries consciously and willingly ; for they had acknowledged that it was impossible to deny the miracle. This was indeed the power of Satan, but also of an office destitute of the power of God. Whenever man finds himself in such a position, he is unwilling that God should work.

But what a state of soul, what a frightful condition !

Let us contemplate the spectacle of an un-

lettered and ignorant man, but believing in Jesus, and full of the Holy Ghost. He announces openly, and with frank candour, not only that it was by the name of Jesus that the man had been cured, but that He was the stone set at nought by the builders, now become the head of the corner ; and that there was none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. The position of the rulers is clearly established, such as we have seen it. The man there present had been cured by the name of Him whom they had crucified, and whom God had raised from among the dead. But alas ! the will of men was not moved, though they had nothing to say against the facts. The power of God was there ; the testimony could not be refuted ; but they would not have divine testimony. And having conferred together, they dismissed them, "straitly threatening them that they should speak henceforth to no man in this name."

Their part was taken against God, and against His Anointed. They commanded the apostles therefore, when they had brought them in again, never to speak again in this name. Peter does not boast, does not insist on his rights, or on his liberty, does not threaten the priests and the council, does not show on his part any of his own

will ; he remains tranquil in obedience, but in obedience to God rather than to man. God was with them ; the others were only men. They must obey God. He appeals to the priests themselves, if it was not right to do so. Again they threaten them and let them go ; witnesses were before them who glorified God for what had been done.

It is well to remark that the apostles do not assail the Jews—they do their duty ; and when these oppose themselves, conscious of doing the will of God, sent by Him, they declare that necessarily they were doing His will—that, when God willed and sent, they had to obey. It is the calm, the tranquillity of him who does not think of himself, either through fear or through human ardour. It is full of the Holy Ghost ; what is said, what is done, comes from Him. Such a man works perfectly on God's side, because the man is put aside, and God, by His Spirit, works in him. Though it may be the man who presents himself perfectly in the position in which he finds himself, yet it is the Spirit that produces the perfection in him. "It shall not be ye," said the Lord, "who speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you." If man works, then there is imperfection. God works in man ; and then man is what he ought to be. It is always thus.

But the miserable position of the Jews unfolds itself only too clearly. God was no longer to be found among the chosen people, who had rejected their Messiah, the Son of God, in whom we have all the promises of God ; and now they were abandoned. God dwelt by His Spirit among the Christians. God will fulfil His promises to the nation in the last times, but then it will be in pure grace. He is faithful, whatever may be the iniquity of His people. What Peter proposed to Israel in chapter iii., repentance, will be accomplished in their hearts by grace, when the assembly of God shall have been taken up into heaven ; then they shall see Him whom they have pierced, and shall be blessed. But meanwhile they are put aside ; kept apart, however, till the fulness of the Gentiles be brought in. Then Israel, as a whole, shall be saved. But now they are displayed as resisting the Holy Ghost, as having rejected the Messiah. Now we see the power of the Spirit, and His presence manifesting itself in the midst of the assembly.

The apostles returned to " their own ;" for now there existed a company, a society, the house of God,—composed, it is true, of Jews, but apart, outside the national pale. There they recount what has happened. Then, moved by the Holy Ghost, with one heart they raise the voice to God, ac-

knowledging the accomplishment of the second Psalm, where the rejection of the Messiah, the Son of God, is announced, and the absolute power of God whatever might be the wickedness of men, who did nothing but fulfil the counsels of God. Nevertheless they do not ask that the kingdom should be established, according to what is said in that Psalm, of which kingdom the Father has put the times into His own power (i. 7); but the manifestation of the power of the Holy Ghost is promised in the same place, whether in the full courage to announce the word, or in the works of power done in the name of the holy Servant of God, Jesus, His Son.

After they have prayed, the presence of God is manifested in their midst, and the place where they are assembled shakes. Here too is seen, in an exterior way, the difference between the new birth and the presence of God by the Spirit. Many more important proofs of it are to be found; but I speak of it because here it is an outward sign, impossible to confound with the work of grace in the soul. Their prayer is heard. They are all filled with the Holy Ghost, and speak the word of God with great boldness. But it is not only in the gifts of speech; it is the faith which does it all, that shows the effect and the power of

being filled with the Holy Ghost. We find a work of the same character in that description in chapter ii. : there was but one heart.

No one retained his own property but distributed to those who were in need. With great power the apostles bore testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was on them all. None among the disciples lacked anything. Those who possessed lands or houses sold them, and laid the prices of the things that were sold at the apostles' feet, and distributed to every one according to his need. Beautiful testimony of the power of love, the love of God shed abroad in the hearts by the Holy Ghost of those who were filled with it! Among the others we find Barnabas specially noticed here, because we shall find him soon occupied in the work of God, the companion of Paul, so that he is called an apostle. But God has not forgotten the others.

Such is the scene which passes before our eyes, when the Church was established in the beginning, when the Spirit, ungrieved, displayed all the effect of its presence. Most blessed scene! giving us to understand what it is to be filled with the Holy Ghost. He dwells in every true Christian; but it is another thing to be so filled with Him that He may be the source of all that is thought, all that is

done, and that all that the heart, which is His vessel, produces, may be the fruit of His presence ; that there may be no doubting, no shutting up in the career of love, that Jesus may be faithfully confessed before men. The heart is set free from its own love, and loves according to the love of Christ. Liberty, true liberty, is found, and the practical life with its fruits are the fruits of the Spirit.

What a blessed state ! And, whatever may be the ruin of the Church, in principle this state belongs to-day to every Christian. Circumstances may hinder the form that existed in the days of the apostles ; but the Spirit of God, at the bottom, is more powerful than circumstances.