1 Kings - Commentaries by Henri L. Rossier

Meditations on 1 Kings, 1 Kings 9:24-28: Pharaoh's Daughter

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In 1 Kings 9:24 Pharaoh's daughter comes up from the city of David to her house which Solomon had built for her (cf. 1 Kings 7:8). In keeping with this house, the king built Millo, the citadel which henceforth made up a part of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:9; 1 Kings 11:27; 2 Kings 12:20; 1 Chron. 11:8; 2 Chron. 32:5).

2 Chronicles (2 Chron. 8:11) informs us of the reason for this change of residence. Solomon said, "My wife shall not dwell in the house of David, king of Israel, because the places are holy, whereunto the ark of the Lord hath come." The ark had first been placed in the city of David (2 Sam. 6:12) and, as the passage in 2 Chronicles tells us, in the very house of the king. Solomon had carried it from the city of David, or Zion, into the temple. But the Gentile wife could not dwell in the place sanctified by the presence of the covenant God, Jehovah. Doubtless she could have her own large part in the benefits of the covenant, even to being associated with him who was its representative on earth; nonetheless, a distance must be maintained. The covenant made with Israel did not directly concern her. In the Millennium there will be a difference between Israel and the nations. These latter shall not receive their blessing except through the medium of the people of God. The covenant will not be contracted with them.

Three times a year Solomon sacrificed upon the brazen altar (1 Kings 9:25) constructed for the temple by the ministry of Hiram (2 Chron. 4:1)—the only mention thereof in 1 Kings, and an incidental mention at that. Furthermore, he burned incense on the golden altar. As we have seen in 1 Kings 8, on certain occasions he filled the office of priest, of Melchizedek, and of intercessor. Does this not speak to us of Christ? Every dignity is concentrated in His person, and He has acquired them all by virtue of His death, without which He would not be able to assume even one of these offices. The Captain of our salvation was made perfect through sufferings.

In 1 Kings 9:26-28 we again find the relationship of Solomon with Hiram in view of the glory and external affairs of the kingdom. Gold flows into Jerusalem. Hiram is the Gentile friend, ever ready to serve the greatness of the king who is seated on Jehovah's throne, and his good will for the house of the Lord likewise extends to the wealth and prosperity of the kingdom.

Meditations on 1 Kings, 1 Kings 9:10-23: Hiram

1 Kings 9:10-14 speak of the outward relationship of Solomon with Hiram. In return for his voluntary collaboration on the temple and on the king's house, at the end of the twenty years of their being built, Solomon gave Hiram a territory consisting of twenty cities in the land of Galilee, the nucleus of what was later called "Galilee of the nations" (Isa. 9:1; Mt. 4:15). This territory originally consisted of a part of the borders of Naphtali and later spread to include the area of Zebulun, all of "Upper Galilee," reaching to the Sea of Tiberias by way of Capernaum. The first of this territory thus was ceded to Hiram. Was Solomon acting according to God in thus subtracting a part, be it the very least part, of Israel's inheritance for the profit of one of the chiefs of the nations? We do not hesitate to answer in the negative, for the land could not be given away. The Lord had said: "The land shall not be sold forever: for the land is Mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with Me" (Lev. 25:23). So the land belonged to the Lord. It is a remarkable fact that the book of Chronicles, which for reasons already given never indicates wrongdoing in the kings unless it has to be mentioned to make the history understandable, does not speak of this gift. On the contrary, it substitutes for this account that of the "cities which Huram had given to Solomon," and which the latter, after having built and fortified them, gave to the children of Israel to dwell in (2 Chron. 8:1-7). Thus in 1 Kings Solomon diminishes God's inheritance; in 2 Chronicles he enlarges it. This fact seems very significant to us. What is even more significant is that this territory is given up to a nation overrun more and more by idolatry until the whole land came to be called "Galilee of the nations." Still, it was there that God's grace began to be revealed through the ministry of the Lord. Thus, a thousand years after Solomon, grace remedied his fault.

This mistake has an immediate consequence: it brings discredit and shame upon the Lord's land. Hiram was unable to appreciate that which had great value in the eyes of Solomon and of any Israelite. He said, "What cities are these which thou hast given me, my brother? And he called them the land of Cabul [amounting to nothing] unto this day" (1 Kings 9:13). He gave them this name because "they did not please him." So it always is. When the world, even with best intentions like Hiram, simply — that is, without faith — has the use of those good things of Christianity that are our joy, it finds no relish for them. These things weary the world; they count for nothing in its life. The world will doubtless keep them so that it can boast, on occasion, of having them, but it cannot keep them in their pristine character. Without at all appreciating them, it will use them as a means of showing off, and Satan will use these things that appear religious to spread his dominion over a greater number of souls. He will use them to slight their worth; he will convince the king of Tyre that what is offered by Solomon cannot be compared to the splendors of a kingdom granted by the bounty of the prince of darkness. The Christian who in the pursuit of broadmindedness abandons the least part of his inheritance to the world, will gain nothing but to see his own character debased, his religion despised, and in the end, shame cast upon God Himself.

When it is a matter of giving to Solomon (1 Kings 9:14), Hiram shows that he is very generous. This is well-suited to the pride of the head of the greatest maritime and commercial power of that day, the England of the ancient world. Hiram gives one hundred twenty talents of gold (18,000,000 francs at the time of the writing of this book). Is this a benefit, a profit to Solomon? As long as Hiram was tributary to him for the construction of the temple, everything had divine approval. Now Hiram is calling Solomon "my brother" and giving him presents!

Solomon's activity and wisdom are seen (1 Kings 9:15-23) in the establishment of store-cities, cities for chariots, and cities for horsemen. It is the external organization of the kingdom, be it for commerce and trade or be it for war. He receives Gezer from Pharaoh who had

exterminated the Canaanites who dwelt in that city, and who had given it to his daughter, the king's wife. Thus the order to destroy the Canaanites is realized without trouble for this reign of peace. Their city rightfully belonged to Israel. All the Canaanites, spared of old through the weakness of the people, are subjected, just as formerly the Gibeonites. Solomon does not repeat Saul's error toward these latter (2 Sam. 21), but he reduces to servitude those Canaanites who still remain among the people.

Like Solomon, Christians need not consider as valid the claims of the world which the unfaithful Church has allowed a foothold in her midst; on the other hand, they are not to drive them out. They themselves should walk in the liberty of the children of God and leave them to their yoke of bondage, the only religion proper to the flesh and that which the flesh recognizes. Never before Solomon had so complete a separation ever existed in Israel, but so it can and should be realized even in the worst days of Israel's history or of that of the Church. "Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity." "From such turn away." Under the glorious reign of Christ, separation will be absolute; we read of this even to the point that "In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO JEHOVAH" (Zech. 14:20).

Meditations on 1 Kings, 1 Kings 9:1-9: The Lord Speaks

This passage completes the second part of the history of Solomon.

The first part, 1 Kings 1-2, tells us of the proclamation of the throne and the principle upon which it is established: judgment executed upon those who had dishonored God under the reign of David.

1 Kings 3-9:9 present the internal history of this glorious reign.

In 1 Kings 3-4 we find the beginning of this history, Gibeon; the principles and the order of the kingdom; the character of the moral perfection of the king.

In 1 Kings 5-8 the king's wisdom is used to give the Lord a place of rest worthy of Himself in the midst of the people that is subjected to him. The construction of the temple is the main event of Solomon's reign; then comes the construction of the king's palace, in which the nations are associated with the people of God. Lastly, as we have seen in 1 Kings 8, the dedication of the temple with the Feast of Tabernacles prefigures the rest of the people around the Lord during the reign of Messiah, and Solomon himself appears in his character of Melchizedek and intercessor.

This internal history ends with a new appearance of the Lord. He appears to Solomon in a dream, as He had appeared to him at Gibeon. He grants his request: "I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication which thou hast made before Me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put My name there forever; and Mine eyes and Mine heart shall be there perpetually" (1 Kings 9:3). It is an unconditional response to that which Solomon, as a type of Christ, had done for the Lord. He receives that which Solomon had built as being established forever before His eyes.

But immediately, as in all this book, the question of responsibility follows, which is exactly the opposite of the foregoing. When it is a matter of Solomon the type, all is assured; when it is a matter of Solomon in responsibility, all comes into question. His throne cannot be established forever unless he be upright and faithful; his posterity cannot be established except on this condition. Let Israel prove unfaithful as well as her king, let them bow down before other gods, and nothing will remain of all that the Lord has established by Solomon. The people will be cut off, the house itself rejected and destroyed (1 Kings 9:6-9).

Thus in the space of two verses God declares unconditionally that His eyes and His heart shall forever be upon this house, and that He shall cast it out of his sight! Does God contradict Himself? Certainly not, and just as the conditional warning has been fulfilled to the letter, so shall the unconditional promise be fulfilled to the letter, when the true king after God's heart shall have built Him a house, a temple upon earth much more glorious than that of Solomon, and a habitation in heaven where the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be, there when God shall rest in Zion and at the same time in His glorious Assembly.

Thus ends this part of Solomon's history. The remainder of chapter 9 and chapter 10 deals with his relations with the nations. It is the external history of his reign. Not that this was not mentioned in the preceding period, but these relationships are not mentioned there except in their connection with the internal kingdom, as for example the marriage of Solomon with the daughter of Pharaoh and Hiram's connections with the king for the construction of the temple.

Meditations on 1 Kings, 1 Kings 7:13-51: Hiram and the Court

Solomon called Hiram from Tire in order that he might make the brazen objects destined for the court of the temple. "He was a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father was a man of Tire, a worker in brass."

In the wilderness the Lord had chosen Bezaleel of Judah and Aholiab of Dan for the work of the tabernacle (Ex. 35:30-35). Then the work of the tabernacle had devolved upon the children of Israel alone. The people, entirely separated from the nations, could have no work in common with them. The scene changes under Solomon: the reconciled nations are engaged in God's service together with His own people. The Lord's Anointed has dominion over them both. Hiram belonged to both by birth: his parentage was formed by the alliance of Israel with the Gentiles — a remarkable fact perfectly suited to the scene before us.

Hiram "was filled with wisdom, and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass" (1 Kings 7:14). He is the representative of the Spirit of God (Isa. 11:2) for this work.

Two metals, gold and brass, play the preponderant role in the construction of the temple. Gold is always the symbol of divine righteousness which brings us into the presence of God.

In virtue of divine righteousness we are able to stand before Him. We possess it in Christ in heaven. Brass is the symbol of the righteousness of God displaying upon earth what He is for sinful man. The furniture of the temple was made of gold, the furniture of the court was of brass and had been cast in the earth. Hiram worked in brass only.

We have already remarked that First Kings does not speak of the brazen altar, of which Hiram nevertheless was the artisan (cf. 2 Chron. 4:1). This altar represents the righteousness of God coming to manifest itself in favor of sinful man, there where he is, in such a manner as to enable him to approach God in virtue of the sacrifice offered upon the altar. The Book of Kings does not develop this viewpoint. It speaks to us of dwelling with God in His temple, and when it mentions brass, it is not as a figure of divine righteousness by which we approach God, but as the manifestation to the eyes of the world of that righteousness which characterizes the kingdom and the government of Solomon or of Christ. In a word, it is the righteousness of God, but manifested without in government. The furniture of the court, mentioned in our chapter, shows us what is necessary in order that this manifestation be not hindered. The Spirit of God, represented by Hiram, is occupied with this. Thus we find in the chapters before us, God opening His house that we may dwell there with Him, Christ supplying us with the divine righteousness (the gold) necessary for this objective; the Son, as King of Righteousness, manifesting the glory of His kingdom; and the Spirit acting so that this righteousness can be manifested without hindrance before the eyes of all men upon earth.

Let us now consider the objects which Hiram cast for Solomon in the plain of Jordan. They all belonged, we repeat, to the court of the temple; that is to say, to the outward manifestation of the glorious government of Christ.

The Pillars (1 Kings 7:15-22)

The brazen pillars, situated in front of the porch of the temple, attracted attention immediately. They represented the outward manifestation of the principles of the kingdom. We have already said that no other pillar is mentioned in the temple. They were named Jachin (He shall establish) and Boaz (in Him is strength). These were the two great truths presented symbolically to whosoever took part in the blessed reign of Solomon. All came from Him; in Him and in Him personally there is strength. He maintains Himself and needs no external help whatsoever. His strength is used to establish rather than needing to be established.

Millennial blessing is based upon these two principles — our present blessing as well.

Solomon's throne, his government, his people's relations with God, his worship, everything, in type, was based upon that which God had done: He had established his reign. But under Solomon himself the pillar Jachin — He shall establish, not, He has established — spoke of a future establishment of which Solomon's reign was but the feeble picture. As for the pillar Boaz — In Him is strength — this is something past, present, future, and eternal. Strength is in Him. Solomon, just as every godly king in Israel, had to know this. At the moment the link with God was broken, neither the king nor the kingdom would have any strength.

We make the same experience today. Philadelphia has "a little strength," but its strength is in Christ, for He has the key of David. And the Lord says to Philadelphia: I shall establish thee a pillar in the temple of my God. Thou shalt be a Jachin and a Boaz. In a time to come the poor remnant without strength shall be acknowledged publicly. Christ with His incommensurable power shall be admired in all those who have believed.

We need not wait for some future time to experience this, for He is our strength today, as He shall be forever. But the time is coming when Christ's witnesses shall be established and shall manifest in a glorious way all that shall be theirs throughout eternity. "I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name" (Rev. 3:12).

The pillars were crowned with lily work, a picture, we believe, of the glory of this reign at its commencement (Mt. 6:28-29). One characteristic detail: they had hundreds of pomegranates on their capitals. In the Word the pomegranate seems to be the image of fruit borne for God. The hem of the high priest's garment was trimmed with bells and pomegranates alternately (Ex. 28:31-35). The bells represent the testimony, the pomegranates, the fruit. These latter were "of blue, purple, and scarlet," 'heavenly fruit, fruit corresponding to the dignity of the Lord, and to His royal dignity as Messiah. Our fruit should bear the character of Christ and be worthy of Him; it should also correspond to and be like our testimony, just as the pomegranates were the same in number as the golden bells. One often finds Christians with more bells than pomegranates, more words than fruit!

Fruit cannot be borne nor testimony be rendered except in virtue of the anointing oil, that is to say, of the Holy Spirit, which "ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments" (Psa. 133:2). The hem of our High Priest's garment is ourselves, we who can make no pretense to the title of Christian if we do not render testimony to Christ and bear fruit for God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Brazen pomegranates ornamented the tops of the pillars. How can the divine character be declared before all without bearing fruit abounding in righteousness? The Lord desires to be crowned with fruit. If strength is in Him, it is there in order to produce fruit. He is the True Vine here below, and as such, He has no other function. All His care for His own, all His disciples, has for its purpose that they might bear fruit. He must show Himself before all eyes as He who produces it.

The Spirit of God has publicly erected a pillar. This pillar is Christ. He bears His own, who have no strength save in Him. "Without Me ye can do nothing." That which God establishes, that which draws its strength from Christ, must necessarily bear fruit in abundance. Our passage applies properly to the fruit of righteousness manifested under the reign and government of the Lord.

In Solomon's case, the brazen pillars could not be kept because of the unfaithfulness of the king and his successors. They were broken up by the Chaldeans (Jer. 52:17-23). His kingdom could not be established because he did not seek his strength in God. But even if the material pillars have disappeared, the moral pillars remain: the day shall come when the Lord in whom is strength will show to all that He has established in righteousness a kingdom which shall never be moved. Then shall it be said, "The Lord reigneth, He is clothed with majesty, the Lord is clothed with strength, wherewith He hath girded Himself: the world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved. Thy throne is

established of old: Thou art from everlasting" (Psa. 93:1-2).

The Brazen Sea (1 Kings 7:23-26)

Behind the pillars the temple court held the brazen sea. We are specifically told (1 Chron. 18:8) that Solomon "made the brazen sea and the pillars, and the vessels of brass" of the brass which David had taken from the cities of Hadarezer. We have seen that brass here represents the righteousness of God coming to meet man where he is to deliver him and to manifest itself outwards, as shall be seen in Christ's glorious reign. This righteousness was here displayed in the destruction of the power of the enemy whom David had conquered. We know that this has already taken place at the cross of Christ, but under His reign of righteousness the power of Satan, bound for one thousand years, shall be annulled, that it may no longer hinder the practical purification of the saints who serve the Lord.

The brazen sea differs from the brazen altar. The latter represents divine righteousness coming to meet sinful man to expiate his sin by the blood of a victim and to purify him by death so that he can approach God. From Christ's pierced side issued the atoning blood and the purifying water. Under the law the washing of the priests at their consecration corresponds to purification by death. They were completely washed, and that once for all (Ex. 29:4; Lev. 8:6). This ceremony was not conducted at the brazen laver nor at the brazen sea. It was never repeated. It was a figure of the "washing of regeneration" (Titus 3:5), the death of the old man, and the purification which places the believer in an entirely new position, that of Christ before God (cf. John. 13:10).

The brazen sea served for the daily purification of the priests. There they washed their hands and their feet. Thus they were qualified to accomplish their service and to dwell (for in this book it is always a matter of dwelling, not of approach) there where the Lord dwelt. Likewise, the disciples could have no part with Christ in the Father's house unless He would wash their feet (John. 13:8). This washing is effected by the Word of God in virtue of Christ's intercession as Advocate. Under the law this washing applied to hands and feet, that is to say, to works and walk. Under grace it applies only to walk, for we have been purified from dead works to serve the Living God, and this has taken place once for all something the law was unable to do.

The brazen laver of the tabernacle differs somewhat from the brazen sea of the temple. We have just seen that this latter was the manifestation of divine righteousness breaking the power of the enemy in order to make possible the daily purification of the priests. This victory was not gained in the wilderness. The laver was not cast of brass taken from the enemy, but from "the mirrors of the crowds of women who crowded before the entrance of the tent of meeting" (Ex. 38:8). This passage alludes to that which followed the sin of the golden calf. Moses had set up a tent outside the camp and had called it the "tent of meeting." All the people, as a sign of humiliation, were to strip themselves of their ornaments, and those who sought the Lord went forth to the tent of meeting outside the camp (Ex. 33:4-7). The mirrors of the repentant women of Israel served to make the brazen laver. They acknowledged their sin and humbled themselves; they stripped themselves of that which until then had served their vanity. How could they still delight to consider their natural faces? They did not wish, nor could they any longer behold themselves. They truly judged themselves, their selfishness, their lightness, all that had contributed to make them forsake God for an idol. That which presented them in their state of sin must be destroyed. Thus the brazen laver is the righteousness of God pronouncing judgment upon the old man, but in order that the believer might obtain practical, daily purification by the Word. In order to deliver us, this righteousness has been brought upon Christ. It is in Him that we now realize that "Know thyself" so impossible to sinful man.

The obstacle which the flesh and Satan presented to our daily cleansing being removed, the water of the brazen sea teaches us that without this purification we cannot have communion with God in our service and walk, and that every manifestation of the flesh must be suppressed in practice.

In Revelation 4:6 we find the sea again, as in Solomon's court, but "a sea of glass like unto crystal." It is the final result of the righteousness which has gained the victory over Satan and has destroyed him. Those who stand there before God are found in a permanent condition of holiness and of purity, having reached their unchangeable, and so to speak, crystallized character forever. One can no longer wash himself in the crystal sea: one is that which it represents before God eternally.

In Revelation 15:2 we again find a heavenly scene. It is a sea of glass, mingled with fire, on which stand those who have overcome the Beast and his image. They are the faithful from among the nations who, after having gone through the tribulation and having stood fast to the point of martyrdom, have part in the first resurrection. They do not possess absolute and final purity until after they have undergone baptism by fire.

Let us come back to the brazen sea. It rested upon twelve oxen, three facing each of the four quarters of the horizon. The ox is one of the four animals which form the attributes of the throne (Rev. 4), and represent the active qualities of God, the principles of His government. The ox, as we have already seen, is the firmness and patience of God in His ways. The twelve brazen oxen are the complete manifestation in every sense of God's patience in His ways by which He has succeeded in bringing Israel under the scepter of the Messiah, in making her capable of standing in holiness before Himself. This does not signify that in the millennial reign of which Solomon's reign is the type, the purification of a priestly people will no longer be necessary. Sin shall not yet have been taken away from the world. Doubtless it will be restrained and its manifestations hindered, for Satan shall be bound, but the flesh will not be changed (it cannot be), much less abolished (that it shall be), and the Word in the hands of Christ the High Priest shall ever have its cleansing virtue.

It is interesting to note that the sea is not mentioned in the temple of Ezekiel — not that it is not there, but its importance is relegated to the background as it were. In contrast, the altar dominates there, and though the sin offering is offered there, the principal role is given to the burnt offering and the peace offering. Just as the pillars, the sea was broken up by the Chaldeans (Jer. 52:20).

The Lavers and Their Bases (1 Kings 7:27-40)

The brazen sea served to cleanse the priests; the ten lavers, five on the right of the court and five on the left, served to "wash... such things as they offered for the burnt offering" (2 Chron. 4:6). In Leviticus 1:9 we see that the priest washed the inwards and the legs of the victim with water. This type must correspond to future reality—to the offering of Christ to God in perfect purity. He who offered Himself as an odor of a sweet smell was holiness itself and had no need to be washed, but the type must be washed in order to show the perfection of the offering of Christ.

The burnt offering represents the sacrifice of Christ offering Himself to God, glorifying Him in all that He is, and this in regard to sin. God is able to receive us according to the perfection of this sacrifice. As the victim must needs be presented to God without any defilement, it was needful to show that it was perfect and that this purity went further than conduct alone, but included the “inwards” of the offering. This truth was presented by the water of the lavers. The “molten sea” washed the priests. They all had access to this single way of being cleansed from the defilement of their walk. Christ, made sin, is the source of cleansing for His own; His Word is the means. Ten lavers were needed to wash the victims; these were, we do not doubt, symbolic of the absolute purity of Christ.

The lavers did not belong to the tabernacle in the wilderness, though doubtless this latter had vessels for washing the burnt offering (Ex. 27:19; 38:30). They manifested in the kingdom the perfection of the burnt offering, the basis of the people’s acceptance before God. This purity, this holiness of the sacrifice, satisfied all the demands of God’s government. We also see that the bases and the chapiters of the bases proclaimed by their ornaments all the attributes of this government. 1

“Lions, oxen, and cherubim”2 were sculpted on the bases themselves: strength, patience, and divine intelligence. The burnt offering is presented pure according to these attributes. It is manifested that they have been used to establish an offering by which the people might be made acceptable to God, having been identified with the victim. One might read on the “bases” what was the manner of the God who had supplied His people with a means for dwelling with Himself.

These lavers, continually pushed about on their wheels, were placed at the threshold of the platform of the altar, in order that the victims might continually be presented as pure.

The chapiter, that is, the crown of the base, bore nothing more than cherubim (men) and lions with palm trees, as on the walls of Ezekiel’s temple3 (Ezek. 41:18-19). Strength and intelligence crown the foundation of God’s ways in government. If Solomon would be faithful, there would be no more need of patience: it would have accomplished its goal. Strength and divine intelligence could now, as in the millennial temple to come, look towards the palm trees, symbols of triumph and of peaceful protection. Peace upon earth! The reign of peace was established in righteousness: the lavers for the burnt offering proclaimed this, as did the walls of the temple.

God had been glorified by the burnt offering. All that He was had been manifested by the holy offering, and this had been declared openly. Under the glorious reign of Solomon the people had these things before their eyes everywhere—but, could this reign, entrusted to man’s responsibility, maintain itself?

It should be noted that the lavers, which are merely mentioned in 2 Chronicles 4:6, are here described in greater detail, for it is a matter of the external manifestation of what God is both in His government and in His kingdom. This manifestation of God will be shown in Christ who will reign in full view of the world.

The work of Hiram ends here. It was, in type, the development in this world by the power of the Holy Spirit of what Christ is and of what God Himself is in His government.

The Golden Objects (1 Kings 7:48-51)

The objects of gold are presented, just as also in 2 Chronicles 4, as being the work, not of Hiram, but of Solomon. Solomon is occupied with all the objects by which divine righteousness is displayed in its glorious essence. Christ alone can display this. Intercession (the golden altar), the showing forth of Christ (the table of shewbread), the light of the Spirit (the candlestick), even the least of the vessels of the sanctuary correspond to this righteousness established by Himself. Even the doors of the sanctuary swung upon golden hinges. How would it be possible to enter into the most holy place and dwell there apart from divine righteousness?

In this chapter we have seen the outward manifestation of the kingdom, and as belonging to it, a glorious temple which corresponds in type to the heavenly part of this same kingdom, and in which the priests dwell with God.

All that had been prepared during the reign of grace is brought to adorn the house of the Lord under the reign of glory. The entire plan came from David, and not from Solomon — even less from Hiram, as rationalists would suppose (1 Chron. 28:11-13). The first reign prepared the glory of the second. A suffering, rejected Christ precedes a glorious Christ. That which David had done was less in appearance than the work of Solomon, the materials less than the glorious workmanship; but in reality David’s work served as that indispensable basis of that which represents the whole of the millennial blessing.

Meditations on 1 Kings, 1 Kings 7:1-12: Solomon?s Houses

“But Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished all his house” (1 Kings 7:1). It had taken Solomon seven years to build the house of the Lord. We see in this his promptness at this work. It took Herod forty-six years to build his temple (John. 2:20). At the beginning of his career the service of the Lord came before all else in the king’s heart. His own house, certainly of less importance than the temple, cost him thirteen years of labor.

The passage before us speaks of three different houses.

The first is called Solomon’s “own house,” “his house where he dwelt,” his own residence. Little is said about it except that in place of the “porch for the throne” which characterized the “house of the forest of Lebanon” (1 Kings 7:7) the king’s house had, within the entrance porch (cf. 1 Kings 7:6), “another court” which was of like work (1 Kings 7:8). Solomon did not judge in this house. He dwelt there. It is presented to us in a rather mysterious way; it is a house of intimacy. But it is mentioned immediately after the temple and is its counterpart, so to speak. God dwelt in the temple and had “many abodes” there for His own. The temple was an image of the Father’s house. The house we have before us here is the Son’s house (1 Chron. 17:13). If we seek its analogy in the New Testament, our thoughts turn immediately towards the Church of which He said: “Upon this rock I will build my church.”

As we know, the Church was not revealed in the Old Testament. It was a mystery which could only be known after the Lord's resurrection. Nevertheless, there is nothing in the Old Testament which contradicts this future revelation. Quite to the contrary, it seems at times that her place is depicted beforehand, waiting for the Church herself to be introduced at the appropriate moment. Certain types go beyond Jewish relationships and suggest more intimate ones. May we just call to mind the relationship of Adam and Eve, of Rebecca and Isaac, of Abigail and David. May we remember above all the assembly of Psalm 22, mentioned in Hebrews 2:12. Finally, let us consider this house of Solomon's of which the New Testament presents the glorious foundation.

Christ's millennial reign will not only be characterized by His relationships with His people and with the nations, but by the glorious intimacy of the Church with Himself. She shall be the Bride, the Lamb's wife; but, we repeat, our passage in no wise goes on to this point — and it treats these things in a manner designedly obscure and mysterious.

This is not so of "the house of the forest of Lebanon" (1 Kings 7:2-7). The name given it calls to mind its construction on the one hand and perhaps its architectural appearance as well. It was built of cedar wood; throughout, both inside and outside, it presented cedar columns which, set in long rows, may have given the house the appearance of an imposing forest. On the other hand, we can see in this name a beautiful image of this glorious reign. Lebanon faced Tire and even belonged to it.

Thus there was a relationship between this house and the nations in submission to the great king. It was there that Solomon sat as sovereign and judge of the nations as well as of his own people.

The house of the forest of Lebanon was one hundred cubits long (forty cubits longer than the temple), fifty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high. It rested upon four rows of columns. On both sides were three rows of columns, set in groups of fifteen, and suites of chambers superimposed one on the other, according to all appearances, in three stories like those of the temple.1 The windows were opposite one another; that is to say, we have reason to think that some faced outward and the others inward toward the building itself, facing the porch. Above these chambers a ceiling of cedar formed a roof and also covered the center of the building, which supported this ceiling by four rows of columns. The center itself was composed of two porches, first the porch of pillars, well named for its six lateral rows of pillars and the four rows of pillars rising in the middle of the porch. Next the porch of the throne or the porch of judgment, a continuation of the first and occupying the back of the building.2 At the back of this porch a marvelous throne arose, to which we shall return later.

In front of the porch of pillars there was an entry porch, whose dimensions are not given us. It too was garnished with a colonnade and had an entablature or flight of steps by which one reached the house. We can easily imagine the majesty of this construction. One's eye penetrated through the forest of cedar pillars of the central portion to the second porch at the farther end of which rose a throne of gold and ivory, marvelously executed, and upon this throne one could contemplate the glorious king, peaceable Solomon, the beloved Jedidiah of the Lord, whose wisdom was never surpassed — the righteous king executing righteousness.

This porch of the throne was the "porch of judgment." The seat of the government of the nations was there, the place where righteousness was upheld. The house of the forest of Lebanon linked the government of Israel itself with that of the nations.

This house where pillars were found everywhere was in contrast to the temple where there were none, except for Jachin and Boaz at the entrance of the house, as we shall see later on; at least there is no pillar mentioned, neither in the holy place nor in the oracle. The house of God supports itself, and has no need of other support in its perfect stability. The glory of God suffices for itself, only God the Father associates His children with it and gives them a dwelling place there. It will not be so with the reign of Christ over the nations. The saints will be called to share in His reign and to judge the world with Christ (1 Cor. 6:2; Psa. 2:9; Rev. 2:26-27). The Lord will have companions in His government who will always dwell near the king, as formerly the companions of Solomon dwelt in the house of the forest of Lebanon. Similarly, the Lord had priests dwelling with Him in His temple.

The third house is that of the Gentile wife, the daughter of Pharaoh. There is little more said of it than of the house in which the king dwelt. We know only that it was built according to the plan for the porch3 of the house of Lebanon. We have already said that the union of Solomon with Pharaoh's daughter did not prefigure the relationship of the Lord with the Church, but that of the nations, formerly oppressors of God's people, with the Messiah. This union, beyond doubt glorious, does not afford the same intimacy as that of the Messiah with Israel or so much the more, as that of Jesus with the Church.4

1 Kings 7:9-12 Connect the glory of these houses to that of the temple and of its inner and outer courts. The same precious stones were used for all these buildings. Their foundations were the same. No element entered in which did not correspond to the character of the Lord and of Solomon.

These three houses and the temple give us an insight into the characteristics of the glorious reign of the Son of God, of the Son of Man, and of the Son of David. There is a heavenly sphere, the Father's house, where a people of priests shall dwell with Him — a glorious Assembly, the Son's house, His intimate dwelling place and His wife. There is an earthly sphere, a Gentile bride, sharing in the blessings of the covenant — a government of all nations, in submission to the scepter of the great king — to say nothing of Israel, rejected so long on account of her unfaithfulness, now received in grace under the new covenant as the beloved Jewish wife, center of Messiah's earthly government.

Meditations on 1 Kings, 1 Kings 3:16-28: Righteous Judgment

After the understanding to worship before the ark, the first manifestation of his wisdom, we find in Solomon "the wisdom of God... to do judgment" (1 Kings 3:28). Though it concern harlots, nothing changes this judgment. Men ever allow themselves to be influenced in their judgments by the character of those who speak to them; it is not so with God. What is important for Him is the heart, not the outward character. Solomon's judgment is based on the affections manifested by the heart. Affirmations or denials were of equal value in this case, and judgment could not be based upon them (1 Kings 3:22). That which could establish judgment was the manifestation of the heart. Neither was the question which of the two women was the more worthy — both were harlots; nor whether the actions objected to were probable or had taken place — there had been no witness to it; nor whether the true mother could recognize her child by certain outward signs — here were none. The only testimony was that one of these women said that she did not recognize her son in the dead child. It was a matter

therefore of judging the state of her heart, and this could only be judged by the affections manifested. One of these women had an object she loved. Which of the two had this object? For there where true ties of love exist, we seek to safeguard at any cost that which is dear to us, even at the risk of losing it for ourselves. That is the character of love. Love is not selfish: it sacrifices itself for the object loved. The love of Christ has done that for us and we can do that for Him in return: “For thy sake we are killed all the day long” (Rom. 8:36).

When the true mother saw the sword lifted over her child, “her bowels yearned upon her son.” The object loved is more to us than our love for it. This is how one distinguishes reality, the true mother. In the Christian profession he who has not found an object for his heart and bowels betrays himself quickly. “Divide it,” says the one who is not the mother, yielding to her resentment. One quickly sacrifices Christ when it is a matter of satisfying one’s own passions. Only divine wisdom is able to discern the reality of profession by the state of the heart. How frequently there is profession without reality! Where are the affections for Christ? Where the devotion which sacrifices even its legitimate advantages and rights for Him? In this passage, it is not a question of natural goodness nor of nobleness of heart, for, we repeat, we are dealing with two harlots. It is a question of ties created by God, of an object given by Him which the soul appreciates. God will never take it away from us; to the contrary, in the trial we shall receive it afresh from His own hand. “Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it: she is the mother thereof.”

Meditations on 1 Kings, 1 Kings 3:4-15: Gibeon

1KI 3:4-15In 1 Kings 3:2-3 we see clearly that the order of things was not the ultimate at the beginning of Solomon’s reign. The ark of the Lord abode under curtains; it remained to David’s son to build the house of the Lord. At that time the tabernacle and the altar were at the high place at Gibeon and the ark, which David had brought back, was at Jerusalem. How David had this ark of the covenant, the throne of the Lord, the sign of His personal presence in the midst of His people, in his affections (Psa. 132)! From the moment he brought it back to Zion we do not see in his history that he personally ever sought another place of worship, though he was not unmindful of Gibeon. When the ark was being carried to Jerusalem he took care to link worship before the ark with the sacrifices upon the altar at Gibeon (1 Chron. 16:37-43), maintaining in this way the unity of worship. Each day service was performed before the ark and before the altar at Gibeon, so that at the same moment and “continually” these two parts of worship were carried on together, though separated geographically.

Later, according to the commandment of the Lord, David built an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, and there he offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. His God did not long deprive him of an altar in relation to the ark. In this way Gibeon lost its value and meaning.

Solomon does not appear to have thought of this unity at the beginning of his reign. Doubtless God bears him a lovely testimony: “And Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father” (1 Kings 3:3), but this testimony is qualified: “only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places.” In so doing he accommodated himself to the religious practices of his people, of whom it is said in 1 Kings 3:2: “Only the people sacrificed in high places.”

It was not a positive sin against the Lord, as was the case later on with certain pious kings of Judah, when the building of the temple had removed every plea for such practices. If they still continued then, it was to the Lord’s great displeasure, for they must needs lead to idolatrous practices. 1In these days of blessing and power under young King Solomon it was not at all so, but “he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places,” and not only at Gibeon, “for that was the great high place” (1 Kings 3:3-4) where the brazen altar was still found, the tabernacle and all its furniture. At any rate, this practice served to disperse worship in Israel. And so the unity of worship was lost, for the altar was, among its other attributes, the expression of this unity, just as the Lord’s Table is today for Christians. In former days under Joshua with regard to the altar Ed (Josh. 22:34), Israel had understood this and had risen up in zealous energy against sacrifices offered on an altar other than that of the tabernacle.

God bore with this state of things as long as the full manifestation of His will concerning worship had not yet been given by the consecration of the temple. Nevertheless it was a weakness in this great king. How much more intelligent was David’s worship, even before Moriah, than Solomon’s! The ark was everything for David; for him it was the Lord, the mighty God of Jacob (Psa. 132:5), whose worship was there where the ark was found. Solomon did not rise to the height of these blessings and did not enjoy the intimacy of this relationship with God. He did not go beyond the common level of religion of his people.

Do we not find in our own day the same weakness, the same lack of intelligence, even there where the desire to worship is present? Everyone chooses his own high place without troubling himself about the presence of the ark — of Christ. Everyone builds his own altar without even dreaming that since the cross, as in old times after Moriah, there could be but one symbol of unity for the people of God.

Solomon went to Gibeon, but he loved the Lord, and the Lord always takes account of our affection for Him. There it was that He appeared to him in a dream (1 Kings 3:5). This fact, as others have remarked, has its importance. In a dream one is unable to disguise the true state of one’s heart; one is not controlled by either his reason or his will to repress the manifestation of what is in his heart. In a dream the soul is laid bare before the Lord. What then were the thoughts harbored in this young king’s heart when God said to him, “Ask what I shall give thee” (1 Kings 3:5)? What the divine word finds in the first place in this heart is gratitude for the great mercy of the Lord towards David: “Thou hast showed unto thy servant David my father great mercy,” and at the same time the high esteem he held this latter in (1 Kings 3:6) because of his walk of truth, of righteousness, and of uprightness which had proved that David feared the Lord (Prov. 14:2). Next there is thankfulness for the mercy of God towards himself, David’s son; “Thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day” (1 Kings 3:6). Lastly, there is the consciousness of his youth, of his ignorance, of his incapacity. “And I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.” Such a state of soul promises abundant blessing; it is summed up in this: Fear the Lord, have the consciousness of His grace, esteem others better than yourself, and count yourself as nothing.2

Solomon was there before God with an undivided heart and he was seeking but one thing: to serve the Lord in the circumstances in which He had placed him as leader of the people. He asks the Lord for “an understanding heart,”3 for hearing is the door to discernment and intelligence. In order to be wise one must begin by listening to wisdom: “Blessed is the man that heareth me” (Prov. 8:34). All true service starts with hearing. Solomon did not know how to “go out or come in”; he could not learn this except by listening. He who does not begin by

enrolling himself in the school of wisdom will never be a true servant. Such was the pathway of service of Christ Himself as man. “He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned” (Isa. 50:4).

Let us remark that Solomon asks the Lord for “an understanding heart.” One does not truly learn to know the mind of God except with the heart—not with the intelligence. True intelligence is produced by affection for Christ. The heart listens and when it has received the lessons it needs, it is made wise, capable of discerning between good and evil and of governing the people of God. That which makes the role of the heart so important in service is that no judgment can be according to God if it does not have love as its starting point. We experience this in cases of discipline, in guiding souls, and in caring for saints and assemblies.

Solomon’s answer “pleased the Lord” (1 Kings 3:10). What grace to have His approval on all that we ask of Him and to receive His testimony that we have been pleasing to Him! The Lord grants Solomon his request and is pleased to add that which Solomon had not requested. He grants him the first place in wisdom, “so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.” Moreover, He gives him “both riches, and honor: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days” (1 Kings 3:12-13). Solomon’s humble dependence put him in first place, according as it is written: “Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.” It was so with Christ: “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mk. 10:43-45). In every respect there is none like Him! Wisdom, power, wealth, the crown of glory and honor—all things shall be His in “the day which the Lord shall make,” and even the greatest, most magnificent things will only serve as His footstool!

In 1 Kings 3:14, as in all the books we are studying, the question of the king’s responsibility is brought up. “If thou wilt walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days.” It is this if that Solomon could not come up to and which led to his ruin and to the division of his kingdom.

Having received these blessings, Solomon leaves Gibeon to come to Jerusalem, where he “stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord” — the act of a submissive heart which understands the mind of God, the first manifestation of the wisdom which he has just received. He leaves the forms to take hold of the reality; he leaves the external display of his religion to come to seek the presence of God represented by the ark — Christ in figure. The altar of Gibeon is no longer sufficient for him; this place is abandoned and no longer plays a role in Solomon’s religious life. Later the Lord reveals Himself to him again (1 Kings 9:2), but no more at Gibeon.

Before the ark Solomon offers up “burnt offerings” and “peace offerings” and makes “a feast to all his servants” (1 Kings 3:15).

There is more joy before the ark than at Gibeon, though the king had probably offered up many more sacrifices at Gibeon (2 Chron. 1:6) than here; but before the ark we find peace offerings, the true sacrifices of communion, and at the same time a feast for all the servants of the king.

Meditations on 1 Kings, 1 Kings 3:1-3: Pharaoh?s Daughter

“And Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh’s daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the Lord, and the wall of Jerusalem round about” (1 Kings 3:1).

The mention of the establishment of the kingdom under Solomon’s hand (1 Kings 2:12) is followed in chapter 2 by the account of judgment which purifies the kingdom from all that had risen up against David. The repetition of the mention of this establishment (1 Kings 2:46) is followed in chapter 3 by Solomon’s alliance by marriage with the king of Egypt. He brings into his alliance the very nation which had formerly enslaved his own people — a most intimate union, for he takes his wife from Egypt.

This union recalls that of Joseph with an Egyptian bride, the daughter of the priest of On, but their typical meanings differ. Joseph, rejected by his brothers, before making himself known to them, finds a wife and sons in Egypt among the nations according to that which is said of Christ in Isaiah 49:5-6: “Though Israel be not gathered... I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.” Joseph’s marriage typifies the relationship of a rejected Christ with the Church, and it brings before us the posterity which He acquires outside the promised land before taking up his relationship with His own people again.

Solomon’s marriage to Pharaoh’s daughter, contracted in different circumstances, does not have the same meaning. The kingdom is established in the king’s hand; the period of the rejection of the Lord’s anointed in the person of David is over; Solomon is established as king of righteousness (he proves this in executing judgment) over Israel, his people. Then, and only then, does he make affinity with Pharaoh and take his daughter to wife according as it is written in Isaiah 19:21-25: “And the Lord shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the Lord, and perform it... In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.”

Solomon brings his Egyptian wife into the city of David. Thus at the beginning of the millennial reign the nations shall first be put under the safeguard of the alliance made with Israel and represented by the ark established on Mount Zion (2 Sam. 6:12). Afterward they shall have their distinct place of blessing, just as Solomon later builds a house for his Gentile wife outside the city of David, “For he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places are holy, whereunto the ark of the Lord hath come” (2 Chron. 8:11; 1 Ki. 9:24).

Up to this moment Pharaoh’s daughter is established in the blessings — not in the relationship — of which the ark of the covenant is the type. Wherever this ark was found, whether in the house of Obed-edom (2 Sam. 6:11, 18, 20), or in the city of Zion, it brought blessing with it. During the Millennium the nations will take account of this privilege: “Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord... In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you” (Zech. 8:22-23).

Scarcely is the throne inaugurated before elements hostile and foreign to the kingdom manifest themselves; but it is the character of the kingdom of righteousness to reprove all that is not in harmony with itself. In Solomon's presence the flesh can no longer push itself forward nor freely follow its bent.

Adonijah addresses himself to Bathsheba, that she may present his request to the king, her son. "Comest thou peaceably?" asks this pious woman who stands in doubt of the son of Haggith. She knew in effect that if he would have succeeded in his projects, she and her "son Solomon should be counted offenders" (1 Kings 1:21). This man though outwardly broken is nevertheless far from being so in his heart. "Thou knowest," he says, "that the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel set their faces on me, that I should reign" (1 Kings 2:15). How could such pretensions fail to raise the indignation of the true king? He — Adonijah — to have all the rights of succession to the crown and to the people of David! His words alone betoken an embittered heart, a bitterness long suppressed now manifesting itself because he had not judged himself in the least. To be sure, he also adds: "The kingdom is turned about, and is become my brother's: for it was his from the Lord," but is this a true recognition of the will of God, a true submission to the throne of righteousness? Adonijah accepts this because he cannot do otherwise. Certainly he does not belong to the "willing people" in the day of the power of the son of David. To his mind Solomon is an intruder, and this being the case, what must be the Lord who had established Solomon therefore be to Adonijah?

"And now," he says, "I ask one petition of thee, deny me not... that he give me Abishag the Shunammite to wife" (1 Kings 2:16-17). Abishag! — that young maiden who had served David and had tenderly cared for him, who had lived in the intimacy of the king of grace, to be given to this rebellious man whom only the patience of Solomon had spared to this moment! How little he knew both David and Solomon!1 To give Abishag to him would be to admit to him some right to his father's succession, some contact with the kingdom which he might be able to assert at some favorable occasion; it would be to accept his pretensions and the revolt led by Joab and Abiathar (1 Kings 2:22) as legitimate. Should the woman who as a chaste virgin had served David be given to this profane man?

It will be the same with regard to the Church. Will the King of Glory ever consent to yield to another the bride He has chosen for Himself as King of Grace? The Antichrist, the man of sin, may hope to rob Christ of His bride by seizing apostate Christendom, become Babylon the Great at the end; but his efforts to substitute himself for Christ, to take possession of His bride, and to seize the kingdom will end for both the harlot and for himself in the lake of fire and brimstone. Here judgment did not have to wait: the very same day Adonijah is put to death.

The leader of the conspiracy, the false king, having met his fate, Solomon's righteousness catches up with the priest (1 Kings 2:26-27) who had been supported for a long while by David, but whose sentence the Lord had already spoken to the ears of Eli (1 Sam. 2:35). Here we find the principle that is expressed in the words "I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau" (Mal. 1:2-3) pronounced thirteen centuries after He had said, "The elder shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23). It was the Lord's free choice, but the sentence is pronounced only after Esau had manifested himself to be the irreconcilable enemy of God and of His people. It is the same with regard to Abiathar. One hundred thirty-five years after the judgment is announced, he is cut off from the priesthood, after having first furnished a reason for his judgment by his alliance with the rebel.

Thus the reign of righteousness commences with the judgment of all those who when placed under the grace and longsuffering of God had not availed themselves of this to reconcile their hearts and their actions to this rule. Abiathar was all the more guilty in that he had borne the ark of the Lord before David, and that he had also shared in his afflictions from the beginning (1 Sam. 22:20). Thus he had had part in the testimony of the Lord's anointed and had suffered. Solomon recognizes this, but in the only case where Abiathar's faithfulness is put to the test and where it is a matter of the glory of the son of David, he makes shipwreck and abandons his master. The word of the Lord, long suspended, is fulfilled: Abiathar is rejected.

Joab comes next. Of him it is expressly said that he had not turned after Absalom (1 Kings 2:28), whatever may have been his feeling in this, as we have seen in the Second Book of Samuel. But it was a far more serious thing to turn away from the reign of righteousness at its beginning, for this denoted an absolute lack of fear in the presence of him who was destined to sit as glorious king upon his throne.

Joab flees to the tabernacle and takes hold of the horns of the altar. That cannot save him. The Word of God is against him: "If a man come presumptuously upon his neighbor, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from my altar, that he may die" (Ex. 21:14). Solomon remembers this. When Joab's judgment is determined it is too late for the altar to shelter him. Vengeance must be executed upon him in order that "upon David, and upon his seed, and upon his house, and upon his throne, shall there be peace forever from the Lord" (1 Kings 2:33), for without vengeance, blood would have remained upon the house of David. Judgment was necessary for his glory.

Lastly comes Shimei (1 Kings 2:36-46). Solomon places him on the footing of responsibility and he accepts this. He thus reveals his pure ignorance of his state of sin and consequently of his incapacity to obey. Had not Israel spoken the very same words when the law was proposed? "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do" (Ex. 19:8). And so Shimei: "The saying is good: as my lord the king hath said, so will thy servant do" (1 Kings 2:38). He knows, wretched man, that to disobey means death for him and that his blood will be upon his own head and nevertheless he is unable to do aught but disobey. He is unable to surrender two runaway slaves. In order to regain possession of them for a day, he sacrifices his own life! What a picture of the world which knows the law of God and which will not and cannot submit to it once a passing interest comes between the will of God and itself. He is judged by his own word: "The word that I have heard is good" (1 Kings 2:42). The man who is placed under responsibility and who accepts this and fails, cannot be tolerated under the reign of righteousness.

Meditations on 1 Kings, 1 Kings 2:1-12: David?s Last Recommendation

1 Kings 2:1-12

As he dies, David leaves a commandment with his son Solomon, and insists upon his responsibility. It is, so to speak the testament of the aged king and the fruit of his long experience. Here we do not find “the last words of David” as 2 Samuel 23 gives them to us. The discourse contained in our passage historically precedes these “last words” which could be inserted between verses 9 and 10. It is not here a question of David judging his entire conduct in view of that of the true King, “the just ruler over men,” and proclaiming the infallibility of the counsels of the grace of God (2 Sam. 23:4-5). No, Solomon at the dawn of his reign must first of all be armed against that which could hinder or ruin it.

There are many analogies between the words of David to his son and those of the Lord to Joshua (Josh. 1). The king must first of all “be of good courage and be a man.” Obedience to the Lord and dependence upon Him are the proofs of this strength which is to be used to “walk in his ways.” The walk itself is directed by the Word of God, as we see here and in Psalm 119. The Word has different characteristics and it is necessary to pay attention to all of them. Here it is said: “To keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies; (1 Kings 2:3). Such is the whole of the Word. His statutes are the things He has established and to which His authority is attached; His commandments, the expression of His will to which we are obliged to submit ourselves; His ordinances (or judgments), the principles He conveys and according to which He acts; and finally, His testimonies are the thoughts He has communicated to us and which faith must receive. All this constituted “the law of Moses” for the Israelite and was to be the divine standard for the walk of the faithful. A life ordered in this manner must prosper in whatever aspect one might consider it: “That thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself.” This was to have been the secret of the reign of Solomon and his successors. With these principles there would not ever have failed him “a man on the throne of Israel.”

It is the same for us. Our life finds its nourishment and its strength in the Word of God, and it is only by keeping it that we are enabled to travel through an inimical world without fear and see all we do prosper (Psa. 1:2-3). It teaches us to walk in the way of God. Can there be a greater blessedness than to find a perfect path here on earth, the path of Christ upon which the eyes of God rest with complacency? See then the task of Solomon and of his successors. Had they walked in God’s way and under His eye their dominion would have continued to be established forever (Psa. 132:11-12).

David’s second recommendation to his son had reference to the judgments which the latter was to execute. David, who represents grace, understood what was appropriate to a reign of righteousness. If there were no righteousness, grace itself would be nothing but guilty weakness. As a man, David had shown himself very little able to give each of these qualities its rightful place. Thus, many times we find him too weak to exercise righteousness, as in the case of Joab, or we find him extending grace at the expense of righteousness. He alone has found, in Christ, the way to reconcile these two things: His perfect hatred for sin and His perfect love for the sinner.

But this absence of judgment was nothing less than weakness in David. A time is coming when the actions of men will be appraised according to the standard of righteousness, a standard that has long been postponed, but which will not have its sway until then. When righteousness reigns, can it appear to ignore sin? Men do not violate the laws of a kingdom with impunity, and when this kingdom is established in power those who have trampled these laws underfoot during the reign of grace must suffer the bitter consequences of their revolt. There are no legal exceptions to the law of God as there are to the laws of men. The sinner’s act of iniquity will find him out — perhaps when his hair is white with age, but without question it will be recalled to mind.

Joab is mentioned first (1 Kings 2:5-6). We have already sufficiently evaluated his career1 that we will pass over it here. David’s weakness (2 Sam. 3:39) had prevented the king from immediately avenging the murder of Abner, and later that of Amasa, but he had not forgotten them. What Joab had done to these men, he had done to David. “Thou knowest also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me.”2 Perhaps this bloody man thought he was serving his king all the while he was serving his own self-interests. Impossible! That which man does in his self-interest, he is doing against God. In time of peace Joab’s “girdle and shoes,” his service and his walk, had been spotted with the blood of war. This was a defilement. War must overtake him in turn; he must learn that there could be no peace for him, for this is reserved for those who make peace (Jas. 3:18). Neither Solomon’s reign of peace nor his reign of righteousness could tolerate such elements. Joab must be immolated without delay and without mercy. “Do therefore according to thy wisdom,” says David (1 Kings 2:6). Yes, there is retribution according to the wisdom of Christ (Rev. 5:12). Without it His glory would not be completely displayed.

But David’s thoughts delight to linger, in contrast, on what Barzillai had done for him (2 Sam. 19:31-40). He rewards that devoted old man far beyond his desires in the person of his sons. Originally Chimham alone was concerned; now, all the sons of Barzillai have a right at the king’s table in return for the faithfulness of their father. They enjoyed the glory of the kingdom in a particular position of honor and intimacy. Let us be mindful of this in our families. The devotion of parents to Christ is recompensed in their children. “When I call to remembrance,” says the apostle, “the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice” (2 Tim. 1:5).

A third person here is Shimei, the Benjaminite who had cursed David, and then at his return had given tokens of repentance in confessing his sin. This same Shimei had not joined Adonijah’s following;3 he remained in the company of David’s mighty men and had followed Solomon. Of him David says, “And, behold, thou hast with thee Shimei the son of Gera.” He was then apparently restored, but if David in grace had spared him, he did not hold him innocent. All was made to depend on his conduct under the king of righteousness. His conduct would show if his repentance was real. As with the case of Joab, Shimei’s case is entrusted to the wisdom of Solomon (1 Kings 2:9).

David dies (1 Kings 2:10-12), and the Word notes here not the opening of Solomon’s reign, but that which characterizes it both generally and in its entirety: “His kingdom was established greatly.” This is the character of the kingdom of righteousness in contrast with that of the kingdom of grace, full of trouble and sedition.

Meditations on 1 Kings, 1 Kings 19:9-21: Elijah Before God

Elijah comes to Horeb, the mountain of God, and goes into the cave, the same place, no doubt, where the Lord had hidden Moses (Ex. 33). The prophet did not know where God would bring him; he did not intend to betake himself to Horeb when he fled a day’s journey into the wilderness. But though he reaches the cave, it is not with the feelings of the heart of a Moses toward the guilty people — a heart which despite all their iniquity, beat for the people of God. “Blot me, I pray thee, out of Thy book that Thou hast written” (Ex. 32:32), ready to suffer being made a curse in order to save Israel. “Consider that this nation is Thy people!” (Ex. 33:13), he said again, interceding for them. This

same Moses who proclaimed the God of the law appealed to the mercies of the God of grace towards those who had offended Him.

But Elijah had not yet learned the lesson which God wanted to teach him. “The word of Jehovah came to him, and he said to him, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for Jehovah the God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I am left, I alone, and they seek my life, to take it away” (1 Kings 19:9-10). Then God teaches him what Moses had desired to know when he said, “Let me see thy glory.” First He makes various manifestations of His power and His judgments pass before the prophet. Elijah knew them well: he had been present when the stormy wind had preceded the rain (1 Kings 18:45); at his word fire had fallen from heaven in presence of all the people (1 Kings 18:38); and these same phenomena had occurred of old upon this very mountain when God had given the law; the mountain had also quaked and there had been thunder and lightening and fire. But — what a lesson for Elijah — the Lord was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire. The whole life of this most powerful of the prophets might well have slipped away without him ever really knowing God!

Elijah hears “a soft gentle voice” (1 Kings 19:12-13); then he understands that this is something new surpassing the scope of his experiences, and, his face wrapped in his prophet’s mantle, he stands at the entrance of the cave. This soft gentle voice was that of grace. It is in grace that God has revealed Himself in the fullness of His being to poor sinners like ourselves. The God who thus reveals Himself repeats His question to the prophet to probe him to the very depth: “What doest thou here, Elijah?” Elijah makes the same reply (1 Kings 19:14; cf. 1 Kings 19:10). He had had time for reflection; he lays bare what is in his heart. Whom does he credit with good? Himself: “I have been very jealous for Jehovah... I am left, I alone... they seek my life.” Whom does he accuse? The people of God: “The children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets... they seek my life.” In a word it is an orderly accusation, a pleading against Israel, and a panegyric for Elijah.

“Know ye not,” says the apostle, “what the scripture says in the history of Elias, how he pleads with God against Israel? Lord, they have killed thy prophets, they have dug down thine altars; and I have been left alone, and they seek my life. But what says the divine answer to him? I have left to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed knee to Baal. Thus, then, in the present time also there has been a remnant according to election of grace.” “God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew” (Rom. 11:2-5; 11:2).

Elijah had come to intercede against Israel! In accusing the people and in justifying himself he was showing his ignorance of grace and of himself. How was this then? He was appearing before the God of grace to play the role of accuser and to plead for judgment! But what was the divine answer to him? First of all, that vengeance would be executed. To Elijah would fall the sad mission of preparing the instruments: Hazael and Jehu. Secondly, the prophetic administration is taken away from Elijah and he must anoint Elisha as prophet in his stead. He who was saying, “I am left, I alone,” must learn that God chooses, forms, or discharges His instruments as it suits Himself. How Elijah thus is judged to the very depths! No longer will he say, “Take my life; for I am not better than my fathers.” He will have to live on, all the while being witness to another ministry which he will have to acknowledge, being himself used of God in forming it.

Thirdly, and this is the great point of “the divine answer”: “Yet I have left myself seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth that hath not kissed him” (1 Kings 19:18). There was therefore a remnant according to the election of grace, known by God, but unknown to Elijah. The soft gentle voice was still being heard in these days of apostasy, and it was in this feeble remnant that God found His pleasure.

Elijah accepts this humiliating lesson: he submits when for the fourth time God says to him: “Go!” (cf. 1 Kings 17:3, 9; 18:1). He returns by the way by which he had come (1 Kings 19:15). He finds Elisha the son of Shapat and casts his mantle on him — the mark of identification as a prophet. Had he stuck to the mere letter of God’s word, he would have had to begin by anointing Hazael and Jehu (1 Kings 19:15, 16), but he makes haste to carry out the act which would reduce himself to nothing — himself, the great prophet — by handing over his authority to another. Thus he who had said, “I am left, I alone,” shows that from now on he is nothing in his own eyes. As for Hazael and Jehu, it would not be Elijah, but Elisha who would anoint them. He surrenders all claims to that which could have made him stand out and leaves that work to be carried out by someone other than himself.

Elisha leaves his oxen and runs after Elijah. “Go back again,” the prophet answers him, using the same words he had heard from the mouth of the Lord (1 Kings 19:15). He was nothing in his own eyes from now on, and this was not the moment to induce Elisha to follow him. “What have I done to thee?” Elijah had not cast his mantle on him to draw him after himself, but that he might be prophet in his stead. What a beautiful example of humility, of self-judgment, of unselfishness, of obedience, of trust in the Word this man of God gives us here! How quickly chastening had produced its fruits in him! Can we not say that Elijah’s humiliation will glorify God more than all the prophet’s power? His career is apparently broken off, but a new career, beginning in chastening, is about to open before him; and if the first has not ended in glory, the second will end in nothing but glory! Let us all follow Elijah’s example in the breaking of self in order to glorify the Lord!

Meditations on 1 Kings, 1 Kings 19:1-9: Elijah Before Jezebel and Before Himself

It is worthwhile to remark as we begin this chapter, that if men of God or their actions serve as types for us in the Word, this does not mean that these men understood the hidden meaning of their lives or their acts. Without even going beyond Elijah’s history, we have already remarked that in Luke’s Gospel the Lord gives an import to his mission to the widow at Zarephath quite other than that in the account here in our book. The fire falling from heaven upon the burnt offering is another proof of this. Elijah could not have seen in this either the cross or crucifixion with Christ, things that have become so clear for us in the light of the gospel. In fact, Elijah as a man of God was above all a prophet of judgment, and as far as his personal experiences go, it is only in our chapter that he lifts his eyes under divine instruction beyond the scene of judgment to that lofty, serene region in which God finds His delights, makes Himself known, and reveals Himself in the fullness of His character. This remark will help us understand the scene that is about to unfold before us.

After the total destruction of the prophets of Baal and the account Ahab gives Jezebel of this, she swears by her false gods to take her revenge upon Elijah within twenty-four hours, and she lets him know this. “And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life” (1 Kings 19:1-3). He flees before a woman, he who had met with Ahab and had resisted the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal! This attitude, so contrary to his attitude before, came from Elijah’s at this moment forgetting the source of his strength. He could no longer say, “The Lord

before whom I stand." He felt himself to be before Jezebel, not before the Lord. And the thing was so true that he was going to have to walk for forty days and forty nights in order to stand before God again. From the moment a believer lets any object whatsoever come between his soul and God, the distance immediately takes on incalculable proportions. The result of this estrangement necessarily is that the prophet loses all his strength, for one does not find this anywhere but before God. "Thou hidest Thy face, they are troubled." Elijah, a quite remarkable instrument of the Lord's power, had not realized in the same measure that in himself there was neither goodness, nor light, nor strength. It was needful for him to make this experience, and God would bring him to this in leaving him to his own resources before the enemy's power. He who had sent the message, "Behold Elijah," to Ahab flees for his life at a mere threat from Jezebel. From Jizreel he passes into the territory of Judah where the queen could no longer reach him, continues his flight to Beer-sheba, the farthest border of Judah toward the wilderness, leaves his servant there, and not satisfied with his flight, goes into the wilderness itself a day's journey. There he "sat down under a certain broom-bush, and requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough: now, Jehovah, take my life; for I am not better than my fathers" (1 Kings 19:4). He is so completely discouraged that he wishes for an end to his life. Why this? "For I am not better than my fathers!" The prophet thus had thought, even if only for a moment, that he was better than his fathers and that God had supported him in the conflict because of this excellence! Poor prophet!—powerless before Jezebel, absolutely discouraged in his own sight, he who had believed that he could build something upon this foundation of sand.

But in order that this man of God might be entirely delivered from self, the Lord was going to have him undertake a long journey, at the end of which he would meet the God of the law at Horeb.

How many lessons this scene contains for us! We can have been used in God's service and yet know Him very imperfectly. Then too, a time of special blessing often precedes a period of great spiritual weakness, because Satan, ever on the lookout, causes us to find in the blessings themselves an occasion to be puffed up and to exalt the flesh. Such is in part the reason for Elijah's discipline; such was the reason for the apostle's discipline after he was caught up to the third heaven, though this was only preventative. Notice again that Satan attacks us on that side which we guard the least because it seems the least vulnerable to us. Would it be likely that a man whose courage had resisted the entire people would be seen fleeing at a mere threat?

"He himself went... into the wilderness." What a blessing when the Lord leads us there so that we may there experience those infinite resources which are in Him; how humiliating but how beneficial too, when our own will has brought us there, that we be there to learn what is in our hearts! Such was Elijah's situation. — "And he lay down and slept under the broom-bush." He was giving up his mission, so to speak, just as its reality had been proven by brilliant exploits. But it was necessary for him to learn that his inner life was not being sustained by faith as his outward testimony had been.

"And behold, an angel touched him, and said to him, "Arise, eat!" (v. 5). In chapter 17 it had been he, Elijah, who had dispensed food to others after having been fed himself; here where his lack of faith had driven him, he had no food at all. But God does not abandon him: He thinks of him. The only strength available to him comes from food which God has prepared for him; at his head he finds a cake baked on hot stones and a cruse of water. He eats, but does not understand what God wants of him, and goes to sleep again. A second time he finds the same food and the angel says to him, "Arise, eat; for the journey is too great for thee" (v. 7). God fed him in order that he might walk. An important lesson for us! The Lord had fed him at Cherith and at Zarephath so that he might render a powerful testimony, but if divine food does not impart strength to us for ourselves, will God's purpose be attained?

This food which Elijah finds at his head has miraculous power. Is it not so with the Word of God? It brings us to "the mount of God." So deemed the apostle as he spoke to the Ephesians elders: "I commit you ... to the word of his grace, which is able to ... give to you and inheritance among all the sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

Elijah "went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God" (v. 8). With it one walks and does not faint. Moses had spent forty days and forty nights upon Horeb, conversing with God. His word and His presence were enough to sustain His servant's strength. The Lord Himself spent forty days and forty nights in the wilderness without any food, in the presence of wild beasts and exposed to Satan's attacks. He hungered and found nothing at His head to cause Him to resist the enemy's temptations. But He was the Man who did not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceeded from the mouth of God. Simple dependence upon this word fed Him, was His strength, and gave Him the victory in extraordinary circumstances that He alone could overcome.

Meditations on 1 Kings, 1 Kings 18:17-46: Elijah Before the Prophets of Baal

Ahab goes to meet Elijah (1 Kings 18:16-20); he accuses God's servant of being "the troubler of Israel." This is how the world regards the activity of the Lord's witnesses. To announce the judgment that is inevitable, to declare that there is no resource against it except in God Himself, to stand fast for the Lord in the presence of evil, in effect is to stir up the world which is sleeping in a false security and does not want to be disturbed from its sleep. "I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house," says the prophet. "Ye have forsaken the commandments of Jehovah"—that is the true cause of the troubles, for "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

"Send," says Elijah to Ahab, "gather to me all Israel to mount Carmel." "So Ahab sent to all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel" (1 Kings 18:19-20). God wants it so; whether Ahab wants it or not, this must be done, But doubtless the thought would never occur in the mind of this impious king that his religion with its eight hundred fifty prophets would be absolutely nothing before one single prophet of Jehovah!

"Then Elijah drew near to all the people, and said, How long do ye halt between two opinions? if Jehovah be God, follow Him; and if Baal, follow him. And the people answered him not a word" (1 Kings 18:21). Israel under the yoke of an idolatrous religion was following Baal without positively abjuring Jehovah. She was halting between two opinions. This is one of the characteristics of the world's religion. Doubtless the number of those walking in open unbelief is growing daily. But there are others who deny neither the faith nor impiety. They find good reasons both for, excusing the evil, objecting to the good. They are the indifferent ones who abstain from choosing between the two sides and who do not answer a word when Elijah speaks to them.

The prophet begins by taking his stand for the Lord by himself (1 Kings 18:22) in the face of Baal's four hundred fifty prophets. He proposes to the people a sign that the Lord alone would be able to produce and which had a deep significance. "The god that answers by fire, let him be God" (1 Kings 18:23, 24). Here it is not a question of fire from heaven falling upon men in judgment, as would happen later at the summons of the prophet (2 Kings 1:10), but of fire falling upon the burnt offering.

Baal does not answer (1 Kings 18:25-29). With what irony does the prophet treat this inert object by means of which Satan was exercising his abominable influence upon the hearts of men! The blood of the false prophets flows (1 Kings 18:28), but neither their blood nor that of any man can atone for Israel's sin or open heaven to this poor people!

Two religions meet face to face: Elijah's and Baal's, for the third, Israel's, is party to both. Publicly these two religions appear to have the same sacrifice. How are they to be distinguished? One of the bullocks must be consumed by fire from heaven, but not the other. By this means one will be able to recognize the true God; by this means the people too will be able to learn to know themselves so that they may be turned to repentance.

Elijah says, "Draw near to me" (1 Kings 18:30). At that time he was God's representative upon earth, that which Christ was in perfection. If they would remain afar off, Israel would not be able to be witness to what God was about to do. Elijah repairs the altar that was broken down (1 Kings 18:31, 32). The twelve stones represented the twelve tribes, the people in their entirety before God. The prophet, at a time of ruin, bears testimony to the unity of the people, just as today's witnesses bear testimony to the oneness of the body of Christ. Elijah does not act as a sectarian man would, but by faith in the deep reality of this unity which God had established at the beginning. Outwardly the altar was broken down; that is to say, Israel as a whole no longer existed. But it was enough that one man should bear witness with his altar of twelve stones that that which God had established in the beginning would remain forever. It is the same today. We do not tire of rendering testimony to the fact that for us there is but one body and one Spirit, just as there was one altar of twelve stones for Elijah. Those who proclaim this truth will ever be few in number. Perhaps they will remain alone like Elijah, but what does their number matter if this testimony has been entrusted to us, as it was to Elijah, in the midst of universal apostasy?

The burnt offering was the victim presented to God for the people. Fire from heaven — divine judgment — falls and consumes everything: the sacrifice, the wood, and the very altar itself, leaving nothing standing (1 Kings 18:38). In this way the Lord indicated that there was but one offering by which one could know the true God, the offering upon which His judgment had fallen. Each Israelite present at this sight could at the same time learn what was due to him, and that the people, represented by the twelve stones of the altar, could not stand before the judgment of God. But oh, the wonder of grace! If the people were present at their own judgment and saw themselves being consumed together with the sacrifice, they were not struck down themselves. The sacrifice was consumed; the people are consumed with the sacrifice; but judgment without mercy upon that which represents them before God sets them free to rejoice in His deliverance. So also we can say, "Our old man has been crucified with him, that the body of sin might be annulled, that we should no longer serve sin" (Rom. 6:6).

Drought and famine had been warning judgments to straying Israel, God thus making Himself known in part by His ways, but the people did not really know God in the fullness of His being until the fire from heaven had consumed the burnt offering and the altar.

Elijah had two desires: that God might be glorified, and that the people might learn to know Him. "Jehovah, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things by thy word. Answer me, Jehovah, answer me, that this people may know that thou Jehovah art God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again" (1 Kings 18:36-37). There is a twofold result: the people, delivered by divine power, acknowledge the Lord, turn their heart to Him, and render homage to Him! "And all the people saw it, and they fell on their faces and said, Jehovah, he is God! Jehovah, he is God!" (1 Kings 18:39).

"And Elijah said to Ahab, Go up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain" (1 Kings 18:41). There is a sound of rain, but only Elijah's ear — or rather his faith — perceives it. "And Ahab went up to eat and to drink." He is helpless against God, a tool the Lord uses as it may please Him. Thoroughly wicked though he may be, he is obliged to obey. He who had said, "Thou troublest Israel," can do nothing against the dreadful humiliation that is inflicted upon him in seeing all the priests of his false god slaughtered before him. But after all, of what importance was this profane king? It was not a question here of his own salvation, about which he did not care in the least, but of the salvation of the whole people of God.

Elijah goes up to the top of Carmel. His patience emerges victor from the trial; his faith has its perfect work. The showers of blessing come after God's judgment has fallen upon the burnt offering and only after Israel, in presence of this event, has acknowledged the Lord and turned their hearts back to Him. In our days abundance of rain is sought without the conscience being reached. This desire can be crowned with but one result. The rain was not given to Israel until after the work of God had been done for them and in them.

The hand of the Lord is upon Elijah who with his loins girded, runs before Ahab.

Let us again summarize briefly the beautiful character of this man of God. We do so all the more gladly since we are going to be present at a scene that no longer testifies to the power of the Holy Spirit in the prophet.

Completely separated from the evil that surrounds him, Elijah is not in the least taken up with himself nor desirous of personal recognition. He stands before the Lord, hears His word, obeys Him, lives in dependence upon Him in every detail. He depends upon God for sustenance, to bring grace to the nations, to resist the enemy, to bear witness, to exercise divine power in holding back or in giving rain, but above all else, to cause fire to fall from heaven upon the burnt offering and to judge the world. He waits upon the Lord, walks with Him, and, like Enoch, will be caught up into glory. The word of the Lord, the angel of the Lord, the Lord Himself all speak to Elijah; as for himself, he speaks to God and God listens to him. Elijah is a friend of God (1 Kings 17:22, 8:38, 44). Elijah is an epistle of Christ. But, where the Lord never failed, this man of God did fail, and that is what we are about to consider.

Meditations on 1 Kings, 1 Kings 18:1-16: Elijah and Obadiah

A third time the word of the Lord comes to Elijah (1 Kings 18:1; 1 Kings 17:2, 8); a third time Elijah obeys. The career of this man of God is marked by obedience. May it characterize us also! Only one time does Elijah go where his own heart directs him (1 Kings 19.3), and the thread of his career is interrupted. Doubtless he then arises and sets out at the angel's word (1 Kings 19:8), but it is that he may come into God's presence and there learn to judge himself. Later we shall see that despite this, God does not set His servant aside entirely, for the experience of learning to know himself bears fruit; we find him again in 1 Kings 21 before Ahab and in 2 Kings 1 boldly presenting himself before Ahaziah's messengers to pronounce the judgment of the king of Israel.

"Go, show thyself to Ahab" (1 Kings 18:1). Previously it had been, "Hide thyself by the torrent Cherith" (1 Kings 17:3). Elijah obeys without arguing. His obedience stems from implicit confidence in God, His authority, His power, and His goodness. Every disobedient act of a Christian demonstrates a lack of appreciation of what God is.

"I will send rain upon the face of the earth." This does not hinder Elijah from praying that it may rain (1 Kings 18:42). He is in full fellowship with the Lord, having received the revelation of His thoughts and of His purpose, but in order to be an instrument for the fulfillment of His ways in grace, he must depend upon Him. God could well give rain without Elijah or by someone other than the prophet, but He never sets His seal upon disobedience or independence; and it is this which so often strikes the work of God's children with barrenness.

While Elijah was enjoying divine abundance at Cherith and at Zarephath at a time of want, Ahab was using all his faculties to seek to bring about a remedy for the judgment of God by strategies of human wisdom. He associates Obadiah, the steward of his house, one who occupies a public place at the king's court, with himself. "Obadiah feared the Lord greatly" (1 Kings 18:3). This might seem to be enough for a faithful walk, for "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; (Prov. 9:10). But we are also told: "Fear the Lord, and depart from evil" (Prov. 3:7). And again: "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil" (Prov. 8:13). One may fear the Lord greatly, yet nevertheless dishonor Him by being in association with the world that rejects Him. This position, so lacking in openness, is found on every hand in professing Christendom. Yet nevertheless Obadiah's piety had prompted him to hide those who were being persecuted for the Lord's name's sake. "And it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of Jehovah, that Obadiah took a hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and maintained them with bread and water" (1 Kings 18:4). In one sense, his work had not been insignificant. It was no small thing, especially on part of a man in the public eye at Ahab's court, to hide one hundred prophets whose lives were being hunted and to feed them.

Only — for there is an "only" — Obadiah was dependent upon Ahab, and that was evil. If Ahab was his lord, how could he excuse himself from following his master's orders, and how could he testify by his walk to just the opposite of what his faith taught him? Moreover, alliance with the world of necessity makes one little by little lose one's appreciation of its true character. The world is willfully ignorant of God's judgment. Beyond doubt, it suffers it, as did Ahab and his people, but it does not have recourse to God to be delivered from it. All its doings proclaim: I hope to get myself out of this without You.

Even if he "greatly fears the Lord," a believer associated with the world or dependent upon it of necessity acts according to its principles. The Word calls this "the elements of the world." Such a believer first of all will be in ignorance of the fact that God's judgment upon man is absolute and final, and that the wrath of God is already revealed from heaven upon him. Secondly, he will be seeking to improve the condition of man placed under this judgment. All the associations, all the organizations in Christendom today — and they are innumerable, so that we forbear enumerating them — have no other character. Those dear children of God who like Obadiah "divide the land" with Ahab to seek water and grass, show forth the principles of the wicked king in their walk and inevitably draw the responsibility for it upon themselves.

Elijah meets Obadiah (1 Kings 18:7-16). This godly man recognizes the Lord's servant and falls on his face before him. Others perhaps would have passed by on the other side of the road, embarrassed by this so dangerous meeting. "Go, say to thy Lord, Behold Elijah!" such is the word of the prophet. Elijah, as we have seen, being accustomed to this word, often heard a "Go," and he would go. "Go," he himself had said to the poor Zidonian widow, who had then gone and done "according to the word of Elijah." With the one as well as with the other this stemmed from faith, which always obeys. But where is Obadiah's faith? A believer may "greatly fear the Lord," and have an unbelieving heart. Obadiah is struck with consternation and terrified: "And now thou sayest, Go, say to thy lord, Behold Elijah!" (1 Kings 18:11, 14). When it came to obeying Ahab, Obadiah did not object; but when it came to obeying God, he found objections to His word presented by the prophet. "And it shall come to pass when I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of Jehovah shall carry thee whither I know not; and when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he will kill me" (1 Kings 18:12). He who can adapt himself to Ahab's plans for finding sustenance and avoiding death cannot rely upon the Lord and entrust his life to Him. How many souls are in this situation! When the word of God calls for simple obedience on their part, they quickly find fault with it. From this, we may be sure, come the great majority of the arguments of children of God who, walking in a pathway of disobedience, seek to avoid the positive obligation of obeying by persuading themselves that the Word contradicts itself or is not clear: "Thou sayest, Go, say to thy lord, Behold Elijah! And it shall come to pass... that the Spirit of Jehovah shall carry thee whither I know not." This is also the source of the lack of deliverance of souls bound up in this state of things. They are afraid, afraid of the world's opinion, afraid of difficulties, afraid of death: "He will kill me."

"And now thou sayest... Behold Elijah!" Elijah's coming, as we shall see in the rest of the chapter, meant the deliverance of the little remnant of Israel through the judgment of Baal's priests. It was also the sign of the end of God's judgment upon His people and it ushered in the blessings that would follow: "Go, show thyself to Ahab; and I will send rain upon the face of the earth" (1 Kings 18:1). Could the news of Elijah's coming bring anything but joy to one who was faithful? How the seven thousand who had not bowed the knee before Baal must have rejoiced at this news: "Behold Elijah!" For them it meant the end of long sufferings, the sure hope of better times. But it could not be so for Obadiah. He was too entangled with the world to rejoice at seeing its yoke broken. Is it not the same today when one speaks to Christians of the appearing of the One who is greater than Elijah? We are not speaking of His coming to take away His saints, but of His appearing to distribute rewards and to execute judgment upon the world. Will these souls be able to say that they "love His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8)? Will they, like the elders in the Revelation, in the face of this display of judgment have only adoration and the homage of their crowns cast before the throne to render? Obadiah did not know this assurance. He saw nothing but this lot awaiting him with the king: "He will kill me," a fate which due to his lack of faith he considered to be more sure than deliverance.

We find many different characters in Israel in these sad days for faith and the testimony. It is no longer the time of spiritual power, when the beloved of the Lord, gathered around Himself, resolutely enter into the conflict. These are days of weakness when the faithful are persecuted and hide themselves, no longer able as a collective testimony to resist the evil. In short, Elijah alone is a witness. And Obadiah? Beyond doubt he shows his piety in secretly providing for the needs of the saints, and this devotion is recognized by God; but to be the messenger of Elijah

(of Christ) before the world goes beyond his courage. Nevertheless God had said to him, Go! One would be glad to unload the responsibility that the word of the Lord imposes on us onto anyone else, for how can one carry it out? Would it not be openly censuring Ahab's apostasy to go and say to him, "Behold Elijah"? And how can one speak thus when one has never done so before?

And then, look again! In this state of bondage to the world one feels it necessary to justify oneself by giving testimony to oneself: "Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of Jehovah, how I hid a hundred men of Jehovah's prophets by fifty in a cave, and maintained them with bread and water?" (1 Kings 18:13). How many Christians themselves report of their work, of their activity and of its results, thus giving a wrong impression to themselves and to others as to their moral condition! Obadiah adds: "I thy servant fear Jehovah from my youth" (1 Kings 18:12), and this was true enough, but it was not for Obadiah to state this. God had deigned to use him, even in the wrong position he held, and he could be sure that the Lord would not forget even a cup of water given to one of these little ones — but how much more pleasing it would have been to God to have seen Obadiah, full of trust and obedience, setting forth at His command to carry out the mission to the king with which he had been entrusted!

We have dwelt upon Obadiah's character at length on account of its very present day application. May God grant us each to give heed to that which his example teaches us! Elijah reassures this poor fearful, trembling heart (1 Kings 18:15, 16). As surely as he stands before the Lord, he will show himself to Ahab that very day, for he has nothing to fear. God is with His servant; what is the power of the king in comparison to that of God?

Meditations on 1 Kings, 1 Kings 17:8-24: Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath

When the brook had dried up, Elijah was sent to Zarephath to be sustained there by a widow woman (1 Kings 17:9). In Luke 4:25, 26 he is sent to the widow to sustain her. Both these things are true and our account proves this. God had a double purpose: to sustain His servant and to bring a message of grace to the widow by him. The Lord, speaking in the synagogue, compares this message to the gospel spread among the nations beyond the borders of Israel. The evangelist finds his own sustenance in bringing the good news of grace to others. But we find a third thing in Luke's account. If the message is carried to the nations, personified by a Zidonian widow, the widows of Israel are set aside. Judgment upon Israel's state opens the door to the Gentiles to receive grace, and this, remarkably, in the very territory from whence Jezebel, that great corrupter of God's people, came (1 Kings 16:31). In Matthew 15:21 The Lord withdraws to this same territory, but though He was still being sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, He could not be hidden to faith; and faith finds in Him much more than crumbs fallen from the children's table.

Here then Elijah is sent in grace to a widow of Zarephath who is dying of hunger, and just as much as Israel under the weight and consequences of the judgment God had pronounced. This woman was going to die, and she knew it. Elijah's words stirred up the faith that lay in her heart. "And she went and did according to the word of Elijah" (1 Kings 17:15). Instead of doubting something that would happen in a way incomprehensible to human reason she accepted this impossibility and found salvation therein for herself and for her son. The king of Israel, too, felt this imminent death weighing down upon himself and his people, but instead of being sure about his lot, he sought means to escape it. This is the opposite of faith: it is unbelief. Ahab thought he could have or find human resources against famine and death; this woman had none; "That we may eat it, and die" (1 Kings 17:12).

This widow's faith is of the same kind and quality as that of the prophet; consequently she follows the same path he does. It is always so: "And he went and did according to the word of Jehovah" (1 Kings 17:5). "And she went and did according to the word of Elijah" (1 Kings 17:15), but the word of Elijah was "the word of Jehovah which he had spoken through Elijah" (1 Kings 17:16). It is the same word, whether it comes directly to the prophet or whether it is addressed to men through him. So it is today with the gospel.

This poor widow came to know the divine resources for a dying soul. She is called to make experiences even more profound and blessed. Her son dies; she now has to deal with the reality of death. At the same time she acknowledges that which is right, that death is the wages of iniquity. "Art thou come to me to call mine iniquity to remembrance, and to slay my son?" (1 Kings 17:18). To know that death awaits us and will overtake us is not everything; it is necessary besides to realize the actual power of death upon us, sinners. The widow needed this experience to learn to full extent of the power of grace. How, if her son had not died, would she have been able to know the power of resurrection that delivers from death? The same was so for Martha at the tomb of Lazarus.

This whole scene speaks to us of Christ. Elijah is a picture of Him. In sympathy he entered into all the consequences of man's sin. Just as Christ wept at the tomb of Lazarus, Elijah "cried to Jehovah and said, Jehovah, my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?" (1 Kings 17:20). Then he brought the dead child to life again, taking his place. "And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried to Jehovah and said, Jehovah, my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again!" (1 Kings 17:21).

The meal and the oil were a great blessing for the poor widow. They kept her from dying. A soul, still ignorant of all the riches of Christ, may be conversant with the Word and find nourishment for its life therein. At first the widow was a bit like the man left for dead by the thieves, to whose help the Samaritan came, pouring oil and wine onto his wounds. The oil and the wine answered to his needs, just as the oil and the barrel of meal answered to the woman of Zarephath's needs. But resurrection answers to death. "Being dead in your offenses and sins... God... has quickened us with the Christ... and has raised us up together." Elijah stretched himself upon the child three times; Christ spent three days in death. But Elijah did not depend upon himself to raise the dead any more than did Christ. "Father," said the Lord at the tomb of Lazarus, "I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me," and as for His own resurrection, "For Thou wilt not leave My soul to Sheol, neither wilt Thou allow thy Holy One to see corruption." In the same way, as we have already remarked, here Elijah expresses his dependence by praying.

The prophet delivers the child to his mother. "And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of Jehovah in thy mouth is truth" (1 Kings 17:24). She had learned two things by the resurrection of her son: First, that God had come to manifest Himself here below in a man—"Thou are a man of God." And so Christ was "marked out"—much more than a man of God—"Son of God in power... by resurrection of the dead." Previously God had revealed Himself to her as providing for her needs, now, as giving new life, resurrection life, there where death had entered in by the "iniquity" of man. The second thing is that through resurrection she gained the assurance that the word of the Lord in Elijah's mouth was the truth. The truth of the word of grace is proven by resurrection. Christ has not

only died for our offenses; He has been raised for our justification.

This seventeenth chapter has occupied us with a time when Elijah was hidden from the eyes of his people and from the world. We have seen him exercise a ministry of grace during this period. In the following chapter he is going to manifest himself publicly at the time for executing judgment. Do we need to point out how much the prophet in this respect is a remarkable type of Christ? We are in the day when the Lord is hidden, but when the grace that brings salvation is appearing to all men, when the power of resurrection is being announced to the nations. The days are coming when our rejected Lord will again appear, when every eye shall see Him, and they which have pierced him, and all the tribes of the land shall wail because of him. Yea, Amen!

Meditations on 1 Kings, 1 Kings 17:1-7: Elijah and the Brook Cherith

God's Word here introduces the first great prophet of Israel. As we have said previously, all the other prophets had come from Judah or had begun their ministry before the separation of the ten tribes. Elijah was "of the inhabitants of Gilead." He comes on the scene in the most evil days of Israel's history when the falling away is universal and the worship of Baal, patronized by Ahab and Jezebel, had become the national religion. Under this government the servants of the Lord are obliged to hide in order to save their lives, and those still seen are silent. Thus to all appearance Elijah is all alone before this formidable apostasy. His name is characteristic: Elijah means "Whose God is Jehovah," and each of us can read this name in this man's words and in all his conduct. His God is the one whom Israel had abandoned. His testimony is just as characteristic: he is completely separated from the general apostasy. He is the witness of the truth in the midst of evil, and the truth always separates us for God. "Sanctify them by the truth," the Lord said. This truth here consists above all in the judgments of God. In a broad general way Elijah is the prophet of judgment just as, on the other hand Elisha is the prophet of grace. Nonetheless, as we shall see in the very course of this chapter and of the next, Elijah's mission is not accomplished without the accompaniment of grace and deliverance, and this at the very time God's judgments are being prepared and running their course.

Elijah's moral character is just as remarkable as his character as a witness. Above all, he stands before God. "Jehovah, the God of Israel," says he, "before whom I stand" (1 Kings 17:1; 18:15). He enjoys a relationship with God and dwells in communion with Him. Like Elijah, Abraham "stood yet before the Lord" (Gen. 18:22). Elisha likewise (2 Kings 3:14), and so many other prophets and men of God. When one stands before God, one receives the communication of His thoughts. "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?" says the Lord. It is the same for Elijah: standing before the Lord, he knows His thoughts and can declare them: "There shall not be dew nor rain these years, except by my word" (1 Kings 17:1). When one stands before the Lord, then like Jeremiah, one hungers for His word; one eats it (Jer. 15:16). Then one can communicate it to others: "Thou shalt be as My mouth" (Jer. 15:19). In Revelation 10:10 John cannot prophesy until he has taken the little book and has eaten it. Ezekiel speaks forth God's words when he has eaten the roll (Ezek. 3:3-4). It is the same here with Elijah; when he says, "Except by my word," it is because his word is that of the Lord which had been revealed to him (1 Kings 17:2, 8; 18-1).

But in order for the Word to unfold its power outwardly by means of us, something more is necessary than feeding upon it. Dependence is needful. Elijah announces the mind of God, proclaims the word of God, but he prays (and that is dependence) in order that this mind may be realized. This same dependence in prayer is the source of the prophet's power. The sphere of this power is very elevated: it is heaven. Heaven opens and closes according to Elijah's word; he makes fire come down from heaven to consume the burnt offering in the presence of Baal's priests. In every one of these situations we find the prophet praying. "Elias was a man of like passions to us, and he prayed with prayer that it should not rain; and it did not rain upon the earth three years and six months; and again he prayed, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth caused its fruit to spring forth" (Jas. 5:17, 18). Our chapter does not tell us that Elijah prayed the first time, but much later in the Epistle of James the Word reveals this to us, for God remembers these prayers, records them, and can reveal them at the appropriate time. None of the prayers of His beloved fall to the ground. When fire came down from heaven it was not only at Elijah's word, but also at his prayer. When the power of the prophet was displayed in raising the dead, the source of this power again was in prayer (1 Kings 17:20-22).

We would remark right away that dependence (of which prayer so frequently is the expression) with one exception (1 Kings 19:3) characterizes the entire life of this man of God. It is shown at the brook Cherith, whether it is a matter of going there or of leaving there. It is shown at Zarephath in all the circumstances of the poor widow. It is shown before Ahab, before Baal, upon Carmel, in the matter of Naboth, and throughout the history of the prophet until that moment when he is caught up to heaven upon the chariots of Israel.

Such was thus the threefold cause of Elijah's extraordinary power: he stood before God, received His word, and lived in dependence upon Him. On that one occasion when his faith failed, he neglected these three things! Instead of standing before God, he fled to the wilderness; he forgot to consult the Lord; and he went according to the dictates of his own heart, which is independence.

Scarcely had he rendered the solemn, public testimony of 1 Kings 17:1 Than Elijah is set aside by the Lord, until that day when he would reappear to deliver the people by judging the agents of the enemy which had enslaved them. To be set aside is a situation infinitely painful to the flesh, which is thus deprived of all that nourishes it, but easy for faith, for faith finds its happiness in obedience. The great prophet must hide himself; this energetic man must fold his hands, in solitude awaiting the Lord's time; he who had the power to shut up the heavens must depend in a unique way upon the Creator who sends out birds to feed His servant and makes the water of the brook last just as long as He wishes to keep his prophet at Cherith. A painful situation for the flesh, we have said, but a blessed school for dependence! Elijah enjoys its fruits. While all Israel was perishing of thirst and hunger, he could say, "I lack nothing."

The Apostle Paul passed through the same experiences morally as did Elijah. At Damascus he had preached that Jesus was the Son of God; then had been sent into the solitude of Arabia in order to return to Damascus, and then finally to go up to Jerusalem. We know nothing of his experiences during his isolation, nor do we know anything more of Elijah's experiences in isolation. What we do know is that both came forth with power acquired in communion with the Lord.

So it was with John the Baptist. Already in his mother's womb he renders his first testimony to the presence of Him who was to come; then he is kept in the desert until the day of his manifestation to Israel.

Was it not so with the Lord Himself? Only He who could say, “I am lowly in heart,” had no need of being kept in humility; but the Word is silent about His mature years preceding His public ministry. There He was, living before God, finding His delight in dependence, waiting upon the will of God to act, then coming forth when the time was come in the power of the Holy Spirit to defeat Satan and to deliver those enslaved by him. Much more than Elijah, Jesus was a man of prayer. Prayer was always the source of power with Him and preceded its manifestation. We see this at His baptism by John (Luke 3:21, 22; cf. Luke 4:1, 14); upon the mountain (Luke 6:12; compare Luke 6:19); at His transfiguration (Luke 9:28; cf. Luke 9:29); and on so many other occasions during His career.

But let us again go back for a moment to God’s ways with His prophet. They follow a definite order gradually leading on to the high point of his mission. God speaks to him; he believes, obeys the divine word, then comes to realize entire dependence at Cherith and at Zarephath. The more he depends upon the Lord, the more he learns to know His faithfulness and the riches of His love and grace. All this is governed, as we saw to begin with, by a complete separation from evil. The secret of power is in all these things. Their absence is the reason for the lack of real power among Christians in our day. It is not that pretensions to power are lacking — but where is its reality? One no longer believes in the Word of God, one lives in independence and disobedience to this Word, one is in fellowship with the world which has crucified Christ, and one is crying loudly that one has found the secret of power! There indeed exists a secret of power in the world, but of a satanic power based on the giving up of all these things. Let us beware of becoming bewitched by this kind of power. Elijah’s power had a character distinguishing it from every other kind of power: it was the power of the Spirit of God, and every true servant of God had to recognize this (1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:16).

Meditations on 1 Kings, 1 Kings 12:25:33: Jeroboam and His Policies

The division of the kingdom being an accomplished fact, we enter upon the history of the kings of Israel. That of the kings of Judah does not enter into our account except to explain certain events or to give the context, except that at the end of 2 Kings the independent history of the kings of Judah is traced to its end. In contrast, the 2 Chronicles gives us the history of the kings of Judah from the special point of view that characterizes this book.

What is now to become of this new kingdom? Jeroboam had received a conditional pledge from the Lord: “And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in My ways, and do that which is right in My sight, in keeping My statutes and My commandments, as David My servant did, that I will be with thee, and build thee a lasting house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee” (1 Kings 11:38). He had only to let God act in his favor, to obey Him, and he was assured of reigning over all that his soul desired (1 Kings 11:37).

Events unfold without his having to interfere, but he is mistrusting and says in his heart: “Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David.” Not having confidence in God, he weighs over the probabilities and stops there. Faith never stops at probabilities — I would even go so far as to say that it feeds upon impossibilities and is the better for it. Having once admitted the probability that the kingdom would return to the house of David, Jeroboam carries his reasoning even further. It is necessary, he thinks, to prevent the people from going up to Jerusalem and offering their sacrifices there, lest they have contact with the royal house of Judah. The king concludes that this is a matter of life and death: “The heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me.” His decision is made: Israel must have a new religion. Out of his unbelief in God’s promise, out of his indifference to the worship of Jehovah, comes the establishment by Jeroboam of a national religion, distinct from that worship which God had instituted at Jerusalem. From that moment on that this worship was not a worship of the Lord, what could it be? Idol worship.

To forsake the worship of the true God is to fall into idolatry, whatever form this may take. In religion there is no middle ground. No doubt Jeroboam thought he had found such a middle ground: he did not adopt the false gods of the nations round about; he wanted only to establish a common religion for Israel. Having no heart-knowledge of the God who had spoken to him, he took counsel with himself and made two golden calves. “Behold thy gods, Israel,” he says, “which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.” He restores to honor that Jewish idolatry which had been practiced by the people at the foot of Sinai and which had brought down upon them the judgment of God. Only he goes further than Israel had in the wilderness: his forsaking of God is more complete. “Behold thy gods,” he says, whereas the people had said, “This is thy god” (Ex. 32:4, 5, J. N. Darby translation). He does not add as Aaron had done, “Tomorrow is a feast to Jehovah!” The Lord is completely set aside.

Jeroboam is a cunning politician. He sets up one calf at Bethel, on the boundary with Judah, and the other at Dan, the northern frontier of his territory. He patterns his worship after the form of the worship prescribed by the law of Moses. “A house of high places” replaces the temple; the Levitical priesthood is replaced by “priests from all classes of the people, who were not of the sons of Levi.” As Israel had its Feast of Tabernacles, Jeroboam also established a feast, but a month later than this. He sets up an altar at Bethel corresponding to the brazen altar, setting it up before the idol, and burns incense upon it instead of burnt offerings (1 Kings 12:31-33). All this “he had devised of his own heart”!

Thus, despite its misleading external forms, this religion was a complete forsaking of the worship of the Lord, an instrument of polity in the hands of the government. Lulled by false appearances, souls were kept far from the true God, and the king of the line of David became a stranger to them.

Can we not find similar principles in the religions of our day? Are they based upon faith in the word of God or upon practices that only vaguely resemble the worship of God—an arbitrary religion, a voluntary worship, a forsaking of the house of God, the Assembly of the Living God, a denial of worship in the Spirit, priestly functions accorded to such who are not true worshippers, the efficacy of the sacrifice replaced by perfume, so that one worships and pretends to approach God without having been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb! Doubtless it is not idolatry, properly speaking, as in Jeroboam’s false worship, but we know from the Word that before long it will all be part of the lifeless religion characterizing professing Christendom today, and that this latter, left to itself, without ties to Christ, making religion a matter of the intelligence, not of the conscience and of faith, will end up by returning to idols and by bowing down before the works of its own hands.

Meditations on 1 Kings, 1 Kings 12:1-24: Division of the Kingdom: Rehoboam

The Word of God is fulfilled by means of feelings in the depths of the heart of man that drive him to his own ruin.

All Israel comes to Shechem to proclaim Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, king. Jeroboam is there, called by the people to be their spokesman before the king. These men complain to the king of the yoke his father had imposed upon them: “Thy father made our yoke grievous”—an expression showing that this had not always been the case. Christ’s yoke will never be grievous upon His people; to His own He will ever remain the same as they have known Him in the day of suffering and of grace: “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Beyond all doubt, the nations must submit to Him, and He will smite them with a rod of iron, but all the prophets bear witness to the grace wherewith He will feed His people. “He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young” (Isa. 40:11).

Rehoboam consults with the old men who had stood before Solomon to drink at the fountain-head of wisdom. Their counsel is that of Jesus to His disciples: “Let the greater among you be as the younger, and the leader as he that serves” (Lk. 22:26). “If this day,” say the old men, “thou wilt be a servant to this people, and wilt serve them and answer them and speak good words to them, they will be thy servants forever” (1 Kings 12:7). Rehoboam forsakes the counsel of wisdom in order to follow that of the young men who had grown up with him, and who stood before him (1 Kings 12:8). They could not thus be anything other than the mirror and reflection of their master’s thoughts. Had he himself stood before his father hearing the wise proverbs that fell from his lips, he could have communicated somewhat of this wisdom to others. He would have known what was becoming to a king; he would have known that “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (Prov. 15:1); that “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18), and many other precepts. But no, those who flatter his pride are the ones who win his approval. The counsel of the young men in the final analysis is but that of his own heart. Pride goes hand in hand with despising one’s neighbor; this base people counts for nothing in the eyes of a king who exalts himself. Great Solomon, his father, even seems little to him in comparison to his own greatness. This saying that his courtiers suggest to him: “My little finger is thicker than my father’s loins” (1 Kings 12:10), does not meet with his disapproval. In any case, he esteems himself stronger and more energetic than his father and despises the people of God. He does not listen to them; this thing was of the Lord, that He might fulfill His prophetic word (1 Kings 12:15). What God has purposed, must come to pass.

Israel rebels. “What portion have we in David? And we have no inheritance in the son of Jesse: To your tents, O Israel! Now see to thine own house, David! (1 Kings 12:16). This was the rallying cry to rebellion, the common cry of those who were malcontented in the days of David (2 Sam. 20:1). Rehoboam flees; nothing but Judah and Benjamin remain to him. To recover what he had so foolishly lost, he gathers together an army of 180,000 men against Israel. But Shemaiah the prophet exhorts them on God’s behalf: “Go not up, nor fight with your brethren, the children of Israel; return every man to his house, for this thing is from Me” (1 Kings 12:24). The king and the two tribes fear the Lord and return according to His word. Had they only continued in this path, which is the beginning of wisdom!

It should be noted that the role of the prophet becomes increasingly emphasized with the ruin of the kingship. In all this part of the history we are taken up with prophets. Ahijah was the first to appear, when Solomon fell under God’s judgment. There was also at that time a Nathan, and an Iddo who had a vision concerning Jeroboam, the son of Nebat (2 Chron. 9:29). Now here is Shemaiah who turns Rehoboam from his plans of war. The role of the prophet was a great grace, allowing relations between God and His people to continue despite the ruin. Above all the prophet was the mouthpiece for the Word of God. This Word was addressed to him and he could say, “Thus saith the Lord.” Whoever followed this Word could be sure of being well directed and of finding blessing. It is the same for us who live in these sad end times. Our prophet is the Word of God. God no longer grants us new revelations, as He did in times past, for He has revealed everything to us; but when His Word speaks to us, let us respect it and not turn aside. In the world there are many false prophets who pretend to know more than the true Word of God. They despise it, accusing it of being false, telling us that it is not God who has spoken. Let us turn a deaf ear to their words. God has spoken to us; our prophet has communicated His thoughts to us. Have we not proven a hundred times over that His Word is our souls’ life and safety? Let us prove it afresh; and when this prophet tells us, “Thus saith the Lord,” let us do like Rehoboam and Judah who had no need to repent of it. Let us “hearken to the word of the Lord” and act “according to the word of the Lord” (1 Kings 12:24).

Meditations on 1 Kings, 1 Kings 11:14-43: The Enemies

God does not limit Himself to revealing to Solomon the judgment which out of regard for David his father would fall upon Rehoboam his son instead of upon himself; but the king’s unfaithfulness would also bring down on himself the Lord’s discipline during the last years of his reign. Peace, that fruit characteristic of this reign, is destroyed; Solomon goes through a period abounding in troubles, seditions, and plots against his throne; nations such as Egypt who had in former times deemed being allied with him an honor, now nourish, raise to honor, and support his worst enemies. All kinds of ties are weakened. The yoke of the king weighs heavily upon the people in order to avoid internal sedition. This results only in poorly repressed discontentment which breaks out from time to time (1 Kings 12:4).

God stirs up enemies against Solomon from among those nations toward whom his lusts had drawn him. Edom was filled with deadly hatred against Israel because David, by the hand of Joab, had cut off all the males of that land (2 Sam. 8:13, 14; 1 Chron. 18:12; Psa. 60, heading). Hadad had escaped with a few servants. But had his hatred lessened because Solomon had taken Edomite women as wives? Hadad had fled to Egypt, had been welcomed at Pharaoh’s court, had become his brother-in-law, and his son had been brought up among the heirs to the throne. Where do the sympathies and favors of the world go? Not to David, but to David’s enemy. One emotion in the heart of Hadad speaks more loudly than all the honors and delights of Egypt’s court: hatred, hatred against Solomon. He gives up all his advantages to satisfy this hatred. Doubtless the conduct of David’s companions had provided the motive for it, but Joab and David were dead: the hatred continued. Underneath it all, the world always hates the Lord’s anointed, and conduct of believers, whether more or less blameable, only serves as a pretext for this hatred.

Rezon, the servant of Hadadezer, king of Zobah, whom David had smitten (2 Sam. 8:3-8; 10:6), is a second adversary. Rezon becomes king in Damascus and reigns over Syria. “He abhorred Israel” (1 Kings 11:23-25).

The world is like Hadad and Rezon. As long as we maintain the place relative to it that the cross of Christ authorizes us to take — the cross by which the world is crucified to us and we to the world (Gal. 6:14) — as long as we consider the world as a defeated enemy (John. 16:33), it does not make a move. But let us make alliance with it, then it cannot forget its defeat, and though it may perhaps maintain an appearance of indifference, it will not hate us any less.

The last, the most dangerous enemy of Solomon's, is the enemy from within, Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:26-40). He was "Solomon's servant," an Ephrathite or Ephraimite. Solomon had set him over Ephraim for the work of the fortification of Millo, which was the defense of Jerusalem against enemies from the north. It was a most dangerous kind of move, but what was Solomon able to foresee? God alone knew.

Through his duties Jeroboam knew all the secrets of the stronghold, and he gained the sympathes of his own tribe as well. In the same way, when difficulties arise among God's people, the greatest danger comes from those who by their activity have appropriated the principles of their brethren and have succeeded in substituting themselves for Christ in winning the sympathies of the many. Such are the weapons they use to make a breach among the people of God. Their motives seem to be unselfish; like Jeroboam, they would deliver the people from a yoke that is difficult to bear; in reality they are Satan's instruments to destroy the testimony of God, as we shall soon see. And yet they are servants of Christ, as Jeroboam was of Solomon!

Now a prophet appears. Just as Samuel at the time of the ruin of the priesthood, so the fall of the kingship now raises up a prophet. He becomes, as we shall see so strikingly in the course of these books, the bond between the people and God when kingship in responsibility has failed. Ahijah the prophet meets Jeroboam outside Jerusalem. He rends the new garment with which he is clothed (indeed, the kingdom was still quite new), and gives ten parts to Jeroboam. At that very moment the kingdom is torn out of the hands of Solomon, although this fact is only realized later. One tribe is left to the house of David on account of the free choice of grace with regard to David and Jerusalem. "They have forsaken Me," says the Lord, "and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in My ways, to do that which is right in My sight, and My statutes and Mine ordinances, as David his father" (1 Kings 11:33). "They" was Solomon, the king! No doubt, all the people later followed that same path, but at this moment one man had sinned — the king. Set before God in a position of responsibility for all the people, his unfaithfulness brought judgment upon Israel. What a severe punishment Solomon had incurred.

In 1 Kings 11:34 God, ever coming back to the grace he had shown to David, adds: "And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David My servant may have a lamp always before Me in Jerusalem, the city that I have chosen for Myself to put My name there" (1 Kings 11:36). Grace is more in God's eyes than all glory, or rather, grace is the most precious part of glory, for it is, so to speak, at the head of all divine perfections.

"And it shall be," says Ahijah to Jeroboam, "if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in My ways, and do that which is right in My sight, in keeping My statutes and My commandments, as David My servant did, that I will be with thee, and build thee a lasting house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee" (1 Kings 11:38). A new responsibility now devolves upon Jeroboam. God was giving him a privileged position. His house was to be as sure as that of David, if he would hearken to the commandments of the Lord. But God makes one reservation: "And I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not forever" (1 Kings 11:39). In due time that grace upon which David's kingdom was founded would again assert its rights, for it was not upon grace, but upon responsibility that Jeroboam's kingdom and that of Solomon itself were established. The promises of God are without repentance; He delights in grace. Thus the future kingdom of the true King of Glory will be based upon a new covenant, a covenant of grace where God alone is under obligation, upon a new creation — that which was not the case with Solomon's kingdom.

"But not forever": one finds in the ways of God, periods where judgment, so to say, eclipses grace. It is not that grace no longer exists — it remains absolutely the same, but it ceases to shine out so that other perfections of divine glory, such as righteousness and judgment, can be manifested. So too the sun which is more than one hundred times the diameter of the earth is eclipsed by the shadow of the latter. When the eclipse is over, the enormous star appears again in all its brightness, for the shadow that covered it has taken away none of its splendor, except to the eyes of men.

Solomon seeks to kill Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:40). Such are the feelings produced in his heart by this discipline! Instead of bringing him into God's presence bowed, humbly submitting to the chastening, the obstacle God had raised up to him only irritates him and provokes him to seek to free himself of it. How sad the heart that has lost its communion with God and that does not judge itself. What has Solomon, the king of righteousness, come to? His heart is no longer upright before God. How far he is from his beginnings!

Jeroboam flees to Egypt, remaining there until Solomon's death.

All the events related in this eleventh chapter are missing in 2 Chronicles, but two expressions in 2 Chronicles 9 give us to know that they are omitted by design. "And the rest of the acts of Solomon first and last, are they not written in the words of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer concerning Jeroboam the son of Nebat?" (2 Chron. 9:29). An omission in the Word of God always has its reason, and we have so often called attention to this one that there is no need to repeat it.

Meditations on 1 Kings, 1 Kings 11:1-13: The Cause of the Kingdom?s Ruin

In this chapter we come to the history of the responsible king, a subject the Second Book of Chronicles passes over in absolute silence.

Up to this point, though it is a question of a man and therefore of an imperfect being, we have been able to see in the life of Solomon a beautiful unity joined to the wisdom that highly exalted the king's name among the nations, in association with the name of the Lord. The greatness, the majesty, the power, the wealth of his reign were but a feeble image of what will be seen during the Millennium under the reign of the true King of Glory.

Now God points out the blemish in this reign to us. It was not the marriage with Pharaoh's daughter, for this was indispensable if Solomon were to be a type of Christ in His government. Joseph in his time had contracted a similar union; the sons who issued therefrom had given

their names to two of the tribes of Israel after having received the blessing of the patriarch, the father of this people. What is more, Solomon had acted according to the thoughts of God toward this Gentile wife, and Chronicles is careful, as we have seen before, to show us that the king did not give her a place of immediate nearness to the ark of the covenant and the city of the son of David. Thus it was not on account of this union that blame fell upon Solomon; as a millennial type, he, “the light of the nations,” of necessity went beyond the ordinary relationships of a king of Israel. Also the Word sets Pharaoh’s daughter in a place that is distinct from the other strange wives (1 Kings 11:1).

“But king Solomon loved many foreign women, besides the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, Hittites; of the nations of which Jehovah had said to the children of Israel, Ye shall not go into to them, neither shall they come in to you; they would certainly turn away your heart after their gods... and his wives turned away his heart” (1 Kings 11:1-3). Solomon’s sin lay in having “loved many foreign women.” These latter had played a relatively restrained role in David’s life, and yet, as we have seen in 2 Samuel, he had borne some sad and often dreadful consequences in his children. By the very discipline which had resulted from these prohibited marriages God had of old kept His anointed from the snares that might have been spread for his piety. But if his lusts had swept him away in his affair with Bathsheba, a daughter of Israel, Solomon’s lusts attracted him to foreign women. And yet God had said: “And thou shalt make no marriages with them: Thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor take his daughter for thy son; for he will turn away thy son from following Me, and they will serve other gods, and the anger of Jehovah will be kindled against you, and He will destroy thee quickly” (Deut. 7:3-4). And again: “And thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods” (Ex. 34:16).

At the head of this humiliating list we find the Moabites who had led Israel astray into the idolatry of Baal-Peor, having gained control of them through the lust of the flesh (Num. 25:1-5). All the nations—the Ammonites, the Edomites, the Zidonians—at the borders of Canaan hated God and His people. The Hittites, mentioned in last place, should have been exterminated, and never had been. Solomon was openly disobeying god who had said to His people: “Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in to you.” There was a double prohibition. We are in danger of going to the world or of letting it come in to us. Perhaps the latter possibility is even more dangerous than the first. On account of conscience towards God the Christian might perhaps abstain from an act of self-will or of disobedience that might incline him to go to the world, whereas the world might more easily seduce him by coming to him. Little by little it insinuates itself into our homes and into our lives, and often when we open our eyes to the danger, it is already too late. “They would certainly turn away your heart after their gods,” the Lord had said. Marriage with the world will necessarily lead us to the religion of the world. This is an earnest word and well worth being weighed by every godly soul today. In the measure that we avoid or cultivate such union, our religion will take on a heavenly or an earthly character. “To these Solomon was attached in love.” And it was this same king whose lips, by divine inspiration, had dropped wisdom for others and had shown them the path to follow with respect to the strange woman lest they fall into “all evil in the midst of the congregation and the assembly” (Prov. 5:1-14)! It was he, too, who in Proverbs 7 had insisted upon the terrible consequences of evil conduct. What blindness! What a sad spectacle! He had taught others and had not taught himself. He, the responsible head of the people, did things from which the people were to abstain, but in which the king failing, he would draw down judgment not only on himself, but also on those whom he should have been feeding, leading, and protecting!

“His wives turned away his heart”—the word is repeated in 1 Kings 11:4. It is a terrible thing when that which is in the world lodges in the heart and takes control of it, thus turning one’s affections aside from their only object to turn them towards vile, shameful, guilty objects. We would remark that these things did not arise suddenly in the life of this man of faith, or at least their consequences did not develop all at once. For “it came to pass when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods.” Time was needed for this fleshly sowing to bear its fruit. Who would have believed that the Solomon of the temple, at one time on his knees, spreading out his hands toward God in the sight of the people, would become an idolater? Perhaps today some might say that he had a large heart, respecting the freedom of conscience of others; some would adorn this idolatry with some lovely humanitarian or social label. But of what value is human opinion? The question is what God thinks of it. God was dishonored. “Solomon did evil in the sight of Jehovah.” It was not indifference, hateful enough in itself, to build these high places for his wives: it was associating himself with their worship and becoming one with them. It also says, “Solomon went after Ashtoreth (Venus Astarte) the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.” He himself is regarded as an idol-worshipper. He “followed not fully Jehovah, as David his father,” that is, he did not follow him to the end. And yet the Lord “had appeared to him twice,” the first time at Gibeon, the second time after the consecration of the temple. God had warned him about idol worship (1 Kings 9:6-9), showing him its terrible consequences for the people—and he had not kept His commandment! David had committed serious, humiliating errors, but at least he always kept the Lord in view. Even after his fall, his first words were “I have sinned against the Lord.” All the affliction of this man of faith had only the glory of God as its goal, and the close of his life had magnified grace joined to complete self-judgment. Such was not the case with Solomon. We do not even hear the cry of a convicted conscience from him when the terrible words, “Forasmuch as this is done by thee,” resound in his ears just as once the words “Because thou hast despised Me,” had rung in his father’s ears. We are about to learn what very different feelings God’s discipline elicited from his heart. But God would have him know all that is to happen to him. The kingdom, that kingdom of glory spread by divine power to the borders of the nations, was to be violently torn away from him; his son would keep but one tribe, Judah, for Benjamin scarcely counted. In a moment power, majesty, wealth, unprecedented glory, the submission of nations—all was to melt away, and in the midst of the storm only a poor remnant preserved by God would remain, like a fragile boat which had lost everything: oars, sails, masts, and ropes—except only its compass and rudder.

As far as man is concerned, this is the end of the kingdom. But what a perspective for the future! After the judgment of the kingdom of Satan, the Beast, and the False Prophet, the kingdom of the Divine Solomon will reappear like the sun that shines in its strength, never again to depend on the fallible obedience of man, but upon the infallible responsibility of the King whom God shall anoint upon Zion, the mountain of His holiness.

Meditations on 1 Kings, 1 Kings 10:14-29: The Throne

1 Kings 10:14-22 describe the riches and the splendor of the kingdom. Gold, the emblem of divine righteousness, stands out everywhere under Solomon’s reign, from the temple to the throne. The throne was marvelous: “There was not the like made in any kingdom.” It was the throne of righteousness and of power, and it bore the emblems of these.

When he had been raised to the royal dignity, Solomon, according to the order of David himself (1 Kings 1:35), had sat upon his father's throne. Now we see him on his own throne in this marvelous "house of the forest" adorned with six hundred shields of gold, where he judges in righteousness.

So it shall be with Christ. At present He is seated on His Father's throne, at His right hand, according to this word: "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (Psa. 110:1). By these words, "Sit thou at my right hand," God the Father expressed His complete satisfaction with the work accomplished by the Son of Man. It is as though He were saying to Him: Take this supreme and glorious place, my Son, until I shall have prepared a throne for Thee. It must surpass every other throne. Never shall the like be made in any kingdom. None that rise up against Thee shall be spared; they shall be crushed. Thy victory over them shall be the first step by which Thou wilt ascend the throne. The throne of the victorious Son of Man shall be like none other, after that voluntary humiliation that brought Him down to descend lower than the vilest of sinners. Then every knee shall bow, every mouth boldly proclaim the Lord on His throne of glory. Meanwhile this man who has drunk of the brook by the way is seated upon the throne of the sovereign God, at the right hand of the Majesty; but it is the throne of His Father; He takes His place there as Son, a testimony to the perfect satisfaction of His Father's heart in Him!

The queen of Sheba was not the only one to come to him: "All the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom" (1 Kings 10:23-29). What a blessed time it will be when all will be able to come and draw from this divine spring, sure of finding God's thoughts in their completeness there! These verses also contain the enumeration of the king's riches. Here unbelievers shake their heads. For them all that man says seems believable, and all that God says, nothing but lies. In fact, such is their way of reasoning. In one year Solomon received six hundred sixty-six talents of gold — one hundred million francs (at the time of the writing of this book); the queen of Sheba had given him one hundred twenty talents of gold — about eighteen million francs — this was also the sum the king of Tyre had rendered to him. Is there then something unbelievable about this in comparison to the present revenues of the kingdoms of the world? Need we remind ourselves that under this reign all the kings of the earth paid tribute to him?

In 1 Kings 10:26-29 we find the king's power, marked by his chariots and his horsemen. All thus was joined together for the glory of Solomon's reign.

Meditations on 1 Kings, 1 Kings 10:1-13: The Queen of Sheba

The preceding chapter has shown us Solomon's relationships with the representatives of the nations in submission to his rule. Tyre; Lebanon; The Pharaoh of Egypt; his daughter, Solomon's wife; and again the land of Edom where he organized his fleet, the desert where he built Tadmor, the kings of Arabia (1 Kings 10:15); the remnant of the Canaanites whom he brings into bondage — all these diverse elements gravitate around him as their center and contribute to the fame of his kingdom.

Finally we see the queen of Sheba, this "queen of the south" who "came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon" (Mt. 12:42). What distinguishes her from all the others is that she was attracted by the fame of the king's wisdom. She had heard tell of it (1 Kings 10:1), and this had produced in her an intense desire to see this extraordinary monarch, a desire which had caused her to conquer the enormous distance separating her country from Jerusalem and the numerous obstacles to such a journey. This act was an act of faith. She believed the word which had been spoken to her; she believed in the excellence of Solomon, having only that which had been told her to judge by. It is always so with faith. It is attracted by the person and the perfections of Christ. Rebecca, convinced of the love of Isaac which Eliezer had spoken to her of, sets forth to go to meet him. The wilderness does not frighten her, for she desires to reach her bridegroom. Abigail, when judgment is at the door, sets forth to meet the one from whom she should have fled. Why? Because she knew by hearsay the moral glory of David. Later she becomes the companion of His royal glory. Rebecca is drawn by love, Abigail by the perfection of grace, the queen of Sheba by wisdom. This is what happens to souls who become acquainted with Christ. It is impossible for a finite being to embrace infinite perfection; we are attracted at most by a limited knowledge of one side of this divine character, whatever it may be; they all bring us to know His person, and it is on Him that faith feeds.

"She came to hear the wisdom of Solomon." The queen may have been, in fact was a person of remarkable intelligence, whom nothing escaped and who loved to give an exact account of all things; but from the moment she heard tell of Solomon she had but one thought: to prove his wisdom. Wisdom for herself consisted in having none and in seeking it from another. It was hard questions that she brought to him. Certainly these were not lacking with her: the world is full of enigmas to which man has never yet found a solution. From the mysteries of creation, for the simplest of which Job had no answer, to the mysteries of bodily life; from the mystery of the soul to that of good and evil in the world; from the veiled hereafter to eternal life; all is mystery, a dark enigma. Man is unable to decipher the unknown writing of this book. God must reveal its secrets, and if there is no divine revelation, positive and direct, man's poor, limited spirit finds that from the very first question on he is brought to a standstill before an insurmountable wall. He may boast and exalt himself, but all his knowledge can never cause him to penetrate beyond the verification of facts whose first cause completely escapes him.

The queen of Sheba brought her enigmas to Solomon to prove his wisdom by them. But what was the reason for her confidence? She had heard tell of Solomon's fame in connection with the name of Jehovah. If this fame was grounded upon the Lord's presence at Jerusalem, was not the queen assured beforehand that it was not in vain for her to undertake this long journey? If Solomon should answer her enigmas, it is because his wisdom is none other than that of the Lord who had revealed Himself to him. Thus the queen comes to Solomon — and what will she carry away from this interview? The knowledge of God through him.

She comes with a great train, with all the most precious things her kingdom can produce, and with an abundance of spices such as never would come to Jerusalem, for she esteems this august monarch worthy of all homage. Let us here note that it is becoming not only for a queen, but for the lowest of sinners to approach Him with her perfume, for it is not an exchange that the soul is soliciting in coming to Him; she cannot do otherwise than to present him the homage that is his due. It is the knee that bows before Him, the sign of the obedience of faith, the adoration of a heart that finds in Him all the resources it desires and of which it has need.

But the queen brings something better yet than her gifts; she comes to speak "to him of all that was in her heart. And Solomon explained to her all she spoke of: there was not a thing hidden from the king that he did not explain to her" (1 Kings 10:2-3). She opens her heart to

Solomon; the secrets of her heart are made manifest (1 Cor. 14:25); but they find a perfect response on part of him from whom nothing is hidden. In meeting Solomon, she has found God Himself. God is indeed there, in condescending mercy occupied with bringing full light into this soul, so as to leave no place for a doubt or for a question without an answer. The king has the secret of all things; he does not keep it to himself; he shows that His secret is with them that fear Him (Psa. 25:14).

Next the queen sees all Solomon's wisdom in the prosperity and in the perfect order of his house (1 Kings 10:4-5). Such shall be the marvelous order of Christ's millennial kingdom to the eyes of the nation.

The queen of Sheba acknowledges (1 Kings 10:6) the truth of what she had heard tell about Solomon. She has passed from his person to the words of his mouth, and from these to all that has come from his hands, to all that surrounds him—and she has found nothing but perfections. It is thus that every soul comes to know Christ. One hears tell of Him: this excites the interest of a heart in need; one goes to find Him, for He is readily accessible; one enters into relationship with Him; He answers the needs of the heart. One admires Him and adores Him in hymns of praise. One says with the queen: "Mine eyes have seen. Thou surpasses all I had heard about Thee." One esteems happy His men and His servants who stand continually before Him and hear His wisdom. And pursuing this path, one's soul boasts in God who has taken pleasure in His King, who has found His delight in Christ and set Him upon the throne. And this is also the proof of the love of God for His people, that He has given them such a King to execute righteousness and justice (1 Kings 10:6-9).

This song is really a song of the kingdom. The Church shall also raise her own song about the Lamb that was slain, and her heart and mouth shall be filled with His love even more than with His wisdom and with His righteousness.

The queen of Sheba gives the king all the riches she has brought. The spices for making the incense were most highly esteemed by all at Solomon's court. Never had they been seen in such abundance at Jerusalem (1 Kings 10:10). The happy queen's heart thus overflows in her gifts.

But how greatly did Solomon's gifts surpass those of the queen! He is not content to give to her in return for her gifts he grants her "all her desire, whatever she asked" (1 Kings 10:13). Ah! Surely we have to do with Him who does not ask, but whose glory it is to be and to remain the sovereign Giver of all good. Ask and you shall receive. Ask — you will never exhaust them, all the riches of His kingdom, those "unfathomable riches of Christ." His kingdom is not now of this world, so you will not carry out of His presence the temporal goods that were heaped upon the queen. These lesser treasures are reserved for the millennial reign of the Messiah. Our goods, our treasures, are spiritual; the world despises them; the Christian worthy of this name calls them the true riches (Luke 16:11).

The queen returns to her country with treasure in her heart, a thousand times better than that her caravans had brought. Her eyes have seen! Now she knows the king of glory!

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