Genesis - Commentaries by John Thomas Mawson

Scripture Truth: Volume 1, Stone of Israel, The

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Genesis 49:24

The Holy Spirit in the Book of Genesis gives us God's first communication to men; and it is remarkable that in the morning of this world's history there should be such a presentation as we find therein of the ways of God in relation to Christ. The instruments He used for the enlightenment of His creature varied, and there were those who embraced His testimony (Gen. 4:4 and ch. 5.), also some who had neither desire nor appetite for anything He might have to say to them; consequently, they became independent of their Creator, choosing a path of their own which could only have one termination (Gen. 4:5-24; 6:1-7).

But from the beginning, with unwearied precision, the Spirit of God has delighted to unfold the glories of the Son of God. The prophetic word abounds with clear and unmistakable reference to Him, and if His glory and greatness dawns upon our souls we shall be steadied and tranquilized in the midst of the mightiest upheaval that could overtake us while we wait His glorious appearing.

God's rest did not long remain unbroken, nor His creation unsullied. For a brief space only man answered to the intentions of his Maker: then sin came in, blighting and spoiling that fair world of which Paradise was the center. Man was turned out of his inheritance because of his disobedience, and outside Eden the world-system sprang into existence. Cain was the founder of it, and his posterity endeavored to garnish it and establish it in perpetuity: the flood swept it away. At the building of Babel we see the revival of the world-system, but, alas for men they began to build without a foundation, and in defiance of God; Jehovah looked upon their work and confounded it, and instead of accomplishing their cherished desire they did but manifest their folly and perversity. But men have persisted in their course of independence of God, they are still developing their system — a world without the true God — but the end of their works is at hand, for all the glory of man shall perish, and the glory of the Lord shall fill the whole earth.

The Stone Foretold

Christ is the true foundation, the living Stone; He will also be the top-stone of the moral universe which is destined to supplant the great world-system, the first principles of which were seen in Cain and Babel. Genesis 49 is a remarkable prophecy in this connection. Although the eyes of Israel were dim for age so that he could not see, his spiritual vision was wonderfully keen when he gathered his sons about him to tell them what should befall them in the last days, for in the blessing of Joseph he clearly outlined the sufferings of Christ and the glory to follow, and parenthetically in this blessing there is the remarkable allusion to Christ — "From thence is the Shepherd, THE STONE OF ISRAEL."

The special character in which He is thus viewed can be traced through the whole of Scripture, which is full of Christ. If we find anything therein of greater importance to us than Himself we are beside the mark — "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself (Luke 24:27).

The Stone of Israel is introduced in the blessing of Joseph. This typical man was rejected, hated, and cast out by his brethren. His pathway was a downward one until he was cast in a dungeon in Egypt like a common felon; but from that condition of distress and degradation he was suddenly raised to a position of eminence and glory next to the king upon the throne. Let us consider Him whose sufferings and glory are but faintly prefigured in Egypt's great deliverer.

Long centuries intervene ere Jacob's prophecy is seen to be Jehovah's purpose, but Isaiah comes forward to confirm the word of Jacob — "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation" (Isa. 28:16).

Jacob gave no detail, but Isaiah tells us that the Stone of Israel was tried, precious, and sure, the foundation upon which all God's purposes would rest.

The Stone Rejected

When the fullness of time came God sent forth His Son, He appeared in the midst of Israel, for the leaders of that nation were the builders to whom He was first presented. He was the great test for them, set in their midst according to the word of the aged Simeon when Jesus was brought as a Babe into the house of God: "Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel" (Luke 2:34).

The attentive reader of Scripture cannot fail to see how the Lord Jesus took up the Old Testament prophecies in their true and proper order, applying them to Himself during His sojourn on earth. He could use the language of prophet or psalmist in its true connection, bringing conviction to the hearts of His hearers, which could not be produced in any other way. Yet His life of true devotion to the mission on which He came, did not evoke a favorable response on the part of men, it only brought out their hatred. He was rejected at every turn, and brought at last to Pilate's judgment bar as a malefactor, amid the universal cry "Away with this Man... crucify Him, crucify Him" (Luke 23:18-21).

The Stone of Israel was utterly rejected by the builders. In their final act they stumbled, and fell over the Stone, and were broken to pieces. Israel's present condition is conclusive evidence of the terrible fall they sustained in thrusting from them their only hope. In this way Simeon's word was amply verified, "This Child is set for the fall... of many in Israel." The latter part of his prophecy will be fulfilled at Christ's coming again, when they shall be enabled to exclaim — after terrible soul exercise and self-judgment — "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him,

and He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (Isa. 25:9).

The Stone Exalted

We pass now from the short-lived triumph of the enemy, to the triumphs of Christ. It was not possible that He could be holden of death, for He was the Prince of Life. The cross was the crowning act of man's wickedness. God's triumph is demonstrated in resurrection. The morrow after the Sabbath witnessed the exertion of this mighty power in raising Christ from the dead. Let us look, and wonder, and adore. In stately dignity the Conqueror arose from the dead, and the empty grave, vacated in perfect order, gave evidence of the complete overthrow of Satan's power.

The Stone that the builders rejected, and set at naught, has become the Head of the corner (Acts 4:11). He is the One upon whom every purpose of God hangs, and apart from Him there is no salvation for men; therefore the present period of grace is being used of God in calling the attention of men to His beloved Son in glory. The Holy Spirit has come to earth to gather out of the world a company which shall be associated with Him forever.

This company is spoken of in Scripture as a spiritual house, those who form it are living stones, having come to Christ as the LIVING STONE (1 Peter 2:4, 5).

Though men pay little heed to this work it goes on steadily and without interruption. Just as all the stones for Solomon's temple were prepared beforehand, and not so much as the sound of a hammer was heard in the rearing of it, so the Spirit of God is silently working, and the building is being prepared through which will shine in the day of glory, the light and perfection of God.

The Stone Victorious

The great world system commenced in Cain, and revived at Babel, has been perpetuated in Babylon and the kingdoms that followed. This is shown in the great image which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream (Dan. 2), and which sets forth the history of the world from the time that the government of the earth was handed over to the Gentiles. The head of gold was the kingdom of Babylon; the breast and arms of silver set forth the kingdom of Media and Persia; the belly and thighs of brass the Grecian kingdom; the legs of iron the mighty Roman Empire; whilst the feet of iron and clay are that Roman Empire broken up into many kingdoms, some strong, and some weak, whose peoples dominate the earth. Under the protection of these kingdoms the world system has flourished, until the earth is filled with the great works of men, but since it has no moral foundations and has been raised without respect to and in independence of God, it must be utterly destroyed to make way for that which cannot be shaken, and which is pleasurable to Him.

Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream a stone cut out of the mountain without hands, which smote the image, breaking it to pieces, and carrying it away like the chaff of the summer threshing floor. Afterward the stone became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. In this symbolic language we see Christ coming out of heaven to put forth the power vested in Him as the Son of man. He will claim the earth for Jehovah, and He must increase (John 3:30), until His glory pervades the wide creation. "The God of heaven shall set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Dan. 2:44).

The Second Man, the Lord out of heaven, has covered the whole extent of territory between the two extremes in the universe of God: "Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things" (Eph. 4:9). In this way He has established His right to fill everything for God. What a day of rejoicing and gladness it will be when the glory and power of Christ is supreme, and when the earth is in complete subjection to Him: — when "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together" (Isa. 40:5), and "the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in His hand"(53:10).

"Like Unto a Stone Most Precious"

If there is the glory of the terrestrial, there is also the glory of the celestial, but whether in heaven or on earth, all glory radiates from the Son of the Father's love. In all things He must have the pre-eminence. Heaven and earth have never been in accord since sin came into this world, but they will be united again; the moral distance will in that coming day exist no longer. One word therefore remains to be added — the Church is destined for glory. The structure now being raised, the vessel being formed, is for the perfect shining out of Christ in the ages to come. Her light will not be her own. It will simply be the perfection of that which is stated of individuals in 2 Corinthians 4:6: "Because it is the God who spoke that out of darkness light should shine, who has shone in our hearts for the shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (New Trans.).

Here we have a final view of "the Stone," and there is no diminution in the glory of it: " And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal (Rev. 21:10-11).

In eternity the Church will transmit those glorious rays, but then, as now, she will ever be dependent on Him, and yet made competent by Him in every sense for reflecting the light of this Stone most precious.

It will be the work of the blessed God Himself to write the image of Christ on each of the redeemed.

Therefore we read "And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones"(verse 19). No one stone could describe Him, nor can one saint ever express Him fully, but when this happy consummation is reached, each shall bear His blest image.

May each saint of God, redeemed for such a destiny, be enrapt with this glorious Person while we wait His speedy return, and meditate on the depth, meaning, and import of these words — "From thence is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel."

Answers to Correspondents, Between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2

Hy. J. — As to such interval of time as may separate these verses nothing is definitely revealed, and we may not be wise above what is written. From Isaiah 45:18, it seems clear however, as already pointed out — page 101, April issue that during this period some terrific cataclysm overwhelmed this earth as a result of divine judgment. With this passage read Jeremish 4:23-26, and Isaiah 24:1. In the words of another we may add: “The face of the earth bears everywhere the marks of such a catastrophe. There are not wanting intimations which connect it with a previous testing and fall of angels. See Ezekiel 28:12-15 and Isaiah 14:9-14, which certainly go beyond the kings of Tyre and Babylon.” (Schofield Reference Bible: Note fi. 3; see also pp. 726 and 871).

As often in the prophetic writings what is said in these passages has a scope embracing much more than is immediately contemplated. Many of the expressions in Ezekiel 28:12-15 are incapable of full application to any mere man. There is no doubt that the addresses to the Prince and the King of Tyrus have a threefold bearing: first they describe to us Satan the inspirer and unseen ruler of all such pomp and pride as that of Tyre and other successive world powers; secondly, they apply to the then reigning ruler as Satan’s tool (more particularly perhaps verses 1 to 10 addressed to the Prince); and thirdly, they look on to the terrible development of this character of evil in the last days before Christ’s public return.

Ezekiel 28:17 should be read with 1 Timothy 3:6: pride was the condemnation, or more correctly translated, the fault of the devil. Here we get sin in its inception, manifested in the “I will” of Lucifer, day star (Isa. 14:9-14) who can be no other than Satan. There are many passages which lead us to the conclusion that in bygone ages Satan was set in a place of great dignity, and that that dignity, though he has fallen by sin, still attaches to him in measure according to the permit of God in the working out of His ways. Thus see Jude 8-9.

Scripture Truth: Volume 1, God Our Shield

J. T. Mawson

Genesis 15:1

Are you on the Lord’s side? “I asked of a gentleman I chanced to meet.

“Yes,” he replied “by God’s grace I am, and, better still, He is on my side.” I was delighted with his answer, for it proved that He knew the God of the Bible — the One who has revealed Himself for our joy and blessing in the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But there are many who are truly trusting the Savior, who dare not give such an answer; they would deem it presumptuous to say that God was on their side, poor failing sinful creatures as they are; yet this is the blessed truth in which He would have their hearts to be established.

Hear His gracious words to Abram. “Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward” (Gen. 15). What a glorious statement! and how safe must Abram have been since the Almighty was his protector! And Abram did not cavil or doubt, for we read, “And he believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness” (verse 6).

God as our shield is strikingly set forth in the case of the Passover in Egypt (Ex. 12).

Abraham’s children had multiplied exceedingly and become very great, but they were all slaves, groaning beneath the tyranny of hard and cruel masters.

God looked upon their sorrow and undertook their deliverance. He would lead them out of Egypt and bring them to Himself, that they might be His own people, His treasured inheritance. But His holy character required that a righteous basis should be found upon which He could do this. The sprinkled blood of the paschal lamb was this basis, it spoke of the life of a spotless victim having been surrendered on behalf of those who were sinful, and so under the penalty of God’s judgment. It was a type of the Lamb of God whose blood was shed for us.

The word of the Lord came to those Israelites by the mouth of Moses: —

“Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families, and kill the Passover. And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the basin; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning. For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you” (Ex. 12:21-23).

The words, “the Lord will pass over you,” are full of significance and comfort; they do not mean that He would merely pass by the door where the blood was, but that He would halt before it, and cover those within it from all harm.

The use of the word translated “Passover” in other Old Testament scriptures will prove this. In 1 Kings 18:21, it is translated “halt,” the sense, as the context shows, being to hover. A remarkable instance is found in Isaiah 31:5, “As birds flying, so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also He will deliver it; and passing over He will preserve it.”

How striking is the figure! With all the tender solicitude of the mother-bird for her young when danger threatens, so the Lord hovers over those who are His. This is the meaning of Passover. The Almighty stood as sentinel and shield outside the doors that were blood-marked, and did not suffer the destroyer to enter in.

And God’s Passover in Egypt is the type of the way He deals with every soul that, obeying the gospel, flies to the precious blood of Jesus for shelter. That blood bears witness to the fact that righteous judgment has been executed, and the righteousness that inflicted the judgment must protect those on whose behalf that judgment was borne: so that in every attribute of His being the blessed God must pass over such, taking the place of their Shield and Justifier. His mercy and love and tenderness and grace are all on our behalf, and not only so but His very righteousness is our justification. The knowledge of this fills the heart with triumphant praise, so that we can take up the glorious boast of

Romans 8:31-34, “If God be for us, who can be against us?”... It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?

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