Isaiah - Commentaries by James Ebenezer Batten

Watchman, What of the Night?, Watchman, What of the Night? Part 3 (21:11)

Isa. 21:11.

(Concluded from page 110.)

It is time to ask now, what is the solemn result of these trials and tests of such a distinguished man, and what our lessons by God in this history, and of His ways with a nation, in the brief record of his reign? Or rather, what should be the effect of this great proof in such a king, and of an elect people, when gathered round God Himself, with His glory in the temple, and this endowed man upon His throne, as the guarantee (if there could be one outside Christ) of permanent and universal blessing? Ought not the leaders and great men of modern times to allow such an one to challenge them all by the question, even if they do not like to answer him, “What can the man do that cometh after the king?” Nay, is it not presumption, if not a presumptuous sin, for the men of this period to suppose the problem of what man is, and is worth, in his relation to God, and to his neighbor, and to the world, to be an open question still, and left for them to solve? This, too, in the face of the prophecy which challenges all, “What more could have been done for my vineyard that I have not done?” Do any of them come up to Solomon, or can they excel God? Will the scientists, and the men of mark and renown, say they are at an advantage, because experimenting amongst a non-elect people, instead of an elect one, which was so beloved, and placed under law to God? Will they tell us it is better to begin the problem in the midst of Gentile nations, with whom God does not stand in any relationships of this kind, than with the nation which He chose, and brought to Himself?

Do they think it in their favor to make laws of their own, and establish various forms of government, and set up thrones of their devising in their modern cities, rather than to bow their heads, and learn their lesson from the ruins of Jerusalem, and the cast-off people they are treading under their feet? Do they judge it to be in their favor never to have had a Solomon, qualified and endowed as he was, and under the direct guidance of God, that so they may be free of Him, and be left to their own intentions and expediencies, under Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon? If the reigning emperors and kings, with their empires and dynasties, are agitated and perplexed, or sometimes overthrown in the struggle between absolutism and democracy, or betwixt imperialism and a republic, do they think this uncertainty an advance upon the theocracy of the God of Israel? They will do well to remember that the divine form and principles of political economy, and of jurisprudence, were long ago determined by God, and are indelibly written by His finger in the Pentateuch; as well as the patterns and form of the temple, and its priesthood and worship, in the two books of Chronicles. Neither the throne nor the altar has been overlooked. Be it so, that all this greatness and magnificence have come to naught, with an elect people, who had God in their midst, and as a wall of fire around them; what can those do who come after? Is it better to be without Him, and safer and wiser to take counsel with their own hearts, that their dignity and honor may be publicly, and far more fatally, seen to proceed from themselves?

If it be further said, Yes, but this Second Book of Chronicles ends with the captivity of the people, the carrying away of all the golden vessels into Babylon, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the transfer of governmental power from Israel to the Gentiles, and “the morning cometh and also the night,” is fulfilled in their history; be it so. But what, I repeat, is such a lesson for them “who are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, and without God in the world” —who are non-elect, unendowed, and uncovenanted? Will such come out into history at a premium on their predecessors? We shall gee. In the meanwhile the elect nation and her kings are set aside by Jehovah.

If we here close up their two books of Chronicles for another and a brighter day in the millennium of their history, and go with the children of the captivity, it will be only to see that God abides faithful to His own, and advances Daniel into a new place in this strange country. He becomes the prophet of woe to Babylon. The captive Israelite is the one who is anointed by Jehovah to reveal to the great king Nebuchadnezzar, as the head of the Gentiles, all the secret of his dynasty, and its destiny and doom. The four grand divisions of the golden image, which troubled the monarch in his night visions; and which include what is now called “the civilized world,” but which none of the wise men could divine to their master, are brought to light by this child of the captivity. It is Daniel's hand which thus early writes “Ichabod” upon all the grandeur of the king and his kingdoms. So distinguished is this elect vessel in a strange place.

The man who shines brightest among the nobles, and imports a grandeur and a glory into Babylon to which it was a total stranger, is this Israelite; for Daniel stands in a holy luster, be it in the palace, or at the gate of the king, or when in the lions' den. This is the great charm in their opening history, that Daniel eclipses all. The transfer of power from Jerusalem, or rather the use of it when thus committed to Nebuchadnezzar, put the sentence of death upon his palace and his kingdom, and indeed upon himself. It was but taking Jonah into the ship. God was angry with him for his pride, and sent him into the fields to eat straw like an ox, till his nails became as birds' claws. In like manner the transport of the golden vessels from the temple of Solomon to Babylon, and their profanation at the feast of Belshazzar, brought out the hand-writing upon the wall, “Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin,” which put the sentence of death into him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed. So, again, when the king of Babylon had set up the idol-image, and the fiery furnace was prepared for any who refused to fall down and worship it, the three elect children of the captivity were thrown therein, but only to be joined by another, and that one like unto the Son of God. The sentence of death was transferred from the three elect ones, who were in the flames, but not burnt, and gave birth to the decree, that whosoever spake anything amiss of the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, should be cut in pieces. Alas for Babylon and its great idolatrous king at the commencement of this history, and for his non-elect and unchronicled descendants! Thou art this head of gold, and that crowned head driven out of the palace of the kingdom of Babylon, and debased to the level of a beast!

But perhaps, as an empire, their future is brighter, though he must be a bold man, and something more, who would stop us to raise such a question upon the four beasts, or the ten toes of Daniel's prophetic image, in this nineteenth century. Such an one must be forgetful of their great iron teeth, devouring much flesh, to which all the newspapers bear witness, and which all the world knows. Only let them look at the future in the records of Daniel, or in the Apocalyptic visions of Johns and demand in their turn, “Watchman, what of the night?” as being their two books of Chronicles—and what are they? The hand-writing in detail of that selfsame finger which wrote their history in brief upon the palace-wall of Belshazzar says, their “morning cometh, and also their night.” They rise up as a great host of people, “without God,” at their beginning in Babylon, and “without hope in the world,” at their close. Idolatry, maintained by absolutism, was the rise of the power, in the hand of the great monarch, at the first, and proved by the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar set up, and commanded all people to worship.

But perhaps, religiously, their future is different, and they may call on the living and true God, and be better at the latter end—nay, vain is any such expectation, for Rev. 13 says, “He had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.” Blasphemy and profanity were in the palaces of Babylon at the first, when the finger wrote upon the wall, and at the close, the hand-writing in Rev. 13 declares, “He opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven.” Their last end is even worse than the first.

But perhaps, politically, the history of imperial power in the hands of the four great empires, of gold, silver, brass, and iron, may bring up some correctives; not so either, for these metals, in their fourfold character, prove the deterioration of delegated power, and at the close, a “stone, cut out without bands, falls upon the ten toes of this image, and it is destroyed—yea, becomes like chaff upon the summer threshing-floor.” But yet again, Babylon and its descendants may have “hope in their end?” Not so either, “for the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of burning” ascending up. “Without God” at the beginning, and “without hope in the world” at the close, embraces these nineteen centuries of Nebuchadnezzar power, or Gentile greatness. Their doom and utter destruction stand out in contrast with the chronicles and prophecies of the elect nation of Israel, “to whom still pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises, whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all God blessed forever.”

If we now turn from these prophecies to their present history, it yet remains to see how Israel and the Gentiles answered God, when He woke the world up once more by the light of “the day-spring from on high,” and by the songs of the angelic hosts at the coming in of Christ, the Son of the Father, by the mystery of the incarnation. “Last of all he sent to them his son.” The question is no longer the competency of Adam to retain a paradise upon the sole condition of allegiance to the Creator; nor of the sufficiency of Solomon to govern the elect nation in Jerusalem, with Jehovah in covenant relation to the throne and the temple; nor of the Gentiles, in their use of power for the glory of God, when transferred to Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar; but will they reverence the Son, and welcome Him as the Savior, the King of kings, and Lord of lords? “Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and good will to men,” was the new song given out from the heavens to the earth when Jesus was born. Another morning is come; must another night succeed this? Deliverance and blessing were to issue forth from heaven, seeing that all hands were incompetent below to keep what God had bestowed, or to retain the place of honor and power in which He had set them for His glory. The groan of creation—the captivity of Israel—the idolatry of Babylon—left no hope in the world. The cry of the oppressed once more went up to God, and so the multitude of the heavenly hosts brought in their melodious anthem, and piped unto them of the Child born—would they dance? God had yet one Son, and He so loved the world He had made, and the men in it, that He sent Him forth as the Redeemer of Israel, and the Savior of the world.

The innocent first man—the endowed king—the elect nation, on the one hand; or the head of gold, and the image, in its continuation of silver, brass, iron, and clay, on the other; had forfeited their thrones and dominions, their kingdoms, and their scepters and crowns—can they appreciate deliverance, or will they yet do worse? Yes, far worse than all, for when they saw the Son, they said, This is the heir, come, let us kill Him, and seize upon His inheritance. And so they cast Him out of the vineyard and the world too, vociferating up to God, We will not have this man to reign over us, and that man the Son of the Highest—yea, God manifest in the flesh. The whole world had grown so old in wickedness, that it could not estimate such an intervention in supreme goodness as God sending forth His Son to save the lost and the undone. Herod, the king, was troubled by tidings of the birth of Jesus the Savior, and all Jerusalem with him. The high priest, Caiaphas, rent his clothes, and Pilate washed his hands of innocent blood, when his lips had given sentence against Him. The Son of God, the incarnate One, come down to walk with men upon the earth, and to go about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, has been refused, cast out, and crucified. The trial and the test at this time were not, “Thou shalt love the Lord with all thine heart, and thy neighbor as thyself,” but will men consent to be loved by Him who has come after them in love? Alas! they refused to be loved by God, and compel even Jesus to say of them, “For my love they are my adversaries.”

They take Him out of the manger, and lead Him to the brow of the hill, and then to the cross, where they crucify Him between two thieves; and God has looked down upon all this. Yet the earth moves upon its axis still, and a God in providence makes the sun to shine upon the evil and the good, and sendeth rain upon the just and the unjust. What a God He is! If mankind ever had the sense of what was righteous and true in His sight, they would have accepted the sentence of death in Adam's transgression, when confirmed by the flaming sword at the garden-gate; and if they carried the sense of grace, they would cling to the promise of deliverance through the Seed of the woman, and shadowed forth by the coats of skin which God made, and wherewith He clothed them. But it was not till four thousand years had told their sad tale to the heavens, and all who dwell therein, of the growing distance and enmity below, that the cross bore witness against the world itself by the rejection of Christ as its king, and of Jesus as the Savior come to seek and save those that are lost. The earth and its inhabitants had long ago broken down, when tried representatively, before the law, and the kingdom of Israel. Then God called it out into His presence, to learn its insufficiency for restoration and re-establishment under such a government as He had set up in Jerusalem. The world itself, and all its pretensions (and at their highest and best too), had suffered collapse, when its representative man and representative nation failed towards God, and wrought no deliverance in the earth.

Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, with the ten toes, may deny this great and summary collapse as conclusive, and expand and inflate themselves and their kingdoms, as they have done, and are still doing, but only to suffer a heavier judgment and doom by their experiment, and break down finally under the responsibility of power in their own hands. Worse than this, far worse; for it was under the power and rule of

the fourth beast of the image that Caesar's representative acted, and that the Roman soldier pierced the side of Jesus with his spear. Human enmity came forth, instead of love to God, and wickedness had found its victim at last in the Son of God's grace, and their common outlet at His cross and in His blood. This was the crisis, and a night of darkness. What must the Judge of the earth do now? Can there ever be a morning again? Will He submerge the world by water a second time, in righteous anger? or will He destroy it by fire? God had a remedy after the deluge, and brought in the law, and an economy by Moses, whom He installed as the mediator between God and men. Has He yet a resource? Besides this, it was the school-time, when the Levites taught the people, and instructed them in the right ways of the Lord. Israel was at school, and under its schoolmaster. After (or rather with) an elaborate and wondrous system of education in this sample and elect nation, He established government by a theocracy in the midst of this experimental people. The best that God could do with men as they were, and the choicest sample of mankind too, came to naught, and they were driven out of Canaan. Neither education nor government availed. After Jerusalem came Babylon and the Gentiles, and their one only point of agreement, as determined by Caiaphas and Pilate, was to condemn Christ, and crucify Him. This was the cross, where the whole world, which had broken down morally, rose up in defiance and rebellion against God, and against His Anointed. Wickedness and hate have overstepped themselves, by reason of Him who was their object and victim.

A climax has come, and the whole world is in blood-guiltiness before God; but He will not, yea, cannot, determine this new enormity by water, as He once did, nor by melting fire, as He will do at the last day. And why? Because He had His purposes of grace and redemption to bring to light at the cross, and by means of the precious blood they had shed. That act, which was the outlet of man's hatred of God and of Christ, becomes the door for the inlet of His infinite love to sinners. He will not take up the crucifixion of His Son as a murder at His cross, though it be so horrible, nor be ruled by it in vengeance to-day, but use it as a door into the acceptable year of the Lord. By means of the cross God call proclaim forgiveness to the betrayers and murderers, in proof that, high as the world's hate rose, His love was yet higher, and overreached it, even to pardon it, through faith in the atoning blood, which was the very proof of their guilt. In this forbearance and grace the Father and the Son are one; for, as when the woman whom the Pharisees brought to Jesus in her sin—in the very act, as they said—to be stoned, and He would not condemn her, but stooped down, and wrote on the ground, as though He beard them not; so has God, in grace, been acting during this long day of patience and long-suffering, not willing that any should perish, but all should come to repentance. After the blood-guiltiness at the cross God comes out in grace, beginning at Jerusalem; and this is indeed as the light of another morning— “a first day” —and becomes the time of salvation, through the blood and death of Christ, during which God refuses to hear the accusation, or enter into judgment upon this sin with mankind. There is an alternative still between God and man at the cross—salvation or judgment, and herein is wisdom, to be of one mind with Him, and thankfully accept justification by faith in the blood of Christ; and eternal life, through His death and resurrection to the right hand of God as the head of the new creation. Union, by the Holy Ghost, with the Son of man there, and in the glory, is the new position which the gospel of God proclaims and offers to the chief of sinners. Christ is gone!

In conclusion, we may and must ask, Is this alternative accepted for “the obedience of faith among all nations?” Are they rejoicing in the glad tidings of God's salvation, and looking for the second coming of Christ, to take all those who believe up to the Father, as redeemed by the blood of His Son, and to be manifested as the heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ? The Lord and the glorified saints are the appointed kings and priests unto God, and they will order and put the world all right, when He takes to Himself His great power, and reigns on the throne of His glory, as the greater than Solomon, to establish His interests in righteousness and peace on the earth.

“The morning cometh, and also the night,” and it is at the dawn of another and a new dispensation from above, by the coming of the Lord; and in the face of such an administration as this will be, it is that the antagonistic path completes itself, into which the god of this world has led the counselors and the great men of these nineteen centuries. Do any inquire, as the watchman bide them, what the night-time is of this nineteenth century? and what is the fatal and final night? The answer is this: “So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness; and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet-colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.” Moreover, “she had a golden cup in her hand, full of abominations, and filthiness of her fornication.” Isaiah's watchman cried out in his day, “If ye will inquire, inquire ye, return, come;” and Daniel the prophet, as well as the Apocalyptic apostle, the two watchmen who chronicle the approaching end of this age to us, cry, “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear,” for the time is at hand I John, who describes the depth of the darkness of this horrible night-time, as well as its coming and closing judgments, cries out, “The ten horns which thou sawest upon [and] the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.” Once more, the watchman cries, “And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.”

In the by-gone chronicles of God's actings with men, probation and their education were His own care, till they “changed the truth of God into a lie,” and then, judicially, “God gave them over to a reprobate mind, because they did not like to retain him in their knowledge.” These, as well as the theory and establishment of government and rule over the nations, are things of the past, and on the page of history; and yet these are the very subjects which the senates and parliaments have re-commenced, and which occupy them in their midnight sessions, as if they were out upon a voyage of discovery. How tedious and disappointing they find it, none knows so well as themselves, as one premier supplants his fellow and forms another cabinet, or dissolves the existing house of assembly and introduces a different policy; nor will we stop to inquire, for pity's sake. Enough for us to know they are in the darkness of the night, and laboring for very vanity. They have the wrong man in hand to make better, and the wrong world to garnish—the Cain, who went out from the presence of God at first, and, lastly, Barabbas instead of Jesus, when they cast Him out and killed Him—the God who came back into it in the person of His only-begotten and well-beloved Son. Woe be to the world that refused the mystery of the Child born and put Him into a manger, and, when wearied of Him, took Him down from the cross, and offered Him a sepulcher! Life and peace to a world, in which redemption out of its ruins is preached through the death and resurrection of Christ, is God's only remedy, by the Holy Ghost sent down from the Father and the Son in heaven, in the gospel of His grace, and in which world a free pardon is proclaimed through faith in the precious blood of Christ which they shed.

This refusal of God's only resource, as the Judge of the whole earth, is like demanding a new trial (if one may thus speak) at the throne of His Majesty, where the rejected Son is sitting, “till his enemies are made his footstool.” This demand is boldly maintained, moreover, by a refusal to accept the humbling fact of the worthlessness of man, as proved by his breakdown educationally in the school of Moses, or under the economy in Immanuel's land, when King Solomon reigned over the nations; or, finally, by the enmity and outbreak of the civilized world against God and His Anointed at the cross. In their eyes He is still without form or comeliness, for man and the world and the devil are the same; neither is there any beauty in the Son, or value in His work of redemption, that they should desire Him or it. If any think it may be otherwise now, and that national Christianity, together with the pretentious Congress in eastern and western Europe, may yet float these

nations; or give them favor in the sight of God by the mockery of their established but contradictory religions; one only need point any such to the boasted “union” of the Church and State throughout the Roman earth, to falsify every expectation of “a morning without a cloud” from the mother of harlots and her daughters in these alliances with the beast. “Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings, be instructed, ye judges of the earth; serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him!” J. E. B.

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Watchman, What of the Night?, Watchman, What of the Night? Part 2 (21:11)

Isaiah 21:11

(Continued from page 110.)

The Second Book of Chronicles introduces us, in its early chapters, to scenes like these, and the whole world is wakened up, on this break of day, to lay bare its treasures, and mines of gold, and all the precious things in the depths of the earth, because God has risen up out of His place, and is coming in with the brightness of the morning into Jerusalem, to make it “the city of the great King.” What change—yea, what mighty revolution—in favor of mankind, can have come up before the God of heaven and of earth, that all kings and countries should be tributary to Him on this great occasion of His temple on Mount Moriah? Again, we may say, “Watchman, what of the night?” when Hiram, king of Tire, is a willing servant, and lays the forests of Lebanon at the feet of Solomon, with cedar-trees, fir-trees, and algum-trees in abundance. He provides also a cunning man, endued with understanding, who is skilful to work in gold, and in silver, in brass, in iron, in stone, and in timber. In purple also, and in blue, in fine linen, and in crimson; for Jehovah was coming forth into this kingdom and its costly temple. “Likewise men to grave any manner of graving, and to find out every device that shall be put to them, with thy cunning men, and with the cunning men of my lord David thy father;” for this sun was to rise upon Solomon without a cloud.

What can such mighty changes mean between God and His creatures? What can they betoken, but that “the watchman's morning cometh in?” Is the Creator finding out a rest for Himself once more in the works of His own hands? and are men become so good, that He gives out patterns to them, and calls their cunning ones to be master-builders and artificers for Him? Are the plans and methods of the divine order so enlarging themselves, as that He who built all things above and below should ask men to build Him a house? And such a house Or, perhaps, wearied in maintaining righteous government in the midst of men upon the earth, is He about to forego the records of the cherubim at the garden-gate? Does He, not remember the destructive deluge, when a world that then was perished? or the cities of the plain which were burned with fire and brimstone, because of the exceeding wickedness of its inhabitants? Can He have forgotten Babel, and its city, and its tower; or the day when He confounded men's tongues, and set at naught their speech?

But there is no room for any such doubtful inquiries; on the contrary, it is in the full knowledge that Adam and Eden are gone forever, and that an end of flesh in the world before the flood had come before God, and perished, that He has thus divided a nation from the nations, and separated by genealogy a generation from the families of men; that His own purpose of grace by election might surmount the deluge and the flaming sword. He has therefore brought in promises, and a covenant, and a calling-out, and established these in Abraham and his Seed, which is Christ. He has also set up mediation by Moses, and priesthood in Aaron, so that the dark night of ruin might give place to the morning light, and the great day of atonement. God is adding the glory of kingship to these others, in the person of Solomon, whom He now sets upon the throne of his father David, and establishes him over the kingdom of Israel. No, God is not unmindful of His judgments in the earth, but in the midst of them He remembers mercy, and works for His own glory.

Nor is He come forth to repeat Himself, or to inaugurate another beginning, with His creatures; but He is bringing out and completing in Solomon and a theocracy, all the reserves of wisdom and grace, which God had kept in His own power, and still postpones for manifested blessing, till the second coming of Jesus-Immanuel, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. Solomon was responsible (like Adam) for maintaining these treasures which had been put into his hands, and for using them to the glory of God. Jehovah had thus given out all He had to bestow (except, last of all, His Son), and set up these resources before their eyes in Moses, and Aaron, and David, and the times that went over them. Now, “kingship” is to be displayed in Solomon, and the watchman's cry is heard again, “the morning cometh, and also the night.” And is this what God is doing with the elect king, in the midst of His elect nation? Is He in very deed making one more display of Himself, and one more appeal to them, and this almost the last, before the night, that terrible night, comes again, and He sets the best thing aside that He can do for the welfare of His earthly people? Is all this to share the same fate as Eden, and must God come into it all one day, and profane His sanctuary, and His throne, and His kingdom by casting all down to the ground? Alas! He has done all this, and Jerusalem “is trodden down of the Gentiles, till the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” What a lesson does this historical picture present to Judah and Israel, and the civilized world, in their forgetfulness of God, and in this day of their boasted progress and prosperity, whilst they are in a mistaken defiance, making out histories for themselves by their self-sufficiency.

But the judgment of God, by driving out or casting down, plucking up or cutting off, never comes in to take revenge on departure from Himself, and what He creates or bestows, till He can say, “What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?” If we repeat the inquiry in the light of this patient consideration of God, and yet of human responsibility, under such accumulated grace and outward prosperity, as marked the ascent of King Solomon to the throne of his glory, the answer must be plain. And what would this answer be but this—that the moment of his grandest elevation was the one of his greatest danger, and the ripest hour of his vast power and dominion was but the precursor to his declension and downfall. And why? Because, though an elect vessel, like the nation was an elect nation, yet was he but a man in the flesh, and still in a sinful nature, outside Christ and the Holy Ghost.

The time was not come for them to stand before God, as we now do, upon the ground of accomplished and eternal redemption by the work of Christ upon the cross. Nor could “they reckon themselves dead unto sin,” and to the law, by the body of Christ, and be thus made “free to be married to another, even to Him that is raised from the dead, that they might bring forth fruit unto God.” However favored Solomon might be, and was, yet it was by endowment; whilst as the head and king of Israel, he was responsible by his own obedience, in the position he held, for maintaining them in unbroken relationship with Jehovah, their Lord. These great drawbacks, as to his manhood, made him a celebrity by what God had heaped upon him, and not because he had earned them, or was competent to retain them as part of his own being. There is only One—the Son of God—of whom it can personally be said, “Thou art worthy to receive all wisdom, and glory, and riches, and power,” and He had not yet come into this world (though promised) by the mystery of the incarnation. A heavy thousand years had to roll round, weighted by the saddening tale of the decline and fall of a theocracy, in the midst of Israel; and made sadder by their rejection of the marvelous ministry of the prophets (even though accompanied by their lamentations and tears), before the fullness of the time came for God to send forth His Son. The Messiah, their only Savior and Deliverer, will then be the light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

The first man, Adam, in innocency, and in the image of God (before history had began), was at home in an unspotted creation, with Him who made it; yea, God walked with the creature He had formed for His delight in the cool of that unclouded day. When all this was lost, and marred by Satan and sin, and it repented God that He had made man upon the earth, and the world that then was perished by a flood, God, in His sovereignty, called out one and another to walk with Him, upon promise, and blessing, and future happiness to be established in an elect seed, according to covenant. What else could He do in wisdom and grace, when all present and created good, even a paradise, had been forfeited, and the gates of Eden closed—yea, man driven out; and God had retired into His own place to consider, leaving a curse behind Him, in righteous judgment, upon a groaning creation? Adam's world has been since buried by the waters of a deluge, weighed down, moreover, by the violence and the corruption of the millions who inhabited it. In this world, since the flood (or Noah's world), God formally called out Abraham to begin this new line of His election, as the genealogies of the First Book of Chronicles have taught us. These have given birth to, and perhaps close up, this illustrious line of elect vessels with Solomon, till Matthew and Luke add the generations which bring in the Immanuel.

We have taken this short review of two worlds, in order to give weight, or prominence to Solomon, the man of endowments and attainments, conferred upon him by God, in contrast with all who ever were before, or shall come after him; and it is with this wonderful Solomon, in whom the expectations of the world culminate, the Second Book of Chronicles begins, with its bright morning in Jerusalem, followed by its dark night of captivity in Babylon. He is before the world, and before the heavens, and all who dwell in them, to stand or fall in the place where never man was seen before, in royal majesty and imperial power. He is responsible for their use to Him who bestowed them; and yet, having this unheard—of opportunity of bringing glory to God, and blessing to the ten thousands of Israel and the nations, by their rightful exercise, what a new era in the history of God and mankind is in view, and depending on the fealty and obedience of the only competent man, too, upon the earth, for he has not his fellow Adam was perfect as a created being, and a creation hung upon his allegiance to the Creator. Solomon is perfect, not as a creature, but set apart as an elect vessel to receive the favor of God, and to be enriched by him in mind, body, and estate, so that, by reason of his endowments and attainments, “he was wiser than all men, and his fame was in all the nations round about.” What an unparalleled hour in history! what an opportunity for the wisest of men! what an occasion for the world in its throes, and under the bondage of corruption, if it could be delivered by superhuman wisdom and power!

Nevertheless, in the counsels of the Godhead, this problem had to be wrought out, as to the competency, or incompetency of a fallen man, even when sustained and endowed to the utmost, to hold and to use what was entrusted to his hands for the glory of God, and his own happiness, and the welfare of his fellow-creatures? The great men of successive ages may well be dumb before this greater man of a previous age. The bold men of the nineteenth century may stagger, and bow their heads before the man “whom God magnified exceedingly” three thousand years ago, and respecting whom He said, there never again should be his like. It was God who brought out this problem before the world (of the insufficiency of the creature), and that it might not be left an open question for generations which should come after, but be settled in the life-time, and by the living ways, of no one less than king Solomon and this most favored nation. If, besides all these endowments, men speak of genius, let them, but they must pale before him who uttered three thousand proverbs, and whose songs were a thousand and five. If they rejoice in the created works around, and think themselves masters of all the eye can see, or the heart desire—let them, but they must give place to him “who withheld not his heart from any joy.” He spake of trees, from the cedar in Lebanon, even to the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes.

Whether one sees him on the throne in government, and exercising justice and judgment; or in the temple, before the altar of the Lord; or upon the scaffold of brass, as an intercessor and a worshipper, between Jehovah and the commonwealth of Israel—all is as complete and exact as the laws of the sanctuary and of the kingdom demanded. Indeed these were the birth-place and great beginnings of a history, and of a name that rose up in its strength and brightness over the haze and darkness of a vast universal declension—like the sun that dispels the gloom, and drives away the mists, till it mounts into its own supremacy, and rules and makes the day. “Watchman, what of the night? The morning cometh, and also the night.” God acknowledged and put His own seal upon all this opening prosperity, by the glory that dwelt in the temple, and filled the land. “And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand which is on the sea-shore.”

Who would think of, or dare to repeat, an Adam, sinless and in innocence, with whom God was so close, that there was no room for an intermediate providence, nor any necessity for its exercise? Are God and men still so one as to walk and be together, or have they ever since been separated off by sin in a fallen creation? Nay, not only has He closed up all such direct and immediate intercourse between Himself and the creature, but measured the distance, and maintains it still, as a God superintending all things by His providence. He is sitting in the heavens in His righteousness, and they upon the earth, with the curse and the sweat of the brow upon every child of Adam, and the groaning of a blighted creation all around. Moreover, who would think of, or dare to repeat, a Solomon, not sinless like Adam, but sinful in his nature, as born of the men who fell, yet made illustrious, and made a celebrity, by conferred gifts and endowments which he received of God, and which were commanded in a moment of time to rest upon him, in answer to his prayer?

Men may possess the same faculties, but where and when have any stood forth as he, to be wondered at, not because of their attainments, but some who were not a Solomon one instant, and became one the next, by having had to do distinctly and directly with God? May it not be said, yea, must it not be admitted, that first-class education, and its necessity in the nineteenth century, cannot measure the distance, much

less do away with the gulf, between those who are under its high pressure, and an endowed Solomon; just as, for other reasons, a kind and a merciful Providence maintains a distance now between the Creator and His creatures? Did Solomon become one under tutors and governors, and by the slow and measured steps of examinations, and degrees, and honors, as the hardly-won fruit of collegiate study, which are accepted in the present day as the high road to advancement and preferment, for place or power, in the world as it now is? No; he was the wise man, made such out-of-hand, by God, in a moment, just as truly as when He breathed into Adam's nostrils, and he became a living soul—the image representation of God in manhood; but where and what is he? In due time Solomon closed up the progressive history of this elect people according to the flesh, in the generations and genealogies of the First Book of Chronicles. But who and what was he in the Second Book? The morning cometh, it is true, but also the night. Alas "the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared unto him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he kept not that which the Lord commanded." The allegiance which was due from the creature to the Creator, in the creation, but which was violated and broken up by Adam's sin; is come to naught a second time in Solomon, who was seated in glory and power upon the throne of God's government in the earth. The crown has fallen from his head, and the scepter from his hand, and the kingdom from under his feet, and the two staves of beauty and bands has God broken asunder, "for Solomon went after Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites."

An important interval, or dispensation, yet remains to be noticed in the history and ways of God with men, between Acjam, without any government, before government (like Providence) could have any place; and Solomon, as the representative and administrator of a theocracy in the city of the Great King, where government in righteousness was indispensable, on account of the holiness of God, as well as of sin and the flesh. Intermediately the law was given by, Moses, and proclaimed, yea, established the claims of Jehovah upon the elect nation for the worship and devotion which were His due. Besides this, they were morally responsible for obeying and loving Him for all the goodness and mercy which, as the God of providence and the Jehovah of Israel, they had known, together with their fathers, all the way from the house of bondage to the Canaan of rest, into which He had brought them. At any rate, if this were a problem, it had to be wrought out into proof, like the others; for they had entered into covenant with God, and had returned their answer by Moses, at Sinai, "All that the Lord hath commanded us, we will do." This was, in fact, the time of the world's probation, brought to light, it is true, in a handful of people and a sample nation, but under all the advantages and encouragements to love God, and their neighbor as themselves, which He could introduce by outward prosperity and plenty, and by calling them up to Jerusalem, that they might keep "the feasts of the Lord" with Himself, and find their joy in His presence. But they rebelled, and vexed His Holy Spirit, wherefore He was turned against them, and became their enemy; and now, what is become of this highly-favored and select nation, and when are the feasts of Jehovah kept, or with whom? and where is Jerusalem, the city of the Great King? Alas! Ichabod is the sole epitaph, and the one record of forfeited blessing, and of departed glory—from the drawn sword in the hand of the cherubim at the garden-gate, to the trodden-down Jerusalem by the feet of the Gentiles.

(To be continued.)

Watchman, What of the Night?, Watchman, What of the Night? Part 1 (21:11)

Isaiah 21:11

The watchman of that early time, and as under the spirit of prophecy, said, "The morning cometh, and also the night; if ye will inquire, inquire ye, return, come." God has never let the night-time of the ruin of creation and of man—no, nor yet of Jerusalem and of His people Israel—pass out of His own hands; and to them that look for Him, all will, yet issue in "a morning without a cloud," when the Sun of Righteousness shall arise, with healing in His beams.

Another (and he, the anointed apostle for these last times) sent to us from the risen Son of man, exalted above the night of chaos and of ruin,, and seated in the glory of God, cries, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand, let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light." The prophet and the apostle are each right, and in the mind of the Lord, in their respective occupations and seasons, giving out these varied lessons to the people of God.

Isaiah, in the midst of the earthly family, is directing their thoughts as to the night and morning, in relation to the two centers of the earth, Jerusalem and Babylon. Paul, in the midst of the heavenly family, is instructing the elect Gentiles what to do, and what to be, in these present church ruins, and in the night time of an evil world. Paul writes to those united to the Lord, who has been cast out of it till the morning comes, and the word by this watchman to us is, "Ye are all the children of light, and of the day, we are not of the night, nor of darkness, therefore let us not sleep, as do others, but let us watch and be sober," &c.

Many of those who are instructed in the school of God, know that the ministry of an Old Testament prophet, and his prophesyings, can only find their opportunity and place, when the people to whom he is sent have failed in the original blessing where God had set them, for, as we have said, God never allows even the ruin to pass out of His own hand. The ministry of "an apostle by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead," is of a different order, and reveals the hidden things which were "kept secret from before the foundation of the world, and which God ordained to our glory," with Christ. The blessing of the church in the heavens, by His divine callings and separations in a risen Lord, and the final prosperity of Israel, and the nations on the earth, by their bounds and divisions, together with the deliverance of a groaning creation, into redemption-light, are alike in the counsels of the living God, and to be manifested in glory. It is equally in His own hands to meet and set aside Babylon and the Gentile nations then, as to establish Jerusalem, and make her a praise in the whole earth, with Christ hereafter.

The watchman said, by Isaiah," The morning cometh, and also the night: ye will inquire, inquire ye: return, come;" and these are the alternations which lie before us for inquiry and examination. Originally everything in creation that God saw was good, and there was no evil; but, as in a moment, all was changed, and everywhere there was evil, and no good. Originally too, the blessing of God that maketh rich rested on every creature, but, as in an instant, the blessing was nowhere, and the curse of God lay heavily on all around. In creation the evening and the morning made each day, but in history with man, it is the morning cometh, and also the night, alas! Still, He has not cast

away the heavens and the earth that He created for His own pleasure with the sons of men, nor will He suffer the mighty ruin to pass into the power of the enemy of God and man. But what will He do, in whose hands are the issues of life and of death? Only to think for a moment of God Himself standing in the breach, and acting upon the supremacy of His own goodness, over all the evil and the misery; yea meeting the usurpation of Satan, and the outbreak of sin in the creature, by falling back upon His own sovereign power and electing love. God's only resource was in Himself, nothing could challenge His omnipotence, or escape His omniscience, or go beyond His control. He alone can say, “Hitherto shalt thou go, but no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.” How will He, and how can He, bring down His own immensity and infinitude in grace into the circle of morning and night? How connect them with Himself inside the range of men and things, where all is now in ruins and wretchedness, and when all that was morning has become night, and gone down into darkness?

He who said, Let there be light, and there was light, and who made a firmament in the midst of the waters, to divide the waters from the waters, can bring in a sunrise to form a morning where there is none. In the earliest records of His ways, He did it after this creation-pattern of dividing the one from the other, when He acted as the Possessor of the heavens and the earth. For example, “when the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.” When this supremacy of God, by act and deed, in dividing the nations, is anything more to man than an historical fact, it becomes a very wonderful thing. Marvelous indeed to set their bounds, and, further, that God should come out into the midst of mankind, to divide them, and to act upon His own sovereignty in grace—yea, to begin a register, by which to chronicle an earthly family for Himself in their generations! This supervision and care makes one understand that some purpose of God, which He has ordained for His own glory, and the blessing of His creatures, is to be ultimately reached in the circle of manhood, notwithstanding the expulsion of Adam from paradise. One only begins to discover what this divine secret can be of dividing a nation from all others, and a race from races of men, when we recall the promise that “the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head.” This wonderful registration was therefore strictly maintained till after Jesus, the Immanuel, was born, to whom God pointed, according to the genealogies that went before, and which closed by His incarnation.

It is remarkable, too, that our early progenitors were guided to call their sons by names, not only significant of their own faith in this promise, but that their offspring were the rightful heirs. The two books of Chronicles, which contain the generations of Israel, and their kingly history, maintain these facts in their general character, and prove likewise that God held that elect nation always in His mind, by starting their genealogies from Adam and Seth. The first, of these books is in harmony with the dividings and distinctions in the six days' work of creation, and with God's intention of thus bringing out a seed for the accomplishment of His purposes, and the establishment of covenanted blessings in the midst of Israel and the tribes, as “an elect people” on the earth. The second book opens grandly with the record of this accomplishment, in the typical David and his son Solomon, reigning on God's throne in Jerusalem. The king and his kingdom are established in Israel, and divided off from the nations, as the wonder and admiration of the whole world. Consistently with those objects, the first book begins its genealogy of the family, or household of God, in the elect line of Adam, Seth, and then Enoch. It commences thus the history of the elect tribes, in the registry of Jehovah and His people, by going back to the man created in the image of God; and closes their antediluvian ancestry with the Enoch who walked with God, and was translated that he should not see death. A precious type this of the heavenly family caught up, on the one hand, and an early intimation that Israel will really be connected with them, and in blessing likewise, in the time of their happy millennium.

It is a point of much interest and significance to notice here, that in this Book of Chronicles, where God is writing up His people, or setting Israel as a firmament to divide the nations from the nations, the Spirit refuses to introduce or make any mention of Cain, that wicked one, and his posterity. I judge this was that the earthly family might be rightly identified by descent, and as born after the flesh, with the promises of Jehovah; and, moreover, distinguished and divided off from all others, as they afterward were, by circumcision. Indeed we may ask, in passing, how could the man who went away out of the presence of God, and became a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth, be a link in the chronicles of an elect people? On the contrary, Seth, or the substituted and appointed one (instead of righteous Abel, whom Cain slew), is the man with whom the generations of men and their genealogies begin anew in Gen. 5 “And the days of Adam, after he had begotten Seth, were eight hundred years. And Seth lived, after he begat Enos, eight hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters.” Israel's genealogies, which include the birth of the Messiah and finish with it, are on this account full of interest; nor is there any other ancestry or generation worthy of record, save it be “the dukes of Esau, and the dukes of Edom,” which stand apart in an unenviable place of their own, and outside.

Succession in the flesh was thus established by God, and became their pride—yea, everything—to a true Israelite. On this account, as “an elect people,” it was their only remaining glory and boast, on coming up out of Babylon, that they could be still reckoned by their genealogies and families, because the promises were made to “the Seed” of their father Abraham. Thus “the Tirshatha” says, in Neh. 7, “My God put it into mine heart to gather together the nobles and the rulers of the people, that they might be reckoned by genealogy, and I found a register of the genealogy of them which came up at the first,” which identified them with the city of Jerusalem and the first Book of Chronicles. Morally and prophetically, we may add, as well as by adoption and birth, they were the descendants of an elect seed, to be brought out in due time as the ordained family, and an appointed nation, for the introduction of covenanted blessing upon the earth. This was promised through Abraham, the friend of God, as the heir of the world, and confirmed to David, the man after God's own heart, as the anointed king, whose greater Son is yet to rule and reign over it, from the rising to the setting of the sun.

It may be further observed, that the First Book of Chronicles closes its earthly and typical program with David's charge to Solomon, and with the transfer of all the measurements and patterns which he had received by the Spirit of God, concerning the temple of peace, and rest, and glory that was to be built. For the palace,” as he says, “is not for man, but for the Lord God,” who was coming to take up His abode in their midst. Nor can David happily close his eyes upon that day and generation until he, as the head of Israel, unites with the chief of the fathers, and with the princes of their tribes, in offering their gifts of gold, and silver, and precious stones, to make the place of the Lord's feet glorious in that hour of their morning As the sweet psalmist, under the anointing oil, he exceeds them all when he sings or plays upon the harp, touching their bright millennial day; or when, as a worshipper before the ark, he dances on its way to the place of its rest; or as now joyfully making preparations for the temple to receive it. How excellent is he, too, as the leader of the prayers and praises of the great congregation: “Now, therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name ... .O Lord our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thy holy name, cometh of thine hand, and is all thine own.....And all the people blessed the Lord God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads, and worshipped the Lord and the King.”

The first book of genealogies, and its arrangements of order and service for the throne and the kingdom, together with the magnificent architectural plans and buildings, with its yet costlier gifts and preparations, is in manifest distinction to their accomplishments and construction in the Second Book of Chronicles. Who can measure, for example, the contrariety and the distances between the opening verses in each book? Or who would attempt to fill in the immense gap of time and circumstance between them, by a narration of the historical facts, except as gathered from the word of God? It is like coming up out of the night of chaos into creation again, with a new company, as we open the first book, and read of an “Adam, Seth, and Enoch,” who was translated that he should not see death. Nor is this feeling of surprise lessened when we open the Second Book of Chronicles, to read, as in the morning light, “that Solomon, the son of David, was strengthened in his kingdom, and the Lord his God was with him, and magnified him exceedingly.” What a tremendous chaos is thus being filled up by God in history! It is like a new beginning in the midst of other and elect creatures, and of a better creation, so that one scarcely knows where we are in this new genealogy, which has given birth, by the letter and order of the first book, to such a man as this Solomon of the second; and yet a man endowed with wisdom such as never had been, or shall be; and invested with honor and power, by the hand of the living God, such as Adam had not before the fall.

Within the beauty of this enclosure, too— “Immanuel's land” —one might ask again, “Watchman, what of the night?” and what has become of the curse on the ground, when all flows with milk and honey? In the presence of this Solomon, inducted into the highest place out of heaven, and invested with royal majesty as a king, before whom all other kings bow and pay tribute, and queens do homage, one may almost think of the fall, and of the man whom God drove out of Eden, as a bygone thing, a dream that is past away with the night, and obliterated in the peace and prosperity of this new center of the world's jubilee. The earth seems to invite the heavens to come out, and hail the new morning that is come, and make merry and be glad with the elect people whom God is leading into His “rest in Zion.” Moreover, Jehovah has left the tent and tabernacle, in which He dwelt and journeyed with the twelve tribes of these genealogies in the wilderness, and is ready to accompany them, and the ark of the covenant, out of the First Book of Chronicles into the Second, and to draw out the staves, when its final resting-place in the temple is completed. The Lord will Himself then appear, and fill the whole house with His glory, so that there shall not be room even for the priests to enter in, because God is in His holy temple.

(To be continued.)

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