Isaiah 51:1 (John L. Erisman) 55390

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A Word in Season

We have a call in Isa. 51:1, issued to the Lord's people of another day, yet coming down to us: "Hearken to Me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged."

In the business world it is often necessary to stop and take stock of one's operations to see whether these operations are on a sound basis or not. This is human prudence, but here we have a divine call for a similar course. In the New Testament we are told that the Rock so often mentioned in the Old Testament was Christ (1 Cor. 10:4). We have a similar statement in Psalm 40:2, 3. "He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord."

Let us pause and consider. First, let us lift up our gaze and look "steadfastly on Jesus the leader and completer of faith" (Heb. 12:2 J.N.D. Trans.); then let us look backward and "remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh... that at that time ye were without Christ... having no hope, and without God in the world." Eph. 2:11, 12. Is not this the pit from whence we have been digged? "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air [Satan], the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." Eph. 2:2.

In Gal. 1:4 we have the work of Christ brought before us in a twofold way. "Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father." He gave Himself for our sins, and then He also gave Himself to deliver us from this present evil "age." "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the wicked one." 1 John 5:19; J.N.D. Trans.

Another has remarked that there are two great systems in this world: the one that belongs to the Father, and the other that belongs to Satan. We have a remarkable expression in Colossians 1:12-14: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son: in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins." We learn from this that the child of God is no longer under the power of Satan as he once was; he has been delivered. But we learn elsewhere that he is still in the enemy's land and subject to Satan's wiles. The word is, "Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11), for we are told, "To whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness." Rom. 6:16. At the time the New Testament was being written, the record is that some had "erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" 1 Tim. 6:10.

We are warned furthermore, "that in the last days perilous times shall come," and truly we are in the last days. Then further on we are told that "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived." 2 Tim. 3:1, 13. Let us look somewhat into the ways of this arch deceiver, that his methods of operation may be understood so that we can "flee these things" 1 Tim. 6:11. His methods have been revealed to us; we are told that "we are not ignorant of his devices" 2 Cor. 2:11. The Apostle John, in the last-written book of the New Testament, gives us a remarkable summary of these operations. "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." 1 John 2:16. If we search the Scriptures we can see that it is these three things which are used on all that ever came into this earth. If we turn to Genesis 3, we will see that it was by these three things that man was overcome. "And when the woman saw that the [forbidden] tree was good for food [the lust of the flesh], and that it was pleasant to the eyes [the lust of the eyes], and a tree to be desired to make one wise [the pride of life], she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat." Gen. 3:6.

Satan's method of approach is first to challenge—then to flatly contradict what had been said, and then to put forward to those who had given their ear to him what now seems to them something better than what God in His love and goodness had provided for His creatures. It has been remarked that Satan only puts forth half-truths; he said, That ye shall know good, but he did not say that they would lack the power to do it; then he said that they would know evil, but again he failed to put before them that they would lack the power to keep from evil. All through the Old Testament history we will be able to trace that when man walked in his own strength and intelligence and did not seek the wisdom from above, he was under one or more of these three things. However, it is not now my object to attempt to trace this, but to pass on to the One spoken of as the "second man, out of heaven." 1 Cor. 15:47; J.N.D. Trans. Moses and the prophets write of Him—the One who would glorify God where everyone else had failed. Immediately after His baptism, He "was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil." Luke 4:1, 2. This did not take place in the "garden of delights" where God had placed the first man, but in a barren wilderness. We are not told what these temptations were, but when they were ended and after His fasting forty days, the devil came unto Him. Heaven at His baptism had opened unto Him, and a voice had announced, "Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased." Luke 3:22. The devil brought before Him the same three things in the most seducing way that had ever been presented to a man, and, as stated above, the Apostle John tells us at the close of the New Testament, that these three things summarize all that is in the world. So we do well that we examine them carefully and prayerfully, that we may receive instruction.

We are also told that "The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer." 1 Pet. 4:7. The enemy knows this too, as his demons challenged the Lord when He was here, with "Art Thou come hither to torment us before the time?" Matt. 8:29. His efforts are intensified as he approaches the time of the end. Rev. 12:12 brings this before us: "For the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time."

If we examine these three temptations as brought before the Lord, we shall see a very subtle effort concealed in each of them. The first temptation was at the completion of His forty days' fast: "He afterward hungered." Satan suggests a way to appease His hunger and at the same time manifest His power as the Son of God. He intimates that there would be nothing wrong in satisfying His hunger now that His fast was over, but the only begotten Son who was ever in the bosom of the Father came down from heaven not to do His own will, but the will of Him that sent Him (John 6:38). To have listened to the wiles of the tempter would have taken Him out of the place of dependence on His Father. So He answers from the Word of God: "It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God." Luke 4:4. Another has said that the Lord did not walk through this scene manifesting the glory that belonged to Him as the Son of God except on rare occasions, but there ever shone out moral glory, which could not be hid, that belonged to Him. He attracted to Himself those who labored and were heavy laden for the rest that He, in the path of the dependent Man from heaven, alone could give. That One was treading the path of faith and fulfilling the Word of God and so marking out a path in which to lead the "many sons unto glory." Heb. 2:10.

How does Satan now apply to the Lord's people this method which he tried out on the Lord, and which the Lord withstood? We are fast approaching the time spoken of in Rev. 13:17: "And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name." I do not doubt that to the natural man it will appear as a wonderful system of things, and it is being developed now.

John, in his first epistle, chapter 2:15, tells us to "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." We are told that the word "world" used here expresses an "arranged age." It is the same expression used in Gal. 6:14: "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." It is a world arranged by a masterful hand at deception. In Matthew 13, while men slept, the enemy sowed tares in among the good seed planted by the Sower. He would entice the people of God to mix with the tares in all their activities, that they might have a better time in this world. This would take them from the path of dependence into what Satan would fain have them believe is an easier path. "Man shall not live by bread alone," was the answer to this; that is, it was not His object in life to consider bodily needs first and to sacrifice the divine principles of the Word of God for sustaining life here. The Word of God was to be a lamp unto His feet and a light for His path.

The second temptation was to see if the Son of God could be lured from the path of dependence by the lust of the eyes. It is said that people are impressed far more by what they see than what they hear. Thus we can perceive how important what is brought before the eyes is to the tempter. He takes the Son of God to a very high mountain, as though he were doing Him a very special favor to bring Him into such a prominent place that He might have a favorable viewpoint, and "showed unto Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time" (Luke 4:5; in Matthew is added, "and the glory of them"). He promised, "All this power will I give Thee, and the glory of them.... If Thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be Thine." Luke 4:6,7. I suppose that there was never a more magnificent display of "the world" and "the things that are in the world," and we can say without any doubt that it will never be matched again by men or Satan. It is not necessary for him to give such a display to dazzle the eyes of the ordinary man. We are, however, fast approaching the time for the stepping up of displays to man. "And then shall that Wicked be revealed... whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." 2 Thess. 2:8-10.

In a series of lectures on The Revelation delivered by J.N. Darby more than 100 years ago, he made this remark concerning this time of the end: "The miracles wrought by the spirits of demons are those which are so beyond the power of natural science to interpret that they cannot be understood in the age in which they are worked. A more advanced age might be able to understand them. The devil has uncommon knowledge of the resources of nature and science; they may be beyond the power of man to effect, but such a combination of natural things is within the reach of Satan." (Collected Writings, Vol. 34, page 336.)

The coming of the one called "the beast" is foretold in Revelation, and in chapter 13:3 is added, "All the world wondered after the beast." Again in verse 8: "And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Many have wondered in times past how the actions of this beast could be brought before the whole world to cause them to wonder at him. This is very apparent now in this stepped-up age, for by the aid of television all his acts which he wants to be seen can be brought into the homes in that day. He is training mankind to that end now, bringing into the homes in his enticements that part of the world he desires that they should see.

It will be noticed that when Satan brought before the Lord his masterpiece of the kingdoms of the world and their glory, that he did not bring before Him their poverty, oppression, misery, and corruption. That would not be in line with his methods of operation. His purpose has been at, all times to deceive. Whether in the garden of Eden, or with the Lord on the high mountain, or in the living rooms of the present time, he never tells the complete story in connection with his allurements. Truly indeed he is manifesting himself more and more as the prince of the power of the air.

How did the Lord meet the deceiver? In the same way that His people can meet him now: "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shaft thou serve. " Luke 4:8. Do the world' s enticements hinder worship of the Father? We are in the hour of which the Lord spoke in John 4:23, 24; "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." The Apostle tells us in 1 John 4:6: "He that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error." Can there be the worship of the Father when partaking of the spirit of error? He also says in chapter 2:15: "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

The third temptation was the most subtle of all, for there he quotes scripture referring to the Messiah in an endeavor to lead Him from the path as a dependent Man to have Him make a demonstration before all as to who He was. But Satan omitted part of the quotation when he said, "He shall give His angels charge over Thee, to keep Thee [in all Thy ways]: and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone." Luke 4:10,11. To have heeded this temptation would have taken Him out of the ways of the Messiah marked out in the Word, and would have placed Him in the ways of Satan. But the spring of the pride of life was not there in the One "who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Heb. 7:26), and His answer given in Matthew 4:7 is, "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

It is well to bear this in mind when the tempter, his agents or ministers, quote Scripture, that it is written again. Satan is ever ready to seduce by disassociating Scripture from its proper connection. If the lust of the eyes is to further the manifestation of the beast referred to above, the pride of life is to bring about the training necessary to produce him and to train the world to accept him when he does come. "And they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him? And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies" Rev. 13:4, 5.

A great deal of emphasis has been laid on the promoting of self-expression in child training, to the disregard of the teaching of the best Book that was ever written on child training—the Holy Scriptures. Some alarm has been voiced by those who have had to cope with the problems of juvenile delinquency, as to where this sort of training is going to end. The prince of the power of the air has his program and he knows where he wants it to lead.

In closing, a scripture comes to mind of a parallel in a yet future day. We have a woman brought before us in Revelation 12 who no doubt is Israel of a past and a future day and she is to endure great persecutions. "And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. And the earth helped the woman; and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth." Rev. 12:14-16. The Church also is looked at as a woman in 2 Cor. 11:2, Eph. 5:23-32, and Rev. 21:9. Let us look at 2 Cor. 11:2, 3: "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." Does it not look as though the "prince of the power of the air" is casting "out of his mouth... a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood"?

It is necessary that the bulwarks of Scripture be erected that this flood might be diverted into channels that the earth might swallow it up. "Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following." Psalm 48:12, 13. In one sense, if the flood is not diverted, there will be none left to tell it to the generation following. The Lord may have to use "the stranger from a far land" to pass the story of His grace on to the "generation following," for if He tarries, He has a story to be told, and it will be told. "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen." 2 Pet. 3:17, 18.

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