

TRACTS ON THE KINGDOM No. 2

ISRAEL'S HISTORY, THE CHURCH'S WARNING

1 COR. X. 1-13

by Robert Govett

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The connection between the Ninth and the Tenth of the 1st of Corinthians is so close, that it never should have been severed as it is, by being divided into two chapters.

It is generally agreed by critics, that we should read the first verse thus—“*For, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant.*” The preceding verses of the ninth chapter had given us the right course to be taken by the Christian in view of the kingdom as the prize of our calling, illustrated by the example of the apostle.

He pointed out at the close the real danger that affects even true Christians. That this danger is real the Holy Spirit proves, by the facts of God’s dealings with Israel in the desert. Paul had shown the greatness of the danger, by his own constant care against it. He sought the prize, and avoided those things that would have cut him off from it. He now exhibits the contrary conduct, as exemplified in the history of Israel and shows us how they received, not God’s approval, and the prize of their earthly calling; but the displeasure of the Lord, because of their giving way to those temptations, against which the Scripture would put us on our guard.

This exhortation comes in by way of warning to the believers of Corinth against having any fellowship with idolatry. Some of them had even sat in the idol’s temple, and banqueted on meats offered to the idol. They thought that in so doing, they were only displaying true Christian liberty. They would have Paul believe that they were too firm in their attachment to Christ to be in any peril from idols; which were merely so much gold, or marble, or wood. Besides, were they not already publicly pledged to Christ by baptism, and by the Christian Supper?

The Holy Spirit then discovers to us, that despite all they said, the danger was real, of God’s displeasure, and of their fall. He does so by presenting the history of Israel as a case exactly in point.

Let us consider then—

- I. THE CHRISTIAN’S RESEMBLANCE TO ISRAEL IN PRIVILEGES.
- II. ISRAEL’S OFFENCES AND GOD’S JUDGMENTS THEREON.

I. ISRAEL'S PRIVILEGES.

“For, I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea: And were all immersed into Moses in the cloud and in the sea: And all used to eat the same spiritual food: And all drank the same spiritual drink; for they used to drink out of the spiritual rock which followed them; but the rock was the Christ.”

Paul shows us, how God's people of the earthly calling ransomed by grace, and set upon a footing of continual privilege, were called to win the prize of their calling, and lost it.

They were delivered out of the hand of their enemies by the blood of the Lamb. They were taken visibly under God's protecting wing, and led out of Egypt. They were set under the cloud of the Lord's presence: Num. xiv. 14.

All were led out from Egypt by a door miraculously opened, and miraculously shut. The Red Sea cut off Pharaoh's claims upon them. That answers then to the Christian's redemption by the blood of Christ, and to his passage through the waters of baptism. “They were immersed *into* Moses,” as believers ought to be immersed into Christ, and identified with Him. The cloud of the Divine Presence over Israel answers to the name of God—as Father, Son, and Spirit, called over the baptized believer.

They had somewhat answering to our Lord's Supper. They had the bread, not of nature, but of heaven, as their daily supply. They had water given them by grace, out of the rock smitten by the rod of law and judgment. This answers spiritually to Christ smitten for our sins, and the Holy Spirit thence flowing to us. The water, after once bursting out of the rock, followed Israel in their wanderings through the desert. This in its spiritual significance answers to ourselves, who after being buried to the flesh, walk with Christ, and are fed by Him. The passage through the Red Sea precedes the manna and the water of the rock. The Red Sea was a severance once and forever; even as baptism is a rite but once to be solemnized by the believer. But the bread and water were supplies constantly repeated; even as our feeding on Christ and drinking into His Spirit are to be our continual aid.

Israel then was led as one family by God's appointed leader, and was all fed alike. Must they not, therefore, all alike receive God's approval? Very far from it!

“But with the majority of them God was not well-pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness.”

Here then comes in the force of the five times repeated “*all*.” Thus the Holy Spirit presents to us the correspondence with the race of the previous chapter. “Know ye not that they who run in a race run *all*? But *one* (only) receiveth the prize.” The whole body

of Israel received the same great privileges, and was set at the same starting post. But did all win the goal? Nay, they became “castaways,” or were disapproved of God. Here then is refuted by solemn fact the Corinthians’ confidence in their feelings of attachment to Christ, and in their resting upon their union with Christ, as manifested in baptism and the Supper. Did Israel turn away from Moses, in spite of like identification with him? So might *they*, despite their union with Christ, both real and visible.

God was not well pleased with Israel. Their privileges did not so place them under grace, as to put them beyond responsibility, and the call to obedience. The Lord displayed His disapproval of them. For they never gained the prize of their calling. What was that? An entry on the land that flowed with milk and honey. That was the object set before God’s rescued ones. “I am come down to deliver them out of the land of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land *unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey:*” Ex. iii. 8. They were His people ransomed by blood, numbered by hundreds of thousands, and yet of the delivered out of Egypt by grace—but two entered the land of promise, when it became a question of their obeying God and pleasing Him! Among the number of the excluded were Moses the servant, and Aaron the saint of the Lord. Of course these two and others of Israel will be saved; but the principle took effect even *on the leaders!*

God was not “*well-pleased.*” The proof was visible enough. They never entered the good land. The millennial glory is to be distributed according to God’s good pleasure in His ransomed ones. His redemption-work will answer to His creation-work. In six days God made heaven and earth. On the seventh day God rested from His work, surveyed it, and was pleased with it. “God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good.” At the end then of His six thousand years of redemption-work God will look over His redeemed, and will admit to His seventh day of rest those of His redeemed alone in whom He can take pleasure, as having sympathized with Him, obeyed Him, and wrought with Him. Christ, as being the One in whom the Father has always been well pleased, will be chief in that day. Paul sought always to please God. He would teach us to be like Him. “We labour (are ambitious) that whether present or absent [in body] we may be “*well pleasing* to Him:” 2 Cor. v. 9. We are instructed that with some of the saved, God will not be well pleased.

“The just by faith shall live; but if he draw back my soul hath no pleasure in him.”

Let us consider next:--

II. SOME OF ISRAEL’S OFFENCES, WHICH DISPLEASED GOD, AND EXCLUDED THEM FROM REWARD.

(1) “Now these things were types of us, that we should not be lusting after evil things, as they also lusted. (2) Nor become ye idolaters; as did some of them, as it is written— ‘The people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.’ (3)

Nor let us commit fornication, as some of them committed fornication, and fell in one day twenty-three thousand. (4) Neither let us tempt the Christ, as some of them tempted, and were destroyed by the serpents. (5) Neither murmur ye, as some of them murmured, and were destroyed by the Destroyer."

We are apt to sever ourselves from Israel's evil conduct, as though we believers were much better than they were. But the Holy Spirit gives us to know that Israel's desert-history is only a picture of the provocation of God's own assembly. Not of the *professing church*, but of *the Church* of Christ. "*Types of US.*" (1) Their offences were generally, "lusts of evil things." God put His racers under a new discipline, and training, and diet. He took away the old vegetables and fruit of Egypt, the fish, and the flesh, and the wine, to feed them peculiarly as His people. But Israel relished not the new diet, and rebelled against the training. Their heart went back after the old, and they despised the new.

"Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish that we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic. But now our soul is dried away, there is nothing at all beside this manna before our eyes:" Num. xi. 4—6. They lusted after flesh, and quails were given in abundance. But the displeasure of God sent them by numbers into "the graves of lust."

Then, Christian, turn not back to the objects and the pleasures of a world you have left, or you will displease your Heavenly Trainer!

(2) They fell into idolatry, in spite of being dedicated to Jehovah; in spite of their promise to serve Him alone. True believers have need to be warned against every sin, however heinous.

Idolatry is fast coming into England. Worship of the 'consecrated elements,' of the crucifix, of the Virgin, saying prayers before one's 'patron saint,' are practiced. *All worship be fore images is idol-worship.* The Corinthian Christians had unwittingly fallen into this sin, by banqueting in the idol's temple.

Perhaps Israel scarcely realized that they were idolaters in worshipping the golden calf. 'Was not the feast to Jehovah?' "Did they not direct their worship to the God that led them up out of Egypt?" How God thought and felt about it, His wrath, which had almost swept the nation away, showed. The sword that slew three thousand discovered His displeasure, and He warns us that He has never yet reckoned fully with Israel for that sin; but means to avenge it in a day to come.

(3) The Christian is next warned against fornication. This follows in close connection with idolatry; as one of its constant effects. It was one of the sins for which Corinth was notorious. There was danger, therefore, lest that, which the world accounted a trivial offence, should gain head in the church in Corinth. How highly it

displeases God was shown by the sudden blow of destruction which overtook so many even in Israel's dispensation of far less light. Twenty-three thousand in one day! Numbers then are no security in sinning! Moses says, that twenty-four thousand were slain. Paul's twenty-three thousand were cut off "*in one day.*"

(4) "Neither let us tempt Christ." The word used seems to signify—"Let us not tempt beyond endurance." The reference is to Num. xiv. 22. "Because all those men have seen my glory, and my miracles which I did in Egypt and the wilderness, and have *tempted me now these ten times*, and have not hearkened to my voice; Surely they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it." They tempted God at Marah because of the bitter water; when their bread came to an end, and when there was no water. They would not go up to take possession of the land when called to do so. They would go up when forbidden. They murmur against the length of the sojourn in the wilderness, and are cut off by the fiery serpents. These judgments of God took effect, not on Egyptians, or Moabites, but on His own people. They are designed to affect, not 'professors,' as if none but such could so sin, or so be smitten; but God's own ransomed ones. They might have argued against such judgments as many do now. 'What! Will God smite those whom He has rescued out of Egypt by the blood of the Lamb, His host led through the waters of miracle, fed at His table day by day?' *Yes! These were the parties cut off in God's displeasure!*

(5) We are warned against murmuring. God's own people so murmured against Himself and His appointed leader. Many times in the course of their desert wanderings they did so. But the final one, the consummation of the whole, which were almost incredible if God had not testified it, was this. After God's vengeance by fire on Korah and his Levites, and the swallowing up of Dathan and his fellow conspirators, we are told that *the next day "all the congregation"* "murmured against Moses and against Aaron; saying, *Ye have killed the saints of the Lord!*" This was such barefaced provocation of the Lord, that at once the destroying angel smote them with pestilence. Fourteen thousand and seven hundred were slain before God would accept the atonement of Aaron His priest. Do no true believers ever murmur now? Are there not some, whose great feature of life is their perpetual dissatisfaction, and quarrel with all that befalls them? These then are the parties against whom, as truly as against those in Israel, the threatening will take effect.

"Now all these things happened unto them by way of examples, but were written to warn us, whom the ends of the ages have reached. Therefore let him that thinks he stands, look to it lest he fall."

These offences of Israel were outbreaks of the fallen nature, which God met with His visible resentment. His conduct toward them discovered how He felt. He cut them off from the hope set before them. When His people at last entered the land, they were not among them. But Israel is like us, and we as God's people are subject to the same

trials as they, and liable to break out into words and deeds against God of exactly the same quality. These their offences then on the one hand, and God's acts of severity on the other, are put on record for us; on purpose that we may fear God, and rest rain ourselves from desires after these worldly and evil things which so drew down God's indignation. Ours is the last age ere the long-promised millennial glory break forth. The rest of God, His redemption-sabbath of a thousand years destined for those accounted worthy to rest with him, is nigh at hand.

As then we are, though believers, like tinder to the spark of temptation, and as God abides the same in His character now as then, we may not be high-minded, but fear.

Like offences on our part will be followed by like exclusion from the hope of our calling on God's part.

Let not then these examples of our tendencies to evil, and of the things which provoke God till they draw down the sentence of exclusion from millennial reward, be without fruit to us!

There will be less excuse for us than for them, if we offend as they, and are excluded as they were. For God has made His earlier people a warning to us. He has shown us in them the temptation against which we have to watch, and the issues with which such conduct is visited by Him. These facts are handed down to us in writing, and Paul expounds them for us, lest we should overlook them, or so misinterpret them, as to put ourselves beyond the range of their application; as many do, in spite of such warning.

Let us then not be self-confident, as was Peter. Let us not be high-minded, as if we sons of God could not be so tempted, and so fall, as did Israel. He who says—'Trust me! There is no fear!' is already drifting with strong current on the rocks.

But there is another and an opposite danger, against which the Spirit lets fall a word of caution.

"No temptation has befallen you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted beyond that ye are able; but will together with the temptation make also the escape, that ye may be able to bear up."

Some have strong tendencies to discouragement and despair. 'Well, if there are so many snares, so many dangers from within and from without, and Israel's example is a type of the offences of God's people under the Gospel, there is no hope, no chance of entering this reward. For my part I shall not try!'

The words and acts of despair as truly provoke God as those of pride and presumption. You are not called to trust yourself, and to measure your forces against those of your foes. Faithfulness and strength reside in God, not in you. But for His grace, none would enter. Be not cast down then! Let not unbelief quench your hope! Peter, when looking away from his Lord at the waves and clouds, began to sink. God measures the strength of the assaults which the enemy is permitted to make. He will give support under trial. He will either remove the temptation, or make the way of escape from it. The world, the flesh, the devil, are against you; but God is stronger than them all; and they who trust His strength will prevail, and enter into His millennial glory.

Fear *yourselves!* For the flesh is weak, and temptations are many and strong! Fear *Cod*; though you are His people, yea His sons, you may so speak and so act as to provoke Him, and to cut yourselves off from the promised reward. Trust God; for in Him alone are power and faithfulness.

Thus then the Lord has given us, to illustrate this subject, two opposite cases.

1. In *Paul's* example we have humility, strictness of watch, self-denial and at length the crowning of reward to come: 2 Tim. iv.
2. In *Israel's* case, we have the laxity and license of the flesh in word and deed, with provocation of God, ending in His cutting them off.

Follow then the one example; beware of the other! But all this argument would be quenched in a moment by many believers, and by some versed in Scripture. They would deny the three main points of parallelism between Israel and us, on which the whole argument rests.

They would say: --

1. *'Israel's standing is not like ours; but the very opposite.'*

'But were they not God's ancient chosen people?'

'Yes; but people of the flesh and of sense only, unconverted men.'

'This is not true.' They are described as men of *faith*. "And Aaron spake all the words which the Lord had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people. AND THE PEOPLE BELIEVED:" Ex. iv. 30, 31.

"Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians; and *the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and His servant Moses:*" xiv. 31; Heb. xi. 28—30. But they were guilty afterwards of *partial* unbelief, as most believers are now. Among the excluded were Moses and Aaron. Were they unconverted?

2. *'Professors only, not true believers, are in danger of offending in like sort.'*

Are no Christians murmurers? Are none guilty of covetousness, which is idolatry? Have no true believers been guilty of immorality? Do none tempt Christ by marriage with the ungodly?

3. *'Our relations with God and Christ, inasmuch as we are members of Christ, and His Bride, are of grace only.'*

This should be proved. It is not true. If we are to be dealt with before Christ *"according to our works,"* it is not true: Matt. xvi. 27; 2 Cor. v. 10; Rom. ii. 6; 1 Cor. iii. 13—17; Rev. xxii. 12. *"All the churches shall know, that I am He that trieth the reins and hearts; and I will give unto EVERY ONE OF YOU according to your works:"* Rev. ii. 23.

'But does not Moses say? —"Not a hoof shall be left behind." Does not the prophet say? —"He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel.'"

The first of these words is spoken of the coming out of Egypt. *But how many entered into the land?* The second relates to Israel's justification, against the enemy that sought to thrust Israel away from being any more His people. But had not God already cut off the offenders of whom Paul speaks? And said not God within his camp? —" *This evil congregation that are gathered together against Me, in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there shall they lie.*" Did He not swear to them that they should not enter the land? And did He not keep His oath, despite their presumptuous attempt to turn Him?

In short, the general answer to the objector I have supposed, is—' The Holy Ghost's arguments here and in Hebrews iii, iv—if your objections be true, are quite valueless.'

He should have said just the contrary to what he does say. He should have said—'there are among you who are the sons of God certain *'professors'* who are in danger of falling into sin, and who will certainly be lost, as were God's professing people of old. But all who know themselves regenerate, cannot so fall, or be so excluded. For they are not under law, but under grace. These awful judgments of God are directed against *them*; but as regards yourselves, they only show how *you cannot* fall, and how God *cannot* act toward *you*.'

Until any are bold enough openly to say so, and to seek to prove their words, I must consider the apostle to say the contrary here. 'Though you are sons, yet God can be so displeased with your temper, your words, and conduct, as to shut you out of all reward. *Grace is the principle of God's actings now, but the day of Christ's coming is on*

another principle— 'reward according to works.' 'The throne of judgment is set (Rev. iv.),' as soon as the Church ends; and then comes the question—' Who is worthy?' Grace will save eternally multitudes accounted unworthy of *reward*. The book of life is opened when the millennium is past, and those found in it enter through grace into the city of God.

Let us then follow in Paul's steps of self-denial, patience, humility, watchfulness, prayer. Let us keep aloof from the world and its objects of glitter! Let us fear the laxity, and self-indulgence, and pursuit of the world's prizes which are found in so many of Christ's people. Let us beware of pride, self-confidence, disobedience, and hardening the heart against the threats of God. It was sad to awaken, like Esau after the birthright has been sold, to bitter repentance and unavailing tears! How much better—" I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me in that day!"

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