

H. L. Rossier

**Comments on
the 1st book of the Kings**

Extracted from “Stempublishing”

Reformatted by www.bible.beauport.eu

bible@beauport.eu

Rue du Château d’Or n°16/6

1180 Uccle (Brussels)

Belgium

Comments on the 1st book of Kings

By H.L. Rossier

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Part 1: Chapters 1 to 11.....	15
Salomon.....	15
Chapter 1.....	15
Adonijah's Rebellion.....	15
Chapter 2:1-12.....	35
David's Last Recommendation.....	35
Chapter 2:13-46.....	44
Righteousness and Judgment are the Foundation of His Throne.....	44
Chapter 3:1-3.....	53
Pharaoh's Daughter.....	53
Chapter 3:4-15.....	57
Gibeon.....	57
Chapter 3:16-28.....	70
Righteous Judgment.....	70
Chapter 4.....	74
The Glory of the Kingdom.....	74
Chapter 5.....	89
Hiram. Preparations for the Temple.....	89

- - -

- - -

<i>Chapter 6</i>	99
<i>The Temple</i>	99
<i>Chapter 7:1-12</i>	125
<i>Solomon's Houses</i>	125
<i>Chapter 7:13-51</i>	136
<i>Hiram and the Court</i>	136
<i>Chapter 8</i>	163
<i>The Dedication of the Temple</i>	163
<i>Chapter 9:1-9</i>	185
<i>The Lord Speaks</i>	185
<i>Chapter 9:10-23</i>	190
<i>Hiram</i>	190
<i>Chapter 9:24-28</i>	197
<i>Pharaoh's Daughter</i>	197
<i>Chapter 10:1-13</i>	200
<i>The Queen of Sheba</i>	200
<i>Chapter 10:14-29</i>	210
<i>The Throne</i>	210
<i>Chapter 11:1-13</i>	214
<i>The Cause of the Kingdom's Ruin</i>	214
<i>Chapter 11:14-43</i>	225
<i>The Enemies</i>	225
<i>Two Psalms</i>	235
Part 2: <i>Chapter 12-16</i>	242
<i>Division of the Kingdom</i>	242
<i>Chapter 12:1-24</i>	242
<i>Rehoboam</i>	242
<i>Chapter 12:25-33</i>	248
<i>Jeroboam and His Policies</i>	248
<i>Chapter 13</i>	255
<i>The Man of God and the Old Prophet of Bethel</i>	255
<i>Chapter 14</i>	269
<i>Jeroboam and the Prophet Ahijah</i>	269
<i>Chapter 15</i>	282
<i>Nadab and Baasha, Kings of Israel; Abijam and Asa, Kings of Judah</i>	282
<i>Chapter 16</i>	291

- - -

Complete Decadence.....	291
Part 3: Chapter 17-22.....	303
Division of the Kingdom.....	303
1 Kings 17:1-7.....	303
Elijah and the Brook Cherith.....	303
Chapter 17:8-24.....	314
Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath.....	314
1 Kings 18:1-16.....	322
Elijah and Obadiah.....	322
Chapter 18:17-46.....	335
Elijah Before the Prophets of Baal.....	335
Chapter 19:1-9.....	346
Elijah Before Jezebel and Before Himself.....	346
Chapter 19:9-21.....	355
Elijah Before God.....	355
Chapter 20.....	363
Ahab and Ben-Hadad.....	363
Chapter 21.....	379
Ahab and Naboth.....	379
Chapter 22.....	389
Ahab and Jehoshaphat.....	389

Introduction

The Second Book of Samuel presents the establishment of the kingdom of Israel* by David; the opening of First Kings shows us this kingdom definitely established by Solomon. It should be noted that the rule of Solomon forms one continuous whole with that of David. The death of the aged king did not cause even a momentary interruption, Solomon having sat upon the throne of his father during David's lifetime. In type, this is a unique and continuous reign which, while presenting most contrasting characteristics according to one or the other of its periods, unites both of them in an indissoluble and absolute unity.

* *Meditations on the Second Book of Samuel, by H. L. Rossier.*

Considered in its entirety, this reign begins with the rejection of the true king of Israel (1 Sam.), is consolidated, after victory, in the midst of dissensions of the people and strife (2 Sam.), and is finally established in peace, righteousness, and glory at the beginning of the book which now occupies us. This account, as indeed the whole of the Word, directs our eyes to Christ and

presents His reign in all its various phases. Rejected as Messiah, He appears again upon the scene in the last days, gradually gathers Judah and the tribes of Israel under His sceptre, extends His dominion over the nations by judgments, but also in grace, until the final establishment of His universal, millennial kingdom. Then, in peace and in righteousness He rejoices in His victory, associating His earthly people with Himself in this.

Thus we find in these books the exposition of the whole of the counsels of God in regard to the earthly inheritance of the Messiah, the Lord's Anointed — the true David and the true Solomon. Apart from the period of David's afflictions these counsels have not yet been fully realized, but they shall be during the Millennium when the Lord shall be established upon His throne as King of Israel and of the nations, as King of righteousness and of peace, the true Melchizedek, a priest forever.

These books moreover present another very important trait to consider, without which one would continually run the risk of falsely applying the types found here. We have already men-

tioned this trait in reference to the Second Book of Samuel: The king established by God is a responsible man. This responsibility, which will rest upon Christ with all its glorious and blessed consequences, leads necessarily to the ruin of weak, sinful men when placed in their hands. The two Books of Kings therefore present the ruin of royalty in the hands of man and its definitive judgment.

In maintaining the certainty of His counsel of grace God maintains just as firmly the certainty of His judgments should the king fail to answer to the demands of His holiness. These two currents, grace and responsibility, flow on in parallel without ever becoming confused. In 2 Samuel 7:13-16, the words of the Lord to David bring out this truth in a remarkable manner. On the one hand there is the election of grace, and on the other hand there is the responsibility of the king and its consequences; then after these two principles there is the assurance that the counsels of God will nevertheless be fulfilled.

All this is the more striking because the two Books of Chronicles show us the royalty in another aspect. They narrate the history of the house of David from the point of view of grace, as we shall have ample occasion to consider if the Lord allows us to reach the study of these books. It is enough to mention here that according to this principle Chronicles presents not the history of the kings of Israel, but that of the kings of Judah who remained faithful longer than the former and to whom the testimony of God was entrusted. The spirit of God points out the work of grace in them and all that the Lord could approve, often passing over their shortcomings in silence in order to bring out His purpose, but not seeking in the least to hide their weaknesses. In contrast, the two Books of Kings retrace the history of the kings of Israel, introducing those of Judah only as landmarks in the account, or to bring out the mutual relationships of the two dynasties.

Let us establish one more important fact in regard to the history which is before us. In these books the principles, according to which God governs His people remain the same as in all the

Old Testament. Israel, as well as her kings, is placed under the system of the law. It is not a case here of the law in its initial character of absolute, unmixed righteousness, such as Moses received in the beginning. The tables on which this law was written were broken by the legislator at the base of the mountain and never reached the people who, before receiving them, had already made the golden calf. From its very promulgation on, this pristine law would have crushed the people under judgment. But it is a case here in the entire history we are about to consider, of the law as given by God to Moses the second time, and which we find in Exodus 34. It was a mitigated law, offered to man to fulfill, if his flesh had been capable, at least that which is relatively good. It proclaimed in the first place that which pure law could in no wise manifest: the mercy and the grace of the Lord. "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious. longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." Secondly, it proclaimed righteousness: "And that will by no means clear the guilty." Lastly, it announced retribu-

tion according to the government of God on earth: "Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation" (vv. 6-8). In the course of the history before us we shall have occasion to note the application of the principles of which we have just spoken, both in regard to the kings and in regard to the people.

Lastly, these books expose a final general truth. Since its ruin the priesthood had ceased to be the means of a public relationship between the people and God. The king, the Lord's anointed, had been substituted for the priest to fill this office. (See the beginning of 1 Samuel). All the blessing of Israel, its judgment also, depended henceforth on the conduct of the king. The king failing in responsibility affected, properly speaking, the relations of the people with God. But then a phenomenon occurred which persisted throughout the entire duration of the kingdom and even afterwards: the prophet came on the scene. His appearance proved that the grace and mercy of God could not be destroyed even when everything was ruined.

Without a doubt prophecy existed before the time of which we speak. The fall of man had given occasion to the first prophetic utterance. Abraham was a prophet (Gen. 20:7); Jacob prophesied (Gen. 49); Moses was a prophet (Deut. 18:15; Deut. 34:10); but Samuel inaugurated the series of prophets whom we see laboring in the books before us (Acts 3:24). In these dark days the prophet became, in place of the king, the link between the people and God. He was the messenger of the Word; to him were confided the thoughts of God. Immense grace! Without doubt, the prophet announced the terrible judgments which would fall upon the people and the nations, but at the same time he presented to faith grace as the means of escaping. He testified against iniquity and even delivered the people, as did Elijah by the exercise of power, in order that the people might begin again, if possible, to walk in God's ways. He taught, he gave the people, to use the words of another, "the key to the ways of God, incomprehensible without him." He consoled also, turning the attention to a future of blessing, the "times of restitution of all things," "a kingdom which cannot be

moved," and where the responsibility of the house of David shall be borne by Christ, the Son of David, to the full satisfaction of God Himself. Fixing the eyes of faith upon the glorious person of the Anointed of the Lord, he announced the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories to follow. He felt at the same time the great gulf which separated the present time from this future "regeneration." He humbled himself on behalf of the people when the latter could not and would not do so. Without him in the dark days of the kingdom there would not have remained even one ray of light for this poor people, guilty and chastened. The prophet supported and encouraged.

But on account of the principles proclaimed under the dispensation of law the mercy of God immediately acknowledged the monarch when he acted by faith and when he was faithful.

However incomplete this faithfulness might be, God appreciated it, and even when the link was ostensibly broken, the blessing of the people was the consequence. Accordingly, in the period of the prophets bright days followed on dark days and

respites were granted despite the judgment announced, because the king had looked to the Lord. This faithfulness in the king was chiefly found in Judah, where God maintained yet a while "a lamp for His Anointed," whereas Israel and her kings, having begun in idolatry, continued in this path and soon became the prey of the demons that they had not wished to remove from their path.

Part 1: Chapters 1 to 11

Salomon

Chapter 1

Adonijah's Rebellion

At the time our account begins, King David was about seventy years old. He was far from having reached extreme old age, but a life of sufferings, conflict, and grief wears at the strength of even the most robust of men, so that the king "was old and advanced in age." At thirty-three years of age, the Lord Himself

appeared to be fifty years old (John 8:57), but His strength was unbroken. He was not, like David, worn by grief, but, Man of Sorrows, His face was marred more than any man. Love impressed this character upon His features, for He in sympathy carried all the sorrows that sin had brought upon our miserable race.

The king's servants devise a means of recalling him to life (vv. 24), imitating in this the sovereigns of the surrounding nations. It seems that David lacked the will-power to oppose the plan of those around him. A Shunammite* is brought to him. She cares for him and serves him. This "very fair" virgin of Israel will later be considered by Solomon as one of the most precious jewels in his crown. She is to belong to him, and whoever may dare to look on her to covet her shall bear his judgment. But let us not anticipate. That which the Word teaches us is that she did not become the wife of David, the king of grace. It is thus at present with Christ. Though having His eyes upon Israel, all the while there is another bride at the present moment taken from among the Gentiles. He shall keep her as King of Glory,

but as such He will also renew His relations with the remnant of Israel, the excellent of His people.

- * The Word does not authorize us to affirm, as some have pretended, that she is the Shulamite celebrated in the Song of Songs (Cant. 6:13).

Before Solomon comes upon the scene, Adonijah, the son of Haggith, seeks to seize the throne of David, his father (vv. 5-8). Born immediately after Absalom (v. 6; 2 Sam. 3:3-4), though of another mother, he thought no doubt to have the same claim as this latter to the kingdom. He "exalted himself, saying, I will be king." Pride, an unchecked will that had never been curbed, and a high opinion of himself, all motivated him. He was "a very comely man." His flaws had been nourished by his father's weakness, a weakness that had contributed so greatly to the disasters of David's own life. David had not been unaffected by the appearance of his children, as the history of Absalom points out; perhaps for this same reason he had spared the rod in Adonijah's case. "His father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?" Families of believers often

see their testimony ruined through the weakness of the parents. In sparing the rod with their children they bring the rod upon themselves, as well as dishonour upon Christ. God never acts thus. The proof of His love toward us is furnished by His discipline. The weakness of parents is not a proof of their love, but of their egoism which would spare themselves in sparing their children (Prov. 13:24).

Adonijah follows the same path as did Absalom (2 Sam. 15:1), perhaps with less cunning deceit, for he openly manifests his pretensions and prepares chariots, runners, and horsemen for himself just as would a sovereign. Joab and Abiathar follow him. Joab, ever the same, seeks only his own self-interest. Sensing that David is near his end, he turns to Adonijah, just as previously at first opportunity he had turned to Absalom. How could he have taken the part of the king of righteousness? The misdeeds of his past life must have made him fear too intimate a contact with Solomon. And then there is nothing in the true king that is an attraction to the flesh. The natural man orients himself and will ever orient himself without hesitation toward

the usurper and the false king. It is thus that we will see in a time to come that "All the world wondered after the beast."

Adonijah is a type of the man who seeks to exalt himself to the very throne of God (Dan. 11:36); Joab and Abiathar are such who take advantage of this (Dan. 11:39); the following of Adonijah are those who are subjugated by his ascendancy (Rev. 13:4).

As far as Joab is concerned, sooner or later the flesh, however clever it may be, must uncover itself and show its true character. For a long time Joab was able to keep company with David, the Lord's Anointed, and to conceal the motives which animated and dominated his heart, but an occasion always arises when the natural heart shows itself to be hostile and rebellious, manifesting that it is neither subject nor capable of being subject to the law of God.

Abiathar, the representative of religion, already condemned at the time of the judgment pronounced upon Eli,* is also on Adonijah's side. Surrounded by such a fair show, it is not surpris-

ing that this latter becomes the centre of gathering for the many. He is no such centre for faith. What can faith find in the company of the usurper? Zadok, Benaiah, Nathan, and the mighty men of David are not present with Adonijah. The true priest; the prophet, the messenger of God; Benaiah, the true servant who walks in the footsteps of his master** — what have they to do with him? The priest looks to God, the prophet to the Spirit of God, the servant to David, to Christ. Do they need anything else? Those mighty men who have found their strength in David, shall they go after Adonijah who is unable to communicate it to them?

* Meditations on 1 Samuel, by H. L. Rossier.

** Meditations on 2 Samuel, by H. L. Rossier.

Benaiah is of special interest to us. In David's time he already occupied a preeminent place in service (1 Chr. 27:5). Is he not worthy, he who had followed in everything, step by step, the footprints of his master, later to be established chief captain over the entire army? Nevertheless this man has no ambition other than to remain faithful to his king and to imitate him. He

is not like Joab who takes the stronghold of Zion to acquire the preeminence. No, he is humble, for his whole purpose is to reproduce David in his conduct.

Adonijah (vv. 9-10) gives the meeting at En-rogel the false appearance of a peace offering. He follows the footsteps of his brother Absalom who had said that he wished to pay a vow to the Lord. He invites his brothers, the sons of the king, and even the servants of the king. These later go to his feast. The rebel does not fear that they will fail him. We know what the title of servants of the king is worth if the heart is not truly attached to David, or of servant of God if Christ is not the object of the affections. How many of these "king's servants" do we not see in our day running to those who cloak their enmity against Christ under an appearance of piety? But Adonijah is too shrewd to invite those whose faith or whose testimony keeps them in David's intimacy. He invites all his brothers, with one exception: the only one having the right to the throne according to the will of God and of his father, Solomon, he who is to become the king of glory. It is evident that he must exclude from

his feast him whose presence would judge it, would condemn it, would bring to nothing all his plans and all his ambitions. Christ is the last to be invited by the world; more than that, the world is loathe to invite Him. On the other hand, was there anything at this feast with which Solomon could associate himself? No, if he had put in an appearance there, it would have been only to bring well-deserved punishment upon these rebels.

In the day that this great danger threatened Israel, no measure had been taken to ward it off (vv. 11-31). The king, weakened by age, confined to his palace, "knew not" what was happening. Blessedly, God was keeping watch for him. God who has the glory of His Son and His kingdom in view, does not allow the designs of the usurper to succeed. To this end He sends the prophet to Bathsheba with a word of wisdom. Be assured that we shall always find in the Word of God the means by which Christ may be glorified and we ourselves preserved from the ambushes of the enemy. What a contrast between Nathan's mediation and that of Joab through the woman of Tekoah (2 Sam.

14)! There all was ruse and lying in order to affect the king's spirit and to flatter his hidden leanings, and in order eventually to substitute for David a deceitful and violent man as king over Israel. Here prudence suggests that which is to be done, but without wavering in the least from the truth. The king must be made aware of the imminent danger. He must be persuaded to act resolutely for God. The mind of the Lord concerning Solomon had already been revealed to David. He knew it very well. It was not without reason that the Lord had given to David's son the name Jedidiah, Beloved of the Lord (2 Sam. 12:25). David knew the mind of the Lord on this subject so well that he had sworn to Bathsheba "by the Lord God of Israel, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead" (vv. 17, 30). It was enough to remind this man of faith of his oath for him to see the path to take.

Doubtless Adonijah had counted upon the weakening of his father's faculties in order to seize the kingdom, but he had not reckoned on God, the prophet, or the truthfulness of the king's

heart. Bathsheba speaks with respect and boldness. She shows David that he is unaware of the danger (v. 18), that the purpose he had resolved on was to have a king according to the heart of God (v. 17) as his successor; she also points out to him his responsibility towards herself, her son, and the people, for the eyes of all Israel were upon David, that he should tell them who should sit upon his throne after him. The truth is in the heart of this woman, as also in the heart of the prophet — a lovely example of the spirit in which we should behave one towards another. Nathan appears in his turn, and in his own conversation with the king lays stress upon the fact that not only had none of the faithful servants of the Lord been invited, but above all, that Solomon had been deliberately set aside. What must one expect from a man who gives no place to the Lord, to the true King, in his purposes or in his life?

Nathan also points out that the true servants of the king did not know the king's plans (v. 27). Certainly such is not the case with us! God has "made known to us the mystery of his will" (Eph. 1:9), which is to gather together in one all things in

Christ. But the aged king must be exhorted to reveal his secret. His decision is made immediately: all his energy is renewed when it is a matter of the Beloved. "Even so," he says, "will I certainly do this day" (v. 30).

We have seen in this chapter that the counsel of Nathan was according to God and according to the respect due to the king. Here it is not a matter of human counsel, as when this same Nathan said to David: "Go, do all that is in thine heart" (2 Sam. 7:3); but of divine wisdom which purposes to prevent the prophet-king from a fall, and to defend the honour of Solomon, the anointed of the Lord, after his father's passing. Above all, it is a matter of the establishment of the king of glory upon his throne. Of all this the world neither sees nor hears anything. Gibeon with its refreshing waters, seems to be ignored by Adonijah.

But what an awakening! What trouble overwhelms those at his feast! Suddenly, in the midst of the feast, the false king, Joab, and all the guests hear the sound of the trumpet and such cries

of joy that the very earth is split by the noise of Solomon's train. "Wherefore," says Joab, "is this noise of the city being in an uproar?" Thus the public establishment of the reign of Christ will surprise the world and deeply trouble it. Then "He that sits in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision ... Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion" (Ps. 2:4-6). Do we not hear the noise of this scene in our chapter?

Jonathan, Abiathar's son, appears suddenly in the midst of the guests (vv. 41-48). Once before (2 Sam. 17:17) he had left En-rogel together with Ahimaaz, Zadok's son, to go at the risk of his life to warn David of that which was transpiring against him. Now he returns to En-rogel to warn Adonijah of the failure of his attempt, though he is in no wise associated with the rebels. He comes, full of what is good news to him, for we see by his language that his heart has remained faithful to David. "Thou ... bringest good news," Adonijah says to him. "Indeed," he replies, but these tidings were not good for his hearers. They were a disaster to Adonijah. In no way is this incompatible with Jonathan's feelings as a son for his father who by his own fault

had embarked on this dead end road. These feelings cause Jonathan to report truthfully to this company all that had taken place, holding nothing back from them. Let them take heed! — As for himself, his joy, one senses, is with David's successor. His service has not changed its character since the days of his king's afflictions. He is ever ready to bring news, just as his companion Ahimaaz to run. His character is remarkable in its consistency. Whether he fulfills his service to David during the time of his rejection or to the world in the day of the triumph of the son of David, Jonathan remains the same faithful messenger. The time is short: it is imperative to submit immediately by "kissing the Son." So it will be in the last days when those whom the King will call His brethren will announce far and wide the necessity of recognizing the reign of the true Solomon.

Just as Jacob in former days, the aged king, seeing the desires of his heart fulfilled, "bowed himself upon the bed" (v. 47). We find in David the slowness of age to make a decision, but once the word of God is addressed to him by Nathan, everything

changes. He does not hesitate; he sets everything in order, and acts in every detail according to the mind of God which the word recalls to him. At first he was ignorant of the plot — now he knows everything; he knows that the hour of his son's reign has come. He is neither bitter, displeased, nor jealous in confiding to other hands the reins of government. One thought alone fills him with happiness and adoration: "Blessed be Jehovah, the God of Israel, who has given one to sit on my throne this day, mine eyes even seeing it!"

David here is no longer a type of Christ, but a figure of the believer who forgets himself and overflows with thanksgiving, giving all the glory to the true king; a type of those saints who, adorned with their glorious crowns, remove them to ornament the steps of the throne of the "Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David." But this Lion of Judah is the Lamb who was slain. The grace of David and the glory of Solomon are concentrated in this unique Person. The joy of a Simeon, holding in his arms the grace and salvation of God represented by the

child Jesus, will be mixed in heaven with the joy of David who sees the glory of God shining in the person of the King.

In verses 49 to 53, all Adonijah's guests, stricken with fear, flee hither and thither. They no more attempt to resist than will men before the proclamation of the reign of Christ, for they shall be broken immediately. Adonijah beseeches the mercy of the king and seeks to obtain from him his solemn promise to spare his life. Solomon consents to forget, to be gracious yet another time, but he places Adonijah under responsibility before the glory of his reign: "If he will show himself a worthy man, there shall not an hair of him fall to the earth: but if wickedness shall be found in him, he shall die" (v. 52).

It will be the same in the future reign of the Messiah. He will spare many rebels who come to him feigning repentance, but once evil is found in them He will cut them off from the land (2 Sam. 22:45; Ps. 101:8). When righteousness reigns the wicked will no longer be tolerated. Solomon, figure of the millennial King, knows Adonijah and does not modify his judgment when

he sees him bowed before him. He knows what is harbored in his proud heart which is merely feigning submission and repentance. "Go to thine house," he says to him. Brief, severe words. Adonijah should have taken warning from them. From henceforth his role was to be quiet as a man who has been found guilty and is being kept under surveillance. He benefits from this longsuffering as long as evil is not manifested in him.

Chapter 2:1-12

David's Last Recommendation

As he dies, David leaves a commandment with his son Solomon, and insists upon his responsibility. It is, so to speak the testament of the aged king and the fruit of his long experience. Here we do not find "the last words of David" as 2 Samuel 23 gives them to us. The discourse contained in our passage historically precedes these "last words" which could be inserted between verses 9 and 10. It is not here a question of David judging his entire conduct in view of that of the true King, "the just ruler over men," and proclaiming the infallibility of the

counsels of the grace of God (2 Sam. 23:4-5). No, Solomon at the dawn of his reign must first of all be armed against that which could hinder or ruin it.

There are many analogies between the words of David to his son and those of the Lord to Joshua (Joshua 1). The king must first of all "be of good courage and be a man." Obedience to the Lord and dependence upon Him are the proofs of this strength which is to be used to "walk in his ways." The walk itself is directed by the Word of God, as we see here and in Psalm 119. The Word has different characteristics and it is necessary to pay attention to all of them. Here it is said: "To keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies; (v. 3). Such is the whole of the Word. His statutes are the things He has established and to which His authority is attached; His commandments, the expression of His will to which we are obliged to submit ourselves; His ordinances (or judgments), the principles He conveys and according to which He acts; and finally, His testimonies are the thoughts He has communicated to us and which faith must receive. All this con-

stituted "the law of Moses" for the Israelite and was to be the divine standard for the walk of the faithful. A life ordered in this manner must prosper in whatever aspect one might consider it: "That thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself." This was to have been the secret of the reign of Solomon and his successors. With these principles there would not ever have failed him "a man on the throne of Israel. "

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

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

But this absence of judgment was nothing less than weakness in David. A time is coming when the actions of men will be appraised according to the standard of righteousness, a standard that has long been postponed, but which will not have its sway until then. When righteousness reigns, can it appear to ignore sin? Men do not violate the laws of a kingdom with impunity, and when this kingdom is established in power those who have trampled these laws underfoot during the reign of grace must

suffer the bitter consequences of their revolt. There are no legal exceptions to the law of God as there are to the laws of men. The sinner's act of iniquity will find him out — perhaps when his hair is white with age, but without question it will be recalled to mind.

Joab is mentioned first (vv. 5-6). We have already sufficiently evaluated his career* that we will pass over it here. David's weakness (2 Sam. 3:39) had prevented the king from immediately avenging the murder of Abner, and later that of Amasa, but he had not forgotten them. What Joab had done to these men, he had done to David. "Thou knowest also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me."** Perhaps this bloody man thought he was serving his king all the while he was serving his own self-interests. Impossible! That which man does in his self-interest, he is doing against God. In time of peace Joab's "girdle and shoes," his service and his walk, had been spotted with the blood of war. This was a defilement. War must overtake him in turn; he must learn that there could be no peace for him, for this is reserved for those who make peace (James 3:18).

Neither Solomon's reign of peace nor his reign of righteousness could tolerate such elements. Joab must be immolated without delay and without mercy. "Do therefore according to thy wisdom," says David (v. 6). Yes, there is retribution according to the wisdom of Christ (Rev. 5:12). Without it His glory would not be completely displayed.

* Meditations on 2 Samuel, by H. L. Rossier.

** We do not believe that the king was here referring to the murder of Absalom by Joab.

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

dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice" (2 Tim. 1:5).

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

- * Despite opinions to the contrary on part of some, we see no reason why the Shimei of 1 Kings 1:8 should be any other person than the son of Gera.

David dies (vv. 10-12), and the Word notes here not the opening of Solomon's reign, but that which characterizes it both

generally and in its entirety: "His kingdom was established greatly." This is the character of the kingdom of righteousness in contrast with that of the kingdom of grace, full of trouble and sedition.

Chapter 2:13-46

Righteousness and Judgment are the Foundation of His Throne

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

Adonijah addresses himself to Bathsheba, that she may present his request to the king, her son. "Comest thou peaceably?" asks this pious woman who stands in doubt of the son of Haggith. She knew in effect that if he would have succeeded in his projects, she and her "son Solomon should be counted offenders"

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

"And now," he says, "I ask one petition of thee, deny me not ... that he give me Abishag the Shunammite to wife" (vv. 16-17).

Abishag! — that young maiden who had served David and had tenderly cared for him, who had lived in the intimacy of the king of grace, to be given to this rebellious man whom only the patience of Solomon had spared to this moment! How little he knew both David and Solomon!* To give Abishag to him would be to admit to him some right to his father's succession, some contact with the kingdom which he might be able to assert at some favorable occasion; it would be to accept his pretensions and the revolt led by Joab and Abiathar (v. 22) as legitimate. Should the woman who as a chaste virgin had served David be given to this profane man?

* Nothing gives us any positive authority, as we have said in 1 Kings 1, to identify Abishag the Shunammite with the Shulamite of the Song of Songs, the beloved of Solomon; moreover it is prudent in the application of these types not to go beyond that which the Word clearly teaches us.

It will be the same with regard to the Church. Will the King of Glory ever consent to yield to another the bride He has chosen for Himself as King of Grace? The Antichrist, the man of sin,

may hope to rob Christ of His bride by seizing apostate Christendom, become Babylon the Great at the end; but his efforts to substitute himself for Christ, to take possession of His bride, and to seize the kingdom will end for both the harlot and for himself in the lake of fire and brimstone. Here judgment did not have to wait: the very same day Adonijah is put to death.

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

from the priesthood, after having first furnished a reason for his judgment by his alliance with the rebel.

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

Joab comes next. Of him it is expressly said that he had not turned after Absalom (v. 28), whatever may have been his feeling in this, as we have seen in the Second Book of Samuel. But it was a far more serious thing to turn away from the reign of

righteousness at its beginning, for this denoted an absolute lack of fear in the presence of him who was destined to sit as glorious king upon his throne.

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

Lastly comes Shimei (vv. 36-46). Solomon places him on the footing of responsibility and he accepts this. He thus reveals his pure ignorance of his state of sin and consequently of his incapacity to obey. Had not Israel spoken the very same words

when the law was proposed? "All that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Ex. 19:8). And so Shimei: "The saying is good: as my lord the king has said, so will thy servant do" (v. 38). He knows, wretched man, that to disobey means death for him and that his blood will be upon his own head — and nevertheless he is unable to do aught but disobey. He is unable to surrender two runaway slaves. In order to regain possession of them for a day, he sacrifices his own life! What a picture of the world which knows the law of God and which will not and cannot submit to it once a passing interest comes between the will of God and itself. He is judged by his own word: "The word that I have heard is good" (v. 42). The man who is placed under responsibility and who accepts this and fails, cannot be tolerated under the reign of righteousness.

Chapter 3:1-3

Pharaoh's Daughter

"And Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David,

until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the Lord, and the wall of Jerusalem round about" (v. 1).

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

This union recalls that of Joseph with an Egyptian bride, the daughter of the priest of On, but their typical meanings differ. Joseph, rejected by his brothers, before making himself known to them, finds a wife and sons in Egypt among the nations according to that which is said of Christ in Isaiah 49:5-6: "Though Israel be not gathered ... I will also give thee for a

light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." Joseph's marriage typifies the relationship of a rejected Christ with the Church, and it brings before us the posterity which He acquires outside the promised land before taking up his relationship with His own people again.

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

shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance."

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

Up to this moment Pharaoh's daughter is established in the blessings — not in the relationship — of which the ark of the covenant is the type. Wherever this ark was found, whether in the house of Obed-edom (2 Sam. 6:11, 18, 20), or in the city of Zion, it brought blessing with it. During the Millennium the nations will take account of this privilege: "Yea, many people and

strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord ... In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech. 8:22-23).

Chapter 3:4-15

Gibeon

In verses 2 and 3 we see clearly that the order of things was not the ultimate at the beginning of Solomon's reign. The ark of the Lord abode under curtains; it remained to David's son to build the house of the Lord. At that time the tabernacle and the altar were at the high place at Gibeon and the ark, which David had brought back, was at Jerusalem. How David had this ark of the covenant, the throne of the Lord, the sign of His personal presence in the midst of His people, in his affections (Ps. 132)! From the moment he brought it back to Zion we do not see in his history that he personally ever sought another place of wor-

ship, though he was not unmindful of Gibeon. When the ark was being carried to Jerusalem he took care to link worship before the ark with the sacrifices upon the altar at Gibeon (1 Chr. 16:37-43), maintaining in this way the unity of worship. Each day service was performed before the ark and before the altar at Gibeon, so that at the same moment and "continually" these two parts of worship were carried on together, though separated geographically.

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

Solomon does not appear to have thought of this unity at the beginning of his reign. Doubtless God bears him a lovely testimony: "And Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father" (v. 3), but this testimony is qualified: "only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places." In so doing he ac-

commodated himself to the religious practices of his people, of whom it is said in verse 2: "Only the people sacrificed in high places."

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

- * See 1 Kings 14:23; 1 Kings 15:14; 1 Kings 22:43; 2 Kings 12:3; 2 Chronicles 20:33, where the people do not seem to have acted otherwise than they had at the opening of Solomon's reign. But we see idolatry allied to the high places under Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:4; 2 Chr. 31:1). Wicked Manasseh rebuilt them and raised altars to Baal (2 Kings 21:3). When he repented, "the people did sacrifice still in the high places, yet unto the Lord their God only" (2 Chr. 33:17). This proves what we are saying, that is, that these high places at certain periods in Israel's history are not necessarily connected with idol worship, though they led to this. From the moment that worship no longer has Christ as its centre, as the ark at Zion but finds place only for blessings received, even though they be the blessings of salvation, it has deviated from its purpose and become an instrument in Satan's hands to finally replace Christ with false gods. Josiah entirely abolished the high places together with all idolatry in Judah and in Israel (2 Kings 23:8).

God bore with this state of things as long as the full manifestation of His will concerning worship had not yet been given by the consecration of the temple. Nevertheless it was a weakness

in this great king. How much more intelligent was David's worship, even before Moriah, than Solomon's! The ark was everything for David; for him it was the Lord, the mighty God of Jacob (Ps. 132:5), whose worship was there where the ark was found. Solomon did not rise to the height of these blessings and did not enjoy the intimacy of this relationship with God. He did not go beyond the common level of religion of his people.

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

Solomon went to Gibeon, but he loved the Lord, and the Lord always takes account of our affection for Him. There it was that He appeared to him in a dream (v. 5). This fact, as others have

remarked, has its importance. In a dream one is unable to disguise the true state of one's heart; one is not controlled by either his reason or his will to repress the manifestation of what is in his heart. In a dream the soul is laid bare before the Lord. What then were the thoughts harbored in this young king's heart when God said to him, "Ask what I shall give thee" (v. 5)? What the divine word finds in the first place in this heart is gratitude for the great mercy of the Lord towards David: "Thou hast showed unto thy servant David my father great mercy," and at the same time the high esteem he held this latter in (v. 6) because of his walk of truth, of righteousness, and of uprightness which had proved that David feared the Lord (Prov. 14:2). Next there is thankfulness for the mercy of God towards himself, David's son; "Thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day" (v. 6). Lastly, there is the consciousness of his youth, of his ignorance, of his incapacity. "And I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in." Such a state of soul promises abundant blessing; it is summed up in this: Fear the Lord,

have the consciousness of His grace, esteem others better than yourself, and count yourself as nothing.*

- * All this is reflected later on in the Proverbs, counsels of the wisdom of the king. See, for example, Proverbs 3:7; Proverbs 4:7; etc.

Solomon was there before God with an undivided heart and he was seeking but one thing: to serve the Lord in the circumstances in which He had placed him as leader of the people. He asks the Lord for "an understanding heart,"* for hearing is the door to discernment and intelligence. In order to be wise one must begin by listening to wisdom: "Blessed is the man that hears me" (Prov. 8:34). All true service starts with hearing. Solomon did not know how to "go out or come in"; he could not learn this except by listening. He who does not begin by enrolling himself in the school of wisdom will never be a true servant. Such was the pathway of service of Christ Himself as man. "He wakens morning by morning, he wakens mine ear to hear as the learned" (Isa. 50:4).

- * Literally, "a heart that hears."

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

Solomon's answer "pleased the Lord" (v. 10). What grace to have His approval on all that we ask of Him and to receive His testimony that we have been pleasing to Him! The Lord grants Solomon his request and is pleased to add that which Solomon had not requested. He grants him the first place in wisdom, "so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee." Moreover, He gives him "both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the

kings like unto thee all thy days" (vv. 12-13). Solomon's humble dependence put him in first place, according as it is written: "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." It was so with Christ: "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:43-45). In every respect there is none like Him! Wisdom, power, wealth, the crown of glory and honour — all things shall be His in "the day which the Lord shall make," and even the greatest, most magnificent things will only serve as His footstool!

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

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

Before the ark Solomon offers up "burnt offerings" and "peace offerings" and makes "a feast to all his servants" (v. 15).

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

Chapter 3:16-28

Righteous Judgment

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

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

When the true mother saw the sword lifted over her child, "her bowels yearned upon her son." The object loved is more to us than our love for it. This is how one distinguishes reality, the true mother. In the Christian profession he who has not found an object for his heart and bowels betrays himself quickly. "Divide it," says the one who is not the mother, yielding to her resentment. One quickly sacrifices Christ when it is a matter of satisfying one's own passions. Only divine wisdom is able to discern the reality of profession by the state of the heart. How

frequently there is profession without reality! Where are the affections for Christ? Where the devotion which sacrifices even its legitimate advantages and rights for Him? In this passage, it is not a question of natural goodness nor of nobleness of heart, for, we repeat, we are dealing with two harlots. It is a question of ties created by God, of an object given by Him which the soul appreciates. God will never take it away from us; to the contrary, in the trial we shall receive it afresh from His own hand. "Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it: she is the mother thereof."

Chapter 4

The Glory of the Kingdom

This chapter tells us of the internal order and of the splendour of Solomon's kingdom, but also of its moral glory characterized by the wisdom of the king.

All Israel was gathered under his sceptre (v. 1), thus forming one peaceful unity. Such had been unknown during his father's

reign, as the seven years at Hebron, the rebellion of Absalom, that of Sheba the son of Bichri, and that of Adonijah prove. Now everything is in order and worthy of this glorious reign, but we find only eleven princes (vv. 2-6). The perfect order in relation to government on earth, represented by the number twelve, had not yet come and would not come until the advent of One greater than Solomon.

Azariah the son of Zadok heads the princes. "He it is that executed the priest's office in the temple that Solomon built in Jerusalem" (1 Chr. 6:10*). The very highest function falls to him. The temple is to become the centre of the whole order of Solomon's kingdom, just as it will be on the earth at the establishment of the millennial kingdom by Christ (Ezek. 40-48). Abiathar himself (v. 4), who had been driven from the priesthood, is counted among the princes alongside Zadok. He had carried the ark and shared all David's afflictions, and though he was removed from his office, his lord did not wish to deprive him of the dignity which he was bestowing upon all those who had suffered with the rejected king.

- * It is probable that this Azariah was the son of Ahimaaz and the grandson of Zadok. The term son for any descendant whatsoever is found continually in the Jewish genealogies. A somewhat obscure passage in 1 Chronicles 6:9 would seem to attribute the priesthood to Azariah, the great-grandson of Ahimaaz.

Among Solomon's twelve stewards (vv. 7-19) we find two who had married daughters of the king, a singular honour granted to the son of that same Abinadab who had received the ark and had guarded it for twenty years in his house on the hill. To be of the family which had religiously watched over the ark of the Lord was a title to nobility in the king's eyes.

An equal honour is granted to Ahimaaz, son of Zadok,* faithful to David at the risk of his life, and concerning whom the old king had given this testimony: "He is a good man, and comes with good tidings." He was the first to announce to David the victory which restored his throne to him and assured him of inheriting it according to God.

- * The critics, without any apparent reason, make this Ahimaaz out to be another individual.

Verses 20 to 28 describe the condition of the people under Solomon's reign and the character of this reign. "Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude" (v. 20). The promise made to Abraham after he had offered his son upon the altar was now realized (Gen. 22:17), at least in part, for his seed was to be "as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore." This promise will not be fully realized until Christ's millennial reign. Then as far as that which concerns Israel, the two parts of the kingdom, the heavenly and the earthly, shall be established forever in perfect harmony. Here the people is as numerous as the sand by the sea — restraining the surrounding peoples and keeping them within their bounds. Solomon's subjects ate and drank and made merry (v. 20). They had material abundance; there were no more needs which were not satisfied. Joy filled their hearts; security reigned everywhere (v. 25). Everyone had his possession and was dwelling under his vine and under his fig tree. That which men vainly seek in this world of iniquity where Christ was cast out shall be fully realized when the Lord, acknowledged by all,

shall reign over all the kingdoms of the earth (vv. 21, 24). Moreover, this powerful reign shall be a reign of universal peace: "He had peace on all sides round about him" (v. 24). All the prosperity, all the resources of the kingdom serve to exalt the king, unite to bring out his glory (vv. 22-23, 26-28).

But that which characterizes this universal dominion above all was its moral aspect, much more glorious than its material aspect (vv. 29-34). "God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart even as the sand that is on the sea shore" (v. 29). God had given Solomon wisdom, the moral discernment that applies itself to all things, to the good, to the evil, to the various circumstances of man, and the knowledge of the manner of conducting oneself in relation to these things. This moral discernment is not to be found apart from the fear of God which, as we have seen, characterized Solomon at the beginning of his career. The Word of God is the means of communicating this wisdom to us; that is why Solomon asked God for "an understanding heart." This wisdom

has found its expression in the Proverbs of Solomon, themselves become the Word of God.

"And understanding exceeding much." Solomon's understanding was as great as his wisdom, to which it was intimately bound. Understanding is the capacity to take in and to appropriate the thoughts of God in such a way that one is able to communicate them to others. Beyond that — "largeness of heart even as the sand that is on the sea shore," a heart capable of embracing all his people (cf. v. 20), identifying Israel with himself, providing all their needs according to his love, responding to all their interests and making them his own. Does not this speak to us of Christ, of that which He will fully manifest when He shall introduce us into the glorious rest of His presence, when His heart, divinely large, shall embrace us all; when "He will rest in His love" (Zeph. 3:17)?

The extent of Solomon's wisdom is described for us in verses 33 and 34. During his reign there was much more than mere physical rule. His wisdom had sway over all things. "And he

spoke of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springs out of the wall: he spoke also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes" (v. 33). Adam had ruled physically "over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth" (Gen. 1:26). God had delivered into Noah's hands "every beast of the earth, and ... every fowl of the air ... all that moves upon the earth, and ... all the fishes of the sea" (Gen. 9:2). Later the God of heaven gave "the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven" into the hands of the king of the Gentiles and made him ruler over them and over men. All this is not said of Solomon, but his wisdom held sway over all these things, from the cedar to the hyssop, from the beasts to the fishes. He understood their life, the reason for their being, their relationships among themselves and their interrelationships with the whole of creation, the examples God was furnishing by their means for the moral life of mankind; and he spoke of all these things. Modern science, with all its high pretensions, is nothing but

darkness compared with these certainties. But Solomon did not possess universal dominion under these two aspects. This is reserved for a Greater than Solomon, for the Second Adam: Thou hast "crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passes through the paths of the sea" (Ps. 8:5-8). It is also said of Him: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Rev. 5:12).

Solomon's dominion was but a weak type of Christ's, who will have "the uttermost parts of the earth" (Ps. 2:8) for His possession. The king of Israel had dominion "over all the region on this side of the river" "unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt" (vv. 24, 21). In sum, these were the limits the Lord had assigned to Israel in Joshua 1:4; but when it came to the wisdom of Solomon, these limits were exceeded by far: All people came to hear him; all the kings of the earth came to

inquire of him (v. 34), and we see in type that which is said of Christ: "I will ... give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth."

"Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol" (vv. 30-31). We have no other mention of the two latter except in 1 Chronicles 2:6, but we have an indication of the wisdom of Ethan and of Heman in the Word. Heman the Ezrahite is the inspired author of Psalm 88; Ethan the Ezrahite, that of Psalm 89. Now, what kind of wisdom is found in these two psalms? Psalm 88 has a very special character which is found to the same degree in no other psalm. It shows us Israel, convicted of having broken the law, and under the consequences of this disobedience. Nothing could be worse! Death, the grave, being cut off, and darkness are Israel's lot. Moreover, the wrath of God weighs upon her and she is afflicted with all His waves. She is abandoned by men and is shut up. She cries, she cries in vain (vv. 1, 9, 13). She is rejected;

God hides His face from her. The intense heat of the Lord's wrath has passed over her; she is overwhelmed by His terror. God has removed from her all who might have sympathized with her. And the conclusion of all this? None! Not a ray of hope! A soul who cries out, and God who does not answer!*

* We find these same feelings expressed in the prayer of Moses in Psalm 90: verses 1-6, concerning sin; verses 7-12, concerning the breaking of the law — but not without hope.

Now, let us note, this Psalm is the only record given us of the wisdom of Heman. This is very great wisdom, indeed, to consider the responsibility of man relative to the demands of righteousness and divine holiness; wisdom which ascertains that there is no way out of this position, and that the law, the measure of this responsibility, must cast man into the darkness of death, forever far from the face of God.

Through wisdom Heman reached the conclusion which God desired to teach man by the law of Moses. Has not this man of God's spirit already been convinced of the experience to which

the long centuries of man's history must lead and which should form the basis for the gospel? In reading this Psalm does one not seem to read the description of the law which kills the sinner which we find in the Epistle to the Romans?

In Psalm 89 the wisdom of Ethan instructs us. What does this other wise man speak of? Of grace! This Psalm is about the unchangeable promises of God and the sure mercies of David. The people's relationship to God on the footing of the law can only lead to the darkness of judgment and death; their relation on the basis of the covenant of grace made with David leads to this: "Mercy shall be built up forever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens" (v. 2) — in the heavens, where nothing shall ever touch it. This magnificent Psalm is the hymn of grace and of all the glory of God which this grace has established and brought to light.

Righteousness, judgment, mercy, truth, faithfulness, and the power of God are celebrated as manifested in a Person, Himself the centre and the key to this Psalm: the True David, exal-

ted as One chosen out of the people, the Lord's Anointed (vv. 19-20), He who is to be made the First-born, higher than the kings of the earth (v. 27), He from whom He will not withdraw His loving kindness, whom His faithfulness shall not fail (v. 33), He whose seed shall endure forever, whose throne shall be as the sun before the Lord (v. 36)!

Doubtless, in this marvelous picture of grace seen in the True David and in His glorious throne, the question of the responsibility of David's sons (vv. 30-32) cannot be absent, nor the consequences which result for the people who have failed (vv. 38-51), but this dark scene ends in blessing: "Blessed be the Lord forevermore. Amen and amen" (v. 52).

Such are the instructions of wisdom by the mouth of these two men of God, one showing the system of the law which ends in the curse and the darkness of death, the other the system of grace based upon the Person of the True David and ending in eternal glory. The first proclaims the end of the old man, the second the endless reign of the new man.

What then must have been the wisdom of Solomon to surpass that of these two wise men?

Chapter 5

Hiram. Preparations for the Temple

After having described the internal order of Solomon's kingdom and all the wisdom that governed there, the Holy Spirit conducts us to that which, above all, was to characterize this reign: to the temple of the Lord. David was unable to build this house, for peace must be established (v. 3) for the Lord to be able to make His abiding dwelling in the midst of His people. As long as they had wandered in the desert the Lord had associated Himself with them in their condition of pilgrim and traveler by the tabernacle. Then followed the wars of Canaan under Joshua and the judges; these had not ceased until the reign of David. God cannot dwell in rest where there is war. The first condition of His abiding* dwelling with His people in Canaan is that peace be made. It is the same, spiritually, for the Church. When the "good news of peace" is announced, the house of

God, the holy temple in the Lord, is built up, and this work continues until the full rest of glory.

* We say "abiding" because the first condition for God to be able to dwell with His people is redemption, typified by the Passover and the Red Sea.

Under Solomon this peace was outward, material, so to speak. The Lord had given him rest on every side (v. 4). The blessings that filled his reign had the same material character. All the desirable things of earth were brought to him, and he made them contribute to the glory of the Lord who had firmly established his throne.

The king of Tyre is the first one mentioned as coming to bring his services to the newly founded kingdom. In the Word Tyre is a type of the world with all its riches and desirable things. In Ezekiel 27 we see what Tyre, whose commerce spread over all the earth and to which the resources of the whole world flowed from every direction, was in antiquity. Precious woods which the Sidonians excelled in working, ivory and ebony, fine linen, white wool, embroidered work, blue and purple, silver, iron,

tin, lead, brass, carbuncles, coral, rubies and every precious stone, gold in great abundance, spices, oil and wheat, flocks innumerable; to say nothing of warriors to defend her, sailors to guide her fleets, wise men to direct her and to make use of her resources — such was, in very few words, the wealth of Tyre. All that the human heart could desire upon earth could be procured there.

In Solomon's time Tyre had not yet taken on that character of pride denounced by Isaiah and especially by Ezekiel, and which went so far as to deify the intelligence of man. Hiram, the friend of David, still ruled over this people. Of his own free will he had come to offer his services to Solomon's father, and his carpenters had built him a house (2 Sam. 5:11). The same willing spirit led him to send his servants to David's son because he had always loved his father (v. 1). How could he fail to be welcomed by the king of glory when he had always loved the king of grace?

Solomon tells Hiram of his plans, plans that in no way were the fruit of his own will. He had resolved to build the house of the Lord because God had so decreed, communicating His will beforehand to David (v. 5). Such is the true character of the decision of faith. Faith decides because God has determined. This point is important. Often we know the will of God beforehand and instead of saying, "I have determined" to do it, we seek excuses and good reasons to avoid it or at least to avoid putting our whole heart into it. At other times our resolutions have no motive behind them other than our own self-will, and lead us to bitter disappointments.

Solomon's rule is characterized, as we have said, by an earthly glory to which all the natural resources the whole world can furnish contribute. But this glory was to be to the glory of God and to give Him, in the midst of His people a temple which would exalt His holiness and His greatness. So it will be in the glorious reign of the Messiah.

We shall see later that Solomon, as responsible king, was not content with that which the Lord bestowed upon him, but later sought to augment this by and for himself and had to bear the consequences of this.

Hiram rejoiced greatly when he heard the words of Solomon. He considered himself honoured to be able by his service to contribute to the glory of the God of Israel. This Gentile king said, "Blessed be the Lord this day" (v. 7). He looks upon the Lord, the God of Solomon, as his God, and thanks Him for giving David a son to reign over His people. Affection for David, the rejected king, leads his soul to appreciate the king of glory, to appreciate God Himself, and to appreciate the people of God.

The fruit of a rejoicing heart is entire devotion to the service of Christ. "I will do all thy desire" (v. 8). And after all, what is Hiram's service in comparison to that which Solomon does for him? Sometimes that which we do for the Lord looks like something. The cedars of Lebanon and all the effort to trans-

port them were no little thing, but Solomon uses many other materials also to construct the temple besides Hiram's cedars and cypresses: the great costly stones and the gold which overlaid everything were more important for the foundation and the glory of the building than the products of Lebanon. Nevertheless Solomon accomplishes the desire of Hiram because the latter accomplishes that of Solomon (vv. 9, 10), and the desire of Hiram is the feeding of his house. The Lord could do without us, but He does not want to do so; He well knows that to use us in His service gives joy to and blesses our hearts — but we cannot do without Him. It is He who gives life, nourishment, strength, and growth. The food of Hiram's country, the wheat in which his merchants trafficked, came from Palestine (Ezek. 27:17). It is the Lord's land which furnishes those things needful for our existence. Thus Hiram depended upon Solomon for this: "giving food for my household" (v. 9). And what abundance reigns among the servants of the king of Tyre thereafter! four million eight hundred thousand litres of wheat annually! One might own cedar trees and cypresses and yet die of hunger.

Certainly one doesn't die of hunger when one places them into the service of Solomon!

Peace characterizes this whole scene. Hiram and Solomon made a league of peace (v. 12).

"And the Lord gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him" (v. 12). He had received wisdom (1 Kings 2:6) in order to purify his kingdom by judgment; then (1 Kings 3:12) in order to discern aright in view of governing his people; then (1 Kings 4:29) in view of leading and instructing the nations, the peoples, and the kings of the earth; finally, he received wisdom in view of building the temple, the great work which was to characterize his glorious reign.

In verses 13-18 we witness the organization of the preparatory work on the temple. Each is employed according to his own ability. The wisdom of Solomon directs everything. His workers come to assist Hiram's for the wood with which to build, carrying burdens, cutting stones out of the mountain. The men of Gebal have their part in the work. Ezekiel 27:9 mentions

them as skilled to repair the breaches of Tyre, which is there represented by the form of a magnificent vessel sailing the seas.*

- * The Giblites are mentioned in Joshua in relation to Lebanon as those to be conquered by Israel (Joshua 13:5). The Gebal mentioned in Ezekiel (Ezek. 27:9), a seaport at the foot of the northern slopes of Lebanon, was probably their city. In this glorious reign of Solomon they were to be tributaries, as belonging to the conquered race of Canaan.

The first act of Solomon is to transport "great stones, costly stones, and hewn stones, to lay the foundation of the house." It was of prime importance to lay a costly foundation, one whose solidity would be proof against every test, as the base of the temple of God. This is what God has done for His spiritual house as well. The foundation is Christ, the Chief Cornerstone; the foundations are the truths touching Christ and His work as He has presented them by His apostles and prophets. These are the great stones, the costly stones. It is impossible to remove one without compromising or shaking the whole building. This

is what Solomon's wisdom had well understood in preparing the hewn stones on which the house of God was to be built.

Chapter 6

The Temple

Four hundred eighty years have passed since the exodus from Egypt; the Lord's purpose in delivering His people has been attained. That which Israel had sung on the shore of the Red Sea is at last realized: "Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established" (Ex. 15:17). The two things mentioned in this passage are realized in type by David and by Solomon. To prepare is not the same as to build. It was David who had prepared everything for the construction of the temple (1 Chr. 22:14). Much more, it was to him that the plans of the building and all its contents had been communicated in writing (1 Chr. 28:11-19). David had imparted these plans to Solomon. Solomon built. The Savior "prepares"; the Lord "establishes by

His hands." The materials prepared by God for His dwelling with men and for the accomplishment of all His counsels are the fruit of the sufferings and rejection of the true David; Christ, the Son of the living God, builds, and says: "Upon this rock I will build my church."

Before beginning the subject of the construction of the temple, we need to present briefly the significance of this building.

The temple, as also the tabernacle, was the dwelling of God in the midst of His people, the visible sign of His presence. His throne, the ark where He was seated between the cherubim, was found there. The ark contained the tables of the law, the testimony of the covenant between the Lord and His people. This covenant, on God's part, was kept with scrupulous and unchangeable faithfulness, but it was conditional. If Israel fulfilled its conditions, God would dwell in the midst of His people. If Israel disobeyed, the Lord was obliged to abandon her, to leave His throne and His house in Israel.

The temple was the centre of worship. One approached God in His temple by means of sacrifices and the priesthood. Nevertheless, God remained inaccessible, for in actual fact man in the flesh could not approach Him. The way into the holiest, though revealed in type, was not made manifest. Only the work of Christ was able to open this up.

The temple, the place of worship, was also the centre of the government of Israel. It was God who governed. The king was only the responsible representative of the people before God and the executor of the Lord's will in government.

From the moment that God acquired an earthly people, a tabernacle or a temple was indispensable and became the centre of all their political and religious life. When the people was declared to be "Lo-ammi" the glory of the Lord abandoned the temple which eventually disappeared after having been destroyed and rebuilt many times. But when the sure relationship of the Lord with His people shall be re-established under the

new covenant of grace, the temple will reappear, more glorious than it has ever yet been.

The temple (like the tabernacle) also has a typical meaning. The temple represents heaven, the Father's house, and we can apply its symbols to our Christian relationships. All that is found in the temple is but the figure of spiritual things which are the portion of the Christians, as we shall have ample opportunity of considering.*

* We shall be presented with many other details throughout the course of this chapter and the following one.

The temple being God's dwelling-place, it is necessarily also the dwelling-place of those who are His (John 14:2; John 4:21-24). This is why Solomon's temple shows us the priests' rooms as being one with the house. This brings us to note an important difference in the way the temple is presented in 1 Kings 6 and 2 Chronicles 3. In 1 Kings the priests' dwellings form a part of the house; 2 Chronicles 3:9 mentions them only in passing and without indicating their connection with the

temple. In 1 Kings the two most important parts of the Jewish system, the altar and the veil, are completely missing, whereas Chronicles mentions them. Without them one could not approach God. Finally, the height of the temple's great porch is passed over in silence in Kings and given in Chronicles.* From these facts we can conclude a priori that Kings presents the temple as dwelling-place and Chronicles as place of approach. We must keep this in mind as we consider these chapters.

* This is why the following pages of necessity present a constant mixture of Jewish and Christian elements.

The temple, viewed as a whole, is also the figure of the Christian Assembly, the Church, the spiritual house, the holy temple, the dwelling of God by the Spirit.

Finally, the temple is Christ. "Destroy this temple," He said, "and in three days I will raise it up." Here below He was the temple in which the Father dwelt (John 14:10). But if in a general way the temple is Christ, all its parts present Him in diverse characters. The ark with the law in its heart, the mercy-

seat on the ark, the veil, all the utensils of the holy place and of the court, all the way to the walls and foundations of the building — all, absolutely everything, just as in the tabernacle in the wilderness, speaks to us of Him. Everything presents His glories, the efficacy of His work, the light of His Spirit, the perfume of His Name, the value of His blood, the purity, the holiness, the glory of His Person. Wherever we turn, whatever object our eye contemplates in this marvelous building, we ever find the perfections of Him in whom the father has found His delight, in whom He has manifested Himself to us. If we enter into the Father's house, it is to find the perfect manifestation of all that He is, in the Person of His Son.

Having said this, let us examine the teaching of our chapter in detail.

"And the house which king Solomon built for the Lord, the length thereof was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof twenty cubits, and the height thereof thirty cubits" (v. 2).

At first glance, the proportions of the temple seem astonishing, for they are very restrained, and this fact has struck even unbelievers. There is a great difference between the dimensions of Solomon's temple and those of the gigantic sanctuaries of Egypt. It is not size, but holiness, perfect order, righteousness, and glory, that is to say the balance and harmony of all the perfections of God that characterize His house.

The dimensions of the temple were exactly double those of the tabernacle in length, in width, and in height, but the proportions of the different parts remained the same. While crossing the wilderness, the tabernacle might have seemed a thing of relatively little importance in view of what the house of God was to be in glory. But all God's plan, all the order of His house, was found in this transitory building and was to be manifested there. It is the same with the Church. This is why it is said to Timothy: "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth": (1 Tim. 3:15). In glory the order of the government of the house

will be fully manifested, as we see in the description of the New Jerusalem in relation to the kingdom (Rev. 21).

Moreover, if one considers carefully the manner in which the temple was built, beyond the astonishing analogy between its dimensions and those of the tabernacle one observes that the temple was built upon no model other than that one. We insist upon this point because men who often without even a thought, disbelieve the revelation of God will go to great lengths to discover whether Tyrian, Assyrian, Egyptian, or Babylonian temples have more or less served as models for Solomon's, whereas it served as its own model. Is this not worthy of the True Architect of the temple, who revealed all its details to David just as previously those of the tabernacle to Moses? But now, what was impossible with any purely human undertaking — every one of these details had a divine meaning which would draw out our thoughts by faith to the Person and work of Christ.

The porch of the temple, its only entrance, differed in its proportions from those of the tabernacle. 2 Chronicles 3:4 tells us that it was one hundred twenty cubits high.* It was four times as high as the house. In figure it corresponds to the passage in Psalm 24: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in the holy place? ... Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in." This true arch of triumph was worthy of the King of glory, the Lord of hosts, strong and mighty, of whom Solomon was but the feeble type.

* Rationalistic critics contest this figure, seeing, as always, errors in that which they do not understand.

All around the temple, except at its entrance, naturally, were the side chambers, dwellings of the priests. There was nothing comparable in the tabernacle in the wilderness, where God doubtless was able to condescend to dwell in the midst of a people according to the flesh on condition that He would hide Himself in thick darkness, but where He could not allow man to come to dwell with Him. This latter condition is here real-

ized under Solomon's glorious reign, as it will for us be realized when the Lord brings us into the Father's house. All of us who are children of God belong to this family of priests which will have its home around its Head, though already the Father's house is open to our faith and we may dwell there, though still in this world.

The priests' dwellings were inseparable from the house, forming one whole with it without spoiling any one part. The walls of the temple had offsets where the beams could be fastened without hurting the walls. In this way the priestly rooms were perfectly adapted to the house without in any way compromising the integrity of the building. It is thus that we shall dwell in glory. The fact that we shall be there, far from weakening the perfection of God's house, will only enhance it. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. 21:3).

"And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building" (v. 7). No trace of human instruments was seen during the construction of the temple. It was built in silence; neither axe nor hammer was heard. It was the work of God; everything was prepared beforehand. The stones that made up the house had the same character as the foundation stones, also precious and prepared beforehand (1 Kings 7:9-12). It is the same with the assembly (1 Peter 2:4-5) insofar as its being built up is not entrusted to man's responsibility (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

Yet it was this very responsibility that fell upon Solomon (vv. 11-13) in connection with the construction of the house. Just as so many others, he failed, thus bringing ruin upon his kingdom "If thou wilt walk in my statutes ... I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel." The only condition God set for not forsaking His people was the

king's faithfulness. All His blessing was dependent on this condition being met.

The oracle as well as the holy place ("the temple before it") was covered with cedar wood. In the Word cedar represents majesty and height, durability and firmness. No part of the walls within was not covered. Nowhere did the stone appear. But the cedar wood itself and even the planks of cypress of which the floor was made were entirely covered with gold. In the Word gold always represents divine righteousness and glory.

Thus the house was made up of precious prepared stones built upon the great and precious foundation stones. This was the temple's value in God's eyes. But within, everything was firm, durable, and consequently incorruptible, worthy of the greatness and majesty of the Lord. Finally, those who entered the temple to dwell with God saw nothing but divine righteousness round about them. Down to the very floor beneath their feet, all was covered. Man cannot dwell with God except according to

divine righteousness. Moreover, all the furnishings of the temple were either made of gold or overlaid with gold, as for example the altar of incense, the cherubim, and the doors of the most holy place.

As in the tabernacle in the wilderness, the most holy place formed a perfect cube within. "And the oracle in the forefront was twenty cubits in length, and twenty cubits in breadth, and twenty cubits in height thereof*" (v. 20). So shall the New Jerusalem be: "The length is as large as the breadth" (Rev. 21:16). The result of God's work is perfect without adding anything or taking anything away. Everything is ordered according to the mind of the Divine Architect. The New Jerusalem is, so to speak, a great most holy place where God can dwell, just as in the oracle of the temple, because everything answers to His holiness and His righteousness. There is no temple to be found in her, "For the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it," but she herself answers to all that is of the most holy character in the temple of God. God's sanctuary is the Church in glory!

- * The house itself was thirty cubits high (v. 2). It is a fact worthy to be noted that the millennial temple described by Ezekiel, despite the immense development of its outer and inner courts and the dimensions of the body of the building which reached one hundred cubits including its chambers. does not go beyond the dimensions of Solomon's temple for the holy and the most holy places. These measurements are unchangeable. That which was from the beginning in God's plan is to be realized without change or development in the age of Christ's glory. The overall dimensions can be adapted to the future greatness of this reign, but the sanctuary remains the same.

As stated previously, the veil is not mentioned here. A double door of olive wood (v. 31) overlaid with gold replaces it — a free, large access, allowing one's view to penetrate into the most holy place, although, corresponding to the order of things under the law, golden chains were stretched out before the oracle (v. 21).

The cherubim played a great role in the temple. In the tabernacle they were beaten out of the mercy seat and overshadowed

it. They looked toward that which was hidden in the ark, toward the covenant of the law which had been placed within it, written on tables of stone. The cherubim, two in number, were witnesses of the contents of the ark (Matt. 18:16). At the same time they were attributes of the judicial power of God. These attributes made the covenant sure. On His side God kept it faithfully by all that which characterized Him in government.* The ark and the cherubim of the tabernacle had been brought over into the temple. On condition that the king, on his side, be faithful, God remained seated on His throne between the cherubim, faithfully keeping, for His part, the covenant contracted with His people.

* We shall speak of these attributes again in respect to the ornamentation of the temple and of the cows.

But the temple contained two other cherubim, each ten cubits high, with their wings spread so as to touch each other on the one side and to touch the walls of the sanctuary on the other. "Their faces were toward the house" (2 Chr. 3:13, J.N.D. translation), that is, facing out of the sanctuary. They faced outward

because under the reign of glory the judicial attributes of God, terrible to sinful man, can look upon him in blessing. In our chapter, where it is not a question of dwelling with God, the cherubim are not presented to us as facing outward.

Several other details of the ornamentation call for our attention.

The walls were decorated with cherubim, palms, and half-open flowers within and without. These ornaments were visible outside. Within, they were covered and hidden by a wall of cedar. We have already seen that the cherubim are attributes of the righteous government of God. The "beasts" of Revelation (Rev. 4:6-7) are cherubim and represent: the lion, strength; the ox (or calf), firmness and patience; the man, intelligence; the eagle, the rapidity of the judgments and government of God. The bearers or representatives of these attributes may be either angels or saints, depending on the occasion (Rev. 4, 5). In these chapters before us the cherub has a unique place. It is neither an ox nor a lion. It is an intelligent being. It is "the cherub" in contrast with the others. The eagle is not mentioned in the or-

namentation of the temple nor of the vessels of the court, for the eagle represents rapidity of judgment and does not apply to an established, peaceful government. 1 Kings 7:29 proves what we are saying: "And on the borders ... were lions, oxen, and cherubim." The cherubim therefore are the aspect of intelligence in the government of God here. This intelligence ornaments the house of God. Those who draw nigh may see it in all the details of the divine building. All the ways of God in His government, the external portion, that which may be read upon the wall, bears witness to this intelligence, to this infinitely varied wisdom. But beyond this we find another whole portion of the thoughts of God, unknown under the law, hidden and covered over in the interior of the temple where no human eye could see them. These are the counsels of God. Now divine intelligence goes into them and they are familiar to us, for God has revealed them to us by his Spirit (1 Cor. 2:9-10).

Palm trees or palm branches also have their significance in the Word. When the Lord entered Jerusalem as the King of Peace, His disciples bore palm branches before Him. It is the sign of

the peaceful triumph of a reign about to be inaugurated. Similarly, the immense multitude of Revelation 7 carry palm branches in their hands, celebrating the Lamb's victory. The palm trees of Elim are the symbol of peaceful protection in the wilderness; the palm branch (Isa. 9:14), a protection and shelter. Palms were used at the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:40), symbolic of the millennial celebration where the people, dwelling beneath palms and the branches of other green trees, shall take part in the universal rest of the kingdom, but not without the reminder of the years of testing in the wilderness. Thus palm branches symbolize the peace, security, and triumph of that reign of righteousness.

The half-open flowers are the emblem of a new season, of the beginning of spring (Cant. 2:12). In Psalm 92:13-14 we see that "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree ... Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God." Thus these emblems are not only those of the kingdom, but also emblems of those who belong there.* There will be perfect harmony between the glories of the kingdom

and those who will have part in it, between the Father's house and those who dwell there. And everything will be in perfect accord with Christ, the true Solomon. Intelligence shall be His, for upon Him as Man rests the Spirit of the Lord, the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord (Isa. 11:2). He is Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. He is the true Son of David, and upon Himself shall His crown flourish (Ps. 132:18).

* It is likewise with the cherubim, as we have seen previously.
The king of Tyre was a cherub in Eden.

Divine wisdom, perfect peace, beauty, freshness, and joy thus characterize this entire scene, and we shall participate in it also, made like unto Christ, and with Him who shall bear all these glories.

On the doors of the oracle (v. 32) were found cherubim with palm trees and flowers. This was the only spot within the holy place where the cherubim could be seen. Similarly to the veil

which they take the place of, the doors represent Christ who by giving Himself has opened up access for us to God. In the sanctuary the wisdom of God only is contemplated. Christ crucified is the wisdom of God. By His cross we enter the sanctuary in full peace, in full joy, and there we can in an intelligent way praise the Lamb who was slain.

The cedar walls do not bear the same decoration. They were ornamented only with half-open flowers and colocynths (or buds or knobs, for that is perhaps the meaning of this word in verse 18). There one saw the representation of a perpetual flowering, of a renewal full of freshness and beauty in harmony with the rest of God, of an eternal season of joy, all this covered and protected by divine glory there in the temple of God which for us is the Father's house!

Chapter 7:1-12

Solomon's Houses

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

The passage before us speaks of three different houses.

The first is called Solomon's "own house," "his house where he dwelt," his own residence. Little is said about it except that in place of the "porch for the throne" which characterized the "house of the forest of Lebanon" (v. 7) the king's house had, within the entrance porch (cf. v. 6), "another court" which was of like work (v. 8). Solomon did not judge in this house. He

dwelt there. It is presented to us in a rather mysterious way; it is a house of intimacy. But it is mentioned immediately after the temple and is its counterpart, so to speak. God dwelt in the temple and had "many abodes" there for His own. The temple was an image of the Father's house. The house we have before us here is the Son's house (1 Chr. 17:13). If we seek its analogy in the New Testament, our thoughts turn immediately towards the Church of which He said: "Upon this rock I will build my church. "

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

of Psalm 22, mentioned in Hebrews 2:12. Finally, let us consider this house of Solomon's of which the New Testament presents the glorious foundation.

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

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

tions in submission to the great king. It was there that Solomon sat as sovereign and judge of the nations as well as of his own people.

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

building.** At the back of this porch a marvelous throne arose, to which we shall return later.

* The expression "light was against light in three ranks," (v. 5) can scarcely, so it seems to us, be taken otherwise. The chambers contained the golden shields which Solomon had made for his guard, for the house of the forest served as an arsenal as well (1 Kings 10:16-17; 1 Kings 14:26-28; Isa. 22:8).

** The expression "porch of pillars" leads us to suppose that the lateral chambers did not extend beyond half the length of the building and did not face the porch of the throne.

In front of the porch of pillars there was an entry porch, whose dimensions are not given us. It too was garnished with a colonnade and had an entablature or flight of steps by which one reached the house. We can easily imagine the majesty of this construction. One's eye penetrated through the forest of cedar pillars of the central portion to the second porch at the farther end of which rose a throne of gold and ivory, marvellously executed, and upon this throne one could contemplate the glorious king, peaceable Solomon, the beloved Jedidiah of the Lord,

whose wisdom was never surpassed — the righteous king executing righteousness.

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

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

formerly the companions of Solomon dwelt in the house of the forest of Lebanon. Similarly, the Lord had priests dwelling with Him in His temple.

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

* Probably the porch of pillars.

** This relationship is nevertheless much more intimate than that with the nations at the extremities of the kingdom. There were various categories of nations. Under Solomon's reign, the remainder of the Canaanites were employed at servile labour (2 Chr. 2:17-18, 2 Chr. 8:7-9). The nations, like Tyre, co-operated

voluntarily in this work. Egypt and Assyria, formerly Israel's oppressors, will turn to the Lord during the millennial period and will serve Him together. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land; whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance (Isa. 19:24-25).

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

These three houses and the temple give us an insight into the characteristics of the glorious reign of the Son of God, of the Son of Man, and of the Son of David. There is a heavenly sphere, the Father's house, where a people of priests shall dwell with Him — a glorious Assembly, the Son's house, His intimate dwelling place and His wife. There is an earthly sphere, a Gentile bride, sharing in the blessings of the covenant — a govern-

ment of all nations, in submission to the sceptre of the great king — to say nothing of Israel, rejected so long on account of her unfaithfulness, now received in grace under the new covenant as the beloved Jewish wife, centre of Messiah's earthly government.

Chapter 7:13-51

Hiram and the Court

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

In the wilderness the Lord had chosen Bezaleel of Judah and Aholiab of Dan for the work of the tabernacle (Ex. 35:30-35). Then the work of the tabernacle had devolved upon the children of Israel alone. The people, entirely separated from the nations, could have no work in common with them. The scene changes under Solomon: the reconciled nations are engaged in

God's service together with His own people. The Lord's Anointed has dominion over them both. Hiram belonged to both by birth: his parentage was formed by the alliance of Israel with the Gentiles — a remarkable fact perfectly suited to the scene before us.

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

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

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

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

as King of Righteousness, manifesting the glory of His kingdom; and the Spirit acting so that this righteousness can be manifested without hindrance before the eyes of all men upon earth.

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

The Pillars (vv. 15-22)

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

whatsoever. His strength is used to establish rather than needing to be established.

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

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

We make the same experience today. Philadelphia has "a little strength," but its strength is in Christ, for He has the key of David. And the Lord says to Philadelphia: I shall establish thee

a pillar in the temple of my God. Thou shalt be a Jachin and a Boaz. In a time to come the poor remnant without strength shall be acknowledged publicly. Christ with His incommensurable power shall be admired in all those who have believed.

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

The pillars were crowned with lily work, a picture, we believe, of the glory of this reign at its commencement (Matt. 6:28-29). One characteristic detail: they had hundreds of pomegranates on their capitals. In the Word the pomegranate seems to be the image of fruit borne for God. The hem of the high priest's garment was trimmed with bells and pomegranates alternately

(Ex. 28:31-35). The bells represent the testimony, the pomegranates, the fruit. These latter were "of blue, purple, and scarlet," heavenly fruit, fruit corresponding to the dignity of the Lord, and to His royal dignity as Messiah. Our fruit should bear the character of Christ and be worthy of Him; it should also correspond to and be like our testimony, just as the pomegranates were the same in number as the golden bells. One often finds Christians with more bells than pomegranates, more words than fruit!

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

Brazen pomegranates ornamented the tops of the pillars. How can the divine character be declared before all without bearing

fruit abounding in righteousness? The Lord desires to be crowned with fruit. If strength is in Him, it is there in order to produce fruit. He is the True Vine here below, and as such, He has no other function. All His care for His own, all His disciples, has for its purpose that they might bear fruit. He must show Himself before all eyes as He who produces it.

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

In Solomon's case, the brazen pillars could not be kept because of the unfaithfulness of the king and his successors. They were broken up by the Chaldeans (Jer. 52:17-23). His kingdom could not be established because he did not seek his strength in God. But even if the material pillars have disappeared, the moral pil-

lars remain: the day shall come when the Lord in whom is strength will show to all that He has established in righteousness a kingdom which shall never be moved. Then shall it be said, "The Lord reigns, he is clothed with majesty, the Lord is clothed with strength, wherewith he has girded Himself: the world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved. Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting" (Ps. 93:1-2).

The Brazen Sea (vv. 23-26)

Behind the pillars the temple court held the brazen sea. We are specifically told (1 Chr. 18:8) that Solomon "made the brazen sea and the pillars, and the vessels of brass" of the brass which David had taken from the cities of Hadarezer. We have seen that brass here represents the righteousness of God coming to meet man where he is to deliver him and to manifest itself outwards, as shall be seen in Christ's glorious reign. This righteousness was here displayed in the destruction of the power of the enemy whom David had conquered. We know that this has already taken place at the cross of Christ, but under His reign

of righteousness the power of Satan, bound for one thousand years, shall be annulled, that it may no longer hinder the practical purification of the saints who serve the Lord.

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

The brazen sea served for the daily purification of the priests. There they washed their hands and their feet. Thus they were

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

The brazen laver of the tabernacle differs somewhat from the brazen sea of the temple. We have just seen that this latter was the manifestation of divine righteousness breaking the power of the enemy in order to make possible the daily purification of the priests. This victory was not gained in the wilderness. The laver was not cast of brass taken from the enemy, but from "the mirrors of the crowds of women who crowded before the entrance of the tent of meeting" (Ex. 38:8). This passage alludes

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

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

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

In Revelation 15:2 we again find a heavenly scene. It is a sea of glass, mingled with fire, on which stand those who have overcome the Beast and his image. They are the faithful from among the nations who, after having gone through the tribulation and having stood fast to the point of martyrdom, have part

in the first resurrection. They do not possess absolute and final purity until after they have undergone baptism by fire.

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

and the Word in the hands of Christ the High Priest shall ever have its cleansing virtue.

It is interesting to note that the sea is not mentioned in the temple of Ezekiel — not that it is not there, but its importance is relegated to the background as it were. In contrast, the altar dominates there, and though the sin offering is offered there, the principal role is given to the burnt offering and the peace offering.

Just as the pillars, the sea was broken up by the Chaldeans (Jer. 52:20).

The Lavers and Their Bases (vv. 27-40)

The brazen sea served to cleanse the priests; the ten lavers, five on the right of the court and five on the left, served to "wash ... such things as they offered for the burnt-offering" (2 Chr. 4:6). In Leviticus 1:9 we see that the priest washed the inwards and the legs of the victim with water. This type must correspond to future reality — to the offering of Christ to God in perfect pur-

ity. He who offered Himself as an odor of a sweet smell was holiness itself and had no need to be washed, but the type must be washed in order to show the perfection of the offering of Christ.

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

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

* Except for the eagles. We have previously stated that promptness of judgment has no relationship to a reign of righteousness and peace.

"Lions, oxen, and cherubim"* were sculpted on the bases themselves: strength, patience, and divine intelligence. The burnt offering is presented pure according to these attributes. It is manifested that they have been used to establish an offering by which the people might be made acceptable to God, having been identified with the victim. One might read on the "bases"

what was the manner of the God who had supplied His people with a means for dwelling with Himself.

* These latter simply bear the human figure here, as on the walls of the temple. In Ezekiel 41:19 they have two faces, that of a lion and of a man, the power and intelligence which characterize the reign of Christ definitely established. In Ezekiel 1 the four creatures each had four faces, for it was a question of characterizing the throne of God in judgment.

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

The chapter, that is, the crown of the base, bore nothing more than cherubim (men) and lions with palm trees, as on the walls of Ezekiel's temple* (Ezek. 41:18-19). Strength and intelligence crown the foundation of God's ways in government. If Solomon would be faithful, there would be no more need of patience: it would have accomplished its goal. Strength and divine intelligence could now, as in the millennial temple to come, look towards the palm trees, symbols of triumph and of

peaceful protection. Peace upon earth! The reign of peace was established in righteousness: the lavers for the burnt offering proclaimed this, as did the walls of the temple.

- * In our book here the walls also bore partially opened flowers, perhaps because this was not yet the full bloom of the kingdom. These partially opened flowers are missing in 2 Chronicles 3:5-7.

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

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

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

The Golden Objects (vv. 48-51)

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

In this chapter we have seen the outward manifestation of the kingdom, and as belonging to it, a glorious temple which cor-

responds in type to the heavenly part of this same kingdom, and in which the priests dwell with God.

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

Chapter 8

The Dedication of the Temple

The temple having been built and all its vessels having been put into place, He for whom Solomon had established all these things must come Himself to dwell in His house; and His

throne must be placed there. The temple was built upon Mount Moriah at the place where David had set up his altar upon the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. Until now the ark had dwelt under tents in Zion, the city of David. Solomon, together with all the men of Israel, all the elders, all the heads of the tribes, and the priests busies himself with bringing it up from there to the temple. It is no more "the chosen men of Israel" (2 Sam. 6:1) as in the time of David; all the people assist at this complete and final celebration. Final indeed, for the dedication of the temple takes place during the great days of the Feast of Tabernacles which closes the series of Jewish feasts (Lev. 23). It is indeed "the feast" above all feasts, "the feast in the month of Ethanim, which is the seventh month." Properly this feast comprised seven days, followed by an eighth which was "the great day of the feast" (John 7:37). It was held after the harvest and the vintage, figures of judgment. It was the symbol anticipating the marvelous reign of Christ when the people will dwell in joy and security in their tents, remembering the testings, past forever, in the wilderness. It speaks of millennial joy after the

forty years of chastening which the rebellion of the people brought upon themselves.

The eighth day, the great day, the new day, the day of resurrection and of the new creation, is added to the feast because those who will be resurrected will have a special part in this joy. It is the heavenly day added to the earthly days. When David brought the ark up to the city of David, this was rather a "feast of trumpets" (2 Sam. 6:15) preparatory for Solomon's solemn day. Here that very day has arisen in all its glory.

The priests have indeed finished with the miserable state of things at Gibeon. All the vessels of the holy place, the altar, and even the tent (vv. 4, 64) are now reunited there where the ark is found. This is the end of the tabernacle — there is no further mention of it. In this great feast the memento of God with which the tent was associated during Israel's pilgrimage abides alone. At last God has found a final resting place in the midst of His people.*

- * We would only remark that in all this we leave the teaching proper to First Kings and enter into the teaching of Second Chronicles. As a matter of fact, our chapter omits the words, "Now therefore arise, O Lord God, into thy resting place, thou, and the ark of thy strength"; it omits the millennial song: "Praise the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever" (cf. 2 Chr. 6:41; 2 Chr. 7:3, 6). It does not mention the eighth day except to tell us that on that day Solomon dismissed the people (1 Kings 8:66), whereas Second Chronicles emphasizes the solemn feast of the eighth day after the first week of the dedication of the altar and the second week of the feast (2 Chr. 7:8-10). All this clearly shows us God's different objects in these two accounts. The feast of First Kings is necessarily incomplete, because the responsible king occupies the foreground; that of Second Chronicles is complete, because this book presents the king according to the counsels of God — in consequence, a much more complete type of Christ. The rest of First Kings is rather the end of a period of the history of the king in responsibility. The period of grace having been completed under David, God shows that He can finally rest under Solomon, on the one condition that the king be faithful.

On this day countless sacrifices, burnt offerings, meal offerings, and peace offerings are presented (v. 64). Joy and fellowship prevail throughout: Solomon offers as peace offering alone 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep, and the brazen altar being too small for all these offerings, he hallows the middle of the court for the sacrifices.

The ark of the covenant with its cherubim beaten out of the mercy seat, who are witnesses of this covenant, is introduced into its place, along with the standing cherubim, their wings touching, who are its guardians. On the Lord's side nothing was missing; all was assured; God was faithfully watching over the carrying out of His will. But of what benefit was that under the old covenant if the people for their part were unfaithful to the covenant? It will not be so when the Lord makes a new covenant with Israel, all of grace, unconditional, and one in which the responsibility of the people will not count at all.

The cherubim covered not only the ark, but its staves as well. On God's part the rest which the covenant gave was as sure as

the covenant itself. The staves of the ark, witnesses of its pilgrimage through the wilderness, are henceforth useless and serve no more; they remain as witnesses of the past in the very place of rest. We have already explained why the veil is not found in 1 Kings as it is in 2 Chronicles, but in both cases "the ends of the staves were seen out in the holy place before the oracle, and they were not seen without" (v. 8). Manifestly it was the rest of God, and it had all the more value in that it was accompanied by the permanent reminder of what had preceded it. Only, to be assured of this rest and to enjoy it, it was necessary to enter the Holy Place. Those outside could not take account of it. The final rest of God is the portion of those who dwell with Him, of the priests who dwell in His house.

Yet other things characterize the wilderness journey, too, in relation to the ark — blessings were preciously stored up within it. The golden pot containing the manna and Aaron's rod that budded were no longer found in the ark at that moment when Solomon brought it into the temple of God (v. 9; cf. Heb. 9:4). In the wilderness, God had revealed Himself as a God of mercy

despite the severity of the law; hiding the condemning law under the mercy seat, establishing grace under the shadow of the cherubim - attributes of divine righteousness; guarding under their gaze together with terrible law the glory of a Christ come down to earth as the true bread of heaven to nourish His people, but resurrected, having clothed His humanity (the manna) with a glorious body (the pot of gold), now hidden in the most secret place of the tabernacle; keeping also the rod of the priesthood, alone capable (at Korah's opposition) of leading the people safely through the desert. These two objects, the manna and the rod, will no longer be necessary in the millennial reign, as we see here in type. The covenant shall be kept, God being the sole contracting party; the priesthood will have Melchizedek, no longer Aaron, as its model, and its function will be to bless. The glory of Christ the Man instead of being hidden in the sanctuary will be manifested to all eyes in the person of the true Solomon.

"And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that

the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord" (vv. 10-11). Striking picture of that which could not be obtained even under the most glorious dispensation of the law. God's presence excluded that of the priests. In the heavenly sanctuary the priests are able to stand in the presence of His glory, to dwell there, and to have their part there; but indeed that which we have in spirit already now cannot be equalled in the millennial temple.

This is what Solomon begins to establish in verse 12: "The Lord said that he would dwell in the thick darkness." The way of approach was not yet manifest. The dispensation of the temple at Jerusalem was the same as that of the tabernacle. The veil, even if it is not mentioned here, subsists nonetheless (2 Chr. 3:14). Meanwhile Solomon knew that this was not the last word in the counsels of God, and he had built Him a house, a fixed place, in order that He might dwell there forever (v. 13).

After having turned his face towards God the king turns towards the congregation of Israel. He fills the role of Melchizedek, whereas the Aaronic priesthood is unable to stand in the sanctuary. He blesses all the congregation of Israel; then (v. 15) he blesses the Lord. He recalls that the sure mercies of David are the beginning of the glory of his kingdom, even though this glory is dependent upon a legal covenant. God had done to the king of glory all that He had promised to the rejected, suffering king. We find here in Solomon, as in Christ, the accomplishment of all the promises, because David, the rejected king, object of God's special favor, had walked here, having but one object and but one thought: to find a place of rest for the glorious throne of the Lord. Christ throughout all his affliction had at heart only to glorify God there where sin had dishonoured Him. For this reason the Father loved Him and demonstrated it in raising Him to the glory.

This magnificent house had been built to harbor the ark of the covenant (v. 21). The responsibility of the people was to be put to the test under a new regime, hitherto unknown, that of glory,

but in which the tables of the law remained as standard of this responsibility. So it shall be in the Millennium, only Satan shall be bound for the duration of this reign; men shall no longer be seduced by his tricks, and the reign of righteousness will compel men to bow to its demands.

Verses 22-30: Here Solomon really fills the role of priest. He stands before the altar, facing all the congregation of Israel. There he stretches out his hands toward heaven, taking the character of intercessor. He is truly, as we have said, the type of Melchizedek, king of righteousness and king of peace. Like Melchizedek he knows and proclaims the Lord, the God of Israel, as the Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth. He acknowledges that God keeps His covenant — Israel had not kept it — and His mercy (v. 23). Without the latter, to keep His covenant would be the sure condemnation of His people. Nevertheless this mercy itself was according to the covenant of the law: God kept it with those that "walk before him with all their heart."

And now he supplicates God to keep with David that which He had promised him (v. 25). All the faithfulness of God towards His own depends on what He has promised Christ. Here we would be entering upon the ground of pure grace if only there were not an if. "There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit on the throne of Israel; so that thy children take heed to their way that they walk before me as thou hast walked before me." How this "so that" or "if only" condemns us all! It absolutely condemned wise Solomon, and how much more ourselves, a worthless lot. Under a system of responsibility in order to obtain anything from the Lord, we are condemned from the outset. It goes without saying that grace also brings with it responsibility for those under its rule, but this responsibility is completely different. It can be put into these words: "Let us be that which we are," whereas legal responsibility says: "Let us become that which we should be."

"But," adds Solomon (v. 27): "will God indeed dwell on the earth?" Even in the Millennium this will not be. God as such will dwell above the earth in His Assembly, the New Jerus-

alem. His dwelling upon earth with men awaits the eternal heaven and earth of Revelation 21:3. Solomon, knowing these things, asks God that His name might be there, this name that to faith represents His very person. He asks that from His dwelling place in heaven God might hear the king, His servant, and His people Israel when they turn toward His house. At the same time he expresses his feeling that both the one and the other will need forgiveness: "And when thou hearest, forgive."

Next Solomon begins to enumerate various situations where these prayers and this intercession may be addressed to the Lord.

1. The first situation (vv. 31-32) is individual. It is the request for God to condemn the wicked when an oath is imposed upon him before the altar "in this house" — and to justify the righteous. The presence of God in His house makes iniquity impossible. It is the simple and general truth of individual retribution, as it was known under the

law when God consented to come to dwell in the midst of a people in the flesh.

2. He admits the case (vv. 33-34) where the people having sinned against the Lord, He would raise up enemies against them to smite them. If the people would repent and seek the Lord in His house, God would pardon them and cause them to return to their land.
3. He supposes that plagues, drought, famine, locusts, enemy attacks, or the like might smite the land because of its inhabitants' unfaithfulness. Should they repent in heart, the supplication of only one man would be sufficient when they would stretch forth their hands towards this house; might God then hear in heaven and forgive, yet rendering to each according to his ways, in order that He might be feared. It is ever law, but with that mixture of mercy that it might allow if God would find truth in the heart (vv. 35-40).

4. There are also resources for the stranger (vv. 41-43); he would come from afar, hearing tell of the great name and of the power of the Lord, and would address his request to Him, facing toward this house. God would hear him in heaven and answer him, for the king wishes that all the peoples of the earth, as well as his people Israel, might know the name of the Lord and fear Him. Here there is no judgment, no conditional blessing at all. The stranger, outside the circle of the law, approaches God by faith and receives a full blessing. It is in short a beautiful picture of the millennial blessing of the nations, whose privileges flow from the fact that God has His house at Jerusalem in the midst of His people.
5. Here (vv. 44-45) we find, not the shortcomings of the people, but Israel acting according to the will of God and guided by this will to wage war against her enemies. This is a remarkable fact. After the nations have acknowledged the God of Israel, the people of Israel themselves will be a people willing to fight the enemies of the Lord. The house

henceforth will be the centre of blessing and strength for the people.

6. Verses 46-53 mention the end of their history as a responsible people. They are led into captivity on account of their sin. Solomon is a prophet here. He anticipates what must necessarily come upon this people under the law, for there is no man who does not sin. Yet a resource still exists. The house is there, and God cannot deny His promises. Solomon does not refer to the law, but to grace. By pure grace the God of the promises had saved His people from Egypt — could He deny this grace, even under the system of law? They are His people; shall God abandon them? No, if in repentance they turn toward the land, the city, and the house, God will hearken to them. Daniel is an example (Dan. 6:10). He remained upright amid disaster, the only righteous man who prayed for the people and humbled himself on their behalf, and did not God hear him? But a greater than Daniel, Solomon the king of glory himself, was there. He said to God: "That thine eyes may be open

unto the supplication of thy servant, and unto the supplication of thy people Israel." And this Solomon himself is but a weak picture of the true King, the true Servant of the Lord. Christ's intercession causes God to receive this people anew. He will restore them for the glory of Him who made the promises and for the glory of His Beloved. Thus the future restoration of the people depends upon the presence of the righteous Servant of God before Him, and on the fact that God cannot deny His character of grace, manifested long before the law.

Another characteristic trait: in his supplication Solomon goes back further than David, all the way back to Moses. The more the people of God go away from Him, the more faith returns to that which was set up in the beginning. The ways of God towards His people may vary according to their faithfulness or unfaithfulness, so that a certain way of acting on God's part may be appropriate for one period of history and inappropriate for another, but the counsels of God never change: His purposes are eternal. This is what makes the apostle say at the end

of his course, when the ruin of the Church was already evident: "Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Titus 1:1-2). This is also what causes Solomon to say: "Thou didst separate them from among all the people of the earth, to be thine inheritance, as thou spakest by the hand of Moses thy servant, when thou broughtest our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord God" (v. 53). It is always so. In darkest times faith finds its refuge in "that which was from the beginning" (1 John 1:1; 1 John 2:7, 13, 14, 24; 2 John 5, 6). "As for you, let that which ye have heard from the beginning abide in you."

(vv. 54-66). Solomon knelt before the Lord to intercede on behalf of the people; now he rises to bless all the congregation of Israel. He praises God first of all because He has given rest to His people, rest which depends upon that into which the Lord has just entered, Himself and the ark of His strength. The king acknowledges the absolute accomplishment of all the Word of

God: "There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised by the hand of Moses his servant" (v. 56). He presents his own words of intercession as a motive for God to bless His people, and the result of this blessing should be "that all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God, and that there is none else" (v. 60). This shall be realized in Christ's millennial reign toward which all this history, as we have so often remarked, is directing us. Only, in order that this blessing may take place, the heart of Israel must be "perfect with the Lord our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments." Again the legal condition, impossible for this fallible king and people to fulfill — that which shall find its accomplishment in Christ alone!

Chapter 9:1-9

The Lord Speaks

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

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

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

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

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

of Messiah, and Solomon himself appears in his character of Melchizedek and intercessor.

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

But immediately, as in all this Book, the question of responsibility follows, which is exactly the opposite of the foregoing. When it is a matter of Solomon the type, all is assured; when it is a matter of Solomon in responsibility, all comes into question. His throne cannot be established forever unless he be upright and faithful; his posterity cannot be established except on

this condition. Let Israel prove unfaithful as well as her king, let them bow down before other gods, and nothing will remain of all that the Lord has established by Solomon. The people will be cut off, the house itself rejected and destroyed (vv. 6-9).

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

Thus ends this part of Solomon's history. The remainder of 1 Kings 9 and 1 Kings 10 deals with his relations with the nations. It is the external history of his reign. Not that this was

not mentioned in the preceding period, but these relationships are not mentioned there except in their connection with the internal kingdom, as for example the marriage of Solomon with the daughter of Pharaoh and Hiram's connections with the king for the construction of the temple.

Chapter 9:10-23

Hiram

Verses 10 to 14 speak of the outward relationship of Solomon with Hiram. In return for his voluntary collaboration on the temple and on the king's house, at the end of the twenty years of their being built, Solomon gave Hiram a territory consisting of twenty cities in the land of Galilee, the nucleus of what was later called "Galilee of the nations" (Isa. 9:1; Matt. 4:15). This territory originally consisted of a part of the borders of Naphtali and later spread to include the area of Zebulun, all of "Upper Galilee," reaching to the Sea of Tiberias by way of Capernaum. The first of this territory thus was ceded to Hiram. Was Solomon acting according to God in thus subtracting a

part, be it the very least part, of Israel's inheritance for the profit of one of the chiefs of the nations? We do not hesitate to answer in the negative, for the land could not be given away. The Lord had said: "The land shall not be sold forever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev. 25:23). So the land belonged to the Lord. It is a remarkable fact that the book of Chronicles, which for reasons already given never indicates wrongdoing in the kings unless it has to be mentioned to make the history understandable, does not speak of this gift. On the contrary, it substitutes for this account that of the "cities which Hiram had given to Solomon," and which the latter, after having built and fortified them, gave to the children of Israel to dwell in (2 Chr. 8:1-7). Thus in 1 Kings Solomon diminishes God's inheritance; in 2 Chronicles he enlarges it. This fact seems very significant to us. What is even more significant is that this territory is given up to a nation overrun more and more by idolatry until the whole land came to be called "Galilee of the nations." Still, it was there that God's grace began to be revealed through the ministry of the

Lord. Thus, a thousand years after Solomon, grace remedied his fault.

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

the king of Tyre that what is offered by Solomon cannot be compared to the splendors of a kingdom granted by the bounty of the prince of darkness. The Christian who in the pursuit of broadmindedness abandons the least part of his inheritance to the world, will gain nothing but to see his own character debased, his religion despised, and in the end, shame cast upon God Himself.

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

Solomon's activity and wisdom are seen (vv. 15-23) in the establishment of store-cities, cities for chariots, and cities for

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

Like Solomon, Christians need not consider as valid the claims of the world which the unfaithful Church has allowed a foothold in her midst; on the other hand, they are not to drive them out. They themselves should walk in the liberty of the children of God and leave them to their yoke of bondage, the only religion proper to the flesh and that which the flesh recognizes. Never before Solomon had so complete a separation ever existed in Israel, but so it can and should be realized even in

the worst days of Israel's history or of that of the Church. "Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity." "From such turn away." Under the glorious reign of Christ, separation will be absolute; we read of this even to the point that "In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO JEHOVAH" (Zech. 14:20).

Chapter 9:24-28

Pharaoh's Daughter

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

The Second Book of Chronicles (2 Chr. 8:11) informs us of the reason for this change of residence. Solomon said, "My wife shall not dwell in the house of David, king of Israel, because the places are holy, whereunto the ark of the Lord has come."

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

Three times a year Solomon sacrificed upon the brazen altar (v. 25) constructed for the temple by the ministry of Hiram (2 Chr. 4:1) — the only mention thereof in 1 Kings, and an incidental mention at that. Furthermore, he burned incense on the golden altar. As we have seen in 1 Kings 8, on certain occasions he filled the office of priest, of Melchizedek, and of intercessor.

Does this not speak to us of Christ? Every dignity is concentrated in His Person, and He has acquired them all by virtue of His death, without which He would not be able to assume even one of these offices. The Captain of our salvation was made perfect through sufferings.

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

Chapter 10:1-13

The Queen of Sheba

The preceding chapter has shown us Solomon's relationships with the representatives of the nations in submission to his rule. Tyre; Lebanon; The Pharaoh of Egypt; his daughter, Solomon's wife; and again the land of Edom where he organized his fleet,

the desert where he built Tadmor, the kings of Arabia (1 Kings 10:15); the remnant of the Canaanites whom he brings into bondage — all these diverse elements gravitate around him as their centre and contribute to the fame of his kingdom.

Finally we see the queen of Sheba, this "queen of the south" who "came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon" (Matt. 12:42). What distinguishes her from all the others is that she was attracted by the fame of the king's wisdom. She had heard tell of it (v. 1), and this had produced in her an intense desire to see this extraordinary monarch, a desire which had caused her to conquer the enormous distance separating her country from Jerusalem and the numerous obstacles to such a journey. This act was an act of faith. She believed the word which had been spoken to her; she believed in the excellence of Solomon, having only that which had been told her to judge by. It is always so with faith. It is attracted by the Person and the perfections of Christ. Rebecca, convinced of the love of Isaac which Eliezer had spoken to her of, sets forth to go to meet him. The wilderness does not frighten her, for she desires

to reach her bridegroom. Abigail, when judgment is at the door, sets forth to meet the one from whom she should have fled. Why? Because she knew by hearsay the moral glory of David. Later she becomes the companion of His royal glory. Rebecca is drawn by love, Abigail by the perfection of grace, the queen of Sheba by wisdom. This is what happens to souls who become acquainted with Christ. It is impossible for a finite being to embrace infinite perfection; we are attracted at most by a limited knowledge of one side of this divine character, whatever it may be; they all bring us to know His Person, and it is on Him that faith feeds.

"She came to hear the wisdom of Solomon." The queen may have been, in fact was a person of remarkable intelligence, whom nothing escaped and who loved to give an exact account of all things; but from the moment she heard tell of Solomon she had but one thought: to prove his wisdom. Wisdom for herself consisted in having none and in seeking it from another. It was hard questions that she brought to him. Certainly these were not lacking with her: the world is full of enigmas to which

man has never yet found a solution. From the mysteries of creation, for the simplest of which Job had no answer, to the mysteries of bodily life; from the mystery of the soul to that of good and evil in the world; from the veiled hereafter to eternal life; all is mystery, a dark enigma. Man is unable to decipher the unknown writing of this book. God must reveal its secrets, and if there is no divine revelation, positive and direct, man's poor, limited spirit finds that from the very first question on he is brought to a standstill before an insurmountable wall. He may boast and exalt himself, but all his knowledge can never cause him to penetrate beyond the verification of facts whose first cause completely escapes him.

The queen of Sheba brought her enigmas to Solomon to prove his wisdom by them. But what was the reason for her confidence? She had heard tell of Solomon's fame in connection with the name of Jehovah. If this fame was grounded upon the Lord's presence at Jerusalem, was not the queen assured beforehand that it was not in vain for her to undertake this long journey? If Solomon should answer her enigmas, it is because

his wisdom is none other than that of the Lord who had revealed Himself to him. Thus the queen comes to Solomon — and what will she carry away from this interview? The knowledge of God through him.

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

But the queen brings something better yet than her gifts; she comes to speak "to him of all that was in her heart. And Solomon explained to her all she spoke of: there was not a thing

hidden from the king that he did not explain to her" (vv. 2-3). She opens her heart to Solomon; the secrets of her heart are made manifest (1 Cor. 14:25); but they find a perfect response on part of him from whom nothing is hidden. In meeting Solomon, she has found God Himself. God is indeed there, in condescending mercy occupied with bringing full light into this soul, so as to leave no place for a doubt or for a question without an answer. The king has the secret of all things; he does not keep it to himself; he shows that His secret is with them that fear Him (Ps. 25:14).

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

The queen of Sheba acknowledges (v. 6) the truth of what she had heard tell about Solomon. She has passed from his person to the words of his mouth, and from these to all that has come from his hands, to all that surrounds him — and she has found

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 10:14-29

The Throne

Verses 14 through 22 describe the riches and the splendor of the kingdom. Gold, the emblem of divine righteousness, stands out everywhere under Solomon's reign, from the temple to the throne. The throne was marvelous: "There was not the like made in any kingdom." It was the throne of righteousness and of power, and it bore the emblems of these.

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

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

Son, a testimony to the perfect satisfaction of His Father's heart in Him!

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

In verses 26 through 29 we find the king's power, marked by his chariots and his horsemen. All this was joined together for the glory of Solomon's reign.

Chapter 11:1-13

The Cause of the Kingdom's Ruin

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

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

Now God points out the blemish in this reign to us. It was not the marriage with Pharaoh's daughter, for this was indispensable if Solomon were to be a type of Christ in His government. Joseph in his time had contracted a similar union; the sons who issued therefrom had given their names to two of the tribes of Israel after having received the blessing of the patriarch, the father of this people. What is more, Solomon had acted according to the thoughts of God toward this Gentile wife, and Chronicles is careful, as we have seen before, to show us that the king did not give her a place of immediate nearness to the ark of the covenant and the city of the son of David. Thus it was not on account of this union that blame fell upon Solomon; as a millennial type, he, "the light of the nations," of necessity went beyond the ordinary relationships of a king of Israel. Also the Word sets Pharaoh's daughter in a place that is distinct from the other strange wives (v. 1).

"But king Solomon loved many foreign women, besides the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, Hittites; of the nations of which Jehovah

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

after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods" (Ex. 34:16).

At the head of this humiliating list we find the Moabites who had led Israel astray into the idolatry of Baal-Peor, having gained control of them through the lust of the flesh (Num. 25:1-5). All the nations - the Ammonites, the Edomites, the Zidonians — at the borders of Canaan hated God and His people. The Hittites, mentioned in last place, should have been exterminated, and never had been. Solomon was openly disobeying God who had said to His people: "Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in to you." There was a double prohibition. We are in danger of going to the world or of letting it come in to us. Perhaps the latter possibility is even more dangerous than the first. On account of conscience towards God the Christian might perhaps abstain from an act of self-will or of disobedience that might incline him to go to the world, whereas the world might more easily seduce him by coming to him. Little by little it insinuates itself into our homes and into our lives, and often when we open our eyes to the danger, it is

already too late. "They would certainly turn away your heart after their gods," the Lord had said. Marriage with the world will necessarily lead us to the religion of the world. This is an earnest word and well worth being weighed by every godly soul today. In the measure that we avoid or cultivate such union, our religion will take on a heavenly or an earthly character. "To these Solomon was attached in love." And it was this same king whose lips, by divine inspiration, had dropped wisdom for others and had shown them the path to follow with respect to the strange woman lest they fall into "all evil in the midst of the congregation and the assembly" (Prov. 5:1-14)! It was he, too, who in the Book of Proverbs (Prov. 7) had insisted upon the terrible consequences of evil conduct. What blindness! What a sad spectacle! He had taught others and had not taught himself. He, the responsible head of the people, did things from which the people were to abstain, but in which the king failing, he would draw down judgment not only on himself, but also on those whom he should have been feeding, leading, and protecting!

"His wives turned away his heart" — the word is repeated in verse 4. It is a terrible thing when that which is in the world lodges in the heart and takes control of it, thus turning one's affections aside from their only object to turn them towards vile, shameful, guilty objects. We would remark that these things did not arise suddenly in the life of this man of faith, or at least their consequences did not develop all at once. For "it came to pass when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods." Time was needed for this fleshly sowing to bear its fruit. Who would have believed that the Solomon of the temple, at one time on his knees, spreading out his hands toward God in the sight of the people, would become an idolater? Perhaps today some might say that he had a large heart, respecting the freedom of conscience of others; some would adorn this idolatry with some lovely humanitarian or social label. But of what value is human opinion? The question is what God thinks of it. God was dishonoured. "Solomon did evil in the sight of Jehovah." It was not indifference, hateful enough in itself, to build these high places for his wives: it was associat-

ing himself with their worship and becoming one with them. It also says, "Solomon went after Ashtoreth (Venus Astarte) the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites." He himself is regarded as an idol-worshipper. He "followed not fully Jehovah, as David his father," that is, he did not follow him to the end. And yet the Lord "had appeared to him twice," the first time at Gibeon, the second time after the consecration of the temple. God had warned him about idol worship (1 Kings 9:6-9), showing him its terrible consequences for the people — and he had not kept His commandment! David had committed serious, humiliating errors, but at least he always kept the Lord in view. Even after his fall, his first words were "I have sinned against the Lord." All the affliction of this man of faith had only the glory of God as its goal, and the close of his life had magnified grace joined to complete self-judgment. Such was not the case with Solomon. We do not even hear the cry of a convicted conscience from him when the terrible words, "Forasmuch as this is done by thee," resound in his ears just as once the words "Because thou hast despised me,"

had rung in his father's ears. We are about to learn what very different feelings God's discipline elicited from his heart. But God would have him know all that is to happen to him. The kingdom, that kingdom of glory spread by divine power to the borders of the nations, was to be violently torn away from him; his son would keep but one tribe, Judah, for Benjamin scarcely counted. In a moment power, majesty, wealth, unprecedented glory, the submission of nations — all was to melt away, and in the midst of the storm only a poor remnant preserved by God would remain, like a fragile boat which had lost everything: oars, sails, masts, and ropes — except only its compass and rudder.

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

King whom God shall anoint upon Zion, the mountain of His holiness.

Chapter 11:14-43

The Enemies

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now a prophet appears. Just as Samuel at the time of the ruin of the priesthood, so the fall of the kingship now raises up a prophet. He becomes, as we shall see so strikingly in the course of these books, the bond between the people and God when kingship in responsibility has failed. Ahijah the prophet meets Jeroboam outside Jerusalem. He rends the new garment with

which he is clothed (indeed, the kingdom was still quite new), and gives ten parts to Jeroboam. At that very moment the kingdom is torn out of the hands of Solomon, although this fact is only realized later. One tribe is left to the house of David on account of the free choice of grace with regard to David and Jerusalem. "They have forsaken me," says the Lord, "and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in my ways, to do that which is right in my sight, and my statutes and mine ordinances, as David his father" (v. 33). "They" was Solomon, the king! No doubt, all the people later followed that same path, but at this moment one man had sinned — the king. Set before God in a position of responsibility for all the people, his unfaithfulness brought judgment upon Israel. What a severe punishment Solomon had incurred.

In verse 34 God, ever coming back to the grace he had shown to David, adds: "And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a lamp always before me in Jerus-

alem, the city that I have chosen for myself to put my name there" (v. 36). Grace is more in God's eyes than all glory, or rather, grace is the most precious part of glory, for it is, so to speak, at the head of all divine perfections.

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

lights in grace. Thus the future kingdom of the true King of Glory will be based upon a new covenant, a covenant of grace where God alone is under obligation, upon a new creation — that which was not the case with Solomon's kingdom.

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

Solomon seeks to kill Jeroboam (v. 40). Such are the feelings produced in his heart by this discipline! Instead of bringing him into God's presence bowed, humbly submitting to the chastening, the obstacle God had raised up to him only irritates him

and provokes him to seek to free himself of it. How sad the heart that has lost its communion with God and that does not judge itself. What has Solomon, the king of righteousness, come to? His heart is no longer upright before God. How far he is from his beginnings!

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

All the events related in 1 Kings 11 are missing in 2 Chronicles, but two expressions in chapter 9 give us to know that they are omitted by design. "And the rest of the acts of Solomon first and last, are they not written in the words of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer concerning Jeroboam the son of Nebat?" (2 Chr. 9:29). An omission in the Word of God always has its reason, and we have so often called attention to this one that there is no need to repeat it.

Two Psalms

In ending this history, we would like to set two Psalms before our readers, one of them having Solomon as its subject, and the other composed by him. We would run out of space were we to attempt to set forth the wisdom of Solomon in the various writings of which he is the inspired author. We shall therefore limit ourselves to this short appendix.

Psalms 72 is a psalm "concerning Solomon": human reason at first glance may even doubt that this psalm is prophetic and applies to the reign of Christ, since so many of the details apply so exactly to that of Solomon. "And he shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. The dwellers in the desert shall bow before him, and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall render presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer tribute: Yea, all kings shall bow down before him; all nations shall serve him" (vv. 8-11). "And he shall live; and to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba; and prayer shall be made for him continually: all the day shall he be blessed" (v. 15). As to

his character: "He will judge thy people with righteousness, and thine afflicted with judgment" (v. 2). As to the blessings of his reign: "In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace till the moon be no more" (v. 7). "There shall be abundance of corn in the earth, upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon; and they of the city shall bloom like the herb of the earth" (v. 16). "All nations shall call him blessed" (v. 17).

Truly, there is scarcely one characteristic feature of that reign with which we have been occupied missing here. Nevertheless we find one thing that is not mentioned in Solomon's reign: grace. That is why, too, this reign speaks less to our heart and conscience than that of David does. Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of the lilies of the field. His glory speaks less to the soul than the tender care of a father for his children and the grace with which his love overwhelms them. We find this stream of grace, which characterized David much more than it did Solomon, throughout our psalm.

We must therefore look to Him who will unite in His Person the characters attributed to these two men of God in order to understand the millennial reign of the Messiah. His reign of righteousness will not only surpass Solomon's reign, so miserably interrupted, by its splendor and its length, for they shall fear Him "as long as sun and moon endure, from generation to generation" (v. 5), and there shall be "abundance of peace till the moon be no more" (v. 7); but it shall begin as that of Solomon never began: "He shall come down like rain on the mown grass" (v. 6), bringing heavenly blessing there where judgment has done its work and has left nothing to harvest. Under His gentle influence a new harvest shall spring up. David had predicted this of One greater than his son: "From the sunshine, after rain, the green grass springs from the earth" (2 Sam. 23:4). Observe this character of grace in our psalm bringing compassion, deliverance, and salvation, in order to bring out the afflicted from under the yoke of the oppressor: "He will judge ... thine afflicted with rectitude" (v. 2, margin). "He will do justice to the afflicted of the people; he will save the chil-

dren of the needy, and will break in pieces the oppressor" (v. 4). "For he will deliver the needy who cries, and the afflicted, who has no helper" (v. 12). "He will have compassion on the poor and needy, and will save the souls of the needy" (v. 13). "He will redeem their souls from oppression and violence, and precious shall their blood be in his sight" (v. 14). It is this that will give its incomparable stamp to Christ's glorious reign, as it is said again: "I will satisfy her needy ones with bread" (Ps. 132:15). Thus thought the rejected Messiah here on earth when He fed the multitudes, and if the people would have had Him, He would have manifested Himself as the Messiah entering into His reign. But when He shall take His power to Himself and shall shine upon the earth as the Sun of Righteousness, He will rejoice in the work of His grace and will bring healing in His wings.

Psalm 127 is the only psalm of which Solomon actually is the author. He speaks of the house, the great object of his reign; but he announces a future time when men shall turn to building it and to laboring in vain, to watching in vain to keep the city

from the enemy. Such a thing never took place under his sceptre. That which Solomon established of course was not final; that which men shall set up will be even less so. But the time will come when Jehovah Himself will build the house and keep the city. Then His Beloved shall at last find "sleep," that rest of which it is said: "He will rest in his love" (Zeph. 3:17). Then shall He have children as "an inheritance from Jehovah," a new people; "from the womb of the morning shall come to thee the dew of thy youth" (Ps. 110:3). Then shall He be called happy.

Solomon, just like David, looks on to Christ. Each of them knows that he cannot be that righteous ruler over men. Both of them rejoice to see their dignity conferred upon Him who will never use it except for the glory of God.

Part 2: Chapter 12-16

Division of the Kingdom:

Chapter 12:1-24

Rehoboam

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

All Israel comes to Shechem to proclaim Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, king. Jeroboam is there, called by the people to be their spokesman before the king. These men complain to the king of the yoke his father had imposed upon them: "Thy father made our yoke grievous" - an expression showing that this had not always been the case. Christ's yoke will never be grievous upon His people; to His own He will ever remain the same as they have known Him in the day of suffering and of grace: "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Beyond all doubt, the nations must submit to Him, and He will smite them with a rod of

iron, but all the prophets bear witness to the grace wherewith He will feed His people. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young" (Isa. 40:11).

Rehoboam consults with the old men who had stood before Solomon to drink at the fountain-head of wisdom. Their counsel is that of Jesus to His disciples: "Let the greater among you be as the younger, and the leader as he that serves" (Luke 22:26). "If this day," say the old men, "thou wilt be a servant to this people, and wilt serve them and answer them and speak good words to them, they will be thy servants for ever" (v. 7). Rehoboam forsakes the counsel of wisdom in order to follow that of the young men who had grown up with him, and who stood before him (v. 8). They could not thus be anything other than the mirror and reflection of their master's thoughts. Had he himself stood before his father hearing the wise proverbs that fell from his lips, he could have communicated somewhat of this wisdom to others. He would have known what was becoming to a

king; he would have known that "A soft answer turns away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (Prov. 15:1); that "Pride goes before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18), and many other precepts. But no, those who flatter his pride are the ones who win his approval. The counsel of the young men in the final analysis is but that of his own heart. Pride goes hand in hand with despising one's neighbor; this base people counts for nothing in the eyes of a king who exalts himself. Great Solomon, his father, even seems little to him in comparison to his own greatness. This saying that his courtiers suggest to him: "My little finger is thicker than my father's loins" (v. 10), does not meet with his disapproval. In any case, he esteems himself stronger and more energetic than his father and despises the people of God. He does not listen to them; this thing was of the Lord, that He might fulfill His prophetic word (v. 15). What God has purposed, must come to pass.

Israel rebels. "What portion have we in David? And we have no inheritance in the son of Jesse: To your tents, O Israel! Now see

to thine own house, David! (v. 16). This was the rallying cry to rebellion, the common cry of those who were malcontented in the days of David (2 Sam. 20:1). Rehoboam flees; nothing but Judah and Benjamin remain to him. To recover what he had so foolishly lost, he gathers together an army of 180,000 men against Israel. But Shemaiah the prophet exhorts them on God's behalf: "Go not up, nor fight with your brethren, the children of Israel; return every man to his house, for this thing is from me" (v. 24). The king and the two tribes fear the Lord and return according to His word. Had they only continued in this path, which is the beginning of wisdom!

It should be noted that the role of the prophet becomes increasingly emphasized with the ruin of the kingship. In all this part of the history we are taken up with prophets. Ahijah was the first to appear, when Solomon fell under God's judgment. There was also at that time a Nathan, and an Iddo who had a vision concerning Jeroboam, the son of Nebat (2 Chr. 9:29). Now here is Shemaiah who turns Rehoboam from his plans of war. The role of the prophet was a great grace, allowing rela-

tions between God and His people to continue despite the ruin. Above all the prophet was the mouthpiece for the Word of God. This Word was addressed to him and he could say, "Thus saith the Lord." Whoever followed this Word could be sure of being well directed and of finding blessing. It is the same for us who live in these sad end times. Our prophet is the Word of God. God no longer grants us new revelations, as He did in times past, for He has revealed everything to us; but when His Word speaks to us, let us respect it and not turn aside. In the world there are many false prophets who pretend to know more than the true Word of God. They despise it, accusing it of being false, telling us that it is not God who has spoken. Let us turn a deaf ear to their words. God has spoken to us; our prophet has communicated His thoughts to us. Have we not proven a hundred times over that His Word is our souls' life and safety? Let us prove it afresh; and when this prophet tells us, "Thus saith the Lord," let us do like Rehoboam and Judah who had no need to repent of it. Let us "hearken to the word of the Lord" and act "according to the word of the Lord" (v. 24).

Chapter 12:25-33

Jeroboam and His Policies

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

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

assured of reigning over all that his soul desired (1 Kings 11:37).

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

had instituted at Jerusalem. From that moment on that this worship was not a worship of the Lord, what could it be? Idol worship.

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

morrow is a feast to Jehovah!" The Lord is completely set aside.

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

Thus, despite its misleading external forms, this religion was a complete forsaking of the worship of the Lord, an instrument of polity in the hands of the government. Lulled by false ap-

pearances, souls were kept far from the true God, and the king of the line of David became a stranger to them.

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

Chapter 13

The Man of God and the Old Prophet of Bethel

A man of God, a new prophet, comes out of Judah, where the Lord was yet maintaining a light for David. He comes to Bethel to prophesy against Israel at the very moment that the ten-tribe kingdom has been formed.

"Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense" (v. 1). It goes without saying that he who had made his own priesthood and had consecrated anyone who wished to be (v. 33) could not have this priesthood in very high esteem. Subordinated to the royal authority, the priesthood had become a political instrument in his hands; and there was nothing surprising in the king arrogating to himself the right to carry out its rites according to his own pleasure.

The man of God cries against the altar (v. 2), not against the idol. For man to imagine that he can replace God's altar is more hateful in God's eyes than anything else he can do. God's altar

is unique; this He has proclaimed before all. Believers have but one altar, Christ, the Lamb of God (Heb. 13:10). God will judge wicked men who want to set up another altar alongside His own. A worship instituted by man cannot subsist forever; divine judgment shall fall upon it, as upon the harlot of the Revelation. But God will not destroy it without at the same time putting the priests of this profane religion to death upon their own altar. The man of God announces a king of the seed of David, Josiah, who would overturn the high places of Israel, calling him by name three hundred fifty years prior to his day (v. 2); he gives a present sign of that which would happen in years to come: the altar is rent and the ashes upon it are poured out.

The hand of the man who had established this odious system, the very hand which is stretched out against the man of God in order to seize him, is dried up at the very moment the king thought to suppress the witness of the Lord and of His Word. The hand which he is unable to bring back to himself again remains outstretched in his menacing gesture against the man of

God and against God Himself as a monument to his powerlessness. But upon the king's request the man of God intercedes that the judgment might temporarily be set aside, and that Jeroboam might be granted more time to repent (v. 6.)

God shows here that He is God indeed; He preserves his loved ones, his witnesses, and defends them. He is for us as He was for His prophet, and who can be against us? What security for the testimony! We have nothing to fear when God sends us. No one, not even the highest authority on earth, can seize us, and should this power be granted to one, it is only in the measure in which the purposes of God may be realized through his instrumentality. Such was the case with Elijah, with the apostles Peter, John, Paul, and with all the Lord's servants.

The value of the man by whom God renders testimony is so insignificant that the prophet is not even called by name in this account. He is simply a man of God — but what a title! A man of God is a servant who represents God before men and upon whom God has impressed his own character. Such a man

speaks for God, speaks as the oracles of God: an august and solemn function, but one which reduces man to nothing and removes all confidence in the flesh from him. Moses and David are each called a man of God; this name is also applied to the prophets in a time of ruin. Timothy was a man of God. 2 Timothy 3:17 shows us that he was prepared for his commission by the Word; 1 Timothy 6:11 shows us that he could not carry it out except by bringing his life and conduct into accord with what he was proclaiming.

The king's violence had returned against himself; but Satan does not regard himself defeated; he comes onto the scene and seeks to use Jeroboam as his instrument. "Come home with me, and refresh thyself, and I will give thee a present" (v. 7). Let us beware of the favors of the world even more than of its threats! If the man of God had accepted the king's testimony of gratitude, it would have been an act of disobedience that would have dishonoured the Lord. Jeroboam no doubt was ignorant of what God had prohibited His servant, but Satan was well aware of it. The profane king did realize that if the man of God would ac-

cept his hospitality and reward, he would in some measure connect himself with the king who had dishonoured the lord, and would thus tacitly declare that things were not as serious as he had first thought. Thereby his testimony would be annulled, as Satan well knew. But the prophet remains faithful; he follows the example of Abraham with the king of Sodom and accepts nothing; he obeys the word of the Lord and is not tempted by the greatest of temporal advantages. "If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee; neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place: For so was it charged me by the word of the Lord, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest" (vv. 8-9).

Whether he understands the charge given him by the Lord or not, the prophet's path is simple: God has spoken to him; he must obey. He must not return by the same path; that would be to deny that the ways of God are without repentance. And the prophet obeys.

At Bethel there was an old prophet who was not living there by command of the Lord, for the Lord was not using him in His service, but he was living there with his family. Perhaps, we might even say probably, he had nothing to do with Jeroboam's false religion, but his presence alone at Bethel sanctioned what was going on there, a thing which the prophet from Judah understood. Whether he wanted to be or not, the old prophet was associated with the evil, and the result of this association was that he, a prophet, was not in the secret of the thoughts of God. He learns them from others - from his sons who repeat the words of the Lord to him. God manifests neither Himself nor His thoughts to a servant found in an association that dishonours Him. No revelation was made to him; another was employed while he remained barren for the work of the Lord. How could he prophesy against Bethel when he was used to living there?

There is something more serious yet. This old prophet becomes an instrument of ruin for the ruin of the Lord's witness (vv. 11-19). What was his interest in acting thus against him? It was

this: If the man of God would listen to him, it would be like a divine sanction of his position at Bethel.

The same thing happens in our day also. More than one servant who should be separated from evil enters into association with another servant who is not, there in the very place where God is being dishonoured. The old prophet does not think of the consequences for his brother of the course of unfaithfulness in which he is engaging him. A false position makes us selfish and lacking in uprightness.

The old prophet catches up with the man of God on the road that goes out from Bethel. To his request, "Come home with me, and eat bread," he answers just as categorically as he had answered Jeroboam (vv. 16-17). "I am a prophet also as thou art," replies the old prophet, "and an angel spoke to me by the word of Jehovah saying, Bring him back with thee into thy house, that he may eat bread and drink water" (v. 18) - and the Word adds: "He lied unto him." But how could the man of God lend an ear for even an instant to this lie? How could he ima-

gine that there could be contradictions in the word that God had addressed to him?

And yet, this is what unfaithful Christians tell us in order to justify their bad walk in their own eyes. Everyone, they tell us, understands the Word differently. "I am a prophet also!" But no, thank God, His will can only be understood in one way, and who can understand it but the one who is separated from evil in obedience to the Word?

By appealing to brotherly love the old prophet succeeds where the king's offer had failed. "Then he went back with him, and ate bread in his house, and drank water" (v. 19). The old prophet was a pious and respectable man. Why should not the man of God believe what he said? But however pious he might be, should a man's word have more weight than the word of God? The prophet from Judah is ensnared by the age and authority of his brother prophet and by his sympathy for him. Let us ask ourselves seriously what role these ties play in our reli-

gious life when the question of obedience to the Word is placed before us.

The old prophet is severely chastised for his lie (vv. 20-22), for he becomes God's instrument to pronounce, against his will, the condemnation of his brother who had trusted in his word. He is obliged to judge in another the evil which he himself had committed. "Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord, and hast not kept the commandment which the Lord thy God commanded thee, but camest back, and hast eaten bread, and drunk water in the place, of which the Lord did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers" (vv. 21-22). If the lie of the old prophet was punished, how much more the disobedience of the man of God who had been put in an even more intimate relationship to Him by His office and the Lord's revelation.

Who does not recognize himself in the features of the man of God? "Thou hast disobeyed," says the Lord. Who does not re-

cognize himself in the features of the old prophet? Art thou a prophet also? Very well, the moment is coming when you must pronounce a curse upon your own work and punishment upon those whom you have led astray! And what will be left to you? Will it be a crown?

(Vv. 23-26). The serpent, disguised as an angel of light, had seduced the man of God. Now he finds a lion on his path. The extraordinary circumstances of his death force one and all to recognize the divine intervention. The lion is not permitted to do more than to fulfill the word of the Lord. The old prophet, instrument for the fall of his brother, is the witness of the consequences of this fall. How this ought to have reached his conscience and filled his soul with sorrow and mourning (v. 29)! His work is reduced to nothing and judged, but God uses this to bring him back; he himself is not lost. "When I am dead, then bury me in the sepulchre wherein the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones. For the saying which he cried by the word of the Lord against the altar in Bethel, and against all the houses of the high places which are in the cities of Samaria,

shall surely come to pass" (vv. 31-32). His soul is restored before he dies, and he seals the testimony of his brother against the altar of Bethel by his own, extending this testimony to all the high places in the cities of Samaria. Be our unfaithfulness what it may, God will not leave Himself without a witness. The weakest, the most guilty among us may become its bearer, if he repent. In his death the old prophet testifies to his association with the man of God (v. 31).

But no testimony stops the idolatrous career of Jeroboam (vv. 33-34). He sets his heart on the religion he has invented more than on the word of the Lord; and yet this infallible Word had declared all to him beforehand by the mouth of Ahijah. He had been able to verify it by what had happened, had received its blessings without any positive result for his soul — he was about to make acquaintance with its judgment.

Chapter 14

Jeroboam and the Prophet Ahijah

"At that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam was sick" (v. 1); this was a blow keenly felt and a reason for great anxiety on the part of the king. If this cherished son, his successor, should die, what would become of the monarchy he had thought to secure to himself by so much cunning? For Jeroboam was what men call a great politician. He had other sons, no doubt, but this one, the heir, enjoyed God's favor and that of the people. It is thus that the folly of human strategy devised apart from God becomes manifest. The Lord had assured Jeroboam of the kingdom, but he had preferred to secure it for himself by forsaking the Lord. He must learn whether his way was the way of wisdom. He had not reckoned with death; his plans had not taken into consideration the one thing men can never escape, and they were at the point of being reduced to nothing.

What to do? He remembers the prophet "who told [him] that [he] should be king over this people" (v. 2). He knew these

things. "He will tell thee what shall become of the lad." Jeroboam acknowledges the man of God's ability and thinks that he can help him. One thing, however, is lacking, that which an unconverted soul always lacks — the consciousness of having to do with God; it just does not enter his mind that he is about to come before Him. If it were otherwise, could he be telling his wife to disguise herself? No, even this profane king could hardly suppose he could hide from God by being disguised. But God was not in his thoughts, so he does not take account of the connection between the prophet and Jehovah. That which the man of God had said had come to pass; therefore it was worthwhile to consult him. Jeroboam would as easily consult a fortuneteller. "Disguise thyself," he tells his wife, "that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam." And indeed he had good reason for this. What would his people say if he, their head, who had fabricated a new religion, should turn back to the representatives of the old faith, to the prophets of Jehovah, to seek help and light from them? And then, had he not learned at his own expense that these prophets were not favorably dis-

posed towards him? Perhaps Ahijah who at one time had spoken well of him would be more favorable ... In any event, disguise yourself, he says, and bring him some presents — not such as would go with the dignity of a queen, which would give us away, but after all, a present is always in order when one goes to consult a prophet!

Ahijah was dwelling in his own city in the territory of Ephraim. He is called Ahijah the Shilonite (1 Kings 11:29; 1 Kings 12:15). It was fitting that God have His prophet in Israel and on the other hand, how well suited was this place for the prophet of the Lord! It was at Shiloh that the ark had remained during the long period of the judges and of the priesthood of Eli. One could call it to mind in Israel now that one could no longer go up to the temple at Jerusalem. To the faithful, obliged to dwell among the ten tribes, at least there remained the remembrance of the worship of former days, the initial blessings connected with the presence of the tabernacle at Shiloh. "For go now," said the Lord, "unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I caused my name to dwell at the first" (Jer. 7:12). A man of faith

must not forget that the name of the Lord had been placed there, and he could consequently reside there as well. In the troublesome circumstances in which Israel now was, perhaps Ahijah had no more to do at Shiloh than did the old prophet at Bethel, but he was separated from idolatry there and fit to receive communications from God who had placed His name there. How good it is in a day of ruin to remember that which was from the beginning! One can always find God there, for if His ways change in the different dispensations, He Himself never changes. He can still reveal Himself to the faithful soul there in the place where He has placed His name in the beginning.

Ahijah lived in hope at Shiloh. Apparently all was against him; how could he still be useful in service? "And Ahijah could not see; for his eyes were set by reason of his age." But the prophet's dull eyes did not hinder his spiritual vision, as had been the case with Eli. He remained in direct connection with the Lord. God speaks to him, reveals to him who it is who is about to come to him, for what purpose, and that she will come

disguised (v. 5). Ahijah's natural sight could never discern all this, but by grace, the Lord had given him his real sight. He had seen everything; He sees in the present and in the future. Ahijah knew and saw because the Lord knew and saw. Blessing of this kind is found only in communion of heart with God. May it ever be ours! It is not our weaknesses that hinder divine communications from being granted us; it is our worldliness and our disobedience. God finds satisfaction in weak vessels if their hearts are faithful to Him, and the weakest — Paul was a testimony to this publicly — receive most precious revelations right here in this world.

"I am sent to thee," says Ahijah to Jeroboam's wife, "with a hard message" (v. 6). As he could not go to her, God brought her to him, and to Himself who had ordered all things from the child's illness right down to the thoughts and decisions of Jeroboam, in order to bring this latter face to face with the Word that the Lord had sent against him by the prophet. "Thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do only that which

is right in my sight" (v. 8). Could David have spoken thus of himself? No — neither he nor any other man. But God had chastened him as a son whom one acknowledges, and the discipline had borne fruit. In virtue of his sacrifice God had been able to pass over the sin of His servant, never to remember it any more, and to consider only the fruit produced in his heart, His own work in which He could find pleasure. But to Jeroboam He says, "But thou hast done evil above all that were before thee, and hast gone and made thee other gods, and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back" (v. 9). Jeroboam had dispensed with God, had despised Him as a useless object. And is it any different today? Man dispenses with God as with a "negligible quantity"; he banishes Him from his life, casting Him behind his back so as to see Him no more. That which man has before him is the pursuit of his own plans, his ambition, and his well-being; he does not think about what he has cast behind him. But the moment will arrive when like Jeroboam, he must turn around to meet the God whom he has counted as nothing face to face. Then he will

hear this terrible word: "I ... will take away the house of Jeroboam, as a man takes away dung, till it be all gone" (v. 10). God will cast him to the dogs and to the fowl of the heavens. So much for the future. But for the present, death is at the door: "When thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die" (v. 12).

He shall die! What a judgment upon Jeroboam! What grace for the child! He was one of the Lord's elect. "In him there is found something good toward Jehovah the God of Israel, in the house of Jeroboam" (v. 13). The eyes and heart of God rested upon this weak offshoot of family given up to destruction. There too God had a remnant according to the election of grace. Of such a young child was the kingdom of heaven. He could not remain in Israel. God would take him out of the scene of judgment to have him with Himself. He was righteous. "The righteous perishes, and no man lays it to heart; and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from before the evil. He enters into peace" (Isa. 57:1-2). Just so before the flood the righteous, Noah's contemporaries, were gathered up; just so the saints will be gathered up at the ap-

proaching day of the coming of the Lord: "I also will keep thee out of the hour of trial, which is about to come upon the whole habitable world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Rev. 3:10). But what? - already now! Yes, judgment is at the door; there will be no more delay. Oh, if only men's consciences might be reached before it is too late! Already now! How this reminds us of the words in the Revelation: "The time is near. Let him that does unrighteously do unrighteously still; and let the filthy make himself filthy still ..." (Rev. 22:10-11).

But the people must be judged, too (vv. 15, 16), not just because the king had seduced them, but because they had themselves sinned, for "they have made their Asherahs, provoking Jehovah to anger." They must be judged according to the principle set forth in Romans 5:12: "As by one man sin entered into the world, and by sin death; and thus death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

From this moment Jeroboam's history comes to a close. The chronicles of the kings of Israel have recorded it, but God

passes over it in silence. If He makes mention of it somewhat in the Second Book of Chronicles, it is in reference to Abijah, Rehoboam's successor.* Nadab, Jeroboam's son, succeeds his father.

- * We intentionally are not relating the account in 2 Chronicles to what we have here. It is preferable to let events speak in the context where God has recorded them. When we do otherwise we run into danger of confusing principles which should be kept distinct and of losing a part of the blessing God has attached to each book of His Word. Thus, except for details we have already come to, we shall refrain from commenting here on those things God has not given us in the Books of the Kings.

In a few words (vv. 21-31) we have the history of Rehoboam, king of Judah. It does not appear to be he himself who introduced idolatry into his land. It was rather the act of the people (v. 22), but Rehoboam in allowing the evil to become established in his kingdom is just as guilty as Judah, because he was responsible for Judah's conduct (cf. 2 Chr. 12:1-2, 14). His mother, it is twice repeated (vv. 21, 31), was Naamah, an Am-

monitess. How this would have influenced the sin of Judah, for Solomon had built high places for Moloch, the abomination of the children of Ammon, for the sake of this woman and her fellowcountrywomen, if there were such among the kings' wives. Idolatry goes hand in hand with most horrible corruption (v. 24; Rom. 1) — and such things took place among the people of God! God had destroyed the cities of the plain and had cast out before His people the nations whose iniquity had become full. What would He do to Judah?

Shishak, the king of Egypt, comes up against Jerusalem (vv. 25-28). All Solomon's prosperity, the treasures of the temple, the riches of the king's house, the golden shields of his guard, all is gone, and so quickly! In less than seventeen years the kingdom of David's son collapses — all its glory is cast down and trodden underfoot! The gold is gone, and only brass is left in its place (v. 27).

Chapter 15

Nadab and Baasha, Kings of Israel; Abijam and Asa, Kings of Judah

Abijam or Abijah (2 Chr. 13), the son of Rehoboam, began to reign over Judah in the eighteenth year of Jeroboam, king of Israel. His mother was Maachah, the daughter of Absalom. Absalom's mother was named Maachah (2 Sam. 3:3); it was natural that this name should be perpetuated in the family. This Maachah the mother of Abijam must herself have been the granddaughter of Absalom according to the evidence of 2 Chronicles 13:2. Here in verse 10 Maachah is called the mother of Asa, Abijam's son, according to the Jewish custom, although she was his grandmother. This woman was a worthy counterpart of Naamah, the mother of Rehoboam, an Ammonitess. Throughout the course of these books we shall see how the character of their mothers and where they came from had its influence upon their children. A pious mother sees her sons prospering round about her. The apostle Paul reminds Timothy of his blessed ancestry: "The unfeigned faith ... which dwelt

first in thy grandmother Lois, and in thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that in thee also" (2 Tim. 1:5). The children of the "elect lady" walked in the truth (2 John 4). We shall notice other similar things as we go through Kings and Chronicles.

Here we find the other side of what we have just been saying. A profane or worldly mother is all the more dangerous for the moral development of her children, as according to divine order, both in nature and in relationship, the responsibility of guiding their youthful years is naturally entrusted to her. Thus it was that during the three years of his reign Abijam walked in all the sins of his father. "Nevertheless," it is said, "for David's sake did the Lord his God give him a lamp in Jerusalem, to set up his son after him, and to establish Jerusalem" (v. 4). God remembers David and his obedience, even though he had turned aside from uprightness in the matter of Urijah; but after the bitter discipline this had necessitated, his restored soul had again found fellowship with his God. The Lord did not forget these things; thus we see Abijam's success and son, Asa, for David's sake raised up as a true witness for God in Judah. Only the

grace of God could do this, not the merits of man, and so much the more so as Asa was placed under the same female influence as had been his father. His grandmother Maachah sought to promote the practice of idolatry under his reign, but Asa's faith fought this influence, reproved it, and destroyed it in order that the rights of the Lord might be known again in Judah. Maachah occupied the position of queen, perhaps of regent mother, at Asa's court. He stripped her of her dignity and prestige, she who in face of her grandson's zeal to abolish idolatry had ventured and had wished to reestablish it in its most corrupt forms.

Asa's reign was a long one and singularly blessed; it lasted for forty-one years, thus being longer than the reigns of David and of Solomon. Chronicles gives us the detailed account of all the faithfulness which he demonstrated. Here the Word considers him more from the standpoint of responsibility. The close of his reign is marked by a very sad lack of faith. Baasha, the king of Israel, comes up against Judah and begins to build Ramah with the goal of shutting up Asa in his kingdom so that he might not be able to go out (v. 17). In order to oppose this project Asa re-

lies upon Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, sends him presents, courts his alliance, and uses him to make Baasha depart. This plan was successful to all appearance: the king of Israel abandoned Ramah, the building materials for which were then dispersed. But what unfaithfulness in this pious king who had vanquished Zerah the Ethiopian with his army of a million men (2 Chr. 14:9) to fail to commit his interests to the Lord. A league with the world at first may bring us advantages, but afterwards we taste its bitter fruits. Asa's conduct is not severely condemned here as it is in Chronicles, because the kings of Judah are not the special object with which the Spirit of God is occupied. But how sad to hear these words in the mouth of a godly king: "There is a league between me and thee, as between my father and thy father!" (v. 19). Abijam had walked "in all the sins of his father," and lo, Asa identifies himself with him. His father had allied himself with the enemies of God's people; Asa acknowledges and seeks after this alliance!

"Asa slept with his fathers" (v. 24) — the same words that are said of Jeroboam, of Rehoboam, and of so many others. It may

be a special favor, for the opposite is said of certain wicked kings and of their posterity (cf. 1 Kings 14:11), but this favor is far from indicating that the Lord took pleasure in them or that they had found beyond the tomb the happiness their hearts had sought in vain in the world. It is still so everywhere here below. The sons are buried beside their fathers; they die, if one may so say, a natural death, without letting us draw a comforting conclusion as to their eternal future.

"In the time of his old age he was diseased in his feet" (v. 23), and there again Asa manifests his lack of confidence in God: "Yet in his disease he did not seek Jehovah, but the physicians" (2 Chr. 16:12). One unjudged act of independence (cf. 2 Chr. 16:9-10) necessarily leads to another; at the same time the judgment of God falls upon those who instead of bearing his testimony, have preferred to seek the alliance, support, and help of the world.

In order not to interrupt the account of the events of Asa's reign, Baasha's attack, though much later, had been mentioned

in verse 17. The Word turns back in verse 25 and tells us of Nadab, the son of Jeroboam, who began to reign over Israel in the second year of Asa. His reign lasted two years; this short period of time was sufficient to prove his iniquity. The Lord's word against Jeroboam is fulfilled with regard to his son and all his family (cf. 1 Kings 14:14). Baasha conspires against him, smites him, and slays him at Gibbethon and reigns in his stead in the third year of Asa, king of Judah. "And it came to pass when he was king, he smote all the house of Jeroboam; he left to Jeroboam none that breathed; until he had destroyed him, according to the word of Jehovah which he spoke by his servant Ahijah the Shilonite, because of the sins of Jeroboam which he sinned, and wherewith he made Israel to sin; by his provocation with which he provoked Jehovah the God of Israel to anger" (vv. 29-30). Baasha reigned twenty-four years and did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.

This whole account, filled with wars and cruelty, follows Solomon's reign of peace which ended so quickly on account of the unfaithfulness of the king and of his people. "And there had

been war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of his life" (v. 6). "And there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days" (v. 16), and verse 32 repeats the very same thing. This is one of the principal symptoms of decline. War is declared, implacable war between people of the same race. Rehoboam had been at the point of attempting war, but, warned by the Lord, he had desisted. Next the kings of Israel are authors of warfare, for they feel their position jeopardized by the maintenance of God's testimony in Judah. A nation which has turned idolatrous after having known the true God cannot endure God's testimony so near by. It hates this and wages desperate warfare against it.

Chapter 16

Complete Decadence

Prophets of the Lord are multiplied under these ill-omened reigns. We have first seen Ahijah the Shilonite prophesying to Jeroboam that he would be king over the ten tribes (1 Kings 11:29), then pronouncing the death of his son and the annihila-

tion of his whole line to the same king (1 Kings 14). After him Shemaiah, the prophet to Rehoboam, persuading the king and his people not to fight against their brethren, the children of Israel (1 Kings 12:22; 2 Chr. 11:2), the only thing appropriate for those who yet maintained the lamp of David. They, the Lord's witnesses, ought to accept the division as the result of their sin and ought to commit themselves to God who would know how to remedy the situation once His judgment, having run its course, would bear its fruit. And that is why Ahijah had said to Jeroboam: "And I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not for ever" (1 Kings 11:39). Before these prophets, under the reign of Solomon Iddo the seer had prophesied concerning Jeroboam,* to say nothing as to Nathan, who had played such a marked role in the days of David and at the opening of the reign of his son. Lastly, Azariah the son of Oded encouraged Asa, the king of Judah, to restore the worship of the true God after his victory over Zerah the Ethiopian (2 Chr. 15:1, 8).

* See also as to Iddo: 2 Chr. 12:15; 2 Chr. 13:22.

All these prophets were, properly speaking, prophets of Judah, for even Ahijah the Shilonite first prophesied to Jeroboam near Jerusalem, and would not have been found in the territory of the ten tribes were it not through the circumstances of the division of the kingdom. It is so too with regard to "the man of God from Judah" who prophesied against Jeroboam in 1 Kings 13. We will not speak of the "old prophet" in that same 1 Kings 13, remaining behind at Bethel through his unfaithfulness.

Hanani, a prophet of Judah (2 Chr. 16:7), prophesies against Asa who had called upon Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, for help against Baasha, the king of Israel. Despite the apparent success of this league, Hanani tells the king that henceforth he would have wars and not the rest he had hoped for in his alliance with the world. Pious Asa, incensed at the divine reproof, sets himself against the Lord by casting His prophet into prison!

After Hanani there appears Jehu, his son. He is a prophet in Israel as well as in Judah. He prophesies against Baasha, the king

of Israel, Asa's enemy, but also against Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, the friend of Ahab (2 Chr. 19:2; 2 Chr. 20:34), for these two things — the world's hatred for the children of God and the friendship of God's children for the world — are equally sinful in the eyes of the Lord.

Jehu prophesies against Baasha who had smitten the house of Jeroboam, pronouncing the same judgment upon the former that had already come upon the latter: "Him that dies of Baasha in the city shall the dogs eat, and him that dies of his in the field shall the fowl of the heavens eat" (v. 4; cf. 1 Kings 14:11). Nevertheless Baasha, just like Jeroboam, "slept with his fathers," and "The rest of the acts of Baasha, and what he did, and his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?" (vv. 5, 6). Reference is made quite frequently in these books to the chronicles of the kings of Israel or to those of the kings of Judah. These chronicles were drawn up during the course of the reign of all the sovereigns of those times, whether Jewish or Gentile. They have nothing to do with the Word of God. That which it has not pleased the Lord to re-

cord or to explain is found recorded there. These chronicles have been lost; perhaps someone will one day find some fragments of them. The believer has no need for any of them; he has God's Word. There in God's account he finds all that is necessary for him as well as the divine evaluation of people, events, and things. Certain deeds may be recorded in non-inspired writings, and even with great exactness, but these deeds are never accompanied by anything more than human evaluation. And what is more, men of God, prophets, seers could be used to draw up these chronicles, to make these genealogical registers, to write these commentaries (2 Chr. 12:15; 2 Chr. 13:22); these writings are still not the inspired Word of God. In spite of their human interest they are of no importance whatsoever for setting forth the truth of God. And so they have disappeared, whereas the Word of God remains.

When they were still in existence they testified to the divinity of this Word and to the reality of the facts recorded in it; now that they have disappeared, they have no other witness than the mention of them in the sacred writings. Amid the ruin and dis-

appearance of these things the Word of God remains, the only monument, the only document that cannot be shaken!

The history of the kings of Israel becomes increasingly dark and tragic. The curse of God rests upon this apostate line. Elah, the son of Baasha, reigns two years (v. 8); Zimri, who had a high rank in the army, kills him at Tirzah while he was drinking himself drunk. Thus the word of Jehu the prophet begins to be fulfilled, for "As soon as he sat on his throne, he slew all the house of Baasha: he left him not a male, neither of his kinsmen nor of his friends" (v. 11). This action of extermination was accomplished in a few days, for Zimri reigned seven days at Tirzah (v. 15). And these seven days were sufficient for him to do "evil in the sight of Jehovah, in walking in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin which he did, making Israel to sin" (v. 19). When a man's heart is estranged from God, each of his deeds bears the impress of this, and so it is that a mass of iniquities may accumulate in so short a period of time.

The people, encamped before Gibbethon on the day of Zimri's usurpation, choose Omri, the captain of the army, for their king. These facts always repeat themselves in the decline of empires. When the people is without God, His will is counted as nothing. That which He established in the beginning is done away with; he who has might reigns, and as might lies in the army, the empire is at the mercy of the military power. Conspiracy on the one hand, soldierly revolution on the other.

Another feature characterizes the decline of the kingdom. Israel is divided against itself: how shall it stand? Half the people choose Tibni for king, while the other half follows Omri. This latter prevails: Tibni dies, Omri reigns. He reigns twelve years altogether, six years at Tirzah. He builds Samaria and does worse than all those who had been before him. He sleeps with his fathers and is buried in Samaria.

Ahab, the son of Omri, begins to reign during Asa's lifetime yet, for all the catastrophes mentioned in 1 Kings 15 and 1 Kings 16 take place during this latter's reign. Just as the reigns

of Ahab's predecessors (Nadab, a year; Elah, two years; Zimri, seven days) except for Omri had been short, just so the reign of Ahab is prolonged (twenty-two years). Ahab has time before him for doing only evil. He follows the idolatrous worship of Jeroboam, but does worse yet: he marries Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and bows down before Baal to whom he builds an altar and a temple at Samaria. He sets up an image of the Phoenician Astarte and provokes the Lord God of Israel to anger (vv. 29-33).

And it is in such days that God, provoked to anger, goes forth to manifest His power in testimony against the evil, but also to deliver this miserable people who were willfully serving demons. What a God is ours! He chooses the moment when man has completely rejected Him to show that He is God, He alone, as we shall see in that which follows. But as for us Christians, have we not contemplated what God is at the cross of Christ?

Before beginning with the history of Elijah, one detail is added: "In his [Ahab's] days Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho; he laid its foundation in Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates in Segub his youngest, according to the word of Jehovah which he spoke through Joshua the son of Nun" (v. 34). Five hundred thirty-two years had passed, and the Lord had not forgotten His word (Joshua 6:26), a detail all the more remarkable that it is intended to prove before the eyes of men the infallible authority of all the words God has spoken. Israel was idolatrous, the name of the Lord was being dishonoured, evil of most frightful description was vaunting itself in broad daylight in this time of apostasy. Why did God not intervene? Why did He not crush this ungodly one? It is because He is a God of infinite patience and He proves this. He fulfills His word when after five centuries man might have thought and no doubt did think that He was no longer paying any attention. One act of disobedience brings on the judgment foretold, down to the very letter. This event takes place before the eyes of all; did it speak to the conscience of the people and of their king?

And it is a man of Bethel who builds Jericho! There is no more fear of God before the eyes of Israel. God's threats are just as despised as His promises. This event is given us here as being morally the final stage of the condition of the individual in a time of apostasy, for historically speaking, it took place during the twenty-two years of Ahab's reign.

Part 3: Chapter 17-22

Division of the Kingdom

1 Kings 17:1-7

Elijah and the Brook Cherith

God's Word here introduces the first great prophet of Israel. As we have said previously, all the other prophets had come from Judah or had begun their ministry before the separation of the ten tribes. Elijah was "of the inhabitants of Gilead." He comes on the scene in the most evil days of Israel's history when the falling away is universal and the worship of Baal, patronized

by Ahab and Jezebel, had become the national religion. Under this government the servants of the Lord are obliged to hide in order to save their lives, and those still seen are silent. Thus to all appearance Elijah is all alone before this formidable apostasy. His name is characteristic: Elijah means "Whose God is Jehovah," and each of us can read this name in this man's words and in all his conduct. His God is the one whom Israel had abandoned. His testimony is just as characteristic: he is completely separated from the general apostasy. He is the witness of the truth in the midst of evil, and the truth always separates us for God. "Sanctify them by the truth," the Lord said. This truth here consists above all in the judgments of God. In a broad general way Elijah is the prophet of judgment just as, on the other hand Elisha is the prophet of grace. Nonetheless, as we shall see in the very course of this chapter and of the next, Elijah's mission is not accomplished without the accompaniment of grace and deliverance, and this at the very time God's judgments are being prepared and running their course.

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

"Except by my word," it is because his word is that of the Lord which had been revealed to him (vv. 2, 8; 18-1).

But in order for the Word to unfold its power outwardly by means of us, something more is necessary than feeding upon it. Dependence is needful. Elijah announces the mind of God, proclaims the word of God, but he prays (and that is dependence) in order that this mind may be realized. This same dependence in prayer is the source of the prophet's power. The sphere of this power is very elevated: it is heaven. Heaven opens and closes according to Elijah's word; he makes fire come down from heaven to consume the burnt-offering in the presence of Baal's priests. In every one of these situations we find the prophet praying. "Elias was a man of like passions to us, and he prayed with prayer that it should not rain; and it did not rain upon the earth three years and six months; and again he prayed, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth caused its fruit to spring forth" (James 5:17-18). Our chapter does not tell us that Elijah prayed the first time, but much later in the Epistle of James the Word reveals this to us, for God remembers these

prayers, records them, and can reveal them at the appropriate time. None of the prayers of His beloved fall to the ground. When fire came down from heaven it was not only at Elijah's word, but also at his prayer. When the power of the prophet was displayed in raising the dead, the source of this power again was in prayer (1 Kings 17:20-22).

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

Such was thus the threefold cause of Elijah's extraordinary power: he stood before God, received His word, and lived in dependence upon Him. On that one occasion when his faith

failed, he neglected these three things! Instead of standing before God, he fled to the wilderness; he forgot to consult the Lord; and he went according to the dictates of his own heart, which is independence.

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

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

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

Was it not so with the Lord Himself? Only He who could say, "I am lowly in heart," had no need of being kept in humility; but the Word is silent about His mature years preceding His public ministry. There He was, living before God, finding His delight in dependence, waiting upon the will of God to act, then coming forth when the time was come in the power of the

Holy Spirit to defeat Satan and to deliver those enslaved by him. Much more than Elijah, Jesus was a man of prayer. Prayer was always the source of power with Him and preceded its manifestation. We see this at His baptism by John (Luke 3:21-22; cf. Luke 4:1, 14); upon the mountain (Luke 6:12; cf. v. 19); at His transfiguration (Luke 9:28; cf. v. 29); and on so many other occasions during His career.

But let us again go back for a moment to God's ways with His prophet. They follow a definite order gradually leading on to the high point of his mission. God speaks to him; he believes, obeys the divine word, then comes to realize entire dependence at Cherith and at Zarephath. The more he depends upon the Lord, the more he learns to know His faithfulness and the riches of His love and grace. All this is governed, as we saw to begin with, by a complete separation from evil. The secret of power is in all these things. Their absence is the reason for the lack of real power among Christians in our day. It is not that pretensions to power are lacking — but where is its reality? One no longer believes in the Word of God, one lives in inde-

pendence and disobedience to this Word, one is in fellowship with the world which has crucified Christ, and one is crying loudly that one has found the secret of power! There indeed exists a secret of power in the world, but of a satanic power based on the giving up of all these things. Let us beware of becoming bewitched by this kind of power. Elijah's power had a character distinguishing it from every other kind of power: it was the power of the Spirit of God, and every true servant of God had to recognize this (1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:16).

Chapter 17:8-24

Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath

When the brook had dried up, Elijah was sent to Zarephath to be sustained there by a widow woman (v. 9). In Luke 4:25-26 he is sent to the widow to sustain her. Both these things are true and our account proves this. God had a double purpose: to sustain His servant and to bring a message of grace to the widow by him. The Lord, speaking in the synagogue, compares this message to the gospel spread among the nations beyond the

borders of Israel. The evangelist finds his own sustenance in bringing the good news of grace to others. But we find a third thing in Luke's account. If the message is carried to the nations, personified by a Zidonian widow, the widows of Israel are set aside. Judgment upon Israel's state opens the door to the Gentiles to receive grace, and this, remarkably, in the very territory from whence Jezebel, that great corrupter of God's people, came (1 Kings 16:31). In Matthew 15:21 the Lord withdraws to this same territory, but though He was still being sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, He could not be hidden to faith; and faith finds in Him much more than crumbs fallen from the children's table.

Here then Elijah is sent in grace to a widow of Zarephath who is dying of hunger, and just as much as Israel under the weight and consequences of the judgment God had pronounced. This woman was going to die, and she knew it. Elijah's words stirred up the faith that lay in her heart. "And she went and did according to the word of Elijah" (v. 15). Instead of doubting something that would happen in a way incomprehensible to human

reason she accepted this impossibility and found salvation therein for herself and for her son. The king of Israel, too, felt this imminent death weighing down upon himself and his people, but instead of being sure about his lot, he sought means to escape it. This is the opposite of faith: it is unbelief. Ahab thought he could have or find human resources against famine and death; this woman had none; "That we may eat it, and die" (v. 12).

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

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

This whole scene speaks to us of Christ. Elijah is a picture of Him. In sympathy he entered into all the consequences of man's sin. Just as Christ wept at the tomb of Lazarus, Elijah "cried to Jehovah and said, Jehovah, my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?" (v. 20). Then he brought the dead child to life again,

taking his place. "And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried to Jehovah and said, Jehovah, my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again!" (v. 21).

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

thy Holy One to see corruption." In the same way, as we have already remarked, here Elijah expresses his dependence by praying.

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

1 Kings 17 has occupied us with a time when Elijah was hidden from the eyes of his people and from the world. We have seen him exercise a ministry of grace during this period. In the following chapter he is going to manifest himself publicly at the time for executing judgment. Do we need to point out how much the prophet in this respect is a remarkable type of Christ? We are in the day when the Lord is hidden, but when the grace that brings salvation is appearing to all men, when the power of resurrection is being announced to the nations. The days are coming when our rejected Lord will again appear, when every eye shall see Him, and they which have pierced him, and all the tribes of the land shall wail because of him. Yea, Amen!

1 Kings 18:1-16

Elijah and Obadiah

A third time the word of the Lord comes to Elijah (v. 1; 1 Kings 17:2, 8); a third time Elijah obeys. The career of this man of God is marked by obedience. May it characterize us also! Only one time does Elijah go where his own heart directs him (1

Kings 19:3), and the thread of his career is interrupted. Doubtless he then arises and sets out at the angel's word (1 Kings 19:8), but it is that he may come into God's presence and there learn to judge himself. Later we shall see that despite this, God does not set His servant aside entirely, for the experience of learning to know himself bears fruit; we find him again in 1 Kings 21 before Ahab and in 2 Kings 1 boldly presenting himself before Ahaziah's messengers to pronounce the judgment of the king of Israel.

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

"I will send rain upon the face of the earth." This does not hinder Elijah from praying that it may rain (v. 42). He is in full fellowship with the Lord, having received the revelation of His

thoughts and of His purpose, but in order to be an instrument for the fulfillment of His ways in grace, he must depend upon Him. God could well give rain without Elijah or by someone other than the prophet, but He never sets His seal upon disobedience or independence; and it is this which so often strikes the work of God's children with barrenness.

While Elijah was enjoying divine abundance at Cherith and at Zarephath at a time of want, Ahab was using all his faculties to seek to bring about a remedy for the judgment of God by strategies of human wisdom. He associates Obadiah, the steward of his house, one who occupies a public place at the king's court, with himself. "Obadiah feared the Lord greatly" (v. 3). This might seem to be enough for a faithful walk, for "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; (Prov. 9:10). But we are also told: "Fear the Lord, and depart from evil" (Prov. 3:7). And again: "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil" (Prov. 8:13). One may fear the Lord greatly, yet nevertheless dishonour Him by being in association with the world that rejects Him. This position, so lacking in openness, is found on every hand in pro-

fessing Christendom. Yet nevertheless Obadiah's piety had prompted him to hide those who were being persecuted for the Lord's name's sake. "And it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of Jehovah, that Obadiah took a hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and maintained them with bread and water" (v. 4). In one sense, his work had not been insignificant. It was no small thing, especially on part of a man in the public eye at Ahab's court, to hide one hundred prophets whose lives were being hunted and to feed them.

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

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

Elijah meets Obadiah (vv. 7-16). This godly man recognizes the Lord's servant and falls on his face before him. Others perhaps would have passed by on the other side of the road, embarrassed by this so dangerous meeting. "Go, say to thy Lord, Behold Elijah!" such is the word of the prophet. Elijah, as we

have seen, being accustomed to this word, often heard a "Go," and he would go. "Go," he himself had said to the poor Zidonian widow, who had then gone and done "according to the word of Elijah." With the one as well as with the other this stemmed from faith, which always obeys. But where is Obadiah's faith? A believer may "greatly fear the Lord," and have an unbelieving heart. Obadiah is struck with consternation and terrified: "And now thou sayest, Go, say to thy lord, Behold Elijah!" (vv. 11, 14). When it came to obeying Ahab, Obadiah did not object; but when it came to obeying God, he found objections to His word presented by the prophet. "And it shall come to pass when I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of Jehovah shall carry thee whither I know not; and when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he will kill me" (v. 12). He who can adapt himself to Ahab's plans for finding sustenance and avoiding death cannot rely upon the Lord and entrust his life to Him. How many souls are in this situation! When the word of God calls for simple obedience on their part, they quickly find fault with it. From this, we may be sure, come the

great majority of the arguments of children of God who, walking in a pathway of disobedience, seek to avoid the positive obligation of obeying by persuading themselves that the Word contradicts itself or is not clear: "Thou sayest, Go, say to thy lord, Behold Elijah! And it shall come to pass ... that the Spirit of Jehovah shall carry thee whither I know not." This is also the source of the lack of deliverance of souls bound up in this state of things. They are afraid, afraid of the world's opinion, afraid of difficulties, afraid of death: "He will kill me."

"And now thou sayest ... Behold Elijah!" Elijah's coming, as we shall see in the rest of the chapter, meant the deliverance of the little remnant of Israel through the judgment of Baal's priests. It was also the sign of the end of God's judgment upon His people and it ushered in the blessings that would follow: "Go, show thyself to Ahab; and I will send rain upon the face of the earth" (v. 1). Could the news of Elijah's coming bring anything but joy to one who was faithful? How the seven thousand who had not bowed the knee before Baal must have rejoiced at this news: "Behold Elijah!" For them it meant the end

of long sufferings, the sure hope of better times. But it could not be so for Obadiah. He was too entangled with the world to rejoice at seeing its yoke broken. Is it not the same today when one speaks to Christians of the appearing of the One who is greater than Elijah? We are not speaking of His coming to take away His saints, but of His appearing to distribute rewards and to execute judgment upon the world. Will these souls be able to say that they "love His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8)? Will they, like the elders in the Revelation, in the face of this display of judgment have only adoration and the homage of their crowns cast before the throne to render? Obadiah did not know this assurance. He saw nothing but this lot awaiting him with the king: "He will kill me," a fate which due to his lack of faith he considered to be more sure than deliverance.

We find many different characters in Israel in these sad days for faith and the testimony. It is no longer the time of spiritual power, when the beloved of the Lord, gathered around Himself, resolutely enter into the conflict. These are days of weakness when the faithful are persecuted and hide themselves, no longer

able as a collective testimony to resist the evil. In short, Elijah alone is a witness. And Obadiah? Beyond doubt he shows his piety in secretly providing for the needs of the saints, and this devotion is recognized by God; but to be the messenger of Elijah (of Christ) before the world goes beyond his courage. Nevertheless God had said to him, Go! One would be glad to unload the responsibility that the word of the Lord imposes on us onto anyone else, for how can one carry it out? Would it not be openly censuring Ahab's apostasy to go and say to him, "Behold Elijah"? And how can one speak thus when one has never done so before?

And then, look again! In this state of bondage to the world one feels it necessary to justify oneself by giving testimony to oneself: "Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of Jehovah, how I hid a hundred men of Jehovah's prophets by fifty in a cave, and maintained them with bread and water?" (v. 13). How many Christians themselves report of their work, of their activity and of its results, thus giving a wrong impression to themselves and to others as to their moral

condition! Obadiah adds: "I thy servant fear Jehovah from my youth" (v. 12), and this was true enough, but it was not for Obadiah to state this. God had deigned to use him, even in the wrong position he held, and he could be sure that the Lord would not forget even a cup of water given to one of these little ones — but how much more pleasing it would have been to God to have seen Obadiah, full of trust and obedience, setting forth at His command to carry out the mission to the king with which he had been entrusted!

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

Chapter 18:17-46

Elijah Before the Prophets of Baal

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

"Send," says Elijah to Ahab, "gather to me all Israel to mount Carmel." "So Ahab sent to all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel" (vv. 19-20). God wants it so; whether Ahab wants it or not, this must be done. But doubtless the thought would never occur in the mind

of this impious king that his religion with its eight* hundred fifty prophets would be absolutely nothing before one single prophet of Jehovah!

{*In addition see 1 Kings 22:6.

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

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

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

Two religions meet face to face: Elijah's and Baal's, for the third, Israel's, is party to both. Publicly these two religions appear to have the same sacrifice. How are they to be distinguished? One of the bullocks must be consumed by fire from

heaven, but not the other. By this means one will be able to recognize the true God; by this means the people too will be able to learn to know themselves so that they may be turned to repentance.

Elijah says, "Draw near to me" (v. 30). At that time he was God's representative upon earth, that which Christ was in perfection. If they would remain afar off, Israel would not be able to be witness to what God was about to do. Elijah repairs the altar that was broken down (vv. 31, 32). The twelve stones represented the twelve tribes, the people in their entirety before God. The prophet, at a time of ruin, bears testimony to the unity of the people, just as today's witnesses bear testimony to the oneness of the body of Christ. Elijah does not act as a sectarian man would, but by faith in the deep reality of this unity which God had established at the beginning. Outwardly the altar was broken down; that is to say, Israel as a whole no longer existed. But it was enough that one man should bear witness with his altar of twelve stones that that which God had established in the beginning would remain forever. It is the same

today. We do not tire of rendering testimony to the fact that for us there is but one body and one Spirit, just as there was one altar of twelve stones for Elijah. Those who proclaim this truth will ever be few in number. Perhaps they will remain alone like Elijah, but what does their number matter if this testimony has been entrusted to us, as it was to Elijah, in the midst of universal apostasy?

The burnt offering was the victim presented to God for the people. Fire from heaven — divine judgment — falls and consumes everything: the sacrifice, the wood, and the very altar itself, leaving nothing standing (v. 38). In this way the Lord indicated that there was but one offering by which one could know the true God, the offering upon which His judgment had fallen. Each Israelite present at this sight could at the same time learn what was due to him, and that the people, represented by the twelve stones of the altar, could not stand before the judgment of God. But oh, the wonder of grace! If the people were present at their own judgment and saw themselves being consumed together with the sacrifice, they were not struck down

themselves. The sacrifice was consumed; the people are consumed with the sacrifice; but judgment without mercy upon that which represents them before God sets them free to rejoice in His deliverance. So also we can say, "Our old man has been crucified with him, that the body of sin might be annulled, that we should no longer serve sin" (Rom. 6:6).

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

Elijah had two desires: that God might be glorified, and that the people might learn to know Him. "Jehovah, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things by thy word. Answer me, Jehovah, answer me, that this people may know that thou Jehovah art God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again" (vv. 36-37). There is a twofold

result: the people, delivered by divine power, acknowledge the Lord, turn their heart to Him, and render homage to Him! "And all the people saw it, and they fell on their faces and said, Jehovah, he is God! Jehovah, he is God!" (v. 39).

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

Elijah goes up to the top of Carmel. His patience emerges victor from the trial; his faith has its perfect work. The showers of

blessing come after God's judgment has fallen upon the burnt offering and only after Israel, in presence of this event, has acknowledged the Lord and turned their hearts back to Him. In our days abundance of rain is sought without the conscience being reached. This desire can be crowned with but one result. The rain was not given to Israel until after the work of God had been done for them and in them.

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

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

Completely separated from the evil that surrounds him, Elijah is not in the least taken up with himself nor desirous of personal recognition. He stands before the Lord, hears His word, obeys Him, lives in dependence upon Him in every detail. He depends upon God for sustenance, to bring grace to the nations,

to resist the enemy, to bear witness, to exercise divine power in holding back or in giving rain, but above all else, to cause fire to fall from heaven upon the burnt offering and to judge the world. He waits upon the Lord, walks with Him, and, like Enoch, will be caught up into glory. The word of the Lord, the angel of the Lord, the Lord Himself all speak to Elijah; as for himself, he speaks to God and God listens to him. Elijah is a friend of God (1 Kings 17:22, 1 Kings 8:38, 44). Elijah is an epistle of Christ. But, where the Lord never failed, this man of God did fail, and that is what we are about to consider.

Chapter 19:1-9

Elijah Before Jezebel and Before Himself

It is worthwhile to remark as we begin this chapter, that if men of God or their actions serve as types for us in the Word, this does not mean that these men understood the hidden meaning of their lives or their acts. Without even going beyond Elijah's history, we have already remarked that in Luke's Gospel the Lord gives an import to his mission to the widow at Zarephath

quite other than that in the account here in our book. The fire falling from heaven upon the burnt offering is another proof of this. Elijah could not have seen in this either the cross or crucifixion with Christ, things that have become so clear for us in the light of the gospel. In fact, Elijah as a man of God was above all a prophet of judgment, and as far as his personal experiences go, it is only in our chapter that he lifts his eyes under divine instruction beyond the scene of judgment to that lofty, serene region in which God finds His delights, makes Himself known, and reveals Himself in the fullness of His character. This remark will help us understand the scene that is about to unfold before us.

After the total destruction of the prophets of Baal and the account Ahab gives Jezebel of this, she swears by her false gods to take her revenge upon Elijah within twenty-four hours, and she lets him know this. "And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life" (vv. 1-3). He flees before a woman, he who had met with Ahab and had resisted the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal! This attitude, so contrary to his attitude be-

fore, came from Elijah's at this moment forgetting the source of his strength. He could no longer say, "The Lord before whom I stand." He felt himself to be before Jezebel, not before the Lord. And the thing was so true that he was going to have to walk for forty days and forty nights in order to stand before God again. From the moment a believer lets any object whatsoever come between his soul and God, the distance immediately takes on incalculable proportions. The result of this estrangement necessarily is that the prophet loses all his strength, for one does not find this anywhere but before God. "Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled." Elijah, a quite remarkable instrument of the Lord's power, had not realized in the same measure that in himself there was neither goodness, nor light, nor strength. It was needful for him to make this experience, and God would bring him to this in leaving him to his own resources before the enemy's power. He who had sent the message, "Behold Elijah," to Ahab flees for his life at a mere threat from Jezebel. From Jizreel he passes into the territory of Judah where the queen could no longer reach him, continues his flight

to Beer-sheba, the farthest border of Judah toward the wilderness, leaves his servant there, and not satisfied with his flight, goes into the wilderness itself a day's journey. There he "sat down under a certain broom-bush, and requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough: now, Jehovah, take my life; for I am not better than my fathers" (v. 4). He is so completely discouraged that he wishes for an end to his life. Why this? "For I am not better than my fathers!" The prophet thus had thought, even if only for a moment, that he was better than his fathers and that God had supported him in the conflict because of this excellence! Poor prophet! — powerless before Jezebel, absolutely discouraged in his own sight, he who had believed that he could build something upon this foundation of sand.

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

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

"He himself went ... into the wilderness." What a blessing when the Lord leads us there so that we may there experience those infinite resources which are in Him; how humiliating but how beneficial too, when our own will has brought us there, that we be there to learn what is in our hearts! Such was Elijah's situation. — "And he lay down and slept under the

broom-bush." He was giving up his mission, so to speak, just as its reality had been proven by brilliant exploits. But it was necessary for him to learn that his inner life was not being sustained by faith as his outward testimony had been.

"And behold, an angel touched him, and said to him, Arise, eat!" (v. 5). In 1 Kings 17 it had been he, Elijah, who had dispensed food to others after having been fed himself; here where his lack of faith had driven him, he had no food at all. But God does not abandon him: He thinks of him. The only strength available to him comes from food which God has prepared for him; at his head he finds a cake baked on hot stones and a cruse of water. He eats, but does not understand what God wants of him, and goes to sleep again. A second time he finds the same food and the angel says to him, "Arise, eat; for the journey is too great for thee" (v. 7). God fed him in order that he might walk. An important lesson for us! The Lord had fed him at Cherith and at Zarephath so that he might render a powerful testimony, but if divine food does not impart strength to us for ourselves, will God's purpose be attained?

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

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

Chapter 19:9-21

Elijah Before God

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

But Elijah had not yet learned the lesson which God wanted to teach him. "The word of Jehovah came to him, and he said to

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

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

"Know ye not," says the apostle, "what the scripture says in the history of Elias, how he pleads with God against Israel? Lord, they have killed thy prophets, they have dug down thine altars;

and I have been left alone, and they seek my life. But what says the divine answer to him? I have left to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed knee to Baal. Thus, then, in the present time also there has been a remnant according to election of grace." "God has not cast away his people whom he foreknew" (Rom. 11:2-5; 2a).

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

have to live on, all the while being witness to another ministry which he will have to acknowledge, being himself used of God in forming it.

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

Elijah accepts this humiliating lesson: he submits when for the fourth time God says to him: "Go!" (cf. 1 Kings 17:3, 9; 1 Kings 18:1). He returns by the way by which he had come (v. 15). He finds Elisha the son of Shaphat and casts his mantle on him — the mark of identification as a prophet. Had he stuck to the mere letter of God's word, he would have had to begin by anointing Hazael and Jehu (vv. 15, 16), but he makes haste to carry out the act which would reduce himself to nothing —

himself, the great prophet — by handing over his authority to another. Thus he who had said, "I am left, I alone," shows that from now on he is nothing in his own eyes. As for Hazael and Jehu, it would not be Elijah, but Elisha who would anoint them. He surrenders all claims to that which could have made him stand out and leaves that work to be carried out by someone other than himself.

Elisha leaves his oxen and runs after Elijah. "Go back again," the prophet answers him, using the same words he had heard from the mouth of the Lord (v. 15). He was nothing in his own eyes from now on, and this was not the moment to induce Elisha to follow him. "What have I done to thee?" Elijah had not cast his mantle on him to draw him after himself, but that he might be prophet in his stead. What a beautiful example of humility, of selfjudgment, of unselfishness, of obedience, of trust in the Word this man of God gives us here! How quickly chastening had produced its fruits in him! Can we not say that Elijah's humiliation will glorify God more than all the prophet's power? His career is apparently broken off, but a new career,

beginning in chastening, is about to open before him; and if the first has not ended in glory, the second will end in nothing but glory! Let us all follow Elijah's example in the breaking of self in order to glorify the Lord!

Chapter 20

Ahab and Ben-Hadad

Ever since Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, had lent a firm hand to Asa, king of Judah, against Baasha, king of Israel, he had remained the enemy of the latter, had taken cities from him, and had even acquired by conquest certain rights over Samaria, the capital of the kingdom (v. 34). His son, also named Ben-Hadad,* goes up against Ahab and besieges Samaria. Laying claim to his father's rights, he sends an insolent summons to the king: "Thy silver and thy gold is mine; thy wives also and thy children, the goodliest, are mine" (v. 3).

- * The name Ben-Hadad is probably the religious title of the kings of Syria: "Son of Hadad" or "hadad's worshipper." Hazael's son is also called Ben-Hadad (2 Kings 13:3, 25).

What does Ahab do? He, before whose eyes the scenes of 1 Kings 18 had been unfolded, who had heard his whole people cry in his ears, "Jehovah, he is God!" has not even a thought for the God who had just restored His worship by His power, that worship for which Ahab had substituted the worship of Baal (1 Kings 16:31-32)! Ahab does not consult the Lord nor commit his cause to Him. For that matter, had he ever humbled himself before Him? Had he tried to stop the arm of Jezebel as she sought to put Elijah to death? No, this weak, wicked-hearted man "did sell himself to do evil in the sight of Jehovah, Jezebel his wife urging him on" (1 Kings 21:25).

Demonstrating that God was a stranger to him, acting as though He did not even exist, he accepts the humiliation inflicted upon him by the heathen monarch: "My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have" (v. 4). What, indeed, could he do against Ben-Hadad at the head of all his forces and accompanied by thirty-two kings? So those who do not know God reason things out. But what is accomplished by his humiliation before Israel's enemy? This latter uses the

occasion to add outrage to his harshness: "Thou shalt deliver me thy silver, and thy gold, and thy wives, and thy children; but tomorrow about this time I will send my servants to thee, and they shall search thy house, and the houses of thy servants; and it shall be, that whatsoever is pleasant in thy sight, they shall put in their hand and take away" (vv. 5-6). There again, Ahab does not return to God; to him it is more important to call together and consult with the elders of the land. They favor resistance; he, accepting the first conditions and rejecting the second. At this answer Ben-Hadad's anger knows no more limits. Ahab replies spiritedly: "Let not him that girds on boast himself as he that puts off" (v. 11), but God is still not taken into consideration.

A great multitude is arrayed against the city. God intervenes by a prophet whose name is not revealed to us: "Hast thou seen all this great multitude? behold, I will deliver it into thy hand this day; and thou shalt know that I am Jehovah" (v. 13). What was the Lord's ground in speaking thus? The condition of Ahab's heart? We have just seen its callousness. But Israel in presence

of Elijah's miracle had acknowledged the true God. Would He not show His grace at the least sign of His people's returning to Himself? As for Ahab, God tells him: "Thou shalt know that I am Jehovah." If he had not learned this before under the weight of the judgments of God, this miraculous deliverance might perhaps touch his heart so that he would be restored. What touching patience on part of God, even toward the most profane, the most indifferent, the most hardened. The God whom man rejects, instead of tiring, reappears to him as the God of grace and of deliverance!

At this critical moment Ahab seems inclined to let God work; in any case, he has no other resource. The prophet answers his questions categorically. The "servants of the princes of the provinces" by whom the enemy army would be delivered into the hands of Ahab are only a handful against this multitude. Instead of awaiting the assault of the enemy, it is Ahab who is to begin the battle, and his army only numbers seven thousand men! Ahab follows the prophet's word, and that day the Syrians suffer a great defeat.

No spirit of thankfulness is produced in the king's heart. God warns him by the prophet that at the return of the year Ben-Hadad will attack him again. This time it is a matter of proving to the Syrians that Israel had not gotten the victory by their "gods of the mountains." In vain does Ben-Hadad change the organization of his army and the place of battle: the Israelites, in number like two little flocks of goats, in one day smite one hundred thousand of the enemy's men; the wall of Aphek falls upon those who were left. Thus the Syrians had to learn who the Lord was and thus Israel could know Him.

Ben-Hadad flees into the city and escapes from chamber to chamber. His servants offer to beg clemency of the victor, for they have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are gentle and merciful kings. Humiliated and conquered, they come supplicating on behalf of their king: "I pray thee, let me live." Ahab replies: "He is my brother," when God had given him into his hands for destruction. The idolator who had likened Jehovah to "the gods of the mountains" is brother to the king of Israel! What an outrage to the glory and the holiness of God

there is in this word, "He is my brother"! Ahab has Ben-Hadad come up into his chariot, makes a covenant with him, and sends him away. The king of Syria restores to him the cities that his father had taken away. The world loves and owns this kind of clemency and affability. How often those who ought to be God's witnesses before the world call the latter, "My brother, my brethren"! How sad is this word which deceives the world and denies Christian character. No, Christians are of another family than the world; they are children of God; the world has the prince of this world for its father.

But, you say, are not all men brothers since they are all sinners? No indeed, for Christians can and ought to say: "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Thus they are that no longer and cannot call those who are still sinners their brothers. It is true that there is "one God and Father of all" in the sense of God's relationship with His creatures, but even in this respect, only those of His creatures who belong to Him by faith are able to add: "Who is ... in us all," which absolutely

excludes the world from any intimacy with Him in this relationship (Eph. 4:6).

To call Ben-Hadad his brother! Poor Ahab lays bare the state of his heart, still a follower of Baal, one whom even this twofold deliverance wrought for him had not led to repentance.

A second prophet comes (vv. 35-43). The one of verse 13 announced the deliverance, this one the judgment of Ahab. What patience on part of God! Even in the next chapter He still delays with pronouncing the final word of judgment! But first we are to learn to know God's chastening towards His own. "And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said to another by the word of Jehovah, Smite me, I pray thee. But the man refused to smite him." If this man was not a prophet himself, he was at any rate the prophet's companion. God's chastening of his own is so much the more severe, as they are in a more privileged position. Here we have a different case from that of the prophet from Judah in 1 Kings 13. The latter, having a positive word from the Lord to act upon, gives it up to follow another

word that is asserted to be the word of God, and he finds a lion on his path. Here a companion of a prophet refuses to do according to the word of Jehovah. He does not want to smite and wound his companion when God orders him to do so. His intentions were good, you say; he loved his companion too much to hurt him. Doubtless, but there was an imperative word! God had given the command. You still object that the man did not understand the benefit of what was being ordered; but when it comes to the word of the Lord, it is not a question of understanding, but of obeying. And indeed, it was impossible for him to understand; he could not and need not give account for what God wanted to do. The thing was that there was an express command, and that "by the word of Jehovah." Could this man ignore it? No, he was the prophet's companion and ought to know the word of God. The man of God from Judah ought to have known that the word of the old prophet could not have been the word of God; this man ought to have known that the word of his companion was the word of Jehovah. The more our position places us in direct relationship with God, the less ex-

cuse we have when we treat the word of God as though it were not so.

Positive disobedience to the Word is an infinitely serious thing. How many lives of Christians are made up of similar acts of disobedience! Christians are often asking why they meet a lion in the way without being able to answer this question. Should they not first of all ask themselves whether or not they have been willing to submit to the word of God when it has shown them His will in a positive way? Usually one looks everywhere else to find the reason for God's chastening of His children or His servants. Judgment overtakes this man "because [he had] not hearkened to the voice of Jehovah" (v. 36).

"Another man," who does not seem to have been in as intimate a relationship with the prophet as the first man, hears and obeys. He smites him hard and wounds him. He does not try to understand, but does what God tells him to do.

Now the prophet can appear before Ahab with the sure proofs of what would happen to him. God had said: Smite! He had re-

fused to do so. Now another would smite Ahab and wound him. His fate was determined.

Ahab, like David when Nathan came to him, is compelled to pronounce his own judgment (v. 40). He was blind; the bandage he saw over the prophet's eyes was the bandage he had over his own eyes, and he did not even know it! Suddenly the word of God, like a violent wind of judgment, echoes in his ears: "Because thou hast let go out of thy hand the man that I had devoted to destruction, thy life shall be for his life, and thy people for his people" (v. 42).

Will repentance and contrition of spirit finally penetrate into this hardened heart? "And the king of Israel went to his house sullen and vexed, and came to Samaria" (v. 43).

"Sullen and vexed" - these two words describe him. "Sullen": oh, how this characterized the world! It does its own will and is sullen, sad. Joy is never found in the pathway of disobedience and of rebellion against God. Only the Christian can really know joy, "full joy." The Word and the Lord Himself show us

where it is to be found: In obedience to His commandments, obedience which itself is His love realized (John 15:9-14); in dependence, fruit of the new nature which we have from Him (John 16:24); in assurance which the knowledge of our union with Him gives us (John 17:11-13); and finally, in communion with the Father and with the Son (1 John 1:3-4).

How this poor man who had thought he could follow his own thoughts in spite of the word of God was wanting in all these things. However ungodly Ahab might be, God was judging him according to the favored position in which he had been placed. In Christendom people are accustomed to reasoning about the fate reserved by divine justice for the poor heathen. It is certain that they will be judged according to the witness they have received and by which they could have known God (Acts 14:15-17); but we do not hear the Christian world reasoning about the fate awaiting it. Ahab's lot is more dreadful than that of Ben-Hadad.

The Word also says that Ahab was "vexed." The king's grief was not the kind that leads to repentance, but to vexation. Against whom? Against God. Would the king then meet with God on his pathway all the time? "Come," says the world, "tell us of the love of God when He takes away our health, our loved ones, or our wealth!" Really! Wouldn't it be better to do evil like everyone else instead of trying to behave ourselves well, since God treats us so unjustly?" This is one of the thousand varieties of this vexation that fills men's hearts against God. But when there is a certain knowledge of the Word, as in Ahab's case, one can no longer be diverted by doing evil. This had been easy in times past before the sudden appearance of Elijah who came to "trouble Israel." Now the Word is there; one cannot shake it off; it gnaws at the heart, allowing one no rest. This word of the prophet has unveiled the future. Nothing, perhaps, will come of it ... but who can know? One thing is certain in the life of this monarch: this Word is constantly being fulfilled, and so often in undeserved blessings to which he has not paid attention. Will the threats be fulfilled too? The prophet

had said, "Thy life shall be for his life." He did not say when. What if it were today? Or tomorrow? Couldn't he just leave me alone? There is well reason for being "sullen and vexed." The gnawing worm is there; it has begun its work, that worm that never, never dies.

Chapter 21

Ahab and Naboth

Fresh circumstances show us the king's moral condition. Covetousness overruns his heart, eager greed for something God had not given him. Now this is idolatry just as well as is the worship of Baal (Col. 3:5). Ahab, dominated by the enemy, has simply passed from one form of idolatry to another.

Ahab's proposal to Naboth is much greater in import than would appear at first glance. It would result in permanently giving away the inheritance of this godly Israelite. To make an exchange or even to give the value of the land in money would mean that Ahab would take full and final possession of his

neighbor's vineyard. Now an Israelite who feared God could not accept such conditions. When he would sell his land, he would only sell its harvests, and, as his possession would be restored to him in the year of jubilee, its price would be set according to the number of years the buyer would harvest its produce (Lev. 25:15). The seller even had the right to redeem his land at any time by refunding the buyer the amount over the value of the crops for the years that had passed since the time of the sale. The Israelite who feared God would keep the inheritance of his fathers because they had received it from the Lord; but there was a reason even more peremptory than that. In reality the land, the ground itself, did not belong to the people, but to the Lord: "The land shall not be sold for ever; for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me. And in all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land" (Lev. 25:23-24).

This makes Naboth's very categoric answer understandable: "Jehovah forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to thee" (v. 3).

Verse 4 shows us the effect produced by unrealizable covetousness on the heart of a man without God: "And Ahab came into his house sullen and vexed." Here we find again the same words as at the end of 1 Kings 20. Oh, the poor heart of man, overwhelmed with sorrow, swollen up with vexation! And that is all that it can hold unless Satan, in order to keep his sway over him, comes to him to whisper of new deceptive lusts. Ahab is sullen at seeing the object of his desire placed out of his reach; vexed with a will that presents an obstacle to him that he cannot make give way because, in short, it is the will of God.

Thus on every hand Ahab had met God on his path. Behind drought and thirst, he had found God; he had found Him in opposition to his religion, in opposition to his league with Ben-Hadad, and in opposition to his lusts. God, always God, that God whom he had thought to replace by his idols! Since the slaughter of his priests the house was, it is true, swept and garnished, but already worse demons had entered it.

Who stirs up the evil spirits that feed these lusts? It is Jezebel, a true type of the satanic spirit (vv. 5-14). Jezebel does evil, knowingly and willingly. She rouses all the evil instincts of her husband's heart. She appeals to his pride: "Dost thou now exercise sovereignty over Israel?" (v. 7). She adds, "I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jizreelite." When a man has sold his soul to Satan, as Ahab had, Satan does not fail to make him all sorts of promises. He is the tempter. What God does not want to give you, I'll give you. Leave it to me; I shall give you the vineyard. Ahab leaves it to her, because he sees that thus his eager desire will be realized. And now, Ahab, "arise, eat bread, and let thy heart be glad." That indeed is the constant goal of the flesh: health, a gay time, doing what one pleases, and getting what one wants. But how to attain this goal? Naboth had said, "I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers." Jezebel comes and says, "I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth." She takes Ahab by the hand and leads him down her own path, a path of lying and murder, under the guise of being his benefactress. She "will give him," but meanwhile she pos-

sesses herself of his authority, of his royal prerogative: "She wrote a letter in Ahab's name, and sealed it with his seal" (v. 8). Ahab has turned into her slave. She does not shrink back from either perjury or from the murder of a righteous man in order to bring gain to her protegee. This worshipper of Baal has the false witnesses say: "Naboth blasphemed God and the king" (vv. 10, 13). She uses God's name, acknowledged by the people but not by herself, to destroy a servant of the true God. Has not Jezebel always acted thus? We see her appearing again in Revelation 2, no longer in Judaism but in the Church, taking on the character of a prophetess and accusing God's true witnesses of "knowing the depths of Satan," while she herself is teaching her children to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols.

Ahab lets evil be done and iniquity be consummated in order to profit thereby; the men of Jizreel, the elders and nobles, do it knowing the reason for it, for the letters sent them told them to choose two wicked men, sons of Belial, who should perjure themselves in order to get rid of Naboth. They have hardly any

scruples, for it is in their interests to please the king and to gain his good will.

Naboth is stoned; at last the time has come for Ahab to enjoy the fruit of his covetousness. "Arise," says Jezebel, "take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jizreelite, which he refused to give thee for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead" (v. 15).

Ahab goes down. Is he going to be happy now? This is the moment for him, his goal having been attained, to have that gay time that Jezebel had promised him. Scarcely has he begun to take possession when Elijah, informed by God, meets him there where he had come to survey his new estate. His enjoyment, his happiness disappear. Satan always entices us and leaves us facing God after having betrayed us and plunged us into the mire.

Ahab says to Elijah: "Hast thou found me, mine enemy?" (v. 20). Yes, his enemy! He had taken Satan as his friend; he finds God to be his enemy. In the very place of promised satisfaction

he finds nothing of that he had hoped for, but God stands up before him, represented by His prophet, and says to him: "Hast thou killed and also taken possession?" (v. 19). Others had done the killing; God holds Ahab accountable. The joy so longed for is replaced by that horrible curse which is repeated all through this sad history of Israel. This was the judgment of Jeroboam, the judgment of Baasha, in the very same words: "Him that dies of Ahab in the city shall the dogs eat, and him that dies in the field shall the fowl of the heavens eat" (v. 24; cf. 1 Kings 14:11; 1 Kings 16:4). And Jezebel is not forgotten: "The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the moat of Jizreel" (v. 23). The execution of the judgment foretold is postponed for her (2 Kings 9), but it is no less certain.

This time Ahab must say to himself: God's judgment has reached me. He is aroused to the fact that God's word against his predecessors had been without repentance. For himself, who had done worse than all the rest, judgment is at the door.

What does Ahab do? He humbles himself; he goes about afflicted, mourning, and fasting (vv. 27-29); he lies down in the sackcloth he has put upon his flesh; he "went softly," as one does in a funeral home. Where is his pride and his merry heart, and even his sadness of the wrong kind and his vexation? Nothing remains but unbounded mourning in face of his inevitable fate. Is this conversion? The next chapter will give us the answer, but in the meanwhile, what a merciful God is our God! If He discovers the evil, He also ascertains the slightest return of a soul to that which is good; He takes note of the least sign of repentance. He says to Elijah: "Seest thou how Ahab humbles himself before me? because he humbles himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house" (v. 29). Not one jot of His Word will fall to the ground, but the judgment is to be deferred until the times of his heir.

Chapter 22

Ahab and Jehoshaphat

"And they continued three years without war between Syria and Israel" (v. 1). Aside from the question of God's judgment, this then was what had resulted from Ahab's covenant with Ben-Hadad: a short respite of three years without war! After that Ben-Hadad, just scarcely set free, had not kept his promises (cf. 1 Kings 20:34): he had not restored Ramoth-Gilead. "Do ye know," says the king of Israel to his servants, "that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we keep quiet without taking it out of the hand of the king of Syria?" It would be shameful to pass over this in silence; thus war is unleashed again. God is not taken into account in these claims between peoples. History is ever the same, and the Christian nations of our day are no better in this respect than the heathen nations. The desire to expand, on the one hand, and the desire to resist such encroachments on the other, form the basis of politics. God does not engage in politics; He is a stranger to these strifes, though He has

the upper hand in all things and makes use of all to accomplish His purposes.

Jehoshaphat, the son of pious Asa, and faithful like him to maintain the worship of the Lord in Judah without admixture, goes down to the King of Israel. From whence did this relationship arise? From the fact that Jehoshaphat had "allied himself with Ahab by marriage," not personally, but Jehoram his son had taken a daughter of Ahab as wife (2 Chr. 18:1; 2 Chr. 21:6). This alliance was a great evil, and the king of Judah had to prove its serious consequences. "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate Jehovah?" Jehu the son of Hanani, seeing this, later said to him. This alliance disastrously led the faithful king to espouse the interests of a king unequalled for his iniquity in the land of Israel (21:25-26).

"Wilt thou go with me to battle?" Ahab asks Jehoshaphat. The latter replies: "I am as thou, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses" (v. 4). This alliance thus leads Jehoshaphat to declare that he, the godly king of Judah, is just

like wicked Ahab, and to throw down the barrier separating the man of God from the world. Is there any great difference between this word and that of Ahab to Ben-Hadad: "Thou art my brother"? Alliance with the world, we cannot repeat too often, makes us liable for its iniquity. In the historical books again and again we find the solemn truth that to associate or cooperate with a system where evil is tolerated or recognized is to become jointly liable for that system. One might ask whether Ahab's momentary repentance may not have influenced Jehoshaphat's frame of mind. We are not told this, but it would not have excused the king in any way. A believer does not remain in any system whatsoever because he can find some good there, but because it is approved by God. But Israel and its king had no more to expect than God's final judgment, and there were no more righteous men in the city who could save them from this.

Still (vv. 5-12), in this unfortunate alliance Jehoshaphat is too pious to act without consulting the Lord and His Word. Ahab immediately assembles four hundred prophets. There were

many of them. Where did they come from when hardly a few isolated prophets could be found in all the territory of Israel? They were few, for only one prophet of the Lord was sufficient to make known His mind. These four hundred prophets of Ahab's, who were they? Could they perhaps have been in disguise the four hundred prophets of the Asherah, the female divinity, who had not been destroyed at the Kishon? This is quite likely! Whatever it may have been, if they were the same, they had changed their dress with the circumstances. They were now pretending to speak by the Spirit of God, whereas a lying spirit who served their own interests had taken hold of them. One can wear the livery of a prophet of the Lord and be lying. How often this has been so at all times, and how much more so today. "Go up," they all cry, "and the Lord will give it into the king's hand" (v. 6).

Nevertheless Jehoshaphat is ill at ease. There is a spiritual sense that warns a true heart, though perhaps not being able to account for it, that certain spiritual manifestations do not have the Spirit of God as their agent. This is not the gift of discern-

ing of spirits (1 Cor. 12:10), which is not given to all, but a sense which, however weak it may be in a child of God, ought never to be wanting with him. He feels ill at ease in an environment opposed to God, ill at ease in presence of certain discourse which claims to come from religious tongues but lacks the divine character, ill at ease confronted with such vaunting as that which takes place here before the king of Israel. So it was with Jehoshaphat, too, for after having been present at the scene brought on by his request to Ahab, "Inquire, I pray thee, this day of the word of Jehovah" (v. 5), he finds himself obliged to add: "Is there not here a prophet of Jehovah besides, that we might inquire of him?" (v. 7). It would be enough for him that there be one, truly separated to God, to counterbalance the other four hundred. Ahab replies: "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of Jehovah; but I hate him, for he prophesies no good concerning me, but evil: it is Micah the son of Imlah" (v. 8). He hated him, and he likewise hated all those who pronounced the Lord's judgment upon him. He wanted the prophet to "prophesy good concerning him." Such will ever be

the character of the religious world. Those composing it choose for themselves teachers according to their own lusts, teachers who call them brothers just as Ahab himself said "My brother" to Ben-Hadad, teachers who praise them, extolling the world in which they live, and foretelling success and prosperity for them. Honest Jehoshaphat cannot suffer these words. He is accustomed to respect every word that comes from the Lord. One does not see him contesting Jehu's word condemning him later on (2 Chr. 19:1). "Let not the king say so!" he says (v. 8).

Ahab has but one thought: to show proof of Micah's malice toward himself (cf. v. 18). Promptly he has him sent for. The man of God naturally kept himself apart from the four hundred prophets — a good example for the king of Judah who had joined himself to the profane king. The very sad but necessary result of this alliance is that he follows Ahab instead of following Micah. Such is the effect of "evil communications" upon the believer. Never does one see the opposite effect produced, that is to say, that the world follows the example of God's children. One has well said: "There is no equality in an alliance

between truth and error, for by the very alliance itself, truth ceases to be truth and error does not become truth."

To make that which he is going to proclaim even more solemn, Micah at first speaks just like the four hundred prophets: "Go up, and prosper; for Jehovah will give it into the hand of the king" (v. 15). "How many times," replies Ahab, "shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but truth in the name of Jehovah?" (v. 16). We see here what conscience is, even a hardened one. It speaks within the heart, telling Ahab: What Micah is saying cannot be the expression of his opinion! And even though Ahab is seeking after a lie, his conscience forces him to want the truth. He will not follow it nor obey it, but the uneasiness produced by his conscience allows him no rest until he hears, knows, and sees it, like a murderer who despite himself is drawn back to the scene of his crime. Then these harrowing words reverberate in his ears: "I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And Jehovah said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace" (v. 17).

The prophet does not stop there. He points out the satanic lying spirit that has gotten hold of all the prophets in order to cause Ahab to go up to Ramoth. Jehovah had said: "Who shall entice Ahab that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?" (v. 20). This was the judgment of God, prepared beforehand against Ahab, an indirect judgment by which the demonic spirits he had worshipped became the instruments for their victim's doom.

Zedekiah, who had played the leading role in this scene, making himself horns of iron and saying to the king: "With these shalt thou push the Syrians, until thou have exterminated them" (v. 11) — this Zedekiah smites Micah on the cheek and says: "Where now went the Spirit of Jehovah from me to speak to thee?" (v. 24). He claims the Holy Spirit's direction and makes use of violence to prove this, but he thus proves what spirit is urging him on. He too would come under judgment when he would "go from chamber to chamber to hide" himself (v. 25).

Micah, like so many prophets and faithful servants of the Lord, is thrown into prison, cruelly persecuted for the truth which he had proclaimed (vv. 27, 28). But his testimony spreads, in that way becoming public, just as later that of Paul. He has the honour of speaking the mind of God as to the future to all: "Hearken, O peoples, all of you!" (v. 28).

Poor Jehoshaphat beholds this scene in silence. Being on his ally's territory, he has no authority to thwart his orders. Did his feeble remarks change Ahab's plans and decisions? Does he find the courage to break this unfortunate alliance? Nothing of the kind. And of what use is this alliance to him except to lead him to be unfaithful to God? He goes up with the king of Israel to Ramoth-Gilead.

But here is that troublesome conscience coming again to besiege Ahab. What if Micah has spoken the truth? Has he really foretold Ahab's death on this expedition? He wishes and believes he has found a sure means of escaping that judgment which is directed towards him and pursuing him. He disguises

himself, and under the sway of selfish fear is not even noble enough in heart to avoid imperiling his ally against whom, on account of his royal garments, the attacks in the battle are going to be directed. The captains of the chariots turn aside after Jehoshaphat, thinking that they have to do with Ahab. Just then "Jehoshaphat cried out." We see in 2 Chronicles 18:31 that in this extremity Jehoshaphat had recourse to the Lord: "Jehoshaphat cried out, and Jehovah helped him." He does not forsake His own in distress.

Ahab is struck by an arrow shot "at a venture," something he had not anticipated. He dies a hero, as the world would say, stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians even though dying. He dies at even and his blood fills the bottom of the chariot. "And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked his blood, where the harlots bathed: according to the word of Jehovah, which he had spoken" (v. 38). Thus the judgment against him is carried out, but it is not fully accomplished until later by the hand of Jehu.

How differently men would have written up this history than God has done! The reign of Ahab was long and relatively glorious. For a man not having divine revelation his victories over the Syrians were deeds of high value and intrepid courage; his alliance with Ben-Hadad one of noble clemency and good politics; that with Jehoshaphat still wiser yet; the war at Ramoth was forced upon him for the honour of his kingdom. The annals of his reign, probably lost forever, enumerate all the cities he built and fortified, tell of his ivory palace — probably an imitation of Solomon's palace — and of still other things (v. 39). But of all this nothing remains except the horrible example of a man responsible to serve God who, knowing Him, preferred his idols and his lusts to Him and hated the faithful witnesses of the God of Israel.

A few words close this book (vv. 41-50) and refresh our heart a little in the midst of so much ruin. Jehoshaphat was faithful, though not free from reproach, for he was not zealous enough to destroy the high places, remains of the idolatry which had been implanted in Judah. He exterminates those infamous

creatures who had established themselves in the land along with the Canaanitish idolatry. But one sees with regret that he does not immediately learn the lesson that Jehu had taught him upon his return from Ramoth. He joins himself with Ahab's son Ahaziah who does wickedly (2 Chr. 20:35-37), and associates himself with him in building ships and in going together to Ophir for gold. Wanting the riches that would be acquired by the alliance with Ahaziah is a motive that is taken up less than his wanting the influence that would be acquired by the alliance with Ahab. But the Lord does reprove him: "And Eliezer the son of Dodavah, of Mareshah, prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, Jehovah has broken thy works. And the ships were broken, and could not go to Tarshish" (2 Chr. 20:37).

Thank God, after the prophet's word and the destruction of his fleet Jehoshaphat understood what had been the great weakness of his life - that an alliance with the world, whatever its purpose may be, is a thing of which God disapproves and which will bring judgment upon His children. "Then said Ahaziah the

son of Ahab to Jehoshaphat, Let my servants go with thy servants in the ships. But Jehoshaphat would not" (v. 49).

This scene, cheering after all, is followed by a few words (vv. 51-53) summarizing the reign of Ahaziah the son of Ahab, a short reign, but one filled with all that could provoke the Lord to anger. Under his reign the worship of Baal revives again in Israel, and the king himself bows down before this abomination of the Zidonians.

About the author:

Dr. Henri L. Rossier was born on January 25, 1835 at Vevey in French Switzerland to a family that was among the first there to gather to the Lord Jesus alone. After studying medicine at Zurich and Wurzburg he settled in his native Vevey, where he lived a long life of devoted self-sacrificing service. At age 27 he married Madeleine de Graffenried from Berne, and the Lord in time granted them six children.

Along with practicing medicine for well over fifty years, as time went on he increasingly devoted himself to ministering the Word in assemblies and taking part in Bible conferences in Switzerland, Germany, and France.

However, it is for his written work that Rossier is best known today. Acquainted from his youth with J. N. Darby, he began early in life to translate this brother's writings into French. He was helpful also with the editing of Darby's translation of the Bible into French and with preparation of the volumes of *Etudes sur la Parole*, later to become better known as the *Synopsis* after it had been translated into English. For 58 years he served as editor of *Messenger Evangelique*, a monthly magazine for the edification of believers widely circulated throughout the French-speaking world. He wrote many articles for this magazine himself, often while being driven in a horse-drawn coach to the homes of his patients.

Besides this, Rossier wrote commentaries on most of the books of the Bible, especially on the historical and prophetic books of the Old Testament and on the epistles of Paul and Peter and the Revelation in the New Testament. He was a prolific hymnwriter as well. Some 28 of his hymns are included in *Hymnes et Cantiques*, the hymn book used among many French-speaking assemblies and which he played a major role in compiling and revising. Some of his hymns have been translated into English, as have his commentaries on Joshua and Judges.

After a long and useful life of service, he was called home to be with the Lord on March 20, 1928 at the advanced age of 93.

