

A short overview of the Bible

This text is based on the introductory pages of the Bible, translated in French from the original texts by J.N. Darby, Rolle Edition 2022.

Les quoted verses are not a copy/paste out of the KJV Bible, but English translations from French.

Table of Contents

A first glance.....	7
The Old Testament.....	7
The New Testament.....	8
Preface.....	10
Introduction to the Bible.....	17
The great principles revealed.....	20
The two Adams.....	20
The government of God.....	21
The sovereign grace of God.....	22
The law.....	22
The gift of promises, election.....	24
Faith.....	24
Promises with and without conditions.....	25
The promises are to Christ.....	26
The promised Messiah.....	28
Man's responsibility.....	30
The introduction of sin.....	30
The period between Adam and Christ.....	31
The offerings of Abel and Cain.....	36
The beginning of the "world".....	39
The state of fallen man.....	40
With Noah, a new world begins.....	41
The introduction of idolatry.....	42
The call of Abraham.....	44
The life of Abraham according to God's ways.....	45
The history of Israel.....	47
Redemption and ransom.....	47
The life that God cares for.....	48
The Red Sea.....	50
Wars in the wilderness.....	51

Deliverance at the crossing of the Jordan....	52
God dwells among his people.....	54
Note.....	55
Review of Bible books.....	55
The Old Testament.....	55
The Pentateuch.....	56
Genesis.....	56
The Exodus.....	56
Leviticus.....	56
Numbers.....	57
Remarks on these three books.....	57
Deuteronomy.....	58
From Joshua to Samuel.....	59
The Book of Joshua.....	59
The Book of Judges.....	60
The Books of Samuel.....	60
Remarks on kingship.....	62
Lessons from the books of Joshua to Samuel	
.....	64
The books of Kings and Chronicles.....	64
The Prophets.....	70
Isaiah.....	70
Chapters 1 to 4.....	70
Chapter 5.....	71
Chapter 6.....	71
Chapters 7 to 10.....	71
Chapters 11 and 12.....	72
Chapters 13 to 27.....	72
Chapters 28 to 35.....	73
Chapters 36 to 39.....	74
Chapters 40 to 66.....	74
From chapter 40 to chapter 48.....	74

Chapters 49 to 57.....	74
Chapters 58 to 66.....	75
The other prophets.....	75
Jeremiah.....	75
Ezekiel.....	76
Daniel.....	76
Hosea.....	77
Joel.....	78
Amos.....	78
Obadiah.....	78
Jonah.....	79
Micah.....	79
Nahum.....	80
Habakkuk.....	80
Zephaniah.....	81
Note.....	82
Haggai.....	82
Zechariah.....	83
Malachi.....	84
Note.....	84
The Hagiographists.....	85
Daniel.....	85
The Psalms.....	86
Book 1: Psalms 1 to 41.....	86
Psalms 1 & 2.....	86
Psalms 3 to 7.....	87
Psalm 8.....	87
Note.....	87
Psalms 9 to 18.....	88
Psalms 19 to 21.....	88
Psalm 22.....	88
Psalms 23 to 41.....	89

Book 2: Psalms 42 to 72.....	89
Book 3: Psalms 73 to 89.....	89
Book 4: Psalms 90 to 106.....	90
Book 5: Psalms 107 to 150.....	90
Notes.....	91
Job.....	91
Ecclesiastes.....	93
Proverbs.....	93
Ezra & Nehemiah.....	94
Esther.....	95
The Song of Songs.....	95
Lamentations of Jeremiah & Ruth.....	96
In summary.....	97
The remedy: the coming of Christ.....	98
The New Testament.....	100
Introduction.....	100
The Gospels.....	105
The Gospel according to Matthew.....	110
The Gospel according to Mark.....	111
The Gospel according to Luke.....	111
The Gospel according to John.....	111
The Acts of the Apostles.....	112
The Epistles.....	112
The Revelation.....	116

A first glance

The Bible consists of two main parts, each comprising several books. These two parts relate to two distinct periods: one before the coming of Jesus Christ into this world — the Old Testament — and the other after his coming — the New Testament.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament corresponds to the Hebrew Bible. It contains 39 books written by a large number of authors over a long period of time, from approximately 1450 to 420 BC. In the Bible, these books are arranged in three distinct successive divisions:

- 17 historical books, from Genesis to the Book of Esther, the first five of which, known as the Pentateuch, form the Pentateuch.
- Five poetic books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. These books contain experiences, prayers, hymns, precepts, and exhortations.

- 17 prophetic books, the first five of which are known as the Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.

If we consider prophecies to be revelations of things to come, the historical books and the Psalms also contain them, and likewise certain books of the prophets present historical accounts, such as the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel.

The New Testament

The New Testament consists of 27 books written by eight different authors in a relatively short period of time, approximately between 50 and 96 AD. In order, we find:

- 5 historical books, first the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, then the Acts of the Apostles.
- 21 books of teaching and exhortation, the Epistles, 14 of which are by the Apostle Paul (including the Epistle to the Hebrews) and 7 known as Catholic, or universal, written by James, Peter, John and Jude.

- 1 prophetic book: Revelation.

The entire Bible is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16), which makes it, from beginning to end, the Word of God. Each book has a particular subject, but the whole is given to us to make us know God and his Son Jesus Christ. The Bible also teaches us to know ourselves, as needing God's grace. It reveals to us the salvation that God offers to all and the final and eternal fate that is reserved for each of us, depending on whether we have accepted or rejected this salvation (John 3:16, 36).

How precious and important this Word is! It is "the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" (Ephesians 1:13); it is "the word of life" (Philippians 2:16); it is the word of the Lord's grace (Acts 14:3).

Let us therefore love this Word, which, when received into our hearts, has the power to save our souls (James 1:21). May we say, like the Psalmist: "I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you," and again: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:11, 105).

Preface

N.B. This preface dates from 1885, when the first edition of the French translation by J.N. Darby was published. However, the notes included in this preface were added later.

The following text relates to a new edition of the Bible, but the principles contained therein are of general application.

The rich and faithful goodness of the Lord allows us today to present to souls who value the word of God the work of one of His servants, who for more than fifty years devoted himself to preaching and defending the Gospel, as well as to studying, expounding, and translating the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments into various languages. We give thanks to Him who, in a time such as this, inspired His servant to undertake once again the translation of the Holy Scriptures into French from the original languages, and who, in response to the prayers of our brethren, sustained him and guided him through all the labours and difficulties of such a work.

Deeply convinced of the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, the translator sought to render them, by reproducing in English as simply and accurately as possible

what God gave in other languages, unknown to most readers of the Bible. He endeavoured to render the Hebrew or Greek of the original texts as literally as the clarity necessary for understanding what is said would allow. The depth of the divine Word is infinite, and the connection that exists between all parts of the divine mystery is no less admirable, even though this mystery is not revealed in its entirety, for "we know in part and we prophesy in part". Thus, we often encounter expressions in the Holy Word which, flowing from the depths of the mystery in the mind of the inspired writer, give us, with the help of grace, an insight into the connection between the various parts and between each of these parts and the whole. Preserving these expressions from the original texts sometimes detracts from the style of the version; but when the clarity of the sentence did not suffer as a result, it was advantageous to retain those whose form could help us grasp the full meaning of what we read in the Hebrew or Greek texts. In other cases, where French did not allow the original text to be rendered literally and where the form of the Hebrew or Greek sentence seemed to contain thoughts that might have been more or less lost

or altered in the English expression, the literal translation has been added in the form of a note.

We know that, apart from a few small portions (Jeremiah 10:11; Daniel 2:4 to 7:28; Ezra 4:8 to 6: 18; 7:12-26), which are written in a language very close to Hebrew, known as Chaldean or Aramaic, the entire Old Testament is in Hebrew, written in a single language despite the diversity of writers and the ten centuries that separate the composition of the different books, not to mention the different places where they originated. Completed after the time of Ezra, the holy books of the Old Testament, read and explained in public schools and Jewish synagogues, became the objects of veneration and the subject of the persistent, methodical and meticulous care of Jewish rabbis, until, between the 7th and 10th century AD, the ancient tradition, already established, concerning reading and interpretation, was fixed in writing (either in the text called *Chetib*, "that which is written", or by the annotations or corrections added in the margins, which were given the name *Keri*, "what must be read", and by what is called Massoretic punctuation. In this form,

which is, so to speak, stereotyped, the sacred text has come down to us intact, as it is found everywhere today in the many editions that are widespread among Jews and throughout the world. The first printed editions of the Hebrew Old Testament, preceded first by the printing of the Psalms in 1477 and then other parts, date back to the last years of the 15th century.

As we have done in our successive editions of the New Testament, we have here, for the Old Testament as well, abandoned the division into verses, except in certain poetic parts where it might be particularly important to bring out the Hebrew rhythm and its parallelism. The divisions in Proverbs are self-evident from the meaning.

For the New Testament, written in Greek, as we know, textual issues are more complex; but here too, God's grace and providence have preserved for us the clearest and most sufficient evidence as to the true text to follow. The documents available to the translators of the Reformation editions (only 13 or 14 manuscripts), not to mention the Latin Vulgate on which the Catholic versions are based, were very limited: this did not prevent the Elzevirs

of Holland, who had adopted Theodore Beza's text as the standard for their numerous editions, from being bold enough to say, in the preface to the edition they published in 1633, that the text they were presenting was *textus ab omnibus receptus*, the "text received by all". This text, henceforth known as the "Received Text", has remained authoritative within Protestantism to this day. (*)

(*) This paragraph shows the context in which this translation was produced. Today, Catholic versions are no longer translated solely from the Latin Vulgate, and most Protestant versions no longer refer solely to the "Received Text".

The fears of those who apprehended that faith would be shaken prevented the question of the accuracy of the text thus presented and accredited from being raised for a long time. But the discovery of numerous manuscripts, several of which are very ancient, the study of versions even older than any manuscript, all the work of a multitude of scholars who examined and compared the texts and documents currently known, classifying them according to various systems and judging each from their particular point of view, served to purify the text of the

errors that had crept in through human carelessness and presumption, and to establish its certainty. Human weakness has undoubtedly left its mark here, as it has everywhere else where something has been entrusted to man, but God's providence has watched over His Word, so that despite the differences in the systems that scholars have followed in revising the text, they have nevertheless arrived at almost entirely identical results. With the exception of one or two passages, the various editions of the Greek text that have been published agree with each other almost everywhere on passages that may be of some importance. The variations are relatively few, of a secondary nature, and often barely noticeable in a translation.

These considerations explain why, from our first edition of the New Testament published in 1859, and more positively in the subsequent editions of 1872, 1875, 1878 and in this one, we abandoned the text called by the Elzevirs, without any acceptable basis, the "Received Text" - and why, for the second edition, the translator undertook an in-depth study of the text, a task whose scope and diffi-

culties are known only to those who have undertaken it.

[...] (*)

(*) The presence of the variants introduced by the "Received Text" in the notes was announced here. Today, as most translations have moved away from the "Received Text", it no longer seems necessary to indicate these variants. In the present edition, these variants are therefore no longer mentioned. This makes it easier to read the notes in the New Testament.

In the volume we are publishing today (*), the reader should not expect to find a scientific work or a critical edition; we have simply sought, by all means at our disposal, to provide a translation of the text that is as simple and literal as possible. We have placed our trust in God's grace to dare to work on what could be useful to souls and to seek to glorify the One who alone can bless. May He deign to place His blessing on His own Word and on you who use it!

(*) This is one of the latest editions of the Bible, translated by J.N. Darbu.

Introduction to the Bible

N.B. This introduction was written by J.N. Darby. The titles have been added to assist the reader.

Writing an introduction to the Bible is undoubtedly a difficult and serious undertaking of the highest order. How could it be otherwise when it comes to presenting:

- a book that contains all of God's thoughts and ways concerning man, as well as His purpose concerning Christ and man in Him,
- a book that reveals at the same time what God is, what man's responsibility is towards Him, what He has done for man, and the new relationship with God that man enters into through Christ,
- a book that reveals what God is morally in His nature, and the economies in which He glorifies Himself before the heavens and their inhabitants,
- a book that unveils the secrets of the human heart and lays bare its condition, and at the same time reveals to it the things that are invisible,
- a book that begins at the point where the past touches eternity, and leads us, through the devel-

opment and solution of all moral questions, to the goal where the future is lost in eternity according to God,

- a book, finally, that probes moral questions in the perfect light of God fully revealed, and makes known to us the foundations of new relationships with Him according to what He is in Himself and according to what He is in infinite love?

Taking such a book to show the sequence of its various parts, their relationship to each other and to the whole, in order to open the human mind (to the extent that it is given to man to do so, for only God can do it effectively) the path to understanding the ways of God as He has revealed them, is a task whose difficulty and seriousness are likely to discourage those who wish to undertake it, for they find themselves in the presence of the thoughts of God expressed by Himself. What a thing worthy of admiration is this divine parenthesis opened between eternity past and eternity future! During its course, the feverish activity of fallen man, under the instigation of the one who exercises the power of lies and murder, unfolds in

thoughts that will all perish, but in this same period also, the nature and thoughts of God, His moral being and His determined purpose, hitherto hidden in Him from all eternity, are revealed and accomplished through the Son, - while putting man to the test and revealing what he is - in order to appear, in their final result, in an eternity of glory where God, surrounded by blessed creatures made capable of knowing and understanding Him, will manifest Himself as light and love in the fruit of His eternal and imperishable thoughts. Then, everything that has been wrought by his grace and wisdom through the things that appear here below will be revealed in its glorious and eternal fruits; then God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, known to himself before time began—will be known to countless happy beings, known in the enjoyment of their own happiness, when time shall be no more. And this world is the stage where everything that is done contributes to this goal; and the heart of man is the place where everything happens and is morally realised, if God, in whom and through whom and for whom all these things are, dwells in him by His Spirit to give him understanding, and if Christ, the object and centre of all

that God accomplishes, is also his sole object. Now the Bible is God's revelation to us of this whole marvellous system and all the facts relating to it. Is it not understandable that we shrink from the task of explaining such things? But we are dealing with a God of goodness. He takes pleasure in helping us in everything that can help us to understand the revelation He has been pleased to give us of His thoughts.

The great principles revealed

Great principles characterise this revelation: we will say a few words about them before turning to the details.

The two Adams

The first great idea that characterises God's revelation is that of **the two Adams**. There are two men, the first and the second: one is the responsible man; the other is the man of God's counsel, in whom, while confirming the principle of responsibility, God reveals Himself and at the same time makes known His sovereign counsel and the grace that reigns through righteousness. These two principles dominate the entire content of the Bible. How-

ever, although God's goodness was continually manifested in His ways until the coming of His Son, grace, in the full sense of the word, was only revealed prophetically before that coming, and even then it was veiled enough not to undermine the state of man's relationship with God at that time. so it often did so in ways that can only be understood when the New Testament provides the key.

The government of God

This leads us to consider two other principles that are revealed and developed in the Scriptures. First, **God's government** in the world, a sure government, but long hidden, except in Israel where it manifested itself on a small scale. But even there, it still appears unclear to human eyes, because iniquity prevailed (Psalm 73), and God had deeper ways and greater blessings for His people in the midst of this government—ways in which, for their spiritual good, He used evils inflicted according to the principles of His government. The historical part of the Bible reveals the course of these ways to the spiritual man; the Psalms present the reflections made on them by the Spirit of Christ in the faithful, the expressions sometimes rising

to the experience of Christ Himself, and thus becoming directly prophetic. But let us not anticipate.

The sovereign grace of God

The other divine principle is **sovereign grace**, which takes poor sinners, erases their sins, and places them in the same glory as the Son (who became man for this purpose), "conformed to the image of his Son," and this according to God's justice, by virtue of Christ's sacrifice through which He fully glorified God in regard to sin. Features of this sovereign grace are found in God's government and are evident when that government has produced its effect, but it is in heavenly glory that it is fully revealed.

The law

Closely connected with God's government is **the law**, which presents the rule of good and evil according to God and bases this rule on His authority. The Lord provides us with an expression of this by drawing from various parts of the Pentateuch the principles which, if established in the heart and operating there, would lead to obedience to God and the fulfilment of his will, and thus

produce human righteousness. The Ten Commandments do not create duty; the existence of duty is based on the relationships in which God has placed man.

There is a difference between the Ten Commandments and the principles of the law laid down by Jesus, in that the latter, drawn by Him from the books of Moses, embrace the whole of absolute good, without question of sin, while the Ten Commandments presuppose sin and, with one exception, prohibit any unfaithfulness to the relationships they deal with. It is important to note that the last of these commandments defends the movement of the heart towards previously condemned sins: "the sting is in the tail". In addition to this, the various relationships are the basis of duty, with the commandments forbidding men from failing in them. But the principle of the law, of any law, is that the approval of the One to whom I am responsible, my acceptance by the One who has the right to judge my faithfulness to my responsibility, or my failings—my happiness, in a word—depends on what I am in this regard, on what I am towards Him. Relationships are established by the will and authority of the Creator, and

when I fail in them, I sin against Him who established them, I disobey Him and I despise His authority. The principle of the law is that a person's acceptance depends on their conduct; grace, on the contrary, does what it will, acting in goodness, according to the nature and character of the One who grants grace.

The gift of promises, election

In contrast to the law, there is another important element in God's ways, namely, **the promises**. They begin with the fall; but as a principle in God's ways, they date back to Abraham, when the world had already fallen, not only into sin, but into idolatry, Satan and the demons having taken the place of God in the mind of man. Now **the election** of Abram, his **calling**, and **the gift of the promises** made to him are all connected with grace. So Abram followed God (*) to the land that God showed him, but he had no place to set his foot in it.

Faith

This introduces another vital principle: living by **faith**, receiving the word of God as such, and relying on God's faithful goodness. The promise obviously depended on

grace; it was not the thing given, but the word of God assured it. Faith counted on this promise and, more or less clearly, introduced the idea of a blessing outside the world; otherwise, those who had faith would have received nothing through their faith. Awareness of God's favour was undoubtedly important, but it depended on faith in His faithfulness to what He had promised.

(*) At first He did so only halfway; but we are speaking here of God's ways.

Promises with and without conditions

Regarding promises, there is an important point to note: there are unconditional promises and conditional promises. The promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were unconditional; those made at Sinai were conditional: God's word never confuses one with the other. Moses recalls those made to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that is, to Jacob (Exodus 32:13); Solomon speaks of what happened under Moses (1 Kings 8:51-53). What is said in Nehemiah 1 refers to Moses, and in Nehemiah 9, first to Abraham as the source of everything, then to Moses when it comes to the ways of God. It is this difference

that the apostle establishes in verses 16 to 20 of chapter 3 of the Epistle to the Galatians. Under the law, when there was a mediator, the enjoyment of the effect of the promise depended on the faithfulness of Israel as well as on the faithfulness of God; but then we see that everything was lost from the beginning. The fulfilment of God's simple promise depended on his faithfulness; in this case, everything was certain.

The promises are to Christ

The passage from the Epistle to the Galatians to which we have referred teaches us further that it is to Christ, the second man, that the promises made to Abraham have been confirmed, and they will certainly be fulfilled—all yes, and all amen—when his day comes, which the prophets have always had in view. Here, the difference, already pointed out, between the government of this world and sovereign grace finds its application. The prophets do not speak of the grace that places us in heaven; for prophecy refers to what is earthly, and, as far as the Lord Jesus is concerned, it contains the revelation of what He was to be on earth at His first coming; then,

continuing the subject, it tells us what He will be on earth when He returns, without any reference to what was to take place between the two comings. However, the facts relating to the person of the Lord are announced in the Psalms, which reveal more of His personal history: His resurrection (Psalm 16), His ascension (Psalm 68), His sitting at the right hand of God (Psalm 110); and, as for the Holy Spirit, they teach us that He will receive Him as a man, - that the gifts are not only gifts from God, but that Christ will receive them "in man", that is, as a man in relation to humanity. On the other hand, except for David's wishes in Psalms 72 and 145, which concern the person of the Lord, there is no mention in the Psalms of the state of affairs that will follow His return, whereas this future state is extensively described in the prophets, in terms of the fulfilment of the promises made to the Jews and the consequences that will ensue for the nations. Another point should be noted: when the prophets give encouragement to faith on behalf of God for the time in which they were speaking and the difficult circumstances of that time, the Spirit of God uses this to

carry thoughts forward into the future, when God will intervene on behalf of his people (*).

(*) This ties in with what is said in 2 Peter 1:20-21. The circumstances of the moment do not explain the significance of the prophecies in Scripture; what is said is part of the great system of God's ways.

The promised Messiah

Finally, when sin was already present, when the law had already been broken, when even the prophets sent by God had vainly reminded Israel of its duty and demanded the fruit of its vineyard for God, the promised Messiah arrived with clear evidence of his mission, evidence that human intelligence could recognise and did in fact recognise (John 2:23; 3:2). God spoke in the person of the Son (Hebrews 1), the great promised Prophet. But at the same time, the Father was revealed in the Son, and man did not want God. The Son of God was there, delivering man from all the external evils that sin had brought into the world and from the power of Satan that was attached to it; but this manifestation of God in goodness only served to bring out the hatred against God that is in the heart of man: the Jews thus lost all right to the promises, and man

rejected God manifested in goodness here below. The history of responsible man was over, for we are not speaking here of grace, except insofar as God's presence in grace put that responsibility to the test. Not only were sin and lawbreaking already present, but men, even though God was present in goodness, not imputing their sins to them, could not bear his presence. Any relationship between man and God was impossible on the basis of what man showed himself to be, despite the miracles, all of kindness (1*), and not only of power, performed by Jesus, as He Himself said (John 15:22-25): "They have no excuse for their sin...; they have seen and hated both me and my Father"; (John always uses the expression "Father" when he speaks of God acting in grace). Yes, and it is a solemn truth that the history of man is morally over! But it ends in order to open, God be blessed, the door of infinite grace before Him who, in the Son, reveals Himself as the God of grace (John 12:31-33). The cross of Christ says: Man does not want God, even when He comes in grace (2 Corinthians 5:17-19); but it also says: God is infinite in grace, not even sparing His Son to reconcile man to Himself (2*).

- (1*) With one exception, the curse of the fig tree, which is an expression of this state of affairs at the end of the Lord's career.
- (2*) The rejection of Christ, who came as the promised Messiah and was at the same time God manifested in the flesh, the end of God's ways with his people, and the manifestation of man's hatred against God coincided; Israel's forfeiture of all rights to the promises and the condemnation of man in his natural state, on the principle of responsibility, took place simultaneously.

Man's responsibility

Let us briefly retrace, from a historical point of view, God's ways with regard to man's responsibility. It is striking to see, in the history of mankind, that whenever God established something good, **the first thing man did was always to ruin it.**

THE INTRODUCTION OF SIN

Man's first act was one of disobedience: he fell into sin and broke all relationship with God; from then on, he feared the One who had showered him with goodness. Noah, who escaped the flood that engulfed the whole world, except for his family, became drunk, and in him

authority was dishonoured and lost. After the law was given, Israel made a golden calf before Moses had come down from the mountain. On the first day of their service, Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire, and Aaron was forbidden to enter the holy place with his garments of glory and beauty, or to enter it in any way except on the great day of atonement (Leviticus 16). Solomon, son of David, fell into idolatry, and the kingdom was divided. The foremost leader of the nations, the one to whom God had given power, made an idol and persecuted those who were faithful to the Lord. The outward or professing church did not escape the common law of disobedience and ruin any more than the rest.

THE PERIOD BETWEEN ADAM AND CHRIST

If we now consider God's ways with man in the period between Adam and Christ, we find first of all that innocent man enjoyed earthly goods without any trouble, and for him evil did not exist. Responsibility was made clear by the prohibition against eating the fruit of a certain tree. It was simply a matter of obedience. This prohibition, or law, did not imply evil: Adam could have eaten the fruit

of the tree as he would any other; there would have been no evil in doing so, had it not been forbidden. Man succumbs to temptation, loses God, and hides from Him before being driven out by Him. Then he is judicially expelled from the garden where he could enjoy the presence of God, who, in fact, came to look for him there in the cool of the day; he acquires a conscience: he learns, despite himself, not through an imposed law, but internally, to distinguish between good and evil. No doubt conscience can be horribly hardened or misguided; nevertheless, it is there in man: when a man does what is wrong, his conscience condemns him. God's law is the rule of conscience, but it is not itself the conscience that uses this rule. Man is now fallen because he has disobeyed; he has renounced his dependence on God and his submission to Him, he fears God and seeks to hide from Him (if that were possible); then he is driven out of the garden, deprived of all those blessings in which he tasted God's goodness, in which he could recognise Him and even enjoy His presence, for "the Lord God walked in the garden " (Genesis 3:8). Self-will and covetousness had entered into man's nature, guilt and fear of God into his

position; but then he is judicially driven out of a place that was no longer suitable for his condition, and morally he is driven away from God. What a horrible thing it would have been if he had been able to eat from the tree of life and fill the world with immortal sinners who feared neither death nor God! God did not allow this to happen.

But we must note some very interesting circumstances relating to the judgement under which man fell. As we have seen, Adam fled from God's presence. The judgement pronounced on him, on Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:14-19), is an earthly judgement and not a judgement of the soul. Both Adam and Eve are placed in misery and under the yoke of labour, suffering and death. Before being driven out, Adam, by faith, it seems, recognises life where death has entered (Genesis 3:20); but there is more: there is the promise, concerning the woman, of the seed that would crush the head of the serpent. Christ, the seed of the woman through whom evil entered the world, was to destroy all the power of the Enemy; then, as sin had destroyed man's innocence and given him, through

the shame of his nakedness, the awareness that it was lost, God Himself, by bringing in death, clothes Adam and his wife and covers their nakedness (Genesis 3:21). Previously, man was unaware of evil; now evil is known to him, but he is covered by God's own act. Man had sought to hide his sin from himself, but when he hears the voice of God, what use are fig leaves? They are nothing to a conscience awakened in the presence of God: "I hid myself," he says, "because I was naked." Let us note that before driving him out, God does not restore his innocence, which was impossible; He does better: in order to see His work, He clothes Adam and his wife, something that their condition made necessary in His eyes and which He accomplished in His grace; to this is added the declaration of the future crushing of the one who had led them into evil. However, man is driven out of the garden where he enjoyed, without faith, all of God's blessings. He will have to till the soil, die, and, until he dies, be separated from the God who previously walked in the cool of the day in the garden where man lived. From now on, man can only know God **through faith**, if faith is in his heart—a new and very important principle. He had lost

God, gained a conscience, and had to work hard to earn his temporal living; he had to live, if he could, and find God, if he could; but he was now outside the enclosure that God visited, and where the abundance of his blessings was dispensed without pain or labour. Man had fled from God's presence, and God had cast man out. Adam was no longer, either in the state of his soul or judicially, in the relationship in which God had formed him to be with Him: he was in sin. We repeat, man had fled from God's presence, and God had cast him out of the position in which He had placed him when He created him; he was now a stranger to God, with a guilty conscience, having just enough knowledge of God to fear Him. He had learned, however, that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. God's grace and work had provided him with a garment which, while bearing witness to death, perfectly covered, on God's behalf, the nakedness of which he was conscious, and which was the expression of his fall and his state of sin. Man is outside; will there be a place where he can enter into God's presence to worship Him and be morally with the One he had abandoned?

This new question now arises in the story of Adam.

THE OFFERINGS OF ABEL AND CAIN

Abel offers a **sacrifice** that costs him nothing, so to speak; but he offers it by faith, recognising that he is a sinner, outside the garden, far from God, and that death has entered. At the same time, he recognised the divine grace that had covered his parents' nakedness, and he approached God with a sacrifice of atonement, which alone could take away sin and allow a sinner to approach God by virtue of the death of another. The character of God, in love and justice, on the one hand, and on the other, the state of Abel, were recognised in Abel's offering: he offers it by faith, and God accepts it, as well as the person of Abel himself, bearing witness to his gifts (Hebrews 11:4). Abel was accepted by God according to the value of his gifts, that is, of Christ. God Himself had covered Adam's nakedness; Abel came, recognising his position and the necessity of the sacrificial offering by which alone he could enter into God's presence.

Cain, on the contrary, presented himself with the fruit of his hard labour. Man, since he was outside God's pres-

ence, had to come to Him and worship Him: all those who are not openly apostates, not only from Christ but from God, recognise this. Cain recognises it, but in what way? He believes he can approach as he is. And why not? As for sin, he does not think about it. The fact that God had driven man out of paradise made no difference to him. He presents himself as if nothing had happened; then, morally blind and insensitive, he offers the fruit of **his labour**, it is true, but which was proof of the curse that now rested on the earth. He recognised neither what he was, nor what God was, - neither sin, nor the curse that weighed on his work, the fruit of sin. Once man was out of paradise, it was a matter for him to approach God, and God Himself, in that treasure trove of great principles laid down in Genesis, proclaims for all ages how this can be done. All these accounts contain the foundations of our relationship with God and at the same time show the condition of man.

Sin is complete: we saw, in Adam, sin against God; then came man's sin against his brother. Cain is angry that God has rejected him, and murder enters the world: Cain

kills his brother. God calls out to him, not saying as He did to Adam, "Where are you?", for Adam should have been full of joy with God, and these words, "Where are you?", implied his entire position; to Cain, God says, "What have you done?" But before that, we have God's conversation with Cain about the state of his relationship with Him: "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" and "his desire shall be toward thee (*), and thou shalt rule over him"; if thou doest well, thou shalt be accepted; but if thou doest not well, sin—or a sacrifice for sin, the Hebrew word having both meanings—is "at the door" (literally "lying at the door"), that is, there is a remedy: these are the general principles of our relationship with God. If one does what is good, one is accepted by God, and if one has done what is evil, God's grace has placed a sacrifice for sin at the door. Note here that Abel's sacrifice was not a sacrifice for sin; neither Cain nor Abel come to God with a conscience burdened by a known transgression. It is the state of each of them that is in view, the state of man before God: one, the man who, recognising himself as cast out from God, approaches Him according to grace; the other, the natural man, insensitive

to sin. God's response to Cain speaks of positive transgression, confirming the idea that this passage refers to a sacrifice for sin, not to sin itself.

THE BEGINNING OF THE "WORLD"

But, as we have said, Cain is guilty of sin against his brother, which was impossible for Adam: he thus completes sin in its second character. God pronounces judgment on Cain, who, cursed in his work, a fugitive and a wanderer, gives himself over to despair. Then, abandoning entirely the presence of God who spoke to him, he goes to settle in the land where God had made him a wanderer ("*Nod*"), and **the world** begins. Cain builds a city and names it after his son; his children become rich, invent the art of working metals, and introduce the pleasures of the arts: they seek to make themselves as happy as possible without God. In addition to the general truth, we can see in Cain a type of the Jews, murderers of the Lord: they bear the mark on their foreheads. Lamech gives in to his own will and takes two wives, but he is, we believe, a type of Israel at the end of days. Seth is the man according to God's purpose, a type of Christ. The

two families of men are established on earth, but already the hatred of one against the other appears in Cain and Abel (compare 1 John 3:11-12). We then have the testimony of God in Enoch, who announces the coming of Christ in judgement, and in Noah, who goes through earthly judgement and is reborn, so to speak, in view of a new world.

(*) Compare these words with the judgement pronounced on the woman (Genesis 3:16).

THE STATE OF FALLEN MAN

We have dwelled on this part of the story because it presents the state of fallen man and the principles according to which he enters into relationship with God, without religious institutions, but not without testimony from God. Eternal life is also manifested in the figure of Enoch, as was the sacrifice by which fallen man can approach God in Abel, and, in Adam and Eve, under the judgement in which man finds himself, the sovereign grace that clothed them before driving them out of Eden. Finally, in Noah, the end of the age is announced, as well as the passage through judgement. All this is recalled, in terms of the principles involved, in grace, in chapter

11:1-7 of the Epistle to the Hebrews. But fallen man continued to worsen; only Noah remained faithful, and God saved him when He destroyed the world. It is important to note that, in the events reported so far, which contain principles that are much deeper and more eternal in their nature and effect, the story of this period of judgement on Adam and the world is a story of this world, and that the judgements are governmental and relate to earthly things.

WITH NOAH, A NEW WORLD BEGINS

A new world begins with Noah: it begins with sacrifice. Here, "burnt offerings" are expressly mentioned: they were pleasing to God. God declares that He will no longer curse the earth and strike down every living thing, but that the seasons will follow one another, according to the order established by Him, as long as the earth lasts. But man is no longer, as in paradise, the authority that exercises peace, sovereignly giving names to animals: the fear of man must now dominate all these creatures. Man could eat them, but he must not touch the blood, the sign of life. Furthermore, the authority of the magistrate was established to restrain the violence that had been un-

leashed. Anyone who attempted to take the life of another man would incur the loss of his own life: God would demand blood for blood shed, and man was vested with the authority necessary to enforce this law. Then God gave the rainbow as a sign of his covenant with all creation: it is the testimony that there will be no more floods. We live on earth under this regime.

Alas! Noah, enjoying the blessing granted to him, fails in his position, becomes drunk and dishonours himself. The world is divided into three parts: one in relationship with God; another, cursed, mentioned in view of the history of Israel; and a third, the mass of Gentiles. Men seek to elevate themselves on earth and to centralise the power of their race, whose unity still remains; but God confounds their designs with their language. After that, imperial power is established on earth with Nimrod. Babel and the land of Shinar begin to come to prominence. This is our world.

THE INTRODUCTION OF IDOLATRY

Another important element emerges in history: **idolatry** is introduced. Not only does Satan, as the tempter, make

man wicked, but he also sets himself up as his god in order to help him satisfy his passions. Having lost God, with whom he had once been in relationship, and with whom these relationships had been renewed in the person of Noah, man makes a god of every power of nature, which becomes a plaything for his imagination and a means of satisfying his lusts; having lost God, man had nothing left but idolatry: even that part of the human race which was in relationship with the Lord (Genesis 9:26) is specifically noted as having fallen into it (Joshua 24:2). What a terrible fall! Although man could not rid himself of the awareness that there was a God, a Being above him, and although he feared Him, he created a multitude of lesser gods through whom he sought to banish this fear and obtain an answer to his desires, hiding what was, and always remained for him, an "unknown God". The stars, the ancestors, sons of Noah, members of the human race even older and less known, the forces of nature, everything that was not man but acted and operated without him, nature reproducing itself after his death, the generation of living beings, everything was deified in his eyes. Man did not possess the true God; he needed a God,

and, dependent and miserable, he made gods according to his passions and imagination, and Satan took advantage of this. Poor humanity without God! It was then that God intervened as Sovereign. Let us note in passing that He halved the lifespan of man during the flood, and reduced it once again in the time of Peleg, when the earth was divided and God assigned each people its place (Deuteronomy 32:8).

THE CALL OF ABRAHAM

As we have just said, the universal influence of idolatry led to God's intervention, an intervention that left its mark on His most important ways: He **called** Abraham and brought him out of this corrupt environment so that he might become the progenitor of a people who belonged to Him. In Abraham, the father of the faithful, three or even four great principles are highlighted: God's sovereign will, in other words **election**, then **God's call**, **the promises**, and **the constant worship rendered by the man who became a stranger on earth**. These two facts, the possession of the promises and the non-possession of the promised things, engaged the affections and

hopes in a realm outside this world, no doubt still in a vague way, but later revelations were added to them. These principles have since characterised the people of God.

Here, then, is a summary of these new ways of God: the world having given itself over to idolatry, God calls a man to be His own, apart from the world, and makes this man the depositary of the promises. There had been faithful people before Abraham, but not the root of a race as Adam was, the head of the fallen race; but Abraham is the head of the race, for we ourselves, being of Christ, are the seed of Abraham.

THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM ACCORDING TO GOD'S WAYS

Nothing is more instructive than the life of Abraham, but we can only point out here what characterises God's ways. Abraham declares that he is a pilgrim and a stranger; arriving in the land that God gave him, but where he has nowhere to set his foot, he builds an altar to God: he has only his tent and his altar; he pitches his tent and builds his altar where he stays. But he failed when,

without consulting God, he went down to Egypt. God protects him, but Abraham has no altar from the time he leaves the land of Canaan until he returns. Promises are made to him: he will have numerous descendants (Israel), to whom the land of Canaan will be given as a perpetual possession; then all the nations of the earth will be blessed in him. The son, in whom the promises were made, having been offered to God and recovered as if raised from the dead, in figure, the promise of the blessing of the nations is confirmed to the seed, that is, to Christ (compare Galatians 3:16). The promises are unconditional: they are God's determined purpose. Israel will benefit from them in the last days; Christians, not to mention the revelations and accomplished deeds that are of infinite importance, enjoy them now. Sarah wants to have "the seed" according to the flesh before the appointed time. But everything had to be based on the principle of the promise: grace, faith, hope, for nothing had been accomplished at that point; and this remains true with regard to glory, except in relation to the person of Christ. In the meantime, God was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the co-heirs of the same promise. In Isaac, we

have the type of Christ's relationship with the Church; Jacob brings us into the sphere of the earthly people.

THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL

Jacob having gone to Egypt, the Israelites, his descendants, are subjected to the yoke of slavery, to the harsh servitude of the Egyptians, as we are to sin in the flesh.

Redemption and ransom

This fact introduces a new principle of immense significance, that of **redemption**, accompanied by another truth: the existence of a people of God on earth, a people among whom God dwells (Exodus 3:7, 8; 6:1-8; 29:45, 46). It is sovereign grace that considers the misery of the people and hears the cry of the children of Israel. But Israel was in sin just as much as the Egyptians; how then could God deliver them? He found **a ransom**: the blood of the Passover lamb, a figure of Christ, was sprinkled by faith on the lintel and on the two doorposts of every Israelite home, and God, who struck in judgment, "passed over" the people sheltered by the blood. Israel ate the lamb that had been sacrificed and had guaranteed them from judgement; they ate it with bitter herbs and un-

leavened bread, with the bitterness of humiliation and truth in their hearts, their loins girded, their staff in their hands, their sandals on their feet; then they hastily left Egypt. Then the people, having arrived at the Red Sea, are delivered: "Stand still," says Moses, "and see the salvation of the Lord." The power of Egypt falls under God's judgement executed upon it; from now on, Israel is out of Egypt, delivered and brought to God. Redemption is complete; the people will never see the Egyptians again (Exodus 14-15).

The life that God cares for

There is also now a life that God cares for. Israel must drink the bitter waters of death (this is Mara) that Christ suffered in reality for us; it is fed with manna, Christ, and watered with water from the rock, which is the Spirit of God; then it is sustained from above in the battle. In these accounts, everything is grace; God acts in grace and glorifies Himself in the midst of man's failings; moreover, man is with God, for redemption brings us to God (Exodus 19:4); but the journey under grace to reach Him is added in its great principles. The establishment of the

Sabbath, for the redeemed people had a share in God's rest, accompanies the manna, Christ, just as the battle comes after the water from the rock.

A few verses from chapter 15 of Exodus demand our attention here. We find: "You have led this people whom you have redeemed with your kindness, you have guided them with your strength to the dwelling place of your holiness" (verse 13); but on the other hand, we read in verse 17: "Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them upon the mountain of thy inheritance, the place which thou hast prepared for thy habitation..." That is to say, the children of Israel were not only brought to God, their redemption being absolute and complete, but they were also to be brought into the promised inheritance. The reader will notice that there is no mention of the wilderness in Exodus 3, nor in chapter 6, nor in the passage we are quoting, Exodus 15:1-21. The work of redemption being perfect, the wilderness is not necessary. The saved thief was fit to be with Christ in paradise, as we are also (Colossians 1:12). The wilderness is not part of God's **counsels**, which, as far as we are concerned, relate to re-

demption and inheritance; it is part of God's **ways** (see Deuteronomy 8:2-3, etc.). God tests us so that we may know ourselves and know God. All professing believers are tested on the basis of accomplished redemption: if they do not have life, they fall by the wayside, while true believers persevere to the end. Furthermore, the condition of the people is tested, and they are chastened (Deuteronomy 8:5, 15, 16). In this position, we are, in principle, under the law; it is a question of who we are before God in relation to his government, but it is under the rod of the priesthood that we are led. (Aaron's death ends this part of the type; then the "red heifer" is given as a special provision for the defilements contracted in the desert). It is different when it comes to justification: then, at the end of the desert, of our life of trial here below, it is said: "At that time (the end of the desert) it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, 'What **has** GOD **done**? ' All along the way the question was, 'What has Israel done?'

The Red Sea

Just as the Red Sea is, in type, Christ's death for us, so the Jordan is our death with Him. After the Jordan come

our battles in Canaan, as God's army, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places. But before that we find Gilgal, the application of our death with Christ to the state of the soul, in practical details. The camp was always at Gilgal: this is where we remember our identification, by faith, with Christ in death, an identification represented by the Jordan. After that, the manna, a type of Christ descended here below and provision for the desert, is replaced by the old wheat of the land, a figure of a heavenly Christ. Finally, the Leader of the army of the Lord appears.

Wars in the wilderness

Success in war and blessing in the wilderness depended on the state of those who were in relationship with God: He blessed, but at the same time He ruled in the midst of His people. For us, the two things, the wilderness and the war (the war in which Israel is engaged as the year of the Lord), do not take place at the same time, but within the same span of human life.

Deliverance at the crossing of the Jordan

Only salvation, redemption, is at the Red Sea; experiential deliverance is at the Jordan. The rod struck the sea, and there was no more sea, except as a safeguard for the people. The ark remained in the Jordan until all had crossed over. It is worth noting that the conditions, the "ifs", do not relate to salvation, but to the journey through the desert. For those who have faith and life, the "ifs" are accompanied by the promise of being kept safe until the end, so that there is no uncertainty for faith: but in the desert it is a matter of experiential relationships with a living God, not of a completed work.

As for Israel historically, it had accepted the promises at Sinai on condition of obedience. This is the first covenant, established through a mediator, which presupposes two parties. However, the enjoyment of the results of the promise, depending as much on man's faithfulness as on God's, was not assured beyond what the weaker of the two contracting parties could offer in terms of security; thus, even before Moses had come down from the mountain, the people had made the golden calf. Like the old

covenant, the new covenant will be established with Israel and Judah when the Lord returns, forgiving their sins and no longer remembering them, and accomplishing his work by writing his law in their hearts and not on tablets of stone. But the fact that the people at Sinai agreed to receive the blessing on condition of prior obedience is of great importance: it changed the nature of sin and aggravated it in that not only were the things themselves evil, but they became a transgression of the law that formally attached God's authority to the obligations resulting from the relationships in which man finds himself, obligations that the law forbade to violate. The relationships and obligations already existed, but the law made the violation of the latter a positive transgression of God's express will. Under the law, it was not only human justice that was at stake, but also God's authority. The last commandment, "Thou shalt not covet...", did not deal with acts of sin, nor strictly speaking with sin in the flesh, but with its first movements, and made the soul born of God discover the root of sin in the flesh. Even if the whole law had been fulfilled, it was still only human justice.

God dwells among his people

Another great truth, already indicated, was now realised: God dwelt here below among his people; it was there, in the midst of Israel, that he had established his throne. Two things were connected with this: the direct government of God, known by faith as the God of all the earth, and the existence of a recognised place where one could approach God. Only God did not reveal himself; he remained hidden behind the veil. But there sacrifices were offered; there all the religious relations of the people with God were realised and centralised, at least those relating to worship. It was there that God's dwelling place was purified every year, there that the sins of Israel were blotted out by sacrifices, figures of that of Christ. At the same time, the tabernacle was an expression of heavenly things; only the veil that closed the entrance to the Holy of Holies had not yet been torn, and no man entered there except the high priest once a year. Such was the state of the people. They had accepted the law as the condition for the fulfilment of the promises; God was present among the people, but inaccessible behind the veil, and God's government was exercised among the people and

in their favour. But the tabernacle and all its ordinances were only a shadow, not the "very image" of things; that is why the Epistle to the Hebrews proceeds more by way of contrast than comparison.

Note

Let us note in passing the grace and condescension of God in his dealings with his people. Were they in slavery? God presented himself as their redeemer. Did they have to wander as pilgrims in the desert? God also wanted to dwell in a tent with them. Must they fight in Canaan? Here is God with his sword drawn, leader of the army of the Lord. Is the people established in peace in their land? God builds himself a dwelling there like the palaces of kings.

Review of Bible books

The Old Testament

Having reviewed what relates to the journey of the people in the desert, let us say a few words about Deuteronomy, which is a book apart. But first, let us make a few brief remarks about the content of the Pentateuch.

THE PENTATEUCH

Genesis

Genesis lays the foundations and all the major principles of man's relationship with God: creation, Satan, the fall, sacrifice, the separation of the saints from the world, the judgement of the world, government that curbs evil, God's call when idolatry was introduced, promises, the seed of God, the faithful, pilgrims and strangers on earth, but worshipping God regularly; no other religious institution; resurrection, in Isaac; the Jews, an earthly people, in Jacob.

The Exodus

In Exodus, we have redemption, the law, the tabernacle, a people of God, the presence of God on his throne on earth, the old covenant, the priesthood.

Leviticus

In Leviticus, we have the details of the sacrifices, the prescriptions relating to ceremonial purity and in particular those relating to leprosy, the great day of atonement, the feasts, the sabbatical year and the year of jubilee, when everyone returned to their inheritance, and finally the

prophetic threats in case of disobedience on the part of the people.

Numbers

In Numbers, the census of the people, the separation of the Levites, the law on jealousy, the Nazirite vow, the story of the crossing of the desert with the cloud as a guide and under the priesthood, and, linked to the story of the conduct of the children of Israel during this crossing, the red heifer. The people, except for two men and the little children, perished in the desert; God's final assessment of Israel is pronounced, according to his sovereign grace, by Balaam. The Book of Numbers also contains details of the sacrifices for feast days, particularly for the Feast of Tabernacles, the law concerning vows, the taking possession of the land east of the Jordan, the bronze serpent, the inheritance of the Levites, and the cities of refuge.

Remarks on these three books

In all these books, not only are the rites and ceremonies types, but the history itself is typical and represents spiritual things: "All these things," says Paul, "happened to

them as types, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come " (1 Corinthians 10:1-13). Apart from Leviticus 8-9, we have no evidence that a single sacrifice was offered in the wilderness, except to Molech and Remphan.

Deuteronomy

The book of Deuteronomy occupies a special place: assuming that the people are in the land of Canaan, it reminds them of their disobedience and insists on obedience to the Lord; its purpose is to keep them bound to their God. A place was to be designated in the land where the ark would be placed and worship established, where all the feasts would be celebrated, where all the offerings and tithes would be brought, except what was given to the Levite in the third year, in the place where he lived (*). There is almost no mention of priests in this book; the people are in direct relationship with the Lord. Blessing is promised for obedience, and judgement must come upon disobedience. The book ends with a prophetic song announcing the apostasy of the people and the judgement of God, a judgement that will also fall upon the nations

that have oppressed Israel. Exodus and Leviticus deal with drawing near to God; Deuteronomy deals with enjoying the blessings of the Lord by showing a spirit of grace towards those in need, being placed directly under the hand of the Lord, and faithfully observing the law He had given. Several ordinances are repeated, relating to feasts and cities of refuge, but what distinguishes the book is a people without a king, without a prophet (although appointed, the priests hardly appear), put in possession of the land to serve the Lord who had given it to them; only God raises up, when necessary, at the time to which this book refers, extraordinary men to lift up the people who have fallen into decadence as a result of their sins: but, as we have said, it is essentially the Lord and the people.

(*) This is found historically in the apocryphal books (see Tobit 1:6-8).

FROM JOSHUA TO SAMUEL

The Book of Joshua

The Book of Joshua recounts the conquest of the land of Canaan. The responsibility of the people is highlighted,

but, in short, God is with them: no enemy was able to prevail in the war against Israel. God was with Joshua every day of his life, and this continued during the days of the elders who had been eyewitnesses to the marvelous works of the Eternal One.

The Book of Judges

But immediately afterwards (as we see in the Book of Judges), the people fell into idolatry. Having failed to exterminate the nations upon whom God was executing judgement through them, they learned their wicked and idolatrous ways; they fell under God's judgement and were delivered into the hands of various tyrants and persecutors. From time to time God raised up a judge to deliver Israel, and there was relief and blessing during his lifetime; then, after his death, the people fell back into the same disobedience and were again delivered into the hands of their enemies.

The Books of Samuel

Finally, in the time of Samuel, Eli, judge and priest, died; his family was cut off, the ark was taken, and Israel's relationship with God on the basis of its own responsibility

came to an end. God, nevertheless, continued in his ways, and the capture of the ark became an opportunity to make them evident. Christ is the centre of these ways: he is prophet, priest, and king. The high priest served as the point of contact between the responsible people and God; the ark was the place where this contact could be maintained. But the ark is taken. From now on, there is no more Day of Atonement, no more throne of God in the midst of the people, no more sprinkling of blood according to the order of the house of God! Where was He who sat between the cherubim? No doubt He struck the false god with His great power, only it was not in Israel, but among the Philistines. Everything was over for Israel on the basis of its responsibility; but God's sovereignty and His sovereign goodness cannot be set aside or limited. He intervenes through a **prophet**: He raises up Samuel, as He had once brought His people up out of Egypt before the ark existed. The prophet whom God, in His sovereignty, sends becomes the link between the people and God. God Himself was the King of Israel, but the people, wanting to be like the nations and walk by sight and not by faith, set up a man, Saul, as their king. In general, Saul

was successful, but, abandoned by God because of his disobedience (which was that of Israel), he fell by the hand of the enemies whose destruction he had been raised up to accomplish. But God, with a view to Christ, wanted a king, and David was that king. The priest, the prophet, and the king reveal God's thought concerning His Anointed One. But David's son, Solomon, blessed as he was, failed, as has always happened to man, and the kingdom was divided.

Remarks on kingship

There are a few remarks to be made concerning kingship itself. Kingship, strictly speaking, is the effective power in exercise. In the kingdom of God, it is God's power; the king who reigns on God's behalf in Israel is the instrument of God's intervention, in power, among His people. We have seen the walk of the responsible man under the priesthood, and alongside this, the prophet acting on behalf of God through the word; this was already grace; but now power is united with grace to accomplish God's intentions. God knew well how to deliver Himself and take vengeance on false gods without man; but He wanted to

reign in man: this is the third characteristic of Christ. As Prince of Peace, Solomon is the type of the Lord; however, it is in David, suffering and liberating his people, that the exercise of his power is characteristically shown. This will be the means of Israel's restoration in the last days. (In Psalm 72 we have the king and the king's son.) David therefore brings back the ark from Kiriath-Jearim, but he no longer places it in the tabernacle, which was associated with the outward form of worship, but on Mount Zion, which God had chosen to be the seat of kingship. (See Psalm 132; 2 Samuel 6; 1 Chronicles 16). Then, for the first time (for now it was grace, and grace exercised in power), David instituted the singing of the hymn: "His goodness endures forever". This hymn was sung again under Nehemiah—the occasion was striking for doing so—and we hear it again in view of the last days, in Psalms 106, 107, 118, 136. Although kingship was historically placed on the basis of responsibility, the great and infallible principle of grace acting in power was now established—God's assured goodness toward Israel in the person of Christ: "His goodness endures forever." David had received the promise of a seed and a house that would

never fail (2 Samuel 7:12-16; 1 Chronicles 17:11-14). Christ, the true son of David, has a clearly defined and established position from God, although for the time being the house of David was placed under responsibility and immediately failed (2 Samuel 23:5; compare Hebrews 12:18-22). The temple built on Mount Moriah, while being the dwelling place of God, did not have a promise of perpetual duration.

Lessons from the books of Joshua to Samuel

In summary, the book of **Joshua**, beginning in Gilgal with death, symbolised by the Jordan River and circumcision, presents us with the spiritual power of Christ, leader and guide of his people. The **Judges** show us the fall of the people, but also God's intervention in grace; then comes **Samuel**, the last of the judges, followed by the monarchy.

THE BOOKS OF KINGS AND CHRONICLES

Israel, namely the ten tribes, soon abandoned the Lord, while still claiming His name; Judah declined less rapidly. This is the story told to us in the books of Kings and Chronicles, the latter written, or at least completed, after

the return from Babylon. The Book of Kings mainly contains the history of Israel (after the division of the kingdom); we see the intervention of the Lord through Elijah and Elisha; however, the history of Judah is continued in this book until the captivity. The Book of Chronicles is essentially the history of David's family. The David of Chronicles differs greatly from that of the Books of Samuel. The latter present David in his historical character, David being tested and held accountable. The same principle is found in the Books of Kings, which contain the history of the people and the conduct of their kings from the point of view of their responsibility. On the contrary, the ^{first}book of Chronicles shows us the David of grace and blessing, according to God's counsel. We can thus understand why this book passes over in silence the story of Uriah and Bathsheba, and that of Solomon's last days. Evil is recounted only when the understanding of history makes the account necessary.

Israel, by establishing the worship of golden calves, broke with the temple and, in fact, with the Lord. Undoubtedly, responsibility lies with the office of king, but

Israel itself never left its false position. For both Israel and Judah, this period is characterised by the ministry of prophets sent by God. God thinks of the faithful who are in Israel, while the prophet can no longer find any: a touching testimony to his grace! As great as the prophet was, who did not even go through death, God knew seven thousand men, when Elijah, seeing only himself, said, "I alone am left." It should be noted that the prophets in Israel and those who bore witness in Judah had very distinct characters. Much of the book of Kings recounts the stories of Elijah and Elisha. Their testimony concerned the rights of the Lord among an apostate people and served to maintain, in the hearts of the faithful hidden among this people, faith in the One whom Israel had abandoned. They did not bear witness to the coming Messiah (*) or to the ways of God in general, but they performed miracles, which is not seen (except for the sign given to Hezekiah) among the prophets of Judah, because in the kingdom of Judah the profession of worship of the Lord still existed. Elijah and Elisha maintained, in their persons, the testimony of the Lord among an apostate people, and, like Moses when he established this

testimony, they performed miracles to maintain it personally. The prophets of Judah insisted on the faithfulness that a people professing to serve the true God and to possess his temple should maintain towards the Lord. They encouraged personal faith, not by miracles declaring the power of the Lord, but by the promise given to the people according to God's love and his unfailing faithfulness.

(*) The spiritual eye, however, can discern a hidden testimony in their history. Elijah at Horeb, so to speak, places the violated law back into the hands of the Lord; then he retraces every step of Israel: Gilead, where Israel was set apart for God; Bethel, the place of the promise made to Jacob for the land; then Jericho, the place of the curse; finally the Jordan or death, then Elijah ascends to heaven. From there, Elisha passes through death and enters his career of service. But Elijah's miracles are miracles of judgement, while Elisha's, except for the second, are miracles of goodness and grace.

Israel, taken captive by the Assyrians, remained lost among the nations; but not forever: when the Messiah comes, He will find it again. In the meantime, God's ways continued publicly in the history of Judah. The ministry of the prophets continued until there was no remedy,

as Jeremiah says, that is, until the Babylonian captivity and even beyond. But the Babylonian captivity had immense significance for the earth: God's throne ceased to be on earth. The time of the nations, of the power of the "beasts" spoken of by Daniel, had begun, and will continue until the destruction of the last beast by the power of the Lord Jesus at His coming. Only Christ had to be presented to the Jews as king: this is the story of the Gospel in relation to them. Having rejected him, they are now "wanderers" on earth, but bearing the mark of God in order to be preserved (without being, like Israel, lost among the nations) for the days of blessing that await them. It is then that they will repent, at least a remnant of them, and see Him whom they have pierced. The expressions "the God of heaven" and "the God of all the earth" are never confused in prophecy. The history of Israel under the old covenant, when blessing depended on man's obedience, was over; but the promise still remained, the promise of the Messiah and the new covenant. God, in His goodness, put it into the heart of Cyrus, who had not given himself over to the gross idolatry of Babylon and who hated idols, to bring back even a remnant of Israel to

the land of promise, and even to help restore the temple of the true God and His worship. It was among this remnant that the promised Messiah came in his time, but for purposes even more glorious than the restoration of Israel, while subjecting man to a final test. He came in humiliation in order to be close to man, demonstrating by his words and deeds who he was and how he was above all, but he came in grace and kindness towards man, accessible to all, abolishing all the effects of sin. He encountered sin, manifested according to its true character in man, in that man rejects God in the person of the Saviour.

In summary, tested by the enemy, when he is innocent, man falls; he is tested without law, and sin reigns; under the law, he transgresses it; then, man being already a sinner and transgressor, God comes in kindness, not imputing his sins to him, but he did not want to receive God. The history of responsible man is therefore over; at the same time, Israel has lost all right to the fulfilment of the promises, given unconditionally, be-

cause it rejected the One in whom this fulfilment took place.

We still need to provide some information on the prophecies to facilitate understanding of these revelations from God, and then quickly review the hagiographers.

THE PROPHETS

Isaiah

Of all the prophets, Isaiah is the one who embraces the broadest horizon. As long as Israel is recognised by God, Assyria is the enemy. It will be the same in the last days; but while what the prophets say about it encourages the faith of their contemporaries, what they announce will only be fully fulfilled in those days. A brief analysis of Isaiah will give us the complete framework of the prophecy, with the other prophets providing details that require only a few words.

CHAPTERS 1 TO 4

The first four chapters are a preface that notes the moral ruin of Jerusalem and Judah, the judgments that will fall upon them, and their restoration, bringing peace, destroy-

ing man and his glory, and revealing Christ, the glory of the remnant.

CHAPTER 5

In chapter 5, the judgement is based on the people's abandonment of the position in which God had placed them in the beginning.

CHAPTER 6

In chapter 6, the judgement is based on their inability to stand in the presence of the God who was to come. Such are the grounds for the judgement of man, Israel, and the Church; but in the midst of the general blindness of the people, there was to be a faithful remnant.

CHAPTERS 7 TO 10

Next we find Immanuel, son of the Virgin, the sure foundation of trust for faith, and, on the other hand, the Assyrian, the rod of God; but also (until the end of verse 7 of chapter 9) the effect of the presence of Immanuel, a stumbling block for the people from whom God hides his face, yet a sanctuary, and ultimately the restorer of the people in glory.

Chapters 7, 8, and 9:1-7 are a parenthesis that introduces Christ.

Verse 8 of chapter 9 resumes the thread of the history of the people in its various phases, verses 8-12, 13-17, 18-21; 10:1-4; then comes the Assyrian, with whom the punishments come to an end.

CHAPTERS 11 AND 12

Chapters 11 and 12 depict the full blessing of the end: the Holy One of Israel is once again among the people; this completes the review of the major elements of the prophecy.

CHAPTERS 13 TO 27

Chapters 13 to 27 announce the judgement of the Gentiles, of Babylon, the city where Israel was held captive, and which characterises the times of the Gentiles and the captivity of Israel. The judgement of Assyria comes after that of Babylon, which shows that these are the last days, for historically, the greatness and empire of Babylon were founded on the fall of Assyria.

After Babylon come the other countries; only in chapter 18 do we see Israel brought back to its land, but plundered by the nations at the moment of its apparent flowering. Jerusalem and its leader undergo judgement; then the whole world is turned upside down, and the Lord, whom the faithful were waiting for, arrives. The powers of wickedness above are judged, and the kings of the earth are judged on earth (24:21). The veil that prevented the nations from seeing will be removed, the reproach of the people will be abolished, and the first resurrection will take place; the power of the Serpent among the peoples will be destroyed; the Lord will care for Israel as for a vineyard that is his delight (25 to 27).

CHAPTERS 28 TO 35

In chapters 28 to 35, we have a series of special prophecies depicting the final assault of the nations against Israel, with Edom and Assyria being prominent, but each of these prophecies ends with the full blessing of Israel and the presence of the King (Christ).

CHAPTERS 36 TO 39

Then come four chapters containing the story of Sennacherib, which provided the occasion for the prophecy, but where Hezekiah's healing, a type of the resurrected Christ, and the deliverance from the Assyrian attack, foreshadow the events of the last days.

CHAPTERS 40 TO 66

From chapter 40 to chapter 48

From chapter 40 to the end, we find the Lord's controversy with Israel, who had forsaken their God for idols, and the judgement of the great centre of idolatry on earth, Babylon, which was taken by Cyrus, who is mentioned by name here (chapter 44 v. 28; 45 v. 1). In a word, it is the judgement of idolatry; then comes the rejection of Christ.

The first part extends to the end of chapter 48.

Chapters 49 to 57

The second part, in which Christ is the subject, runs from chapter 49 to the end of chapter 57.

Chapters 58 to 66

God demands the exercise of justice, then, after some reproaches addressed to Israel, we witness his glory in the last days.

The other prophets

We have dwelled a little on the book of Isaiah because it contains the entire framework of prophecy, as well as God's thoughts when Israel was still recognised; whereas **DANIEL** gives us the history of the powers of the nations represented by "beasts" when the Jews were captives and, consequently, outside God's direct government. The other prophets deal with the details: Jeremiah, from within (the throne of God still being in Jerusalem), deals with the ruin of Judah; Ezekiel deals with Israel already rejected, viewing it from outside.

JEREMIAH

Jeremiah emphasises the iniquity that brought about the ruin, but in chapter 31 he announces grace and a new covenant with Judah and Israel; and in this chapter, as well as in the following two, the full blessing for Judah and Israel. We then find the judgement of the nations.

EZEKIEL

Ezekiel introduces the Lord Himself, executing judgment on Jerusalem, which He had left, His throne no longer being there; Judah and Israel are therefore in the same position before God, so Ezekiel deals with both of them.

In chapters 34 to 37, we see God restoring Israel and purifying it: Judah and Israel are united together, never to be separated again; Christ (David) is there, and God's sanctuary is in their midst.

In chapters 38-39, the power of the North, Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal, rises up to ravage the land of Israel. The judgement that the Lord executes on him makes known the name of the Lord and also shows that Israel had been in captivity because of its iniquities. Ezekiel then gives the plan for the new temple.

DANIEL

Daniel, captive in Babylon but keeping himself pure from all defilement, is entrusted with the revelation concerning the four monarchies of the nations.

The first six chapters of his book recount the history of these empires as the history of the world; Daniel is merely an interpreter.

The last six chapters show us the same empires in relation to captive Israel. As everywhere in prophecy, the deliverance of Israel is announced at the end, as well as the judgement of its oppressors. Daniel will have his share in this blessing.

HOSEA

Hosea predicts the transportation of the ten tribes, then announces that, as a result of Judah's captivity, there will no longer be a recognised people of God on earth, but that in the end Judah and Israel will establish a single leader (Christ), and that this day of blessing will be great. Israel must remain for a long time without the true God and without false gods, without sacrifice and without idols, but in the last days it will recognise the Lord and David (Christ); its repentance is depicted in the last chapter.

JOEL

Joel announces, during a famine, the destruction of the army of the North; then he predicts the gift of the Spirit to all flesh before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.

AMOS

Amos, after announcing the judgement that would fall upon several nations of Canaan, declares that God's patience will no longer bear the iniquity of Israel; but he also proclaims, like all the prophets, the return and blessing of the people, adding that they will never again be uprooted from their land.

OBADIAH

Obadiah prophesies against Edom, whose relentless jealousy and hatred of Jerusalem are often found in the course of the prophecy; then he announces the day of the Lord to judge the nations, and as always, the deliverance of Zion.

JONAH

Jonah has a special character. Although the Lord had chosen Israel to be a people apart, in order to preserve the knowledge of His name on earth, He is nonetheless the God of the nations, and a God of goodness and mercy. When the privileges that God grants obscure the knowledge of who He is in Himself, the possession of these privileges gives rise to a harsh spirit of partisanship; this was clearly seen among the Jews. It is remarkable that in the book of Jonah, the testimony of divine mercy is addressed to the great enemy of God's people. We also see in this prophet the ways of God when repentance is manifested. In some respects, Jonah is a well-known type of the Saviour. The subject of chapter 4 contrasts with the special blessing of the Jews at the end: God is also the God of the nations.

MICAH

Micah's prophecy resembles that of Isaiah in many respects, but the development of God's plans is much less complete in his book, which is addressed more to the conscience of the people. He concludes by affirming that

the promises made to Abraham and Jacob will be fulfilled.

NAHUM

Nahum shows God's indignation rising against the arrogance of human power and domination; he announces the destruction of Nineveh (Assyria), which will never rise again, and Judah will finally be delivered.

HABAKKUK

In the book of Habakkuk, we find expressions of faith in the Lord despite everything, as well as God's ways in the history of the people. The prophet complains about the iniquity surrounding him in Israel, and God shows him the Chaldeans whom He is bringing to punish the country for this iniquity: then the prophet's affection for the people is reawakened, and he complains about the Chaldeans. God shows him that he must live by faith: He will punish these violent enemies, whose passions have served as His rod to chastise Israel; but the faithful must wait. The day of the Lord will come, and the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the bottom of the sea is covered by water. The prophet recalls

the ancient deliverance of Israel and rejoices in the Lord, even though no blessing from Him is yet apparent.

ZEPHANIAH

Zephaniah announces a judgment upon the land that will leave no iniquity unpunished: it is the day of the Lord, a day of wrath, turmoil and distress, when the land will be devoured by the anger of the Lord. The meek must seek the Lord in order to be "sheltered" (2:3); first Israel, then the Gentiles, will be judged, with the Assyrian as the leader of the latter (for here Israel is recognised). Then comes what concerns Jerusalem; God had warned her, as if He had said, "She will repent"; but she became corrupt, going from bad to worse. The prophet takes this opportunity to invite the remnant to wait for the Lord, who was going to gather all the nations together to judge them in His wrath. Then a complete change will take place: all nations will call upon the Lord with a pure heart, and Israel will be brought back to the Lord with all its heart, and iniquity will no longer be found among them; the Lord will make them a people of renown and glory

among all nations, a conclusion in harmony with all the ways of God spoken of by the prophets.

NOTE

The following prophets, who prophesied after the return from Babylon, have a different character.

HAGGAI

Haggai, though simple and short, is of great interest. He insists that the people think of the Lord and not of their temporal affairs; he calls on them to continue the construction of the temple interrupted by their enemies, to do so by trusting in the Lord and without waiting for the permission of the king of Persia. The Jews obeyed this word, and indeed, when they acted in faith, they were providentially helped, in that the king granted them his permission. But as far as faith was concerned, it was God who directed everything, for it is He who disposes the hearts of kings. This is always how faith acts according to the word of God, which in this case came through the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. The prophet then announces that God was going to shake the heavens and the earth, so that all human power would be set aside, as well as the

spiritual powers that are in the air. Then what the multitude of disciples proclaimed by inspiration when Jesus entered Jerusalem would come to pass: "Peace in heaven"; and the power of Christ, the leader of Israel, identified with that of the Lord, would be established.

ZECHARIAH

Zechariah deals with the restoration of Jerusalem at that time, but gives the history of the city up to the first coming of Christ, and even up to the second. He speaks only occasionally of the destruction of the nations that ravaged Jerusalem. This destruction is justified and then blessed by the administration of grace, according to the perfect and divine order; the wicked are relegated and find their place with Babylon, then Christ is introduced.

A second prophecy begins in chapter 7 and introduces, in chapter 11, the rejection of Christ at his first coming; Israel is then delivered into the hands of a wicked shepherd. Then Jerusalem must be the place where the nations will be judged, and the spirit of grace and supplication being poured out on the people, they will repent of having put to death the man who is the companion of the

Lord. The city will be taken, but the Lord will come out to judge his enemies, and everything will be sanctified in Jerusalem.

MALACHI

Malachi shows us the moral decline of the people after their return from Babylon, but there is a remnant in the midst of the ruin. The mission of John the Baptist is foretold, the day of the Lord is coming, and the coming of Elijah is announced; the people are brought back to the law.

NOTE

Note that Christianity does not appear here, but Christ and his rejection do; the shepherd is struck and the sheep are scattered (Zechariah 13), then judgement comes. In these three prophecies, uttered after the return from Babylon, when one of the empires represented by Daniel's "beasts" had already fallen, and although reference is made to the nations (for it was their time, they possessed the world), there is a noticeable narrowing of the scope of the prophecy, and we find many more details that have a direct application to Christ. It is true that we

find Egypt and Assyria (Zechariah 10), those great players among the nations; we see them being judged, but still awaiting the final judgments; they give way to the beasts of Daniel, all associated with the captivity of the Jews, for this captivity characterised the position of the people. When the Assyrian was on the scene, the throne of God was in the midst of the people in Jerusalem; here, although captivity under the power of the nations still exists and is recognised, the horizon, as we have said, narrows, and the scene is filled more with Christ Himself and details relating to restored Jerusalem; then comes the great day of the Lord.

THE HAGIOGRAPHISTS

N.B. The Hagiographa, or sacred writings, is the name given to the following books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs

We still have a few words to say about THE HAGIOGRAPHS

Daniel

Daniel is one of them for the Jews. We have spoken of his book as prophecy, although it has a character of its

own, the throne of God having disappeared from the earth and the prophet being in Babylon. But it does share the character of the other Hagiographa, which contain moral discourses or detailed histories during Israel's rejection, and which express Christ's affection for Israel. We find in it God's relationship with man and the providential care He takes of His people when He had no relationship with them as a people and did not recognise them as such.

The Psalms

The Psalms set forth this state of affairs more completely than any other book of Scripture.

The Psalms are divided into five books: Psalms 1-41; 42-72; 73-89; 90-106; 107-150.

BOOK 1: PSALMS 1 TO 41

This first book deals more with Christ personally, and the remnant is in Jerusalem, but in the presence of the power of the wicked.

Psalms 1 & 2

Two principles underlie the entire book:

- The first is that there is a remnant among the wicked who fear God
- the second is that the Lord and His Anointed One encounter opposition from the people and the nations (Psalms 1 and 2).

Psalms 3 to 7

We then have God's counsel in the Anointed One, Son of God and King in Zion, then Ruler of the whole earth. If he is rejected, the faithful must suffer and carry their cross (Psalms 3-7).

Psalm 8

In Psalm 8, He is presented as the Son of Man established over all the works of God.

Note

The method *generally* followed in the book of Psalms is to first put forward a primary and fundamental thought, then add the experiences of the remnant in the circumstances presented as a basis.

Psalms 9 to 18

Psalm 9 begins the story of the remnant in the midst of Israel. A few principles will serve as a guide in reading this book.

Psalms 9 and 10 are the foundation; the following psalms, up to the end of Psalm 18, express feelings related to it; but the last three present Christ more directly to us.

Psalm 18 is remarkable in that it connects the entire history of Israel, from Egypt to the end, with the sufferings of Christ.

Psalms 19 to 21

Psalms 19, 20, and 21 are the various testimonies of God: creation, the law, and Christ. Psalm 21 shows the introduction of Christ into glory.

Psalm 22

Psalm 22 presents Christ, not in relation to the Jews, but as sin before God.

Psalms 23 to 41

There is no confession of sins until Psalm 25.

BOOK 2: PSALMS 42 TO 72

In the second book, the remnant is seen outside Jerusalem. In Psalm 45, the Messiah is introduced, and from then on we find the name of the Lord. When we encounter the name Jehovah, faith recognises the relationship between the people and God (compare Psalms 14 and 53). Note here that the first verse or verses of a Psalm usually give the thesis, with the following verses describing the way to achieve it.

In this second book, Christ's afflictions occupy a large place, followed by David's wishes for the establishment of his son in the millennial reign.

BOOK 3: PSALMS 73 TO 89

The third book, while mentioning Judah and Zion, embraces all of Israel, thus going back in time, reviewing the history of the people and continuing it up to the assured covenant made with David and his seed.

BOOK 4: PSALMS 90 TO 106

After recalling Moses and telling how the Lord had been the God of Israel at all times, after speaking of the Messiah and the Sabbath, the fourth book introduces the Lord coming to establish his reign and describes his journey from above until he sits between the cherubim and the nations are called to bow down before him and worship him. In this book we find the principles of Christ's reign, his rejection, his divinity and the length of his days as a resurrected man, and finally the blessing of the people and the world through his presence. God remembers his promise to Abraham. Israel has been unfaithful, but God, in his grace, has remembered him.

BOOK 5: PSALMS 107 TO 150

The fifth book goes to the end; it sets forth the principles and ways of the Lord and the return of the people to their land (Psalms of Degrees). Meanwhile, Christ sat down at the right hand of God, made Lord as the Son of David. The goodness of the Lord remains forever; the law is written in the heart of Israel, which had gone astray. Then, after the Psalms of Ascents and the judgement of

Babylon, comes the great "Hallel" or Hallelujah, a series of songs of praise.

NOTES

Psalms 72 and 145 are the only ones that prophetically describe the reign itself.

The book of Psalms begins by showing Christ rejected; then, introducing his return to establish the reign, it gives the ways of the people and their restoration to their land. Let us also note that in the Psalms we never find God as Father, nor the feelings that belong to adoption. We clearly see trust, obedience, faith in the midst of difficulties, devotion (as in Psalm 63), faith in promises, and faithfulness, but never the relationship of a son to a father.

Because of a failure to pay attention to this point, the character of the piety of more than one sincere soul has been diminished by reading this precious book.

Job

The Book of Job shows us man being tested. Will he, the man renewed by grace, as we would say with our current

knowledge, the man who is righteous and upright in his ways, be able to possess righteousness within himself and stand before God in the presence of the power of evil? That is the question posed by this book. We still see God's ways of probing hearts and giving them knowledge of their true state before Him. This subject is all the more instructive because it is presented to us outside of any economy, any particular revelation from God. Job is a pious man, as could be expected of a descendant of Noah who had not lost the knowledge of the true God, at a time when sin was spreading once again throughout the world and idolatry was beginning to take hold, even though the Judge was ready to punish it. We also see in Job a heart that, while rebellious against God, relies on Him, a heart that turns to God but cannot find Him, a heart that, because it knows God, while being rebellious, claims for Him qualities that the cold reasoning of his friends cannot attribute to Him; and yet he takes pleasure in his integrity and makes it a garment of his own righteousness that hides God from him and hides Job from himself. Elihu reproaches him for these things, while explaining God's ways to him. Finally, God reveals Himself to Job

and his heart is broken; then God heals him and fills him with peace and blessings. This book also provides a picture of God's ways with the Jews, as well as the Spirit's teaching on Satan's role in God's ways and government on earth.

Ecclesiastes

The Preacher in Ecclesiastes wonders whether it is possible to find happiness under the sun. All is vanity in man's efforts; but there is a law, a perfect rule of conduct for man, and every work will be weighed in God's judgment. There is no positive relationship with God in this book; we find the Creator God and man in the world as it is, but not the Eternal One, and still not the Father.

Proverbs

Proverbs is different. This book presents us with the wisdom of an authority that restrains man's will, represses corruption and violence, and furthermore puts a brake on self-satisfaction, which is man's danger; we also see God's counsel revealed in that the Wisdom of God (Christ), the object of his good pleasure, finds delight in the sons of men, and this before the world was (chapter

8). Throughout this book, we have the Lord or God who has made himself known and who acts through the authority entrusted to man, to parents, etc. Then God gives us the teachings necessary to help each of us avoid the pitfalls of this poor world, without having to learn through our own experience all the iniquity in which we are immersed.

Ezra & Nehemiah

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah contain the story of the national reintegration of Judah, from both a religious and a civil point of view. Ezra comes after Jeshua and Zerubabel. We see in them men who act by faith: they build an altar to defend themselves against the enemies that surround them; they rely on God (Ezra 3:2). The prophets Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the Jews on behalf of God, who responded to their faith. Later, Ezra arrives, a faithful, devoted man who trusts in the Lord: educated in the law, he brings order to the conduct of the people. However, it would seem that, under the influence of the natural inclination of the human heart, this order degenerated into pharisaism. For the time being, the faithfulness

of the Jews consisted in being separated as God's people, in requiring a known Jewish genealogy, especially for the priests, and in sending away foreign women. Nehemiah rebuilt the walls and the city; he was a faithful and devoted man, but one who liked to talk about his faithfulness, for Scripture presents these two characteristics as they were found in him.

Esther

The book of Esther shows how God, in his providence, while remaining hidden, cares for Israel. It has often been noted that God is not named in this book: this is precisely appropriate, since it deals with God's providence when God does not show himself openly.

The Song of Songs

The Song of Songs presents the renewal of the Son of David's relationship with the faithful remnant of Israel in the last days, when this remnant will be "My delight in her" (Isaiah 62:4). It should be noted that He always addresses the Shulamite when He speaks of her, while she speaks of Him as the object of her affections, but rarely to Him. The affection of the Church is calmer than that

expressed in the Song, because the Church already enjoys the love of Christ as a known thing and is in a firmly established relationship, although the consequences are not yet fully realised. Personally, the believer can enter more deeply into the feelings expressed in this book.

Lamentations of Jeremiah & Ruth

There are two small portions of the Hagiographa that are separated in our Bibles. They are: Lamentations of Jeremiah and Ruth.

The touching story of the latter presents us with very primitive customs and, at the same time, admirable character traits, and carries within itself an undeniable stamp of reality. It is important in that it traces the genealogy of David and therefore of Christ, and shows us a woman from among the Gentiles admitted into this genealogy.

The Lamentations are characterised by grief caused by the feeling that God has struck down his people, destroyed his altar and ruined his house. For the time being, under the old covenant, Jerusalem and the people of God are finished. Jeremiah sees with the eye of God, from

within (where the house of God and the seat of his authority were), and there is no remedy! We must remember that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah recount the return of a remnant of Jews, brought back by God's mercy, so that there might be a people to whom grace could present the One who had been promised.

IN SUMMARY

The history of man, considered as having to answer for his own conduct, tested without law and later under the law, is over. From the fall, before man was driven out of the Garden of Eden, God's goodness had given the promise of a Saviour who would crush the head of the Serpent; but for the time being, God left men to themselves. Saving what needed to be preserved to populate the new world, the flood put an end to a fallen race steeped in corruption and violence. However, the heart of man remained the same (Genesis 6:5; 8:21): in this renewed world, all men soon fell into idolatry. Then grace called Abraham, and formal promises concerning his seed were given to him. Four hundred and thirty years later, this race of Abraham, set apart for God, was placed under the

law, the perfect rule of what man should be, if we take into account the fact that the law forbids covetousness. The prophets remind the people of the law, but at the same time they support the faith of those who were faithful in the midst of general unfaithfulness, recalling, confirming and developing the promise of the 'seed' and that of the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. We see an example of this in the last words of the prophet Malachi (chapter 4). The promise of the seed and the appeal to conscience were constantly repeated by the prophets until there was no remedy left.

THE REMEDY: THE COMING OF CHRIST

God, however, fulfilled the promise by sending Christ, the seed of David. This is grace on God's part. It was undoubtedly faithfulness to his promise, and in this sense, justice in God (such is the meaning of 2 Peter 1:1), but it was no longer a matter of man's responsibility to observe a rule imposed on him: it was a matter of receiving Christ. There was more than that. Christ was the Word made flesh. God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, and not counting their sins against them. He

came to His own, but they did not receive Him: the world did not want Him, it did not know Him; the Father was manifested in the Son, in His words and in His works, but the world did not know Him: "They saw," says the Saviour, "and they hated both me and my Father." Thus the Jews lost all right to the promises by rejecting the One in whom they were fulfilled. Moreover, man was not only disobedient, but in being so, he showed his hatred for God, who had shown him grace in this state. On the part of man's responsibility, any relationship with God was impossible. The cross is the public manifestation of this rejection, of this enmity against God; and at the same time, it is the manifestation of God's love for man as he was. It is even more than that: it is the fulfilment of a perfect work of propitiation, a sacrifice to take away sin, a completely new basis for the relationship between man and God, a relationship that depends not on man's responsibility – in this area he was lost – but on God's infinite grace: He did not spare his own Son, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself to him without blemish, so that grace might reign through righteousness for eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. The promises

will be fulfilled; the believer possesses eternal life, and will possess it in glory, when he is made like the Son of God who returned to glory as a man; for God's heart, His love, must be satisfied, His holy justice manifested and honoured; his Son, who left glory for us and humbled himself by being obedient unto death, must be exalted according to all the glory that is due to him.

This brings us to the subject of the Gospel.

The New Testament

INTRODUCTION

The New Testament is very different in character from the Old Testament. The latter reveals to us the thoughts that God communicated to those who were the instruments of this revelation, and leads us to worship the wisdom that develops therein; but God remains hidden behind the veil. In the New Testament, God manifests Himself. In the Gospels we find Him Himself, gentle, good-natured, human, God on earth; then we see Him spreading divine light in the subsequent communications of the Holy Spirit.

Previously, God had made promises and had also executed judgments; He had governed a people on earth and had acted towards the nations for the sake of this people to whom He had given His law and to whom He had granted, through the prophets, increasing light, announcing ever more clearly the coming of the One who was to tell them everything on behalf of God.

But the presence of God Himself, a man among men, changed everything. Either man should have received Him in the person of Christ as the crowning blessing and glory, He whose presence was to banish all evil, develop and bring to perfection every element of good, and at the same time give an object and a centre to all affections made perfectly happy by the enjoyment of that object; to goodness, by rejecting such a Christ, our miserable nature had to show what it really is, that is, enmity against God, and make evident the need for a completely new order of things, where the happiness of man and the glory of God would be based on **a new creation**. We know what happened: He who was the image of the invisible God had to say, after exercising perfect patience,

"Righteous Father, the world has not known you," and even more, alas, "They have hated both me and my Father" (John 17:25; 15:24).

However, this sad state of man did not prevent God from accomplishing his purposes; on the contrary, it provided him with an opportunity to glorify himself in accomplishing them. God did not want to reject man before man had rejected Him. This was the case in the Garden of Eden: man, conscious of sin and unable to bear God's presence, turned away from Him before God had driven him out of the garden. But when man, for his part, had completely rejected God, who had come in kindness in the midst of his misery, God was free (if one may so speak, for the expression is morally correct) to pursue His eternal purposes. Now, in this case, God does not execute judgment as He did in Eden, where man was already far from Him; but sovereign grace, when man is manifestly lost and has declared himself an enemy of God, continues its work to reveal His glory to the eyes of the universe in the salvation of poor sinners who had rejected God. However, in order that God's wisdom might be manifested even in the

details, this work of sovereign grace, in which God revealed Himself, had to be coordinated with all His previous ways revealed in the Old Testament, while also leaving room for His government of the world.

The result of all this is that, apart from the great dominant idea, there are four subjects in the New Testament that unfold before the eyes of faith. The great subject, the fact par excellence, is that perfect light is manifested: God Himself reveals Himself. This light is manifested in love, the other essential name of God.

Secondly, Christ, who is the manifestation of this light and love, and who, if He had been received, would have been the fulfilment of all the promises, is presented to man, and in particular to responsible Israel, with all the personal, moral, and powerful proofs that leave this people without excuse. Then, Christ being rejected, his rejection becomes the means by which salvation is accomplished; **a new order of things** (the new creation, glorified man, the Church participating with Christ in heavenly glory) is placed before our eyes.

Thirdly, the relationship between the new and old orders of things, with regard to the law, the promises, prophecies, and divine institutions on earth, are clearly explained, either in that they present the new order as the fulfilment and setting aside of what had grown old, or in that they note the contrast between the old and new orders of things, or in that they demonstrate God's perfect wisdom in all the details of his ways.

Finally, God's government of the world is highlighted, and the prophetic word announces the judgments and blessings that will accompany the resumption of God's relationship with Israel, which was broken when the Messiah was rejected.

We might add that everything necessary for man, a pilgrim on earth, until God accomplishes the purposes of his grace in his power, is abundantly provided for him. Having left, at God's call, that which is rejected or condemned (and not yet taken possession of the lot that God has prepared for him), the man who has responded to this call needs guidance; he needs to know the sources of the strength necessary to walk towards the goal of his voca-

tion, and the means to appropriate this strength. God, in calling him to follow his Master whom the world has rejected, has not left him without providing him with all the light and guidance necessary to enlighten and encourage him on his way.

THE GOSPELS

The Gospels recount the life of the Lord and present him to our hearts, either through his actions or his words, in the various characteristics that, in every respect, make him precious to the souls of the redeemed, according to the understanding granted to them and according to their needs. These characteristics together form the fullness of his personal glory, as far as we are able to grasp it while we are in clay vessels here below. We must exclude what concerns Christ's relationship with the Church, for, except for the announcement that Christ would build a Church on earth, it was through the Holy Spirit, sent after his ascension, that he gave the apostles and prophets the revelation of this precious mystery. It is evident that the Lord had to unite in Himself on earth, according to the counsel of God and the revelations of His word, more

than one character for the fulfilment of all that pertains to His glory and for the maintenance and manifestation of His Father's glory. But for this to happen, He also had to be something, whether considered as walking here on earth or from the point of view of His true nature. Christ had to fulfil the service that belonged to Him towards God, as the true servant par excellence, and as serving God through the word among His people. (See, for example, Psalms 40:8, 9, 10; Isaiah 49:4, 5, and other passages.)

A multitude of testimonies had announced that the Son of David would sit on his father's throne on behalf of God; and the fulfilment of God's plans for Israel is linked, in the Old Testament, to the One who was to come in this way and who, on earth, was to have the relationship of **Son of God** with **the Eternal God**. Christ, the Messiah—or the Anointed One, a word that is simply the translation of this name—was to appear and present himself to Israel according to God's revelation and counsel. The Jews limited their expectation almost exclusively to this character of Christ, Messiah and Son of David, and even

then it was in their own way, seeing only the elevation of their nation, without any sense of their sins and the consequences of those sins. However, this character of Christ was not all that the prophetic word, which had declared God's counsel, announced concerning the One whom the **world** itself was waiting for. Christ was to be **the Son of Man**. This title, which the Lord Jesus likes to give Himself, is of great importance to us. The Son of Man, according to the word, is the heir of all that God's counsel intended for man, as belonging to his position in glory, of all that God was to give to man according to that counsel (see Daniel 7:13-14 and Psalms 8:5-6; 80:17). But to be the heir of what God intended for man, Christ had to be a man. The Son of Man was truly of the race of man, a precious and comforting truth! Born of a woman, He was truly and really a man, partaking of blood and flesh, made like His brethren, except for sin. In this character He had to suffer and be rejected; He had to die and rise again to inherit all things, to possess them in an absolutely new state, the state of a risen and glorified man; for the inheritance was defiled, man was in rebellion against

God, and the co-heirs of Christ were as guilty as the others.

Jesus, therefore, had to be the servant par excellence, the great prophet, son of David, and Son of Man; consequently, a true man on earth, born of a woman, born under the law, of the seed of David, heir to the rights of the family of David, heir to the destinies of man according to the intention and counsel of God. For this, it was necessary that He glorify God according to the position in which man had failed in his responsibility, that He fulfil this responsibility by glorifying God, and that He bear witness during his life on earth as a prophet, "the faithful witness". Who could combine all these characteristics in his person? Was this glory only an official glory that the Old Testament had announced that a man would inherit? The condition of man, manifested under the law, demonstrated the impossibility of allowing him, as he was, to share in God's blessing. The rejection of Christ added the final proof. Indeed, man needed above all to be reconciled with God, apart from any economy or the special government of a people on earth. Man was a sinner; re-

demption was necessary for the glory of God and the salvation of men. But who could accomplish it? Man needed it for himself; an angel had to keep his place, fill it, and could do no more; otherwise he would not have been an angel.

Who among men could be heir to all things, and have all the works of God placed under his dominion, according to the word? It was the Son of God alone who was to inherit them; it was He who had created them who was to possess them. Therefore, the one who was to be the servant, the son of David, the Son of Man, the Redeemer, was the Son of God, the Creator God.

These different characteristics of Christ are linked not only to the particular character of each of the Gospels, but also to the difference between the first three and that of John. The former show Christ presented to man, so that man might receive him, and his rejection by man; John, on the contrary, takes this rejection as the starting point of his Gospel and presents the divine nature manifested in a Person, in whose presence man and the Jews found themselves and whom they rejected: "He was in

the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him..."

But let us go back a little.

The Gospel according to Matthew

Matthew shows the fulfilment of the promise and prophecy. In his Gospel, we see Emmanuel among the Jews, rejected by them; they thus stumble over the stumbling block. Then Christ is presented as a sower of the word: for it was useless to look for fruit. Next come the Church and the kingdom, substituted for Israel, which would have been blessed according to the promises, but which refused them by rejecting the person of Jesus. However, when they receive the Lord after the judgement, the Jews will be recognised as objects of mercy. The Ascension is not mentioned in Matthew; this is undoubtedly why it is not Jerusalem, but Galilee, that is the scene of the Lord's meeting with his disciples after the resurrection. Jesus is with the poor of the flock who have listened to the word of the Lord, in this place where light has dawned on the people sitting in darkness. The mission to baptise also starts from there and applies to the nations.

The Gospel according to Mark

Mark presents us with the servant-prophet, the Son of God.

The Gospel according to Luke

Luke presents us with the Son of Man; the first two chapters offer us a delightful picture of the remnant of Israel.

The Gospel according to John

John, as we said above, introduces us to the divine and incarnate person of the Lord, the foundation of all blessing, and a work of propitiation which is the very basis of the condition where sin will no longer be found, of new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells. At the end of the Gospel we have the promise of the Comforter; all this in contrast to Judaism. Instead of tracing the Lord back to Abraham and David, the roots of promise, or to Adam, as the Son of Man who brings blessing to man, or instead of telling us about his active ministry as the great Prophet who was to come, John shows us a divine Person in the world, the Word made flesh.

Paul and John make us aware that we are in an entirely new position in Christ; but John's main purpose is to reveal to us the Father in the Son, and thus life through the Son in us, while Paul's writings show us the Christian presented to God in Christ and reveal to us his counsels of grace. Considering only the epistles, Paul alone speaks of the Church, except that Peter (1 Peter 2) mentions the building up of living stones to form a building not yet completed; but Paul alone speaks of the Church as the "body" of Christ.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts recounts the establishment of the Church by the Holy Spirit who came from heaven, then the work of the apostles in Jerusalem and Palestine, and that of other workers for the Lord. It tells us specifically about the work of Peter, then that of Paul, and ends with the account of the rejection of Paul's gospel by the Jews of the dispersion.

THE EPISTLES

To summarise even briefly the content of the epistles would take us too far afield: let us simply say a few

words about their chronological order, noting only that they develop the effectiveness of Christ's work and the love of the Father revealed in him.

Those whose date is certain must be placed first: **1st and 2^d THESSALONIANS, 1st and 2^d CORINTHIANS, ROMANS, EPHESIANS, COLOSSIANS, PHILIPPIANS,** and **PHILEMON**, the latter four written during Paul's captivity.

The epistle to **THE GALATIANS** was written 14 to 20 years after the apostle's calling, and after he had worked for some time in Asia Minor, perhaps during his stay in Ephesus, in any case shortly after the founding of the assemblies in Galatia.

The **1st epistle to TIMOTHY** was written on the occasion of the apostle's departure from Ephesus; the exact date cannot be determined; the **2^d epistle** was written at the end of Paul's life when he was about to suffer martyrdom.

The epistle to **TITUS** is linked to a journey Paul made to Crete, although we do not know when this journey took place (it has been thought that it could have been during the apostle's stay in Ephesus); morally, it is synchronous

with 1st epistle to Timothy, as it was not God's intention to give us chronological dates. Divine wisdom did not want this, but the moral order is very clear; we see this in the way the 2^d epistle to Timothy relates to the ruin of the house of God, the order of which was established in the 1st epistle.

The epistle to **THE HEBREWS** was written at a relatively late date, in view of the judgement that was about to fall on Jerusalem; it called on Christian Jews to separate themselves from what God was about to judge.

The Epistle of **JAMES** refers to a time when this separation had not yet taken place in any way: Jewish Christians are still considered part of Israel, which had not been definitively rejected; they only recognise Jesus as the Lord of glory. Like other Catholic (or universal) epistles, James's was written in the last days of apostolic history, when Christianity had found wide acceptance among the tribes of Israel and judgement was about to bring their history to a close. John's epistles were written even later.

The **1ST EPISTLE OF PETER** shows us that the gospel had already spread widely among the Jews; it is addressed to

Jewish Christians in the diaspora. The **2^p EPISTLE** is later, of course, and belongs to the end of the apostle's career, when the time was approaching for him to lay down his tent and leave his brothers. He did not want to leave them without the warnings that apostolic care would soon no longer provide them with; that is why, like the Epistle of Jude, this second epistle of Peter sees those who had denied the faith abandoning the path of piety, and mockers rising up against the testimony of the coming of the Lord.

In the **1ST EPISTLE OF OF JOHN**, according to the testimony of this apostle himself, we are in "the last hour." Apostates had already appeared, apostates from the truth of Christianity, denying the Father and the Son, and adding Jewish unbelief to deny that Jesus was the Christ.

The epistle of **JUDE** comes morally before that of John. It shows us false brethren who had crept in among the saints, and leads us to the final revolt and judgement. It differs from the 2^d epistle of Peter in that it does not view evil as mere iniquity, but as an abandonment of the first state.

THE REVELATION

Revelation completes the picture by showing Christ as judge among the churches represented by golden lamps. The first church, having abandoned its first love, is warned that unless it repents and returns to its first state, its lamp will be taken away. The final judgement of the Church is found in Thyatira and Laodicea. This book then shows the judgement of the world and the return of the Lord, the kingdom and the heavenly city, and finally the eternal state.

The general character of apostasy and decline found in all the last books of the New Testament, from the Epistle to the Hebrews to the Apocalypse, is quite remarkable. Paul's epistles, except for²Timothy, which provides individual guidance for walking in the midst of ruin, while foretelling this state of affairs, present us with the work and care of the wise architect. The interest of their dates is linked to the history of the Acts; but the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Catholic (or Universal) Epistles, and the Apocalypse all show us that the decline has already come (the First Epistle of Peter, which bears this stamp, tells

us, however, that the time had come for judgement to begin with the house of God); they therefore show us the judgement of the professing church, then, prophetically, that of the world rebelling against God. This final character of the Catholic (or universal) epistles is striking and instructive.