Synopsis of the Books of the Bible

1 Kings

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)

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Introduction

The trial of kingly power placed in the hands of men

The Books of Kings shew us the kingly power established in all its glory; its fall, and God's testimony in the midst of the ruin; with details concerning Judah after the rejection of Israel, until Lo-ammi had been pronounced upon the whole nation. In a word, it is the trial of kingly power placed in the hands of men, not absolute, as in Nebuchadnezzar, but kingly power having the law for its rule; as there had been a trial of the people set in relationship with God by means of priesthood. Out of Christ nothing stands.

The foreshadowing of Christ's kingdom

Although the kingly power had been placed under the responsibility of its faithfulness to Jehovah; and although it had to be smitten and punished whenever it failed in this, it was yet at this time established by the counsels and the will of God. It was neither a David, type of Christ in his patience, who, through difficulties, obstacles, and sufferings, made himself a way to the throne; nor a king who, although exalted to the throne and always victorious, had to be a man of war to the end of his life; a type in this, I doubt not, of what Christ will be in the midst of the Jews at His return, when He will commence the coming age by subjecting the Gentiles to Himself, having been already delivered from the strivings of the people (Psalm 18:43-44). It was the king according to the promises and the counsels of God, the king established in peace, head over God's people to rule them in righteousness, son of David according to the promise, and type of that true Son of David, who shall be a priest upon His throne, who shall build the temple of Jehovah, and between whom and Jehovah there shall be the counsel of peace (Zech. 6:13).

Responsibility and election

Let us examine a little the position of this kingly power according to the word; for responsibility and election met in it, as well as the foreshadowing of the kingdom of Christ. In chapter 7 of the Second Book of Samuel we have seen the promise of a son whom God would raise up to David, and who should reign after him, to whom God would be a father, and who should be His son, who should build the temple of Jehovah, and the throne of whose kingdom God would establish for ever. This was the promise: a promise which, as David himself understood, will be fully accomplished only in the Person of Christ (1 Chron. 17:17). Here is the responsibility: "If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the stripes of the children of men" (2 Sam. 7:14); which David well understood also (1 Chron. 28:9). The book which we are considering shews us that this responsibility was fully declared to Solomon (2 Sam. 9:4-9), Psalm 89:28-37 sets the two things also before us very plainly, namely, the certainty of God's counsels, His fixed purpose, and the exercise of His government in view of man's responsibility. In the Book of Chronicles we have only what relates to the promises (1 Chron. 17:11-14), for reasons of which we will speak when we examine that book. From all these passages, we perceive that the royalty of David's family was established according to the counsels of God and the

election of grace; that the perpetuity of this royalty, dependent on the faithfulness of God, was consequently infallible; but that at the same time the family of David, in the person of Solomon, was in fact placed upon the throne at that time under the condition of obedience and faithfulness to Jehovah.* If himself or his posterity were to fail in faithfulness, God's judgment would be executed; a judgment which nevertheless would not prevent God's fulfilling that which His grace had assured to David. {* This is the universal order of God's ways: to set up blessing first under the responsibility of man, to be accomplished afterwards according to His counsels by His power and grace. And it is to be noted that the first thing man has always done is to fail. Thus Adam, thus Noah, thus under law, thus the priesthood, thus as here the royalty under law, so Nebuchadnezzar where it was absolute, so, I add, the church. Already in the apostles' days all sought their own, not the things of Jesus Christ. God continues His own dealings in grace in spite of this, all through, besides His government according to responsibility in the public body in this world, but a government full of patience and grace.}

The scope of the Books of Kings

The Books of Kings contain the history of the establishment of the kingdom in Israel under this responsibility, that of its fall, of the longsuffering of God, of God's testimony amid the ruin which flowed from the unfaithfulness of the first king, and finally that of the execution of the judgment, a longer delay of which would but have falsified God's own character, and the testimony that should be given to the holiness of that character. Such delay would have borne a false testimony with respect to that which God is.

We shall see that, after Solomon's reign, the greater part of the narrative refers to the testimony given by the prophets Elijah and Elisha in the midst of Israel, and in general to that kingdom which had entirely departed from God. Little is said of Judah before the complete ruin of Israel. After this the ruin of Judah, brought on by the iniquity of their kings, is not long delayed, although there were moments of restoration.

Chapters 1 and 2

The proclamation of Solomon as king

Before David's death the iniquity and ambition of a son whom he "had not displeased at any time "led to the solemn proclamation of Solomon, to whom God had destined, and David promised, the throne. In this circumstance Joab, long restrained by prudence in David's lifetime, shews himself as he is. He makes himself necessary to Adonijah, as he had been to David. Abiathar, long under the sentence of God, takes the same course. Solomon, the elect of God, who held his rights from God, did not suit them. But after all, man's prudence fails before the judgment of God. God arranges events in such a manner as, sooner or later, to exhibit the most prudent in their true light. Apparently all goes on well. The elder and beloved son of the king, the captain of the host whom David himself could not resist, and the priest who had always accompanied David, are there, as well as all the king's sons, excepting the elect of God; but the thought of God, or His will, had no place there. The companions of David, who

had truly served with him for the glory of God, were not there either.

The prophet of God, the witness to His will, is employed in the fulfilment of that will, and Solomon is proclaimed king, and inaugurated before the eyes of David himself.

Righteous judgment executed by the king reigning in glory

David's faith, if it had not energy enough to give each one his place in judgment, had at least full intelligence of what was proper. He communicates his judgment to Solomon, who is to execute it according to his word.* Solomon at first shews clemency to Adonijah; but the still restless will of the latter, who desired the deceased king's wife, awakens the righteous judgment destined for those who had failed in integrity, and who had risen up against God's anointed. It is the first character attached to the king reigning in glory. He executes righteous judgment in the earth. There is no escaping the vigilance of this judgment. This is seen in the case of Shimei. {* It is to David also, and not to Solomon, that God communicated the plan of the temple. Solomon, in glory, performs these things, and possesses the requisite discernment for executing justice and judgment, but it is in David that intelligence displays itself. In fact if Christ, reigning in glory, exercises just judgment, He is already wisdom, and, indeed, it is in His connection with the assembly in the present time of grace, that the communication of the purposes of God, and the intelligence of His ways, are found.}

We find at the same time the fulfilment of the word given to Samuel, namely, the humiliation of the priest. Solomon, Jehovah's anointed, sends Abiathar away, and puts Zadok in his place.

Chapter 3

Pharaoh's daughter as Solomon's bride

But there is another element in the history of the king of glory, in which he oversteps the limits of the king of Israel's legitimate position; he allies himself with the Gentiles, and marries Pharaoh's daughter. Neither the house of Solomon, nor that of Jehovah, was yet built; but the daughter of Pharaoh, whom the king espouses in grace, dwells in the place where the suffering and victorious king had provisionally placed the ark of the covenant, which secures blessing to the people, and which, when placed in the temple, will form the source of blessing for Israel. This ark was not a covenant made with Pharaoh's daughter; but she dwelt where the symbol of the covenant was hidden, and she was placed under the safeguard, and sheltered by the power, of Him who had made this covenant, and who could not break it, whatever might be the unfaithfulness of a people who ought always to have enjoyed its benefits.

I doubt not, that hereafter a remnant of the Jews will find themselves through sovereign grace in the same position* (before the glory of the kingdom, and of the house of God, is established) under shelter of the covenant attached to the city of David, the seat of royal grace, but the provisional seat in anticipation of the full and entire result of the king's power. But we confine ourselves here to recognising the principle of the bringing in of the Gentiles, manifested in the reception of Pharaoh's

daughter as Solomon's bride. {* Consider here Rev. 14:1, and Heb. 12:22.}

The position of those who enjoy royal grace

It is well to remark, that the passage we are considering does not introduce the light and intelligence of the heavenly places, but only, in connection with the kingdom, the principle through which the position of those who enjoy that grace is established. And therefore, while admitting the Gentiles, the principle applies to this Jewish remnant of the latter days, who are intelligent and faithful according to their intelligence, a remnant which will be admitted according to the same principles of grace.

The people in general do not enter into this thought. The kingdom itself even, and the blessing of the kingdom, are not established on that footing. All doubtless will be founded on the new covenant, and that by the presence of the Mediator of this covenant. Still, even then, the connection of the people with God, as an earthly people, will not be established on the efficacy of a faith which enters into the enjoyment of the grace of the covenant while the mediator of it is hidden, and which anticipates the public establishment of it as made with Judah and Israel, but on the positive enjoyment of its results, when the king shall have settled everything by his power. The brazen altar was not in the sanctuary but in the court, marking indeed a rejected one lifted up from the earth (and on this the future blessings of Israel depend), but not gone into heaven and hidden, save to faith, there. It is by that the people will approach God. It is the earth which is the scene of the development of their religious affections and the knowledge of God manifested on the earth. The efficacy of the cross, as the means of approaching God on the earth, will be known to them. Without it they could not approach Him. They will mourn when they shall see Him whom they have pierced, but see Him as manifested down here to those below. Blessing, pardon, new life, will be brought them down here. They will not enter into the power of these things as hidden within the veil. Being established on the earth, it would not even be suitable for them to do so.

Solomon at Gibeon: the altar and the ark

To return to our history: if the ark is on Mount Zion, there are two ways of approaching God — before the ark, and at the altar which in fact is confounded with the high places. Until the temple is built, the people are on the high places, earthly and carnal even when approaching the true God.* God bears with it. Solomon himself goes thither, and God hears him there. The temple is not built. If it had been, it ought to have been the only centre of service and worship. That God bears with a thing, until power shall act, is quite another thing from sanctioning it after power has acted. We must remember that, if Solomon went to Gibeon, it is because the tabernacle and the brazen altar were there; and it was there that, according to the law, the priests performed their functions (1 Chron. 16:36-40). The ark of the covenant was not there. David had placed it in a tent in the city of David. These latter points are more developed in the Chronicles (and I refer the reader to that which will be said in the examination of that book); but the passage we are considering would hardly have been understood without some anticipation of what is found there. {* The position of Solomon is morally worthy of attention He loves Jehovah; he walks in the statutes of David; but he does not cleave to the ark which David had placed in Zion; he offers sacrifices in the high places. How often Christians, who do not walk outwardly in sin,

do not seek in Christ the secret of His will according to the revelation He has made of Himself while hidden! For us the temple is not built. We may draw nigh to the ark — Christ rejected and gone up on high; or to the brazen altar and the high places, for this altar is confounded with them.}

The personal faith of David and Solomon compared

As to the responsibility of the moment, the state of the people in this respect appears to me to be set before us as a sorrowful state; and Solomon himself is but on a level with the existing state of things — a state borne with indeed by God in grace, but not after His heart. The king thought neither of the ark nor of the hidden blessing of the covenant, as that from which all his thoughts and actions should spring,* and as the only means of his connection with Jehovah. He loved Jehovah. It was given him to accomplish all that was requisite for the manifestation of His glory; but his heart rose not to the height of that faith which reckoned upon the secret of God's love, when the glory was not manifested, and which discerned it through all the existing things, even while God still bore with them. It was this which formed the strength of David personally. The ark of the covenant in the city of David was the symbol of this and for the time its expression. {* He drew nigh to it, under the influence of granted blessings, to render thanks to God (ver. 15).}

Solomon walked no doubt in the statutes of David, and he loved Jehovah; but he approached Him without rising above the level of the people. Only our chapter says that he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places. This continued until Hezekiah. The lustre of a great blessing often keeps out of sight something which God bears with, as we have said, but which produces disastrous effects when the energy which gave rise to the blessing has disappeared. Better to be little and despised at the ark, than to possess the glory of the kingdom and to worship on high places.

A motive above the path necessary to walk in it

Moreover, although loving Jehovah, if we are not by faith in the secret of the covenant at the ark, we shall always let in something which is not according to integrity even in our own path. Before we are in the glory, we are never on a level with the position we hold, while we have only this position to sustain us. We must look above our path to be able to walk in it. A Jew, who had the secret of Jehovah and who waited for the Messiah, was pious and faithful according to the law. A Jew, who had only the law, assuredly did not keep it. A Christian, who has heaven before him and a Saviour in glory as the object of his affections, will walk well upon the earth; he who has only the earthly path for his rule will fail in the intelligence and motives needed to walk in it; he will become a prey to worldliness, and his christian walk in the world will be more or less on a level with the world in which he walks. The eyes upward on Jesus will keep the heart and the steps in a path conformable to Jesus, and which consequently will glorify Him and make Him known in the world. Seeing what we are, we must have a motive above our path to be able to walk in it. This does not prevent our needing also for our path the fear of the Lord to pass the time of our sojourning here in fear, knowing that we are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ.

Solomon's request and God's gracious answer

Solomon goes to Gibeon to offer burnt-offerings. Jehovah appears to him there in a dream. Solomon is conscious that he needs the help of Jehovah to fulfil the duties before him; and, through the grace of God, he manifests a state of heart with respect to this, which is pleasing to Jehovah. The sense of the difficulty of performing the duties of his position, towards a people who belong to Jehovah, makes him feel his own littleness; and the desire of not failing in the task entrusted to him of God is uppermost in his heart, and leads him to ask for the wisdom requisite to accomplish it. The genuineness of this sentiment is so much the more evident, from its being in a dream that he replies to God. God adds glory and riches to the fulfilment of this prayer. The sense of God's goodness and the joy of his heart, bring him before the ark of His covenant who had thus revealed Himself to him beyond his expectation. God's answer places the king immediately under the condition of obedience. The wisdom he had asked for is manifested in the judgment he gives, and the people acknowledge that it comes from God.

Strict justice in vengeance had cut off the wicked at the beginning; now it is the justice which maintains order and blessing among the people of Jehovah. Thus will it be also with Jesus.

Chapters 4 and 5

Solomon's glory

1 Kings 4 contains an enumeration of the officers who served Solomon, and upheld the glory of his throne; and then, the manner in which the whole country provided for the maintenance of his household, Judah and Israel being multiplied and full of joy The king's authority extends as far as the Euphrates. Peace reigns all around. The wisdom and understanding which God had given him surpassed all that was known in the world; so that from the ends of the earth they came to hear the wisdom of his lips.

His proverbs, his songs, and his knowledge, bore testimony to the excellent spirit with which God had endowed the king His throne is established, and the glory of the son of David abounds. The Gentiles now — the king of Tyre, emblematic of the world and its desirable things — are at Solomon's disposal, and apply themselves joyfully to the fulfilment of the king of Israel's projects, and to his service in building the house of Jehovah.

Chapter 6

The two aspects of God's house

The house may be looked at in two ways — as a type of the Father's house, and as in fact the habitation of God on the earth when Jesus reigns. In the latter aspect I only look for the grand thoughts and character of the government revealed in it. In the former, as a typical house, two circumstances give it its character. It is, first of all, God's house, His dwelling; and then there are chambers all around it.*

God surrounded Himself with dwellings, in the very place where He had fixed His habitation. {* It is to this, I doubt not, that the Lord alludes, when He says, "In my Father's house are many dwellings" — at any rate, to the fact that other priests besides the high priest dwell there.}

As the dwelling-place of God at that time in the midst of His people, the presence of God in the temple depended on the faithfulness of Solomon.

What characterized the house

That which characterised the house in general is that nothing except gold was to be seen in it. All was bright with the glory of divine righteousness that distinguished the throne of God which was placed there. But it is not transparent as glass. Beauty and holiness are not what characterise the earthly throne, but righteousness and judgment. Nor are there seraphim.

In the Revelation we have the seraphic character added to the cherubim, and the gold is transparent as glass. Emblems, as we have seen, of judicial power, the cherubim had a new position (those belonging to the ark remained the same); the wing of one of these new cherubim touched the wall of the house on one side, and on the other the wing of the other cherub. Their wings extended from one side of the house to the other. They looked not towards the ark, but outwards.* At this time, righteousness reigning and being established, these symbols of God's power can look outwards in blessing, instead of having their eyes fixed on the covenant alone. During the time that there was nothing but the covenant, they gazed upon it; but when God has established His throne in righteousness, He can turn towards the world to bless it according to that righteousness. {* The word in Hebrew is "towards the house," which is used as a preposition for inwards; but here, being at the bottom of the most holy place, "towards the house "was outwards. I anticipate the Chronicles here a little. This circumstance of their looking outwards, which is not brought in here by the Holy Ghost, refers to the aspect of this history given in the Chronicles, that is, to the glorious reign of the Son of David. Here, the typical character of the heavenly house and glory being the object, the veil is not seen, nor the circumstance as to the cherubim which gave its character to the governmental blessing of the earth. Both are in Chronicles. Here, while the veil is not mentioned, in its place are folding doors. I make this allusion to that which is written in the Chronicles, in order to give a general idea of the whole, and to link the two accounts together. I will give here something more definite, as to the contents of chapters 6 and 7 of the book that occupies us. There are three parts in this description: the temple itself; the different houses of cedar; and, lastly, the brazen vessels. 1. The temple. The idea which it presents has been already pointed out. It is the dwelling-place, the house of God: there are chambers all around; but it is the house of God. Within, all is gold. Nothing is said about the veil. Dwelling, not drawing near, is the idea. But there are folding doors which open. 2. After this comes the royal connection of Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter with the world without, but with a view to the glory and elevation of this position. It is not the dwelling-place of God, but the royal position of the king, the judge, and of his bride. It is Christ in His glorious administration. All is solidity, magnificence, and grandeur, within and without. 3. Then comes the manifestation, according to the power of the Spirit of God, and in a glorious manner, of all that belonged to His reign here below. All was of brass, the pillars and the sea. Nothing is said of the altar, because drawing near to God is not the question; but the manifestation of God in Christ who reigns in

sight of the world — divine righteousness in respect of man's responsibility, not of approach to God Himself. Thus we behold the dwelling-place of God where all is gold, the glory of divine righteousness; the house as the dwelling of the king, and the porch of judgment: the house of his bride. It is the sovereign glory of Christ in manifestation according to the dispensation of glory; and then the development, in this world, by the power of the Spirit, of what Christ is, of what God Himself is. There is no mention of silver — the type of the immutable stedfastness of God's purposes and ways in the wilderness. It is gold; the house of cedar; brass. In the description given by the Book of Chronicles there are an altar and a veil, because there the positive administration of the things and circumstances of the true Solomon's reign is much more the question; the state of things which will in fact exist upon earth, rather than the abstract idea, and the type of that which is manifested of God Himself, as well as of the king's glory; and this, whether in the dwelling-place of God, or on the earth, as the sphere where He will unfold that which He is according to the Spirit.}

Chapter 7

The outer and inner glories of Solomon's buildings manifesting the king's glory, riches and power

It is rather, to my mind, the house of Solomon that prefigures the church, as such, in connection with Christ; the temple, the Father's house on high, where we are brought to dwell. "We are his house"; as the house of the forest of Lebanon prefigures His glory among the Gentiles. The porch of judgment characterises this glorious reign. The glory was not all on the outside. The inner court was equally beautiful. The glory was not hidden either. The outer court, as well as the inner, exhibited His royal glory who built the whole.

It was the same thing also towards the great outer court. Thus even the great court, as well as the inner court of the house of Jehovah, was built with costly stones and with cedar. The house itself had its peculiar glory. Everything manifested the glory, the riches, and the power of the great king. With respect to this outward glory, Pharaoh's daughter had a house similar to the king's. This outward glory of the walls, of the courts of Jehovah, of the king's house, and of all the others, exhibits the connection between these things in Christ in the day of His manifested glory.

The larger scale of the vessels in the temple

The vessels of Jehovah's house were made on a much larger scale then those of the tabernacle; but they were the same, although greater in number. The only new things were the pillars, Jachin and Boaz; that is to say, "He will establish," and, "in Him is strength" (names which make the meaning of these pillars evident). I doubt not that the passage in Revelation 3:12 alludes to these pillars.

We find here also the union of Jews and Gentiles recognised; and the latter employed in the work for the temple of Jehovah.

The unalterable symbol — the ark

The ark is not altered. It was put in the temple, which was but a house for its reception, as the seat of His presence who dwelt between the cherubim. As to the token of God's presence, and of the establishment of His throne on the earth, the ark had entered into its rest, as well as Jehovah whose seat it was (compare Ps. 132:8).

Chapter 8

The removal of the staves, the absence of Aaron's rod and the manna — the ark at rest

The circumstances which revealed the character of this rest were remarkable. The staves, with which the priests had borne the ark, were now the memorial of their journeys with God, who, in His faithfulness, had led and preserved them, and brought them into the rest which He had prepared for them. But that which, in the passage through the wilderness, had been the token of their means of grace, was no longer in it: nothing but the law remained there. Aaron's rod and the pot of manna would not have been in harmony with the glorious reign and the rest of Canaan. The law was there; it was the basis of the administration of the kingdom, and the rule of that righteousness which was to be exercised in it.

The ark at rest, Jehovah's presence hallows the house

The ark of the covenant once set in its place of rest, Jehovah comes and seals it with His presence, and fills the house with His glory. As the rod, the emblem of the priestly grace which had led the people, and the manna, which had fed them in the wilderness, were no longer there, so did the priesthood no longer exercise its ministry on account of the presence of the glory.

Solomon as King-Priest

For the moment Solomon fully assumes the character of priest. It is he who stands before Jehovah, as well as between Jehovah and the people — a remarkable type, as to his position, of what Christ as King will be for Israel in the day of His glory. He has built a house for Jehovah to dwell in a fixed habitation — that He may dwell in it for ever. Remark here also that all refers to the deliverance out of Egypt, to Horeb, to the law, and not to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. It was doubtless, up to a certain point (and fully so, typically), the fulfilment of the promises made to them; but Solomon does not refer to them as to his present position. This is seen in verse 56.

Solomon's blessing and prayer

In examining the blessing pronounced by the king (which, like almost all that is termed blessing, consisted of thanksgiving), and his prayer, we shall again find the same principles that we pointed out

at first — the fulfilment of the promises made to David as present blessing (vers. 20-24); but the enjoyment of this blessing granted under condition of obedience (vers. 23-25). The prayer sets the people under the terms of a righteous government, abounding indeed in kindness and forgiveness, yet one which will not hold the guilty to be innocent; and it presents God as the people's resource, when the consequences of their sin fall upon them according to the principles laid down by Moses in Deuteronomy and elsewhere. Moreover, while confessing that the heaven of heavens could not contain Jehovah, the king entreats Him to grant every prayer that should be addressed to Him in this house — a petition which was granted (chap. 9:3), so that the house was established as the throne of the God of heaven upon earth — the place in which He revealed Himself, and in which He had put His name.

This fact has a very wide bearing. It was the establishment of Jehovah's government upon the earth in the midst of His people — a government entrusted to a man, the son of David; so that it is said that Solomon sat upon the throne of Jehovah.

This enables us to understand the importance of the events which took place under Nebuchadnezzar, by whom this throne was cast down, according to the judgment pronounced by God Himself. The house was not elect; but, built under God's own direction, it was hallowed by Himself, that His name might dwell there for ever. The close of chapter 8 gives a very lively figure of Israel's millennial blessing.

Chapter 9

God's answer: the enjoyment of blessing conditional on faithfulness

The answer which God gives establishes the house as the place in which He has set His name for ever. His eyes and His heart shall be there perpetually; but, at the same time, for the enjoyment of the granted blessing, the dynasty of Solomon, the people of Israel, and even the house itself, are subjected to the condition of faithfulness to Jehovah on the part of Solomon and his children. If he, or his posterity, should turn away to serve other gods, Israel should be cut off; and the house should become a testimony of the judgment of God to every one that passed by. We see here to what an extent the fate of Israel hung upon their king.

Chapter 10

The Queen of Sheba

The king of Tyre also was dependent on the king of Israel; and the queen of Sheba comes from the far south to delight herself in the wisdom of the head of God's people, and to be filled with wonder at the sight of his glory, and to praise Jehovah who had raised him so high, and who had blessed the people in giving him to be their king. She also came with gifts; for the king's renown had spread into distant lands. Nevertheless, although it was a true report that she had heard, the sight of his glory went far beyond all that had been said of it.

Chapters 11 and 12

Solomon's failure: the secret of it and its results

Till now we have had the beautiful picture of God's blessing resting upon the son of David, whose only desire it had been to possess wisdom from God, that he might know how to govern His people. Jehovah had in addition given him riches, magnificence, and glory. The reverse of this picture, painful to the heart, serves nevertheless to instruct us in the righteous dealings of God.

In the event, foreseen by God, of Israel's having a king, he was forbidden to multiply his wives or his riches, and to go down into Egypt to multiply horses (Deut. 17:16-17). Now with whatever blessings we may be surrounded, we can never forsake the law of God with impunity, nor the walk appointed in the word for His children. God had bestowed the abundance of riches and honour on Solomon, who had only asked for wisdom; but the study of the law, which was prescribed to the king (Deut. 17:19-20), should have prevented his using the means he did in acquiring his riches. These chapters teach us that he did precisely that which the law forbade his doing. He multiplied silver and gold, he multiplied the number of his wives, and had a great number of horses brought from Egypt.

God's promise was fulfilled. Solomon was rich and glorious above all the kings of his day; but the means he used to enrich himself shewed a heart at a distance from God, and led to his ruin according to the just judgment and sure word of God.

How perfect His ways, how sure His testimony! Holiness becomes His house. His judgments are unchangeable.

Solomon enjoys the sure promises of God. He sins in the means by which he seeks to satisfy his own lusts; and although the result was the accomplishment of the promise, yet he bears the consequences of so doing. Outwardly only the fulfilment of the promise was seen; in fact there was something else. Without sending for horses from Egypt, and gold from Ophir, Solomon would have been rich and glorious, for God had promised it. By doing this he enriched himself, but he departs from God and from His word. Having given himself up to his desires after riches and glory, he had multiplied the number of his wives, and in his old age they turned away his heart. This neglect of the word, which at first appeared to have no bad effect (for he grew rich, as though it had been but the fulfilment of God's promise), soon led to a departure more serious in its nature and in its consequences, to influence more powerful and more immediately opposed to the commands of God's word, and at last to flagrant disobedience of its most positive and essential requirements. The slippery path of sin is always trodden with accelerated steps, because the first sin tends to weaken in the soul the authority and power of that which alone can prevent our committing still greater sins — that is, the word of God, as well as the consciousness of His presence, which imparts to the word all its practical power over us.

God brings chastening and trouble upon Solomon during his life, and takes from his family the rule over the greater part of the tribes, declaring that He will afflict the posterity of David, but not for ever.

Rehoboam's folly: Jeroboam's revolt: the two kingdoms

According to the king's lamentation (Ecc. 2:19), he to whom Solomon left all the fruit of his labour was not wise. His folly brought the consequences upon him which, in God's counsels, were attached to his father's sin. Under the guidance of Jeroboam ten tribes shook off the authority of the house of David. Looked at with an eye to its responsibility, the house of David has entirely and for ever lost its glory.

We have to follow the history of the two kingdoms, and yet more particularly that of the kingdom of the ten tribes, which retained the name of Israel, although God still caused the lamp of David to shine at Jerusalem.

The sin of Jeroboam

Now, the moral fall of the new king — of Jeroboam — was not long delayed. Judging by human wisdom and forgetting the fear of Jehovah, he made two golden calves, in order that the powerful links of a worship in common might be broken, and no longer attach his subjects to Judah and Jerusalem. A new priesthood had to be set up; everything, with respect to worship, was devised of his own heart. Israel's sin was an established rule, and the phrase, "Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin," became the sad designation of their first king.

Chapter 13

A prophet sent in testimony and judgment from Judah

But the testimony and the judgment of God tarried not according to the mercy of God towards His people. Prophecy immediately re-appears; for the faithful love of God to His people never grows weary. His mercy endureth for ever. The testimony of His word — prophecy — that is to say, the intervention of God in testimony, when the people go astray and the ordinary connections between God and His people are broken, does not fail. Rehoboam himself is forbidden, by prophecy, to carry out his intention of fighting against Israel, to bring them again under his dominion; but, in the case of Jeroboam, Jehovah vindicates the rights of His glory against the king himself and against his altar. The altar is rent, the ashes poured out, the king's arm — put forth against the prophet — is dried up, and only restored through the prophet's intercession.

Here too Jehovah makes known that He has not forgotten the house of David in the midst of all this evil. From his house shall proceed the repairer of the breach, and the judge of that iniquity which caused the breach; for Judah is still recognised as the place of His throne.

God's just judgment on disobedience shown in the prophet himself

The prophet, charged with such a testimony as this, is forbidden even to drink water among a people who call themselves Israel, but who are rebellious and defiled. No participation in such guilty confusion is allowed; and the prophet himself suffers the consequences of God's just judgment upon his disobedience. Such was the severity of God with respect to an action that countenanced a state of unfaithfulness, which the light He had given was sufficient to judge.

The details of this case deserve some notice.

By the word of God the prophet had knowledge of the judgment of God. His heart should have recognised, morally as well as prophetically, the dreadful evil of Israel's position; and the moral sense of this evil should have given the prophetic testimony its full power over his own heart. At any rate the word of God was imperative: he was neither to eat nor to drink there. He knew it, and he remembered it; but there was in appearance another testimony, a motive for neglecting the Lord's command. The old prophet (and he was a prophet) told him that Jehovah had said unto him, "Bring him back into thine house that he may eat bread"; so the prophet from Judah went back with him. It was very desirable for the unfaithful old prophet, that a man whom God was using for testimony (and whose testimony he himself also believed) should sanction his unfaithfulness by association with it. Outwardly he appeared to honour the testimony of God, and the man who bore it. In fact the prophet from Judah, by returning with the old prophet, destroyed the power of his own testimony. The old prophet — although truly such — bore with the evil around him. The testimony of God, on the contrary, declared that the evil was not to be borne with. It was with this testimony that the other prophet was charged; and the refusal to eat or drink in the place was the moral and personal testimony of his own faithfulness, of his conviction, and of his obedience. This refusal was the testimony that, in this matter, he took God's part. But, by returning with the old prophet, he nullified his testimony, and countenanced the old prophet in his unfaithfulness. God did not reverse His word, if the prophet was disobedient to it. The old prophet was punished, in that God made use of his mouth to announce the consequences of his fault to the prophet from Judah. It is also a lesson which teaches us, that, whenever God has made His will known to us, we are not to allow any after influence whatever to call it in question, even although the latter may take the form of the word of God. If we were morally nearer to the Lord, we should feel that the only true and right position is to follow that which He told us at first.

Obedience to God's Word

In every case our part is to obey what He has said. His word will put us in a true position — in position apart from evil, and from the power of evil, even when we have not spiritual intelligence to appreciate it. If we fail in this obedience, we lose our sense of the falseness of our position, because the moral sentiment is weakened. At best there is uneasiness, but no liberty. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. Unfaithfulness to the simple and primary testimony of God's word never sets us at liberty, whatever may be the reasons which apparently justify our putting it aside.

Chapters 14 to 16

Jeroboam's neglect of God's warning: its results on himself and his house

In spite of this testimony, Jeroboam perseveres in his sin. The only one of his sons in whom any piety is seen dies; and the judgment of God is pronounced upon his house.

Judah's condition after Solomon's death: constant war between the two kingdoms

Judah having walked in all sorts of iniquity also, during the reign of Rehoboam, Jerusalem is taken, and all the riches which Solomon had amassed became the prey of the Egyptians. Abijam, his son, follows no better course. There was constant war between the two kingdoms — the sad story, so often renewed, of man placed in the enjoyment of God's blessing, and the effect of his fall. In what a condition do we see the kingdom of God's people, and the house of David itself, recently so glorious!

Transgression against Jehovah and hastening doom

Asa, pious himself and faithful to Jehovah, pressed by the power of Baasha, king of Israel, who had dethroned the house of Jeroboam, seeks that help from the Syrians which he did not know how to find in God. The family of Baasha falls, as that of Jeroboam had done, and the chief captains contend together for the throne, which remains at last in the hands of Ahab's father. Ahab added to the sin of his predecessors the worship of Baal, the god of his idolatrous wife; and, in the enormity of his transgressions against Jehovah, he went beyond all the kings of Israel that were before him.

But in the midst of all this moral ruin, the word of God reaches those who violate it; and Joshua's prophetic judgment upon whosoever should rebuild Jericho is fulfilled in the family of Hiel, the Bethelite. Not only are the ways and government of God manifested in full vigour, however great His patience with a rebellious people, but the energy of the king's iniquity, in the presence of God's long-suffering, gives occasion for a testimony remarkable in proportion to the evil which made it necessary.

The reign of Ahab was the occasion of the testimony of the prophet Elijah. Israel, at that time, was hastening to its doom. But, whatever their iniquity may be, God does not smite a people who have forsaken His ways, until He has sent them a testimony. He may chastise them previously, but will not definitively execute His judgment upon them.

The testimony of the prophets in Judah unaccompanied by miracles

The character of the testimony deserves particular attention here.

In Judah the prophets, who bore testimony in the midst of an order of things which God Himself had established, performed no miracles. They dwell upon the people's sin, and put them in mind of the law of Jehovah, His ordinances, and the obedience due to Him. They proclaim the advent of the Messiah, and the future blessing of Israel; but, the system in the midst of which they give this testimony being still owned of God, they perform no miracles.

Chapters 17 and 18

The striking miracles of Elijah and Elisha

Elijah and Elisha, on the contrary (witnesses for God in the midst of a people that according to grace God still recognised as His own, but who had openly forsaken God and worshipped golden calves), perform striking miracles in proof of their divine mission.

They maintain the power and the rights of Jehovah in the midst of a people who disavow His title; while the prophets of Judah, standing amid those who publicly profess to own Jehovah's authority, insist upon the consequences of this position. God sent indeed to Israel by the mouth of His prophets — such as Hosea and Amos — threatenings similar to those addressed to Judah; but it does not appear that miracles were wrought in Judah by the prophets who bore witness there.

The miracles of Moses and Elijah

Elisha's miracles, of which we will speak farther on, have a different character from those of Elijah. The latter have a character which none but the miracles of Moses share with them. They are judicial miracles with respect to the people among whom the prophet dwelt. Accordingly God preserved His servant in a miraculous manner. I only speak now of what Elijah did in testimony in the very midst of the people.

Elijah's miracles are few in number, and of striking character. He shuts up the heavens* over a rebellious and apostate people, so that there should be no rain. He brings down fire from heaven upon the captains sent by the king to take him prisoner. At length he proves that Jehovah is God, and (in spite of all that had happened) the God of all the tribes of Israel, according to immutable rights which depend upon His counsels, and upon what He is in Himself. When the people confess this, by executing judgment themselves upon the priests of Baal, Jehovah grants His blessing anew, and the heavens give rain.** The import of these signs is evident. {* Let us remark here that this book gives us, as a solemn and positive declaration of the prophet's, that which we know from James's testimony to have been an answer to the prayer of a man like ourselves. This is the history of all true spiritual energy. It appears to man as a simple action, accompanied with more or less demonstration on God's part, and as a proof of the authority and spiritual power of the man who performs it; and so it is. But at the same time, in fact, all these things flow from the energy of divine life, and from communion with God; they are its expression and its fruit, but in power exercised on God's part. Compare Christ's words. at the tomb of Lazarus. It is profitable to examine such cases when presented to us in the word. There are others also which have two aspects. Historically the mission of the spies was according to the will of God; it was nevertheless, as to its origin, the fruit of the people's unbelief, an unbelief which soon manifested its effects. Paul's journey to Jerusalem, related in Acts 15, is apparently the same which he mentions in Galatians 2, but we find in the latter elements and motives which are not spoken of at all in the Acts. ** Elijah had said "but at my word," yet the rain is given when God is glorified; for Elijah was, as a witness, the witness of the government of Jehovah, of Jehovah the God of Israel, despised by Israel. Hence the truth and reality of Jehovah's authority and the principles of His government were both displayed.}

Moses was in a different position. The people of God were in captivity, not in rebellion, and the judgment falls on their oppressors. It is neither the heaven become brass closed over the people, nor

heaven the source of judgment which falls from thence. The earth, given to the children of men, and possessed by those who will not acknowledge that Jehovah is its God, or that He has any rights over its inhabitants, is smitten with all kinds of plagues. The earth, the water, the fruits of the earth, the cattle, the air, and, finally, man himself in his firstborn, all is smitten by the rod of God, according to the powerful word of God's witness. The Egyptians, enjoying the providential bounties of the gracious Creator, have not judgment inflicted upon them until they have refused to let go the people of God and to recognise His rights, who claims them for His own. After having refused to hear, they are first of all smitten in the enjoyment of the earthly blessings which they hold from Him, and afterwards the people themselves are smitten in the persons of their firstborn.

The two kinds of signs of the two Apocalyptic witnesses

We may remark here, that the power of the two witnesses in the Apocalypse manifests itself in these two kinds of signs. They shut heaven that it rain not, they bring down fire from heaven: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. That is Elijah. They smite the earth with all plagues as often as they will. That is Moses. Their testimony also will, no doubt, be given in the midst of a people who bear the double character of a rebellious people, and of a people in captivity, oppressed by the world who will not hear the God of the earth whose rights their testimony proclaims.

God's sovereign rights and power exercised in grace

If, in the case of Elijah, God shut heaven over His rebellious people, He takes care of the remnant according to grace, overstepping even in this grace the limits of the covenant of law. There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah the prophet, but unto none of them was he sent, save unto a widow of Sarepta in Sidon, a widow who hearkened to the voice of God's testimony, and by faith acted on that testimony in a case that required self-denial; and her life is preserved. The grace — a hard thing to the hearts of Jews — which is a revelation of His heart, whom they knew not, reveals itself in power equal to the need; and the dead is restored to life. The poor widow receives her son by a power which is that of resurrection, and her faith is fully established in the word of God.* {* This reference to the sovereign rights and exercise of power of God in grace, out of the limits of Israel, is frequent and full of interest; and here, as followed by the renewed blessing of Israel, looked at as composed of the whole twelve tribes, is very striking. It will be remembered that Jesus refers to it in the Gospel of Luke, which is the witness of this great principle, and causes thereby the anger of the Jews. Pride sinks the lowest and worst when it clothes itself with a religious form.}

God's power shown: Baal's priests slain

Afterwards God blesses Israel again, when they are brought back to the confession of His name by a striking manifestation of His power which confounds the priests of Baal. These are all slain by the people, now convinced of the folly of idolatry and made the instrument of God's judgment. It is here that — looked upon as the general expression of the mind of God — Elijah's mission closes, although his ministry was prolonged for some time.

Chapter 19

Elijah's flight at Jezebel's threats

Until now the prophet had stood before Jehovah (1 Kings 17:1; 18:15) and had spoken in His name; but now, terrified by the threats of Jezebel, he flees from the dangers of the place into which his testimony had brought him.

Just as we have seen in Moses at Meribah, Elijah's faith* does not rise to the height of Jehovah's grace and patience, who is full of goodness and mercy to His people. It is this failure which puts an end to Elijah's testimony, as it had shut Moses out of Canaan; for who can equal Jehovah in goodness? Elijah does not look to God; he thinks of himself, and takes flight; but God has His eye upon him. He who had not God's strength amid the evil had no refuge but the wilderness. There was a heart true to God, but not faith equal to meet Satan's hostile power in the place of testimony to the end. He must either be a witness for God amongst His rebellious people, or be entirely apart from them. {* We see here how far the energy of the outward life of faith may continue to exist, while the inward life grows weak. It was at the moment of the most striking testimony to the presence of God in the midst of the rebellious people, and when Elijah had just caused all the prophets of Baal amongst them to be slain by the people's own hands, that his faith entirely fails at a mere threat from Jezebel. His life was not inwardly sustained by this faith in proportion to the outward testimony. His testimony excites the enemy in a way for which his personal faith was not prepared. This is a solemn lesson. The still small voice (which, unknown to him, was still heard among the people) had not perhaps its due influence upon his own heart, where the fire and manifestations had held too much place. Thus he did not know himself the grace which was still in exercise towards the people; he could not love them for the sake of the seven thousand faithful ones as God loved them, nor hope as charity hopes. Alas! what are we, even when so near God! And his complaint when he came to God, for a person so blessed, has a sad deal of self in it. I have been zealous, he says, and they have cast down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets; just when he had cast down Baal's and killed all his prophets; and then, I am left alone. It is a humbling testimony.

God's care over His servant

The heart of Elijah and the hand of God led the prophet into the wilderness, where, overwhelmed perhaps, yet precious in Jehovah's sight, he will be alone with God. Elijah's forty days' journey in the wilderness has only a partial resemblance to the forty days which Moses spent with God, in the same Horeb to which the prophet was going, or to those which Jesus spent in the wilderness for conflict with the enemy of God and man. In the two latter cases nature was set aside. Neither Moses nor the Lord ate or drank. As for Elijah, the goodness of God sustains the weakness of tried nature, makes manifest that He considers it with all tenderness and thoughtfulness, and gives the strength needed for such a journey. This should have touched him, and made him feel what he ought to be in the midst of the people, since he had to do with such a God. His heart was far from such a state. Impossible, when we think of ourselves, to be witnesses to others of what God is! Our poor hearts are too far from such a position.

Elijah at Horeb: his complaints

Elijah goes on till he reaches Horeb. But coming before God to speak well of himself and ill of Israel is a very different thing from forgetting self through the power of the Lord's presence, and setting Him before the people in His power which is patient in mercy in spite of all their evil.* People sometimes come before God because they have forgotten Him in the place where they ought to have stood and borne testimony for Him. And thus God asks Elijah, "What doest thou here, Elijah? "Terrible question! like those addressed to Adam, to Cain, and now to the world with respect to Jesus. The answer does but betray (as is always the case) the sad and fatal position of one who has forgotten God. The voice was not a voice of thunder, but one that made Elijah feel it was the voice which he had forgotten. Wind, fire, earthquake, these heralds to man of the power of God, would have suited the angry heart of Elijah as instruments of divine power against Israel; but these manifestations of His power were not God Himself. The still small voice reveals His presence to Elijah. That which would have satisfied his will, and that which would perhaps have been just towards others, did not awaken his own conscience. But the still small voice by which God reveals Himself penetrates Elijah's heart, and he hides his face before the presence of Jehovah. Nevertheless the pride of his embittered heart is not yet subdued. He repeats his complaints, unsuitable as they were at the time when he had himself just destroyed all the prophets of Baal, and proving that his faith had not been able to find, by the light of his testimony, all that God saw of good in Israel. {* It was different too from Moses who, with God, interceded for the people, setting himself aside.}

God's answer: the patience of His grace

God's answer, although just, is sorrowful to the heart. Vengeance shall be executed, and Elijah is commissioned to prepare its instruments — a sad mission for the prophet, if he loved the people. As to Elijah, he should be succeeded by Elisha in his prophetic office. But if the deserved vengeance was to be executed in his time, and if the saddened prophet was to announce it, God has still seven thousand souls who had not bowed the knee to Baal, although Elijah had not been able to discover them. Oh! when will the heart of man, even in thought, rise to the height of God's grace and patience? If Elijah had leant more upon God, he would have known some of these seven thousand. He would at any rate have known Him who knew them, and who raised up his testimony to strengthen and comfort them.

Chapter 20

Ahab and Benhadad

According to the outward history of Israel, that which follows the revelations made to Elijah in Horeb looks like a time of restoration and blessing; and outwardly it was so. Benhadad is overcome and Israel delivered from his power; but Ahab has no knowledge at all of the mind of God, and he lets the man whom God had condemned escape. There are cases in which levity only proves that the honour of God and His thoughts have no influence over the heart. It was not for Ahab to be on brotherly terms with a king whose constant aim was the oppression of God's people. It was putting himself on a level with a

Gentile king, forgetting the position both of Israel and of Israel's king, with respect to God. In such a case as this, severity of conduct is the suitable accompaniment of the sense of God's perfect grace towards His people. He who, from love to God's people, desired in Mount Horeb to be blotted out of the book of Jehovah, is also he who said, in the presence of evil, "Consecrate yourselves to-day unto Jehovah, every man upon his brother, his companion, and his neighbour"; but the weakness, which despisal of God produces in one who holds the place of God's servant, assumes the character of kindness towards men.

Chapter 21

Ahab's great wickedness: the longsuffering of God ready to accept humiliation

At Jezebel's instigation, Ahab adds sin to sin, and a piece of flagrant injustice fills up the apostasy of the king of Israel. He enjoys the fruit of a crime which he had not courage to commit himself. His enjoyment was short-lived. Sent by God to meet the king, Elijah goes before him into the vineyard, which Ahab went down to possess. The king's heart bows before the word of Jehovah, and the fulfilment of the judgment is put off until the days of his son: a new proof of the longsuffering of a God ever ready to accept and respond to any movement of man's heart towards Himself.

Outward prosperity: apostasy and iniquity

The reign of Ahab, looked at historically, was in general prosperous and glorious. Moab was tributary. Syria subject and quiet. The king had an ivory palace, and built fresh cities: a new motive to own Jehovah, a snare to one who worshipped Baal. God did not regard all this prosperity. In a moral point of view, this reign stamps its character upon the kingdom of Israel. It is apostasy and iniquity, but at the same time the testimony of a faithful and patient God.

Chapter 22

Outward peace and mutual alliances, marked by unfaithfulness and forgetfulness of God

The last chapter presents another element of this history, namely, the guilty alliances which were formed between the royal families of Israel and Judah. Both of them prosperous at this period, they seek the establishment and increase of their power by peace and mutual alliances. On Jehoshaphat's side it was nothing but unfaithfulness and forgetfulness of God. And, if God did not forsake him, Jehoshaphat saw the commencement of chastisements, the results of which were deeply disastrous to his house.

The false prophets and the prophet of Jehovah

We see also the false prophets in power: Ahab had four hundred of them. We may remark also, that they made use of Jehovah's name, and no longer, as it appears, of Baal's.* Nor was Elijah, as we see, the only prophet of Jehovah. The intermixture continues. Outwardly the state of things is less offensive; but the heart of Ahab is unchanged. At the request of Jehoshaphat, who is uneasy in this false position, Ahab sends for the prophet of Jehovah; but he does not hearken to him and has to meet the consequences. {* Nevertheless the worship of Baal had not ceased.}

We learn also here in what manner a lying spirit deceives and leads the wicked to ruin, fulfilling the purposes and judgments of Jehovah. Elisha and Elijah During all this time Elisha constantly accompanies Elijah and, led to this intimacy by grace, he is morally imbued with his spirit before he is clothed with it in power. He seems identified with him.