

## Christ: The Divine Resource

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In all the long history of the conflict of good and evils never once has God been taken by surprise. In the pages of the Old Testament we trace the progress of that conflict over the space of four thousand years, during which period to all appearances every fresh joining of battle resulted in the worsening of good through the general failure of the persons or the people who were taken up by God as His servants and warriors. So universal was this failure that by the time the days of Malachi were reached it seemed as though good would have to retire from the unequal contest to make room for an outpouring of resistless judgment by which the evil might be swept away. Hence the closing words of the Old Testament, "lest I come and smite the earth with a curse (Mal. 4: 6).

The New Testament, however, opens with the reappearance of good livingly personified in Jesus, and at once the tide of battle was turned, and through lowliness and humility, even unto the suffering of death, was the impregnable position of REDEMPTION taken up. There mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace kissed each other; and from thence will they ultimately go forth to final victory.

All through the black night of defeat, which the Old Testament so faithfully chronicles, the children of faith were cheered by the twinkling star-light of Messianic promise, and as the centuries slowly passed, these promises concerning THE CHRIST not only increased in number but became clearer and more definite in outline, so that such a record as Hebrews 11 presents became a possibility. Of such it could be said, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." If they were so animated and affected by what they dimly saw, shall not we who live in the sunshine of New Testament revelation — we "whose souls are lighted by wisdom from on high" — shall not we gain fresh strength and courage by seeing the way in which God Himself always fell back upon His Resource in Christ: the way in which every fresh disaster encountered in the long-drawn-out testing of the first man only served to throw into fresh relief the excellency and stability and triumph that should be found when there should be revealed the "second Man," the Lord out of heaven.

Though Messianic predictions and allusions, in type and song and prophecy, lie scattered over Old Testament pages much as the stars of heaven besprinkle the black face of the night sky, yet all are not of the same distinct and important type; just as, to pursue the analogy, all stars are not of the first magnitude. One striking fact, however, will be noticed; several of the greatest prophecies, true stars of the first magnitude, shone forth in moments of great crisis, when some cherished thought of God, entrusted for a moment to some representative of the "first man," had failed. Let us briefly trace a few examples.

The greatest of all Old Testament crises was the fall of Adam as recorded in the early chapters of Genesis. In this first man was expressed the original thought of God for man; so much so that, set in innocence as head of creation, he becomes a type of Christ, just as when fallen he becomes His greatest contrasts This splendid creature, the intelligent head of creation, its connecting link with the Creator, became the object of the malignant attack of evil, through Satan its originator. The deceiver began by casting doubt upon the word of God; this accomplished, he easily sowed seeds of distrust of God, which soon bore heir sad fruit in an open act of rebellion against God. Thus was the wreck of the first

creation accomplished in the ruin of its head. The top link — connecting the chain of creation with its Creator — being snapped, the whole chain fell away.

This was a crisis indeed! The fall being an accomplished fact, a whole train of dire results was set in motion, and of these we read in Genesis 3: 14-19, first in regard to the serpent, then the woman, and then the man. In all those solemn words which fell from the lips of the Lord God there is only one ray of hope. No word was said as to the recovery or re-instatement of Adam; no hope held out that in future ages, by means of education and progress, the results of that day might be reversed. In the beginning of His pronouncement, however, the Lord God did predict the appearance of the Seed of the woman, saying, "It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel" (ver. 15).

This first prophecy of the coming Messiah was not entrusted to human lips, as were subsequent ones; it was uttered directly by God Himself. At least four of the great facts of the gospel may be discerned enfolded in its words.

1. The coming Deliverer should be Man. He should be "*her Seed.*"

2. He should be a Man of a unique kind, and not one born according to the ordinary laws of human generation. God spoke not of "*their seed,*" or "*his seed,*" but of "*her Seed.*" In these words were involved the truth of the "virgin birth," at which modern scepticism so ostentatiously stumbles.

3. The coming Man should enter the arena of conflict, and, turning the tables, should vanquish the victor. In bruising - or crushing — the serpent's head, He would smite him a death-blow in the very centre of his intelligence and power.

4. This great coming victory should not be achieved without personal loss and suffering to the Victor. In the bruising of the heel of the Seed of the woman we have one of those marvellous germ-thoughts of which Genesis is full: when expanded in New Testament light it presents to us the picture of the rejected Man of sorrows overthrowing the powers of darkness by dying.

" . . . the Conqueror slain,

Slain in His victory!"

No second man appeared until Christ came. Every man that trod the earth between was but Adam reproduced in the second, third, or fortieth generation, as the case might be. Only in the Messiah was this sad succession, with its accompanying entail of sin and death, broken. He was truly Man, but of another order to that of Adam, miraculously born of the virgin under the power of the Holy Ghost.

To the appearing of this Man, who is the Son of God, did the Lord God look on that fatal day of defeat and ruin. He was uplifted as the Divine Resource; and thus there blazed forth upon the darkened sky the first star of promise for the encouragement of faith.

There is no record in Genesis of any further prophecy during the ante-diluvian age, but when that dispensation had reached its close in the judgment of the flood, and a fresh period had started, marked by the establishment of government in the earth by Noah, then in connection with a fresh crisis a fresh prophecy was given. The new regime had not long prevailed when there arose in the earth a Satan-inspired system of idolatry. The first home of this frightful curse appears to have been in the Babylonian region. Its nature seems to have been the deifying of dead heroes, or rather the worshipping of Satan and his demons under cover of deified heroes. The subtle craft underlying the mythology of the Babylonian idolatry, and all the other national systems of idolatry derived from it, such as the Egyptian, Grecian, and Roman, was seen in this: that it kept in the background the dark and mysterious figure of a great and powerful god who acted as father, whilst it put in the foreground a goddess with

her son, who became the great objects of veneration. This would lead one to suppose that if no one else had understood the prophecy of Genesis 3: 15, Satan had done so; and that he prepared in advance to discount the coming of the real Deliverer by this wretched parody.

The plague of this idolatry had overspread the earth, when, out of its very home and hotbed, Abraham was called that he might become the depository of earthly blessing; and when he had proved the reality of his faith in connection with the offering up of Isaac, there was made to him a further promise in connection with his Seed, of whom Isaac, dead and risen in figure, was a type. It was said, "In thy Seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 22: 18).

Reading this in connection with the context, it is evident that "the Seed of Abraham" presents to us Christ as having died and risen again, so that through Him, and in Him, the blessing of God might overspread all nations. This was the resource of God just when the devil's curse of idolatry had overspread all the nations so recently formed at the tower of Babel. Notice, too, that previously it was the crushing of the former victor; now it is the blessing of those formerly vanquished. Thus it was that another star of hope shed its beams above the dark horizon.

From this point, the call of Abraham, the divine plan unfolded with greater rapidity. There sprang up from his descendants Israel, the chosen people, who were constituted a nation when delivered from Egypt under the leadership of Moses, the apostle of the law-system. They were to be entirely separated from the surrounding nations sunken in idolatry, in order that they might be God's witness-bearers in the earth.

At the beginning of their history the fortunes of that nation were largely bound up with the individual faith and energy of Moses himself, although the priesthood was almost immediately established. This was specially true after the incident of the golden calf, when both priest and people so lamentably failed. From that point more than ever did Moses, "faithful in all God's house," stand forth as a contrast to the rest. Numbers 12 makes very plain his special place as the great prophet of God, by whom the Lord spake, and to whom He spake "mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches" (vers. 2, 8). At a later stage in Israel's history, in the declining days of the kings, the prophets again became the chief link between the people and God, but never did they have such a place of prominence as belonged to Moses, the greatest of them all.

And Moses failed! Angered beyond endurance by the irritating perversity of that stiff-necked people, the meekest man in the earth spoke unadvisedly with his lips. How grievous a sin this was may be easily seen if we remember that these hot and scorching words of anger flowed as a torrent from the mouth that had been specially set apart to convey to the people the veritable words of God upon which they might hang their souls. Another cherished thought of God had apparently come to grief, for the prophetic office, in its highest Old Testament expression, had broken down by reason of the weakness of the best of men. This was another crisis of the first magnitude.

Then it was that another great prophecy of Scripture was given. The passage that records it — Deuteronomy 18: 15-19 — makes it plain that Moses received the communication from the lips of God as far back as the days of Sinai, at the start of the forty years of wandering; the public announcement of it was, however, delayed until, at the end of the forty years, he had to ascend Nebo to die because of his sin.

How suitable was this! How hearts must have quailed at the prospect; even those of men of faith, such as Joshua and Caleb! With what thrilling power, then, must have come the revelation of the divine words:

"I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put My words in His mouth; and He shall speak unto them all that I shall command Him."

"It is well," they must have said; "so God is not defeated, after all."

Thus, though the sun of Moses, obscured by failure, set while yet it was high day, as far as his natural strength was concerned, there arose upon the world this fresh star of promise concerning another PROPHET who should be the perfect exponent of the mind of God, and through whose lips there should flow nothing but the clear waters of the truth. And that Prophet was CHRIST.

As we have already noticed, the failure of the priestly office in Aaron even antedated that of the prophetic office in Moses; nevertheless, for some time after his death it seems to have maintained its importance, and been the main link between Israel and God. As an institution it persisted, of course, to the time of Christ; but under Eli and his sons it reached the lowest point of degradation, and from that point its importance declined.

The sin of Eli's sons marked another of those crises of which we have spoken. Another of these divinely-established offices had failed, and fallen into disrepute in man's hands. Rottenness and corruption had invaded it to such an extent that instead of the lips of these young men "keeping knowledge," so that men "should seek the law at His mouth" (see Mal. 2: 7), their sin was "very great before the Lord: for men abhorred the offering of the Lord" (1 Sam. 2: 17). Another of these great thoughts of God was apparently to fall to the ground.

Again, however, the Lord intervened with a new message which is recorded in the same chapter, verses 27-36. An unnamed man of God appeared with a message of judgment for Eli. God would smite his unruly house with such a curse that both the ears of all who heard it should tingle. And yet at the close of this terrible message there came a gleam of light, for he proceeded to say:

"I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed forever." (ver. 35).

So, after all, deep though the dishonour, the priesthood should not perish for ever. Another should take it up in faithfulness as pronounced as the previous unfaithfulness. Another should carry out the office according to God's mind, and be established for ever. Another star of hope shone forth for the encouragement of the faith that watched through the ever-darkening night. God was not defeated, for He had in reserve One who should be not only prophet but priest. In due time there would come the faithful priest: and that priest is CHRIST.

Subsequent to the days of Eli the kingdom was established in the midst of Israel, and after Saul the wilful king had been removed, David the man after God's heart was set up. Once again the story of failure repeated itself. The seeds of decay were sown right at the beginning. David grievously broke down, and the evil rapidly reproduced itself in his house. Another great crisis arose as once more in connection with this fresh departure all appeared to be lost.

But as before, the Divine Resource was speedily unveiled. As David at the end of his career surveyed the condition of his house with its incipient ruin, his soul was strangely moved, and he took up his lyre for the last time. The Spirit of the Lord spake by him, and this is what He said:

"The God of Israel said, The Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain" (2 Sam. 23: 3, 4).

After David's death, oppression and injustice came in like a flood, but for the comfort of each believing heart another star of hope had risen, by the revelation once again of the Resource of God. There would be another King, marked by absolute justice and the fear of God, and beneath His beneficent sway the earth would rejoice, being brought into the light of a new and cloudless day.

Again we may say with rejoicing all was not lost: kingly dominion shall not be for ever a ghastly failure. The true, the righteous King will come. He will be CHRIST.

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And we, upon whom the ends of the ages are come, shall not we too rejoice in the contemplation of these things? We live in days that witness the breakup and dissolution of many things; some of them doubtless but human institutions which need not be deplored; others have their roots in that which is divine, and our hearts might rightly be depressed did we not know that Christ is the Resource of God. Nothing shall fail. All shall be carried to a triumphant issue. He who has become the second Man, He who has died and risen again, He who has assumed the offices of Prophet, Priest, and King, will never fail nor be discouraged.

Let us remember that man is nothing, nor was he ever anything; CHRIST IS EVERYTHING. Let none of us then glory in man. We are in Christ Jesus, who of God is made everything to us in order that we might from henceforth and for ever glory in the Lord.