

PSALM CVI.

GENERAL REMARKS.—*This Psalm begins and ends with Hallelujah—"Praise ye the Lord."* The space between these two descriptions of praise is filled up with the mournful details of Israel's sin, and the extraordinary patience of God; and truly we do well to bless the Lord both at the beginning and the end of our meditations when sin and grace are the themes. This sacred song is occupied with the historical part of the Old Testament, and is one of many which are thus composed: surely this should be a sufficient rebuke to those who speak slightingly of the historical Scriptures; it ill becomes a child of God to think lightly of that which the Holy Spirit so frequently uses for our instruction. What other Scriptures had David beside those very histories which are so depreciated, and yet he esteemed them beyond his necessary food, and made them his songs in the house of his pilgrimage?

Israel's history is here written with the view of showing human sin, even as the preceding Psalm was composed to magnify divine goodness. It is, in fact, a NATIONAL CONFESSION, and includes an acknowledgment of the transgressions of Israel in Egypt, in the wilderness, and in Canaan, with devout petitions for forgiveness such as rendered the Psalm suitable for use in all succeeding generations, and especially in times of national captivity. It was probably written by David,—at any rate its first and last two verses are to be found in that sacred song which David delivered to Asaph when he brought up the ark of the Lord (1 Chron. xvi. 34, 35, 36).

While we are studying this holy Psalm, let us all along see ourselves in the Lord's ancient people, and bemoan our own provocations of the Most High, at the same time admiring his infinite patience, and adoring him because of it. May the Holy Spirit sanctify it to the promotion of humility and gratitude.

DIVISION.—Praise and prayer are blended in the introduction (verses 1—5). Then comes the story of the nation's sins, which continues till the closing prayer and praise of the last two verses. While making confession the Psalmist acknowledges the sins committed in Egypt and at the Red Sea (verses 6—12), the lusting in the wilderness (13—15), the envying of Moses and Aaron (16—18), the worship of the golden calf (19—23), the despising of the promised land (24—27), the iniquity of Baal-Peor (28—30), and the waters of Meribah (32—33). Then he owns the failure of Israel when settled in Canaan, and mentions their consequent chastisements (34—44), together with the quick compassion which came to their relief when they were brought low (44—46). The closing prayer and doxology fill up the remaining verses.

EXPOSITION.

PRAISE ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for *he is good: for his mercy endureth* for ever.

2 Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? *who* can shew forth all his praise?

3 Blessed *are* they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times.

4 Remember me, O LORD, with the favour *that thou bearest unto* thy people; O visit me with thy salvation;

5 That I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.

1. "Praise ye the Lord." Hallelujah. Praise ye **Jah**. This song is for the assembled people, and they are all exhorted to join in praise to Jehovah. It is not meet for a few to praise and the rest to be silent; but all should join. If David were present in churches where quartettes and choirs carry on all the singing, he would turn to the congregation and say, "Praise ye the Lord." Our meditation dwells upon human sin; but on all occasions and in all occupations it is reasonable and profitable to praise the Lord. "O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good." To us needy creatures the goodness of God is the first attribute which excites praise.

and that praise takes the form of gratitude. We praise the Lord truly when we give him thanks for what we have received from his goodness. Let us never be slow to return unto the Lord our praise; to thank him is the least we can do—let us not neglect it. “*For his mercy endureth for ever.*” Goodness towards sinners assumes the form of mercy, mercy should therefore be a leading note in our song. Since man ceases not to be sinful, it is a great blessing that Jehovah ceases not to be merciful. From age to age the Lord deals graciously with his church, and to every individual in it he is constant and faithful in his grace, even for evermore. In a short space we have here two arguments for praise, “for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever;” and these two arguments are themselves praises. The very best language of adoration is that which adorningly in the plainest words sets forth the simple truth with regard to our great Lord. No rhetorical flourishes or poetical hyperboles are needed, the bare facts are sublime poetry, and the narration of them with reverence is the essence of adoration. This first verse is the text of all that which follows; we are now to see how from generation to generation the mercy of God endured to his chosen people.

2. “*Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord?*” What tongue of men or angels can duly describe the great displays of divine power? They are unutterable. Even those who saw them could not fully tell them. “*Who can shew forth all his praise?*” To declare his works is the same thing as to praise him, for his own doings are his best commendation. We cannot say one tenth so much for him as his own character and acts have already done? Those who praise the Lord have an infinite subject, a subject which will not be exhausted throughout eternity by the most enlarged intellects, nay, nor by the whole multitude of the redeemed, though no man can number them. The questions of this verse never can be answered; their challenge can never be accepted, except in that humble measure which can be reached by a holy life and a grateful heart.

3. Since the Lord is so good and so worthy to be praised, it must be for our happiness to obey him. “*Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times.*” Multiplied are the blessednesses which must descend upon the whole company of the keepers of the way of justice, and especially upon that one rare man who at all times follows that which is right. Holiness is happiness. The way of right is the way of peace. Yet men leave this road, and prefer the paths of the destroyer. Hence the story which follows is in sad contrast with the happiness here depicted, because the way of Israel was not that of judgment and righteousness, but that of folly and iniquity. The Psalmist, while contemplating the perfections of God, was impressed with the feeling that the servants of such a being must be happy, and when he looked around and saw how the tribes of old prospered when they obeyed, and suffered when they sinned, he was still more fully assured of the truth of his conclusion. O could we but be free of sin we should be rid of sorrow! We would not only be just, but “keep judgment”; we would not be content with occasionally acting rightly, but would “do justice at all times.”

4. “*Remember me, O Lord, with the favour which thou bearest unto thy people.*” Insignificant as I am, do not forget me. Think of me with kindness, even as thou thinkest of thine own elect. I cannot ask more, nor would I seek less. Treat me as the least of thy saints are treated and I am content. It should be enough for us if we fare as the rest of the family. If even Balaam desired no more than to die the death of the righteous, we may be well content both to live as they live, and die as they die. This feeling would prevent our wishing to escape trial, persecution, and chastisement; these have fallen to the lot of saints, and why should we escape them?

“Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease?
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas.”

At the same time we pray to have their sweets as well as their bitters. If the Lord smiled upon their souls we cannot rest unless he smile upon us also. We would dwell where they dwell, rejoice as they rejoice, sorrow as they sorrow, and in all things be for ever one with them in the favour of the Lord. The sentence before us is a sweet prayer, at once humble and aspiring, submissive and expansive; it might be used by a dying thief or a living apostle; let us use it now.

“*O visit me with thy salvation.*” Bring it home to me. Come to my house and

to my heart, and give me the salvation which thou hast prepared, and art alone able to bestow. We sometimes hear of a man's dying by the visitation of God, but here is one who knows that he can only *live* by the visitation of God. Jesus said of Zaccheus, "This day is salvation come to this house," and that was the case, because he himself had come there. There is no salvation apart from the Lord, and he must visit us with it or we shall never obtain it. We are too sick to visit our Great Physician, and therefore he visits us. O that our great Bishop would hold a visitation of all the churches, and bestow his benediction upon all his flock. Sometimes the second prayer of this verse seems to be too great for us, for we feel that we are not worthy that the Lord should come under our roof. Visit me, Lord! Can it be? Dare I ask for it? And yet I must, for thou alone canst bring me salvation: therefore, Lord, I entreat thee come unto me, and abide with me for ever.

5. "*That I may see the good of thy chosen.*" His desire for the divine favour was excited by the hope that he might participate in all the good things which flow to the people of God through their election. The Father has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus, according as he has chosen us in him, and in these precious gifts we desire to share through the saving visitation of the Lord. No other good do we wish to see, perceive, and apprehend, but that which is the peculiar treasure of the saints. "*That I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation.*" The Psalmist, having sought his portion in the good of the chosen, now also begs to be a partaker in their joy: for of all the nations under heaven the Lord's true people are the happiest. "*That I may glory with thine inheritance.*" He would have a part and lot in their honour as well as their joy. He was willing to find glory where saints find it, namely, in being reproached for truth's sake. To serve the Lord and endure shame for his sake is the glory of the saints below: Lord, let me rejoice to bear my part therein. To be with God above, for ever blessed in Christ Jesus, is the glory of saints above: O Lord, be pleased to allot me a place there also.

These introductory thanksgivings and supplications, though they occur first in the Psalm, are doubtless the result of the contemplations which succeed them, and may be viewed not only as the preface, but also as the moral of the whole sacred song.

6 We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly.

7 Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but provoked *him* at the sea, *even* at the Red sea.

8 Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known.

9 He rebuked the Red Sea also, and it was dried up: so he led them through the depths, as through the wilderness.

10 And he saved them from the hand of him that hated *them*, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy.

11 And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left.

12 Then believed they his words; they sang his praise.

6. "*We have sinned with our fathers.*" Here begins a long and particular confession. Confession of sin is the readiest way to secure an answer to the prayer of verse 4; God visits with his salvation the soul which acknowledges its need of a Saviour. Men may be said to have sinned with their fathers when they imitate them, when they follow the same objects, and make their own lives to be mere continuations of the follies of their sires. Moreover, Israel was but one nation in all time, and the confession which follows sets forth the national rather than the personal sin of the Lord's people. They enjoyed national privileges, and therefore they shared in national guilt. "*We have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly.*" Thus is the confession repeated three times, in token of the sincerity and heartiness of it. Sins of omission, commission, and rebellion we ought to acknowledge under distinct heads, that we may show a due sense of the number and heinousness of our offences.

7. "*Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt.*" The Israelites saw the miraculous plagues and ignorantly wondered at them: their design of love, their

deep moral and spiritual lessons, and their revelation of the divine power and justice they were unable to perceive. A long sojourn among idolaters had blunted the perceptions of the chosen family, and cruel slavery had ground them down into mental sluggishness. Alas, how many of God's wonders are not understood, or misunderstood by us still. We fear the sons are no great improvement upon the sires. We inherit from our fathers much sin and little wisdom; they could only leave us what they themselves possessed. We see from this verse that a want of understanding is no excuse for sin, but is itself one count in the indictment against Israel. "*They remembered not the multitude of thy mercies.*" The sin of the understanding leads on to the sin of the memory. What is not understood will soon be forgotten. Men feel little interest in preserving husks; if they know nothing of the inner kernel they will take no care of the shells. It was an aggravation of Israel's sin that when God's mercies were so numerous they yet were able to forget them all. Surely some out of such a multitude of benefits ought to have remained engraven upon their hearts; but if grace does not give us understanding, nature will soon cast out the memory of God's great goodness. "*But provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea.*" To fall out at starting was a bad sign. Those who did not begin well can hardly be expected to end well. Israel is not quite out of Egypt, and yet she begins to provoke the Lord by doubting his power to deliver, and questioning his faithfulness to his promise. The sea was only called Red, but their sins were scarlet in reality; it was known as the "sea of weeds," but far worse weeds grew in their hearts.

8. "*Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known.*" When he could find no other reason for his mercy he found it in his own glory, and seized the opportunity to display his power. If Israel does not deserve to be saved, yet Pharaoh's pride needs to be crushed, and therefore Israel shall be delivered. The Lord very jealously guards his own name and honour. It shall never be said of him that he cannot or will not save his people, or that he cannot abate the haughtiness of his defiant foes. This respect unto his own honour ever leads him to deeds of mercy, and hence we may well rejoice that he is a jealous God.

9. "*He rebuked the Red sea also, and it was dried up.*" A word did it. The sea heard his voice and obeyed. How many rebukes of God are lost upon us! Are we not more unmanageable than the ocean? God did, as it were, chide the sea, and say, "Wherefore dost thou stop the way of my people? Their path to Canaan lies through thy channel, how dardest thou hinder them?" The sea perceived its Master and his seed royal, and made way at once. "*So he led them through the depths, as through the wilderness.*" As if it had been the dry floor of the desert the tribes passed over the bottom of the gulf; nor was their passage venturesome, for HE bade them go; nor dangerous, for HE led them. We also have under divine protection passed through many trials and afflictions, and with the Lord as our guide we have experienced no fear and endured no perils. We have been led through the deeps as through the wilderness.

10. "*And he saved them from the hand of him that hated them.*" Pharaoh was drowned, and the power of Egypt so crippled that throughout the forty years' wanderings of Israel they were never threatened by their old masters. "*And redeemed them from the hand of the enemy.*" This was a redemption by power, and one of the most instructive types of the redemption of the Lord's people from sin and hell by the power which worketh in them.

11. "*And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left.*" The Lord does nothing by halves. What he begins he carries through to the end. This, again, made Israel's sin the greater, because they saw the thoroughness of the divine justice, and the perfection of the divine faithfulness. In the covering of their enemies we have a type of the pardon of our sins; they are sunk as in the sea, never to rise again; and, blessed be the Lord, there is "not one of them left."—Not one sin of thought, or word, or deed, the blood of Jesus has covered all. "I will cast their iniquities into the depths of the sea."

12. "*Then believed they his words.*" That is to say, they believed the promise when they saw it fulfilled, but not till then. This is mentioned, not to their credit, but to their shame. Those who do not believe the Lord's word till they see it performed are not believers at all. Who would not believe when the fact stares him in the face? The Egyptians would have done as much as this. "*They sang his praise.*" How could they do otherwise? Their song was very excellent, and is the type of the song of heaven: but sweet as it was, it was quite as short, and when it was ended

they fell to murmuring. "They sang his praise," but "they soon forgot his works." Between Israel singing and Israel sinning there was scarce a step. Their song was good while it lasted, but it was no sooner begun than over.

13 They soon forgot his works ; they waited not for his counsel ;

14 But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert.

15 And he gave them their request ; but sent leanness into their soul.

13. "*They soon forgot his works.*" They seemed in a hurry to get the Lord's mercies out of their memories ; they hastened to be ungrateful. "*They waited not for his counsel,*" neither waiting for the word of command or promise ; eager to have their own way, and prone to trust in themselves. This is a common fault in the Lord's family to this day ; we are long in learning to wait for the Lord, and upon the Lord. With him is counsel and strength, but we are vain enough to look for these to ourselves, and therefore we grievously err.

14. "*But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness.*" Though they would not wait God's will, they are hot to have their own. When the most suitable and pleasant food was found them in abundance, it did not please them long, but they grew dainty and sniffed at angel's food, and must needs have flesh to eat, which was unhealthy diet for that warm climate, and for their easy life. This desire of theirs they dwelt upon till it became a mania with them, and, like a wild horse, carried away its rider. For a meal of meat they were ready to curse their God and renounce the land which floweth with milk and honey. What a wonder that the Lord did not take them at their word ! It is plain that they vexed him greatly, "*And tempted God in the desert.*" In the place where they were absolutely dependent upon him and were every day fed by his direct provision, they had the presumption to provoke their God. They would have him change the plans of his wisdom, supply their sensual appetites, and work miracles to meet their wicked unbelief : these things the Lord would not do, but they went as far as they could in trying to induce him to do so. They failed not in their wicked attempt because of any goodness in themselves, but because God "cannot be tempted,"—temptation has no power over him, he yields not to man's threats or promises.

15. "*And he gave them their request.*" Prayer may be answered in anger and denied in love. That God gives a man his desire is no proof that he is the object of divine favour, everything depends upon what that desire is. "*But sent leanness into their soul.*" Ah, that "but" ! It embittered all. The meat was poison to them when it came without a blessing ; whatever it might do in fattening the body, it was poor stuff when it made the soul lean. If we must know scantiness, may God grant it may not be scantiness of soul : yet this is a common attendant upon worldly prosperity. When wealth grows with many a man his worldly estate is fatter, but his soul's state is leaner. To gain silver and lose gold is a poor increase ; but to win for the body and lose for the soul is far worse. How earnestly might Israel have unprayed her prayers had she known what would come with their answer ! The prayers of lust will have to be wept over. We fret and fume till we have our desire, and then we have to fret still more because the attainment of it ends in bitter disappointment.

16 They envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the LORD.

17 The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram.

18 And a fire was kindled in their company ; the flame burned up the wicked.

16. "*They envied Moses also in the camp.*" Though to him as the Lord's chosen instrument they owed everything they grudged him the authority which it was needful that he should exercise for their good. Some were more openly rebellious than others, and became leaders of the mutiny, but a spirit of dissatisfaction was general, and therefore the whole nation is charged with it. Who can hope to escape envy when the meekest of men was subject to it ? How unreasonable was this envy, for Moses was the one man in all the camp who laboured hardest and had most to

bear. They should have sympathised with him ; to envy him was ridiculous. “ *And Aaron the saint of the Lord.*” By divine choice Aaron was set apart to be holiness unto the Lord, and instead of thanking God that he had favoured them with a high priest by whose intercession their prayers would be presented, they cavilled at the divine election, and quarrelled with the man who was to offer sacrifice for them. Thus neither church nor state was ordered aright for them ; they would snatch from Moses his sceptre, and from Aaron his mitre. It is the mark of bad men that they are envious of the good, and spiteful against their best benefactors.

17. “ *The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram.*” Korah is not mentioned, for mercy was extended to his household, though he himself perished. The earth could no longer bear up under the weight of these rebels and ingrates : God’s patience was exhausted when they began to assail his servants, for his children are very dear to him, and he that toucheth them touches the apple of his eye. Moses had opened the sea for their deliverance, and now that they provoke him, the earth opens for their destruction. It was time that the nakedness of their sin was covered, and that the earth should open her mouth to devour those who opened their mouths against the Lord and his servants.

18. “ *And a fire was kindled in their company ; the flame burned up the wicked.*” The Levites who were with Korah perished by fire, which was a most fitting death for those who intruded into the priesthood, and so offered strange fire. God has more than one arrow in his quiver, the fire can consume those whom the earthquake spares. These terrible things in righteousness are mentioned here to show the obstinacy of the people in continuing to rebel against the Lord. Terrors were as much lost upon them as mercies had been ; they could neither be drawn nor driven.

19 They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten image.

20 Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass.

21 They forgot God their saviour, which had done great things in Egypt ;

22 Wondrous works in the land of Ham, *and* terrible things by the Red sea.

23 Therefore he said that he would destroy them, had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy *them*.

19. “ *They made a calf in Horeb.*” In the very place where they had solemnly pledged themselves to obey the Lord they broke the second, if not the first, of his commandments, and set up the Egyptian symbol of the ox, and bowed before it. The ox image is here sarcastically called “ a calf ” ; idols are worthy of no respect, scorn is never more legitimately used than when it is poured upon all attempts to set forth the Invisible God. The Israelites were foolish indeed when they thought they saw the slightest divine glory in a bull, nay, in the mere image of a bull. To believe that the image of a bull could be the image of God must need great credulity. “ *And worshipped the molten image.*” Before it they paid divine honours, and said, “ These be thy gods, O Israel.” This was sheer madness. After the same fashion the Ritualists must needs set up their symbols and multiply them exceedingly. Spiritual worship they seem unable to apprehend ; their worship is sensuous to the highest degree, and appeals to eye, and ear, and nose. O the folly of men to block up their own way to acceptable worship, and to make the path of spiritual religion, which is hard to our nature, harder still through the stumbling-blocks which they cast into it. We have heard the richness of Popish paraphernalia much extolled, but an idolatrous image when made of gold is not one jot the less abominable than it would have been had it been made of dross and dung : the beauty of art cannot conceal the deformity of sin. We are told also of the suggestiveness of their symbols, but what of that, when God forbids the use of them ? Vain also is it to plead that such worship is *heartly*. So much the worse. Heartiness in forbidden actions is only an increase of transgression.

20. “ *Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass.*” They said that they only meant to worship the one God under a fitting and suggestive similitude by which his great power would be set forth to the multitude ; they pleaded the great Catholic revival which followed upon this return to a more ornate ceremonial, for the people thronged around Aaron, and danced before the calf with all their

might. But in very deed they had given up the true God, whom it had been their glory to adore, and had set up a rival to him, not a representation of him; for how should he be likened to a bullock? The Psalmist is very contemptuous, and justly so: irreverence towards idols is an indirect reverence to God. False gods, attempts to represent the true God, and indeed, all material things which are worshipped are so much filth upon the face of the earth, whether they be crosses, crucifixes, virgins, wafers, relics, or even the Pope himself. We are by far too mealy-mouthed about these infamous abominations: God abhors them, and so should we. To renounce the glory of spiritual worship for outward pomp and show is the height of folly, and deserves to be treated as such.

21, 22. "*They forgot God their Saviour.*" Remembering the calf involved forgetting God. He had commanded them to make no image, and in daring to disobey they forgot his commands. Moreover, it is clear that they must altogether have forgotten the nature and character of Jehovah, or they could never have likened him to a grass-eating animal. Some men hope to keep their sins and their God too—the fact being that he who sins is already so far departed from the Lord that he has actually forgotten him. "*Which had done great things in Egypt.*" God in Egypt had overcome all the idols, and yet they so far forgot him as to liken him to them. Could an ox work miracles? Could a golden calf cast plagues upon Israel's enemies? They were brutish to set up such a wretched mockery of deity, after having seen what the true God could really achieve. "*Wondrous works in the land of Ham, and terrible things by the Red sea.*" They saw several ranges of miracles, the Lord did not stint them as to the evidences of his eternal power and godhead, and yet they could not rest content with worshipping him in his own appointed way, but must needs have a *Directory* of their own invention, an elaborate ritual after the old Egyptian fashion, and a manifest object of worship to assist them in adoring Jehovah. This was enough to provoke the Lord, and it did so; how much he is angered every day in our own land no tongue can tell.

23. "*Therefore he said that he would destroy them.*" The threatening of destruction came at last. For the first wilderness sin he chastened them, sending leanness into their soul; for the second he weeded out the offenders, the flame burned up the wicked; for the third he threatened to destroy them; for the fourth he lifted up his hand and almost came to blows (verse 26); for the fifth he actually smote them, "and the plague brake in among them"; and so the punishment increased with their perseverance in sin. This is worth noting, and it should serve as a warning to the man who goeth on his iniquities. God tries words before he comes to blows, "he said that he would destroy them"; but his words are not to be trifled with, for he means them, and has power to make them good. "*Had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach.*" Like a bold warrior who defends the wall when there is an opening for the adversary and destruction is rushing in upon the city, Moses stopped the way of avenging justice with his prayers. Moses had great power with God. He was an eminent type of our Lord, who is called, as Moses here is styled, "mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth." As the Elect Redeemer interposed between the Lord and a sinful world, so did Moses stand between the Lord and his offending people. The story as told by Moses himself is full of interest and instruction, and tends greatly to magnify the goodness of the Lord, who thus suffered himself to be turned from the fierceness of his anger.

With disinterested affection, and generous renunciation of privileges offered to himself and his family, the great Lawgiver interceded with the Lord "*to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them.*" Behold the power of a righteous man's intercession. Mighty as was the sin of Israel to provoke vengeance, prayer was mightier in turning it away. How diligently ought we to plead with the Lord for this guilty world, and especially for his own backsliding people! Who would not employ an agency so powerful for an end so gracious! The Lord still hearkens to the voice of a man, shall not our voices be often exercised in supplicating for a guilty people?

24 Yea, they despised the pleasant land, they believed not his word:

25 But murmured in their tents, and hearkened not unto the voice of the LORD.

26 Therefore he lifted up his hand against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness:

27 To overthrow their seed also among the nations, and to scatter them in the lands.

24. "*Yea, they despised the pleasant land.*" They spoke lightly of it, though it was the joy of all lands: they did not think it worth the trouble of seeking and conquering; they even spoke of Egypt, the land of their iron bondage, as though they preferred it to Canaan, the land which floweth with milk and honey. It is an ill sign with a Christian when he begins to think lightly of heaven and heavenly things; it indicates a perverted mind, and it is moreover, a high offence to the Lord to despise that which he esteems so highly that he in infinite love reserves it for his own chosen. To prefer earthly things to heavenly blessings is to prefer Egypt to Canaan, the house of bondage to the land of promise. "*They believed not his word.*" This is the root sin. If we do not believe the Lord's word, we shall think lightly of his promised gifts. "They could not enter in because of unbelief"—this was the key which turned the lock against them. When pilgrims to the Celestial City begin to doubt the Lord of the way, they soon come to think little of the rest at the journey's end, and this is the surest way to make them bad travellers. Israel's unbelief demanded spies to see the land; the report of those spies was of a mingled character, and so a fresh crop of unbelief sprang up, with consequences most deplorable.

25. "*But murmured in their tents.*" From unbelief to murmuring is a short and natural step; they even fell to weeping when they had the best ground for rejoicing. Murmuring is a great sin and not a mere weakness; it contains within itself unbelief, pride, rebellion, and a whole host of sins. It is a home sin, and is generally practised by complainers "in their tents," but it is just as evil there as in the streets, and will be quite as grievous to the Lord. "*And hearkened not unto the voice of the Lord.*" Making a din with their own voices, they refused attention to their best Friend. Murmurers are bad hearers.

26, 27. "*Therefore he lifted up his hand against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness.*" He swore in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest; he commenced his work of judgment upon them, and they began to die. Only let God lift his hand against a man and his day has come; he falls terribly whom Jehovah overthrows. "*To overthrow their seed also among the nations, and to scatter them in the lands.*" Foreseeing that their descendants would reproduce their sins, he solemnly declared that he would give them over to captivity and the sword. Those whose carcases fell in the wilderness were, in a sense, exiles from the land of promise, and, being surrounded by many hostile tribes, they were virtually in a foreign land: to die far off from their father's inheritance was a just and weighty doom, which their rebellions had richly deserved. Our own loss of fellowship with God, and the divisions in our churches, doubtless often come to us as punishments for the sins out of which they grow. If we will not honour the Lord we cannot expect him to honour us. Our captains shall soon become captives, and our princes shall be prisoners if we forget the Lord and despise his mercies. Our singing shall be turned into sighing, and our mirth into misery if we walk contrary to the mind of the Lord.

28 They joined themselves also unto Baal-peor, and ate the sacrifices of the dead.

29 Thus they provoked *him* to anger with their inventions: and the plague brake in upon them.

30 Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment: and so the plague was stayed.

31 And that was counted unto him for righteousness unto all generations for evermore.

28. "*They joined themselves also unto Baal-peor.*" Ritualism led on to the adoration of false gods. If we choose a false way of worship we shall, ere long, choose to worship a false god. This abomination of the Moabites was an idol in whose worship women gave up their bodies to the most shameless lust. Think of the people of a holy God coming down to this. "*And ate the sacrifices of the dead.*" In the orgies with which the Baalites celebrated their detestable worship Israel joined, partaking even in their sacrifices as earnest inner-court worshippers, though

the gods were but dead idols. Perhaps they assisted in necromantic rites which were intended to open a correspondence with departed spirits, thus endeavouring to break the seal of God's providence, and burst into the secret chambers which God has shut up. Those who are weary of seeking the living God have often shown a hankering after dark sciences, and have sought after fellowship with demons and spirits. To what strong delusions those are often given up who cast off the fear of God! This remark is as much needed now as in days gone by.

29. "*Thus they provoked him to anger with their inventions : and the plague brake in upon them.*" Open licentiousness and avowed idolatry were too gross to be winked at. This time the offences clamoured for judgment, and the judgment came at once. Twenty-four thousand persons fell before a sudden and deadly disease which threatened to run through the whole camp. Their new sins brought on them a disease new to their tribes. When men invent sins God will not be slow to invent punishments. Their vices were a moral pest, and they were visited with a bodily pest : so the Lord meets like with its like.

30. "*Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment : and so the plague was stayed.*" God has his champions left in the worst times, and they will stand up when the time comes for them to come forth to battle. His righteous indignation moved him to a quick execution of two open offenders. His honest spirit could not endure that lewdness should be publicly practised at a time when a fast had been proclaimed. Such daring defiance of God and of all law he could not brook, and so with his sharp javelin he transfixed the two guilty ones in the very act. It was a holy passion which inflamed him, and no enmity to either of the persons whom he slew. The circumstances were so remarkable and the sin so flagrant that it would have involved great sin in a public man to have stood still and seen God thus defied, and Israel thus polluted. Phinehas was not of this mind, he was no trimmer, or palliator of sin, his heart was sound in God's statutes, and his whole nature was ablaze with zeal for God's glory, and therefore, though a priest, and therefore not obliged to be an executioner, he undertook the unwelcome task, and though both transgressors were of princely stock he had no respect of persons, but dealt justice upon them as if they had been the lowest of the people. This brave and decided deed was so acceptable to God as a proof that there were some sincere souls in Israel that the deadly visitation went no further. Two deaths had sufficed to save the lives of the multitude.

31. "*And that was counted unto him for righteousness unto all generations for evermore.*" Down to the moment when this Psalm was penned the house of Phinehas was honoured in Israel. His faith had performed a valorous deed, and his righteousness was testified of the Lord, and honoured by the continuance of his family in the priesthood. He was impelled by motives so pure that what would otherwise have been a deed of blood was justified in the sight of God ; nay, more, was made the evidence that Phinehas was righteous. No personal ambition, or private revenge, or selfish passion, or even fanatical bigotry, inspired the man of God ; but zeal for God, indignation at open filthiness, and true patriotism urged him on.

Once again we have cause to note the mercy of God that even when his warrant was out, and actual execution was proceeding, he stayed his hand at the suit of one man : finding, as it were, an apology for his grace when justice seemed to demand immediate vengeance.

32 They angered *him* also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes :

33 Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips.

32. "*They angered him also at the waters of strife.*" Will they never have done ? The scene changes, but the sin continues. Aforetime they had mutinied about water when prayer would soon have turned the desert into a standing pool, but now they do it again after their former experience of the divine goodness. This made the sin a double, yea a sevenfold offence, and caused the anger of the Lord to be the more intense. "*So that it went ill with Moses for their sakes.*" Moses was at last wearied out, and began to grow angry with them, and utterly hopeless of their ever improving ; can we wonder at it, for he was man and not God ? After forty years bearing with them the meek man's temper gave way, and he called them rebels, and

showed unhallowed anger; and therefore he was not permitted to enter the land which he desired to inherit. Truly, he had a sight of the goodly country from the top of Pisgah, but entrance was denied him, and thus it went ill with him. It was *their* sin which angered him, but *he* had to bear the consequences; however clear it may be that others are more guilty than ourselves, we should always remember that this will not screen us, but every man must bear his own burden.

33. "*Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips.*" Which seems a small sin compared with that of others, but then it was the sin of Moses, the Lord's chosen servant, who had seen and known so much of the Lord, and therefore it could not be passed by. He did not speak blasphemously, or falsely, but only hastily and without care; but this is a serious fault in a law-giver, and especially in one who speaks for God. This passage is to our mind one of the most terrible in the Bible. Truly we serve a jealous God. Yet he is not a hard master, or austere; we must not think so, but we must the rather be jealous of ourselves, and watch that we live the more carefully, and speak the more advisedly, because we serve such a Lord. We ought also to be very careful how we treat the ministers of the gospel, lest by provoking their spirit we should drive them into any unseemly behaviour which should bring upon them the chastisement of the Lord. Little do a murmuring, quarrelsome people dream of the perils in which they involve their pastors by their untoward behaviour.

34 They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the LORD commanded them:

35 But were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works.

36 And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them.

37 Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils,

38 And shed innocent blood, *even* the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood.

39 Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions.

40 Therefore was the wrath of the LORD kindled against his people, inasmuch that he abhorred his own inheritance.

41 And he gave them into the hands of the heathen; and they that hated them ruled over them.

42 Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their hand.

43 Many times did he deliver them; but they provoked *him* with their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity.

34. "*They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the Lord commanded them.*" They were commissioned to act as executioners upon races condemned for their unnatural crimes, and through sloth, cowardice, or sinful complacency they sheathed the sword too soon, very much to their own danger and disquietude. It is a great evil with professors that they are not zealous for the total destruction of all sin within and without. We make alliances of peace where we ought to proclaim war to the knife; we plead our constitutional temperament, our previous habits, the necessity of our circumstances, or some other evil excuse as an apology for being content with a very partial sanctification, if indeed it be sanctification at all. We are slow also to rebuke sin in others, and are ready to spare respectable sins, which like Agag walk with mincing steps. The measure of our destruction of sin is not to be our inclination, or the habit of others, but the Lord's command. We have no warrant for dealing leniently with any sin, be it what it may.

35. "*But were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works.*" It was not the wilderness which caused Israel's sins; they were just as disobedient when settled in the land of promise. They found evil company, and delighted in it. Those whom they should have destroyed they made their friends. Having enough faults of their own, they were yet ready to go to school to the filthy Canaanites, and educate themselves still more in the arts of iniquity. It was certain that they could learn

no good from men whom the Lord had condemned to utter destruction. Few would wish to go to the condemned cell for learning, yet Israel sat at the feet of accursed Canaan, and rose up proficient in every abomination. This, too, is a grievous but common error among professors: they court worldly company and copy worldly fashions, and yet it is their calling to bear witness against these things. None can tell what evil has come of the folly of worldly conformity.

36. "*And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them.*" They were fascinated by the charms of idolatry, though it brings misery upon its votaries. A man cannot serve sin without being ensnared by it. It is like birdlime, and to touch it is to be taken by it. Samson laid his head in the Philistine woman's lap, but ere long he woke up shorn of his strength. Dalliance with sin is fatal to spiritual liberty.

37 and 38. "*Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils.*" This was being snared indeed; they were spell-bound by the cruel superstition, and were carried so far as even to become murderers of their own children, in honour of the most detestable deities, which were rather devils than gods. "*And shed innocent blood.*" The poor little ones whom they put to death in sacrifice had not been partakers of their sin, and God looked with the utmost indignation upon the murder of the innocent. "*Even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan.*" Who knows how far evil will go? It drove men to be unnatural as well as ungodly. Had they but thought for a moment, they must have seen that a deity who could be pleased with the blood of babes spilt by their own sires could not be a deity at all, but must be a demon, worthy to be detested and not adored. How could they prefer such service to that of Jehovah? Did he tear their babes from their bosoms and smile at their death throes? Men will sooner wear the iron yoke of Satan than carry the pleasant burden of the Lord; does not this prove to a demonstration the deep depravity of their hearts? If man be not totally depraved, what worse would he do if he were? Does not this verse describe the *ne plus ultra* of iniquity? "*And the land was polluted with blood.*" The promised land, the holy land, which was the glory of all lands, for God was there, was defiled with the reeking gore of innocent babes, and by the bloodred hands of their parents, who slew them in order to pay homage to devils. Alas! alas! What vexation was this to the spirit of the Lord.

39. "*Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions.*" Not only the land but the inhabitants of it were polluted. They broke the marriage bond between them and the Lord, and fell into spiritual adultery. The language is strong, but the offence could not be fitly described in less forcible words. As a husband is deeply dishonoured and sorely wounded should his wife become unchaste and run riot with many paramours in his own house, so was the Lord incensed at his people for setting up gods many and lords many in his own land. They made and invented new gods, and then worshipped what they had made. What a folly! Their novel deities were loathsome monsters and cruel demons, and yet they paid them homage. What wickedness! And to commit this folly and wickedness they cast off the true God, whose miracles they had seen, and whose people they were. This was provocation of the severest sort.

40, 41. "*Therefore was the wrath of the Lord kindled against his people, inasmuch that he abhorred his own inheritance.*" Not that even then he broke his covenant or utterly cast off his offending people, but he felt the deepest indignation, and even looked upon them with abhorrence. The feeling described is like to that of a husband who still loves his guilty wife, and yet when he thinks of her lewdness feels his whole nature rising in righteous anger at her, so that the very sight of her afflicts his soul. How far the divine wrath can burn against those whom he yet loves in his heart it were hard to say, but certainly Israel pushed the experiment to the extreme. "*And he gave them into the hand of the heathen.*" This was the manifestation of his abhorrence. He gave them a taste of the result of sin; they spared the heathen, mixed with them and imitated them, and soon they had to smart from them, for hordes of invaders were let loose upon them to spoil them at their pleasure. Men make rods for their own backs. Their own inventions become their punishments. "*And they that hated them ruled over them.*" And who could wonder? Sin never creates true love. They joined the heathen in their wickedness, and they did not win their hearts, but rather provoked their contempt. If we mix with men of the world they will soon become our masters and our tyrants, and we cannot want worse.

42. "*Their enemies also oppressed them.*" This was according to their nature;

an Israelite always fares ill at the hands of the heathen. Leniency to Canaan turned out to be cruelty to themselves. "And they were brought into subjection under their hand." They were bowed down by laborious bondage, and made to lie low under tyranny. In their God they had found a kind master, but in those with whom they had perversely sought fellowship they found despots of the most barbarous sort. He who leaves his God leaves happiness for misery. God can make our enemies to be rods in his hands to flog us back to our best Friend.

43. "*Many times did he deliver them.*" By reading the book of Judges we shall see how truthful is this sentence: again and again their foes were routed, and they were set free again, only to return with vigour to their former evil ways. "*But they provoked him with their counsel.*" With deliberation they agreed to transgress anew; self-will was their counsellor, and they followed it to their own destruction. "*And were brought low for their iniquity.*" Worse and worse were the evils brought upon them, lower and lower they fell in sin, and consequently in sorrow. In dens and caves of the earth they hid themselves; they were deprived of all warlike weapons, and were utterly despised by their conquerors; they were rather a race of serfs than of free men until the Lord in mercy raised them up again. Could we but fully know the horrors of the wars which desolated Palestine, and the ravages which caused famine and starvation, we should shudder at the sins which were thus rebuked. Deeply engrained in their nature must the sin of idolatry have been, or they would not have returned to it with such persistence in the teeth of such penalties; we need not marvel at this, there is a still greater wonder, man prefers sin and hell to heaven and God.

The lesson to ourselves, as God's people, is to walk humbly and carefully before the Lord, and above all to keep ourselves from idols. Woe unto those who become partakers of Rome's idolatries, for they will be joined with her in her plagues. May grace be given to us to keep the separated path, and remain undefiled with the fornication of the scarlet harlot of Babylon.

44 Nevertheless he regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry:

45 And he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies.

46 He made them also to be pitied of all those that carried them captives.

47 Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, *and* to triumph in thy praise.

44. "*Nevertheless he regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry.*" Notwithstanding all these provoking rebellions and detestable enormities the Lord still heard their prayer and pitied them. This is very wonderful, very godlike. One would have thought that the Lord would have shut out their prayer, seeing they had shut their ears against his admonitions; but no, he had a father's heart, and a sight of their sorrows touched his soul, the sound of their cries overcame his heart, and he looked upon them with compassion. His fiercest wrath towards his own people is only a temporary flame, but his love burns on for ever like the light of his own immortality.

45. "*And he remembered for them his covenant.*" The covenant is the sure foundation of mercy, and when the whole fabric of outward grace manifested in the saints lies in ruins this is the fundamental basis of love which is never moved, and upon it the Lord proceeds to build again a new structure of grace. Covenant mercy is sure as the throne of God. "*And repented according to the multitude of his mercies.*" He did not carry out the destruction which he had commenced. Speaking after the manner of men he changed his mind, and did not leave them to their enemies to be utterly cut off, because he saw that his covenant would in such a case have been broken. The Lord is so full of grace that he has not only mercy but mercies, yea a multitude of them, and these hive in the covenant and treasure up good for the erring sons of men.

46. "*He made them also to be pitied of all those that carried them captives.*" Having the hearts of all men in his hands he produced compassion even in heathen bosoms. Even as he found Joseph friends in Egypt, so did he raise up sympathisers for his captive servants. In our very worst condition our God has ways and means for allaying the severity of our sorrows: he can find us helpers among those who have been our oppressors, and he will do so if we be indeed his people.

47. This is the closing prayer, arranged by prophecy for those who would in future time be captives, and suitable for all who before David's days had been driven from home by the tyranny of Saul, or who had remained in exile after the various scatterings by famine and distress which had happened in the iron age of the judges. "Save us, O Lord our God." The mention of the covenant encouraged the afflicted to call the Lord their God, and this enabled them with greater boldness to entreat him to interpose on their behalf and rescue them. "And gather us from among the heathen." Weary now of the ungodly and their ways, they long to be brought into their own separated country, where they might again enjoy the means of grace, enter into holy fellowship with their brethren, escape from contaminating examples, and be free to wait upon the Lord. How often do true believers now-a-days long to be removed from ungodly households, where their souls are vexed with the conversation of the wicked. "To give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise." Weaned from idols, they desire to make mention of Jehovah's name alone, and to ascribe their mercies to his ever abiding faithfulness and love. The Lord had often saved them for his holy name's sake, and therefore they feel that when again restored they would render all their gratitude to that saving name, yea, it should be their glory to praise Jehovah and none else.

48 Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting : and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the LORD.

48. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting." Has not his mercy endured for ever, and should not his praise be of like duration? Jehovah, the God of Israel, has blessed his people, should they not also bless him? "And let all the people say, Amen." They have all been spared by his grace, let them all join in the adoration with loud unanimous voice. What a thunder of praise would thus be caused! Yet should a nation thus magnify him, yea, should all the nations past and present unite in the solemn acclaim, it would fall far short of his deserts. O for the happy day when all flesh shall see the glory of God, and all shall aloud proclaim his praise. "Praise ye the Lord," or "Hallelujah."

Reader, praise thou the Lord, as he who writes this feeble exposition now does with his whole heart.

"Now blest, for ever blest, be He,
The same throughout eternity,
Our Israel's God adored!
Let all the people join the lay,
And loudly, 'Hallelujah,' say,
'Praise ye the living Lord!'"

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS.

Verse 1.—"For he is good;" essentially, solely and originally; is communicative and diffusive of his goodness; is the author of all good and no evil; and is gracious and merciful and ready to forgive.—*John Gill*.

Verse 1.—"For he is good: for his goodness endureth for ever." Observe here what is a true and perfect confession of the divine goodness. Whenever God so blesses his own people that his goodness is perceived by carnal sense, in bestowing riches, honours, peace, health and things of that kind, then it is easy to acknowledge that God is good, and that acknowledgment can be made by the most carnal men. The case stands otherwise when he visits offenders with the rod of correction and scourges them with the grace of chastisement. Then the flesh hardly bears to confess what by its own sense it does not perceive. It fails to discern the goodness of God unto salvation in the severity of the rod and the scourging, and therefore refuses to acknowledge that goodness in strokes and sufferings. The prophet, however, throughout this Psalm celebrates in many instances the way wherein the sinning people were arrested and smitten. And when he proposed that this Psalm should be

sung in the church of God, Israel was under the cross and afflictions. Yet he demands that Israel should acknowledge that the Lord is good, that his mercy endureth for ever, even in the act of smiting the offender. That therefore alone is a true and full confession of the divine goodness which is made not only in prosperity but also in adversity.—*Musculus.*

Verses 1—3.—There is, (1.) The doxology; (2.) Invitation; (3.) The reason that we should, and why we should, give thanks always; (4.) The greatness of the work. But “who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? who can shew forth all his praise?” That is, it is impossible for any man in the world to do this great duty aright, as he should. (5.) The best mode and method of giving thanks. “Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times.” As if he had said, “This is indeed a vast duty; but yet *he* makes the best essay towards it that sets himself constantly to serve God and keep his commandments.”—*William Cooper, in the “Morning Exercises.”*

Verses 1, 47, 48.—The first and two last verses of this Psalm form a part of that Psalm which David delivered into the hand of Asaph and his brethren, to be sung before the ark of the covenant, after it was brought from the house of Obed-edom to Mount Zion. See 1 Chron. xvi. 34—36. Hence it has been ascribed to the pen of David. Many of the ancients thought, and they are followed by Horsley and Mudge, that it was written during the captivity; resting their opinion chiefly on verse 47; but as that verse occurs in the Psalm of David recorded in 1 Chron. xvi., at the 35th verse, this argument is clearly without force.—*James Anderson's Note to Calvin in loc.*

Verse 2.—“Who can utter?” etc. This verse is susceptible of two interpretations; for if you read it in connection with the one immediately following, the sense will be, that all men are not alike equal to the task of praising God, because the ungodly and the wicked do nothing else than profane his holy name with their unclean lips; as it is said in the fiftieth Psalm: “But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?” And hence to this sentence the following clause should have been annexed, in the form of a reply, “Blessed are they that keep judgment.” I am of opinion, however, that the prophet had another design, namely, that there is no man who has ever endeavoured to concentrate all his energies, both physical and mental, in the praising of God, but will find himself inadequate for so lofty a subject, the transcendent grandeur of which overpowers all our senses. Not that he exalts the power of God designedly to deter us from celebrating its praises, but rather as the means of stirring us up to do so to the utmost of our power. Is it any reason for ceasing our exertions, that with whatever alacrity we pursue our course, we yet come far short of perfection? But the thing which ought to inspire us with the greatest encouragement is the knowledge that, though ability may fail us, the praises which from the heart we offer to God are pleasing to him; only let us beware of callousness; for it would certainly be very absurd for those who cannot attain to a title of perfection, to make that the occasion of their not reaching to the hundredth part of it.—*John Calvin.*

Verse 2.—“Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord?” etc. Our sight fails us when we look upon the sun, overpowered by the splendour of his rays; and the mind's eye suffers the like in every meditation on God, and the more attention is bestowed in thinking of God, the more is the mental vision blinded by the very light of its own thoughts. For what canst thou say of him, what, I repeat, canst thou adequately say of him, who is sublimer than all loftiness, and more exalted than all height, and deeper than all depth, and clearer than all light, and brighter than all brightness, and more splendid than all splendour, stronger than all strength, more vigorous than all vigour, fairer than all beauty, truer than all truth, and more puissant than puissance, and greater than all majesty, and mightier than all might, richer than all riches, wiser than all wisdom, gentler than all gentleness, juster than all justice, more merciful than all mercy?—*Tertullian, quoted by Neale and Littledale.*

Verse 2.—“Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord?” etc. This may be resolved either into a negation or restriction. Few or none can “utter the mighty acts of the LORD,” can “show forth all his praise”; few can do it in an acceptable manner, and none can do it in a perfect manner. And indeed it is not unusual in Scripture for such kind of interrogations to amount unto either a negation, or at least an expression of the rareness and difficulty of the thing spoken of: 1 Cor. ii.

16; Ps. xcii.; Isai. liii. 1. Without a full confession of mercies it is not possible to make either a due valuation of them, or a just requital of them. And how impossible a thing it is fully to recount mercies, you may see by Psal. xl. 5: "Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered."—*Henry Jeanes, in "The Works of Heaven upon Earth,"* 1649.

Verse 2.—"Mighty acts of the Lord." Or powers, to which answers the Greek word for the miracles of Christ (Matt. xi. 20, 21), and Kimchi here restrains them to the wonders wrought in Egypt and at the Red Sea; but they may as well be extended to the mighty acts of God, and the effects of his power, in the creation of all things out of nothing; in the sustentation and government of the world; in the redemption of his people by Christ; in the conversion of sinners, and in the final perseverance of the saints; in all which there are such displays of the power of God as cannot be uttered and declared by mortal tongues.—*John Gill.*

Verse 3.—"Blessed are they that keep judgment," etc. That are of right principles and upright practices; this is real and substantial praising of God. Thanks-doing is the proof of thanksgiving; and the good life of the thankful is the life of thankfulness. Those that say, God-a-thank only, and no more, are not only contumelious, but injurious.—*John Trapp.*

Verse 3.—"Keep judgment"; "doeth righteousness." I doubt not that there is some difference; viz. that he is said to keep judgment who judgeth rightly, but he to do righteousness who acts righteously.—*Augustine.*

Verse 3.—I have read of Louis, king of France, that when he had through inadvertency granted an unjust suit, as soon as ever he had read those words of the Psalmist, "Blessed is he that doeth righteousness at all times," he presently recollected himself, and upon better thoughts gave his judgment quite contrary.—*Thomas Brooks.*

Verse 4.—"O visit me." This is a beautiful figure. The prayer is not, "Give me a more intense desire, increased energy of action, that I may please thee, that I may serve thee, that I may go step by step up to thee, every step bringing with it a fresh sense of meritorious claim upon thee." No such thing. It is "Visit me;" "descend down upon me" daily from thine own lofty throne, for the fulfilment of thine own purposes. "Visit me."—*George Fisk, 1851.*

Verse 4.—"O visit me with thy salvation." Hugo takes the *visit* of God as that of a physician of whom healing of the eyes is sought, because it is immediately added, "That I may see," etc.—*Lorinus.*

Verse 4.—There is an ancient Jewish gloss which is noteworthy, that the petition is for a share in the resurrection in the days of Messiah, in order to see his wonderful restoration of his suffering people.—*Neale and Littledale.*

Verse 5.—We may note that the threefold nature of man prompts the union of the three petitions of this verse in one. "That I may see," is the prayer of the body, desiring the open vision of God; "and rejoice," is the wish of the soul or mind, that the affections may likewise be gratified; and give thanks, as the spirit needs to pour itself out in worship. Further, there are three names here given to the saints, each for a reason of its own. They are God's "chosen," because of his predestinating grace, "according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph. i. 4); they are his "nation," having one law and one worship under him as sole king, "And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law?" (Deut. iv. 8); they are his "inheritance," for it is written, "I shall give the heathen for thine inheritance" (Ps. ii. 8).—*Hugo Cardinalis and Albertus Magnus, in Neale and Littledale.*

Verse 5.—"That I may see the good of thy chosen." That, having been predestined, and justified, we may come to see the good of thy chosen, which means that the very face of the Lord may be made conspicuous to us. "For we shall be then like him when we shall see him as he is" (1 John iii. 2). By the "good of thy chosen" we are not to understand their own probity or goodness, but the supreme happiness that is their lot. "That I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation." That we may partake in that unspeakable joy which arises from the beatific vision, which is the

peculiar property of the chosen people, of which strangers cannot taste, of which the gospel says, "Enter into the joy of thy Lord."—*Robert Bellarmine*, 1542—1621.

Verse 6.—"We have sinned with our fathers." Let us look a little further back, to find the age of sin; even as far as the original, from whence comes all the copy of imitation. Be they never so new in act, they are old in example: "We have sinned with our fathers." God tells them they had rebelled of old; "As your fathers did, so do ye" (Acts viii. 51). Antiquity is no infallible argument of goodness: though Tertullian says the first things were the best things; and the less they distanced from the beginning, the poorer they were; but he must be understood only of holy customs. For iniquity can plead antiquity: he that commits a new act of murder finds it old in the example of Cain; drunkenness may be fetched from Noah; contempt of parents from Ham; women's lightness from the daughters of Lot. There is no sin but hath white hairs upon it, and is exceeding old. But let us look further back yet, even to Adam; there is the age of sin. This is that St. Paul calls the old man; it is almost as old as the root, but older than all the branches. Therefore our restitution by Christ to grace is called the new man.—*Thomas Adams*.

Verse 6.—"We have sinned with our fathers." It enhances the sin considerably by adding "with our fathers." He would have seemed to extenuate, not exaggerate, if he had said, We have sinned with other mortals. But by saying, *We have sinned with our fathers*, he by no means lessens but aggravates their offences, while he hereby extols the goodness of God who blessed not only those who acted sinfully and impiously, but also the children and descendants of the sinful and impious, even those whom he could with the highest justice have cut off as doubly detestable.—*Musculus*.

Verse 6.—"Sinned; committed iniquity; done wickedly." The Rabbins tell us that there are three kinds and degrees of sin here set down in an ascending scale; against one's self, against one's neighbour, against God; sins of ignorance, sins of conscious deliberation, sins of pride and wickedness.—*R. Levi and Genebrardus*, in *Neale and Littledale*.

Verses 6, 12, 13, 14, 21, 24.—Though the writers of the Scriptures were by divine inspiration infallibly preserved from extravagance, yet they use every appropriate variety of strong and condemnatory language against sin (ver. 6). Surely moral evil cannot be a trifle. Yet it breaks forth on all occasions and on all hands. Sometimes it is in the form of forgetfulness of God (ver. 13, 21), sometimes of rash impetuosity towards evil (ver. 13), sometimes of strong, imperious lusts (ver. 14), sometimes of vile unbelief (ver. 12, 24), and so of the whole catalogue of offences against God and man. O how vile we are!—*William S. Plumer*.

Verse 7.—"Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt." Though the elders went along with Moses, and heard him shew his commission to Pharaoh, and make his demands in the name of the Lord to let Israel go (Exod. iii. 16); yea, and they saw the judgments of God on Egypt; yet "they did not understand" that these wonders would do the work of their deliverance. At first they thought it was worse with them. Much less did they understand, that their deliverance should be a type of eternal deliverance, that God would be their God, as after is explained in the preface to the ten commandments. And because they "understood not his wonders," therefore they "remembered not his mercies." A shallow understanding causeth a short memory.—*Nathaniel Homes*, 1652.

Verse 7.—"Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt." It is more than probable, that many of the Israelites ascribed most of these wonders to the skill of Moses transcending that of the Egyptian magicians, or to his working by the assistance of a higher and more potent spirit than that which assisted them. Or, in case they did believe them to have been the effects of a Divine Power, yet they did not inure their minds seriously to consider it, so as to have a standing awe of that power imprinted upon their hearts by such a consideration: and he that considers great and important matters superficially, in the language of the Scripture, does not understand them.—*Robert South*.

Verse 7.—"Understood not" . . . "remembered not." He reproveth both their understanding and memory. Understanding there was need of, that they might meditate unto what eternal blessings God was calling them through these temporal ones; and of memory, that at least they might not forget the temporal wonders which had been wrought, and might faithfully believe, that by the same power which they had already experienced, God would free them from the persecution of

their enemies ; whereas they forgot the aid which he had given them in Egypt, by means of such wonders, to crush their enemies.—*Augustine.*

Verse 7.—One sin is a step to another more heinous ; for *not observing*, is followed with *not remembering*, and *forgetfulness* of duty draweth on *disobedience* and rebellion.—*David Dickson.*

Verse 7.—“*They provoked him.*” To *provoke*, is an expression setting forth a peculiar and more than ordinary degree of misbehaviour, and seems to import an insolent daring resolution to offend. A resolution not contented with one single stroke of disobedience, but such a one as multiplies and repeats the action, till the offence greatens, and rises into an affront ; and as it relates to God, so I conceive it as aimed at him in a threefold respect. 1st, Of his power. 2ndly, Of his goodness. 3rdly, Of his patience.

1st. And first it rises up against *the power and prerogative of God.* It is, as it were, an assault upon God sitting upon his throne, a snatching at his sceptre, and a defiance of his very royalty and supremacy. He that provokes God does in a manner dare him to strike, and to revenge the injury and invasion upon his honour. He considers not the weight of God’s almighty arm, and the edge of his sword, the swiftness and poison of his arrows, but puffs at all, and looks the terrors of sin-revenging justice in the face. The Israelites could not sin against God, after those miracles in Egypt, without a signal provocation of that power that they had so late, and so convincing an experience of : a power that could have crushed an Israelite as easily as an Egyptian ; and given as terrible an instance of its consuming force upon false friends, as upon professed enemies ; in the sight of God, perhaps, the less sort of offenders of the two.

2ndly. Provoking God imports an abuse of *his goodness.* God, as he is clothed with power, is the proper object of our fear ; but as he displays his goodness, of our love. By one he would command, by the other he would win and (as it were) court our obedience. And an affront to his goodness, his tenderness, and his mercy, as much exceeds an affront of his power as a wound at the heart transcends a blow on the hand. For when God shall show miracles of mercy, step out of the common road of providence, commanding the host of heaven, the globe of the earth, and the whole system of nature out of its course, to serve a design of goodness upon a people, as he did upon the Israelites ; was not a provocation, after such obliging passages, infinitely base and insufferable, and a degree of ingratitude, higher than the heavens struck at, and deeper than the sea that they passed through ?

3rdly. Provoking God imports an affront upon *his longsuffering, and his patience.* The movings of nature in the breasts of mankind, tell us how keenly, how regretfully, every man resents the abuse of his love ; how hardly any prince, but one, can put up an offence against his acts of mercy ; and how much more affrontive it is to despise majesty ruling by the golden sceptre of pardon, than by the iron rod of penal law. But now patience is a further and an higher advance of mercy ; it is mercy drawn out at length ; mercy wrestling with baseness, and striving, if possible, even to weary and outdo ingratitude ; and therefore a sin against this is the highest pitch, the utmost improvement, and, as I may so speak, the *ne plus ultra* of provocation. For when patience shall come to be tired, and even out of breath with pardoning, let all the invention of mankind find something further, either upon which an offender may cast his hope, or against which he can commit a sin. But it was God’s patience the ungrateful Israelites sinned against ; for they even plied and pursued him with sin upon sin, one offence following and thronging upon the neck of another, the last account still rising highest, and swelling bigger, till the treasures of grace and pardon were so far drained and exhausted, that they provoked God to *swear*, and what is more, to *swear in his wrath*, and with a full purpose of revenge, that *they should never enter into his rest.*—*Robert South.*

Verse 7.—“*They provoked him.*” Wherein lay their provocation ? “*They remembered not the multitude of his mercies :*” the former mercies of the Lord did not strengthen their trust in present troubles ; that was one provocation. And as former mercies did not strengthen their trust, so the present troubles drew out their distrust, as another Scripture assures, reporting their behaviour in it (Exod. xiv. 11) : “*And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness ? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt ?*” What were these fearful forecasts, these amazing bodements of an unavoidable (as they apprehended) ruin, but the overflowings of unbelief, or distrust in God ; and this was another provocation. Former mercies are forgotten, yea, eaten up by unbelief, as the seven lean kine in Pharaoh’s

dream eat up the fat ones, and present difficulties are aggravated by unbelief, as if all the power of God could not remove and overcome them. And will not the Lord (think you) visit in anger such a sin as this?—*Joseph Caryl*.

Verse 7.—"At the Red Sea." That is to say, at the *Arabian Gulph*: literally, at the *Sea of Suph*, which, if *Suph* be not here a proper name, (as it seems to be in Deut. i. 1, and, with a slight variation, in Numb. xxxi. 14.) means the *sea of weeds*, and that sea is still called by a similar name, in modern Egypt. Its designation, throughout the books of the Old Testament, is in the Syriac version, and the Chaldee Paraphrase, likewise rendered the *sea of weeds*; which name may have been derived from the reeds growing near its shore; or from the weeds, or coralline productions, with which, according to Diodorus Siculus, and Kircher, it abounded; and which were seen through its translucent waters. Finati, quoted by Laborde, speaks of the transparency of its waters, and the corals seen at its bottom. . . . Pliny states, that it is called the Red Sea from King Erythras, or from the reflection of a red colour by the sun, or from its sand and its ground, or from the nature of its water.—*Daniel Cresswell*.

Verses 7, 8.—This Psalm is a Psalm of thanksgiving, as the first and last verses declare. Now because a man is most fit to praise God when he is most sensible of his own sin and unworthiness; the Psalmist doth throughout this Psalm lay Israel's sin and God's mercy together. Ver. 7, "*Our Fathers* (says he) *understood not thy wonders in Egypt.*" They saw them with their eyes, but they did not understand them with their heart; they did not apprehend the design and scope and end of God in those wonders: and therefore, "*they remembered not* (says the text) *thy mercies*;" for a man remembers no more than he understands.

But it may be these mercies were very few, and so their sin in forgetfulness the less? Nay, not so, for verse 7, "*They remembered not the multitude of thy mercies.*"

But it may be this was their infirmity or weakness, and so they were rather to be borne withal? Not so, "*but they rebelled against him*;" so Montanus reads it better.

But it may be this sin was committed whilst they were in Egypt, or among the Egyptians, being put on by them? Not so neither, but when they were come out of Egypt, and only had to deal with God, and saw his glorious power at the Red Sea, then they rebelled against him, "*at the sea, even at the Red Sea.*"

What then, did not the Lord destroy them? No says the text, "*Notwithstanding*" all their grievance, unthankfulness, and their rebellion, "*he saved them for his name's sake.*"—*William Bridge*, in a *Sermon preached before the House of Commons*, Nov. 5, 1647.

Verse 8.—"Nevertheless he saved them."—If God should not shew mercy to his people with a *nevertheless*, how should the glory of his mercy appear? If a physician should only cure a man that hath the head-ache or the tooth-ache; one that hath taken cold, or some small disease; it would not argue any great skill and excellency in the physician. But when a man is nigh unto death, hath one foot in the grave, or is, in the eye of reason, past all recovery; if then the physician cure him, it argues much the skill and excellency of that physician. So now, if God should only cure, and save a people that were less evil and wicked; or that were good indeed, where should the excellence of mercy appear? But when a people shall be drawing near to death, lying bed-rid, as it were, and the Lord out of his free love, for his own name's sake, shall rise, and cure such an unworthy people, this sets out the glory of his mercy. It is said in the verse precedent, "*They rebelled at the sea, even at the Red Sea,*" or, as in the Hebrew, "*even in the Red Sea*"; when the waters stood like walls on both sides of them; when they saw those walls of waters that never people saw before, and saw the power, the infinite power of God leading them through on dry land; then did they rebel, at the sea, *even in the sea*; and yet for all this the Lord saved them with a *notwithstanding* all this. And I say, shall the Lord put forth so much of grace upon a people, that were under the law; and not put forth much more of his grace upon those that are under the gospel?—*William Bridge*.

Verse 8.—"For his name's sake." Improve his name in every case; for he hath a name suiting every want, every need. Do you need wonders to be wrought for you? His name is Wonderful; look to him so to do, for his name's sake. Do you need counsel and direction? His name is the Counsellor: cast yourself on him and his name for this. Have you mighty enemies to debate with? His name is the Mighty God; seek that he may exert his power for his name's sake. Do you

need his fatherly pity? His name is the everlasting Father; "As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." Plead his pity, for his name's sake. Do you need peace external, internal, or eternal? His name is the Prince of Peace; seek for his name's sake, that he may create peace. O sirs, his name is *JEHOVAH-RORHI*, the Lord, the healer and physician; seek, for his name's sake, that he may heal all your diseases. Do you need pardon? His name is *JEHOVAH-TSID-KENU*, the Lord our righteousness; seek, for his name's sake, that he may be merciful to your unrighteousness. Do you need defence and protection? His name is *JEHOVAH-NISSI*, the Lord your banner; seek, for his name's sake, that his banner of love and grace may be spread over you. Do you need provision in extreme want? His name is *JEHOVAH-JIREH*, in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen, the Lord will provide. Do you need his presence? His name is *JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH*, the Lord is there: *IMMANUEL*, God with us; look to him to be with you, for his name's sake. Do you need audience of prayer? His name is the Hearer of prayer. Do you need strength? His name is the Strength of Israel. Do you need comfort? His name is the Consolation of Israel. Do you need shelter? His name is the City of Refuge. Have you nothing and need all? His name is All in all. Sit down and devise names to your wants and needs, and you will find he hath a name suitable thereunto; for your supply, he hath wisdom to guide you; and power to keep you; mercy to pity you; truth to shield you; holiness to sanctify you; righteousness to justify you; grace to adorn you; and glory to crown you. Trust in his name, who saves for his name's sake.—*Ralph Erskine, 1685—1752.*

Verse 9.—"He rebuked the Red Sea also, and it was dried up." A poetical expression, signifying that the Red Sea retired at God's command, just as a slave would fly from his master's presence on being severely rebuked.—*Robert Bellarmine.*

Verse 9.—"He rebuked." We do not read that any voice was sent forth from heaven to rebuke the sea; but he hath called the Divine Power by which this was effected, a rebuke, unless indeed any one may choose to say, that the sea was secretly rebuked, so that the waters might hear, and yet men could not. The power by which God acteth is very abstruse and mysterious, a power by which he causeth that even things devoid of sense instantly obey at his will.—*Augustine.*

Verse 9.—"Wilderness." *Midbar*; a broad expanse of poor dry land, suited for sheep-walks (like our South-Downs, or Salisbury Plain). Compare *Isa. lxiii. 13.*—*William Kay.*

Verse 11.—"There was not one of them left." An emblem this of the utter destruction of all our spiritual enemies by Christ, who has not only saved us from them, but has entirely destroyed them; he has made an end of sin, even of all the sins of his people; he has spoiled Satan, and his principalities and powers; he has abolished death, the last enemy, and made his saints more than conquerors over all. Likewise it may be a representation of the destruction of the wicked at the last day, who will all be burnt up at the general conflagration, root and branch, not one will be left. See *Mal. iv. 1.*—*John Gill.*

Verse 12.—"Then believed they his words." There is a temporary faith, as Mark calls it (*iv. 17*), which is not so much a fruit of the Spirit of regeneration, as of a certain mutable affection, and so it soon passeth away. It is not a voluntary faith which is here extolled by the prophet, but rather that which is the result of compulsion, namely, because men, whether they will or not, by a sense which they have of the power of God, are constrained to show some reverence for him. This passage ought to be well considered, that men, when once they have yielded submission to God, may not deceive themselves, but may know that the touchstone of faith is when they spontaneously receive the word of God, and constantly continue firm in their obedience to it.—*John Calvin.*

Verse 12.—Natural affections raised high in a profession of religion will withstand temptations for a fit, but wait till the stream runs lower, and you will see. What a fit of affection had the Israelites when their eyes had seen that miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea! What songs of rejoicing had they! what resolves never to distrust him again! "Then believed they his words; they sang his praise." Satan doth not presently urge them to murmuring and unbelief, though that was his design, but he staid till the fit was over, and then he could soon tempt them to "forget his works."—*Richard Gilpin in "A Treatise of Satan's Temptations," 1677.*

Verse 12.—In the very brevity of this verse, the only one of its kind in the narrative portion of the Psalm, we may well see how short-lived were their gratitude, belief, and worship of God; as it follows at once, "*They soon forgot,*" etc.—*Neale and Littledale.*

Verses 12, 13.—"*They sang his praise. They soon forgot his works.*" This was said of that generation of the Israelites, which came out of Egypt. The chapter which contains the portion of their history here alluded to, begins with rapturous expressions of gratitude, and ends with the murmurs of discontent; both uttered by the same lips, within the short space of three days. Their expressions of gratitude were called forth by that wonderful display of the divine perfections, which delivered them from the host of Pharaoh, and destroyed their enemies. Their murmurs were excited by a comparatively trifling inconvenience, which in a few hours was removed. Of persons whose thanksgivings were so quickly, and so easily changed to murmurings, it might well be said,—though they *sang God's praises*, "*they soon forgot his works.*"

Unhappily, the Israelites are by no means the only persons of whom this may, in truth, be said. Their conduct, as here described, affords a striking exemplification of that spurious gratitude, which often bursts forth in a sudden flash, when dreaded evils are averted, or unexpected favours bestowed; but expires with the occasion that gave it birth; a gratitude resembling the joy excited in an infant's breast by the gift of some glittering toy, which is received with rapture, and pleases for an hour; but when the charm of novelty vanishes, is thrown aside with indifference; and the hand that bestowed it is forgotten. Springing from no higher principle than gratified self-love, it is neither acceptable to God, nor productive of obedience to his laws; nor does it in any respect really resemble that holy, heaven-born affection, whose language it often borrows, and whose name it assumes. It may be called, distinctively, the gratitude of sinners; who, as they love those that love them, will of course be grateful to those that are kind to them; grateful even to God when they view him as kind.

Of these instances, the first which I shall notice is furnished by the works of *creation*; or, as they are often, though not very properly, called, the works of nature. In so impressive a manner do these works present themselves to our senses; so much of variety, and beauty, and sublimity do they exhibit; such power, and wisdom, and goodness do they display; that perhaps no man, certainly no man who possesses the smallest share of sensibility, taste, or mental cultivation, can, at all times, view them without emotion; without feelings of awe, or wonder, or admiration, or delight.

But, alas, how transient, how unproductive of salutary effects, have all these emotions proved? Appetite and passion, though hushed for a moment, soon renewed their importunities; the glitter of wealth and distinction, and power, eclipsed, in our view, the glories of Jehovah; we sunk from that heaven toward which we seemed rising, to plunge afresh into the vortex of earthly pleasures and pursuits; we neglected and disobeyed him, whom we had been ready to adore; and continued to live without God, in a world which we had just seen to be full of his glory.

A second instance of a similar nature is afforded by the manner in which men are often affected by God's works of *providence*. In these works his perfections are so constantly, and often so clearly displayed; our dependence on them is at all times so real, and sometimes so apparent; and they bear, in many cases, so directly and evidently upon our dearest temporal interests, that even the most insensible cannot, always, regard them with indifference.

But the feeling is usually transient; and the acknowledgment is forgotten almost as soon as it is made.

In a similar manner are men often affected by God's works of *grace*; or those works whose design and tendency it is, to promote the spiritual and eternal interests of man. These works most clearly display, not only the natural, but the moral perfections of Jehovah. Here his character shines, full-orbed and complete.

That an exhibition of these wonders should make, at least, a temporary impression upon our minds, is no more than might naturally be expected. For a moment our hearts seem to be melted. We feel, and are ready to acknowledge, that God is good; that the Saviour is kind; that his love ought to be returned; that heaven is desirable! Like a class of hearers described by one great Teacher, we receive the word with joy; a joy not unmingled with something which resembles gratitude; and we sing, or feel as if we could with pleasure sing, God's praises. But we leave his house; the emotions there excited subside; like the earth, when partially softened

by a wintry sun, our hearts soon regain their icy hardness ; the wonders of divine grace are forgotten ; and God has reason to say in sorrow and displeasure,—Your goodness is as the morning cloud ; and as the early dew it goeth away.—*Condensed from a Sermon by Edward Payson, 1783—1827.*

Verse 13.—“ *They soon forgot his works.*” They forgot, yea, “soon” ; they made haste to forget, so the original is : “They made haste, they forgot.” Like men that in sleep shake Death by the hand, but when they are awake they will not know him.—*Thomas Adams.*

Verse 13.—How may we know that we are rightly thankful ? When we are careful to register God’s mercy, 1 Chron. xvi. 4 : “David appointed certain of the Levites, to record, and to thank and praise the Lord God of Israel.” Physicians say the memory is the first thing that decays ; it is true in spirituals : “*They soon forgot his works.*”—*Thomas Watson.*

Verse 13.—“ *They soon forgot.*” As it is with a sieve or boulder, the good corn and fine flour goes through, but the light chaff and coarse bran remains behind ; or as a strainer, that the sweet liquor is strained out, but the dregs are left behind ; or as a grate, that lets the pure water run away, but if there be any straws, sticks, mud, or filth, that it holds. Thus it is with most men’s memories ; by nature they are but, as it were, *pertusa dolia*, mere river tubs, especially in good things very treacherous, so that the vain conceits of men are apt to be held in, when divine instructions and gracious promises run through ; trifles and toys, and worldly things, they are apt to remember, tenacious enough ; but for spiritual things they leak out ; like Israel, *they soon forget them.*—*William Gouge.*

Verse 13.—“ *They soon forgot his works.*” Three days afterwards, at the waters of Marah (Exod. xv. 24).—*Adam Clarke.*

Verse 13.—“ *They waited not.*” The insatiable nature of our desires is astonishing, in that scarcely a single day is allowed to God to gratify them. For should he not immediately satisfy them, we at once become impatient, and are in danger of eventually falling into despair. This, then, was the fault of the people, that they did not cast all their cares upon God, did not calmly call upon him, nor wait patiently until he was pleased to answer their requests, but rushed forward with reckless precipitation, as if they would dictate to God what he was to do. And, therefore, to heighten the criminality of their rash course, he employs the term “counsel” ; because men will neither allow God to be possessed of wisdom, nor do they deem it proper to depend upon his counsel, but are more provident than becomes them, and would rather rule God than allow themselves to be ruled by him according to his pleasure. That we may be preserved from provoking God, let us ever retain this principle, That it is our duty to let him provide for us such things as he knows will be for our advantage. And verily, faith divesting us of our own wisdom, enables us hopefully and quietly to wait until God accomplishes his own work ; whereas, on the contrary, our carnal desire always goes before the counsel of God, by its too great haste.—*John Calvin.*

Verse 13.—“ *They waited not.*” They ought to have thought, that so great works of God towards themselves were not without a purpose, but that they invited them to some endless happiness, which was to be waited for with patience ; but they hastened to make themselves happy with temporal things, which give no man true happiness, because they do not quench insatiable longing : “for whosoever,” saith our Lord, “shall drink of this water, shall thirst again.” John iv. 13.—*Augustine.*

Verse 13.—“ *They waited not for his counsel.*”—Which neglect of theirs may be understood two ways. First, that they waited not for his open or declared counsel, to direct them what to do, but without asking his advice would needs venture and run on upon their own heads, to do what seemed good in their own eyes. Secondly, that they waited not for the accomplishment of his hidden and secret counsel concerning them ; they would not tarry God’s time for the bringing forth and bringing about his counsels. Not to wait upon God either way is very sinful. Not to wait for his counsel to direct us what to do, and not to wait for his doing or fulfilling his own counsel, argues at once a proud and an impatient spirit ; in the one, men do even slight the wisdom of God, and in the other vainly presume and attempt to prevent his providence.—*Joseph Caryl.*

Verse 13.—“ *They waited not for his counsel.*” A believer acting his faith, hath great advantage of an unbeliever. An unbeliever is froward and passionate, and

heady and hasty, when he is put to plunge ; *he waits not for the counsel of God.* He leaps before he looks, before he hath eyes to see his way ; but a believer is quiet and confident, and silent and patient, and prayerful, and standing upon his watch-tower, to see what God will answer at such a time.—*Matthew Lawrence, in "The Use and Practice of Faith," 1657.*

Verse 14.—" *In the wilderness.*" When God by circumstances of time and place doth call for moderation of carnal appetite, the transgression is more heinous and offensive unto God : " They lusted exceedingly in the wilderness," where they should have contented themselves with any sort of provision.—*David Dickson.*

Verse 14.—" *In the wilderness.*" There, where they had bread enough and to spare, yet nothing would serve them but they must have flesh to eat. They were now purely at God's finding ; so that this was a reflection upon the wisdom and goodness of their Creator. They were now, in all probability, within a step of Canaan, yet had not patience to stay for dainties till they came thither. They had flocks and herds of their own, but they will not kill them ; God must give them flesh as he gave them bread, or they will never give him credit or their good word : they did not only wish for flesh, " but " they " lusted exceedingly " after it. A desire even of lawful things, when it is inordinate and violent, becomes sinful ; and therefore this is called " lusting after evil things " (1 Cor. x. 6), though the quails as God's gift, were good things, and were so spoken of, Ps. cv. 40. Yet this was not all, " they tempted God in the desert," where they had had such experience of his goodness and power, and questioned whether he could and would gratify them therein. See Psalm lxxviii. 19, 20.—*Matthew Henry.*

Verse 15.—" *And he gave them their request,*" etc. The throat's pleasure did shut up paradise, sold the birthright, beheaded the Baptist, and it was the chief of the cooks, Nebuzaradan, that first set fire to the temple, and razed the city. These effects are, 1. Grossness ; which takes away agility to any good work ; which makes a man more like a tun upon two pottle pots. Cæsar said he mistrusted not Antony and Dolabella for any practices, because they were fat ; but Casca and Cassius, lean, hollow fellows, who did think too much. The other are the devil's crammed fowls, too fat to lay. Indeed, what need they travel far, whose felicity is at home ; placing paradise in their throats, and heaven in their food ? 2. Macilency of grace ; for as it puts fatness into their bodies, so leanness into their souls. God fattened the Israelites with quails, but withal " sent leanness into their soul." The flesh is blown up, the spirit doth languish. They are worse than man-eaters, for they are self-eaters : they put a pleurisy into their bloods, and an apoplexy into their souls.—*Thomas Adams.*

Verse 15.—" *Sent leanness into their soul.*" God affords us as great means for our increase in these Gospel times as ever he did ; he puts us into fat pastures, and well watered, Ps. xxiii. ; therefore it is a shame for God's people not to grow, not " to bring forth twins," as Cant. vi. 6. They should grow twice as fast, bring forth twice as fast, bring forth twice as many lambs, twice as much wool, twice as much milk, as those that go upon bare commons. All the world may cry shame on such a man that is high fed, and often fed with fat and sweet ordinances, if he be still like Pharaoh's lean kine, as lean and ill-favoured as ever he was before. Certainly, fat ordinances and lean souls do not well agree. We are to look upon it as the greatest of judgments to have *leanness sent into our souls* while we are fed with *manna*. We look on it as an affliction to have an over-lean body ; but it's a far sadder condition to have a lean soul. Of the two, it were far better to have a well-thriving soul and a lean body : it is a great mercy when both prosper, 3 John 2 : " I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." Oh it is a sweet thing, especially to have a prospering soul, and still upon the growing hand : and God expects it should be so, where he affords good diet, great means of grace ; as Dan. i. 10 : " The prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink." If you should look ill, who fare so well, I should be sure to bear the blame ; it were so much as my head is worth. So certainly, where God affords precious food for precious souls, if these souls be lean under fat ordinances, either those that are fed, or those that feed them ; either the stewards or the household ; either minister, or people, or both, are sure to bear the blame. It is but equal and just that such should grow. We do not wonder to see lean sheep upon bare commons, but when we see sheep continue lean

in fat pastures, we think their meat is ill bestowed on them; and therefore let us strive to be on the growing land.—*Matthew Lawrence.*

Verse 15.—“*Leanness*” is rendered “loathing” by Bishop Horsley, which accords with the literal state of the case; but I think *leanness*, as applied to the soul, is exceedingly descriptive of its spiritual barrenness and emptiness of aught like Divine tastes or enjoyments.—*Thomas Chalmers.*

Verse 17.—“*The earth opened,*” etc. This element was not used to such morsels. It devours the carcasses of men; but bodies informed with living souls, never before. To have seen them struck dead upon the earth had been fearful; but to see the earth at once their executioner and grave, was more horrible. Neither the sea nor the earth are fit to give passage; the sea is moist and flowing, and will not be divided, for the continuity of it; the earth is dry and massy, and will neither yield naturally, nor meet again when it hath yielded: yet the waters did cleave to give way unto Israel for their preservation; the earth did cleave to give way to the conspirators in judgment; both sea and earth did shut their jaws again upon the adversaries of God. There was more wonder in this latter. It was a marvel that the waters opened; it was no wonder that they shut again; for the retiring and flowing was natural. It was no less marvel that the earth opened; but more marvel that it shut again; because it had no natural disposition to meet when it was divided. Now might Israel see they had to do with a God that could revenge with ease.

There are two sorts of traitors: the earth swallowed up the one, the fire the other. All the elements agree to serve the vengeance of their Maker. Nadab and Abihu brought fit persons, but unfit fire, to God; these Levites bring the right fire, but unwarranted persons, before him: fire from God consumes both. It is a dangerous thing to usurp sacred functions. The ministry will not grace the man; the man may disgrace the ministry.—*Joseph Hall.*

Verse 17.—Dathan and Abiram only are mentioned, and this in strict agreement with Numb. xxvi. 11, where it is said, “*the children of Korah died not.*” And the same thing is at least implied in Numb. xvi. 27, where it is said, that, just before the catastrophe took place, “*Dathan and Abiram*” (there is no mention of Korah) “*came out and stood in the door of their tents.*” See this noticed and accounted for in Blunt’s *Veracity of the Books of Moses*, Part I. § 20, p. 86.—*J. J. Stewart Perowne.*

Verse 19.—“*They made a calf.*” And why a calf? Could they find no fitter resemblance of God amongst all the creatures? Why not rather the lordly lion, to show the sovereignty; vast elephant, the immensity; subtle serpent, the wisdom; long-lived hart, the eternity; swift eagle, the ubiquity of God, rather than the silly senseless calf, that eateth hay? But the shape mattereth not much, for if God be made like anything, he may be made like anything, it being as unlawful to fashion him an angel as a worm, seeing the commandment forbids as well the likeness of things in heaven above as in earth beneath (Exod. xx. 4). But probably a calf was preferred before other forms because they had learned it from the Egyptians’ worshipping their ox Apis. Thus the Israelites borrowed (Exod. xii. 35) not all gold and silver, but some dross from the Egyptians, whence they fetch the idolatrous forms of their worship.

Verse 19.—The modern Jews are of opinion that all the afflictions which ever since have, do, or shall befall their nation, are still the just punishments on them for this their first act of idolatry. And the rabbins have a saying that God never inflicts any judgment upon them, but there is an ounce of his anger on them for their ancestors’ making the golden calf. A reverend friend of mine, conversing at Amsterdam with a Jewish youth (very capable and ingenious for one of that nation) endeavoured to make him sensible of God’s anger upon them for rejecting and crucifying of Christ, for which foul act he showed how the Jews have lived many hundred years in miserable banishment. But the youth would in no wise acknowledge in their sufferings any effect or punishment of their murdering of Christ, but taking his Bible turned to God’s threatening immediately after their making of the calf (Exod. xxxiii. 34): “*Nevertheless in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them,*” so interpreting and applying all the numerous calamities which since have befallen them to relate to no other cause than that their first idolatry. Whereas, indeed, the arrears of their idolatry long ago were satisfied, and this is a new debt of later date contracted on themselves by their infidelity.—*Thomas Fuller*, 1608—1661, in “*A Pisgah Sight of Palestine.*”

Verse 19.—"They made a calf," etc. This people had seen this idolatrous service in Egypt; and now they did not more long after Egyptian food, than after this Egyptian god. . . . It is an easy matter for men to be drawn to the practice of that idolatry that they have been accustomed to see practised in those places that they have a long time lived in. He that would take heed of idolatry, let him take heed of Egypt: the very air of Egypt (as I may so say) is infectious in this kind. See here, they had seen the worship of a young bullock in Egypt, and they must have a bullock. . . .

The local seat of Antichrist (and what seat can that be but *Rome*?) is called in the Revelation by three names: it is called *Egypt*, Rev. ii. 8. It is called *Sodom* in the same verse. It is called *Babylon* in many places of the Revelation. It is called *Babylon*, in regard to her cruelty. It is called *Sodom*, in regard to her filthiness; and *Egypt*, in regard to her idolatry.

It is a hard matter for a man to live in Egypt, and not to taste and savour somewhat of the idolatry of Egypt. We had sometime, in England, a proverb about going to Rome. They said, a man that went the first time to Rome, he went to see a wicked man there; he that went the second time to Rome, went to be acquainted with that wicked man there; he that went the third time, brought him home with him. How many have we seen (and it is pity to see so many) of our nobility and gentry to go to those *Egyptian* parts, and return home again: but few of them bring home the same manners, the same religion, nor the same souls they carried out with them.—*Thomas Westfield, Bishop of Bristow, in "England's Face in Israel's Glasse," 1658.*

Verse 19.—"In Horeb." There is a peculiar stress on the words "*in Horeb*," as denoting the very place where the great manifestation of God's power and presence has been made, and where the law had been given, whose very first words were a prohibition of the sin of idolatry.—*Agellius, in Neale and Littledale.*

Verses 19, 20.—*Apis*, or *Serapis*, was a true living black bull, with a white list or streak along the back, a white mark in fashion of an half-moon on his right shoulder, only two hairs growing on his tail (why just so many and no more, the devil knows), with a fair square blaze on his forehead, and a great bunch called *cantharus* under his tongue. What art their priests did use to keep up the breed and preserve succession of cattle with such *γωρίσματα*, or privy marks, I list not to inquire. . . . Besides this natural and living bull, kept in one place, they also worshipped *βοῦν διάχρυσον*, a golden or gilded ox, the image or portraiture of the former. Some conceive this *Apis* to have been the symbol and emblem of Joseph the patriarch, so called from *אב*, a father, seeing he is said to be made by God a father to Pharaoh (Gen. xlv. 8), that is, preserver of him and his country; and therefore the Egyptians, in after ages, gratified his memory with statues of an ox, a creature so useful in ploughing, sowing, bringing home, and treading out of corn, to perpetuate that gift of grain he had conferred upon them. They strengthen their conjecture because *Serapis* (which one will have to be nothing else but *Apis* with addition of *ἄρ*, *sar*, that is, a prince, whence perchance our English *Sir*) was pictured with a bushel over his head, and Joseph (we know) was corn-meter-general in Egypt. Though others, on good ground, conceive ox-worship in Egypt of far greater antiquity.

However, hence Aaron (Exod. xxxii. 4), and hence afterwards Jeroboam (who flying from Solomon, lived some years with Shishak, king of Egypt, 1 Kings xi. 40) had the pattern of their calves, which they made for the children of Israel to worship. If any object the Egyptians' idols were bulls or oxen, the Israelites' but calves, the difference is not considerable; for (besides the objector never looked into the mouths of the latter to know their age) *gradus non variat speciem*, a less character is not another letter. Yea, Herodotus calls *Apis* himself *χόρμος*, a calf, and *Vitulus* is of as large acceptation among the Latins. Such an old calf the poet describes—

*Ego hanc vitalam (ne forte recuses,
Bis venit ad mulctram binos alit ubera fætus)
Depono.*

My calf I lay (lest you mistake't both tides
She comes to th' pail and suckles twain besides).

But to put all out of doubt, what in Exodus is termed a calf, the Psalmist calleth an ox (Ps. cvi. 20).—*Thomas Fuller.*

Verses 19—22.—It is to be hoped, we shall never live to see a time, when the

miracles of our redemption shall be forgotten; when the return of Jesus Christ from heaven shall be despaired of; and when the people shall solicit their teachers to fabricate a new philosophical deity, for them to worship, instead of the God of their ancestors, to whom glory hath been ascribed from generation to generation.—*George Horne.*

Verse 20.—“*An ox that eateth grass.*” The Egyptians, when they consulted Apis, presented a bottle of hay or of grass, and if the ox received it, they expected good success.—*Daniel Cresswell.*

Verse 20.—Although some of the Rabbins would excuse this gross idolatry of their forefathers, yet others more wise bewail them, and say that there is an ounce of this golden calf in all their present sufferings.—*John Trapp.*

Verse 21.—“*They forgat God.*” To devise images and pictures to put us in the mind of God, is a very forgetting both of God’s nature, and of his authority, which prohibits such devices, for so doth the Lord expound it: “*They forgat God their Saviour.*”—*David Dickson.*

Verse 21.—Let us observe in this place that Israel is now for the third time accused of forgetting God; above in ver. 7, afterwards in ver. 13, and now in ver. 21. And that he might shew the greatness of this forgetfulness he does not simply say they forgat God, but adds, *their Saviour*: not the Saviour of their fathers in former times, but *their own Saviour.*—*Musculus.*

Verse 22.—“*Land of Ham.*” Egypt is called the land of *Ham*, or rather *Cham*, *חם*, because it was peopled by Mizraim, the son of Ham, and grandson of Noah. Plutarch (De Iside and Osiride) informs us, that the Egyptians called their country *Χημία*, *Chemia*; and the Copts give it the name of *Χημι*, *Chemi*, to the present day.—*Comprehensive Bible.*

Verse 23.—“*Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach.*” Moses stood in the gap, and diverted the wrath of God; the hedge of religion and worship was broken down by a golden calf, and he made it up: Numb. xvi. 41, 42, the people murmured, rose up against Moses and Aaron, trod down the hedge of authority, whereupon the plague brake in upon them; presently Aaron steps into the gap, makes up the hedge, and stops the plague, ver. 47, 48. That which they did was honourable; and they were repairers of breaches. We, through infinite mercy, have had some like Moses and Aaron, to make up our hedges, raise up our foundations, and stop some gaps; but all our gaps are not yet stopped. Are there not gaps in the hedge of doctrine? If it were not so, how came in such erroneous, blasphemous, and wild opinions amongst us? Are there not gaps in the hedges of civil and ecclesiastical authority? Do not multitudes trample upon magistracy and ministry, all powers, both human and divine? Are there not gaps in the worship of God? Do not too many tread down all churches, all ordinances, yea, the very Scriptures? Are there not gaps in the hedge of justice, through which the bulls of Bashan enter, which oppress the poor, and crush the needy? Amos iv. 1: are there not gaps in the hedge of love; is not that bond of perfection broken? Are there not bitter envyings and strife among us; do we not bite and devour one another? are there not gaps in the hedge of conscience? is not the peace broken between God and your souls? doth not Satan come in oft at the gap, and disturb you? are there not gaps also in your several relations, whereby he gets advantage? Surely, if our eyes be in our heads, we may see gaps enough.—*William Greenhill.*

Verse 23.—“*The breach.*” This is a metaphor taken from a city which is besieged, and in the walls of which the enemy having made a “*breach*,” is just entering in, to destroy it, unless he be driven back by some valiant warrior. Thus *Moses* stood, as it were “*in the breach*,” and averted the wrath of God, when he was just going to destroy the Israelites. See Exod. xxxii.—*Thomas Fenton.*

Verse 23.—If Christians could be brought to entertain a just sense of the value and power of intercessory prayer, surely it would abound. It is a terrible reproof against the lying prophets of Ezekiel’s time: “*Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord*” (Ezek. xiii. 5). Compare Ex. xxxii. 9—14.—*William S. Plumer.*

Verse 24.—“*Yea, they despised.*” When the promised inheritance of heaven

(which was figured by the pleasant *land of promise*), is not counted worthy of all the pains and difficulties which can be sustained and met with in the way of going toward it, the promised inheritance is but little esteemed of, as appeareth in the Israelites, who for love of ease, and fear of the Canaanites, were ready to turn back to Egypt: "*They despised the pleasant land.*"—*David Dickson.*

Verse 24.—" *They despised the pleasant land.*" This was a type of heaven, the good land afar off; the better country, the land of promise and rest; in which is fulness of provisions, and where there will be no hunger and thirst; where flows the river of the water of life, and stands the tree of life, bearing all manner of fruits; where there is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore; the most delightful company of Father, Son, and Spirit, angels and glorified saints, and nothing to disturb their peace and pleasure neither from within nor from without. And yet this pleasant land may be said to be despised by such who do not care to go through any difficulty to it; to perform the duties of religion; to bear reproach for God's sake; to go through tribulation; to walk in the narrow and afflicted way which leads unto it; and by all such who do not care to part with their sinful lusts and pleasures; but prefer them and the things of this world to the heavenly state.—*John Gill.*

Verse 24.—One great bar to salvation is spiritual sloth. It is said of Israel, "*They despised the pleasant land.*" What should be the reason? Canaan was a paradise of delight, a type of heaven; aye, but they thought it would cost them a great deal of trouble and hazard in the getting, and they would rather go without it, they despised the pleasant land. Are there not millions of us who would rather go sleeping to hell, than sweating to heaven? I have read of certain Spaniards that live near where there is great store of fish, yet are so lazy that they will not be at the pains to catch them, but buy of their neighbours: such a sinful stupidity and sloth is upon the most, that though Christ be near them, though salvation is offered in the Gospel, yet they will not work out salvation.—*Thomas Watson.*

Verses 24, 25.—Murmuring hath in it much unbelief and distrust of God. "*They believed not his word; but murmured in their tents.*" They could not believe that the wilderness was the way to Canaan, that God would provide and furnish a table for them there, and relieve them in all their straits. So it is with us in trouble. We quarrel with God's providence, because we do not believe his promises; we do not believe that this can be consistent with love, or can work for good in the end.—*John Willison, 1680—1750.*

Verse 25.—" *But murmured.*" Murmuring! It must have been a malady characteristic of the Hebrew people, or a disease peculiar to that desert. As we proceed with this narrative we are constantly meeting it, creaking along in discord harsh and chronic, or amazing earth and heaven by its shrill, ear-piercing paroxysms. They lift up their eyes, and as the Egyptians pursue, the people murmur. They come to a fountain, the water is bitter, and once more they murmur. Then no bread; murmurings redoubled. Moses is no longer in the Mount; murmurs. He takes too much upon him; more murmurs. When shall we reach that promised land?—murmurs extraordinary, loud murmurs. We are close to the land, but its inhabitants are giants, and their towns walled up to heaven. Oh, what a take-in! and the last breath of the last survivors of that querulous race goes forth in a hurricane of reproach and remonstrance—a perfect storm of murmurs.—*James Hamilton (1814—1867) in "Moses the man of God."*

Verse 25.—The murmuring on this occasion seems to have been a social evil, they *murmured in their tents.* So do men in social life promote among each other prejudice and aversion to true religion.—*W. Wilson.*

Verse 28.—" *They joined themselves also unto Baal-peor,*"—rather "bound themselves with his badge": for it was the custom in ancient times, as it is now, in all Pagan countries, for every idol to have some specific badge, or ensign, by which his votaries are known.—*John Kitto, in "Daily Bible Illustrations."*

Verse 28.—" *They joined themselves also unto Baal-peor.*" The narrative (Num. xxv.) seems clearly to show that this form of Baal-worship was connected with licentious rites. Without laying too much stress on the Rabbinical derivation of the word *חַיָּהּ* *hiatus, i. e., "aperire hymenem virgineum,"* we seem to have reason to conclude that this was the nature of the worship. Baal-Peor was identified by the Rabbins and early fathers with Priapus (see the authorities quoted by Selden, *De Diis Syris*, i. 4, p. 302, sq., who, however, dissents from this view). This is, moreover, the view of

Creuzer (ii. 411), Winer, Gesenius, Fürst, and almost all critics. The reader is referred for more detailed information particularly to Creuzer's *Symbolik* and Movers' *Phönizier*.—William Gotch, in "Smith's Dictionary of the Bible."

Verse 28.—"Ate the sacrifices." It was usual for the officers to eat the chief part of the sacrifice. Hence the remarks of Paul on this subject, 1 Cor. viii., 1—13.—Benjamin Boothroyd.

Verse 28.—"The dead." The word מֵתִים, *maithim*, signifies *dead men*; for the idols of the heathen were generally *men*,—warriors, kings, or lawgivers,—who had been deified after their death; though many of them had been execrated during their life.—*Comprehensive Bible*.

Verse 28.—"And they ate the sacrifices of the dead."

His obsequies to Polydorus paying
A tomb we raise, and altars to the dead
With dark blue fillets and black cypress bind
Our dames with hair dishevell'd stand to mourn;
Warm frothy blows of milk and sacred blood
We offer, in his grave the spirit lay,
Call him aloud, and bid our last farewell.

—Virgil.

Verse 29.—"They provoked him to anger with their inventions." Note, that it is not said, *with their deeds*, but with their pursuits (*studies*). It is one thing simply to do a thing; it is quite another to pursue it earnestly night and day. The first may take place by chance, or through ignorance, or on account of some temptation, or violence, and that without the consent and against the inclination of the mind. But the latter is brought about in pursuance of a fixed purpose and design and by effort and forethought. We see, therefore, in this passage that the patience of God was at length provoked to anger and fury when the people sinned not merely once and again, but when the pursuit of sin grew and strengthened.—*Musculus*.

Verse 29.—"Their inventions." *Their sins* are here called by the name of "*their inventions*." And so, sure, they are; as no ways taught us by God, but of our own imagining or finding out. For, indeed, our inventions are the cause of all sins. And if we look well into it we shall find our inventions are so. By God's injunction we should all live, and his injunction is, "You shall not do every man what seems good in his own eyes" (or finds out in his own brains), "but whatsoever I command you, that shall you do." Deut. xii. 8. But we, setting light by that charge of his, out of the old disease of our father Adam ("ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil"), think it a goodly matter to be witty, and to find out things ourselves to make to ourselves, to be authors, and inventors of somewhat, that so we may seem to be as wise as God, if not wiser; and to know what is for our turns, as well as he, if not better. It was Saul's fault. God bade him destroy Amalek altogether, and he would invent a better way, to save some (forsooth) for sacrifice, which God could not think of. And it was St. Peter's fault, when he persuaded Christ from his passion, and found out a better way (as he thought) than Christ could devise.—*Lancelot Andrewes*.

Verse 29.—"Brake in upon them." The image is that of a river which had burst its barriers; see Exod. xix. 24. The plague is the slaughter inflicted upon the people by command of Moses; Numb. xxv. 4, 5, 8, 9, 18.—"The Speaker's Commentary."

Verse 30.—"Then stood up Phinehas." All Israel saw the bold lewdness of Zimri, but their hearts and eyes were so full of grief, that they had not room enough for indignation. Phinehas looked on with the rest, but with other affections. When he saw this defiance bidden to God, and this insultation upon the sorrow of his people (that while they were wringing their hands, a proud miscreant durst outface their humiliation with his wicked dalliance), his heart boils with a desire of a holy revenge; and now that hand, which was used to a censer and sacrificing knife, takes up his javelin, and, with one stroke, joins these two bodies in their death, which were joined in their sin, and in the very fragrance of their lust, makes a new way for their souls to their own place. O noble and heroic courage of Phinehas! which, as it was rewarded of God, so is worthy to be admired of men. He doth not stand casting of scruples: Who am I to do this? The son of the high priest. My place is all for peace and mercy: it is for me to sacrifice, and pray for the sin of the people, not to sacrifice any of the people for their sin. My duty calls me to appease the anger of God what I may, not to revenge the sins of men; to pray for their conversion,

not to work the confusion of any sinner. And who are these? Is not the one a great prince in Israel, the other a princess of Midian? Can the death of two so famous personages go unrevengeed? Or, if it be safe and fit, why doth my uncle Moses rather shed his own tears than their blood? I will mourn with the rest; let them revenge whom it concerneth. But the zeal of God hath barred out all weak deliberations; and he holds it now both his duty and his glory, to be an executioner of so shameless a pair of offenders. . . .

Now the sin is punished, the plague ceaseth. The revenge of God sets out ever after the sin; but if the revenge of men (which commonly comes later) can overtake it, God gives over the chase. How oft hath the infliction of a less punishment avoided a greater! There are none so good friends to the state, as courageous and impartial ministers of justice: these are the reconcilers of God and the people, more than the prayers of them that sit still and do nothing.—*Joseph Hall*.

Verse 30.—"Then stood up Phinehas," etc. Mark the mighty principle, which rolled like a torrent in the heart of Phinehas. The Spirit leaves it not obscure. The praise is this, "He was zealous for his God," Numb. xxv. 13. He could not fold his arms, and see God's law insulted, his rule defied, his majesty and empire scorned. The servant's heart blazed in one blaze of godly indignation. He must be up to vindicate his Lord. His fervent love, his bold resolve, fear nothing in a righteous cause. The offending Zimra was a potent prince: nevertheless he spared him not.

Believer, can you read this and feel no shame? Do your bold efforts testify your zeal? Sinners blaspheme God's name. Do you rebuke? His Sabbaths are profaned. Do you protest? False principles are current? Do you expose the counterfeits? Vice stalks in virtue's garb. Do you tear down the mask? Satan enthral's the world. Do you resist? Nay, rather are you not dozing unconcerned? Whether Christ's cause succeeds, or be cast down, you little care. If righteous zeal girded your loins, and braced your nerves, and moved the rudder of your heart, and swelled your sails of action, would God be so unknown, and blasphemy so daring?

Mark, next, the zeal of Phinehas is sound-minded. It is not as a courser without rein, a torrent unembanked, a hurricane let loose. Its steps are set in order's path. It executes God's own will in God's own way. The mandate says, let the offenders die. He aims a death-blow, then, with obedient hand. The zeal, which heaven kindles, is always a submissive grace.—*Henry Law*, in "Christ is All," 1858.

Verse 30.—"Stood up," as valiantly to do his work of zeal, as Moses had done to discharge the office of intercessor, and because he alone rose to set the example of resistance to the foul rites of Baal-Peor.—*Cassiodorus*, quoted by *Neale and Little-dale*.

Verse 30.—"So the plague was stayed." God himself puts this peculiar honour of staying the plague (when he was about to destroy the whole camp) upon this fact of Phinehas, saying, "He hath turned away my wrath," Num. xxv. 10, 11, because he was acted with the same zeal for God's glory and Israel's good, as God himself is acted with for them, and feared not to lose his life in God's cause, by putting to death a prince and a princess in the very flagrancy of their lust at one blow. There is such an accent and such an emphasis put by the Lord on this act (as the Jewish Rabbis observe), that here they begin the forty-first section or lecture of the Law, or (as Vatablus saith) the seventh section of the book, which they call Phinehas. Moreover, it teacheth us, that zeal of justice in the cause of God is an hopeful means to remove God's wrath from, and to procure his mercy to, man. Thus David also made an atonement by doing justice on Saul's house, 2 Sam. xxi. 3, etc. . . .

Phinehas by virtue of this promise of the priesthood (Num. xxv. 12, 13) lived himself to a great old age, even (as some say) to three hundred years, as appeareth by Judg. xx. 28, where he then is found alive, for his zeal at this time. He lived so long that some of the Rabbis are of opinion that he died not at all, but is still alive, whom they suppose to be the Elias that is to come before the coming of Christ; but this notion is confuted by others of their Rabbis, and by the mention of his seed succeeding him in sacred Scripture. However, though few after the Flood did near attain to any such age, yet must Phinehas be very old in that time of Israel's warring with Benjamin. . . . Phinehas's priesthood is called "everlasting," not in his person, but in his posterity, whose sons were successively high priests till the captivity of Babylon, 1 Chron. vi. 4—16; and at the return out of captivity, Ezra, the great priest and scribe, was of his line, Ezra vii. 1—6; and so it continued in that line until, or very near, the approach of our evangelical High Priest (as Christ is called, Heb. v. 6), who was of the order of Melchizedek.—*Christopher Ness*.

Verse 30.—Why is the pacifying of God's wrath, and the staying of the plague ascribed to Phinehas, having a blush of irregularity in it, rather than to the acts of Moses and the judges, which were by express command from God and very regular? For answer, the acts of Moses and the judges *slaked the fire* of God's wrath, that of Phinehas *quenched it*; again the acts of Moses and the judges had a rise from a *spark*, that of Phinehas from a *flame of zeal* and holy indignation in him; hence the Lord, who is exceedingly taken with the springs and roots of actions, sets the crown upon the head of Phinehas.—*Edmund Staunton, in a Sermon preached before the House of Lords, 1644.*

Verse 30.—“*So the plague was stayed.*” A man doth not so live by his own faith, but in *temporal respects* the faith of another man may do him good. Masters by their faith obtained healing for their servants, parents for their children, Matt. xv. 28. “Oh, man, great is thy faith!” “Jesus seeing their faith,” healed the sick of the palsy. God's people for the town or place where they live: “The innocent” (*i.e.*, the faithful doer) “shall deliver the island,” Job xxii. 30. Gen. xviii. 32, “If ten righteous persons shall be found there, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.” Especially in Magistrates, *Moses*, Numb. xiv.; *Hezekiah*, Isai. xxxvii., put up prayers, and God saved the people and places they prayed for: “*Then Phinehas executed judgment* (appeased God by faith) *and so the plague was stayed.*”—*Matthew Lawrence.*

Verse 32.—“*It went ill with Moses.*” This judgment of God on that sin did not imply that he had blotted Moses out of the book of life, or the number of the saints, or otherwise than forgive his sin. For he continued still to talk with him, and advise with him of the governing of his people, and spake to Joshua that he should be faithful to him as his servant Moses. That was not the true Canaan from which he was shut out, but only the figure and shadow; and that he was allowed to see; a vision well worthy of all his labours, for the more excellent things signified by it.—*Isaac Williams, in “The Characters of the Old Testament,” 1873.*

Verse 33.—“*They provoked his spirit.*” As Abraham was distinguished for his faith, so was Moses for his meekness; for Scripture has declared that he was “very meek, above all the men which were on the face of the earth,” Numb. xii. 3. Yet judging from facts recorded of him, we should be inclined to suppose that he was by nature remarkable for sensitiveness and hastiness of temper—that was his one besetting infirmity. Such appears to have been evinced when he slew the Egyptian; when he twice smote the rock in the wilderness; and on that occasion when he was “punished,” as the Psalmist says, “*because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips,*” and when he broke the two tables of stone. Something of the same kind appears to have been the case with our own Hooker, whose biographer attributes to him such singular meekness, while his private writings indicate a temper keenly alive and sensitive to the sense of wrong.—*Isaac Williams.*

Verse 33.—“*They provoked his spirit.*”—In a dispensation itself mainly gracious, and foreshadowing one which would be grace altogether, it was of prime importance that the mediating men should be merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and slow to anger. And such they were in marvellous manner. . . .

Brimming over with instruction as is this passage, we must leave it with a few remarks.

1. How careful preachers of the gospel and expounders of Scripture should be not to give an erroneous impression of God's mind or message. The mental acumen is rare, but the right spirit is rarer. But what is the right spirit?—A loving spirit, a gentle spirit, a faithful spirit, a meek and weaned spirit, a spirit which says, “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth,” and a spirit which adds, “All that the Lord giveth me, that will I speak,” that excellent spirit which is only imparted by the good Spirit of God. For if he withdraw, even a Moses ceases to be meek, and ceasing to be meek, even a Moses becomes a bad divine and an erroneous teacher, striking the rock that has been already stricken once for all, and preaching glad tidings gruffly. He who gives the living water does not grudge it; but sometimes, instead of “Ho! every one that thirsteth,” the preacher says, “Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?” and makes the very invitation repulsive.

2. When any one has run long and run well, how sad it is to stumble within a few steps of the goal! If Moses had an earthly wish, it was to see Israel safe in their inheritance, and his wish was all but consummated. Faith and patience had held out well nigh forty years, and in a few months more the Jordan would be crossed

and the work would be finished. And who can tell but this very nearness of the prize helped to create something of a presumptuous confidence? The blood of Moses was hot to begin with, and he was not the meekest of men when he smote the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. But he had got a good lesson in ruling his spirit, and betwixt the long sojourn with Jethro and the self-discipline needful in the charge of this multitude, he might fancy that he had now his foot on the neck of this enemy: when lo! the sin revives and Moses dies.

Blessed is the man that feareth alway! Blessed is the man who, although years have passed without an attempt at burglary, still bars his doors and sees his windows fastened! Blessed is the man who, although a generation has gone since the last eruption, forbears to build on the volcanic soil, and dreads fires which have smouldered for fourscore years! Blessed is the man who, even when the high seas are crossed and the land is made, still keeps an outlook! Blessed is the man who, even on the confines of Canaan, takes heed of the evil heart, lest, with a promise of entering in, he should come short through unbelief!

3. Elevation of mind and sweetness of spirit are pearls of great price, and if we wish to preserve them we had better intrust them to God's own keeping. If Moses lost his faith, it was by first losing self-command: and if a man lose this, it is hard to say what next he may lose: like the mad warrior who makes a missile of his shield and hurls it at the head of an enemy, he is henceforward open to every fiery dart, to the cut and thrust of every assailant. But, as John Newton remarks, "The grace of God is as necessary to create a right temper in a Christian on the breaking of a china plate as on the death of an only son;" and as no man can tell on any dawning day but what that may be the most trying day in all his life, how wise to pray without ceasing, "uphold me according unto thy word. Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth: keep the door of my lips." "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression."—*James Hamilton*.

Verse 33.—"They provoked his spirit," etc. Angry he certainly was; and when, reverting to a former miracle, the Most High directed him to take the wonder-staff—his rod of many miracles—and at the head of the congregation "speak to the rock," and it would "give forth its water," in the heat and agitation of his spirit he failed to implement implicitly the Divine command. Instead of speaking to the rock he spoke to the people, and his harangue was no longer in the language calm and dignified of the lawgiver, but had a certain tone of petulance and egotism. "Hear now, ye rebels; must we—must I and Aaron, not must Jehovah—fetch you water out of this rock?" And instead of simply *speaking* to it, he raised the rod and dealt it two successive strokes, just as if the rock were sharing the general perversity, and would no more than the people obey its Creator's bidding. He was angry, and he sinned. He sinned and was severely punished. Water flowed sufficient for the whole camp and the cattle, clear, cool, and eagerly gushing, enough for all the million; but at the same moment that its unmerited bounty burst on you, ye rebels, "a cup of wrath was put into the hand of Moses." * To you, ye murmurers, there came forth living water; to your venerable leaders the cup of God's anger.

"The Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them." Numb. xx. 12.—*James Hamilton*.

Verse 33.—"He spake unadvisedly with his lips." The Lord desires him to address the rock, but Moses speaks to Israel. God wishes him to speak a word to the inanimate stone, and Moses strikes it twice. God still is willing that the people shall remain as his inheritance, but Moses evidently treats them with ill-will and much offensiveness. God wishes to relieve, and give refreshing to the people in their thirst, and Moses is selected to co-operate with him in all such joy; but mark how, on this very day, a deep discord between God's inclination and the mind of Moses shows itself. God is inclined to grant forgiveness,—Moses inclines to punishment: before, the very opposite seemed to prevail. God is forbearing,—Moses, filled with bitterness; God seeks to glorify his grace,—with Moses, self, not God, comes into prominence. "Must we,"—not, "must the Lord,"—but "must we fetch you water out of this rock?" We see now, in this prophet, strong at other times, the first plain indications of decay and weariness. He has grown tired (and truly it should

* Van Oosterzee.

not seem strange, for which of us could have sustained a struggle such as his for half the time ?) of carrying these stubborn children any longer now. This man, so truly great, has never for an instant hitherto forgotten his own dignity in presence of all Israel ; but now, he is no longer master of himself.—*J. J. Van Oosterzee.*

Verse 33.—“*He spake unadvisedly.*” A gracious person may be surprised and fall suddenly among thieves that lurk behind the bushes. Nay, very holy men, unless wonderful wary, may be quickly tript up by sudden questions and unexpected emergencies. Who knows the subtlety of sin, and the deceitfulness of his own heart ? Take heed of answering quickly, and send up sudden ejaculations to heaven before you reply to a weighty and doubtful motion.—*Samuel Lee.*

Verses 34—38.—The miracles and mercies which settled them in Canaan made no more deep and durable impressions upon them than those that fetched them out of Egypt ; for by that time they were well warm in Canaan ; they corrupted themselves, and forsook God. Observe the steps of their apostasy.

1. They spared the nations which God had doomed to destruction (ver. 34). When they had got the good land God had promised them, they had no zeal against the wicked inhabitants, whom the Lord commanded them to extirpate, pretending pity ; but so merciful is God, that no man needs to be in any case more compassionate than he.

2. When they spared them, they promised themselves, that for all this, they would not join in any dangerous affinity with them ; but the way of sin is downhill ; omissions make way for commissions ; when they neglect to destroy the heathen, the next news we hear is, they “*were mingled among the heathen,*” made leagues with them, and contracted an intimacy with them, so that they “*learned their works*” (ver. 35). That which is rotten will sooner corrupt that which is sound, than be cured or made sound by it.

3. When they mingled with them, and learned some of their works that seemed innocent diversions and entertainments, yet they thought they would never join with them in their worship ; but by degrees they learned that too (ver. 36). “*They served their idols*” in the same manner, and with the same rites that they served them ; and they became a snare unto them, that sin drew on many more, and brought the judgments of God upon them, which they themselves could not but be sensible of, and yet knew not how to recover themselves.

4. When they joined with them in some of their idolatrous services, which they thought had least harm in them, they little thought that ever they should be guilty of that barbarous and inhuman piece of idolatry, the sacrificing of their living children to their dead gods : but they came to that at last (verses 37, 38) in which Satan triumphed over his worshippers, and regaled himself in blood and slaughter. “*They sacrificed their sons and daughters,*” pieces of themselves “*to devils ;*” and added murder, the most unnatural murder, to their idolatry ; one cannot think of it without horror ; they “*shed innocent blood,*” the most innocent, for it was infant blood, nay, it was the “*blood of their sons and their daughters.*” See the power of the spirit that works in the children of disobedience, and see his malice. The beginning of idolatry and superstition, like that of strife, is as the letting forth of water, and there is no villainy which they that venture upon it can be sure they shall stop short of, for God justly “*gives them up to a reprobate mind*” (Rom. i. 28).—*Matthew Henry.*

Verse 37.—“*Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils.*” We need no better argument to discover the nature of these gods than this very service in my text accepted of them : for both by the record of sacred writ, and relation of heathen authors and other writers, we know that nothing was so usually commanded nor gratefully accepted by these heathenish gods, as was the shedding of man’s blood, and the sacrificing of men, maids, and children unto them, as appears by the usual practice of men in former times. From the testimonies of Scripture, I give only the example of the king of Moab, mentioned in 2 Kings iii. 27, where it is said, that, being in some straits, “*He took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall.*”

The stories likewise of the heathen are full of like examples. When the oracle of Apollo was asked by the Athenians how they might make amends for their killing of Androgeus, it willed them to send yearly to king Minos seven bodies of each sex to appease the wrath of the god. Now this kind of yearly sacrifice continued still in Athens in the time of Socrates. Thus the Carthaginians, being vanquished

by Agathocles, king of Sicily, and supposing their god to be displeased, to appease him did sacrifice two hundred noble men's children. This custom was ancient even before the Trojan war, for then was Iphigenia sacrificed. Thus we read that the Latins sacrificed the tenth of their children to Jupiter; that men and children were usually sacrificed to Saturn in many places in Candia, Rhodomene, Phœnice, Africa, and those commonly the choice and dearest of their children and most nobly descended. The manner of sacrificing their children to Saturn, Diodorus relates to be this: bringing their children to the statue or image of Saturn, which was of huge greatness, they gave them into his hands, which were made so hollow and winding that the children offered slipped and fell down through into a cave and furnace of fire. These sacrifices continued in use till the birth and death of our Saviour Christ, who came to destroy the work of the devil; for such sacrifices were first forbidden by Augustus Cæsar; after more generally by Tiberius (in whose reign our Saviour suffered) who, as Tertullian writes, so straitly forbade them, that he crucified the priests who offered them; howbeit, even in Tertullian's time, and after in Eusebius' and Lactantius' times, such sacrifices were offered (but closely) to Jupiter Latiâlis.

Who can now doubt, seeing such exceeding superstitious cruelty, but that the gods commanding such sacrifices were very devils and enemies to mankind? God commands no such thing, but forbids it, and threatens plagues to his people, because they had forsaken him and "built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind" (Jer. xix. 5). Most infallibly then we may conclude that none but Satan, that arch-devil, with his angels, were the commanders of such service, for this agrees right well with his nature, who hath been a murderer from the beginning.—*Robert Jenison* in "*The Height of Israel's Heathenish Idolatrie, in Sacrificing their Children to the Devil,*" 1621.

Verse 37.—"Yea, they sacrificed their sons," etc. From this we learn that inconsiderate zeal is a flimsy pretext in favour of any act of devotion. For by how much the Jews were under the influence of burning zeal, by so much does the prophet convict them of being guilty of greater wickedness; because their madness carried them away to such a pitch of enthusiasm, that they did not spare even their own offspring. Were good intentions meritorious, as idolaters suppose, then indeed the laying aside of all natural affection in sacrificing their own children was a deed deserving the highest praise. But when men act under the impulse of their own capricious humour, the more they occupy themselves with acts of external worship, the more do they increase their guilt. For what difference was there between Abraham and those persons of whom the prophet makes mention, but that the former, under the influence of faith, was ready to offer up his son, while the latter, carried away by the impulse of intemperate zeal, cast off all natural affection, and imbrued their hands in the blood of their own offspring.—*John Calvin*.

Verse 37.—"Devils," שֵׁרִים, *Shedim*. It appears that children were sacrificed to the deities thus named; that they were considered to be of an angry nature, and inimical to the human race, and thus the object of the homage rendered to them was to avert calamities. The name שֵׁרִים may signify either *lord* or *master*, or anything that is *black*, it being derived from an Arabic verb meaning, *to be black*, or *to be master*.—*John Jahn*, in "*Biblical Antiquities*."

Verses 37, 38.—We stand astonished doubtless, at this horrid, barbarous, and unnatural impiety, of offering children by fire to a Moloch: but how little is it considered, that children, brought up in the ways of ignorance, error, vanity, folly, and vice, are more effectually sacrificed to the great adversary of mankind!—*George Horne*.

Verse 39.—"And went a whoring with their own inventions."—As harlotry is one of the most abominable of sins that can be committed by a daughter or a wife; so often in the Scriptures turning from God and especially the practice of idolatry is called whoredom and fornication, Ps. lxxiii. 27; Ex. xxxiv. 15, 16.—*William S. Plumer*.

Verse 40.—"He abhorred his own inheritance." Whenever great love sinks into great hate it is termed *abhorrence*.—*Lorinus*.

Verse 43.—"They were brought low for their iniquity." Sin is of a weakening and impoverishing nature; it has weakened all mankind, and taken from them

their moral strength to do good ; and has brought them to poverty and want ; to be beggars on the dunghill ; to a pit wherein is no water ; and left them in a hopeless and helpless condition ; yea, it brings the people of God often times after conversion into a low estate, when God hides his face because of it, temptations are strong, grace is weak, and they become lukewarm and indifferent to spiritual things.—*John Gill.*

Verse 46.—“ *He made them also to be pitied of all those that carried them captives.*” This improved feeling towards the Jews through God’s influence appears in Dan. i. 9 ; as Joseph similarly had his captivity improved by God’s favour (Gen. xxxix. 21). So Evil-merodach, King of Babylon, treated kindly Jehoiachin, king of Judah (2 Kings xxv. 27).—*A. R. Fausset.*

Verse 47.—“ *Gather us.*” Bishop Patrick says that, in his opinion, this verse refers to those, who, in the days of Saul, or before, were taken prisoners by the Philistines, or other nations ; whom David prays God to gather to their own land again ; that they might worship him in that place which he had prepared for the ark of his presence.—*Thomas Fenton.*

Verse 48.—“ *Amen.*” Martin Luther said once of the Lord’s Prayer that “ it was the greatest martyr on earth, because it was used so frequently without thought and feeling, without reverence and faith.” This quaint remark, as true as it is sad, applies perhaps with still greater force to the word “ *Amen.*”

Familiar to us from our infancy is the sound of this word, which has found a home wherever the natives have learnt to adore Israel’s God and Saviour. It has been adopted, and without translation retained, in all languages in which the gospel of Jesus the Son of David is preached. The literal signification, “ *So be it,*” is known to all ; yet few consider the deep meaning, the great solemnity, and the abundant consolation treasured up in this word, which has formed for centuries the conclusion of the prayers and praises of God’s people. A word which is frequently used without due thoughtfulness, and unaccompanied with the feeling which it is intended to call forth, loses its power from this very familiarity, and though constantly on our lips, lies bedridden in the dormitory of our soul. But it is a great word this word “ *Amen*” ; and Luther has truly said, “ *As your Amen is, so has been your prayer.*”

It is a word of venerable history in Israel and in the church. The word dates as far back as the law of Moses. When a solemn oath was pronounced by the priest, the response of the person who was adjured consisted simply of the word “ *Amen.*” In like manner the people responded “ *Amen*” when, from the heights of Ebal and Gerizim, the blessings and the curses of the divine law were pronounced. Again, at the great festival which David made when the ark of God was brought from Obed-Edom, the Psalm of praise which Asaph and his brethren sang concluded with the words, “ *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel for ever and ever. And all the people said, Amen*” (1 Chron. xvi. 36). Thus we find in the Psalms, not merely that David concludes his Psalm of praise with the word *Amen*, but he says, “ *And let all the people say, Amen.*”—*Adolph Saphir, in “ The Lord’s Prayer,”* 1870.

HINTS TO PREACHERS.

Verse 1.—Take this verse as the theme of the Psalm, and we shall then see that its exhortation to praise, I. Is directed to a special people : chosen, redeemed, but sinful, borne with, and forgiven. II. Is supported by abundant arguments. Man not to be praised, for he sins. God gives in his goodness, and forgives in his mercy, and is therefore to be thanked. III. Is as applicable now as ever : for our story is a transcript of Israel’s.

Verse 2.—I. A challenge. II. A suggestion : at least let us do what we can. III. An ambition : in the ages to come we will make known with the church to angels, and all intelligent beings, the mighty acts of divine grace. IV. A question—shall I be there ?

Verse 3.—The blessedness of a godly life.

Verse 4.—I. The language of Humility : “ *Remember me, O Lord.*” Let me not escape thy notice amongst the many millions of creatures under thy care. II.

The language of Faith. 1. That God has a people to whom he shows special favour. 2. That he himself has provided salvation for them. III. The language of prayer. 1. For the free gift of salvation. 2. For the common salvation—not wishing to be peculiar, but to be as “Thy people,” taking them for all in all, both here and hereafter. Walking in the footsteps of the flock.

“Be this my glory, Lord, to be
Joined to thy saints, and near to thee.”

—G. R.

Verses 4, 7, 45.—In verse 4, a remembrance desired. In verse 7, a failure of remembrance deplored. In verse 45, a divine remembrance extolled.

Verse 5.—The Persons: “Thy chosen”; “Thy nation”; “Thine inheritance.” II. The Privileges: “The good of thy chosen”; “The gladness of thy nation”; “The glory of thine inheritance.” III. The Pleas: “That I may see,” etc. They were once as I am: make me what they are now. 2. My salvation is everything to me. “That I may see,” etc. “That I may rejoice,” etc. They are many, I am but one. “That I may glory,” etc.—G. R.

Verse 6.—In what respects men may be partakers in the sins of their ancestors.

Verses 7, 8.—I. On man's part a darkened understanding, ungrateful forgetfulness, and provocation. II. On God's part: understanding discovering a reason for mercy; memory mindful of the covenant; patience revealing its power.

Verses 7, 8.—I. A special provocation: they murmured at the Red Sea. II. A special deliverance; “Nevertheless,” etc. III. A special Design: “For his own sake”; “That he might make his power known.”—G. R.

Verse 8.—Salvation by grace a grand display of power.

Verse 8.—“Why are men saved?” See “Spurgeon's Sermons,” No. 115. I. The glorious Saviour, “He.” II. The favoured persons, who are they? 1. They were a stupid people: “Our fathers understood not,” etc., ver. 7. 2. An ungrateful people: “They remembered not,” etc., verses 7, 13, 24, etc. 3. A provoking people. III. The reason of salvation: “He saved them for his name's sake.” The name of God is his person, his attributes, and his nature. We might, perhaps, include this also: “My name is in him”—that is, in Christ; he saves us for the sake of Christ, who is the name of God. He saved them that he might manifest his nature: “God is love.” He saved them to vindicate his name. IV. The obstacles removed: “Nevertheless.”

Verse 9.—“Israel at the Red Sea.” See “Spurgeon's Sermons,” No. 72. I. Israel's three difficulties. 1. The Red Sea in front of them. This was not put there by an enemy; but by God himself. The Red Sea represents some great and trying providence placed in the path of every new-born child of God, to try his faith, and the sincerity of his trust in God. 2. The Egyptians behind them,—the representatives of the sins which we thought were dead and gone. 3. The third difficulty was faint hearts within them. II. Israel's three helps. 1. Providence. 2. Their knowledge that they were the covenant people of God. 3. The man,—Moses. So the believer's hope and help is in the God-man Christ Jesus. III. God's grand design in it. To give them a thorough baptism into his service, consecrating them for ever to himself (1 Cor. x. 1, 2).

Verse 9 (second clause).—Dangerous and difficult paths rendered safe and easy by God's leadership.

Verse 11 (second clause).—Song over sins forgiven.

Verses 12—14.—The faith of nature, based on sight, causes transient joy, soon evaporates, dies in utter unbelief, and conducts to greater sin.

Verses 13—15.—I. Mercies are sooner forgotten than trials: “They soon forgot,” etc. We write our afflictions on marble, our mercies upon sand. II. We should wait for God, as well as upon God: “They waited not,” etc. III. Immoderate desire for what we have not of worldly goods, tempts God to deprive us of what we have: ver. 14. IV. Prayer may be answered for evil as well as for good: “He gave them their request,” then smote them with a plague. V. Carnal indulgence is inimical to spiritual-mindedness: ver. 15. Better have a lean body and healthy soul, than a healthy body and leanness of soul. “Poor in this world, rich in faith.” There are few of whom it can be said, “I wish thou mayest prosper and be in health,” etc. (3 John 2).—G. R.

Verse 14.—The wickedness of inordinate desires. I. They are out of place—

“in the wilderness.” II. They are assaults upon God—“and tempted God.” III. They are despisers of former mercies—see preceding verses. IV. They involve solemn danger—see following verse.

Verse 16.—The sin of envy. Its base nature, its cruel actions, its unscrupulous ingratitude, its daring assaults, its abomination before God.

Verse 19.—The sinner as an inventor.

Verses 19—22.—I. The Sin remembered. 1. Idolatry: not forgetting God merely, or disowning him, but setting up an idol in his place. 2. Idolatry of the worst kind: changing the glory of God into the similitude of an ox, etc. 3. The idolatry of Egypt under which they had suffered, and from which they had been delivered. 4. Idolatry after many wonderful interpositions of the true God in their behalf. II. The Remembrance of Sin. 1. For Humiliation. It was the sin of their fathers. 2. For self-condemnation. “We have sinned with our fathers.” It was our nature in them, and it is their nature in us that has committed this great sin.

Verse 23.—Moses, the intercessor, a type of our Lord. Carefully study his pleading as recorded in Exod. xxxii.

Verse 23.—Mediation required: “He said that he would destroy them,” etc. II. Mediation offered: “Moses stood before him in the breach.” III. Mediation accepted: “To turn away his wrath,” etc. Exod. xxxii.—*G. R.*

Verses 24—26.—Murmuring. I. Arises from despising our mercies. II. Is fostered by unbelief. III. Is indulged in all sorts of places. IV. Makes men deaf to the Lord’s voice. V. Provokes great judgments from the Lord.

Verses 24—27.—I. The Rest promised: “The pleasant land.” II. The Refusal of the Rest: “They despised,” etc. III. The Reason of the Refusal: unbelief. “They could not enter in because of unbelief.”—*G. R.*

Verses 30, 31.—The effects of one decisive act for God; immediate, personal, and for posterity.

Verses 32, 33.—I. The afflictions of God’s people are for the trial of their faith. II. The trial of their faith is to bring them from dependence upon circumstances to depend upon God himself. III. The forbearance of God with his people is greater than that of the best of men.—*G. R.*

Verse 33.—I. What it is so to speak unadvisedly. II. What is the great cause of it—“they provoked his spirit.” III. What the results may be.

Verses 34—42.—I. What Israel did not do. They began well, but did not complete the conquest of their foes: ver. 34. II. What they did do: ver. 35—39. 1. They became friendly with them. 2. They adopted their habits: “learned their works.” 3. They embraced their religion: “served their idols.” 4. They imitated their cruelties; ver. 37, 38. 5. They did worse than the heathen (ver. 39), they added wicked inventions of their own. III. What God did to them: ver. 40—42. He gave them into the hands of their enemies, and suffered them to be severely oppressed by them. We must either conquer all our foes or be conquered by them. Bring your shield from the battle or be brought home upon it.—*G. R.*

Verse 37.—Moloch-worship in modern times. Children sacrificed to fashion, wealth, and loveless marriage among the higher classes. Bad example, drinking customs, etc., among the poorer sort. A needful subject.

Verses 44, 45.—Sin in God’s people. I. Is very provoking to God. II. Ensures chastisement. III. Is to be sincerely mourned—“their cry.” IV. Will be graciously forgiven, and its effect removed. So the covenant promises.

Verse 47.—I. An earnest Prayer: “Save us, O Lord,” etc. II. A Believing Prayer: “O Lord our God.” III. A humble Prayer: “Gather us from among the heathen.” IV. A sincere Prayer: “To give thanks unto thy holy name”; to own thy justice and holiness in all thy ways. V. A confident Prayer: “To triumph in thy praise.” None but bruised spices give forth such odours.—*G. R.*

Verse 48.—I. God is to be praised as the “God of Israel.” 1. Of typical Israel. 2. Of the true Israel. II. He is to be praised as the God of Israel under all circumstances: for his judgments as well as for his mercies. III. At all times: “From everlasting to everlasting.” IV. By all people. “Let all the people say, Amen.” V. As the beginning and end of every song: “Praise ye the Lord.”—*G. R.*

Verse 48.—“Let all the people say, Amen.”—The exhortation to universal praise. All men are indebted to the Lord, all have sinned, all hear the gospel, all his people are saved. Unanimity in praise is pleasant, and promotes unity in other matters.