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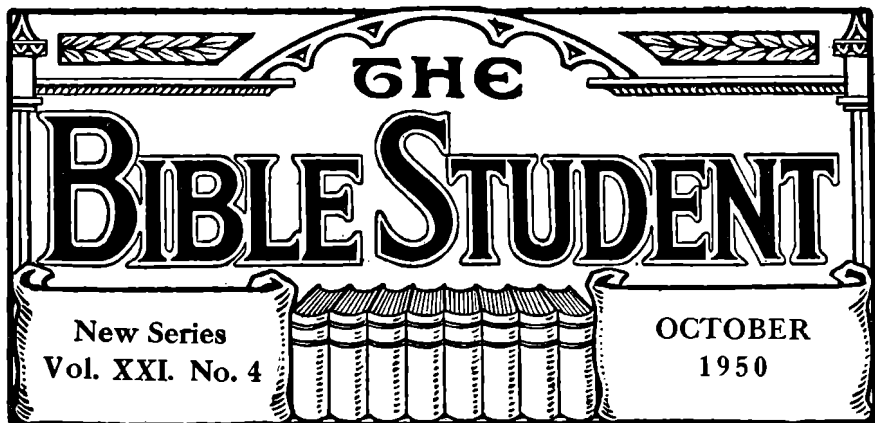
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"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"

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Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD

distant hills; the rolling plains; the well-fed flocks; the rows of tents that housed his disciplined young men; the busy scene in the back court; his own neatly kept tent; the spreading oaks beneath whose greenery the "men" from heaven ate, with Abraham standing by as the host who served and waited. Two milleniums later an inspired pen wrote these words: "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers"; and in the first century the early Christians were so hearty in the display of this homely virtue that for 2000 years their hospitality has been remembered—it is still spoken of.

Seven divine visitations are set down in the life story of the patriarch. The first was in Ur when the God of glory said, "Get thee out of thy country" (Gen. 12:1; Acts 7:1); the second, near Bethel, when at God's call he lifted up his eyes to see his spacious heritage (Gen. 13:14); the third, when he believed in the Lord and it was counted to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:1); the fourth, in his 99th year when the rite of circumcision was instituted (17:10); the fifth, under the oaks of Mamre, the visitation we have just considered; the sixth, a year later, when the bondwoman and her son were cast out (21:10); and the last and most memorable of all, the scene that was enacted on Mount Moriah (22:1).

These heavenly visitations might well be likened to shafts of heavenly light falling on the path of God's pilgrim servant. But it is preeminently in the tent door episode that that light is softened and sweetened with the touch of Home.

CHRIST IN THE FOUR GOSPELS

BY A NAISMITH, M.A.

V. Immanuel as Revealer of the Father

All four Evangelists, and particularly the fourth, present the Lord Jesus Christ not only as the One sent from God but also as the Revealer of God the Creator of all, the Source of all blessing and the Father of His own. In this respect too, a different aspect is emphasized by each, and it is interesting to discover that He Who is the Eternal Son and the Eternal Word is viewed as exhibiting in all He says and does what is predicated of God the Father in the four titles of Fatherhood that occur in the New Testament epistles.

In resurrection the Lord Jesus revealed the full implicate of that gracious association of "His own which were in the world" with Himself in the words He addressed to Mary Magdalene, "Go unto my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God". In his epistles Paul affirms that relationship, making a distinction between its two aspects because each had a different source, and the relationship between the Eternal Son and the Father implies a deeper mystery than that between the Father and those whom regeneration by the Holy Spirit makes "partakers of the Divine nature". It is to those very brethren that Jesus, crowned with glory and honour, says in Heb. 2:12 that He will declare the Father's name. As He said to Philip, He says to us, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father"; and "I am in the Father and the Father in Me" (John 14:9-10). Our blessed Lord, when He was on earth, revealed the Father in many ways,—by His life, teaching, actions and prayers; by what He was, in what He said, in what He did and by what He felt.

I. "Father of Lights"—In MATTHEW

One of the titles of God with reference to His Fatherhood is "Father of lights" (James 1:17) from Whom we derive every good gift and every perfect boon. Already we have remarked in Matthew's Gospel the frequent reference to giving and gifts, and this is the very gospel record in which, through the Lord Jesus Christ, God our Father is unveiled as "the Father of lights", because He is the Source and Creator of that "light unapproachable" in which He, the blessed and only Potentate, dwells (1 Tim. 6:16). "God is light" and therefore the Source of all light, both material and spiritual. His bestowal of light of every kind on His creatures makes Him the Giver of every good gift. Seven characteristics of the Gospel of Matthew may suffice to demonstrate that God is here revealed in Christ as the Father of lights.

(1) The first reference the Lord Jesus makes to the Father is in the beautiful and familiar discourse commonly designated "the Sermon on the Mount". He has been telling His disciples that they are "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world", and concludes this presentation of truth with the exhortation, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven".

(2) The kingship of Jesus the Messiah is specially emphasized

by Matthew. The prerogative of a king is to rule, and the first to exercise that office under the great Creator were the lights that He set in the firmament of heaven, "the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night" (Gen. 1:16).

(3) Lights are represented as situated in the heavens. To "the Father of lights" our Lord gives the title the "Father which is in heaven", or "heavenly Father" fifteen times in Matthew's Gospel. He also speaks of God as "your Father which seeth in secret"; for nothing is hid from "the Father of lights".

(4) In 2 Pet. 1:19 the prophetic Word is called "a lamp shining in a dark place". In Matthew there are more citations from the prophetic Word as fulfilled in Jesus Christ than in any of the other Gospels. Over twenty prophecies are quoted by Matthew from the Old Testament Scriptures, seven of them in the first four chapters of the Gospel record.

(5) Matthew's is the only account that tells us that "the Father of lights" placed His star in the sky to guide seekers to His Son, the Babe of Bethlehem.

(6) The prediction of the advent of the Saviour of the world in Isa. 9:1-2, quoted in Matt. 4:14-16, mentions Jesus of Nazareth as the "Bringer of light". "The people that sat in darkness saw a great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up". Truly this was the greatest Gift from the great Giver, "the Father of lights".

(7) Matthew's account of the transfiguration gives prominence and priority to the radiance of the face of Christ:—"His face did shine as the sun" (Matt. 17:2).

II. "Father of Spirits"—In MARK

(1) Sonship, suffering and service are closely linked in Heb. 12. Of our Lord the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews had said in ch. 5:8:—"Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered". Mark's Gospel is the story of the suffering Servant Who was nevertheless the Eternal Son:—"the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). It is in connection with Sonship and suffering that the title, "Father of spirits", is applied to God: and it is more prominently the record of Mark that reveals Him to us in this aspect.

(2) Our Lord's first recorded reference to the Father in Mark's Gospel is in 8:38, where He predicts His own second advent "in

the glory of His Father with the holy angels". Again it is the letter to the Hebrews (1:14) that teaches us that God's angelic hosts are "all ministering spirits sent forth to serve". The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the "Father of spirits."

(3) Two verses in Mark's record epitomise the story of our Lord's temptation in the wilderness, and twice in that short compass the provision of the Father of spirits for the Incarnate Son Who had taken the form of a servant is mentioned. The Holy Spirit led Him into the wilderness so that He might endure temptation and overcome: the angels "ministered unto Him" in the physical weakness that followed forty days and nights of fasting, forty days' solitude with only the wild beasts near, and the hostile attacks of the Devil.

(4) Now only are the beneficent offices of God's angels emphasized by Mark; the opposition of rebellious, evil and unclean spirits also receive greater prominence here than in any of the other Gospels. There are seven recorded instances of our Lord, the Representative on earth of the "Father of spirits", exercising His authority over the hosts of evil. These are found in Mark 1:23-27; 3:2-34; 3:11; 22-29; 5:1-18; 7:26-30; 9:17.

III. "Father of Mercies"—In LUKE

The background of this title applied to the Father in 2 Cor. 1:3 is one of affliction endured not only by Paul who wrote the words under the Holy Spirit's guidance, but also by the Corinthian saints to whom he addresses his epistle: and the complementary title in the same verse is "the God of all comfort". This is the view of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that the beloved physician presents to the world.

(1) Our Lord Jesus appears in this gospel narrative as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief", as One able to sympathize with the afflicted. He is the great Physician full of compassion for sin-sick souls, the compassionate Priest Whose special care is for the ignorant and erring (Heb. 5:1-2), the Good Samaritan Who is merciful to those whom sin has bruised and broken.

(2) In the recorded discourses of the Lord Jesus in Luke's Gospel His first reference to the Father in heaven occurs in Ch. 6:36:—"Be ye therefore merciful as your Father also is merciful".

(3) In the two ascriptions of praise at the birth of Christ, there are four significant mentions of the mercy of God, two by

Mary the mother of our Lord (1:50, 54) and two by Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist (1:72, 78). In verses 77 and 78 the diffusion of the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins is attributed to "the tender mercy" of the "Father of mercies."

(4) The gracious unfolding of our Lord's mission of mercy is peculiar to Luke's biography of our Lord. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor: he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19).

(5) The great parables of our Lord selected for record by Luke and peculiar to his narrative, are nearly all parables of mercy—the pardoned debtors, the good Samaritan, the barren fig tree, the prodigal son, and the Pharisee and the publican. These are all undoubtedly illustrations of God's mercy; the most familiar of all, that of the prodigal son, which Charles Dickens called "the world's greatest short story," illustrating, as none other does, the compassion and forgiveness of the Father of mercies.

(6) In the story of the crucifixion Luke alone records the prayer of Jesus for His enemies as He hung in agony on the cross to which they had nailed Him—"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do".

(7) Again, Luke is the only Evangelist who describes the dying thief's penitence and the dying Saviour's pardon (23:39-43).

IV. "The Father of Glory"—In JOHN

Even a superficial perusal of the fourth gospel will suffice to convince the reader that "the glory of the Father" as reflected in the Incarnate Son is the outstanding theme of John's writing.

(1) The key that unlocks the great "mystery of godliness" is given to us early in the Gospel:—"No man hath seen God at any time: the only-begotten Son Who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared Him" (John 1:18). The eternal Word, the only-begotten Son, the Lamb of God, the King of Israel—as this wonderful first chapter declares Jesus to be—is the only Person capable of revealing the Father of glory and unfolding the glory of the Father. (For the title see Eph. 1:17).

(2) The first reference to the Father by the apostle John, also found in chapter 1 (verse 14), expressly designates Him as the Father of glory: "we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father".

(3) The Father's house, whether on earth (2:16) or in heaven (14:2) is a place of resplendent glory befitting Him Whose habitation it is.

(4) The teaching of Jesus during His life on earth on the subject of worship is condensed within the compass of a very brief discourse containing 72 Greek words and addressed to a Samaritan woman (4:21-24): and in it our Lord makes it very clear that the object and recipient of all true worship is the "Father of glory".

(5) The Lord Jesus Christ in His longer public discourses recorded in John's Gospel, particularly between chapters 5 and 12, makes frequent reference to His Father as entitled to honour and reverence because He is the all-glorious One.

(6) The Lord's prayer in chap. 17, when He intercedes for "His own which were in the world", is addressed to His Father. In it He mentions several times the glory that He had shared with the Father and the glory He derived from the Father as Man. (John 17:5, 22, 24).

(7) When the Lord appeared in His resurrection body to Mary Magdalene, He spoke of His ascension in the near future to His Father on high, encircled in heavenly glory. (Ch. 20:17).

The revelation of God in the Man Christ Jesus is truly marvellous. The wonder increases when we recognize that Jesus has made known to us a God Who is intrinsically holy, as our Father: and we marvel yet the more when we comprehend that the Father's character and attributes have been unfolded to us with such fulness and perfection.

Holy Father ! all-excelling wisdom, power and grace are Thine :

Heavenly Spirit ! from Thy dwelling radiant righteousness doth shine.