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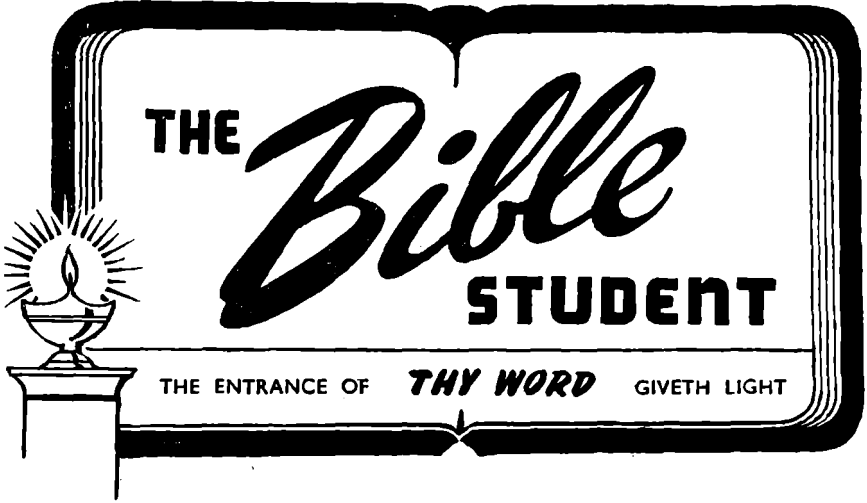
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Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD

suffering which befell him in the first instance because satan presented God with a challenge that could not be ignored was overruled by God for Job's own benefit. When he was 'exercised' by it, it produced in him 'the peaceable fruit of righteousness' (Heb. 12:11). 'Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world' (C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p. 81).

A number of years ago, Dr Campbell Morgan wrote a book with the suggestive title, *The Answers of Jesus to Job*. Questions raised in Job's day about the deepest issues of life had inevitably to remain unanswered until Christ came and gave the answer. And when He came, He gave the answer not only in word but in deed. This is supremely so with regard to the central question of the book of Job—the problem of suffering. For when we see our Lord accept and fulfil the prophecy of the obedient and suffering Servant of Isa. 53, bearing the sin of many in order to present them righteous before God, there we have the true answer to the problem—if only we could grasp it.

THE THEOPHANIES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

By ALEX SOUTTER

VII. The Ascent of the Angel

Manoah, the father of Samson, belonged to the tribe of Dan. Dan was notorious for his double dealing. The Danites, numerically, were second only to Judah, yet the land they inherited was smaller than that assigned to any other tribe. They dwelt in the far north. One would not naturally look for godly leaders in that region so far removed from the chosen centre of God's heritage, but often-times it is in unlooked for places and by means of unlooked for persons that God begins to work. The need of deliverance was certainly great. The Philistines had become Israel's oppressors. No foe terrorised Israel more than they. They originally came up from the region of Egypt and seized on a

fertile strip of land, a part of the S.W. of Palestine. Their entry into the land was not by crossing the Jordan as God had appointed. They would seek a heritage not by way of the Cross but only through their fleshly striving. 'Spiritually they stand for those enemies of the soul who oppress us through our compromise with the world.' They entered the land without Faith's title deeds. They were trespassers in the sphere where only the circumcised were destined to dwell. They were descended from Casluhim, the son of Misraim, who peopled Egypt. Their domination in and around the area where they settled is evidenced by the fact that they gave to Palestine its name—Palestine, the land of the Palestines or Philistines. Moses uses the name as early as in Exod. 15:14.

Manoah and his wife were a godly pair. They were well matched. What the one lacked the other possessed. They lived in harmony. They hid nothing from one another. Manoah's wife was a true helpmeet and if her virtues were greater than her husband's, she did nothing to parade her excellencies. She was godly, womanly, transparent, and full of that rather uncommon virtue which we call common sense. When at the end the Angel left Manoah with certain fearful forebodings (Manoah's own fault, of course) his wife hastened to his relief by showing that even though the Angel was none other than God, there was nothing to fear, for had He not graciously received a burnt offering and a meat offering at their hands? And had He not brought to them the glad tidings that they would have a son who would deliver down-trodden Israel?

Self-denial (vv. 2-5). The Angel of Jehovah appeared to this woman when she was alone. A son was promised. He would be a Nazarite and would begin to deliver Israel from the enemy's oppression. For the barren woman to be promised a son was wonderful enough; but to be told that he would be the national leader that Israel so sorely needed was wonderful beyond words. No woman in Israel in her day and generation was so honoured as she was. She virtually became the first woman in the land. But honour goes hand in hand with responsibility. Only the well-disciplined can bear prosperity. Therefore Samson's unnamed mother must suffer much self-denial in the days and months that preceded his birth. He was, like Samuel and John Baptist, to be a Nazarite for life. The Nazarite must needs set his face as a

flint to renounce not only all sinful pleasure but much that was legitimate and lawful for others. Nothing of the vine could be tasted—earthly joys were renounced. No dead body could be touched—earthly uncleanness was forsaken. No razor was to be used on his head—reproach was borne for his vows (I Cor. 11:14). These same vows should be upon us today—no fleshly indulgence, no moral impurity, no shunning the reproach of Christ. See I Cor. 9:25; I Tim. 4:22; Heb. 11:26. And mark this: the mother of the child must first tread this narrow path of self-denial if she would have her son to tread it. We cannot expect those who follow us to reach higher heights than we ourselves have scaled. Like *guru*, like disciple.

The Angel brought to the woman a promise, a warning and a prophecy. The promise related to the gift of a son; the warning (which we have considered) related to the conduct of the expectant mother; and the prophecy to the saving work that Samson would perform. He would begin to save Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. Incomplete devotion kept him from completing his work; nevertheless he stood at the head of a notable succession—Samuel, Jonathan, David and others continued the good work he began.

Home witness (vv. 6, 7). Manoah's wife lost no time in telling her husband all that the Angel had told her. She certainly had a remarkable story to tell. It concerned One Whom she called a man of God but Whom she likened to an Angel, very terrible. Her witness was direct, simple, concise and clear. It remains a model for all time, a model for every loyal-hearted witness for God on earth. She told what she saw and heard; what she knew and what she did not know; she spoke with perfect freedom of speech and her speech revealed perfect clarity of thought; she told out the nature of her God-given honour and of her God-ordained responsibility; her witness gave due heed to what God had said but no heed to her own opinion. The more we look into these 180 words from the lips of Manoah's wife, the more we are impressed by them.

Prayer (vv. 8-10). 'Let the man of God come again'. Such was the burden of Manoah's prayer. Come again! Two blessings are better than one. Two assurances are better than one. Two recipients of blessing are better than one. Manoah longed to share

with his wife in the direct hearing of the message. Nor is this alien to the method employed by God in His dealings with His people. 'Abraham, Abraham' (Gen. 22:11) betokens God's loving solicitude for His servant. 'Verily, verily' (John 3:3) reveals our Lord's emphasis on certain vital truths. And the reiteration of certain happenings in Scripture (cp. 2 Kings 20 and Is. 38) is part of the divine plan to imprint on the mind the divine precepts. The fact that Manoah's prayer was so effectual on this all-important occasion suggests that he had formed the habit of prayer long before this. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man is neither spasmodic nor fitful. It continues in storm and sunshine, on the mount and in the vale. Manoah's reward was great. The revelation he beheld in answer to his prayer was directly related to the wondrous Cross and the wondrous Ascension of Israel's Anointed. The Angel of God 'came again' to Manoah's wife as she sat in the field. She ran to tell her husband: 'Behold the man has appeared to me that came to me that day'. What day? How many days had elapsed between that day and this when the man came again? We do not know, but of this we are sure: If the woman was anxious that the Man should not be kept waiting a moment too long, so the divine Hearer of Prayer would see to it that this godly couple did not have to wait a moment too long for the fulfilment of Manoah's brief but earnest prayer.

The woman led the way; the husband followed. Their quest was real and whole-hearted. Manoah opened the conversation. His query had to do with the coming child. His wife remained silent. Her quietness befitted the occasion, for her husband as head of the home, must needs receive first-hand from the Angel the divine instructions. The A.V. in v. 12 'How shall we order the child?' is changed in the New Translation as follows: 'What shall be the child's manner and his doing?' But the Angel in reply only pointed to one thing, namely, the mother's responsibility. Let the mother keep right; that was the best way to ensure the child's well being.

The Name (vv. 15-18). 'Let us detain thee', said Manoah. The Angel did not altogether refuse to be detained (cp. Gen. 18:5; Judg. 6:18), but He made it plain that the meal Manoah thought of preparing would not be acceptable. But a sacrifice to Jehovah would. The temporal must give place to the spiritual. Then came the question: 'What is thy name?' He wished the

Stranger to disclose His identity. So did Jacob (Gen. 32:29) but Jacob's request was refused. The Angel said it was Secret. There is much regarding His Person that still remains secret, and beyond man's finite comprehension. Yet we rejoice that His name has now been revealed—Jesus (Matt. 1:21). The history of the Ark illustrates the sacred mystery that enshrouds the Person of our beloved Lord. When curious eyes looked into the Ark at Beth-shemesh, 50,000 men perished (1 Sam. 6:19); Uzzah wrongly handled it and he also perished (2 Sam. 6:7). We dare not intrude into those things we have not seen (Col. 2:18). Matthew Henry says 'We have not what we ask when we ask we know not what'. But this same Hebrew word (*Peli*) is also rendered 'wonderful' in Isa. 9:6, and this thought is sustained throughout the narrative, for in v. 19 we read that the Angel did 'wondrously'.

Great God of wonders! All Thy ways,
 Display Thine attributes divine,
 But the bright glories of Thy grace
 Above Thine other wonders shine;
 Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
 Or who has grace so rich and free?

The comparisons and contrasts between Gideon's experience and Manoah's should here be noted. These two Theophanic scenes are found in the same book and this fact links chapters 6 and 13 very closely. Note, first, the contrasts: Gideon's name means 'feller' or 'hewer'; Manoah's means 'rest'. Gideon stood alone in his father's house; Manoah and his wife stood side by side. Gideon was called to fight; Manoah to eschew pleasure. Gideon offered unleavened cakes, kid and broth; Manoah offered kid and meat offering. Gideon's offering was consumed by fire from the rock; Manoah's by the flame in which the Angel ascended. The comparisons are as follows: In both cases the deliverance of Israel from oppression was the end in view; both Gideon and Manoah were weak vessels, unlikely ones to be called to places of honour; both had victories to win in their own homes; both offered a *minchah* or meat offering; both offered it on the rock, and on the altar; fire and flame appeared miraculously in either case; the result in each case was a fear of death; for each display of power led to the identity of the Angel of the Lord being disclosed. He was God.

The Offering and Ascension (vv. 19-23). This great mystic Being, Man (v. 11) and God (v. 22) manifested Himself thus in grace and in power to His earthly people. His first manifestation was near Beer-sheba (Gen. 16:14); His last in Dan. Dan to Beer-sheba—as if to span the whole life of Israel. Manoah did his part in presenting his offering; then the Angel wrought; need we wonder that all the wondering pair could do was to look on? What a sight met their gaze! The fire doubtless had been lit by Manoah. The fire consumed the offering and as its flame leapt heavenwards the Angel ascended in it. It is surely fitting that this 7th Theophany should end in this glorious manner. The emphasis here is not (in type) on the Death of the Victim but on the Ascension of the Victor. His sacrificial work was wondrously complete. Naught could be added to it. It is by reason of its completeness and perfection that now the Ascension is seen to be equally wonderful. It was in a flame that Jehovah appeared to Moses. Now in a flame that ascended to heaven He, that same wondrous Lord, took His departure from Manoah. Mark how the altar and the flame are connected. 'The flame of the altar' it is called in v. 20, for it 'went up from off the altar'. The altar speaks of the Cross; the ascending flame of that which followed after—Christ's resurrection and ascension. Our Lord always linked the two together—His death and resurrection. As we think of that miraculous departure of the Angel our minds turn to Him Who was parted from His own and carried up into heaven, and as they looked up they saw a cloud receiving Him out of their sight. He was made higher than the heavens. He passed upwards, through those successive ranks of Angelic beings described by Paul in a four-fold way—principality, power, might and dominion. Above them all He ascended till the very highest pinnacle of glory was reached and the Father's voice was heard; 'Sit Thou on My right hand till I make Thine enemies thy footstool'. (See Luke 24:51; Acts. 1:9; Heb. 7:26; Eph. 1:21; Ps. 110:1).

The everlasting doors, the King
 Received with loud acclaim;
 And heaven's hosts in everything
 Gave glory to His name.