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Messianic Mountaintops

by

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V. BALAAM

Jacob's farewell to his sons was his farewell to the world and to his life which he called short and full of trouble. However, this patriarch had his face set toward hope. He had "waited for God's salvation," and in the revelation given him he saw Christ's day as did Abraham.

Not yet does Judah take over or actually begin his reign. It was clear enough to all the tribes that what Jacob said was of the future. But the plan of salvation goes on and Israel's sons must move on to the Promised Land. Centuries flow on like the River Nile they knew so well. With the rule of the Pharaoh that knew not Joseph comes the time of great tribulation and oppression, when it seemed God had forgotten His people. Many a heart longed for the hero to whom would be given "the necks of their enemies"—so little hope, so little help, and seemingly no growth of knowledge of their God. To be sure, individual Israelites show their faith. The guild of midwives has two leaders that stand up against the king's method of population control. They do so in faith and are blessed. By faith the parents of Moses hid him for three months. But another two generations pass before the time of tribulation and slavery comes to an end. A tremendous explosion of miracles, of judgment and delivery, takes place and Israel is on the move back to its original homeland.

Nothing can stop this thrust, not the sea, nor the Amalekite, nor the Golden Calf. The forty years imposed on Israel for balking at the last moment before taking God's country are a training period. The time comes when Israel, united, tough, durable, and, above all, blessed by the Lord of hosts rolls like a Juggernaut over people and nations. God is with her and all enemies must flee before her. Every time the cloud of God's glory lifts from the tabernacle and every time the ark moves forward Moses prays: "Rise up, O Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered and let them that hate thee flee before thee."

Not far from the River Jordan lies the plain of Moab. Here the great camp was established to gather new power for the final thrusts against the nations standing between the people and their God-ordained goal. By this time the terror of their conquest has gripped the proud gentile nations. At this time a voice is heard saying wonderful things about Israel and its God. Not a prophet of their own people but a soothsayer is called to speak words that are like Messianic mountaintops from whose height a panorama of future events stretches to the very horizon of eternity.

Not that the prophecy of Balaam was the first sign after many years of lightless and sightless wanderings. Not at all. Ever since that burning bush the signs of God's salvation and covenant were multiplied to the people. Hardly a page of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers is without Messianic character. From the type of redemption from Egypt to the symbol-enwrapped tabernacle, from the declaration of God's solemn covenant to the establishment of

sacrifices and regulations every day was filled with the reminders of God's promises and grace. Clearly the Lord was with them. They drank from Christ the Rock and ate the bread from heaven. As they prepare to enter and are near Jericho the events that are recorded in the chapters of Numbers 22-24 occur.

Balak, son of Zippor, was king of the Moabites. He was awed at the mystifying might of Israel. Even the conference with the Midianites and the result of it affirmed the fact that Israel was licking up all nations "as an ox licks up the grass of the field." Human help and natural strength promised no help. There must be something that can stop Israel. In superstitious despair a message is sent to Balaam. He is to curse Israel.

Balaam must have had quite a reputation for power. In the mind of the king and his counselors Balaam is the last court of appeal. The desperate situation and their frantic call for help as well as the bribes they offer and the pay they promise speak for the reputation of Balaam as a great magus.

The subsequent detailed account of the message to Balaam and the renewed and redoubled effort when the first invitation is declined heighten the expectation and increase the tension. It would be interesting to take a close look at Balaam. Famous as he is, he appears to be a ridiculous imposter. The holy writer seems to have a humorous gleam in his eye as he tells the story. Balaam is a mystery. He knows who the true God is. He knows of God's covenant with Israel. He knows God Yahweh is the most high God. Was he a believer? Did he worship God? He obeys God, fears God in his way, and God does reveal to him what the future holds for Israel and all the world. It seems that he has the devil of avarice and covetousness riding him. When God for His own purpose lets Balaam go to meet with Balak and when dreams of new riches dance through Balaam's head, God gives him a deadly warning and Balaam's amazing ass speaks to him. The disconcerting interference prepares Balaam not to give way to deceit and lies for the sake of money and fame. Balaam arrives and is received with all pomp and circumstance. From here on Balaam becomes the solemn leader for the liturgy of hate that Moab wants carried out against Israel. So the magic begins. Balaam is led to a mountain range from which he has a view of the far-spread camp of the Israelites from one end to the other—as if he thus were better able to put the "hex" on this people. Now comes a day of sacrifices and worship in which, no doubt, the people, and above all, the king and all his court participate. The ceremonies are solemn. Seven altars and seven oxen and seven rams are prepared. **And as the burnt offerings are made** Balaam goes to a high place by himself to commune with God. God speaks to Balaam, and He seems to indicate that the number seven proves that this is really a sacrifice to the true God. God sends Balaam with a first message back **to Balak and the people. Balak and all the princes stand by the altar** of burnt offerings in expectation of the oracle that would save them. Balaam knows he will more than disappoint them. Nevertheless he

frankly explains that he cannot curse where God blesses and recites the solemn chant of the revelation God has given him concerning the people (Num. 23:9-10):

For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall not be reckoned among the nations.

Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!

What Balaam has seen is something both physical and spiritual, both for time and eternity. This seer knows that he sees bliss beyond human power and riches. He can but wish he were a member of this people. Himself faced with the realities of life and death, he can but wish he could die the death of the righteous, a death better than the life of the godless.

Balak knows what Balaam has said is not a curse but a blessing. As expected, Balak remonstrates. But Balaam tells him he cannot do otherwise. Nevertheless, Balak wants to try again. At the rites of augury practiced by idolators, it was not uncommon for a second test to be made if the first was not favorable to the plans of the worshipper. Sometimes, therefore, another animal was slain and another liver examined for a better sign. In this case Balak thinks a relocation of the worship service might bring a different prediction. He prevails on Balaam to try again, and Balaam has the secret hope that God might change His mind as God seemed to have done when Balaam asked a second time to be permitted to go with the messengers of Balak.

There follows a second solemn worship and a second set of altars and a second series of sacrifices. Perhaps the first time something vital had been neglected or some rite had been imperfectly performed. But the second try brings only more glory to Israel. It is like preaching the glory of the chosen people to the gentiles. Some day the gentiles were to walk in the light of Israel's rising, but as yet Israel is a terror to them. Not by chance is Israel the power and threat that it seems. It is a chosen people. God does not change His mind. God is not man. For centuries God had promised what He was going to do for Israel. And what He has promised He will do. The covenant of grace is the blessing of forgiveness. Balak believes Israel to be no better than his own people—but is mistaken. But Balaam tells him that God will not see iniquity in Jacob or perverseness in Israel (23:21)—rather, that Israel has God; it has Immanuel; its king is its God.

Balaam has heard in spirit the triumphant roar rising from the people as their king is presented to them. The cheer of victory pervades the camp of Israel. It is as if this seer hears the song of the angels, archangels, and of all the company of heaven. He hears the *hosannas* and *hallelujahs* of all believers. The picture or vision Jacob had of the victorious lion of Judah is part of Balaam's vision. (23:24) . . . Balak is told this people is invincible.

What now? Balak is desperate. He grasps at straws. Perchance Balaam could at least work out a compromise, something that is neither total blessing nor total curse. This is like the theological compromise that would neither approve nor condemn doctrines. Hence, Balak makes a third try. How desperate the enemies of Israel have become. How ridiculous this waste of time and labor and sacrifices. Again a new location, again seven altars, again a new set of sacrificial animals must be slaughtered. This time Balaam does not ask to be excused so that he might commune with God. This time he faces toward Israel, which he can plainly see from the high spot chosen by Balak, a summit on Mt. Peor. The words of Balaam's oracle flow with majestic beauty, a beauty we can only appreciate as we remember that the seer here emphasizes the source of this revelation. He is inspired. God has come over him. God has thrown him into a trance. God has opened his inner eyes to see God's vision.

What does he see this time? He sees the conquest of the Promised Land. He sees them settled in the land where milk and honey flow and he sees a king greater than famous Agag ruling them. The vision concludes with convincing logic that God who brought Israel out of Egypt (by this time everybody knows with what mighty wonders it was done) is the God who will finish His work. This was said in the previous vision. This is what God has wrought. Again Balaam confirms the vision of the Lion of Judah and with it the other high promises made to the patriarchs: "Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee," a promise first given to Abraham (Gen. 12:3).

Now Balak's patience is at an end. He bangs his hands together and tells Balaam to run for his life or he will tear him to pieces. Frustrated, Balaam feels the injustice. Had he not told the messengers this very thing! Balaam cannot do otherwise. Not only had God given him the message; He had also made him proclaim it. Was there ever such a prophet, unwilling but forced to declare the blessing!

Now something happens not expected. Balaam, it seems, has seen more than he has told. The vision on the third try seems less than the second. In truth it was probably even greater than the first and the second. Balaam, too, is angry. We can see him turn to the king and look into that face purple with rage: "I'll give you a bonus. I'll really tell you what will happen to you and your crowd. I'll tell you what the end will be like."

Thus begins one of the most brilliant and beloved predictions of the Messiah and His Kingdom. Balaam, not without good reason, introduces the oracle with the solemn claim that this is God's Word. For all who know the character of the Scriptures as the inspired Word of God this is a sample of how powerfully the truth comes to men from the Spirit of God. This is inspiration in its most intense form. Those who speak of the concept of verbal inspiration as a theory and smile at those who consider it infallible should know that the Spirit of God can make an ass speak truth, can make the ass'

owner see the truth, can even make a pagan high priest prophecy. Here the seer tells what emanated from God. He describes it (Num. 24:15-16): "The man whose eyes are open hath said: he hath said which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open." This is direct revelation, prophetic vision, exclusion of the outer sense but an opening of eyes for a vision of a knowing and seeing what the Almighty and Highest God reveals.

Whenever God speaks through man, God makes use of a man's knowledge, gifts, and skills, but He always says exactly what He wants to say, whether the man, in this case Balaam, is willing or not. God speaks by inspiration. His Word is a new exalted peak of the Messianic massive mountain of God's Word:

"I see Him, but not now;

I behold Him, but not nigh:

a star shall come forth out of Jacob,

and a scepter shall rise out of Israel;

it shall crush the forehead of Moab,

and break down all the sons of Sheth.

Edom shall be dispossessed,

Seir also, his enemies, shall be dispossessed,

while Israel does valiantly.

By Jacob shall dominion be exercised,

and the survivors of cities be destroyed!"

Then he looked on Amalek, and took up his discourse,
and said,

"Amalek was the first of the nations,

but in the end he shall come to destruction."

And he looked on the Kenite, and took up his discourse,
and said,

"Enduring is your dwelling place,

and your nest is set in the rock;

Nevertheless Kain shall be wasted

Until Asshur shall take you away captive?

And he took up his discourse, and said,

"Alas, who shall live when God does this?

But ships shall come from Kittim

and shall afflict Asshur and Eber;

and he also shall come to destruction."

It may be Balak knew that in order to defeat Israel one had to cut Israel off from the power and blessing of their God. This was very clear to Balak when he went to Balaam: without the blessings of God Israel would perish miserably. But Israel had not perished in Egypt. Israel had not perished in the wilderness, and Israel had a hold on God as long as it trusted in His blessing. Jacob, wrestling

with God, conquered by his hold on God: "I leave thee not, except thou bless me." Israel would never be defeated as long as it trusted in God's promises. How could any world power triumph over the people whose very existence was by God's grace and truth? God held His hand over Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. A Laban may pursue Jacob in hot anger till God stops him and orders him not to speak in wrath to Jacob. And when Jacob fears the wrath of Esau, God promises him protection. There is even a possibility that Balaam might be an Edomite. Edom had a reputation for wisdom. At all events, Balaam knows that there is no way of cutting Israel's lifeline.

What Balaam tries later was a demonic trick and shows Balaam never forgot that he lost a king's ransom because of Israel. But now, in his disgust with Balak, he angrily throws open the window to the future that has given him a view that reaches out beyond the present, almost into eternity, that reaches out above and beyond all known and unknown powers. We, who have seen the fulfillment of the vision granted this seer, must admire the unification of the general and the particular—the abstract and the concrete—blending into a portrayal that communicates what all Christians confess: Christ is Victor over all His enemies.

This section of the vision shows order and symmetry. Four oracles are given. Four times it is said: "He took up his sentence." These "sentences" are called *neum*, usually a term for a prophetic divine oracle. The translation of the King James Version is "parable" for *meshal*; the Revised Standard Version says "discourse." The context shows each of these sections to be a prophetic vision referring to the relation between Israel and the nations of the world. The progression of thought leads from Moab to Edom, from Edom to Amalek, to the Kenites, to other future world powers. The sampling of enemies is interesting as it shows nations that have a blood relation to Israel: Edom-Esau and Moab. The enmity of the gentiles is represented by the nation that spearheaded the attack against the covenant people, Amalek. The peculiar historic relation of the Kenites to Israel is a sample of nations that share blessings with the people of God while not completely becoming a part of them. The final sight of a distant future speaks of awesome conflicts among world powers that also shall "perish forever"—world history in a condensed form, representing nations that become typical for all future powers, powers that are all destined to be shattered by the scepter of iron that will rise out of Judah.

Balaam says: "I see Him . . . yet not now." The one whom Jacob saw in his son Judah, Shiloh, the Lion of Judah, now is seen also by Balaam as an individual, a future person. "I sight Him . . . yet not near." Time and space are no barrier to God's revelation. Far away yet very real is the One of whom Balaam speaks. The seer sees Him, focuses on Him, describes Him in His power and victory and yet knows this to be an event of eschatological significance—an event showing the way to full realization of God's plans.

"There shall come a star from Jacob" is parallel to the sentence, "and a scepter arises from Israel." This is easy to understand as a reference to the One seen and envisaged. He is represented by a star. A star is symbolic of power and has been used by almost all ancient civilizations as representing a ruler in his glory. The mentioning of a scepter in the parallel statement confirms the fact that a ruler is seen. The scepter of Judah is mentioned in the previous vision of Jacob, and as we have noticed in the other "sentences" of Balaam, he refers to the testament of Jacob as though he were familiar with the First Book of Moses. It is interesting to note, as does W. Vischer, that the word for scepter in the Hebrew has also been used to describe a comet. The star "takes his course," says the text. Both star and scepter are seen arising from Jacob whose covenant name is Israel. The scepter smashes the corners or temples of Moab and the crown or head of the sons of Sheth.

The scepter was often used as a war-club. In a relief presenting a pharaoh executing the chiefs of his enemies, we see him using this war-club to smash the skulls of the defeated kings kneeling before him. Beautifully wrought clubs or scepters of ebony and ivory have been found in Egypt's tombs, and there can be no misunderstanding of the dire message Balaam gives Moab, who must hear for the first time what he had feared might come to pass if Israel were not stopped in its Juggernaut-like progress. Balaam "advertises," as the KJV puts it, what these people will do to Balak's people in the latter, the future days. Total destruction and execution at the hands of Israel, a shattering of the head or crown of the sons of confusion. Jeremiah 48:45 quotes this verbatim, except that the word for vertex (German: *Scheitel*) is spelled in Numbers *Karkar* and only here so. In Jeremiah the more frequent spelling is *Kadkad*. In this parallelism Moab is the same as the sons or children of confusion. In Jeremiah the KJV translates the word with "the tumultuous ones." This might mean "warmongers" from the verb "to seethe, to roar." Moab's destruction is announced as punishment for opposing Israel (24:9) in quoting almost verbatim God's word to Abraham: "Blessed be every one who blesses you and cursed be every one who curses you." A curse flung at Israel is, according to God's promise, a boomerang that falls back on the curser. The history of the people of God has shown this time and again, not only under the dispensations of God in ancient days, but even to our day. God's people, the true Israel, are protected by God and avenged by Him.

While the fire of God's wrath was directed against the enemies of Israel, the Edomites, who had refused to let their "brothers" pass through their land and had nevertheless been spared because of their descent from Esau, Jacob's brother, were yet not to escape God's vengeance. Edom and Mt. Seir are parallel terms and the fate of Edom is foreseen as being overcome by an Israel fighting valiantly. The fulfillment began in 2 Samuel 8:13-14: "And David won a name for himself. When he returned he slew eighteen thousand

Edomites in the Valley of Salt. And he put garrisons in Edom and all the Edomites became David's servants." The prophet Obadiah dedicates his work to a prediction of Edom's fate. About one hundred and thirty years before Christ, it ceased to be a nation.

The next sentence (24:19) is formed by only two words in the Hebrew text: "One shall rule out of Jacob." If we take the local meaning of the preposition, we have the idea of one whose rule proceeds from Jacob, which is a natural rendering of the words since the star and scepter go out from Jacob and Judah. There is one that will rule and his rule will be total; even the survivors of the cities will be destroyed. Even they who have succeeded in finding refuge in walled cities are not safe from the wrath of this king. It cannot be denied that much of the prediction fits David, but the totality of victory and the subjugation of all and every enemy is better understood of Shiloh, who will bring peace by His victory and before whom all nations will bow. All knees finally are bent in obeisance before the Messiah.

But Balaam goes on in his accounting of the eschatological victory of the Star of Judah. He looks in Amalek's direction, as if he can see the land and people from afar and sees how their end will come. "Amalek was the first of the nations" sounds like praise, but here it gives reason for God's condemnation. When Israel had truly become God's covenant people ready to take the victorious road to the Promised Land, the first of the gentile nations to be their enemies and to waylay them on the path to God's country was Amalek. The scene of Moses praying with uplifted hands with Aaron and Hur holding up the prophet's arms all through the battle is a familiar one.

Less familiar is the subsequent dedication of Israel to perpetual war against Amalek. Moses had to write this resolution of God into the book and built a memorial altar called "The Banner of Yahweh" to put this solemn duty on Israel to have war with Amalek until it was extinct. Later when Saul is reminded of this duty and does defeat Amalek, God is very angry that the war is not completed in total victory. Samuel, fired with the Spirit of Judgment, deposes Saul for sparing the best of the cattle and Agag, the king of the Amalekites. Amalek had made itself a symbol and spearhead of enmity against the people of God. For that they were forever damned to defeat. The lesson is clear that the King of kings will triumph over Agag (Gog or Magog), that is, will finally defeat all his enemies.

A third oracle deals with a friendly nation. The Kenites had affiliated themselves with Israel. If the tribal head was Kain, he has had no connection with the fratricidal Cain. Moses had married a Kenite woman. Jethro and Hobab had joined Israel in the wilderness and offered counsel and guidance to the people of Israel. It was farsighted of them to leave their Rock Horeb to nest with the Rock that went with Israel. They were people that blessed Israel and in turn were blessed. They never were fully integrated. They never became a part of Israel. The statement that follows leaves the

hearer puzzled. "Shall Kain be wasted or destroyed [till?] Asshur carry you captive?"—a rhetorical question that seems to imply that Kain will be safe as long as Israel is safe. When Assyria carried away the Jews, also Kenites were taken, and they finally ceased to exist.

A fourth and final picture of the turbulent future is revealed to Balaam. It is the cataclysmic crash of nations in conflict. "Woe! Who shall live when God does this?" The God of history will end all history of man. Before the end comes, an end that is still more remote in the future than the Messiah's coming to rule, the haze of distant time lies over a scene, marvelous and dreadful to behold: Balaam sees a fleet of ships from Kittim, from the direction of Italy, bringing conquest over world powers like Assyria and Eber. Immediately the vision shows that this invader shall also be destroyed. How? Why? Because God does this. Because even a power like Alexander's or like Rome's will not be permanent. All powers of this world finally will be destroyed, for the God of Israel will send Him who shall destroy all His enemies and be the final victor over all.

Balaam's prophecy closes with the bursting forth of a gigantic all-consuming fire putting an end to the world that was. Above all the battle and bloody warfare, above the smoke and fire of God's wrath, we look to the Star serenely shining in the sky, leading His people from victory to victory.

That this is the understanding of these prophecies is evident from the words of Christ Himself speaking in the last book of the Bible, Revelation 22:16: "I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star." Filled with the Holy Spirit, Zechariah blesses the God of Israel, "for He has visited and redeemed His people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David." In his Benedictus, Zechariah speaks of the "light from on high that looks upon us" when the Messiah comes. Peter speaks of this lightbearer as the bright and morning star shining in our hearts. Above all, we are forced to see in the story of the wise men, searching for the newborn King of the Jews because they have seen His star in the east, a line leading back to the prophet Balaam, whose oracles may have been alive in the tradition of other members of a guild of magi. These traditions were considered sacred and may have from then on been a part of the archives. Another wise man, Daniel, assuredly knew what was written in the law of Moses and just as certainly made as little secret of this prophecy of old as he did of his own faith and prophecies. It is hardly credible that the wise men coming to Judea to worship the King announced by the star would have been ignorant of the words of Balaam. They came, they saw, they believed and worshipped.

For our day the light from above illuminates our way to the Lion of Judah, the Star of Jacob, the King of kings. As we hear the ancient oracles spoken by the renegade seer we glorify God and take warning that we may not be like Balaam, who knew the sayings of God and saw the vision of the Almighty but would not wor-

ship. Balaam's end is tragic. Once more he tried to break Israel away from its God. A plot to draw her into idolatry and adultery succeeds only too well, but not fully, and it is only by the grace of God that Israel once more is spared. Balaam, later captured, is executed with the leaders that conspired with him against the Lord and His Anointed. Perhaps the scepter of a leader in Judah smashed his temples.

VI. MOSES

The light the Old Testament writings shed on God's plan of salvation is often underestimated. As we read the Scripture statements, often very brief and succinct, we are likely to miss much of their import. We are thankful, therefore, that there always have been excellent and faithful students of the Scriptures who meditated long and fervently on what the prophets wrote down. Even the prophets themselves were constantly "searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ, which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (1 Peter 1:11). They searched diligently, for it was "the salvation of souls" they were searching for. As did the prophets, so did their readers. It is interesting to see how many among the Jews, both young and old, were expectant and waiting. Some great promises were made in the long ago, and we have evidence that the people of that time understood them.

However, some of them misinterpreted the hope held out to them. Eve, for example, was mistaken in her identifying of "the Man who is Yahweh" as her son Cain. But it must be added that she was not mistaken in her believing that God would send the Man-Deliverer from her sin and the sins of all others. Similarly, many Jews at the time of Christ had wrong ideas and notions of what the Messiah should be like. But surprisingly clear to them, even the simple ones, was the basic concept of the One who should come. We remember, too, the Samaritan woman at the well. She states very clearly what hope she harbored: "I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when He comes He will tell us all things."

Now where did she get that? The Samaritans accepted only the Five Books of Moses. It must have been from these that she knew of the Messiah to come. But what passage might she be referring to when she says, "He will tell us all things"? There is one passage that speaks of the coming of the Messiah as a prophet who will be listened to. This passage is Deuteronomy 18:15-19. It is from the vantage point of the Gospels and their reports that we get a clear hold of this prophecy given to Moses and delivered by him to the people. The Gospels are rich in reference to an eschatological prophet. Often it is "the" prophet, who was to come into the world, very often, too, simply "a prophet." Some waited for Enoch or Elijah, who had not died and who might return at any time. The people knew, too, that Malachi had promised the return of Elijah before the final day of salvation. The meditations of the believing hearts, it seems, became more expectantly tense as the fullness of time came. We have the record of their exclamations of joy and even their astonishment or fear when they saw the miracles Jesus did. However, not only were the Messianic prophecies in Genesis and Exodus and the symbolic significance of Leviticus a source of their faith in a coming Savior, but particularly Moses' farewell prediction of a new prophet like unto himself was alive in their hearts.

According to the testimony of the Scriptures, Deuteronomy 18:15-19 is another Messianic mountaintop; indeed, a vantage point

from which Moses was able to look into the future—one that comforted him at the thought of leaving his people now ready to cross the Jordan and move into their Promised Land though he knew that this, too, would be a Paradise not without temptation.

In one of his farewell speeches Moses tells the people that he has been carrying this promise from God in his heart. Whether he implies that he told no one till now is not clear, but it is clear that he remembers the day God told him of the coming Prophet. It was that unforgettable day when God came down on Horeb and spoke to the people and the people were so terrified at the voice of God that they told Moses: "Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God." Moses reports that God said, "What they have spoken is well." God intended not to speak to them directly anymore. He would speak to them through Moses and especially through the Prophet. "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken."

The verses preceding this are a warning not to engage in the abominations of the nations in Palestine. Especially mentioned are the diviners, enchanters, witches, necromancers and the like. The people of the land got their guidance from the demonic and idolatrous powers. Israel was not to have just a "religion" but "revelation." The prophets that God would give them should guide them. They may even encounter some prophets that are false prophets. To them they were not to listen. Instead, they should listen to the Prophet like unto Moses, who would speak to them. If they would not listen to Him, God would "require it of them."

We can easily tone down the Messianic color of this word of God by regarding the term *Prophet* as a collective term, as if God here established a class of men, as in the case of priests and Levites or as in the case of the king in the previous chapter. Some interpreters think that this Scriptural statement is simply a promise of a long line of prophets to culminate in the Great Prophet Messiah. What is decisive here is that we have sufficient evidence, both in the Old and New Testaments, that this Prophet is the very Promised One. The word *prophet* is not used in a collective sense anywhere in the Scriptures. When a plural form is used, the verbs and suffixes are also in the plural. Besides, Moses speaks of the prophet promised as a person, "like unto me."

Moses holds a unique position in the Scriptures. There is no doubt that this fact was recognized by the people of God ever since the time of Moses. The book of Deuteronomy itself testifies: "And there arose not a prophet in Israel like unto Moses" (Deut. 34:10). Even before that, the book of Numbers puts Moses in a class by himself. We read: "If there be a prophet among you, I, the Lord, will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. **My servant Moses is not so: who is faithful in all my house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently,** and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold" (Numbers 12:6-8). This God declared, speaking from the

cloud in the door of the tabernacle at a time when Aaron and Miriam rebelled against Moses. "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut. 34:10).

Those who presuppose that with this promise God intended to assure Israel that there would always be a prophet, thus establishing this office, must demonstrate the existence of a continuing prophetic succession. To succeed, they make Joshua the successor to Moses in the prophetic office. Unfortunately, they overlook that God appointed Joshua leader of the people into Canaan with the stipulation that he and the people be obedient to Moses' doctrine. To believe that Joshua is called a prophet by applying to him the term "servant of the Lord" (which term, it is asserted, is the formal title for a prophet) is to overlook the fact that Joshua's colleague and companion Caleb is also called "my servant" but was never in any sense a prophet. Also at a later point King Hezekiah is given the same title. In Judges 6:8 God does send a prophet, but the promise of prophets does not establish a profession or order like that of priests, Levites, kings, etc. Especially when we look back from the vantage point of the New Testament, this promise clearly is focused on Christ. Hebrews 3:5-6 compares Moses and Christ in words reminiscent of those used in Deuteronomy 18.

No other prophet in the Old Testament ever claimed to equal Moses but often these prophets point forward to the One to come, who would speak God's Word to the people. Isaiah speaks of the Servant of the Lord as coming with God's message of salvation, as in chapter 42 ("I have put my spirit upon Him: He shall bring forth judgment to the gentiles"—"for a light to the gentiles") or 49 ("He hath made my mouth as a sharp sword"—"that thou mayest say to the prisoners: 'Go forth'"), chapter 50 ("The Lord God has given me the tongue of the learned . . ."), chapter 61 (. . . "the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings . . ."). The Messiah, Anointed, is to be that great Prophet like unto Moses. That the promised Prophet is greater than Moses is evidenced by the fact that God threatens judgment to anyone who does not listen to the Prophet here promised, saying, "Hear ye Him!" The Word of the Messiah is the final and conclusive Word of God. Indeed, disobedience to Moses' commands was punished as disobedience to God. But woe to the people that would not believe the message the Great Prophet would bring.

The subsequent verses, 20-22, speak of the punishment meted out to prophets that would prophesy falsely. There would be prophets like the prophet Balaam, who told the truth but turned against the people of God. There would be prophets that would practice the superstitious rites and sorcery of the gentile soothsayers. Any such prophet should die by execution. The question raised by some, "How shall we know the word that the Lord hath not spoken?" is answered by assuring the people that God will not confirm their word. What they promise shall not come to pass. This refers to confirmation of God's Word by signs accompanying the Word. And then, too, there was the Law and the Testimony of Moses to which the people should refer.

When Jeremiah exposes Hananiah as a false prophet, Hananiah dies that year. Isaiah speaks of the same situation, people running to false prophets that "peep" and "mutter." He demands that the people should seek their God. Isaiah refers them to the "Law and Testimony." He adds: "If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20). As Joshua was to keep the Law and Writing of Moses before his eyes, and as every king was to have a copy of the law that he might follow it, so the people of God have the Law of Moses to guide them and the promise of God that He would unmask false prophets, as God did in instances recorded in the history of Israel.

The Great Prophet promised was to be greater than Moses in that His Word would be the final Word. The Great Prophet Christ refers to this promise and command by announcing that the word that He has spoken will judge man in the Last Judgment. Hence we can compare Moses and Christ in so many points.

Christ, like Moses, was a prophet sent from God, but with a fundamental difference. Christ speaks God's Word of Himself.

Christ's office has excellency like unto Moses; but Christ's glory outshines Moses' glory. Moses, a true son of Abraham, shared the suffering of his people, despising the wisdom of Egypt, bearing the weaknesses and burdens of his people with them. Christ, who is of the same father according to the flesh, shared and bore the sufferings and sins of His People in a greater and more complete sense than Moses. *The Prophet* is greater in that He could do what Moses offered to do—but could not. Christ died for His people. Moses died even before entering the physical Promised Land, for Moses, too, was a sinner like unto his stubborn people and because of a moment of weakness could not enter into the rest of Canaan. Christ, without sin, gave His life for the sins of the world and enters into eternal Paradise together with all His elect people. In his time Moses performed miracles through the power of God and in the name of God. Christ performed greater miracles by His own divine power and in His own Name.

Moses was privileged to talk with God face to face, yet could not be granted the full knowledge of God's glory. Christ, who is in the Father's bosom from eternity, declared God's glory to man. Whereas Moses had to say: "Thus says the Lord," Christ said: "I say unto you."

VII. DAVID

As history supplied meaning, the concept "king" implied more or less emphasis on actual power and rule over others. History records many forms of kingship—from the time when a king had absolute power over his subjects to our day when the need for kingship is questioned, as in England, where king or queen reigns but has no rule. The Hebrew word for "king" was in use among the gentiles long before Israel ever had a king. However, Israel had the promise of kings to come out of the loins of Abraham. It was one of the tests of faith that Israel knew their cousins, the Edomites, had kings long before any kings arose in Israel. When finally a king was chosen for them, Israel was long established as a nation though not fully united under one rule.

Israel had turned down the idea of the dynastic type of kingship found in the rulers over cities. These smaller kings had been defeated by Israel in Joshua's time and when later one of the judges aspired to it, nothing came of that kind of kingdom.

But Israel had never forgotten the promise of God and looked with envy on the kings of the gentiles roundabout, who could parade their power for men to see and admire. When therefore Samuel's days were counted and his sons proved weak and unreliable as judges in Israel, the people came to Samuel requesting a *melek*, a king such as the gentiles had. Samuel's sorrow at this turn of events had no doubt as its source his understandable feeling of being shabbily treated with ingratitude and disrespect by the people whom he had served so well and so long. But God calls Samuel's attention to the fact that it was not Samuel that should sorrow but rather God, whom they rejected. Not that their request for a king should be so out of character for the people, who had been promised kings. However, their idea of a king with the same autocratic power as that of the kings of their neighbors could be interpreted as shying away from the Lord. God intended they should have leaders worthy of the name king. They were to be leaders under God—the term preferable to *melek* would be *nagid*—whom God had chosen for them.

Balaam's prophecy, of which we saw the final Messianic peak and climax, contains the statement: "The Lord God is with them, and the shout of a king is among them" (Numbers 23:21). In the next oracle Balaam says his king shall be higher than Agag and his kingdom shall be exalted (Numbers 24:7). Balaam's promise of the Star and Scepter of Judah indicated that a ruler would come out of Jacob. There can be no doubt that God planned a monarchy for Israel. However, it was to be a theocratic monarchy. Saul fails because he acts autocratically and is therefore rejected for his disobedience to the King of kings. Yet God has a substitute ready, and the son of Jesse is anointed while Saul still bears the crown and scepter.

The rejection of Saul is a sign that the true king of Israel is more than a *melek* or gentile king even though he may have less

outward power. David is not the firstborn of Jesse and not the eldest or the tallest. David is taken from tending the sheep, as God reminds him later. The true picture of the king of Israel is not that of the *melek*, a name with an all too human connotation of power and pressure. We must remember that the kings of the peoples of that time and at other times tried to increase respect and authority by claiming divine nature for themselves.

Yet the very fact that they had no hope for an eschatological ruler, who would at the same time be a savior from their sins, sets the kingship of Israel apart and above all other royalties. Israel's true king is God, who has no rival. In the Psalms—including those composed by David—God, the God of Israel, is exalted above all nations and kings. To compare the exaggerated claims of other kings and their adherents as found in contemporary enthronement hymns with the statement of God's majesty in the Psalms is to forget the distinction between "religion" of a people and the revelation God gave Israel. What the Psalms say of God as King and of the Messiah King is not spoken to glorify any king on the throne of David as divine.

Of the many passages in the Scriptures of both testaments that speak of the majesty of God and the glory of the King above all kings, two predictive mountainpeaks are 2 Samuel 7 and 2 Samuel 23—one given David at the time when he thought he had time and reason to build God a temple and one that David himself pronounces as what is sometimes called his "last will and testament." That both are related is beyond doubt. The interpretation of one depends to a great extent on the other. If we put the best Messianic construction on both, we see far into the history of what actually is the Kingdom of God.

The first prediction, spoken by David's court chaplain, Nathan the prophet, comes at a time when David's position was firmly established both within the amphictyony of the twelve tribes and beyond by his conquest of all his enemies. "The Lord had given him rest." Now David could think more of constructive work within his own kingdom. Truly, it was the Lord who had granted him this "rest." In keeping with the picture of the Messianicity of the whole Old Testament, we should note that many other facets testify to God's hand in the progression of the plan of salvation.

Let us, for instance, take a look at the history of Jerusalem. So firmly established is the concept of this city as the capital of Israel and Judah, politically, geographically, and theologically speaking, that we may overlook the fact that in the plans of God as the God of all history the emergence of this city to such importance was nothing less than a miracle. Even at the time when David became king, the Jebusites still held a fortified hill in the area. For centuries they had resisted every attempt of conquering them. They were accepted as a fact to be lived with, and we have no doubt that the people of Judah led a comfortable co-existence with them. Nor was there much reason for taking this strong point, for Jerusalem was in

a very unimportant section of the land. No great highway routes passed near it. It was not easily accessible. Although the name of the city occurs in some of the ancient records of Egypt, yet the same records seem to show that this town was not considered worth keeping an eye on. Pharaoh Amenophis III seems to ignore the appeal of Jebusites. But God had planned for Jerusalem a glory as well as a historical focus that is inseparably tied to the Messiah. Outside the walls of this city the world's Messiah would some day be raised, elevated, to His highest position. Beyond these walls the Messiah, David's Son and God's Son, would become the Redeemer of all the world. God used David to make Jerusalem the City of David.

The Jebusite fortress finally falls to David. This was an heroic act. The Jebusites were so sure of their fortifications that they coined the slogan: "The blind and the lame [any handicapped] can keep David out." David knew of this boast. He takes with him his own personal bodyguards, not the regular forces of Israel or Judah. He gives them a pep talk and instructs them in the strategy which he has devised—a strategy about the nature of which we are not fully clear. Either they went "up the watershaft" (RSV) or used scaling ladders. However, the victory was important not so much because it resulted from David's military acumen and leadership but rather because of its political significance. David thereby became the undisputed ruler of a city situated at a much more centrally located point than the previous capital Hebron. Because of David Jerusalem gets its significance. Just so and more so, David's Son unites His people of all times, all races, and all ages in the Jerusalem "above." As is true of so many other happenings in the history of the Jews, so here even the sudden rise of a small town becomes a part of the typology of the Scriptures. Never again will the city Jerusalem be forgotten, even if it were again laid in dust and ashes as it was time and again.

Now, David knew the Scriptures of Moses well and realized "what God had wrought." His successes that lead up to the events of chapter seven are also recorded in the eighth chapter, which chronologically might come first. But now we come to the event that, we may say, is the center of the whole "kingdom" concept, the "Messianic covenant" God makes with David.

Grateful as David was to God for all the favors He showered on this son of Jesse, yet David, as we well know, was not immune to glorying in himself. Few men can ignore continued success and honor. What David proposes to Nathan does not, at first glance, seem out of place at all. In fact Nathan rejoices that David (chapter 7) resolves to do for the Lord at least as much as he has done for himself. The Lord "lived within curtains" while David had a "house of cedar." The contrast is, of course, not between the materials of which the dwellings were made, but rather between the concepts "tabernacle" and "house"! A tent is the symbol of the nomadic life, of the insecurity of man, who like Cain is a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth. Because Israel lived in tents in the wilderness, the Lord also "tabernacled" or tented among them. Now that Israel had

come to rest and possessed cities and permanent residences, it seemed fitting to David that the Lord, too, should have a permanent building.

It can safely be assumed that David knew what was written in Deuteronomy 12:10-11: "But when you go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the Lord your God giveth you to inherit, and when He giveth you rest from all your enemies round, so that you dwell in safety: then there shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there." David could easily see the time as having come when God would appoint a sanctuary and he probably thought that he would be the one to build this for God. So this plan looks good, and Nathan says: "Go, do all that is in thine heart, for the Lord is with you." Was this presumptuous of David? Did this victorious monarch harbor in his heart a kind of pride which causes him to say to God in a sort of patronizing way: "God has done so much for me; now I am going to do something for him." The Lord's answer sounds like a rebuff and a setback to David's "well-meant" plans. That night Nathan has a revelation from God, and he has to speak to David, saying: "Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in?" In the following verses we cannot help hearing the Lord talking down to David, treating him as if he were a boy who must be shown his place. "What? *You* want to do something for me? I can take care of myself as I always have. Did I ever complain about the tabernacle (after all it was designed by the Lord Himself)? If I wanted a house of cedar, I should have said so. Let me remind you of where you came from, tending sheep. I was with you, I gave you your present position. I made your name great, and I will take care of my people - I will give them a permanent place, and the children of wickedness shall afflict them no more." This latter statement extends the promise of God to the city of Everlasting Peace.

Now comes what is purest Gospel to David—God promises to build David a "house." Here we climb up to another Messianic "viewpoint," which affords a majestic survey of God's country. Let us stop, then, and take a look at the vista spreading out to all eternity. Let us trace the history of the Kingdom of God from David to David's greater Son.

To understand as much as possible of the covenant here described we need to pay close attention to both the words of the vision Nathan proclaims and the answer that David gives in his prayer of thanksgiving before God. An external feature which we cannot ignore even while we do not interpret it is that both Nathan's words and David's prayer show a numerical symmetry. Three plus four plus five verses is twelve verses. The twelve sentences of Nathan are divided into seven and five. Just so, the thanksgiving of David is in seven and five strophes. The sacred writer, guided by the Spirit of God, uses the name of God twelve times in reporting David's prayer. Although order and symmetry in this important text may be the least of the noteworthy aspects, yet they do show the integrity of the sections. What is said is more important than how it is said.

David is told by God: "I will build a house for you!" We understand that the word "house" here does not refer to a building or stone structure. "House" takes on the meaning of permanent or lasting dynasty. The "house of David" becomes a term more significant now than it was before. The word for house occurs thousands of times in the Old Testament and frequently means the family or tribe or nation—house of Israel, house of the king, house of Joseph, etc. God does not simply promise David children. These he had. God promises a descendant who would sit on the throne of David forever and would build an everlasting temple. This is not to be during David's lifetime. This is to be when David shall sleep with his fathers. God would set up a seed after David, someone that would come "out of his bowels," a true physical descendant and son. God would establish his kingdom. As this promise is repeated, the term "forever" is added. We note, too, that the word *establish* is related to the word *Amen*, which denotes firmness, faithfulness, truth, certainty. A certain, eternal throne or kingdom is promised to David and the seed of David will accomplish what David is not to do: He will build a temple to God. Certainly Solomon fulfilled a part of that prophecy and in fact refers to it. But as in Jacob's prophecy the person of Judah is only the type and the real Lion of Judah is yet to come, so here Solomon is a type of the great Shiloh, the Prince of Peace, who will be the King of kings forever. In this Kingdom, which will outlast every other, He will build a temple not made with hands.

As Christ speaks to the Jews of the temple and tells them that it will be destroyed but that He will raise it up in three days (speaking of the temple of His body), so here the spiritual kingdom and temple is that glorious future revealed to David by the prophet. David, who knew of the words in Genesis 49, must have seen that now it was not only a son of Abraham in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed, and not just a son of Judah. But as God's election narrowed down, He pinpointed the promise more and more. The Messiah was to be indeed a son of David. The echo of this promise is heard in David's prayer, in David's Psalms, in the preaching of all prophets and in the uncounted references in the New Testament. We hear it in the loud cry of the blind man: "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!" We see it in the superscription on the cross and discover the underlying glory at every word and act of the Christ.

Some interpreters still follow Luther's translation of David's words in verse 19 of this seventh chapter. Luther translated: "Das ist die Weise eines Menschen, der Gott der Herr ist." "This is the manner of a man who is God the Lord." The lack of both time and space forbids our spelling out our defense of Luther's observation. Luther presupposes that David knew of the mystery of the incarnation. In this Luther is right, for on the basis of Christ's own interpretation of another word of David, Christ refers His enemies to Psalm 110 (Matthew 22:41-46), where David calls his Son his Lord. Dare we deny either Christ's interpretation or David's knowl-

edge of the two natures of Christ or both? On the basis of the Scriptures it would not at all be impossible that David says in astonishment: "This is the manner of a man who is Lord God!"

If someone shrinks from such a direct Messianic interpretation, we shall not hold it against him, so long as he is willing to hold that both Nathan's words and David's prayer refer to the One who is to have an eternal throne and build the everlasting temple of God. Christ levels the following charges against the Pharisees: "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God." Most exegetical failures in the past and now suffer from the same weakness Christ pinpointed for the Pharisees who opposed Him. In the case of Psalm 110 they would not answer Christ, because they would not admit that Christ was David's Son and Lord.

How far this prophecy opened the vision into the future becomes even more evident in the so-called last words and testament of David. The great king's last recorded confession of faith came many years later. At the time of 2 Samuel 7 David was not out of the woods, as he thought he was. Some bitter conflicts were to come, and not all of them ended in victories, especially not the spiritual conflicts. David was not a "painted saint," as Luther says. The saints were human, made of flesh and blood and afflicted with the same "Old Adam" active in us. David fell, fell grievously. Nevertheless he rose to the height of a true saint in his psalm of repentance (51). It cannot be denied either that after that fall he seems to be reluctant to carry out punishment against others as severely as he should. Above all, he fails to deal with his own sinning sons. The spiritual graph in David's lifeline rose and dipped again several times, but in the end David was victorious by faith in his God and Lord. His last prophetic look into the future is based on God's revelations to him. David's last words are couched in short sentences. Had he become tired of using long ones? The introduction to these words is brief and clear. In contrast, sentences of the testament seem long-winded. Yet as we look at them we see what his intention is. 2 Samuel 23:1-5 reads:

Now these are the last words of David: The oracle of David, the son of Jesse, the oracle of the man who was raised on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the sweet psalmist of Israel: "The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me; his word is upon my tongue. The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me: A ruler over man, just, a ruler in the fear of God, shall arise as the light of the morning, when the sun rises, even a morning without clouds, as the tender grass springing out of the earth in the clear sunshine after the rain. Is not my house thus with God? For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. Verily, all my salvation and all my desire, should he not make it sprout?"

The last will and testament of David is far above any similar documents composed by men of royalty. Even though it has been the pious custom of Christian rulers to introduce their testaments with references to God and other pious sentiments, David's last will

abounds in references to God who has raised him high upon the throne of Israel. The God of Jacob, he says, anointed him. Divine names connote meaning and intention. The God of Jacob is the God who chose Jacob above Esau his twin brother. The God of Jacob is the God who made Jacob the Father of Israel against Jacob's own nature. Very often the Scriptures use the term Jacob to remind the readers and hearers of the Old Testament of the origin of the people. David also uses the terms *God of Israel* and the *Rock of Israel*. He does so not for the sake of poetic requirements, as if it would be too monotonous to use the same name of God several times in the same sentence. For David, inspired as he was, all the terms are significant. Yahweh is the God that made the covenant with Jacob on which all the hope of the future does depend. God is the God of Israel, for God named Jacob Israel, giving him thereby an honorable and blessed name. God is also called the Rock of Israel.

In order to realize better what this term meant to the Sweet Singer of Israel, we must read David's Psalms, especially the one that precedes the chapter containing David's will. Chapter 22 of 2 Samuel is repeated in the Book of Psalms as Psalm 18. Several verses of this chapter refer to the Rock of Israel, e.g., verses 2, 32, and 47. It is evident that the words which follow are to be regarded as important for they are the words of the One who is David's Rock of Salvation. These words speak of things pertaining to the covenant people as the people of God and their future firmly established by the faithful God, who is unmoved and unmovable.

With such an introduction and with the thunder of God's names preceding the oracle, what is the message?

We read words that seem abrupt and terse, words that we feel need amplification by auxiliary verbs and the like. The four words that seem to bring the total message are *ruler, over, man, righteous*. This has been translated into a sentence that seems only a platitude: "A ruler over men must be just." This is a good idea and an ever valid rule or wish: "May all rulers of men be just rulers." But more must be said here than only this. The solemn introduction is intended to be a declaration that this is not a word of man but the very inspiration of God, words from God's mouth, words to be recorded as the last will of the great king.

As in much of prophecy, especially when the prophet is overwhelmed by God's Spirit, the message may come in an abrupt and ecstatic way. We have other samples of such in the Scriptures. Here, too, the seer, whether he is seeing a vision or receiving a message from God, describes the vision as one would set a title under a picture. Him whom Jacob has seen as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the victorious Shiloh with flashing eyes and pearly teeth, celebrating victory at the feast of wine and milk, David sees as the ruler of men, of *mankind*, for the singular is used: "Ruler of Man." His royal person is described not only by the term *just*, but also by the following words: just and righteous — this is the supreme ruler David sees. His majesty and power are glorious for their essential in-

redient is perfect justice and righteousness. The person of the future king is described simply as just. What royal robe can match this adornment? David has no illusions as to the justice human kings would show. For he knows his own human weakness, faults, sins, and injustices too well. Looking back on his own reign, David, now exalted, has nothing except the mercy of his God to thank that he did not end up as did Saul, rejected and damned. Nor was David foolish enough to think that one of his natural sons would be the future perfect ruler. He knew enough about his own children not to entertain such a false hope. Fortunately David knew what we read in 2 Samuel 7 of God's promise of an eternal throne and everlasting king. God grants David a vision of the coming King of kings, who is the "righteous branch" (Jer. 23:5), the King that comes "just" according to Zechariah 9. David's words echo the description of the Rock of Israel as found in Deuteronomy 32:4: "He is the Rock, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He!"

There is the portrait of the King and under the picture, for anyone asking who this is, the inscription: A Ruler of Mankind, the Just.

Now David adds another short notice: "A ruler in the fear of God." This is a parallel to "ruler over man, just." The reason why this ruler is just is He fears God. What is revealed to David is that a just and obedient King will come. The words "will arise" can be added in a translation. They are not found in the original Hebrew text, for there they are simply taken for granted. David, having stated that he is telling what God told him, declares that the time will come when men are ruled by a just and perfect King, who fears God.

That time would be the day when the people of God, indeed all men, would be blessed by the rule of the just and pious ruler. How beautiful this reign will be is shown in the subsequent double picture or vision: "And as light of the morning, when the sun rises, a morning without clouds"—so shall the day of this ruler be. The glory of a sunrise is appreciated especially by people who know the darkness of night. The days of David were not those of dwellers in concrete canyons that seldom see the sun rise and attempt to turn night into day with artificial lights.

The people of that time knew where to find the prophets promising light after darkness. Isaiah 9:2 speaks of the same day David describes: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." "Arise, shine, for the Light has come!" (Is. 60:1). Last of all, Malachi 4:2: "But unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings." Can we imagine Malachi saying this without thinking of what David had promised? Indeed, the new day which comes with the new ruler will be like a glorious sunrise after the gloomy night. David stresses

further "no clouds," one of the short phrases that he records. One word includes a whole world of concepts. This is especially true of the Hebrew. The word studies made of the Biblical terms will show that the Bible itself fills words and concepts with a world of ideas. Morning, light, sun, clouds gone, etc.—it is a beautiful scene. It is just like that. And more follows:

The KJV reads: "As the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain."

Again we simply list the phrases used: the rain is over, in the rising sun the green grass glistens on the earth . . . The reign of the King is compared to the day of peace, light, fertility, beauty, plenty. As in Jacob's prophecy, so here we have a picture of ideal beauty. In the kingdom of the Messiah, for He is the just King come to reign over the hearts of men, there will be no shadow of death, no cloud or storm. He will make it all prosper and grow. Isaiah says: "They shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses" (Is. 44:4). Again: "Let the earth open and let them bring forth salvation and let righteousness spring up together" (Is. 45:8). Again, Psalm 72: "He shall come down as rain on the mown grass. As showers that water the earth. In His day shall the righteous flourish."

A beautiful dream? A beautiful reality! David sees the future not in terms of statistics and dates, but in terms of the King of Righteousness and His Kingdom of Peace.

David is overjoyed. He knows this means joy and happiness for him. He continues: "Is not thus my house with God?" (The translation of the KJV is not the best although it can be used properly as translated.)

As always, we want to listen to each word. That David here rejoices at his house we can see as echoing the promise made David in 2 Samuel 7, where God says to him: I will build you a house. David's house is secure in God's promises. "For an eternal covenant hath he made with me" are the next words. "Ordered in all and secured" is almost legal language. God, the Rock of David's salvation, has made a promise. This makes it secure. Everything has been ordered and established that it cannot be moved. David knows Deuteronomy 7:9: "Know therefore that the Lord thy God, He is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations . . ." "Ordered in all" is in contrast to unfinished. The covenant and promise covers all things and for all time. Nothing can hinder the plan of salvation. Not the defection of future kings, such as Solomon, no hatred of the enemies, not even the death of the King Messiah stopped or hindered God's plan. It all worked together for good to them that love God.

However, David is not simply an instrument for this prophecy, nor is he an unwilling prophet like Balaam. David participates most intimately and joyfully in the glory of the coming Messiah. He exclaims: "Verily, all my salvation and all desire, should He not make

it sprout (grow)?" The term "sprout" from now on is for all practical purposes a technical term for the Messiah. Jeremiah speaks of the righteous Sprout and of the Branch of Righteousness (33:15). Zechariah's prophecies refer repeatedly to the *zemach*, the Branch.

It is hard to realize that this is spoken by a David that knows of the approach of death. His joy is completely the joy of his salvation. The true joy of salvation in Christians is centered on the trust and faith in God's promises for His kingdom. Personal prestige and certain promised rewards are fringe benefits for the children of God. One thing stands out: God's kingdom is a reality for time and eternity.

However, the words of David have another part to them. This part may at first seem somewhat strange to be stated in such a solemn document till we remember that Messianic Psalms and promises of the coming Kingdom similarly are concluded with statements concerning the enemies of the Lord. Compare Psalm 2 in the third part, or read Psalm 110. Remember Numbers 24 regarding the fate of the Prince of Judah's enemies, etc. The theme here is the relation of this just ruler to His enemies. As blessed as the person of the Savior is to David's soul and life, so terrible is this King to His enemies. There is no special transition here. It is as if a new picture is projected before David's eyes. We read in the KJV translation (2 Samuel 23:6-7):

But the sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands:

But the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place.

The sons of Belial are the worthless ones. They are, all of them, to be scattered as are thorns. For these enemies of the Messiah there will come a smashing as with a rod of iron, a pursuing as Balaam describes it, the smashing of the corners of Moab, the defeat of the warlike ones. Establishment of the peace of God includes the defeat of all His enemies. They, these thorns and thistles that may grow together with the good seed on this earth, will not be gathered carefully into the garner of the King; they are in fact not even to be touched, for "every contact is enmity." The great difference between the seed of Satan (Sons of Belial) and sons of the Kingdom will become evident in the final and total judgment of the King. There will be no handling with kid gloves; rather, anyone that makes contact had better be armed. The man who touches them, that is, inflicts their destruction, has in his hands an iron-tipped spear, which he uses both to cut the spiny thorns down and heap them up for burning. They will be burned wherever and whoever they are. There is no hiding possible; even, as Balaam says, those that escape into a city or whatever they consider a safe place will be destroyed. It is exactly as Christ says: the chaff, the thorns, the weeds, will be burned with the fire of God's wrath. John 15:6 includes also those who are dry branches of the vine. "Men gather them and cast them into the fire."

In Acts 2, Peter refers to David as a prophet. Indeed, God spoke through David, as David insists and the Church has always recognized. David had the knowledge of the Messiah, and the "sure mercies of David" (Is. 55:3) were to him true comfort and hope.

VIII. PSALM 110

A Psalm of David

The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.

Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning; thou hast the dew of thy youth.

The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of His wrath.

He shall judge among the heathen, He shall fill the places with the dead bodies; He shall wound the heads over many countries.

He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall He lift up the head.

The unity of the two testaments and their cohesion and organic interdependence is probably nowhere more evident than in this song of David, which Luther called the great *Sheblimini*. The divine finger that points us to this prophecy as one of the mountainpeaks of Messianicity is Christ Himself, the author of all the Scriptures. In His devastating test of the Scriptural knowledge and exegetical ability of the Jewish scribes in Matthew 22, He not only rightfully assumes that the Jews knew who was spoken of by David in Psalm 110 but challenges them to recognize in Him, who had insisted on His being the Son of God and Son of Man, the Son and Lord of David. The New Testament refers to this Psalm at least as often as to any other Old Testament passage. Luther is said to have held that every syllable of this Psalm is greater and more glorious than the Tower of Babel. Indeed, with the light of promise and fulfillment focused on this prophecy it radiates a glory supernatural.

Some interpreters of both the past and of our time find literary parallels only in the royal hymns of the non-Hebrew world; they look upon Psalm 110 as solely a hymn composed for some national event such as the enthronement of a king of the Israelites. They usually give no consideration to the use Christ makes of this psalm and thereby degrade this jewel to the character of an exaggerated poetic praise of a human king. To be sure, in some respects the poetry of that time as well as the liturgy and sacrificial practices were on the surface similar to the worship and temple practices of Israel. Even the design of the Temple of Solomon reveals not a completely distinctive architectural form but a partial copying of architectural designs found in adjacent nations. This practice has been continued by the New Testament Christians, also in the U.S.A. Witness even Lutheran church buildings, copying in a degree the design of a Greek temple of that nation's golden age.

More comparative studies of ritual poetry point out certain similarities in many religions. Yes, indeed, even among the Zulus their King Tschetchewayo was greeted by his parading warriors with extravagant praises of his prowess.

However, the Bible interpreter has the responsibility of seeking out also the dissimilarities. They are not difficult to find. They will reveal basic religious differences—irreconcilable differences. The essential, the central difference between the Scriptures and the other scriptures is that the former are divinely inspired revelation, the latter only humanly inspired.

It is regrettable that not a few Bible interpreters reject this distinction and difference. Worse, some even sneer at this view of the Scriptures as a kind of orthodoxistic naiveté, quite unaware that their view is the result of scholasticism (wild speculation), which like a barnacle has attached itself to the interpretative enterprise.

On the other hand, we are happy to find many scholars who even without disavowing the so-called “assured results of Biblical research,” contend that in this psalm the Word of God lifts the statements far beyond the possibility of identifying the King spoken of here with any other king ever enthroned in Jerusalem.

We are going to refrain from a detailed interpretation of each single word now even though we concede that Luther is right in counting every syllable important. Suffice it to say that we can see in this psalm the same structure and prophetic intent as we perceived in the previous Messianic mountaintops we have studied.

For parallels we once more take a look at Balaam's oracles. Here too it is a *neum* or sentence (oracle) of a prophet, by whom the Spirit of God speaks. In this case David, whose knowledge of the coming King is clear from the revelation given him by Nathan (2 Sam. 7) and the revelation of which he testifies in his last words (2 Sam. 23). How rich and deep David's knowledge of his God and Savior was can easily be gathered from his psalms. He has a right to identify himself as the “sweet singer” of Israel.

David was permitted to hear the conversation between The Lord and his Lord. The Lord Yahweh speaks to one whom David considers his Lord and Master. Those who miss appreciating the sublime quality of this hymn and are therefore puzzled as to what or who is meant are referred to the people who at the time of Christ were ready to crucify Him. They knew full well that in this psalm David was speaking of the future Son of David. It is from Him that David received the revelation that He some day would be exalted at the right hand of God.

The solemn statement David hears and reports is a divine decree, just as in Psalm 2: “I will declare the decree!” God appoints and establishes him who is David's Son and Lord as His co-equal and vice-regent. The right hand is the right hand of power and authority. It is interesting to read what Pharaoh said to Joseph, who is not only being honored but appointed to his office: “Behold I have set you over all the land of Egypt; you shall be over my house, and all my

people shall order themselves as you command; only as regards the throne will I be greater than you." Then Pharaoh expands what he has said with "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no man shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." Truly this is an example of what is meant by setting someone at the right hand of the throne.

In addition, we note many other evidences in the Old and New Testaments of the meaning of sitting at the right hand of God. The prophets' theophanies and their descriptions of the glory of God's throne abound in a symbolism of power and glory. To be sure, the enthronement ceremonies here described may be couched in common contemporary terminology to communicate the heavenly action. But certainly nowhere in the history of the people of God do we come upon an instance where the throne of the king of Judah or Israel was placed next to the ark of the covenant. The purpose of the elevation to the throne of God is to make the enemies of the Son of David His footstool. It is not hard for our imagination to recognize the picture of the conqueror setting his foot on the necks of his enemies.

Previous prophecies use the same idea, as does Genesis 49 when speaking of the future of the Prince of Judah. When Joshua and his men had captured the five Amorite kings in the cave at Makkedah, Joshua summoned the chiefs of the men of war and told them "Come near! Put your feet upon the necks of these kings." Then they came near and put their feet on their necks" (Joshua 10). Christ refers again to this Psalm when challenged by the council. He makes the majestic declaration: "Hereafter you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." Psalm 110 is quoted by Peter who declares on the basis of it "to all the house of Israel that God has made Jesus Lord and Christ." In Acts 7 Stephen has practically the same vision as David, for he too sees heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. In Romans 8 and Ephesians 1 Paul uses the same term as a description of the fulfillment of the promises in Christ.

Christ is accorded more than a place of honor, such as was given Bathsheba, when she was seated at the right hand of Solomon's throne for the purpose of honoring her as the queen mother. The entire context shows that in Jesus' case His being seated at the right hand of God meant a giving of power. His enemies fall down before Him that sits at the right hand of God. Ensuing words tell of the successful war against the enemies. His scepter is extended by God over Zion, and again it is not just the symbol of kingship but the staff of power. It is not necessary to distinguish too nicely between scepter and staff. Very often they were identical. The scepter of some Pharaohs is pictured as a warclub used to smash the heads of enemies. The scepter of Judah and the staff of Judah are the same. In Balaam's prophecy the scepter is used to smash the corners of Moab. Finally and exceedingly important, the scepter is not to depart from Judah—never.

"Rule in the midst of thy foes!" is another decree conferring victory and rule on David's Son and heir. Numbers 24 tells that out of Jacob will the ruler come, and the survivors of the city will be destroyed. In the midst of the foes surrounding the Messiah He will have His rule. As in all the Scriptures, there is no promise of exemption from enmity, adversity, conflict, shadows, and fears. Nevertheless always the rod and staff of the Ruler brings peace and power and rule over and even among His enemies.

The triumph of good over evil is not presented as the abolition of all evil, but rather as the subjugation of evil. The Lord reigns among His enemies. They must be put under His feet and there He controls them. The portals of hell shall not prevail against the King's people. One day evil will be confined and bound as the book of Revelation tells us. The kingdom of the Lord is here seen as a powerful and militant one.

The third verse is most beautifully translated by Luther: "After thy victory thy people shall willingly sacrifice in holy splendor. Thy children shall be born unto thee as dew from the dawn." Thus Luther with his charisma strides with courage born of his knowledge of the Scriptures through paths where other exegetes only hobble. Luther rides on the analogy of faith when he translates with unrestricted literary freedom and poetic feel for literary beauty. We can find any number of suggestions as to how the verse is to be translated. "In the day of thy power" can mean in the day when thy army or the power of thy army is shown, thy people will offer themselves freely in sacred array. In Revelation 19:14 the army follows the King crowned with many crowns, and they ride on white horses clothed in fine linen white and clean. "From the womb of the morning like dew your youth will come to you," translates the RSV in the second part of verse 3 and comes close to Luther. Other well-meaning exegetes want to see in this sentence a description of the birth of the King and Lord described as born like dew from the dawn. The idea is that this is a parallel statement to Psalm 2:7: "This day have I begotten thee." The Septuagint translates the sentence in that sense.

It matters not whether we find the right auxiliary verbs to connect the concepts and words in the Hebrew text, for we must realize that the Hebrew, especially in poetry and still more often in prophetic oracles may simply use a single word and concept rich with meaning. When we think of David's last words and testament, 2 Samuel 23, we find him saying the same thing as here in the psalm. There he strikes full chords, or to use the picture of a great artist, he paints in single powerful strokes the future King Messiah and His kingdom: "A ruler—over men—just—ruling in the fear of God—as the light of the morning—the sun rises—a morning—no clouds—shine after rain—the earth greens." No one can miss the picture of the kingdom of the Sun of Righteousness when clouds have passed and all is bright and fresh and green as it was on the first day, when God said, "Let there be light!" and on the third day, when God said, "Let the earth be green with green!"

Hence, we believe the words of the third verse describe the scene after the exaltation and sitting on the right hand of power, the miracle the Israelite could never forget, the miracle of the sunrise over a field glistening with myriads of sparkling drops of dew. It seemed the dawn of the new day had given miraculous birth to the innumerable jewels that brought life to the green earth of Palestine, where the lack of dew could mean failure of harvest. The kingdom of the Messiah is like the wonder of this gift of morning, a kingdom born to Him to serve Him in holy garments, to serve Him willingly. The concepts of multitude, of beauty, of willing service, of the new day, of the day of victory of the Messiah are conveyed by the Psalmist, and there is no doubt as to the glory of it all.

And all this is established and secure, as David says in another place, because the Lord has sworn it and will not take it back. The singer hears another sentence or oracle of the Lord concerning the Messiah: "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

The people of the King Messiah are born to Him and worship Him in holy garments because of what and who He is. Holy people bringing willing worship and sacrifice are not born of flesh and blood, of natural man. They are born of and by the victory of Christ, and they are sanctified and purified by the great High Priest. Melchizedek was king and priest of Salem. He appears suddenly and blesses Abraham. This was never forgotten by the children of Abraham, particularly not when under David the last fortress of the erstwhile capital of the Jebusites, the Salem of which Melchizedek was king, was finally taken by force and made the city of David. Henceforth, Jerusalem is the city of the great King. There outside the city walls the King of the Jews brought the one sacrifice by which once and for all He propitiated and paid for all the sins of all mankind. Lifted up and crucified on a cursed executioner's cross, He ever since has drawn all mankind to Him to give them the blessings of His priestly kingdom. As such, in truth, we see Him in all the Scriptures as well as in this psalm. To ignore these facts and to deal with this psalm by subjecting it to an analysis made up of highly hypothetical presuppositions which equate the Scriptures with any other scriptures as to origin and composition, simply as a collection of discrete literary productions rather than a unified whole, will create only a series of discordant sounds rather than the melody of heaven.

Next, the Psalm continues to describe the battle of the Lord against His enemies. Again we hear the same thundering and crashing sounds we hear at the end of the second psalm: the smashing of kings and armies, filling the valleys with the corpses of the defeated, indeed even smashing the heads of rulers. The evident parallels again are Numbers 24 and Balaam's "smash the corners of Moab."

One final scene: "He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall He lift up the head." It does not take much to be reminded of that great hero of the Hebrews who singlehandedly battled and slew many Philistines. When the battle was over, he was so thirsty that he felt he would die. "Now shall I die for thirst?" he asks of God. In answer, "God clave the hollow place in Lehi and there came water

thereout, and when he had drunk his spirit came again and he revived." We cannot believe, as some would have us do, that Psalm 110 simply refers to a part of the coronation ritual, when the newly crowned king drinks from the Gihon brook and is then anointed. Evidently, the water here gives the great warrior strength to lift up His head. We would rather be faulted for seeing too much in this passage than to offer only a surface and a completely humanized interpretation. Even Christ, the Warrior and Hero of our Salvation, was comforted in the Garden of Gethsemane and received strength to go on to victory.

The question is not: Is David aware of the full meaning of what he is saying? The question is rather this: Is not what he is saying his confession of faith? He knows what God has revealed to him. David has had the opportunity of listening in on the divine council for the establishment of the Kingdom of God. David knows there is a Son of his who will sit eternally on the Throne of Glory. He knows God will give Him complete victory over all His opponents. His enemies will be His footstool, and a holy host of servants will bless Him as their Priest and King everlasting.