

Judges 1 Notes

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Judges 1:12-15 Achsah's Asking, A Pattern of Prayer

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(Ed note: This sermon emphasizes application more than exposition)

“And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjath-sepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife. And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife. And it came to pass, when she came to him, that she moved him to ask of her father a field: and she lighted from off her ass; and Caleb said unto her, What wilt thou? And she said unto him, Give me a blessing: for thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water. And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the nether springs.” — Judges 1:12-15.

IN domestic life we often meet with pictures of life in the house of God. I am sure that we are allowed to find them there, for our Savior said, “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” God is a Father, and he likens himself to us as fathers; and we who are believers are God’s children; and we are permitted to liken ourselves to our own children; and just as our children would deal with us, and we would deal with them, so may we deal with God, and expect God to deal with us. This little story of a daughter and her father is recorded twice in the Bible. You will find it in the fifteenth chapter of the Book of Joshua, as well as in this first chapter of the Book of Judges. It is not inserted twice without good reasons. I am going to use it tonight simply in this manner — the way in which this woman went to her father, and the way in which her father treated her, may teach us how to go to our Father who is in heaven, and what to expect if we go to him in that fashion.

I would hold up this good woman, Achsah, before you to-night as a kind of model or parable. Our parable shall be Achsah, the daughter of Caleb; she shall be the picture of the true successful pleader with our Father in heaven.

I. And the first thing that I ask you to notice is, Her Consideration Of The Matter before she went to her father.

She was newly-married, and she had an estate to go with her to her husband. She naturally wished that her husband should find in that estate all that was convenient and all that might be profitable, and looking it all over, she saw what was wanted. Before you pray, know what you are needing. That man, who blunders down on his knees, with nothing in his mind, will blunder up again, and get nothing for his pains. When this young woman goes to her father to ask for something, she knows what she is going to ask. She will not open her mouth till first her heart has been filled with knowledge as to what she requires. She saw that the land her father gave her would be of very little use to her husband and herself because it wanted water-springs. So she therefore goes to her father with a very definite request, “Give me also springs of water.”

My dear friends, do you always, before you pray, think of what you are going to ask? “Oh!” says somebody, “I utter some good words.” Does God want your words? Think what you are going to ask before you begin to pray, and then pray like business men. This woman does not say to her father, “Father, listen to me,” and then utter some pretty little oration about nothing; but she knows what she is going to ask for, and why she is going to ask it. She sees her need, and she prizes the boon she is about to request.

Oh, take note, ye who are much in prayer, that ye rush not to the holy exercise "as the horse rusheth into the battle"; that ye venture not out upon the sea of prayer without knowing within a little whereabouts will be your port! I do believe that God will make you think of many more things while you are in prayer; the Spirit will help your infirmities, and suggest to you other petitions; but before a word escapes your lips, I counsel you to do what Achsah did, know what you really need.

This good woman, before she went to her father with her petition, asked her husband's help. When she came to her husband, "she moved him to ask of her father a field." Now, Othniel was a very brave man, and very brave men are generally very bashful men. It is your cowardly man who is often forward and impertinent; but Othniel was so bashful that he did not like asking his uncle Caleb to give him anything more; it looked like grasping. He had received a wife from him, and he had received land from him, and he seemed to say, "No, my good wife, it is all very well for you to put me up to this, but I do not feel like asking for anything more for myself." Still, learn this lesson, good wives, prompt your husbands to pray with you. Brothers, ask your brothers to pray with you. Sisters, be not satisfied to approach the throne of grace alone; but ask your sister to pray with you. It is often a great help in prayer for two of you to agree touching the thing that concerns Christ's kingdom. A cordon of praying souls around the throne of grace will be sure to prevail. God help us to be anxious in prayer to get the help of others! A friend, some time ago, said to me, "My dear pastor, whenever I cannot pray for myself, and there are times when I feel shut up about myself, I always take to praying for you: I God bless him, at any rate! and I have not long been praying for you before I begin to feel able to pray for myself." I should like to come in for many of those odd bits of prayer. Whenever any of you got stuck in the mud, do pray for me. It will do you good, and I shall get a blessing. Remember how it is written of Job, "The Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends." While he prayed for himself, he remained a captive; but when he prayed for those unfriendly friends of his, then the Lord smiled upon him, and loosed his captivity. So it is a good thing in prayer to imitate this woman, Achsah. Know what you want, and then ask others to join with you in prayer. Wife, especially ask your husband; husband, especially ask your wife. I think there is no sweeter praying on earth than the praying of a husband and a wife together when they plead for their children, and when they invoke a blessing upon each other, and upon the work of the Lord.

Next, Achsah bethought herself of this one thing, that she was going to present her request to her father. I suppose that she would not have gone to ask of anybody else; but she said to herself, "Come, Achsah, Caleb is your father. The boon I am going to ask is not of a stranger, who does not know me; but of a father, in whose care I have been ever since I was born." This thought ought to help us in prayer, and it will help us when we remember that we do not go to ask of an enemy, nor to plead with a stranger; but we say, "Our Father, which art in heaven." Do you mean it? Do you really believe that God is your Father? Do you feel the spirit of sonship in your heart? If so, this ought to help you to pray with a believing tone. Your Father will give you whatever you need. If there was anything that I wanted, and I should ask it of him, I expect that my dear father, old and feeble as he is, would give it to me if it were within the range of his possibility; and surely, our great and glorious Father, with whom we have lived ever since we were newborn, has favored us so much that we ought to ask very boldly, and with a childlike familiarity, resting assured that our Father will never be vexed with us because we ask these things. Indeed, he knoweth what things we have need of before we ask him.

So this good woman, Achsah, feeling that it was her father of whom she was going to ask, and seeing that her husband hesitated to join her in her request, made the best of her way to go and pray alone. "Well, well, Othniel, I would have liked you to have gone with me; but as you will not, I am going alone." So she gets upon the ass, which was a familiar way for ladies to ride in that day, and she rides off to her father. The grand old man sees his daughter coming, and by the very look of her he knows that she is coming on business; there is something about her eye that tells him she is coming with a request. This was not the first time that she had asked something of him. He knew her usual look when she was about to petition him; so he goes to meet her, and she alights from her ass, a token of great and deep respect, just as Rebecca, when she saw Isaac, alighted from the camel. She wished to show how deeply she revered that grand man, of whom it was an honor to be a child. Caleb survived Joshua a little while, and still in his old age went out to fight the Canaanites, and conquered Hebron, which the Lord had given him. Achsah pays reverence to her father; but yet she is very hearty in what she is going to say to him.

Now, dear friends, learn again from this good woman how to pray. She went humbly, yet eagerly. If others will not pray with you, go alone; and when you go, go very reverently. It is a shameful thing that there should ever be an irreverent prayer. Thou art on earth, and God is in heaven; multiply not thy words as though thou wert talking to thine equal. Do not speak to God as though thou couldst order him about, and have thy will of him, and he were to be a lackey to thee. Bow low before the Most High; own thyself unworthy to approach him, speaking in the tone of one who is pleading for that which must be a gift of great charity. So shalt thou draw near to God aright; but while thou art humble, have desire in thine eyes, and expectation in thy countenance. Pray as one who means to have what he asks. Say not, as one did, "I ask once for what I want; and if I do not get it, I never ask again." That is unchristian. Plead on if thou knowest that what thou art asking is right. Be like the importunate widow; come again, and again, and again. Be like the prophet's servant, "Go again seven times." Thou wilt at last prevail. This good woman had not to use importunity. The very look of her showed that she wanted something; and therefore her father said, "What wilt thou?"

I think that, at the outset of our meditation, we have learnt something that ought to help us in prayer. If you put even this into practice, though no more was said, you might go away blessed thereby. God grant us to know our need, to be anxious to have the

help of our fellow-believers; but to remember that, as we go to our Father, even if nobody will go with us, we may go alone, through Jesus Christ our Lord, and plead our case with our Father in heaven!

II. Now, secondly, in this story of Achsah, kindly notice Her Encouragement. Here we have it: "She lighted from off her ass; and Caleb said unto her, What wilt thou?"

"Oh!" says one, I could ask anything if my father said to me, 'What wilt thou?' "This is precisely what your great Father does say to you to-night, What wilt thou?" With all the magnanimity of his great heart, God manifests himself to the praying man or pleading woman, and he says, "What wilt thou? What is thy petition, and what is thy request?"

What do I gather from that question, "What wilt thou?" Why, this. First, You should know what you want. Could some Christians here, if God were to say to each of them, "What wilt thou?" answer him? Do you not think that we get into such an indistinct, indiscriminate kind of a way of praying that we do not quite know what we do really want? If it is so with you, do not expect to be heard till you know what you want. Get a distinct, definite request realized by your mind as a pressing want; get it right before your mind's eye as a thing that you must have. That is a blessed preparation for prayer. Caleb said to his daughter, "What wilt thou?" and Christ says to you to-night, "Dear child of mine, what dost thou want of me? Blood-bought daughter, what dost thou want of me?" Will you not, some of you, begin to find up a request or two if you have not one ready on the tip of your tongue? I hope that you have many petitions lying in the centre of your hearts, and that they will not be long in leaping to your lips.

Next, as you ought to know what you want, you are to ask for it. God's way of giving is through our asking. I suppose that he does that in order that he may give twice over, for a prayer is itself a blessing as well as the answer to prayer. Perhaps it sometimes does us as much good to pray for a blessing as to get the blessing. At any rate, this is God's way, "Ask, and ye, shall receive." He puts even his own Son, our blessed Savior, under this rule, for he says even to him, "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." It is a rule, then, without exception, that you are to know what you want, and you are to ask for it. Will you do this, dear friend, while the Lord says to you, "What wilt thou?"

And when Caleb said, "What wilt thou?" did he not as good as say to Achsah, "You shall have what you ask for"? Come, now, to-night is a sweet, fair night for praying in; I do not know a night when it is not so; but to-night is a delightful night for prayer. You shall have what you ask. "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Desires written in your heart by the Holy Ghost will all of them be fulfilled. Come, then, bethink you of these three things, you must know what you want, you must ask for what you want, and you shall have what you want. Thy Father says to thee, as Caleb said to Achsah, "What wilt thou?"

And, once more, it shall be a pleasure to thy Father to hear thee ask. There stands Caleb, that good, brave, grand man, and he says to his daughter, "What wilt thou?" He likes to see her open that mouth that is so dear to him; he loves to listen to the music of her voice. The father delights to hear his child tell him what she wants; and it shall be no displeasure to thy God to hear thee pray to-night. It shall be a joy to him to have thy petition spread before him. Many fathers would quite as soon that their children did not tell them all their wants; in fact, the fewer their wants, the better pleased will their parents be; but our Father in heaven feels a pleasure in giving to us all we need, for giving does not impoverish him, and withholding would not enrich him. He as much delights to give as the sun delights to shine. It is the very element of God to be scattering bounties. Come, then, and pray to him; thou wilt thus please him more than thou wilt please thyself. I wish that I could so speak to-night that every child of God here would say, "The preacher is talking to me. He means that I have to pray, and that God will hear me, and bless me." Yes, that is precisely what I do mean. Take my advice, and prove it yourself to-night; and see if it be not so, that God takes delight in thy poor, feeble, broken prayer, and grants thy humble petition. Thus we have seen Achsah's consideration before prayer, and her encouragement to pray.

III. Now comes Her Prayer itself.

As soon as she found that she had an audience with her father of the kindest sort, she said to him, Give me a blessing." I like that petition; it is a good beginning, Give me a blessing." I should like to put that prayer into every believing mouth here to-night, "Give me a blessing. Whatever thou dost not give me, give me a blessing. Whatever else thou givest me, do not fail to give me a blessing." A father's blessing is an inheritance to a loving child.

"Give me a blessing." What is the blessing of God? If he shall say, "Thou art blessed," thou mayest defy the devil to make thee cursed. If the Lord calls thee blessed, thou art blessed. Though covered with boils, as Job was, thou art blessed. Though near to death, like Lazarus, with the dogs licking his sores, thou art blessed. If thou shouldst be dying, like Stephen, beneath the stones of murderous enemies, if God bless thee, what more canst thou wish for? Nay, Lord, put me anywhere that thou wilt, as long as I get thy blessing. Deny me what thou wilt, only give me thy blessing. I am rich in poverty, if thou dost bless me. So Achsah said to her father, "Give me a blessing." I wish that prayer might be prayed by everybody here to-night. Printers here to-night, pray for once, if

you have not prayed before, "Lord, give me a blessing." Soldiers, pray your gracious God to give you a blessing. Young men and maidens, old men and fathers, take this prayer of Achsah's upon your hearts to-night, "Give me a blessing." Why, if the Lord shall hear that prayer from everybody in this place, what a blessed company we shall be; and we shall go our way to be a blessing to this City of London beyond what we have ever been before!

Notice next, in Achsah's prayer, how she mingled gratitude with her petition: "Give me a blessing: for thou hast given me a south land." We like, when people ask anything of us, to hear them say, "You did help me, you know, sir, a month ago;" but if they seem to come to you, and quite forget that you ever helped them, and never thank you, never say a word about it, but come begging again and again, you say to yourself, "Why, I helped that fellow a month ago! He never says a word about that." "Have I not seen you before?" "No, sir I do not know that you ever have." "Ah!" you say to yourself, he will get no more out of me. He is not grateful for what he has had." I do believe that ingratitude seals up the springs of blessing. When we do not praise God for what we have received from him, it seems to me but just that he should say, "I am not going to cast my pearls before swine. I shall not give my precious things to those who set no value upon them." When thou art praying, take to praising also; thou wilt gather strength thereby. When a man has to take a long jump, you have seen him go back a good distance, and then run forward to get a spring. Go back in grateful praise to God for what he has done for thee in days gone by, and then got a spring for thy leap for a future blessing, or a present blessing. Mingle gratitude with all thy prayers.

There was not only gratitude in this woman's prayer, but she used former gifts as a plea for more: "Thou hast given me a south land; give me also." Oh, yes, that is grand argument with God: "Thou hast given me; therefore, give me some more." You cannot always use this argument with men, for if you remind them that they have given you so much, they say, "Well, now, I think that somebody else must have a turn. Could you not go next door?" It is never so with God. There is no argument with him like this, "Lord, thou hast clone this to me; thou art always the same; thine all-sufficiency is not abated; therefore, do again what thou hast done!" Make every gift that God gives thee a plea for another gift; and when thou hast that other gift, make it a plea for another gift: he loves you to do this. Every blessing given contains the eggs of other blessings within it. Thou must take the blessing, and find the hidden eggs, and let them be hatched by thine earnestness, and there shall be a whole brood of blessings springing out of a single blessing. See thou to that.

But this good woman used this plea in a particular way: she said, "Thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water." This was as much as to say, "Though thou hast given me the south land, and I thank thee for it, it is no good to me unless I have water for it. It is a very hot bit of ground, this south land; it wants irrigating. My husband and I cannot get a living from it unless thou give us springs of water." Do you see the way you are to pray?

"Lord, thou hast given me so much, and it will all be good for nothing if thou dost not give me more. If thou dost not finish, it is a pity that thou didst ever begin; thou hast given me very many mercies, but if I do not have many more, all thy generosity will be lost. Thou dost not begin to build unless thou meanest to finish; and so I come to thee to say, 'Thou hast given me a south land, but it is dry; give me also springs of water to make it of real value to me.'" In this prayer of Achsah's there is a particularity and a speciality: "Give me also springs of water." She knew what she was praying for; and that is the way to pray. When you ask of God, ask distinctly: "Give me springs of water." You may say, "Give me my daily bread." You may cry, "Give me a sense of pardoned sin." You may distinctly ask for anything which God has promised to give; but mind that, like this woman, you are distinct and plain in what you ask of God: "Give me springs of water."

Now, it seems to me, to-night, as if I could pray that prayer, "Give me springs of water." "Lord, thou hast given me a south land, all this congregation, Sunday after Sunday, all this multitude of people; but, Lord, how can I preach to them if thou dost not give me springs of water? 'All my fresh springs are in thee.' What is the use of the hearers if there be not the power of the Holy Spirit going with the Word to bless them? Give me springs of water." Now, I can suppose a Sunday-school teacher here to-night saying, "Lord, I thank thee for my interesting class, and for the attention that the scholars pay to what I say to them; but, Lord, what is the good of my children to me unless thou give me springs of water? Oh, that, out of myself, out of my very soul, might flow rivers of living water for my dear scholars, and that I might have the power of thy Holy Spirit with all my teaching! Give me springs of water." I can imagine a Christian parent here saying, "Lord, I thank thee for my wife and my children; I thank thee that thou hast given me servants over whom I have influence; I thank thee for all these; but what is the use of my being the head of a family unless thou give me springs of grace that, like David, I may bless my household, and see my children grow up in thy fear? Give me springs of water." The point of this petition is this, "O Lord, what thou hast given me is of little good to me unless thou give me something more." O dear hearers, if God has given you money, pray that he will give you grace to use it aright; or else, if you hoard it up or spend it, it may, in either case, prove a curse to you! Pray, "Give me springs of water; give me grace to use my wealth aright." Some here have many talents. Riches in the brain are among the best of riches. Be thankful to God for your talents; but cry, "Lord, give me of thy grace, that I may use my talents for thy glory. Give me springs of water, or else my talents shall be a dry and thirsty land, yielding no fruit unto thee. Give me springs of water." You see, the prayer is not merely for water; but for springs of water. "Give me a perpetual, eternal, ever-flowing fountain. Give me grace that shall never fail; but shall flow, and flow on, and flow for ever. Give me a constant supply: "Give me springs of water."

This woman's prayer, then, I have thus tried to commend to you. Oh, that we might all have grace to copy her!

IV. Now, lastly, see Her Success. Upon this I will not detain you more than a minute or two. "Caleb gave her the upper springs and the nether springs."

Observe, her father gave her what she asked. She asked for springs, and he gave her springs. "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?" God gives us what we ask for when it is wise to do so. Sometimes we make mistakes, and ask for the wrong thing; and then he is kind enough to put the pen through the petition, and write another word into the prayer, and answer the amended prayer rather than the first foolish edition of it. Caleb gave Achsah what she asked.

Next, he gave her in large measure. She asked for springs of water, and he gave her the upper springs and the nether springs. The Lord "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask, or think." Some use that passage in prayer, and misquote it, "above what we can ask or even think." That is not in the Bible, because you can ask or even think anything you like; but it is "above all that we ask, or think." Our asking or our thinking falls short; but God's giving never does.

And her father gave her this without a word of upbraiding. He did not say, Ah, you Achsah, you are always begging of me!" He did not say, Now that I have given you to your husband, it is too bad of him to let you come and ask for more from me, when I have given you plenty already." There are some gruff old fathers who would speak like that to their daughters, and say, "No, no, no! Come, come, I cannot stand this; you have a good portion already, my girl, and I have others to think of as well as you." No, Caleb gave her the upper and the nether springs, and never said a word by way of blaming her; but I will be bound to say that he smiled on her, as he said, "Take the upper and the nether springs, and may you and your husband enjoy the whole! You have only asked, after all, what my heart delights to give you." Now, may the Lord grant unto us to-night to ask of him in wisdom, and may he not have to upbraid us, but give us all manner of blessings both of the upper and the nether springs, both of heaven and earth, both of eternity and time, and give them freely, and not say even a single word by way of upbraiding us!

I have done with this last point when I have asked a plain question or two. Why is it that, to-night, some of you dear friends have a very parched-up inheritance? The grass will not grow, and the corn will not grow, nothing good seems to grow. You have been ploughing, and turning the plot up, and sowing, and weeding, and yet nothing comes of it. You are a believer, and you have an inheritance; but you are not very much given to song, not very cheery, not very happy; and you are sitting here to-night, and singing, to the tune Job, —

"Lord, what a wretched land is this, That yields us no supply!"

Well, why is that? There is no need for it. Your heavenly Father does not want you to be in that miserable condition. There is something to be had that would lift you out of that state, and change your tone altogether. May every child of God here go to his Father, just like Achsah went to Caleb! Pour out your heart before the Lord, with all the simple ease and naturalness of a trustful, loving child.

Do you say, "Oh, I could not do that"? Then I shall have to ask you this question, "Are we truly the children of God if we never feel towards him any of that holy boldness?" Do you not think that every child must feel a measure of that confidence towards his father? If there is a son in the world who says, "No, I-I-I really could not speak to my father," well, I shall not make any enquiries, but I know that there is something wrong up at his home, there is something not right either with the father or with the boy. Wherever there is a loving home, you never hear the son or daughter say, "You know, I-I-I could not ask my father." I hope that we have none of us got into that condition with regard to our earthly fathers; let none of us be in that condition with regard to our heavenly Father.

"My soul, ask what thou wilt, Thou canst not be too bold; Since his own blood for thee he spilt What else can he withhold?"

Come, then, while in the pew to-night, before we gather at the communion-table, and present thy petition with a childlike confidence, and expect it to be heard, and expect to-night to have fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

And you, poor sinners, who cannot pray like children, what are you to do? Well, you remember how the Savior said to the Syrophenician woman, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs." But she answered, "Yes, Lord; yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs." You come in for the crumbs to-night; for if a man is satisfied to eat crumbs with the dogs, God will not be satisfied till he makes him eat bread with the children. If thou wilt take the lowest place, God will give thee a higher place before long. Come thou to Jesus, and trust in him henceforth and for ever. Amen.

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ADONI-BEZEK'S PUNISHMENT

Jdg 1:6, 7

THERE are times and seasons afforded us for the performance of our duty, which, if they be once lost, can never afterwards be recovered. It was thus with the Israelites in the invasion of Canaan: if they had followed up their successes with becoming zeal, their difficulties would have been comparatively light: but at no time did they advance with that ardour which they should have manifested in such a cause. Joshua had reproved them for their indolence (Josh. 18:), and quickened them in some degree; but still, after his death, and fifteen years after their first invasion of Canaan, no one of the tribes had complete possession of the lot assigned them. The Israelites had increased, and now wanted the whole of their inheritance: but the Canaanites had increased also, and, possessing still their strong-holds, were able to cope with Israel in battle. Now therefore the different tribes found the bitter consequences of their past indifference; and, as it should seem, were afraid to resume a warfare with such potent enemies. However, after having consulted God, Judah, by divine direction, took the lead, and, in conjunction with the tribe of Simeon, renewed the conflict with the Canaanites. God gave them success, and delivered into their hand Adoni-bezek, one of the most powerful of the kings of Canaan. Him they treated with great severity: and their conduct towards him forms the subject of our present consideration. We shall consider,

I. The particular dispensation here recorded—

The conduct of this king had been most cruel—

[What occasions he had had for waging war against seventy kings, we know not: ambition never wants a pretext for its bloody projects: but to insult over their misfortunes in such a manner as to maim their persons, and compel them, like dogs, to gather up scraps from under his table for their subsistence, argued a degree of cruelty, which one could scarcely have conceived to exist in a rational being. One might suppose it possible that some particular provocation might have caused him to offer such an indignity to a single individual; but when such conduct was pursued towards so many vanquished kings, it manifestly proceeded only from his barbarous and brutal disposition. But here we are constrained to acknowledge, how empty is human greatness; how uncertain the continuance of those honours in which men so vainly pride themselves; and how often it happens that pre-eminence in station leads only to a sad pre-eminence in distress and misery. Nor can we forbear to notice, what desolation and trouble one ambitious tyrant may produce in the earth.

Whilst we see the dispositions of this man exhibited in such awful colours, let us not suppose that we ourselves are altogether exempt from them. The truth is, that the dispositions themselves are common to every child of man, though they have not attained in all the same maturity, or brought forth in all such visible and deadly fruits. We cannot but have seen that children feel a pleasure in vexing and tyrannizing over those who are weaker than themselves; and, as we grow up in life, a fondness for manifesting superiority and exercising despotic sway increases: and, in proportion as our opportunities for displaying these hateful qualities are enlarged, our evil tendencies become augmented and confirmed. How conspicuous is this in the great men of the earth, who can spread desolation over whole provinces without remorse, and invade, as we have seen, even neutral and friendly kingdoms for no other end than to gratify their own insatiable ambition!]

But he in his turn was made to feel the judgments which he had so wantonly inflicted upon others—

[It was a law in Israel, that magistrates should punish offenders in a way of just retribution (Lev 24:19, 20): and doubtless it was by the direction of God, the righteous Governor of the universe, that the Israelites on this occasion maimed the body of their captive king. To insult over him indeed, as he had insulted over others, would have been inconsistent with those gracious affections, which Israel, as the Lord's people, were bound to exercise. In that part therefore the sentence was relaxed: but, as far as the law required, they "meted to him the measure which he had meted out to others." This brought his sin to his remembrance, and compelled him to acknowledge the equity of Jehovah, who in his righteous providence had so requited him: "As I have done, so God hath requited me." And though a feeling mind cannot but regret that such a judgment should be executed on a fallen prince, yet in this case we are constrained to acquiesce in it, and even to feel a secret satisfaction, in seeing that the evils which he had so cruelly inflicted upon others were at last brought home to himself.]

Let us now turn our attention from the particular dispensation, to,

II. The insight which it gives us into God's moral government—

"God is still known by the judgments which he executeth"—

[God has not relinquished the government of the earth: he orders and overrules every thing now as much as ever; and in his

former dispensations we behold a perfect exhibition of the government which he still administers. Still, as formerly, does he requite the wickedness of men; sometimes on the offenders themselves, as when he smote Uzziah with leprosy (2Chr 26:19); and sometimes on others upon their account; as when he slew seventy thousand of the people, to punish the sin which David had committed in numbering his subjects (2Sa 24:15, 17). Sometimes he inflicts the judgment immediately, as on Herod who was eaten up with worms (Acts 12:23); and sometimes after a long season, as on the sons of Saul for their father's cruelty to the Gibeonites many years before (2Sa 21:1, 6, 9). Sometimes his judgments are sent as a prelude to those heavier judgments that shall be inflicted in the eternal world, as in the case of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Nu 16:24-35); and sometimes after the offenders themselves have been forgiven, as was experienced by David in his family (2Sa 12:13, 14), and by Manasseh, whose iniquities were visited upon Israel after he himself had been received up to glory (2Ki 24:2, 3, 4). Sometimes his chastisements had no particular affinity with the offence committed, as in the plagues of Egypt; and sometimes the offence was clearly marked in the punishment; as in the case of Joram, who had slain all his brothers, and whose children were all, with one exception, consigned to the slaughter (2Chr 21:4, 17); and as David, whose wives and concubines were openly denied by his own son Absalom, just as he himself had defiled the wife of his faithful servant Uriah (2Sa 12:10, 11, 12, 2Sa 12:16:21, 22). So minutely is this correspondence marked in the Scriptures, that even the time and the place are noticed, as designed to manifest the very offence which God designed to punish; as Israel's wandering in the wilderness forty years on account of their murmuring at the reports which were brought them by the spies who had searched out the land forty days (Nu 14:33, 34); and as Ahab's blood was licked up by dogs, on the very spot where dogs had licked the blood of Naboth, whom he had murdered. (1Ki 21:19, 22:38)

We might further notice the correspondence between the spiritual judgments which God oftentimes inflicts for spiritual transgressions. Those who "will not hearken to his voice, he gives up to their own counsels;" (Ps 81:11, 12) those who abandon themselves to all manner of wickedness, he gives up to vile affections and a reprobate mind (Ro 1:26, 27, 28); and those who "will not receive his truth in order to salvation, he gives up to their own delusions, that they may be damned." (2Th 2:10, 11, 12)

We have not prophets indeed at this time to declare the particular instances in which God intends this righteous procedure of his to be discovered: but we have no reason to think that he has altered his system of government, and consequently no reason to doubt but that he still displays his own righteousness in his dispensations, as he has done in every age and quarter of the world. If any imagine that this conduct of his was confined to the nation whose temporal Governor he was, we must remind them, that he dealt precisely in the same way with the heathen nations (Is. 33:1), and has taught us to expect that he will do so to the end of time. (Re 18:5, 6)]

Whereinsoever he fails to requite either good or evil in this life, he will requite it perfectly in the world to come—

[God inflicts some judgments here on account of sin, in order that it may be seen that he governs the world; but he does not do it in all instances, in order that men may know, that he will judge the world. It often happens that the wicked prosper, and the righteous are oppressed; and yet God does not remarkably interpose to punish the one, or to reward the other: but in the last day, all will be made right; and every creature in the universe, the good and the evil, the oppressor and the oppressed, will "receive at God's hands a just recompence of reward." (2Th 1:6, 7, 8, 9, 10)]

From hence we may learn,

1. To investigate the reasons of God's dealings with us—

[Every dispensation of Providence has a voice, to which we should give diligent attention. If we more carefully inquired into the design of God in his various dispensations towards us, we should find them an inexhaustible source of most instructive information. We might read in our afflictions some fault which God designs to correct; some mistake which he intends to rectify; some corruption which he desires to subdue; some grace which he is anxious to confirm; or some temptation, against which he purposes to fortify our minds. As in the instance before us, God brought to the remembrance of Adoni-bezek the sins which he had committed, and which perhaps in the fulness of his prosperity he had overlooked; so he often, by a particular chastisement, shews us the evil of some practice which we had justified, or revives in our minds the recollection of some which we had too slightly condemned. I would say unto you therefore, "Hear the rod, and Him that hath appointed it." If you see not the reason of it, go unto your God, and say, "Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me?" and let no cross be suffered to escape from you, without having first paid to you that tribute of good, which by the order of Providence you are entitled to exact.]

2. To repent of particular sins—

[We cannot be too particular in calling to mind the sins which at any time we may have committed. Though we have not walked in the steps of this wicked tyrant, it is highly probable that we have lived in sinful habits, which custom has rendered familiar to our minds; and that we have in many things offended God, whilst we have not been conscious of committing any offence at all. Possibly Adoni-bezek at first felt a consciousness of doing wrong; but after a season, accounted his rival kings a legitimate prey, whom he might subdue, and torture in any way that he pleased. But at last God made him sensible of the enormity of his

conduct. In like manner we may learn hereafter to view many parts of our conduct with far different feelings than we have yet done. God has borne with us indeed; but we must not consider his long-suffering as any proof of his approbation: he is recording every thing in the book of his remembrance, and will call us into judgment for it, whether it be good or evil. Let us then search and try our ways: let us pray that he will not “remember against us the sins and transgressions of our youth:” let us, like Hezekiah, “humble ourselves for the pride” or any other evil passion that has at any time been in “our heart.” In this way we shall avert many evils from ourselves which unlamented sin would bring upon us, and extract the sting from those which God in his providence may allot us.]

3. To abound in every good work—

[“The godly, no less than the sinner, shall be recompensed in the earth (Pr 11:31 Pr 13:21):” “for godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” Look into the Scriptures, and you will find that there is nothing that you can do for God or for your fellow-creatures, to which God has not annexed an appropriate reward. “Draw nigh to him, and he will draw nigh to you:” “honour him, and he will honour you:” “serve him, and he will gird himself and serve you.” Visit and relieve your sick neighbour, and “God will be with you in trouble, and make all your bed in sickness (Ps 41:1, 3):” “nor shall even a cup of cold water given to a disciple, in any wise lose its reward.” Would you then have testimonies of God’s approbation here? endeavour to “abound in the work of the Lord:” and expect also, that, in proportion as you improve your talents now, shall be the weight of glory assigned to you in a better world.] (Simeon, C. 1832-63. *Horae Homileticae*)