

A SNARE – A TRAP – A STUMBLING-BLOCK

"And David saith, Let their table become a snare and a trap, and a stumbling-block, and a recompense unto them; let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see." – Rom. 11:9,10.

AT ONE TIME these words seemed irreconcilable with either justice or love. Supposing that the poor Jews who were blinded, stumbled into eternal torment, God's conduct seemed inscrutable – no matter if, through the Apostle, he did promise (vss. 25,26) that, generations after, the blindness should be turned away – after the fullness of the elect Church, the Gentiles, had been brought into Divine favor.

We reasoned that the recovery of a man's great-great-great-grand-children could never compensate for his own loss, if he went to eternal misery. And although trained in Presbyterian thought it seemed terrible to read the calm, cold assertion, "What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the *elect hath obtained it*, and THE REST WERE BLINDED" – "STUMBLED," "SNARED," "TRAPPED."

KNOWLEDGE OF THE DIVINE PLAN ENABLES US TO UNDERSTAND THE SCRIPTURES PROPERLY

But, thank God, our own blindness was removed and the breaking of the Millennial dawn, revealing the Divine Plan, set our ideas right, enabled us to rightly divide and apply the Scriptures and brought the grandest order out of our confusion. We found that the hell to which Israel went was the *grave – hades*; that there is no consciousness in hell (Heb., *sheol*; Greek, *hades* – Ezek. 37:12; Psa. 6:5); that blinded, stumbled Israel is still there, and that not merely their grand-children, centuries after, will have their blindness removed and their sins forgiven, but all of them will individually enjoy these favors.

They *all* were included in the unbelief and blindness and stumbling, that God might have mercy upon *all* and recover every one of them from that blindness and bring every one of them to that full, clear knowledge which will render every man without excuse and fully responsible for his choice of life through obedience to Christ, or of the "second death" through disobedience. See verses 27-32; John 5:28; Ezek. 37:12,13; John 1:9.

To see the matter thus clearly was a great relief; but still our heart cried out to God for an explanation and a just reason for the blinding, stumbling and entrapping of all but an elect few of a nation to which, as a whole, he had made many gracious promises and for whom he had already done so much, for eighteen centuries – a nation which alone of all the nations of earth recognized him as its Ruler and were under covenant relations to him and his Law.

ISRAEL'S PROMISES EARTHLY – NOT HEAVENLY

The answer of God's Word is that, while he had called Israel by his promises to a great and noble part in his Plan of Salvation, he did not call them to the place of chief favor and honor. His promises to them were earthly, not heavenly. And although all of the sons of Jacob were *called* or invited, it was a conditional call which the nation as a whole never complied with. Only the few ever kept his Laws (or were reckoned to have kept them by proper intention) and hence, all along, it was true that some children of Jacob, professedly children of God, were really of their father the Devil (John 8:44), because they were not all Israelites that were of the nation of Israel. – Rom. 9:6.

When God's due time came for the great Atonement for sin to be made by our Redeemer's sacrifice of himself (Heb. 7:27), that also was his due time for beginning the selection of his *spiritual* Israel, to whom he extends heavenly promises and for whom he has reserved the very highest place in his great Plan – next to himself.

EARTHLY ISRAEL SET ASIDE UNTIL THE COMPLETION OF THE SPIRITUAL ISRAEL

Christ himself became the Head and Chief of this spiritual or heavenly Israel, of which fleshly Israel with its precious but earthly promises had so long been a type or shadow. And as soon as Christ's sacrifice was completed the work of selecting the spiritual Israel as his "Bride" or "Body" or "brethren" and "joint-heirs" was due to begin.

It was not God's purpose that the *two* Israels should continue side by side; hence, as soon as the spiritual was *begun* the earthly was set aside; not set aside *forever*, but merely until the spiritual Israel had been selected. But although the fleshly House of Israel was set aside at the time of Christ's crucifixion (Matt. 23:38), yet the first opportunity for membership in spiritual Israel was given to that people.

It is not surprising that only a handful, a "remnant," of fleshly Israel was able to stand the tests of faith and sacrifice exacted of the spiritual Israelites. Those "hypocrites" to whom it was said, "Ye are of your father the Devil," would surely not be in condition to be attracted by the Truth and its spirit into fellowship in the **[R4781 : page 84]** new spiritual Israel. And even of those who were Israelites indeed, who trusted in the promises of God, we cannot suppose that many would be without guile, pure in heart, and just ready for faith and obedience under the Gospel Age call. By the Divine arrangement, therefore, the preaching of the Gospel of the Cross skimmed off, as it were, into the Gospel Church the cream class of that people – "and the rest were blinded"; and God was agreeable to their being blinded.

THE GREAT GULF BETWEEN THE EARTHLY AND THE HEAVENLY ISRAEL TO BE DESTROYED

God would allow "a great gulf" to be fixed by their *prejudices* between them and the spiritual Israel; he would make of them a spectacle before the world, and although outcasts from his favor for a time they should, as a dead nation, be witnesses to his Word

throughout the world; and, finally, when he shall have selected and polished and glorified his spiritual Israel, he will destroy the "great gulf," turn away their blindness as a people, and receive back to favor all of them who then will come – showing mercy upon them through the glorified spiritual Israel – vss. 31,32.

"O, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God"! How grandly systematic and reasonable [R4782 : page 84] and just is the Divine Plan of the Ages! – Romans 11:33.

HOW THEIR TABLE BECAME A SNARE, A TRAP AND A CAUSE OF STUMBLING

But now another point deserves consideration: In what way was their *table* their snare and trap and cause of stumbling?

Their "table" signifies their food; and the table or food spread before fleshly Israel, God's fleshly children, consisted of those special favors and promises of God to them as his Chosen People. (Matt. 15:26,27.) Thus seen, it was God's goodness and favor toward them that stumbled and entrapped them and prejudiced their unconsecrated hearts. They presumed upon God's favor. They said within themselves, "We have Abraham to our father." (Matt. 3:9.) They concluded that God *must* keep his promises to Abraham and that they, being his children, the Kingdom to bless the world *must* sooner or later be themselves. They trusted in themselves and despised others; they became arrogant, haughty and self-confident, and hence that much the less the humble-spirited, that the Lord sought, for his spiritual Israel.

PRIDE LED TO OVERSIGHT OF CERTAIN SCRIPTURES FORETELLING "THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST"

Their pride led them to look only at the promises of glory and honor and power to accompany the exaltation of Israel, and led them to ignore the passages which tell that Messiah must first be rejected and "led as a

lamb to the slaughter" and "pour out his soul unto death," being smitten for our sins, "the chastisement of our peace being laid upon him."

For the same reason they overlooked the statements of God's prophets that they should first be scattered amongst all nations, where God would show them no favor; and that their later blessing would be in connection with their regathering out of all nations (Jer. 16:13-17; Deut. 4:26-28; 28:36,37,63-65), and that when the Lord shall deliver them "they shall look upon him whom *they have pierced*, and they shall *mourn* for him as for an only son." – Zech. 12:10.

Thus their "table" became their "trap," which still holds them tightly – their pride of heart, built upon those promises, still blinds them. But we should notice carefully that their stumbling was not because of any wrong done them by God. No; "his way is perfect." "Every good and perfect gift cometh down from our Father." "He is not a God of confusion" and "he is the same yesterday, today and forever." The "table" which he provided was good. The entire difficulty was that Israel's consecration was incomplete; hence the majority of them were not of the class whom the Lord intended should know the Truth before the Messianic Age, when the eyes of all shall be opened and all shall come to an accurate knowledge of the Truth.

THE THINGS WRITTEN WERE SPECIALLY FOR OUR LEARNING

But now we come to the most important feature of this subject. These things were written for our learning, upon whom the ends of the Ages are come. (I Cor. 10:11.) As fleshly Israel was a shadow or type of spiritual Israel, so the stumbling, trapping, snaring in the Harvest of their Age foreshadowed a similar sifting out of all except a faithful "remnant" here.

Here, as there, many in nominal spiritual Israel are not Israelites, but "hypocrites," and of their father the Devil. Here, as there, all who are really of Israel and before whom the "table" of God's bounties has

been spread with Providential care – "exceeding great and precious promises" – all of these do not digest and appropriate God's promises to the upbuilding of characters pleasing to God and fit for the Kingdom; and hence, even while feeding at his "table," such receive the grace of God in *vain*. To these, as well as to their prototypes, the "table" of Truth which they delight in is sure to become a snare, a trap, a stumbling-block. And it is specially for the sake of such that we now write to put them on guard as to *how they use* the "food" now so abundantly supplied to us. – Luke 12:37.

Only those who have at least some hunger and thirst after righteousness [Truth] are at all welcomed at this "table"; it is the *children's* table and others than God's true children may gather and eat only the crumbs that fall from it.

UNLAWFUL FOR ANY EXCEPT THE PRIESTS TO EAT THE SHEW-BREAD

It is the table of the consecrated believers at which others "have no right to eat." (Heb. 13:10.) The truly consecrated are the antitypical or Royal Priesthood, whose "table" was typified in the Tabernacle and in the Temple by the table of shew-bread, of which it was not lawful for any except the priests to eat. If, therefore, you have "tasted that the Lord is *gracious*"; if you have "tasted of the *good* Word of God"; if you have had "meat [food] to eat that the world knoweth not of"; if you have tasted the "present truth" – "meat in due season" – it implies either that you are one of the consecrated ones, one of the Royal Priests, or else that you are in contact with them and receiving crumbs from *their* "table."

The giving of all Truth, and especially "present truth," implies an object. That object is the sanctifying or setting apart to God and to his holy service. The crumbs of Truth are to awaken a desire for and to lead to the act of *consecration* or *sanctification*. The full table of bounties is for those who have taken the step of fully consecrating themselves, their wills and their all to the Lord – and the bountiful supply of

exceeding great and precious promises then granted to *them* is that by these they might be strengthened and enabled to carry out fully, [R4782 : page 85] step by step, the full consecration they have made – even unto death.

The object of our consecration and subsequent disciplining under the guidance and power of the Truth is for the formation of *character*, for "perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord." The Apostle clearly shows the object of our precious promises, our spiritual food, saying, "Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us *cleanse ourselves* from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit; perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord." (2 Cor. 7:1.) He assures us that knowledge may be received and used for a different purpose and produce a bad, instead of good effect and puff up or make proud and self-willed.

WHAT EFFECT HAS THE TRUTH UPON OUR HEARTS?

It becomes each of us to ask himself the questions, Have not I received considerable knowledge of the Truth – of God's Character and Plan? Has it had the bad effect of puffing me up and making me feel that I am somebody? Has it caused a self-satisfied feeling, which ignores my own weaknesses and failings and merely relies on God's mercy and seeks to exaggerate that mercy and to ignore Scripture texts which clearly show that "God is angry with the wicked every day"; that "the wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness," for "all unrighteousness is sin"; that whosoever committeth sin [wilfully] is [a child] of the Devil," and that "all the [intelligently and wilfully] wicked will God destroy"? Or has it caused me to feel more humble and dependent on the giver of all good? And has it, properly, caused me to feel Divine approval and rest and security, only under the merit of the precious blood when I am using my best endeavors for righteousness, godliness, purity and Truth?

The latter is the only legitimate and proper use of the Truth. If the true view of God's character, seen in his Plan and the exceeding great and precious promises held out to the overcomers, reaching our ears and

our hearts, fails to awaken there a responsive adoration of things that are true, things that are honest, things that are just, things that are pure and things that are lovely, and a desire to be more and more transformed to that God-likeness and accordingly to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit and to become more and more perfected in holiness – if these are not the effects of the Truth upon our flesh and our spirits (minds, dispositions) we are *receiving the grace of God in VAIN*; for it was given for no other purpose. And if we receive God's grace and Truth in vain, we may be sure it will be but a little while until it will slip from us and be replaced by misconceptions.

Let us, therefore, take heed to the illustration given us in God's typical people, lest our table, so bountifully spread and served by the Master himself, become to us a snare, a trap and a stumbling-block into blindness – the "outer darkness" of the world, because of a failure to properly use its blessings already received.

"Let us *fear* lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest [by full consecration and perfecting holiness **[R4783 : page 85]** in our hearts and conduct and thus developing our characters and being changed from glory to glory into the likeness of God's dear Son] any of us should seem to come short of it." – Heb. 4:1.

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