

THE TRIED AND PROVEN PEOPLE

**"The Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul."
– Deut. 13:3.**

GOD HAD entered into a Covenant with the Children of Israel, in harmony with His promise made to Abraham their father. Four hundred and thirty years after His Covenant with Abraham, the Lord had called Israel out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, and had made them a nation in the wilderness. He had proposed to them that if they would keep His Law and His statutes He would make of them a great people, above all other peoples of the earth. They had entered into this Covenant with the Lord, and had declared that they were very glad to accept this Divine arrangement and to have the opportunity of carrying God's blessing eventually to all mankind. But now Israel was about to cross over Jordan and enter the land of Promise. Before parting from them, Moses explained to them that it was not enough that they had accepted the conditions of the Covenant and become the Lord's people: God would test them, would prove them.

Why should God prove them? As a people they had left Egypt under the leadership of the chosen servant of God. They had crossed the Red Sea, and sung their praises for deliverance. They had journeyed forty years in the wilderness. They had been refreshed with the water from the smitten rock. They had been fed with the bread from Heaven. God knew all about them when He took them for His people. What more could He wish?

Ah! but their fathers had rebelled against God, and had fallen in the wilderness because of sin, because they had murmured against Him whom they had covenanted to serve. And now Moses explained that God wished to prove to what extent the Covenant

would be kept by these their children. He said: You have entered into this agreement which God made with your fathers. You have made a consecration to be the servants of the Lord. Now, are you ready to perform the terms of your agreement? "The Lord your God doth prove you, to see whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." – Deuteronomy 13:3.

GOD'S WONDERFUL CARE OVER ISRAEL

Do you appreciate God? was the query. Do you realize the value of His kindness? Do you truly love Him with all your being – with all your powers, your strength? Are you fully surrendered to the Lord? For "thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness – to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments or no. He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know, that He might make thee to know that man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live. Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years. Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee. Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him. [R5527 : page 263]

"For the Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness; thou shalt not lack anything in it. ...When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which He hath given thee. Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping His

commandments and His judgments and His statutes, which I command thee this day." – Deuteronomy 8:2-11.

SUPREME FAVORS TO SPIRITUAL ISRAEL

What an exhortation! What an incentive to faithfulness! Who would not worship and serve such a God! And what a wonderful application can Spiritual Israel make of this Scripture! How marvelously has our God led us, His Covenant people, through the wilderness of this world, and provided for our needs day by day! How the chastenings of His loving hand have kept our feet from wandering; or if we have turned at any time to the right hand, or to the left, how has His love drawn us back! And has He not brought us into a good land, a land of brooks of water, a land of fountains and depths, a land of oil olive and honey, a land wherein we eat bread, the Bread of Heaven, without scarceness? Truly, we have not lacked anything in it. If Israel of old had reason to prove their gratitude and love to God, how much more reason have we, Spiritual Israel!

MOSES' DYING MESSAGE

After Moses had reminded Israel of all the loving kindnesses of the Lord on their behalf and of their solemn Covenant, he proclaimed to them the ordinances of the Lord by which they were to be governed, and then gave them most solemn warnings of the consequences of forgetting God and breaking their Covenant. This discourse, **[R5528 : page 263]** of which our text is a part, and which comprises the larger part of the Book of Deuteronomy, was delivered to Israel just before Moses' death in Mount Nebo – the highest point of the ridge of Pisgah – whence the Lord showed him all the land of Canaan, and where he was buried. God had told Moses that He should not go over Jordan, because of his disobedience at the waters of Meribah, when he smote the rock contrary to the command of God. This discourse was his last message to Israel, and is very touching and impressive.

Moses finished his message with these words: "I call Heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Therefore choose life, that thou and thy seed mayest live, that thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest cleave unto Him; for He is thy life, and the length of thy days, that thou mayest dwell in the land which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them." Such words were very forceful at such a time; for Moses had told them that he was about to die, and that God would give them a new leader to go with them over Jordan.

ONLY "ISRAELITES INDEED" ARE SOUGHT

As a matter of fact, we know that Israel did not live up to their engagement, as God had assured Moses would be the case. They were like unto their fathers who died in the wilderness. During the centuries of their dwelling in Canaan, however, there were quite a large number who individually proved worthy of the blessing and favor of the Lord. St. Paul refers to these in Hebrews 11, and declares their loyalty to God. These are to have a "better resurrection" than their brethren or than mankind in general. The Apostle mentions such characters as Moses, Samuel, David, and many of the prophets and others who were not so honored and prominent as these in an earthly way, but who had the honor of having pleased God.

Their serving the Lord with all their heart and soul could not justify them legally; for they were imperfect and blemished through the fall. But all the powers they had were devoted to the Lord. These became heirs of God – not heirs in the highest sense, because this opportunity was not open in their time. No one could gain this highest position until the Redeemer had come and opened the way. So all these worthy ones who lived prior to the Christian Era, died in faith, not having received the promise, i. e., its fulfilment. But "they looked for a City which hath foundations,

whose Builder and Maker is God." And soon these faithful servants of the Lord will "stand up for their portion."

But we, the Church, must all first be perfected. In this class our Lord Jesus holds the highest place, and by the sacrifice of Himself He opened the door of opportunity to His brethren of the elect class. "Israelites indeed" were honored with this invitation to become joint-heirs with Christ, sons of God. Only those who love God with all their heart and soul are "Israelites indeed." The average Israelite of our Lord's day was not fit to be of this select company; only "Israelites indeed" accepted the invitation. Throughout this Gospel Age these true Israelites have been entering into this wonderful favor with all their heart and with all their soul.

It is not because we are more nearly perfect in the flesh that we have obtained this great favor, but because the Lord opened the way, and because we had a love for righteousness and an honesty of heart. Those who lived before our time, during the Law Covenant Dispensation and prior to it, needed justification also; and the same Redeemer who has purchased us has through His sacrifice provided justification for them, that they too may ultimately come into the blessed relationship of sons of God.

IS GOD'S KNOWLEDGE LIMITED?

The way in which this expression of our text is put might give the impression that God does not know the hearts of men. The Scriptures assure us that God can fully read the heart, "that all things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" – no thought or purpose of our heart is hidden from Him. But when we think of the Almighty – what He knows or what He does not know – we are at a loss to form an opinion. So far as our experience goes, there is no one who could know just what he himself would do under any given condition in the future. We may think what we would probably do, but we are not sure. And if we

are not sure that we ourselves know what we would do, we cannot see how any one else could know what we would do. We cannot by any mental process understand how it would be possible for God to know what we might do tomorrow, unless He coerced our mind or hedged up our way, so that we could do only one certain thing.

In the matter of the Gentile Times, God permitted various governments – Babylonia, Medo-Persia, Grecia and Rome – to rule the world successively. We can understand how He could say: "Thus far shalt thou go and no farther." The tendency of sin in the fallen race would lead people to go to any length, if not restrained. In such ways, we can understand how God would know in advance. He knows, too, when the Church will be selected, as He has a definite Plan concerning this selection. He knew that Satan would have the disposition to raise up an Anti-Christ System – a counterfeit of the true **[R5528 : page 264]** Church. He knew how many saints within a given time could be developed under those conditions, and how much time would thus be necessary to gather His predestinated number; for He purposed to permit Satan to operate within certain bounds for the testing of His professed people.

It would not be wise for us to say that there are some things that God could not know, that He does not know – or that there is *anything* that God does not know – but we can say that we are not able to *understand* how God could know what we shall think tomorrow, or next week. God made man a free moral agent; and He always respects this free agency, and gives us the opportunity of exercising our own wills. He is not pleased to have people who would work automatically. He permits us to make our own decisions. He has given us His Word, He gives us all needed assistances, and He will help all who are seeking to walk in His way. But these questions, we trust, will all be solved for us ere long. We know that God proves His professed people and

demonstrates their heart attitude just as if He did not know – perhaps only as a proof to angels and men.

WHAT WILL THE ISSUE BE?

God is proving the Church now. There are many of the professed Church of Christ who have never made a covenant with God at all. But He is testing all those who have made a covenant, as to whether or not it is a heart-consecration – whether it is *self* first or *God* first – whether it is success in life or the honor of God and the doing of His will. He is trying us because He wishes to find out who will be worthy of a place with His Son on the Throne, who will be worthy to reign with Him in the Kingdom, and who of the remainder will be worthy of a place in the company of antitypical Levites, and finally, who will be deserving of the Second Death.

Ours, therefore, is not only the high honor of being sons of God during this Gospel Age, but also of being proved for the lasting rewards. The Jews that knowingly lived in violation of their Law lost merely their temporal life, but did not forfeit their opportunity for the eternal life. But if any of *us* do likewise, we shall forfeit the life eternal. Therefore, the dealing of God with us goes beyond His dealing with Natural Israel. Our responsibility, then, is so much the greater, and the issue is final.

The Kingdom is designed only for those who by the grace of God shall in heart, in character, become like the Master, in that they will love the Lord with all their heart, with all their soul (all their present capacity), and be able to say: "Not My will, but Thine, O Lord, be done." No other heart condition than this of entire submission to God in Christ can make us acceptable for the Kingdom; for no other condition represents full loyalty and full love to God. Let us not forget that all the Heavenly glories and blessings, which "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man," God has prepared only for them

who love Him supremely – and who prove this love. But His grace will be sufficient for our every need.

"Then let us bid each doubt remove –
Those doubts that fain would rise –
And view the Canaan that we love
With unbeclouded eyes!
Could we but climb where Moses stood,
And view the landscape o'er,
Not Jordan's stream, nor death's cold flood,
Should fright us from the shore!"

