

THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

A SERMON

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“And it come to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said. Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt.” Exodus 13:17

THESE circumstances, even historically taken, are beautifully expressive of the care which the Lord takes of his people. But when we remember, that in after parts of the Bible these circumstances are made use of to illustrate things that are eternal, it is with this view that they acquire a lasting, I may say an everlasting interest. So that there will be no difficulty whatever in applying the language of our text unto the people of God spiritually; for while the circumstances here are in themselves literal and temporal, yet we shall have this morning to treat them in their spiritual and eternal application. And in so doing, I notice, first, *the release*; “When Pharaoh had let the people go.” Secondly, *Divine management*; “God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines.” Thirdly and lastly, *the calamity avoided*; namely, “Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt.” This, therefore, by the Lord’s leading, was prevented.

But before I enter upon the subject, I may just observe that I shall not this morning, I think I shall not have time nor space to take any notice of the larger number of Israelites who turned out to be apostates. I shall therefore treat the text and the people, too, this morning, as though they were all people of God; for it was on account of the true Israelites among them that the Lord dealt thus carefully with them. I shall therefore treat the subject in that way.

First, then, here is the release: “When Pharaoh had let the people go.” The word of God shows that this, as I have hinted, had a spiritual meaning, and that the bondage in which the people were was a type of that bondage in which a convinced sinner feels himself to be. And when the Lord wakens up the soul to a knowledge of its state, then there is the dragon to be overcome; there is Satan at Joshua’s right hand, and Satan certainly will not let Joshua go before he is forced to do so; it is when the Lord comes in that Satan is conquered, cast out, and cast down, and the soul is released.

But let us look into the nature of this release: for it is that which is as delightful as anything I could meet you with this morning. You will perceive that the Paschal lamb, Pharaoh's defeat, and their release, went together. Let us then, look at this matter. For I trust we are not weary of dwelling, shall I say, within sight of Calvary; we are not weary of looking again and again at the Lord Jesus Christ in that way in which we daily feel more and more our need of him. Here, then, it was simply by the Paschal lamb that the Israelites were exempted from judgment, and all their enemies defeated. Just so now spiritually. And you will observe one thing here, and upon that I would chiefly dwell, and that is the sufficiency of the Paschal lamb. You observe there was nothing whatever needed of the creature. There was an order of things introduced which I shall presently take notice of; but still their entire escape, and the defeat of their foes, were entirely by that sacrifice which the Lord had instituted. And so now we come to the delightful truth that the blood of Jesus does with infinite and with eternal certainty cleanse from all sin. And as sure as we are brought to approve of him, for "Blessed is he that is not offended in me" as sure as we are brought to receive him, so sure as we are brought to make him our hope, and to have that confidence in his work that accords therewith; for if we once doubt the ability of his atonement, once doubt the sufficiency of his sacrifice, once doubt the perfection of it, once doubt the certainty of it, then there is no other hope; but if brought to see the infinite power of this atonement, being brought to receive this Jesus Christ, and to take up your stand there, and to say, "If I perish, I will perish here; if I am lost, I am lost here." Only, as I have said, you must be led to see into the sufficiency of that atonement. There are neither bolts, nor locks, nor bars, nor any human strength required; simply the blood, and I will pass by the house where I see the blood. And so it is, every one, and there never was, since the foundation of the world, yet, a sinner so broken down as to be brought to see that unless the atonement of Jesus Christ be what the Scriptures declare it is, namely, that which does perfect; as for the typical sacrifices, they made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope does make everything perfect, there never was a poor sinner yet so broken down, and brought thus to receive the perfection of Christ's atonement, and yet that man lost. Here, then, is the release. Never mind what the world may say. The Lord help you to think less and less of what the world may say, and the Lord help you to think less and less especially of what the professing world may say. Let your religion be, I was going to say, your own; look to your own heart, to your own state, and ask yourself, What have I to do with men as to my final destiny, and what have men to do with me? I must die alone, and shall be judged alone; I am complete, as it were, as to individuality in myself; and therefore, my whole concern is in the first place with myself. I have nothing whatever to do with what men may say, for they all stand, whether they know it or not, in the same position that I do. And thus, if your heart and your fallen nature from day to day tell you what a poor creature you are, and that you are by your carnal nature perpetually turning things upside down, you feel there is something in you that would put this world first, and the kingdom of God last; that there is something in you that would exalt the gains and advantages of this world, and make the revenues of eternal wisdom, although the word of God declares all things you can desire are not to be compared to the advantages of the glorious gospel of God, yet there is something in us that would labor to persuade us that the advantages of time surpass the advantages of eternity. Every Christian feels this is the case, and therefore all he can say is, "Oh, wretched man that I am!" Now it is so; this is your state whether you feel it or not. And if you do not, then all the worse; if you do not see it, then all the worse, if you can sing that hymn,

"Since I can hardly bear
What in myself I see,

How vile and black must I appear,
Most holy God, to thee,”

and yet you do not mean it, and do not feel it; it is a mere singsong say; it is a customary hymn, and so it goes glibly off the tongue, without any thought as to the reality; then, if that be the case, so much the worse. I only say this, if you are in your right mind when you come to words of that kind, and to scriptures that describe what we are, you will confess the truth of it. And I then cannot describe, I have never yet attempted, and never shall, to describe how precious the blood of Christ is to such an one that is thus sensible of his state; how precious the atonement of Christ is to such an one; how precious the perfection of it, how precious the certainty of it, how precious the glory of it, and how precious the timeliness of it, how precious the relations of it. It bears relation not to a covenant that could wax old, but to a covenant that never can wax old; it bears relation not to promises that are conditional, but to promises that are yea and amen.

Now here, then, was the release; here Pharaoh was defeated; here Pharaoh's firstborn were slain; and here Satan's firstborn, enmity, apostasy, and all the progeny of those two, are slain. Enmity and apostasy are the prime sins, they are the original sins. If you ask what original sin consists in, it consists in those two things, enmity against, and apostasy from, God; the one necessarily follows the other. Satan came and worked enmity into the mind of Adam and Eve against God, insinuating that God was not universal in his charity, that he ought not to have withhold one tree from them; that God was deficient in goodness, and that God was withholding from them what they ought to have, and what they ought to be. Then came the enmity, and from the enmity came the apostasy; and then, from this father and mother came the whole progeny of hell. Now then, as Pharaoh was defeated and his firstborn were slain when the Israelites were exempted by the paschal lamb, so by the Lord Jesus Christ enmity is slain; he has slain the enmity; apostasy is slain, and every sin is slain. And hence, the Egyptians seem, somehow or another, ingenuously to make a confession which we find no difficulty in spiritualizing, for the Egyptians said, "We be all dead men;" which was a fact as it regards their further power over the Israelites, for they were now as helpless as to their power over the Israelites as though they were dead; so that they were to the Israelites as good as dead; they were not all dead yet; by-and-bye Pharaoh and his hosts are dead; but the Egyptians are not all dead yet; but they are as good as dead unto the Israelites; the Israelites become by the paschal lamb as freed from them as though they were all dead. We are brought now into a state of reconciliation by Christ Jesus to God; enmity is now impossible; we could not, the thing is impossible for us to hate our covenant God now, we could not hate Christ Jesus now, we could not hate the Spirit of grace now. And bless the Lord, we cannot apostatize from him, for the unity into which we are brought is vital, and "he that has begun the good work will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ." And "therefore, having loved his own, he loved them unto the end." "I will," says God the Father, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." I think we are pretty sure, if the Holy Spirit carries his work on, we shall continue in the faith; and if Jesus Christ loves us unto the end he will be precious unto the end; and if God the Father never leaves nor forsakes us, I think Pharaoh certainly will have a job to overtake us; it is certain he will not be able to bring his hosts to where we are; we shall find the Mediator, the interposing cloud, the God of the Hebrews, between us and all our sins. Here, then, is the release; here Satan must part with us; here sin must part with us; here the law willingly parts with us; here death must part with us; here tribulation must part with us; all our troubles pass eternally away as a dream. Now, let us see whether we know something of this our bondage, and something of the truth that there is no release but by the perfection of

Christ's atonement; but that there is by that, perfect and eternal release. See how nicely Isaiah was led into this when the church in his time prayed like this, "Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord; are you not it that has cut Rahab?" Rahab meaning Egypt, are you not it that has cut Egypt in pieces? Egypt was an iron furnace, and the Israelites were encircled as with an iron wall, encircled all round, and there they were as in a cauldron, But the Lord came, and rent that mighty power asunder, and it fell to pieces, and a way was opened for the Israelites to pass out. "Awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Are you not it that has cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? are you not it which has dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that has made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over? Therefore, the redeemed of the Lord shall return." Oh, why then did grace work effectually in you to open your eyes when your eyes were opened? Why, because of that eternal redemption obtained by the Savior. And why, when your eyes were opened, and you were turned from darkness to light, from the darkness or sin to the light of salvation, from the darkness of death to the light of eternal life, from the darkness of the law to the light of the gospel, from the darkness of the curse to the light of the blessing, from the darkness of error to the light of truth, how was it that we then received forgiveness of sins? Why, there is the secret of it. "The redeemed of the Lord shall return;" there is the price paid, the redemption obtained. Ah, precious blood of Jesus Christ, that was speaking for us when we knew not him, when we were enmity against him, when we were afar off; "But now in Christ Jesus," "made nigh by the blood of Christ." Here, then, is the release; here, then, Satan must let us go, and all that heretofore have held us fast. I have often thought, though I hardly dare now branch out into that, that the 12th chapter of the Revelation is taken in great measure from the circumstances of the Israelites coming out of Egypt. You have a dragon here, that is a tyrannical power; and you have a dragon there; and you have this tyrannical power opposing the church here, and you have that tyrannical power opposing the church there. But Michael and his angels fought, and the dragon and his angels, or agents, did their best; but they prevailed not; no, Satan is cast down. And how was it that the saints overcame? Oh, that sweet scripture! These are the things that we like to touch upon; and I am sure the more familiar we are with them the happier we shall die. It is in nearness to our God by Christ Jesus that we are happy, and you are never near to God but by Christ Jesus. Some people say, That man walks very near to God. Indeed, I assure you, sir, he walks very near to God. When I come near to some of these people that walk very near to God, I can get nothing out of them except their own doings; they are wrapped up in their own doings; and they walk in a kind of imitation of something, and they call that walking near to God; whereas, to walk near to God is to walk near to God by faith in the perfection of Christ Jesus the Lord. "You who were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." So then, in the 12th of Revelation, "they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony;" and the Lord so supremely endeared it unto them that "they loved not their lives unto the death." Here, then, is the release; here, then, is the paschal lamb; here is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It does seem deplorable, but so it is, that the majority of the so-called Christian world are dead set against the perfection of Christ's atonement, are dead set against the certainty of the salvation of the sheep; they are dead set against these things. This, then, is the release. Whatever prison you are in, whatever pit, whatever guilt, whatever trouble, whatever it may be, let it be what it may, if, amidst all your faults, and all your troubles, and all your trials, and all your sins, let them be what they may, if you have this one excellency, confidence in the ability of the blood of Christ, then there stands the declaration, (and who will limit the variety of application the words have I am about to quote?) namely, "By the blood of your covenant I have sent forth your prisoners out of the pit wherein there is no water," You say, What pit? I answer, Any pit; that is, any trouble, any guilt, any adversity, any loss, any

cross; let it be whatever it may, there is not anything that the blood of the covenant cannot defy. Only to prove that you are one that shall be released you must be distinguished spiritually as the Israelite was literally. His taking the lamb, eating the lamb, sprinkling of the blood, demonstrated his faith in the Lord's provision. And just so now, you will receive the Savior, and abide by the truth as it is in Jesus, and your freedom is sure, whatever bondage you may be in now. It is written upon every one of your tribulations, "Loose him, and let him go;" written in lines of blood; and when the angel sees the blood, the sword of judgment shall depart from you, your enemies defeated, the victory must be yours forever.

But, secondly, *Divine management*. Why did not the Lord lead them to the left, through the land of the Philistines, and that would have taken them in three or, four days into the promised land? Why, for this reason, that they were not yet prepared to see war; and the reason they were not yet prepared to see war was that they had not yet seen enough of God to have all that needful confidence in him that should enable them to stand fast in the presence of warlike and mighty foes. So, until they were prepared to do so, they were not to see that, or have that to encounter which they were not yet prepared to encounter. And now, Christian, look at you, some of you advanced Christians; why, if you had known as much of your own heart when you first set out, if you had seen as many things, even among good people, and in yourself, and as many things in the professing world in a variety of ways as you have seen since, it would have sunk you into black despair; and if Almighty grace did not prevent, it would have driven you right back into the world. and you would have sworn there was no reality in religion, it was all delusion together, and back you would have gone, as thousands of professors do. But what doctrine have we here? We have, first, the doctrine of divine foresight. The Lord saw which was the best way for them to go. And the way which they did not go was the way of course which they voluntarily would have gone. Why, that is the nearest way; we shall soon be there; that is the best way. But then the Lord, would not let them go that way. So, have you not found it so? He leads his people about the wilderness, and instructs them, that they may know what is within their hearts; and he does not bring them near to himself before they can from bitter and trying experience, appreciate what he is. The next doctrine we have here is the deceitfulness of mere appearance. Our subject this morning I am sure will lead us to bless the Lord that he has led us and leads us still to desire that he may lead us. Now I say appearances are sometimes deceitful. Lot sees the plains well-watered. Why, says he, that is just the place for me. As for this Abraham, I would not be such a dull passive as he is forever so. Abraham says, Well, if you turn to the right, I will take the left; and if you turn to the left, I will take the right. Why, says Lot, what a dull passive Abraham is. I will look out; I am sharp; I have got some worldly wisdom; I am not to be such a fool as Abraham; he is not half sharp enough. But, however, Abraham desired to be guided by the Lord, and he desired to stop, notwithstanding, till he could see the hand of the Lord. So, Lot, he walked off right into the well-watered plains, and his flocks increased, and it was all right. And he found a good market in Sodom, found an excellent market there; got on wonderfully. Oh dear, he says, market every day; I must go and live in the town: this will not do; I have to go to and fro, no railroads then; I will go and live in the town, and get money as fast as I can. And so he did; and what was the result? The reservoirs of Almighty vengeance, reserved under the earth to punish the awful crimes of the city, burst forth, and away went the well-watered plains, the accumulated flocks, away went the whole, and there is Lot left a poor solitary thing. Who is the wise man now? Abraham, that waited for the Lord, or the other that was determined to go his own way? It is a great thing, then, to cry to the Lord to guide us. "A good man's steps," when that good man acts in his character as a good man, "are

ordered by the Lord, and he delights in his way.” And we go a little farther, and as appearances are sometimes deceitful, so are persons. Here is a prophet; naturally, perhaps, a weak-minded man, he is sent to denounce the idolatry set up in Bethel. He executed his mission so far, and he was going off home, according to the Lord’s direction. But it was rather hot, and he met with a nice shady tree. Ah, he says, I will rest here and enjoy myself a little. Oh, you fool, you fool! go on, go on; don’t stop here; you are not out of the parish of Bethel yet; bundle off as fast as you can, or else I shall think you are a greater ass than the ass you are riding upon. Oh, he says, it is a nice shady tree. Trouble take the shady tree! bundle off at once. Oh, I will stay here a little; it will be cooler by-and-bye. Oh, you silly thing! Presently he sees a gentleman coming along. Good morning, sir! Good day, sir! won’t you have something to eat? No; the Lord says I am neither to eat bread nor drink water in this place, this place, mind you; he was not off yet. An angel of God has appeared to me, and you must come back and eat and drink. Oh, well, if an angel of the Lord has appeared, that alters the matter. Well, but what a fool you are to believe it! what proof have you of it? Well, but look at his gentlemanly manner. If he had been a clownish, awkward, rough, stern, surly sort of man, that would be different; but see how gentlemanly he is what a gentlemanly manner. There goes the poor prophet. And then this same prophet, I am sorry for you, sir, but I made a mistake somehow or another; I am afraid you have done wrong now, and so you had better be off as soon as you can. And you see what the consequence was, a lion met him and slew him by the way. So much, then, for going on to the same platform; so much for amalgamation; so much for personal friendliness with false prophets; so much for a confederacy with free-will and duty-faith for the sake of a little human applause. Here, then, was the deceitfulness of appearance. Again, there is king Ahab; how humbled down he is, broken-hearted, poor, dear man; I assure you he is very humble; he has got sackcloth upon him. And they went and told Jehoshaphat of it, and instead of Jehoshaphat stopping and saying, Well, Ahab, I see you are humbled, I see you are very penitent; but are you changed? are your sentiments changed? are your principles changed? is your heart changed, are you really brought over to God? Jehoshaphat did not stop to ask this; and Jehoshaphat, unhappy man! though a good man, rushed into affinity with Ahab because Ahab appeared to be a penitent. There are plenty of crocodile tears in day, plenty of raise repentance, plenty of croaking and cringing, and the devil is the author of it. And see the fearful consequences, which I have not now space to enumerate, that followed in Jehoshaphat’s family from affinity with an idolatrous family. Oh, there is a vast importance in companionship. Oh, how careful young people ought to be of companionship! You cannot companion with persons in religion or in social life without being tinged more or less with their sentiments, feelings, and habits. It is wonderfully insinuating. Let a young person go into bad company, it will be revolting to him at the first; but after a little, his profane principles come into operation, by degrees he becomes enamored with vice, and after a little time he will become the first in the company for wickedness. So powerful, then, is example, and so powerful is bad association, and so mightily does Satan work by this means. So that here, then, is the deceitfulness of appearances; and many more instances I could give from the word of God, but these will suffice. Let us then lift up the Lord enabling us, our hearts to the Lord that he while in life’s uncertain path we stand, that he will be our guide. And then we have now, on the other hand, the comfort that if some things that appear every way attractive turn out so badly, at the same time we have the comfort, on the other hand, that things that appear very bad now do not turn out so badly at the last. I dare say poor Joseph when he was cast into the pit, Well, he says, this is a dark appearance of things; and then sold for a slave, darker still; then shut up in prison, darker still; and yet to see how well the end turned out. And I dare to say, Moses, while in the wilderness forty years, he thought this was a very dark state of things; this

is really very bad; I think I did wrong in refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; if I had but have done that, I might have remained there amidst all the comforts of life; and here am I in this miserable desert; looks very dark. And yet it turned out well at the end; and so David, no doubt, would think it looked very dark, but it turned out well at the end; and so Job, but it turned out well at the end; so in Paul's voyage it looked very dark, seemed to be no chance of one man's life, and yet not a life was lost. So, then, the Lord preserve you from being led by the mere appearance of things either way; for when things appear most advantageous, there is very often a great curse lying behind; on the other hand, whatever be the trouble in which we are placed, let us abide firmly by the truth, and the end will be, if we abide firmly by the truth, as the Israelites came safely out of Egypt, so we shall come out into a wealthy place, and bless the Lord that though he has led us in many respects by a rough way, he has led us by a right way. Now this may seem a little confusing, except by simplifying the matter in this way: whatever may be your experience, or infirmities, or troubles, or adversities, or circumstances, simply abide in the light of Christ's mediatorial perfection; stick to that, cleave to that. "Though he slays me, yet will I trust in him." Never give up that; that is your remedy, and all your experiences are to make way for endearment after endearment of this covenant God by Christ Jesus, till you are dead to everything else, and your soul swallowed up in the eternal glory of God.

I now notice, third, *the calamity avoided*: "Lest, per adventure, the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt." It is a very bad thing to repent of salvation and return to Egypt. Now let us see how the Lord avoided this. There were four things by which the Lord prepared them to see war. I speak now only of the people of God; the others I could dispose of very easily, consistently with the safety of those that belong to the Lord, but that would take me too much astray this morning. Well, now comes that great event, when the Israelites were shut up, as you see, on all hands, and there seemed no way of escape. Their condition seemed worse now than ever, and they themselves recognized that fact, and would that they had continued to serve the Egyptians, would that they had continued where they were; for there seemed no hope now of anything, seemed every certainty of their destruction, as they stood by the side of the Red Sea. Just so, my hearer; but what a delightful display of faith is that! Why, Job, here is one part of your property gone! Well, it must go. Here is another part gone, another part gone, family gone, all gone. Well, "the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Well, but Job, you never were in such a plight as this before. No, I know that; but then the Lord has not changed, he is not altered. I did not foresee this, but he foresaw it, and he has provided against it. And Job was prepared for it; Job was established in the perfection that is in Christ, established in the uprightness of faith, established in decision for the truth, established in that eternal separation that Christ has made between sin and the Church, And there Job stood upon gospel ground, and Job blessed the Lord that while the Lord had taken away the Lord gave, and blessed be the name of the Lord. So, my hearer, not that I can preach in a way that will make you always comfortable, because I am not always so myself. I am sometimes; I bless the Lord for it. I know what it is to be up to the chin in trouble, one thing and the other, and yet be as happy and feel I have not a trouble in the world; laugh at them all, smile at them all, yes. So would the Israelites, if they could have seen the salvation that stood so closely connected with their tribulation. Ah, when the rod is stretched out over the sea, and the sea parts hither and thither, and the cloud moves round and stands between them and the Egyptians; and the path was dry, perfectly dry, for they went over dry shod; and the lame lost their lameness, and little children became strong, and old women, eighty years old, that tottered before, that wanted staffs or crutches just now, they threw the staffs

and crutches away, for the Lord's presence with the people in the Red Sea made every one strong; there was not one feeble person among them; they marched through without the slightest difficulty whatever, on dry ground, with perfect security, with their crystal walls on the right and left, and the waters congealed in the heart of the sea, and the presence of the Lord there, until they gained the fulness of their freedom. And here they now knew more of God than they ever knew before, and "the Egyptians whom you have seen to-day you shall see no more forever." And so, it came to pass; they saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore. And so, the Christian will never rest till he sees that his sins are dead, virtually dead, by the blood of Christ. "They are dead that sought your life." This is one step towards preparing the people. You may gather, from gazing on the opposite shore, that the right-minded now were prepared for anything. I see I must omit four of the things I meant to say at the close. So that by this manifestation of the Lord's power there was now no danger of the true-hearted man either repenting of his coming out of Egypt or desiring to go back again. It was not the true believer that repented leaving Egypt, and wanted to go back again, but the disbeliever. It was not the man that understood and knew something of Abraham's God that turned back in his heart to Egypt. No; for they that believed, as Moses said at the end, "You that did cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you unto this day." This great event prepared them for anything and for everything. Moses, in this event, saw his way all the way to the promised land; just as the people of God do now; they see, in the light of what Christ has done, the certainty of their going from strength to strength, till they appear in Zion before God. Moses looks forward to the powers that stood in the way. Ah, he says, "all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away; fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of your arm they shall be as still as a stone; till your people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over which you have purchased." And so, if we are thus brought to see the salvation of Christ, we shall see from that the certainty of the Lord never leaving nor forsaking us, and we shall see such in that that will prevent either our repenting that we have left the world, or causing us to have the slightest desire ever again to return. No, they had no desire to return, plenty of opportunity for them to return, but they desired a better country, which is an heavenly; wherefore God, who is not ashamed to be called their God, prepared for them a city. And Moses says, "You shall bring them in." Ah, so with all who are thus brought to Jesus Christ, guided by the Lord. He has said, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." So said Moses, "You shall bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of your inheritance;" plant them in the perfection of Christ's work, in the perfection of holiness, righteousness, victory, peace, plenty, and safety; "in the place, O Lord, which you have made for you to dwell in;" that is, Christ; Christ is the place that God has prepared to dwell in; God dwells in Christ, and the saints shall dwell in Christ; all things gathered together in him. "In the sanctuary;" there it is. Oh, what is that sanctuary? Christ, he is the sanctuary. "In the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established." And now Moses sums up the whole thus: "The Lord shall reign for ever and ever."