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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

A P O S T A S Y.

A S E R M O N

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 18TH OCTOBER, 1868,

By MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

"And now what hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? or what hast thou to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river?"—Jeremiah ii. 18.

THESE words are an expostulation with Israel in its apostatized condition; and this was the conduct of the greater part of that nation. It is well for us that there is a better covenant, established upon better promises; that there is a better religion, that is written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; written not on tables of stone, but in the fleshy tables of the heart; and these shall not apostatize and become one with heathen nations, but shall remain in that severation into which they are brought; fulfilling the Saviour's words, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." This chapter gives us the fourfold position in which these people stood, and from which they apostatized; and this fourfold position is typical of that state into which the Lord brings his people. That shall be the first part of our discourse this morning—to show the state into which the Lord brings his people, and from which they shall not apostatize. Then our second part shall be to show what these apostates put into the place of that from which they apostatized, or, as the next verse has it, backslided. And then, thirdly, the solemn reproof carried in the words of our text.

We notice, then, first, *the position*; second, *the substitution of evil for good*; thirdly, *the solemn reproof*.

First, *the position*. These people had fallen from their first love. "Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." Here we have the type of a soul being brought into the love of God. How descriptive is this language of the work of the Holy Spirit, when the words are taken in a different way from that in which they apply to those who apostatized—taking the words spiritually! Here is the first love, "the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals." The Lord saith, "I will betroth thee unto me for ever." And when a sinner is brought to see what he is as a sinner, and then brought to see that by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ he will be so one with Christ, that Christ's atonement set down to his account puts away all his sins,—as this is realized, love flows into the soul. "I will

betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord." The Lord so reveals Jesus Christ that our souls bound with love to God. When we look at God the Father, blessing us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus, it makes us love him; when we look at the Saviour as having given himself for us, and put away our sin, it makes us love him; and when we look at the delightful and precious truth, "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more;" they are forgotten for ever, gone to all eternity, cast behind his back, and as it were into the depths of the sea,—when the soul is made acquainted with this, it draws out love to God. "Thou wentest after me in the wilderness." Ah, says the world, if you go after such a religion as that, everybody will hate you. Well, saith the soul, that is not my concern; my concern is to be where the Lord is; and however trying the path, though it may be a wilderness path, yet if the Lord be there, he will send me the manna, the water from the rock, and it shall be well with me where he is; even if I am in the bottom of the sea with Jonah, or in the fiery furnace with the three, or in the lions' den. "When thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." You brought yourself for my sake into such a wilderness, into such a state, that none but myself could appear for you and support you. This is the love. And in the child of God this love, I must readily grant, does rise and fall very much in our experience, and as we go along; and yet no child of God can fatally apostatize from this first love. We see the holy prophets; nay, we go back to the antediluvians; they were thus brought to know the truth, they were kept in the love of the truth hundreds of years. And then if we go to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they lived, as you know, between one and two hundred years, but they abode firm in the truth, they never apostatized from their love to the truth. And some of you, that have known the Lord for many years, so far from your going away from what you first loved and received, the truth is dearer to you than ever. Here, then, is one department I am sure in our right minds we should tremble to apostatize from. Oh, whatever the Lord may take from us, let us pray he may never take from us our confidence in him, and love to him, and decision for him. When we lose our confidence in him, we lose every standing; there is no standing anywhere else. Here, then, is the love into which some were brought professionally, and from which they apostatized; but those who are brought into it vitally, they shall not go back, nor even look back with any thought of going back. They have plenty of opportunity to return, but they desire a better country; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city. The second position which they occupied, as a type of the vital position occupied by the saved soul, naturally follows the first—it was that of pure consecration to God. "Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the firstfruits of his increase; all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, saith the Lord." "Israel was holiness unto the Lord," and so interested in the cause of God, that all the increase of the firstfruits was brought into the house of the Lord; and the Lord opened the windows of heaven, and poured out blessings from time to time upon his people. "Israel was holiness unto the Lord." And just so it is with the real Christian. He receives Christ Jesus as his sanctification. And as the high priest wore on the mitre a golden plate, "Holiness unto the Lord," bare the people in by the sacrifice he had offered before the Lord, presenting them according to the inscription on the golden plate—"Holiness unto the Lord," expressive of what the sacrifice had made them before God; so we are approved in Christ, accepted in Christ; and thus we receive Christ as our sanctification, and by him we are devoted acceptably unto God the Father, but in no other way, for "without faith it is impossible to please God." By

holding fast the Saviour as our sanctification, his blood cleansing from all sin, we very much exalt and honour him, and by thus holding fast the truth, for the truth is the instrument or means also by which we are consecrated to God;—"Sanctify them through the truth;" we are thus made holiness unto the Lord; a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, showing forth the praises of him that has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light. Ah! from this standing, from this consecration to God by faith in Christ, there are many feasible ways of apostasy. Whenever you find men go away from the truth, it is always under the pretence of superior sanctity, superior holiness; and that those doctrines are rather dangerous. And this is the reason why the people of old left the right sanctification, because that right sanctification did not appear to them to be so holy and so good as the plan they had adopted. So the Lord saith in the 5th verse of this chapter, "what iniquity have your fathers found in me?" Well, a great deal, Lord; we have found the doctrine of election to be very dangerous, and we have found Divine predestination to be very dangerous, and thy promises to be very dangerous. And when thy dear Son comes into the world, a pious world will find him to be a very unacceptable person, not holy enough for them, and they will hold him as a wine bibber, as a gluttonous man, as a friend of publicans and harlots, as having a devil, as being mad, and so cast him out. Therefore, say these apostates, we are not going away from the truth, but we see the necessity of more holiness, of more practical goodness. This is the hypocritical way in which men leave God's truth. But the man that is taught of God, God will break up in that man from time to time the fountains of the great deep, and that man shall every day loathe himself in his own sight, and acknowledge that it is of the Lord's mercies he is not consumed. Ask him to go away from the holiness he has in Christ, that man knows that without holiness no man shall see the Lord; but it must be the holiness of faith, purifying their hearts by faith. Such an one says, If I go away from this sanctification, all other sanctification is deceptive. I know I am that poor Ethiopian, that poor spotted leopard, that nothing but the blood of Jesus can be my plea before God. And as there was the sacrifice every day, morning and evening, so Christ abideth a priest continually, that we may live a life of holiness and closeness to the Lord our God by faith in Christ Jesus the Lord.

The third thing from which they apostatized was God's salvation, as a pledge of the great things he would do for them. "Neither, said they, where is the Lord that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt." Now, see the two things put together there, the salvation from Egypt, and the care he took of them through the wilderness, "through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt." Just so it is here. The Lord Jesus Christ has wrought eternal salvation, eternal redemption; and God having revealed to us that eternal salvation, that eternal redemption, accomplished and obtained by Jesus Christ, he has shown us that there is no wilderness that can stop us from our final triumph, that there is no pit that can hold us long, that there is no drought that can destroy us, no desert that can fatally mislead us. But then it was "a land that no man passed through." Now, my hearers, the Christian experience there intended the solitude, the pit, the drought, the shadow of death, the land that no man passed through—you may go through the ranks of the great bulk of professors, and ask them to give you a testimony of the experience there described, and they cannot give it. Now salvation stands first, then comes the wilderness; and when a man becomes a saved man, oh! what

wilderness experiences, in order to abide faithfully by that salvation does that man come into. Then come the pits of tribulation, and the land of drought; the scriptures seem closed, the heavens as brass, and the earth as iron. Yet the man will not give up the salvation, he still holds it fast. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Ah! what a wilderness, what a pit, what a land of drought, was Job brought into when God swept away everything belonging to him; yet Job would not give up God's truth, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." So, if God would give his dear Son, let that be a pledge of the truth of the words of Hart—

"Though thousand snares enclose their feet,
Not one shall hold them fast;
Whatever dangers they may meet,
They shall get safe at last."

Now no man passes through such an experience as this but those that God takes through. The stony ground bearer flies away from it; no man dwells in such a land as this but those that are taught of God, "A land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt." Oh, my hearers, some of you know these trying paths; and they are to humble you, to strip you, and that you may know what is in your heart, and increasingly prize that amazing provision which is in Christ Jesus. You that know the Lord, how few companions you find. Go wherever you will, it is creature holiness, creature righteousness, and creature doings; and if a man dare to preach the gospel in our land in a way that can meet the worst case, take up the man among thieves, and put him right, why, the man is set down for a mad dog. But one smile from God more than makes up for all. Ah, the minister ought to feel the force of the words of the poet—

"Careless, myself a dying man,
Of dying men's esteem;
Happy, O God if thou approve,
Though all beside condemn."

Here then is the love, here is the consecration, here is the salvation, here is the trying path. But did they get to the end? "I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; but when ye entered ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination." How did they do that? The 8th verse will show you, "the prophets prophesied by Baal." A pretty thing to prophecy by, but quite as good as the Baals of the present day. And therefore, bringing in these false gods, they shut out, as it were, the true God, and thus made the heritage an abomination. "I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof;" brought you into the land of the gospel, that you might eat the fruit of it, and that fruit will be Christ, he yields the fruit of all the promises of the gospel, "to eat the fruit thereof, and the goodness thereof." "But ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination." This is one of the last things that a child of God is capable of. What! bring in Popery? Bring in puseyism? Bring in creature sovereignty? Bring in creature inventions to the land of the gospel? Sir, I have not in the land of the gospel, where I live, any room for it; for in the land where I live the Saviour occupies so much room that I have not room for anything else; our God occupies so much room that I have not room for anything else. I still go on with the old-fashioned feeling, "whom have I in heaven but thee; and there is none upon the earth I desire beside thee;" I still go on with the old-fashioned doctrine that Jesus Christ filleth all things; and therefore, as he is all and in all, I have no room for anything else. I find that the Lord has blessed me with all spiritual blessings, so I do not want anything from any other quarter; I find that Jesus Christ has set me en-

tinily free, and has brought me into a good land, a land of wheat and of barley, of vines, and figs, and pomegranates, and of oil and honey; it flushes with honey, to denote it shall all end in sweetness; so that I do not want anything else; and the promises of God are yea and amen, and so blessed and so suitable that the land in which I have been living now for forty-three years, is just what it was and just what it will be. The Lord never turns the poor and needy away. It is true they have nothing but filthy garments, but then he gives them the wedding garment; it is true they are full of wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores, but he gives them the healing ointment of his grace; it is true they are unworthy of the least of his mercies, but then Jesus Christ is worthy, and he puts his worthiness upon us:—"They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy." The wife is entitled by virtue of oneness with the husband. "This is the name wherewith she shall be called, Jehovah our righteousness." So, then, I have no inclination to give up my faith in God, or go away from his salvation, or to attribute any weakness to him; I have no inclination to go out of the promised land, concerning the inhabitants of which it is written, "Thy people shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land for ever." You see how easily and comfortably we in some respects live. All our troubles are down in the valleys; we have no troubles on the mountains. "The Lord was with Judah; and he drove out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron." He could, if the Lord had so intended it. But the Lord did not so intend it. So you will not be able to drive the troubles out of the world, you will find the chariots of iron there; the remedy is, you must go out of yourself; by-and-by you will leave this vale of tears; by-and-by you will ascend into the delectable mountains of an eternal world, there to ride upon the high places of the new earth, and glorify that God that has raised you from such unfathomable depths to a height of glory, there to reign for ever and ever.

I now, secondly, notice *the substitution of evil for good*. "What hast thou to do in the way of Egypt?" These Jews were got into the way of Egypt, and if you can find out what the way of Egypt was, you will find out where they had got to; and then you will easily understand what is meant by drinking the waters of Sihor; the word Sihor being a name applied to the river Nile. Understand, that these ancient nations have their antitype in the world. Babylon, Egypt, Assyria, all these ancient nations were only as so many representations, in their relation to the people of God, of the world. Now, these people were got into the way of Egypt, that is, they were got into a way of enmity against God. I may bring their treatment of Jeremiah as a proof of this. Let us just have a word upon this. If you go to the first chapter, you will see what the Lord made Jeremiah in his spiritual character—that he made him a Calvinist, shall I say? no, Calvin was not high enough, Calvin was a duty faith man, the Lord made a hyper-Calvinist of Jeremiah. Before you were born I knew you, and ordained you. What, Lord, without waiting till I was born to ask whether I would be ordained? Yes; "before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations;" and now thou art born, I will make thee in thy mission as an iron pillar, a defended city, a brazen wall. All these apostates shall fight against thee, and subject thee to many sufferings, but they shall never be able to sever thee from my truth, or from my favour, or to falsify one of the predictions thou shalt put upon record. Did not that come true? The Saviour was speaking to people of the same spirit as these enemies of Jeremiah when he said, "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias." The way of Egypt, therefore, is enmity against the truth, and if you want to see

real enmity, you will find it nowhere so strong as in the apostate. In the 11th of Revelation the witnesses of God's truth are slain; and who by? By those people that are thus in the way of enmity against God; "and their dead bodies"—dead ecclesiastically, not spiritually or vitally—"shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified." There it is. So that going in the way of Egypt is to go into enmity against the blessed God. That is where we all are by nature. The apostle in the epistle to the Hebrews gives a three-fold representation of apostasy. It commences with neglect, it then goes on to positive enmity, and terminates in fearful contempt. First, neglect. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" If we now mean to leave the atonement and righteousness of Christ behind, to leave our professed love to the truth behind, and put enmity into its place, and in future look to our own doings, then how shall we escape? The neglect of that salvation does not mean the faults and forgetfulness of the people of God, but it means leaving it behind as the Israelites left behind the great work that God had done in delivering them from Egypt. So now, if we were to leave Christ behind, ah! my hearer, that would be a proof that he would leave us; and hear what he saith—"Woe unto them when I depart from them." If, therefore, we wish God to leave us, his mercy and loving kindness to depart from us, if we wish to be left to sin, Satan, delusion, and damnation, then let us leave behind Christ's salvation. That is one representation. The second is that these people were enlightened intellectually, and had tasted of the heavenly gift—very pleased with Jesus Christ—made partakers of the Holy Ghost, in the instructions given by his word; they had listened to many sermons with great interest—in that sense partakers of the Holy Ghost. "If these shall fall away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame;" openly despise and ridicule him. The third representation of apostasy is, "If we sin wilfully." Why, in the name of everything in heaven, in the name of everything good on earth, in the name of angels, prophets, and apostles, in the name of the great God himself, if the sinning wilfully there mean the common infirmities of the people of God, not a man or woman under heaven could be saved; for "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves;" "there is not a just man upon the earth that doeth good and sinneth not." If I feared man, I should not say this, but I do not fear man, but I fear God. What can be the meaning, then? It must mean some particular sin; what is that particular sin? The apostle, knowing what poor creatures we are, and how we should tend to take his words, and cut ourselves off, and turn his words into a table upon which we should write bitter things against ourselves, and that thus he should make the hearts of those sad that God did not intend to make sad—the apostle there is exceedingly careful to explain what he means by this wilful sin. He says in the next verse—"He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much surer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace." I ask this assembly, this morning, if I am not stating a solemn truth when I say the world has in all ages counted the prophets—when the prophets were living—unholy men? Have they not counted God's truth an unholy thing? Did they not count that Holy Thing born of the Virgin Mary—did they not count Him unholy? And what is this but treading under foot the Son of God? what is this but counting the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, and wherewith the people are sanctified, an unholy thing? what is this but doing despite unto the Spirit of grace? Oh, this spirit of enmity is a fearful, a dreadful spirit. Here then, first,

salvation is left behind ; then Christ is crucified afresh and despised, then trampled under foot, and everything belonging to him. Why, the thought of such things as these makes the real Christian shudder. No prophet ever did such a thing ; no apostle ever did such a thing, except Judas ; no good man ever did such a thing ; and when Peter denied Him there was a want of wilfulness in it ; he did it through the fear of man. When martyrs shrank, and temporarily recanted, there was a want of wilfulness ; it was through weakness, not wilfulness ; and they felt their souls in such agonies after the recantation that no agonies that men could inflict could equal those they felt in renouncing God's truth ; therefore they came forward, and seemed to have been strengthened by their fall, boldly met their fate, went triumphant through the fire into that eternal glory into which all Israel shall enter. The way of Egypt, then, is a way of enmity against God. What is the way of Assyria ? The same thing ; a little more respectable, but the same thing. Say some, we will not go to Popery ; we want something a little more refined, a little more respectable. The way of Assyria is just the same. You have nothing to do but read that part of the history of Hezekiah to see what the spirit of Assyria was there. It carried away these apostates captive, and would have carried away the little few that were left ; but the little few that were left did not lose their confidence in God. Hezekiah encouraged them, and then Isaiah encouraged them. Isaiah was a most daring sort of man, because he had the Lord on his side ; so he told Hezekiah to tell the King of Assyria this, that "the daughter of Zion"—poor little timid thing she is in herself, but she sees that the Lord of Hosts is with her, on her side ; "the daughter of Zion," great as thou art, king of Assyria, though thou hast made the nations tremble, thou canst not make this daughter of Zion tremble ; her Father is here, and she knows all is well ; "the daughter of Zion hath shaken her head at thee ;" she says, I am not afraid of you, big as you are ; though you have pretty well two hundred thousand men I will defy the whole ; "she hath laughed thee to scorn." Why, it was enough to make the old King of Assyria turn round and bite his own ears off, to be laughed at like that ; but so it was ; they abode by the Lord. I will pay you for this ; and so he would if he could. And yet these hypocrites were gone in the way of Assyria, and would destroy the city of the Lord. "I will send a blast upon him." Faith, prayer, and decision prevailed ; they gained the victory, God was glorified. Now, "to drink the waters of Sihor" the water of the river Nile represents all the good things of Egypt, all the advantages they would have by this oneness with Egypt ; for man will look to advantage ; and the river Euphrates means the same thing. You see in 2 Kings xvii. that there was a time when the Assyrian empire embraced the Babylonian empire, when the Babylonian and Assyrian were one ; and when that was the case, the river Euphrates stands the representative of the empire at large ; or else, afterwards, when Assyria and Babylon became two, then the river Tigris, upon which stood the city of Ninevah, would more properly represent Assyria. The drinking of the water of these two rivers, then, will represent the good of the produce of those two nations.

Lastly, I notice *the solemn reproof*, What hast thou to do with them ? Let us hear what the Lord saith of these two rivers. We will take the river of Egypt first. What is to be the end ? You will see how these two rivers contrast with another river. "In that day the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea ; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dry shod." The river shall be dried up. Ah ! my hearers, so every stream of comfort we have apart from Christ shall be dried up. Those men, therefore, that leave God's truth, and seek to make their all in worldly things, worldly advantages, are

drinking of a river that must very soon be dried up. Is it not also said that "the angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates, and the water thereof was dried up." But shall the river of God ever dry up? These rivers also represent streams of error, rivers of delusion. Hence, "the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood"—away from her husband, from Christ, and from the truth. "And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up," with zest, "the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth." Is it, then, of no importance whether my religious comforts come from the devil or from God? If I receive delusion, it is the water that proceeds from the serpent's mouth; and what will be the end? Just use that scripture figuratively in the 1st of Ecclesiastes—"Unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again;" and the place whence the spirit of error comes, thither it will return again, and take me with it if I receive it, and die with a lie in my right hand. On the other hand, that pure river of living water, clear as crystal, that free grace river, that comes from the throne of God and the Lamb, will take me to the throne of God.

Look, then, at the reproof; as though the Lord should say, See how unwise you are. We cannot do better than take Moses' expostulation: "They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children;" the spot there signifies a mark; the mark of the saints is faith in Christ; but these people had apostatized from the truth, and therefore their faith was not the faith of his children. "Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?" He bought them from Egypt at the expense of his providence and his power; but their being thus bought, and his own people bought at the expense of a Saviour's blood—these two redemptions are very different. The one was an external buying and did not alter the character of the person bought; the other is a vital buying, that alters the character of the person bought; for the person bought by the Saviour's blood shall ere long feel the life-giving power of that blood by faith. What do we say to this matter? Can we drink of the rivers of error? Can we drink of the Babylonian river, the mystery of Babylon, the waters the serpent casts out of his mouth? Ah, my hearer, the text has made me pray to God for grace and for wisdom to rightly guide me. There is only one way to be right; there are so many ways to be wrong, but only one way to be right. And what signifies it what we suffer, if we are delivered from all delusion, and brought to drink of the river of the water of life, and that only; brought to hope in God and God only; brought to receive the new covenant, ordered in all things and sure, and to stand out for it; and to have done with Egypt—that is, the spirit of enmity against God, to have done with it for ever; to have done with the river of Assyria, to have done with it for ever; and to abide in the truth, and stand fast in the liberty where-with Christ has made us free.

May we not, then, well take heed *what* we hear, and *how* we hear, and so beware of false prophets, who so sanctimoniously bring in their feasible delusions. These false prophets are raised up by the providence (though not by the grace) of God, and do, even unknown to themselves, bring in destructive heresies, denying the Lord that *providentially* bought them. These are not bought from sin and error by the blood of the Lamb; if so, they would dwell at Zion, where that river is which can never run dry, and would be in undying and in inseparable love with that truth which saith that they that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.