

THE CONSCIENCE IN THE LIGHT OF GOD'S PRESENCE.

The knowledge of our proper relationship with our gracious God, as Father, and of our calling and standing in the Lord Jesus Christ,—the Son of Man at God's right-hand,—necessarily goes far beyond all questions of conscience and exercises of soul in the children of God. Yet because of this, and in order to the full blessing—"fellowship with the Father and with His son Jesus Christ"—the conscience of the believer must be in the light; all that is individual judged *there—alone with God*. For there is no such thing as *corporate* conscience. May it not be said that the Lord's great purpose, in all His dealings in grace, is to bring the souls of His children—the individual soul—into fellowship with himself? Does not John so present it? (1 John i. 1-7.)

There seems to be a special need at this hour to speak as to conscience being in His Presence, so that all might be judged according to God. It was always so surely. But this present is a solemn moment. Christendom, spurious, and apostate Christianity enlarges—Satan is working mischief as an angel of light; flesh or man's nature is active; combinations between the true people of God and mere professors are weakening the former and nullifying their testimony—the mass indeed are sunk down to the level of the earth, alas! Of those who are in some measure

separated to God, what urgent need of self-judgment as to the will and ways ! What confession may be made ! What humiliation is becoming ! All this demands that conscience should not only be exercised, but be really in the light of the Lord's presence. In fact, this lesson may be learnt : that while there may have been activity in God's service, even joy, and the Lord (for faith was there) using the strength of his servant, yet conscience, not having been fully in the light ; and self and nature not judged there,—communion with God, and its happy peaceful effects and power, have been unknown or very imperfectly known in the soul.

We read those remarkable words in Ephes. v. 8. "Now are ye light in the Lord ; walk as children of light." What does the Apostle mean in its practical experimental sense by "light in the Lord" ? Surely if the gentle, but strong, hand of the Spirit of God leads the renewed soul,—the new man,—the divine nature of the believer—into immediate contact with its Source (*i. e.* God Himself)—conscience brought there—all will be seen, all judged (according to the measure given) in that presence "where no flesh can glory." There the flesh is judged, there sin is seen in its exceeding sinfulness—there the will is detected—there it is no longer the *fruit* only of sin and flesh which is judged but the *roots, deep laid roots*, exposed and made bare in that light. The world is there unmasked ; above all, grace, seen and learnt in its proper Divine character ; and the soul, by faith

established in it ; there the blessed Source, " the God of all grace," bowed to in another and deeper way ; reconciliation known more truly ; the living glory of the Father's name connected with the soul ; and the beauty and glory of Jesus, the Son of Man, seen and appreciated, through the power of the present and Eternal Spirit. " Now are ye light in the Lord." The heart may make progress now in the power of its communion, yet the work in conscience go on from time to time, whenever there is something in nature not in obedience to Christ, " Casting down reasonings and every high thing which exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ " (2 Cor. x). It may be further stated, that the conscience being in the light, and the affections of the soul drawn out to God, who reveals His glory in the face of Jesus Christ, the soul learns what " fear and trembling " mean in the word. Yet that fear is in the very light of the grace consciously possessed, and in the taste of it. For sure I am, at least I believe the thought to be according to truth, that while tasting the love of God in Christ, and the joy of relationship—while the cry of Abba Father, intelligently understood as giving a place of heavenly sonship, yet there is a blessed, solid, divine satisfaction and joy in discovering and knowing the holiness of God. Oh, the joy when the Spirit sanctions and enforces that truth in the light, that nothing can be suffered in the child as to will—

nothing recognized by God which is contrary to His nature and being. All must be judged—the levity and folly of man—the will and way—the mixed motives, all exposed there, that God may impart deeper blessing. Hence chastisement, and the exercises of Hebrews xii., “that we might be partakers of His holiness.”

The Scriptures in their rich and varied treasures, afford abundant illustrations of the action on conscience and exercises of soul when man is brought into the light of God. We see there the Divine hand at work, illuminating the understanding, quickening and enlightening, as well as purging the conscience; purifying the heart by faith, and drawing out its affections, renewed by grace, to God; to us, the affections gathered round and centered in the Person of the Son. It may be profitable just to glance at a few instances of the Spirit's handy-work, to exemplify and apply what is stated above. The case of Abraham would not be adduced as showing *exercise* of soul and conscience. Yet as to the general question of God acting on man's soul, it is most important to observe that if Abraham, called and elected peculiarly as the Lord's witness against an idolatrous world, needed power for difficult requirement, the Holy Ghost teaches us in Acts vii. the secret that, “the God of Glory appeared unto him.”—The glory shone into his soul, and he “obeyed, and he went out, not knowing whither he went.” (Hebrews xi.)

In the account we have of Moses in Exodus ii. and iii., seen in the light of Acts vii., where we get some comment on these chapters, we find exercise of soul. We see his conscience brought into the light, and its effect in power and communion. There is activity in him (in Exodus ii. 11-14), and love of his brethren, though expressed with carnal power and wisdom; "he looked this way and that way;" "he supposed his brethren would have understood;" marking the want of calmness and guidance, and he has to flee from the consequences of his act. But when he beholds the glory from the burning bush; when he has to put off his shoes from off his feet, (the rough shoe of nature must come off), for it was holy ground; when sent by Him who calls himself, "I AM THAT I AM," what a contrast do we find! Unable to move or speak at first; yet, when the heart of Moses is assured, and faith is there—the rod of power is taken instead of the carnal weapon—boldness now in the presence of Pharaoh, endurance in difficult service, "he endured as seeing Him who is invisible"; and of this exercised servant, the Holy Ghost deigns to say, "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num. xii. 3).

In the history of Job, we have a still more apt illustration of our subject. We see there, in a pointed way, the difference wrought in a man, and he a child of God, when conscience is brought into the light of His presence. It will suffice here, to

notice the case *generally*; and it is happy to remember the Holy Ghost's own comment on the cause of Job's trial and great afflictions:—"Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (James v. ii.). The end of the Lord was to give His servant and precious child, Job, deeper blessing, true communion with Himself; and this he did *by bringing the conscience into the light of His presence*. No one would suppose it was mere natural uprightness which Job exhibits at first—that he was religious or pious according to the flesh. God's own words to the Adversary of Job and man (chaps. i. 8; ii. 3), would show the contrary. But Job's nature detected grace, and *exalted itself*. He was occupied with *himself*—his good works—his righteousness (the history of many a soul, and quickened soul too, at the present hour); and God would have all judged according to the light, hence His dealings with Job. We see the terrible process. We hear fearful language before God in the bitterness and trial of his soul; he is sifted; his heart is *wrung out*. Oh! to those who in their measure have known something of this process—the Spirit of God carrying the conscience into the light, where the heart must be wrung out; "the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts," judged; all passing under His eye who has judged, and has brought this judgment into conscience. The process continues, as we know, till

poor (but rich) Job utters the memorable words, "I have *heard* of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye *seeth* Thee. *Wherefore* I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Grace now understood in the light, produces self-abhorrence, self-loathing. Grace gives the broken spirit, which we so essentially need at this hour. Grace teaches us. May the reader of this remember (and if the point be urgently pressed, let him bear with the writer a little), that it *is only in the Lord's presence that grace can be appreciated in its proper or Divine character*. Hence the importance of this subject. Let this thought be well weighed, *that communion is before walk, or service, or exercise, or gift*. Oh! for the power of true communion! One drop of the love of Jesus in a broken heart and softened spirit! Look for a moment at that word in Titus ii. 11, 14, and connect it with the Lord's presence. "Grace," the apostle tells us, "teaches us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts (in fact, *ourselves*), we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." The soul, being true, covets to learn thus. It is to be learnt of grace. Where? In the Lord's presence; for outside that we cannot really know grace. But, further, this precious grace teaches us to look for that blessed hope (the return of Jesus to take us up into the air to Himself), and the appearing of the Glory of our Great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ (the Epiphany, or public manifestation of the Glory of Jesus, when the Saints will be manifested with Him). Blessed be His Holy Name, for such hope!

Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and other prophets, in their day and history, would witness something of the same. We may take a passing notice of Isaiah and the rather as it furnishes so lovely a

picture of grace and light acting on conscience. What cry burst from his lips, as narrated in chap. vi., when he saw the glory of Jehovah Jesus filling the Temple (consult John xii. 41, where the Holy Ghost shows us it was Jesus)? "Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips:" and when the grace reaches him—for we see three virtues or powers flowing to him—from the Throne and Person of the Lord; first, full conviction of what he was; secondly, full forgiveness and purging of conscience; thirdly, the heart won, and the dependence of true affection: "Here am I, send me"—The servant and prophet formed, and for difficult service, the message of judgment. These illustrations might suffice, but I would yet briefly notice one or two in the New Testament.

There, where the mighty instruments for God's work were prepared, the Holy Ghost being down here consequent on the work of the Lord Jesus, there is necessarily a deeper action on conscience—a deeper and brighter glory visits the soul. Not that the deep and bright glory of God did not visit Abraham—but Abraham never could have known the communion which Paul and John enjoyed. The question of righteousness had not been raised, which we know the law did—and, instead of promises, to which Abraham in his wondrous faith looked, Paul and John (the Church's portion) possessed the Accomplisher of the promises. The Lord of Glory, the heavenly Son of Man—all was deeper—"The true light now shone." "It was fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ." With what wondrous grace, then, divine tenderness and power, the Lord Jesus dealt with Peter's conscience after his fall, restoring his soul and putting honour upon His servant (John

xxi). The Lord had accomplished redemption, and in Resurrection light and power, stands before His poor trembling servant, conscious of having accomplished sin and a terrible fall. The Lord does not take up the sin, but rather deals with the *root*. The deep laid evil in his nature—the immense self-confidence in Peter; the carnal energy which characterized him. (Alas! if one may speak for others, how much of this have we found in ourselves, and the bitter fruits: how far has it been judged in His presence?) “*Peter was grieved*, because He said unto him the third time, lovest thou Me?” Here was conviction of conscience. There is nothing but grace from the Lord, winning the affections of the soul of His servant; but showing him it could no longer be Peter for power of walk, but Christ in Peter. When filled with the Holy Ghost, we have the mighty Apostle of the Circumcision.

In Saul of Tarsus we have that which exceeds: He meets, he sees, in his mad career (the very expression of the Jews' hatred to Messiah), the Lord of Glory, who has accomplished Redemption. Saul beholds the Heavenly Man, from whose face streamed down the Glory of God—a glory too effulgent for man (he is blind for a season). Saul utters these strange words (conscience struck and confounded), “who art Thou, Lord?” He finds that Jesus the Head in Heaven, speaks of all the saints as Himself. “I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest.” He preaches the Gospel of the Glory, that Jesus is the Son of God. How sweetly this honoured servant afterwards learns the secret of power, as recorded in 2 Cor. xii., where the Lord shows him that it is dependence in conscious weakness which was the condition of power. “My grace sufficeth for thee, *for* (the condition) My

power is made perfect in weakness." It may be observed here, that Revelation itself, Blessed and glorious as it is, is not power, but communion with God in the Revelation. It produces for Paul, here, the thorn in his flesh, lest he should be exalted above measure. "All power is of God." The creatures—even the Angels who have kept their first estate—only have strength as communicated to them; hence the secret of the blessings of dependence—"dependent suppliants alone prevail."

Further, do we not find, in Rev. i., the secret of that power which enabled John, the beloved apostle, to have communion with the heavenly scene opened to him, as recorded in chap. iv.—he has title and power to look within the door opened in heaven. He has communion there with the crowned elders, as secure as they are; yea, as The Throne itself. When John's conscience was brought into that living blaze of glory—judicial glory, no doubt around The Person of the Son of Man (chap. i., when he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day)—he fell at His feet as dead." The glory was exceeding bright and overpowering. Yet, in fulness of grace and Divine tenderness, Jesus said, "fear not."

John never feared anything after that. Seals, trumpets, vials, judgments, all pass before him: he is unmoved in their midst. John is witness to the end,* not only of the coming of The Lord Jesus, but of the Kingdom and Glory—of the New Heavens and the New Earth. May each of our hearts taste, in sweet communion, the love of Our Father; and, in personal love to Jesus, Our Lord, bow head and heart in worship saying, "Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus." Amen.

* Compare John's Gospel, xxi. 22-23.

MEDITATIONS ON THE BOOK OF JUDGES.

(Continued from page 200.)

Breach and Recovery.

(Chapter XX.)

Following on the crime of Gibeah, all the tribes from the extreme North to the extreme South were gathered together *as one man* unto Jehovah in Mizpeh" (ver 1). Very little seemed wanting in this unanimous protest against evil. There was *zeal* to enquire into, and to purify themselves from, it, and also a sense of Israel's *corporate responsibility*, which, later on under Deborah, Gideon and Jephthah, was lacking. The assembling together, the actions and the sentiments of the eleven tribes presented above all a fair appearance of *unity* (vs. 1, 8, 11), for the smallest tribe, and what was more a guilty one, was the only one absent. The centre of the people's unity was acknowledged, for it was "unto Jehovah" that they gathered together in Mizpeh (ver.1). What then was wanting in Israel? One thing, "the first love," which finds expression both towards God and towards those that are His. *Towards God*, this love had waxed cold in Israel. They had hearkened, deliberated, decided, and then consulted God (ver. 18). In place of commencing with *the word of God* they had left it to the last. Not that it was omitted, but it no longer occupied the first place. This was a mark of having left

their first love. "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." "If a man love Me, he will keep My word" (John xiv. 21, 23). "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John v. 3). Another mark was, that their hearts were more alive to the *shame* inflicted on Israel, than to the dishonour done to God (vs. 6, 10, 13). How often does this tendency show itself in assembly discipline! It is because God no longer has His right place in our hearts.

The forsaking of first love also betrays itself in our conduct *towards our brethren*; indeed intercourse with God and with our brethren are closely connected. "And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also" (1 John vi. 21). Israel looked upon Benjamin as an enemy, and, notwithstanding the fair appearance of unity, did not regard the sin of one tribe as that of all of the people. They said: "What wickedness is this that is done among *you*?" (ver. 12)—not "among *us*." What a difference between this love and that which is described in 1 Cor. xiii. 4-7! Zeal was not wanting, but that did not make up for having left their first love. "Thou canst not bear them which are evil" of Rev. ii. 2, was found here; but, as further on in the address to Ephesus, the Lord could say to His people: "I have somewhat against thee." They added: "that we may put away the evil from Israel" (ver. 13), but where was their

brotherly affection? This is indeed always the danger in connection with discipline, and the Corinthians were exhorted to confirm their love toward the one who had fallen, after the discipline had done its work. If on the one hand, the people addressing Benjamin said "you" in place of "us" in verse 12; on the other, "us" and "we" usurp an undue place in the next verse: "Deliver *us* the men . . . that *we* may put them to death and put away evil from Israel." Leaving the first love opens the door to self-importance.

As for Benjamin, they had grievously sinned in upholding evil in their midst, and the remonstrance of Israel, instead of humbling them, incited them to the most serious act: "to go out to battle against the children of Israel" (ver. 14), and then what was far worse—they allied themselves with evil. The children of Benjamin gathered themselves together at Gibeah, they numbered the inhabitants of Gibeah, and they went forth out of Gibeah and destroyed down to the ground of the Israelites (vs. 14, 15, 21). The absence of humiliation on their part led to terrible results; not only did they not judge the evil, but as a necessary consequence, they fatally excused it, taking sides with the evil-doers against the people of God. It is true that they put on an appearance of being *without* the inhabitants of Gibeah (ver. 15), but they numbered them and availed themselves of their seven hundred chosen warriors. In this army the "left-handed" were equal in numbers to the

chosen men of Gibeah, weakness which became strength in the Lord's service when it was an Ehud who fought. Here the left-handed were skilful against the Lord ; the hand which ought to have been apt in defence, was strong to attack and deceive those who confronted them.

When every preliminary was exhausted, Israel asked counsel of God (ver. 18). Judah shall go up first, was the reply of Him who was about to discipline Israel, and twenty-two thousand men of Judah were destroyed down to the ground. What grace God displayed in this defeat ! Israel must learn that, in contests between brethren, there could be neither victors nor vanquished, but that all must be vanquished for the Lord to triumph at the end. God made use of this defeat for the restoration of His beloved people. Israel came forth strengthened from a combat which had cost him his troops, for he came out of it judged in reality by God himself. When the twenty-two thousand fell, the men of Israel encouraged themselves (ver. 22). See what fruit their chastisement bore : First : It led them to seek again the presence of Jehovah. Secondly : Instead of human indignation, they were filled with sorrow according to God and their tears were the proof of it. Thirdly : Their sorrow was not transient, for they wept until even. Fourthly : They learnt to depend more truly on the word of God, and no longer say, "Which of us shall go up first ?" but " Shall I go up again ?" Fifthly : Affection for their brother

in his fall is at length revived, for they say :
 " The children of Benjamin my brother " (ver. 23).
 How worthy of God was such a result ! It was
 not victory but defeat which brought about these
 things, blessed fruits of the discipline, and mean-
 while other fruits were yet to be produced. " And
 Jehovah said, go up against him."

Eighteen thousand men of the children of Israel
 were destroyed down to the ground in the second
 defeat. Then, in the first place, " *All* the children
 of Israel, and *all* the people went up, and came
 unto the house of God." No one was missing ;
 they were unanimous in seeking Jehovah. Sec-
 ondly : Instead of weeping until even, they wept,
 and sat there before Jehovah. Their sorrow
 before God was deepened and of longer duration.
 Thirdly : They " fasted that day until even."
 That was more than sorrow ; it was humiliation,
 judgment of the flesh and repentance. Fourthly
 and fifthly : They " offered burnt offerings and
 peace offerings before Jehovah." They recovered
 those two things of inestimable value, a true sense
 of the value of the sacrifice and of communion.
 Dependence on the word of God and the realization
 of His presence became more highly valued,
 through God's discipline. The people had the
 consciousness of being before God Himself, who
 dwelleth between the cherubims over the ark, and
 drew near to Him, by a living High Priest who
 interceded for Israel. Sixthly : Their own will
 was at last completely broken. " Shall I yet again

go out or shall I cease?" (vs. 26-28.)
 What thorough restoration! And that which brought it about was a horrible evil; not that God makes light of the enormity of the evil, but in the interest He bears towards His people, He makes use even of the evil for their blessing. From that time God could bless and assure them of victory.

Then the battle took place in which Israel restored, yet experiencing his own weakness and insufficiency, obtained the victory, but lost nearly a whole tribe. Benjamin was defeated by a humbled people who showed themselves weaker than he. It is the principle of all discipline in the assembly. Without love, without dependence on God and His word, without self-judgment, discipline will always be defective, and it is only under such conditions that an assembly can purge out the old leaven.

Fruits of recovery.

(Chapter xxi.)

The restoration of Israel had as a result the absolute refusal of any connection with the evil. "Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpeh, saying there shall not any of us give his daughter unto Benjamin to wife" (ver. 1). Let us remember that, in a day of ruin, when souls, under the action of grace, recover their first love for the Lord, they never become more tolerant of evil.

The closer our communion is with God the more does it separate us from evil, but the affections of the saints' hearts towards their brethren are not blunted by this separation, as we see here. For the third time the people went up to the house of God, for this place having been found again, became indispensable to them. Defeat first drove them on that road, victory led them on to it again. "And they abode there till even before God." On the previous visit, "they *wept and sat there* before Jehovah;" on this occasion, the *first* thing was to abide there. "When thou saidst, seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face Jehovah will I seek" (Ps. xxvii. 8). It is our happiness, amid the evil and the sorrow of the present day, to seek the face of the Lord and abide till even before Him. Tears then flowed and such tears! "They lifted up their voices and wept *sore*." For the first time feeling all the bitterness they said: "O Jehovah, God of Israel, why is it come to pass in Israel, that there should be to-day one tribe lacking in Israel?" They did not say: The evil is put away, we are at length in quietness and tranquility. The bitterness was in proportion to their recovery of their affections for Jehovah and for their brethren. The breach had been made, one tribe was wanting; it was like the body suffering from the loss of a limb. Israel's God had been dishonoured, the God before whose eyes, in His tabernacle, was the golden table with the twelve loaves of shew bread thereon. Israel no longer thought of their own dishonour as they had before their humiliation, for the tears of bitterness were shed before Jehovah; and it was when the unity seemed hopelessly lost, that its realization was

made good in the hearts of the people, which, in the eyes of Jehovah was more true unity than the semblance of it by the people in a state of declension in the beginning of chapter xx.

The earliest rays of the morning found Israel at work building an altar. The people might say, with the Psalmist : " Early will I seek Thee." Humiliation and ruin did not hinder worship. What grace that there remained an altar to Jehovah amid such a state of things ! Three things preceded this worship and led up to it—resolute separation from all evil, getting back into the presence of God, the ruin deeply felt and acknowledged. It was there that they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings ; then that the heart entered into what the sacrifice of Christ was for God, and the portion God has given us with Him in it.

All these blessings recovered in the path of humiliation, were the starting point for the judgment of Jabesh-gilead. The inhabitants of that place had not come up to Jehovah to Mizpeh. That was indifference to the judgment of the evil by which God had been dishonoured in Israel's midst, and it was at the same time contempt for the unity of the people established by God, and which had been confirmed in such a striking way by the attitude of the eleven humbled tribes. The people of Jabesh-gilead had doubtless said, that it was no concern of theirs. How frequently do we hear such expressions in our days ! Their state was even worse than that of the evil-doer. For such a refusal, there *was* no mercy ; but *before* the execution of the judgment, Israel delighted to contemplate mercy. " And the children of Israel repented them for Benjamin their brother, and said, there is one tribe cut off from Israel this day.

How shall we do for wives for them that remain, seeing that we have sworn by Jehovah that we will not give them of our daughters to wives?" (vs. 6, 7.) Moreover, the judgment was but the exercise of this mercy, for the cutting off of Jabesh-gilead was with a view to the restoration of Benjamin. Such was the way that Israel came out of that long and painful conflict. Happy indeed are they who learn from such circumstances, and know how to combine *perfect hatred* of evil, with unmingled love for their brethren. The four hundred young virgins of Jabesh-gilead were given for wives to the poor remnant of Benjamin.

But that did not suffice; the wound must be completely bound up. Love was ingenious in finding the remedy and suggested to Israel a way of helping their brethren without disowning their obligations toward God, or lowering the standard of separation from evil. Israel allowed themselves to be plundered at Shiloh (vs. 17-21), as it were under the eyes of Jehovah. Exchanging the victor's place for that of the vanquished, they permitted their brother, so sorely tried by the discipline, to have the last word.

"And it shall be," they said, "when their fathers or their brethren come unto us to complain, that we will say unto them, Be favourable unto them for our sakes, because we reserved not to each man his wife in the war" (ver. 22). Israel did not say: *They* reserved not, but "*we* reserved not." What delicacy and tenderness did those words evince, and how different from those recorded in chapter xx. 12. "What wickedness is this that is done among *you*?" Israel no longer separated their cause from that of their brethren and the unity of the people, formed by God Himself, recovered its due place of importance

in the eyes of the faithful in those sorrowful days of declension.

God grant that such may be the case with us, my brethren ! If men, if Christians even, lightly esteem the divine unity of the church, or, when forced to avow that it is outwardly gone, seek to substitute for it a miserable daubing with untempered mortar and content themselves with an appearance of unity which does not deceive even those upholding it ; if, in a word, men form alliances between their various sects, proving the very ruin they seek to justify ;—let us turn away from such things, humbling ourselves on account of the ruin of the church (looked at on the side of human responsibility) without conforming to it ; boldly proclaiming that “ there is one body and one Spirit,” “ endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace ” (Eph. iv. 3, 4), refusing all fellowship with the moral and religious evil of the day, “ and above all these things putting on love, which is the bond of perfectness ” (Col. iii. 14).

Such is the instruction contained in the book of Judges, which closes with the solemn repetition of that which characterized the evil days. “ In those days there was no king in Israel, every man did that which was right in his own eyes ” (ver. 25). God did not change that deplorable state of things ; He simply states the fact ; but He led His own away from the confused light of conscience, which while it judged never guided them ; and brought them back to the pure light of His own infallible word which was able to conduct them, to build them up, and to give them an inheritance among all them which are sanctified (*c f.* Acts xx. 32). “ To the law and to the testimony,” this is our safeguard in a day of ruin ! (Isaiah viii. 20.)