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*"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"*

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# The Bible Student

Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD

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## IN THE HEAVENLIES

BY THE EDITOR

The last reference to "the heavenlies" is perhaps the most mysterious of all (Eph. 6:10-18). It is understandable that blessing and joy and spiritual riches are found within the heavenlies, but who can help wondering at the fact of *conflict* in such a place—that enemies should find entrance *there* at all! Here indeed is mystery—stern and menacing.

It would almost seem as if the very style of the apostle changes with the new subject. The sentences seem to become abrupt, sharp, commanding, challenging: "Be strong", "put on", "stand"! We have hardly time to catch the meaning of his opening challenge, when swiftly he draws aside the veil of the invisible and reveals to us the Enemy—strong, wily, resourceful, authoritative, intangible. We are amazed, staggered at the array. But at once he braces us to the conflict by the immediate revelation of the secret of victory—"the whole armour of God"! Great paradox of the Spirit—the clang of armour in that fair abode of rest and fellowship!

But let us examine this wonderful passage:

1. *The call to arms* (vv. 10, 11). He first reviews the Christian's impregnable foundation and fortress—"in the Lord." *There* lies the secret of all our strength—"in the Lord". A strength "the only alternative to which is spiritual impotence" (John 15:5). All power resides "in HIM." Therefore, "be strong in Him," for in Him you live.

He then passes to the believer's further resources, also provided by the Lord—the "whole armour of God" (Gk. *panoplia*\*).

\* In N.T. only occurs here, in verse 13, and Lk. 11:22.

Nothing less than what is "wholly His in origin and gift" will do. This we are exhorted to "*put on.*" It implies a definite act of appropriation in faith. As we appropriated Christ by faith, for our salvation so now by faith we appropriate Him for victory. We take what He has provided.

Then comes the definite implication contained in the little word "able." If HE enables, what can or should we fear? All our 'capacity' or 'ability' is swallowed up in His. Stand we must and shall therefore! The fortress may be assaulted—it will be—but it will not fall. All the 'schemes,' 'wiles,' 'stratagems,' of the Devil cannot avail. His veiled attacks at weak points have been foreseen and provided against by our Captain. "Put on", then, and "stand"!

2. *The Enemy Hosts* (v. 12). The apostle now describes the character and resources of the enemy.

First, they are very different from those of flesh and blood—mere mortal humanity. Our wrestling is against spiritual hosts, personal evil spirits, members of an organized spirit-world. This at once establishes not only their reality, but their formidable character. Against such must be ranged something more than mere human wisdom.

The fourfold description contains clear indications of organized action and authority. Moule refers to the use of the term "*Legion*" in Mark 5:9, 15; Lk. 8:30; and Matt. 26:53, in connection with both evil spirits and holy angels—"a word used on both occasions with profound earnestness and appeal to fact." The *leaders* alone are mentioned in the passage now under consideration, whereas 'legion' takes in rank and file also.

(a) In respect of *rank* these evil spirits are called Principalities, World-rulers "of this darkness", asserting authority. Their authority is stated by the word *exousia* in Eph. 2:2 and Col. 1:13, etc. This authority is not mere strength or force (*dunamis*), but ability to exercise rule and government. This is not a lawful rule, but rather it is usurped, though permitted by God until such time as He pleases for the carrying out of His own purposes.

The terms used, "authority of the air," "authority of the darkness" (see refs.), are exceedingly significant. They are not mere figures of speech, but both localize and characterize the exercise of the authority. The "airy envelope of earth" is the

haunt of these spirits, but the sphere of their operation is specially in "the world of humanity"—defined more explicitly in ch. 2:2 as "*in the sons of disobedience*".

As "authorities of the air" and of "this darkness" their operations are exerted in creating, controlling and manipulating the world's 'atmosphere,' its 'spirit'; characterized firstly by its subtle mixture of good and evil, and secondly, by its veiled or open antagonism to the will and government of God. It is mere carping to suggest that an 'atmosphere' is too intangible and abstract an idea to have any power. Modern writers on philosophy and ethics recognise its reality and influence. In experience we know the decided effects produced by the constant breathing in of a contaminated 'social atmosphere'—and contrariwise of a wholesome atmosphere. What a weapon it becomes in the hands of the Arch-Enemy of souls!

As "*the spirit* that now worketh *in* the sons of disobedience", that Influence operates within the heart and mind, turning them into so many "spiritual resistances" against the claims of God. The net result is that the human will is made defiant to the will of God. And inasmuch as the whole will of God lies behind the smallest divine precept, every act of disobedience, however seemingly trivial, is a virtual surrender, to the "authority of the darkness".

Jowett commenting on this passage is illuminating. He says: "Here is the teaching of the book of the Word. At the gate of every faculty of the soul there is an invisible foe, and his power becomes operative and energetic whenever a faculty is exercised in the direction of the Highest. Is not that true of the faculty of veneration? Let any man walk through the streets of this city and seek to lift his soul in the contemplation of anything venerable and august, and he will surely feel the might of SOME INVISIBLE FORCE DRAGGING HIM DOWN TO THAT WHICH IS FLIPPANT AND JAUNTY. Let a man seek to exercise his imagination among the vast and holy fields of the ideal life, and HE WILL FEEL THE INVISIBLE ANTAGONIST DRAGGING HIM BACK TO THE INSIGNIFICANT. Or let a man seek to exercise the faculty of benevolence, and he will feel the same adversary seeking to shape his inclinations *toward that which is mean*. We become conscious of an invisible, hostile pressure which is fiercest when the soul seeks to use her supreme and royal privilege of communing with God. How is it with us when we seek to pray? Have we any experience of difficulty, any

sense of an adversary, any feeling of strenuous conflict? Every effort is made to hinder, to thwart us in some way.

Sometimes, when I turn to pray, or to meditate on things that matter most, I have to struggle through something like nausea to the open air and liberty of communion with God. I am conscious of having to fight my way through reluctance, through indifference, through insipidity, to the highest interests and concerns of the soul. As soon as ever I begin to lift myself the adversaries are there! They always range between me and what next I ought to do. They are always between me and the higher and the Highest, always and everywhere. You may call them what you please. The Bible names them 'principalities', 'powers', 'world-rulers of the darkness', 'spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places', and I for one meet them every day."

(b) In respect of *resources*, these Principalities and Powers are formidable for their numbers, craft and stratagems. And from such passages as 1 John 2:15-17; James 4:4; Gal. 5:12-21 we learn that these spirit forces are not alone, but have willing and powerful allies in "the flesh" and "the world." In 1 Pet. 2:11 we get the vision of a concerted campaign, for the words, "war against the soul", are literally rendered, "*carry on a campaign* against the soul." Together they form a combination so utterly resistless as to be appalling were it not for the all-victorious CHRIST!

Their united force is directed against the whole of man—his body, his soul, his spirit; against his entire personality, his will, his understanding, his affections.

Furthermore, their range of influence is so far-spread as to involve even the "heavenlies". Yet let us note carefully that, in this sphere they are not to be reckoned as rulers but as intruders, bereft of authority though still possessing ability to fulfil their evil designs. Whilst the man of the world meets them only in one sphere, the Christian may meet them in both. Candlish brings this out vividly:

"They may follow you into your retreat, in the heavenlies. Resenting your escape from their dominion; bitterly grudging your being blessed and exalted with Christ in the heavenlies, they would fain scale the mountain of your hope and joy in the Lord. They will find ways of access into your most sacred and secret hiding-place; and, adapting themselves to the circumstances of your lot, and the varying frames and moods of your experience, they

will become in the heavenlies 'spiritual wickedness,' the very 'spiritualities of evil.' Their temptations and assaults now are not carnal but spiritual. They become expert disputants about the very Word of God itself. They quote Scripture for their purpose. They pervert texts. They bring up nice questions about the deep and sacred things of God to confound you. They harass you with blasphemous suggestions. They malign God to you. They minister to you most plausibly even out of the Scriptures, the materials, either of presumption and spiritual pride, or of doubt and darkness and despair. But be ye strong in the Lord and in the power of His might!"

But the vital point is this, that the Christian who meets them in the heavenlies does so with *immeasurable advantage*, for he is *seated with Christ* in the very place of *assured victory*! Review all the vast assets possessed by the believer who abides "in the heavenlies in Christ"—do they not all minister strength, fortitude, grace, wisdom to overcome?

Where the terrible danger lies is when the Christian abides not in the heavenlies, but walks the carnal way of the world. *There* he *cannot* claim victory, for he is in territory ruled by the "Authority of this darkness" who wields the power, albeit usurped. If he is not overwhelmed at once he is certainly incapable of overcoming. It is the superabounding grace of God alone that stands between him and complete spiritual disaster. The carnal Christian has *no claim* upon the protection of the Holy Spirit. How very solemn is that truth. How little we apprehend its implications. Safety and divinely-pledged protection are found altogether "*in the heavenlies in Christ*" (see John 15:7).

3. *The divine provision for the conflict* (vv. 13-18). "Wherefore take up the whole-armor of God".

In drawing up the inventory of what God has provided, the writer prefaces it by another challenge to faith—*faith* must act, must appropriate. Idleness never was a virtue, not to say a Christian virtue. The armor lies at our feet, as it were, take it up, put it on, use it.

Now this act of "putting on" is really three-fold: *It is an act of the will*; you bring your will to choose and use what God has provided, and His will becomes yours to obey. *It is an act of the mind*; no longer do you wildly beat the air in your own wisdom, but you intelligently wield the sword in the power of the Spirit.

*It is an act of the heart*; your desires, your love, your feelings are under the captivity of the Christ who loved and gave Himself for you. All that is involved in the act, and if any one of those features is lacking or weak, to that degree is the armour defective and we open ourselves to defeat.

He then calls us *to stand*—"stand therefore". *Faith* is essential for this as for every other experience and duty of the Christian life. Moule suggestively points out that the apostle here is not so much emphasising the idea of progress and conquest—although such ideas are intimately related to the subject—as to fixity, determination, steadfastness of purpose. "The scene is filled with the marshalled hosts of the Evil One, bent upon *dislodging* the soul, and the Church, from the one possible vantage-ground of life and power—union and communion with their Lord." Having appropriated, stand therefore!

How often that is the hardest thing possible! To run, to fight, to charge headlong, seems, in some senses, easier—action of almost *any* kind is easier than inaction. To stand rooted to the post of duty, impregnable, or shall we say impervious, to the fiery onslaught of the enemy—is hardest of all!

"It was not in the open fight  
We threw away the sword,  
But in the lonely watching  
In the darkness by the ford."

Possessing such divine resources we cannot run away or evade the battle—yea, rather we might almost say we welcome it! For one of the great laws of moral and spiritual health is that, in *resistance* we find our fullest development of strength. "A difficulty is more than a test of our powers, *it is a possible addition to our resources*. Hardships do more than try us; they harden us." As Jowett finely says elsewhere: "Every conquered difficulty empties its strength into our souls. We drink the 'blood' of our tasks. . . . Every temptation subdued empties its strength into the treasury of our wills."

Then follows the royal inventory of heavenly armour. Space forbids us following out each detail, but every item will repay study.

There is the *girdle* for the loins, the girdle of truth, of personal integrity and sincerity imparted by regeneration. By this we are protected from the enemy as Liar (John 8:44). The breast-plate



of righteousness to cover both back and front, to protect the heart from the stratagems of the Accuser (Rom. 8:33, 34; Job 1). The feet are to be shod with the preparation (lit. equipment) of the gospel of peace, for oft times the enemy acts as a Hinderer (Zec. 8:1, 2).

Then comes a very important piece, to be worn "over all things" (or perhaps "*against* all things"), the large oblong *shield* of faith. With this we may quench all the "darts" of the Evil One. How true the imagery, how real the darts! But they are quenchable, they need not touch us!

Two more pieces follow, the helmet and the sword. These we are to *accept* (not the same word earlier translated 'take'), for salvation and the Word are the Spirit's gifts. The sword is the one offensive weapon, and it is the Spirit's peculiar property—forged by Him, and only wielded by His might and direction.

Finally, the Apostle indicates the true attitude of *mind* in which the armour is to be employed, the atmosphere in which it is most effective—"praying on every occasion . . . in the Spirit . . . keeping awake with all perseverance." This praying reaches beyond the narrow confines of self-interest and includes "all saints." "With a noble abruptness the thought, long detained upon the combat and resources of the individual, and of the single community, now runs out to the great circle of the Church." In being true to our own highest interests we find ourselves true to the pressing claims of the whole household of God, for the battle rages everywhere. We are not alone in the fight. But

"This day the noise of battle,  
The next the victor's song!"

We conclude with this quotation for which we are indebted to Jowett—ponder it, pray over it, ask yourself as to what it means to you personally and whether it has a message for you:

"If there is confronting you today some powerful antagonism, which threatens your highest progress, then I tell you that in the armour of God you may conquer by quiet patience, by strong fighting, by PERSISTENT PRAYING. . . .

"How, then, must the Christian regard his antagonisms? He must regard them as ALLUREMENTS TO BATTLE, as clarion calls to more steadfast devotion. Behind every antagonism, nay, within it, there lies imprisoned a new endowment. Behind every obstacle,

nay, within it, there is a hidden door into a larger life. In the strength of the Lord God let us march up to the antagonism and claim the endowment; let us contend with the obstacle and find the secret door. Have you an adversary confronting you today? Does some powerful temptation stand in the way of your life, threatening your moral integrity? Move up to it with courage. Despoil it and make it serve in your own well-being. Or is some threat looming in front of you, some menace, seeking to turn you from the path of right? In the strength of God move up to it and convert its threatened lightning into your own dynamic."

From strength to strength go on,  
 Wrestle and fight and pray.  
 Tread all the powers of darkness down  
 And win the well-fought day.

Teach us, O Lord! according to the greatness of Thy tender mercies, to live and love and fight and serve, with all the devotion and fervour imparted by Thy Holy Spirit, in the conscious enjoyment of Thy fellowship and peace, each day of our pilgrim journey, until Thou dost call us to exchange the scenes of earth for the glories of the city of God and eternal day! Amen!

## THE THEOPHANIES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

By ALEX SOUTTER

### III. Jacob at Peniel

Jacob's life was a variegated one, and may be divided into four parts: (1) in the land as a son who supplanted; (2) "beyond the river" as a shepherd who served; (3) back in the land as a saint who suffered; and (4) in Egypt as a sage and seer who worshipped and prophesied.

His Peniel experience took place at the end of the second stage and the beginning of the third. It was the greatest crisis of his career, the most outstanding landmark of a life lived, first in the shadows, but ultimately in the sunshine of God's unfailing mercy.

He had lived twenty years in Padan Aram with Laban during which time Syrian and Jew each sharpened his wits at the other's