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Spiritual Power in Later Judaism and in the New Testament.¹

BY THE REVEREND CAMPBELL N. MOODY, M.A., MISSIONARY IN FORMOSA.

THE literature of the Apocrypha and other products of later Judaism is tedious and unspiritual, and yet not wanting in expressions of dependence upon God in matters of heart and life. Earnest efforts to do His will and observe His law led, of course, in some cases, to reflections on the merits of good works, and even, as Schlatter has shown, on the merits of faith, and again, on the redemptive power of alms, prayers, and penitence. 'Our works are subject to our own choice and power,' says one; 'to do right or wrong in the works of our hands' (Ps Sol 9⁷). 'If thou wilt,' declares another, 'thou shalt keep the commandments; and to perform faithfulness is of thine own good pleasure' (Sir 15¹⁶). This, however, is a protest against a fatalism very common among Gentiles of that age; it is an affirmation of responsibility, an acquitting of God of all blame for men's misdeeds and of all unrighteousness in His judgments: the context in both cases must be remembered.

While some tried to balance good works against bad, others were fain to acknowledge sin. In books written after the great Return, such as Ezra, Daniel, and Baruch, the confessions of national unworthiness are very strong, and it is astonishing to read in 2 Mac that the sufferers in the midst of their persecutions charge both their people and themselves with sin. Even in 4 Mac there is no trace of the thought that Israel is an innocent, suffering servant. What many of the later books expect is that God Himself will abolish evil. We need not dwell upon such predictions; they are to be found in the Books of Adam and Eve, the Book of Jubilees, the Book of Enoch, the Testament of Dan, and elsewhere. Some of them suggest magical transformation rather than a gracious work of God's Spirit in the heart. Yet the later writers have not altogether forgotten the lesson of grace which Deuteronomy and the prophets taught, as may be seen from the following words: 'They shall no longer sin before His face, for the evil heart shall be taken from them, and there shall be given them a heart understanding the good, and to serve God only' (*Apoc. Mosis*, 13⁵; cf. *Assump. Mosis*, 12⁷).

In the present age what were men to do? As

in earlier times, they were sometimes urged to make themselves righteous. 'Make your hearts good before the Lord,' says the Testament of Simeon (5²); and 4 Mac (7¹⁶; cf. 7²⁹) asserts that inspired Reason is able to guide the passions (cf. Wis 10¹⁸). But how earnestly the Jewish elders in the Letter of Aristeas admonish the Gentile king to pray for strength! 'He must pray to God,' says one, 'that no duty may be neglected.' 'If you wish the aforesaid graces to continue,' advises another, 'you must call upon God continually' (par. 226, 245; cf. 17, 20, etc.). In 2 Mac 1³ there is a prayer for the Jews in Egypt that God may give them all a heart to worship Him and do His pleasure.

The Book of Jubilees gives several instances of prayer for spiritual power, as when Abraham says, 'My son Jacob, may the God of all bless thee and strengthen thee to do righteousness, and His will before Him' (22¹⁰; cf. 22¹⁴, 25¹⁶). The Son of Sirach gives utterance to many a harsh saying, and he talks of the merits of piety and charity in a very irreligious fashion; yet when he extols the bliss of an untroubled conscience and of a life that calls for no repentance (14¹⁻²), he is aware that this is beyond common attainment. 'Who hath had the power to transgress, and hath not transgressed?' is his melancholy cry (Sir 31¹⁰). And, in the midst of an unpleasant mixture of worldliness, cynicism, and mercantile piety, he breaks out into a remarkable prayer: 'Who shall set a watch over my mouth, and a seal of shrewdness upon my lips, that I fall not from it, and that my tongue destroy me not? O Lord, Father and Master of my life, abandon me not to their counsel: suffer me not to fall by them. Who will set scourges over my thought, and a discipline of wisdom over mine heart? That . . . mine ignorances be not multiplied, and my sins abound not, and I shall fall before mine adversaries, and mine enemy rejoice over me. O Lord, Father and God of my life, give me not a proud look, and turn away concupiscence from me. Let not greediness and chambering overtake me; and give me not over to a shameless mind' (*ib.* 22^{27-23⁹}).

But this is surpassed by one of the Psalms of Solomon: 'When my soul slumbered (being afar) from the Lord, I had all but slipped down to the

¹ A preliminary article on *Spiritual Power in Pagan Religions and in the Old Testament* appeared in January.

pit. When (I was) far from God, my soul had been wellnigh poured out unto death, (I had been) nigh unto the gates of Sheol with the sinner, when my soul departed from the Lord' God of Israel—Had not the Lord helped me with His everlasting mercy. He pricked me, as a horse is pricked, that I might serve Him; my saviour and helper at all times saved me. . . . Rule me, O God, (keeping me back) from wicked sin, and from every wicked woman that causeth the simple to stumble. . . . Protect my tongue and my lips with words of truth; anger and unreasoning wrath put far from me. Murmuring, and impatience in affliction, remove far from me, when, if I sin, Thou chastenest me that I may return (unto Thee). But with goodwill and cheerfulness support my soul; when Thou strengthenest my soul, what is given (to me) will be sufficient for me. For if Thou givest not strength, who can endure chastisement with poverty?' (Ps Sol 16, in Charles, *Apocr. and Pseudep.*). What an autobiography, and what a prayer!

All these prayers for righteousness and for deliverance are offered by men who love the Law. We are reminded that the 19th and 119th Psalms in the Old Testament express the same ardour for God's statutes, and that the man in whom the prophecy of Jeremiah received fulfilment when he exclaimed, 'I delight to do Thy will, O my God; yea, Thy law is within my heart,' was the same person who cried to the Lord, 'Mine iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head, and my heart hath failed me. Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me' (Ps 40¹²⁻¹³).

Of late, too many writers have ignored the truth of Paul's judgments on the Law. The Law has been, and, in a broad sense of the word, law will always be, a great teacher. It has been well said that what the prophets attempted, but failed to accomplish, the Law achieved. With the synagogue as its instrument, it instructed, not a handful of disciples, but a whole nation, in the worship of the Most High. The old prophets, however spiritual their messages might be, were never able to disregard the question, Is Jehovah the true God? With painful surprise we see that Jeremiah, who so delighted in the religion of the heart, was still at the close of his life obliged to contend with Jews and Jewesses who argued that the worship of Jehovah had proved a mistake, and that they were more prosperous when they served the Queen of Heaven (Jer 44¹⁷). Now, any one who has lived in a heathen land must perceive that so long as worshippers of God are busy debating in their own

minds, or even with outsiders, the rival claims of deities, it is difficult for them to get 'far ben.' When at last the Law and the lawyers took hold of the people, and swept out all leaven of paganism, there was leisure for the question, Are we serving God aright? Then men could begin to pray, 'Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts. And see if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting' (Ps 139²³⁻²⁴).

It is a great step when men begin to inquire, What is the chief commandment? Who is my neighbour? What shall I do to inherit eternal life? It is much even to ask, How may I observe all those laws? And will God help me to observe them?

What kind of petitions were uttered in the synagogue when Jesus frequented it? In the Jewish Prayer-Book there are prayers that are thought to have been used while the Temple was yet standing. Did the fishermen of Galilee join in such words as these, 'Our Father, our King, . . . put it into our hearts to understand and to discern, to mark, learn, and teach, to heed, to do, and to fulfil in love all the words of instruction in thy Law. Enlighten our eyes in thy Law, and let our hearts cleave to thy commandments, and unite our hearts to love and fear thy name, so that we may never be put to shame'?¹

Schlatter has shown in a very interesting way (*Der Glaube im neuen Testament*) how much discussion there was in the synagogues of Palestine, even before the advent of Christ, on the value of faith, and on the merits and rewards of Abraham's faith, and the like. This, as he remarks, was faith in God's providence, and, we may add, in His wonder-working power. It has no direct bearing, therefore, on our present subject; yet it must be mentioned here because the knowledge of the fact helps us to see how readily our Lord and His disciples might be understood when they spoke of faith.

Was prayer like that of the 119th Psalm habitual among pious Jews? Did Paul, before his conversion, appeal to God for spiritual strength? Or was it true of him and of many of his contemporaries, in a strict sense of the words, that they 'sought to establish a righteousness of their own'? No inference can be drawn from the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.

Certain it is that after his conversion it might have been said of Paul at any time, 'Behold he prayeth!' What an extraordinary outburst there was in him and in the Church of Christ!

¹ *Jew. Prayer-Book*, p. 39, ed. by S. Singer and I. Abrahams.

The like had never been known. 'In the most emotional moments of a Roman of enlightenment, like Cicero,' says Fowler, 'when we can truly say of him that he was touched by true religious feeling . . . prayers find no place at all. But for St. Paul and the members of the early Christian brotherhood, the whole of life was a continuous worship, and the one great feature of that worship was prayer.'¹ Even thus the truth is insufficiently expressed. For Paul and for us the life which we now live is 'in Christ'; we live by faith in the Son of God. The actual prayers of the New Testament are not many; some, however, like those embedded in the Epistles to the Colossians and to the Ephesians, are very impressive. What most strikes the reader is that everywhere in Paul, Peter, John, and the Apocalypse there is a triumphant sense of dependence on God in Christ Jesus. Bousset has well observed that it is difficult for Paul to give a command because the Christian already *is* what he is urged to be. And for Paul and many a Christian since it is sometimes difficult to pray, because the heart is full of its possession.

And now, between the Old Testament and other pre-Christian writings on the one side, and the Epistles on the other, comes the life and death of Jesus. What shall we say of the records in the Synoptic Gospels? Shall we say that they differ as much from the Epistles as from the Old Testament? The Epistles are saturated with faith in Christ as the source of all spiritual strength. They show this, it is to be observed, partly by employing the words 'faith' and 'believe,' partly by other expressions such as 'in Christ,' 'through Christ,' 'have fellowship with Him,' 'know Him,' 'abide in the Son,' 'have the Son,' 'to be Christ's,' 'put on Christ,' 'call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

We observe something similar in the Gospels. The terms 'faith' and 'believe' are employed; but, for the most part, when the highest religious topics are spoken of, other modes of speech take their place. With reference to God the mention of faith or trust or belief is rare; but a good deal is said that implies profound confidence in the Heavenly Father's readiness to answer prayer, and to give food and raiment, protection and guidance, and victory over death. This accords with the trust in God's care and protection so prominent in the Old Testament; but the Gospels convey an inexpressible sense of intimacy with the Father, and of satisfaction and joy in His purpose, even when it leads to suffering and death.

What about life and conduct? Here we look

¹ Fowler, *Relig. Exper. of Rom. People*, 468.

for much, and we seem to find little. The prayer that Jesus taught His disciples is in most of its petitions a prayer for spiritual blessing. The suppliants ask God so to work that His name may be honoured, and His rule prevail. For themselves they entreat that their sins may be forgiven, and that they may not be led into temptation. How meagre this is to our feeling! We would fain believe that Jesus said, Your Heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. Must we choose between Matthew's version and Luke's? Or did Jesus repeat the saying many times, and vary the expression? Of His own prayers the Synoptic Gospels tell but little. In Luke's Gospel Peter receives the assurance, 'I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not.'

It is predominantly in connexion with the miracles that the words 'faith' and 'believe' are used. Jesus frequently worked miracles without depending on any one's Faith. The three Sabbath healings seem thrust upon the patients and upon the public too. The same may be said of the two Sabbath healings recorded by John. It is as if Jesus wished to throw down a challenge to Sabbath-observers, and to bear the sole responsibility of breaking the Law! It is plain from His message to John, from His command to the Gadarene demoniac, and from His vehement reproach of the cities which did not repent, although they had seen His mighty works, that Jesus set great store by His mighty works, and sometimes wished them to be known, whether as signs of the Messianic Kingdom or not, we need not now inquire. His readiness to work apart from any recipient's faith increases our surprise at His delight in the manifestation of faith. Jesus attached very great importance to faith in His own wonder-working power. Shall we speak of faith in the power of God working through Jesus? No; for, as a rule, what patients thought of was His own power; and He never disclaimed this, but on one occasion directly asked the question, Believe ye that I am able to do this? He was not alarmed, as many critics are, when allegiance was paid to Himself. When the Gadarene was sent home to tell what 'the Lord' had done for him, Mark understood 'the Lord' to mean Jesus; for at once he added that the man went home and told what Jesus had done for him (Mk 5²⁰). We are not here discussing what Greek or Aramaic word Jesus used; it is enough to observe that in two other passages Mark employed the name 'Lord' in a similar way; in the one of these it means God (Mk 13²⁰), in the other it means Jesus (Mk 11³).

But perhaps we ought to exclaim, as J. Weiss did, at the wonderful faith of Jesus Himself, when, for example, He went right on to the ruler's house, undeterred by the news that the little girl was dead. This imports a foreign element into the Gospels. Jesus, on one occasion, gave the disciples to understand that they had failed to heal an epileptic boy because of their want of faith and prayer. But the only passage in the Synoptics that even suggests prayer of His own in connexion with healing is that in which it is said that Jesus looked up to heaven and sighed (Mk 7³⁴). That He prayed and that He was obliged to exercise faith is beyond dispute. But the records give the impression that His wonder-working power was not one of the matters in which His faith was strained. However this may be, it sets the narratives awry when attention is called to Christ's faith in God, while He makes everything of faith in Himself.

When Jesus felt surprise at the absence of faith in His power among the townsmen of Nazareth, we should have been apt to exclaim, What matter? belief or disbelief of this order will not make the smallest difference in the character of the men and women concerned. But for Jesus the faith of the centurion was manifestly a great joy, and He saw in it the harbinger of untold blessings for outside nations. Probably He felt a like joy in the faith of the Syro-Phœnician woman. And, on the other hand, He showed His disgust at the faithlessness of all concerned in the plight of the epileptic boy, and His disappointment that, after so much experience of His power, the disciples did not expect Him to guard them from the storm. (Cf. what is said of the provision of loaves in connexion with the warning against 'the leaven of the Pharisees.')

Did our Lord recognize, more than we do, that a higher faith is frequently, or usually, built upon a lower, and that the noblest motives grow from baser ones? Many a convert from Heathendom sets out with nothing better than the belief that God will protect and prosper him, and arrives at the most spiritual faith and the most unselfish devotion.

But now, we are ready to exclaim, if our Lord so valued faith in His miracles, how much more highly must He have esteemed the faith that could work moral miracles and save immortal souls! This kind of faith is familiar to us; and we have gained our knowledge from the New Testament. But did we learn it from the Synoptic Gospels?

We read among other matters in the Gospels that it is not enough to observe the Law in the most approved way, the way of Scribes and Pharisees;

no one may enter God's kingdom unless he outruns them. To keep the Ten Commandments is not enough. If a man commits no murder, but bursts into angry speech, he is still an offender. If he keeps the seventh commandment, yet indulges a lustful look, he is an adulterer. 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth?' Not so with you: you must treat with the utmost generosity those who insult and oppress you, and make unjust demands. 'Love your neighbour as yourself': do to him as you would have him do to you; if your brother offends you and repents, you must forgive; no matter how often he repeats his offence, you must still be ready to pardon. Is this enough? I say, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you; give your best wishes to those who wish you the worst, and pray to God for those who hunt you down. For you must be perfect, like your Heavenly Father who loves all, both those who love and those who hate Him.

What a law! if we call it 'law.' We tremble as we picture to ourselves the boundless demands that are made upon us. With J. Weiss¹ we are fain to confess that to meet such hate with such love our own goodwill does not suffice. But does Jesus say anything of Divine allies in our extremity?

We remember His announcement that He has come to call sinners, that He is like a physician who goes to the sick, like a shepherd who goes after a lost sheep and finds it, like a father who welcomes back an erring son, nay more, that He has power to pardon sin. These sayings puzzle us, because their grace appears to have no connexion with the awful severity of the demands.

Consider again that the Epistles contain far more precepts than all the Gospels do. Not to make much of Thessalonians, Philippians, and Galatians, there are contained in the First Epistle of Peter and in Ephesians whole lists of commands. Most of all, Paul lays down in the Epistle to the Romans a long series of very exacting rules, and some of these recall the Sermon on the Mount. Neither Paul, nor any other writer, was careful to remind his readers that the injunctions could not be observed without supernatural strength. The readers were Christians who already possessed all strength because they lived by faith in Jesus Christ.

It is not much otherwise with such precepts as we have taken from our Lord's words. They are, as all critics acknowledge, but readers often forget, addressed to disciples, men who had heeded such invitations as, Come to Me, Forsake all and follow Me, Receive Me. The words of command issue

¹ S.N.T., p. 280.

from the lips of One who made everything for time and eternity to depend on a close attachment to Himself.

A question arises and presses upon us: Why did Jesus, when He spoke of miracles in the physical world, make much of faith, and, when He spoke of greater things, use language quite different? The first part of the answer is obvious: in order to receive healing it was unnecessary to become a 'follower'; it was sufficient to 'believe' that Jesus was able to cure. Such 'faith' saved the sufferer; he 'saved his life' by it. For the salvation of the soul it was far otherwise: a man must 'lose his life'; the rich young man must sell all and follow Jesus to gain 'eternal life'; in general, it was necessary to put friends and kinsfolk, property, life, self, in the second place, and yield oneself to Jesus. This was faith; but it was faith of a higher order, so much higher that it claimed a different order of speech. It could not be put in a more intimate and concrete fashion than in the words, Come; Forsake and follow; Receive. When Jesus was no longer visibly present, such language ceased to be appropriate: the Church was soon obliged to speak of 'faith,' which was the best word in the circumstances, but, as every one knows, liable to be misunderstood. The misunderstanding was avoided in the phrase, 'Renounce yourself and follow Me.'

It has been necessary to discuss this matter because the subject of 'Faith,' as it is unfolded in the Gospels, has been treated by Schlatter, Bousset, and others in a mechanical fashion, just as if they had turned up the concordance for the words

'faith' and 'believe.' Denney, in his *Jesus and the Gospel*, does not correct this error.

We may sum up our discussion. The Old Testament is not so full in its recognition of spiritual need and Divine supply as the ordinary reader supposes; but it is richer in this respect than some modern writers represent, and it far excels the ancient heathen religions. We seem justified in concluding that between the return from Exile and the coming of Christ, as the demands of God's Law became better recognized, the sense of spiritual dependence increased in the minds of the most godly. Then comes, shall we say? the announcement by word and example of a new 'law,' so lofty in its requirements that enlightened Jews of the present day reject it as impossible. At the same time, *apart from what Jesus says of attachment to Himself*, nothing, or next to nothing, is said of Divine aid for its performance. Yet, when the Teacher is gone, we find Stephen, in his dying prayer, fulfilling the new law, and soon the fiery Paul learns to say, 'Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat' (1 Co 4¹²): 'I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake' (2 Co 12¹⁰). These men ascribe everything to Jesus. What can we conclude but that they were right, and that they fulfilled the law because they had truly learned of Him who 'came to fulfil'? Yet we are told that it was they who introduced into the gospel 'a double object of faith' (Jesus side by side with God), and thus they caused confusion. O blessed confusion!

The Parable of the Tares

(MATT. XIII. 24-30, 36-43).

BY THE REVEREND LESLIE H. BUNN, B.A., CREWKERNE, SOMERSET.

THE Parable of the Tares is followed by an explanation which our Lord gave, at their request, to His disciples. The present exposition is based on the observation that Jesus had one purpose in telling the story to the multitude, and quite another when He afterwards spoke to the disciples.

This is in accordance with His custom as a Teacher, for He always had regard to the special needs of His hearers. He sat patiently unfolding to all who cared to listen the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven, and

to this end He told this story; but when His own intimate followers sought the inner meaning of His teaching He at once turned to adapt the Parable to serve their particular case. In His eyes they were men set apart for a great mission, and their preparation was His peculiar concern. For them, therefore, He takes again the allegory and turns it about to show them the truth they most need to see.

But it is not the whole of the Parable that He expounds for His disciples. It was not meant