

**CONNEXION OF SACRED AND PROFANE
HISTORY; BEING A REVIEW OF THE PRINCIPAL
EVENTS IN THE WORLD, AS THEY BEAR UPON
THE STATE OF RELIGION, FROM THE CLOSE OF
THE OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY, TILL THE
ESTABLISHMENT OF CHRISTIANITY; IN THREE
VOLUMES, VOL. III**

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D. DAVIDSON

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BY D. DAVIDSON.

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CONNEXION
BETWEEN
SACRED AND PROFANE HISTORY.

CHAPTER I.

RISE OF THE FIFTH EMPIRE, OR KINGDOM OF GOD.

THE whole history of man demonstrates the truth uniformly attested in the sacred Scriptures, that he can only enjoy rational happiness in the same proportion as he cultivates and attains to moral excellence. In every age and country, he experiences present misery, and the fearful apprehension of its perpetual increase and eternal duration, to be inseparable from subjection to the malignant and impure passions, and perseverance in such practices as manifestly tend to produce disquietude, destruction, or despair in his own bosom, and distress and wretchedness to his species, and to every living thing. "The wages of sin," he truly finds "to be death." "God is love," and in his good pleasure he purposed in himself to restore his disobedient race to conformity to his own likeness and participation of his favour, which is life or happiness, and of his loving-kindness, which is better than life. This purpose he graciously revealed, when he announced his design to place the human race under the government of the Almighty Deliverer, whom he had chosen to be head or ruler of all who should, in any age, voluntarily confide in him, and humbly obey him. Till he should appear on earth as the sovereign Lord of all, they who looked for him were placed under the government of certain individuals, to whom he committed the authority of deputies, responsible to him for the manner in which they acted for him in the promotion of the interests of all who waited for him, and publicly worshipped the True and Living God. The first order of these deputies were the patriarchs, who were generally prophets,

and intercessors with God for his visible worshippers, in things pertaining to this life. They were succeeded by Moses, the great legislator, prophet, deliverer, and intercessor of Israel. His successors were the judges, and the divinely chosen kings of Judah, and the many prophets who were raised up in their age. Their ministry was recommended by God to the confidence of the people by many signal and supernatural interpositions; and those of them who were unfaithful to their trust were publicly punished, often by the most striking expressions of the displeasure and indignation of the Supreme Sovereign, Saviour, and Judge of the whole community, who professed to do him homage.

How, and to what an extent this Divine administration failed to accomplish the moral and spiritual deliverance of the great majority of those who enjoyed it, we are fully instructed in the sacred history preserved in the Old Testament. Few comparatively of any generation of Israel were visibly subjects of moral renovation, and by consequence active instruments in the promotion of human happiness. The multitude despised the spiritual blessings of the eternal covenant made with the patriarchs, and thought and acted without reverence for God, or love for man. This failure was foreseen by the Most High, to whom are known all his works from the beginning; and it was more early and frequently predicted, in respect of the Abrahamic race, than almost any event in their history. Moses and all the prophets distinctly announced infidelity, mere formality in religion, hypocrisy, idolatry, or obstinate and ruinous wickedness, to be the characteristics of this race, during all their existence as a nation or a people separated from the nations. They had been separated from all other people, and specially favoured by God, in order that they should celebrate his praise, by publicly proclaiming his immeasurable excellencies and wonderful works; and it was on account of their utter worthlessness in relation to this great work, that Jehovah declared his unchanging purpose to renounce them as his worshippers, and to adopt a new mode of administration to accomplish his benevolent designs towards the human race. Numb. xiv. 21.; Jer. xxxi. 31—34.

The Divine administration appointed for the worshippers of God, during the ages preceding Messiah, was confessedly not perfectly adapted to display the Divine benevolence in all its fulness, on the supposition that all nations should become his worshippers. This is plain, if we only advert to the command, that all who would enjoy the most important means of

religious instruction and comfort should ascend to Jerusalem, the chief seat of public worship, to keep the three great annual festivals. That their moral deliverance did not, however, depend on this, is unquestionable; for whoever, believing the revelation of mercy that God would send an Almighty Saviour, feared God and wrought righteousness, were always accepted by him.

That the means of religious instruction which God conferred on the Jewish nation were amply sufficient to effect their moral renovation, will be acknowledged by all who candidly and deliberately investigate their history. They were constituted his visible family, and were granted visible signs of his presence to receive their confessions of sin, and answer their supplications for mercy. To them also were granted the covenants, promises of mercy, a succession of inspired guides, and, finally, the complete Oracles of truth contained in the Old Testament. But these favours, as well as his miraculous doings on their behalf, were misinterpreted and misimproved by many of them in every age, and by almost all of them in the reigns of Herod the Great and of Augustus. They had been, from the time of Nehemiah, continually degenerating; and were now as the facts which have been already noticed show, scarcely exceeded in wickedness by any people on the face of the earth: nor ought it to be forgotten that their wickedness was that species which is most odious and hateful in the sight of God and man. They had, in all generations, appeared a strong-minded race, remarkable for powerful passions, and resolute determination in gratifying them; but in no former period were they equally distinguished by intellectual acquirements. Far were they from being the weak, ignorant, rude, semi-barbarous people that many of the learned would have us to regard them. Their perfect hatred of idolatry disposed the most devotional among them to despise the literature of Rome and Greece from its idolatrous aspect and tendency; but Roman and Grecian literature, arts, and customs were generally known and admired by many Jews. This knowledge, of course, had no salutary influence on the minds of its possessors. This class most probably belonged to the sect of the Sadducees; and these, we know, were as destitute of moral excellence as the Pharisees, who, as a sect, embraced almost all who discovered any ardent zeal for religion. The religious leaders excused many species of wickedness in any one who avowed reverence for their authority, devoutly observed the laws of Moses and the traditions of the

elders, and liberally devoted his property to religious purposes. The teachers restrained not themselves from what their covetous, ambitious, and sensual hearts desired, for they persuaded themselves that their religious services were a sufficient expiation for every possible sin. Thus Jesus charged them with devouring widows' houses, and, for a pretence of godly intentions in all their actions, they made long prayers. All classes were completely debased by indulgence of every selfish, revengeful, and impure desire and passion. The best of them was a briar, and the most upright, a thorn hedge. The Sacred Scriptures were entirely perverted. The demands of the laws of Moses were limited to the external conduct; and pardon for violations of moral precepts pronounced certain to all who most zealously observed the ceremonies of religion.

Thus the Jews, as a nation, lived only to cause the name of God to be blasphemed, and his Revelation to be contemptuously treated or neglected. A few, like the gleanings of grapes after vintage, remained to point the way to the tree of life. With this exception, the whole race had renounced in heart and life the authority of God, and were wholly ignorant of the true nature and import of the writings of Moses and the prophets. Nothing almost remained to prevent the entire moral death of the human race, but the reading of the Scriptures in the synagogues; and this was rendered almost useless by the false interpretations of them, and the traditions exalted above them, by the public instructors. How urgently and loudly then did the moral condition of the Jews call for the Divine interposition of a new and more mighty apparatus of means and influence to avert the entire extermination of the true religion, and to make it felt and acknowledged among the nations! Nor was such an interposition of Deity less imperatively required from the moral condition of the whole of the inhabitants of the Fourth Empire. They had, doubtless, advanced to a considerable degree in what is called civilization; the conveniences and comforts; and even rational pleasures of life, were multiplied and more widely and generally diffused; and, probably, the ferocities of human nature were somewhat softened, and its most oppressive evils diminished or ameliorated. But, viewed in their relation to their Creator and his law, and in their relation to one another, as rational, intelligent, and immortal beings, they had made, in general, no essential improvement. Moral evil everywhere reigned with uncontrolled and destructive power. Vice, in its most diabolical and

polluted forms, universally triumphed; the whole world continued in willing and abject slavery to Satan, the prince of darkness. The solitary individuals emancipated from his tyranny were almost unnoticed and unknown. All human governments have been established with the avowed purpose of ministering to the reformation, safety, and welfare of mankind; and almost every chief ruler considered it his highest glory to be called the father of his people. Appellations of this import were, and, still are, in many countries, exclusively appropriated to designate their successive kings. Such is said to be the signification of *Pharaoh*, the royal title of the monarchs of ancient Egypt; and of *Praw*, the princely name of the sovereigns of Burmah. Good, less or more, undoubtedly results to man from the least enlightened and benevolent government, devised by human wisdom, and maintained by human power. How much more desirable is any government than entire anarchy, or liberty for every man to do what is right in his own eyes! This latter state, were it universal, would undoubtedly speedily terminate in the utter ruin of the human race, and in the complete dissolution of the globe. Less order and happiness would be known among mankind than among the animals that rove at pleasure over the deserts and forests, exulting in the exercise of their unceasingly active and devouring capacities.

But what moral deliverance did the mighty governments of the four empires of prophecy accomplish in the earth? They certainly brought the scattered nations into a closer union and intercourse than had previously existed. Law acquired more influence over mankind. Knowledge, and the useful and ornamental arts of life, were more widely disseminated, and the principles of true religion were more generally made known, and invisibly operated to subvert the dominion of human authority, and the subtle and wicked devices of the wise in religion. The tyranny of Satan was, nevertheless, still paramount; the evil one remained apparently immovably seated on his iniquitous throne. How little could any one of the absolute despots of Assyria or Babylon do to mitigate human woe were he even inclined to rule according to justice or mercy? Their thrones were sustained by men resolutely determined to uphold, propagate, and establish idol-worship, by the arts of divination and every means of imposition which the perversion of human knowledge could suggest. And the kings were equally destitute of humanity and truth as their counsellors, the magicians, astrologers, and priests, inasmuch