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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;
he shall set me up upon a rock.*

—Psalm 27:5

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Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

—Exodus 20:16

Ninth Commandment

Consider the sobering scene presented by the ninth commandment. A mighty judge sits in the august halls of justice, presiding over a trial. Before the judge stands the accused. The accused is innocent, but nobody knows it. There was only one witness, whose testimony will either condemn or acquit the accused. The accused will live if the witness speaks truly. The accused will die if the witness speaks falsely. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor!

False witnesses abound.

Naboth was condemned by false witnesses at the orchestration of Jezebel. “And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people: and set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die” (1 Kings 21:9–10).

Our Lord was condemned by false witnesses. “Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; but found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, and said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days” (Matt. 26:59–61).

Stephen was stoned to death under the accusation of false witnesses. “Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up

false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law” (Acts 6:11–13).

The blood of many servants of the Lord has been shed under the lying testimony of false witnesses. How happy for the Lord’s servants! “Blessed are ye, when men...shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake” (Matt. 5:11). But how terrifying for the false witnesses! “A false witness shall perish” (Prov. 21:28).

In forbidding bearing false witness, the ninth commandment forbids all lying and deceit. Lying is the proper work of the devil, for he abode not in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar and the father of it. Liars show themselves to be children of their father the devil, and the lusts of their father they will do (John 8:44).

In forbidding all lying, the ninth commandment requires the truth. Ah, the truth! How precious it is! For God is true (John 3:33). God’s counsels of old are faithfulness and truth (Isa. 25:1). And God’s truth endureth to all generations (Ps. 100:5).

God is true, but how little we regard the truth! With our mouths we have spoken falsehoods. With our tongues we have framed deceit (Rom. 3:13).

What shall be done for us liars?

Behold Jesus Christ, who has covered our lies with his blood. And behold Jesus Christ, who has told the truth in our place. For Jesus Christ is the truth (John 14:6). He is full of grace and truth,

and grace and truth came to us by him (John 1:14, 17). His mouth shall speak truth (Prov. 8:7). And his truth is our salvation. For “ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

And how shall we forgiven sinners show our gratitude to the God of our salvation? This way: “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.”

—AL

THE ARBOR

The Enigma of Grace and Gratitude

Why is grace so hard to see?
By our own ability
Don't we grasp it easily?
No, not so, not so for me.

What's the problem? What's the cause?
First, it seems grace has no laws.
Grace means favor, and no flaws
On our part can stop or pause

Any blessing God so wills
To bestow on whom he fills
Overbrim and over hills;
Over mountains high it spills!

But by law, how is that fair?
Undeserving gifts declare
Nothing's earned, nor loaned, but bare
Giving freely's all that's there.

Now, if heaven comes by course,
Freely given, is that source
To sin's open trojan horse?
God's commands will lose all force!

Earthly minds are not endued
To construe that attitude
Only grace presumes imbued:
All we owe is gratitude.

What? Is thanks so hard a thing
For a man to hold and bring
To a loving, mighty King,
Thanking him for ev'rything?

Yes, there is that awful side
Of us all who still have pride.
Like a man of truth who's lied,
Thanks and arrogance collide.

Is thanks then impossible?
Lightning is unstoppable.
Surely there's no obstacle
That can block its audible

Power.

Grace is power. Grace is might.
Grace beams forth from heaven's height,
Irresistible and bright.
Gratitude is grace's light.

— Connie L. Meyer

Question and Answer 64

But doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane?

By no means; for it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Greetings:

You asked for information on why Bible publishers have stopped including the titles of the 5 Psalm divisions. I asked the question of ChatGPT and received this reply:

“The omission of the book titles that mark the five divisions of the Psalms in modern KJV editions is a reflection of both historical and editorial shifts in biblical publishing. In the original 1611 King James Version, these titles were included, likely because they mirrored the structure found in the Hebrew text, which divides the Psalms into five books (Book 1: Psalms 1–41, Book 2: Psalms 42–72, etc.). This division not only holds historical and theological significance but also highlights the Psalms’ connection to the Torah, with its five books paralleling the five books of the Pentateuch.

However, over time, publishers and translators have tended to omit these divisions for several reasons:

Shift Toward Streamlined Editions: With the rise of more compact and standardized Bible formats in the 19th and 20th centuries, publishers focused on providing a cleaner, more accessible text for a broader audience. The decision to remove marginal notes, book titles, and other annotations was likely aimed at simplifying the reading experience, particularly for those less familiar with the structure of the Psalms. This trend towards brevity and clarity often meant that features deemed secondary to the flow of the text, such as the book titles in the Psalms, were omitted.

Changing Focus in Biblical Interpretation: The theological and liturgical significance of the Psalms’ division into five books, while important in the original context, may not be as emphasized in some contemporary Christian traditions. Many modern readers and even preachers may be less concerned with the division, and may

focus instead on individual psalms or collections of psalms without regard to their original “book” structure. As a result, publishers may have assumed that retaining the book titles was unnecessary for the average reader or listener, especially in Bibles intended for more general consumption.

Editorial Choices for Readability: Modern Bible publishers often make editorial decisions based on readability and user experience. In this context, eliminating marginal annotations such as the book titles of Psalms can create a more seamless flow in the reading experience, minimizing distractions or interruptions that might disrupt the reader’s engagement with the text.

Evolution of Biblical Printing: As the process of Bible printing and translation evolved, certain features of earlier editions—such as the marginal titles or notes—became less consistent in their inclusion. Early Bibles, especially before the rise of standardized printing practices, often contained more extensive annotations. Over time, however, the trend shifted toward minimalist editions, especially in Bible societies and mass-market publishing. This shift reflected broader trends in publishing, where annotations were often seen as supplementary rather than integral.

In conclusion, the omission of the titles for the five books of Psalms in modern KJV editions is likely a result of both changing publishing practices and the evolving nature of biblical interpretation and presentation. While these titles carry significant historical, theological, and literary meaning, their removal may be seen as a move toward simplification and standardization for contemporary readers. For seminary students, understanding this shift is important, as it reflects broader trends in biblical interpretation and textual presentation that may influence their own approach to the Psalms in both personal study and preaching.”

—Gary VanderSchaaf

Reply

Much thanks to our correspondent for the interesting information. ChatGPT's answers to the questions sound plausible. Perhaps other readers have found books or articles that could either confirm or contradict what artificial intelligence has

speculated. If so, I am sure that your fellow readers would like to hear from you. But for now, let us consider the puzzle of the missing division titles to be solved. The Lord willing, we will continue our investigation of the books of the psalms in future articles.

—AL

THE ALCOVE

Introduction

The following is an excerpt from Herman Hoeksema's book *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*.¹ In this excerpt Hoeksema recounts the history of the Ralph Janssen case as it unfolded in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) from 1919 to 1922. The doctrine in the Janssen case was the infallibility of scripture, especially in scripture's description of God's miracles. Janssen taught his students in Calvin Seminary that the miracles in the Bible could be explained by natural causes. For example, Janssen taught that the water in the rock at Rephidim was always present in a hollow cavity in the rock, and the blow of Moses' rod upon the rock broke it open and released the water.² Not only does such a view deny the scriptures, which teach that God miraculously brought forth water out of the solid rock (Deut. 8:15; Ps. 114:8), but such a view also implicitly denies the spiritual reality of the miracle: God miraculously brings forth salvation for his people out of Christ, which salvation is impossible by any merely human wisdom or work.

Janssen approached scripture from a higher critical viewpoint. A higher critical viewpoint does not treat scripture as the infallible, authoritative, and divine revelation of God. Rather, a higher critical viewpoint subjects scripture to the authority of man's wisdom and knowledge, rejecting whatever in scripture man cannot explain by his own investigation and understanding. A higher critical viewpoint necessarily treats scripture as a human book rather than a divine book. A higher critical viewpoint denies that every word of the written scriptures is given by inspiration of God, as II Timothy 3:16 teaches. Higher criticism is a cruel viewpoint, for it takes the word of God away from God's people and leaves them with nothing but the latest fashions and theories of man. The CRC was right to condemn Ralph Janssen at Synod 1922 and expel him from the seminary.

The Janssen case was significant for Herman Hoeksema. Hoeksema played a leading role in the case: he obtained the student notes where Janssen's views were recorded, published some of his findings in *The Banner*, and signed the

¹ Herman Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America: Their Origin, Early History and Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: First Protestant Reformed Church, 1936), 17–25.

² For this example and others, see Herman Hanko, *For Thy Truth's Sake: A Doctrinal History of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000), 38.

majority report to synod that carried the day against Janssen.

But the aftermath of the Janssen case was also significant for Herman Hoeksema. As Hoeksema reflects in the excerpt reprinted here, there was an underlying issue in the Janssen case that the CRC of the day left untouched. The underlying issue was the theory of common grace. Janssen's views rested upon the idea that God was gracious to the unbelieving scientist and that the unbelieving scientist's conclusions were the product of God's gracious operation on him. Therefore, the church must not disregard the unbeliever's conclusions—which are the fruits of God's grace, after all—but must take those conclusions into account when she interprets the scriptures.

Almost all the men who joined with Herman Hoeksema in condemning Ralph Janssen's higher criticism actually agreed with Janssen's view of common grace. In the months and years after Janssen's defeat, the theory of common grace would be brought to the foreground. Hoeksema's friends turned on him very quickly. Almost every single one of the men who had joined Hoeksema

in 1922 to condemn Janssen's higher criticism opposed Hoeksema and deposed him in 1924 for his opposition to common grace. Their sudden turning cannot be explained merely as factions in the church, as some have tried to explain 1924. Rather, God was working reformation, centered on the doctrine of his sovereign, particular, saving grace.

Hoeksema's account of the Janssen case is reprinted here this week in light of where we are in Hoeksema's *Banner* articles. In Hoeksema's account of the Janssen case, he mentions that he had commented on the Janssen case in his rubric *Our Doctrine* in *The Banner*. Hoeksema's reference is to the very articles that are being reprinted now in *Reformed Pavilion*. Therefore, the following excerpt from Hoeksema's account of the Janssen case provides the historical and doctrinal background for his *Banner* articles.

Reading these accounts, one cannot help but rejoice at the sovereign grace of God. How wonderful are his ways! How marvelously he preserves his church! How graciously he causes his truth to stand!

—AL

The Janssen Case

by Herman Hoeksema

Excerpt from *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*

In 1914 Doctor R. Janssen, a man of wide erudition and an able scholar, had been appointed to the chair of Old Testament Exegetical Theology at the Theological School of the Christian Reformed Churches. Before many years elapsed he was suspected by his colleagues in the seminary of modernistic tendencies in his teaching. His case became a matter of official investigation and, at the same time, of public interest, when, in the spring of 1919, the colleagues of Doctor Janssen, the Professors L. Berkhof, W. Heyns, F. M. Ten Hoor and S. Volbeda, presented a combined request to the Board of Trustees, urging the necessity of inquiring into the nature and tendency of Doctor

Janssen's instruction. They lodged no direct indictment or accusation against their fellow-professor, but simply presented a request for investigation. And as they brought no definite charges, so the grounds for their request were rather vague and uncertain. Their request was based on mere rumors. Nor had they, previous to their presentation of this request, approached their suspected colleague on the matter. The decision of the Board of Trustees in this case was to the effect, that they condemned the action of the four fellow-professors of Doctor Janssen as unethical, because they acted without first seeing their colleague; and, further, that for this reason they would not enter into the matter of

the request. The four petitioners, however, were not satisfied and could not abide by this decision of the Curatorium. They appealed to synod. That body, which convened in June 1920 in the auditorium of the Theological School, investigated the case. Ample opportunity was given to the four professors to present the grounds for their request, as well as to the suspected professor to explain and defend his instruction. The result was that the four colleagues of Doctor Janssen were utterly defeated and the latter was fully justified. Synod decided that it had not become evident that Doctor Janssen's instruction was in conflict with the Reformed faith. Once again, therefore, the four professors had lost their case against their fellow instructor in the seminary.

Still they were not satisfied.

Instead of abiding by the decision of the broadest ecclesiastical tribunal, they openly criticized its position and appealed to the people in the form of a pamphlet.

In the meantime, the Reverend H. Hoeksema had interested himself in the case. He had collected a considerable mass of material in the form of student-notes containing class dictations of Doctor Janssen, for the purpose of investigating the case for himself. The study of these notes convinced him that the decision of synod, though it might be true as formulated, was based on a very imperfect investigation of the case. Being editor of the department "Our Doctrine" in *The Banner*, one of the official organs of the Christian Reformed Churches, he inserted a few articles in which he showed (1) that the conclusion reached by synod was a purely negative one: it merely declared that it had *not* become evident that Doctor Janssen's instruction was contrary to the Reformed faith; (2) he maintained that this negative character of its decision was due to improper and insufficient investigation of the case; (3) he sustained his position by quotations from the student-notes. To these articles Doctor Janssen replied. However, instead of denying responsibility for the quotations made from his notes and defending his instruction, he chose to launch

a counter-attack upon the supposedly erroneous views of his opponent regarding common grace. After Doctor Janssen had published several articles without ever coming to the point, the Publication Committee closed *The Banner* for further discussion of the matter.

Still another pamphlet was published in reply to a brochure by Doctor Janssen. The pamphlet was entitled: *Waar het in de zaak Janssen om gaat* (The point at issue in the Janssen case) and was signed by the four colleagues of Doctor Janssen and four ministers, including the Reverends H. Danhof and H. Hoeksema. About this time, too, a new magazine appeared bearing the name of *The Witness*. Its publication was occasioned chiefly by the Janssen controversy, although it aimed no less at exposing and opposing the views of the "broadminded" party in the Church, which, speaking generally, rose to the support of Doctor Janssen. The result was that in the spring of 1921 the matter was considered once more by the Curatorium of the Theological School. This time that body appointed an investigating committee, consisting of the Reverends J. Van Lonkhuyzen, D. Kromminga, H. Danhof, H. J. Kuiper, G. Hoeksema, H. Hoeksema and J. Manni. In the fall of the same year this committee held its meetings in the parlors of the Douglas Park Christian Reformed Church of Chicago, Ill. For ten days the committee held its sessions, labored through piles of student-notes (the only material the committee had in its possession since Doctor Janssen had refused to co-operate), and finally attempted to formulate a united opinion. This, however, proved to be impossible. Almost from the start the committee appeared to be divided into two opposing camps. Doctor Van Lonkhuyzen, and the Reverends D. Kromminga and G. Hoeksema were evidently inclined to defend the views of Doctor Janssen and to maintain the professor in his position at the school of the churches; while the rest of the committee became more and more convinced that the instruction of Professor Janssen could not be tolerated at a Reformed seminary. The conclusions of the committee, therefore, were presented to the

Board of Trustees in the form of two printed reports, the Majority Report by the Reverends Manni, Danhof, H. Hoeksema and Kuiper, and the Minority Report by the Reverends Van Lonkhuyzen, G. Hoeksema and Kromminga. The final outcome of this controversy was that the conclusions of the Majority Report were virtually adopted and its advice was followed by the Synod of Orange City, Iowa, in the summer of 1922. Doctor Janssen's views were condemned and he was relieved of his professorship at the Theological School.

And it was not until after the Janssen controversy had been definitely and finally settled that a veritable ecclesiastical storm broke loose over the heads of the Reverends H. Danhof and H. Hoeksema, that had played such an important part in the defeat of the liberal faction!

Even before this, especially while the controversy about Doctor Janssen's views was raging, a cloud like a man's hand had appeared occasionally on the horizon, but not until Doctor Janssen had been deposed did the ecclesiastical sky assume a threatening aspect.

And it is in the light of these precursory events only that the history of the origin of the Protestant Reformed Churches can fully be understood.

We do not mean to suggest—let this be emphasized—that the history of the common grace controversy must be viewed solely in the light of the troubles about Doctor Janssen's instruction; nor that the deposition of the Reverends H. Danhof, H. Hoeksema and G. M. Ophoff was motivated only by the desire to avenge the deposed professor. The suggestion was sometimes made by some well-meaning brethren in the Christian Reformed Churches, that the separation of 1924 would never have taken place had there been no Janssen controversy, that the Synod of Kalamazoo can only be explained in the light of the Synod of Orange City, and that the Three Points were merely formulated as a means to an end. Such a view of the history of 1924 is not capable of explaining all. It fails to explain how the four professors, whose cause

against Doctor Janssen the Reverends Danhof and Hoeksema so strongly supported that without their support the professors would have suffered defeat most probably, after 1922 turned against the two ministers and co-labored with their own enemies for their deposition. It does not account for the fact that, when after the Janssen controversy was closed, the Reverends Danhof and Hoeksema suggested that as editors of *The Witness* they would further develop their views in that magazine, the staff rather accepted their resignation. Nor does it explain how, after the two ministers had resigned from the staff of *The Witness*, the latter could be amalgamated with *Religion and Culture*, the publication of the "broad" party, an amalgamation which proved to be the death of both publications. And how could it possibly explain the fact of the Three Points, their adoption by the Synod of Kalamazoo and their subsequent defense by Professor L. Berkhof, who is also supposed to be their chief author?

Besides, the fact must not be overlooked, that after 1922 the pro- and con- Janssen factions united, not only in their combined opposition against the Reverends H. Danhof and H. Hoeksema, but also in permanent peace and positive cooperation. Since Doctor Janssen was deposed there was no more controversy, in spite of the fact that all the supporters of the deposed professor remained within the fold of the Christian Reformed Church and some of them have been appointed to professorships at the Theological School.

Due allowance, therefore, may and must be made for the effect of the Janssen controversy upon the history of 1924 and the origin of the Protestant Reformed Churches, but it is certainly a serious mistake to maintain that the former is the cause of the latter.

The Janssen controversy certainly served to accentuate existing differences in doctrinal views, differences that were quite fundamental and radical; it became the occasion of their being more sharply defined and definitely expressed than before. It also became the occasion of a

faster development of the conflict, and it ultimately forced the issue and led to a premature conclusion of the common grace controversy. There is no denial of the fact that personal elements, motives of hatred and envy, of jealousy and malice, the desire to avenge the blood of Doctor Janssen played an important part in the action against the Reverends H. Danhof, H. Hoeksema and G. M. Ophoff. Doctrinally the Christian Reformed Churches were not at all prepared in 1924 to settle the question of common grace, witness the synodical confusion that gave birth to the Three Points. Eliminate the Janssen controversy and you are at a loss to explain why the separation of 1924 occurred at that early date. The reformation that gave rise to the Protestant Reformed Churches would have had a later date and a different setting.

But when due allowance is made for the influence of the Janssen controversy upon the history of 1924, the fact remains that the former cannot be regarded as the *cause* of the latter.

In the light of subsequent history it is a patent fact that the alignment of the pro- and con-factions in the Janssen case was not purely determined by its deepest underlying principle, but rather by secondary and superficial considerations of agreement and disagreement.

The fact that the four professors and others of the opponents of Doctor Janssen could unite with the pro-Janssen faction in their action against the three ministers that were deposed in 1924–25, plainly reveals that, apart from superficial differences, there was a fundamental agreement in principle. There was in the Janssen controversy an underlying principle which, had it not been violently and intentionally forced to the background, would have paralyzed every effort of the four professors to combat Doctor Janssen's views and would have aligned them from the beginning with the pro-Janssen faction against the Reverends H. Danhof and H. Hoeksema.

This underlying principle is the theory of common grace!

On this fundamental principle all agreed, except the Reverends H. Danhof and H. Hoeksema!

It is deplorable that Doctor Janssen in his defense tried to prove that also the four professors and others of his leading opponents denied the theory of common grace. For, in the first place, this was untrue (except, perhaps, in the case of Doctor Volbeda). But in the second place, it would have been more fruitful for a proper discussion had he proceeded from the correct assumption that his opponents, except the Reverends H. Danhof and H. Hoeksema, do accept the theory of common grace, and that, therefore, they must also in deepest principle agree with him in regard to his views on revelation, inspiration, canonicity, the miracles and related subjects, even though, due to a lack of consistency on their part, they differed with him in ultimate conclusions.

In the light of subsequent history it was evidently a mistake on the part of the Reverends H. Danhof and H. Hoeksema, that they co-operated with the four professors in the Janssen controversy, rather than to oppose his views separately and from their own standpoint; that, for practical reasons, they allowed the deepest principles involved to be pushed into the background and the controversy to be confined to surface questions and differences.

And it was an error on the part of the four professors to oppose their colleague, with whom, as subsequent history plainly reveals, they agreed fundamentally. There is, in our opinion, no radical and principal difference between Doctor Janssen and Professor Berkhof. In as far as the latter's teaching with respect to such fundamental questions as revelation, inspiration, the canonicity of the Scripture-books and the miracles is reformed and orthodox, it is not to be attributed to fundamental soundness of principle and method, but largely to an inconsistent drawing of sound conclusions from unsound principles!

This interpretation of history will explain all the facts. It will also answer the question,

how the four professors and the entire anti-Janssen faction could, after 1922, unite to oust the chief opponents of Doctor Janssen.

And it will serve to shed the proper light upon the origin of the Protestant Reformed Churches, which is not to be viewed as a deplorable,

accidental but unavoidable result of the Janssen controversy, but as a *reformation* of the churches, a return from the erroneous and dangerous path of common grace to the fundamentally Reformed line of the Synod of Dordrecht as drawn in the Three Forms of Unity.

HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S BANNER ARTICLES

The Banner

October 7, 1920

(pp. 615–16)

Our Doctrine by Rev. H. Hoeksema

Article LXXXIX. The New King and His Kingdom: The Historicity of Scripture

One reason for my feeling of uncertainty in regard to the action of Synod I stated in my last article. Certain views, as that the God of Abraham and the god of the Canaanites are the same; that Abraham lived on such a low level morally and religiously that a brutish intention of deliberately delivering his wife to the royal harem of Egypt for business reasons must be excused in him since he did not know any better; that Israel till the time of the prophets clung to semi-monotheism; that the author of Ecclesiastes wrote his book as a sceptic philosopher, and that the fundamental thought of the book is that all is in a state of flux and vanity, — all these can, to my mind, scarcely be reconciled to the Reformed conception of objective, supernatural revelation.

The cause of my uncertainty is evident.

Synod expressed that it did not become evident after investigation that anything contrary to Reformed principles was taught.

The question in my mind is: does that decision imply that the above views are henceforth to be considered as officially approved by Synod?

Or were these views not investigated by Synod? Does the act of Synod not cover all that has been taught at school?

It is extremely important that we have certainty in this whole matter. It concerns a most fundamental principle.

The other principle I mentioned concerns the historicity of the Bible. Let me first of all explain what is meant by it.

Scripture relates various events as historical. It presents them as facts. It relates them as having actually occurred. Thus, for instance, the narrative of the creation of man out of the dust of the earth is narrated as history. It is not a beautiful myth containing some kernel of truth, symbolically to be explained, but it is history in the purest sense of the word. There is nothing in the narrative that points to the contrary. Thus the creation of the woman from a rib of man is narrated as historical reality. The fact of man's living originally in paradise, a beautiful garden man was called to keep, of his eating of the forbidden tree and thereby falling into the power of sin, the history of the patriarchs, of Israel in Egypt and in the desert, of the period of the judges and of the kings, of the captivity and the return, — all this is related as actual history. In short, there is a good deal of history in the Bible, a good many narratives of events actually having occurred. As such they are very plainly presented.

Now, modern criticism finds that a good many of these narratives contain little or no historical information whatever. It considers the story concerning man in his original condition in Paradise, and his eating of the forbidden tree with all its consequences, and many more of these narratives as myths, often beautiful, but not to be regarded as history. They reveal to us how people in their primitive condition conceived of God and his relation to mankind. And it does not hesitate to pronounce other historical narratives in Scripture concerning the patriarchs, Israel in Egypt or during the period of the judges as unhistorical and untrustworthy.

Now, over against this critical view the Reformed view has always strongly emphasized that we must maintain the historicity of the Scriptural narratives. If some of these narratives are to be regarded as beautiful myths and others as untrustworthy oral traditions, while all of them are presented in Scripture as actual history, the very reliability of Scripture disappears. Once having admitted the principle that all that the Bible presents as history need not be considered as such, there is no end to the interpretations that may be given of these myths and traditions. Fact is, of course, that with their historical character these narratives lose all their significance for us. Dr. Kuyper in his “E Voto,” speaking of the fall of man and the historicity of the narrative concerning it, writes:

“Houd dit vast, en zie wel toe, dat ge u door de ethische dwaling niet verlokken laat, om het historisch karakter van dit feit prijs te geven. Men stelt het u zoo verleidelijk voor. ‘Vrees

niet,’ zoo fluistert men u in de ziele, ‘dat we ook maar eenigszins afbreuk zouden willen doen aan de waarachtigheid van deze zaak. Integendeel ook wij belijden van harte, dat er een val moet geweest zijn. Ook ons is deze gebeurtenis dus historie. Alleen maar voor ons is ze hoogere historie. Een historie, te hoog om in het kleed van zulk een kort verhaal gehuld te worden. En dus, wij gelooven wel niet dat deze Adam er zoo was, en dat die boom er stond, en dat die slang bekoorde, en dat toen in verstaanbare woorden alzoo tot Eva gesproken is, maar overigens, de zaak als zaak wordt er ons slechts des te vaster door!’ En dat hoorende laat meer dan één zich meesleepen. Ook bij prijsgeving van den vorm behoudt men dan immers de zaken toch. Maar zie toe, deze ethische begoocheling is niets dan toepassing op de geschiedverhalen van des Bijbels van een valsch-wijsgeerige opvatting van het verband tusschen idee en werkelijkheid. Eens dien weg op, raakt ge af van alle historie, spatten straks ook deze schoone mythen als zeepbellen voor u uiteen.

“Torn er dus niet aan en duld niet dat uw leeraars er aan tornen. Wat in Gen. 3 verhaald wordt moet u werkelijk feilloos verhaal van zoo gebeurde zaken blijven, of ge zijt weg.”¹

This beautiful paragraph is applicable not only to the narratives of the first three chapters of Genesis, but to all that Scripture relates as history. The events narrated actually, historically happened, and they happened exactly as they are related. The principle of the historicity of Scripture implies this. Abandon this principle, and the Bible as the infallible Word of God is

¹ English translation: “Hold this fast, and see to it that you do not allow yourself to be tempted by the ethical error to give up the fact of its historical character. They propose it to you so enticingly. ‘Fear not,’ they whisper in your soul, ‘that we should in any way wish to detract from the truthfulness of this matter. On the contrary, we also wholeheartedly confess that there must have been a fall. So this event is also history for us. Except that for us it is higher history. A history too high to be wrapped in the garb of such a short story. And so we do not really believe that there was such a thing as this Adam, and that that tree stood there, and that that serpent charmed, and that then Eve was thus spoken to with intelligible words; but otherwise, the essential meaning only becomes all the more certain for us!’ And hearing this, more than one is carried away. Indeed, by relinquishing the form, they think to still retain the meaning. But note well, this ethical delusion is nothing but the application of a false philosophical conception of the relationship between idea and reality to the historical narratives of the Bible. Once you are on that road, you get rid of all history; soon these beautiful myths will burst like soap bubbles for you.

“So do not tamper with it and do not tolerate your teachers’ tampering with it. What is related in Genesis 3 must remain a truly infallible story of things that have happened in this way, or you are gone.”

(Translation done by Google Translate, with slight editing.)

simply gone! Nothing less than the very reliability of Scripture is here at stake.

Again, I want to compare in the light of this principle some of the views propagated at school.

It is in this connection that I want to make mention of the explanation given of the standing still of sun and moon at the command of Joshua. The Scriptural narrative reads as follows: “Then spake Joshua to Jehovah in the day when Jehovah delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel; and he said in the sight of Israel,

“Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon;

“And thou, moon, in the valley of Aijalon.

“And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed,

“Until the nation had avenged themselves of their enemies. Is this not written in the book of Jasher? And the sun stayed in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that Jehovah hearkened unto the voice of a man, for Jehovah fought for Israel” (Joshua 10:12–14). Thus is the narrative. In the strongest terms we are assured that the sun stood still and that there never was a day like that before or after it. And what explanation was given? It was claimed that this was poetry, and that, therefore, it could not be understood as literal history. Now, we do not deny that the expression as used by Joshua is here quoted in poetical form from the book of Jasher. But is that a reason to doubt the historicity of the narrative? It was suggested that there was a heavy hailstorm immediately before this, and that upon the command of Joshua the sun pierced again through the thick clouds, so that the Israelites could continue to pursue the enemy. But how can this explanation ever be fitted upon the text of the author in plain prose: “And the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that Jehovah hearkened unto the voice of a man”? The explanation is not based upon the text at all. It destroys, it denies the simple narrative. I maintain if such a method is allowed in regard to

simple historical narratives in Holy Writ, we are at sea. We are on the way of losing Scripture.

Again, the fact that David is forbidden to build the temple is explained by Scripture by the fact that David is a man of war, and the permanent central sanctuary for Jehovah was to be erected in a period of rest (I Kings 5:3). The narrative in I Samuel has it that David communicates his plan to build a temple to Nathan the prophet, and that the prophet immediately favors the plan. It is only after the same prophet has received a vision from Jehovah that the former returns once more to the king with the definite message not to build the temple. But how is this explained? The following is offered in the notes on “Old Testament History—David” (p. 34):

“Why is David forbidden to rear the temple?

“Prophets are very conservative.

“Prophet says that from earliest times Jehovah lived in tent.

“Harps back to Mosaic customs.

“Prophets want to perpetuate Mosaic forms of worship.

“But David wants temple.

“But the building must be postponed. Looks like compromise.

“David is out and out progressive.

“He wants new things, providing they pertain to non-essentials.”

Thus the entire narrative is presented as a compromise between progressive David and the conservative prophets! But the historical narrative has it that Jehovah does not want David to build the temple, even though the prophet is willing that it be done.

Again, in “Historia Sacra—Part Three” (p. 34) the statement is made in regard to some of the exploits narrated of Samson among the Philistines: “These accounts are not important historical accounts, but current and oral traditions of the experience of an individual. There is often an element of exaggeration. We find this also in the New Testament. Sometimes a correction is added. Literalness should not always be

pressed.” And again in connection with the narrative of Samson carrying the gates of Gaza to the top of a neighboring mountain: “This account suggests strongly that it is but oral tradition which the writer here uses.” If this is to be accepted, I ask, what is left of the historicity of the book of Judges, and, in fact, of the Word of God? If this is not history, if there is exaggeration, if literalness should not be pressed, — what is it? How much exaggeration is there in it? How much symbolism?

These are some of the reasons why I feel concerned about the action taken by Synod last June. The seriousness of the matter seemed to me sufficient justification for my lengthy digression

from my subject proper. I feel satisfied that I have written without malice, without personal hostility against anyone. I know no such hostility in my heart. But I feel that the Word of God is at stake and nothing less.

No one could welcome more heartily a sound explanation of the things I have mentioned that would conclusively prove that I am wrong, that I have misinterpreted, that I have taken the matter altogether too seriously.

But such an explanation must be based on facts and truth. Nothing less can possibly satisfy.

To me it is a matter of the Word of God.

Ultimately a question of to be or not to be.

—Grand Rapids, Mich.



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