

There are some who have admired their disobedience, and have attributed it to the enthusiasm of gratitude and admiration; but was it not rather the enthusiasm of a blatant wonder, the vulgarity of a chattering boast? How many of these multitudes who had been healed by Him became His true disciples? Did not the holy fire of devotion which a hallowed silence must have kept alive upon the altar of their hearts die away in the mere blaze of empty rumour? Did not He know best? Would not obedience have been better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams? Yes. It is possible to deceive ourselves; it is possible to offer to Christ a *seeming* service which disobeys His inmost precepts—to *grieve* Him, under the guise of honouring Him, by vain repetitions, and empty genuflexions, and bitter intolerance, and irreverent familiarity, and the hollow simulacrum of a dead devotion. Better, far better, to serve Him by doing the things He said than by a seeming zeal!—often false in exact proportion to its obtrusiveness—for the glory of His name. These disobedient babblers, who talked so much of Him, did but offer Him the dishonouring service of a double heart; their violation of His commandment served only to hinder His usefulness, to trouble His spirit, and to precipitate His death.

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### LESSON FOURTEEN

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### A VISIT TO JERUSALEM.

ANY one who has carefully and repeatedly studied the Gospel narratives side by side, in order to form from them as clear a conception as is possible of the life of Christ on earth, can hardly fail to have been struck with two or three general facts respecting the sequence of events in His public ministry. In spite of the difficulty introduced by the varying and non-chronological arrangements of the Synoptists, and by the silence of the fourth Gospel about the main part of the preaching in Galilee, we see distinctly the following circumstances:—

1. That the innocent enthusiasm of joyous welcome with which Jesus and His words and works were at first received in Northern

Galilee gradually, but in a short space of time, gave way to suspicion, dislike, and even hostility on the part of large and powerful sections of the people.

2. That the external character, as well as the localities, of our Lord's mission were much altered after the murder of John the Baptist.

3. That the tidings of this murder, together with a marked development of opposition, and the constant presence of Scribes and Pharisees from Judæa to watch His conduct and dog His movements, seems to synchronise with a visit to Jerusalem not recorded by the Synoptists, but evidently identical with the nameless festival mentioned in John v. 1.

4. That this unnamed festival must have occurred somewhere about that period of His ministry at which we have now arrived.

What this feast was we shall consider immediately; but it was preceded by another event—the mission of the Twelve Apostles.

At the close of the missionary journeys, during which occurred some of the events described in the last chapters, Jesus was struck with compassion at the sight of the multitude. They reminded Him of sheep harassed by enemies, and lying panting and neglected in the fields because they have no shepherd. They also called up to the mind the image of a harvest ripe, but unreaped for lack of labourers; and He bade His Apostles pray to the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth labourers into His harvest. And then, immediately afterwards, having Himself now traversed the whole of Galilee, He sent them out two and two to confirm His teaching and perform works of mercy in His name.

Before sending them He naturally gave them the instructions which were to guide their conduct. At present they were to confine their mission to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and not extend it to Samaritans or Gentiles. The topic of their preaching was to be the nearness of the kingdom of heaven, and it was to be freely supported by works of power and beneficence. They were to take nothing with them; no scribe for food; no purse for money; no change of raiment; no travelling shoes (*ὑποδήματα, calcei*), in place of their ordinary palm-bark sandals, they were not even to procure a staff for the journey if they did not happen already to possess one; their mission—like all the greatest and most effective missions which the world has ever known—was to be simple and self-supporting. The open hospitality of the East, so often used as the basis for a dissemination of new

thoughts, would be amply for their maintenance. On entering a town they were to go to any house in it where they had reason to hope that they would be welcome, and to salute it with the immemorial and much-valued blessing, *Shalôm lakem*, "Peace be to you," and if the children of peace were there the blessing would be effective; if not, it would return on their own heads. If rejected, they were to shake off the dust of their feet in witness that they had spoken faithfully, and that they thus symbolically cleared themselves of all responsibility for that judgment which should fall more heavily on wilful and final haters of the light than on the darkest places of a heathendom in which the light had never, or but feebly, shone.

So far their Lord had pointed out to them the duties of trustful faith, of gentle courtesy, of self-denying simplicity, as the first essentials of missionary success. He proceeded to fortify them against the inevitable trials and persecutions of their missionary work.

They needed and were to exercise the wisdom of serpents no less than the harmlessness of doves: for He was sending them forth as sheep among wolves.

Doubtless these discourses were not always delivered in the continuous form in which they have naturally come down to us. Our Lord seems at all times to have graciously encouraged the questions of humble and earnest listeners; and at this point we are told by an ancient tradition, that St. Peter—ever, we may be sure, a most eager and active-minded listener—interrupted his Master with the not unnatural question, "But how then, if the wolves should tear the lambs?" And Jesus answered, smiling perhaps at the naïve and literal intellect of His chief Apostle, "Let not the lambs fear the wolves when the lambs are once dead, and do you fear not those who can kill you and do nothing to you, but fear Him who after you are dead hath power over soul and body to cast them into Gehenna." And then, continuing the thread of His discourse, He warned them plainly how, both at this time and again long afterwards, they might be brought before councils, and scourged in synagogues, and stand at the judgment-bar of kings, and yet, without any anxious premeditation, the Spirit should teach them what to say. The doctrine of peace should be changed by the evil passions of men into a war-cry of fury and hate, and they might be driven to fly before the face of enemies from city to city. Still let them endure to the end, for before they had gone through the cities of Israel, the Son of Man should have come.

Then, lastly, He at once warned and comforted them by reminding

them of what He Himself had suffered, and how He had been opposed. Let them not fear. The God who cared even for the little birds when they fell to the ground—the God by whom the very hairs of their head were numbered—the God who (and here He glanced back perhaps at the question of Peter) held in His hand the issues, not of life and death only, but of *eternal* life and of *eternal* death, and who was therefore more to be feared than the wolves of earth—HE was with them; He would acknowledge those whom His Son acknowledged, and deny those whom He denied. They were being sent forth into a world of strife, which would seem even the more deadly because of the peace which it rejected. Even their nearest and their dearest might side with the world against them. But they who would be His true followers must for His sake give up *all*; must even take up their cross and follow Him. But then, for their comfort, He told them that they should be as He was in the world; that they who received them should receive Him; that to lose their lives for His sake would be to more than find them; that a cup of cold water given to the youngest and humblest of His little ones should not miss of its reward.

Such is an outline of these great parting instructions as given by St. Matthew, and every missionary and every minister should write them in letters of gold. The sterility of missionary labour is a constant subject of regret and discouragement among us. Would it be so if all our missions were carried out in this wise and conciliatory, in this simple and self-abandoning, in this faithful and dauntless spirit; Was a missionary ever unsuccessful who, being enabled by the grace of God to live in the light of such precepts as these, worked as St. Paul worked, or St. Francis Xavier, or Henry Martyn, or Adoniram Judson, or John Eliot, or David Schwarz?

That the whole of this discourse was not delivered on this occasion, that there are references in it to later periods, that parts of it are only applicable to other apostolic missions which as yet lay far in the future, seems clear; but we may, nevertheless, be grateful that St. Matthew, guided as usual by unity of subject, collected into one focus the scattered rays of instruction delivered, perhaps, on several subsequent occasions—as for instance, before the sending of the Seventy, and even as the parting utterances of the risen Christ.

The Jews were familiar with the institution of *Sheluchîm*, the plenipotentiaries of some higher authority. This was the title by which Christ seems to have marked out the position of His Apostles.

It was a wise and merciful provision that He sent them out two and two; it enabled them to hold sweet converse together, and mutually to correct each other's faults. Doubtless the friends and the brothers went in pairs; the fiery Peter with the more contemplative Andrew; the Sons of Thunder—one influential and commanding, the other emotional and eloquent; the kindred faith and guilelessness of Philip and Bartholomew; the slow but faithful Thomas with the thoughtful and devoted Matthew; James with his brother Jude; the zealot Simon to fire with his theocratic zeal the dark, flagging despairing spirit of the traitor Judas.

During their absence Jesus continued his work alone, perhaps as He slowly made His way towards Jerusalem; for if we can speak of probability at all amid the deep uncertainties of the chronology of His ministry, it seems extremely probable that it is to this point that the verse belongs—"After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem." This nameless feast was in all probability the Feast of Purim.

But how came Jesus to go up to Jerusalem for such a feast as this—a feast which was the saturnalia of Judaism; a feast which was without divine authority, and had its roots in the most intensely exclusive, not to say vindictive, feelings of the nation; a feast of merriment and masquerade, which was purely social and often discreditably convivial; a feast which was unconnected with religious services, and was observed, not in the Temple, not even necessarily in the synagogues, but mainly in the private houses of the Jews?

The answer seems to be that, although Jesus was in Jerusalem at this feast, and went up about the time that it was held, the words of St. John do not necessarily imply that He went up for the express purpose of being present at this particular festival. The Passover took place only a month afterwards, and He may well have gone up *mainly* with the intention of being present at the Passover, although He gladly availed himself of an opportunity for being in Judæa and Jerusalem a month before it, both that He might once more preach in those neighbourhoods, and that He might avoid the publicity and dangerous excitement involved in His joining the caravan of the Passover Pilgrims from Galilee. Such an opportunity may naturally have arisen from the absence of the Apostles on their missionary tour. The Synoptists give clear indications that Jesus had friends and well-wishers at Jerusalem and in its vicinity. He must therefore have paid visits to those regions which they do not record. Perhaps it was

among those friends that He awaited the return of His immediate followers. We know the deep affection which He entertained for the members of one household in Bethany, and it is not unnatural to suppose that He was now living in the peaceful seclusion of that pious household as a solitary and honoured guest.

But even if St. John intends us to believe that the occurrence of this feast was the immediate cause of this visit to Jerusalem, we must bear in mind that there is no proof whatever of its having been in our Lord's time the fantastic and disorderly commemoration which it subsequently became. The nobler-minded Jews doubtless observed it in a calm and grateful manner; and as one part of the festival consisted in showing acts of kindness to the poor, it may have offered an attraction to Jesus, both on this ground and because it enabled Him to show that there was nothing unnational or unpatriotic in the universal character of His message, or the all-embracing infinitude of the charity which He both practised and enjoined.

There remains then but a single question. The Passover was rapidly drawing near, and His presence at that great feast would on every ground be expected. Why then did He absent Himself from it? Why did He return to Galilee instead of remaining at Jerusalem? The events which we are about to narrate will furnish a sufficient answer to this question.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE MIRACLE OF BETHESDA.

THERE was in Jerusalem, near the Sheep-gate, a pool, which was believed to possess remarkable healing properties. For this reason, in addition to its usual name, it had been called in Hebrew "Bethesda," or the House of Mercy, and under the porticoes which adorned the pentagonal masonry in which it was enclosed lay a multitude of sufferers from blindness, lameness, and atrophy, waiting to take advantage of the bubbling and gushing of the water, which showed that its medicinal properties were at their highest. There is no indication in the narrative that any one who thus used the water was *at once* or

*miraculously*, healed ; but the repeated use of an intermittent and gaseous spring—and more than one of the springs about Jerusalem continue to be of this character to the present day—was doubtless likely to produce most beneficial results.

A very early popular legend, which has crept by interpolation into the text of St. John, attributed the healing qualities of the water to the descent of an angel who troubled the pool at irregular intervals, leaving the first persons who could scramble into it to profit by the immersion. This solution of the phenomenon was in fact so entirely in accordance with the Semitic habit of mind, that, in the universal ignorance of all scientific phenomena, and the utter indifference to close investigation which characterise most Orientals, the populace would not be likely to trouble themselves about the possibility of any other explanation. But whatever may have been the general belief about the *cause*, the *fact* that the water was found at certain intervals to be impregnated with gases which gave it a strengthening property was sufficient to attract a concourse of many sufferers.

Among these was one poor man who, for no less than thirty-eight years, had been lamed by paralysis. He had haunted the porticoes of this pool, but without effect ; for as he was left there unaided, and as the motion of the water occurred at irregular times, others more fortunate and less feeble than himself managed time after time to struggle in before him, until the favourable moment had been lost.

Jesus looked on the man with heartfelt pity. It was obvious that the *will* of the poor destitute creature was no less stricken with paralysis than his limbs, and his whole life was one long atrophy of ineffectual despair. But Jesus was minded to make *His* Purim present to the poor, to whom He had neither silver nor gold to give. He would help a fellow-sufferer, whom no one had cared or condescended to help before.

“Willest thou to be made whole?”

At first the words hardly stirred the man's long and despondent lethargy ; he scarcely seems even to have looked up. But thinking, perhaps, with a momentary gleam of hope, that this was some stranger who, out of kindness of heart, might help him into the water when it was again agitated, he merely narrated in reply the misery of his long and futile expectation. Jesus had intended a speedier and more effectual aid.

“Rise,” He said, “take thy couch, and walk.”

It was spoken in an accent that none could disobey. The manner

## **Ed. Note on the pool called Bethesda.**

The general tendency of some to not believe we have the Preserved Word of God in the KJV, of which the textbook author obviously was one, unfortunately have fallen for that heresy and that causes them to deviate quite widely, at times, from the biblical accounts. In this case the textbook author tries to seek a natural explanation for what the Bible plainly describes as a phenomenon of divine authorship carried out by one of His messengers. Then, as many well-meaning but errant believers do, the textbook author tries to label the scripture in question as an interpolation. However, scholarly investigation into the scripture questioned, John 5:4, has repeatedly shown that that particular scripture has been included in most preserved manuscripts, except for some few including the Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Vaticanus. And those particular manuscripts are given inordinate weight by the translators of the New Versions in spite of many of the readings in them being in the Minority and the thousands of variances between themselves. Overall, they both disagree in major portions from the Majority Text, and, therefore, are not to be trusted. Even though some MS have not the verse, the inclusion of it is observed in even the most corrupt of the English Translations, both today and down through the last 3 centuries, as well as in the preserved Word of God, the KJV, and very few Bible scholars still question its authenticity.

Thus, the verse in question, John 5:4, because it is in the majority of the extant manuscripts, is obviously not an interpolation of a “very early popular legend” as is stated by the textbook author but is an account of an intervention by the messenger of God, an angel, who troubled the waters and, thus, brought about the healing of the first person who stepped into the pool during the time of troubling.

Once one has accepted the inerrant preservation of the Scriptures, then the account given in the scripture can rightly be viewed as taking place exactly as given and for the reasons given. Dr. VBK



of the Speaker, His voice, His mandate, thrilled like an electric spark through the withered limbs and the shattered constitution, enfeebled by a lifetime of suffering and sin. After thirty-eight years of prostration, the man instantly rose, lifted up his pallet, and began to walk. In glad amazement he looked round to see and to thank his unknown benefactor; but the crowd was large, and Jesus, anxious to escape the unspiritual excitement which would fain have regarded Him as a thaumaturge alone, had quietly slipped away from observation.

In spite of this, many scrupulous and jealous eyes were soon upon Him. In proportion as the inner power and meaning of a religion are dead, in that proportion very often is an exaggerated import attached to its outer forms. Formalism and indifference, pedantic scrupulosity and absolute disbelief, are correlative, and ever flourish side by side. It was so with Judaism in the days of Christ. Its living and burning enthusiasm was quenched; its lofty and simple faith had died away; its prophets had ceased to prophesy; its poets had ceased to sing; its priests were no longer clothed with righteousness; its saints were few. The axe was at the root of the barren tree, and its stem served only to nourish a fungous brood of ceremonials and traditions,

“Deathlike, and coloured like a corpse’s cheek.”

And thus it was that the observance of the Sabbath, which had been intended to secure for weary men a rest full of love and peace and mercy, had become a mere national Fetish—a barren custom fenced in with the most frivolous and senseless restrictions. Well-nigh every great provision of the Mosaic law had now been degraded into a mere superfluity of meaningless minutiae, the delight of small natures, and the grievous incubus of all true and natural piety.

Now, when a religion has thus decayed into a superstition without having lost its external power, it is always more than ever tyrannous and suspicious in its hunting for heresy. The healed paralytic was soon surrounded by a group of questioners. They looked at him with surprise and indignation.

“It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.”

Here was a flagrant case of violation of their law. Had not an offender in the wilderness, though half an Egyptian, been stoned to death for gathering sticks on the Sabbath day? Had not the prophet Jeremiah expressly said, “Take heed to yourselves, and bear *no* burden on the Sabbath day?”

Yes; but why? Because the Sabbath was an ordinance of mercy

intended to protect the underlings and the oppressed from a life of incessant toil ; because it was essential to save the serfs and labourers of the nation from the over-measure of labour which would have been exacted from them in a nation afflicted with the besetting sin of greed ; because the setting apart of one day in seven for sacred rest was of infinite value to the spiritual life of all. *That* was the meaning of the Fourth Commandment. In what respect was it violated by the fact that a man who had been healed by a miracle wished to carry home the mere pallet which was perhaps almost the only thing that he possessed ? What the man really violated was not the law of God, or even of Moses, but the wretched formalistic inferences of their frigid tradition, which had gravely decided that on the Sabbath a nailed shoe might not be worn because it was a burden, but that an un-nailed shoe might be worn ; and that a person might go out with two shoes on, but not with only one ; and that one man might carry a loaf of bread, but that two men might not carry it between them, and so forth, to the very utmost limit of tyrannous absurdity.

“He that made me whole,” replied the man, “*He* said to me, Take up thy bed and walk.”

As far as the man was concerned, they accepted the plea ; a voice fraught with miraculous power so stupendous that it could heal the impotence of a lifetime by a word, was clearly, as far as the man was concerned, entitled to some obedience. And the fact was that they were actuated by a motive ; they were flying at higher game than this insignificant and miserable sufferer. Nothing was to be gained by worrying *him*.

“*Who* is it that”—mark the malignity of these Jewish authorities—not that *made thee whole*, for there was no heresy to be hunted out in the mere fact of exercising miraculous power—but “that gave thee the wicked command to take up thy bed and walk ?”

So little apparently, up to this time, was the person of Jesus generally known in the suburbs of Jerusalem, or else so dull and languid had been the man’s attention while Jesus was first speaking to him, that he actually did not know who his benefactor was. But he ascertained shortly afterwards. It is a touch of grace about him that we next find him in the Temple, whither he may well have gone to return thanks to God for this sudden and marvellous renovation of his wasted life. There, too, Jesus saw him, and addressed to him one simple memorable warning, “See, thou hast been made whole : continue in sin no longer, lest something worse happen to thee.”

Perhaps the warning had been given because Christ read the mean and worthless nature of the man; at any rate, there is something at first sight peculiarly revolting in the 15th verse. "The man *went and told the Jewish authorities* that it was Jesus who had made him whole." It is barely possible, though most unlikely, that he may have meant to magnify the name of One who had wrought such a mighty work; but as he must have been well aware of the angry feelings of the Jews—as we hear no word of his gratitude or devotion, no word of amazement or glorifying God—as, too, it must have been abundantly clear to him that Jesus in working the miracle had been touched by compassion only, and had been anxious to shun all publicity—it must be confessed that the *primâ facie* view of the man's conduct is that it was an act of needless and contemptible delation—a piece of most pitiful self-protection at the expense of his benefactor—an almost inconceivable compound of feeble sycophancy and base ingratitude. Apparently the warning of Jesus had been most deeply necessary, as—if we judge the man aright—it was wholly unavailing.

For the consequences were immediate and disastrous. They changed in fact the entire tenor of His remaining life. Untouched by the evidence of a most tender compassion, unmoved by the display of miraculous power, the Jewish inquisitors were up in arms to defend their favourite piece of legalism. "They began to *persecute Jesus because He did such things on the Sabbath day.*"

And it was in answer to this charge that He delivered the divine and lofty discourse preserved for us in the 5th chapter of St. John. Whether it was delivered in the Temple, or before some committee of the Sanhedrin, we cannot tell; but, at any rate, the great Rabbis and Chief Priests who summoned Him before them, that they might rebuke and punish Him for a breach of the Sabbath, were amazed and awed, if also they were bitterly and implacably infuriated, by the words they heard. They had brought Him before them in order to warn, and the warnings fell on *them*. They had wished to instruct and reprove, and then, perhaps, condescendingly, for this once, to pardon; and lo! He mingles for *them* the majesty of instruction with the severity of compassionate rebuke. They sat round Him in all the pomposities of their office, to overawe Him as an inferior, and, lo! they tremble, and gnash their teeth, though they dare not act, while with words like a flame of fire piercing into the very joints and marrow—with words more full of wisdom and majesty than those which came among the thunders of Sinai—He assumes the awful dignity of the Son of God.

And so the attempt to impress on Him their petty rules and literal pietisms—to lecture Him on the heinousness of working miraculous cures on the Sabbath day—perhaps to punish Him for the enormity of bidding a healed man take up his mat—was a total failure. With His very first word he exposes their materialism and ignorance. They, in their feebleness, had thought of the Sabbath as though God ceased from working thereon because He was fatigued; He tells them that that holy rest was a beneficent activity. They thought apparently, as men think now, that God had resigned to certain mute forces His creative energy; He tells them that His Father is working still; and He, knowing His Father and loved of Him, was working with Him, and should do greater works than these which He had now done. Already was He quickening the spiritually dead, and the day should come when all in the tombs should hear His voice. Already He was bestowing eternal life on all that believed in Him; hereafter should His voice be heard in that final judgment of the quick and dead which the Father had committed into His hands.

Was He merely bearing witness of Himself? Nay, there were three mighty witnesses who had testified, and were testifying, of Him—John, whom, after a brief admiration, they had rejected; Moses, whom they boasted of following, and did not understand; God Himself, whom they professed to worship, but had never seen or known. They themselves had sent to John and heard his testimony; but He needed not the testimony of man, and mentioned it only for *their* sakes, because even they for a time had been willing to exult in that great Prophet's God-enkindled light. But He had far loftier witness than that of John—the witness of a miraculous power, exerted not as prophets had exerted it, in the name of God, but in His own name, because His Father had given such power into His hand. That Father they knew not: His light they had abandoned for the darkness; His word for their own falsehoods and ignorances; and they had rejected Him whom He had sent. But there was a *third* testimony. If they knew nothing of the Father, they at least knew, or thought they knew, the Scriptures; the Scriptures were in their hands; they had counted the very letters of them; yet they were rejecting Him of whom the Scriptures testified. Was it not clear that they—the righteous, the pious, the scrupulous, the separatists, the priests, the religious leaders of their nation—yet had not the love of God in them, if they thus rejected His prophet, His word, His works, His Son?

And what was the fibre of bitterness within them which produced all this bitter fruit? Was it not *pride*? How *could* they believe, who sought honour of one another, and not the honour that cometh of God only? Hence it was that they rejected One who came in His Father's name, while they had been, and should be, the ready dupes and the miserable victims of every false Messiah, of every Judas, and Theudas, and Bar-Cochba—and, in Jewish history, there were more than sixty such—who came in his own name.

And yet He would not accuse them to the Father; they had another accuser, even Moses, in whom they trusted. Yes, Moses, in whose lightest word they professed to trust—over the most trivial precept of whose law they had piled their mountain loads of tradition and commentary—even *him* they were disbelieving and disobeying. Had they believed Moses, they would have believed Him who spoke to them, for Moses wrote of Him; but if they thus rejected the true meaning of the written words (*γράμμασιν*) which they professed to adore and love, how could they believe the spoken words (*ῥήμασιν*) to which they were listening with rage and hate?

We know with what deadly exasperation these high utterances were received. Never before had the Christ spoken so plainly. It seemed as though in Galilee He had wished the truth respecting Him to rise like a gradual and glorious dawn upon the souls and understandings of those who heard His teaching and watched His works; but as though at Jerusalem—where His ministry was briefer, and His followers fewer, and His opponents stronger, and His mighty works more rare—He had determined to leave the leaders and rulers of the people without excuse, by revealing at once to their astonished ears the nature of His being. More distinctly than this He could not have spoken. They had summoned Him before them to explain His breach of the Sabbath; so far from excusing the act itself, as He sometimes did in Galilee, by showing that the higher and moral law of love supersedes and annihilates the lower law of mere literal and ceremonial obedience—instead of showing that He had but acted in the spirit in which the greatest of saints had acted before Him, and the greatest of prophets taught—He sets himself wholly above the Sabbath, as its Lord, nay, even as the Son and Interpreter of Him who had made the Sabbath and who in all the mighty course of Nature and of Providence was continuing to work thereon.

Here, then, were two deadly charges ready at hand against this Prophet of Nazareth: He was a breaker of their Sabbath; He was a

blasphemer of their God. The first crime was sufficient cause for opposition and persecution; the second an ample justification of persistent and active endeavours to bring about His death.

But at present they could do nothing; they could only rage in impotent indignation; they could only gnash with their teeth and melt away. Whatever may have been the cause, as yet they dared not act. A power greater than their own restrained them. The hour of their triumph was not yet come; only, from this moment, there went forth against Him from the hearts of those Priests and Rabbis and Pharisees the inexorable irrevocable sentence of violent death.

And under such circumstances it was useless, and worse than useless, for Him to remain in Judæa, where every day was a day of peril from these angry and powerful conspirators. He could no longer remain in Jerusalem for the approaching Passover, but must return to Galilee; but He returned with a clear vision of the fatal end, with full knowledge that the hours of light in which He could still work were already fading into the dusk, and that the rest of His work would be accomplished with the secret sense that death was hanging over His devoted head.

**Stop here and take lesson test.**

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE MURDER OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

IT must have been with His human heart full of foreboding sadness that the Saviour returned to Galilee. In His own obscure Nazareth He had before been violently rejected; He had now been rejected no less decisively at Jerusalem by the leading authorities of His own nation. He was returning to an atmosphere already darkened by the storm-clouds of gathering opposition; and He had scarcely returned when upon that atmosphere, like the first note of a death-knell tolling ruin, there broke the intelligence of a dreadful martyrdom. The heaven-enkindled and shining lamp had suddenly been quenched in blood. The great Forerunner—he who was greatest of those born of women—the prophet, and more than a prophet, had been foully murdered.