

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expositor-series-1.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php)

and therefore of all love, of the commandment which was ordained unto life, and therefore at all the ethical grandeur of the Gospel of Christ. They said they were Jews, but were not, being the synagogue of Satan. The Lord from his glory compared them to Balaam, to Jezebel and her lovers. They professed by licentious freedom to sound the depths of God and scale heights sublimer than those of virtue, purity, and love. They infested the early Church, and well merited the condemnations of those who had entered into fellowship with the living Christ. One of the fond excesses of modern speculation has been an attempt to identify these enemies of righteousness with the believers in Pauline theology, and to suppose that Paul himself is the "vain man" condemned by St. James (ii. 20). The passage before us ought to be the refutation of the whole theory.

H. R. REYNOLDS.

---

GODET ON ST. LUKE.<sup>1</sup>

I AM constantly receiving letters from readers of THE EXPOSITOR in which I am asked to point out those Commentaries which I judge to be real and valuable aids in the study of the various books of the Bible. In response to these appeals I hope, before long, to commence a series of papers on the Commentaries which I myself have most constantly in use, and especially on those—since these are most in demand—which the unlearned student of Scrip-

<sup>1</sup> "A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke." By F. Godet. Translated from the French, by E. W. Shalders, B.A., and M. D. Cusins. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark.

ture will be likely to find most useful to him. Meantime, though I must take it out of its proper place in the proposed series, I wish to say a few words on a Commentary lately issued by Messrs. Clark of Edinburgh,—a Commentary which will be most enjoyed by those who are familiar with New Testament Greek, but from which even those who know no language but that “wherein they were born” may derive much instruction, if, at least, they were born in England or France, and will not suffer themselves to be repulsed by the sprinklings of Greek and Hebrew type which will be found on its pages.

It is very strange and much to be regretted that there are so few Commentaries of the highest class on the Gospels. No thoughtful Christian, unbiassed by theological preconceptions, will hesitate to admit that, even in the Bible, there are no books of such priceless value as the four Memoirs which record the words and works of the Lord Jesus. And yet I believe it would be far easier to put into the English student's hands able and scholarly expositions of almost any other Scripture than of these. There is more than one Commentary on most of the Old Testament books, and on nearly all the Epistles of the New Testament, which I could recommend such a student to get; but I cannot name more than one on any of the Gospels, and not one on one of them. Dr. Morison's Commentaries on St. Matthew and St. Mark, indeed, are simply invaluable. In brief compass they give all that most students really need to know of what previous expositors have said; while yet they state with singular and idiomatic force the learned author's own interpretations of the Sacred

Records. His interpretations, moreover, are marked by a notable blending of strong common sense and profound spiritual insight, of orthodoxy and yet of breadth of view. Dr. Godet's Commentary on St. Luke possesses, as we shall see, very similar qualities, and is hardly less valuable. But on the Gospel of St. John we have still, so far as I am aware, to wait for the appearance of an exposition which can be regarded as satisfactory. Let us hope that Messrs. Clark—to whom students of the Bible already owe much—may soon be induced to give us a translation of Godet's Commentary on that Gospel as admirable as that which they now give us on St. Luke's.

Dr. Godet, like Dr. Morison, combines in a singular degree spiritual insight with broad good sense. He has, too, the rare gift of moderation, sober-mindedness. He does not suffer himself to be carried away by extreme views, from whatever quarter they may come, but weighs all views in the scale of an even and balanced judgment. He is far from being insensible to the influence of the scientific criticism of the age; on the contrary, he listens to its arguments with impartiality, and accepts them gratefully in so far as they are conclusive: but, at the same time, he takes a firm stand against its mere vagaries and conjectures, when it seeks to wrest the Sacred Records into conformity with its own foregone conclusions; and however willing he is to yield its arguments, not only as far as he *must*, but as far as he *may*, he holds with a wise and devout constancy to the supernatural elements of the Gospel history, elements which are, indeed, involved

in the very fact of *Revelation*. He is a sincere and firm believer in the Incarnation and the Resurrection, and in all the truths logically implied in these great historical facts; so that, even when he surrenders this passage or that to the force of critical argument, or cuts some common hypothesis or prejudice against the grain, no attentive reader can for a moment fear lest he should be led away from "the *simplicity* of Christ," *i.e.*, from his single-minded loyalty and devotion to Christ.

Dr. Godet opens with an *Introduction*, of the value of which I cannot decisively speak since, unfortunately, the sheet containing pp. 33-50 has been omitted in the copy that has been sent to me. But it is obvious from the Commentary itself that he holds St. Luke to be the true author of the Gospel that bears his name, to have drawn what is peculiar to his Gospel from St. Paul, and to have written his Gospel during the Apostolic age.

The Commentary proper is clear and terse in style, often compressing valuable suggestions into the compass of a single sentence. In its moderation and sobriety, its freedom from bookishness and technicality, its vital relation to the facts of human life and experience, it closely resembles the highest type of English Commentary, and is therefore far more readable by an English student than the Commentaries which of late have been so plentifully imported from Germany. It differs from our highest standard—from the work of such men as Dr. Morison and Canon Lightfoot—in that it does not give the results of a reading so wide, limiting itself too much to modern German literature, and in that it addresses itself too generally to answer

those critics in whom scepticism has degenerated into unbelief of the facts and truths which the Church holds most dear.

As an instance of its clear and compact style, as well as of its good sense and spiritual insight, take the following annotation on the final clause of Chap. xxiv. 28 :

“When Jesus *made* as if He would continue his journey, it was not a mere feint. He would really have gone on but for the sort of constraint which they exercised over Him. Every gift of God is an invitation to claim a greater (*χάρις ἀπὲρ χάριτος*. John i 16). But most men stop very quickly on this way ; and thus they never reach the full blessing (2 Kings xiii. 14-19).”

Here the true explanation of an acknowledged difficulty is suggested in the fewest words ; and, in addition, the thoughts naturally arising out of the recorded event are stated with equal brevity. No doubt many a minister will see a whole sermon in these few short sentences, which might so easily have been printed as only two, and will hew it out much to the edification of his flock.

Or take the following on Luke xix. 8, partly because of its expository merit, and partly because Robertson of Brighton has been much taken to task for assuming the point (First Series, Sermon V.), which Godet here reasons out and defends :

“Most modern interpreters take the words of Zaccheus as a vow inspired by gratitude for the grace which he has just experienced. *Ἴδοὺ, behold*, is taken to indicate a sudden resolution : ‘Take note of this resolution : From this moment I give, . . . and I pledge myself to restore . . .’ But if the present tense *I give* may certainly apply to a gift which Zaccheus makes at the instant once for all, the pres. *I restore fourfold* seems rather to designate a rule of conduct already admitted and long practised by him. It is unnatural to apply it to a measure which would relate only to some special cases of injustice to be repaired in the future. *Ἴδοὺ, behold*, is in keeping with the unexpected revelation, so far as the public are concerned, in this rule of

Zaccheus, till then unknown by all, and which he now reveals only to shew the injustice of those murmurs with which the course of Jesus is met. 'Thou hast not brought contempt on Thyself by accepting me as Thy host, publican though I am ; and it is no ill-gotten gain with which I entertain Thee.'

But we can only do justice to Godet's work by letting him speak for himself more at length and on higher themes. How fine, then, is the passage (Vol. I. pp. 224, 5) in which he explains the service done to Christ by the Temptation in the Wilderness, shews how it fitted in with the plan of God concerning Him, how it was even an essential factor in the discipline by which He was trained for the Messianic function, and thus vindicates, while he expounds, the words, "Then was he led, *by the Spirit*, to be tempted of the devil." After shewing that the three temptations addressed to the Lord Jesus were designed to arouse in Him (1) a painful sense of the contrast between the abundance due to his Divine greatness and the miserable destitution in which He found Himself ; (2) to provoke Him to win universal empire by a sudden exhibition of Divine power rather than by a patient manifestation of the Divine character ; and (3), to presume on the favour and love of which the Voice from Heaven had just assured Him, Godet continues :

"The Temptation is the complement of the Baptism. It is the *negative* preparation of Jesus for his ministry, as the baptism was his *positive* preparation. In his baptism Jesus received impulse, calling, strength. By the temptation He was made distinctly conscious of the errors to be shunned and the perils to be feared, on the right hand and on the left. The temptation was the last act of his moral education ; it gave Him an insight into all the ways in which his Messianic work could possibly be marred. If, from the very first step in his arduous career, Jesus kept the path marked out by God's will without deviation, change, or hesitancy, this bold front and steadfast perseverance are certainly due to his experience of the temptation. All the wrong

courses possible to Him were thenceforth known ; all the rocks had been observed ; and it was the enemy himself who had rendered Him this service. And it was for this reason that God apparently delivered Him for a brief time into his power. This is just what Matthew's narrative expressessso forcibly : ' He was led up by the Spirit . . . to be tempted.' When He left this school, Jesus distinctly understood that, as respects his *person*, no act of his ministry was to have any tendency to lift it out of his human condition ; that, as to his *work*, it was to be in no way assimilated to the action of the powers of this world ; and that in the *employment* of Divine power, filial liberty was never to become caprice, not even under a pretext of blind trust in the help of God. And this programme was carried out. His material wants were supplied by the gifts of charity (Chap. viii. 3), not by miracles ; his mode of life was nothing else than a perpetual humiliation—a prolongation, so to speak, of his incarnation. When labouring to establish his kingdom, He unhesitatingly refused the aid of human power,—as, for instance, when the multitude wished to make Him a king (John vi. 15) ; and his ministry assumed the character of an exclusively spiritual conquest. He abstained, lastly, from every miracle which had not for its immediate design the revelation of moral perfection, that is to say, of the glory of his Father (Luke xi. 29) These supreme rules of the Messianic activity were all learned in that school of trial through which God caused Him to pass in the Desert."

As a final specimen of this admirable work I cite a passage in which Godet may be seen in his *militant* attitude, contending with the adversaries of the Faith, only regretting that the requirements of space will not allow the whole of his dissertation on the Resurrection to be given, but only what he has to say on *the Fact*, and *the Design*, of the Resurrection :

"The Apostles *bore witness* to the resurrection of Jesus, and on this testimony founded the Church. Such is the indubitable historical fact. Yet more : they did not do this *as impostors*. Strauss acknowledges this. And Volkmar, in his mystical language, goes the length of saying, 'It is one of the most certain facts in the history of humanity that, shortly after his death on the cross, Jesus appeared to the Apostles, risen from the dead. however we may understand the fact, which is without analogy in history.' Let us seek the explanation of the fact.

"Did Jesus return to life from a state of *lethargy*, as Schleiermacher thought? Strauss has once for all executed justice on this hypothesis.

It cannot even be maintained without destroying the moral character of our Lord.

“Were those appearances of Jesus to the first believers only *visions* resulting from their exalted state of mind? This is the hypothesis which Strauss, followed by nearly all modern rationalism, substitutes for that of Schleiermacher. This explanation breaks down before the following facts :

“1. The Apostles did not in the least expect the body of Jesus to be restored to life. They confounded the Resurrection, as Weizäcker says, with the Parousia. Now such hallucinations would suppose, on the contrary, a lively expectation of the bodily reappearance of Jesus.

“2. So far was the imagination of the Disciples from creating the sensible presence of Jesus, that at the first they did not recognize Him (Mary Magdalene, the Two of Emmaus). Jesus was certainly not to them an expected person, whose image was conceived in their own soul.

“3. We can imagine the possibility of a hallucination in one person, but not in two, twelve, and finally five hundred ! especially if it be remembered that in the appearance described we have not to do with a simple luminous figure floating between heaven and earth, but with a person performing positive acts and uttering exact statements, which were heard by the witnesses. Or is the truth of the different accounts to be suspected? But they formed, from the beginning, during the lifetime of the Apostles and first witnesses, the substance of the public preaching, of the received tradition (1 Cor. xv.). Thus we should be thrown back on the hypothesis of imposture.

“4. The empty tomb and the disappearance of the body remain inexplicable. If, as the narratives allege, the body remained in the hands of Jesus' friends, the testimony which they gave to its resurrection is an imposture, a hypothesis already discarded. If it remained in the hands of the Jews, how did they not by this mode of conviction overthrow the testimony of the Apostles? Their mouths would have been closed much more effectually in this way than by scourging them. We shall not enter into the discussion of all Strauss's expedients to escape from this dilemma. They betray the spirit of special pleading, and can only appear to the unprejudiced mind in the light of subterfuges. But Strauss attempts to take the offensive. Starting from Paul's enumeration of the various appearances (1 Cor. xv.), he reasons thus : Paul himself had a *vision* on the way to Damascus ; now he put all the appearances which the Apostles had on the same platform ; therefore they are all nothing but visions. His reasoning is a mere sophism. If Strauss means that Paul himself *regarded* the appearance which had converted him as a simple vision, it is easy to refute him. For what Paul wishes to demonstrate, 1 Cor. xv., is the *bodily* resurrection of believers, which he cannot do by means of the appearances of Jesus,

unless he regards them all as bodily, the *one* as well as the other. If Strauss means, on the contrary, that the Damascus appearance *was* really nothing else than a vision, though Paul took it as a reality, the conclusion which he draws from this mistake of Paul's, as to the meaning which must be given to all the others, has not the least logical value.

“Or, finally, could God have permitted the *spirit* of the glorified Jesus, manifesting itself to the Disciples, to produce effects in them similar to those which a perception by the senses would have produced? So Weisse and Lotze think. Keim has also declared for this hypothesis in his ‘Life of Jesus.’ But (1) what then of the narratives in which we see the Risen One seeking to demonstrate to the Apostles that He is not a *pure spirit*? (Luke xxiv. 37-40.) They are pure inventions, audacious falsehoods. (2) As to this glorified Jesus, who appeared spiritually to the Apostles, did He or did He not mean to produce on them the impression that He was present bodily? If He did, this heavenly Being was an impostor. If not, He must have been very unskilful in his manifestations. In both cases, He is the author of the misunderstanding which gave rise to the false testimony given involuntarily by the Apostles. (3) The empty tomb remains unexplained on this hypothesis, as well as on the preceding. Keim has added nothing to what his predecessors have advanced to solve this difficulty. In reality there is but one sufficient account to be given of the empty tomb: the tomb was found empty because He who had been laid there Himself rose from it.”

His exposition of *the design* of the ten appearances of the risen Jesus, recorded in the New Testament Scriptures, is no less admirable than his defence of *the fact* of the Resurrection.

“In the first three, Jesus comforts and raises, for He has to do with downcast hearts: He comforts Mary Magdalene, who seeks his lost body; He raises Peter after his fall; He reanimates the hope of the Two going to Emmaus. Thereafter, in the following three, He establishes the faith of his future witnesses in the decisive fact of his resurrection; He fulfils this mission toward the Apostles in general, and toward Thomas; and He reconstitutes the apostolate by returning to it its head. In the seventh and eighth appearances He impresses on the apostolate that powerful missionary impulse which lasts still, and He adds James to the Disciples specially with a view to the mission for Israel. In the last two, finally, He completes the preceding commands by some special instructions (not to leave Jerusalem, to wait for the Spirit, &c.), and bids them his last farewell; then, shortly afterward, He calls Paul specially with a view to the Gentiles. This unity, so profoundly psychological, so holily organic, is not the work

of any of the Evangelists, for its elements are scattered over the four accounts. The wisdom and love of Christ are its only authors."

I have been anxious that, so far as was possible in the few pages at my command, Godet should be allowed to speak for himself; and though the quotations from his Commentary have been necessarily few and brief, I hope they may suffice to indicate its worth. But every student must be aware that the worth of any work on which much thought and labour have been expended can only be faintly indicated by a few short citations from it; and therefore I may be permitted to add that this Commentary has been in my hands for some time, and that I have never consulted it on any point without receiving from it some valuable criticism or suggestion.

EDITOR.

---