

DOUBT*

The Hebrew of the Old Testament seems to lack an exact equivalent to our term "doubt," when used in a religious reference. Some have, indeed, understood "doubters," "skeptics" to be meant when the Psalmist, who loves God's law and hopes in his word and delights in keeping his commandments, declares that he "hates them that are of a double mind" (Ps. cxix. 113, מִצְפֵּיִם). Apparently, however, it is rather hypocrites, what we should call "double-faced men," who are meant; and it seems to be hypocrisy, rather than doubt, which is in mind also in 1 Kings xviii. 21, where the kindred term מִצְפֵּיִם occurs, and in 1 Chron. xii. 33, Ps. xii. 2, where the similar phrase "double heart" (לֵב וְלֵב) appears, as well as in Hos. x. 2, where the commentators differ as to whether the words לֵבָק לְלֵבָם are to be translated "their heart is divided," or, perhaps better, "their heart is smooth," that is, deceitful.

In the New Testament, on the other hand, we meet with a series of terms which run through the shades of meaning expressed by our words, perplexity, suspense, distraction, hesitation, questioning, skepticism, shading down into unbelief.

Perplexity is expressed by the verb ἀπορέω (Mark vi. 20; Luke xxiv. 4; John xiii. 22; Acts xxv. 20; 2 Cor. iv. 8; Gal. iv. 20), with its strengthened compound, διαπορέω (Luke ix. 7; Acts ii. 12; v. 24; x. 17), expressing thorough perplexity, when one is utterly at a loss, and the still stronger compound ἐξαπορέω (2 Cor. i. 8; iv. 8), in which perplexity has passed into despair. This perplexity is never assigned in the New Testament to the sphere of religion. Even in such instances as Luke xxiv. 4, where we are told that the women, finding the Lord's

*Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. I, pp. 618-619.

tomb empty, "were perplexed thereabout"; Mark vi. 20, Luke ix. 6, where Herod's perplexity over John's preaching and the subsequent preaching of Jesus and his followers is spoken of; and Acts ii. 12, where the extreme perplexity of those who witnessed the wonders of the Day of Pentecost is adverted to, it is not a state of religious doubt but of pure mental bewilderment which is described. The women merely had no explanation of the empty tomb ready, they were at a loss how to account for it; Herod simply found John's preaching and the reports concerning the preaching and work of Jesus and his disciples inexplicable, he had no theory ready for their explanation; the marvels of Pentecost, before Peter's explanation of them, were wholly without meaning to their witnesses; and, similarly, in Acts x. 17, Peter was just at a complete loss to understand what the vision he had received could mean, and required a revelation to make it significant to him. It was this state of mind, a state of what we may call objective suspense due to lack of light, which the Jews claimed for themselves when in John x. 24 they demanded of Jesus: "How long dost thou lift up our soul (τὴν ψυχὴν ἡμῶν αἶρεις)? If thou art the Christ, tell us plainly." They would suggest that they were in a state of strained expectation regarding his claims, and that the lagging of their decision was due, not to subjective causes rooted in an evil heart of unbelief, but to a lack of bold frankness on his part. Jesus, in his reply, repels this insinuation and ascribes the fault to their own unbelief. They were not eager seekers after truth, held in suspense by his ambiguous speech: they were men in possession of full evidence, who would not follow it to a conclusion opposing their wishes; they were therefore not perplexed, but unbelieving.

For the doubt of the distracted mind the New Testament appears to have two expressions, *μετεωρίζεσθαι* (Luke xii. 29) and *διστάζειν* (Matt. xiv. 31; xxviii. 17). This state of mind is superinduced on faith, and is a witness to the faith which lies behind it; only those who have faith can waver or be distracted from it. But the faith to which it witnesses is equally necessarily an incomplete and imperfect faith; only an imperfect

faith can waver or be distracted from its firm assurance. The exhortation, "Be ye not of a wavering mind," is appropriately given, therefore, in Luke xii. 29, to those who are addressed as "of little faith" (ὀλιγόπιστοι), of whom it is the specific characteristic. It is to trust in God's providential care without carking anxiety as to our food and drink and clothing that the Savior is exhorting his hearers in this context—to fulness of faith, which, according to its definition in Heb. xi. 1, is absorbed in the unseen and future in contrast with the seen and present. Those who have full faith will have their whole life hid with God; and in proportion as care for earthly things enters, in that proportion do we fall away from the heights of faith and exhibit a wavering mind. It was a similar weakness which attacked Peter, when, walking, by virtue of faith, upon the water to come to Jesus, he saw the wind and was afraid (Matt. xiv. 31); and, accordingly, our Savior addressed him similarly, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt (ἐδίστασας)?" Here, again, is real faith though weak, but a faith that is distracted by the entrance of fear. The same term, and surely with similar implications, is used again and on an even more interesting occasion. When the disciples of Jesus came to the mountain where he had appointed them and there saw their risen Lord, we are told (Matt. xxviii. 17), "They worshiped: but some doubted (ἐδίστασαν)." It is this same doubt of imperfect and distracted faith, and not the skeptical doubt of unbelief, that is intended. All worshiped him, though some not without that doubt of the distracted mind which is no more "psychologically absurd" here than in Luke xii. 29 and Matt. xiv. 31. Whence the distraction arose, whether possibly from joy itself, as in Luke xxiv. 41, or from a less noble emotion, as possibly in John xx. 25, we do not know. But the quality of doubt resulting from it, although manifesting the incompleteness of the disciples' faith, was not inconsistent with its reality; and the record of it is valuable to us as showing, along with such passages as Luke xxiv. 37, 41, John xx. 25, that the apostles' testimony to the resurrection was that of convinced rather than of credulous witnesses.

A kindred product of weak faith, the doubt of questioning hesitation, is expressed in the New Testament by the term *διαλογισμός* (Luke xxiv. 38; Rom. xiv. 1; Phil. ii. 14; 1 Tim. ii. 8). It is the nemesis of weakness of faith that it is pursued by anxious questionings and mental doubts. Thus, when Christ appeared to his disciples in Jerusalem, "they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had beheld a spirit" (Luke xxiv. 36), provoking their Master's rebuke, "Wherefore do questionings arise in your heart?" And in St. Paul's Epistles, the timid outlook of the weak in faith is recognized as their chief characteristic. This seems to be the meaning of Rom. xiv. 1, where "he that is weak in faith" is to be received into full Christian brotherhood, but not "for the adjudication of questionings" (cf. the *κρινέτω* of vs. 3 and the *κρίνων* of vs. 4): here is a man whose mind is crowded with scruples and doubts—he is to be received, of course, but not as if his agitated conscience were to be law to the community; he is to be borne with, not to be obeyed. The same implication underlies Phil. ii. 14, where the contrast between "murmurings and disputings" seems to be not so much between moral and intellectual rebellion, as between violent and timid obstacles in the Christian pathway—a contrast which appears also in 1 Tim. ii. 8. It would seem that those who are troubled with questionings are everywhere recognized as men who possess faith, but who are deterred from a proper entrance into their privileges and a proper performance of their Christian duties by a settled habit of hesitant casuistry, which argues lack of robustness in their faith.

The New Testament term which expresses that deeper doubt which argues not merely the weakness but the lack of faith is the verb *διακρίνεσθαι* (Matt. xxi. 21; Mark xi. 23; Rom. iv. 20; xiv. 23; James i. 6 *bis*; Jude 22). Wherever this critical attitude toward divine things is found, there faith is absent. The term may be used in contrast to that faith by which miracles are wrought, or in which God is approached in prayer (Matt. xxi. 21; Mark xi. 23; James i. 6 *bis*); in either case it implies the absence of the faith in question and the consequent

failure of the result—he that “doubteth” in this sense cannot expect to receive anything of the Lord. It may be used of a frame of mind in which one lives his life out in the Christian profession (Rom. xiv. 23); in this case, the intrusion of this critical spirit vitiates the whole course of his activities—because they are no longer of faith, and “whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” Or it may be used as the extreme contrast to that fulness of faith which Abraham exhibited in his typical act of faith; and then it is represented as the outgrowth of unbelief (Rom. iv. 20). From the full description of its opposite here, and the equally full description of it itself in James i. 6 ff. (see Mayor’s note), we may attain a tolerably complete conception of its nature as the critical self-debating habit of the typical skeptic, which casts him upon life like a derelict ship upon the sea, and makes him in all things “double-minded” and “unstable.” Such a habit of mind is the extreme contradiction of faith, and cannot coexist with it; and it is therefore treated everywhere with condemnation—unless Jude 22 be an exception, and there the reading is too uncertain to justify its citation as such.