

Moab at Ease from his Youth

Sermon by Joseph Philpot

"Moab has been at ease from his youth, and he has settled on his lees, and has not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither has he gone into captivity--therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed." Jeremiah 48:11

Moab represents a professor in the church of God destitute of divine grace. It will be my main object to unfold this to your view, that, with God's blessing, you may gather up instruction, encouragement, or if need be, warning, reproof, and admonition from it.

With God's help and blessing, then, in attempting to unfold the meaning of this striking description, I shall—

- I. First, direct your attention to the general character of Moab.
- II. Secondly, to the special features which are represented here as peculiar to him.
- III. Thirdly, to the general effect and result of these features so strongly impressed upon him.

I. The GENERAL CHARACTER of Moab.

But in tracing out this description, I shall, as the Lord may enable, endeavour to compare with these features of Moab, corresponding or to speak more correctly, contrasting features in the Lord's family; and if I succeed in so doing, I shall not merely hold up to your view such a character as Moab is by way of warning, but take occasion from what is said of him to draw those peculiar features which distinguish the people of God, and which are all the more visible as standing in such striking contrast with this representative character.

1. His birth and parentage may be viewed as having an important bearing upon his general character. Who and what was he by birth? He was the offspring of an incestuous connection between Lot and his eldest daughter. He had therefore some natural connection, so to speak, with a good man; and yet what a dreadful connection it was; and how the passionate desire for offspring in Eastern women must have overpowered every right feeling to have prompted these two

daughters of Lot to resort to such a way of obtaining progeny. This is a point worth noting. Not that I mean to extenuate their crime, which makes one almost shudder to think of; but it was not the bubbling up of animal passion, which was not characteristic to their own father; but a scheme that they might not die childless, and thus avoid that terrible reproach; for in that time and climate it was viewed as a mark of the curse of God. And how strong must this feeling have been, that they who had been preserved chaste in Sodom should have preferred incest to childlessness. But though it was a horrible scheme, and Moab and Ammon sprang from it, yet God had such tender regard to both these people, as being in some way sprung from Lot, that he would not allow the children of Israel to oppress or exterminate them, as they were commanded to do to the seven accursed nations of the land of Canaan.

Now does not Moab's very origin, birth, and parentage, connecting him with a good man, cast some light upon Moab as a representative character? I shall by and by show you that he represents a professor in the church of God destitute of divine grace. I do not mean to lay it down as an absolute rule, but as a matter of general observation it may be remarked that there is usually some connection between a graceless professor and a gracious father or a gracious mother, or someone from whom he has got his creed without getting grace with it. Moab had the blood of Lot running in his veins, but he had not the grace of Lot working in his heart. So many a professor of religion may have the blood of a godly parent in his body, but not the grace of a godly parent in his soul.

2. But now look at Moab's character in another light. He lived in a very fertile land. If you cast your eye upon a map of Palestine, you will see the river Jordan separating it into two parts. On the west side was the land of Canaan, where the children of Israel were located; on the east side the two tribes Reuben and Gad, and half Manasseh. But Moab you will find at the south-east of the Dead Sea, just below the portion of Reuben, and the Ammonites a little higher up. If you still continue to examine the map, you will see next the portion of the tribe of Reuben, then that of Gad a little further north in the fertile land of Gilead, and then a little higher up that of half Manasseh nestling in the large and wealthy territory of Bashan, so celebrated for its pastures, producing those "bulls of Bashan" of which the Psalmist speaks.

Now there was this great difference between the country on the east of Jordan, which was not properly the land of Israel, and the country on the west side of Jordan, which was emphatically the land of Canaan or the promised land, that whereas Israel's portion was for the most part mountainous and sterile, Moab's portion, and in fact the whole of the east of Jordan, was eminently fertile, being well watered by rivers, and especially adapted to feed sheep and rear cattle. But what was the consequence of the difference of these two lands? Simply this. The children of Israel were poor, and the Moabites, Ammonites, and other occupants on the east of Jordan, wealthy and prosperous. You will perhaps recollect that it was David who first subdued them and made them pay tribute, as we read, "And he smote Moab, and measured them with a line, casting them down to the ground; even with two lines measured he to put to death--and with one full line to keep alive. And so the Moabites became David's servants--and brought gifts." 2Sa 8:2 Now this tribute was not only very heavy, but from its amount clearly shows the great wealth of that country; for we read that in the days of Ahab, at whose death the king of Moab shook off the yoke, that "Mesha, king of Moab, rendered unto the king of Israel a hundred thousand lambs and a hundred thousand rams with the wool." 2Ki 3:4 In reference to this tribute thus broken off, the prophet Isaiah sends a warning word to the people of Moab--"Send lambs as tribute to the ruler of the land, from Sela, across the desert, to the mount of the Daughter of Zion." Isaiah 16:1

But why do I mention this peculiar feature in the typical and representative Moab? Because it finds its counterpart in the character whom he represents. Moab of old was rich and prosperous. He had his portion in a fertile land, and was surrounded with flocks and herds. Similarly, his typical descendant is for the most part prosperous in this world. He is not one of those of whom James speaks as poor in this world and rich in grace, but is thriving in business, successful in his schemes, and rarely encountering those reverses and disappointments which seem to be the appointed lot of the family of God. And indeed, this is one of the reasons why he is so much at ease--a special feature in his character which I shall have presently occasion distinctly to trace.

3. Another general feature in the character of Moab is that he was a very great snare to the children of Israel. Balaam could not bring the wrath of God down upon the children of Israel by curses and imprecations, but was even compelled

to bless when he would gladly have cursed them. But with all the subtle malice of a baffled and disappointed limb of Satan, he devised an effectual way of moving against them the anger of God. And this was by entangling them with Moabitish women. We have an account in Numbers 25 of the sin of the children of Israel in this matter, and of the anger of the Lord in consequence, so that twenty-four thousand died of the plague, besides the heads of the people, who, as they were first in rank, appear to be first in sin, and therefore, as a special mark of God's fierce anger, were taken and hanged up before the Lord against the sun.

And have not Moabitish women been in all ages snares to the Israel of God? For these women appear to have inherited the charms of the daughter of Lot from whom they sprang, and, as dwelling in so rich a land, being well fed and housed, were singularly attractive to the men of Israel, who had before their eyes only the sunburnt and dried up women who had come with them out of Egypt, and who were probably as black as the tents of Kedar.

But what provoked the Lord even more than their guilty connection with these fascinating daughters of Moab was that they made them partakers of their filthy idolatries for we read that "they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods--and the people did eat and bowed down to their gods, and Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor." Now this Baal-peor was worshiped in such a way as cannot be named with any due regard to modesty. The prophet Hosea therefore says, "They went to Baal-peor, and separated themselves unto that shame;" or, as it means, shameful idol; "and their abominations were according as they loved." Hosea 9:10.

How strong is the language of the prophet. First, they fell in love with the women, then they separated themselves from the worship of God to bow down before the shameful idol, Baal-peor; and thus, the filth of their abominations was in proportion to the measure and fury of their abandoned love. How carefully need we watch the first movement of our heart from God when such and similar temptations are cast in our path. Well has Solomon said, "Let not your heart decline to her ways; go not astray in her paths. For she has cast down many wounded--yes, many strong men have been slain by her." Pr 7:25-6.

Who so strong as Samson? Who so wise as Solomon? But Moabitish women overthrew the strongest and the wisest, for the strength of sin is stronger than the strongest, and the subtlety of sin is subtler than the wisest.

In, then, these three points of view, Moab is a general representative of a professor in the visible church, without the grace of God in his heart. He has an indirect connection with the family of God; he is for the most part well to do in the world; and he or his daughters are ever spreading snares and temptations in the path of the just, and what is worse, too often succeed in entangling their feet so as to bring down upon them the just displeasure of God.

II. The SPECIAL FEATURES which are represented here as peculiar to Moab.

But the Holy Spirit is not content with merely setting before us Moab as a representative character generally in what I may call a broad outline such as I have sketched, and which perhaps might demand some study and thought, and examination of the word of God rightly to apprehend. He has also stamped upon him for our instruction certain very peculiar marked features of simpler and easier observations, which I shall now endeavour to bring before you.

Of these peculiar features as distinct from the broad general outline, two are positive, and two are negative.

The two positive features are—

1. that "he had been at ease from his youth;"
2. that "he has settled on his lees."

The two negative features are—

1. that "he has not been emptied from vessel to vessel;"
2. "neither has he gone into captivity."

We will, with God's help and blessing, examine these features in the order that I have named, and contrast them as we go on with the dealings of God in the souls of his people, that we may see more distinctly from them—

—what a man is in a profession without the grace of God;

—what a man is in a profession with the grace of God.

THE TWO POSITIVE FEATURES

1. "Moab has been at ease from his youth."

We gather from these words that Moab was now no longer young. The character then whom he typically represents is not one only just in a profession of religion, but who for many years has lived in it. And it would appear from the text that his profession, such as it was, began very early in life. Now I am not against what I may call a youthful religion, for I said very lately, if you remember it, that I believed for the most part God began the work of grace upon the souls of his people when they were young. But without limiting the grace of God or denying that there are such beginnings, I confess myself very suspicious of that profession which begins in the Sabbath school; and more than suspicious if its beginning be such as is here ascribed to Moab as being "at ease from his youth;" in other words, that he began with ease, has gone on with ease, and is now established in ease.

His religion came to him from the first very easily. It did not begin with any degree of soul trouble. There were no arrows of the Almighty in his conscience, no wrath of God found or felt in his soul, or fear of hell living or moving in his heart. He took his religion from his father as he would his father's business, and got his father's creed without getting his father's godliness, for many of these professors, at least in our chapels and among our people, are sons and daughters of gracious parents who were not at ease from their youth, but who had to get their religion in the fire. But their children took an easier path. Thus, Moab's religion came to him very easily—it fit him like an old glove in which he could put his hand even from the first without any difficulty and without any stretching of the fingers.

Now the child of God does not get his religion in this way. He is not at ease at any time of his life, still less in his youth. He does not take his profession up because his father was a good man before him, nor does he pick it up at a Sabbath school, nor is he persuaded into it by teachers and tutors. I do not say a word against a Sabbath school, for I am much in favour of it; but I am very much against making it a nursery for religious hypocrites, and blazing forth the pious death of Sabbath scholars as if they were almost necessary fruits of a Sabbath school, and the almost certain result of a religious education. At any rate it is not God's usual way.

Where there is a real work of grace upon the heart, God begins with man; not man with God. The very first movements of the work of God upon the soul are sovereign. Yes, it is the sole and sovereign work of God upon his heart, the sole and sovereign power of God put forth upon his soul, springing out of the alone good will and pleasure of the Lord God Almighty, and not granted on account of anything that we have done or can do to obtain his favor. And God will teach us to know this deeply and effectually, and sometimes by terrible things in righteousness.

We may lay it down then for the most part as a certain truth that a religion which saves the soul, a religion of which God is the Author, is for the most part, as regards us, though on God's part freely given, yet got at with great difficulty; and is usually attended with many forebodings, many fears, many convictions, much anxiety, and often great and painful distress of mind as to the result.

Now, if your religion began in any easy, smooth, quiet, lukewarm way, so that you can scarcely tell when or how it commenced, and have had no sharp exercises since or at any period of your religious career, you have very good reason to doubt whether you have got hold of that religion which will save your soul. It is a mark against you if you took up religion of yourself, and embarked upon a profession without any conviction, distress, anxiety, supplication, fears, or forebodings. I do not wish to set up any standard, or lay down a hard and fast line, as if I would prescribe to the Lord Almighty himself the exact course he must take. This indeed would be to dictate to Him, and, as Elihu speaks, to "enjoin him his way; for touching the Almighty we cannot find him out; he is excellent in power and in judgment." But taking the Scripture as our guide, and the experience of the saints in harmony with the Scripture, we may form some sound judgment of God's usual dealings with the children of men, and the effect of his teachings in the heart.

But Moab's case is not to be found thus sanctioned by Scripture or experience. It cannot be laid down in harmony for instance with the Psalms, in which we have so much description of soul exercise and trouble; and the general testimony is against those "who are not in trouble as other men, nor plagued like other men, whose eyes stand out with fatness and they have more than heart could wish."

No, David complains bitterly that "his soul was exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease and with the contempt of the proud."

But Moab was always at ease, and that from his very youth. Nothing troubled him. Easy circumstances, good health, plenty of friends, and abundant prosperity made him as happy as the day was long. Sin never troubled him, the world never opposed or persecuted him, and Satan never thrust hurtfully at him; he had, therefore everything to make him easy. He had no fears of God; no dread of hell, no trembling apprehensions of the wrath to come; no sense of the Majesty of the Almighty, against whom and before whom he had sinned, and no tormenting, chilling conviction, or even anxious thought, but that it was as well with him in grace as it was in providence, and would be so to the end.

In a wicked book, for I must call it so, written to show young men how to make the best of both worlds, these Moabites are the very characters represented as proper and usual members of churches. I do not doubt that they are the usual members of the great body of general dissenters, but whether they are proper members of a true gospel church is another matter. At any rate they suit the general ministers of the day, and the general ministers well suit them. Those, whether ministers or members, who resemble Moab, and have bought their religion cheap, do not like those who have bought it dear; who have been pierced with powerful convictions, and brought into gospel liberty as it were over the very belly of hell. They think this may be the case now and then where a man has been a desperate, out of the way sinner, but is not the general type of Christians; that the general type of Christians consists of those who have got their religion they can scarcely tell how, scarcely tell when, scarcely tell where, and scarcely tell why; who have been drawn on by one thing after another until they find themselves in possession of a full blown religion, as a man in business gradually enlarges his connection by carrying it on successfully, and then retires as a prosperous man to enjoy, for the rest of his life, the fruits of his industry and skill.

Now, ease thus obtained and ease thus maintained never was and never will be the character of a child of God. Bunyan says, in his plain, homely language—

A Christian man is never long at ease,

When one fright is gone another does him seize.

Sin will never let him rest long, nor Satan let him rest long, nor God let him rest long, nor his own fears let him rest long. He cannot be at ease until his conscience is purged with the blood of sprinkling; until his soul has been blessed with a feeling sense and enjoyment of the love of God; until he has sweet manifestations of pardoning mercy, blessed revelations of Christ to his soul, with the voice and witness of the Spirit in his breast. This is not the ease of Moab, but the ease of which the Psalmist speaks when he says--"his soul shall dwell at ease" Ps 25:13. All ease but this is the sleep of the sluggard-carnal ease as opposed to spiritual. If then he drops into carnal ease, and for a time sin does not seem to plague, nor Satan tempt, nor the world persecute, the Christian man feels that he is getting wrong; he has lost a burden, but not in the right way, and would rather have the burden back than be left to have his portion among those who are at ease in Zion.

Now contrast your religion--I speak now to those who desire to fear God--with Moab's. Are you at ease? How does your religion sit upon you? Why, you will describe it perhaps somewhat in this way; "It is the most comforting and yet the most trying thing I have ever had to do with. Sometimes I don't know what to do with it, and sometimes I don't know what to do without it. It will never leave me alone nor can I leave it alone."

I am not surprised at your answer, for religion is certainly the most weighty, and yet the most mysterious matter that we ever have had or can have to do with in this world. And I will tell you this, that it will either comfort you, or it will distress you. It will either exercise your mind, trouble your soul, cast down your spirit, and make you truly miserable, or else be the source of your choicest comfort and your greatest happiness. From religion come our deepest sorrows and highest joys, the greatest uneasiness and the sweetest peace.

There is this peculiar feature about true religion, that in the greatest prosperity it may be the cause to us of the chief trouble, or in the greatest adversity be to us the cause of the purest joy. What are wealth or health, rank or titles, and every comfort the world can afford, to a wounded spirit? What are poverty, sickness, persecution, contempt, a garret or a prison to a soul basking in the smiles of eternal love? Religion will surely make itself felt wherever it exists, and will testify by its power to its presence. If then you are a partaker of true religion, be you

who, where, or what you may, you cannot be at ease in Zion, for there will be ever something working up out of your own heart or arising from some other quarter to make you uneasy.

Job was once at ease, but he was not allowed to die in his nest. He therefore says, "I was at ease, but he has broken me asunder--he has also taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces, and set me up for his mark." Job 16:12 And yet with all this unexpected and apparently cruel treatment, he could still say, "Behold, my witness is in heaven and my record is on high."

And though so exercised and distressed that he had to cry out, "My bone cleaves to my skin and to my flesh, and I am escaped with the skin of my teeth. Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O you my friends; for the hand of God has touched me" Job 19:20,21; yet he could add, in all the confidence of faith, as desirous that his words might stand forever upon record--"Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead, or engraved in rock forever! I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes--I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" Job 19:23-27

2. But I pass on to consider another special feature stamped upon the character of Moab-- "And he has settled on his lees."

The figure is taken from WINE, which, in order to thoroughly purify and refine it from all those dregs which would spoil its taste, needs to be often racked off, as I shall have occasion by and by more clearly to show. But Moab was like an old wine cask which somehow or other had been overlooked in the corner of the cellar, and was thus forgotten, neglected, and covered with cobwebs. Or, to speak more correctly, had been purposely neglected, as being of a vintage which did not promise such improvement by pouring off, as would pay the expenses or trouble to do so. He had therefore become "settled upon his lees." These lees were the husks of the grape, and other waste parts of the berry, with the general residuum which in the process of fermenting gradually falls to the bottom of the cask. If wine therefore is left to settle upon these lees, they infect it with a coarse, earthy, unpleasant taste, which spoils the wine and makes it scarcely drinkable. But Moab was left to settle upon these coarse, impure dregs, as not having in him sufficient

good wine qualities to repay the trouble of racking him off. His religion therefore was not only in its origin and in its vintage coarse and noxious, but by being left to settle so long upon the lees of the old cask was worse than it otherwise would have been; for the coarse, decaying, sour lees made the wine worse than it naturally was.

But what made it worse was that he was well satisfied it should be so--he was "settled upon his lees." If you look at the margin of Zeph. 1:12, where God says that "he will punish the men that are settled on their lees," you will find the word translated in the text "settled" rendered in the margin "curdled or thickened." The same word indeed is not used in this passage, but the idea is still the same. Moab was curdled or thickened upon his lees; that is, so settled down upon them and infected with those who the whole body of the wine in the cask has become soured and thickened like curdled milk, and was therefore undrinkable.

But what are we to understand spiritually by these lees, and what is it to be settled on them? By the lees I understand the husks of worldliness, pride, and covetousness, which are, so to speak, dropped and deposited by a carnal profession. And to be settled upon one's lees is to be settled down in a dead confidence of one's state before God, though that rests upon the dregs of a worldly life and of a hypocritical, arrogant, daring, and presumptuous profession.

Now when a man is settled down upon these dregs of a dead profession, he knows as regards religion neither misery nor joy, neither affliction nor consolation. In him, as thus left neglected in a corner of his pew, like the old wine cask in the corner of the cellar, there are no stirrings, or movings, or dealings of God upon his soul, so as to take him off and separate him from his lees. Moab, therefore, as thus settled upon his lees, represents a professor of religion who is neglected of God, in whom, if I may use such an expression, He does not take sufficient interest to pour him off and refine him.

God is very jealous over his own people, and very tender about them. He will therefore take peculiar care to fit them for the kingdom for which he has designed them, and refine them as gold is refined, that they may be vessels of honor meet for the Master's use. They are not allowed therefore, as Moab was, to be settled upon their lees like a forgotten wine cask, but are made fit for the

inheritance of the saints in light, by the purifying effect of God's dealings with their soul.

But we will now look at the TWO NEGATIVE FEATURES of Moab, which I mentioned as stamped upon him in our text.

1. "He has not been emptied from vessel to vessel."

Moab was never emptied from vessel to vessel, for no art or skill could have made good wine out of him. If wine has, from its peculiar sort of grape, its earliest growth, its soil, situation, and a favorable vintage, certain natural qualities, it may be developed into every perfection of which wine is capable. But if the natural quality of the grape be noxious and coarse; if soil, situation, and vintage be also bad, no art or skill of man can manipulate that wine into a first-class article.

Thus, it is with human nature. It is radically and naturally bad, and grows worse as it gets older; and therefore, no art or skill of man can make it good or acceptable to God. In this state most men live and die. But not so with the true family of God. He plants his vineyard "with the choicest vine" Isa 5:2; what another prophet calls "a noble vine, wholly a right seed" Jer 2:21. The Lord therefore will by his Spirit and grace bring forth out of this noble vine such wine as shall prove it to be set in a vineyard which his right hand has planted, and a branch which he has made strong for himself.

And we may observe as an aside, that that species of grape which looks best to the eye and is most pleasing to the palate is not usually that which makes the best wine. Moab was outwardly flourishing and prosperous, like grapes fair to the eye and pleasant to the taste, but the wine of which was for all wine purposes radically coarse and bad.

Now contrast this with the case of the people of God. Though there is much in them rough and distasteful, much from which they need to be cleansed and refined, yet still there is that in them by grace which will, so to speak, work itself fine. They are not therefore left to settle on their lees, like Moab, but are emptied from vessel to vessel. They may sometimes indeed, through absence of trial and temptation, seem as if they would settle down upon the lees of their profession, but this does not last long. Some trial, temptation, exercise, affliction, bereavement, or sorrow is brought upon them. This we may compare to a vessel

into which the wine is poured out of the cask, and where it has to stand for a time that it may become refined, lose its new, raw taste, and get the right flavor.

Observe, then, the effect of the various trials and afflictions which the Lord brings upon his people to cleanse and refine them. They instrumentally draw off the wine which otherwise would have settled upon its lees and become impregnated with their earthy taste. Every trial which a child of God has to undergo separates from him something rough, austere, raw, carnal, and sensual. We may view these lees as representing pride, or self-righteousness, or worldly-mindedness, or carnality, or covetousness, or anything and everything distinct from and inconsistent with what is holy, heavenly, and spiritual.

There will always remain in a child of God, whatever be his experience or amount of grace – the old nature still. He needs therefore to be emptied from vessel to vessel; for corrupt nature soon casts down fresh lees, which, if he were left to settle down upon them, would spoil his flavour. In order therefore to keep him from this bitter and raw flavour, there comes upon him another trial, another temptation, another affliction, or another bereavement. This is a fresh vessel, into which he is again drawn off; and as during the process the cask is stirred and shaken, the wine will sometimes seem thick and muddy and almost worse than before. Have not you felt how a fresh trial stirred up every corruption of your heart? But after a time, when you are made a little still, you are enabled to cast down some of this rebellion and unbelief, and it seems to sink to the bottom of your heart. Thus, as the effect of a fresh trial or temptation, our free-will, self-righteousness, creature holiness, vain confidence, carnality, and worldly-mindedness, and everything which is contrary to the mind of the Spirit, are gradually deposited and dropped, and the wine begins to run more clear, fine and pure.

If you cannot see or feel this in yourself, can you not see it in tried and exercised Christians? Do you not see them cleansed and purified, more than those that are at ease, from pride, vain confidence, self-righteousness, carnality and death?

But after a time, the wine needs another pouring off, in order to get the right quality, taste, and scent. There is another vessel to come--another trial, another temptation, another affliction, another bereavement, another sorrow. Here comes the vessel. Don't you tremble as you see it approaching, and to have the

auger struck into you to draw the wine off? But there is no use crying out, for it must come. There must be a drawing off again into the fresh vessel. But is this the last? No, no. When the Christian has after a time cast down more lees, and by that means become brighter, clearer, and finer, more dead to the world, more alive unto God, old nature is old nature still. He casts down fresh lees and needs another pouring off; and so he goes on until he gets the right quality, the right fineness, the right taste, and then he is fit to be drawn off from earth to heaven and set upon the royal table.

But Moab never was thus emptied from vessel to vessel--in fact, he was, as I before remarked, not worth the trouble. We may easily fancy a French wine-grower saying, "I don't know how many casks I have, of a worthless vintage in my cellar--it really would not pay me to take any trouble with it. Let the casks be where they are; let them stand until I have time to roll them out of the way, break in the staves, and pour off their contents into the ditch."

So we may say God looks upon such a professor of religion as Moab represents. It is as if he were not worth the trouble of any special dealings--he has no living conscience to be touched; there is no grace in his heart to work upon, no judgment to be informed, no affections to be wrought upon, no spiritual capability for being benefited by trials and afflictions. Let him therefore sit quietly in the corner of his pew; let him fill up his church membership; let him be half asleep during the sermon. Let no judgment rouse him, no promises melt him, no precepts move him; let him sit there like an old wine cask in the corner of a cellar, covered with cobwebs, nobody scarcely knowing it to be there but the old cellar-man.

How many of these wine casks we have in the corners of pews in our churches and chapels who have never been emptied from vessel to vessel. No sermon ever touches them; no admonition ever reaches them; no warnings ever frighten them; no promises ever cheer them. There they are at ease, settled upon their lees, having no fear of death and eternity, but as unconcerned as if there were neither heaven nor hell. It is a dreadful spot to be in, for there is a woe to those who are at ease in Zion. If such be your case, God will let out your wine someday, pierce the cask, and burn the staves. That will be the end of your profession, of your sleeping in your corner and being at ease in Zion.

2. The second negative mark against Moab is, "Neither has he gone into captivity."

We have a generation of preachers and professors who are very much against any experience of captivity or bondage in the living family--at least, after a certain period. They are allowed to be in bondage to the law at first, while under its curse and condemnation; but after deliverance from it by some manifestation of mercy, are never to be, according to these men, in bondage any more. They are safely booked for the next world, and need no more fear being left behind than a person going by train who is seated in a first-class carriage.

According, however, to our text, it is a mark against Moab that he had not gone into captivity. But God's people have very often to go into it. Moab, with his fertile lands, broad pastures, flowing brooks, and copious streams, was not treated as the children of Israel were. There were no Philistines to trouble him. He therefore never went into captivity. He dwelt for generations upon his ancestral lands, eating the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the stall, drinking wine in bowls, and anointing himself with the best ointments, but not grieved for the affliction of Joseph Amos 6:4,6.

But those on the other side of the river, the Israel of God, in the land of Canaan, were often led into captivity, had to fight hard for their very existence, exposed to the incursions of the Philistines and various other tribes, and were ever holding their life in their hand. So it is with the 'mere professor' and the 'true child of grace'. The professor is not in captivity; he is never in bondage; he never knew anything about the law to put him into real distress of soul at the first; and though under the power of sin, yet he has no feeling of what it is to be a prisoner, crying out under the heavy pressure of bonds and fetters. Contrast with him the living soul. He is continually going into captivity--often taken captive by some lust, entangled in some snare, drawn aside by some excitement; and if he is preserved from sin or doing anything derogatory to his profession, yet there is an inward captivity, a feeling of bondage, a sense of being put into the prison-house, so as to groan as a poor imprisoned captive under the hidings of God's face, the withdrawals of his presence, the fears of his own mind, and the sinkings and

foreboding of his own evil conscience. But Moab knew nothing of this--he was always at ease and always at liberty.

III. But time warns me that I must pass on to point out what I proposed to do in the third place, that is, the EFFECTS of these dealings with Moab. They are two. The first affected the taste, the other the scent of the wine to which Moab is compared, that is, "Therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed."

1. "Therefore his taste remained in him." Let us consider the first effect first. What was the effect of drawing and pouring the wine off from vessel to vessel? It was to change the taste. If it had been left to settle upon its lees, there would have been an earthy flavour; it would have tasted of the husks of the grapes and of all the impurities mingled with it in the wine-press. Now Moab as being settled upon his lees, and not being drawn off from vessel to vessel, retained this earthy taste--"His taste remained in him." He was earthy at the first and earthy at the last. He had therefore no taste himself for heavenly things. He had never tasted that the Lord was gracious; he had never tasted the sweetness of God's word coming into his soul with divine power; he had never tasted the authority of God in a broken law, nor the love of God in a revealed gospel. Therefore, his taste remained in him.

You could soon tell this by your acquaintance with him--that his taste was an earthy taste; that he had no relish for divine things, no love for the word of God, for the company of God's family, heavenly employments, or spiritual enjoyments. His taste remained in him. He began by being an earthy man, and he ends by being an earthy man. And you can taste it in his conversation and in his conduct.

It is not so with God's people. Their taste is altered. When the Lord begins to visit their soul, His very first dealings with them change their taste. It gives them a different apprehension of God from what they had before; it raises up the fear of God in their conscience; it plants the dread of the Almighty deep in their soul; it gives them a taste of the anger of God in a broken law; and all this changes their taste. They tasted once of free-will, legality, creature-righteousness, self-exaltation, based upon human ability. But now all this is changed. They have different views now of the purity and majesty of God; different views of the

authority of his holy law, and different views of the evil of sin; and as this works in them it changes their tastes. They begin to see what a bitter thing sin is and to taste how evil it is to depart from the Lord. They see sin working in a way they never saw before--in the glance of an eye, in the thought of the heart, in the dropping of a foolish word, in the sanctioning of an unbecoming action. And their taste is changed as regards the word of God. They once had no relish for God's word--they could not taste it, nor handle it, nor enter into it. They had no spiritual faculty to which the word of God was adapted.

Moab, with all his professions, never had his taste changed. He always loved earthy things, and his religion, such as it was, was an earthly religion. But the dealings of God with the souls of his people in pouring them from vessel to vessel, in exercising them with various trials and temptations, in letting down His authority into their breast, and exercising them with spiritual fears, give them a real abiding taste of divine things. The light of God's countenance, the teachings of his Holy Spirit, the manifestations of his favour, and the droppings in of words from his gracious lips, have changed the whole taste of their religion.

2. And what else? What is the next effect of Moab being settled on his lees? His "scent (aroma) was not changed." In all first-class wine there is a peculiarly fragrant and delicious scent, and connoisseurs know and value wine by its scent as much or even more than by its taste. Now there was no delicious aroma in Moab's wine. It was earthy both in taste and scent.

But God's people are not so. By the various refinings, rackings, and dealings of God upon their souls, there is communicated to them this scent, this fragrant aroma which impregnates their conversation and demeanour, and makes them so acceptable to those who can know and recognize it. Of their fragrant conversation we may say, "The scent thereof is as the wine of Lebanon," which was celebrated for its choice aroma. There is in the tried, exercised children a savour, a sweetness, a scent, an aroma, which commends itself to all who know and love what the grace of God is. And it is by this taste and by this scent that we know God's people, as connoisseurs know good wine from bad. By this taste and by this scent, tried, exercised, savoury, and precious souls, whom God exercises and teaches, are distinguished from those who are at ease in Zion.

But it is not everybody who knows this taste or can recognize this scent. The people of God know it. Nothing is more odious to them than a religion without savour--it is like an egg without salt. What they want to find in themselves and in others is a religion brought into their souls by the power of God, wrought in their heart by the unction of the Holy Spirit. That makes them new creatures, gives them new tastes, invigorates them with new life, and breathes into their conduct and conversation, words and works, a heavenly aroma, which is the very breath of heaven, whereby it is manifested they are the people of God, in whose hearts he has wrought by his Spirit and grace.

Thus, while the one are of the earth earthy, impure, and only fit to be fermented into vinegar, or poured off into the dust; the others, the children of God, by his gracious dealings with them, have more of heaven in their own conscience, more of the power of God resting upon their souls, and are drawn more into sweet union and heavenly intimacy with God and each other.

Now can you say--and you have reason to bless God for it if you can--that he has not left you as he left Moab to be at ease from your youth, to be settled upon your lees, never to be emptied from vessel to vessel, and never to go into captivity? If so, he wanted to have you for himself, to adorn you as a bride is adorned for her husband, to make you fit for the inheritance of the saints in light, and to work in your soul that grace whereby you might be in glory a fit companion for the Son of his love.

This, then, is the end of all God's dealings and the object of all the afflictions and trials he sends upon his people--to change their taste, to alter their scent, and make them spiritually minded, which is life and peace, and thus fit, furnish and qualify them for heaven, that they may forever bask in the beams of his eternal love.