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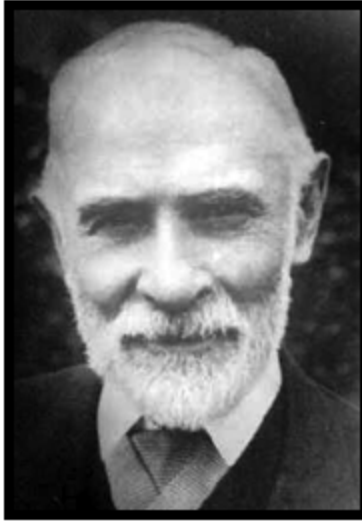
V08 Outline of the Minor
Prophets

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NOTE

The following summaries of Readings held at Teignmouth during the years 1940 - 1943 were carefully revised by Mr. Coates, except that on Jonah, which represents notes taken at the time and now revised with a view to publication.

The Readings took place during a period of great pressure, in keeping with the times during which the prophets themselves served, and it is felt that they contain much of lasting spiritual value to believers.

HOSEA 1

Hosea 1

The name Hosea, meaning Deliverance, seems to suggest that, sad as the state of the people was to whom he prophesied, the leading object of his service was to show how Jehovah would bring deliverance from that state. In the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, and Hezekiah there was a certain outward form of piety, but the prophets exposed the inward state of the people generally, and it was marked by great unfaithfulness to the divinely established relationship between Jehovah and His people. "The land is entirely given up to whoredom, away from Jehovah", verse 2. This state was to be set forth in the prophet's own associations, and his children represented in a symbolical way the results of unfaithfulness. Jizreel means *Jehovah will sow*, and the chapter suggests that this sowing on Jehovah's part takes a two-fold character. In the first place it is retributive; unfaithfulness will inevitably result in a sowing and reaping of judgment, as we see in verses 4, 5, 6, 8, 9. But when this is felt and bowed to, God's sowing takes another character, and He brings in what is of Himself in mercy. This is seen in verses 7, 10, 11. The day of Jizreel in this aspect is clearly one of sovereign mercy.

In verses 6 and 7 Jehovah says that He will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, but that He will have mercy on the house of Judah. This was manifested in His preserving a remnant of Judah through the captivity, and bringing them back to the land so that Christ might be presented to them. Indeed verse 7 was fulfilled in the principle of it when Christ was here, though on the part of the people they did not perceive or accept it. The rejection of Christ by the Jews has resulted in wrath coming upon them to the uttermost as a nation, but a remnant was secured of whom Peter could say that they were once not a people, but were now the people of God, who were not enjoying mercy, but now had found mercy, 1 Peter 2: 10. The two aspects of Jizreel have thus been seen, and they will be seen further in God's future dealings with Israel, for on the one hand they will receive double for all their sins, but on the other hand both Judah and Israel will be blessed according to verse 11 in the sovereignty of mercy.

The relations between Jehovah and Israel were truly wonderful. They were marriage relations. There was in Jehovah the love of a true Husband; see chapter 3: 1. He was pleased to be known as loving a people on earth in a most personal and intimate way, so that the marriage relation was a suitable and divinely intentional way of representing it. Nor is this less so with the saints today. Each believer has been made dead to the law by the body of the

Christ to be to Another who has been raised up from among the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God; Romans 7: 4. Paul had espoused the Corinthians to one Husband that he might present them as a chaste virgin to Christ. And it is well known to us that the assembly is viewed in Ephesians 5 as the wife of Christ. This is the divinely established relation. On the side of Christ there is perfect bridegroom affection. None of us would think of asking the Lord to love us more than He does. Think of all that He did in self-sacrificing love when He gave Himself for us! Think of all His services in love, Saviour, Intercessor, Advocate, Priest and Head! When we think of it all, our hearts may well be deeply moved, and yet we know how easily little things come in that dim the fervent affection that pertains to the marriage relation.

In Israel there was such unfaithfulness that Jehovah had to completely disown them. Such a state will soon be found in the Christian profession that it will be spued out of Christ's mouth as nauseous to Him. But there is still a remnant marked by faithfulness in the affections, those who keep Christ's word and do not deny His name. That there should be such a remnant is the fruit of sovereign love that has wrought from the divine side for the satisfaction of divine Persons. After all Israel's unfaithfulness, and their being disowned by Jehovah, He will yet bring about that "it shall be said unto them, Sons of the living God", verse 11. They will be secured in family relation, with a nature capable of response to God in holy affections. There will not then be any breakdown in the marriage relation. At the present time there are those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption. The privilege is open to us of being found amongst them. We may be very conscious of weakness in ourselves, but weakness need not be unfaithfulness. Conscious weakness casts us all the more upon divine faithfulness, upon the love of Christ and of God. As kept in a sense of divine love we shall not be unfaithful in our affections. The way of deliverance is to know our own nothingness as being kept near to divine love.

HOSEA 2

Hosea 2

Jehovah had said in chapter 1 that He would no more have mercy on the house of Israel, and He refused to acknowledge them as His people. But He looked on to a future day when they would be addressed as "Sons of the living God". In verse 1 of the chapter now before us we find that, notwithstanding Jehovah's rejection of the nation, there were those who could be owned as His people, and who had obtained mercy. This shows that even when the general state is so bad that God cannot own it, He is pleased to have a remnant which He can own. It is so today. Not that those of the remnant are better in themselves than others, but through God's mercy they have had experience of His restoring ways as they are outlined in this chapter. We have all had to learn to judge the unfaithfulness and idolatry to which we are naturally prone. I suppose that, at some time or other, we have all known what it was to have our way hedged up (verse 6) so that we were unable to pursue the course which we had proposed to ourselves. God did not allow us to succeed in our self-chosen path. This particularly applies to those who have turned away from what they once knew of God. If there is in any heart a remembrance of former happiness which has now been lost, it is a powerful appeal to return. "I will go and return to my first husband, for then was it better with me than now", verse 7. Paul says to the Galatians, "What then was your blessedness?" reminding them of a joy which they once had. It is sometimes well to ask, Have I ever been happier in my relations with God than I am now? If so, it is because I have gone away from Him; I had better return at once. All that constitutes true happiness for the intelligent creature is to be found in God Himself. But the result of sin having come in is that the natural heart prefers anything to God. Any foolish propensity, or momentary gratification, any form of self-confidence or self-righteousness, or self-pleasing in a religious way, may be a Baal to seduce us from faithfulness to the only true God and Jesus Christ His sent One.

But God has alluring ways even with an unfaithful people. "Therefore behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak to her heart", verse 14. His governmental ways and correction are seen in verses 6 - 13. He has to make His people feel the seriousness of departure from Him — the poverty and disappointment it entails. But He does not fail to allure,

and to speak to the heart. He is still a faithful Lover, bent upon making Himself attractive to the poor heart that has forgotten Him, but whose responsive affection He is set upon having. Being brought into the wilderness here is the

result of being allured; it suggests that she is brought in a tender and appealing way. Her heart is so affected that she is prepared for a position where she will have nothing but Himself, and where she will hear no voice but His. It corresponds with Jeremiah 2: 2, "I remember for thee the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land not sown". The divine allurements are very wonderful; God proposes to be known, not merely as the merciful Benefactor of His people, but as coveting their affection in a most intimate and personal way, so that His love may be more attractive and satisfying than the whole realm of created things. The wilderness here is in contrast with the corn and new wine and oil which she had employed for Baal. Under the divine alluring she comes apart from all that to be satisfied with Jehovah alone, and the communications of His love. Every heart that takes up this position will find fulness of joy. "And I will give her her vineyards from thence". If, in response to the divine alluring, we are content to have our portion in the love of God, He will give us all that is in the purpose of that love. "Thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land not sown". That was what He appreciated; there was nothing else to attract them, and He was sufficient.

Then the valley of Achor is given "for a door of hope"; verse 15. That was where the first movement of departure in the land was fully judged (Joshua 7:24), and this is always necessary. True affectionate response to God will always be accompanied by thorough judgment of that in our own hearts which led us away from Him. This is a true *door of hope*; it opens up to us all that love is so ready to give; and the result is that "she shall sing there as in the days of her youth and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt". The singing here is an answer or response (see margin of New Translation) to the known love of God. Then Jehovah is claimed in an affectionate way as "My husband" (verse 16), the rival Baals have lost their power, and are remembered no more. He undertakes to defend His people from all their enemies, and He betroths them to Himself for ever; verses 18 - 20. It is now a blessed known reality that Jehovah has become Man, not only to save sinners, but that He might be known in an affectionate relation of which a husband is the scriptural type. He had betrothal in view from the outset with each of us; that is, that we should be altogether for Him on the ground that He had been altogether for us. He is entitled to us, for He died for us when we were in a state of death. The love of Christ is known as claiming us to live to Him, and this claim love recognises and yields to. It is, indeed, a matter of righteousness as well as love that we should live to Him and not to ourselves, for we are not our own; we have been bought with a price.

Righteousness, judgment, loving-kindness, mercies, faithfulness, in verses 19, 20, are precious qualities or characteristics of Jehovah, but in this connection they suggest that those betrothed to Him will have features which correspond with Him whom they now claim as Husband. They are moral features which stand in contrast with what is here, and betrothal could hardly be thought of apart from suitability. We are going to be like Christ eternally, but the effect of knowing this is that we purify ourselves even as He is pure. There is a remarkable link of communication between the top and the bottom in verses 21, 22. Jizreel is looked at as being down here on earth, but she is linked by a wonderful chain with Jehovah on high. There is no discord or want of harmony between the bottom and the top. It is wonderful to think of there being something down here which is in harmony with heaven, and with the divine Persons who are there. The saints are fitted, through infinite grace, to be with Christ up there, but they also become, by the work of God, morally suitable to Him down here. They would hardly have the true character of betrothed ones otherwise. Prophecy will not be needed in heaven, but it is necessary down here that conditions may be brought about in the saints morally and spiritually that correspond with what is above.

It is thus that a testimony is secured down here. "And I will sow her unto me in the land", verse 23. In a future day Israel will appear on earth as the fruit of God's sowing, and will show forth His praise. But Peter, having this very scripture in mind, gives it present application to the sojourners of the dispersion when he says, "But ye are a chosen race, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a people for possession, that ye might set forth the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness to his wonderful light; who once were not a people, but now God's people; who were not enjoying mercy, but now have found mercy", 1 Peter 2: 9, 10. There is thus a present Jizreel, a present result of God's sowing, but it is found in those who have come into affectionate relation with Christ, "whom having not seen ye love, on whom though now not looking, but believing, ye exult with joy unspeakable and filled with the glory", 1 Peter 1: 8. Such do really, in the spirit of it, call Him "my husband"; they are, indeed, betrothed to Him. Saints of the assembly ought not, surely, to be less active in their affections than Israel will be in a coming day.

HOSEA 3

Hosea 3

The prophet was told to love "an adulteress, according to the love of Jehovah for the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods, and love raisin-cakes". That God should love a people in spite of the greatest unfaithfulness on their part is truly marvellous, and the thought of it bows the heart in wonder and worship. It is very necessary that we should know this character of divine love; a love which has its source and fountain in the very heart of God because of what He is, and which cannot be quenched or stayed by any unworthiness on the part of the creature. Jehovah's controversy with the children of Israel in Hosea's day was that there was no truth, nor goodness, nor knowledge of God in the land, chapter 4: 1. They did not know that Jehovah loved them in spite of their unfaithfulness; if they had known this it would have broken their hearts in repentance and turned them to Him. All the service of the prophets whom Jehovah sent carried with it the testimony that He still loved them, and desired their love, and when He came as Immanuel into their midst it was that this might be known in the most unmistakable way. "How often would I have gathered thy children as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" By the last of the Old Testament prophets Jehovah said, "I have loved you" (Malachi 1:2); and to the last phase of unfaithfulness in the assemblies the Lord says, "I rebuke and discipline as many as I love; be zealous therefore and repent". Revelation 3: 19. What touching appeals on the part of divine Persons! In spite of all departure and unfaithfulness, though the loved one is an adulteress, the love remains.

Love has established its title to the unfaithful one by purchase (verse 2), and this title holds good even if the claim is not answered to. Jehovah has not given up His claim on Israel, or His title to possess her, though He has had to wait long for the claim to be acknowledged on her part. The last prophecy in Israel was that Jesus was going to die for the nation that it might not perish; John 11:50 - 52. He has established His title in love, and "at the end of the days" (verse 5) "shall the children of Israel return, and seek Jehovah their God, and David their king; and shall turn with fear toward Jehovah and toward his goodness". They will recognise the blessed goodness that has been expressed in Jesus. The two thousand years that have elapsed have not changed Him, and when they turn to Him "at the end of the days" they will find that the love in which He died for them remains undiminished.

All in the Christian profession have been "bought with a price"; we are not our own; but it is a price which love has paid. Christ "died for all, that they who

live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who died for them and has been raised", 2 Corinthians 5: 15. He is entitled to say to us, "Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be another man's, and I will also be for thee", verse 3. But as it was with Israel so has it been in Christianity; there have been "many days" during which the claim of divine love has been disregarded, with the result that God's people have been deprived of all that is suitable to their ordering before Him, and they have not had even the miserable comfort which deceived hearts might have found in pure idolatry. Without divine love being known and responded to there is really nothing. No "teraphim" can be a substitute for God, and all who turn away from the love of God will find that they have nothing which they can put in its place. I think this is the meaning of being without "teraphim", verse 4. All idols are really "nonentities" (see Isaiah 2: 8, margin), and will be proved to be so in the end.

But the husband love of Jehovah for Israel has in view their return to Him "at the end of the days", and I believe the love of Christ has cherished this thought in regard of the assembly. All believers have some idea that the assembly will be the bride, the Lamb's wife, in a future day, and that in the glorified conditions she will know His love, and respond to it in a way that will satisfy His heart. But all believers have not understood that God is giving a special ministry of Christ and the assembly now so that saints may turn in their affections to the precious reality of what Christ is for the assembly, and what the assembly is for Christ. No one can be in the current of the present working of God who does not understand this; it is coming about "at the end" of the assembly's days.

HOSEAS 4 TO 6

Hosea 4; Hosea 5; Hosea 6

When God has a controversy with His people, which He surely has at the present time, it will always be found to turn on the knowledge of Himself. His people were destroyed in Hosea's time "for lack of knowledge", or, more literally, "*the knowledge*"; that is, the specific knowledge referred to in verse 1. So how the knowledge of God is acquired becomes the most important matter for our consideration. It is evident that we cannot get it by pursuing idolatry; it was said, "their doings do not allow them to return unto their God", verse 4. We can understand this, but it is said also, "They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek Jehovah; but they shall not find him: he hath withdrawn himself from them", verse 6. He is not to be found on that line. People would often be prepared to make great sacrifices if they could thereby obtain the favour of God. But this prophet, and, indeed, the whole of Scripture, make plain that He can only be found through affliction, and through learning that there is no help anywhere else. The deepest affliction anyone can pass through is to be convicted of sin, and to learn that death is upon one. It is by the cutting off of all hope from any other quarter that men are brought to turn to God. But none of us accepts this very readily; we look in every other direction first. "When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his sore, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb; but he was unable to heal you, nor hath he removed your sore", verse 13. Assyria was at that time the dominant human power, and I believe he represents what is dominant at the present time. The great characteristic of the present day is confidence in the human mind. The religious element is still strong in Christendom, but the rationalistic or modernist element is stronger. The mass of people who think at all are modernists; they do not attach supreme authority to the Holy Scriptures, or look to them for the final settlement of every question. They prefer human thoughts. King Jareb, (meaning, *He will contend*), represents the contention of the human mind against the truth. The man of sin will be the great modernist; he will oppose and exalt himself against all called God or worshipped; man is to be supreme.

But the dealings of God go on, His tearing and smiting, until He is owned as the One who is dealing with us for blessing. He waits (verse 15) until trespass is owned, and His face sought in affliction. Then He gives assurance that He will heal and bind up; we have but to return to Him, and He will undertake for us. When we have reached this point, truth and mercy and the knowledge of God are beginning to come into the soul; chapter 6: 1. But there are yet two days of self-experience to come; "after two days will he revive us". In God's

ways with Israel the law and the prophets came before Christ; they were a necessary preparation for Christ on account of the extreme unwillingness of man to appreciate grace. The law brought home to those under it the knowledge of sin and powerlessness; that was its divine intent. The prophets deepened this. "Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth; and my judgment goeth forth as the light", chapter 6: 5. If people are slain they need to be brought up from the very place of death, and that is what we find here is done for them. "After two days will he revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live before his face", chapter 6:2. When Immanuel came in, light sprang up "to those sitting in the country and shadow of death". There is no reviving until Christ comes in; they are preparatory exercises, but there is no reviving Godward until Christ is seen as bringing in all that God can delight in. The Pharisees objected to the Lord eating with tax-gatherers and sinners, and they objected to the disciples plucking ears of corn on the sabbath, but the Lord answered them on each of these occasions by telling them that they did not know Hosea 6: 6. "For I delight in loving-kindness, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings". God's delight is in what He can be for men, according to the thoughts of His own loving-kindness, and He has set this forth perfectly in Christ. The Pharisees did not *revive* in the appreciation of this; they utterly refused it. But the disciples revived in the blessedness of what they had found in Christ, the loving-kindness of God in living expression, taking account of all man's misery and need, but meeting it all perfectly as God alone could meet it. Where the knowledge of God comes there is a true reviving; indeed, in New Testament language, the persons are born anew. But the *third day* seems to suggest something beyond revival; "on the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live before his face". This gives the thought of being before God for His pleasure;

it is not only that He is for us, but we are for Him. Israel will yet be raised up to be in wifely relations with Jehovah, and to be sons of the living God. We anticipate them in this, and in a higher and heavenly way. For we not only walk in newness of life here, according to Romans, but we are raised with Christ through faith of the working of God who raised Him from among the dead, according to Colossians, and quickened together with Him so that we may live before God in association with Christ as risen with Him. All this belongs to *our* third day. The Spirit would support us in taking up this ground, for the end in view in deliverance is that we should take it up.

"And we shall know — we shall follow on to know Jehovah his going forth is assured as the morning dawn". This means for us that we shall know the Son of God as He is to be known now. Jesus has gone forth as the morning dawn

of an eternal day. It is an assured thing, for we have had it from His own lips. "Go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend to my Father, and your Father, and to my God, and your God", John 20: 17. Let us not stop short of this; let us "follow on" to the full blessed thought of divine love — to know that the ascended One claims us as His brethren, to be with Him before the Father's face in unclouded and eternal acceptance and relationship. And the Spirit is intimately connected with this, for He is here because Jesus is glorified; it is the ascended One who has shed Him forth. The Holy Spirit is here on Christ's behalf; in a certain sense He represents Him here. And it is thus that Christ comes to us "as the rain, as the latter rain which watereth the earth". The "latter rain" comes to bring the crop to maturity, and the Spirit of God is here for that purpose. It has reference to the perfecting of that work by which the full thought of God is developed in the spiritual affections and intelligence of the saints down here. This is what we are to *follow on* to know by divine grace and love. May we be intensely moved as we contemplate these precious realities!

HOSEA 11

Hosea 11

To read this prophecy rightly we must keep in mind that the background of it all is the love of Jehovah for His people. That love found touching expression in the pathetic and sorrowful utterances of this book with regard to His unfaithful people. "But they like Adam have transgressed the covenant" (chapter 6:7);

they had departed from a blessed relation in which they once stood. Ephraim had mixed himself with the peoples, and become "a cake not turned", chapter 7: 8. He was not Self-judged; the fire had never acted properly upon him; there was nothing in his inward state to keep him from the influence of the world. So that strangers had devoured his strength without his being aware of it, and grey hairs marked his decay, but he knew it not. He was "like a silly dove without heart", verse 11. The result is that such "become among nations as a vessel wherein is no pleasure", chapter 8: 8. The "manifold things" of God's law "are counted as a strange thing", verse 12. No wonder there was a call to such persons to "break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek Jehovah, till he come and rain righteousness upon you", chapter 10: 12.

Much of this is as applicable today as it was in Hosea's time! And God feels it as intensely today as He did then because it is all the result of turning away from His love. He reminds Israel in the chapter now before us that from the beginning He had loved them; chapter 11: 1. "When Israel was a child", when all was infantile and undeveloped on their side, God loved them as in the place of son to Him. "And I it was that taught Ephraim to walk, He took them upon his arms", verse 3. What tender paternal solicitude there was on Jehovah's part as He upheld them in all their feebleness, and taught them to walk in the wilderness in subjection to Him, and to be dependent every day for all the goodness that came to them from Him! As Paul so touchingly says, "For a time of about forty years he nursed them in the desert", Acts 13: 18. And yet all that time "they knew not that I healed them". He was acting in love, but they did not recognise it; they were even openly idolatrous. Still in spite of all that, He did not cease to love them, and He provided a faithful witness of His love in His servant Moses. It was to Moses, and by Moses to the people, that Jehovah made known His purpose to deliver them. It was Moses who "celebrated the passover and the sprinkling of the blood, that the destroyer of the first-born might not touch them". Moses was the mediator of the covenant, and when the people proved unfaithful to it he interceded for them, and was willing to be blotted out of Jehovah's book for them. We may learn, particularly

from the book of Deuteronomy, how imbued he was with Jehovah's thoughts concerning His people. Moses was not only a type of Christ, but he was personally characterised by the Spirit of Christ, even as we read, "But the man Moses was very meek, above all men that were upon the face of the earth", Numbers 12: 3.

All this had its part in, "I drew them with bands of a man, with cords of love", chapter 11: 4. God was pleased to have a man who was nearer to Him than any prophet (see Numbers 12: 6 - 8), that His people might be drawn into the thoughts of His love as known by and expressed in that man. Of course, it was Christ who was set forth, for it is by Him that God draws in love. The greatest wonder of all is that Jehovah has become Man that He might be near to men in His love, telling out what is in His own heart, not only by doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, but by taking upon His own spirit the full weight of everything that pressed upon man by reason of sin, finally becoming a sacrifice for sin, and bearing our sins in His own body on the tree, and tasting death for us so that the reality and depth of the love of God to men might be manifested and known. God in this way is drawing men "with bands of a man, with cords of love". It is His pleasure to be known by men as acting for them in this wondrous way of love. The One who died upon the cross is now the living Mediator of the love of God to men, and He is ever serving in love as interceding on high. In Him as the glorified One are perfectly set forth the place and acceptance in which the love of God would have men to be before His face. Man is in heaven in the most blessed acceptance with God, and the great proposal of the glad tidings is that through the love of God men may have Christ as their righteousness, and be accepted in Him the Beloved. By the bands of that blessed glorified Man God is drawing men into the knowledge of Himself as revealed in love. All the past and present unfaithfulness of the church has not altered the love of God. Men have turned away from it, but the drawing continues. "And I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw all to me", John 12: 32. Christ is not repelling but attracting, and the fact that He speaks of "bands" and "cords" shows that He intends to bind men firmly to Him as the One in whom the love of God is expressed. That love cannot be found anywhere else, but its fulness can be found there: "the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord". It is there for an unfaithful people as well as for a perishing world. If we respond to the drawing, the love that draws undertakes everything for us. God knows everything that there is on our side, and on the side of an unfaithful church, but He says, 'I am drawing you by the Man in whom I have revealed My love so that you may find out that everything on your side is an opportunity for My love'. It was always so really, whether it was a naked sinner in Eden, or toiling slaves in

Egypt, or idolatrous Israel, or self-righteous Jews, or poor Gentiles without God in the world; God made Himself known as acting in love so that the ruined creature might turn to Him in that blessed character, and be blessed in knowing Him. And now the whole truth of what God is for man has come out in the Man of His delight, the Son of His love. There will never again be such drawing as there is today; the glory of God is in the face of Jesus, and it is infinitely favourable to men. Some of us have known a little of its attractiveness; may we know it in an ever increasing way!

But then we need to know the love of God not only in its attractiveness, but in its liberating power. Naturally we find ourselves unable to appropriate the blessed things which divine love has provided for us. We have to learn how He can liberate us to feed upon those things. "And I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I gently caused them to eat", verse 4. How much that is strikingly suggestive is bound up in this statement! For the passover lamb and the unleavened bread which accompanied it, the quails, the manna, the peace-offerings, the priests' portion in the offerings, the old corn of the land, had a place in what Israel was caused to eat. We may say this, or read it over, in one sentence, but if we consider all that it speaks of typically how immense it is!

Then, again, the wilderness experience was "that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread alone, but by everything that goeth out of the mouth of Jehovah doth man live", Deuteronomy 8:3. This is exceedingly comprehensive, for the "word" or "commandment" of Jehovah is often, literally, "mouth"; this is so particularly in the book of Numbers, which is the wilderness book. What goes out of God's "mouth" is thus made very personal to Him; it is a very direct communication, and He would have us to live by it. If this was so in Old Testament times, as it surely was, how much more now when the Son has spoken personally on earth, and we have in the epistles what is really divine speaking from heaven. It is all to be fed upon, and God in His love would "gently" cause us to eat this wondrous spiritual food; we do so by the blessed liberating action of His love. We have observed before that this book is intended to bring about liberty in the affections of God's people, and liberty to "eat" is very essential to this. For what goes out of God's mouth will, in some way or other, speak of His love. Even if it is rebuke or correction, love is behind it. In the gospels every word speaks of divine love, and so in the epistles. Satan does not care what we go on with, what we feed on, if he can divert us from feeding on the love of divine Persons, but we can have as much of that love as we want. It is, in one sense, left to us to assess how much will satisfy us; we may make it our food and our drink.

HOSEA 12

Hosea 12

The references to Jacob in this chapter are remarkable, and brought in apparently without much connection with what the prophet is speaking of. He suddenly leaves all the present failure to dwell upon the energy which had characterised their great forefather. It had been said prophetically before the children were born that "the elder shall serve the younger" (Genesis 25: 23), but it also came out that there was an energy in Jacob to make good what had been said of him. "He took his brother by the heel in the womb", verse 3. The very name Jacob means *heel-holder*, or *supplanter*. It intimates that, along with God's election, there is always found an inward energy to displace or dispossess that which according to nature came first. Esau represents what we are by nature as children of Adam, but Jacob represents what we are by God's grace and election. The work of God in souls is the consequence of His election, and He brings it in to dispossess that which actually preceded it in point of time, so that persons take a course which they never would have taken naturally. Israel in turning from Jehovah to idolatry had given up all thought of displacing the elder, the Esau man. This was the root of all the terrible departure and unfaithfulness; they had gone back to the man whom God hated. They no doubt boasted in having Jacob as their father, but they had not Jacob's energy to supplant the "elder". The distinction between the old man and the new could not really be known until the death of Christ had taken place, but we read the typical Scriptures in the light of what is now made known. There should have been energy in God's elect to supplant the man after the flesh, and with that man supplanted by the work of God there would have been no departure, no idolatry. It raises the question with each one of us whether we have energy to claim, as it were, place for the "younger". That which is divinely wrought in us is to supplant all that was there previously. It is only thus that faithfulness can be maintained in the affections.

Then we find that the energy by which Jacob took his brother by the heel developed into energy acting Godward. "In his strength he wrestled with God. Yea, he wrestled with the Angel, and prevailed", verses 3, 4. In the historical account (Genesis 32) we are told first that "a man wrestled with him", but Hosea does not dwell upon that; the point before the Spirit of God here was to bring out the energy that was in Jacob. It was true that he had first to be crippled as to his natural power before he could prevail with God, but he had spiritual strength to wrestle with God. We have read of Paul agonizing, for that is the word used in Colossians 2: 1, and he uses the same word of Epaphras, "who is one of you" in Colossians 4: 12. It conveys the thought of great

energy Godward expended on behalf of His saints. A well-known servant of the Lord used to say sometimes to persons who came to him with questions, Have you ever spent a night in prayer about it? I think most of us have to deplore a lack of energy Godward, and yet this is how the knowledge of God comes in power into the soul. Tears, too, have their place in this. "He wept, and made supplication unto him"; verse 4. How humbling to idolatrous Israel to be reminded of the energy with which their great ancestor had sought the knowledge of Jehovah, and yet they had given Him up for every worthless idol that presented itself to them! Perhaps it is hardly less humbling to some of us. In all this God was saying to Israel, and is now saying to us, that His elect come to light by the energy and purpose of heart with which they seek Him.

"He found him in Bethel, and there he spoke with us, even Jehovah, the God of hosts, — Jehovah is his memorial"; verses 4, 5. Early in his history Jacob had been favoured with an impression of the house of God so that he could give it a name, but it was many years before he came to it in suitability. There were strange gods in his household which had to be put away, and other matters which had to be faced, before God could find him in Bethel in a condition suited to the place. But eventually he was found there, and if Jacob could be found there why should not all Israel be found there? All this is like Jehovah saying to His poor idolatrous people, 'I want you to go over Jacob's history yourselves, and come to what he came to'. Why should any of us allow idols to keep us away from the house of God where He is willing to speak with us, and to bring us into the blessedness of the revelation of Himself in love? We read, "And Jacob called the name of the place where God had talked with him, Bethel"; Genesis 35:15. Is it possible for God to talk with us? Indeed, it is. For the Spirit leading Hosea to say, "there he spoke *with us*", shows that God speaking in His house has all His people in view. But the speaking is *there*, and if we want to hear it we must come there. God's revealed name is His memorial; for us it is the Father revealed in the Son. It is dreadful how lightly people treat the revelation of God, which is truly the greatest blessedness of the creature. What are all the idols in the world worth if we think of them from a moral point of view? But God speaks that we may know what is in His heart and mind for us, the outcome of what He is, and He would have us to know His house as the place where He speaks.

It was "Jehovah, the God of hosts" who spoke in His house, God known in relation to "hosts" blessed by Him. The speaking in the house today takes character from the fact that God has been declared, the Father's name made known, by His beloved Son. If He is made known as Father it implies that He would have men to know Him as acting in supreme favour, and to be set in relationship with Him in that character. The *hosts* now are children and sons;

they are for God's delight as "in Christ Jesus". The place and relationship in which they are set corresponds with the Name which has been made known to them, and all is of infinite grace and love. At Peniel Jacob had said, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me", Genesis 32: 26. And we are told that God "blessed him there", and said that his name should be called Israel, meaning *wrestler*, or *prince of God*. But at Bethel it was definitely said, "And he called his name Israel", Genesis 35: 10. That is, he was there as having a distinguished name, and for us this means that we are there as sons. We must first take up the Jacob exercise of supplanting the fleshly and the natural, and then we shall have energy Godward to secure His blessing, and we shall get a princely name in the house of God, and God will talk with us on that footing, and make His name known to us. All this is viewed here as reached through Jacob's inward exercise and energy in seeking the knowledge of God. It is to stir up our hearts to greater earnestness with regard to God's blessing, and our place in His house as sons. It is not the gospel side of the truth that we receive sonship as God's gift, but the energy on our side that will not rest until we are consciously in the dignity of it in the house of God.

The second reference to Jacob in this chapter brings out another side of the truth. "Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep". I have no doubt that, in saying this, the Spirit had in mind that Jehovah had been serving for a prolonged period to secure Israel in wifely relationship to Himself. The wifely place to which Israel was called has a very prominent place in this book. It had been written that "Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they were in his eyes as single days, because he loved her", Genesis 29: 20. It was a touching expression, in a typical way, of how Jehovah had loved Israel; He had served from the time of Moses onward to win Israel for Himself. His service had been carried on mediately through those by whom He had acted, as we read in the next verse, "And by a prophet Jehovah brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved", Hosea 12: 13. "Preserved" here is the same word as "kept" in verse 12. The whole of God's prophetic service in Israel, from Moses to Malachi in the Old Testament, and by John the baptist and Christ Himself in the New Testament, was to keep the people for Jehovah that they might be in true wifely relation to Him. All the God-sent prophets laboured for this, and yet the service of love was unrequited. Israel had turned out unfaithful and idolatrous, as this very prophet bears witness in his strong expostulations and pleadings. And the Lord Himself had to say, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for naught and in vain", Isaiah 49: 4. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those that are sent unto her, how often would I have gathered thy children as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and ye would not", Matthew 23: 37.

The thought of serving for a wife is not limited to Israel; it is brought over into the relations of Christ with the assembly. How He served when He delivered Himself up for it! And in sanctifying and cleansing it by the washing of water by the word He is serving that He may have His wife in suitability to Himself. He serves by means of the gifts He has given. If Israel for a wife *kept sheep*, it suggests to us that all the shepherd-service of Christ to His own has in view that He may have them as His wife. Whatever He does for us individually will ultimately work out in His having the assembly for the satisfaction of His love, and in responsive affection to Him as His wife. The book of Hosea would raise the question with us whether His blessed service has had the present result of really securing us in wifely affection and devotion. Alas! much of the Christian profession has taken on the character of the *great harlot* spoken of in Revelation 17.

Israel in princely dignity in the house of God corresponds with the thought of sonship as seen in this book; chapter 1: 10; 11: 1. The wife, for whom Israel served, typifies the faithful and responsive affection in a feminine way, the lack of which in the people of God is so deplored in this book. Sonship Godward and wifely faithfulness and affection Christward are two of the most precious and affecting thoughts of divine love. It is intended that they shall both be realised in the assembly during the present period, and that they shall give character to the service of the assembly as convened. But as it was with Israel, so has it been with the assembly: the great thoughts of divine love have been departed from. Hence it has become necessary to return. "Return unto thy God: keep loving-kindness and judgment, and wait on thy God continually", verse 6. The word "return" is both humbling and encouraging; humbling, because it Shows there has been departure; encouraging, because it shows that infinite grace makes it possible to return. This we shall See in a most affecting way in the last chapter of this book.

HOSEA 14

Hosea 14

One striking feature of this book is the way touching words of grace are found in the midst of scathing exposures of the state of the people. This prophet is most severe in his denunciation of their unfaithfulness, but none appeals more sweetly or powerfully to the hearts of God's people in the way of grace. "Yet I am Jehovah thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou hast known no God but me; and there is no saviour beside me. I knew thee in the wilderness, in the land of drought", chapter 13: 4, 5. Notwithstanding the departure and idolatry of His people, Jehovah remained what He was. Their destruction was that they were against Him who was their help. Though long centuries of evil on their part had elapsed, He was still Jehovah their God. And so it is now.

At the beginning of our dispensation the Father was revealed in the Son, redemption was wrought by divine love through the death and blood-shedding of Christ, so that believers might have a wholly new place before God as in Christ, and the Holy Spirit might be given to them, and they might be in the place of sons for God's delight. We know that at the beginning Romans 5 and 8 described the enjoyed portion of saints, not to speak of being risen with Christ as in Colossians, or seated in heavenly places in Him according to Ephesians. And the Lord's commandment in relation to Christian fellowship and divine assembly order is found in 1 Corinthians. If we consider these things we shall be compelled to admit that there has been very great departure. But it is certain that God has not departed from His original thoughts, so that to return to Him involves returning to what is in His mind and heart, and it is open to all His people to do so. We may return not only to individual blessing, but to the truth and order and privilege of the assembly.

"O Israel, return unto Jehovah thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity", verse 1. "Iniquity" is departure from God, and from what is in His mind and heart, but He says, "return". He even puts words in our mouths to make it as easy as possible for us to approach Him in a suitable way. He is as ready to forgive the iniquity of the Christian profession as He was to forgive that of Israel. "Take with you words, and turn to Jehovah; say unto him, Forgive all iniquity, and receive us graciously; so will we render the calves of our lips", verse 2. To turn away from God and become self-indulgent and idolatrous is a terrible thing. It is more dreadful now than it was in Hosea's day, because the light in which God is revealed is so much greater now. But every form of iniquity, whether it be worldliness, or self-righteousness, or trusting the human mind in the things of God, or following the traditions of men, or sectarianism,

can be forgiven. He teaches His people to say, "Forgive *all* iniquity, and receive us graciously". He will most assuredly do so for all who turn to Him. He has but one way of receiving those who turn to Him, whether they be new converts from the world, or old wanderers from His ways, and that is in the acceptance of Christ. He has no second or third class reception for anybody; He receives in the very best style if He receives at all. And He receives in view of there being offering service. The remarkable expression, "the calves of our lips", gives us distinctly the thought of spiritual sacrifices, not literal calves or bullocks now, but appreciation of the preciousness of Christ voiced before God in the praises of our lips. We are received as accepted in Him, and thus liberated to speak of Him to God with great delight. We then renounce everything that has formerly been a snare — the human mind, natural strength, and everything that has been of ourselves (verse 3). Indeed, it is as consciously bereft of human support or counsel that we find mercy in the blessed God.

"I will heal their backsliding", suggests that there is not a scar left. The younger son came into his father's house without a trace of the far country, or of his former history, left upon him. The father covering him with kisses is the New Testament equivalent to "I will love them freely". If He receives us in Christ, and as Christ, how could it be otherwise? "Thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me". John 17: 23.

"I will be as the dew unto Israel", verse 5. This is the manner of God's acting to those whom He receives and loves. He becomes, in the gift of His Spirit, a power of refreshment that causes what is of Himself to spring forth in life, so that "he shall blossom as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon". How wondrous that the beauty of the lily should appear instead of all that had been so offensive in Israel as seen in this book! As we give place to the Spirit He will bring out His beautiful fruit in us. We shall come out as "harmless and simple, irreproachable children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation; among whom ye appear as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life", Philippians 2:15.

Lebanon is mentioned three times in verses 5 - 7; first in regard to stability, then as to smell, and finally, "the renown thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon". Lebanon seems to speak of what is most goodly and desirable; "that goodly mountain, and Lebanon", Deuteronomy 3: 25. "His bearing as Lebanon" (Song of Songs 5: 15), is evidently intended to suggest what is most excellent. The effect of Jehovah's being "as the dew unto Israel" is that Israel comes to the surpassing excellence of what is in His thought for her. The epistle to the Ephesians describes our "Lebanon"; it is well that we should be

“rooted and founded in love” according to that epistle, and that we should take on the smell of that heavenly region. It suggests the fragrant odour, the indescribable influence, that emanates from truly spiritual persons. It is well, too, that we should covet the “renown” of having a joy that is far, far above all the joys of earth.

“His beauty shall be as the olive-tree” intimates that as “a fellow-partaker of the root and of the fatness of the olive-tree” of promise he abides in the goodness of God (see Romans 11), and thus becomes truly spiritual. All is summed up in this, “They shall return and sit under his shadow”, verse 7. The blessed God would bring us to restfulness as under the sense of all that He is for us, all that He delights to be for us, at a time when we need His protecting shadow. It supposes that there are influences which, like a scorching sun, would tend to wither us up. But as under His shadow we do not wither. “They shall revive as corn, and blossom as the vine”. We do not often get within three verses such an accumulation of beautiful and varied symbols, and they are all combined here to bring out what recovering grace can do for the people of God even when they have gone to the utmost limit of departure and unfaithfulness. Israel will yet be the subject of this grace; it is ours at the very end of the church’s sorrowful history to be the subjects of it now.

It is as experiencing this blessed recovering grace that Ephraim says, “What have I to do any more with idols?” How can one go on with idols if God has shown us such grace? And when we take this ground He has pleasure in noticing it. “I answer him, and I will observe him” is God recognising the movement which His own grace has brought about. He always loves to acknowledge, and often in a public way, those who return to Him in a time of general departure. It pleases Him that the recovered soul should be conscious of how he is now approved of God. “I am like a green fir-tree” is Ephraim in the happy consciousness that, as the fruit of recovering grace, he is in the freshness and verdure of life. It is impossible that hearts that have long wandered should be recovered to God without being blessedly conscious of it. There is no self-deception in this; it is God-given joy. And God confirms it by saying, “From me is thy fruit found”. The very essence of the joy of recovery, and of the consciousness of being received by Him and being now fruitful for Him, is the deep sense that it is God Himself who has brought it all about. When this point is reached, deliverance is fully known in the affections. Wifely affections towards Christ are liberated, and the sons of God are happy in the place His love has given them.

“Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? intelligent and he shall know them? For the ways of Jehovah are right, and the just shall walk in

them; but the transgressors shall fall therein". God's ways of recovery at the present time are a joy to those who walk in them, but to those who do not appreciate them they only become a stumbling block.

OBADIAH

Obadiah 1

The book of Obadiah has a very remarkable place as prophesied after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and it stands in remarkable contrast to the prophet Amos. Hosea, Amos and Joel addressed themselves to Israel, and their prophecies are full of solemn warning and unsparing denunciation. The prophet Obadiah has not a single word to say about anything wrong with the people of God. This fact is no indication of their character, but it shows us the character of God.

This particular period was the darkest and most solemn moment in Israel's history. God had cut them off, as we see at the end of Kings. If He had spoken to His people He would have had to speak to them on that line, but in speaking to Edom He can utterly ignore the people and speak of what is in His own heart. When everything has gone from His people God did not depart from one of His thoughts; and in due time He would give effect to those thoughts. This must have been the greatest comfort to those in the captivity. God does not say a word against His people; He only speaks of their distress and afflictions and calamities, and His heart is touched with the deepest feeling for their misery. God takes the opportunity of saying to Edom what He could not possibly have said to Israel.

This is exactly like the history of Balaam. While Moses says of Israel, "Ye rebelled", Balaam says, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen wrong in Israel". It is sometimes good, speaking reverently, when God is driven back upon Himself. God felt it very much that Edom should have taken advantage of His discipline to be cruel to His people. He feels their distress now, and He will carry out His thoughts in due time, one might say, in spite of Israel. Some of the most wonderful things that the Lord said about His people were said to adversaries — to Edomites. Every attack by the enemy brings out what is in God's heart. We have to wait for 2,500 years for the end of the chapter, for His future ways with His people, yet His heart clings to them and yearns over them. Even though they were cast off, they can come behind this to the heart of God. People may go under if they do not get behind to the heart of God. If people are not at peace and happy it is their own fault, to a certain extent anyway, because He has made provision in the gospel. Job could say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him". There is always that sense in a true saint. God had to teach them that they were shut up to Christ. They disobeyed the law and the prophets and there was no recovery; He could

only set them aside as we see in the teaching of Romans 10 and 11. It will be the same for the Gentiles.

Edom in the prophets stands very much for the hatred of what God chooses. People who have had the opportunity of blessing and have despised it are pretty sure to hate what God chooses, so the principle has to disappear absolutely from the sphere of blessing. God's mind is favourable to all, as Esau's blessing, I think, suggests; there was hope on God's side, but Edom would not, for he had nothing in common with God, and if that is so we must disappear. I would not like to be in the place of those who treat the Jews cruelly today, because the Lord feels it just as much today. I pity those who are cruel to the Lord's people, whether earthly or heavenly people.

We see at the end of the chapter that God is going to carry out all that is in His mind and bring His people into possession of all that it is in His mind to give them. The words "shall possess" occur a number of times. This for us is all that is secured in Christ. Zion is sovereign mercy; all is secured in a risen Christ. We have to leave all that we are, for God is never going to take that up again, but He has brought in Christ and what is in Him, and He brings His people into possession of it, too. The way of escape for us is to come to mount Zion. There is a way out from all the pressure and affliction on the people of God — mount Zion. We can get to what God has given us which no enemy can touch. "Ye are come to mount Zion" — it is something outside the world altogether, available to those in the world by going out of it. Our place is heavenly, and the more simple we are in accepting it the better we shall get on. Every feature of the land will be possessed; everything that God has assigned to Israel will be possessed, there will not be a barren spot. We all have Ephesians in our Bibles and are happily familiar with the fact that God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ, that He has quickened us with Christ and has raised us up together and made us sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus; it is looked at as a complete thing, but the mere light of it does not carry us very far. The great need is for us to accept that our position is a heavenly one. God's thought is that the whole assembly goes up to Christ to the same elevation as He is, and that is to be known as a possession by the Spirit which is the earnest of the inheritance — a part *of it* and so able to make it good to us. When we get there the Edomite is left behind; he cannot possibly come there! Whether for Israel or for the assembly it all turns on God bringing in Christ and on the place into which Christ has entered. Edom with natural ability and clever intellect has gone up to a pinnacle, but the saints go up to a very much higher pinnacle! It is very encouraging to see what is in the heart of God.

The "saviours" mentioned in the last verse will literally be so strengthened and raised up that they will be able to have part with Jehovah in defiling with Edom. He will put Edom in the winepress and He will tread them, which speaks of utter destruction. "I have trodden them in mine anger, and trampled them in my fury", Isaiah 63: 3. To put it in one word, the principle of hatred is going to disappear from God's moral universe and the principle of love is going to take its place. "God all in all" means that the element of hatred — which always arises from selfishness — is going to be eliminated. Esau represents a principle that God will not suffer in His universe; it is to go out for God's blessed nature to take its place, His nature is shown in His feelings for Israel's misery. So Paul says of the past, "We were ... hateful and hating one another", and again, "But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost".

This prophecy will have been a great comfort, I believe, to those who were in the captivity, the knowledge that God will carry out His thoughts notwithstanding what was true then, and remained true, of their departed state. As to ourselves, we do not perhaps possess much of the heavenly, but the rapture will put every saint into possession of it eternally; all will enter into it then.

JONAH

Jonah 1; Jonah 2; Jonah 3; Jonah 4

Prophets such as Jonah that have to do with the Gentile world are interesting, showing that though God has ever special regard to His own people, He does not overlook men in general. The thoughts of God's heart come out wonderfully in this book, and the workings of man's heart are exposed, too, even in a true saint and servant of God. We see with Jonah how the thought of his own importance obscured everything. His own reason for not going to Nineveh was not that he was afraid of that city, but that he knew God! He tells us so in the fourth chapter: "And it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed unto Jehovah, and said, Ah, Jehovah, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? ... for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great lovingkindness, and repentest thee of the evil". He knew that he was bidden to cry against Nineveh a message of judgment. Supposing that he cried for forty days and that it worked out that God had mercy on them, what a fool it would make of Jonah! He would rather that all Nineveh perished than that anything should reduce his self-importance — that is man! Though he knew Jehovah in a remarkable way, he was not at all in accord with Jehovah; God's goodness was most distasteful to him; it made him quite angry, and he was angry without making any apology.

It has often been said that Jonah sets forth the state of the Jews, who could not bear that grace should go out to the publicans and sinners. We see this exemplified in the gospel of Luke in the case of the elder son (chapter 15) and in other instances. It was this which necessitated the casting out of the Jews, and their casting out has made room for us to come in, so that we have profited. The Jew should have been the exponent to the Gentile world of the goodness and grace of God. Jonah became a testimony to God's character by God's judgment coming on himself — he had to acknowledge that he was under the judgment of God himself. Paul speaks of the Jews as "forbidding us to speak to the nations that they may be saved", and that "wrath has come upon them to the uttermost". That is the casting out of the Jew, which comes out in the first chapter: "And they took up Jonah and cast him forth into the sea". The Jews should have been a testimony to God Himself, but instead are a testimony of the judgment of God. It is a warning to Gentile nations; all that the Jews are suffering today is a warning to us.

The whole thing in the record is left in suspense. There is nothing to indicate that Jonah is brought into line with God at all; he is still angry and self-

important, and the book closes with that. You wonder what is going to happen next, and that is just the position I Jonah is given to make us interested and look somewhere else for the sequel. God says that His people are going to be an ornament to set forth His character to the Gentiles. Jonah never became that ornament. He had to learn that he was as much dependent on the sovereign mercy of God as Nineveh was. And we cannot afford to be off that ground in our souls, though, like Jonah, we often lose sight of it. Jonah is all right in the whale's belly, in "the belly of Sheol", for no one could be self-important there! But as soon as he comes out, it all rebounds again. No amount of experience will reduce the self-importance of the flesh.

Jonah's experience of being in the belly of the fish three days and three nights is very striking. The Lord appropriates it as a type and sign of His own death, and that sign when it is truly seen by the Jew will transform him. The Lord said, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and a sign shall not be given to it save the sign of Jonas the prophet". All will be based on the experience of which Jonah was a type. The Jew will see that his Messiah had to go under the judgment on his account, when he sees that he will be permanently cured. The flesh is so a part of us that we cannot overcome it until we are brought spiritually into the presence of God. Jonah's prayer indicates the great end to which Jehovah meant to bring him eventually, and which is not seen in this book. The true power of reduction comes by the introduction of Christ and His experiences before the soul.

Jonah speaks of his life being brought up from the pit: "But thou hast brought up my life from the pit, O Jehovah my God", that is, he speaks of a life which typically would find all its springs in God. If all that is of the flesh is brought to nothing in the death of Christ, if we come up out of that, it is to live in a life that has all its sources in God. Jonah reached that in prophecy, but he did not reach it personally in his own experience; and we can reach things in the way of light through ministry that we have not reached experimentally. He spoke of coming up from the pit; when that is spiritually wrought in the soul we live by what we know of God. Jonah is just the contrast. In his utterance he really reaches God: "I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that which I have vowed. Salvation is of Jehovah". He reached it all in the spirit of prophecy, but he did not reach it in his own experience. It is like the psalmists; they reached the things of which they spoke in the spirit of prophecy. They voiced what will yet be true of God's people; they "sought out and searched out; searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them pointed out To whom it was revealed, that not to themselves but to you they ministered those things". We may have things as light which we do not know experimentally. If it had been made good in

Jonah's soul he would not again have showed the same spirit. Paul says, quoting from the Psalms, "I have believed, therefore have I spoken". Jonah in the whale's belly inspired by the Spirit is a very different man from the man in the booth outside Nineveh. This principle of self-importance was even in Paul and had to be kept down by "a thorn for the flesh". So Jonah personally is rather a disappointing man; he had a second opportunity, but he finds it was what he thought at the beginning, he finds the goodness of God. What a man, he thinks, it will make of me, what a poor prophet *I* shall seem to be!

This repentance that was brought about in Nineveh was one of the most wonderful things that God ever did; it was a kind of anticipation of what Isaiah says will be brought about in a day yet to come. Jonah knew the character and disposition of God, but he did not appreciate it one bit — he dreaded it. It shows the patience of God, for it must have grieved Him, that His servant was morally so far from Him in mind and heart, yet He treats him kindly as though he deserved consideration. Probably there were a million people in Nineveh and all of them were brought to repentance from the king downwards, and they, were heathen the day before! Everything was to be affected; man and beast were covered with sackcloth. It involved even the beast. This king seems to have had a sense that the brute creation is involved in man's sin. So God "repented of the evil that he had said he would do unto them, and he did it not". The death of Christ is the righteous ground on which God can act; it does not deny His mind or His heart. Christ died because God *was* favourable to us, in order to supply a righteous ground for mercy. The death of Christ has not changed God's thoughts one lot or tittle, but has provided a basis on which God can show His grace and mercy, and even in Old Testament times we see how merciful and gracious He is.

Now Jonah goes out of the city full of repenting people, and he goes out of it and watches to see what will happen to a city under sentence of judgment. What strikes one in this book is that almost everyone in it is more affected than Jonah himself. Jehovah says, "Doest thou well to be angry?" Is it not wonderful to think of the blessed God suggesting to Jonah that he should consider whether he was really doing well to be angry? It is very touching that the gourd should be given to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his trouble when he had not a single thought in correspondence with God. It was something for himself, and he liked that, and he was more touched about the gourd than he was about Nineveh. It is difficult to think of a true servant of God getting so far away from Him.

The second chapter gives us one of the very affecting delineations by the Spirit of what Christ went through. "All thy breakers and thy billows are gone

over me The deep was round about me I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the bars of the earth closed upon me for ever". He went to the extremest place — to the heart of the earth, that was something more than death, death was not the limit to which Christ went. The sentence on Adam involved burial as well as death. The Lord went to the point of burial, so that He was in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. When Israel sees that, it will change everything for them. When they see that their Messiah has gone through all that for them, through death and burial, it will effectively cure them of all their self-important hatred of grace. The end of it is the temple, and thanksgiving, and the vow is paid; it ends really in a spirit of worship. They will have to learn that instead of being better they are worse than the Gentile; they will have to come to it that they have rejected and murdered their Messiah. When God forgives them it will remain true that they will never forgive themselves. "And I will pour out upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look on me whom they pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for an only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn", Zechariah 12: 10.

This whole book is the history of one to whom God had disclosed Himself but who turned out to be unfaithful and ungracious. And that is the history of Israel really; they were not prepared to move with Jehovah to the Gentile. God was proposing great enlargement to His servant; if God glorified Himself in His grace, that would be making much of His servant. So he had to be degraded in the eyes of the Gentile, and the Gentile *did*

come in. It was a solemn sign to the Jews that they were just like Jonah. Jonah did not continue in the grace and goodness of God, and his behaviour was really a false testimony to God.

The second chapter discloses Jonah's secret history with God. It is in verse form, really in the nature of a psalm. The public position today is that the Jew is cast out, and that is a public witness to God; all the Gentiles know it. But that is not the end of it. These are really the exercises of the ungracious and unfaithful nation that finds itself under the judgment of God, exercises that will be those of Israel in a coming day. The testimony of His surpassing grace is connected with the assembly. The Jews are an object-lesson for us of God's government, that is, they illustrate to us His discrimination between good and evil and His dealing with each as it deserves. All is in view of carrying out His purposes, so that His governmental ways with Israel will result in their coming into blessing. These are the secret exercises God will bring the remnant through in order that ultimately He may bring them into blessing. Now Jonah

passes through this personally. That is the secret exercise; the public matter ends with his being thrown into the sea. So Israel will have these severe exercises under God's government. This is the exercise of those who fear God in the time of Jacob's trouble; they come into Isaiah 53 eventually. These experiences are connected with the temple. "Thy holy temple" is twice referred to. It is an intimation that they will get the sense, notwithstanding the sentence of government, in the secret of God's presence of something that can be counted upon: God's ways with Israel are intended to be instruction to us; there is not much of God's government given in the New Testament, because we have it in the Old.

Jonah is a witness sent of God; if such a man is unfaithful and ungracious, all God's waves and billows will roll over him; there is no doubt about it. We ought to pay great attention to God's ways with Israel, not only to His ways in the past but in the future, for if we do not do so we shall be off the line. Israel needs to be perfected in the ways of God's government if they are to be head of the nations. It is in that way that the prophets are so valuable to us. We in this dispensation shall never have quite the same exercise that Jonah had, but we do not need to have the exercise to get the good of it. We can learn through the experiences of others.

Psalm 42, of the sons of Korah, is a kindred exercise to this. The wonderful thing is that Israel's Messiah has entered into it all and has taken it up in the presence of God. He has taken up their condition as under the anger of God and He has answered perfectly to God on that score, and more. He has made atonement of them so that they are forgiven. The remnant will learn that He has felt it all far more deeply than ever they will; they will never fully do so, I believe. He felt it according to the greatness of His own Person. Atonement was made on the cross, whereas in the garden the Lord was feeling in His own spirit what it was right for Israel to feel — which they did not, but He did.

Psalm 22 is purely prophetic of Christ and was *never* entered into by any other. There are other Psalms mostly speaking of suffering and affliction, that are the product of the Spirit of Christ in the remnant; they own it to be God's dealings with them, like Jonah and God's waves and billows. It is different with us; our position with God is the fruit of redemption as "perfected for ever", as "accepted in the Beloved". It is not easy for us to enter into the exercises of a people with no knowledge of redemption, a people who do not know Christ, who have not the Spirit, and who are all under law. "Their mercy" — we shall see that they have it. None of us will be under God's waves and billows for we are accepted in the Beloved permanently. We never knew, and never can know, God's punitive judgment. The gospel brings with it the knowledge of the

righteousness of God in justifying us and setting us before His face in Christ. It is very different from the experience of the Jew, who does not know Christ and is under law.

In the course of his prayer Jonah finds relief, before he comes out of the whale's belly: "Thou hast brought up my life from the pit, O Jehovah my God". He gets a sense, in spite of intense distress under God's displeasure, that there is that in Jehovah that can be counted upon, and that is how it always is with faith. He has really reached Jehovah and Jehovah's thoughts as established in the temple; that is, it suggests Christ to us and all God's precious thoughts hidden there in Christ for a poor oppressed people under the displeasure of God. So with the remnant there will come a moment when there is a secret presentation of Christ to their hearts and then the severity of their distress will be over. The first lamentation of Jeremiah answers very much to Jonah's prayer; when that is gone through we can move on to the exercises of the Song of Solomon, and then on to Psalm 45. The prince's daughter in Lamentations goes through unspeakable distress and she comes out as the spouse in the Song, and eventually reaches the place of honour along with the King.

"I will pay that I have vowed", Jonah says. I suppose, if we take him as representing Israel, they will be brought to the point of doing all that they said they would do: "All that Jehovah has said will we do". They will come under the hand of the Mediator; it is He who writes the law upon their hearts. Christ is only brought in in a very veiled way here in the temple, and so I suppose it will be for them light of that obscure character, not very bright at first. It makes us thankful that we live in a very different dispensation and take up our exercises on a very different ground. We learn from studying God's ways with Israel. The assembly's place is the greatest and best, and from our great elevation we can descend to contemplate His doings with others. We shall never have God's waves and billows, but there are those who will; we see that in the Psalms. We have our own knowledge of Christ, which is far deeper than theirs, and that is according to the heavenly position and heavenly blessing. It is remarkable that in John's gospel there is no agony in the garden; we are in another region, the region of God being glorified in the Son. Matthew and Mark speak of the agony in the garden; all that is on the side of God's government. Israel will not enter into what John presents. The corrective exercises of other families increase our knowledge of God, and we get a knowledge of the extreme holiness of God's government. In Revelation God shows the temple and the ark of the covenant, that is, He has His own secret. Jonah sees there is a temple, that is, that there is something outside the sphere of His government where God has His own secret thoughts that He is

going to preserve. The assembly is in the secret of Israel's past and future, and has her own secret portion. God's government is learnt in Israel. At the end of chapter 2 of Ephesians we come down from the heavenly position to be a habitation of God on the earth. He is teaching the angels His all-various wisdom in the assembly so that He is making one family dependent on another. It is just like Him! The result from every exercise that we go through is that God is magnified. So it is with the discipline of the saints; we are not under His severe fury, but we have His discipline. Is not that a warning that under the discipline of God we may turn to some form of idolatry for relief? If we do, we forsake our own mercy! Out of the discipline we should come up to the assembly charged to the top with God's praise, and God gets all that He looks for, the responsive praise of His saints.

MICAH 1 - THE HEIR

Micah 1

It is noticeable in this chapter that Jehovah's judgments are said to come upon all peoples "for the transgression of Jacob ... and for the sins of the house of Israel", verse 5. If Israel had been faithful, the nations would have been blessed through them, but on account of their unfaithfulness judgment came upon the nations and Israel had to suffer also. For the judgment came even unto Judah and reached to Jerusalem, verse 9. It is probably so to day. The presence here of the assembly should have brought blessing near to men, but if the assembly is unfaithful she comes under judgment herself, and the nations suffer in consequence.

But while all this is in view the Spirit of God speaks in a blessed way of Christ as the Heir. "I will yet bring unto thee an heir, O inhabitress of Mareshah (meaning *possession* or *inheritance*); the glory of Israel shall come even unto Adullam", verse 15. There is One who has the sure right of possession: whatever may happen, this stands firm. The blessing of Israel and the blessing of the assembly is all secured by Christ being the Heir. Indeed, one of the most striking testimonies to the greatness of His Person lies in the fact that He is "established heir of all things", Hebrews 1: 2. He will yet take up "all things" and hold them for God on the ground of redemption. But the passage now before us has particular reference to the blessings of Israel. What a comfort it will be for the remnant of Israel, when they feel that they have forfeited all right to Jehovah's promises, to have an Heir brought to them who can take up and hold for them all that they have lost! Christ is rightful Heir to all the promises, not only by personal right but by redemption right. The husbandmen said, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and possess his inheritance", Matthew 21: 38. But their killing Him in their wickedness became the occasion in the wondrous wisdom of God for Him to redeem the inheritance. He has exercised the right of redemption so that all that had been lost through sin is brought back in Him. He is rightful Heir of all Israel had forfeited; Heir of all the promises. He is the Seed to whom the promises were made (Galatians 3: 19); in the mind of God there was no thought of anyone else being able to inherit them. When Israel takes up his inheritance it will be as seeing that Christ alone is entitled to it. And it is in Him that saints of the assembly have obtained an inheritance; that is, in Him as the Heir. It is as being of Christ that we are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise; Galatians 3: 29. What Christ is entitled to He shares with His joint-heirs.

This has to be taken up in remnant conditions now, for the assembly as a whole, the whole professing body, has quite departed from any true sense of it. Hence the glory comes "even unto Adullam". Adullam means *retreat*; it suggests that Christ as Heir will be found in the place of reproach and rejection, like David in the cave, but it is He who is "the glory of Israel". When we see that we have nothing at all to glory in but Christ, it makes us very happy to be in Adullam. No one can touch our glory. If people speak against us and reproach us we are sorry for them, but they cannot touch our glory. Knowing this makes saints content to be in the place of reproach. Man wants some recognition, and is unhappy if he does not get it, but if Christ is all my glory I cannot be upset by what people think or say of me. Those in Adullam get the glory. The spiritual ministry of Christ today is not found in connection with what is great or popular in the eyes of men. Its very nature makes it impossible that it should be known there. But it is well worth while to leave all that is humanly pretentious in order to get it.

MICAH 2 - DIVINE PRINCIPLES OF GATHERING

Micah 2

"Arise ye, and depart; for this is not the resting-place, because of defilement that bringeth destruction, even a grievous destruction", verse 10. We have often been reminded that separation from evil is God's principle of unity. There can be no resting-place for persons with holy desires, and a holy constitution, where there is defilement, because such will be convinced that defilement must bring destruction. The only safe thing is to depart from it. One special instruction for the last days is, "Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity", 2 Timothy 2:19. This principle is of universal application; all saints can act upon it, and are under obligation to do so. Indeed, all divine principles are matters of obligation; they are in no wise optional,

because God ever has all His people in view. So we read in verse 12, "I will surely assemble, O Jacob, the whole of thee". There is nothing sectional in the mind of God, or in the assembling ways of God. He had "the whole of thee" ever before Him. The direct tendency of every part of the truth is to lead to assembling. The Lord's commandment to His own to love one another implies that they would be drawn together in face of the hatred of the world. In the very nature of things they would assemble as opportunity occurred. As having one Lord, and holding one Head, and being indwelt by one Spirit, and forming one body, they have the most powerful spiritual motives for assembling together. But these great realities are evidently true for all saints; they take in "the whole of thee" from the divine point of view, however little they may have been understood from our side.

Jacob represents God's people viewed on the responsible side, so that the assembling of Jacob suggests that God will cause the exercise of assembling in a divine way, and according to divine order, to be raised amongst His people in view of it being worked out in a practical way. All saints would admit the desirability of this, but it is regarded by many as impracticable. But *why* should all men's thoughts be practicable and God's thoughts impracticable? This is an assumption which faith could not accept.

In *assembling* His people God has the positive side of their blessing before Him. He would have His saints to take up together their relations with Him according to His own thoughts of grace and love. *Gathering* the remnant of Israel is not quite the same thought; it views them as having been scattered. "That he should also gather together into one the children of God who were scattered abroad", John 11: 52. Gathering has reference to a previous

scattering, but assembling is to the positive blessedness of our divine relations. Indeed, there are three thoughts in this verse 12 of chapter 2; assembling, gathering, and putting together. The latter term is used of God's people in the character of a flock of sheep, "in the midst of their pastures". It is an important feature of God's way that He puts His people together to feed. One of His first thoughts is that we should all be satisfied by feeding on the same spiritual food. Later in this book we learn wonderful things about the Shepherd who leads and feeds His flock, but here it is seen to be God's work to put the flock together in the midst of their pastures. The fact that there are pastures is in itself a power of gathering; many thousands of saints have proved this; they would never have been where they are if the food supply had not attracted them. And this is not a contracted or limited idea, for we read, "They shall make great noise by reason of the multitude of men". Why should not a multitude enjoy the pastures which are available today? Perhaps we ought to make more noise about what is available. It may be that many have not heard how rich the pastures are. Perhaps a few words, or a little book handed on, might swell the volume of *noise*!

Isaiah speaks of "a very small remnant", but this contemporary Micah speaks of a "multitude of men". We need to keep both in mind. "A very small remnant" stands in contrast with the whole corrupt profession, but "a multitude of men" shows the largeness of God's thought for all true saints. He has in mind that they should be put together in the rich pastures which He has provided. The ministry of His word is for all whose hearts value it. But they will have to come out of associations which God cannot own if they wish to be put *together* in divine pasturage.

A way out has been made for them. "One that breaketh through is gone up before them", verse 13. Jehovah will break through every barrier that hinders His remnant from following Him in a future day, and He has done so in this day. It was a breaking through of everything conventional when the Lord led many of His saints to see that they need not remain identified with national systems, or with anything sectarian. He was making a way for the true assembling and gathering and putting together of His own. It needed faith to break forth from all that had the sanction of long usage just as it needed faith to break forth from Judaism at the beginning of our period. But there were those of whom it could be said, "They have broken forth, and have passed on to the gate, and are gone out by it". Such language reminds us of Hebrews 13: 12 - 14: "wherefore also Jesus, that he might sanctify the people by his own blood, suffered without the gate: therefore let us go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach: for we have not here an abiding city, but we seek the coming one".

It was Jesus Himself who put forth His sheep from the Jewish fold, and went before them. It meant going into the place of reproach in the eyes of all who wished to maintain a traditional position, but it was in reality a most dignified going forth. There could be nothing more glorious than what is written here: "Their king passeth on before them, and Jehovah at the head of them".

There will be a wonderful temple in Jerusalem at the time of which this scripture speaks prophetically. It is called in Scripture "the temple of God", for it is so responsibly, but Antichrist will sit in it! 2 Thessalonians 2: 4. Every barrier that Satan can raise in that day will be set up to keep the faithful remnant in his own system of things. But the barriers will be broken down, and their King and Jehovah, both known in one divine Person, will be their Leader out of all that has become so evil. Jerusalem as full of unrighteousness must be left: they will flee out of it when they see the abomination that makes desolate standing in a holy place. Can we suppose that God will lead His remnant out of what is evil in holy places then, and leave them in association with what is evil in His sight today? Surely not! If any remain in what is Babylonish today it is because they disregard His call and leading.

The teaching of this chapter is as important for us today as it will be for the remnant of Israel in a coming day.

MICAH 4 - THE HOUSE AND THE KINGDOM

Micah 4

When Jehovah leads the remnant of Israel out of evil associations and assembles them in relation to Himself, as we have seen in chapter 2, His intention will be to establish His house as the place of divine teaching, and to set up His kingdom over His people so that, in result, He may give them the kingdom and dominion. These are the great subjects which chapter 4 brings before us.

The *elevation* of Jehovah's house is very strikingly presented in the opening verses of the chapter. We read of "the mountain", "the top of the mountains", "lifted up above the hills". "And many nations shall go and say, Come, and let us go up". Men will become sensible "in the end of days" that God's house is very elevated, but that it is attractive, and that it is worth while to go up to it. Indeed, it is said that "the peoples shall flow unto it", which seems to indicate a readiness to move under a law of attraction which draws upward. The natural law of gravitation is reversed, and this is what always happens when grace becomes operative in the souls of men. The tendency of everything here is downward, for it is a fallen world, but when God moves in "the peoples" they will desire to *flow* up to what is of Him, and will realise that it is to be found in His house. This is true, in the principle of it, today.

It is well that we should entertain the thought that God has a house here where He dwells in grace and holiness. In the Lord His saints "are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit;" Ephesians 2: 22. And Paul wrote to Timothy that he might know "how one ought to conduct oneself in God's house, which is the assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth", 1 Timothy 3:15. That house exists that what is of God may be set forth in it as an attraction to men who have desire for something which is far above the level of the world or of the natural man. What an exercise it is that what is set forth shall be a true presentation of God in His blessed character of a Saviour God who will have all men to be saved! Men, long darkened and held in bondage by the god of this world, need *the truth* to set them free, and God's house is "the pillar and base" of it. Hence it is impossible to think of any form of error being set forth, or tolerated, in that which has the true character of God's house. Everything there must, indeed, have a very elevated character, for nothing could be suitable there which is unworthy of the One whose house it is.

None of us learn all at once what is suitable for God's house. Even Timothy needed instruction as to it, and the sense how much we need this should

make us appreciate the fact that God's house is the place of divine teaching. This is the first feature of the house, as seen in Micah 4; "He will teach us of his ways", verse 2. We come there to learn, and we should never lay aside this attitude of mind. It would maintain freshness in our souls, and in our intercourse with one another, and in the meetings. Those learning from God in His house will always have something to communicate, and in this way light as to God's mind will be diffused, and this in view of there being increased ability to walk in His paths. This leads to extended testimony.

"For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and Jehovah's word from Jerusalem". The assembly being "the pillar and base of the truth" shows that God has in mind to set forth the truth in a company of persons. But it is certain that the assembly can only be the *pillar* of the truth, the public witness of it here, as holding it in love. And being the *base* of the truth suggests that the assembly supports the truth by being in practical accord with it. So that the *law* and the *word* go forth from a suitable centre. We all realise how the assembly has failed in public witness to this, and we do not exempt ourselves from having part in that failure. But it is our privilege, notwithstanding admitted failure, to cherish what is in the mind of God, and to refuse to adopt any lower standards. The chapter we are reading will show us how God considers in grace for those who have *halted* or *limped*. We can all own that we have done so, more or less, so that we are cast upon grace and mercy all the time, but let us not give up the divine thought. There is a provision of grace to remedy defects if they are felt and owned. If we honestly accept the obligation which rests upon us as being of the house of God, His grace will come in to help us and give us strength. This comes out in a touching way in verses 6 and 7.

"In that day, saith Jehovah, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted; and I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast off a strong nation". It is very touching to see that, after speaking of millennial peace and fruitfulness, Jehovah returns to the thought of His gracious consideration for His feeble and afflicted people. This is to remind us that all that is good, or that will ever be good, in human beings is the fruit of sovereign mercy. As limping and afflicted, and even cast far off in the righteous government of God, His people will be made a remnant and a strong nation. We have often been told that a remnant is not a fag-end, but a piece which has the features of the original. It is a great honour from God, and a wondrous mercy, to be amongst those who are true the remnant today, having some of the original features of the truth as set forth in the Scriptures, particularly in the ministry of the apostles Paul and John. Though found limping and afflicted the remnant of Israel will be strengthened by grace under the new covenant so as to become a nucleus of

blessing for the whole nation. If Philadelphian features are found anywhere today they are a nucleus of blessing for the whole assembly. Something is secured which has the original features of the assembly.

We are painfully aware of the fact that the nations have not yet forged their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-knives, but we are glad to know that this will come to pass "in the end of days". And in the meantime it is possible to have peace and fruitfulness in a spiritual sense.

When the people are brought to say, "But we will walk in the name of Jehovah our God for ever and ever", conditions are secured for His kingdom. Therefore it can be said, "And Jehovah shall reign over them in mount Zion, from henceforth even for ever", verse 7. The kingdom requires a subject people from whom all elements of lawlessness have been purged. Jehovah will not stop short in His dealings with Israel until He has reached this end by giving them the Spirit of Christ. They will then delight in the law of Jehovah as having it written in their hearts. As brought under the moral sway of God the saints of the assembly become His kingdom. The Lord makes His loved and washed ones "a kingdom" (Revelation 1: 6); in this aspect they are reigned over so that they may know the blessedness of subjection to infinite love. This qualifies them for the wondrous place of reigning with Christ; they will have the kingdom along with Him. And this is what the daughter of Zion and the daughter of Jerusalem will have in their God-given domain. "And thou, O tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, yea, the first dominion shall come, the kingdom to the daughter of Jerusalem", verse 8. All that was set forth typically in the reigns of David and Solomon will come to the daughter of Zion and Jerusalem as having her part along with the King according to Psalm 45. Saints of the assembly, and others also, will reign with Christ; the kingdom comes to them along with Him.

But the kingdom will not come to the daughter of Zion until she has passed through great travail. She had to go captive to Babylon (verse 10), and we find that many nations will assemble against her (verse 11), but her travail will result eventually in her bringing forth a seed for blessing in the earth. "The remnant of her seed" is spoken of in Revelation 12:17, as the subject of the dragon's enmity. But Jehovah will give her the dominion and the kingdom, and she will beat her enemies in pieces; verse 13. Saints of the assembly will have the dominion and the kingdom in a higher and better way as reigning with Christ above. But the travail precedes the dominion, it is the time of suffering and endurance now; but reigning together with Christ is the sure portion of those who suffer for or with Him now.

MICAH 5 - THE GREATNESS OF THE SHEPHERD AND HIS SERVICE

Micah 5

Isaiah said about the same time that Micah prophesied, "And a throne shall be established in mercy: and in the tent of David there shall sit upon it, in truth, one judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness", Isaiah 16: 5. And again, "For Jehovah is our judge, Jehovah our lawgiver, Jehovah our king: he will save us", Isaiah 33: 22. The thought of salvation is thus clearly connected with the judge, as also in Judges 2:16, 18. I believe it is in this sense that Christ is said to be "the judge of Israel". If they had repented He would have secured to them blessing in righteousness. He would have taken up their cause on God's behalf, and administered righteous grace to them. But they refused Him in this blessed character. "They shall smite the judge of Israel upon the cheek", Micah 5: 1. This was really the rejection of Jehovah's salvation by His people; and perhaps it is significant that Gentiles had part in this (Matthew 27: 30), as intimating that the Gentiles would follow Israel's lead in this dreadful and contemptuous refusal of God's delivering power and grace in Christ.

But the Spirit of God brings in at this point the divine greatness of the One who should come forth out of Bethlehem Ephratah, David's city. He was, in that character, David's Offspring, but He was also the Root of David, for His goings forth were from of old, from the days of eternity. He is the eternal God, but He came forth to rule His people as a Shepherd. He came in to take personal charge of the flock, and the remnant of Jacob became His flock, as we know from John 10. He had had to give up Israel, according to Micah 5: 3, "until the time when she which travaileth shall have brought forth: and the residue of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel". But this did not suspend His shepherd service. That service went on amongst the sheep who were in the Jewish fold, and it has extended now to the "other sheep" who were not of that fold, but whom He has brought that there might be "one flock, one shepherd".

"And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of Jehovah, in the majesty of the name of Jehovah his God", verse 4. The Lord's position and service amongst His own, when He was here, was unique, and their position and privilege was also unique. There will never be anything like it again. For He was not only Israel's Messiah, in the most blessed relation as Man to Jehovah, and bringing all that amongst His own so as to cause them, as having faith in Him, to know its blessedness, but He was personally the Son of

the Father, and His being here brought the Father's name here, and made that name available for them. He was amongst them as the revelation of the Father, making known the Father's name, and giving them to understand that they were to know God as Father. Our minds are so familiar with the thought that we, perhaps, hardly conceive what it was to the disciples to hear Him say, "your Father", "thy Father", "that ye may be sons of your Father". No Old Testament saint had ever know God by that name, but the presence of the beloved Son with His own brought that name to them, and He kept them in it. What could only be the portion of men through redemption, and through having the gift of the Spirit, was brought hear to men so that in nearness to Him they could have something of the joy of it anticipatively, though not yet having the Spirit. This explains how the Lord could say so much, particularly in John's gospel, that was really anticipative of the full result of His being glorified. As it has been said, the Lord did much for them which was afterwards the work of the Spirit. He led and fed His flock not only in the majesty of the name of Jehovah His God, but in the added blessedness of His Father's name.

And His sheep were capable of appreciating their Shepherd and His feeding. For they had their origin in the Father, as He says in John 17:6, "They were thine, and thou gavest them me", They were "his own sheep" because the Father had given them to Him (John 10: 29), and He lays His life down for them. He feeds them in a manner which is wholly divine, but which harmonises perfectly with all the requirements of their nature. Every one of the sheep is conscious of the need of pasture; the fact that the Lord says, "shall find pasture" implies that they have been looking for it. They have a different nature from those who are not the Lord's sheep, as He said to some, "Ye do not believe, for ye are not of my sheep, as I told you", John 10: 26. Through the sovereign working of the Father the sheep of Christ are inwardly different from all others. They answer to Christ as the disciples did when He called them. They hear His voice and know it; they know not the voice of strangers, but flee from them. Their requirements are such that only the personal service of a divine Shepherd can supply them.

It is wondrous to think that the majesty and blessedness of the name of His God and Father give character to His feeding His flock. We should perhaps hardly have thought of bringing that into His Shepherd service, but Micah 5: 4 suggests it. We need not be surprised that it is so when we remember that He said, "I know those that are mine, and am known of those that are mine, as the Father knows me, and I know the Father", John 10: 14, 15. He feeds His flock in the blessedness of His Father's name so that they may know the love of the Father to His Son, and know that they are loved in Him. We have to

grow up to it by His feeding: none other than Himself could make it known to us "For all things which I have heard of my Father I have made known to you". "All things that the Father has are mine; on account of this I have said that he (the Comforter) receives of mine and shall announce it to you". "The words which thou hast given me I have given them, and they have received them, and have known truly that I came out from thee, and have believed that thou sentest me". These words show how the Son identifies His own with Himself, and He feeds them by His words into the blessedness which He knows so well.

What a comfort that Micah 5: 4 adds, "and they shall abide!" *Abide* is a characteristic word of John's writings, occurring about 40 times in his gospel and about 20 times in his first epistle. The sheep are brought into what is permanent. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them life eternal, and they shall never perish, and no one shall seize them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one can seize out of the hand of my Father. I and the Father are one", John 10: 27 - 30. Those whom He feeds have the abiding consciousness of this; their blessedness is in Christ and in the Father's love.

"For now shall he be great even unto the ends of the earth". This verse extends the greatness of Christ far beyond Israel. At the present time it links with, "And I have other sheep which are not of this fold: those also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one flock, one shepherd", John 10:16.

"And this man shall be Peace", verse 5. It is not here that He makes peace, or gives peace, but He Himself is peace. The force of this seems to be that, *before* the enemies are dealt with, Christ Himself becomes peace to those who know Him. Wherever He comes peace comes; it was so in John 20. There is not an anxious thought or a fear in the heart of Christ, and He says, "These things have I spoken to you that in me ye might have peace". And this was after telling them that those who killed them would think to render service to God! Peace is as much for us in Christ as righteousness or salvation. Before the prophet speaks of the Assyrian coming he gives this blessed word, "and this man shall be peace". And it is what He is at this very moment; it is there in Him for all His own. In the scripture before us it is given to qualify the flock to meet the Assyrian, who in the prophets is the last enemy to come up against Jerusalem, Daniel's "king of the north". I believe that Assyria as a type represents the violence of men against God and His Anointed; Babylon represents corrupting influences. So the two original characters of evil, violence and corruption, will be headed up in Babylon and Assyria. Babylon will be destroyed before Assyria. There can be no doubt that violence will specially

mark the closing period of this age. The beast makes war with the saints and overcomes them; Revelation 13:7. At the present time the Assyrian represents what is definitely opposed to God and to His people, which would take an active form if not restrained by God. But in the meantime, before God deals with it in judgment He meets it in a remarkable way.

"Then shall we raise against him seven shepherds, and eight princes of men", verse 5. This is a very beautiful touch. The enemy is to be met by shepherds and princes; literally, *anointed ones*. That is, he is definitely in this book as the Shepherd. "Princes of men" are those who can move in the dignity of the anointing. Such are God's great power against the Assyrian. It is in keeping with God's design, made known elsewhere, to still the enemy and the avenger by the praises of babes and sucklings, Psalm 8. God meets the violence of men by the Spirit of Christ; let us ever remember this.

Then the remnant of Jacob gets an extended mission as dew from Jehovah, as showers upon the grass; verse 7. They will go out to bring the refreshment of what Jehovah is to many peoples. It is a gentle influence, corresponding in character with the personal service of Christ, but carried on by His Jewish brethren far and wide in the Gentile world. And it is to be noticed that it is the persons themselves who are the dew and the showers. They are personally permeated with what they have been fed upon by their Shepherd, so that wherever they go there is dew and rain. It is not what they say, but what they are, which brings the divine refreshing. It does not wait for some change in man, or in the sons of men. It is just itself, and it falls with subduing power wherever it goes. And this is the place and abiding service of the saints today; we may not have gift or great human ability of any kind, but we can be true to what we are as having the Spirit of Christ. And people will be tested by how they regard it, just as the presence of Christ's brethren will test all the nations in a coming day; Matthew 25: 31 - 46.

There is another and a very solemn side. The dew of grace rejected becomes a lion; verses 8 and 9. The remnant of Jacob will have this character also. They will destroy their enemies, as many scriptures show. This is because they can only have their promised portion on earth by the destruction of those opposed to them. Hence they pray for this in various Psalms, which is sometimes a difficulty to those who do not understand the difference between an earthly people and those called to heavenly blessing. The partakers of the heavenly calling know that they are to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, to be for ever with Him. But the portion of an earthly people can only be secured to them by their enemies being destroyed. *Our* enemies are spiritual enemies, and they have to be destroyed by spiritual power and spiritual

weapons. Human or natural strength is of no avail in this conflict, nor, indeed, will it be in Israel's battles. They will have to prevail by divine power alone. Verses 10 - 14 of our chapter show that God will not allow His people to use what is merely natural power in His conflicts.

MICAH 6 - GOD'S GRACE AND FAITHFULNESS

Micah 6

It is humbling and distressing to think that what God does for His people should become the occasion of His having a controversy with them. There is something very touching in the divine pleading of this chapter, because Jehovah does not take the ground that His people had behaved badly to Him, but He challenges them to testify against Him if they had any cause of complaint. "O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me". It is as much as to say, 'If you have any complaint against Me, let Me know what it is'. The matter in controversy here is whether there had been any wrong-doing on Jehovah's part towards His people. If things are not satisfactory in our relations with God He is prepared to take this ground with us. It is extraordinary ground for *God* to take with His poor creatures, but in His grace He does take it. He assumes that His people would not turn away from Him unless they had some cause of complaint. He would like to know what it is!

He condescends to go over all His ways with them, from Egypt to the end of the wilderness, to remind them of what He had done for them, and that He had omitted nothing that was favourable to them. "For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of bondage", verse 4. It would settle a thousand questions that arise if we always kept in mind that we are a redeemed people. On the ground of the death of Christ God has taken us for Himself in a wonderful way, because we must remember that there could not possibly be any flaw or defect in the result of redemption; it must be complete and according to God. The saints are on this blessed ground, "knowing that ye have been redeemed, not by corruptible things as silver or gold ... but by precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, the blood of Christ", 1 Peter 1: 18, 19. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins", Colossians 1:14. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offences, according to the riches of his grace", Ephesians 1:7. When there was utter ruin on our side God moved to secure His own end, to have us for Himself as a redeemed people. The full result of redemption will be that God's elect will be found eternally in sonship with glorified bodies. But in the type before us Israel was redeemed "out of the house of bondage". Redemption, known in its true power and effect, takes God's people out of the world, frees them from the bondage of sin and Satan, and puts them in the acceptance of Christ risen from among the dead. God's redeemed ones are in Christ and have the Spirit. "Christ has redeemed us out of the curse of the law, having become a curse

for us ... that the blessing of Abraham might come to the nations in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith", Galatians 3: 13, 14. The saints in Christ can be addressed in a wonderful way. For example, "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who has been made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and holiness, and redemption", 1 Corinthians 1:30. "But ye have been washed, but ye have been sanctified, but ye have been justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God", 1 Corinthians 6: 11. "But when the kindness and love to man of our Saviour God appeared, not on the principle of works which have been done in righteousness which we had done, but according to his own mercy he saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, which he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that, having been justified by his grace, we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life", Titus 3: 4 - 7.

Jehovah, having redeemed His people, provided leadership for them. "And I sent before thee Moses, Aaron and Miriam". Moses as the mediator was in such nearness to God that he could bring to the people all that God was pleased to make known of Himself at that time, and he could also bring out in great detail God's pleasure in regard to the walk and ordering of His people. The dispensation was furnished on the divine side with all that was necessary to give a true lead to the people as to their walk before God. How much more is this true today, for the fulness of grace and truth has come out in God's beloved Son, and the mind of God is fully made known as to how He would have those to walk who have received His grace and truth! The Lord Jesus is the true Moses, and every Christian would admit that if we followed His lead we should move in accord with the mind of God.

Then Aaron represents priestly leadership, and this suggests a provision for infirmity on the side of the people. Every Israelite ought to have felt that Aaron could be sympathetic with him in his weakness, but that Aaron also represented him in the most blessed way in the presence of God, according to God's thoughts of His people as they were known in the holy place. Aaron was a reminder to the people that they needed a priest on account of their weakness, but that God had provided a priest who could represent them before Him according to the fulness of His own thoughts, and thus apart from the infirmity which was in themselves. So that Aaron's leadership was in relation to approach to God; and Christ is our Leader in this priestly way. He is a sympathetic Priest in regard to our actual condition in weakness here, but we are never disconnected in His heart from what we are in the full height of our calling. He is before the face of God for us in heaven itself, and

In Him we stand, a heavenly band,
Where He Himself is gone. (12:2)

What leadership there is in this to lead us to draw nigh to God For the nearer we get to our blessed Priest the more we realise how wonderful is our place with God. The leading is divinely perfect, though gracious movements in our hearts are needed in order that we may follow it.

Such movements are seen, typically, in Miriam. She represents what is feminine in character; that is, the subjective or responsive side of our relations with God. "And Miriam answered them, Sing to Jehovah, for he is highly exalted: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea", Exodus 15: 21. There is a leadership of this kind; it is found in the ability which the people of God have, through grace, to take up and respond to the great actings of God for them. It is set forth in all true Christian hymns, and in every spiritual utterance of praise in the assembly. We should pay attention to all divine leading of this kind. It is an essential part of what God has provided for us.

Then, in this retrospect of Jehovah's ways with His people, He passes on to the end of the wilderness. "My people remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him, from Shittim unto Gilgal, that ye may know the righteousness of Jehovah", verse 5. There is great teaching in the fact that Balaam answered Balak at the end of the wilderness journey, because it showed that Jehovah had the last word. We know what their history had been, but having beheld the serpent of brass, and come to the well and sung to it, they could be viewed as God's elect, and His righteousness could be known in their blessing in spite of all that had come out in themselves. There was one who consulted to curse them, but Jehovah provided an answer by speaking of the sanctification, the justification, and the beauty of His people. And his righteousness came out in His doing so. The plural, *righteousnesses*, is used, as often in Hebrew, to intensify the thought. God has a righteous ground on which to identify His redeemed people with the One on whom they have believed, and with all the results of the redemption which that blessed One has accomplished. His own righteousness is made known in this. Paul teaches this; he is the only one who teaches that the righteousness of God is by faith of Jesus Christ, and that it is upon all those who believe. God's righteousness is now a revealed and manifested thing; Romans 1: 17; Romans 3: 21. When the saints are glorified it will be seen that they have become God's righteousness in Christ, and this on the ground that He has been made sin for them; 2 Corinthians 5: 21.

Paul's great desire, towards the end of his course, was to gain Christ, and to be found in Him, not having his own righteousness, which would be on the

principle of law, but that righteousness which is by faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God through faith; Philippians 3: 9. God's righteousness holds the saints on the ground of redemption to be sanctified in Christ Jesus, and to be justified in Christ, and to have life in Christ Jesus. When we see that we are sanctified, and justified, and have life in God's anointed Man, we understand that God's righteousness is a matter of pure grace acting through redemption for His own glory.

It is evident that if this is so the thought of doing anything to improve one's status with God drops out altogether; see verses 6 and 7. Nothing that we could bring or do could add one jot or tittle to the clearing away of our sin, or to our acceptance with God. All that God requires of us is reduced to three simple elements; "to do justly, and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with thy God", verse 8. The whole life of piety is summed up in these three things. Nothing but the action of our own will can ever deprive us of the peace and happiness which are found by those who, under the influence of grace, move on this line. Verses 4 and 5 show what grace has done for us. It has freed us from every kind of bondage or uncertainty as to the terms on which God is with us, so that in simplicity and liberty we may do what is right, and love goodness (*or mercy*) and walk humbly with our God. The practical power of grace is seen in our being delivered from evil so that we have nothing to do but to go on with what is good.

"Jehovah's voice crieth unto the city, and wisdom looketh on thy name", verse 9. Whether God speaks in grace or in government He addresses Himself to that which is responsible before Him. *Wisdom* will come to light by regarding His name, and what is due to it. If His revealed grace does not affect His people, or bring forth its normal fruits, the *rod* of His corrective discipline will be appointed to do its work with them. His government cannot be trifled with, or escaped from. This comes out in a solemn way in the rest of the chapter.

MICAH 7 - THE EXERCISES AND DELIVERANCE OF THE REMNANT

Micah 7

What Jehovah had done for His people at the beginning of their history came before us in chapter 6, but they had turned away from Him, and came under His rod of chastisement. If a remnant was to be secured for Him after all the failure it must be through conscience work which rightly felt the state of departure, accompanied by faith of heart which counted on Him to come in for those who looked to Him. They had to come back to all that was made known typically at the beginning of their history. The very departure provided occasion for Jehovah to come in and show His people marvellous things. But the way must be prepared for this by much exercise on their part, and this is brought out in chapter 7. So that this chapter is peculiarly instructive for us who are at the end of the assembly period; a period marked by as great departure as was ever seen in Israel.

The prophet is seen here as representative of the godly remnant, feeling keenly the terrible state of those amongst whom he served. This exercise marked all the prophets, and it finds expression in many of the Psalms. The sorrows and distresses of those who feared Jehovah were largely occasioned by the presence and conduct of those who were in the place of privilege as Jehovah's people, but whose hearts were far from Him. This exercise is always present with us. It was a deep grief to Paul to have to say of those who were in the Christian profession, "all seek their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ". And, again, "Many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ ... who mind earthly things". We have only to read 2 Timothy, 2 Peter, and Jude to see what Scripture has said about the present state of things. The language is as severe as anything the Old Testament prophets said about Israel.

The effect of all this is to isolate anyone who really fears God from the state of things which surrounds Him, and to shut him up to God. He comes to realise that nobody can be trusted. "The best of them is a briar; the most upright worse than a thorn-fence", verse 4. If you cannot put confidence in a familiar friend, or in your dearest relation (verse 5), where can your resource be? You must turn wholly to God. "But as for me, I will look unto Jehovah; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me", verse 7. The more evil I see around me the more I am shut up to God: this is the great exercise of the Psalms on the moral side; it is a detaching and sanctifying exercise. In an evil day it is impossible to find a divine path without taking it up.

But there is something even more deadly than bad conduct. There is an enemy (verse 8) ready to rejoice over the sorrows and failures of the one who has been isolated by his distress at the prevalent evil, ready to rejoice even in what such a one suffers under God's chastening hand. The word *enemy* is feminine, and she is spoken of in verse 10 as *her* and *she*. It is well known that in Scripture a woman often represents a system of things, as, for example, Hagar and Sarah, or the harlot of Revelation 17, or the Lamb's wife of chapter 21. Perhaps the female enemy of Micah 7: 8 refers prophetically to the apostate Jews who in the last days will seek to ingratiate themselves with Antichrist. They will go to the king with ointments (Isaiah 57: 9), but they will taunt and persecute those who fear Jehovah and cherish His promises. They will say, "Where is Jehovah thy God" (verse 10), just as the chief priests said of Christ upon the cross, "He trusted upon God; let him save him now if he will have him", Matthew 27: 43. There may be circumstances in which God does not seem to come in on behalf of His suffering saints, and the *enemy* will taunt them with it. The tried saints in Smyrna had to bear "the railing of those who say that they themselves are Jews, and are not, but a synagogue of Satan", Revelation 2: 9. And this synagogue of Satan appears also in connection with the assembly in Philadelphia (Revelation 3: 9); it evidently represents traditional and ceremonial religion, an imitation of Judaism, but really of Satan.

But while the prophet recognises the presence and tauntings of the enemy he goes on with his own exercises. He cannot meet the taunts of the enemy by setting up to be anything but one who has fallen (verse 8); if he has arisen after falling it is surely by mercy alone! And he says further, "When I sit in darkness, Jehovah shall be a light unto me". He is like the one spoken of in Isaiah 50: 10, but he confides in the name of Jehovah, and stays himself upon his God. He is not out of the darkness yet, but he knows he will be. He has not yet seen the great light of Jehovah having become Man, and accomplishing redemption, but he is assured that Jehovah will be light for him. He is cast down, but hoping in God. This is far better than walking in the light of sparks of his own kindling. But it is not the Christian position. The New Testament never speaks of one who has peace with God sitting in darkness. What we have before us here in verses 8 and 9 is the exercise of an upright soul who looks only to God, but he does not yet know God's righteousness; he is looking forward to beholding it. He says, "I will bear the indignation of Jehovah, for I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light: I shall behold his righteousness", verse 9. He does not yet know "the righteousness of Jehovah" as spoken of in chapter 6: 5, but he is assured that he will be brought to the light of it. Many

sincere souls are practically in this state, but it is because they are not yet really in the light of Christ and the glad tidings. The exercise of looking only to God is good, but to close our eyes to the light which He has now caused to shine for us is not good.

The glad tidings of the grace of God gives us to know that God has pleaded our cause, and executed judgment for us. He has brought us to the light that we might behold His righteousness. That righteousness was borne witness to by the law and the prophets; this very scripture bears witness to it. But it was something to be looked forward to then, and it will be something for the remnant of Israel to look forward to until Jehovah brings them forth to the light of Christ and the new covenant, but that righteousness is now revealed and manifested. Redemption has been accomplished, and the mercy-seat set forth in all the value of the blood of Christ. We are brought to the full light of God's righteousness as being upon us, and this by infinite grace. This really qualifies us to receive the Spirit, and to take our place in God's assembly.

This is suggested in verse 11, where we read of "the day when thy walls shall be built". This is clearly collective, for walls have reference to a city. This gives great enlargement. Down to this point the exercise has been an individual one until the soul is brought to behold God's righteousness. But now those delivered are to be put together in a city, and "the established limit" recedes. If the *limit* recedes there is clearly more room; there is enlargement, and a centre to which those scattered can come. I think it means that all who have had similar exercises to the prophet can now draw together in separation from what is evil, and in the comfort of God's light and righteousness. God's *city* thought is secured thus, even though *the land*, speaking of the general state of His people, is "desolate because of them that dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings", verse 13. It is a beautiful suggestion of what Jehovah will make available for the remnant before the kingdom or the house are publicly established. And it is not less a divine encouragement for us who find ourselves in very similar conditions at the end of our dispensation.

Jehovah's "rod" is not here (verse 14) the rod of correction, but the shepherd rod for the feeding of His people, "the flock of thine inheritance". How surely He may be trusted to feed those who are brought together by moving on the lines of the exercises seen in this chapter! Though the flock is not seen in Jerusalem, but as "dwelling alone in the forest". They are still in the outside position publicly, but grace makes it a Carmel, a fruitful field.

Then Jehovah declares what He will do for them. "As in the days of thy coming forth out of the land of Egypt, will I show them marvellous things", verse 15. He begins, as it were, afresh with them on the ground of His original thoughts.

He does not go into what He will show them, but He describes the effect which it will have upon the nations when they see it; verses 16,17. Millennial circumstances are not brought in here, but something which is morally greater. The remnant celebrates God as known in forgiveness. Verses 18 and 19 enlarge upon this. He does not speak here of the house or the kingdom, but of their delight in God Himself as known according to the new covenant. They are brought to Him morally as knowing His forgiveness. This gives perfect liberty to approach Him, and it is powerful leverage in the heart to do so, for the one who has been forgiven much loves much. Those who are not free to approach do not really know the forgiveness that is in the heart of God for them. It would appeal to us very powerfully if we understood that forgiveness is in the heart of God because He wants us to be near Him without a shade of reserve, and in perfect liberty. It is because He loves that He forgives, and He does it righteously because "Christ indeed has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God", 1 Peter 3: 18.

This, if truly known, will powerfully affect us in our feelings as to any who may, in some small way, have trespassed against God. Yet He has in love forgiven us, and He now gives us the privilege sometimes of forgiving others as He has also in Christ forgiven us; Ephesians 4: 32. Indeed, if we do not forgive men their offences, our Father in His government of His family will not forgive ours. The Lord's words are very explicit, "And when ye stand praying, forgive if ye have anything against any one", Mark 11: 25. It is what you are to do in the presence of your Father without question as to whether the offender has repented or not. It is the state of our own hearts that He is concerned about. The creditor in making a release (Deuteronomy 15) acted like God, whether His debtor appreciated it or not. Of course one who has sinned ought to repent, and will never be right until he does, but nothing is more likely to break him down and to bring him to confess his wrong than a spirit of forgiveness in the heart of the one against whom he has sinned.

When God is known in forgiveness the ground is clear for Him to fulfil all His promises. "Thou wilt perform truth to Jacob, loving-kindness to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers, from the days of old", verse 20. The outlook of all the prophets is earthly blessing as the fulfilment of promise, but sins on the part of the people of God morally barred the way to this. God removes that barrier by forgiveness founded on a propitiation which He Himself has provided in love; see 1 John 4: 10. All the sins of His people are cast into the depths of the sea. His course is now clear to fulfil all His promises. *Jacob* has particularly in view the earthly seed, but "Abraham", who was told to look toward the heavens (Genesis 15: 5), brings in the thought of a heavenly seed. Saints of the assembly have their blessing, not only

according to promise, but according to God's eternal purpose in Christ Jesus our Lord.

NAHUM 1, 2 AND 3

Nahum 1; Nahum 2; Nahum 3

Nahum probably prophesied at the time when Sennacherib took the cities of Judah and threatened Jerusalem itself. The immediate object of his prophecy was to comfort the distressed remnant, and to encourage their confidence in Jehovah.

Nahum means *Comfort*.

I believe Nineveh is the only city in the Old Testament which is called "the great city". It was, apparently, built by Nimrod (*Rebel*) — see Genesis 10: 10, 11 and note — so that it appears to represent the developed greatness of the world on the line of rebellion against God. It had been warned through Jonah, and had for a time repented, so that the announced overthrow was suspended. This only aggravated the guilt of Sennacherib in coming violently against the people and city of the God who had so graciously spared Nineveh.

But at that time Jehovah's people had become "a hypocritical nation" of whom He could speak as "the people of my wrath" (see Isaiah 10: 5, 6), and the Assyrian was the rod of His anger upon them. But, though this was the general state of things, by His grace there was still a remnant. Hezekiah called upon Isaiah to "lift up a prayer for the remnant that is left", Isaiah 37: 4. There was a "virgin daughter" who could not be conquered by the Assyrian. God may use the violence of men as the rod of His anger upon hypocrisy and wickedness when such things are found in those who profess to know Him, but He never forgets His remnant. The faithful remnant was under His protecting hand all the time, and the prophecy of Nahum was given to sustain their confidence in Him.

Jehovah reminded His people that He is "a jealous and avenging God" and that He "taketh vengeance on his adversaries", and "he reserveth wrath for his enemies"; chapter 1: 2. Those who "trust in him" (verse 7) are not His enemies; they have learned that "Jehovah is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble". This was the happy experience of Hezekiah, Isaiah, and all the remnant. They did not need to strike a blow at the enemy; Jehovah undertook all for them. It is a comfort to know that there never need to be any thought of vengeance in our hearts; God has undertaken that matter. So it is written, "not avenging yourselves, beloved; for it is written, Vengeance belongs to me, I will recompense, saith the Lord", Romans 12: 19. If God is our stronghold and we trust in Him, our enemies are His enemies, and He will deal with them in due time, perhaps by converting them into His friends and ours! He will

convert Assyria in a coming day; see Isaiah 19: 23 - 25. This is what we desire and look for as having come under grace ourselves. But this does not change the fact that God will assuredly deal at His own time with all that is evil. "It is a righteous thing with God to render tribulation to those that trouble you, and to you that are troubled repose with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven", 2 Thessalonians 1: 6, 7. It is the privilege of the saints now to act in grace towards their enemies and persecutors "If therefore thine enemy should hunger, feed him; if he should thirst, give him drink, for, so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head", Romans 12: 20. But God will inevitably judge what is evil, whether it be in those who profess to know Him, or in those who are openly adverse to Him and to His saints. There will most assuredly be "wrath and indignation, tribulation and distress, on every soul of man that works evil, both of Jew first and of Greek", Romans 2: 9.

God's people may have to suffer, either from persecution or from disturbed conditions in the world, but He would have them always to recognise that "his way is in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet", verse 3. No one can doubt that at the present time the mountains are quaking and the earth is upheaved, and the world and all that dwell therein; verse 5. And God's people have to suffer along with all others; the languishing of Bashan and Carmel and of the flower of Lebanon (verse 4) would indicate this. But Jehovah has His way amidst all that is happening, and the "dust of his feet" indicates that there is movement on His part, though "clouds" show that His steps are not discernible by men. But faith has the comfort of knowing that it is so.

As to Nineveh and its proud oppressor Jehovah would "make a full end of the place thereof", whatever they might have imagined against Him. Verse 11 shows that evil counsel is present as well as the pride of power; Satan's craftiness has its place in all the movements that are adverse to the people of God. But they do not baffle Jehovah. Indeed, He makes use of them for the chastening of His people until the time comes when He says, "And though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more", verse 12. So we see many things working together. Jehovah's judgment was upon Nineveh, though suspended for a time by their repentance. But then His people were worse than the Assyrian, considering the light and privileges which he had vouchsafed to them, so He made use of the Assyrian as His rod to chasten them. Then He saw also that the faithful remnant needed affliction to deepen His work in them. But when suitable exercise came about in the remnant He overthrew the Assyrian, and presently destroyed Nineveh the capital as fully described in Nahum 2 and 3.

"And now I will break his yoke from off thee, and will burst the bonds asunder", verse 13. There would seem to be an interesting connection between this verse and Isaiah 10: 27: "And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck; and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing". The yoke being destroyed "because of the anointing" seems to suggest a moral deliverance by spiritual power even before the actual deliverance. Jehovah put the spirit of victory into the virgin daughter of Zion before He Smote the Assyrian; see Isaiah 37:21 - 38. Whatever pressure may be upon us God would not have us to be held in bondage by it; He would have us to be freed in spirit from the yoke in virtue of the power of "the anointing".

Verse 15 connects with this: "Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth glad tidings, that publisheth peace". The peace of victory is published, the testimony sounded forth before the actual destruction of the enemy because it is known that Jehovah has taken the whole matter in hand! It is quite a common thing in Scripture for the full result of God's actings to be celebrated from the moment He takes them in hand; see Luke 2:43, 14; Revelation 11:15 - 17; Revelation 12: 10. In the light of this Judah is called to celebrate his feasts and perform his vows. He is to go on with the enjoyment of spiritual privileges and in rendering what is due to Jehovah; he is to evidence in this way the practical power of the anointing.

HABAKKUK 1 AND 2

Habakkuk 1; Habakkuk 2

In the vision of Nahum it is seen that the people of God have been afflicted, and that He knows those who trust in Him, but their personal exercises do not appear. "The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see" stands in contrast with this, for it throws into strong relief the exercises of a faithful heart in a time of sore trial, and shows what that heart reaches for its own joy before there is any outward deliverance.

Habakkuk prophesied many years later than Nahum, and in his time things had reached the point when "there was no remedy" (2 Chronicles 36: 16); the people were about to fall by Jehovah's judgment under the power of a terrible enemy. The whole state of things was most testing, and particularly because the cry of a distressed heart seemed to be unheeded. "Jehovah, how long shall I cry and thou wilt not hear? I cry out unto thee, Violence! and thou dost not save. Why dost thou cause me to see iniquity, and lookest thou upon grievance? For spoiling and violence are before me; and there is strife, and contention riseth up. Therefore the law is powerless, and justice doth never go forth; for the wicked encompasseth the righteous; therefore judgment goeth forth perverted", verses 2 - 4. Everyone must feel that this is not altogether inapplicable at the present time, and it brings suffering upon the people of God as well as upon others. Faith could hardly be more severely tested than by seeing the people of God suffer oppression without any apparent intervention of God on their behalf.

But the answer to this deep exercise was that the prophet was called to "Behold, and wonder marvellously; for I work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be declared to you", verse 5. It is very striking that the apostle Paul applied this scripture to the work which God is doing now, and which is declared in the glad tidings. This is, indeed, the greatest work which God has ever done. He has raised up Jesus from among the dead, and the blessed declaration is going forth: "Be it known unto you, therefore, brethren, that through this man remission of sins is preached to you, and from all things from which ye could not be justified in the law of Moses, in him every one that believes is justified", Acts 13:38, 39. How good it would be if men took account of what God is declaring now! There is a widespread recognition that it is suitable to pray in a time of pressure that God may intervene. But comparatively few seem interested to know that He *has* intervened in a most wonderful way, and that He is causing it to be declared that men may believe it. All the distress of men and of nations can be

accounted for by the fact that men have not believed what God has declared in the glad tidings.

Then God's corrective ways with His people are always going on, as they were in Habakkuk's day. It is always faith's privilege to recognise God's hand in the afflictions and pressures that come upon His people. In that day He was raising up an enemy who worshipped his own power; verse 11. But Habakkuk's reaction to the terrible description of the Chaldeans in verses 6 - 11 is, "Art thou not from everlasting, Jehovah my God, my Holy One?" verse 12. He takes, as it were, personal possession of Jehovah as *his* God, *his* Holy One. This is ever faith's answer to what seems to be overwhelming. Whatever Israel or Judah might have been, whatever the Chaldeans might be, Jehovah was from everlasting. He was the one great Reality, subsisting eternally. Nothing can get behind this. And the conclusion which faith draws from it is, "We shall not die". Looking at the Chaldeans would lead nature to say, We shall all die, but faith looking at the eternal God says, "We shall not die". However severe God's dealings may be, faith is fully assured that they are in the way of correction for His people. "Jehovah thou hast ordained him for judgment; and thou, O Rock, has appointed him for correction", verse 12. It could not be otherwise in the estimation of faith; those who fear God and honour Him in their hearts know that He is for them and not against them, and that His correction is the correction of love, and for their benefit.

But faith has its exercises when it sees that God "keepeth silence when the wicked swalloweth up a man more righteous than he", verse 13. Why should God allow such things to pass? Why should He allow the wicked to take men and do as they like with them, so that men worship the very means they use when they find them Successful? verse 16. We can see these things going on today: how are they affecting us? Faith says, "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will look forth to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer as to my reproof", chapter 2: 1. It is for each one of us to take up this position. What is God about to say to me in connection with all the questions which His ways raise in my heart? There is always some element of reproof in God's correction: He does not rebuke without cause. The watchful soul on the tower will hear what He says, and be prepared to answer. When God speaks correctively He expects an answer; He expects us to take up the exercise intelligently, and answer as having understood what He said. The psalmist answered when he said, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep thy word": "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes", Psalm 119: 67, 71. See also Job 42:1 - 6.

When we answer to God's reproving ways He always makes further communications. "And Jehovah answered me and said, Write the vision, and engrave it upon tablets, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but it hasteth to the end, and shall not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; for it will surely come, it will not delay". The *vision* looks on to the full deliverance of God's people, which has so large a place in the word of prophecy; that is, it looks on to the coming of the Lord. It was to be made very plain that faith's hopes and expectations as to the future on earth would only be realised then. The *it* of Habakkuk 2: 3 is changed by the Spirit of God into *he* when He quotes this passage in Hebrews 10:37. There, receiving what is promised stands in contrast with losing what the Hebrew believers had possessed on earth. It gives added heavenly light as to the vision. But whether it be Israel's earthly deliverance, or the saints of the assembly getting their heavenly place in actuality, the *appointed time* is the coming of the Lord. The saints of the assembly will be caught up at the rapture into their own heavenly place, and the remnant of Israel will be delivered and brought into their promised earthly blessing after the Lord appears. The word through Habakkuk was, "though it tarry wait for it", but when the Holy Spirit quotes this passage in Hebrews 10 He says nothing about tarrying; He says, "For yet a *very little while* he that comes will come, and will not delay". There was a tarrying period when Habakkuk wrote the vision; Daniel's seventy weeks had to come in, but there are no prophetic periods for the assembly, no thought of tarrying now. The *vision*, so far as we are concerned, would put all saints in the attitude of constant expectancy, and thus entirely apart in spirit from such persons as are described by the words, "Behold his soul is puffed up, it is not upright within him", chapter 2: 4. The one who is just; God's just one (see note to Hebrews 10: 28)

lives by faith. All that belongs to the vision is a reality to him and he lives by the faith of it, though having as yet no outward deliverance. The New Testament very distinctly applies "the just shall live by faith" to the present time. Though the Messiah has come and redemption has been accomplished, it is still the faith period. If we slip away from faith we have nothing left by which to live Godward. In the law period the proposal was that men should live by doing "these things" (Galatians 3: 11, 12), but now we live by faith, and through faith we get the Spirit. Outside faith and the Spirit there is no life Godward or in power, and this will go on until the day of deliverance when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah as the waters cover the sea", chapter 2:14. That is God's great objective as regards the earth, but in the meantime He is in His holy temple, and all the earth is called to hear what He may be pleased to say.

HABAKKUK 3

Habakkuk 3

The prophet's prayer in chapter 3 sets forth what may be known by those who draw near to Jehovah in His holy temple. His first exercise is marked by fear as realising that the state of the people was such as to deserve wrath. But he looks for revival on the ground of mercy "in the midst of the years" of departure. And his prayer indicates that revival comes about by returning to that which was from the beginning. For verse 3 alludes very distinctly to Deuteronomy 33: 2, which refers to how Jehovah moved at the beginning for the blessing of His people. As it is said in verse 13 of the chapter before us, "Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, for the salvation of thine anointed". The full result of this will be that "his glory covereth the heavens, and the earth is full of his praise", verse 3. In coming out for the blessing of His people God has the heavens and the earth before Him. He may seem to be operating in a limited sphere, but what He does will have universal results. In considering Habakkuk's prayer we must bear in mind that what he dwelt upon was the deliverance of Israel, and the destruction of their enemies, but their deliverance was only a typical one; there was no redemption wrought for them, save in type. We have to bring what is said here into the present period to get the divine reality of what was done for Israel in a typical way. I have no doubt the Spirit of God had in mind in verses 3 and 4 what has come to pass now through God having sent His only begotten Son into the world. God has truly come in now for the salvation of His people. "And his brightness was as the light; rays came forth from his hand; and there was the hiding of his power". When the Word became flesh He was the true Light; God's glory and praise were brought in in the fullest way. Rays of glory were effulgent in every movement of His hand. The word *rays* is really *horns*, and horns in Scripture are symbolical of power. Divine power acting in grace was seen in every movement of Jesus. It became the joy of faith, and yet all the time "there was the hiding of his power". It was hidden from the wise and prudent, but revealed to babes. Indeed, in view of the condition of Israel and the world, and in view of God's glory in redemption, it was necessary that there should be "the hiding of his power". He could have called upon His Father, and had more than twelve legions of angels to overpower His adversaries, but "how then should the scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?"

The *pestilence* and the *burning flame* show, I think, the solemn consequences of man's rejecting God's light and salvation. If men love darkness rather than light, after light has shone upon them, they are "already judged"; the day of judgment has already come for them. Hence Jesus said, "For judgment am I

come into this world, that they which see not may see, and they which see may become blind". "He stood and measured the earth; he beheld, and discomfited the nations", verse 6. In a moral sense everything here has been measured by the coming of the Son of God; its exact dimensions are known. Man's religion, his philosophy, his science, his schemes for human progress, are all measured and found to come short. God has brought in His standard, and all is really measured by the One who is "God's power and God's wisdom". What is it all now to those who believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's beloved Son? For faith, Christ and His cross have brought down all the greatness of man, and all that is pretentious because of its antiquity. In that sense "the eternal mountains were scattered, the everlasting hills gave way", verse 6. But in blessed contrast it is said, "his ways are everlasting". The stability and permanence of God's ways in Christ, as seen in the holy temple, are the confidence and joy of faith.

Verses 7 - 15 review Jehovah's actings on behalf of Israel. They present Him as acting against all the powers that were opposed to His people, or that stood in the way of their possessing the inheritance which He had assigned to them. We consider these things as having in mind what they represent typically. The most terrible enemy of all is referred to symbolically in verse 8. "Was Jehovah wrathful with the rivers? Was thine anger against the rivers? Was thy rage against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thy horses, thy chariots of salvation?" There can be no doubt that the reference here is to the Red Sea and the Jordan. Both represent, as believers know, the power of death. It was God who imposed the sentence of death upon the disobedient man, and death reigned many centuries before the law was given; it is the gravest of all questions. If men are to be delivered from the power of evil and brought into blessing, death must be met and overcome. The supreme wonder is that the One who in His righteous government passed the sentence of death upon the fallen creature has undertaken in His grace and love to deal with death on behalf of His poor creature. From the standpoint of His thoughts of love and blessing death has become His enemy as well as ours, and He has ridden upon His horses and chariots of salvation to meet and set aside its power. He has taken our side against death, just as He took the side of Israel against the Red Sea and Jordan. God's purpose and grace "has been made manifest now by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who has annulled death, and brought to light life and incorruptibility by the glad tidings", 2 Timothy 1: 10. Jesus took part in blood and flesh "that through death he might annul him who has the might of death, that is, the devil; and might set free all those who through fear of death through the whole of their life were subject to bondage", Hebrews 2:14, 15. The Spirit of God had this in mind

when He inspired the words, "The sea saw it and fled, the Jordan turned back What ailed thee, thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou turnedst back?" Psalm 114: 3, 5. The Red Sea is a type of the death of Christ for us, and the Jordan typifies our death with Him. But Habakkuk is not occupied with how the people availed themselves of the way made for them through the sea or the river, but with the fact that Jehovah acted for them in dealing with what barred their way out of Egypt or into Canaan. He had before him the acting of God viewed objectively, and therefore in its divine completeness. Death no longer bars the way to man's salvation or to the blessing of God's people. Indeed, in the death of Christ it has become the way of deliverance, the way into life. Faith must take that way,

but on God's part the sea has fled, the river has turned back. Death is not annulled publicly in this world, but the resurrection of Christ is the proof to believers that in relation to Him death is annulled, and this for man's benefit through the great favour of God. There is a way out by the death of Christ from the world as under judgment. This is what baptism to the death of Christ signifies.

Then at the Jordan the people saw the ark of the covenant move before them at a time when the river was full over all its banks, and they went after it on dry ground because the river had turned back. This is one of the most striking types in Scripture. It shows how Christ has gone into death in its fullest power, and has so turned it back that all the people of God can go over into the fulness of spiritual blessing in association with Him in life. They can go into the abundant life of John 10: 10. The death of Christ in its full power is available, though it is only by the attraction of His Person and love that any pass over with Him into the land.

"Thy bow was made naked, the rods sworn according to thy word" (verse 9) would connect with Deuteronomy 32: 23 and Psalm 45:5. *Rods* is the same word as *sceptre* in Psalm 2: 9 and Psalm 110: 2. God has the means by which to deal with everything that is adverse to Him. This was seen when Jesus was here by His binding the strong man and spoiling his goods, and by His casting out demons. It was seen, too, when His enemies went backward in the garden and fell to the ground. All the power was there by which He will eventually subjugate all opposition, but it did not act then for men's destruction because God was in Christ reconciling, not judging. The "mountains" were there, indeed, and the "torrents of waters"; great powers represented by the chief priests and rulers, and those under their influence; the Roman power also lending itself to be the instrument of their wickedness. But none of them could hinder the Lord from completing the work which His Father had given Him to

do, or from bringing in the kingdom of God in spiritual power, or securing His own for the assembly which He was about to build. Neither the prince of this world, nor any of his instruments or agents, could stand in the way of what God was doing. "The floods lifted up, O Jehovah, the floods lifted up their voice; the floods lifted up their roaring waves", but this only brought to light that "Jehovah on high is mightier than the voice of many waters, than the mighty breakers of the sea", Psalm 93: 4.

The sun and moon standing still (verse 11) evidently refers to Joshua 10: 12 - 15. It suggests typically the present prolonged day during which dispensational movements are arrested. Things continue in a certain fixed relation. Christ is at the right hand of God, and the assembly is in her place of witness here. But it is a time of spiritual conflict, of which the "arrows" and the "glittering spear" and Jehovah marching through the land in indignation are expressive; verse 12. Jehovah dispossessed the nations of Canaan that it might be the inheritance of His people, and these nations represented the spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies. These are spiritual powers which are active to darken the mind and imagination of men so that God may not be known by them. It is not simply that the mind of the flesh is enmity against God, as we know it is, but there are great supernatural powers behind the scenes operating against the knowledge of God. Paul was in conflict with those powers, for he speaks of having arms of warfare which were "powerful according to God to the overthrow of strongholds; overthrowing reasonings and every high thing that lifts itself up against the knowledge of God", 2 Corinthians 10: 4, 5. The powers in question are no insignificant enemies; they are described as being principalities, authorities, and universal lords of this darkness. Saints would be no match for them if they were not strong in the Lord and in the might of His strength, and also invested with "the panoply of God". But it is unspeakable comfort to know that God has gone forth against them. He has taken up the challenge, and "having spoiled principalities and authorities, he made a show of them publicly, leading them in triumph by it"; that is by the cross. The fact that He has done this by the *cross* shows that it is by setting aside *the man* on whose mind and imagination those powers could act that they are spoiled, and exposed in their true character, and triumphed over. In the mighty acting of God it is completely done. And Christ as the ascended One has "led captivity captive"; He has overcome every power in the universe that could have stood in the way of God's making Himself known in grace to men.

All this gives the present spiritual application to us of what Habakkuk expresses in such energetic language, full of striking figures and symbols. It is all included in the greatness of that salvation for which God has gone forth;

verse 13. It covers in spiritual suggestion all that has come to light for us in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. And it is presented as known in relation to God's "holy temple"; that is, as known in the power of the Holy Spirit. Habakkuk speaks of these things as being "heard" by him when he addressed himself to Jehovah as known in His holy temple; verse 16. The greatness of it all made him realise, as he had never done before, what a wretched thing he was in himself. His belly trembled, his lips quivered, rottenness entered into his bones. It is ever thus when God vouchsafes light as to Himself and His wondrous actings for men. Job experienced it in his day, Daniel in his day (Daniel 8: 27; Daniel 10: 8), and John falling as dead at the feet of the Son of man has somewhat the same character. If God is really to fill the soul it is certain that all of self must go out. The end in view is that God fills the soul without any subtle admixture of self-righteousness or self-commendation in any form. It is a humbling experience, but those who have gone through it never regret it, for it leads to confidence in God alone, and thus to fulness of joy in Him which is independent of all circumstances. One who has gone through this exercise has "rest in the day of distress, when their invader shall come up against the people", verse 16. He has reached a resting-place in God upon which no distress or invader can intrude. If we tremble as searched out inwardly by the light of God we shall not tremble in the day of outward trial; we shall have *rest* then, and not only rest, but profound joy in God. All that the Jew looked for as the sign of God's favour might utterly fail, but Jehovah remained as the Source and Crown of His people's blessing. We cannot be sure that privileges which have comforted us in the past will continue; many have been deprived of them in greater or lesser degree. But what we know of the Father and the Son in the power of the Spirit will abide.

"Yet I will rejoice in Jehovah, I will joy in the God of my salvation. Jehovah, the Lord, is my strength, and he maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon my high places". It would be well if our prayers took more the form of Habakkuk's prayer. His prayer, strictly speaking, is limited to the latter part of verse 2. All the rest is a recital of what Jehovah had already done for the salvation of His people. We sometimes ask God to do many things for us when we should be more profitably occupied in considering what He has done through and in our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us give more attention to this; it will relieve our anxieties and fill us with joy. Because what He has done, and how He has made Himself known in doing it, is an unchangeable blessedness. Even if we think of it in the setting of Habakkuk's prayer it is most wonderful. Habakkuk's prayer is mainly occupied with the setting aside of adverse powers; it is the God of salvation who is celebrated. But "my high places" suggest an elevation where the positive thoughts of divine love are

known and enjoyed. And the "feet like hinds' feet" show that as in Christ and by the Spirit we can be sure-footed even there. "My high places" has, for us at any rate, a heavenly significance; it speaks of what is unfolded in Ephesians as connected with love's eternal purpose.

It is delightful to see that, after all the experiences and exercises through which Habakkuk had passed, he finished on the highest possible level. "The chief Musician" and the "stringed instruments" are in keeping with the whole order of divine service as set up by David. Fifty-five of the Psalms are headed "To the chief Musician". And here is a man, representing a faithful remnant, in the darkest day of Israel's history, just on the eve of the captivity, able to indite an utterance that corresponded in quality with what was possible in the brightest day of that history. There could hardly be a greater triumph of faith. Whatever service was going on publicly in Jerusalem at that day must have been extremely formal; indeed, as we know, it was offensive to God. But to Habakkuk's faith there was a spiritual temple where wonderful things could be seen and heard, and where Jehovah could be praised in the same lofty notes as when His service was first inaugurated. The "*chief* Musician" implies the presence and accompaniment of others, and "*my* stringed instruments" shows that faith has its own equipment for the service of praise, and this in a collective way.

The application of all this to our own times is obvious. Christendom is in as sad a state as Israel was. But in a day of extreme departure a remnant have cried to God to revive His work, and He has done so. He has brought the great actings of His grace and love in Christ in a fresh and living way before the hearts of His people. He had enabled many to rejoice in Himself, and in His great salvation, and in what He has brought to pass for the satisfaction of His love. He has caused them to walk upon "their high places" in His eternal purpose. Now He intends that all this shall come out in assembly service, to His praise and glory. It is not to be merely a personal experience, however blessed this might be, but it is to give character to the collective worship of His sons as assembled. *Our* "chief Musician" is the One who has said, "in the midst of the assembly will I sing thy praise", Hebrews 2:12. It is still possible for saints as stringed instruments to blend harmoniously in praise under the touch of the hand of the chief Musician. We must not think of this as a beautiful, but unrealisable, conception, or that it can only be true in heaven. It is what may be realised down here as the result of such exercises as are set out in this part of the Holy Scriptures. This prophecy was given to encourage and support faith, in a difficult time, just such a time as we are passing through now.

ZEPHANIAH 1, 2 AND 3 - THE DAY OF THE LORD

Zephaniah 1; Zephaniah 2; Zephaniah 3

We have noticed in the prophets already considered many references to the day of Jehovah. As Zephaniah gives particular prominence to the day of Jehovah it would be well to consider it a little. A consideration of the different ways in which that coming day is presented in the New Testament would help us greatly in the understanding of the structure and teaching of the prophecy of Zephaniah; we want to come to Zephaniah in the light of what is brought out in the New Testament.

The expression "the day of the Lord" is the same as "the day of Jehovah". Zephaniah, Isaiah and most of the prophets refer to it. In 1 Thessalonians 5 the apostle says to those young converts through his teaching, "Ye know perfectly well ... that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief by night". Well, *do* we? I believe it is always presented in Scripture as a time of dreadful affliction.

Zephaniah means "Whom the Lord hides" or "treasures". We need to have that day before us, as soon the day of the Lord is actually coming on the earth and will affect men, women and children in a very short time. God is very shortly going to deal with everything on the earth that is displeasing to Himself in a way of most terrible judgment. "But ye brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you as a thief", 1 Thessalonians 5: 4. "So then do not let us sleep as the rest do, but let us watch and be sober", 1 Thessalonians 5: 6. So it has a most important bearing on all saints, calculated to lead to watchfulness and sobriety and separation from the world of the ungodly. These people thought that Jehovah was asleep. "Jehovah will not do good, neither will he do evil", Zephaniah 1: 12. The day of the Lord is suspended in the longsuffering of the Lord to allow of repentance in sinner and saint. If I am going on with anything that will not bear the day of the Lord, which is just about to come, I had better repent. We are apt to put off not only the coming of the Lord but also the day of wrath, so that it would affect our testimony. God has in mind the formation of a people with features that please Him and that are suitable to the day. We are "sons of the day", that is, carrying something of the dignity of the day. So here a remnant comes to light, persons that are characterised by meekness.

"Seek Jehovah, all ye meek of the land, who have performed his ordinance; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of Jehovah's anger". Zephaniah 2: 3.

There are other thoughts in 1 Corinthians 1: 7; "so that ye come short in no gift, awaiting the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall also confirm you to the end, unimpeachable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ". It is good to know that our Lord Jesus Christ is going to have His day. His revelation is going to take place — He is hidden in the heavens at the moment — He is coming forth. All the saints will come with Him, and they will be unimpeachable; no charge can be brought against them. The saints are made suitable to be the associates of the Lord Jesus Christ in His day. It shows that the matter is viewed here entirely of grace; on no other ground could these Corinthian believers be spoken of as unimpeachable in His day; Paul was about to charge them with a good many offences. There was a beautiful touch about this, because it shows that the saints will be made not only ready for heaven (1 Thessalonians 4) and for the Father's house (John 14), but for the day of the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, for public display. These thoughts have to be taken up in our minds in connection with the day of Jehovah.

There is a very touching reference in 1 Corinthians 5: 5, "To deliver him ... to Satan for destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus". It is the spirit in contrast to the flesh in view of some terrible discipline coming on the man's body, but then it is in view of the spirit being saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. It shows the ability of the Lord Jesus in His own day to save the spirit of a believer who has behaved shamefully and disgracefully in his practical life and has been delivered to Satan for severe discipline. It gives a beautiful touch to the day of the Lord Jesus. The apostle does not speak of the man being restored to the communion of God's people; he goes beyond to the day of the Lord. Even with the Corinthians he looks to the ultimate triumph of the day of the Lord Jesus when everything would be accomplished in the power and grace that is in Him.

The Lord said of Abraham that he "rejoiced to see my day". It was in Isaac that he saw it. Man after the flesh could not bear to see it, for all that shines forth then will be connected with the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing would be more intolerable to men naturally than to think of His absolute supremacy. It was detestable to Ishmael But there will be those who love His appearing. That brings us to Philippians 1: 6, where we have "Jesus Christ's day", which gives a very precious touch to the thought of the day, and might be spoken of as the moral character of the day. "He who has begun in you a good work will complete it unto Jesus Christ's day". Jesus Christ is the lowly Man who walked this earth in lowliness in that beautiful path down here, and He is going to have a day, and saints down here are going to be formed after Christ, suitable to come out in correspondence with Christ morally, subjects of the work of God. Paul was sure He would complete it, not only by God's work directly, but

by ministry, that is, by Paul's labour; so he says, "Do all things without murmurings and reasonings, that ye may be harmless and simple, irreproachable children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation; among whom ye appear as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life, so as to be a boast for me in Christ's day, that I have not run in vain, nor laboured in vain", Philippians 2: 14, 15. They come out like that as the result of Paul's ministry; every saint is a bright star in the sky. All this brings us back to Zephaniah, to the beautiful thought in chapter 2 "Seek Jehovah, all ye meek of the land, who have performed his ordinance; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of Jehovah's anger". We take that up in the light of all we have been considering in the New Testament. The Lord could say, "I am meek and lowly in heart", and Paul, "I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ". It is remarkable that in Hebrew the word for meekness and affliction is the same. By affliction God brings in this quality of meekness, it breaks down the pride and haughtiness of the flesh and brings in meekness.

Now all these things have to be brought together in their practical power in connection with the day of the Lord. Everything that man prides himself in is coming down. We anticipate the judgment seat, I suppose, personally. Whatever God's wrath is coming upon, everything of man's boast, everything brought about by the fall of man, is coming down; Isaiah shows that; the testimony of Scripture is very definite about it. So God is working to have a people that have come under the influence of "the day of the Lord", and "the day of the Lord Jesus", and "the day of Christ". What a wonderful privilege of the apostles it was to walk about with Him! They never heard a word from His lips that savoured of the world or in approbation of what was going on in the world. He spoke of "the days of the Son of man".

What days they were! What features marked them! We are no good in the testimony if we are not after Christ. God wants a people after Christ, so these people (chapter 2:3) are secured; we find that God makes room for them. The Philistines are destroyed that there may be room for the house of Judah, and he says, "Jehovah their God shall visit them, and turn again their captivity". They are sure to be in captivity here in the world, but Jehovah is going to turn their captivity, so that He will visit them. What could be more blessed than to be in that state of separation and character that the Lord could visit us! He does visit certain people in this world yet.

There is an added reason found in verses 8 and 9 for the judgment. It is wonderful that God can own them as His people in verse 9, calling them, "the remnant of my people". It means that God will dispossess those that have

seized the land of Canaan, and His people will possess it. There are powers now, religious powers, that will keep God's people out of their inheritance; God would put all that aside and bring His people to rest in their inheritance. They have to be formed morally to be in suitability to the day of Jehovah. All this has to be taken in and we have to come into harmony with it. That is why we have to stand apart from the world politically, religiously and socially — because judgment is coming on it. The Lord loves to gather His own together in the enjoyment of these things, and His love and His principles of acting do not change with the dispensations. Everything that is an idol will be annihilated in that day (verse 11): "Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day". Psalm 82: 8 says, "Thou shalt inherit all the nations". What a comfort it is that God is coming into His own! What is all the power of the earth worth, viewed at from the standpoint of heaven's view! It is all going to be dispossessed soon. It is better to have what is given by God and that no power of evil can take away; and if God makes His people happy nothing can disturb their happiness. This is all preparatory to chapter 3, so that there is to be that which is morally suitable to come into it. God wants everyone of us in a state of heart that yields Him perpetual pleasure; He wants us all in that state.

The Philistines, the Moabites, the Ethiopians and the Assyrians are all dealt with in chapter 2; nothing escapes Jehovah's notice. In chapter 3 He turns to Jerusalem, His own city, and finds that all is intensely displeasing to Him there. All that He wanted was that she would receive correction (verses 2 and 7). Correction has an important place with God if His people are wrong. We find that five assemblies out of seven are spoken to in reproof in Revelation. Correction is God's putting His people right. What a mercy it is that God is always ready to correct His people when it is necessary! "Only fear me, receive correction", He says, then everything can be put right. If there is no disposition for correction, there is a very sad state indeed; there was none on Jerusalem's part: "they rose early, they corrupted all their doings". It is the condition of the mass of Christians today. So we see at the end of this chapter that God has to move in the sovereignty of His love to produce something in correspondence with Himself when there was not anything.

Verses 11 to 13 describe God's oblation. The end of verse 10 says, "My suppliants ... shall bring mine oblation"; that is, God gets His portion. It would be good for us to take the line indicated here. Verse 9 says, "For them will I turn to the peoples a pure language". The first thing He does is to teach them to pray. The first utterance of a pure language is when one can speak to God; to call upon God's name is a pure language. It is a first mark of a sovereign movement of God in the soul; thus a revolution is brought about. To obtain a

link with God in calling upon His name is a revolution. "My suppliants" — it is a beautiful expression, speaking of a certain class that God can regard as His people. We would like to be among them. It indicates a very definite desire to have something from God. Those are the people we are to look out for; we are to follow with those that call on the name of the Lord out of a pure heart. And prayer must lead to service. "That they may all call upon the name of Jehovah, to serve him with one consent". The footnote reads, "with one shoulder". The result of prayer is a united desire to serve God for His pleasure. The true remnant must be ever marked by these things. A pure language is not mere formal prayer, for that will not secure anything; with it there is no self-confidence, no leaning on anything but God.

The features of the oblation come out in verses 11, 12 and 13. The first thing God takes away is spiritual pride, which may be in the favour He has shown us; He takes away that spirit. "Thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain". God does not give us marks of His favour to build up the flesh; it is a subtle and self-satisfying pride that He roots out of us. "An afflicted and poor people" is the people He gets on with! There is nothing in man for God but what He has Himself wrought sovereignly. Mary was morally suited to be the vessel for bringing in the Lord, that Holy One. Of Elizabeth and Simeon it says that they spoke in the Spirit; Mary spoke out of her own inwardness, for it does not say that she spoke by the Spirit. Simeon was a very definite part of the oblation in that day, he was entirely taken up with the excellence that was in Another. In verse 13 they are morally suited. God loves to see His own character reproduced in His people, and then there is nothing to disturb the conditions of rest of the soul. "They shall feed and lie down". They will be gathered where they were scattered. The dispersion is greater today; but if saints only prayed about matters, would it not be all put right? Persons who pray must come into one mind. It is impossible that two praying persons should be found not coming into accord; having no will of their own, they would get into line with God's mind and be of one accord.

HAGGAI

Haggai 1; Haggai 2

The prophet Haggai prophesied in the second year of Darius the king, when the work of rebuilding the temple had been at a standstill for a number of years. The adversaries had been persistent (see Ezra 4) and a king had arisen who was ready to listen to them, and to give orders that the work should cease, but the work really ceased because it was no longer the chief interest of those who had been engaged in it. Opposition never really hinders the work of God; it is waning interest on the part of His people that is the true secret of all weakness.

Now after an interval of about fifteen years, Haggai, with Zechariah, "prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them", Ezra 5: 1. But in spite of all that had transpired, his prophecy made no reference to the external difficulty; it addressed itself to the state of the people and made manifest the real hindrance to the work. "Thus speaketh Jehovah of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that Jehovah's house should be built. And the word of Jehovah came by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you that ye should dwell in your wainscoted houses, while this house lieth waste?" Haggai 1:2 - 4.

There are always difficulties in the way of anything being done for God, and it is easy quietly to accept them, and to regard them as an indication that we should let things stand as they are. When God's chief interest ceases to be our chief interest some form of self-consideration inevitably comes in. Jehovah speaks of His house lying waste while they dwelt in wainscoted houses. It was very sad that Paul had to say of those about him at Rome, "all seek their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ". Timothy stood out as a bright exception to this, caring with genuine feeling how the saints got on.

Living in our own things leads to poverty and dissatisfaction. The divine call is to set our hearts on our ways; we are to weigh well how things are working with us. Are we really prospering in soul? Or is it such a time with us as is described in Haggai 1:6; Haggai 1:9-11? God would have His people to consider whether they are not giving a good deal of time to things which yield very little. There is a kind of eating which gives no satisfaction, and drinking which adds nothing to the inward man, and we may surround ourselves with things which bring no warmth to the soul, and what we earn may go into a bag with holes. These are striking figures of the result of seeking our own things. Christians on this line may get through life by the mercy of God, but it

is a lean and empty and impoverished life compared with what it might have been.

The divine call is, "Go up to the mountain and bring wood, and build the house, and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith Jehovah", chapter 1: 8. God's house cannot be built without material, and the material cannot be found without labour. All true spiritual labour at the present time has the house in view. The preaching of the gospel and all ministry of the word is only carried on intelligently as we see that it is to get material for the house and to build it. Let us make this our great business. It is not easy work to go to the mountain and hew timber, but what could be a greater honour than to do something of which God says, "I will, take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified?" God's great thought is that there may be a company here built together for His pleasure, and amongst whom He is glorified. We are all to be at this great work. If each one who knows something of God's chief interest were to be the means of bringing one other into the truth of God's house, and into practical accord with it, what pleasure God would take in it! It is the same work that began nineteen centuries ago by the labours of the apostles and others, but it has now to be done at a time when Christendom is full of bodies which are not for God's pleasure, and in which He is not glorified, for they have not the constitution or the character of His house. Indeed, the religious bodies of today answer to the wainscoted houses of Haggai 1, and it is not difficult to see that as religious buildings get larger and finer the inward spiritual power declines. The Lord had spoken of the temple as His Father's house, but the time came when He had to call it "your house". God had ceased to have pleasure in it, and so it is today. Christians are running to what are really their own houses while God's house lieth waste. And this accounts for the spiritual dearth of which many believers complain. "Ye looked for much, and behold it was little; and when ye brought it home I blew upon it". There is much going on in an outward way, but where are spiritual results? Where do we find the dew of the heavens? Where are the precious things which answer for us to the corn, the new wine and the oil? Is it not time for Christians to consider their ways, and to ask why blessing is withholden? We need not go far for the answer; it is "Because of my house which lieth waste, whilst ye run every man to his own house".

What is needed is that we should do as the remnant did in that day. They "hearkened to the voice of Jehovah their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, according as Jehovah their God had sent him, and the people feared before Jehovah", chapter 1:12. As soon as they took this ground the message was sent to them, "I am with you, saith Jehovah". All that is needed on our part is that we should hearken to what God says; that is, be in the spirit of

obedience before Him and fear Him. The moment we take this ground He will be with us, and His presence with His people is their only power. If God is not with us, even our efforts to build His house will come to nothing. But if He is with us our spirits will be divinely stirred up, and we shall come and work at the house of Jehovah. It is a notable day when that takes place; the exact day of the month is given. We may be sure that when our hearts are stirred up to come and work at the house it is placed on record in heaven.

Then on the one and twentieth day of the seventh month there was a further prophetic word given to fortify the hearts of the remnant against discouragement; chapter 2: 1. It would appear that, within a month of resuming to build, a discouraging influence was found amongst the people. It took the form of contrasting what was then present with the former glory of the house. This is a subtle form of the enemy's work because it seems rightly to make much of a glorious past. But it is evident that the object was to minimise, and even make nothing of, the wonderful revival that was then in movement. In the estimation of faith the fact that it was God's house put upon it a wondrous glory, however feeble might be the outward expression of it at the moment. The widow who cast her two mites into the treasury showed that the house was exceedingly precious to her as God's house notwithstanding its actual state at the time. If we have really seen the former glory of the house we cannot accept that if God is reviving His work He has something very inferior in view. We cannot accept that it is a different house now, or that anything less than the full divine thought is to be before us in our building, however feeble we may be in relation to such great thoughts. If we have a right thought of the house we see it as invested with all the glory that originally attached to it, and if God is with us we shall not be prepared to give up any part of what is in His mind.

So there is a thrice-repeated call to "be strong", chapter 2: 4. If we think that what we are occupied with is "as nothing" we shall be weak indeed, but if we think of God's house, and that He is with us in the building of it, we shall be preserved from fear. "The word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, and my Spirit, remain among you: fear ye not", verse 5. It is as though God said, 'My thoughts have not changed one bit. I brought you to Myself that you might be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, and that you might make Me a sanctuary that I might dwell among you, and this is still what I have in My mind'. If God's Spirit remains among us, it is certain that He will never depart from God's original thoughts. Christendom may depart from them, and we may depart from them, but the Spirit never will. So now if there is only one stone laid upon another there is something which speaks of, and represents, the whole divine thought. There may be today, perhaps, only two

saints in a town or village who recognise in a practical way that they are a constituent part of the house of God, and are set to further the building, but there is something which recognises the whole divine thought, and that cannot be "as nothing" in our eyes. Satan would desire that it might be, and that we might despise it as a small thing, and give up the practical confession of it, and the building in of what is suitable to it.

God would have us to know what He thinks of His house. He is going to shake everything with a view to His house being here filled with glory. Every divine shaking at the present time has in view the freeing of what will contribute to His house. We know that there will be a terrible shaking presently to prepare the way for God to bring in the First-begotten into the habitable world, and when He comes in there will be found material that will fill the house with glory. But at the present time there is much precious material in the world, and God claims it all for Himself and for His house. "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts", verse 8. The silver and the gold today are the saints secured for God as the fruit of redemption and as in new creation. "The desire of all nations" (verse 7) refers to everything that is precious and truly desirable in all the nations. It refers to apprehensions and appreciations of Christ brought by the work of God into the hearts of His saints everywhere, so that Christ has become "the preciousness" to them. This is what has value before God, and He intends that it should all come to His house to enrich it with glory. So what God has in mind is not diminishing glory, but increasing glory. "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, saith Jehovah of hosts", verse 9. Each brother and sister can bring more of the glory in; it is the divine thought that we should be continually moving "from glory to glory". If God shakes the nations it is with a view to what is precious coming to light as the glory of His house; it is that men and saints may be shaken out of settings that are not suitable to God's house, and brought as contributors of glory to that house.

Then two months later Haggai had another prophetic word, and this time it was a solemn warning against what is unclean. This is just the opposite to acquiring glory, and it seems to suggest that if we are not acquiring features of glory we shall be very likely to become unclean by contact with the uncleanness that is all around us here. The questions raised by Jehovah (verses 11 - 13) brought to light that holy things have no power to make holy what is not holy in itself, but what is unclean can quickly impart its own characteristic to anything which it touches. It is a warning against touching what is unclean. If we want to be suitable to the house of God, and to have features of glory, we must keep from the touch of what is unclean. The people in running to their own houses were really unclean; the state of their hearts in

allowing the house of God to lie waste while they pursued their own interests was one of uncleanness, and it brought upon them the severe governmental dealing of God. This is very much the state of the Christian profession at the present time.

The four and twentieth day of the ninth month (verse 18) was a notable day, for there was evidently a fresh start made in building, and Jehovah took immediate notice of it. "From this day will I bless you". It is interesting to notice that this was not the first movement they had made. They had begun years before, but there had been a long period of slackness. It is often like this; there is a beginning made, but it is not followed up, and spiritual energy wanes. Then God sends a prophetic word and uses it to bring about revival. A fresh start is made, and God immediately answers it by the assurance and bestowal of blessing.

Then on the same day there was a second word given to the prophet, but this time it was addressed to Zerubbabel as typical of Christ. It declared plainly how God would shake everything, the heavens and the earth, the throne of kingdoms and the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, but His object in all this was that Zerubbabel might be made as a signet. That is, God's object is to use Christ as His seal, and to put the impress of Christ on the whole created scene. We are made painfully aware that the nations do not carry the impress of Christ at the present time. They might have done so, for God has sent the gospel into all the creation and, if it had been believed, it would have brought all who received it under the impress of Christ. But it has not been believed, and hence there must be a terrible shaking to make way for the impress of Christ as God's chosen One. At the present time it is those who have come under the impress of Christ who are suitable to form part of God's house and to build it. But this has to be brought about by the shaking and overthrow of all that belongs to the flesh and to the natural man. As the flesh is judged and refused, God can seal us with His chosen Signet, and those who are thus sealed can build God's house and can bring glory into it.

There is very definite help for us in these things if we pay attention to them. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah helped the builders in their day. We are told that "the elders of the Jews built; and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo", Ezra 6: 14. In putting these prophecies on record the Spirit of God had in mind that they would be a help to *us* in building the house of God in our remnant times. May we have grace from God to profit by them!

ZECHARIAH 1

Zechariah 1

The first word that came to Zechariah called attention to the state of departure which had brought God's wrath upon His people, and was a call to return to Him, when He would return to them. The former prophets had called upon them to return, but they did not hearken. They had now to own that what had come upon them was the result of this; all had come to pass as the prophets foretold. Now it is important for us to remember that divine prophecies have been uttered with reference to the period in which we live, and our measure of spiritual light and prosperity largely depends upon our seeing that they have come to pass. For example, the Lord's words in Matthew 13: 24 - 33 are prophecies of what the kingdom of the heavens would become publicly, ending in the whole mass being leavened. Then Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 makes plain that after his departure grievous wolves would come in, not sparing the flock, and even from among those present, men would rise up speaking perverted things to draw away the disciples after them. 2 Timothy is another prophecy of what the state of the Christian profession would be in the last days, and 2 Thessalonians warns us that apostasy would come. Revelation 2 and 3 give us a prophetic outline of church history ending in Laodicea being spued out of the Lord's mouth as utterly nauseous to Him. 2 Peter and Jude may also be considered in this connection. Now we have to own that all these prophecies have been fulfilled, or are being fulfilled, so that the Christian profession is manifestly the subject of divine judgment. If we do not see this we shall not receive much light from God as to the resources available for a faithful remnant in a day of general departure. There are resources, but they are only made known to those who accept the truth as to the general position of things. Zechariah was a young man, and he represents youthful energy such as is needed for faithful service in remnant times.

The second word given to Zechariah took the form of a vision to assure him, and those who listened to him, that Jehovah was intensely interested in Jerusalem, though His indignation had been against it governmentally for seventy years. The man riding on a red horse is the prominent figure in this vision; he is called the so angel of Jehovah in verse 11. He is seen in verse 8 standing "among the myrtle trees that were in the low valley". I believe that the myrtle trees in the low valley represent the faithful remnant, and in having the man on the red horse standing among them God would give them, and us, the assurance of One being with us who has far greater power than the kingdoms which exist by God's appointment on the earth. The remnant to

whom Zechariah was sent were no doubt familiar with the book of Daniel, and they knew that four kingdoms would succeed each other on the earth, the first of which had already passed away, so that only three remained to be taken account of here. But the instruction is that all the three are seen to be *behind* the man on the red horse. The three horses represented all the earthly powers with which the people of God would come in contact until the kingdom of the Son of man should be set up. But they are all seen to be behind the man on the red horse, because in this vision he represents the Lord as we learn Him at the end of Matthew's gospel, having all power given to Him in heaven and upon earth. There are great powers which have been sent forth by Jehovah to walk through the earth, but in faith's vision they are all seen to be behind the man on the red horse. He stands among the myrtle trees in the low valley, which represents those who have come to Christ and received rest from Him, and who learn from Him as the meek and lowly One, as having taken His yoke upon them. It is only such persons who have Him with them, and who understand that He is their resource. Those who had returned from captivity were in danger of thinking that they could not go on with the work of the house of God without the sanction of the kings of Persia, but God would have them to take up the work in the light of His thoughts alone, and as having Him with them in it. As a matter of fact, they began to build without having any sanction from Darius (Ezra 5:2); they acted in the light of what Haggai and Zechariah brought before them. The movement did not begin with Cyrus, or Darius, or Artaxerxes, but with the angel of Jehovah and his intercession.

"And the angel of Jehovah answered and said, Jehovah of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these seventy years?" Zechariah 1: 12. In seeking to apply this to the present time I think it is right to conclude that the present revival, which has been going on during the last hundred years, is the answer to the intercession of Christ. Jerusalem represents that which is the common portion and joy of all saints as blessed in Christ. Jerusalem was the divine centre where all Israel was unified in approaching God; it was the place where He had set His name, so that there could be no rival centre. Now when God's universal thoughts get a place in our hearts we see ourselves and all saints as in relation to them. Everything narrow and sectional and sectarian drops out as being inconsistent with our spiritual outlook. We know that the Lord's prayer for His own was that they might all be one, and it is profoundly interesting to see that His intercession in remnant times, as presented to us in the intercession of the angel of Jehovah in Zechariah 1, is that God's universal thoughts may be restored in mercy. That is, that they may be so brought into the faith and affections of saints that they give character to the way in which

we walk together, and to our service Godward. If Jerusalem represents what is universal, the cities of Judah may be regarded as representing the local assemblies in which God's universal thoughts are realised and enjoyed together without being obstructed by any human order. I think it is right that we should recognise that the revival of these great and precious realities has come about in answer to the intercession of Christ. But the thought of this adds to the gravity of any difference as to these great matters.

The kingdoms set up by God when He transferred authority to the Gentiles were not doing anything at this time for Jerusalem. They could report that "all the earth sitteth still and is at rest", but it was sitting still with Jerusalem in ruins and God's house lying waste. God had used Gentile power to chastise His people, but they had gone to an extreme in what they had done. "I was but a little wroth, and they helped forward the affliction". Now God was wroth exceedingly with the nations which were at ease because they did not care for the city which He loved, and He made known through the prophet that He was jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. "Therefore thus saith Jehovah: I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith Jehovah of hosts, and the line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem", verse 16. That is, God undertakes the matter Himself in answer to the intercession of the angel. What a comfort it is to know that the revival in our day is the work of God Himself in answer to the intercession of Christ! We may be sure that He will see the matter through, even though only a small remnant may be in the current of His mind. It is not at all the mind of God that all the earth should sit still and be at rest while Jerusalem is trodden down of the nations. All man's efforts to bring about universal peace will fail. Peace on earth will depend on Jerusalem having her place as the city of the great King. In the meantime it is for us to understand what has taken the place of Jerusalem and the house that was there, as God's present chief interest. We must see this clearly before we can rightly apply the book of Zechariah to the present time. Jerusalem that now is is in bondage with her children, as Paul tells us (Galatians 4: 25), but in the same passage he speaks of what may be called *our* Jerusalem. He says, "the Jerusalem above is free, which is our mother". So there is at the present time a spiritual Jerusalem, though we have to admit that its features have long been terribly obscured in the Christian profession. The blessing of Abraham has arrived at the nations in Christ Jesus that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith, and now believers are all God's sons by faith in Christ Jesus, and are all one in Christ Jesus. The liberty which we have in Christ Jesus has been the great subject of attack by the enemy from the beginning; he would have us brought into bondage. When Christians were carried away from the thought of blessing

in Christ Jesus (and this took place very early in the history of the church) the great thoughts of God, and His true grace, were departed from, and His people were carried off into captivity. The whole system of legal bondage was brought into what professed to be Christianity, and, as a matter of public testimony, Jerusalem became a heap of ruins. How could there be any liberty or joy before God when justification by faith was unknown, and people were kept in their own souls on the ground of what they were as in the flesh? The Reformation was the beginning of God's returning to Jerusalem with mercies, and from that time onward increasing light from God broke in on the darkness of Christendom until it pleased God to restore Paul's ministry of the gospel and of the assembly a little more than a hundred years ago. God's universal thoughts of blessing in Christ were revived in contrast with men's false thoughts of what was "catholic". And as the unity of all saints as blessed in Christ entered into the faith and affections of those who enjoyed liberty in Christ Jesus, there was a breaking loose from sectarian and clerical bondage, and saints found that they could come together and worship together in the light of God's thoughts with regard to all His called ones. It might seem a small thing that a few feeble saints should be able to walk together according to the truth, but it was really God returning to Jerusalem with mercies. He was making what was of Himself, and which had been for ages obscured and denied, a concrete and tangible reality.

"And Jehovah answered the angel that talked with me good words, comforting words", verse 13. It is very precious to think of Christ interceding that God's original thoughts and purposes should be revived in a remnant at the end of the church's history, and to think of God answering Him with good and comforting words. It is a peculiar comfort given by God to Christ that a remnant should be brought into the truth of His headship, and should respond to His love, and should know their association with Him as His brethren before His Father and God. Oh, that Christians everywhere might be moved to enquire into these things, and to learn the wonder of God's great thoughts, particularly as brought out in the ministry of the apostle Paul! God has returned to those thoughts in mercy. Not that He ever departed from them Himself, but He has returned to them in His actual ways of blessing, so that thousands of saints the world over are finding their joy, and their communion with God and with one another, in these precious divine realities. In this way God is ministering comfort to the heart of Christ at the end of a history in which there has been so much in the assemblies that has called forth His rebuke.

Jehovah would have the remnant to know that in working at His house they were engaged with that which He had before Him. "I am returned to

Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith Jehovah of hosts, and the line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem", verse 16. What can be more encouraging than to be assured that we are putting our hands to the very thing that is God's present object? Would not every faithful heart value the privilege of doing so? And I think we can say without doubt that the line is stretched forth upon Jerusalem today. That is, the precious and universal thoughts of God are marked out and defined for us in the current ministry of the word in a way that they have not been since the days of the apostles. If we have not clear understanding of how the city of God is laid out, it is not because ministry is lacking. Every year adds something to the area which is clearly marked out. The Spirit will not cease to speak to the assemblies so long as they are on earth, and His speaking will always be to define more clearly the outlines of the truth. We all know that it is permanently defined in the Holy Scriptures, but there is a constant service of the Spirit in order that it may be more clearly defined in the spiritual apprehensions and understanding of the saints who compose the assembly. Every such accession increases the pleasure of God in His people.

The last paragraph of the chapter gives us another vision. "And I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and behold four horns. And I said unto the angel that talked with me, What are these? And he said to me, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem. And Jehovah showed me four craftsmen. And I said, What come these to do? And he spoke, saying, Those are the horns which scattered Judah, so that no man lifted up his head; but these are come to affright them, to cast out the horns of the nations, which lifted up the horn against the land of Judah to scatter it", verses 18 - 21. The four Gentile kingdoms are seen here as using their power to scatter the people of God. Under the providential ordering of God the authorities punish evildoers and commend those who do well, and so far as they carry out this, which is their divine commission, they are favourable to the people of God. And, in exceptional circumstances, as in the reign of Cyrus and at certain other times, they have directly furthered the cause of God. Indeed, we owe much at the present time in this country to a form of government which puts no restriction upon us in relation to the service of God, and protects us from any form of interference. We may well pray earnestly that this liberty may be preserved to us, for it is God's exceptional mercy. It has been more often the case that the "four horns" have used their power to scatter. All can see that the Gentile powers have scattered Israel and Judah, and it was under the Roman power that Christ was crucified, and long years of persecution suffered by the saints. During the greater part of the last nineteen centuries the powers

that be have been under the influence of a corrupt profession which has persecuted and scattered the people of God whenever it could do so.

But it is extremely encouraging to see that there has always been a counteracting power at work. The four craftsmen, or carpenters, have been present all the time, exercising a power and skill which was really greater than the power of the horns, for it was directly the power and wisdom of God. Craftsmen, or carpenters are persons who carry on constructive work, and I believe that in Zechariah's vision they set forth those agencies by which God has carried on His spiritual work, which has always tended to build up His saints on their most holy faith so that they have been strengthened to stand, notwithstanding the presence and activity of scattering powers. Every faithful saint down through the ages has been an overcomer, and the fact that there have been overcomers shows that constructive work has been going on all the time. It must have encouraged the feeble builders in Zechariah's day to know that if they were really building for God, and with God, there was a power with them greater than all the powers that had scattered them. In a day when scattering powers are at work it is good to remember this. The scattering powers can only be overcome morally as we go on with the positive work of God. The positive constructive powers are stronger than the horns. Paul's labours, for example, have proved far more effective than all the power of the Caesars, for they have built up something in myriads of hearts which no earthly power could possibly destroy. So it is, in measure, with all true ministry of the word, and with all true spiritual labour.

Whatever pressure comes we are to go on with what is constructive; the building of the house is to be our chief interest and business. It may not appear to the natural eye that the power that builds is greater than the power that scatters, but it most assuredly is so if viewed in divine light. In times of pressure it is most important that the ministry of the word should go on, that we should edify one another. The "craftsmen" must be busily at work so that gathering may go on instead of scattering. God shakes things in the world in view of gathering for His house, as we see in Haggai. He builds up His saints so that scattering efforts, by whomsoever made, may be defeated. May we, like the remnant of old, prosper in our building through the consideration of these things!

ZECHARIAH 2

Zechariah 2

In a further vision Zechariah sees a man with a measuring line in his hand, to whom he says, "Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, to measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof", verses 1 and 2. The result of the work of the "craftsmen" seen in the vision is that it becomes possible to take definite account of Jerusalem as it is in the mind of God. The whole breadth and length of God's thoughts as to His assembly come into view. The man with the measuring line has the whole area before him, and with special reference to the city having four sides, which suggests universality. If God returns to Jerusalem with mercies it is to a Jerusalem with measurements; that is, to a Jerusalem which answers to His own thoughts. No spiritual person could think that the Christian profession today answers to the mind of the Lord, or to the teaching of His apostles. Outwardly things are, indeed, in a ruined state, as they were in Zechariah's time, but if God comes in in mercy it is to call attention to things as they are in His mind. The constructive work today proceeds on the line of the divine plan. If we have not the thought of things being according to divine measurement we shall be aimless, and there will be little really done that is constructive. We shall, more or less, contribute to the ruin.

The man with the measuring line directs our thoughts to what is before God, and suggests that He means to give effect to it in a practical way. The full accomplishment of the prophecy of this chapter will be the setting up of Jerusalem in the earth as the city of God's choice. This was set before the remnant to cheer them in a day of small things. They were to have before them the wide expanse of what God would do for Jerusalem in a coming day of glory. This was to be a stimulus and strength for them in a day of much weakness. There had been what corresponds with this in our day. God has brought before His saints the whole breadth and length of what is in His mind as to the assembly, and He has done so in order that it might be worked out constructively; that is, in a concrete and practical way. God's Jerusalem today has been brought about as the result of the death of Christ. It was prophesied by Caiaphas that "Jesus was going to die for the nation" and, it is added, "not for the nation only, but that he should also gather together into one the children of God who were scattered abroad", John 11:51, 52. This gathering together into one of the children of God is the Jerusalem which God chooses and loves today. Then the Son of God as the Shepherd has said, "And I have other sheep which are not of this fold: these also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one flock, one shepherd", John 10: 16. What

a contrast is this to the many folds of Christendom! But that this is the divine thought no believer could question for a moment. Then as to the gift of the Holy Spirit, Peter said on the day of Pentecost, "For to you is the promise and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God may call",

Acts 2: 39. The reception of the same divine gift by all those called of God constitutes such a unity as was never known on earth before. Even as we read in 1 Corinthians 12: 13, "For also in the power of one Spirit we have all been baptised into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bondmen or free, and have all been given to drink into one Spirit". All who are in Christ are "one body in Christ, and each one members one of the other", Romans 12: 5. Indeed, no thought of different parties or opinions could be introduced into that region of which Scripture speaks as "in Christ", and "in Christ Jesus". Nothing inconsistent with "the truth" can have any footing in the assembly of God, for that assembly is "the pillar and base of the truth", 1 Timothy 3: 15.

If we put these thoughts together, and of course many other Scriptures might be added, we shall get some idea of what answers now to the city Jerusalem as seen in Zechariah. In God's way of mercy and blessing and by a revival of His precious truth in the ministry of the word, and in the intelligent affections of His saints, He has returned, by causing His people to return, to His original thoughts. The breadth and length of His grace and counsel in Christ have been measured for us so that we might apprehend them, and live in them, and walk together as in the practical power of them. We see in the scripture before us that Jerusalem was not only to be measured, but it was to be inhabited.

"Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein", verse 4. God does not intend the truth of the assembly merely to be contemplated in the abstract; He would have it to be taken up and worked out practically, for it does not appear in any way as a testimony save as living persons walk in it together. God is bringing His people in these last days to inhabit Jerusalem. When we commit ourselves to walk together with our brethren in the truth of what is in God's mind for all His saints we become pleasurable to Him, and we come in a special way under His protection. "And I, saith Jehovah, I will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her", verse 5. If we commit ourselves wholly to what is of God He will assuredly protect us. The assembly of God, "which he has purchased with the blood of his own", is not less precious to Him than Jerusalem. It is the true Jerusalem today, and God is the glory in the midst of it. There is no such glory as God in the midst of His saints. Would that we were more expectant of realising it whenever we come together! Of course, it can only be in holy conditions. But where Christ is treasured in every

heart, and all are enjoying the liberty which is in Christ Jesus, and refusing any place to the flesh, there is nothing to interfere with the glory of God's presence being known in the midst of His assembly. Those who hold in faith and love to God's thoughts concerning Christ and the assembly will be protected by God as "a wall of fire round about". There is much in the Christian profession that is not worth protecting, for it savours of man, and not of God. The question is raised with us all as to whether we are of value to God as bound up in our affections with what is precious in His sight. A few saints walking together in truth and love will find that God is unto them "a wall of fire round about". This was perhaps never more needed than it is today.

Then there is a gracious call to the many who are not dwelling in Jerusalem, who do not really know the liberty which is in Christ Jesus. "Ho, ho! flee from the land of the north, saith Jehovah Ho! escape Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon", verses 6 and 7. At that time the majority of the people of Judah were still in Babylon, just as the majority of God's people today are still in bondage to a clerical system of things which deprives them of liberty to take up assembly privileges. But they are all called to flee from bondage, and to come to their true place of liberty according to the mercies which God is showing to His people today. Every true saint belongs to Jerusalem, and should be there as to his affections and his associations. What God has done for some of His people He is ready to do for all.

Then there is a remarkable word in verse 8: "For thus saith Jehovah of hosts: After the glory, hath he sent me unto the nations that made you a spoil: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye". After bringing in the glory to Jerusalem, God will deal with every adverse power. We know that after the assembly is glorified God will judge the corrupt and idolatrous system of Babylon; Revelation 17 and 18. But in reviving the truth as to the assembly, and securing some correspondence with it, even though in a small remnant, God has already, in a spiritual sense, brought in the glory. His having done so makes it more necessary than ever that all that is Babylonish and corrupting should be judged, for we may be sure that Babylon will ever be hostile to Jerusalem, and therefore it will ever be a subject of judgment with God. He is intensely sensitive to anything that touches His Jerusalem, "for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye". No figure could more strikingly convey how sensitive God is as to anything that touches those who love Him, and who enter collectively into His thoughts. For it must be obvious to us all that Jerusalem refers to what the saints have in common, and what they enjoy together; it refers to what is collective.

So Jehovah says, "Sing aloud and rejoice, daughter of Zion; for behold I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith Jehovah", verse 10. God is securing a place where He can dwell among His people collectively. Do we really believe it? Shall it not be our supreme care to preserve conditions suitable to His dwelling in our midst? We can hardly think of God dwelling in the midst of His saints without there being blessing in the gospel. So He says, "And many nations shall join themselves to Jehovah in that day, and shall be unto me for a people", verse 11. There is the thought of others joining themselves to God known as dwelling in the midst of Zion. Things come short of God's thought if there is no extension of the knowledge of Himself to others. I am sure this is an exercise to us all.

"And Jehovah shall inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land, and shall yet choose Jerusalem", verse 12. God has chosen to have *men* for His portion. This is a wondrous thought, and should affect us profoundly. As we open our hearts to His grace and love made known to us in Christ, and as we take in what He has freely given to us, we become His portion, His inheritance. We may be quite sure that there is nothing so delightful to God as those purposes of love in regard to His elect which He has formed in Christ. He is working that they may be so known in human hearts that He gets the praise and worship that are due. It is as all that in which He is made known comes in its blessedness into the hearts of His saints that He gets the glory of it. It comes before Him, not only as known in His own heart, but as known in the hearts of those who compose His assembly. As they take up His thoughts with great delight they become His portion. It will be so eternally.

This section of the book finishes with a call to all flesh to "be silent before Jehovah; for he is risen up out of his holy habitation", verse 13. If God rises up to give effect to His thoughts and purposes with regard to His assembly He will see the matter through in His own way. Our chief concern should be to be with Him as to what He is doing, and to be available for His work.

It is important to bear in mind that what we have been considering, and what follows in this book, were spoken to a people who had returned from captivity, but who were neglectful of His work. They were dwelling in their own houses while His house lay waste. But He helped them, and re-awakened their energies by bringing before them what He had in His own heart, and what was involved in His returning to Jerusalem with mercies. It was just what was worthy of God in such circumstances. And in our day, notwithstanding all the felt and acknowledged weakness, and the feeble interest which we have in His things, God would remind us that He has risen up to give practical effect to what is in His own mind, so that we may think, not of what we are doing, but

of what He is doing, and that we may identify ourselves wholeheartedly with it. Every believer should ask himself, Is God doing anything today with reference to the assembly as it is in His mind? Has He returned to it with mercies? If so, we want to be with Him in what He is doing. However small it may appear to be, if God is doing it, it is really greater than anything else in Christendom. It will be suitable to link on morally with all that is going to be displayed in the heavenly city, just as Jehovah showed in the book we are reading that the revival which was then in progress linked on in His mind with all the future glory of Jerusalem and of His house. It was only by looking at it thus that the work could be taken up in a way that was worthy of God.

ZECHARIAH 3

Zechariah 3

Joshua the high priest is introduced here as representing the people in their actual state; even the priesthood had become defiled and unsuitable for holy service. There was an unclean state which God could not overlook, for He is light and in Him is no darkness at all. But if He had chosen Jerusalem, and had returned to her with mercies, He must needs undertake to remove the defilement, and to bring in suitable conditions for His service to go on. There can be no doubt that much has come in amongst the people of God which is contrary to His thought of the holy priesthood. This scripture suggests that priestly habiliments may be defiled even amongst a returned remnant. Though outwardly delivered from the captivity and corruptions of Babylon, there was a defiled state which rendered it impossible for God to be served in the beauty of holiness. But God in His wondrous mercy undertook to deal even with such a condition, because it was His thought to have His portion in His people, and in their acceptable service.

It is to be observed that Satan is brought personally into this matter; God is lifting the veil and exposing the very source of the evil which has come in. We are shown, too, that the one who was the source of the evil would do all that he could to frustrate the designs of mercy. But there is also another Person in the scene who is spoken of as "the Angel of Jehovah". I believe that when this term is used in Scripture it always has reference to Christ. Joshua was standing before the Angel of Jehovah; that is, he was in presence of God's mighty intervention in Christ. That is where faith puts us, however defiled we may be, or rather it is where infinite mercy puts us. If that is so, whatever Satan may wish to do, he is rebuked. It is a question of God's sovereignty; He has chosen Jerusalem, and He has a right of way. As regards Joshua Jehovah says, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" In presence of Satan God asserts His right to do what He will in mercy; if He is minded to pluck a brand out of the fire He will do it in spite of Satan. And the more simply and fully we are prepared to take the place of being brands plucked out of the fire the more we shall learn the surpassing riches of God's grace in His kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. People who realise that they are brands plucked out of the fire have done with all thoughts of self-worthiness. I do not think any of us get rid of our filthy garments without standing in them in the presence of Christ. Joshua must have felt what a contrast there was between the Angel of Jehovah and himself.

We must bear in mind that what is dealt with here is not the ungodliness of a man in the world, but a defiled condition of things in the priesthood; it is a man defiled even while in the highest possible position of service Godward. It sets before us the fact that even our religious ways and associations may be filthy garments which render us unsuitable for the service of God. God would in mercy divest us of such things, and I believe He uses the ministry of the word to free us from anything that hinders the spirituality of our service Godward. It is "those that stood before him" who are told to take away the filthy garments from off Joshua. I believe Paul was taking away the filthy garments from off the Galatians when he wrote his epistle to them, and from the Corinthians when he wrote his first epistle to them. Ministry comes in to help, but it is only those who are before God who can really help us, for they are the only ones who know what is suitable to the service of God. We may learn from Scripture that the Jewish elements which were brought into the assembly in its early days, and against which the apostle Paul had so constantly to contend, were really "filthy garments". Circumcision, law-keeping, observing days and months and times and years, and the whole round of what was Jewish, were things which defiled when God's mind had been made known in Christ. Those that stand before God know that everything connected with man as in the flesh is defiling, for God has had to remove it from before His eye in the death of His Son. Man as in the flesh can have no place before God or in His holy service. Christ having died for all is the proof that all were dead, and we cannot bring before God in His service that which He accounts dead. Philosophy and vain deceit and doing our own will in humility are "filthy garments;" because, however, commendable in the estimation of men, they are not Christ. Paul's great service was to announce Christ, "to the end that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus", Colossians 1: 28. How many things have come into the professed service of God which are "not after Christ"! They are all "filthy garments" which disqualify for holy service. The human mind, as such, is essentially unholy, for it cannot rise above the measure of man, and man is unholy as having departed from God. So we have all to stand in the presence of God's great intervention in Christ, and to see how God has provided for His own pleasure in us by investing us with Christ in the character of "festival-robes".

"And unto him he said, See, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I clothe thee with festival-robes". It is important to see that it is God who does this; there is no mixture of human work in it. It is brought about that God may have His portion in those whom He thus invests. The delight of God is that we should be consciously in Christ before Him. As saints, called of God, we have indeed no other status; every believer who has the Spirit is in Christ,

though many may be only "babes in Christ"; that is, we are small in the apprehension of what it is to be in Him. But a babe in Christ has apprehended that redemption is in Christ Jesus, Romans 3: 24; Ephesians 1:7. There can be no question about that. God has caused our iniquity to pass from us, not by there being anything meritorious on our side, but in the value of the redemption which is in Christ, and in the power of His blood. We are justified in Christ (Galatians 2:17); that is, we are not justified in ourselves but in another Man; it is a matter of faith in Him. I think that our first apprehension of being in Christ is that we see that redemption is in Him, and that we are justified in Him. Then we learn through grace, that there is one blessed Man who has died to sin once for all, but who now lives to God, and on account of this we can, through grace, reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus; Romans 6: 11. There is no other way of being alive to God save as in Him; the best bit of flesh there ever was has death stamped upon it, but Christ lives to God for God's pleasure so that we might take up the favour of being alive to God in Him. Then there is no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus, for as in Him we judge the flesh and walk according to Spirit, and those who do so find that they are set free from the law of sin and of death.

Wondrous as all that is, it hardly comes up to what is suggested by being clothed with festival-robcs. This is something of superlative excellence, like the "best robe" of Luke 15. If God acts according to His own choice in what He does for us, and does it that He may have delight in us, we may be sure that He will furnish us with what has the very highest degree of acceptability in His sight. So we read that the Father "has made us fit for sharing the portion of the saints in light", Colossians 1: 12. And I He has made known to us that He has chosen us in Christ "before the world's foundation, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love; having marked us out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has taken us into favour in the Beloved", Ephesians 1: 4 - 6. I think this answers, for us, to the "festival-robcs" of Zechariah 3.

It is worthy of note that such a precious instruction as this should come out in a day of recovery, in a remnant time. There have been long centuries during which the "filthy" character of man in the flesh has not been realised. It had been thought that by sacraments or religious observances man could be qualified to serve God, but the sense of unfitness has always been there. It has been reserved for these last days of wondrous recovery to make clearly manifest that the man after the flesh can never have any status with God save that of condemnation, but that man as blessed in Christ has a place with God that cannot possibly be improved upon. Not that saints come up to the fulness

of this all at once. We begin as babes in Christ, but growth goes on with a view to our coming up to the full thought of "a man in Christ", 2 Corinthians 12: 2. A man in Christ has come to maturity; he is suitable to entertain the most precious thoughts of God, and to serve Him in a priestly way in relation to them. He is clothed with festival robes.

"And I said, Let them set a pure turban upon his head". This implies that the service of holy priesthood can be taken up intelligently. God can be addressed in a way that corresponds with the great thoughts of His own love. Much that is supposed to be the service of God is entirely out of harmony with the truth. It encourages man as in the flesh to draw near, though admitting his unfitness to do so, and it obscures, or even denies, all that the saints are according to 1 Corinthians 1: 30. "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who has been made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and holiness, and redemption; that according as it is written, He that boasts, let him boast in the Lord". But God does not give up what He has in His own mind, and all His work in His saints is to build them up in what they are as in Christ Jesus. All the work of the ministry is with a view to this. For it is those who stood before Jehovah who took away the filthy garments, and who set the pure turban upon his head, and clothed him with garments. It is all the work of God, but it is largely wrought into the souls of the saints by ministry.

"And the angel of Jehovah protested unto Joshua saying, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts; and I will give thee a place to walk among these that stand by", verses 6, 7. This makes clear that all that had been done for Joshua was in view of his taking up responsible service in God's house. If Joshua was faithful he would judge God's house and keep His courts. To be entrusted with the care of God's house is a wonderful favour, as we must realise, if we know God at all. But it is also a very serious responsibility. We cannot judge God's house unless we have priestly intelligence of what is suitable to the house, and then we have to apply that intelligence in a practical way. To judge in this sense is to exercise discernment and discrimination so that the standard of what is suitable to God is maintained in all that pertains to our collective service Godward. Then His courts are to be *kept*; this would imply care as to the kind of persons who are permitted to approach. Some would tell us that only the Spirit knows who is suitable, and that therefore we should leave each one free to act on his own responsibility in relation to approach to God. But this sets aside the whole principle of keeping God's courts, and would reduce things to the level of every man doing what is right in his own eyes. Every really faithful and intelligent saint must admit that the responsibility of keeping God's courts is

committed to us. The greater the confusion is generally, the more incumbent it is upon us to keep this holy charge.

It is also said of Joshua, "and I will give thee a place to walk (or, give thee goings) among those that stand by". I think this is a reference to "those that stood before him" in verse 4. The Scripture suggests that there are servants who are near to God, and who are at hand to do His pleasure in regard to Joshua. They are in the knowledge of God's mind, and are available for any needed service in relation to His house. We may think of the apostles in connections such as this, and no doubt there have been many others. How blessed to have our "goings" among such persons! If any have been a spiritual help to us in relation to the service of God it is the divine intent that we should move with them in nearness to God, and thus in availability for any needed service.

Then Joshua is addressed further in verse 8. It would seem that Joshua throughout this book is a representative person in whom the defiled state of the priesthood is seen, and then the recovery of priestly conditions through sovereign mercy. As thus recovered he is seen as having "fellows". We know that Christ has "companions" or "fellows" (Psalm 45:7; Hebrews 1:9), but here it would appear to be the priest who has been divested of "filthy garments" and invested with "festival-robles", who has "fellows". It clearly suggests that there is a priestly company secured on the ground of restoration by mercy, a company who have shared Joshua's experiences in some measure, and who sit before him to contemplate the priesthood as restored in mercy. Of course, for us, this involves the contemplation of Christ, for we could not get any true thought of priesthood if we did not apprehend it in Him. But the point in Zechariah 3 is that priestly conditions are restored in a remnant day so that the service of God's house may be taken up in a way that is acceptable to Him. Thank God, there are many who know what it is to sit in the presence of such a recovery today. One would not wish to forget the feebleness of the moment, neither would one wish to minimise the greatness of what God has done in restoring, in some measure,

priestly conditions in these last days. I believe that God would have His people to recognise this. Those in whom it has been effected cannot think anything of themselves, for they are conscious that they are brands plucked out of the fire, but they are constrained to acknowledge what mercy has done. If God is restoring priestly conditions today, who of His saints would wish to be out of it? Let us, at any rate, recognise what God is doing. Those who do so will be marked off from others; they will be "men of portent", or men to be observed as signs, or types. Those who recognise that God is restoring priestly

conditions, and who seek to assemble together and to worship in the light of what God is restoring, are persons whom God would have to be observed. They are, indeed, His signs to all Christendom; they are called to be models for all His people of what is truly priestly in service Godward. They are types of what His service should be universally. Would that we understood this better! What holy exercises would be maintained in our hearts, what attention we should pay to every bit of spiritual help that comes to us in relation to the service of God, what care as to every detail of the service, if we had in mind that God would have us to be such as could be observed by all as expressive of His mind in regard to priestly service. Yet would anything less than this really meet our spiritual exercises and desires?

It is at this point that Jehovah says, "For behold, I will bring forth my servant the Branch". The eyes of Joshua and his fellows are turned to Christ as Jehovah's perfect Servant. It was as much as to say to them, If you want to build acceptably you must consider Christ. It is suggested here that persons are present who can look at Christ in a priestly way; that is, they can look at Him in relation to God. It is a never to be forgotten moment when we come to this, that instead of thinking of Christ in relation to us we begin to think of Him in relation to God. Not that we lose the first by entertaining the second; it is rather greatly enlarged. But the Branch is Jehovah's Servant; it is He who will very shortly bring in publicly all that is for the pleasure of God. It is as Man that He will do this: "Behold a man whose name is the Branch", chapter 6:12. It is He who will build the temple, and, when He does, every whit of it will say, Glory. But then all that Christ will do in the future was to be before the hearts of the remnant in their building in Zechariah's day. And so it is to be for us. Everything that is right will come in for the pleasure of God when He brings forth the Branch. For He is "a righteous Branch" (Jeremiah 23: 5), or, as the word really is, *Sprout*. There is the thought of freshness and the energy of life in a sprout; it speaks of Christ as bringing in what is entirely new, but bringing it in in a vigorous way so that it secures the full delight of God. Now God would have us to apprehend that nothing is right that is not brought in by Christ. What will result publicly from the bringing in of the Branch is to have place now in the house of God in a spiritual way.

Then another figure is used. "For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua — upon one stone are seven eyes; behold, I will engrave the graving thereof", verse 9. "A stone" suggests that building is in view, but it is building that is to take character from Christ. I think we see the seven eyes in Isaiah 11:1, 2: "And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots shall be fruitful; and the Spirit of Jehovah shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and

might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah". These are the qualifications of Christ to exercise government in the world to come. How much more is engraven on that Stone than was written on the stone tables of the law! Everything is there that God would have expressed in the Man of His choice, of His delight. When God brings in Christ He will remove the iniquity of His land in one day, and every man will be set free to invite his neighbour under the vine and under the fig-tree. Every one will be in perfect liberty both before God and with his neighbour. Everyone will have the sense of being possessed of good which he can gladly share with his neighbour. God would have His people to know at the present time that they are perfected for ever by the one offering of Christ, so that they can be free and happy with God in the sense of boundless favour. And He has given us brethren with whom we can share every choice thing with which He has enriched us in Christ. Our neighbours are those with whom we have possibilities of contact; it is well to make them welcome to what we have; it is our joy as well as theirs; it is the true gain of our fellowship.

ZECHARIAH 4

Zechariah 4

The fact that Zechariah is waked at the beginning of this chapter "as a man that is wakened out of his sleep" suggests that what is set forth in this chapter is particularly intended to be understood in a time of awakening. The subject of the chapter is "a lamp-stand all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and its seven lamps thereon, seven lamps, and seven pipes to the lamps, which are upon the top thereof; and two olive trees beside it, one on the right of the bowl, and the other on the left of it", verses 2 and 3. The angel explains these figures to Zechariah by saying, "This is the word of Jehovah unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts", verse 6. God calls our attention to a wonderful vessel of light, and gives us to understand that it sets forth symbolically a system of things which is suitable to be pervaded by the activity of His Spirit. This striking symbol presents to us the character of the vessel by which, and in which, He would act. It is important for us to consider this carefully.

This prophecy was given to encourage those who were building the house of God in a remnant time and in outward weakness. It thus applies specially to our own time. God would say to us, If you want to be builders of My house, you must have this vision before you. He would have us to awake out of sleep to see this vessel of light as a great spiritual reality. There was no such vessel of divine light actually in existence when Zechariah saw this vision. It was something to be apprehended as in the mind of God, which conveyed to Zerubbabel that He had before Him the thought of a vessel of light which should be pervaded by the power of His Spirit. There will be such a vessel in a future day in connection with Israel, but God would have us to see that at the present time His thought is that the assembly should come into evidence as having the features set forth symbolically in Zechariah 4, and He is working to that end.

If we think of the assembly as "a lamp-stand all of gold" we are looking at it according to what it is as the product of the work of God. For example, Paul speaks of believers as "they that are according to Spirit", and he says that they "mind the things of the Spirit", Romans 8: 5. It is not only that they have the Spirit, but they are "according to Spirit"; that is the character of the vessel. Again, Paul said, "So if any one be in Christ, there is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold all things have become new: and all things are of the God who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ", 2 Corinthians 5: 17, 18. John speaks of the saints as born of God. As we think of them thus

we do not think of the flesh, or of the human imperfection, but of persons begotten of God, and having a nature directly derived from Him. John says to those to whom he was writing, "Ye are of God, children, and have overcome them (the antichrists), because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world", 1 John 4: 4. As we think of the saints as begotten of God, and having the Spirit, we think of them as "all of gold". This is what they really are; neither flesh nor human infirmity can set this aside, though both are present with us as things to be judged, which we require divine grace to overcome.

There is much said of the Spirit in John's gospel, both as given to the individual believer and as given to the saints viewed collectively, but in no case is it suggested that there is any obstructing or incongruous element in the vessel. It is very much on the line of the "lamp-stand all of gold". We can contemplate this now as set forth in Scripture, but it is set forth there that we may be exercised to have the spiritual reality of it. Perhaps no statements in Scripture are more attractive than what is said of the Spirit in John's gospel, but they are also very challenging, and tend to maintain continual exercise that we may be in the gain of them.

What we see here, in symbol, is very different from the seven golden lamp-stands of Revelation 1. They are the assemblies as responsible light-bearers, but most of them are seen as failing in their responsibility. The secret of their defection lay in departing from what is set forth in Zechariah 4. Nothing has place in the "lamp-stand all of gold" but what is divinely wrought; the power of everything connected with it is the Holy Spirit. How soon was this departed from, and what was of man, and of the flesh, took its place! But the recovery of the truth in these last days is to bring the remnant, that is, in principle, all true saints, back to the recognition that flesh profits nothing, and that only what God has wrought has true value, and that the only power to maintain divine light is the Spirit of God. The flow of the Spirit is the great matter for us all to be concerned about. The "pipes" and "tubes" in the Scripture before us clearly intimate the thought of a flow. There is no suggestion of a periodical replenishment as in the case of the candlestick in the tabernacle.

The olive-trees, the bowl, and the pipes combine to suggest a continuous flow of the Spirit. They speak of conditions by which a continuous flow is maintained. What is put before us here is not the setting up of things as at Pentecost, but a vessel marked by the continuing activity of the Holy Spirit. And this, as it may be known in a day of recovery; John's gospel has this particularly in view.

The "bowl upon the top of it" gives, too, the idea of a containing vessel. When it is said, "Be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18), it implies that the saints

of the assembly are a containing vessel for the Spirit. It is a wondrous thought. The prudent virgins of Matthew 25 took oil in their vessels with their torches. It is not enough that there shall be some action of the Spirit at certain times for particular service, but the saints are to be permanently a containing vessel for the Spirit. The Lord said of the Spirit, "He abides with you, and shall be in you" (John 14: 17), and we read of God's Spirit *dwelling* in the saints. God would have each saint to say, I am part of that golden bowl!

Then there are "seven lamps thereon, seven lamps, and seven pipes to the lamps, which are upon the top thereof". The lamps, though part of the whole system, and deriving from it, are that part which directly sheds forth the light. The actual shedding forth of spiritual light, in view of the service of the house of God, is through certain divinely furnished vessels. The fact that there are seven lamps speaks of the spiritual completeness of the light-giving system, and this is emphasised by the fact that, as the margin suggests, there are seven pipes to each lamp. There is a certain shining of divine light in every "manifestation of the Spirit", and, if nothing of flesh came in, the shining of spiritual light through various vessels would blend in a completeness which would be manifestly of God. The gifts of the Spirit in the body, and the gifts set by God in the assembly, and the gifts of the ascended Christ, would all necessarily blend for the diffusion of spiritual light. The disorder which has come in by human infirmity, and by the setting aside of divine order, has thrown things into confusion so that the perfection of the divine system is lost sight of. But the vision of Zechariah 4 is intended to call our attention to things as they are in the mind of God, so that we may return to spiritual thoughts. God provides in His system for the diffusion of spiritual light in a complete way. He shows us in this striking symbol that the lamps are dependent on the flow of oil through the pipes, and the pipes are fed from the bowl,

and the bowl is fed from the two olive-trees. The whole system works together as the oil circulates through it, and the light is seen to be dependent upon the continuous flow of the oil. So if spiritual conditions are departed from, the operation of the whole system is interfered with, as it has been even from the days of the apostles.

We see at the beginning that there was a company prepared by the personal service of Christ to be the vessel of the Spirit. The saints acquired features under the influence of Christ, as being with Him in the days of His flesh, and in the forty days during which He was with them as risen, which made them suitable for the reception of the Spirit. The work of God was very distinct in them, so that they not only received the Spirit, but they were marked by spirituality, and hence there was no obstruction to the spiritual flow, and the

light was undimmed. But very soon, as we may learn from the Acts and the Epistles, there was departure from spirituality and the spiritual flow was impeded and the light waned. Now God is working to bring about a return to spiritual conditions — in a word, to spirituality. It is not enough that we should recognise that the Spirit is here — that this is the Spirit's day — but we should be greatly concerned to be spiritual. It is only in spiritual persons that there can be the flow of what is spiritual, and without this the assembly cannot be in any real way the vessel of spiritual light. The Spirit Himself acts in the assembly, but in a general way the service there is through spiritual persons; of course, in the power of the Spirit. So that a return to spirituality is essential if the assembly is really to come into evidence as having the features of the symbol before us in Zechariah 4.

I think we may see what answers to this vessel of light in the assembly in Philadelphia, which is evidently the product of divine revival in the closing days of the assembly period. The fact that the Lord had to say, "thou hast a little power", shows that He does not contemplate great things outwardly, but it shows that the power that was there was such as He could recognise; that is, it was spiritual and not natural or fleshly power. Keeping His word and not denying His name, and keeping the word of His patience, bring out in a very full way the character of the vessel. In such a vessel there would be nothing to hinder the spiritual flow, or to dim the light. It clearly contemplates a restoration of spirituality in an assembly setting at the end of the assembly period. Philadelphia is marked by watchful care of the word of Christ; they hold in assembly affection what comes out in John's gospel. Then there is no denial of His name, which covers all that rightly represents Him here. His name is to be borne in testimony here; it is what James calls "the excellent name which has been called upon you". A Philadelphian overcomer is consistent with that name, is a true confessor of it; he will not suffer himself to be identified with anything that denies it. And keeping the word of His patience means that we do not want any place in the world until He gets His place. These are the true features of the assembly as the vessel of light.

There was a time when it needed to be much stressed that the Spirit of God is here, a divine Person, dwelling in the saints, for this was very feebly apprehended generally. But now that this truth is fairly widely accepted, it becomes necessary to lay stress on the character of the vessel in which spiritual activities can be known. Apart from spirituality in the vessel, there will be no flow of oil to maintain spiritual light. Spiritual manifestations in the assembly depend on the presence there of spiritual men. It has often been noticed that in 1 Corinthians 14, where the subject of spiritual manifestations is dwelt upon at some length, the Spirit is not mentioned. Service in the

assembly is not exactly the action of the Spirit but the intelligent service of spiritual men. Ministry is the exercise of gifts conferred by the Spirit, and to be profitable it must be in the power of the Spirit, but the character and measure of the vessel has much to do with it. If the vessel is marked by spirituality, the ministry will be spiritual; divine things will be put together in a spiritual way, and the saints, as taught of God, will discern that it is so, and will profit by it.

What the Spirit says to the assemblies (Revelation 2 and 3) is a more general thought; it covers the whole trend of what the Spirit may be calling attention to at any particular time. If I am spiritual I shall discern what the Spirit is saying to the assemblies. He said much about justification by faith in Luther's time, but of late He has been speaking about Christ as Head, and about the assembly as the anointed vessel for divine service. No spiritual man would care to be out of the line of what the Spirit is saying to the assemblies today. Any who minister would desire that what they say might harmonise with what the Spirit is saying.

As spirituality is maintained there is a suitable vessel for the maintenance of divine light here. The character of the vessel is what is prominent in Zechariah 4, and the "seven pipes to each lamp" (see margin) suggest very plainly that the gifts, or members of the body that are used publicly for the shedding forth of light, are dependent on the channels of supply which form part of the vessel of light. We are not all "lamps" as in this symbol, but we can all be "pipes" through which a spiritual flow is maintained for the furnishing of light. The sisters may have a great place in thus contributing; indeed, if there is no spiritual flow in the sisters the brothers will get on very badly in their more public service.

As Zerubbabel gets the encouragement of this wonderful symbol, difficulties give way before him; the mountain becomes a plain (verse 7), and he is assured of ability to finish that of which he had laid the foundation. "He shall bring forth the headstone with shoutings: Grace, grace unto it!" This implies that the building is brought to completion in that Christ gets His place as the Headstone. When He gets His place, and is saluted as Head, the saints are brought to conscious identification with Him before God. They are complete, or filled full, in Him; nothing is wanting. Zerubbabel had laid the foundation of the house, and his hands should finish it. The divine thought in this connection is that if we have begun to build we are encouraged to proceed to the completion of what we have begun. I believe that God would have us to reach His complete thought every time when we come together to eat the Lord's supper. If Christ gets His place with us as Head, things are, in principle, brought to completion. If the service of praise is according to His place with

the Father and with God, and how He praises, there is nothing more to be added.

Those who despise "the day of small things" show that they have never seen things as Zechariah saw them. They have no idea of the greatness of what is before the mind of God, and which He would bring before the minds of His people in a remnant time. Indeed, it is clear that they do not see things as the "eyes of Jehovah" see them. For we read, "Yea, they shall rejoice, even those seven, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel these are the eyes of Jehovah, which run to and fro in the whole earth", verse 10. "The eyes of Jehovah" rejoice when they see the plummet in the hand of any builder today. Such a one has the thought of building according to the truth, of having things to correspond with the divine mind. We should bring everything to the test of the plummet. This will lead to the rejection of much that is commendable, and even imposing in the eyes of men, but there will be something which will cause the eyes of Jehovah to rejoice.

It was very comely that Zechariah, as a young man, should ask questions about what he saw. He is a model in this for all young brothers. Our readings would be much more interesting and helpful if exercised young brothers were more free to ask questions. Zechariah was particularly concerned about the two olive trees which he had seen; he asked twice about them. He seemed to realise what a vital part they played in relation to the symbolical vessel of light. The two witnesses of Revelation 11 are expressly said to be "the two olive-trees and the two lamps which stand before the Lord of the earth". They are viewed there as in the place of public testimony, so that we read of "*two* lamps". But they are seen in Zechariah 4 as furnishing what would maintain spiritual light in the temple. They are called "sons of oil", and the oil which they yield is called "gold" in verse 12. This figure suggests that, by the grace of the Lord, there may be found conditions among His people which may become sources of spiritual supply. If this figure applied in any way to Zerubbabel and Joshua, as it probably did, it would refer to royal and priestly features, which, as excluding what is of the flesh and bringing in what is of God, become sources of spiritual supply. It is remarkable how all the figures connected with this vessel of light seem to be intended to emphasise spiritual conditions. While the underlying thought is that power is by God's Spirit, what is made prominent is that spiritual conditions are present which are in every way favourable to the free flow of what is of God. This is particularly needful for consideration for us today.

ZECHARIAH 5

Zechariah 5

This chapter stands in very marked contrast with the previous one. In chapter 4 we see a vessel of light, which in a symbolical way answers perfectly to the mind of God. But chapter 5 is descriptive of the actual state of things which had come about in Israel, and which called for divine judgment, and what we see set forth here in a figurative way has also come to pass in the Christian profession. Zechariah sees a flying roll, and he is told, "This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole land: for every one that stealeth shall be cut off according to it on this side; and every one that sweareth shall be cut off according to it on that side", verse 3.

There is an immense amount of dishonesty in the Christian profession; people appropriate to themselves what they have no right to whatever. Indeed, every bit of Christian profession that is not the product of the work of God may be regarded as stolen goods; it is the natural man appropriating what belongs only to the household of faith. Joshua in chapter 3 is an example of one who had things in a righteous way. His condition was fully exposed, and it was met in a divine way, so that he was righteously entitled to stand in the presence of God as perfectly suitable to be there. He was made to know that he was a brand plucked out of the fire, but his iniquity was caused to pass from him, and he was clothed with festival-robcs. Iniquity could not pass from any one apart from the death of Christ, and the cleansing of His blood, and no-one could be clothed with festival-robcs except as having Christ as His righteousness. It is all of pure mercy, and a gift of infinite grace, and the one who gets it is simply a repentant sinner with no title to anything in himself. He has no need to steal, for all that he needs is freely given, according to the riches of God's grace. But for this to be known in truth there must be a personal dealing of God with the soul, so that one is genuinely convicted of sin, and brought to know the value of Christ and of the redemption which is in Him. Any Christian profession which does not rest on this ground can only be regarded as stealing what does not belong to it, and it will result in condemnation.

The Lord said, "Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up", Matthew 15: 13. "Many shall say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied through *thy* name, and through *thy* name cast out demons, and through *thy* name done many works of power, and then will I avow unto them, I never knew you. Depart from me, workers of lawlessness", Matthew 7: 22, 23. Such persons had stolen the Lord's name, and had used it

in a wonderful way without having any right to it. There were certain Jewish exorcists at Ephesus who took in hand to call upon those who had wicked spirits, the name of the Lord Jesus, but on their lips it was a stolen name; they had no right to it. So it is with all profession that has not its roots in a true work of God in the soul.

Swearing falsely by Jehovah's name means that something wrong is accredited by linking that name with it. Jehovah will not hold him guiltless that does so; see Exodus 20: 7 and margin. The Lord's name has been connected with many things in Christendom that He hates, and this will surely bring down His judgment. If we name the name of the Lord we must withdraw from iniquity, that is, from things which are not right in His sight.

In verses 5 - 11 Zechariah sees another vision, and this time it is an ephah into the midst of which a woman is cast who is named "Wickedness". This answers to what is called in the New Testament "the mystery of lawlessness", which had begun to work in the apostles' days (2 Thessalonians 2: 7), and which will continue to work until it issues in complete apostasy. We gather from the woman being seen as sitting in the ephah, and shut up in it by the weight of lead, that God is pleased at the present time to put certain restrictions upon what is lawless. It is a great comfort to the people of God that it is so. However free men may appear to be to do evil, there is a definite measure beyond which they cannot go. The mystery of lawlessness is there, as it were, alongside the golden lamps of chapter 4. The elements of apostasy are present, and God would have them to be discerned by His people, but He would have them to know that those elements are under restriction. The presence of the assembly on earth as the vessel of the Spirit is a restriction upon lawlessness. The more the features of the vessel of light come into evidence the greater the check upon what is evil. The development of spirituality in the saints is extremely important from this point of view.

God has His own way and time to deal with lawlessness in judgment. He will not deal with it publicly until it is fully matured, and this will not be until the present restrictions are removed. The scripture before us tells us that the ephah would have a house in the land of Shinar, and be established there. It will ultimately be found in full development, and then God will judge it. "Wickedness" is not seen here as destroyed or consumed; it is seen as limited, but reserved to be dealt with when its character comes out fully. Paul instructed the young believers at Thessalonica in these things, so that it is a matter which we all need to understand.

The mystery of lawlessness is the working of Satan which will culminate in the revelation of the man of sin. This is set forth in the woman in the ephah. She

represents the working of lawless will, and particularly as acting in the sphere where there has been light from God. If we do not judge this principle of lawlessness it will work in us against what is of God, and the features of the vessel of light will not appear in us. But the working of God in His saints is all on the line of bringing them out here as the "lamp-stand all of gold", that there may be a vessel marked by spirituality, in which everything contributes to the shining of divine light.

ZECHARIAH 6

Zechariah 6

The vision of Zechariah 6: 1 - 8 contains an instruction which is as important for us as it was for the remnant in that day. It lets us know that God has not ceased to carry on a government in the world, though He has taken His throne from Jerusalem. We may remember that it is said that "Solomon sat on the throne of Jehovah" (1 Chronicles 29: 23), and the queen of Sheba said, "Blessed be Jehovah thy God, who delighted in thee, to set thee on his throne, to be king to Jehovah thy God", 2 Chronicles 9:8. Jehovah's throne was then at Jerusalem; there was a direct government of God in the earth in the midst of Israel. But this was conditional on the obedience and faithfulness of Israel, and particularly on that of their kings. The captivity showed that the throne of Jehovah was no longer at Jerusalem. Everything having been forfeited by Israel, authority was definitely put by God in the hands of Gentile powers, as set forth in the great image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream; Daniel 2. It is now "the times of the Gentiles". God has not left things to go on in a haphazard way; He has committed authority to certain powers, which are definitely responsible to Him as to how they exercise that authority. If they abuse the power with which they are entrusted, God will judge them, and it will eventually be found that power — like everything else that God has committed to man's responsibility — will become a subject of judgment. The Stone cut out without hands will smite the image upon its feet, and every constituent part of it will be "broken in pieces together". Gentile power will be judged and broken in pieces, and the whole earth will be filled with blessing under the reign of Christ. The throne of Jehovah will be again set up in the earth, but not in a conditional way which may break down through man's unfaithfulness, but in a permanent way as filled by One who is in every way capable of sustaining the government.

The people to whom Zechariah prophesied had, no doubt, read the prophet Daniel, and thus knew about the four successive kingdoms which would run their course before the setting up of the kingdom of Christ. Those kingdoms were presented to Zechariah under the figure of four chariots, but the Spirit of God views them here as having a special character which does not appear in Daniel. In Daniel we get a public, or historical, view of the four kingdoms, and this was appropriate in the presentation of them to Nebuchadnezzar. But in Zechariah the angel interprets the import of the four chariots by saying, "These are the four spirits of the heavens which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth" (verse 5). So they are seen here as having some distinct relation to the working out of God's plans as "the Lord of all the earth".

This is how God would have His saints to view the Gentile kingdoms; it is, we might say, a private view, reserved for faith, but one which is very comforting when it is spiritually apprehended. It shows that there is a working of God in His government and providence which goes on during the time of the successive Gentile kingdoms. The Gentile powers are entirely unaware of this working, but it is made known to the faith of the remnant. It is the hidden side of the times of the Gentiles. There is something going on all the time which is hidden from the eyes of men, but which is providentially causing things to work out for the furtherance of the plans of the Lord of all the earth during the long period which has come in between the setting aside of the throne of Jehovah in the earth and the coming of Christ, when divine government will be publicly set up in power. To know this is a great comfort for faith.

The stability of this secret government of God is set forth by the two mountains of brass from between which the four chariots came. God would have us to know that, though things seem to be unstable, and to be largely marked by a conflict of human ambitions, and sometimes by the predominance of what is evil, He is over-ruling on fixed principles which cannot be interfered with by any power of man.

It was the time of the second chariot when Zechariah prophesied. The great head of Gentile power had completely failed to answer to the responsibility entrusted to it, and had come under divine judgment. That is why He says, "See, these that go forth towards the north country have quieted my spirit (or, satisfied mine anger) in the north country", verse 8. God judged Babylon for its pride, its idolatry, and its cruelty to His people, and in doing so He gave an intimation that all Gentile power that failed to answer to its responsibilities would also eventually be judged by Him. But in Cyrus God raised up a power that would be favourable to His people, and that would further the building of His house by the remnant delivered from Babylon. Publicly, Cyrus was just a great conqueror, but as known to the faith of God's people there was a spirit of the heavens operating through him for the judgment of Babylon and the deliverance of the remnant. It might be said that this was so obvious in his case as hardly to need faith to discern it. But what was obvious in his case was, and is, really true in connection with all the Gentile kingdoms. Each, in his turn, has been in some way instrumental in furthering the divine plan. So the authorities that are above us are to be recognised as set up by God, and as being the ordinance of God. The authority is "God's minister to thee for good". So Paul says, "Put them in mind to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient to rule", Titus 3: 1, and Peter says, "Be in subjection therefore to every human institution for the Lord's sake: whether to the king as

supreme, or to rulers as sent by him, for vengeance on evildoers, and praise to them that do well", 1 Peter 2: 13.

All this has to do with our apprehension of something in the authorities, of which, perhaps, they themselves are entirely unaware. We recognise the "spirits of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth", as having some place in the matter. This is true, even though bad men may be in positions of rule. Indeed, it was made known by God to Nebuchadnezzar that "the most High ruleth over the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men", Daniel 4: 17. Since the times of the Gentiles began, it has been important that God's faithful remnant should know how to recognise, and be in subjection to, the authorities that exist.

It is said of the fourth chariot, "and the strong go forth, and seek to go that they may walk to and fro through the earth. And he said, Go, walk to and fro through the earth, and they walked to and fro through the earth", verse 7. We can understand that the Roman kingdom would have a special place in this vision, because it was to be in the time of that kingdom that Christ would come in, and the assembly be found on earth. The wisdom of God was in this, so that the "strong" horses have a special commission such as is not given to any of the others. We may be sure that God has had a particular concern about the kind of Gentile power that should be running its course while His greatest actings were taking place. It was not by chance that the sphere of Roman power was so largely the area over which Christianity spread. There was an ordering of God in this, and the powers became publicly favourable to Christianity. Whatever human motives might have acted in this there was a spreading abroad of certain light as to God which had no place in the heathen world. So far as there was this, it was beneficial to men, and it seems to me that the angel's words in Zechariah 6 would lead us to conclude that there is always some working of God in connection with the powers which He has set up for government here. It is a hidden working, but faith would recognise that it is there. I think Paul would speak to Felix, or to Festus, or to Agrippa, or to Nero, with a sense of this in his heart. *They* were the representatives of divine government in the world, as he was the representative of divine grace. He addresses them with all the respect due to their position.

Then in Zechariah 6: 9 another subject is introduced. We find that certain persons "of the captivity", who had "come from Babylon", were able to furnish gifts of silver and gold, of which crowns were made to be set upon the head of Joshua the high priest. The government of God, as under the hand of the first of the four empires, had brought severe pressure upon the people of God, but

it had resulted in their being able to yield something which enhanced the priesthood. This illustrates the working of God's government in its hidden character. The captivity was the outcome of a long course of unfaithfulness and departure, but for those who submitted to it in the fear of God it yielded gain. Any of us may find ourselves in some kind of "captivity" as the result of our wrong-doing. I suppose there are very few saints who have not at some time suffered under God's governmental dealings as reaping what they have sowed. But what a comfort it is to gather from the scripture before us that if we submit to God's government we shall acquire spiritual wealth!

The general condition in which the Christian profession is found today is one of captivity. There is but little of what the apostle speaks of as "our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus", and this is the result of a departure from the truth of such long standing that most people have come to accept it as normal Christianity. But those who have felt it to be bondage, and contrary to God's mind, have come out of it with great spiritual gain. Much "silver and gold" has been found with those who, through the exercises of captivity, have learned to value Jerusalem and the house of God. Silver speaks of what God is as known in the grace of redemption. There was great acquisition of spiritual wealth when believers began to consider, in the light of Scripture, what had resulted from the death of Christ. Certain great and precious things are now subsisting realities by reason of the fact that Christ has died, and His blood has been shed. For example, the sins of believers have been put away, never to be remembered by God any more; and, as a result of this, Christ brings His redeemed ones to God in a priestly way; they are made nigh by His blood; they know the love of God, and have been reconciled to Him. As in the value of redemption, there is not a shade of distance between those who are reconciled and the blessed God. Then "gold" would lead us to think of divine glory as shining out in the bestowal of a wholly new place before God as children and sons. It carries our thoughts to what subsists in the power of new creation; an order of things where what is old has passed away, and all things have become new, and all things are of the God who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ. How different all this is from what obtains in the religious world! But this is what supplies crowns for the priesthood. There is nothing more important at the present time than that the priestly service should be enhanced, and I believe God intends that this shall be brought about by all that is happening.

No one can doubt that the nations of Europe have been under God's special dealings from time to time; and God's people in many countries are under great pressure. But the inward working of it is to give us "silver and gold"; that is, to secure to us increased knowledge of God so that the priestly service may

be enhanced. We should think much of this, and not merely of getting relief. It is possible for the service of God to take on a character beyond what has been yet known in the assembly. New "crowns" may be made; and those who bring their acquired wealth to make them will have them "for a memorial in the temple of Jehovah", verse 14. Who that loves God would not covet to have such a memorial as this, to bring something that contributes to the dignity and glory of the priestly service!

But at the time when Joshua has the crowns set upon his head he also receives a special word from Jehovah with reference to Christ. We may be sure that if priestly conditions are promoted amongst us there will be great enlargement in the knowledge of Christ. He will be seen as the One who truly builds the temple. "Behold a man whose name is the Branch; and he shall grow up from his own place, and he shall build the temple of Jehovah: even he shall build the temple of Jehovah", verses 12, 13. There will be no spiritual understanding of the temple as it exists today unless we see that Christ is the One who builds it. If our responsible building does not take character from Christ's building it will be worthless. So it is of vital importance to consider the "man whose name is the Branch". His advent was still future in Zechariah's day, but we know Him as One who has come in holy manhood, in whom everything that is for the pleasure and glory of God has appeared. God has raised unto David a righteous Branch; He has come in according to promise of the seed of David, Jeremiah 23: 5; Jeremiah 33: 15. The fact that He is called the Branch, or Sprout, indicates the freshness and vigour of what sprang forth in Him to be the righteousness and beauty and glory of His saints, so that He is "for excellency and for ornament for those that are escaped of Israel", Isaiah 4: 2. A sprout is an energetic manifestation of life, and it is a fitting symbol or title of Him who has appeared as "the fruit of the earth" in such a wondrous way as born of the virgin.

The word, "he shall grow up from his own place", shows how perfectly He accepted everything that was appointed for Him by the will of God, and how there was the development in Him from infancy to manhood of an obedience which was always perfect, but disclosed itself more and more fully at every step. That wondrous life is, indeed, an eternal study for the hearts of all the redeemed. I do not think it is too much to say that we may learn how He will fill every place of glory by seeing how He filled His own place in lowly incarnation. In one sense His place in incarnation is more wonderful than any other place which He will ever fill, for in that place He "learned obedience from the things which he suffered". He came into the world in a body prepared for Him that He might do God's will, and He became obedient unto death, though He was, indeed, "the Lord of glory". His death is not mentioned in Zechariah 6,

because the Spirit of God is calling attention here to Him as the Builder of the temple, and as the One who bears the glory, and who rules upon His throne and shall be a Priest upon His throne. But, as we know from other scriptures, He will do all this on the ground that He has glorified God in death.

“And he shall build the temple of Jehovah: even he shall build the temple of Jehovah”. What a new thought of the temple we get when we see that He builds it! It is twice repeated so that we may pay particular attention to it. It is clear from Hebrews 3: 3 that Jesus is the Builder of the house. “For he has been counted worthy of greater glory than Moses, by how much he that has built it has more honour than the house”. He selected Simon the first day that He saw him to be a stone in that wondrous structure. Do we delight to think of the sovereignty of love that selected us for such a place? Would we not like Him to put us where He will in that holy temple? The builders in Zechariah’s day were encouraged by the thought of how Christ would build the temple. Our responsible building must be carried on in the light of how Christ builds. We shall not then labour in a fleshly way, but in a spiritual way, as knowing that only spiritual material is suitable for “a spiritual house”.

“And he shall bear the glory”. He is the true Eliakim, on whom hangs all the glory of His Father’s house; Isaiah 22: 24. He alone is great enough to sustain the glory as it is known today. He said, “And the glory which thou hast given me I have given them”, John 17:22. The true character of sonship is known to us by seeing that Christ bears the glory of it before the Father. But it is a glory which He gives to His own. There are other glories also referred to in John 17 which He bears, and He will bear many glories in the coming day, for He will come “in his glory, and in that of the Father, and of the holy angels”, Luke 9: 26. At the present time, whatever favour or acceptance is granted to those called of God, He bears the glory of it, so that we see the glory of divine grace in Him.

“And he shall sit and rule upon his throne”. No doubt this refers to His coming reign, when He will restfully rule in His kingdom, but it is well to be reminded that He has a kingdom now. The Father has translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, who is the true Solomon. In this connection we are reminded that it was Solomon who built the house; his kingdom was established that he might build the house for Jehovah’s name. His peaceful supremacy was needed that nothing might interfere with the building of the house. Christ cannot use unsubdued material; it is only what comes under His rule that is suitable for God’s house. But His rule, as we know it, is a rule of love; His kingdom is pervaded by love, for He is the Son of the Father’s love.

"And he shall be priest upon his throne". As the royal Priest He is after the order of Melchisedek, and He is already as we know from the epistle to the Hebrews, a Priest after that order. He serves His people in a priestly way according to the greatness of His Person, and the greatness of His place "on the right hand of the throne of the greatness in the heavens"; and, we may add, according to the greatness of the value and result of His offering up of Himself. He serves Godward, too, so that nothing may be lacking in the service of the house. How the consideration of this would elevate our thoughts! It was prophetically given to encourage the builders in Zechariah's day; but it is even more encouraging for us because what was prophetically spoken then is now a great and wondrous reality.

Then, finally, it is said, "and the counsel of peace shall be between them both". This is one of the many scriptures which serve to show clearly the Deity of the Messiah, for it is Messiah and Jehovah who are here spoken of.

"Between them both" could not be said if the Man spoken of were not a divine Person. Chapter 13: 7 of this book confirms this, for it is written, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, even against the man that is my fellow, saith Jehovah of hosts". It reminds us of such words in John's gospel as "I and my Father are one". Everything of God's purposes of blessing is secured between Himself and His Anointed, so that there can be no possible breakdown.

"They that are far off", coming and building at the temple of Jehovah is suggestive of the Gentiles having part in this holy work, even as it is now. But all building is to go on in the light of what was presented prophetically to the remnant in Zechariah's day.

ZECHARIAH 7

Zechariah 7

The building of the house had been going on about two years when certain persons sent "to supplicate Jehovah, and to speak unto the priests that were in the house of Jehovah of hosts, and to the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done now so many years?" verses 2 and 3. These persons were not helping to build the house; they were not in the current of God's mind at all. They had felt the pressure of the captivity in a natural way, and they had been keeping up an outward appearance of recognising God, as people often do when His hand is upon them, but it was no genuine exercise before God. Men often satisfy their own consciences by some outward recognition of God when there is no true turning to Him at all. So the word of Jehovah was, "Did ye really fast unto me, even unto me?" In times of distress men may wish God to come in for them without any true repentance, and even His people may think that some formal acknowledgment, or doing our own will in humility, will do, without facing the moral exercises which our state calls for. But this is a vain hope; God looks for reality in those who have to do with Him.

So the word of Jehovah came to Zechariah, calling attention to the moral state which had brought His judgment upon His people, and we find that His chief concern was that there should be right relations between the brethren. Their relations with God could not be right if they were not acting rightly one toward another. So He said, "Execute true judgment, and show lovingkindness and mercies one to another, and oppress not the widow and the fatherless, the stranger and the afflicted; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart. But they refused to hearken, and turned a rebellious shoulder, and made their ears heavy, that they should not hear. And they made their heart as an adamant, that they should not hear the law, and the words that Jehovah of hosts sent by his Spirit by the hand of the former prophets: therefore was there great wrath from Jehovah of hosts", verses 9 - 12.

The first assembly failure was in regard of brotherly relations. "There arose a murmuring of the Hellenists against the Hebrews because their widows were overlooked in the daily ministration", Acts 6: 1. It is probable that the root of all the departure, and consequent loss of blessing, could be traced to the weakening and giving up of those links of love which normally bind the brethren together. The assemblies soon became congregations, and the warmth and liberty of the family circle were lost. When the saints ceased to love one another as Christ loved them, they had really left their first love and

had fallen, and needed to repent and do the first works. The Lord would have us to be very sensitive as to the maintenance of happy relations with our brethren. "If therefore thou shouldest offer thy gift at the altar, and there shouldest remember that thy brother has something against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and first go, be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift", Matthew 5: 23, 24. These words of the Lord suggest that in approaching God our hearts would be sensitive to recall anything that our brother has against us, and we should feel that we must be reconciled to him before we can offer to God. If this were attended to there would be no such outstanding grievances as sometimes go on for long periods, and have a paralysing effect on liberty in the service of God.

In the assembly in Philadelphia we see what is prophetic of assembly revival in a remnant at the end. Philadelphia means "the love of the brethren". Recovery lies in coming back to this. If we love the brethren we shall not imagine evil against them in our hearts, nor shall we speak evil of them nor do them any harm. We shall in every way seek their good, and this can only be by the pursuit of holiness and truth. We shall want them all to be loved complacently by Christ, and therefore we shall be intolerant of anything in them which Christ hates.

We are brethren as in wilderness conditions, but we are also brethren as in the land. It is to be noted that Paul writes to the Colossians and to the Ephesians on the ground that he had heard of their "love towards all the saints". It would seem that this was a necessary condition in order to the opening up of the heavenly position of the saints. I believe that, as the love of the brethren waned, they lost capacity to appreciate these two epistles. The secret of Israel's losing "the land" was the break down of their brotherly relations. So it is stated: "The land was desolate after them ... they laid the pleasant land desolate", verse 14. It is solemn to think that the assembly lost "the land", in any practical sense, for the same reason that Israel lost it. "The land" can only be enjoyed in the divine nature, that nature which we have as born of God, and it manifests itself in the love of the brethren. So we may all understand the line on which God is working for recovery today. It is opened out in detail in the next chapter, which speaks, indeed, of how God will recover Jerusalem in a coming day, but which we may apply, in the spirit and principle of it, to what God is doing today. That is, He is bringing His saints of the assembly back to His own thoughts, as He will, in a future day, bring Israel back to His thoughts as to them.

ZECHARIAH 8

Zechariah 8

In this chapter we see Jehovah “jealous for Zion with great jealousy”, and returning to her, that by His own presence and power she might really take on the character which belonged to her in His mind. Zion, as we know, represents sovereign mercy, and Jerusalem sets forth what is universal in its bearing, so that we find here the thought of God returning, after a long period of great departure by His people, to what He had in His own mind. Not that God had ever departed from His own thoughts, but His people had, and He returns in a special way of mercy to bring *them* back. This is what He is doing at the present time for His saints of the assembly. The result of God being with His people is that truth and holiness characterise them. “Thus saith Jehovah: I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and Jerusalem shall be called, The city of truth; and the mountain of Jehovah of hosts The holy mountain”, verse 3. This links on with what we were saying about the assembly in Philadelphia, to which the Lord presents Himself as “the holy, the true”. If God comes in in mercy to restore what has departed, the fruit of His work will be seen in love and truth and holiness. Apart from these things there is no evidence of God being with His people.

God is not working merely to set up certain abstract principles that may be professed as being of Himself. He is working that persons may be livingly characterised as having part in what He has wrought. “Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: There shall yet old men and old women sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand for multitude of days. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof”, verses 4, 5. It is a beautiful suggestion that there is room in God’s city for every manifestation of spiritual life. The old men and old women represent those who have had long experience of the faithfulness and mercy of God. Their presence in the assembly is to be most highly prized. Their time of active labour is over, but they are there as restful witnesses to what God has wrought. The “boys and girls” speak of that young life which knows how to be happy in the assembly. It is one feature of God’s present working that so many young people are coming forward to identify themselves publicly with the Lord’s name, and with His saints who seek to walk in the truth, and finding real pleasure in doing so. It is encouraging to know that He takes account of even “boys and girls” as having their place in His city; He loves to see them in the assembly, as enjoying their place there. The young are to be greatly valued because of the spiritual possibilities that are bound up with them. What will mark the generation to come is there potentially in the boys and girls of

today. Let us give them all the spiritual help that we can, both by word and example. The intermediate ages are not mentioned in this particular passage, but the eldest and the youngest being spoken of would suggest that the city has its full complement of inhabitants. No element is wanting. Such is God's thought of His assembly, and it is presented to cheer us even in a remnant time. Such things may be "wonderful" (verse 6) in the eyes of the remnant, but they are not wonderful in God's eyes in the sense of being "hard" for Him to bring to pass. He will bring His people to His own thoughts, even though it be but a remnant.

The next section of this chapter is particularly encouraging, because it shows that even laying the foundation of God's house made an immense difference. This is a cheer to us today if we have even made a beginning with some purpose of heart that God shall have a house where He will be served according to His mind. It changes our whole position in the sight of God, and secures His blessing. In the religious world around us God is served as men think, but how can that be God's house where He is not allowed to have His own way? So it follows that there is no proper tillage of the inheritance. "For before those days there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast; and there was no peace for him that went out or that came in, because of the distress: for I let loose all men, every one against his neighbour", verse 10. This makes clear, that if we do not think of God having His place and His portion we shall fare badly ourselves. Agricultural operations, in a spiritual sense, will cease; the fields will lie fallow; the vines will be neglected: there will be neither harvest nor vintage. But if there is even a beginning to lay the foundation of the house of God things change immediately. "But now I will not be unto the remnant of this people as in the former days, saith Jehovah of hosts; for the seed shall be prosperous, the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things", verses 11, 12. While many Christians are complaining of the lack of spiritual food, those who seek that there shall be something for God are proving that He gives so much that they are not able to gather it all in.

The remnant, enriched by God's blessing, becomes a blessing to others; verse 13. God has thought in our days to do good to His people (verse 15), and He will do so wherever suitable conditions are found. If we do what God loves, and are faithful in our relations with our neighbour, we shall prove that He will do us good. "Our neighbour", is the believer with whom we come in contact; let us speak truth with him, verse 16. That does not mean merely that we are not to tell him what is untrue; it means that we are to speak truth with him. That is, we are to speak of the truth which we know and love. The truth becomes a wonderful bond between those who speak it to one another, and

especially in a day of departure; see 2 John. The truth abides with us, and shall be with us to eternity; then let us speak it to one another. We are told of certain actings of God that "in the whole hill country of Judaea all these things were the subject of conversation", Luke 1:65. All ministry of the word furnishes us with a good deal to talk about, to say nothing of the infinite wealth of the Scriptures. Occupation with holy things will preserve us from imagining evil against our neighbour, and if we do not imagine evil we shall not speak evil; verse 17.

Then the "fasts" become "cheerful gatherings" (verse 19); they become fellowship meetings, and the joy and gladness of the people of God become attractive to others. There is an evangelical touch about the closing verses of this chapter. "And many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek Jehovah of hosts in Jerusalem, and to supplicate Jehovah", verse 22. "The inhabitants of many cities" leave their own cities to come to God's city. "Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: In those days shall ten men take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you", verse 23. It is the report of God being with His people, and securing their happiness, that will affect the nations in a coming day, and we may be sure that, in principle, this is true today. The best way to secure converts is for the people of God to be truly happy in their relations with Him and with one another. There is a great scarcity of happiness in the world, so that the happiness of God's people is, in itself, a powerful gospel sermon.

ZECHARIAH 9

Zechariah 9

In the opening verses of this chapter we see the judgment of God coming upon certain cities which had been, more or less, in rivalry with Jerusalem. They all have to come down to give place to God's city. We have seen at the end of chapter 8 many people leaving their own cities to come to Jerusalem. The cities which they left represent the principles which are dominant in the world, and are such as would mark Damascus, Tyre, Zidon, Ashkelon, and other cities mentioned in chapter 9 which all come under the judgment of God. The only city which is going to stand is God's city, Zion representing His sovereign mercy, and Jerusalem His universal thoughts of blessing in Christ. Men have now the opportunity of changing their city, of leaving what is under judgment, and coming to where there is full blessing.

In Psalm 87 we find God making mention of Egypt, Babylon, Philistia, Tyre and Ethiopia, and noting these as the birthplace of certain ones. These places represent the characterising principles of the world. They are rival centres of influence, competing, as it were, with Zion; but God is not there, nor His house. Man is made something of in those rival centres, and if they are our birthplace we shall make something of man, but all that is come to nothing. Thank God, there are those who are born of Zion, who are begotten of sovereign mercy, and who feel that nothing is of any value but what is of mercy. It is interesting to see that, though God speaks of cutting off the pride of the Philistines, He has in mind to secure a remnant for Himself even from amongst them. "But he that remaineth, he also shall belong to our God, and shall be as a leader in Judah", verse 7. This is a striking illustration of the sovereignty of God's mercy, of which we have been speaking. We all really come in on this ground alone.

"And I will encamp about my house ... for now have I seen it with mine eyes", verse 8. I understand this to mean that God recognised what the remnant was building as His house; it was taking concrete form, though far from being finished yet. There was something there round which He would encamp. He will not defend what has a great place in the sight of men, but He will defend whatever has the true character of His house, though it may be small in outward appearance. Christians are divided because rival centres have been set up. Different bodies have been formed according to the light which men had, but, now that the truth of the assembly as the house of God has come out, believers must either accept it as the truth, and seek to walk according to it, or they will be found supporting what is really contrary to it. God will not

encamp about what is contrary to the truth which He has so graciously revived, but He will encamp about what has the true character of His house. He will make manifest that His house is very precious to Him.

Just at this point we have the well-known prophecy of Zion's King coming to her. The remnant building the house in Zechariah's day were to have in mind Christ coming as the just One, having salvation in Himself but coming in lowliness. He would own Zion as His city, and no doubt the true "daughter of Zion" would own Him as her King. But verse 9 must be clearly distinguished from what is spoken of in verse 10. In verse 10 we read of His speaking peace to the nations, and His dominion being from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. This is clearly yet future. But verse 9 speaks of His coming in such a way and character that only those who were divinely taught could discern Him. He was presented in lowliness to see many hearts there were that could discern Him and rejoice to receive Him. Everything that was needed to complete the joy of the daughters of Zion was there in her lowly King. But the ruling powers in Jerusalem did not discern Him; He was only discerned by faith and love. His presentation in lowliness to Zion answers in great measure to the way in which He manifests Himself now to the saints of the assembly.

He said, "I will not leave you orphans, I am coming to you", John 14: 18. The prophetic word would have prepared every loyal heart to look for Him as Zion's King. Those who, like Simeon, were "awaiting the consolation of Israel", and those who "waited for redemption in Jerusalem", would be out for Him. Now we have His own definite word, "I am coming to you"; shall we not look to Him to fulfil it? If we had more in our hearts the thought of His coming to us it would produce affectionate concern that there might be conditions that would attract Him, and be suitable for Him. "He is just" means that whatever He does has a basis of righteousness; He is "Jesus Christ the righteous". And "having salvation" conveys to us that whatever may be needed to give effect to God's precious thoughts concerning those who receive Him is there in fulness. But all is "lowly" in character as set forth in His "riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass". Though particularly presented to the daughter of Zion and the daughter of Jerusalem, there is an intimation in this that He would have a place to which He could come, where His rights would be owned, and where He would be received with joy and praise. There was a brief gleam of this when He rode into Jerusalem, secured by the power of God in fulfilment of this prophetic word, but at the present time the only place where He is received with joy is amongst His saints of the assembly. The "daughter of Zion" and the "daughter of Jerusalem" have, surely, some spiritual counterpart in those who can now know Christ as coming to them,

and, as having uncorrupted affections, can receive Him with rejoicing. The ass and the colt would suggest that He has need of those who can bear Him into that place where He loves to come. I doubt whether He comes to the assembly apart from such a service being rendered. What a privilege it is to carry Him in affection into the place that is due to Him in the assembly! This is an exercise for us all in coming together in assembly, the Lord's supper awakening lively affections in all hearts so that we are all prepared in heart to bear Him into the place which He loves to occupy. The Lord looks for this service, and has need of it. Shall it not be willingly rendered?

When He came in lowly grace to the literal Jerusalem they crucified Him, and this resulted in all power being cut off from that guilty city so that it became helpless against its enemies. Jerusalem became, indeed, a "pit wherein is no water", and this is what all fleshly religion is. But there were some, even in Jerusalem, who were there as "prisoners of hope", and the prophetic word declared, "As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant, I will send forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water", verse 11. Jerusalem's "prisoners" I take to be those who realised that she had forfeited everything by her rejection of her Messiah, and that their only hope lay in what is called here "the blood of thy covenant". By that means alone could they be delivered, but if God acted by that means there was no limit to what He would do for them. He would not only take them out of the pit, but bring them to the stronghold, and He would defend them. "And they shall be filled like a bowl, like the corners of the altar". The "bowl" referred to here is one of those mentioned in chapter 14, "bowls before the altar". They were vessels connected with offering service. "The corners of the altar", as we know from other scriptures, were where the "horns" were placed, representing the power of the altar. What a mighty divine deliverance! Prisoners taken out of the pit, but made full vessels for offering service! This is how God's sovereign mercy acts; all that is blessing comes in on this ground, as much for us as for them, and thus God secures the carrying on of the service of His house.

"And Jehovah their God shall save them in that day as the flock of his people; for they shall be as the stones of a crown,

lifted up (or, sparkling) upon his land", verse 16. They are a flock secured for God, to feed on the wealth of His land, and to be there as a precious adornment, for the thought of the flock has linked with it another, and a different, figure when they are compared to sparkling crown jewels. God has brought many figures into service to indicate the pleasure which He finds in having blessed His people through Christ. His thoughts are, indeed, beyond all figures, but He is pleased to use figures to convey to our minds the great

wealth of His thoughts and purposes in Christ. When we think that they are all the outcome of what God is in Himself we can understand that they must be surpassingly wonderful. "For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!" verse 17. Whatever God has done for us through Christ, and in Christ, is to bring into display what He is in Himself: "that he might display in the coming ages the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus", Ephesians 2: 7. There is that in the blessed God which is properly the subject of holy admiration on the part of those blessed by Him, for it is a beauty which shines forth in the way of infinite grace, and it becomes the adornment of His people, for one could say, "And let the beauty of Jehovah our God be upon us", Psalm 90: 17.

Finally, it is said, "Corn shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the maidens", It is the continuous feeding upon Christ that maintains spiritual strength. It is not enough to be brought to the knowledge of even the greatest spiritual blessings; we have to be maintained in vigour by spiritual food. Many think they can live upon what has come to them as light, and they steadily decline. We need the "measure of corn in season", that fresh appropriation of Christ by which alone we can "flourish". Then "the maidens" represent the subjective side, which flourishes as we continue to "drink of one Spirit". It was never the divine intent that we should only drink once; we are to do it characteristically and continuously. It has often been said that it alludes to the cup in the Lord's supper, as the one body alludes to the bread. We are reminded every Lord's day by the emblems before us that we are one body, and that we are drinkers of one Spirit, but we are to be this characteristically all the time. If we are so we shall truly "flourish".

ZECHARIAH 10

Zechariah 10

Jehovah returning in blessing to Israel after their long history of departure is more than once compared with the latter rain; Hosea 6:1 - 3; Joel 2: 23. So that "the time of the latter rain", indicates a time of divine favour when Jehovah would visit His people after they have been long afflicted with "vanity", and "a lie", and "false dreams". He had to say, "Therefore they have gone away as a flock, they are in distress, because there is no shepherd". When the Lord was here He was moved with compassion for the crowd "because they were as sheep not having a shepherd", Mark 6: 34. His anger, too, was kindled against those who pretended to be shepherds and leaders of the flock, but whose service was vanity and no comfort to the flock. Such are the conditions which prevail today over a great part of the Christian profession. We can be thankful that there has been a "time of the latter rain" for the assembly even as there will be for Israel.

"For Jehovah of hosts visiteth his flock, the house of Judah, and maketh them as his majestic horse in the battle And they shall be as mighty men, treading down the mire of the streets in the battle; and they shall fight, for Jehovah is with them", verses 3, 5. The great evidence of God having visited His people is that they are made overcomers. The fact that in each of the seven assemblies (Revelation 2 and 3) the Lord assumes that an overcomer will be found shows that He intended that feature to have a place, whatever the general condition might be. The greater the departure the more need there is for overcoming, and I think the chapter before us intimates that overcoming precedes restoration to privileges that have been lost. The overcomers in Revelation 2 and 3 get what is normally the portion of all saints, but in a day of departure it is only really possessed by those who have overcome. That is to say, it is given on the principle of restoration rather than as being possessed as originally given. God's present ways with His people are ways of restoration; indeed, He has peculiar pleasure in restoration, and the greatest restoration of all is assembly restoration. But overcoming is the first thing, as seen in verses 3 and 5 of our chapter, before He speaks of restoration in verses 6, 7 and 12.

The first effect of God's visiting His people is that they take on the character of overcomers. They have power to overcome what is seen to be opposed to what is in God's mind for His people. They may not yet know much of assembly truth or assembly privilege, but they see that certain things are displeasing to God, and they take up a decided attitude with reference to

them. They do not go with the stream. They refuse that in themselves which they see to be contrary to God's mind, and they refuse it when they see it having place in the Christian profession. They overcome it by separating from it. By ceasing to do evil they put themselves in a position where they can learn to do well.

"And I will bring them back again; for I will have mercy upon them; and they shall be as though I had not cast them off: for I am Jehovah their God, and I will answer them", verse 6. "And I will strengthen them in Jehovah; and they shall walk in his name, saith Jehovah", verse 12. What God will do for a remnant in Israel "in the time of the latter rain" He is doing now for a remnant in the assembly. The Lord is leading His saints to see that there is grace and power in Himself to enable them to be overcomers. They can only overcome as they are strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus. But as thus strengthened they can overcome everything which would hinder assembly restoration. The Lord brings His people back to Himself as the Source of everything, and then He can restore us to all that is in His own mind for the assembly.

In Matthew 13 the public history of the assembly is set forth in the first four similitudes, ending with the whole mass being leavened. But then we get the treasure and the pearl — what the assembly is for Christ — and restoration is to that. If God gives restoration it will be to His own most precious thoughts. The Reformers, and those who founded Protestant sects, did not overcome the influences of the time in which they lived sufficiently to be free for restoration to God's precious thoughts as to the assembly. But a good deal of "latter rain" has fallen since their day, and many saints have found in the Lord strength for overcoming, and, in consequence, there has been a great opening out of divine thoughts which have been little known since the days of the apostles. But they are coming out now with an added grace as being restored after many centuries of grievous departure. It is due to the Lord that we should recognise His peculiar grace in this way. He is making things precious to us which have been lost sight of for many generations. All saints may have these precious things; they are truly the portion of all; but it is only the overcomer who gets them as the true wealth and gain of his soul. Let none of us deceive himself. We may walk in company with the most spiritual persons, and yet gain little by it if we do not take up the exercise of overcoming. But in taking up that exercise we have to learn that we need the grace of the Lord to enable us to overcome. So it is a matter of personal dependence. Our chapter begins, "Ask of Jehovah", and in verse 6 we read, "And I will answer them"; showing that behind the restoration and the overcoming is the spirit of deep dependence. The heart, having learned its own emptiness and insufficiency,

has blessed experience of what the Lord can be, not only in giving personal support, but in bringing us into His mind as to the assembly, and as to our place in it. We are not thinking merely of restored truth, but we think of the Lord as the Restorer of it. He is Himself our joy in relation to all that is restored. So we can understand the word in verse 7, "Their heart shall be joyful in Jehovah". The Sweetness of what is restored lies mainly in the fact that it is restored by the personal action of One who loves us. The Philadelphian keeps His word, and does not deny His name; all, for the loyal heart, centres in Him.

"And I will strengthen them in Jehovah; and they shall walk in his name, saith Jehovah", verse 12. This sums up the position of a restored people. Those strong in the Lord will assuredly be overcomers, and they will have strength to walk according to what has been restored. This scripture was given to encourage the hearts of a feeble remnant by filling them with a sense of what God would do for His people in "the time of the latter rain". We are favoured of God to be found here in a time which distinctly answers to this in the history of the assembly. May we know how to profit by the instruction!

ZECHARIAH 11

Zechariah 11

We have seen in chapter 10 how Jehovah visits His flock for restoration, and makes them overcomers as having all strength in Himself. But chapter 11 shows the solemn consequences of His grace being refused. There is still a flock in view, but it can only be regarded as a "flock of slaughter"; that is, as a subject of judgment. Nationally this was the state of the people when the Lord came to them in the days of His flesh. John the baptist declared that the axe was laid to the root of the tree. Their possessors slew them, as Pilate did the Galileans. Their own shepherds did not pity them; the scribes and priests did nothing to help them; and they were in that state by the judgment of God. That was the state of things when Christ came, but He came to feed them all in grace if they would receive Him. But He discriminated between the flock of Slaughter, and those whom He speaks of as "the poor of the flock", though, indeed, all were involved in the judgment which was imminent upon the nation. But "the poor of the flock" are distinguished in verse 11 as those "that gave heed to me". They represented the godly remnant, who had owned the state of the nation by submitting to John's baptism, and who, as repentant, gave heed to the true Shepherd, though He was rejected by those who were in the place of shepherds. As to those shepherds He says, "my soul was vexed with them, and their soul also loathed me", verse 8. The three shepherds destroyed in one month would suggest that in the ministry of the Lord full testimony was given to the true character of the religious leaders of the people. They were morally destroyed by His exposure of them; He was vexed with them, and they loathed Him. They were left to perish, and to destroy one another; by their rebellion against the Roman power they brought destruction upon themselves and their city. But their rejection of the true Shepherd involved solemn consequences in the ways of God which are set forth symbolically in the two staves, Beauty and Bands. In the Lord's ministry here He had before Him to take up the covenant with all the peoples of which the Scriptures had spoken. If Israel had received Him He would have become in Israel the gathering Centre for all the Gentiles also. He would have united Judah and Israel in brotherhood. His ministry to the flock had this in view, but the Soul of the shepherds loathed Him, so that His staff Beauty was cut asunder, and the covenant with all peoples which would have come into effect through Israel was broken. Nor was there any uniting of Judah and Israel in brotherhood; the staff Bands was cut asunder also. At the present time blessing has been secured for the Gentiles on quite different ground; that is,

on the ground of the death and resurrection of Christ, and the present casting away of Israel through unbelief.

Our object at this time is to see if there is any present application of what comes out in this chapter. I think we shall find that there is, for there is now, as there was when the Lord was here.

a large body of people who profess to have relations with God, Christ is serving them, as He did Israel, for the present service of Christ is available for all in Christendom. All that is ministered publicly, both in the glad tidings and in the ministry to those who take Christian ground, is for the benefit of all in the Christian profession, but the present service of Christ is bringing to light that many loathe Him. He is still asking people what they think His service is worth; He says, "If ye think good, give me my hire; and if not, forbear", verse 12. I believe we are all being constantly asked what price we prize Him at. The chief priests decided that it was worth thirty silver-pieces to get rid of Him, and Judas agreed that it was a fair price! He says, "a goodly price that I was prized at by them". If Christ becomes loathsome to the shepherds, instead of valuing Him they will pay money as the price of His blood. But it is very striking that, though this scripture was fulfilled by the priests and Judas, as given in the prophet it has a permanent application. It is the Lord saying to each one of us, 'What do you think Me worth? What is My service worth in your estimation?' The setting of it in the prophet is not exactly the price of His blood, but what did they think His service in Israel was worth? That is how He looked at the matter. It was their unworthy valuation of His service.

"And Jehovah said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prized at by them. And I took the thirty silver-pieces, and cast them to the potter in the house of Jehovah", verse 13. It was impossible that Jehovah should allow Him to accept such a "hire". It was to be cast to the potter to show, I think, how Jehovah resented such an unworthy estimate of Christ, but as being in His house it was there as a testimony. Everybody in Christendom is putting some estimate on the worth of Christ, and the worth of His service, and that estimate is before God in His house. If any of us have an unworthy estimate of Christ, how can God regard it otherwise than as calling for His judgment? Christendom is being judged at the present time by God on account of its unworthy estimate of Christ, and the staff Bands is being cut asunder. There is from time to time a thought of Christendom being re-united, but this can never be so long as Christ is "cast aside as worthless". That is what the religious builders — the shepherds of that day — thought of Him, and it is so still though His name is professed. There is little "brotherhood" today because Christ is not valued; divisions amongst Christians would all

disappear if Christ were more valued. Paul said, "Is the Christ divided?" If Christ and His precious service were more precious to every heart, how the walls which divide saints would crumble away!

If people do not value Christ they will get Antichrist, who is referred to in verses 15 - 17. They will get one who will do nothing for them; he will be a destructive shepherd, eating and tearing in pieces. John tells us that there were many Antichrists in his day; we may be sure that they have not diminished in number since.

It is for us now to see that we are among "the poor of the flock" who give heed to Christ. He is ready to speak to, and feed, those who value Him. Such have their own gathering Centre in the true Shepherd, and as following Him they become one flock. This is another character in which Christ is presented in this precious part of Scripture. We have seen Him as the Branch, the Builder, the King, the Priest, and now the Shepherd. May we value Him more in every way in which God brings Him before us!

ZECHARIAH 12

Zechariah 12

To see how Jerusalem is viewed in the opening verses of this chapter we must keep the previous chapter in mind. It is the Jerusalem that has not known how to value Christ, but which has been ready to receive Antichrist, which is given over by Jehovah to be a bewilderment and a burdensome stone to all peoples, so that, in result, all come against her. This looks on to the time when God will resume His dealings with Jerusalem in a future day. She will have to reap what she has sowed, and pass through a time of terrible distress, but there will be a remnant, represented in this chapter by "the house of Judah" (verse 4), upon whom Jehovah will open His eyes.

It will be remembered that Judah made himself responsible for Benjamin to Israel his father (Genesis 44), and he was also the one to acknowledge that God had found out the iniquity of himself and his brethren, which referred to their cruel treatment of Joseph. It was he, also, who begged to be a bondman instead of Benjamin; he charged himself with responsibility for what had happened. All this had typical reference to the attitude which Judah will take up in a coming day. "The house of Judah" is that remnant which, in the time of Jacob's trouble, will accept responsibility for what has brought it on, and will confess the true state of things before Jehovah. Then will be fulfilled the blessing of Judah by Moses the man of God. "Hear Jehovah, the voice of Judah, and bring him unto his people; may his hands strive for them; and be thou a help to him against his oppressors", Deuteronomy 33: 7. Such a remnant will be a link by which Jehovah will resume contact with Jerusalem in the way of grace. Jehovah will open His eyes on those who feel the state of things, and who call upon Him, and from that point "the inhabitants of Jerusalem" appear in a new character. We get the remarkable statement, "And the leaders of Judah shall say in their heart, The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength through Jehovah of hosts their God", verse 5. It is clear from this that we have passed over to an entirely different view of things. It is not now the corrupt city that did not value Christ, and was ready to receive Antichrist, and was consequently given over to judgment. It is now Jerusalem seen from the stand point that Jehovah of hosts is "their God". So that "the inhabitants of Jerusalem" are now seen as God's elect people, and they become the strength of the leaders of Judah. The praying remnant is encouraged and strengthened by apprehending that, in spite of all that has happened, God has an election of grace, and that He will assuredly carry out His purpose to bless Jerusalem.

When the repentant remnant own the true state of things, and pray to Jehovah, He will open His eyes upon them, and He will make use of them to express His judgment of all that has been adverse to His people. He will make them "like a hearth of fire among wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf", verse 6. It will become a certainty that His purpose will be accomplished. "And Jerusalem shall dwell again in her own place, in Jerusalem". And then the inhabitants of Jerusalem will be defended and strengthened so that they may be able to go through very deep exercise about the One whom they pierced. They will look on Him, and "mourn for him, as one mourneth for an only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn". This is God's work in His elect people. They will think of Christ with deep affection, as having learned His worth by divine teaching, and in proportion to their sense of His worth will be the bitterness of their mourning that they pierced Him, and that for two thousand years they have despised and rejected Him. Jerusalem could never be the city of the great King if its inhabitants did not go through this exercise individually, and every family apart.

There are conditions today which in great measure correspond with what is spoken of in this chapter. The prophetic declarations in Scripture of what will be in the last days lead us to expect a dreadful state of things in the public professing body. Take for example, 2 Timothy 3: 2; 2 Thessalonians 2; 2 Peter 2: 2, 3. We are living in the times thus spoken of; many hostile powers have combined to corrupt and destroy what is of God. Unfaithfulness has exposed the assembly to inroads of superstition, modernism, and worldliness of all kinds. The public profession has largely given up what is heavenly and spiritual. Few exercised believers would deny this.

But, notwithstanding all this, God is securing a remnant marked by right feeling about what has taken place, marked by self-judgment and prayer. God opens His eyes upon people who pray as understanding the conditions which have come about. Every believer should understand that God has an assembly here, but that in its public aspect it has dreadfully departed from what is in His mind. Every believer should, like Judah, feel responsibility for the condition of things at the present time. Any assembly recovery in a remnant today has been granted in answer to prayer. In this dark day we must look for companions who pray, "those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart". That is "the house of Judah" today. As we pray we shall get light as to what the assembly is in the mind of the Lord. We shall get away in spirit from the corrupt profession, and we shall think of the assembly in its spiritual reality.

"The assembly of the living God" is certainly not a "mixed multitude" such as a national church must necessarily be, nor could there be anything sectarian

about it. It is composed of persons who are "sanctified in Christ Jesus", and who confess Jesus as Lord, and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The praying remnant learn to view all saints according to what they are by the grace and work of God, and they become able to judge all that is inconsistent with this. So the leaders of Judah are made "like a hearth of fire among wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf". God would have everything that is contrary to His universal assembly thoughts to be judged by the faithful and prayerful remnant who answer today to "the leaders of Judah". These things are to be judged in the spirit that marked Judah, as accepting responsibility for the things we judge, but refusing them in our spirits as not pleasing to God. If everything is burnt up, in a moral sense, that is opposed to the truth, there is nothing to hinder saints from taking up the ground to which God has really called them.

So what follows is, "And Jerusalem shall dwell again in her own place, in Jerusalem". Our own place by the will of God is that we are of His assembly; therefore it is our privilege, and also our responsibility, to take that ground. We may have a great deal yet to learn of our own weakness, and of God's sufficiency for us. We may have to go through deep and humbling exercises, but let us hold to assembly ground as being God's ground for us just as it was for His saints at Corinth. Let us refuse in our minds every other ground but that on which God has set us. Let us not be diverted from it by anything that is wider or narrower than what God has in His mind for all His saints.

Judah has priority; verse 7. Those who carry exercise, and who pray, become God's firstfruits in a day of restoration. Whatever God may be pleased to give in sovereignty will never be allowed to interfere with the special place which He assigns to those who take the lead in accepting responsibility, and in praying, and in judging what is contrary to His will. It is open to every saint to have his place in "the tents of Judah". God delights to honour those who come forward to carry assembly exercises and responsibilities.

God does not suppose that assembly ground can be taken or held in a day of departure without special support from Him. But if we commit ourselves to what is in God's mind for us He will most surely defend and strengthen us. "In that day will Jehovah defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that stumbleth among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David as God, as the Angel of Jehovah before them", verse 8. It reminds us of Paul boasting in his weaknesses that "the power of the Christ" might dwell upon him. Our safe place is to be in fear and trembling, but counting upon God's faithfulness to give all the support that is needed. Some of the words in the New Testament are quite as wonderful as what is said here. "I have strength

for all things in him that gives me power", Philippians 4: 13. "Strengthened with all power according to the might of his glory unto all endurance and longsuffering with joy", Colossians 1: 11. "For the rest, brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the might of his strength", Ephesians 6: 10.

A further exercise follows. "And I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look on me whom they pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for an, only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn", verse 10. It is most touching to think of the Lord Jesus — for it is He who speaks in this verse — acting so that He may become the loved Object of His people after a long period during which they have caused Him grief. He is at the present moment active to bring about that His saints may look upon Him with intense affection. The pouring out of the spirit of grace and supplications has its counterpart in that gracious movement by which a remnant has been prepared in this day to value the presentation of Christ which God has given. This is pure divine favour on one side of it, but on the other it is marked by "supplications". How many, within the last few years, have had cause to thank God for a deepened sense of "grace"! How many have been led to "supplications" for a fuller knowledge of Christ! This is the Lord's own preparatory action so that we may look on Him as He is pleased to present Himself to His lovers. A wonderful ministry of Christ has been going on through the whole lifetime of the present generation. If we are not conscious of this we have missed the greatest divine actings of the present time. The Lord is as much concerned that we should look upon Him as He will be that the remnant of Israel should.

The view of Him that is contemplated here is preparatory to "great mourning". "They shall look on me whom they pierced". This reminds us that, as the next chapter tells us, He has been wounded in the house of His friends. This may certainly be applied, not only to the Jews, but also to what has been done to Him in the Christian profession. How He has been pierced and wounded there! How the claims of His love have been disregarded! How the assembly order which He instituted has been set aside! How men have usurped His rights! This is all a matter for "deep mourning". If we have affection for Him we shall mourn over it with a sense that we have part in the responsibility of it; we have even personally contributed to it. He would be well pleased to see us mourning thus as the outcome of loving Him. For there was a "time past" in our lives when we did not care to think of Him, or to receive Him. The thought of who He was, or of what He had done for us, or of what He had expressed of God, had no attraction for us. If He had not poured upon us "the spirit of grace", He would never have become precious to us. But the moment came

when we were arrested by the thought that He had come into manhood as the Child born and the Son given that He might be known and possessed by us. We began to realise that we needed Him to be righteousness and salvation for us. We began to think of His sufferings and death with appreciation of their atoning value, and with some sense of the love in which He gave Himself for us. All this was the result of the outpouring on us of the spirit of grace.

The "spirit of grace" was poured upon Saul of Tarsus when he said to the glorified One, "Who art thou, Lord?" and "What shall I do, Lord?" His heart was made ready in one instant to appreciate the One of whom he had been, up to that moment, the bitter enemy. It is the same "spirit of grace" which effects this moral revolution in hearts today, and the spirit of "supplications" still goes along with "the spirit of grace". The Lord said of Saul to Ananias, "Behold, he is praying". No doubt he was praying about the heavenly vision, and the new and wonderful light concerning Christ which it had brought into his heart. We must not suppose that Saul had heard nothing about Jesus before. He would not have been so bitter against His name if he had known nothing of it. No doubt he had heard much testimony from the many he persecuted. But he had thought that he ought to do much against that name. His prayer now would be that he might see everything in the light of Jesus being glorified. He would want to transfer all that the Old Testament had taught him concerning the Messiah to the glorified Man in heaven. What wonders would engage his heart and fill his prayers! He would want to understand how saints on earth could be one with the glorified Man. And he would certainly enter into that word, "They shall look on me whom they pierced". Now all this, in the principle of it, enters into the experience of everyone who is intelligently in the assembly. Jesus must become precious to us, loved as an only son, as a firstborn; He must be the pre-eminent One.

Then comes the mourning, the bitterness, *for Him*. There is deep sorrow that the One who is now the Object of our love should have been despised and rejected, and that we have had our part in this. During the three days that Saul was blind, and neither ate nor drank, we may be sure this mourning had its place. He would very feelingly enter into the sorrow of knowing that those whom Christ had loved and served had pierced Him.

He had had his part in this, but now the deep sorrow is *for Him*, that *He* should be so treated. How this exercise would give point in our hearts to His desire that we should remember Him! It would lead us to earnestly desire to make up to Him in fervent affection for what He has suffered. We should think that we could never do enough to compensate Him for the treatment He has received. This is an exercise for "every family apart, and their wives apart". It

forms no part of normal assembly service, but it is a very important preparation of heart for the assembly. For it is mourning how the Lord Jesus has been treated amongst those who profess His name that we rally to His name, and to the remembrance of Him. Our portion as eating the Lord's supper is in sharp contrast with what causes us to mourn. For we are with His lovers, where glad hearts are filled with His praise, and where all look for Him to come to find love's satisfaction in the company of His own. We do not mourn there; "the disciples rejoiced therefore, having seen the Lord".

ZECHARIAH 13

Zechariah 13

The exercises of chapter 12, when gone through with God, will prepare the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to appreciate the fountain which will be opened for them "for sin and for uncleanness", verse 1. They will feel the need for purification from their whole former state. Jehovah will fulfil His word: "And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your uncleannesses and from all your idols will I cleanse you", Ezekiel 36: 25.

While not losing sight of the direct application of this to a Jewish remnant in a future day, our chief object at present is to consider it as "written for our instruction". The truth of purification by water has application to us as well as to Israel, though it is, perhaps, less understood by believers generally than cleansing by blood. But if we have learned that we long rejected Christ, and were of the same stock as those who actually pierced Him — if we have mourned for Him as feeling how terribly He has been treated — we shall be thankful to know the character of the purification which is to be known today. We need to know this in order to have liberty to enter upon affectionate relations with Christ, and particularly at a time when He is no longer to be known according to flesh.

The "fountain opened" has reference to the death of Christ, for there could be no moral cleansing according to God apart from it. Our righteous title to be apart from our sinful selves is the death of Christ. The "fountain" brings to us the witness of what was accomplished in that death, and gives us to know that our former state as in the flesh was ended, for God, in the death of His Son. We can be with God wholly apart from the flesh, and we cannot be in spiritual liberty until we know this.

It may be observed that John's gospel — which from the outset views Christ as rejected (see John 1: 11) — is the gospel which chiefly presents the thought of purifying. He alone speaks of water as flowing from the pierced side of Christ as well as blood. The Lord told Nicodemus that it was necessary to be "born of water and of the Spirit" to enter into the kingdom of God. By natural birth we came into a state of sin and uncleanness, but as "born of water" we derive moral being from an entirely new source. If we are "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the living and abiding word of God" (1 Peter 1: 23), that word gives character to those born of it. A distinct feature of purification is brought in. It is not that the flesh is purified, but the one "born of water" is purified from it, as now knowing that there is

no element of good in it. As entering into the kingdom of God he moves away practically from the will of the flesh into the sphere of the will of God, and it becomes very clear that moral cleansing has been affected.

Washing with water, as applied to saints in the New Testament, is always spoken of as a thing accomplished. The Lord spoke of His own which were in the world as persons who were "washed all over", and now only needed to have their feet washed (John 13: 10), where a different word is used in the original. In this connection He said, "And ye are clean, but not all. For he knew him that delivered him up: on account of this he said, Ye are not all clean". The disciples, with the exception of Judas, had been washed and were clean. The Lord said, further, "Ye are already clean by reason of the word which I have spoken to you", John 15: 3. The word which Jesus had spoken to them had displaced in them the natural and the fleshly. His word had made Himself known in their affections, and what an immense inward purification this was! *They* did not understand the full bearing of it, but *He* did, and viewing them as having Him in their hearts as the Object of faith and love, He could say that they were "already clean". Then the water flowing from His side, as well as the blood, sets forth the great truth that in His death there was the witness of complete purification being effected. The water is the evidence that the flesh, with all that pertained to it, has been ended in the death of Christ. It has been wholly removed, for the satisfaction and glory of God, and this, known by the Spirit in the heart of the believer, is what purifies.

The teaching of Paul is in accord with what we have seen in John. He said of the believers at Corinth that they were "washed", contrasting their former state with what was now brought about in them by the work of God. Paul also speaks in Ephesians 5:26 of the assembly as having been purified by Christ "by the washing of water by the word". Purification by water is seen here in its most complete aspect. It includes the whole purifying service of Christ for the assembly. In the practical application of "the word" the truth of Romans comes first. We learn that as baptised unto Christ Jesus, and to His death, we have died with him and that "if we have died with Christ, we believe we shall also live with him". Colossians says, further, that we have not only died with Christ, but that we are risen with Him. In both Colossians and Ephesians saints are addressed as having put off the old man and put on the new.

The washing of water is "by the word"; that is, it is by the application to saints of what is in the mind of God in its own purity and completeness. There is no admixture of what is defective in "the word"; it is not contaminated or diluted by our faulty or imperfect experiences. When we hear Christ, and are instructed in Him, we learn the truth as in Jesus. Nothing comes short of God's

mind in Jesus, and the truth as in Jesus is that we have put off the old man and put on the new. There is no thought in "the word" of it not being done, or of it only being partly done. *Our* washing at the fountain is the application to our souls by Christ of the truth as it is in Jesus. This, as Ephesians 4: 21 - 24 clearly states, is our having put off the old man and having put on the new. It is not that we ought to do so; it is Christian truth applied to us for purifying. We shall never walk in the practical power of any truth until we accept it as the truth. We are then definitely committed to it; it governs the heart and the conscience and forms our exercises and prayers, and Christian practice follows.

Our chapter goes on to speak of the names of the idols being cut off out of the land, and also the false prophets and the unclean spirits; verse 2. Those who have been purified at the fountain will not tolerate idols or false teaching. Even the father and mother of a false prophet will thrust him through when he prophesies; verse 3. If people knew what Christian purification was they would not go on with fleshly religion, modernism, or any system of evil teaching. The truth of purification maintained in power in the souls of believers would expose every error, and make the teachers of it ashamed; verse 4.

Just at this point the Spirit of God introduces Christ prophetically, as though to mark the contrast between Him and all false prophets. The object of every teacher of wrong doctrine is to exalt himself; he would like people to believe that, like Simon of Samaria, he is "some great one". But the Lord Jesus came in, not to be a great one here, though He was truly great, but to be the Servant of all. "And he shall say, I am no prophet, I am a tiller of the ground; for man acquired me as bondman from my youth", verse 5. There are scriptures which bring out the Lord's lowliness of heart, His wondrous self-humiliation, in a remarkable way, and this is one of them. If He says, "I am no prophet", it is that we may understand how entirely He disclaimed taking any place of self-importance. He came to labour and to serve. The context here is that there were those who assumed to be prophets to gain some distinction or prominence for themselves; but He said, "*I* do not seek my own glory", John 8: 50. To one who addressed Him as "Good teacher", He said, "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, God", Luke 18:19. The One who subsisted in the form of God — the One spoken of in the chapter now before us as "the man that is my fellow, saith Jehovah of hosts" (Zechariah 13: 7), "emptied himself, taking a bondman's form", Philippians 2: 7. Beware of those who would use such scriptures to take away from the Lord of glory what pertains to Him as a divine Person in manhood. When He said, "I am no prophet", it was to show that He would not take any place that might seem to give Him glory in the eyes of men. The tempter suggested that He should take

such a place in casting Himself down from the edge of the temple to fulfil a scripture concerning Him as the Messiah, but He would not glorify Himself, nor tempt Jehovah His God. He was indeed a Prophet above all others, but He would not assume that office as a distinction amongst men; any more than He would consent to be made a king. He was here to labour and to serve, not to have public honour in the eyes of men.

So He says, "I am a tiller of the ground", verse 5. He was here to labour that there might be some result for God in Israel. As regards the nation, alas! He laboured in vain, and spent His strength for nought and in vain. Israel was not gathered, Jacob was not brought again to Jehovah, but, as we know, their refusal of His service led to a wonderful extension of God's work. He has been given "for a light of the nations", and has become God's salvation unto the ends of the earth; Isaiah 49: 4 - 6.

His service was available for men; "man acquired me as bondman from my youth", verse 5. He was at man's disposal for service, nor did any ever claim service from Him in vain; He was, in infinite grace, bondman to all. To His own He said, "But I am in the midst of you as the one that serves", Luke 22: 27. He who was the Lord as well as the Teacher undertook in love bondman-service in washing the feet of His disciples. He had taken a bondman's form, and He still serves in love of that wondrous character.

The answer to the Lord's service in Israel was that He was wounded. "And one shall say unto him, What are those wounds in thy hands? And he will say, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends", verse 6. It might be thought that man would be glad to have such a Servant, but it was otherwise. Everything that was of God for the blessing of Israel was set forth in Him, and therefore their moral state was fully brought to light by their cruel rejection of Him. If Israel according to the flesh could have been blessed, the blessing was there in Him for their acceptance; He came to them as the house of His friends, but all He got was wounding. This was Israel's part in His unspeakable sufferings.

Christendom has treated Him no better. Men profess to honour the Bible; they read it in their churches just as the Jews did in their synagogues. But the living service of Christ is of no account in their eyes. He is still knocking at the door, and seeking admission, but it is as One outside who is not wanted within. Can we wonder that God's judgment is imminent on Christ-rejecting Christendom as it was on Christ-rejecting Judaism? Happy are those who receive and confess Him as the Son of God, the Christ of God, and find through Him the true knowledge of God as the Source of all blessing! Fearful judgments will come upon Jerusalem, for she will receive of Jehovah's hand

double for all her sins, but a Spared remnant will flee into a great valley opened up to them as a way of escape; Zechariah 14: 5. Fearful judgments are about to fall upon Christendom, but a spared remnant — including all true believers — will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air before those judgments fall in their full intensity; 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

But we are called at this point to contemplate Christ in a way which will, most of all, endear Him to our hearts, though it may, for a time, cause deep sorrow. It will certainly effect a stupendous change in our view of things if we take in the divine import of it. "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, even against the man that is my fellow, saith Jehovah of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered, and I will turn my hand upon the little ones", verse 7. A great and solemn change in the position of Jehovah's Shepherd took place when Jehovah called on the sword to awake against Him, and we know when that change came about. For it was in the night in which He was delivered up that He said, "All ye shall be offended in me during this night. For it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after that I shall be risen, I will go before you to Galilee", Matthew 26:31,32. His disciples would be offended, or stumbled, because they were expecting Him to take the kingdom. That Jehovah should bid the sword awake against *Him* was the complete reversal of all that was in their minds. Yet so it must needs be, according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. But it was a terrible thing for the disciples, who were His true sheep, and who had been attracted to Him in the days of His flesh, to learn that He was to be smitten, and they were to be scattered. The whole ground of their association with Him was to be changed. He had been, as with them, the divine Centre of gathering as the Christ according to flesh, the true Shepherd of Israel. But the very Centre of gathering, as according to flesh, was to be smitten, and the little flock of sheep which had been gathered to Him was to be scattered. This was the complete setting aside of that order of things of which Christ according to flesh was the central figure. As to that order of things He had to Say, "For the things concerning me have an end", Luke 22: 37.

The fact was that none of the disciples really understood what was due to them, as according to the flesh, until they learned it by seeing it come upon Christ. They thought He could redeem Israel *without death*. All of us think that some change is needed, but if nothing short of *death* will meet the case that is the end of us altogether. Christ had to go that way; there was divine necessity for it. "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?" Luke 24: 26. All the Scriptures had spoken of it. "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved the Christ to suffer, and to rise from among the dead the third

day", Luke 24: 46. One having died for all, all were proved to be dead. Apart from what Christ is to us, and what we have in Him risen from among the dead, we are all dead. One blessed Man has been in death for us, and He is risen, and we are only out of death as we live in Him. Christ after the flesh was in that condition that He might die, and if He had not died there would have been no way out of death for us. But, having died, "he presented himself living, after he had suffered, with many proofs; being seen by them during forty days, and speaking of the things which concern the kingdom of God", Acts 1: 3. The kingdom of God was the sphere in which eternal life would be enjoyed, and they entered into it spiritually in the company of the risen One. We do not now know Christ according to flesh, nor do we know ourselves according to flesh, for we were ended in His death. "So if any one be in Christ, there is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new: and all things are of the God who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ", 2 Corinthians 5:16-18.

It is well that we should understand that, though there is deeply important instruction in it for us all, the smiting of the Shepherd has special reference to God's ways with Israel. As Jehovah's Shepherd He was not sent to the Gentiles, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. "Jesus Christ became a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises of the fathers", Romans 15: 8. If any people could have been blessed according to the flesh it was Israel, for they had every advantage that God could confer, even to the point of having Christ, but their state was such that not even Christ after the flesh could meet it. They were under death and the curse. Hence there could be no permanent gathering of the sheep to Christ after the flesh; in that character He must be smitten, and His sheep attracted to Him in Israel must be scattered. His smiting was the end of that kind of association between the Shepherd and the sheep, and it will never be resumed. Israel will never again have the opportunity of knowing Him according to the flesh. I believe Scripture distinguishes between the smiting of the Shepherd and His atoning work, though both took place at the cross. His smiting was the bringing to an end in death of His shepherd service in Israel in the days of His flesh. He was no longer to be known "according to flesh". The state which necessitated smiting was in Israel, not in the Shepherd, but He had in grace identified Himself with that state, and was smitten on account of it. He was cut off and had nothing; Daniel 9:26. He had the deep sorrow of this, as having served Israel in love, and been Jehovah's Shepherd amongst them. Instead of getting Israel for Jehovah the Shepherd was smitten, and the little flock He had gathered was scattered. This was the sorrowful end of His service in Israel, but He has been recompensed in resurrection, and in having the

assembly, and He will yet have a remnant from Israel when they have learned that His smiting was on account of their state, with which, in grace, He had identified Himself. Instead of having His place and glory as the Messiah He was smitten, but in this view of His taking up a new and more glorious place as risen.

The remnant in Israel in a coming day will see that it was on account of their state that Jehovah's Shepherd was smitten. They will feel that they deserve the smiting of God, but their hearts will be deeply touched to learn that their Messiah has entered into, and felt, all that they are justly subject to; they will learn His love in this way. The sword must needs awake against the perversity of human will which refused and wounded the Shepherd who came in fulness of blessing, but the eternal wonder is that it awoke against the Shepherd Himself, who made their cause His own. Could anything move the heart more than this? He was Jehovah's Fellow, which asserts His co-equality in Deity, but He is probably so spoken of here to indicate the perfect oneness of mind between Jehovah and His Shepherd. He could say, "I and the Father are one", John 10: 30, that is, They are one in Their thoughts and purposes regarding the sheep. Jehovah's love and faithfulness to His Israel did not break down, nor did the Messiah fail to go through all that was needed if Israel was to be blessed. In view of this the sword awoke against Him, and as the Shepherd He was smitten. This was because He had taken up Israel's cause, and identified Himself in grace with what was due to them. We, like them, learn what is due to us by seeing it come upon One who bore it in love.

The disciples of Jesus were the true remnant of Israel when the Lord was here, and they were called to follow Christ and to be with Him in the days of His flesh. It was the most blessed association in which men could be found as after the flesh, but the smiting of the Shepherd and the scattering of the sheep brought it to an end. God intended that the remnant of Israel should pass over by way of the death of Christ into a new association with Him as risen from among the dead. This put them on ground where they could have part in God's wondrous thoughts as to the assembly. As gathered to the Messiah come according to the flesh, and on Jewish ground, they were scattered, but this was to make room for greater and more wondrous thoughts of blessing. The assembly was to come in according to divine purpose and counsel. In the wondrous interval between His smiting and His return in glory, the assembly is being called and purified to be in association with Him as risen and glorified, and to be His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all.

It was in view of all this that Jehovah said, "I will turn my hand upon the little ones", verse 7. That refers to the divine dealing with the disciples during the

period between Gethsemane and Pentecost. They had to go through deep soul-travail in seeing Him delivered up, condemned, crucified, and buried. They had to learn that He had, indeed, been smitten, and they had now no rallying point, they were scattered. But wondrously was the divine hand turned upon them. The light of Him as risen broke on one and another, and finally on them all. They found that He could be with them, and they could be with Him, in an altogether new association. Each one of the forty days during which He was seen of them added something to their knowledge of Him as "living". And then they saw Him "taken up", and they realised that they were entrusted with His interests here, and, finally, the Holy Spirit filled them to be their power for service and testimony.

The remnant in Israel will learn that in the smiting and cutting off of the Messiah there was an end of all hopes according to the flesh. They will see that neither promises nor covenants could be of avail to those under death. They will learn, under God's solemn dealings with them, that they are under death, but they will learn it in a deeper way when they see that Christ has been smitten on their account. They will see that every blessing must come to them on the ground of His death and resurrection. They will bless themselves in Him, and they will enter into life eternal in the day spoken of in Zechariah 14, when living waters go out from Jerusalem as the city of the great King. But they will not reach this apart from the refining process which is described in the last verse of chapter 13.

Jehovah will take account of "all the land" (verse 8) in His latter-day dealings with Israel, and judgment will come upon those who continue in unbelief, and in the spirit found in those who wounded Christ. "Two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third part shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part into the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried". Refining goes on because there is precious metal there, so that it only applies to those who have faith. Peter speaks of "the proving of your faith, much more precious than of gold which perishes, though it be proved by fire, be found to praise and glory and honour in the revelation of Jesus Christ", 1 Peter 1:7. The refining in Zechariah 13: 9 is in view of the revelation of Jesus Christ as spoken of in chapter 14. Judicial dealings of God with unbelief, and a refining process where there is faith, are characteristic of the last days. I think we can very clearly see them going on today. God is dealing judicially with nations which have had Christian light but have not been faithful to it. We must not forget that there are judicial dealings with the assemblies as well as with Israel or the Jews. For example, the Lord says to Ephesus, "I am coming to thee, and I will remove thy lamp out of its place, except thou shalt repent", Revelation 2: 5. To Pergamos He says, "Repent therefore; but if not, I come to

thee quickly, and I will make war with them with the sword of my mouth", Revelation 2: 16. To Thyatira He says of Jezebel, "Behold, I cast her into a bed, and those that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and her children will I kill with death; and all the assemblies shall know that I am he that searches the reins and the hearts; and I will give to you each according to your works", Revelation 2: 22, 23. To Sardis He says, "If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come upon thee as a thief", Revelation 3: 3. To Laodicea He says, "I am about to spue thee out of my mouth", Revelation 3:16.

But while these judicial dealings are going on, and will go on, the divine refining is going on also wherever there is faith. The object of the refining is that confidence in God may be developed and purified. It is well to note that the refining does not result in anything very great in an outward way; no great exploits are done. "They shall call on my name, and I will answer them; I will say, It is my people; and they shall say, Jehovah is my God", verse 9. The distinguishing mark of the faithful today is that they follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, but they do this as those who "call upon the Lord out of a pure heart".

2 Timothy 2: 22. They have no other resource, and they are owned and supported by Him.

ZECHARIAH 14

Zechariah 14

There is a great contrast between Jerusalem as seen in the early verses of this chapter and Jerusalem as it is viewed from verse 8 to the end of the chapter. It is much like the contrast between Babylon and the holy city Jerusalem in the Revelation. Jerusalem as seen in verse 2 is the subject of divine judgment, given over to the destroyers by Jehovah's displeasure. She is in the hands of those hostile to Jehovah. Jerusalem in this point of view is like the Jerusalem where our Lord was crucified, which has its counterpart in the present state of Christendom. Terrible things came upon the Jerusalem which rejected Christ, and terrible things will come upon the Christendom which professes His name only to dishonour it. "When they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them ... and they shall in no wise escape", 1 Thessalonians 5: 3.

But at the time when the Lord was crucified at Jerusalem, there was a remnant who valued and loved Him, and who had His company for forty days after His resurrection, and who saw Him "taken up" from the mount of Olives, as we read in Acts 1. It was at the mount of Olives that the disciples were told that He would so come as they had seen Him go. And, as we know, there was a way of escape provided from all that was coming on Jerusalem in that day. Repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins secured the gift of the Holy Spirit for all who accepted Peter's word. The Lord being "taken up" from the mount of Olives gives that mount a very distinct link with His present place on high, and it was really in the recognition of Him as in that place, exalted by the right hand of God, that the spared remnant on the day of Pentecost found a way of escape.

Jehovah will act in a remarkable way for the remnant in Jerusalem in a future day. "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem toward the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, — a very great valley And ye shall flee by (or, into) the valley of my mountains", verses 4, 5. He will take up a position on the mount of Olives before He is King in Jerusalem, and there will be a valley formed in connection with His being there into which, as I understand it, the remnant will flee so as to be in safety from the judgments impending, or actually in progress, in Jerusalem. In fleeing there the remnant will be linked on, in their faith and affections, with Acts 1. They will come spiritually to the thought of Him as risen and ascended, and will understand the Psalms which speak of Him thus. In that valley — a low place — they will

learn Christ as having been taken up, and as having occupied a heavenly position for a long time, but as having now come down to take up His earthly kingdom. They will have learned to value the Shepherd, so long despised and rejected. They will have looked on Him as the One whom they pierced, and will have mourned for Him as one dearly loved. They will have washed at the fountain opened, and will be morally suitable to know Him, and to be with Him, in the mount of Olives position before He comes into Jerusalem. In that divinely formed valley there will be no natural impressions of Christ, such as many had in the days of His flesh (Matthew 16: 14); all their thoughts of Him will be according to God. For they will have gone through that day "known to Jehovah" of which it is said that "at eventide it shall be light". They will come into the light of their association with Him as prophetically made known in the Song of Songs and in Psalm 45. Then they will come with Him into the holy city. They will have the light of the Psalms and probably of the gospels also.

There is a striking analogy between the circumstances of the remnant in that day and the circumstances in which saints find themselves today. The great Christian profession is just on the verge of apostasy, and is ripening fast for judgment. But there are those who have been purified, and have understood — in measure at least — the wondrous import of the death of Christ. Through exercise they have learned their association with Christ in His heavenly position. The only way of escape from what is under judgment is to flee for refuge to One who is altogether outside it. The Lord is to be known today in what answers to the mount of Olives position. That is, He is to be known as risen, and as having been "taken up" to heaven. Those who really want to find Christ must go altogether outside the world — either pagan or Christian — to find Him. This is not easily done, for it runs counter to every thought of the natural heart.

Our mount of Olives is the epistle to the Ephesians or John 20:17; it is what we shall reach in actuality by the rapture.

But I doubt whether any of us learn what it is to be in heavenly association with Christ without going through an experience something like the one described in Zechariah 14: 6, 7. "And it shall come to pass in that day, that there shall not be light; the shining shall be obscured. And it shall be one day which is known to Jehovah, not day, and not night; and it shall come to pass, at eventide it shall be light". One has to learn the absence of light here; every human luminary has to be obscured. I do not think anyone will move out to the Lord in the mount of Olives position so long as he thinks there is light in man's intellect or speculations or religious ideas. The wisdom of man, and even his religiousness, is darkness in the spiritual realm, and God would have

it learned to be so. However able religious leaders and philosophers may be, they are under death. Only Christ is out of death and suitable for heaven, and it is only as having died with Him, and having Him as our life, that we live Godward. But this is outside the religious world as distinctly as the mount of Olives is outside Jerusalem. It is reached through the exercises and experiences of a day which is entirely different from any day in the natural calendar. It is a day "known to Jehovah", which is "not day and not night" according to man's reckoning; it is a day quite apart from natural impressions, such as the period between Gethsemane and the resurrection was to the disciples, or the three days were to Saul when he neither saw nor ate nor drank. None of us pass from the natural to the spiritual without going through a "day" of this kind, which is measured not in hours and minutes but in God-given exercise.

But "at eventide it shall be light". There is no such light as the light of a risen and heavenly Christ. Happy are those whose hearts are filled with it! They are ready for His coming. And "the mount of Olives which is before Jerusalem" is "toward the east". The "east" speaks spiritually of the coming of the Lord. So that we get a sentence here which stands really by itself in the chapter: "And Jehovah my God shall come, and all the holy ones with thee", verse 5. The moment is near when the saints will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. They will actually go out from what is under judgment to be with the Lord, and to come back with Him to share His glorious reign, when all offences and those that practise lawlessness will have been gathered out of His kingdom.

In the time of Jerusalem's desolation the only way to escape will be to flee out of it, for apostasy will be consummated there, and God's judgment will be upon it. But His feet standing upon the mount of Olives is outside Jerusalem, and it appears to have reference to how He will make Himself known to the remnant when they will have to flee from apostate Jerusalem. It is a place which links on with known circumstances in the gospel history, and particularly with the Lord being "taken up". It seems to me that the valley formed by the cleaving of the mount of Olives should be distinguished from the valley of Jehoshaphat in Joel 3. The latter is for judgment — Jehoshaphat means *Jehovah judgeth* — and the nations are brought there to be judged. But the former would remind us that the olive in Scripture is connected with promise and God's sovereign goodness, and it symbolises what is spiritual. Hence I believe that in Jehovah standing on the mount of Olives He is taking up an attitude of grace towards the remnant. The mount cleaving in the midst thereof so as to form "a very great valley" I understand to be a provision of grace for the repentant remnant. They will flee into it from the city which is, at that time, given up to apostasy and judgment. If this is so there is a striking

analogy between their position and ours. We go out spiritually from the scene of apostasy by learning our identification with the One who has been "taken up". We shall go out of it actually when His assembling shout calls us to meet Him in the air. Then "when the Christ is manifested who is our life, then shall ye also be manifested with him in glory", Colossians 3: 4. All the heavenly saints will come with Christ, and those of the earthly saints who are represented by the queen and her companions in Psalm 45 will also be with Him in His glorious reign. "All the holy ones with thee" is a general statement of what will introduce the reign of Christ, who is identified with Jehovah. It will include saints of the assembly, but it covers all who will reign with Christ.

The remnant will not come into the clear light of the Lord in the mount of Olives position until the end of the special "day" of verses 6 and 7, but "at eventide it shall be light". All is "light" as between the king and the queen in Psalm 45, though the king's enemies have still to be dealt with.

The Lord coming with all the holy ones is followed by the introduction of full millennial blessing. Living waters go out from Jerusalem, and Jehovah is King there over all the earth. Jerusalem dwells in her own place, and dwells safely. All who have warred against her will come under judgment, and all the inhabitants of the earth that are left will go up from year to year to worship the King, Jehovah of hosts, and to celebrate the feast of the tabernacles; verse 16.

This most instructive book closes on the note of holiness. "In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO JEHOVAH; and the pots in Jehovah's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. And every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto Jehovah of hosts ... and in that day there shall be no more a Canaanite in the house of Jehovah of hosts". Every movement, and every vessel of service, will carry the impress of holiness. The selfishness of man, and his self-seeking, will have no more place. The mercenary element, which has been such a corrupting element in connection with the things of God, will disappear. It impresses us with the thought that holiness is a most essential feature of all service Godward. Indeed, it is very striking that the features of the millennial Jerusalem that are mentioned in this chapter are features which normally characterise the testimony of God at all times. Wherever the truth is maintained there will be, in principle, the flowing out of living waters and the feature of holiness. This will, assuredly, be as true in remnant times as it was in the early freshness of our dispensation.

God has set before us a wonderful vision of a heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation 21, but both that city and the earthly Jerusalem as seen in

Zechariah 14 are set before us to help us to understand the features that should mark God's assembly now. The Lord says of the overcomer in Philadelphia, "I will write upon him ... the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God", Revelation 3:12. Every saint today whom the Lord makes a pillar in the temple of His God will set forth something that truly represents the heavenly Jerusalem. If this is so of one faithful individual, how true will it be of those who walk together as confessing and seeking to maintain the truth of the assembly!

In closing our consideration of the prophecy of Zechariah we must keep in mind that it was all given to encourage a feeble remnant to build the house of Jehovah in a time of recovery. It is intended to be a help to us as we take up the exercises of a returned remnant today. In Ezra 6: 14 we are told that the people "prospered" through the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah. May we also prosper through it in this our day!

"SONS OF OIL"

Ezra 4:23; Haggai 1:8, 9; Zechariah 3: 1 - 5; Zechariah 4:1 - 14

We see in the scripture in Ezra that there was a power that would cause the work of the house of God to cease, and recent events have reminded us that that power still exists. There is a great power active to cause the work of the house of God to cease and we are all liable to fall under the influence of that power more or less. It is therefore of great importance that we should learn how to stand in spiritual power against it and how to secure the completion of all that belongs to the service of the house of God.

Haggai gives us another reason why the work ceased; it was not really Artaxerxes and the enemies that caused the work to cease, but the state of the people themselves. They were occupied with their own things, and the house of God had lost its place in their interest and affections. In Paul's day all sought their own things and not the things of Jesus Christ. That state of things prevails in the Christian profession and we have to see to it with jealous care that it does not prevail in our hearts.

Zechariah is, I believe, the most important of the post-captivity books because it gives us the secret of success in the carrying on of the work and service of the house of God. So the teaching of the prophet Zechariah is of vital importance to us, and I have on my mind to say a few words on the fact that the saints are called upon to take up features which are set forth in Joshua and in Zerubbabel. These men represent saints like ourselves, who are brought by divine grace into a condition in which they can minister to the work of the house of God. Joshua and Zerubbabel were the two anointed ones or "sons of oil", and I venture to hope that it is our holy desire and purpose to be such, because the maintenance of the divine testimony in the house of God depends on there being "sons of oil".

The prophet saw a golden lamp, and he saw it fed with oil and that two olive trees were the sources from which the oil came. These two olive trees represent the saints as enabled of God to take up priestly and royal character so that what is suitable to God in His house shall be maintained. But we must understand that it is a time of testimony, not of great things outwardly. It is a time of communications from heaven, for Zechariah says eleven times in the first six chapters, "the angel that talked with me". And it is encouraging to see that God takes up a priest who is altogether out of order, because I apprehend that no saint could be in a worse case than Joshua the high priest. Instead of being attired, as the high priest should be, with holy garments for glory and ornament, he is found in filthy garments.

I cannot but think that Joshua represents the state of the Christian profession generally in regard to priesthood, and alas! it may be more or less descriptive of my state and yours. But it is blessed to see that Jehovah in the sovereignty of His love undertakes to make this unsuitable man suitable: He undertakes to do it all from His own side. No doubt Joshua had deep exercises, for it is a solemn thing to think of serving God in a priestly way and to be conscious that one has no fitness to take up the service — our associations, or manner of life, our personal state, all unsuitable to priesthood, and therefore disqualifying us from being "sons of oil". But it is most encouraging to see that the blessed God undertakes to put Joshua into true priestly conditions. We do not find that Joshua had a single word to say; all that he was called upon to do was to submit himself to the actings of holy love. Are we prepared to submit ourselves to the actings of love? They take place in such a meeting as this — the Spirit of God touching spots of defilement here and there, perhaps as yet not even known to ourselves, but in the sovereignty of love God exposing things that are unsuited to priesthood.

There can be no flow of the Spirit apart from holy conditions and such are the conditions of priesthood. Priesthood is one of the two "sons of oil", and it is in view of Joshua becoming one of them that Jehovah says, "Take away the filthy garments", and there were those standing before Him who were ready to do this service. How blessed to know that God does not do everything Himself; He loves to call in His people, His saints, and to make them serviceable in this great work of bringing about holy conditions amongst His people, so that priesthood may have its true holy character before Him. There are those standing before Him who are ready to serve us, and the ministry of the Word is the effective means by which our state is brought home to us, and then a blessed activity of divine love comes in to deal with it so that conditions result that are suitable to God.

In Zerubbabel we do not see moral exercises, which are worked out in connection with Joshua, but we see that he needs instruction.

The thought of royalty is that one has the mind of God so as to be able to apply it in a practical way. So David says, "Give the king thy judgments"; the great thought of the king is that he has the mind of God, and has kingly ability to apply it. Zerubbabel represents the royal element amongst the people of God, and he gets instruction by this wonderful figure of the golden lamp and its seven lamps, and the oil flowing through golden pipes. By all this he is instructed in the great fact that in connection with the work of the house of God it is "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts". That is instruction for the king; if building is to go on according to God

there must be the recognition that there is no power whatever but that of God's Spirit, involving the practical renunciation of every other kind of power.

When everything that is of human power is set aside, the great mountain that would stand in the way of the house being built becomes a plain. All difficulties are removed, and the hands that begin are able to finish. It is a day of small things indeed, but things are brought to completion. We should have nothing less than that before us. The eyes of Jehovah rejoice when they see the plummet in the hands of Zerubbabel. Royalty in the saints comes out in this, that they will not suffer any standard to be substituted for the divine one.

Zerubbabel was seen with the plummet in his hand and he was qualified, not only to lay the foundation, but to finish the work of the house of God without deviating a hair's breadth from the divine standard. The plummet suggests that all the building is to be regulated by a perfect standard; it must conform to the divine thought. The plummet estimates things from above, and it indicates to us that the royal element amongst the people of God will not suffer anything to deviate from the divine standard. It is said of Zerubbabel, as seen with the plummet in his hand, that he had laid the foundation of the house, and his hands should finish it. That is a kingly thought; one who can begin and finish in relation to the work of the house of God is truly kingly, and that royal element is needed amongst us. The Spirit as sent from a glorified Christ acts through the saints. Of course, the Spirit viewed as a Person in the Godhead is free to act as He will and where He will, but we are speaking now of the saints as moving in spiritual power in relation to the work of the house of God. The movements of the Spirit in relation to that work require vessels, and in that connection the saints become "sons of oil".

I hope we really desire to be "sons of oil"? If I am not a "son of oil", how can I minister anything that will be light in relation to the house of God? How can I build or have the plummet in my hand? The plummet is intended to regulate everything in the public service of God according to His mind. The plummet has been applied to things particularly during the last hundred years. There was a very long period — many centuries — when people thought of nothing more, at the best, than doing something to improve the state of things that existed. I trust, beloved brethren, that we have moved away from that standpoint altogether and that we have no thought of improving what exists, but we have the thought of working to a divine pattern and a divine standard. We have the thought of working to what has been set forth in the teaching of the apostles and prophets, and as this is before us constructional work goes on, and I believe God's intent is that it shall be brought to completion.

We must admit that we come short of that yet; much that transpires in our meetings would have no place if we had reached the completion of the divine thought. In order to reach it there must be priestly conditions and royal conditions. It has always been God's thought that priesthood and royalty should go together in connection with the blessed activities of God's Spirit. When these two elements are combined there is a flow of the Spirit which maintains divine light according to the perfection of the divine thought. Things are maintained in ministry as light, and then they are worked out constructionally in the actual service of the house.

I trust we are moving on to the completion of what is in the mind of God, but I would impress upon my own heart and yours that very much depends on the exercises which go on in our souls in relation to these two great thoughts of priesthood and royalty. As they are worked out in us we become "sons of oil". Both characters are going to be taken up by Christ; this book speaks of the time when Christ will be a Priest upon His throne; He is going to be the Branch and the Headstone; He is going to hold publicly these blessed characters for God. But at the present time the work of the house of God is being carried on by the power of the Spirit through the saints, so that it is of the greatest importance that we should be truly "sons of oil". This depends on us now, and God is well pleased to effect in us everything that is necessary in order that all that is in His mind shall be brought to completion. We have not to reach this by human movements of might or power, but the blessed God would be pleased to take us in hand, and, if need be, deal with our state even though it might be as bad as that of Joshua. I am not saying it is, but it is encouraging to see that if it were as bad as that of Joshua, God would undertake to deal with it, and to use the effective ministry that goes on on the part of those that stand before Him to eliminate all the elements that are unsuited to His own holiness. Priesthood has to do with holy conditions of service Godward, but the royal character has to do, as I understand it, with the maintenance of public order. There is a certain public order in the house of God which has to be maintained in royal power. "Sons of oil" are able to hold the plummet and to see that there is no deviation from the divine mind. During the last hundred years we have had to learn that many things deviated from the straight plummet line; they would not bear the standard of God's mind, and we have had to learn to adjust things to that standard. Royal features have come out in the saints as that has gone on.

I commend these thoughts to the affections and the exercises of the brethren, that we should take up these things in a very practical way so that we may truly become "sons of oil". If there is to be the manifestation of the Spirit of God in the assembly, it will come normally through the saints. If we are not

"sons of oil" to furnish the oil for the light the testimony of God must wane; the light will burn dim. All depends upon our being maintained in priestly and royal conditions, and therefore I urge upon the brethren — and this is a matter for brothers and sisters alike — that we should earnestly desire to take up this character of "sons of oil", and to be concerned that priestly and royal conditions are really with us. Do not let us be content with a respectable kind of Christian life that keeps itself pure from manifest evil, but let us be set to cultivate those inward priestly relations with God that are suited to Himself, and then the royal character that has to do with what is outward. As we learn the mind of God, as we bring things to the test of the plummet, we shall get things more and more adjusted and brought into conformity with the divine standard, and then those who begin can finish. If we are on those lines we shall not break down half-way; the Lord will not have to say of us, "I have not found thy works complete before my God". If we move in this priestly and royal way we shall bring things to completion.

Is it possible that just a few people meeting together in a simple way can reach God's great thoughts in completion? Yes, that is what He intends. And that is why He says, "Who has despised the day of small things". He intends that things shall be brought to completion on a small scale before they are brought to completion on a grand scale in the day that is coming. What a pleasure it is to God to see anyone in priestly attire before Him, and what a pleasure it is to Him to see a king — a man with a plummet in his hand — testing everything by what is suited to God! Things are brought to completion on that line. Let us remember that the house of God is one, and it is universal; so that what is secured in any locality is gain to the house universally. If we want to help our brethren in other parts of the world, the best way we can do it is by working out to completion the divine thoughts in our own locality. In being secured there they are secured in God's mind for the whole house. There is something secured, the value and power of which God can make advantageous in every part of His house. As the saints become vessels of the Spirit, ministering what is of the Spirit to one another, the whole thing is being brought on its way to completion. We are drawing near to the time when the headstone will be brought forth with shoutings. The wonderful place of Christ as the Headstone is coming into evidence amongst His people, filling their hearts with holy rapture, with shoutings of "Grace, grace unto it!" What a blessed consummation of the work of God! May it be more, before us in living power, to the glory and praise of God!