

"New things do I declare"

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When the eternal state is reached everything will be made new in the fullest possible sense, according to Revelation 21: 5. But at the present time God's work is characterized by newness, whether we think of the work of Christ for us or the work of the Holy Spirit in us. And even in the Old Testament there are prophecies concerning the new things God proposed to do. This is particularly marked in the three major prophets — Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

If Isa. 42: 8-16 be read, and then Isa. 65: 17, 18, it seems plain that we may speak of him as the prophet of the new things. Between these two passages we get the prediction of the great and glorious basis on which the new things will securely rest.

All attentive readers of this great prophetic book have been impressed by the way that it naturally divides into two parts; the second starting with Isa. 40, and consisting of 27 chapters. At the beginning of Isa. 42 Christ is introduced as the true Servant of the Lord who will not fail nor be discouraged till He accomplishes God's will on earth, and He it is who will introduce and establish the new things of which verse 9 speaks. In the chapters that intervene before we reach Isa. 65: 17, Christ is introduced in a variety of ways, but particularly as "the Arm" of the Lord, and as "the Servant" of the Lord.

The 27 chapters are divided into three groups of nine, each ending with a solemn assertion that there is no peace for the wicked. (See Isa. 48: 22; Isa. 57: 21; Isa. 66: 24). The centre section of the three is therefore chapters 49-57; and the centre chapter of that centre section is Isa. 53, which really begins with Isa. 52: 13. So the prophecy of the One who is Jehovah's Servant, who goes even into death for the transgressions of God's people and comes forth in resurrection, lies at the heart of everything. The twenty-seven chapters begin with, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." Having read the first thirty-nine chapters with their many denunciations and woes, we might wonder where the comfort is to be found. It is fully indicated when Isa. 53 is reached. If we believe the report and discover the mighty "Arm of the Lord" in the suffering "Servant," the comfort will flow into our hearts in abundant measure.

He it is who will introduce the new things of which Isa. 42 speaks. He will not fail nor be discouraged till He has set judgment in the earth and brought them in. All the servants of God, who were merely human, have failed in greater or less degree and have been discouraged. To the outward observer His course would end in what looked like the greatest failure of all. Chapter 49 contemplates this, and shows us that though He apparently failed and spent His strength for nought and in vain, He was not discouraged, knowing that He would be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and His God would be His strength. Israel would ultimately be gathered as the fruit of His work, and meanwhile God had wider and larger purposes of blessing, bringing light to the Gentiles and salvation to the ends of the earth.

As far as Isaiah is concerned the new things predicted are connected with blessings on the earth. The new song that they provoke is from both land and sea, from the far distant isles and from the wilderness and the top of the mountains. For heavenly blessing we have to go on to the New Testament.

Again, in Isa. 65, the promise of the new heavens and new earth that shall be created must be read in the light of the verses that follow, where millennial conditions are described. The heavens will be

new for they will be in direct touch with earth, as described in Hosea 2: 21, instead of being severed and silent as now. In consequence the earth will be blessed. Jerusalem will be a rejoicing, instead of a heartache, as now. Her people will be a joy, instead of "contrary to all men" (1 Thess. 2: 15) as now. Sorrow will depart and prosperity be established. All creation will be blessed, and man's life greatly prolonged, since, "as the days of a tree are the days of My people, and Mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands." It will be new heavens and new earth indeed as to its character.

This golden age will be brought to pass by the Lord Jesus Christ and by His work alone. Let us get that firmly fixed in our minds, so that we may be preserved from meddling with present schemes to bring such an age to pass, be they political or otherwise. It will only come to pass when He, who came first as the Servant to suffer, comes again as Jehovah's mighty Arm to bring salvation for the earth by solemn judgments.

Following the great prophecy of Isa. 53, Isaiah does mention the covenant to be founded on the death and resurrection of God's Servant. We have the words, "the covenant of My peace," which shall not be "removed" (Isa. : 10). He does not however give us any development of this matter. We have to turn to Jeremiah for this.

Of all the prophets Jeremiah had perhaps the hardest task. All his words seemed to fail. He had one or two who helped him but no one seemed to listen to him or be converted through his word. He must have been endowed by God with a very high measure of moral courage. To the Israel of his day he had to say, "Thus saith the Lord, Thy bruise is incurable, and thy wound is grievous" (Isa. : 12). So there was no hope at all for them under the old covenant of law, and the mailed fist of Nebuchadnezzar was about to sweep them away.

Yet in the very next chapter he is commissioned to utter words of hope. There is to be "a new covenant," which will stand upon a basis entirely different, indeed entirely opposite, to the old. Isa. 31: 31-34 must be read to get its scope. To the old there were two parties, God Himself and Israel. God demanded obedience, and if it were rendered in all particulars and all the time, the promised blessing would materialize. The preamble was, "Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed . . ." (Ex. 19: 5). There was that fatal "**If**."

In Jeremiah's beautiful prophecy there is no "if." Rather the characteristic words are, "I will." Israel and Judah come into the picture it is true, but as passive recipients and not as important actors. The new covenant will come to pass when God acts in the sovereignty of His mercy upon the righteous basis laid down in the sacrifice of Christ of which Isaiah has spoken. God will so put His law within them and so write it on their hearts that it will be as natural for them to keep it, as formerly it was natural for them to break it. They will come into the light of the knowledge of God with all their sins forgiven and the very remembrance of them dismissed. And all by an act of God's sovereign mercy, as is made so plain in the closing verses of Romans 11.

Though this new covenant is to be made in a day yet to come with Israel, God's earthly people, the blessing of it is all ours today, as the Epistle to the Hebrews shows us. All that we have reached us on new covenant principles, for the blood of the new covenant has been shed at the Cross. The blessing that has come to us however is of a higher and heavenly character. It includes all predicted as marking the new covenant but goes a long way beyond it. Let us see that we do not slip into the error that ensnared the Galatians — the idea that though we are under the new covenant for justification, we must go back to the principle of the old covenant for practical sanctification.

But what, we may ask, is really signified by this putting of God's law in the inward parts, this writing of it in the heart, of which Jeremiah speaks? To answer this question we must pass on to the

prophecy of Ezekiel.

In Ezekiel 36 greatly enlarges our thoughts as to this part of the work of God. He still speaks figuratively, for the time had not yet come to speak with the plainness we find in the New Testament. If verses 25-31 be read, we notice such terms as "sprinkle clean water," "a new heart," "a new spirit," and the following verses indicate what is going to be the result of this great work of God. The Israel of that day will be entirely cleansed and renovated. In the words of our Lord, recorded in John 3, they will be "born again."

Here then we have, not the **new things**, of which Isaiah speaks, nor the **new covenant** of which Jeremiah speaks, but the **new birth** and this completes the picture. The new birth is an integral part of the new covenant, and without it the new things never could be enjoyed, even though they be righteously established by and in Christ.

In the natural creation water has been given of God as the cleansing agent. It cleanses internally when we drink it. It cleanses externally when we wash in it. Used figuratively, it sets forth quite simply the idea of moral cleansing, as we get it in Ezekiel 36. To this scripture the Lord Jesus alluded when He spoke to Nicodemus, as recorded in John 3. In answer to the question, "How can these things be?" the Lord said, "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?" He should have known them, for there they were in Ezekiel 36, which mentions both the "water" and "My Spirit."

When we reach the New Testament the water stands clearly revealed as the symbol of the word of God: such a passage as John 15: 3 shows this. When Israel is thus sprinkled, the clean water will come into contact with each and all of them, and the new heart and new spirit be produced. Then in addition to this God will put His Spirit within them. This surely is the gift of the Spirit which other prophecies envisage at the opening of the millennial age.

As the result of all this there will be found a new born nation, that will simply loathe the things they formerly loved, and loathe themselves for having indulged in them. They will also love the things they formerly had no desire for. It will be a completely new Israel that will enter into the blessings of the kingdom.

Hence in John 3 we have the Lord Jesus saying to Nicodemus, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" The new birth of which He spoke is an absolute necessity for entrance into the kingdom of God, when established on earth. It is equally needful if there is to be an entrance upon heavenly things.

We may indeed thank God that we have come by the Spirit of God under the cleansing action of the word of God, and thus are born again. We may thank Him further that the Gospel has reached us, bringing us into blessing on the lines of the new covenant. We have thus a new nature and we are cleared of our guilt. In other words, we are both washed and justified.

But we must further thank God that we are brought into new things, and by faith we have the knowledge of them — new things of a heavenly order rather than an earthly. The Son of God having come and accomplished redemption we are all sons of God by faith in Him, and God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, giving us the consciousness of this new relationship and ability to answer to it.

As Christians, let us be careful to live in the power of these new relationships, free from the defilements in which once we found our pleasure.