

Zechariah

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Zechariah 1

AS WE COMMENCE to read Zechariah we note that, just as with Haggai, definite dates are given for the messages that God gave through him; and the first verse reveals that his first message — Zechariah 1: 2-6 — was uttered between Haggai's word of encouragement, in the early part of his second chapter, and the word of warning, recorded later in that chapter. We think we may term Zechariah's first message, a word of exhortation.

We may wonder perhaps, why such a word at that juncture was needed? Had the people not responded to the word of rebuke, and so diligently resumed work on the temple that they were encouraged by a prophetic view of its future glory? Yet before Haggai's word of warning, uttered on the ninth month there came this call to them to remember the directness and certainty of God's governmental dealings with their fathers, and the certainty of similar dealings if like their fathers, they turned away from Him. The exhortation therefore is, 'Turn ye unto Me, saith the Lord of hosts'. Had they not done this? Yes, indeed, outwardly and in action. But had there been that inward and vital turning of heart, which is what counts in the sight of God? Their subsequent history, as revealed by the prophet Malachi, shows how little they were marked by this inward turning of heart to God.

So, as we open this fresh prophecy, we meet with something calculated to make us 'wise unto salvation', from a similar danger today. How easy for us to be satisfied with correctness of outward behaviour, without that inward heart-turning, of great value in the sight of God. Very possibly the 'uncleanness', which in his third message Haggai pointed out as marring the work of their hands, was connected with this matter.

In verse 7 we travel on to the eleventh month of the second year of Darius, so important in the history of the Jews, and we commence a whole series of visions which were granted to the prophet —

visions which had a bearing upon their position at that time, but which carried in them allusions to the far future, and the ultimate deliverance to come through Christ.

Before starting on them we may pause to notice the great difference of style that marked the two prophets. Of all the Minor prophets, none is more plain and direct, and free from figurative language and visions, than Haggai: and none more full of figurative language and the record of visions than Zechariah; yet both were equally used, and at the same time. We see foreshadowed that which comes plainly to light in God's administration for the Church, as recorded in 1 Corinthians 12-14. What God establishes is marked by diversity in unity. Each servant of God is marked by difference and variety as to detail — like the many differing members of the human body — but all bound together in a God-created unity. Let us never forget this fact in our dealings with, or our judgments of, God's many servants today.

From verse 7 of our first chapter, till the later part of Zechariah 6, we get a series of visions that were granted to the prophet, and recorded by him. The words, 'Then lifted I up mine eyes', (Zech. 1: 18), occur a number of times, as he puts on record what he saw. As we ponder these visions we may discern a certain sequence in them.

The first is that of the rider on a red horse among the myrtle trees, and behind him other horses, red, speckled and white. They represented those whom the Lord had sent forth to walk to and fro through the earth. As a symbol, a horse is generally used to indicate strength and power, but in this first vision nothing is said to show just what form of strength is meant, though we gather not earthly kingdoms, such as Persia or Greece, since the horses walk on tours of inspection through the earth. When, however, we read Zechariah 6, we again find horses mentioned, and they are described as, 'the four spirits of the heavens'; that is, they are angelic in character. This, we believe, they are here; and their report is that though God's city and people were still in distress at the end of the seventy years, the nations under the Persian empire were having a very quiet and restful time.

This being so, the angel of the Lord gave Zechariah a clear message to the effect that He was sore displeased with the apparently prosperous nations, and was going indeed to return to Jerusalem in blessing. Reading verses 16 and 17, we cannot but feel that though the help and blessing that visited the people during the next few years was a fulfilment of these words, the complete fulfilment awaits the time when the glorious appearing of Jehovah, predicted in Zechariah's last chapter, takes place.

Then a fresh vision met the eyes of the prophet: the four horns representing the four earthly powers that were permitted to scatter so completely the people and their city. Then there came into his view the four carpenters, who would come, as sent of God, to disturb and destroy the four powers that had done it. The prophecy views the whole matter in a comprehensive way, as from God's side. In Zechariah's days, the first of these 'horns', the Babylonian empire, had been 'cast out', and the second was in power, the third and fourth yet to come; but God was making known the fact that their rule was only temporary, and that each would be 'cast out' in turn.

There can be no doubt, we think, as to the identity of the four horns, though we may not be able to identify in the same way the four carpenters. We believe, however, again that the prophecy is not yet completely fulfilled, for the 'horns of the Gentiles', which lift up their power for the scattering of Israel, are not completely disposed of while 'the times of the Gentiles' (Luke 21: 24), still run their course. But the remnant, now back in Jerusalem, were given the encouragement of knowing that the day of their oppressors would come to an end in God's own time. It is an encouragement to us to know it also.

Zechariah 2

THE ADVERSARIES BEING disposed of, the vision of chapter 2 carries the predictions a further step forward. That God should send a man with a line in his hand, wherewith to measure Jerusalem, indicated that the city was still an object of His attention and interest. The Jews that surrounded Zechariah might be pleased with the progress of their rebuilding operations, and inclined to be complacent about it, but they were to know that God had far more wonderful things in view, as the angel proceeds to explain.

A day is to come when Jerusalem would need no wall, such as the people would soon be building, for Jehovah Himself would be as a wall of fire round about and, even more wonderful, be Himself 'the glory in the midst of her'. Multitudes will be within her in that day, for there will be a great exodus from the lands of their scattering and particularly from 'the land of the north', as is revealed in verses 6-9. This migration will take place, as verse 8 indicates, 'after the glory' has been revealed and established. So that again we have to say that the prophecy goes far beyond anything that has yet transpired and looks on to the time of the end.

This is made yet more plain as we read the four verses that close this chapter. Never yet has Jehovah been dwelling in Zion, and inheriting Judah as His portion, with many nations 'joined to the Lord'. But that day will yet come to pass. At the present time God is not joining nations unto Himself, but rather He is visiting them, 'to take out of them a people for His name' (Acts 15: 14).

Zechariah 3

A FOURTH VISION is recorded in chapter 3, concerning Joshua the high priest, and the removal from him of all that was defiling. In verse 8, we read of him and his fellows that they were 'men wondered at', or, as Darby's New Translation puts it, 'men of portent', with the note, 'men to be observed as signs, or types'. Regarding Joshua therefore as a type, we see a plain prediction that it will only be as cleansed from their filth that the people will enjoy the blessing connected with the dwelling of Jehovah in Zion, as just foretold. There can be no nearness to God without deliverance from the filth of sin. No change of dispensation alters this fact.

It is worthy of note that Zechariah saw. not some erring and disreputable man clothed in filthy garments, but a man who had been used of God and in a place of special privilege. We are reminded that David exclaimed, 'Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity' (Ps. 39: 5).

If Joshua needed cleansing from filth, then they all did. Now Satan was there to resist this cleansing, but he was rebuked since Joshua was 'a brand plucked out of the fire'. This vision supplements what Haggai had to say to the people, in his second chapter about their uncleannesses. But Joshua in this vision was not only delivered from his filthy garments, but was clothed in what was clean with a fair mitre upon his head. He was thus established in his priestly position. God does not only remove evil; He also crowns with good.

But all this will really be established when God brings forth His Servant 'the Branch' who had been predicted under this figure nearly a century before, as we see in Jeremiah 23: 5, 6, where the Branch is revealed to be 'Jehovah tsidkenu' — the Lord our righteousness. We have to travel back to old Jacob for the first reference to 'the stone of Israel' (Gen. 49: 24). He is not only the One who will introduce and establish righteousness, but also the foundation stone, upon which will be built everything that is going to stand unshaken, for He who is the stone has complete power of perception, represented in the 'seven eyes', so that nothing unclean can ever creep in. So, in that day, as the last

verse indicates, there will be quietness and assurance for ever.

Zechariah 4

A FIFTH VISION follows in chapter 4, which indicated, as we understand it, a further thing needful if the full blessing, revealed to the prophet, is to be securely established; namely, the energy of the Spirit of God. The prophet was shown a golden candlestick supplied with oil, after the fashion of the candlestick that had been in the tabernacle and the temple. On confessing his ignorance as to the meaning of this vision, he was instructed as to its present application. This time the vision concerned not Joshua the religious leader, but Zerubbabel the civil leader of the people, who might be tempted to fall back on purely human things to accomplish what he felt would be right. He is instructed that his resource lay not in 'might', or armed force; nor in 'power', or authority, derived from men, but in the Spirit of the Lord of hosts. Obstacles, like a great mountain, might rise before him, but all would be levelled and the 'headstone' be brought forth with rejoicing, and the cry of, 'Grace, Grace'.

Verses 8-10, show the application of all this to the immediate task before Zerubbabel. Relying not upon human force or power but upon God, he would be enabled to finish the work of rebuilding the house. It was, as compared with the days of Solomon, a day of small things, but not to be despised on account of that. In verse 10 the marginal reading is the better. The seven eyes of the Lord, seen in the previous chapter, 'upon one stone', shall rejoice, since they run to and fro through the whole earth, and everything is observed by them.

It is plain then that God gave encouragement through the prophet, and in connection with the two leaders of the people. The two things needed were cleansing as seen with Joshua, and spiritual power as shown to Zerubbabel. And in all this there lay an indication of how God will bring in the ultimate blessing at the end of the age.

The prophet now raises a question as to the meaning of the two olive trees that supplied the oil to the golden candlestick; the very oil itself being spoken of as 'the gold'. The answer was that they represented the two 'anointed ones', or 'sons of oil', that stand before 'the Lord of the whole earth'. In Israel the high priest was anointed, and also the king — David for instance, in 1 Samuel 16. At that moment Joshua represented the priestly line, and Zerubbabel, the kingly line, though not himself a king. The grace and power of God was to flow through them at that time, in its measure. In full measure it will flow through Christ, when He will sit a Priest upon His kingly throne, as the sixth chapter will tell us. It will then be perfectly clear that all is reached on the basis of grace, and not of law-keeping. Compared with the New Testament, the Old has but little to tell us of the grace of God, but here we have it emphasized. 'Grace, Grace', will indeed be the cry when all is established in the Messiah, anointed both as Priest and King.

Zechariah 5

THE OTHER SIDE of the picture meets us as we read chapter 5. In a sixth vision the prophet saw a flying 'roll'; symbolically representing the law, extending its authority over all the earth, and bringing with it a curse. The two sins specified — stealing and swearing — both exceedingly common, represent sin against man and against God. The fact that God acts in grace does not mean that there is any condoning of sin, on which the curse lies. And as Galatians 3: 10 tells us, 'As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse'. A proper sense of this only enhances our wonder, and appreciation of the grace of God.

The second part of this vision reveals what had to take place in view of this curse. An ephah was the common measure of trade and commerce, and a woman is several times used in Scripture as a symbol of a system; and systemized idolatry, linked with profitable business had lain at the root of the evils that had led to the captivity out of which the remnant had come; and the land of Shinar, where Babylon was situated, had been the original home and hotbed of all idolatry. It was this that had brought the curse upon the forefathers of the people. The whole system of this idolatrous evil had to be deported to its own base.

Now this is what in figure seems to be depicted here. It was not so much a personal matter, as presented in the cleansing of Joshua in chapter 3, but a national cleansing from the sin of idolatry. This did come to pass historically, as we know, and from about that time the Jews have not turned aside to the idols of the nations. If Matthew 12: 43-45, be read, we see how our Lord made reference to this act, and yet predicted how ultimately they will be dominated by this sin in an intensified form. But for the time being they were delivered.

Zechariah 6

THE LAST OF this series of visions meets us as we read the early part of chapter 6. Again, as in the first vision, four horses are seen, but this time in chariots and no riders are mentioned. Again there seems to be some connection with the four great world-empires, that successively follow during the time that Israel is set aside; yet they are stated to be, 'the four spirits of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth'. In the closing chapters of Daniel we are permitted to know that angelic beings hold commissions in connection with certain nations; Michael, for instance in connection with Israel. It is an obscure theme, but it seems to be alluded to here, and Zechariah is given to know that there was at that time quietness in the 'north country'; which would indicate that for some little time the Jews would be permitted to pursue their way in peace. We may be thankful that in our day, as in that day, the controlling hand of God is on and over the nations.

The series of visions being finished, Zechariah is directed to perform a striking symbolic act in the presence of certain men of the captivity, who were then present. Crowns, which are a symbol of royalty, were to be made, primarily for the head of Joshua the high priest, though also to be given as a memorial to the four men mentioned. In Zechariah 3 Joshua was cleansed, as representing the people, and then came the prediction as to the branch, who would truly be Jehovah's Servant. Here, Joshua is crowned, inasmuch as for the moment he is made into a type of the branch, who was to come.

When Zechariah had thus done as he was told, there was the high priest, crowned as a king. Thus was set forth the Coming One, who was to build the temple of the Lord. But were they not engaged in the building of a temple? They were: but they were thus notified that all they were building was provisional and not the final thing, when its latter glory would exceed its first glory, as they had been told through Haggai. The Branch, or, Sprout, of David's line would accomplish the permanent work, and He would be a King, as well as Priest, when He did it.

By the oath of Jehovah, according to Psalm 110 Christ is 'Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek' When at last in Zion the kingly crown rests upon His head, He will not relinquish His priestly service, but 'be a Priest upon His throne'. The two things, which so often among men have been in opposition, will be united harmoniously in Him. How often have kingly authority and priestly grace clashed amongst sinful men? They will not do so when this prophecy is fulfilled; for, 'the counsel of peace shall be between them both'.

In result, this further great prediction will be fulfilled — 'He shall bear the glory'. Glory in a small measure has before now descended upon human shoulders, that were unable to bear it, so speedily it vanished. At last it will descend upon One able and worthy to sustain it for ever. What a day that will be! Well may we anticipate it with joy.

Zechariah 7

IN THE FIRST verse of chapter 7, we find another date given; almost two years later than that of the visions just recorded, and the prophecies of Haggai. These fresh prophecies were occasioned by the arrival of certain men with questions as to the observance of fasts, and we notice that we pass from the record of visions to a series of plain declarations of God's message. We now find repeated not, 'I lifted up mine eyes', but rather, 'The word of the Lord came'.

The question raised by these men concerned a fast in the fifth month which had been observed for many years. From Jeremiah 52: 12, we learn that it was in that month the Babylonian army had burned Solomon's magnificent temple, and wrecked Jerusalem. Now once more the house of the Lord was being built, if not entirely finished, so was it suitable that they should still observe the fast? A very natural question!

The answer of God through Zechariah linked with this fast another in the seventh month, which apparently was in memory of the murder of Gedaliah and others, and the flight of the remnant, left in the land, into Egypt, as recorded in 2 Kings 25: 25, 26. These tragedies were commemorated with fasting and tears, during the seventy years captivity. As far as we can discern, no direct answer was given to the question they raised: instead another question was raised with them. Did they have Jehovah before their minds in their observances or only themselves? And when the fast was over, did they return to their eating and drinking just enjoying themselves? Did they really fast, enquired the Lord, 'unto Me, even to Me?'

Here is deeply important instruction for ourselves. We may put it thus: In our observances and service a right motive is everything. We may diligently observe the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week, diligently preach the Gospel, or minister to the saints; but are we doing it with God Himself, revealed in Christ, before us, or are we just pursuing an agreeable ritual and maintaining our own reputations in it all? A searching question, which the writer had better ask himself as well as the readers ask themselves.

If the people had kept the Lord before them and observed His words through the former prophets, things would have been far otherwise. And what was His word now through Zechariah, but just what it had been through them. Take Isaiah's first chapter as an example. He accused the people of moral corruption, whilst maintaining ceremonial exactitude. In verses 11-14, of our chapter the men who enquired are reminded of this, and are plainly challenged as to the present attitude of themselves and the people of their day, as we see in verses 8-10. The moral evils that had wrecked the nation were still working amongst the people that had returned to the land. A remnant may return but the inveterate tendency to develop the old evils remains. Let us never forget that.

Zechariah 8

HAVING EXPOSED the sinful state of the people, another word from the Lord came in which the purposes of His mercy were revealed. In this remarkable chapter there are things specially addressed to the remnant then back in the land — verses 9-17, for instance — yet the main drift of it

goes far beyond anything that was realized in their history, between the rebuilding as permitted by Cyrus. and the destruction under the Romans, so it looks on to the end of the age and the second coming of Christ.

In that age Jerusalem will indeed have Jehovah dwelling in her midst and be called 'a city of truth'. Once indeed He who was the 'truth', as well as the 'way', and the 'life', was in her midst, only to be rejected and crucified, while Pilate, who sanctioned that act of rejection, asked satirically, 'What is truth?' No, Jerusalem has never yet been worthy of that designation; but she will be in a coming age. And then human life will be greatly prolonged, and young life be abundant and free. Our modern streets with fast-moving motor traffic are hardly a playground for children.

Verses 6-8, also look on to the time of the end. What had come to pass in the return of the remnant was indeed wonderful in their eyes, but what is here predicted would be more wonderful still, when God would gather from the west as well as the east, to dwell as His people, so that He would be their God 'in truth and in righteousness'. In Christ truth and righteousness have indeed been revealed and established, but never yet has God dwelt in Jerusalem on that basis. The day is coming when He will do so.

In verses 9-16. there is a special appeal to the remnant of the people then in the land. They are reminded of the words spoken to them earlier, when the foundation of the temple was laid, and how the adversity that had marked their doings had been turned into a time of prosperity. God was now bestowing much favour and prosperity upon them, but they are reminded that He called for suitable behaviour on their part. Truth, honesty and righteous judgment was what was expected of them. Again the stress is on the moral qualities that are according to God, and not on ceremonial observances.

A further word from the Lord is now given and in verse 19 four fasts are mentioned. Besides the two mentioned in the previous chapter we now have the one in the fourth month, for in that month famine prevailed and Jerusalem was broken up, according to Jeremiah 52: 6, and it was in the tenth month that the city was surrounded by Nebuchadnezzar's army, as verse 4 of that same chapter records. It is now revealed that the day would come when these four fasts would be turned into feasts of rejoicing. Therefore they were to love truth and peace. These predictions of future blessing were to have a present effect upon the people.

And all that we know of future blessing should have a present effect of good upon ourselves. It is worthy of note that truth precedes peace, as cause and effect. Error produces strife just as certainly as truth produces peace. In the remaining verses of our chapter we find predictions of the happy state of things that will prevail when truth at last prevails in Jerusalem, and peace fills the scene. In that coming day the house of the Lord will indeed be, 'an house of prayer for all people' (Isa. 56: 7). There will be many who desire to seek the Lord in prayer, and they will recognize where God is to be found in that day. All through the centuries the name, 'Jew', has had a measure of reproach attaching to it. It will not be so then, for they will recognize that at last God is with His ancient people. It is obvious that this prediction has never yet been fulfilled, and looks on to a future day.

Zechariah 9

THE WORD of the Lord that opens chapter 9 is spoken of as a 'burden', since it starts with solemn words of judgment on peoples that surrounded the land of Israel. Some of these judgments took place soon after the predictions were uttered; that upon Tyre, for instance, and upon the cities of the Philistines. Darby's New Translation tells us that an alternate rendering to 'bastard', is one 'of a foreign

race'. But even so there will apparently be a remainder, or a remnant, who will be for God and belong to Him. Moreover, however powerful oppressors may appear to be, God will encamp about His house in protecting mercy. And how will this be brought to pass?

Verses 9 and 10 answer this question, for in these two verses the two advents of the Lord Jesus are brought before us. The coming of the King will settle everything, but we can imagine how the reader of Zechariah's day might pause at this ninth verse in amazement, feeling that in the presence of powerful outside foes, and the inward defection so plainly manifested amongst the Jews, some great and majestic and powerful Deliverer was needful, and the King is announced as lowly in His person and in His approach. True, He is to have salvation, but this was not the kind of King that was popularly expected.

The Spirit of God, who inspired this prophecy knew very well that there was a deeper question to be settled before there could be the intervention in power that was so ardently desired. First must come the bearing of the full penalty of human sin, and hence the Divinely reached settlement of that dreadful matter, and, that accomplished, there could be emancipation from sin's power. This had been set forth typically in Exodus 12 and Exodus 14. First the blood of the lambs in Egypt, and then deliverance by the overthrow of Egypt. The latter is more spectacular, but the former a far deeper thing.

In the Gospels we see how the more spectacular filled the minds of the disciples. Even when they acted and played their part in the fulfilment of verse 9, they did not realize they were doing it. This we are plainly told in John 12: 16. Only when Jesus was glorified and the Holy Spirit was given did they realize the true significance of what they had done. Again, in Acts 1: 6, we see how the coming of the kingdom in power filled their thoughts before the Spirit was given. The coming of the King in lowly grace was but little understood or anticipated by the great majority.

But the Messiah will come in power and have dominion over all the earth, as verse 10 declares. The way His widespread kingship is stated here agrees exactly with the inspired statement through David centuries before written in Psalm 72: 8. When David foresaw this by the Spirit, every desire of his heart was satisfied, and he had nothing left to pray for, as the last verse of the psalm tells us. What our prophet tells us is that the days of warfare will be over — chariot and battle bow cut off, and peace imposed upon the nations.

Verse 11 appears to be a word specially addressed to the sons of Israel, for Ephraim is addressed in verse 13, as well as Judah. They have all been like prisoners, entrapped in a waterless pit, waiting and hoping for deliverance. When Messiah comes in power deliverance will reach them but only through 'the blood of thy covenant'. Here we see an allusion to that new covenant of grace, predicted in Jeremiah 31: 31, illuminated for us by the words of the Lord Jesus at the institution of His Supper, when He spoke of, 'My blood of the new testament' (Matt. 26: 28). On that basis only will the deliverance and the blessing be brought in and firmly established.

When Zechariah wrote these things, Greece, mentioned in verse 13, was hardly a power to be reckoned with, though not long after, under Alexander the Great, it was destined to overthrow the Persian power. We may see therefore in the closing verses of this chapter predictions which had a partial fulfilment not long after the prophecy was given, though in their fulness they look on to the end of the age.

Zechariah 10

CHAPTER 10 opens with solemn words concerning the evils that still were practised among the

people. The 'rain' of blessing would descend from God, and not proceed from the 'idols', or 'teraphim', little images by which men sought to probe into future events. All that came from this source was but vanity, and the 'shepherds' of the people, who dealt with such things would have the anger of God against them, for God was going to take up the house of Judah and use them in the execution of judgment in some directions. The word, 'oppressor', in verse 4 has apparently the meaning of, 'ruler'; but, even so, the details of that verse do not refer exactly to the Messiah, but rather to what God will raise up among His people in the last days. It would agree with what we read in Jeremiah 51: 20, concerning Israel, 'Thou art My battle axe and weapons of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations'. At the end of the age the Lord Himself will execute judgment upon certain nations: upon others He will do so by means of a restored Israel.

Of this our chapter speaks, from verse 5 to the end. It will be an Israel spiritually recreated, and also physically regathered, for God will 'hiss' for them, or, 'pipe' as shepherds used to do in the gathering of their sheep. He will gather them out of Egypt to the south and out of Assyria to the north, as once He smote the river in the days of Moses. Having regathered them, He will strengthen them, so that they 'walk up and down', in His name, which means they will be rightly representing Him on the earth at last. All this clearly looks on to the end of the age.

Zechariah 11

THE PROPHETIC STRAIN now ceases, and we have to come back in chapter 11 to the actual condition of things among the people to whom Zechariah spoke. The solemn words of governmental judgments here uttered might seem to us strange, had we not the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which show us the sad departure into flagrant law-breaking which marked the masses of the people, whilst outwardly temple and city were being rebuilt. The prophet foresaw the times of trouble that would come upon the people, when they would still be under the heel of various Gentile powers, and the really godly are designated as the margin of verse 7 reads, 'the flock of slaughter, verily the poor of the flock'.

Commencing with this seventh verse we find the prophet himself beginning to act in a symbolic way as well as speak God's message. He took the two staves, called respectively, 'Beauty' and 'Bands'. Though the poor of the flock were to be fed, the others were to be left, and the shepherds who might have fed them were cut off. We may not be able to say to whom the 'three shepherds' referred, yet the drift of this judgment is plain. While the poor of the flock should be fed, the ungodly majority lost the worldly leaders who might have fed them.

It would appear that in this remarkable incident of the two staves the prophet is led to impersonate the Messiah Himself. His first action was to break the staff called 'Beauty', as a sign that God's covenant 'with all the people', was broken. The word here is in the plural, 'peoples', and we may turn back to Genesis 49: 10, where the word had previously occurred in the plural — 'until Shiloh come; and unto Him shall the gathering of the peoples be'. The staff 'Beauty' was broken as a sign that there would be no fulfilment to the unbelieving generation, for when Messiah came in lowliness and not in outward splendour, they would see 'no beauty that we should desire Him' (Isa. 53: 2).

This was followed by the remarkable actions recorded in verses 12 and 13, which prophetically set forth the terrible actions of Judas Iscariot. Matthew 27: 3-8, records how accurately this prediction was fulfilled. Messiah, who was the embodiment of all beauty was priced at thirty pieces of silver. Judas who fixed the price and got the silver, before committing suicide in his remorse, cast the money down in the temple, thus fulfilling the words, 'in the house of the Lord'; while the chief priests took the

silver and used it to buy the potter's field, thus fulfilling the words, 'I . . . cast them to the potter'.

The breaking of the second staff followed. If beauty be broken by the rejection of the Messiah, the bands that linked together Judah and Israel were necessarily broken.

Christ is the Centre of unity for God's earthly people, just as He is the Centre of unity for the church today. We may therefore see a word of warning and instruction for ourselves in what we have before us. Christendom is much occupied today in efforts to achieve unity, realizing what great power might be wielded by a unified church. Do they recognize that Christ in His beauty must be the Centre of all their thoughts and efforts? If His beauty be broken in their thoughts and efforts, everything in the way of bands will be broken as well.

Having first acted as impersonating the true Shepherd of Israel, the prophet is now bidden so to act as to impersonate the false one. who is to come, as a direct result of the government of God in retribution upon the people. What were the 'instruments' of a foolish shepherd we are not told, but what will mark the false one we are plainly told in verse 16. First, there are four things that he will not do. We quote from Darby's New Translation. He 'shall not visit those that are about to perish:' and again, 'neither shall seek that which is strayed away:' and again, 'nor heal that which is wounded:' and once more, 'nor feed that which is sound'.

Readers and writer alike will at once be saying, Why, these four things which the false shepherd does not do, are exactly those which the true shepherd does' in abundant and perfect measure. False shepherds there were before the true One came, as He indicated in John 10: 10, 12, but Zechariah is predicting the coming of that antichrist, of whom the Lord spoke when He said, 'if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive' (John 5: 43). This 'idol', or 'worthless' shepherd will be raised up of God in judgment upon the people, 'in the land', as verse 16 says: that is, he will not be some worldly king in the Gentile world, but the false messiah in Palestine — the second 'beast' of Revelation 13, rather than the first.

Here then is a striking exhibition of the governmental ways of God. The unconverted Jew would not have the true Shepherd, when He came in grace: then they shall have the false, who shall feed himself on their 'fat', and tear them unmercifully, though ultimately he will be destroyed in judgment as verse 17 declares. For the ungodly in Israel the final raising up of the 'idol shepherd', will mean the terrors of the great tribulation.

Zechariah 12

HAVING THUS plainly predicted the rejection of the true Messiah and Shepherd, and the consequent raising up, in God's governmental wrath, of the antichrist — the worthless shepherd — the following series of predictions concerning the Jews and Jerusalem, are presented as a 'burden' in the first verse of chapter 12. And indeed a burden must rest upon the spirit of the reader as we begin that chapter. The way Jehovah presents Himself is very remarkable. The heavens, the earth, and man himself, have all been formed by Him: and in particular, 'the spirit of man', for that is the highest part of man's composite being — the part where man's sinful rebellion against God is most sadly manifested. In the end of the prophecy we shall find man's spirit subjugated and restored.

Here however Judah and Jerusalem are in question, and we learn how they will come into prominence and all the nations of the earth be involved in the controversy; for the word 'people', occurring three times in verses 2 and 3, is really in the plural — the peoples or nations. As we write the earth is full of disputes, yet there is no darker spot of contention than the little land of Palestine. Many

worldly observers fear it may yet become 'the cockpit of the nations.' That it will become just that, is plainly declared in these two verses.

When that hour arrives, God's dealings with Jerusalem will reach their climax, as the opening of Zechariah 14 declares; but here the point is that the nations will come under judgment. When they besiege it, they will find it a cup of 'trembling', or 'bewilderment', for nothing will proceed as they vainly imagine. It will also be a 'burdensome' stone, far beyond their power to lift or to carry. At last God will be acting for and with His people, and so the whole situation will be transformed. Verse 3 begins, 'And in that day . . . ' Another 'day' is going to dawn, and the phrase, 'in that day', occurs again in verses 4, 6, 8, 9 and 11. It is the 'day of the Lord', of which other prophets have spoken.

In that day God will act in judgment upon the nations, but will open His eyes upon Judah, just as Jesus turned and opened His eyes upon Peter, after his sad denial, which started the work of repentance in his heart. Later in our chapter we shall find a very deep work of repentance produced in Israel. But for the moment what the prophet brings before us is the fact that in spite of all the failure and faithlessness that had been marking the people, God would at the end make good His word in their deliverance and blessing. This is ever His way, as we may realize with thankfulness. All the evils that have marked the professing church, and the failures that have marked us, who are true saints of the Lord, will not hinder Him, in making good His purpose.

So, as verses 5-8 declare, God will do a remarkable work in Judah, making them like a fire in the midst of the nations, and giving them precedence over the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The reason for this may be that the people of Jerusalem were always inclined to pride themselves on their privileges, with the temple in their midst, as we see in such Scriptures as Jeremiah 7: 4, and Micah 3: 11. All false pride will have to be brought low in that solemn hour. Yet God will look upon them in power and blessing, as verse 8 declares. In that day truly, 'the house of David' will be 'as God'; for He who came 'of the seed of David', by His incarnation, is none other than the Son of God, as Romans 1: 3 so plainly states, and He will be manifested in glory.

As a result of this the nations that come against Jerusalem in that day will be destroyed, and His glorious manifestation will produce the great work of profound repentance that is foretold in the closing verses of the chapter. It will come to pass when, 'they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced', and have their eyes opened to discover who He is. This explains how it will come to pass that as Psalm 110 says, 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power.' They were unwilling and rejected Him in the day of His poverty, of which the closing verses of Psalm 109 speak: nor have they been willing in the day of His patience, with which Psalm 110 opens. In the day of His power they will see in glory the One whom they pierced, with tremendous result in their consciences and hearts.

Repentance, as ever, is an intensely individual matter. 'The spirit of grace' will move them, and all thought of deserving anything as under law will be abandoned. A century or so before they had mourned deeply in the 'valley of Megiddon' over the untimely death of Josiah, but now there will be a mourning extending over the whole land, and of such depth that everyone has to be in solitude before their God. Of old, Nathan had to come to David and convict him of grievous sin, saying, 'Thou art the man!' but now the house of Nathan has to be apart in their own sorrowful self-judgment. Simeon and Levi once were brethren, acting together in an act of cruelty, as Genesis 49: 5 indicates, but now their families will be apart, bowed in self-judgment before their God.

Repentance always precedes blessing. It is so as the Gospel is preached today. This fact, we fear, has hardly had its due weight with many of us today. Our commission is that, 'repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations' (Luke 24: 47). Have we too lightly skipped

over the 'repentance' in our desire to arrive at the 'remission of sins'? By all means say frequently, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.' But always remember that was the brief word that Paul gave to a repentant man, and not to a careless sinner.

Zechariah 13

WHEN DEEP REPENTANCE thus takes place, a fountain is opened to cleanse from sin and uncleanness. We all know Cowper's hymn, based on this verse, notwithstanding we believe the reference here is not to the blood of Christ, shed long ago, which cleanses from sin judicially; that is, as before the throne of God in judgment, but to that 'clean water', that God will 'sprinkle' upon them, as predicted in Ezekiel 36: 25. It was to this verse that our Lord referred, as we believe, when He spoke to Nicodemus of that new birth, which is needful if any are to enter the kingdom of God. It was overlooked by the Jews, so Nicodemus was astonished, at the words of the Lord. As a teacher in Israel, he should have known it, as John 3: 10 indicates; for both 'water' and 'the Spirit' of which man needs to be 'born', are mentioned in Ezekiel 36.

At last then there will be a born-again Israel, and as a result of that they will possess a new nature: the unclean spirit will be gone, and the idols and other evil things that once ensnared them will be put away. No more will false prophets appear to deceive. If any should attempt it, their very parents would condemn them to death. Their unreality will be made perfectly manifest, as verse 4 indicates.

Verse 5 begins, 'But he shall say . . . 'Who is this 'he'? Verses 5 and 6 present a difficult problem. Some take them as referring to one of the false prophets, just alluded to: others as reverting to the true Shepherd, referred to in the previous chapter, and again very clearly in verse 7; and with this we are inclined to agree. The true Shepherd took the place of the 'Hebrew Servant', as indicated in the opening verses of Exodus 21, and was pierced amongst those to whom He came in the spirit of friendship. He took the humble place, and one of suffering, even among men. And there was far deeper suffering beyond this.

Verse 7 predicts that far greater matter. Israel nationally were God's sheep, and their sins and apostasy had a twofold effect. It stirred up God's governmental retribution in this world, of which the prophet had much to say; and it also raised the far more serious matter of God's eternal judgment in the life to come. The true Shepherd was to meet that in such fashion that Jehovah's sword was to awake against Him. The sword that had been awakened by the persistent sins of the faithless sheep, was to smite not them but the holy Shepherd.

'The Man that is My Fellow' — these words may have been an enigma to the prophet who wrote them, for 1 Peter 1: 10, 11, tells us that often the Old Testament prophets had to discover they were saying things, the full meaning *of* which would only appear in an age to come: the privileged age in which we live. These words are no enigma to us, who can read Romans 1: 3, and learn that He who became 'seed of David according to the flesh' was none other than 'His Son Jesus Christ'. When the Son of God assumed Manhood in holiness and perfection, there was indeed a Man that could be called Jehovah's Fellow. He could take the place of sinful men and allow the judgment sword to awake against Himself.

But the immediate effect of the smiting of the Shepherd would be the scattering of the sheep, on the one hand, but also the turning of God's hand upon the little ones. The children of Israel had been scattered 'because there is no shepherd', as Ezekiel 34: 5 says; but since the smiting of the true Shepherd, a far more serious and prolonged scattering has taken place, and yet the 'little ones' have not

been forgotten but rather remembered for blessing.

If we turn to Isaiah 1: 25, we find the same expression, 'I will turn My hand', and the context there indicates that the turning of His hand means blessing, when for His adversaries there is judgment. If we read the closing chapters of the Gospels and the opening chapters of the Acts, we see God turning His hand in blessing upon the 'little ones', when the great ones among the Jews were pursuing their way in blindness to the hour of their great scattering. The great verse we have been considering has indeed been wondrously fulfilled.

And the two verses that conclude the chapter will be fulfilled with equal exactness in their season, for they refer, we judge, to what God will bring to pass at the end of this age, when He will deal with a people to be found in the land at that time. In Ezekiel 20: 34, 38, we learn how God will deal with the people scattered throughout the nations, purging them before He brings them into the land for blessing. Here we learn what He will do to such as may be left 'in all the land', in the last days. Judgment will fall on two-thirds of them, and only a third will come through into blessing. And those blessed will have to pass through the fire of tribulation, which will refine them in a spiritual sense, and bring them at last into vital connection with God. They will truly own Him, and He will own them in blessing.

Zechariah 14

WHEN THE DAY of the Lord arrives, there will come the moment of supreme crisis for Jerusalem. God will allow the most determined adversaries to have their way for a brief time. It has ever been thus. When God begins to work, the adversary is stirred to put forth his power to the utmost but only to find his efforts over-ruled for ultimate good. Thus it was on that occasion that stands out above all else, as is recorded in Acts 4: 26-28. The actions of the adversary only help to accomplish what God had determined from the outset. How great a comfort is this fact for us today.

The final siege of Jerusalem, that verse 2 indicates, we believe to be that which is predicted in the latter part of Daniel 11, as the act of 'the king of the north'. In that chapter, verses 36-39, we have at the time of the end, the king, who will do according to his own will, exalting himself, and magnifying himself above every god, and not regarding 'the God of his fathers', whom we regard as being identical with the 'idol shepherd', and with the second 'beast' of Revelation 13. Against this king, as Daniel reveals, will be found both 'the king of the south' and the king of the north', and it is the latter who will 'go forth with great fury to destroy, and utterly to make away many'; and who will finally plant his palace, 'in the glorious holy mountain'. And Daniel's terse summary of the result is, 'yet he shall come to his end, and none shall help him'.

The two 'beasts' of Revelation are not antagonistic, but acting in concert. The attack of Gog, of the land of Magog, predicted in Ezekiel 38 and 39, is against the land of Palestine generally, and not specially Jerusalem, when the land has been brought back from the sword; so these great actors of the last days cannot well be identified with what we have before us here. This leaves the king of the north, who is called the Assyrian in Isaiah's prophecy, as the one, whose attack will fulfil verse 2 of our chapter, though all nations will be involved in the tremendous happenings of those days. It will be, as Zechariah 12 has told us, 'a burdensome stone for all nations'.

No city, we are told, has been besieged so many times as Jerusalem, and here we learn that this one, the last, will be up to a point a complete success; and then, just before all is complete, the attacker will come to his end and none shall help him. How this will come to pass verse 3 reveals. Jehovah will suddenly and unexpectedly intervene in power. When He fought against Egypt at the exodus, He swept

the whole Egyptian army into death — 'there remained not so much as one of them'. In Hezekiah's day He intervened against Assyria, and 185,000 dead lay upon the earth. What He did of old, He will do again.

But verses 4 and 5 furnish us with further details of a very remarkable character. When He thus appears, He will have 'feet', which 'shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives', and He will have 'all the saints' with Him. In the light of the New Testament we recognize with joy that the 'Lord', the 'Lord my God' of our Scripture is none other than our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. His feet left the mount of Olives, when as the earth-rejected One, He ascended to the glory of heaven. On that same spot His feet shall stand, when He returns in power and great glory in judgment upon His foes.

When He does thus come, a great convulsion will break the surface of the earth. We have not heard of Palestine as a land much subject to earthquakes, during recent centuries. There was one in the days of Uzziah, to which our passage refers, and there was another at the moment Jesus died, as recorded in Matthew 27: 51. From that time onward has there been another in Jerusalem? — we wonder. At any rate, there is going to be another, as predicted here. An earthquake, when He died the death of the cross, in the most extreme humiliation! An earthquake, when He returns in splendour and majesty! How wonderfully suitable are the ways of our God!

It is quite clear, we think, that the overthrow of the two beasts of Revelation 13 at Armageddon is something distinct from that which we have before us, though we do not know of any Scripture which makes plain which of the two overthrows precedes the other.

As the result of the earthquake a way of escape is made for the remnant — the godly remnant, as we suppose — in the moment of their extremity. Saints will be delivered on earth, while the heavenly saints will appear in glory with the triumphant Christ. The translation of verses 6 and 7 is somewhat obscure, but they evidently emphasize the fact that again, just as it was on the day of the crucifixion there will be atmospheric changes in the heavens as well as the earthquake in the surface of the earth. There will be light at eventide, just when naturally we expect darkness to be falling on the scene.

Verses 8 and 10 further show that the earthquake will produce other great changes in Palestine, both in the flowing forth of waters and in the formation of a plain with Jerusalem lifted up in the midst of it. This agrees with the predictions in the later chapters of Ezekiel. All will be preparatory for the Jerusalem and temple that is to arise in millennial splendour, when, as verse 9 says, the Lord will be King over the whole earth. Subsidiary kings there may be, as Isaiah 52: 15 seems to indicate; but He is indeed the King of kings. At last the great era of peace will have arrived.

But it will not come to pass without judgment of a very severe kind falling upon the sinful nations, as verses 12-15 show. The terrible effects of judgment on the bodies of men are given in verse 12, and these have, in our day, been likened to the effects produced on the survivors after the fall and explosion of an atom bomb. But in addition to this there will be the internecine destruction of which verse 13 speaks. And further Judah will enter into the conflict, and much wealth will be laid up for the coming day.

We must remember that, though the king of the north may be specially concerned in this attack on Jerusalem, all the nations will be involved as stated in verse 2, and so these tremendous warlike judgments will be widely felt in all directions, and hence we get in verse 16 the expression, "every one that is left." We believe that this expression signifies that only a very small proportion of mankind will be left. At the present time many men of foresight are concerned about the very rapid rise in the population of the earth, particularly in nations like China, India and Japan. The over-population that they anticipate half a century ahead may never come to pass if the day of the Lord arrives before that,

for their is not only to take place the warrior-judgment here indicated, but also the sessional-judgment of Matthew 25, when the 'goats' are separated from the 'sheep', and go down to destruction.

Those that are left will year by year come up to Jerusalem to worship and to keep the feast of tabernacles. When that feast was instituted under the law it was typical of the rest of the millennial age, which will then have been established. So it will be observed as a memorial of the fact that what had been typified had now been actually established, and not to observe it would result in punishment.

The two verses that close this prophecy emphasize the holiness that becomes everybody and everything that is brought into contact with God. Holiness, we have been told, becomes His house forever. In the coming age it will be stamped upon the most ordinary and the most humble things, such as bells that jingle round the necks of horses and little bowls that have some part to play in the temple services. It is worthwhile noticing that horses are mentioned here, for we might be inclined to ask, But, will not these marvellous inventions in the matter of transport be further increased and expanded in that day? The answer must be that there is no mention of these inventions in Scripture, but the reverse. In that day, instead of men flying all over the earth in their unsatisfied desires, the picture is rather of a man sitting restfully in contentment under his own vine and fig-tree. The knowledge of God will then be filling the earth, and it is this that really satisfies the heart. God in His holiness will, so to speak have come in; and consequently from the house of the Lord the Canaanite will have been permanently cast out.

These closing words of our prophet might strike us as rather unusual, did we not remember that the continual trouble that menaced the returned remnant of Israel amongst whom Zechariah prophesied was this very matter of marrying Canaanite wives, and even giving some of the Canaanites, related to them by these marriages, a place in the chambers of the rebuilt temple. This thing which had been so great a snare to them, would be gone for ever.

And as we close our meditations on this prophet, let us not forget that a similar tendency has ever been a great snare amongst Christians. What was it that underlay all the disorders that marred the church at Corinth? It comes clearly to light in Paul's second letter to them, when in 2 Corinthians 6 he felt his 'mouth' was 'open unto you', as he put it. He put his finger upon the real trouble; and it was their 'unequal' yoking with unbelievers. All through the church's history this has been one main source of trouble and dishonour. It is so today, we have sadly to confess.

May God give us all grace and strength to flee from it!