

**NOTES  
ON  
THE BOOK  
OF  
ZECHARIAH**

**by  
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## FOREWORD

Zechariah was a priest as well as a prophet. He seems to have begun his work while still a young man, as chapter 2 verse 4 indicates. He must have been born while the Israelites were still prisoners in Babylonia, and subsequently travelled to Judah with the first group of exiles under Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest.

In Judah, the prophets Zechariah and Haggai directed all their energies to the rebuilding of the ruined temple of Jerusalem. In Ezra 6:14 it is written, *"And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo".*

Zechariah delights in visions, and like Ezekiel and Daniel, he uses symbols and allegories. He beholds angels ministering to God and fulfilling His commands on earth. He is the only one of the prophets who writes of Satan. Only the book of the prophet Isaiah has more references to Jesus Christ than the book of the prophet Zechariah.

The reader may notice that the term "Jehovah" is not used in this commentary, except where the term appears in a quotation. The term "Yahweh" is used instead. The name "Yahweh", the God of the Israelites, was revealed to Moses and recorded as four Hebrew consonants (YHWH) called the Tetragrammaton. Moses asked in Exodus 3:18 what he was to say to the children of Israel when they wanted to know the name of Him Who sent Moses to them. God replied in Exodus 3:14 *"Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM (that is YHWH) hath sent me unto you".*

The four consonants cannot be pronounced without vowel sounds, but the original sounds are not known for certain because the Israelites regarded the divine name as too sacred to be uttered, and YHWH was replaced in Synagogue Scripture readings by the Hebrew word "Adonai" (My Lord). "Adonai" was translated as "Kyrios" (Lord) in the Septuagint.

The most ancient copies of the Hebrew text were written in consonants only, and scholars, known as Masoretes who copied and preserved the Hebrew Scriptures through the centuries, added small dots and dashes called "vowel points" to indicate how the text was to be pronounced. When the name YHWH appeared in the text, the Masoretes inserted the vowels that go with "Adonai" together with the sacred four letter name, to guide the readers to say "Adonai" aloud in Synagogue services.

The words translated "God" in our English Bible "El", "Elohim", "Eloah" are not names but terms to refer to God and also even to false gods.

The term "Jehovah" arose from the Hebrew tradition of combining the vowels that belong to the word "Adonai" with the sacred four letter name of YHWH. Medieval Christian Hebrew scholars produced from this combination the word YeHoVaH which became JeHoVaH, the latter being really a hybrid name, which was never acknowledged by the Jews.

The term "Jehovah" has become a part of our Christian vocabulary, and it would be a loss to try to eliminate it from our hymns and Psalms. But we should be aware that it is really a name produced by scholars, and the true name of God is "Yahweh".

The Lord God has told us that His name is Yahweh, and many Scriptures record this, such as Isaiah 42:8, Malachi 2:2, Psalm 105:1 and 116:17, Isaiah 12:4 and Zechariah 13:9 which verse ends with the words *"Yahweh is my Elohim"*.

The many visions and symbols in the book of Zechariah are often difficult to understand and interpret, and the comments offered in these notes are intended to urge the reader to think about them and seek to understand them. It is not anticipated that all readers will be in full agreement with the explanations offered. The comments are not meant to be dogmatic, as if they are the only correct understandings, but are offered in the spirit of Isaiah 1:18, *"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord"*. The Apostle Paul's exhortation to the Thessalonians to *"test everything; hold fast what is good"* (1 Thessalonians 5:21) is also very relevant.

Many of the comments and explanations offered are not original with me, though some comments are my own. I acknowledge my indebtedness to many scholars and commentators, in particular the detailed notes on Zechariah by the late Ernest Henninges, and published in monthly editions of ***"The New Covenant Advocate"*** from November, 1929 to June, 1932. Without the assistance of Ernest Henninges' thorough and careful comments, the notes offered in this book would be much shorter and much less helpful than I have tried over a period of some four years to make them.

All reference quotations are from the New King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

Further reflections and exhortations are made from time to time throughout the notes, so I will not repeat them here.

**Russell Collins**

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## INTRODUCTION

Zechariah is the eleventh in order of the twelve minor prophets in the Bible. The term 'minor' prophets, as the last twelve of the prophets in the Old Testament are usually called, is not really appropriate. Some of the prophetic books are short, it is true, but every one of them contains important messages sent by God to His ancient people, the Israelites. Some parts of the messages related directly to the times and circumstances of the prophets themselves, but all prophecies contained information and lessons of value to us, especially those prophecies of our Lord's birth and mission, the call of the Gospel Age Church, and the blessings to come upon the whole human race in the Kingdom of God.

Zechariah was the grandson of Iddo, who is mentioned in Nehemiah 12:4 in the list of Priests who returned to the Holy Land under Zerubbabel and Joshua. In Ezra 5:1 Zechariah is called the son of Iddo, but this is not a contradiction of Zechariah 1:1 where he is called "*the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo*". Some commentators seem to be puzzled by these references, and see them as a discrepancy. But such is not the case. It was customary in those times to speak of descendants beyond the first generation as sons, a custom not followed in our times. Not only grandsons, but more remote descendants were spoken of as sons, "*the sons of Jacob*", for example, in Malachi 3:6, and "*Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham*" in Matthew 1:1. Mephibosheth is called the son of Saul in 2 Samuel 19:24, though he was actually the grandson of Saul, being, in fact, the son of Jonathan, who was Saul's son (2 Samuel 9:6).

Zechariah's father, Berechiah, probably died when Zechariah was young, making Zechariah the immediate successor of his grandfather, Iddo.

Iddo was a priest who returned from Babylonia with Zerubbabel and Joshua, and was, according to tradition, a member of the Great Synagogue, the governing body of the Jews before the Sanhedrin was formed.

The name Zechariah means 'Yahweh remembers'. Zechariah and Haggai were contemporaries who prophesied at the time the Jews began to return to Canaan and Jerusalem from captivity in Babylonia, somewhere in the time about the years 520 to 518 BC.

## **BACKGROUND TO THE BOOK**

During the reign of Cyrus the Persian, more than fifty thousand Jews returned to the land of Judah from Babylonia in 538 BC (Ezra 1:1-4). They laid the foundation of the temple in 536 BC, but opposition from the tribes and peoples living in Palestine caused work on the temple to cease for about fifteen years (Ezra 4:1-5). Darius Hystaspes the Mede (Zechariah 1:1), who came to the throne in 521 BC, confirmed Cyrus's original decree, and work on the temple resumed. Zechariah and Haggai encouraged the people to finish the work on the temple, which task was completed in 516 BC.

It is of great interest to us that Zechariah also foretold more about Jesus the Messiah than any other prophet except Isaiah. We will consider these prophecies as we come to them,.

## OUTLINE AND STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

A	Call to Repentance	1:1-6
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	1. The Horses and Riders	1:7-14
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	7. The Woman in the Basket And the Two Women with Wings	5:5-11
	8. The Four Chariots	6:1-8
	9. The Crowning of Joshua	6:9-15
C.	The Fasts and the Failure of the People	7:1 - 8:23
	1. Obedience Better than Fasting	7:1-7
	2. Disobedience Resulted in Exile	7:8-14
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	(b) The Coming King	9:9-10
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	(d) Restoration of Judah and Israel	10:1-12
	(e) Two Staffs and the Faithless Shepherds	11:1-17
	2. The Second Oracle	12:1 -14:21
	(a) The Lord's Care for Judah and Jerusalem	12:1-14
	(b) The Fountain and the True Shepherd	13:1-9
	(c) Jerusalem Old and New	14:1-21

## A. A CALL TO REPENTANCE

Zechariah 1:1-6

- 1 *In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying,*
- 2 *"The LORD has been very angry with your fathers.*
- 3 *"Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Return to me," says the LORD of hosts, "and I will return to you," says the LORD of hosts.*
- 4 *"Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets preached, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Turn now from your evil ways and your evil deeds." ' 'But they did not hear nor heed me," says the LORD.*
- 5 *"Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live for ever?*
- 6 *Yet surely my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers?" "So they returned and said: 'Just as the LORD of hosts determined to do to us, according to our ways and according to our deeds, so he has dealt with us.'*

Zechariah's introduction to the Jews as a prophet of the LORD contained the same message that God had sent them by the *"former prophets"* (verse 4). The persistence of the majority of the people to turn from the LORD, and to fail to worship Him in ways acceptable to Him, was the cause of so much of the LORD's displeasure and weariness with His people. He had chosen them as His people, and would do His part whether or not they did theirs. Because of the people's persistent disobedience and idolatry, He had allowed them to be taken captive by the Babylonians as punishment, and also as a corrective measure.

When they were back in their own land, many of them evidently neglected their agricultural work and also neglected their service to the LORD by giving attention to idols and the idolatrous teachings of the neighbouring nations. Therefore it was necessary to give them the same message again:

" ... *"Return to me" says the LORD of hosts, "and I will return to you" says the LORD of hosts* " ... " (verse 3).

The fathers did not heed the *"former prophets"*, and what became of them? They died, and what profit was their false religion and idolatry? God alone has control over the dead, and all who have any concern about a future life should consider well before they turn from God, because He has promised a resurrection, and they will be brought back to life with the same thoughts and attitudes as they had when they died (John 5:29; Revelation 22:11).

The prophets died and the people died, but the Word of God given by His prophets remained. Everything that God's prophets had predicted came to pass. The fathers were punished for their sins just as the LORD said they would be, and those Israelites to whom Zechariah was sent were bound to admit all these things.

Yet notwithstanding, they were turning from God just as their fathers had done. They should have seen that the logical consequence of their actions would be to bring down God's wrath on themselves so that they too would be punished because of their stiff-necked attitude, hardness of heart and idolatry (verses 5 and 6).

## **B. THE VISIONS OF ZECHARIAH**

**Zechariah 1:7 - 6:15**

### **1. THE HORSES AND RIDERS; 1:7-17**

- 7 *On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, which is the month Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet:*
- 8 *I saw by night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse, and it stood among the myrtle trees in the hollow; and behind him were horses: red, sorrel, and white.*
- 9 *Then I said, "My Lord, what are these?" So the angel who talked with me said to me, "I will show you what they are."*
- 10 *And the man who stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, "These are the ones whom the LORD has sent to walk to and fro throughout the earth."*
- 11 *So they answered the Angel of the LORD, who stood among the myrtle trees, and said, "We have walked to and fro throughout the earth, and behold, all the earth is resting quietly."*
- 12 *Then the Angel of the LORD answered and said, "O LORD of hosts, how long will you not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which you were angry these seventy years?"*
- 13 *And the LORD answered the angel who talked to me, with good and comforting words.*
- 14 *So the angel who spoke with me said to me, "Proclaim, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "I am zealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with great zeal.*
- 15 *I am exceedingly angry with the nations at ease; For I was a little angry, And they helped - but with evil intent."*
- 16 *Therefore thus says the LORD: "I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy; My house shall be built in it," says the LORD of hosts, "And a surveyor's line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem." "*
- 17 *"Again proclaim, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "My cities shall again spread out through prosperity; The LORD will again comfort Zion, and will again choose Jerusalem."*

In the Revelation (chapter 6, verses 1 to 8), John was given a vision of four horses, but the interpretation of the vision given to John is not necessarily the same as the interpretation of the vision given to Zechariah. Every vision in the Scriptures must be examined in the light of the time and circumstances in which each vision was given, and any explanation that may be provided.

In the vision given to Zechariah of red, sorrel or bay (both words mean reddish-brown) and white horses recorded in verses 8 to 17, the latter section of the vision (verses 12 to 17) contained the explanation.

This particular vision was retrospective, that is, it was not a vision of things to come, but a vision of things as they had been for some time previously. The vision is both arresting and picturesque, and seems intended to convey to the people that God's knowledge of their situation was as accurate as though He had sent riders on horseback throughout Babylonia to report on the people and their activities, and the state of affairs in which the people found themselves, whether peaceful or disrupted by war.

In Proverbs 15:3 we are told *"The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good"*. These words convey to us that the LORD is well informed about all that happens in the earth, and that He distinguishes the evil from the good, as is also seen in Psalm 34:15,16; and 1 Peter 3:12.

In 2 Chronicles 16:9 the eyes of the LORD are spoken of as running to and fro throughout the whole earth, the object being *"to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him"*. In the context of 2 Chronicles 16 we see that God was well aware of all that Asa, king of Judah, had done, and would punish him accordingly. A similar expression concerning *"the eyes of the LORD"* occurs in Zechariah 4:10. We will consider this expression in its context when we come to it.

The conversation between Zechariah, the angel of the LORD and the man who stood among the myrtle trees was intended to impress deeply upon the minds of the people the facts brought forward.

The choice of myrtle trees in the vision is of interest, and adds to the impression conveyed by the vision. The myrtle tree has been, from early periods of history, highly esteemed in the countries of southern Europe, and was frequently mentioned by Greek and Roman poets. The original name of Esther is Hadassah, which closely resembles the compound of Arabic words 'As' and 'tur', which compound word was applied to the myrtle tree in earlier times. Among the Jews the myrtle was considered to be an emblem of justice, and a note on Esther, according to a learned commentator, Dr. Harris, reads; "they call her Hadassah because she was just, and those that are just are compared to myrtles".

The tree possesses a rich colouring of dark green and shining leaves, contrasting with the white star-like clusters of its flowers, the latter giving forth a pleasing fragrance. Myrtle trees are evergreens, and often grow to a height of about ten metres.

When the Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated by the Jews on their return from Babylonia, the people of Jerusalem were ordered to *"Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written"* (Nehemiah 8:15). The prophet Isaiah, writing of God's Kingdom to come, told us that the LORD shall plant in the wilderness *"the shittah tree, and the myrtle tree, and the oil tree"* (Isaiah 41:19). Isaiah also prophesied that *"instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree"* (Isaiah 55:13). In modern times many Jews still use myrtle branches in constructing their booths at the Feast of Tabernacles.

The facts of the vision are related in plain terms in verses 12 to 17, namely, that for seventy years the LORD had protected Babylonia from invasion by its enemies because of His people who remained there, and for whom He made the country a sanctuary. But as the seventy years of captivity were about to be concluded, when His people of Judah would be released and would return to their own land, that state of peace and tranquillity would come to an end with the invasion of the Medes and Persians as prophesied by Isaiah and Daniel. It was not a Babylonian king but Cyrus the Persian who was decreed in God's providence as the one to liberate the Jews and send them back to their own land.

As shown in other prophecies, while Judah was captive in Babylonia and the land of Palestine lay desolate, local tribes and peoples took possession and did not allow the land to have rest and fulfil its sabbaths (Leviticus 26:34,35,43; 2 Chronicles 16:31). In the sabbath years, that which grew of itself was ordered not be harvested or gathered. However, the Moabites, Ammonites and other peoples entered the land and helped themselves when the land was without defenders, much to the LORD's displeasure.

The LORD was certainly displeased with people of Judah for their covenant-breaking sins, and was also displeased with the heathen in general for their sins, yet this action of the heathen in helping themselves to the land which in God's sight still belonged to Judah, increased God's displeasure against the heathen nations (Ezekiel 25: 36:1-7).

The LORD used the word *"zealous"* to express His attitude toward the land of Judah. While He had given it to the Jews for a possession, He still spoke of it as His own to indicate that His will and the law given at Sinai were to be



supreme in the land. Thus God's pre-arrangement stood that the Jews would return after seventy years in Babylonia. There was another reason also, and that was that the Messiah would come to Judah and proclaim the Gospel of salvation at the temple in Jerusalem, and elsewhere, of course, and find a people to become His disciples.

In this retrospective vision given to Zechariah, God's purpose to grant prosperity to Judah was expressly repeated for the benefit of the people who had then returned in accordance with God's promises, but seemed largely unaware that the LORD expected obedience and faithfulness from them in return for His goodness.

## **2. THE FOUR HORNS AND FOUR CRAFTSMEN; 1:18-21**

*18 Then I raised my eyes and looked, and there were four horns.*

*19 And I said to the angel who talked with me, "What are these?" So he answered me, "These are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem."*

*20 Then the LORD showed me four craftsmen.*

*21 And I said, "What are these coming to do?" So he said, "These are the horns that scattered Judah, so that no one could lift up his head: but the craftsmen are coming to terrify them, to cast out the horns of the nations that lifted up their horn against the land of Judah to scatter it."*

A horn is usually a symbol of power, being one of the chief weapons of attack and defence in the animal kingdom. In Daniel's prophecies and in the Old Testament various beasts were used to symbolise Gentile powers. We read of the ten-horned beast, the two-horned ram and the one-horned he-goat in the prophecies of Daniel; and the beast rising from the sea, the two-horned beast, the beast coming up out of the earth and a scarlet-coloured beast with seven heads and ten horns in the New Testament book of Revelation.

The New Testament symbols of beasts and horns refer to ecclesiastical and secular powers that affect and impinge upon the Gospel Age Church, called by Paul the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16).

The four horns of Zechariah's vision represent all the powers which had a hand in destroying Judah and scattering its inhabitants (verses 18 and 19). The Gentile powers were probably Assyria, Egypt, Babylonia and Medo-Persia.

In verse 19 the name Israel is an interpolation. It is not part of the prophecy but was introduced later by someone who may have thought that the name should be included (see the footnote in the Variorum). The ten-tribe kingdom of Israel had been dealt with many years before, and no promise was given to it of returning to Palestine.

Zechariah was a prophet to Judah, and his prophecy concerns Judah and its capital city Jerusalem.

Verse 21 contains the explanation of the four horns and four craftsmen. The four horns represent the Gentile powers or governments *"who lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter its people"* (NIV). The craftsmen represent God's instruments to deprive these Gentile nations of their power over Judah. Retrospectively this prophecy was applicable to the great nations of the time such as Babylonia, Egypt, Moab, Ammon and Medo-Persia, and also to the time of Zechariah's prophecy when the native Gentile governors were interfering with the rebuilding work, and succeeding for a time in stopping it altogether, as mentioned earlier.

### **3. THE SURVEYOR (OR THE MAN WITH A MEASURING LINE); 2:1-13**

- 1 *Then I raised my eyes and looked, and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand.*
- 2 *So I said, "Where are you going?" And he said to me, measure Jerusalem, to see what is its width and what is its length".*
- 3 *And there was the angel who talked with me, going out; and another angel was coming out to meet him,*
- 4 *Who said to him, "Run, speak to this young man, saying: 'Jerusalem, shall be inhabited as towns without walls, because of the multitude of men and livestock in it.*
- 5 *'For I,' says the LORD, 'will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst'."*
- 6 *"Up, up! Flee from the land of the north", says the LORD; "for I have spread you abroad like the four winds of heaven", says the LORD.*
- 7 *"Up, Zion! Escape, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon".*
- 8 *For thus says the LORD of hosts; "He sent me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of his eye.*
- 9 *"For surely I will shake my hand against them, and they shall become spoil for their servants. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me.*

- 10 *"Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst", says the LORD.*
- 11 *"Many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and they shall become my people. And I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.*
- 12 *"And the LORD will take possession of Judah as his inheritance in the Holy Land, and will again choose Jerusalem.*
- 13 *"Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD, for he is aroused from his holy habitation!"*

The vision given in this chapter was a message of encouragement to the people of Judah who had returned to their own land, and also to those who still remained in Babylonia.

It told them not to lose hope, but to realise that God was fulfilling His previous promises *"to restore and to build Jerusalem"* (Daniel 9:25). The surveyor, the man with a measuring line (verses 1 and 2) would have been a reminder to His people that God had already instructed Ezekiel by a series of visions, recorded in Ezekiel chapters 40 to 46, regarding the restoration of the city and temple. For further discussion of the particulars of Ezekiel's prophecy on this subject please see the book ***The Hope of Israel'***, chapter 13, pages 90 to 106.

The usual purpose of a measuring line is to lay out a plan of building works, or to determine the size and position of structures already in place. In the vision under discussion, verse 4 shows that the objective was to impress upon the minds of the Jews that Jerusalem would be rebuilt, and that the LORD would protect and safeguard His people, as though a wall of fire surrounded them and kept them safe (verse 5). Not only was the temple to be rebuilt, but the city also, and on a relatively large scale to accommodate an increasing population. Biblical and secular history verify the fulfilment of these prophecies.

Verse 6 reminded the people of Judah that they had been scattered abroad *"like the four winds of heaven"*, an expressive symbol of their dispersion in every direction. Babylonia was an extensive empire at the time, holding even Egypt in tribute, so the exhortation of verse 6 is very wide in its meaning. It is another illustration of the LORD's goodness in that although He condemned and punished those who fled to Egypt and elsewhere in unbelief, or to indulge in idolatrous worship, He nevertheless allowed for those who might have fled in bewilderment, not knowing their future, and who might have desired to return to the promised land.

So the four winds represent the dispersion and scattering of the people of Judah, and might also represent their return to the land of promise by the LORD's love and mercy, the winds being natural elements which are changeable in force and direction.

Verse 7 was an exhortation to the LORD's people to stir themselves in readiness for their departure from Babylonia, as the LORD was telling them through Zechariah that their deliverance was coming. For, with all His love and mercy, God still required the people's faith as well as their actions and endeavours in support of their faith.

The LORD is long suffering and merciful, but His requirement is, *"Turn unto me, and I will turn unto you"*.

The LORD's people were very dear to Him, and He was deeply concerned about their welfare. The LORD's tender love for them is seen in verse 8 where it is written, *"He that touches you touches the apple of his eye"*.

In verse 9 the way of His people's return was made easier because the LORD sent disorder among the nations, making it easier for His people to leave the land of their captivity and the homes they had made there, and to trust in His guidance to bring them to their own land again.

Verse 10 shows us that the LORD God would be reconciled to the faithful Jews who returned to their land and rebuilt the temple at Jerusalem, and also to those who returned later under Ezra (Ezra chapters 7 and 8) in the reign of Artaxerxes (about 457 BC), as well as to individuals who returned from time to time to the promised land. This reconciliation seems to be the meaning of the words, *"Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst" says the LORD*".

In one of Ezekiel's visions, the prophet saw God departing from the temple and from Jerusalem, for the land was to be desolate for seventy years. The LORD God would not continue to manifest His presence in Jerusalem while the land lay desolate.

God's presence in Judah was in the Most Holy of the temple, so His departure before its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar was appropriate (Ezekiel 11:22,23). God's presence was manifest between the cherubim in the most holy sanctuary in the temple, where His presence and favour were manifested by the Shekinah light. There also He made His will known to the High Priest, when enquiry was made by the High Priest, by means of the Urim and Thummim, about which little is known.

In his vision Ezekiel saw the glory of the LORD returning to the temple at Jerusalem, indicating that at the close of the captivity and Israel's return to their own land, the LORD would once more dwell in Israel's midst and reveal His favour through the temple and the High Priest as before (Ezekiel 43:4).

In verses 11 and 12 Zechariah prophesied of the consequences of the restoration of the temple and of God's return to manifest His presence in it once again.

During the captivities of the Israelites, firstly by Assyria then by Babylonia, many Israelites settled in the countries round about Palestine, and many children were born in those countries and became nationals of them. So it came about that there were Babylonian Jews, Persian Jews, Egyptian Jews, Greek Jews, Roman Jews and so on in addition to Palestinian Jews. All Israelites who were pious and devoted, and who continued to cling to the promises made by God to the fathers, would, as soon as the temple was rebuilt, resume their visits to the temple for the great feasts three times a year. Those who had made their homes in countries near or adjacent to Palestine would join those who had actually returned to Judah and Jerusalem under the decree of Cyrus the Persian king.

Acts 2:9-11 show us how widely the Jews were scattered some centuries after the return from the Babylonian captivity, and also show us that large numbers of Jews still retained their religion and continued their regular visits to Jerusalem for the set feasts. Those Jews present in Jerusalem at Pentecost, who were addressed by Peter, represented only a small fraction of the Jews living in Parthia, Medea, Elam, Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia Minor, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, part of Libya near Cyrene, Rome, Crete and Arabia.

In the wide extent of the territory over which the Jews were scattered, we see how wonderfully God had arranged for the spread of the Gospel in these foreign lands at a later time. For in every case the Gospel was sent *"to the Jew first"*, and subsequently, when as a nation the Jews rejected it, the Gospel was preached to the Gentiles.

The LORD returned to His temple at Jerusalem when it was completed and dedicated in the sixth year of Darius Hystaspis. Historians inform us that the year was 515 BC. The generally accepted date of the return of the captives to Judah and Jerusalem under the decree of Cyrus is 536 BC.

This part of Zechariah's prophecy must have been a great incentive to the Jews to overcome all difficulties and continue their work of rebuilding the temple. The prospect of the LORD returning to dwell in His temple, and the prospect of large numbers of Israelites coming from the various countries to

which they had been dispersed to worship at the temple in Jerusalem, would surely have been encouraging and energising to the Jewish people at that time.

Verses 12 and 13 leave us in no doubt of the LORD's purpose to dwell in the temple as soon as it was ready. The last clause in verse 13 in the NIV reads, *"for he is aroused from his holy habitation"*. The idea of this final clause seems to be rather, "for he has raised up the habitation of his holiness", that is, God has seen to it that the temple of His presence has been rebuilt.

The carrying out of the LORD's promises and plans seems, by the measure of our own individual lifetimes, to be rather protracted. More than five hundred years were granted to the Jews after their return from Babylonia to enable them to become a holy nation ready to receive their Messiah. But their hearts were still prone to wander from God, as Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets showed. Moreover, during the interval between Malachi and John the Baptist there is no evidence of improvement in their behaviour.

Whether the later call to the Gentiles is included in this prophecy of Zechariah is open to question, since the cause of rejoicing of verse 10 is specifically stated to be the return of Yahweh to their midst after their return from Babylonia. Nevertheless it is a fact, as the New Testament shows, that many Gentiles have since been *"joined to the LORD"* (verse 11), but their worship is not at the temple in Jerusalem as the LORD desired it to be in Zechariah's day.

Since the Lord Jesus' death and resurrection, the true worship of God is acceptable only through Jesus Christ, the ancient temple having been demolished and no longer the centre of worship and no longer the place where God's presence was manifest. The temple of God in the Gospel Age exists in the heart of every sincere believer.

The Apostle Paul explained this fundamental change in God's relationship to His people, and His dealings with them under the New Covenant, in his letters to the Corinthians and the Ephesians:

*"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are."* (1 Corinthians 3:16,17).

*"And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."* (2 Corinthians 6:16).

*"And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In who all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." (Ephesians 2:20-22).*

It should be our desire that the LORD may so direct our studies in these latter days that we may see in Zechariah's prophecies what the LORD wishes us to see, and not read into them unrelated matters which later prophecies and later developments of His plan and purpose have made known to us.

#### **4. JOSHUA THE HIGH PRIEST; 3:1-10**

- 1 Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him.*
- 2 And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?"*
- 3 Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel.*
- 4 Then he answered and spoke to those who stood before him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him". And to him he said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes".*
- 5 And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head". So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him. And the Angel of the LORD stood by.*
- 6 Then the Angel of the LORD admonished Joshua, saying,*
- 7 "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'If you will walk in my ways, and if you will keep my command, then you shall also judge my house. And likewise have charge of my courts; I will give you places to walk among these who stand here.*
- 8 'Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you, for they are a wondrous sign; for behold, I am bringing forth my servant the BRANCH.*
- 9 For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua: Upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave its inscription' says the LORD of hosts, 'And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.*
- 10 In that day,' says the LORD of hosts, 'Everyone will invite his neighbour under his vine and under his fig tree.' "*

## **Some Reflections and Comments**

Some prophecies contain their own explanations, that is, when a prophet such as Zechariah spoke or wrote under inspiration from the LORD, an explanation of the meaning was sometimes included, especially if the inspired message was given by a vision or visions.

This was the case with the vision of the four horns in chapter 1 verses 18 and 19, and with the vision of the craftsmen who had come to strive against them. When these two prophecies were given by the LORD, they were not statements about things remote in the future, but of events which had already taken place. The first event recounted was the capture and scattering of the Jews by Nebuchadnezzar and by nations in league with him; and the second event was the removal, seventy years later, of the Babylonians as the rulers of Palestine by the forces of Medo-Persia under Cyrus.

When the LORD sent these prophecies to Zechariah, the Gentile inhabitants of Palestine and surrounding areas were causing trouble and were striving to prevent the rebuilding of the temple. The vision of the four craftsmen was a timely vision, in that it was an assurance to the Jewish people that Gentile opposition was not to be understood as an indication that the rebuilding work would not succeed. On the contrary, God would ensure that the opposition would be overruled, and that the work would be continued. And so it came to pass, as recorded by Ezra in chapters 3 to 8, inclusive.

So it is not necessary to look for events in the future as the fulfilment of these two visions, and there seems to be no authority for doing so. The visions were given to Zechariah, and we can see how they were fulfilled in his day. Many visions to be considered as we move on do relate to future events that would not be fulfilled until centuries after Zechariah recorded them, and we need to study carefully what is written, and endeavour to attribute fulfilment of each prophecy to the correct time.

In considering the vision of the third chapter of Zechariah, we find in it two important revelations of the will of God concerning Joshua the High Priest. We should remember that the Jewish people were making a fresh start at Jerusalem after an absence of seventy years of captivity in Babylonia. Conditions after their return were different from those they had experienced before their captivity, and they needed divine guidance concerning the priesthood and the government of the people in their new circumstances. They were then a subject people, and would remain so for centuries under the domination of the world empires which followed Babylonia, namely Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. At the time of Zechariah's prophecies, the head of the tribe of Judah, Zerubbabel, was appointed by Cyrus as governor over the returned exiles, and so occupied a princely position, while Joshua, as High Priest, would serve at the temple.



The vision given in chapter 3 of Zechariah was intended to show God's purpose to alter this dual arrangement. Zerubbabel, referred to also by his Chaldean or Persian name of Sheshbazzar, was a descendant of Jechonias, the last king of Judah, called Jehoiachin in 2 Kings 24:6,8,12 and 15. Of Jehoiachin it was prophesied that the crown of Judah would be taken from him, and that none of his descendants would occupy the throne after him (Ezekiel 21:25-27; Jeremiah 22:28-30).

Zerubbabel was a godly Jew who co-operated fully with Joshua the High Priest in the building of the temple, in the settlement of the exiles in their inheritances, and in the correction of evils which arose among them. Jehoiachin's heir was recognised by Cyrus the king as the proper head of the people and the most fitting to be their governor. However, God decreed that a change in governorship was to be made, but this change was through no fault of Zerubbabel, who was a godly and pious man, and Zerubbabel was given this assurance in a later vision to Zechariah (chapter 4:1-14).

But for now we are concerned with the vision of Zechariah chapter 3, in which the new status of Joshua the High Priest is set forth, by inference doing away with the governmental control exercised by Zerubbabel.

### **Satan Opposed Joshua (vs. 1-5)**

In this vision, Zechariah saw Joshua standing before the angel of the LORD. Joshua was not alone, as verse 4 mentions others who stood before the angel and carried out the angel's instructions. Since this is a vision and thus a symbolic representation, there is nothing incongruous in the presence of Satan *"standing at his right hand to oppose him"*. The literal rendering of the Hebrew is, as the AV margin tells us, *"an adversary at his right hand to be his adversary"*. The name 'Satan' means 'adversary'.

The Scriptures tell us that Satan is a Spirit being, a specific identity, who has been, since creation, *"the god of this world"* (2 Corinthians 4:4), the wilful and perverse adversary of God, opposed to all God's plans and purposes (Genesis 3:1; John 8:44; Ephesians 2:2; Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 22:31,32). So in this vision it is appropriate that Satan was seen as an opponent of God's purpose in regard to Joshua.

In Jude 23 it is written that professed believers in the Gospel Age who lead inconsistent lives require special treatment by the brethren so that they might be pulled out of the fire, the fire in this case meaning the second death, the ultimate punishment for wilful and persistent sin. If a believer who lapses into sinful ways can be persuaded to abandon them and return to consistent Christian living, he or she is pulled from the fire, so to speak, for the second death will not have a hold on him or her.

But no such meaning could be attached to the angel's statement concerning Joshua, *"Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?"* (verse 2). The *"fire"* in Joshua's case would mean the fire of God's wrath experienced by the children of Judah in captivity in Babylonia. Joshua and all Jews who returned to Judah can reasonably be said to have been plucked from that fire.

Such visions as these given to the prophets were not stories to entertain and amuse. The purpose of the visions was to teach truth and give encouragement to God's people. The rebuke to Satan in verse 2 is so worded as to show the Jews that God was with them, and that Satan's opposition could not prevail against God's power. The words, *"The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you"*, indicate that God had a purpose concerning Jerusalem with which Joshua the High Priest was closely concerned. Therefore the God Who chose Jerusalem would uphold Joshua and the Jewish people and would frustrate Satan's plans, whatever those plans might be.

The same thought of God upholding His people in their faith and devotion is conveyed in Paul's words to the Christians at Rome, *"If God be for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31-39).

We understand that the direct application of the vision was to Joshua, but we nevertheless may take comfort and encouragement from it for ourselves. God never forsakes His servants, whatever the circumstances and trials may be (Hebrews 13:5,6).

### **Joshua's New Authority**

Verse 3 describes the Joshua seen in the vision as wearing *"filthy garments"*. What can this mean in view of Joshua's known character of faithfulness to the LORD? It would seem to mean that Joshua as a man lacked the purity and blamelessness required for the purposes of the vision. It was a reminder that he, even though he was the High Priest, was *"compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins"* (Hebrews 5:2,3). But in the vision, the iniquity was represented as being removed, and the new status conferred, by a change of garments. *"See I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes"* (verse 4).

Clothing in its simplest function consists of coverings for the person to protect the body and shield it from heat and cold. But clothes are also robes of distinction or indications of offices, such as those worn by monarchs, the judiciary, barristers, and mayors of cities.

Under the Mosaic Law the garments worn by priests and the high priest were particularly designated. Aaron wore white linen garments when offering sacrifices. Before these were put on Aaron washed his flesh in water (Exodus 28:40-43; Leviticus 16:4). Aaron also had garments *"for glory and for beauty,"* which were worn on the Day of Atonement on the completion of the sacrificial work when he came out to bless the people. These same garments were also worn on other ceremonial occasions (Exodus 28:4-38).

### **Joshua a Judge (vs. 6,7)**

As High Priest, Joshua was entitled to wear these priestly garments, including the jewelled breastplate and the two onyx stones on the shoulders. But up to that time, Joshua had not been ruler of the people, as that office was occupied by the kings of Judah, Judah being the royal tribe. The new garments with which in the vision Joshua was invested were indicative of the office of judge, as shown by the words in verses 6 and 7.

This indication of God's will was accepted by the Jews, and from that time on the high priest in office was recognised also as civil ruler over the Jews. This situation, however, did not prevent the action of the leaders of the ruling empires in appointing their own rulers over the Jewish high priests whenever such action suited those leaders in succeeding times.

It is certainly of interest to note that the next leader of a band of returning exiles commissioned by the king of Persia was Ezra. Ezra's genealogy is preserved in Ezra 7:1-5, in which it is established that Ezra was a direct descendant of Aaron, the first high priest, through Eleazar who succeeded Aaron in the office. From the commission given to him by Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra was made a judge over the people with full authority to appoint magistrates and judges, and to punish transgressors of the law of God (Ezra 7:1-26).

Ezra proceeded to carry out the decree of judgment, rebuking priests, leading men and people alike for their sins. His work constituted a reform of the nation similar to that accomplished by the judges of former times. This reform work and the work of succeeding priests who were also judges was as near a fulfilment of Isaiah 1:26 as anything in their history up to the time the Lord Jesus came to be Judge of His people. Jeremiah also prophesied that after their punishment of captivity in Babylonia and their return to their own land, their nobles and governors *"shall be of themselves"* (Jeremiah 30:18-21).

### **Joshua a Symbol (v. 8)**

Joshua as a sign or symbol is indicated in the vision, which also explains the identity of *"those who stand here"* mentioned in verse 7, among whom Joshua was to have a place.

Who were the companions who were a wondrous sign or symbol to Israel? In Israel's history Moses was such a symbol in that God worked through him. He was also a type, being so declared in the New Testament as a type of Christ in many of his offices, namely as leader of the people, as mediator and intercessor, as judge, lawgiver and prophet. The Apostle Peter said, *"For Moses truly said unto the fathers, a prophet shall the LORD your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me"* (Acts 3:22). By studying these typical resemblances, the Jews should have been able to recognise Jesus as the prophet of whom Moses wrote.

Other Old Testament characters who served as symbols were Aaron the high priest and David the king of Israel. In Zechariah's prophecy now under consideration, Joshua the high priest was also a symbol.

The Jewish people had returned to their own land, but they were still a subject people and would have had conflicting thoughts about their duty to their conquerors and their duty to the LORD their God. They would have known about the great prophet foretold by Moses, and in many respects like Moses, and would perhaps have wondered if that prophet would arise to deliver them and make them again a self-governing nation.

They would also have known from Psalm 110 verses 4 and 5 of one to be raised up *"after the order of Melchizedek. The LORD at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath."* They would surely have wondered how and when that prophecy would be fulfilled.

But they should also have been aware of Daniel's visions. In these visions, and the interpretations given to explain them, the Jewish people would have known that there would be four great empires successively in control over them.

Joshua was made judge of the nation in addition to his office as high priest, thus combining the two offices of ruler and priest as in the Melchisedec order. However, Joshua was not the fulfilment of the Melchisedec prophecy in the Psalm, but was a symbol to assist the people to see the future functions of the Messiah acted out before them, albeit in a representative manner, given the imperfections of Joshua and the priests assisting him.

Other prophets carried out certain commands given to them in visions, and in so doing gave an object lesson to the people, and were made signs to them. Ezekiel carried out some commands of digging and removal of stuff (the marginal reading is "instruments", the NIV has "your belongings") before the people and said, *"I am your sign; like as I have done, so shall it be done unto them"* (Ezekiel 12:1-11).

So Joshua was also a sign, a continuing reminder to His people that God had not forsaken His promise to raise up a great King and High Priest after the order of Melchisedec. But the people had to learn patience and obey the powers that God had permitted to be set over them, in faith looking forward to the great Deliverer still to come.

### **The Branch (v. 8)**

Of whom was Joshua a symbol?

He was made a symbol of the One whom God called *"my servant the BRANCH"*. The Hebrew word for *"branch"* means literally "shoot" or "sprout" (Strong 6780). This is a reminder to the returned exiles that the promises given through Isaiah were still valid and certain, as recorded in Isaiah 11:1, *"And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots"*.

The word for 'BRANCH' in the Isaiah verse is a different word from that used in Zechariah, but its meaning is the same, and also, according to Dr. Strong, the meaning in Isaiah 11:1 allows for the figurative understanding of 'descendant' (Strong 5342).

Many promises are given in the following verses of Isaiah 11 of the great things to be accomplished by this BRANCH which would grow from the stem of Jesse. Jesse was the father of David, king of Israel, from whom the Lord Jesus Christ was descended. Centuries later, Jesus was called the Son of David, and was and is heir to his throne (Luke 1:32; Matthew 21:9,15). Jesus is certainly the One referred to as the BRANCH, hence the vision of Zechariah 3 may be taken as pointing forward to Him as still to come, and not to be fulfilled in the person of Joshua, here set forth as a symbol.

In Revelation 22:16 we see that He Who was at His first advent the shoot from the stem of Jesse, will be the Stem of Jesse and of David in the Kingdom Age, when the former ancestors of Jesus will be given life again by Him as their Lord (Revelation 5:8; Romans 15:12).

We are thankful that we now know the answer to the question that the Lord put to the Pharisees from Psalm 110:1, recorded in Matthew 22:41-46. Peter's testimony in Acts 2:29-36 is also relevant to the Lord's question. We should note that the 110th Psalm contains the promise of the Melchisedec priesthood, an order or arrangement of a combination in one person (or identity) of the two offices of king and priest.

Another fact of interest to note is that Joshua is the Hebrew form of the name later given to Jesus, a name which means 'Yahweh-saved' or 'Yahweh the Saviour'.

Some centuries before Zechariah was called upon to prophesy, Joshua the son of Nun was the leader of the children of Israel into the promised land, and there served as judge, but not as priest. The Joshua in Zechariah's prophecy is both high priest and judge, thus combining the two offices of ruler and priest, a feature of the Melchisedec order, of which the Joshua in Zechariah is a symbol of the Lord Jesus as already stated.

These two faithful men served God's people well, but neither could cure them of their propensity to sin. Only the Lord Jesus could do and did that, providing the one and only remedy by which Jew and Gentile can be cured completely and eternally from sin and all its consequences.

### **The Stone with Seven Eyes (v. 9)**

In earlier times, as is still the case today, stones were used as landmarks. It was an offence for an Israelite to tamper with boundary stones (Deuteronomy 19:14). It was also a custom to set up a large stone, or a mound of smaller stones, to celebrate some events, as a witness to a contract or transaction, or to serve as a memorial. The crossing of the Jordan by the Israelites was such an event, and twelve stones were erected for a memorial in the midst of the river (Genesis 28:18; 35:14,15; 31:44-53; Joshua 4:1-9; 1 Samuel 7:12).

The placing of a stone before Joshua in the vision would seem to have had the significance of both a contract and a memorial. The engraving mentioned would be the record of this solemn appointment of Joshua to be both judge and priest as a symbol of the Messiah still to come.

The meaning of the "seven eyes" seems to be explained in the vision of chapter 4 verse 10; *"They are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro throughout the whole earth"*. This is surely symbolic of the LORD's ability to see everything and know all that is going on, the number seven often symbolising completeness. Associating the "seven eyes" with the "stone" would mean that God would adhere to the contract and see that it was carried out, and also that He would observe the conduct of the people under the leadership of Joshua and his successors as judges and priests in Jerusalem.

### **Removing the Iniquity (v. 9)**

Joshua sought to remove the iniquity of the people and succeeded in gathering them together for a strict observance of the day of atonement. Ezra also, as already mentioned, secured a great reform, and years later Nehemiah laboured to revive the people to a sense of their shortcomings and the necessity of faithful observance of the law. Each year the iniquity of the nation was removed if the day of atonement was properly observed.

The prediction of verse 10, "*In that day' says the LORD of hosts, 'Everyone will invite his neighbour under his vine and under his fig tree'*" was also accomplished by Joshua and Zerubbabel under the encouragement of the prophets Zechariah and Haggai.

We read of this in Ezra 2:70, "*The priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers and the temple servants settled in their own towns, along with some of the other people, and the rest of the Israelites settled in their towns.*" Yet a few years later Nehemiah found conditions to be very bad, and instituted another reform and cleansing, as may be seen in the book of Nehemiah.

Joshua, as a symbol, fulfilled to the best of his ability the trust placed in him by the LORD when he was made both ruler and priest for the better guidance and instruction of the people under his care. So that, while having in their land idolatrous Gentiles who became a stumbling block to many, there were always some godly persons upholding the worship of the true God and patiently waiting for the promised BRANCH.

Joshua would have realised from Zechariah's vision, as well as from Daniel's prophecies, that many years would pass before the One Whom Joshua typified would come. And surely Joshua and other pious Jews would have understood that the permanent removal of iniquity and the permanent setting of every man under his own fig tree would be accomplished by the BRANCH.

Joshua and his successors, even though they combined both kingly and priestly functions, could do no more than preserve and continue the regular offering of sacrifices and the other rites and ceremonies of the law, which, as we know, were only of temporary value. But even the observance of these formal services was often interrupted in the years between Joshua's day and our Lord's first advent.

Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, lamented the ignorance and sin prevailing in his day, and the Gospels tell us of the deplorable state of affairs that confronted our Lord. During His ministry He encountered great depth of wickedness which He roundly denounced. The generation at the time of His earthly ministry was called "*a generation of vipers*" by the Lord Jesus (Matthew 23:33), and by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:7), and He foretold that sore punishment would come upon them, and it did, as history has shown.

It was not of our Lord's earthly career as King of the Jews that Joshua was a symbol, but a symbol of our Lord's resurrection life, a King and High Priest with all power after having given the true sacrifice, His flesh and shed blood, for the life of the world.

In the interval between Malachi and John the Baptist, notwithstanding changes of government, wars, treachery, and other evils, many of the High Priests preserved their prerogatives as governors of the Jews by favour, in turn, of the Medo-Persians, Greeks and Romans. Right down to our Lord's day the people had a demonstration of the inability of human beings, even though exercising both religious and political authority, to bring in righteousness and banish sin.

A new arrangement was required, the New Covenant, sealed with the sinless blood of Christ, the one and only arrangement that can and will take away sin and banish it forever.

## **5. THE GOLDEN LAMPSTAND AND THE TWO OLIVE TREES; 4:1-14**

- 1 *Now the angel who talked with me came back and wakened me, as a man who is wakened out of his sleep.*
- 2 *And he said to me, "What do you see?" So I said, "I am looking, and there is a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps.*
- 3 *"Two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left."*
- 4 *So I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, "What are these, my lord?"*
- 5 *Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord."*
- 6 *So he answered and said to me: "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts.*
- 7 *'Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"' "*
- 8 *Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying:*
- 9 *"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands shall also finish it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.*
- 10 *For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see the plumb-line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the LORD, which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth."*
- 11 *Then I answered and said to him, "What are these two olive trees one at the right of the lampstand and the other at its left?"*



- 12 *And I further answered and said to him, "What are these two olive branches that drip into the receptacles of the two gold pipes from which the golden oil drains?"*
- 13 *Then he answered me and said, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord."*
- 14 *So he said, "These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the LORD of the whole earth."*

The vision of the golden lampstand and the two olive trees in chapter four of Zechariah's prophecy was given with direct explanations to the prophet, which were intended to assist him, and also other readers such as ourselves, in obtaining an understanding of the vision.

The book of Zechariah contains some prophecies that have a local application to Zechariah's (and also Haggai's) day, but the book also contains some prophecies that have been fulfilled hundreds of years after the Holy Spirit inspired them to be written. We must therefore take care to apply the message of each prophecy correctly, and not apply all Zechariah's prophecies to events long future from his day. From Ezra 5:1 and 6:14 we learn that some of the prophecies of both Zechariah and Haggai were for the purpose of encouraging the Jews to continue rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem.

### **The Golden Lampstand (vs. 1-5)**

Chapter 4 is admirably suited for just such a purpose. In the temple there had been a seven-branched lampstand, made according to the pattern shown to Moses at Mount Sinai, and described in Exodus 25:31-40; 37:17-24; and Numbers 8:4. Solomon's grand temple was evidently adorned with ten lampstands of the same pattern, according to specifications given to King David in 1 Chronicles 28:11, 15 and 19. But Nebuchadnezzar's army had carried away to Babylonia all the treasures and implements of the temple. Those treasures and implements of gold and silver were restored to the Jews on their return to Judah and Jerusalem by decree of the Persian King Cyrus.

No mention was made of the golden lampstands among the temple treasures carried back to Jerusalem, but Ezra 5:14 and 6:5 seem to indicate that all the gold and silver articles that were taken away were returned, so it would seem that the ten golden lampstands were included.

But at that stage of the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, the temple had not been rebuilt, so there was no holy place to receive and house the golden lampstands. They could not therefore serve their purpose to illuminate the table of shewbread and the altar of incense. The vision of the

golden lampstand with its seven branches, and a source of oil to keep the lamps burning, would seem to have been a strong indication to Zechariah, and through him to the people, that they had been tardy in their duty to rebuild the temple. The temple foundations had been re-laid, but no further progress had been made because of the opposition from the Gentile rulers and nations surrounding Jerusalem to the rebuilding work.

Zechariah's curiosity was aroused by the vision, and he inquired its meaning of the angel. The angel's question, "*Do you not know what these are?*" was evidently intended to increase Zechariah's desire to understand.

### **Not By Might But By God's Spirit (vs. 6-9)**

The angel explained that the vision was a message particularly for Zerubbabel, the prince at the head of the returned exiles. As the recognised ruler, Zerubbabel was responsible for the conduct of the Jews, and the thought might have occurred to him, or might have been put to him, to use force against the people who opposed them. But the vision rebuts any such suggestion, as the angel said plainly.

The "*great mountain*" of verse 7 stands for the opposition to the rebuilding of the temple. In ancient times, and even up to our own times, the term "mountain" has been used figuratively to mean hindrance, difficulty and obstruction. We speak of "a mountain in our path", or when overcoming a difficulty or problem we sometimes say, "I am faced with a mountain of work". In Scripture "mountain" is often used as a symbol of a kingdom or government, as in Daniel 2:35 and 44, where the kingdom of God is depicted as a mountain that "*filled the whole earth*". Another instance is Isaiah 65:25, "*They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD*".

The opposition experienced by Zerubbabel and other pious Jews who desired to go on with building the temple was local, and therefore like a mountain in their path. But it was also governmental, since the local opponents made representations to the king when they were resisted by the Jewish leaders (Ezra 4:1-23). The work on the temple ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius Hystaspis. The Jews were rendered helpless, since armed resistance to the king's decree would have been futile. They were obliged to cease work in accordance with the Spirit of God as indicated in the vision and the admonition of the angel. They had to be patient and wait for the Spirit of God to work for them.

The "*mountain*" was to "*become a plain*" before Zerubbabel. An important difference between a mountain and a plain is simply that a mountain hinders progress while a plain facilitates it. And so it happened to Israel in God's due time. The same Persian government which decreed that the temple rebuilding should cease, subsequently declared that the work should go on,

and it rendered great assistance in money and materials. A new king had come to the throne, and in view of that and of the LORD's message through Zechariah, the rebuilding work resumed under Zerubbabel and Joshua.

### **Grace To It (v. 7)**

But opposition to Israel persisted as we read in Ezra 5:3-5. These opponents, however, were more reasonable. They wrote to Darius the king and repeated the claim of the Jews that Cyrus the Persian king had issued a decree authorising the rebuilding of the temple. This letter is recorded in Ezra 5:6-17. The letter asked Darius to search the records to see if such a decree had been made. It would seem that the Spirit of God continued to work here, because Darius agreed to the request, and had the records examined in their place of storage, which was the palace of the Medes.

It was a law of the Medes and Persians that no decree of the king could be rescinded or repealed. Once a law was made it remained a law (Daniel 6:8,15). Darius duly found the decree of Cyrus and quoted it for the benefit of the Jews. He also added a decree of his own, ignoring the decree of Artaxerxes referred to in Ezra 4:11-22. Like many rulers of those earlier days, Darius sought the favour of all the gods he knew or had heard of, and in issuing his decree with its generous subsidy, he admitted his desire that the Jews, when offering sacrifices to God in the temple to be rebuilt and fully furnished throughout, might remember him and his sons in their prayers. Doubtless the Jews did so, for the temple was duly finished in the sixth year of the reign of Darius, as we read in Ezra 6:14.

Thus it appears that God's Spirit was at work in turning the heart of the heathen king (Ezra 6:22), and in blessing His people who waited patiently for His over-ruling (Psalm 37:1-5).

The concluding statement of verse 7, *"And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of 'Grace, grace to it' "* is a graphic method of describing how the work of building would go on when the *"mountain"* became a *"plain"* before Zerubbabel.

The *"capstone"*, or preferably *"cornerstone"*, of the temple would be the main building stone of the rebuilt temple. The foundation of the temple had been laid years before, and was there ready for the addition of the stone superstructure, of which the cornerstone would be the most notable and significant. The cornerstone in all probability would have been set at a suitable height in the structure to allow its inscriptions to be read, and would have been so constructed and placed as to allow for a cavity to enclose documents and records for future generations to read.

The mention of Zerubbabel's bringing forth the cornerstone would indicate the resumption of the rebuilding work, and the shouts of "*Grace, grace to it*" would represent the joy of the people in the resumption of work and the laying of the cornerstone.

Verses 9 and 10 contain a repetition of the word of the LORD concerning Zerubbabel and the rebuilding of the temple. When the Jews saw the building completed by Zerubbabel as indicated in verse 9, they would then have been assured that God Himself had sent the message, and that message was the truth and a true prophecy.

The clear evidence that a prophecy or promise has been fulfilled is mentioned elsewhere in Scripture as a means of distinguishing or discerning a true prophecy of God. A false prophet is exposed when events show his attempts to foretell the future have not taken place, and his predictions have been only guesses or perhaps even suggestions from the evil one.

The credentials of a true prophet are established when his predictions come to pass. By this test Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel and the other prophets of the LORD whose writings have come down to us have been proved to be God's inspired messengers, for it is beyond human ability to foretell with certainty what will happen in the future (Deuteronomy 13:1-5; Jeremiah 28:1-17; 27:4-10, 14-16). There was therefore no doubt that the LORD's temple would be rebuilt when Zechariah, the prophet of the LORD, proclaimed the fact.

### **Day of Small Things (v. 10)**

The plumb-line is a weight suspended by a cord, and is used for finding the true perpendicular of walls in the course of construction of buildings. It indicates to a workman whether he is laying his bricks, stones or vertical timbers truly. It served well in the prophecy as a symbol of building operations in progress, and being in Zerubbabel's hand, showed that he was directing the work and that it would be properly carried out.

In the expression "*the day of small things*," the word translated as "*small*" means "diminutive or abbreviated in quantity, size or number, and figuratively in age or importance" (Strong # 6996).

When the Jews returned to their own promised land, they were few in number compared to their former large population. They had to begin in a small way. Their land was allocated in small allotments to provide for immediate needs. Their worship began in a small way without a building. After much trouble they succeeded in laying the foundation of the temple, but could, for some years, go no further. It was a time when pessimists and doubters could discourage the enthusiasts and the faithful who believed that the temple would be rebuilt.

There was, however, another way in which “*the day of small things*”, that is, the small beginnings of the Jews’ resettlement, could be regarded, namely, not taken into account as a deterrent or hindrance. Beginning in a small way entails subsequent hard work, patience, perseverance and hope that the labour will not be in vain. And so it was that the Israelites were encouraged by the prophet Haggai in chapter 2 verses 2 to 5, as well as by Zechariah, not to be discouraged by small beginnings, but to co-operate and do what they could when they saw Zerubbabel going ahead with the rebuilding work.

Those faithful ones who saw the small beginnings would live to see the temple completed, and would rejoice and realise that they had been seeing as with the eyes of the LORD. Eyes represent sight and wisdom, as well as an understanding of affairs. Those who trust in the LORD may be said to see with the seven eyes of the LORD, in other words, by His Spirit. When the Israelites saw Zerubbabel using the plumb-line to recommence building, and setting the cornerstone, those who were faithful saw by faith that the whole temple would be completed.

It seems appropriate to comment at this stage that some Bible expositors seek to apply this prophecy recorded by Zechariah to our own day or even to a day future from our time. Such an application seems unwarranted for the following reasons.

The New Testament tells us that God spoke to the fathers by the prophets (Hebrews 1:1; Matthew 13:14,15; Romans 10:15-21), and their writings and the history of Israel show that He did so, and also that those who heeded the prophets were blessed in obeying them. Throughout the whole period in which the Jews were subject to the world empires of Babylonia, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome, God watched over them and fulfilled His covenant to be their God and regard them as His people. He preserved them until the day of their Messiah’s appearance among them, the time and date of which had been given by the prophet Daniel (see “*Notes on the Book of Daniel*”, Chapter 9). When a prophecy, such as this, can be seen to have been fulfilled during the period of God’s care for the Israelites, there is no justification in referring it to a different era.

### **The Ever-Flowing Oil (vs. 11-14)**

The explanations by the angel were of great interest to Zechariah, but he wished to know more about the vision of the golden lampstand. He did not see anyone tending the lamps, as was the duty of the high priest, but he saw two olive trees, one on the right and the other on the left of the lampstand. Verse 11 records Zechariah’s question about the trees, and verse 12 shows that he had noticed something rather strange and wonderful about them. The supply of oil was automatic.

The lampstand in the temple was seven-branched, and the seven lamps were regularly supplied with oil by those whose duty it was to care for the holy place. But in Zechariah's vision the lamps were shown to have direct connection with two olive trees, which in the natural world are the source of the oil. The lesson seems to be that the LORD's Spirit, represented by the oil, was ever with His people, giving them the light they required in their perplexities, and that He was prepared to return to His place in the temple as soon as it was completed.

Two olive trees and two lampstands are mentioned in Revelation, chapter 11, and these represent the unfailing light provided by the LORD during the Gospel Age because of the increasing flow of the Holy Spirit, the two witnesses being the written Word of God and the people of God, the Gospel Age church. God's people bear witness to the truth, and their witness is in harmony with the Word of God, given and dictated by the Holy Spirit. The LORD's true people are His witnesses, and, in order to be effective, they are granted a measure of the Holy Spirit as an indwelling power. In this way they are fitted to carry out the commission given by the Lord Jesus immediately before His ascension (Matthew 28:19,20; Luke 24:46-48; Acts 1:8).

But as far as Zechariah's prophecy is concerned, the application of this part of it seems to be limited to Zechariah's day, when God's people were still under the Law Covenant, and still bound to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem, and serve Him with the sacrifices and requirements required under the Law Covenant. The constant supply of oil to the lampstand indicated that God would continue to be with His people, and guide them through the High Priest and the holy prophets who honoured the worship of God and sought to help the people to do the same.

According to the Law, both the High Priest and the prophets were the special recipients of God's spirit for wisdom in the guidance and instruction of His chosen people. (Numbers 27:18-21; Deuteronomy 23:8-10). After the return from Babylonia, the priests felt the lack of a High Priest with Urim and Thummim, and the governor would not permit them to exercise their offices until by Urim and Thummim the hereditary priests were distinguished from other claimants. As we are aware, the Holy Spirit of God operated through the Urim and Thummim when the High Priest entered with it into the Holy of Holies and sought divine guidance.

The inspiration of the prophets by the Holy Spirit was more direct, and operated only at certain times for given periods of time, for we read that holy men of old spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21; Acts 4:25; 1 Samuel 10:6, 10-13; Nehemiah 9:30; Zechariah 7:12).

So we can see that with the rebuilding of the temple, the filling of the office of High Priest by one qualified by descent from Aaron (Ezra 7:1-5) and authorised to inquire of God in the Most Holy, and also by the prophets of the return from Babylonia (Haggai and Zechariah in particular), the Spirit of God was given in abundance for the guidance and welfare of God's chosen people.

The people, however, did not take full advantage of God's help, but their failure to do so was no fault of God's, for the two olive trees continued to provide the oil for the golden lampstands and the seven golden lamps. The two olive trees, the *"two anointed ones"*, symbolise God's care for His people in providing guidance through the Urim and Thummim, and through the words and writings of the holy prophets.

## **6. THE FLYING SCROLL; 5:1-4**

1. *Then I turned and raised my eyes, and saw there a flying scroll.*
2. *And he said to me, "What do you see?" So I answered, "I see a flying scroll. Its length is twenty cubits and its width is ten cubits."*
3. *Then he said to me, "This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole earth: 'Every thief shall be expelled,' according to what is on this side of the scroll; and 'Every perjurer shall be expelled,' according to what is on that side of it."*
4. *"I will send out the curse," says the LORD of hosts; "It shall enter the house of the thief and the house of one who swears falsely by my name. It shall remain in the midst of his house and consume it, with its timber and stones."*

The vision of the flying scroll has been applied by some Bible commentators to books and messages late in the Gospel Age. Such an application seems to be without justification, and ignores the application to Zechariah's day and the time in which the message was delivered.

God's many blessings to the exiles, who had at that time returned from captivity, were to be graciously given, but were conditional upon the people's attitude to Him and upon their obedience of the Law.

Although the nation of Israel had been in captivity in Babylonia, the Law Covenant still remained in force, even though the people had no temple in Babylonia and were unable to offer the sacrifices required by the Law. But there were features of the Law that they could have observed, to the best of

their ability, as Daniel and his three companions and other conscientious Jews demonstrated before the Gentiles, as we read in Daniel 1:8-21; 3:14, 16-18; and 6:10. This fact was drawn to the people's attention by Zechariah.

When the people had returned to their own land, the obligations of obedience to the Law were still upon them, but they were able to carry out these obligations with greater freedom, as they were no longer a captive people.

The vision of the flying scroll represented a curse on the transgressors of the Law. The "*face of the whole earth*" in verse 3 is better understood as the "*face of the whole land*", that is, the land of Palestine to which the people had returned.

Two sins are mentioned in verses 3 and 4, namely, swearing falsely by the name of God, and stealing. There was simply no excuse for the Jews, whether in Babylonia or after their return, to commit either of these two transgressions of the Law. Both of these duties were voluntary and within the individual's control. Hence the false swearer and the thief were singled out as being cursed.

The form of the curse is described in verse 4. The families of such transgressors would not be allowed to live and enjoy the blessings of the new regime under Joshua and his successors. Such punishments as these were within the Law, for God had often forewarned His people of punishments to come upon them for persistent disobedience, as we see in Deuteronomy 13:1-18; 27:13-26; 28:15-68; 30:15-20, and also in the other prophecies such as Hosea 5:1-15.

We should bear in mind that one of the great difficulties facing the returned exiles was that they brought back with them many customs and habits learnt in Babylonia. Many of the people were a new generation which had not seen the holy land, and which knew of God and His Law and temple only by word of mouth, whereas the Babylonian customs and worship had been always before their eyes. So now in Judah and Jerusalem the Jews needed to be rid of idolatrous heathen practices to be acceptable to God and to their leaders in obeying God's commands. The best way to accomplish this was to discard idolatrous beliefs and practices altogether and at once.



## **7. THE WOMAN IN A BASKET**

### **AND THE TWO WOMEN WITH WINGS; 5:5-11**

5. *Then the angel who talked with me came out and said to me, "Lift your eyes now, and see what this is that goes forth."*
6. *So I asked, "What is it?" And he said, "It is a basket that is going forth." He also said, "This is their resemblance throughout the earth:*
7. *"Here is a lead disc lifted up, and this is a woman sitting inside the basket";*
8. *Then he said, "This is Wickedness!" And he thrust her down into the basket, and threw the lead cover over its mouth.*
9. *Then I raised my eyes and looked, and there were two women, coming with the wind in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between earth and heaven.*
10. *So I said to the angel who talked with me, "Where are they carrying the basket?"*
11. *And he said to me, "To build a house for it in the land of Shinar; when it is ready, the basket will be set there on its base."*

God's command was given through Zechariah in this picturesque vision. The question and answer method of exposition was followed here, as in previous visions. Each item was identified. The first item was a basket (ephah in Hebrew, which means a measure of grain holding about one bushel, or 36 litres; Strong #374), the next was the resemblance, while the next was a woman who personified wickedness, and the final vision was of wickedness to be carried away.

In other prophecies Babylonia was represented as mistress of nations, and although Babylonia had been displaced by Medo-Persia, the wicked practices to which the Jews had become accustomed in Babylonia continued to be exercised among the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem.

Placing a woman in a basket, pressing down a heavy lid upon it, and carrying it away to the land of Shinar (an ancient name for part of Babylonia), represented to the Jews that their proper course of action was to send all their evil practices back to the land from which they had taken them. It seems from Ezra 9:1 and 2 that the Jews had combined with the Babylonian practices all the abominations of the surrounding tribes and of Egypt, and that they were being commanded to rid themselves of all of them.

The two women each with the wings of a stork represented the simultaneous action of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin of whom the returned Jews mainly consisted. Both tribes were being instructed to cast away their evil deeds and practices.

The white stork (Hebrew chasiyadah - Strong #2624) is one of the largest of land birds, standing nearly 1.2 metres in height. Its plumage is white, but its huge wings are black. It lives on all kinds of offal and food scraps, and is a very common bird in Palestine. Its huge wings are suggestive in the vision of carrying power to bear away the offal and garbage of wickedness.

Shinar was the ancient name of the land which formed part of the kingdom of Babylonia (Genesis 10:10). The tower of Babel was built in Shinar. Opposition to God was the motive for the tower of Babel, and such opposition is at the foundation of all wickedness.

The Jews would have been well advised to take note of this vision and its meaning, as it surely would have been expounded to them by the prophet Zechariah. The leaders of the Jews used their authority and influence to persuade the Jewish people to reform their lives and their manner of worship. Unfortunately the leaders met with only partial success, as we read in Ezra 9:5-15; and 10:1-17.

## **8. THE FOUR CHARIOTS; 6:1-8**

1. *Then I turned and raised my eyes and looked, and behold, four chariots were coming from between two mountains, and the mountains were mountains of bronze.*
2. *With the first chariot were red horses, with the second chariot black horses,*
3. *With the third chariot white horses, and with the fourth chariot dappled horses – strong steeds.*
4. *Then I answered and said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?”*
5. *And the angel answered and said to me, “These are four spirits of heaven, who go out from their station before the Lord of all the earth.*
6. *“The one with the black horses is going to the north country, the white are going after them, and the dappled are going towards the south country.”*
7. *Then the strong steeds went out, eager to go, that they might walk to and fro throughout the earth. And he said, “Go, walk to and fro throughout the earth.” So they walked to and fro throughout the earth.*
8. *And he called to me, and spoke to me, saying, “See, those who go towards the north country have given rest to my Spirit in the north country.”*

The vision of the four chariots gave instruction to the Jewish leaders as well as to the people concerning the prospects for the immediate future.

Chariots and horses were much used in battle, in invasions as well as in defence in earlier times. They were an important branch of the military organisation, second only to mounted horsemen. The horsemen of the northern plains were in great demand when foreign invaders threatened Judah and Israel, as we read in Judges 1:19; 4:3,13; 1 Kings 4:26; 10:26; 2 Chronicles 9:25-28, and Habakkuk 1:6-8.

The vision of the four chariots suggests that the Ruler of Judah and Israel, namely the LORD God, was well equipped for the defence of His people who were then settled in their own land.

The horses and chariots in the vision were sent to the north and the south, having come out from between the mountains of bronze, which means that one mountain would be to the east and the other to the west.

There were two principal entrances into the land of Canaan; the one on the north by way of the head waters of the Euphrates River to a pass in the mountains, and the other from the south by way of Egypt. The desert on the east and the Mediterranean on the west were two bulwarks against invasion from those directions, appropriately symbolised as mountains of bronze. There was, therefore, no need to send horses and chariots either to the desert on the east or to the sea on the west.

Nebuchadnezzar's headquarters were in Babylonia to the east, but his invasions were from the north, taking advantage of the natural gateway into Palestine. Subsequently the hordes of plainsmen from Meshech, Tubal and Gomar went down also from the north. The LORD used these invaders to drive out the nations which had taken possession of Palestine during the absence of the Jews in Babylonia. These latter invaders were in turn driven out before the return of the LORD's people from Babylonia. Ezekiel prophesied of these developments in chapters 38 and 39 (38:1-23; 39:1-22). Horses and chariots were among the spoil when the Medes and Persians took control of Palestine.

The predatory activities of Gog of Magog as prophesied and described in Ezekiel 38 and 39 are relevant here, but too extensive and detailed to be discussed in this commentary. Suffice it to say that the prophecies of Zechariah and Ezekiel are in full agreement, and the understanding of Gog of Magog (not Gog and Magog as in Revelation 20:8), thoroughly expounded by Ernest Henniges in the journal, the New Covenant Advocate, in the issues of November and December 1915, January 1916 and April 1934, is confirmed by this vision given to Zechariah of the black horses sent to the north.

The chariot and black horses sent to the north, as we read in verse 6, represented the devastations spoken of by Ezekiel when the northern hordes were driven out of Palestine.

The white horses following represented the conditions of peace which followed, and which God indicated He would maintain. The maintenance of peace was accomplished by the long reign of the Persians.

The fourth chariot with dappled and strong horses, sent to the south, represented protection of the southern entrance to Palestine.

But what of the chariot with the red horses? The colour red suggests persecution and bloodshed, as symbolised in the red horse in Revelation 6:4, and it is possible that there were elements within the nation of Israel at that time that would have rebelled and stirred up sedition against the Persian Empire.

The word translated “*earth*” in verse 7 should really be “*land*”, for the land of Canaan is meant in the context, not the earth in general. Had the red horses been allowed to roam at will, as they seemed ready to do in verse 7, they might have stirred up trouble and bloodshed among the returned Jews. But God commanded otherwise, and the red horses walked up and down as guardians of peace.

The horses and chariots of this vision given to Zechariah were appropriate symbols of God’s sovereignty over His people and His preparedness to defend them. He had delivered His people from Babylonia and had seen them settled again in their own land.

An example of God’s preparedness to defend His people is seen in 2 Kings chapters 6 and 7. The King of Syria had sent his forces of men, horses and chariots to take Elisha prisoner, because Elisha, a prophet of God, was able to warn the King of Israel of the movements of any invading army. And so it was that a quiet and stealthy raid was planned to capture Elisha and remove him from Samaria to Syria. The Syrian forces came by night and surrounded the city of Dothan, where Elisha was.

When Elisha’s servant rose next morning and saw the city surrounded by horses and chariots, he was afraid. But Elisha said to him, “*Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them*”. Then, in answer to Elisha’s prayer, his servant was given a vision; “*and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha*” (2 Kings 6:15 -17).

In this way God's protective power was symbolised, for none of these horses and chariots of fire was actually used in Elisha's defence. Elisha was saved by a miraculous blinding of the invaders by the LORD (2 Kings 6:18), and the sending away of the forces of Syria back to the King of Syria.

Thus God protected both Elisha and the kingdom of Israel from the Syrians. The Psalmist wrote, *"The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them"* (Psalm 34:7). When the people of Israel were obedient, God protected them, because they trusted in God's power, and did not trust in the arm of flesh as did the heathen nations (2 Chronicles 32:7,8).

We in the Gospel Age live in different times under a different covenant, but we do well to see by faith that God will protect us when we are obedient to His will, as the Apostle Paul wrote, *"If God be for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31). (See also Hebrews 13:6 and Psalm 118:6 in this connection.)

In Zechariah 6:8 we have the statement that God's spirit had been given rest in the north country. This would seem to mean that God would no more punish the nations of the north for their ravages on the Holy Land during the time that the nation of Israel was captive in Babylonia.

This eighth vision given to Zechariah was evidently intended as an assurance to the Jews that God would watch over them and protect them from outside interference, and would also help them to maintain peace and order amongst themselves.

The duration of this peace and security would rest largely with the Israelites themselves, according to the terms of the covenant, that if they were obedient and remained faithful to God, they would be protected and would prosper (Leviticus 26:3-39). Also, Leviticus 26:40-45 shows that God's mercy would be extended to them during and following their captivity in Babylonia and was dependent upon their repentance for their wrong-doing.

Therefore the Jews, by the favour of God, were granted an opportunity to reform, to abandon former wrong practices and to worship Him in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem with sincerity and goodwill.

## 9. THE CROWNING OF JOSHUA; 6:9-15

9. *Then the word of the LORD came to me saying:*
10. *“Receive the gift from the captives – from Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah, who have come from Babylon – and go the same day and enter the house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah.*
11. *“Take the silver and gold, make an elaborate crown, and set it in the head of Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest.*
12. *“Then speak to him, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, saying: “Behold, the man whose name is the BRANCH! From his place he shall branch out, And he shall build the temple of the LORD;*
13. *Yes, he shall build the temple of the LORD. He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on his throne; So he shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.” ’*
14. *“Now the elaborate crown shall be for a memorial in the temple of the LORD for Helem, Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Hen the son of Zephaniah.*
15. *“Even those who are far away shall come and build the temple of the LORD. Then you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. And this shall come to pass if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God.”*

In Zechariah chapter 3 Joshua the High Priest was described as the first of the line of rulers over Israel who would occupy the double office of High Priest and Ruler, and as Ruler would replace the kings who were desired by Israel contrary to God's wishes and knowledge of what would be best for them. But God, in His longsuffering and mercy acceded to the people's request and allowed them to have a king to rule over them (1 Samuel 8:1-22).

Until the time of Joshua no one person was permitted to be both High Priest and Ruler. But it was at God's direction that Joshua should be installed in this double office, and this was accomplished in the presence of witnesses after the manner described in verses 9 to 15 of Zechariah 6.

But who were Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah who in verse 10 were called as witnesses?

They were evidently Jews who belonged to “the captivity”, a term used to describe the Jews taken captive to Babylonia and their descendants, many of whom remained in Babylonia, notwithstanding the availability of the Holy Land for resettlement. The witnesses named might have been merchants who travelled back and forth, and hence in a good position to tell the Jews in

Babylonia what was taking place in their homeland. Or they might have been members of the priestly tribe and had been in touch with Zechariah, who was of that tribe (Nehemiah 12:4; Zechariah 1:1). We are not given any further information about them, so we must take it that they were faithful Jews worthy to be called as witnesses to Joshua's crowning.

Gold and silver are mentioned in verse 11 to be used to make a crown for Joshua as a memorial in the temple of the Lord, mentioned again in verse 14. Nothing is said of the source of the gold and silver. The precious metals might have been offerings brought to the rebuilt temple, or they might have been provided by Zechariah from other sources. In any case we are not told, so we must leave it at that.

We remember that Moses was told to place in the ark of the tabernacle Aaron's rod that budded and a bowl of manna as memorials of God's dealings with Israel (Hebrews 9:4). To place in the temple a crown specially made would be useful evidence in later times that Joshua had been placed by the LORD at the head of the kingdom as well as of the priesthood.

Verse 15 concludes with a brief prophecy. Joshua and Zerubbabel were to build the temple. They were the directors, responsible for the work. But the people were expected to join in the work. According to the plans and specifications given through Ezekiel in chapters 40 to 44 of his prophecy, the building was to be large and imposing, and would take several years to complete.

The LORD, through Zechariah, foretold the coming to Jerusalem of workers willing to participate in the rebuilding of the temple, some coming long distances, and gave the fulfilment of this prediction as something to be noted by the Jews.

Some read verse 15 as though it says that many shall come from afar and worship at the temple after it had been built.

But what the LORD said was that Jews then living far away would come and assist in the building operations then about to begin. God graciously gave His promises, including the promise of help and support, but He expected His people to enter into the spirit of His gifts and do their part either as participants in the building work or as sympathisers who would help if they could.

In the comments on Zechariah chapter 3 it was said that in being set apart as Ruler and High Priest, Joshua was made as a symbol of the One to come. Psalm 110:4 states, *"The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek"*. The Messiah to come was to be like Melchizedek, a king and a priest.

Until Zechariah's day the combined office of King and Priest had not existed among the Jews, but then Joshua was constituted and installed as both Ruler and High Priest. Such a constitution and installation were not a fulfillment of Psalm 110:4, but a symbol and sign that God had not altered His purpose. The Jews were given the opportunity to see what the combined office of Ruler and High Priest would accomplish. Succeeding history shows that even with the best intentions and facilities, the Jews under the Law could not gain righteousness nor could they bring in an enduring peace to themselves or those around them.

Only God can bring in everlasting righteousness and cause peace to flourish throughout the earth, and He has devised and made known His plan for accomplishing these very things. The plan of God for world peace concerns more than the Jews, who are only a small fraction of humanity.

Joshua the Ruler and High Priest was a man of faith who did all he could for the Jewish people, but could do little for the Gentiles because the Law Covenant applied only to Israel. The Law granted permission for Gentiles to join themselves to Israel by becoming proselytes, and there was an outer court in later temples for Gentiles, as indicated in Ezekiel 40:7 and 20, and also in Herod's temple, but only a few Gentiles availed themselves of this privilege.

Jews scattered throughout the world could by their example of godly living show Gentiles that the worship of Yahweh was superior to the worship of heathen deities. But in this respect the majority of Jews failed lamentably, as Malachi the prophet declared. Their failure to glorify Yahweh among the nations was also mentioned many years later by the Apostle Paul in Romans 2:17-24.

When, therefore, we read the words recorded by Zechariah as God's prophet concerning placing the crown upon the head of Joshua, we must interpret the words in harmony with the vision of chapter 3, which declared that Joshua was for a sign to the children of Israel, and a symbol of the coming One, *"the BRANCH"*.

### **The Branch and the Temple (vs. 12,13)**

The counsel of peace between them both means that the office of king, ruler or judge on the one hand and the office of high priest on the other would not be in conflict, though united in one person. Both offices conducted and administered in harmony would secure the material well-being of the subjects as well as meeting as far as was possible their spiritual needs in those days under the Law.



If Joshua was a symbol and sign of the royal priest, who was the royal priest still to come who would build a temple? And what kind of temple would the royal priest build?

The new temple to be built was not the temple built by Joshua and Zerubbabel, nor the one rebuilt by Herod on its ruins. A new dispensation, a new age was to come into being, and an entirely new temple not made with hands nor constructed of stone, bricks and timber was to be built by the Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 14:58).

Jesus recognised the temple at Jerusalem built by Herod as God's house when He entered it and drove out the money-changers and the sellers of oxen, sheep and doves, saying, *"Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise"* (John 2:13-17).

After Jesus' death and resurrection, the temple at Jerusalem was no longer God's house, and the ceremonies and offering of sacrifices required by the Law were no longer acceptable to God.

Jesus had offered the one true and everlasting sacrifice for the sins of the world, superseding and doing away with the Law Covenant and all of its offerings and requirements.

After Joshua's day the Jews had a stormy history under Gentile powers as foretold in the eleventh chapter of Daniel. These historical developments are discussed in the book ***"Notes on the Book of Daniel"***, chapter 11, part 1.

When the Lord Jesus came to His people, peace was maintained by the Roman Caesars, and Palestine was in a condition suited to the ministry of John the Baptist and the ministry of the Lord Jesus and His apostles. There were here and there persons trying to stir up sedition, but the vast majority of the people were obedient to the Emperor and Roman rule. Jesus and His disciples freely travelled about preaching the gospel of the kingdom, not entirely without opposition, however, because the Jewish leaders, through envy and malice, sought to persecute and destroy the new religion with its message of salvation in Jesus Christ.

When Jesus drove out the defilers of the old temple, the Jews asked for a sign of His authority to act as He did. In His reply our Lord gave assurance that He would build a temple, clearly indicating that the old temple then standing had fulfilled its purpose and was soon to be destroyed. Jesus said, *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. ... But he spake of the temple of his body"* (John 2:18-21).

After the Lord's resurrection the disciples recalled these words, and we read that they believed them, and that they also believed "*the scripture*" (John 18:22). What other scripture could this be than the words of Zechariah addressed to Joshua in those earlier times concerning the royal priest still to come? "*Even he shall build the temple of the LORD*" (Zechariah 6:13).

But the LORD would not build another temple of stone. The temple would be a spiritual temple, as we shall see. Even in the Jewish temple the stones and material objects were not the most important features. It was God's presence that hallowed the old temple. There he would meet with His people, and commune with the high priest. From the temple His blessing would be given when the sacrifices were duly offered and conducted according to the Law (Exodus 29:42-45).

## **C. THE FASTS AND THE FAILURE OF THE PEOPLE**

**Zechariah 7:1 - 8:23**

### **Reflections on the Infallible Historian**

From very early times many books of history have been written. Some are simply chronicles, informing the reader of dates and events that are political, military and ecclesiastical. Other historical accounts seek to analyse the underlying causes which led to the religious controversy, the crisis in politics, or the clash of arms and subsequent warfare. The second kind of historical accounts dwells more on the characters and probable motives of the main participants in the events portrayed, and such accounts are more interesting and rewarding to read than a mere list of dates and record of events.

In any history written by men and women we should allow for possible bias and inaccuracies. All historians are more or less dependent upon the labours of those who preceded them, and upon the results of their searches of local records and traditions. The best histories are those whose authors are known to have exercised relatively unbiased judgment in their selection of incidents and principal events, and in their analyses of the characters and motives of the chief protagonists.

There is, however, always a limitation on writers' abilities to analyse the characters and motives of people, namely, that no person can read the state of mind and heart of another except as words and actions reveal it. The Scripture tells us that *"out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh"*, and *"...out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, ... thefts, false witness, blasphemies"* (Matthew 12:33–35; 15:19).

Historians labour under the difficulties of insufficient or biased statements of evidence, inadequate records, possible mis-statements concerning who was or was not the aggressor in a combat, and the prejudices of even well-meaning witnesses and chroniclers; so that careful research and wisdom are needed to discover the truth, or as much truth as possible, behind actions and events that have occurred in the past.

### **God as Historian**

The one historian in whom we may place complete confidence is the LORD God Himself. Centuries ago the Almighty foretold many events which subsequently came to pass and therefore became events of history. And it stands to reason that He Who could accurately describe events to come, can also describe accurately those events after they have taken place and become facts of history.

The historical accounts recorded in the Bible are in all respects superior to historical accounts written by human beings, because God was the author of Biblical history, and God is infallible in knowledge and unerring in the choice of what information should be presented as relevant. Moreover, God has the advantage over every historian in that He can read the hearts of all, from kings to peasants, and from ecclesiastical leaders to the humblest worshippers. As the Apostle Paul declared in Hebrews 4:13, *“all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do”*. Similar thoughts are given in Proverbs 15:9-11.

James, one of the pillars of the early church (Galatians 2:9), said at the conference in Jerusalem held to consider the correct attitude of Gentile converts towards Jewish Law, *“Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world”* (Acts 15:16). However, although God from the beginning was able to foresee future events, He did not at the beginning reveal to mankind all that He foresaw. His method was to reveal from time to time such knowledge of the future as He considered wise for people to know.

Sometimes only an inkling was given, such as the prophecy that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). At other times more precise information was given to the effect that Israel would wander forty years in the wilderness (Numbers 14:34; Acts 7:42), and later that Israel would serve the king of Babylonia for seventy years (Jeremiah 25:16). The LORD God at times took His people into His confidence, as Amos said, *“Surely the LORD God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets”* (Amos 3:7).

Some communications from God were directly given by an audible voice, while at other times He used angels and also the prophets to foretell events. Similarly, God used agents to record events either as they occurred or afterwards. God's history is no less His production because it was recorded by His servants or agents, than is the history of the human historian when recorded by a writer from dictation or on computer and used afterwards by the printing press.

God moved holy men of old to speak and write by the power of His Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). The accuracy of God's predictions has been proved by events, by their coming to pass in the manner and at the time foretold.

### **History Recorded by Zechariah**

God's prophecy is history foretold. In some cases God's prophecy is difficult to understand until events make clear what God had predicted. But in Israel's case God told them in very plain terms what would happen if His people walked in ways contrary to His requirements and to His Covenant with them. And so it happened that when punishment came upon Israel,

after much patience and long-suffering on God's part, there was no difficulty in recognising the punishments as fulfilments of God's predictions.

In the comments thus far, it has been noted that chapter 6 concluded a series of visions given to Zechariah. The present chapter under discussion is in part an historical review. The historical review was given to Zechariah by the word of the LORD, thus ensuring its accuracy and countering in advance any opposition to it that might arise, and also any allegations regarding the truthfulness of the review. The LORD God as the source of the inspired word related not only the facts of Israel's wrong-doing, but also showed the state of the people's hearts, by which He judged them deserving of the penalties prescribed in His Covenant with them.

The restored temple at Jerusalem was completed in the sixth year of Darius Hystaspis the king (Ezra 6:15). That was the year 515 BC according to the NIV footnote. The visions given to Zechariah and described in chapters 1 to 6 were for the most part given to Zechariah in the second year of Darius. Those visions encouraged the Jews in the rebuilding operations, and answered a number of questions regarding the status of the Jews then returned to their own land, but who were still under foreign rule. The kingdom of the Medes and Persians was then in control instead of the kingdom of Babylonia. The Jews needed instruction on how they should conduct themselves.

Chapter 7 deals with another difficulty that confronted some of the returned exiles. Under the Law certain feasts were prescribed to be observed unto the LORD (Leviticus 23:1-21; 33-44). Only one fast was compulsory, namely that observed on the Day of Atonement, when the people were to afflict their souls (deny themselves; NIV) and confess their sins (Leviticus 23:27-32).

Voluntary fasts and voluntary offerings were at the discretion of the individuals. But when the Jews were taken captive to Babylonia they of themselves set apart certain days as general fasts. These were to commemorate events connected with Nebuchadnezzar's invasions of the Holy Land. It was concerning these fasts that some Jews were uncertain about continuing them because the Jewish people had been restored to their own land. In verse 3 of chapter 7 the query was stated regarding the fast of the fifth month, but the LORD in His answer in verse 5 mentioned also the fast of the seventh month.

At this stage we need to be aware of the historical background to Zechariah's writings. From 2 Kings 24 we learn that at first Nebuchadnezzar was satisfied with the tribute he received. But when the last of the Jewish rulers failed to pay the tribute required, Nebuchadnezzar took strong measures. He besieged Jerusalem, broke its resistance and took many prisoners –

princes and nobles as well as craftsmen and smiths – along with treasures from the temple. He left some agriculturalists to continue the productivity of the country, as well as some priests, officers and others, over whom Nebuchadnezzar placed Zedekiah, who reigned for eleven years.

Zedekiah, however, did evil in the sight of the LORD and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. And so it happened in the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign that Nebuchadnezzar again besieged Jerusalem. The siege lasted two years (2 Kings 25:1,2). Famine prevailed because of the siege, and Zedekiah and his men sought to escape. They were pursued and overtaken by the Chaldees, the fleeing army of the Jews was scattered, and Zedekiah was taken prisoner. Then followed the burning of the house of the LORD, the palaces of the wealthy and all the houses of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar's "*captain of the guard*." (2 Kings 25:9).

The walls of Jerusalem were also broken down. More captives were taken away, and some of the priests and principal or chief men were slain.

All this took place in the fifth month (the month of Ab), on the seventh day of the month in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar (about 596 BC). The Jews subsequently kept a fast of the fifth month in Babylonia in commiseration over the destruction of the LORD's house, the slaying of many of the people and the breaking down of the walls of the city (2 Kings 25:8-21).

*"The poor of the land"* still remained, and Nebuchadnezzar placed another governor over them, Gedaliah. Gedaliah was subservient to Nebuchadnezzar, and advocated co-operation and compliance, saying, *"Fear not to be the servants of the Chaldees; dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon; and it shall be well with you"* (2 Kings 25:24). But such subservience to Babylonia was not acceptable to the Jewish leaders and people that remained. Gedaliah was assassinated, and all the people fled to Egypt *"for they were afraid of the Chaldees"* (2 Kings 25:26). Further details and information are provided in 2 Chronicles 36 and Jeremiah chapters 39 to 44.

Another fast of the seventh month (Tisri) was instituted to commemorate these later events, which left the land of Judah desolate. The seventh month was the one in which, according to the Law, the Day of Atonement occurred, the day of national fasting and lamenting their sins by the people. But at the time of these events, the Jewish people were away from their own land, with no suitable place to offer atonement sacrifices, and no high priest, as God's representative, capable of pronouncing the forgiveness of their sins. The Jewish people had to suffer the punishment foretold: seventy years of subjugation in a foreign land (Jeremiah 25:1-11).

But later, in Zechariah's day, the seventy years of captivity were at an end, and the temple at Jerusalem was being rebuilt. The people wanted to know if they should continue the fasts of the fifth and seventh months.

## **1. OBEDIENCE BETTER THAN FASTING; 7:1-7**

1. *Now in the fourth year of King Darius it came to pass that the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, on the fourth day of the ninth month, which is Chislev,*
2. *When the people sent Sherezer with Regem-Melech and his men, to the house of God, to pray before the LORD,*
3. *And to ask the priests who were in the house of the LORD of hosts, and the prophets, saying, "Should I weep in the fifth month and fast as I have done for so many years?"*
4. *Then the word of the LORD of hosts came to me saying,*
5. *"Say to all the people of the land, and to the priests: 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for me – for me?'*
6. *'When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves?'*
7. *'Should you not have obeyed the words which the LORD proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous, and the South and the Lowland were inhabited?'* "

### **The People's Question (vs. 1-3)**

In verse 2 of chapter 7 it is said that *"the people sent Sherezer with Regem-Melech and his men to the house of God, to pray before the LORD"*. The KJV has "they" instead of "the people", while the RV has *"Now they of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-Melech and their men, to entreat the favour of the LORD"*, and has a different suggested reading in a marginal note, *"Now they of Bethel, even Sharezer ... had sent"*.

It seems that Bethel has to be taken into account from its mention in Ezra 2 in connection with the return of the Jews to their own land after the Babylonian captivity. Bethel is a name familiar from the days of Abraham. It was the place where Jeroboam set up one of his altars for the worship of the golden calves he had made. Bethel is approximately twenty kilometres (twelve miles) north of Jerusalem, and Jeroboam intended to hold services of idol worship there and turn the Israelites away from the worship of God at Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:25-33).

When the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel was overturned by the Assyrian king Shalmaneser, and the people taken captive to Assyria, colonists from the east were settled in the northern kingdom in the place of the captive Israelites. The full account of these events is recorded in 2 Kings 17.

The Assyrians recognised many gods, and believed that every land had its own particular god. So they considered it wise to secure the favour, as they thought, of *“the god of the land”* by retaining numbers of priests to teach the people the religion of the land. Thus was developed the Samaritan religion – part Israelitish and part pagan. These settlers became known as *“the people of the land”*, and this expression in chapter 5 suggests that the enquiry of verses 2 and 3 was made at Bethel, where Jeroboam and his successors had maintained their idolatrous worship until the Assyrian conquest.

The request for instruction concerning the fast of the fifth month was evidently made to the priests left behind by the Assyrians to teach the people the religion of the land. The descendants of these people were probably still to be found there after the return of the Jews from Babylonia.

From Ezra 2:28 we learn that men of Bethel and Ai (a town near Bethel) returned from Babylonia with the host led by Zerubbabel. The king of Babylonia had conquered the whole of Samaria, as well as the land of Judah and Benjamin, so it would seem that the king of Babylonia had carried away people from Bethel and Ai with the captives from Jerusalem.

When Zerubbabel and Joshua entered the holy land with the returning captives, it was their duty to settle the people as far as possible in the cities and districts formerly occupied by their families. Every family was to be settled in the territory of its tribe. In the list given in Ezra 2 we see that a distinction is made between the returned Jews with their genealogical records, and the men mentioned in verses 27 and 28, *“the men of Michmas”* and *“the men of Bethel and Ai”* who were evidently unable to trace their genealogies.

Michmas was a village about eleven kilometres from Jerusalem in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin. Isaiah 10:28 mentions both Ai and Michmas in the prophecy concerning the Assyrian King Sennacherib's invasion. They were subjugated at that time, but Jerusalem was spared in answer to King Hezekiah's prayers (Isaiah 37). Jerusalem's subjugation did not begin until it was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylonia.

The Septuagint reading of verse 2 throws more light on this subject: *“And Sarasar and Arbeseer the king and his men sent to Bethel, and that to propitiate the LORD.”* Confirmation of the Septuagint use of the words “the King” is found in Strong's Concordance, which explains that the Hebrew word ‘melech’ means ‘king’ (#4428). Regem-Melech therefore means ‘Regem the King’.



The name 'Arbeseer' in the Septuagint may be taken as the Greek form of the name 'Regem'. Regem would have been king of *"the people of the land"*, or at least some of them, rather than a king such as Nebuchadnezzar or Shalmaneser who ruled over whole empires. He would have been king in a local sense.

From all this it would seem that representatives were sent to Bethel to enquire about the fasts of the fifth and seventh months. At an earlier time there had been a school of prophets at Bethel (2 Kings 2:2,3,) and later Bethel became one of the two principal places of worship in Samaria. The men of Bethel and Ai were not Jews but were nevertheless taken captive to Babylonia. When they had all returned they were considering how worship to the LORD was to be conducted. It was only natural for the people to inquire first at Bethel which was then being rebuilt, as were other cities.

It seems reasonable to infer that at Bethel the inquirers were referred to the priests at Jerusalem. The priests at Jerusalem were members of the Levitical tribe, whose duty it was to instruct the people and to encourage the worship of the true God. And so it seems that the enquiry brought by Sherezer and Regem-Melech (Sarasar and Arbeseer the king, according to the Septuagint) reached the LORD in the temple at Jerusalem. That enquiry was answered by the LORD through His prophet Zechariah.

### **The LORD's Response to the Enquiry (v. 4-7)**

The LORD's response was firstly a comment on the state of heart which characterised many of the captives in Babylonia, who joined in the fasting and mourning in the fifth month of every year during the whole seventy year captivity.

The LORD answered their enquiry by asking three searching questions, demonstrating His ability to read their hearts. The three questions are recorded in verses 5, 6 and 7, and are expressed rhetorically, that is to say, the questions are worded in such a way that the answers are clearly implied.

The questions were as follows:

1. When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for me - for me? (v.5).
2. When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves? (v.6).
3. Should you not have obeyed the words which the Lord proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous, and the South and the Lowland were inhabited? (v.7).

The LORD is saying to the Israelites that they were really mourning for themselves in their situation as captives, and not showing repentance and remorse for their disobedience, nor were they seeking God's forgiveness, and rendering to Him the worship and honour that were His due. They ate and drank selfishly without thankfulness in their hearts to God for providing the food and drink so necessary for their health and well-being.

In former times Jerusalem prospered under God, and the land of Palestine was settled and well populated from north to south. In these former times it would have been wise for the Israelites to heed the warnings sent to them by God through His prophets, and resolve to listen to God and obey Him.

The priests were included in the rebuke. Also included in the rebuke were *"the people of the land"* in Samaria who were not carried away to Babylonia, but remained as settlers where the Assyrians had placed them. The Assyrian king had given the people Israelitish priests to direct the people's worship toward *"the god of the land"*, in keeping with Assyrian beliefs. Here is history expressed in question form with the answers implied in the questions themselves.

These questions were, of course, the same questions that had been put to Israel long before the captivity in Babylonia. Further comments will be made on verses 8 to 14 of Zechariah 7 in the following chapter.

## **2. DISOBEDIENCE RESULTED IN EXILE; 7: 8-14**

8. *Then the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, saying,*
9. *"Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Execute true justice, Show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother.*
10. *Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother.'*
11. *"But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear.*
12. *"Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Thus great wrath came from the LORD of hosts.*
13. *"Therefore it happened, that just as he proclaimed and they would not hear, so they called out and I would not listen," says the LORD of hosts.*
14. *"But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations which they had not known. Thus the land became desolate after them, so that no one passed through or returned. For they made the pleasant land desolate."*

Verses 9 and 10 are a summary of what God required of Israel, but verse 11 describes how His messages were received. *“But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear.”*

This is unfortunately what occurred. But priests and people went still further. Not only did they stop their ears, but they hardened their hearts against God’s messages through Isaiah, Jeremiah and other prophets of former times that brought down on them the wrath of God.

The continued hardening of the people’s hearts during Jesus’ earthly ministry caused Jesus to look on them *“with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts”* (Mark 3:5). As we well know, the wrath of God came upon the Jewish nation *“to the uttermost”* when they hardened their hearts and rejected their Messiah and subsequently the Gospel message (1 Thessalonians 2:16).

The captivity of the ten-tribe kingdom by the Assyrians, and then of the whole land of Palestine by the Babylonians were the physical manifestations of God’s wrath toward Israel. As far back as the days of Moses, the people had been forewarned of calamities if they persisted in disobedience and evil, but they gave no heed.

So finally, as they would not hear God when He pleaded with them, God refused to listen when they pleaded with Him to take away those calamities, as stated in verse 13. Therefore God scattered them *“with a whirlwind”*, as expressed in verse 14. Similar prophecies are also recorded in Micah 1:1-9; Habakkuk 1:6-10; and 2 Kings 17:18-20.

The LORD’S response to the enquiries at Bethel was that the people would be taken away captive, and the land would lie desolate for seventy years.

### **God’s True Judgment and Mercy**

It seems likely that the delegation headed by Sherezer and Regem-Melech took sacrificial offerings with them to *“intreat the face of the LORD”* as the KJV margin of verse 2 indicates. Such offerings, if presented at Bethel, could not be accepted by God because He did not recognise Bethel as a place where offerings would be acceptable to Him. Only Jerusalem was so recognised from the time Solomon built the glorious temple to the LORD. All the people knew this, including the rebellious ten tribes and the priests who attached themselves to Dan and to Bethel.

But God could not, even at Jerusalem, accept offerings from the people unless they repented of their evil ways and sought the LORD’s forgiveness according to the requirements of the Law. We can see from the reforms

brought about by kings Hezekiah and Josiah that the LORD God was willing to receive back individuals of the ten tribes whenever they humbled themselves and cleansed themselves according to the rites of the Law. Provision was also made for receiving proselytes from among the mixed peoples of the land (2 Chronicles 30:5-11,18-20; 35:1-19). The priests consulted by the delegation should have been well aware of God's provisions for mercy and forgiveness, and how those provisions could be made available to those who sought them.

There was also another truth from God which Zechariah proclaimed. That truth was that while animal sacrifices were necessary as part of the Israelites' duty in the worship of God, yet such sacrifices were pleasing to God only if offered as true acts of worship from the heart, and accompanied by corresponding actions in their lives as verses 8, 9 and 10 tell us.

The question being asked was as follows - since the temple was then being rebuilt in Jerusalem, was it still necessary to keep the fast of the fifth month which commemorated the burning of the first temple by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC (Jeremiah 52:12,13)?

The fast in the seventh month commemorated the assassination of Gedaliah, the Jewish governor of Judah (2 Kings 25:23-25). These fasts were initiated from good motives, but they were man-made, they were not commanded by God, and were observed in a self-righteous and selfish way, as verse 6 indicates.

When the people of the land commiserated themselves for seventy years by fasts in the fifth month and the seventh month, their thought was not for the departure of God's glory and the ruin of His temple. The people's sins did not worry them, nor did they pray with their fasts toward Jerusalem, as did Daniel and other godly exiles. They fasted to themselves and ate to themselves, which means that they simply served their own comfort and convenience. The LORD told them plainly that there was no true worship in their fasts and feasts, they were simply formalities based on selfish considerations.

The people's selfish attitude in religious observance was matched by their selfish attitude to one another. They were unjust and unmerciful in their dealings with their brethren, the widows and fatherless received no consideration, while the poor and the strangers were oppressed. Instead of thinking in their hearts how much good they could do, they were constantly devising schemes for getting the better of their brethren.

The LORD's reply indicated also that in their request for an answer to the question of fasting in the fifth month, the people were moved by selfish considerations. They saw that Yahweh, the true and only God of Israel and

Judah, was again showing favour to His people and demonstrating power on their behalf.

The people of the land evidently did not come forward and assist the returning exiles when they first returned under Cyrus's decree, nor did they take any action when the surrounding pagan peoples opposed the rebuilding of the temple, and delayed its completion for fifteen years. Eventually, when Darius Hystaspis issued his decree authorising the Jews to continue with the building operations, the people in their selfishness wanted a share in the good things, and sought to befriend the Jews and gain the favour of the God of the Hebrews. This seems to be behind the reason for the request concerning the continuation of the fasting.

It is in accordance with Deuteronomy 28:1-13 and 30:5-10, 15, 16 that, had the people heeded God's word through the prophets, they would not have experienced captivity, and would have had no need for the fasts about which they were enquiring, as the LORD's word in verse 7 indicates.

### **3. THE FUTURE CONCERNING JERUSALEM; 8:1-23**

1. *Again the word of the LORD of hosts came, saying,*
2. *"Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'I am zealous for Zion with great zeal; with great fervour I am zealous for her.'*
3. *"Thus says the LORD: 'I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the LORD of hosts, the Holy Mountain.'*
4. *"Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age.*
5. *The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.'*
6. *Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'If it is marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, will it also be marvellous in my eyes?' says the LORD of hosts.*
7. *"Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Behold, I will save my people from the land of the east and from the land of the west;*
8. *I will bring them back, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. They shall be my people and I will be their God, in truth and righteousness.'*
9. *"Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Let your hands be strong, you who have been hearing in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, who were in the day that the foundation was laid for the house of the LORD of hosts, that the temple might be built.*

10. *For before these days there were no wages for man nor any hire for beast; there was no peace from the enemy for whoever went out or came in; for I set all men, everyone against his neighbour.*
11. *'But now I will not treat the remnant of this people as in the former days,' says the LORD of hosts.*
12. *'For the seed shall be prosperous, the vine shall give its fruit, the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew. I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.*
13. *And it shall come to pass that just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you, and you shall be a blessing. Do not fear, let your hands be strong.'*
14. *For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Just as I determined to punish you when your fathers provoked me to wrath,' says the LORD of hosts, "And I would not relent,*
15. *So again in these days I am determined to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Do not fear.*
16. *These are the things you shall do: speak each man the truth to his neighbour; give judgment in your gates for truth, justice and peace;*
17. *Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbour; and do not love a false oath. For all of these are things that I hate,' says the LORD".*
18. *Then the word of the LORD of hosts came to me saying,*
19. *"Thus says the LORD of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah therefore love truth and peace.'*
20. *"Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'People shall yet come, inhabitants of many cities;*
21. *The inhabitants of one city shall go to another saying, "Let us continue to go and pray before the LORD, and seek the LORD of hosts. I myself will go also."*
22. *Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD.'*
23. *"Thus says the LORD of hosts: in those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you." ' "*

Chapter 8 of Zechariah should be read in connection with chapter 7, because the message in chapter 8 is an explanation of God's position regarding the returned Israelites and the people of the land. Some of the people of the land followed either pure paganism or the Samaritan mixture of pagan and Hebrew religions, and it was possible that the returned Israelites might have been influenced by these practices of disobedience to the LORD's Law Covenant requirements.

### **Jerusalem, Holy City for the Israelites (vs. 1-6)**

The message in chapter 8 repeats what had been stated before, namely, that Israel was God's chosen people separated unto Himself from all other nations, and that Jerusalem was the place He had chosen to place His name and manifest His presence.

The fact that God had seen fit to punish His people with seventy years bondage to Babylonia made no difference to their relationship to Him as His chosen people. The punishment was part of His dealings with them because they were His people, and had to be justly dealt with by Him because they had repeatedly disobeyed in spite of frequent warnings of punishment for disobedience and exhortations to be obedient and to avoid God's wrath.

God was jealous for Jerusalem, His holy city, not Bethel or some other city, and through His prophet went on to tell what would yet come to pass.

It is important to note here that some students of Biblical prophecy place the words of Zechariah 8:3-15 as having fulfilment in the Kingdom Age. Such an application of these words seems to disregard the time the prophecy was given and the immediate future at that time.

When Zechariah gave the message in the fourth year of Darius, the temple had not been completed, even though the work was making good progress. Faith was still required on the part of the children of Israel that there would be longevity of residence and settled conditions. Daniel had foretold five world empires which would succeed one another. Babylonia had gone, and Medo-Persia was then in power. They wanted to know what prospect lay in store for the Jews to continue in their own land and worship at the temple then being rebuilt.

Jerusalem was still God's holy city, and Zion stood for His mountain or kingdom. The rulership of heathen nations would not prevent God from continuing to deal with His people according to all the promises of the Law Covenant, and the sending to them of His chosen prophets.

Verses 4 to 6 convey in simple language the long term Jewish tenure of the land by saying that old men would be found in Jerusalem and that the streets would be full of children playing. Their tenure was not forever, but for a long time, that is, time for many men and women to grow old, and for many generations of girls and boys to play childhood games and grow to adulthood.

We know from Biblical and secular history that the Jewish people at Jerusalem outlived three world empires: Babylonia, Medo-Persia and Greece. If this fact seemed marvellous to human eyes, the LORD replied, in the form of a rhetorical question, that it was not marvellous in His eyes, for He said He would save His people and re-establish them in their land and in Jerusalem because they remained then a peculiar treasure to Him above all people (Exodus 19:5,6).

### **Repatriation from Neighbouring Countries (vs .7-10)**

The whole number of Israelites that returned under Cyrus's decree was 42,360, besides some servants and maids - say some 50,000 in all. This was a large number of people for a single migration, but a relatively small number in comparison to the population of the whole land. So in verses 7 and 8 the LORD gave the Israelites to understand that His purpose was to increase the population by bringing in other Israelites, large numbers of whom were scattered in various countries to the east and west. The old relationship would be restored, they would be His people and He would be their God.

The point to be noticed here is the continuity of the Israelitish people. Many of the exiles preserved their racial purity, which they did because they settled in colonies. The scattered ten tribes were less likely to preserve their racial purity because they had by and large departed from the worship of the true God, and many had mixed to some degree with heathen people even while in Samaria. But those who had preserved their genealogies and could show their descent were accepted by the LORD on their return as heirs of the land of their fathers (Ezra 2:1-30).

God said in verse 8 *"And I will be their God, in truth and righteousness"*. This would be so once more, because all the arrangements under the Law for the yearly atonement for sin, and the daily and periodical offerings, could then be carried out, even though somewhat inadequately because the temple building was not yet complete. Full service could not be rendered without the holy of holies and the mercy seat, but an altar for burnt offerings had been built and was available for the purposes described in Ezra 3:1-8.



We should note that a considerable company of Jews returned from Babylonia under the leadership of Ezra, as related in Ezra 8:1-20. In addition, there were continual inflows of individuals and groups as the way opened for them to leave the land of their exile. Some who went to Jerusalem for the Passover would decide to remain, while others as traders and merchants would see the desirability of the land and decide to migrate. Many of these would not have known the land of Judah, having been born in Babylonia, the land of captivity. But if their faith was strong, they would have a love for God and the promised land of their fathers.

The particular prophecies of chapters 7 and 8 were given for the time then present and the immediate future. This understanding is indicated by the next message in verse 9, which was an exhortation to those who heard Zechariah's words, and had also heeded similar prophetic messages some years before when the foundations of the temple were laid under Zerubbabel's administration. Those indications show that the expectation of the greatly increased population was aroused in the minds of all the people.

*"For before these days there were no wages for man nor any hire for beast"* (verse 10) is another way of describing the improved conditions since the return from Babylonia. *"Before these days"* refers to the time preceding the laying of the temple foundations mentioned in verse 9. There were then *"no wages for man nor any hire for beast"* because the land was desolate.

The impression of extreme desolation and emptiness of the land is also conveyed in the last verse of chapter 7, *"But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations which they had not known. Thus the land became desolate after them, so that no one passed through or returned; for they made the pleasant land desolate"*. The walls of the city were broken down, the fields were untilled, and the vines were left unattended or destroyed. Unsettled conditions prevailed.

But all this desolation had been reversed by the coming of Zerubbabel and Joshua with the 50,000 Jews who were immediately under the necessity to raise crops for their own sustenance. As soon as was possible they were given their places in the city or their allotments of land. By his decree Cyrus provided money, food and oil to be a charge on the local governors of provinces, so the returned exiles were not in a condition of want and poverty. Besides, there were some wealthy men among them (Ezra 1 5-11; 2: 68,69; 6:3-12).

### **Both of the Houses of Israel (vs. 11-15)**

In place of desolation there was prosperity, agricultural activity, an ever-increasing population and ever-increasing wealth. God's promise to bless with material, temporal benefits was fulfilled as faithfully as were His warnings of punishment of His people for their disobedience. His people had also been a curse to the nations who took them captive because His people refused by and large to mingle with them. God's people also, unfortunately, had not kept the Law as they should have done, and had set a bad example to their heathen captors.

But God was engaged in saving the people of Judah and bringing them back to their own land in order that they might be a blessing, as indicated in verses 11 to 15. In doing this for Judah, the two-tribe kingdom, the former ten-tribe kingdom of Israel was not completely disregarded. The opportunity to be changed from a curse to a blessing among the nations was offered to both the houses of Israel. *"Do not fear"* is the exhortation, but *"let your hands be strong"* in the rebuilding of the temple. In Ezra 6:14 it is stated that the prophecies of Zechariah, with those of Haggai, were largely instrumental in securing the enthusiasm of the returned exiles for the work. Doubtless these very words were used for that purpose.

Here it seems relevant to note that this passage does not support the belief held by some Christians that the temple at Jerusalem is to be rebuilt in the Millennial or Kingdom Age. In Zechariah's day the rebuilding of the temple was an absolute necessity for the continued operation of the Law Covenant, which had still some five hundred years to run before it was nailed to Jesus' cross (Colossians 2:14).

Some of Zechariah's prophecies undoubtedly do refer to later times, such as the prophecy concerning our Lord's triumphant entry to Jerusalem (chapter nine, verse nine). The inspired Gospel writer Matthew makes it clear to us that Christ's entry into Jerusalem was the fulfilment of this prophecy of Zechariah, so we are left in no doubt as to its correct application (Matthew 21:4,5). But this fact must not be allowed to lead us astray when the evidence of the prophets and the Old Testament writers show fulfilment of the prophecies we are considering to have taken place in the time just after the return from Babylonia.

### **The Need for Study of Old Testament Prophecies**

Some Bible students may wonder why these matters need to concern us, and why we need to be interested in the correct application of these Old Testament prophecies. In response it ought to be said that these matters concern us very much, and as God's children we should strive to gain the correct understanding of His Word.

The experiences of God's people of old are profitable to us in our own lives as they remind us not to be led astray and fall into error, and so displease our heavenly Father. In addition, God's long suffering and patience and His faithfulness to His promises and His people in the past give us confidence that he will fulfil His promises to us.

Another respect in which the prophecy of verses 11 to 15 is of real value to us is in guarding us from the error of the identity of the house of Israel. The context shows that the "house" addressed was not at that time any organised body or nation, as that "house" or kingdom had been conquered by the Assyrians, and had not been reorganised.

The message of this prophecy in Zechariah is an invitation to any and all of the descendants of the ten tribes who desired God's blessing. The way for them to receive God's blessing was to join themselves to the members of the house of Judah, at that time restored to their own land. This union would be accomplished by acknowledgment that the leaders of the ten-tribes had been wrong in separating from Judah and the temple worship which God had set up at Jerusalem.

The invitation showed God's kindness, but also indicated that God regarded obedience to the Law Covenant as still incumbent on all twelve tribes. He did not at any time relieve either individual members of the twelve tribes or the twelve tribes as a whole from their obligations to the Law. We must bear in mind that the conquest of Assyria by Babylonia had placed all the Israelites in Assyria under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar and Babylonia, and many of these were taken to Babylonia with captives from Judah and Jerusalem.

So at the end of the seventy years captivity to Babylonia, the LORD's invitation to return to Him is shown to include all the descendants of Jacob wherever they lived and however disobedient their fathers had been. The LORD was ready to receive them all back to the land of promise and to meet with them as of old in the temple. Hence the invitation was to all to come and help in the rebuilding of God's holy temple and experience the blessing of the LORD and to become in turn a blessing to others.

Verse 15 was a clear reminder to members of the ten-tribe kingdom that Jerusalem was the place from which God's blessing would flow, so it is plain that they were being told not to think of themselves as a blessing until they had resumed worship at Jerusalem. It was not anticipated that all members of the twelve tribes would return at once, but the message was that their worship must be in accord with that at Jerusalem; the yearly feasts had to be kept, and they had to indicate that they had forsaken all idol worship and had returned in their hearts and minds to the one true God.

The invitation to the ten tribes to return to Judah to receive God's blessing was similar in some respects to the invitations given out by kings Hezekiah and Josiah. They sent messengers to the ten tribes inviting them to come and keep the Passover, and once more identify themselves with the true worship at Jerusalem, and many did so (2 Chronicles 30:1, 5, 6, 10-12,27; 35: 3-18). The invitation through Zechariah was to the same effect.

The alternative position was that if the ten tribes did not identify themselves with the worship at Jerusalem, God would not receive them back into His favour. He would not bless them, and consequently they would not become a blessing. Verse 8 implies that any who continued to be indifferent or rebellious would not be recognised by God as His people, nor would He regard Himself as their God.

The descendants of the ten tribes were thus put to the test, and many failed under it. They neither returned to the Holy Land as residents, nor went up to the feasts. They did not acknowledge Judah as the royal tribe, nor the Aaronic priests as the priests of God. Yet today there are some Christians who believe that the blessing of God remained with the ten tribes, that many of their descendants migrated to Europe and are identifiable in modern nations as members of the ten tribes.

Such claims are shown to be fanciful by some of the sentences given to the exiles of Judah and Israel in chapters 7 and 8, and contain the answer to the unprovable claims of Anglo-Israelism. For five hundred years up to the time of Christ's earthly ministry, this message through Zechariah remained as an invitation to any and every member of all the twelve tribes to return to their God and their covenant.

The message of the LORD's willingness to receive His people was for all twelve tribes in Zechariah's day who would return to worship Him in the restored temple. This is indicated in chapter 9:10 and 13, where Ephraim is named with Judah. In Genesis 49:22-26 we see a blessing pronounced upon Joseph, and in Genesis 48:15-22, we see that this blessing was to pass to Joseph's son Ephraim. Ephraim was allocated an area in the centre of the promised land on the northern border of Benjamin not far from Jerusalem, and became a very important tribe.

When the LORD determined to punish the house of Solomon because of the idolatry of all the tribes of Israel, He chose Jeroboam, an Ephraimite, to be the head of the ten tribes; while Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, was made ruler of Judah and Benjamin, and Jerusalem remained as the centre of worship (1 Kings 11:26-36).

Jeroboam was warned that his position would depend on obedience to God (1 Kings 11:37-39). Jeroboam failed to render this obedience when he came to power, and set up a rival religion and a separate kingdom. Thus it came to pass that Ephraim, the principal tribe of the ten, became the recognised title of the ten-tribe kingdom; while Judah became the title of the two-tribe kingdom.

The LORD sent His prophets to the ten-tribe kingdom, often using the title Ephraim in addressing them. Isaiah prophesied concerning Ephraim in chapter 8:1-4. Jeremiah and Ezekiel also prophesied of Ephraim, while Hosea had many messages for both Ephraim and Judah, with many appeals that they should return to the LORD. But Ephraim set up its own places for worship and fell into idolatry, while Judah also adopted idolatrous practices in Jerusalem itself, and polluted the very altars of the temple. The LORD denounced both, but in His mercy and longsuffering He offered forgiveness to both houses if they would turn to Him again.

As mentioned earlier, many of Ephraim did repent and turn to the true worship of God at Jerusalem under Hezekiah's and Josiah's reforms, and after the captivity many returned and were placed again in their own cities. At the time of our Lord's ministry, the northern part of the ten-tribe kingdom, embracing the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, is called Galilee, where our Lord called His first disciples. Of Galilee it had been prophesied that a great light should arise there (Isaiah 9:1,2; Matthew 4:12-23).

In the days of the apostles the people of all the tribes were addressed by them, with the exhortation that they believe on Jesus Christ of Nazareth. In Acts 4:10 Peter declared *"Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel"*. In Acts 5:31 it is recorded that our Lord was exalted to God's right hand *"to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins"*. Peter further declared on the day of Pentecost, *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly"* (Acts 2:36).

The ten-tribes really had no exclusive right to the name "Israel" or "house of Israel". The use of the name to represent the ten tribes is simply a convenience, but appropriate enough because the people involved included the tribes descended from the eldest sons of Jacob and some of the largest of the twelve tribes.

"Judah" is also a convenient name for the remaining two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, since Judah was the royal tribe and Jerusalem was situated within its borders. But Judah and Benjamin were still "Israel". They had never repudiated the name, nor had God rejected them from being considered under the name.

All of this should be obvious to Bible students. Ezra 1:5 states that those mainly interested in the decree of Cyrus for the return of the Jews to their own land were *“the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised”*. So it seems evident that most who returned belonged to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, with some of the priests and Levites.

Cyrus in his official decree used the name *“The LORD God of Israel”* (Ezra 1:3). In his list of those who returned, Ezra wrote of them as those whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away, which were principally the people of Judah, and then called them *“the number of the men of the people of Israel”* (Ezra 2:1,2). [See also Ezra 2:70; 3:1; 6:16 and 7:28.]

In Nehemiah's time the question arose as to whether certain ones were *“of Israel”*, and in Nehemiah 9:1 the *“children of Israel”* are mentioned, and their history is outlined in the remainder of the chapter.

For five hundred years God kept His people together so that they might be ready to receive their Messiah when He should come, including many living in what had once been the northern kingdom. The tribes of Israel were never lost in the sense that Anglo-Israelites contend, and there is simply no evidence to support or prove that contention.

Jesus said He was sent to *“the lost sheep of the house of Israel”* but, with two exceptions, He remained within Palestine during His earthly ministry, and His disciples did the same. The Lord Jesus preached to *“Israel”* in Palestine, where the descendants of all the twelve tribes were to be found. The fathers of the descendants from 586 BC onward had retained their genealogies, the proof that they were *“of Israel”*. See in this connection Ezra 2:62; Matthew 10:6 and 15:24. Simeon waited in the temple for the *“consolation of Israel,”* which of course was the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 2:25-32).

As has been said, the terms *“house of Israel”* and *“house of Judah”* were terms of convenience to distinguish the rebellious ten-tribe kingdom from the more loyal two-tribe kingdom. In God's sight Israel was one and indivisible, all members being under the same Law and the same promise. Both houses were punished for disobedience as provided in the covenant made at Sinai, to which all twelve tribes were party. When their own land was made available to them by the decree of Cyrus, God set the same terms before both houses.

This situation was true of our Lord's time. Any member of any tribe was eligible to accept the Lord Jesus as the Messiah, and become His follower and an heir of the kingdom. The faithful of the various tribes had come to Jerusalem for five hundred years when circumstances permitted (because

wars were frequent), while those who merged with Gentile nations lost their standing as Israelites and their inheritance in the promise. These latter have no part in the promise through Zechariah that those who returned to the worship of God at Jerusalem would be a blessing.

### **The Returned Exiles Became a Blessing (vs. 16-23)**

The returned exiles became a blessing:

- Firstly by example of faith in the promises, of obedience to God's commands, of the desirability of clean and upright living, and of sorrow and penitence as the right attitude after involvement in sin or lapses into faults.
- Secondly they promoted the worship of the true God in the earth.
- Thirdly they recognised and drew attention by observance of the Law to the need of a sacrifice for sins.
- In the fourth place they were a living testimonial to the mercy of God in receiving them back to favour with Him on their repentance.
- Fifthly they restored and preserved Jerusalem as God's holy city, and the temple there as the sanctuary of God in their midst.
- That they were God's holy people was the sixth avenue of blessing. They became a reproof to the Gentiles among whom they came to live, and urged them to become proselytes to the Hebrew faith.
- Finally, in the seventh place, they made themselves ready to receive their Messiah and declare His praise in due time in fulfilment of Zechariah 9:9.

### **God's Providential Care Over Jerusalem**

In the long period of five hundred years that elapsed between the return from Babylonia and our Lord's first advent, the world empires described by the prophet Daniel were more or less a protection to Jerusalem. Under the protection of the Medo-Persian kings the return was accomplished, Jerusalem was rebuilt, the temple was restored and its worship was re-established.

Freedom of communication was maintained with the various parts of the empire, which seems to be another example of God's providential care over His people, and His willingness to receive the dispersed people of all the tribes back into His favour without distinction. But those who intermarried with heathen peoples and forsook the true worship at Jerusalem forfeited all claim to the name of Israel.

Any attempt in our time to revive these ancient names and apply them to modern nations is contrary to God's arrangement at that early period. God's arrangement was to unite all the people of the twelve tribes into one nation with its worship at Jerusalem, and this, God's will for that time, was accomplished.

Jerusalem was the centre of attention and attraction. Its preservation through the five hundred years of conflict between "*the king of the north*" and "*the king of the south*" showed God's care over it. Jerusalem was subject to one or the other at various times, but at intervals it was comparatively free. Throughout this time the high priest, who was also judge or ruler, maintained the temple service and sacrifices more or less constantly in accordance with the law given at Sinai.

In the book ***'Notes on the Book of Daniel'***, a short history of this period is given, with brief mention of the sufferings of the Jews when Jerusalem was attacked by either power.

Finally Rome conquered Greece and formed an alliance with the governor of Judea in 161 B.C. By 63 B.C. Judea had become a tributary Roman province, followed by Egypt in 30 B.C. Herod the Great was King of Judea at the time of our Lord's birth, while another Herod, Herod Antipas, took part in the trial and proceedings that led to Jesus' crucifixion and death. But whatever the political and social conditions, the Jews clung to Jerusalem, and whenever conditions permitted, Jews of all tribes scattered over the surrounding lands went up to Jerusalem. Herod the Great rebuilt the temple, and the Jews were able to continue the sacrificial offerings and observe the three annual feasts prescribed by the Law.

And so we may discern the fulfilment of the word of the LORD given through Zechariah as recorded in chapter 8:18-23.

Verse 19 refers to those fasts kept in memory of Nebuchadnezzar's conquests, and observed yearly in their respective months, the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth. But then, when the people had been restored to their own land in peace and security, such fasts would have been out of place. Instead there was occasion for continual rejoicing in all the LORD had done for them.

### **Ten Men and the Skirt or Sleeve of a Jew (v. 23)**

Verses 20 and 21 may be understood as referring to the many Jews inhabiting many cities throughout the area under contention by the opposing empires. Many thousands lived at Alexandria in Egypt, and there became a community of Egyptian Jews, though still subject to the Ptolemies and their successors. Then as now the Jews took their nominal nationality from the



Gentile nation which gave them sanctuary. There were in those times Palestinian Jews, Egyptian Jews, Greek Jews, Macedonian Jews, Syrian Jews, Roman Jews, as well as Persian and even Chinese Jews, so greatly were the Jewish people scattered.

Verses 20-23 are applied by some Bible students to the end of the Gospel Age. The prediction, according to some, is that the whole world will take hold of the skirts or sleeves of the Jews and go up to worship at the temple which some believe will be rebuilt for the purpose. The word translated “*skirt*” in the KJV and “*sleeve*” in the NKJV means an edge or extremity (Strong 8671). Therefore this understanding is not in keeping with the object of giving this message to the world in general, but to the “house of Israel” or the ten tribes, who were in that day encouraged by the prophets and by the LORD’s providential care to return to their own land.

We should bear in mind that one of the issues at that time was whether those returned ones from the ten tribes should worship at Jerusalem, seeing that their fathers had failed in this worship. By giving them this message of the worship restored at Jerusalem and taken up by “*the inhabitants of many cities*” (verse 21), and that “*many people and strong nations*” shall go up “*to pray before the LORD*” (verse 22), assurance was given that Jerusalem, and Jerusalem only, was the place where God was to be worshipped for a long period of time at the restored temple under Joshua and his successors as priest-rulers.

Verse 23 states that the time would come when ten men “*from every language of the nations*” would take hold of the skirt (or sleeve) of a Jewish man saying, “*Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you*”.

When we remember that there were ten tribes that had rebelled against the LORD, there seems to be a significance in the mention of ten men. The question in the minds of many in Zechariah’s day, besides the men of Bethel who sent to inquire of the LORD, was whether their tenure was secure, and whether Jerusalem was again established as the head of all the tribes once more. We can see an appropriateness in the use of ten men to represent the members of the ten tribes, recognising that God desired them to go up to Jerusalem, just as the exiles from Judah were doing.

The ten tribes, represented by the ten men, were not to go up with the Jews to Bethel or Dan, where Jeroboam had set up the golden calves as their god. They were to go up to Jerusalem and nowhere else to worship in the manner acceptable to God. The taking hold of the skirt or sleeve of a Jew would mean to accompany the Jews, acknowledging that they knew the way to the true worship of God.

In reference to the situation of Jerusalem, as well as the Gentiles and the Jews at the end of the Gospel Age, we must wait until we move further along in our consideration of Zechariah's prophecy.

### **Further Reflections**

We should note that even while assuring the people of Israel of the growth in population and prosperity of Jerusalem, the LORD emphasised a form of worship different from worship associated with other cities and temples. When the men of Bethel inquired of the LORD, they were reminded of justice, mercy and compassion. (chapter 7, verses 9 and 10) These things had been required of their fathers, but they would not listen. So in verses 16 and 17, a right state of heart, mind and conduct are emphasised as of great importance.

Five hundred years later John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Himself reminded the Jews, particularly the Pharisees, that they had been punctilious in ceremonials, but had neglected the weightier matters of judgment, mercy and faith (Matthew 3:7-10; 23:23).

Our Lord reiterated the teaching of these prophecies of Zechariah when He said to the Samaritan woman, *"Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews"* (John 4:22). Our Lord Jesus of the house of David and kingdom of Judah was the Jew in Whom the promises have been fulfilled.

For centuries the only way of salvation had been by obedience to the Law. Gentiles could come to God only by becoming proselytes to the Jewish faith. This was true of the generation then living as it had been for the previous centuries back to the giving of the Law at Sinai. A Messiah was promised to the Jews Who would be sent to the Jews only, Who would be born as a Jew, born at Bethlehem and born under the Law. The Lord's first disciples were Jews. Three thousand of Israel believed on the day of Pentecost the message spoken by Peter and other Jews. The Samaritans heard the message also, and subsequently the Gentiles heard it. Such converts may be thought to have taken hold of the sleeve of a Jew, saying, *"We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you"*.

But it was not to the temple at Jerusalem that the apostles led those looking for guidance. It was to worship on a higher plane, touching the heart, mind and life as the old temple failed to do. It was to Jesus the Deliverer they were led, He Who had declared the worship at Jerusalem at an end: *"Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father ... But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him."* (John 4:21,23).

The temple building at Jerusalem was once the correct place to worship, but its purpose had been fulfilled. There is no Scriptural authority for saying it will be rebuilt and used in the ages to come. If a structure were ever built on the temple site it would need to be used in conformity with the new worship through Jesus Christ, the only way of approach to God (John 2:20-22; 14:6; Hebrews 10:19-22).

### **A BRIEF REVIEW**

God's prophecies recorded in the Bible accurately foretold the future, sometimes having their fulfilment soon after they were made, and sometimes having their fulfilment in the more distant future. To distinguish one from the other requires study and careful research, as well as some knowledge of Old Testament history. God's prophecies often contained history, that is, a record of events that had already occurred, as well as a record of conditions at the time the prophecy was given. Such records are particularly noticeable in the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Comments thus far have been made on the first eight chapters of Zechariah. Zechariah reminded the Jews of their forebears' disobedient ways and the punishments inflicted upon them, and warned the people to take notice of what he was saying and not to continue with the same spirit of rebellion.

Some of the prophecies were given to Zechariah in the form of visions using various symbols such as horses, lampstands and olive trees. Some were actions to be carried out at the LORD's direction to teach certain lessons and to form certain predictions, as in chapter 6:9-15. Joshua the High Priest was also to be made ruler or prince, thus creating unified Jewish rulership under the Gentile dominion of Medo-Persia, Greece, and finally Rome.

In chapter 8 a sufficient rebuttal to the Anglo-Israeli theory was found, verses 11 to 15 showing that the two-tribe kingdom of Judah and the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel were united under Joshua by the will of God, although both had been taken captive separately to foreign lands. The ten-tribe kingdom of Israel had been placed in colonies by the Assyrians. When Nebuchadnezzar's father conquered Assyria, those colonists came under his control. Nebuchadnezzar subsequently subjected Syria, Palestine and Egypt, and took Judah captive to Babylonia. Thus were all the twelve tribes, scattered throughout the Babylonian empire, united in bondage.

Then, at the end of the captivity, all were included in the invitation issued by the decree of Cyrus the Persian king, giving to all Israelites, regardless of tribe, the privilege of returning to their own land and rebuilding the temple. Cyrus had conquered the Babylonians, and had therefore become controller of all the captive twelve tribes of Israel. Zechariah, as we have seen, prophesied after the return and while the rebuilding was in progress (Ezra 6:14, 15).

Zechariah 8:20-23 express an assurance that the children of Israel would not be removed from Jerusalem. Therefore they could return with confidence, rebuild the cities and the temple, and cultivate the land during the next period of their history. This period lasted from the time the temple was rebuilt under Joshua to the first advent of Christ. The dwellers in Jerusalem, it must be acknowledged, experienced many hardships of various kinds. But they were in the main protected by the Gentile empires, Rome allowing them great tolerance in the exercise of their religion and their temple services.

## D. THE ORACLES CONCERNING THE FUTURE

Zechariah 9:1 - 14:21

### 1. THE FIRST ORACLE; 9:1 - 11:17

#### (a) PROPHECIES AGAINST GENTILE NATIONS (9:1-8)

1. *The burden of the word of the LORD against the land of Hadrach, and Damascus its resting place (For the eyes of men and all the tribes of Israel are on the LORD);*
2. *Also against Hamath, which borders on it, and against Tyre and Sidon, though they are very wise.*
3. *For Tyre built herself a tower, heaped up silver like the dust, and gold like the mire of the streets.*
4. *Behold, the LORD will cast her out; he will destroy her power in the sea, and she will be devoured by fire.*
5. *Ashkelon shall see it and fear; Gaza also shall be very sorrowful; and Ekron, for He dried up her expectation. The king shall perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon shall not be inhabited.*
6. *A mixed race shall settle in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines.*
7. *I will take away the blood from his mouth, and the abominations from between his teeth. But he who remains, even he shall be for our God, and shall be like a leader in Judah, and Ekron like a Jebusite.*
8. *I will camp around my house because of the army, because of him who passes by and him who returns. No more shall an oppressor pass through them, for now I have seen with my eyes.*

Chapter 9 begins a new section. Verses 1 to 8 give the reader a renewed view of the LORD's goodness toward His people, the Jews. The LORD's people had previously suffered because of the plundering and destruction brought on them by their Gentile neighbours, and now, as the people returned from captivity, they had to cope with the neglect and ruin of the land of Palestine while they had remained captive in Babylonia for seventy years. The LORD's statements about Damascus, Tyre and Sidon and the Philistines would have been reassuring to His people. These prophetic words applied to those times, and there is no justification for applying them to a time future from the Lord Jesus' first advent.

## **Israel Defended Against Enemies**

*"The land of Hadrach"* in verse 1 was evidently a country of Syria, because Damascus was mentioned as being close to it, or at least closely related to it. Little is known of Hadrach in modern times. At the time that Zechariah's prophecy was given, Damascus was an important city of Syria, and one of the most flourishing cities of the Persian empire, to which Syria was in subjection.

*"Hamath"* in verse 2, according to Smith's Bible Dictionary, "appears to have been the principal city of Upper Syria from the time of the Exodus to that of the prophet Amos .... The Hamathites were a Hamitic race, and are included among the descendants of Canaan (Genesis 10:18). We must regard them as closely akin to the Hittites on whom they bordered, and with whom they were generally in alliance. In the Assyrian inscriptions of the time of Ahab (900 BC) Hamath appears as a separate power, in alliance with the Syrians of Damascus, the Hittites and the Phoenicians." The changes occurring in Hamath may be seen in 2 Samuel 8:10; 1 Kings 4:21-24; 2 Chronicles 8:4; 2 Kings 14:28; 18:34; and 19:13.

Other prophecies concerning Damascus or Hamath or both are found in Isaiah 17:1-3; 37:1-13; Jeremiah 49:23-27; and Amos 1:3-5.

Tyre and Sidon, referred to in verses 2 and 3 as losing their power, were prominent in trade and very wealthy. The king of Tyre assisted in the building of Solomon's temple, supplying materials and skilled workmen (2 Chronicles chapters 2 and 4). But the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon failed to profit from being near to the Jews and the temple worship. They remained idolaters and were subsequently denounced as being lifted up with pride. It was not God's purpose to allow Gentile nations to prosper at the expense of the Jews, and when the Jews were punished, the surrounding nations were punished also, often by experiences of war (Isaiah 23; Ezekiel chapters 26, 27 and 28).

Zechariah's prophecy against Tyre and Sidon is brief, but shows the contrast between the great power and wealth once enjoyed by them, and the extent of God's judgement against them.

The case with Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron and Ashdod was similar. They were cities of the Philistines, centuries old enemies of Israel. When Nebuchadnezzar invaded Palestine he subjugated Philistia and put it under tribute. But being under tribute only slightly affected the prosperity of the country, because the conquered nations were expected to add wealth to the conqueror, which they could not do if they were completely devastated and ravaged.

Zechariah, however, prophesying after the return of the people of Israel to their own land, was, in this chapter, made to foretell a more lasting punishment. The point of verse 5 seems to be that when Tyre and Sidon were humbled, Philistia would see it, and be afraid of a similar fate. The land of the Philistines was like a corridor between Egypt and Syria, and the land suffered greatly in the conflicts between Persia and Greece, and later in the constant warfare carried on by the four kingdoms into which Alexander's empire was divided. These conflicts were foretold by Daniel the prophet in chapters 10 and 11 of his prophecy, comments on which are offered in the Book **"Notes on the Book of Daniel"**.

In Ezekiel 25:15-17 is found another prophecy concerning the Philistines, in which the LORD's object was said to be that *"they shall know that I am the LORD."* So in Zechariah 9 it is shown that Philistia is no more worthy of preservation than were the cities of Palestine, which country God had chosen to be His land.

Verse 6 is a statement that a foreign power should occupy the land of the Philistines, including their principal city Ashdod. Ashdod was probably mentioned because there the Philistines once kept the ark of God. 1 Samuel 5:1-6 tells how Ashdod held a famous temple of Dagon. Another such temple was at Gaza. Dagon was a fish god, part man part fish. The idol Dagon was miraculously caused to fall on its face before the ark of the LORD, and the LORD brought punishment on the Philistines while they retained the ark in their possession. But Zechariah referred to a later period, when Ashdod and its god were to be completely overthrown, and the land of the Philistines ruled over and inhabited by foreigners.

Verse 7 states *"I will take away the blood from his mouth, and the abominations from between his teeth."* These words seem to be prophetic of the cessation of idolatry among the Philistines, while the words *"But he who remains, even he shall be for our God ..."* appear to indicate the removal of the Philistines as a nation, and the turning to the worship of the true God of some individual Philistines who remained.

What is known of the history of the nations mentioned by Zechariah directs us to the fulfilment of verse 1 that *"the eyes of men and all the tribes of Israel are on the LORD."* Of all the nations mentioned, only the Jews continued to live in their land and hold it during the long period of five hundred years from the time of Zechariah's prophecy until the advent of the Lord Jesus Christ to a people waiting for Him and expecting Him (Luke 2: 25,38; John 1:41,45).

A similar expression to that of verse 1 occurs in 2 Chronicles 20:12. Jehosaphat prayed to God to prevent a threatened invasion, and concluded; *"Our God, wilt thou not judge them? For we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee."*

The meaning of the words seems to be that the attention of the people of Judah was fixed on the LORD to see what He would do. So in regard to the cities mentioned in Zechariah 9, their eyes and their attention were directed to the LORD because of His action against the Gentile nations, but favourable to the Jewish nation.

We should note here that a footnote in the RV renders the latter part of verse 1 as *"Jehovah hath an eye upon men and upon all the tribes of Israel."* The Septuagint has *"for the LORD looks upon men, and upon all the tribes of Israel."* The Variorum footnote has a reading *"for the cities of Aram,"* while the RSV has *"For to the LORD belong the cities of Aram, even all the tribes of Israel."* The REV also uses the word "Aram" instead of "men". What are we to make of these different readings?

Aram in ancient times was a large area, one of the earliest settled. Aram is mentioned in Genesis 10:23 as one of the sons of Shem, and an area of land was named after him (Aram). The area in question lay between the headwaters of the Euphrates and the Jordan, and is in the area known nowadays as Syria, although present-day Syria is larger than ancient Aram.

Whichever of the two ways that verse 1 could be rendered would be true. *"The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."* (Proverbs 15:3). *"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."* (Hebrews 4:13).

So it is true to say that the eyes of the LORD saw the actions of Aram (or Syria) and those of Damascus and other cities of the time, as well as the actions of the children of Israel. Similarly it is true to say that the eyes of men were attracted by the marvellous acts of Yahweh on behalf of Israel before other nations, and sometimes on behalf of one Gentile nation against another.

It is written, *"And what one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name?"* (2 Samuel 7:23). It behoves all nations to know that the eyes of God are upon them, as it also behoves all people to have their eyes fixed on the LORD to see what He will do. But nowadays the world at large has become secular, and people have turned their eyes to material things and social



issues and away from God their Creator, and do not understand that this order of things in all its aspects – social, political, economic and ecclesiastical – will pass away to make way for God's kingdom on earth, for which Jesus told all believers to pray in the words "*Thy kingdom come.*"

A Jebusite in verse 7 was an inhabitant of Jebus, probably the original name for Jerusalem. David conquered the city and it became known as the city of David (2 Samuel 5:6-9). When the prophet states that Ekron, one of the chief cities of the Philistines, would become as a Jebusite, the thought seems to be complete subjugation.

### **A Promise Of Protection (v. 8)**

In this verse was a promise of protection by the LORD, the temple at Jerusalem being frequently called the LORD's house. In defending the temple, His house, He would be defending His people also.

Comments have previously been offered on the continual existence of Jerusalem and the temple in spite of invasions by foreign powers, the ravages of warfare and the despoiling and destruction of the temple a number of times. Solomon's temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, and then rebuilt by the captives returned from Babylonia. The restored temple endured for many years more, though frequently attacked and damaged by invaders, then was rebuilt and greatly beautified by Herod the Great after the Romans had established themselves in the East.

That impressive and imposing temple then endured until the advent of the Lord Jesus, a later prophet Malachi predicting that the Lord would come to His temple. Malachi declared, "*.... And the LORD, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.*" (Malachi 3:1). Ezekiel's prophecy concerning the great Prince also requires the temple to be standing, as He would enter by the East Gate (Ezekiel 44:1-3).

The latter part of verse 8 reads, "*No more shall an oppressor pass through them, for now I have seen with my eyes.*" What God foresaw was not the continued existence of the temple, because it was completely destroyed by the Romans in AD 70, but the end of the Law Covenant and its replacement by the New Covenant. God would do this by sending His King, as verse 9 tells us. Invaders of Philistia, Syria and Palestine would have no effect on God's new kingdom, because it would be of a kind different from any previously known.

## **(b) THE COMING KING (9:9-10)**

9. *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; he is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.*
10. *I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; the battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations; his dominion shall be 'from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.'*

Verse 9 is a remarkable prophecy of the Lord Jesus. The Jews as a nation are called "the daughter of Zion" in Isaiah 62:11. Zion represents the government established by God, originally with Moses and the children of Israel, then that which was afterwards established with King David and his heirs. This form of government by a monarch found its greatest development and glory in the reigns of David and Solomon after David had conquered the formerly impregnable fortress of the Jebusites (Joshua 15:63; Judges 1:8, 21; 2 Samuel 5:6-10).

The prophecy of verse 9 was fulfilled as described when the Lord Jesus rode into the city of Jerusalem shortly before His crucifixion. The people rejoiced and shouted, as the prophecy had foretold, and Jesus said that had they not done so, the very stones would have cried out (Matthew 21:1-16; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19 28-40).

Among people of ancient times when peace prevailed it was customary for a ruler to ride to his coronation upon a donkey rather than on a horse, because a horse was symbolic of warfare and battle (1 Kings 4:26; 10:26; Habakkuk 1:6-8). Jesus came as the Prince of Peace, riding quietly on a donkey to be greeted by His people who had waited so long for their Messiah, the Anointed of God (Isaiah 9:6; Luke 2:25; John 1:41). Tumultuously they shouted, *"Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the LORD. Hosanna in the Highest"* (Matthew 21:9).

But the Pharisees and chief priests plotted and worked against Him. They managed to persuade the majority of the people to reject Him and to clamour before Pilate for His execution. All was fulfilled that was prophesied in Isaiah 53. The Jews saw no comeliness in Him that they should desire Him John wrote truly, *"He came unto his own, and his own received him not"* (John 1:11).

The King of Zion, God's holy and righteous King, would be different from most earthly kings, who were often unjust and tyrannical desolators and plunderers, and different also from Israel's kings, who often followed the policies and actions of heathen Gentile kings.

The new King of Zion would be just and righteous, with salvation as His mission, and He would be, as always, meek and lowly of heart. Such qualities and attributes of the King of Zion are found only in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Scriptures declare. *"For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."* (John 3:17). Jesus said, *"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls"* (Matthew 11:29).

Verse 10 shows the eventual practical effect of the coming of our Lord to Jerusalem nearly two thousand years ago as the Prince of Peace.

Ephraim is mentioned in the verse, and at the time it was written, Ephraim was an important area of defence of Jerusalem, being situated to the north of the holy city. Jerusalem itself was well fortified against invaders. But the new King of Zion would cast aside the traditional methods of warfare of those days, symbolised by the cutting off of the chariot, horse and battle-bow. Such carnal weapons, said the apostle later, were not suitable for use by messengers of a gospel of peace and goodwill. The King would prosper without the use of carnal weapons, for *"he shall speak peace to the nations; and his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth."*

The *"River"* would seem to be the Jordan, the chief waterway of Palestine. Our Lord's ministry began at the Jordan, where great numbers of people had gathered to be baptised by John in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. It was there that John declared that *"this is the Son of God,"* and there that two of John's disciples were directed to Jesus and became His disciples (John 1:29-40).

From that beginning the message of peace and goodwill spread across the nation over which the Lord Jesus came as King, in accordance with the prophecies and by the endeavours and personal exertion of the Lord and His disciples (Matthew 10).

They were not to go to the Gentiles at that time, nor even to the Samaritans. During His ministry the Lord adhered to this, with only two or three exceptions, when Gentiles and Samaritans were granted favours of a temporary nature, which in no way interfered with the fact that Jesus was King of the Jews. (Matthew 15:24).

From that beginning at the River Jordan, when the Voice from heaven announced, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," the message of truth, peace and goodwill has spread in ever-widening circles, bringing joy but also the responsibility of service to Him, Who is the King of kings.

**(c) DOMINION TO BE WORLD WIDE  
FROM SMALL BEGINNINGS (9:11-17)**

11. *"As for you also, because of the blood of your covenant, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.*
12. *Return to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope. Even today I declare that I will restore double to you.*
13. *For I have bent Judah, my bow, Fitted the bow with Ephraim, and raised up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and made you like the sword of a mighty man."*
14. *Then the LORD will be seen over them, and His arrow will go forth like lightning. The LORD God will blow the trumpet, and go with whirlwinds from the south.*
15. *The LORD of hosts will defend them; they shall devour and subdue with slingstones. They shall drink and roar as if with wine; they shall be filled with blood like basins, like the corners of the altar.*
16. *The LORD their God will save them in that day, as the flock of his people. For they shall be like the jewels of a crown, lifted like a banner over His land--*
17. *For how great is its goodness and how great its beauty! Grain shall make the young men thrive, and new wine the young women.*

**The Waterless Pit And The Stronghold (vs. 11,12)**

Verses 11 and 12 contain in a few words a special message to the Israelites, the whole number of the twelve tribes embraced under the Law Covenant given at Sinai. God made that covenant with the twelve tribes, Moses being the mediator of that covenant. It is important that we take note of this, because some believe that our Lord's ministry was confined to the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi only, and that the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel was to be dealt with separately. We understand that such is not the case.

Prisoners in a pit with no water aptly described the condition of Israel under the Law. Similar language was used by Paul the Apostle when he wrote that the Law was something added to their experience, but that addition to their experience could not interfere with the original promise to Abraham, which was a promise of blessing, as we read in Galatians 3. The Law Covenant, however, constituted a bondage from which the Israelites could not deliver

themselves. They were *“kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed”* (Galatians 3:23; 4:24,25).

From the human standpoint, the position of Israel was hopeless, but from the divine standpoint Israel's position was not at all hopeless. Israel's attention was called to a stronghold or fortress, and an invitation was extended to all in the waterless pit to turn to the stronghold for help. What is meant by the stronghold to which Israel is invited to turn? The Apostle Paul told us in Galatians 3:22-27:

*“But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”* (NIV).

Jesus Christ is the Stronghold, and faith is the means of transferring the Israelites from the waterless pit, that is, the Law Covenant, to the Stronghold of Jesus Christ. The Israelites could not be in the pit of the Law and in the Stronghold of Christ at one and the same time (Galatians 5:1-6; 6:14-16).

Paul provided us with another illustration of the way by which any member of the twelve tribes could be transferred from the waterless pit of the Law to the Stronghold of Jesus Christ in Romans 7:1-6.

The message that the Apostle conveyed is that under the Jewish law a woman was bound to her husband as long as he lived, and was not free to marry another. If she were divorced or “put away” by her husband, she was still not free to marry again while her husband was still living. If she did marry again while her husband still lived she would be condemned by the Law as an adulteress. But if her husband were dead, she would be free to marry another and would be no adulteress (Romans 7:1-3). Similarly the Jew could not be bound to Christ while still bound to the Law. Many Jews found it hard to credit that the Law Covenant had been abolished and was no longer in force.

To continue the Apostle's illustration of the marriage arrangement between man and woman, the woman whose husband had died was freed from the marriage contract with her late husband, that contract being dead, figuratively speaking. The woman was free to marry again with a clear conscience, and enter into a new marriage with a new husband. And so, the

Apostle explains, the Jew who realised that Christ had superseded the Law should *“become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead”* (Romans 7:4).

The significance of the Apostle's words is that the Law Covenant is dead, and the Jew is no longer under its commandments and ordinances. Each individual Jew should recognise this fact and so be in a state of mind and heart to give himself or herself to the Lord Jesus and obey His commands under the New Covenant, the “better covenant” which our Lord introduced to accomplish what the Law could not do (Hebrews 7:17-19; 8:6; Romans 8:1-4).

### **I Will Restore Double (v. 12)**

*“Even today I declare that I will restore double to you,”* wrote Zechariah in verse 12. This prophecy was addressed to the prisoners in the pit, the Children of Israel.

The time indicated by *“today”* may be the time the prophecy was given, which declared that certain things spoken *“today”* would be fulfilled at a later date. *“Today”* may also refer to the time when the *“double”* was to be restored to Israel, which in the context seems to refer to the time of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and the placing of the Lord Jesus on the holy hill of Zion as God's anointed King at God's right hand in heaven. Certainly a blessing came to the Jews in the ministry of our Lord, and later in the ministry of the apostles and disciples.

The time of our Lord's ministry and His destiny are referred to in Isaiah 9:6,7: *“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”* (KJV).

The words *“from henceforth”* refer to Isaiah 9:1,2, which tell of the light rising upon Galilee and the Jordan, and which in Matthew 4:12-17 is quoted and applied to the beginning of our Lord's ministry. The one who shone as a light in Galilee is the One upon Whose shoulder the government was laid, and Who three and a half years later rode into Jerusalem as Israel's King, only to be rejected and crucified.

But, as we all know, and for which we are extremely grateful, God raised Him from the dead.

Some have thought that the “*double*” was not intended as a blessing but as a curse, a double or two-fold punishment consisting of the length of the period during which God acknowledged the Jews as His people, some fifteen centuries. Such an understanding does not seem to be in keeping with the context, because the prophecy was addressed to “*prisoners of hope*” who were invited to turn “*to the stronghold*”. A double portion of joy and blessing seems more to the point in the context.

### **Zion's Sons Against The Sons Of Greece (v. 13)**

Raised up by God and made as the sword of a mighty man, in verse 13, sounds more like triumph and blessing than punishment and a curse. And so it was. The triumph of the King, the Lord Jesus Christ, was to bring triumph to the prisoners in the pit who would turn to Him for help. Not only would they be delivered from the pit, but they would also be used as instruments in the LORD's work. That is why God made them as the sword of a mighty man.

But Judah and Ephraim were referred to separately in verse 13. Why is this so when they were united as one nation on the return from the Babylonian captivity? In seeking an answer to this question we must remember that Zechariah prophesied just after the return from Babylonia, when members of the former ten-tribe kingdom would have been wondering what their restored position would be in their land of Ephraim in view of the fact that Jerusalem was still the prescribed place of worship for all twelve tribes.

When we realise the circumstances of the nation's return, we can see a reason for naming Judah and Ephraim separately, and then of speaking of them together as “sons of Zion.”

The intended lesson seems to be that regardless of the tribe to which the Israelite belonged, this promise was for him or her whenever the due time arrived for the entry of the King into Jerusalem, riding upon a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey, and “*having salvation*.” Jesus Himself was the first One saved because He fulfilled the will of God.

It may seem a little surprising to speak of the Lord Jesus as the first One saved, because He was “without sin” (Hebrews 4:15) and therefore not under Adamic condemnation. But He was transformed by God from a spirit being to a human being, and made subject to new temptations and the possibility of suffering death as a penalty if He yielded and disobeyed His Heavenly Father, which He did not, even under the most severe trials and suffering.

The fact of our Lord having been saved is referred to in 2 Corinthians 6:2, where the prophecy of Isaiah 49:8 is quoted to show that our Lord was heard and helped in a time acceptable to the Father, that is, when Jesus was under severe trial during His life on earth.

Hebrews 5 also refers to this: *“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him And was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.”* (Hebrews 5:7-10; NIV).

Our Lord’s salvation was shown by the fact of His resurrection and His position at the Father’s right hand. He is, therefore, authorised and able to grant eternal life to all who obey Him. And so it was that the descendants of both Judah and Ephraim who were living when the Gospel message went forth were received on equal terms, terms of faith and obedience.

The first two phrases of verse 13 are an example of a Hebrew poetical form known as parallelism, where the same thought is repeated in somewhat different language, or an additional or even an opposing thought is expressed following the first thought, as in Psalm 21:1-3, and Proverbs 10:1,2 and 7, and Psalm 108:3. Smith’s Bible Dictionary provides detailed comments on parallelism in Hebrew writings under the heading ‘Poetry, Hebrew’.

Leeser’s translation of the Old Testament shows the parallelism in verse 13 more clearly than other versions: *“For I do bend Judah for me, grasp Ephraim (as) a bow.”* Both Ephraim and Judah were described as a bow from which the LORD would shoot an arrow, both being described as one nation and suited to this purpose. The *“arrow”* would be a symbol of the sons of Zion next mentioned, *“And raised up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and made you like the sword of a mighty man.”*

At this stage we should note that verse 10 tells us that the LORD would reject for His use the chariot, the horse, and the battle bow, while verse 13 tells us that he would use the sons of Zion as a sword against Greece. The LORD would use man, not carnal weapons, against Greece, and by this means He would *“speak peace to the nations”* and extend His dominion *“from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.”*

### **The Sons Of Zion -.Who Are They? (v. 13)**

Zion in its original use was the name of a portion of the city of Jerusalem, and was often also used to refer to the kingdom of Judah, as also was Jerusalem. In Psalm 2:6 Zion is used to apply to the government which God has purposed to establish with His Son as King: *“Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.”*



In verse 13 the LORD, through Zechariah, told His people that Zion was to have “sons” raised up who would be as powerful as a sword in the hand of a mighty man. In identifying these “*sons of Zion*” our thoughts turn to John 1:11-13: *He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*”

These surely are the “*sons of Zion*”, those of Israel who believed on Jesus, the “*elect*”, the “remnant” expounded by Paul in Romans 11:5-7.

In Hebrews 2:10, an epistle directed specifically to Hebrew Christians, the Lord Jesus is called the captain of their salvation, the word “captain” meaning “chief leader” or “prince” (Strong 747). Jesus is called “*a Prince and a Saviour*” in Acts 5:31, and “*the author and finisher of our faith*” in Hebrews 12:2. Jesus is the Leader of all true believers, in particular the “*sons of Zion*” of verse 13, who are called out of the waterless pit of the Law into the Stronghold of Zion, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The “*sons*”, chosen first from national Israel, and afterwards from the Gentiles, had been foretold in the Scriptures referred to in Hebrews 2:12 and 13, namely Psalm 22:22; 18:2 and Isaiah 8:18. Our Lord called His followers His sheep which the Father had given Him, because He was to them in the same position as a shepherd is to His flock; a carer, a guide and provider, as described by Jesus in John 10:1-18.

### **His Arrow Like Lightning (v. 14)**

In verse 14 these statements of what the LORD would do were expressed in symbols, but they made clear, in the light of the New Testament Scriptures, exactly what took place at the beginning of the Gospel Age following our Lord’s entry into Jerusalem, His death and resurrection, and His entry into heaven itself.

The “*sons of Zion*”, recognised as sons of God by Jesus Christ, whom God would make as “*the sword of a mighty man*”, were likened to an arrow shot from the bow mentioned in verse 13. After a remnant of “*sons*” had been chosen from the Jews, these “*sons*” were shot as an arrow against Greece, taking with them the good news of the Gospel, the message of salvation through faith. The mission was decidedly “*against*” Greece, because it made no truce or compromise with either the deliberations and teachings of the philosophers or the pagan practices of idol worshippers and their temples. The “*arrow*” going forth “*like lightning*” would seem to convey the notion of the remarkably swift progress of the Gospel message.

A study of the rise and spread of Christianity from its beginning at Pentecost, the ground covered and the number of converts made in a few years despite furious opposition, clearly shows that the symbols of “arrow” and “lightning” well express the energy and extent of the apostles’ and disciples’ evangelism.

The Apostle Paul referred to the effect on the Greeks by the missionary work of the “sons of Zion”, the apostles and disciples chosen out of national Israel, in such telling words as these in 1 Corinthians 1:17-31 and 2:1-5:

1 Corinthians 1:

17. *For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.*
18. *For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.*
19. *For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.*
20. *Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*
21. *For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*
22. *For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:*
23. *But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;*
24. *But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*
25. *Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*
26. *For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:*
27. *But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;*
28. *And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:*
29. *That no flesh should glory in his presence.*
30. *But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:*
31. *That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the LORD.*

## 1 Corinthians 2:

1. *And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.*
2. *For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*
3. *And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.*
4. *And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:*
5. *That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*

The LORD was “*seen over them*” as recorded in verse 14. The divine overseeing of the work was shown by the amazing miracle that accompanied the apostolic mission, as declared in Hebrews 2:4, “*God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will.*”

### **The Trumpet (v. 14)**

The LORD God blew the trumpet, figuratively speaking. In ancient times the trumpet was sounded as a call to war and battle. Through the apostles and disciples God called His people to take the battle to Gentile religions and assist in accomplishing His purpose to take out of the Gentiles a people for His name (Acts 15:14). The Apostle Paul said to the Athenians that God was now calling all people everywhere to repent (Acts 17:16-31). On Mars Hill the trumpet gave no uncertain sound, because if it had done so, who would have prepared himself for battle (1 Corinthians 14:8)? Great controversy raged for many years in Corinth and other Greek communities, as recorded in Acts 13 and onward.

Gentile nations were a fruitful ground for the Gospel message to be planted and to grow. Jews scattered throughout Gentile provinces had been on the whole a testimony to the true God and the desirable code of living contained in the Law. Some Gentiles became Jewish proselytes, and these formed some of the earliest groups of believers together with converted Jews, to whom the Gospel message first went. The apostles constantly affirmed the truth that while the Gospel was “*to the Jew first*”, it was “*also to the Greek*” (Romans 1:16).

The Gospel message was like a trumpet calling on all who heard it to believe, and become in turn bearers of the message to others.

### **The Whirlwinds Of The South (v. 14)**

Smith's Bible Dictionary states that there is nothing in the original Hebrew word 'se-arah' (Strong 5591), translated as "*whirlwinds*" in verse 14 to express the thought of whirling. Leeser translates the word as "*tempest*"; while the NIV has "*storms*" and the REB "*storm-winds*".

Among the discomforts suffered by the population of the Mediterranean coast is the 'simoom', sometimes called the 'simoon', which is defined in the Macquarie dictionary as a hot, suffocating, sand-laden wind of the deserts of Arabia, Syria and other North African countries.

The Gospel message came as a hot, devastating blast upon the Greeks. Nothing could at first stand before it. Only by subterfuge and misinterpretation on the part of the Gnostics and others was the work of the apostles and disciples subsequently undermined. Paul and Silas and their converts became known as "*These that have turned the world upside down*" (Acts 17:6). In Ephesus a public burning was held of books of the "*curious arts*", "*so mightily grew the word of God and prevailed*" (Acts 19:10-20).

It was only when the silversmiths awoke to the fact that their craft was in danger that the opposition became fierce. If they had been left alone, the people might well have been glad to be freed from bondage to the temples, for Paul told them plainly that they were no gods which were made with hands (Acts 19:23-26).

The remarkable advance of the Gospel in the first years of the Gospel Age is pictured in Revelation 6:2. In the vision John the Apostle saw "*a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering and to conquer*". More detailed comments are made in the book "**The Few and the Many**" in chapter 6. Psalm 45:1-6 has similar prophetic words applying to the Lord Jesus.

### **The Lord Of Hosts Will Defend Them (v. 15)**

But not all would be prosperity and triumph, as indicated in verse 15. Contained in this verse are symbols of successful warfare with indications that the opposition was formidable, in that the blood of the conquered was spoken of as being like the blood of sacrifices which filled the bowls and the corners of the altar when certain procedures were followed, as indicated in Leviticus 4: 3-7.

The slingstone was an effective weapon in skilled hands, as we know from David's killing of Goliath. The enemies of the Gospel have, figuratively speaking, slingstones to use against the apostles and disciples, but they and

all true believers have the armour of the LORD which will enable them “*to withstand in the evil day*” as Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:13-17.

The NKJV reads in verse 15 “*They shall drink and roar as if with wine,*” while the KJV has “*make a noise as through wine*” which seems more restrained. Leeser renders this section “*and they shall drink, make a noise as one (drunken with) wine; and they shall be filled like the offering bowls, like the corners of the altar.*” A person who has become drunk with wine is usually conspicuous and talkative.

We think of Peter and the others who stood up on the day of Pentecost and spoke under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The first thought that came to the minds of the hearers was that the disciples were “*full of new wine,*” which accusation Peter quickly refuted, and declared that prophecy was being fulfilled before their eyes and ears (Acts 2:12-16). Later the Apostle Paul wrote, “*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit*” (Ephesians 5:18).

But what is meant by drinking and being “*filled with blood*”? The symbolism seems to indicate the conquest made by the Gospel, adapting the ordinary terms of physical warfare to spiritual conquest as an indication of the vigour and success of the progress of the Gospel message.

The shedding of blood is a graphic means of describing warfare and destruction. The conquest of the land of Canaan by Israel was foretold by the unwilling Balaam in terms of blood in Numbers 23:24: “*Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain.*” The triumph of Israel over their enemies is described in Psalm 58: 10 and 11, attributing their success to God: “*The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.*”

God is not, nor ever has been, a bloodthirsty God, but bloodshed, as has been said previously, is a graphic method of describing warfare and destruction, since in warfare blood is always caused to flow. Great slaughter is pictured as “*mountains ...melted with their blood;*” “*The sword of the LORD is filled with blood, and their land shall be soaked with blood*” (Isaiah 34:2,3,6 and 7).

Why does God permit bloodshed? The answer to this question lies in the fact that Satan and sin have together worked against God, and made it necessary for Him to devise a plan to rescue the human race from the predicament in which they find themselves, and from which none can

escape. An essential part of the answer is that God has been prepared to endure warfare and bloodshed in past ages, and that God has not yet finished His dealings with the human race, and has great peace and happiness in store for everyone who has ever lived, if they will conform to His will.

The wars in which God took an interest in Old Testament times were chiefly those in defence of His people, or to punish His people for disobedience and idolatry, or again to punish Gentile nations for their wickedness and trespass against His people. Such actions served for the time being, and are contrasted with the peaceful and loving methods of the Christian Gospel.

Despite the warm and loving preaching of the early Christian evangelists, their enemies were ready and willing to spill blood literally, for they were as ready to enlist and bribe men to kill or injure the Christian believers as were the Jewish leaders to take counsel to put the Lord Jesus to death. But, under the law of love, the Christians did not defend themselves with carnal weapons, nor did they use carnal weapons to attack the enemies of the Gospel. They submitted to God, the LORD of hosts, Who promised to defend them.

God did not always save His people from death at the hands of persecutors, but they had the prospect of the High Calling, so if persecuted to death, they had God's promise of a heavenly inheritance and great blessings in the age to come.

The Apostle Paul told us that our weapons are not carnal, but they are *"mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds"* (2 Corinthians 10:4). The legends and mythologies of the heathen nations were the repositories of sin and error of all kinds. Sin had no meaning for them, as indicated by Greek proverbs in common use in earlier times, such as *"All things are lawful unto me"* (1 Corinthians 6:12). The apostles listed sins generally practised from which they (the apostles) reminded the Christians they had all been rescued and into which they should be careful not to fall again (1 Corinthians 6:9-13; 1 Peter 1:2-4; 2 Peter 2:22).

### **A Flock And A Crown (v. 16)**

Verse 16 continues the prophetic description of the *"sons of Zion"* mentioned in verse 13, their exploits, and God's care for them. These were the *"remnant"* called out from national Israel by the Gospel message to constitute a nucleus of workers to evangelise among the Greek-speaking peoples and other Gentile nations.

They constituted a *“flock”* separate from others. They were saved or preserved so that their message continued from one generation to the next, as each generation fulfilled its allotted work. Their ultimate salvation was assured also. Jesus said, *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life”* (John 10:27,28), and *“Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom”* (Luke 12:32).

As stones or gems in a crown are precious, so the *“sons of Zion”* were precious and prized by the King. Moreover, the jewels in a crown shine and glimmer, each one a gleam of light. In a hostile environment, the *“sons”* set an example of light and good character to all around them. The Apostle Paul wrote, *“That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world”* (Philippians 2:15).

The stones of a crown are part of it, but are not the crown itself. They are lifted up only when the crown is lifted up. So the *“sons”* could only shine and serve as lights in the midst of nations because the Lord Jesus received His crown from the Father, and gave His followers their commission to carry the light of the Gospel to the nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

### **Events As Signs (v.16)**

The word translated *“banner”* in the NKJV, or *“ensign”* in the KJV, is the Hebrew word *“nasas”* meaning “to be conspicuous as a signal, through the idea of a flag fluttering in the wind, to raise a beacon” (Strong 5264).

The Children of Israel had banners and signs to distinguish tribes and families in encampments and on the march (Numbers 1:18,52; 2:2,34). Moses in the wilderness raised up a serpent of copper. The people had sinned and the LORD sent fiery serpents among them, *“and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died”*. Then the people confessed their sin, and asked Moses to pray to the LORD to take away the fiery serpents. The LORD instructed Moses to make *“a serpent of copper, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of copper, he lived.”*

This actually happened, and centuries later the Lord Jesus used the circumstance as an illustration of how He would be lifted up, and whoever would look on Him in faith would live. The serpent of copper lifted up was the sign of the existence of sin, and it was at the same time a sign of God’s willingness to forgive sin on repentance and confession of faith in God’s promise (Numbers 21:5-9; John 3:14,15).

Among some peoples of the world the movements of the sun, moon and stars in relation to the earth are taken as signs, and sometimes events and circumstances are taken as omens. These beliefs are superstitions, but are held by some even in these days of scientific and technological advance and developments. In the Scriptures there is no endorsement of telling fortunes by the signs of the zodiac or the arrangement of tea leaves in a cup or packs of cards. Nebuchadnezzar lost confidence in his astrologers and fortune tellers when they could neither tell nor interpret his dream which was sent by God (Daniel 2:1-9).

Concerning signs, the God of heaven has a means of giving them which neither angels nor humans can imitate. He gave notice, centuries in advance, of events to take place that He would set up as “signs” to be understood at the appointed time (Habakkuk 2:3). Only God could do this by His knowledge of *“the end from the beginning”* (Isaiah 46: 9,10).

The virgin birth of Jesus was one such sign, the prophecy being given centuries before its fulfilment (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:22,23). Jesus was born a human being, the heir to David’s throne and the Anointed of God, as God had promised.

Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem was another sign, Jesus riding upon a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey (Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:5). This was an important sign to the Jewish people, which the Jewish leaders should have recognised and heeded.

The raising of the *“sons of Zion”*, as foretold by Zechariah, was to be a sign to the children of Israel at the appointed time, beginning with Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem, calling, as it were, the prisoners in the pit of the Law to turn to the Stronghold of their Messiah, Jesus Christ, Whom God had sent, by the separation of the apostles and other disciples from the nation of Israel to form a mighty sword and an arrow to be shot against the Greeks to convert them. These sons of God were the stones of a crown lifted up as a sign for all to see. All this constituted an extended yet straightforward sign for the Jews of our Lord’s day to help them to discern the times in which they were living.

Some two hundred years before Zechariah’s day these sons of God had been foretold by the prophet Isaiah 8:18: *“Behold, I and the children whom the LORD hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth in mount Zion.”*

This prophecy of Isaiah shows that out of the Jews some would be called by God to be given to Jesus and so be taught by Him. In Hebrews 2:13 part of this prophecy of Isaiah 8:18 is quoted, and the *“children”* are identified with



the “sons” over whom the Lord Jesus is Leader or Captain, as mentioned in the letter to the Hebrews: *“For it became him, for whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren”* (Hebrews 2:10,11).

These, the prophet said, *“are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts”*. The Father, by means of the Law and the prophets, drew to Jesus those Jews willing to learn from Him (John 6:44,45). They listened to His preaching and His explanations of the prophecies, and became convinced that God desired them to accept Jesus as His Son and their Messiah. Peter declared: *“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God”*. It was upon this rock-confession that our Lord said He would build His church (Matthew 16:13-20).

The calling out of these sons was a sign and a wonder. He invited the Jews to come to Him and find rest, and taught them to pray to God as their Father. After His resurrection, Jesus said to Mary, *“I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God”* (John 20:17). And still later He told His disciples to wait at Jerusalem until they were given power from on high.

During our Lord’s ministry His disciples had been given power to perform miracles. He said to them, *“But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received freely give.”* (Matthew 10:6-8). And so the disciples, the sons of God, were lifted up in the land of Israel as a sign, like shining gems for all ages to see.

Then after Jesus ascended and the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them they became even more conspicuous, even more wondrous as a sign and a wonder in the land of Israel. The wonders they had already performed in healing the sick and casting out demons were now increased by the gifts of the Spirit, including speaking in foreign languages so that all heard the Gospel in their own languages.

With great power and authority the apostles and disciples witnessed to the people that Jesus was and is the Christ, that He Whom they had crucified was now exalted to the Father’s right hand, and was ready to bless all who would turn to Him. The apostles not only exercised the miraculous gifts, but were also given power to impart them to converts. And this they did from one end of Palestine to the other, and then from one end of the Roman

Empire to the other. God truly bore witness through them that they were indeed the “sons of Zion”.

### **Grain And New Wine (v. 17)**

The effect of all this is told to us in verse 17. This ought to be understood as telling us that there was then spiritual food to be had where previously there was little or none. There were cheerfulness, hope, activity and spiritual blessings, appreciation of God's goodness and beauty as never before.

It is now up to us in our time to realise our privilege as sons and daughters of God by His mercy and grace. The arrow shot out of the bow has not yet spent its force. The work continues in the name and by the strength of Him Who first drew the bow.

### **(d) RESTORATION OF JUDAH AND ISRAEL; (10:1-12)**

1. *Ask the LORD for rain in the time of the latter rain. The LORD will make flashing clouds; he will give them showers of rain, grass in the field for everyone.*
2. *For the idols speak delusion; the diviners envision lies, and tell false dreams; they comfort in vain. Therefore the people wend their way like sheep; they are in trouble because there is no shepherd.*
3. *"My anger is kindled against the shepherds, and I will punish the goatherds. For the LORD of hosts will visit His flock, the house of Judah, and will make them as His royal horse in the battle.*
4. *From him comes the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler together.*
5. *They shall be like mighty men, who tread down their enemies in the mire of the streets in the battle. They shall fight because the LORD is with them, and the riders on horses shall be put to shame.*
6. *"I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph. I will bring them back, because I have mercy on them. They shall be as though I had not cast them aside; for I am the LORD their God, and I will hear them.*
7. *Those of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as if with wine. Yes, their children shall see it and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the LORD.*
8. *I will whistle for them and gather them, for I will redeem them; and they shall increase as they once increased.*
9. *"I will sow them among the peoples, and they shall remember Me in far countries; they shall live, together with their children, and they shall return.*

10. *I will also bring them back from the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon, until no more room is found for them.*
11. *He shall pass through the sea with affliction, and strike the waves of the sea: all the depths of the River shall dry up. Then the pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the scepter of Egypt shall depart.*
12. *"So I will strengthen them in the LORD, and they shall walk up and down in His name," says the LORD.*

### **Early And Latter Rain (vs. 1,2)**

Chapter 10 of Zechariah begins with the words "*Ask the LORD for rain in the time of the latter rain*". Rain is needed in all countries, especially in agricultural lands. According to Smith's Bible Dictionary, no rain falls in Palestine for six months of the year. The harvests are gathered in without any interruption of unseasonable storms. As a result of six months' absence of rain, the whole land becomes dry, brown and parched, and the autumn rains are eagerly awaited to prepare the ground for planting. These early rains commence about the end of October or early November, but not suddenly, rather by degrees, so that the farmer has the opportunity of sowing his fields of wheat and barley.

With respect to the "*latter rain*" of verse 1, and the references in James 5:7 and Proverbs 16:15, there seems nowadays no clear distinction between early and latter rains. In Palestine the whole period from October to March at the present time constitutes one continuous season of rain, without any period of prolonged fine weather. Perhaps we may understand that the expressions early rains and latter rains mean that the first showers of autumn revive the dry, parched ground and prepare it for planting, while the later showers of spring continue to refresh the crops and prepare them for harvest after the rains ease and eventually cease.

The provision of early and latter rains implies the supply of desirable and necessary rain, as is indicated in Jeremiah 5:24. After rebuking Israel for being worse than the waves of the sea, which are restrained by the sands, since Israel rebelled and went beyond the bounds set by the Lord, the prophet said in Jeremiah 5:22 and 23, "*Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest;*" literally, as in the Variorum footnote, "the weeks the statute of harvest" meaning the weeks that are free from rain to enable the grain to be harvested according to God's decree and providential care for His people's sustenance.

Why does wheat sown in Palestine in late October ripen in April or May? The answer of course is that God has so arranged *"the weeks the statute of harvest"* in summer in every country. God created the grain to germinate under certain conditions of moisture, and for the plant to develop under rainfall until the time for harvest, when rain is no longer required. The children of Israel should have been grateful to God for supplying these means of continued sustenance for His people.

God's covenant with Israel was that if they were obedient, the regular seasons would be maintained, but if they were disobedient the rains would be withheld. Leeser's rendering of Jeremiah 5:24 and 25 is, *"And they have not said in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD our God, that giveth rain, the early and the latter rain, in its season; the appointed weeks of the harvest doth he ever preserve for us. Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden what is good from you."*

### **God's Promises Renewed After The Return (v. 3)**

We should remember that Zechariah prophesied just after the Israelites returned from Babylonia, so we can readily see the appropriateness of chapters 10 and 11 which recalled some of their history and reminded them of the promises and warnings previously given through Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Haggai. The promises depended on their obedience, and the warnings would result in punishments when they disobeyed.

As already said in considerations of earlier chapters, the people who returned from exile required instruction concerning their status in God's sight, and His willingness to receive their worship as before at the temple in Jerusalem. Members of the ten tribes who had been taken captive to Assyria, and who had become scattered in the Medo-Persian empire, would have required special instruction and assurance that they too were welcome to return to the land of promise with the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi. They needed to have impressed on their minds that the only acceptable worship of God would be at the temple in Jerusalem. On no account would sacrifices be acceptable if offered anywhere else.

Chapter 9 showed that the King would come to Zion at Jerusalem in Judah, and not to any city of the former northern kingdom that had departed from God and set up idolatrous worship. The promise of regular rains at the beginning of chapter 10 indicated the return of God's favour toward the returned exiles. God assured them that He would provide for their sustenance as before, provided they obeyed Him under the terms of their covenant with Him.

Verse 2 reminded the Jewish people that the diviners and those who used images were guilty of false testimony. Their dreams, visions and messages

were not from God. In the past, these false prophets had led Israel astray, and they were successful in misleading the people because there was *"no shepherd"*.

The *"shepherds"* of Israel were firstly members of the tribe of Levi, including the priesthood, and secondly the heads of the other tribes, all of whom were responsible for keeping the sheep, the nation of Israel, in the fold. They should have led the *"sheep"* into green pastures of righteousness and truth by teaching them the Law, and encouraging true worship at the temple in Jerusalem. But the shepherds did not discharge their responsibility acceptably and proved false to their trust.

In verse 3 Zechariah declared that God's anger was kindled against the faithless shepherds and goatherds. These symbolised the leaders of the people, those conspicuous and powerful persons who should have been noble and worthy leaders, but who had become untrustworthy and had led the people astray, as declared in Isaiah 9:14 to 16.

Jeremiah predicted what the LORD would do to the faithless shepherds and leaders, and Zechariah stated that the punishment predicted had been inflicted. The captivity in Babylonia, the destruction of the conditions or *"pastures"* in which these faithless shepherds enriched themselves, effectually deprived the false leaders of their positions.

On the return from Babylonia, God raised up trustworthy leaders, true shepherds, such as Zerubbabel, Joshua, Ezra and Nehemiah, to guide the people back to their land and the true worship of God. In that return, Judah was the principal tribe numbering more than forty thousand and returning from captivity with wealth and provisions to settle in their own land as described in Ezra 2:64 to 70.

The prominence of Judah is referred to in verse 3: *"For the LORD of hosts will visit his flock, the house of Judah, and will make them as his royal horse in the battle."* This would seem to mean that God would go with His people to the land which had been forsaken and left desolate for seventy years (Jeremiah 25:1-12; 2 Chronicles 36:14-21; Ezra 1:3-11; Ezekiel 8:1-4; 11: 22 and 23).

### **The Cornerstone, The Tent-Peg, The Battle-Bow And The Ruler (vs. 4,5)**

In verse 4 the premier position of Judah among the returned tribes was expressed. From the early history of Israel, Judah was the leading tribe, with the capital city Jerusalem and the temple within its territory. All people of all tribes were required to come to Jerusalem at appointed times to worship as prescribed under the Law Covenant. King David was of the tribe of Judah, and the special promise of an heir to sit on David's throne forever meant that no member of any other tribe could inherit David's throne.

The word translated "*ruler*" in the NKJV is rendered "*oppressor*" in the KJV. The KJV translation of "*oppressor*" is not incorrect in this passage, and it is noteworthy that among the rulers of Judah from Zechariah's day to the first advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, there were many oppressors to come from Judah. Among the last of such rulers were the Pharisees who were denounced by the Lord Jesus for their tyranny over the people in Matthew 23:1-6. The Scribes came in for similar denunciation, and the rulers, or leading men, in the synagogues deserved the same (Matthew 23:14,23,25,27,29; Luke 20:46; 23:13; 24:20).

From ancient times, there was a promise on record in Genesis 49:10 that Shiloh, the great Deliverer, would come from the tribe of Judah: "*The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come: and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.*" To this early prophecy referring to the Lord Jesus would be added other prophecies of the Lord Jesus as the "*corner-stone*" mentioned in verse 4. Such prophecies are found in Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 28:16. These prophecies are applied to the Lord Jesus by the inspired New Testament writers in Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17, Acts 4:11, Ephesians 2:20 and 1 Peter 2:6, 7, 8.

The Stone which God has laid is the foundation Stone of the Kingdom and Priesthood, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the chief corner-stone as described by Paul in Ephesians 2:20: "*And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.*" Here the apostles and prophets are spoken of as the foundation, with Jesus Christ as the special principal stone, the stone which is inscribed with the nature, character and use of the building. The building is the Church. In Ephesians 2:21 we read "*On whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the LORD: on whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit*" (KJV and Diaglott readings).

The chief corner-stone is in one of the foundation courses of the building, where it can be readily seen and its inscription easily read. This is the case with the Lord Jesus. He was laid at the beginning of the Gospel Age and is there for all to see, as the Apostle Paul said: "*For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*" (1 Corinthians 3:11) Paul laid the faith of the early believers upon that same foundation which God had laid, namely, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:10).

Out of Judah would also come "*the tent-peg.*" This at first sounds insignificant, but the word also means "stake" in the sense of the supporting pole of a tent. A "stake" can also mean a close involvement or a landmark

such as a surveyor's peg. We speak of a person as "having a stake" in a property, or some close involvement in a project, meaning that that person has close personal interest and involvement in a property or project. The idea in the statement that *"from him the tent-peg (or stake) will come"* seems to be that continued residence will characterise the return of the Jews to their own land under Cyrus' decree; and authorization to remain under subsequent Gentile powers would centre and depend on the tribe of Judah.

A similar understanding may be seen in the *"battle-bow."* Equipment, facilities and responsibility for the maintenance of the Israelites in their own land would be entrusted to Judah and not to any other tribe. This does not in any way invalidate or diminish the invitation to all the other tribes to return on equal terms with Judah and take advantage of all the blessings that God was prepared to grant them.

All of these things, symbolically expressed, gave assurance to the returned exiles of continued residence and stability, of God's protection, and rulership by their own leaders in their own land to which God had restored them.

Verse 5 seems also to be an assurance to Israel that in all their difficulties, God would be with them. Difficulties and troubles certainly came upon Judah and Jerusalem during the dominance of the Persians and the Greeks. Some of those problems may have been due to inadequate or faulty leadership, but the main problems arose from Judah's location between Syria and Egypt, and the recurring and spasmodic warfare conducted by those nations against each other. For a discussion and description of this warfare please see ***"Notes on the Book of Daniel"*** chapter 11, part I.

### **Saving The House Of Joseph (vs. 6-12)**

The descendants of the two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, developed into prominent tribes, but unfortunately took part in the rebellion under Jeroboam. (1 Kings chapters 12, 13 and 14). However, in Zechariah's day the time had come to bring all the tribes back to their own land, and Zechariah was given the privilege of conveying a special message to them.

While emphasising the premier position of Judah in verses 1 to 5, the Lord also desired those of the house of Joseph to realise that they were also His people and would be welcomed back.

In verse 6, God's stated purpose to "save" the house of Joseph did not refer to their salvation from sin and death, but to their salvation or deliverance from the lands in which they had been exiled, just as Judah had been delivered from Babylonia.

Verse 8 refers to this again, *"For I will redeem them"*, or *"For I have redeemed them"* as in the KJV and the RSV. The promise to the house of Joseph through Zechariah was given some years after Judah had returned and had occupied Jerusalem. The promise was not that the house of Joseph would return in large companies as was the case with the house of Judah, but that the way to return was then open also to Ephraim, which had been the main protagonist in the former rebellion against the worship of the LORD.

The LORD had in effect cast off the house of Joseph when He allowed the Syrians to carry them away. But, in Zechariah's day, He was willing, as an act of mercy and grace, to receive back any and all of the descendants of Joseph as well as those of all the other tribes of Israel. God still recognised them as His people, and although He had punished them, He then opened the way for a renewal of former relations based on obedience to His Covenant with them.

The statement *"For I am the LORD their God, and I will hear them"* in verse 6 reminds us to look back to verse 1, in which the people of Israel were told to *"ask"* for the seasonal rains. God declared He was ready to hear and answer their prayers.

The mention of Ephraim by name was a great kindness in view of their past history (2 Kings 17:6-23; Isaiah 28:1-4). Had the exiles of the ten tribes kept in touch with Jerusalem, they would have remembered or been reminded that in the days of King Hezekiah of Judah, letters had been sent to *"all Israel"*, including Ephraim and Manasseh, inviting all to come to Jerusalem and keep the Passover.

In the letters it was said, *"Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and he will return to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria"* (2 Chronicles 30:6). This appeal met with a positive response from many who had in some way or other escaped from Assyria and returned to the mountains of Israel. A full account of these events is found in 2 Chronicles 30:1-20.

The LORD was willing at any time to turn to individuals of the ten tribes who turned to Him. But the destruction of the temple and the desolation of the land prevented any of those tribes from worshipping Him at Jerusalem. However, as soon as Judah was restored to the land and the temple rebuilt, the LORD sent messages to Ephraim and all the tribes inviting them to return. A very important one of such messages was given in verses 6 to 12.

In verse 7, Zechariah prophesied that members of Ephraim returning in the faith of the God of their fathers would become *"mighty"*, and that they and their children would rejoice.



*"I will whistle for them and gather them"* (verse 8). The word translated as "whistle" ("hiss" in the KJV) is the Hebrew word "sharak" a primitive root which means "to be shrill, i.e. to whistle or hiss (as a call or in scorn)" (Strong 8319). The LORD's efforts would not be in vain. Not everyone would return together and live in the land, but they could come to the yearly feasts.

In the meantime, those who did return had the promise of verse 9, *"I will sow them among the peoples"*, that is, the peoples of God who were then re-established in the land. In other words, those of *"the house of Joseph"* who returned would find provision made for them in the land whenever they chose to accept the invitation extended to them.

From Egypt and from Assyria the people would be brought back and established again in Gilead and Lebanon, as stated in verse 10. *"Until no more room is found for them"* seems to indicate that they would return in large numbers.

As for Assyria and Egypt their power would *"dry up"*. Assyria had been absorbed by Babylonia in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, but its power had not completely dried up. Egypt had also been conquered by Nebuchadnezzar. In the course of time, however, both powers became progressively less influential, as the prophecy indicated in verse 11.

But God's promise to the house of Joseph, representing all of the ten tribes, as mentioned in verse 6, was steadfast, as verse 12 informs us: *"So I will strengthen them in the LORD, and they shall walk up and down in his name, says the LORD."* Walking *"up and down in his name"* seems to mean giving praise and thanks to God and continuing to serve Him, by Whose mercy and grace they had been allowed to return to and to become re-established in their promised land.

## **(e) THE TWO STAFFS AND THE FAITHLESS SHEPHERDS; (11:1-17)**

### **Preliminary Note**

The time of giving the message to the house of Joseph was after Judah had returned and had begun the rebuilding of the temple. The instructions contained in chapter 7 in relation to the inquiries concerning the observance of fasts were given in the fourth year of King Darius, as stated in verse 1 of that chapter.

The temple was finished in the sixth year of Darius, as recorded in Ezra 6:15. Ezra 6:14 told us that the builders *"prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo"*. The temple was finished in time for the Passover celebration in the month of Nisan, the time in the Jewish year which corresponds to March-April on our calendar.

We may infer from these indications of time that Zechariah must have prophesied at least until the month of Nisan in Darius' sixth year, which would be, according to many scholars, 516 BC. There is no evidence that Zechariah concluded his prophesyings then, so we may assume that he continued to prophesy beyond 516 BC according as the LORD inspired him. There is no record of the date of Zechariah's death.

### **Cedars Of Lebanon And Oaks Of Bashan (11:1-6)**

1. *Open your doors, O Lebanon, that fire may devour your cedars.*
2. *Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen, because the mighty trees are ruined. Wail, O oaks of Bashan, for the thick forest has come down.*
3. *There is the sound of wailing shepherds! For their glory is in ruins. There is the sound of roaring lions! For the pride of the Jordan is in ruins.*
4. *Thus says the LORD my God, "Feed the flock for slaughter,*
5. *"whose owners slaughter them and feel no guilt; those who sell them say, 'Blessed be the LORD, for I am rich'; and their shepherds do not pity them.*
6. *or I will no longer pity the inhabitants of the land," says the LORD. "But indeed I will give everyone into his neighbor's hand and into the hand of his king. They shall attack the land, and I will not deliver them from their hand."*

Verse 1 begins, *"Open your doors, O Lebanon, that fire may devour your cedars."* This address to Lebanon may at first appear to have no connection with the promise to the tribes of Joseph in chapter 10. But it has relevance when we think back to the first settlements in Palestine after the return from the captivity in Babylonia. Those first settlements were in the land allotted to Judah and Benjamin, in which the house of Joseph had no inheritance. The invitation to the ten-tribe kingdom, covering Ephraim, Manasseh and the other eight tribes to return, carried with it a notice that their inheritance in the land would be held in reserve for them.

During the years of captivity in Babylonia, the land of Palestine was ruled by governors appointed by the rulers of Babylonia. When Cyrus conquered Babylonia, he took over the whole country of Syria and the lands east of the

Jordan. Gradually Cyrus's own appointees took over from the former governors, but in the meantime there were disturbances resulting from rivalry and jealousy among the governors.

From Ezekiel's prophecies concerning Gog of the land of Magog, (Ezekiel 38:2) (expounded in great detail by Ernest Henningses in the issue of ***"The New Covenant Advocate"*** of April, 1934), we learn that control over Palestine, during the absence of the Jews in captivity, was unsatisfactory, resulting in the adjacent tribes overrunning the land. Some of those tribes had come from the north and occupied some of Syria and northern Palestine as stated in Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39.

But when God's time came to return His people to their own land, and Cyrus defeated Babylonia, other invaders, also from the north, cast out those who had taken possession, resulting in a great slaughter.

Ezekiel prophesied during the time of the captivity, and we have seen in Zechariah's prophecies how Ezekiel's predictions of the return were fulfilled and the temple rebuilt.

Zechariah, prophesying after the return and the settlement of the people of Judah in their own part of the land, was inspired to call upon Lebanon, Bashan, and the Jordan Valley to prepare for action that would clear the country of invaders and make room for the house of Joseph - the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh - as well as other tribes which made up the northern kingdom of Israel.

God's purpose to restore all Israel, the ten tribes as well as the two tribes, was so clearly expressed by Zechariah, that the need to make room in the land for the return of large numbers of Ephraim, representing the ten-tribe kingdom, was apparent.

The whole mountain range of Lebanon was included in the original inheritance given by God to Israel: *"And the land of the Giblites, and all Lebanon, toward the sun-rising from Baal-gad under Mount Hermon unto the entering into Hamath"* (Joshua 13:1-6). The land was originally inhabited by the Hivites and Giblites (Judges 3:1-3), and the children of Israel were told to take possession of the land when brought there under Joshua's leadership. We are told how the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh were so pleased with the district east of the Jordan that they desired to have this area allotted to them. The part that impressed Manasseh east of the Jordan was called Bashan. That area bordered the lake, afterwards called the Sea of Galilee, and reached to Mount Hermon.

The tribes of Israel, however, were so lax in their expulsion of the native tribes, that they did not gain possession of all the land of Lebanon that should have been theirs, including Sidon, that was situated between the mountains and the Mediterranean (Joshua 13:6). And it was also the case that, even in areas well settled by them, the Israelites failed to drive out the Canaanites.

But in chapter 11 Zechariah recorded the promise to the house of Joseph that, though greatly increased in number, they would be amply provided for if they would return to their land. There was abundant room for them. The LORD through His prophet called upon the cedars of Lebanon, the oaks of Bashan, and the forests of the Jordan to bear witness to the removal of the inhabitants. It seems in verse 1 that the cedars, oaks, cypresses and the thick forest are intended to represent the leaders of the peoples in occupation, and the fire is meant to symbolise invasion and destruction.

Trees are sometimes used in prophecy as symbols of persons. In Psalm 1 a well-watered tree represents a godly person, so a forest may be understood to represent an army or a large number of people. In Ezekiel 31:3 it is recorded that *"the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches and with a shadowing shroud, and of a high stature; and his top was among the thick boughs..."*. After describing the greatness of the dominion of Assyria (Ezekiel 31:3-9) the prophet pronounced the verdict of God that this tree must be cut down.

And so it came to pass when the Babylonians conquered the Assyrians. In the above-mentioned passage in Ezekiel, the successors of the Assyrians, and all who remained in Palestine, received notice that God would again take possession and place the ten tribes in their former inheritance, just as He had placed the people of Judah in their inheritance. This general disturbance of the heathen peoples in their occupation of Palestine is graphically described in Jeremiah 25:14-38.

We should also note the reference to *"shepherds"* and *"lions"* in verse 3. According to Jeremiah these *"shepherds"* were the rulers and leaders who took possession of Palestine when it lay desolate, and made gain for themselves. The reference to *"lions"* seems also to have the same symbolic meaning, as it does in Zephaniah 3:3; Nahum 2:8-13; Jeremiah 4:7 and 5:6. In Daniel 7, Nebuchadnezzar and his empire are symbolised by a lion with eagle's wings. The only interest these shepherds and lions had in Palestine was personal gain, while at the same time they mocked Israel and Israel's God.

The leaders or chiefs of heathen tribes that had taken possession of Palestine are called *"shepherds"* in verse 3, and *"owners"* in verse 5.

Young's literal translation calls them "buyers" and "sellers", and certainly part of a shepherd's work is to buy and sell sheep, and see that they are fattened for slaughter.

In our Lord's parable of the Good Shepherd, this pastoral aspect of a shepherd's work is not taken into account. Buying, selling and slaughtering of sheep belong to the business side. Our Lord wished to illustrate His care for His people by reference to a shepherd's care for his flock. A shepherd who deserts his flock in time of danger is unworthy to be called a shepherd, as declared in John 10:1-16.

The shepherds described by Zechariah had only business interests. They thought only of gain, and pastures were given to the sheep for the sole purpose of preparing them for sale and slaughter. And that was all that the shepherds of the nations around Palestine were interested in: making gain for themselves. They were willing to use the LORD's name, as stated in verse 5, but only to take pleasure in the fact that they were rich.

The LORD had left them alone while His people were captives in Babylonia, but Zechariah warned them in verse 6 that they would fight among themselves and destroy one another. And that is exactly what happened.

The attitude of the local rulers and the *"people of the land"* toward the returned Jews was shown in their opposition to the rebuilding of the temple and the occupation of the land. The heathen peoples regarded the land as belonging to them, as may be seen in Ezra 4:1-10.

Subsequently, after some years had elapsed, Ezra persuaded King Artaxerxes to make a decree favourable to the Israelites, compelling the local authorities to grant all facilities and to contribute out of the king's treasure (Ezra chapters 7 and 8). But then, compelled to live peaceably, the *"people of the land"* led many Israelites astray, and caused them to sin against the Law and against the leaders whom God had placed over them.

At a later time Nehemiah found great opposition to the building of the wall of the city, and the evil work of the *"people of the land"* was seen in the corruption of many priests and civilians (Nehemiah 2:10,19; 4:1-8; 13:7-29).

The prayer of penitence and pleading for mercy, which was offered by the children of Israel assembled under Nehemiah's direction, included a confession of their transgressions. This prayer gives an idea of the extent to which the children of Israel had fallen into the evil ways of the land, and the tyranny under which they suffered, in order to increase the wealth of the Persian rulers and also the local rulers (Nehemiah 9:36,37).

These regrettable conditions developed even in the sight of Ezra and Joshua and other loyal Jews, all of whom set a good example of consistent right living. So what condition of affairs would have been likely to arise among the other ten tribes when they returned to the land of promise? They would surely have suffered from the tyranny of the king's representatives and from local rulers, as well as from contamination with the *"people of the land"*. There would also have been chief men among them who would have been ready to take gain out of the returning exiles in the generally unsettled conditions.

We can see how readily the Gentile shepherds or leaders would have found justification for themselves by commenting on the actions of the Israelite shepherds or leaders, as in verse 5, by saying, *"Blessed be the LORD, for I am rich; and their shepherds do not pity them"*.

Verse 6 records God's determination to deal with the native inhabitants. God had shown patience towards them in allowing them to continue to live in the land belonging to His people, but a clearance would take place. It was prophesied that the heathen peoples would destroy one another, and that is what took place.

The Gentile tribes and nations quarrelled among themselves, while the people of Judah and the other tribes that returned disagreed among themselves as to their correct behaviour as a subject people, while still remaining the people of God in charge of His temple and the oracles of the Law and the prophets.

The Persian empire continued as the second world empire, being the empire represented by the breast and arms of silver described in the great image of Daniel chapter 2. But another empire was to arise. In 334 BC Alexander the Greek defeated Darius at Granicus, and the third world empire took over the empire of Persia, including the kingdom of Judah, which led Judah to a partly independent existence, paying tribute to one invader and then another until Rome made Judea a tributary province in 63 BC.

This long period of time was covered by the few words of Zechariah's prophecy of the Gentile tribes attacking one another, of the Israelites in coming into conflict with them, while the Israelitish *"shepherds"* misused their positions and failed to care for and feed the flock of God. But the LORD cared for His own, the *"poor of the flock"* who continued to worship and serve Him as stated in verse 7.

Verse 4 is understood by some commentators as a command applying only to Zechariah to *"feed the flock,"* the *"flock"* being the returned people of Israel. Certainly Zechariah did this, as evidenced by the testimony of Ezra

and by the fact that the prophecies given to Zechariah by the Holy Spirit were duly delivered.

But to limit God's command to Zechariah seems in this case too restricted. The scope of God's command was, and is, to all God's people whether in Palestine or in foreign lands.

It was, and is, the duty of everyone to feed the flock, with particular responsibility in those earlier times resting in the priests, Levites, heads of tribes and families who were able, or should have been able, to expound the Scriptures. The LORD would use earthly messengers to feed His flock, and would see to it that any unfaithful shepherds would not be allowed to injure the poor in spirit and the humble, who waited on Him in sincerity and devotion.

### **Two Staffs (11:7-11)**

7. *So I fed the flock for slaughter, in particular the poor of the flock. I took for myself two staffs: the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bonds; and I fed the flock.*
8. *I dismissed the three shepherds in one month. My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me.*
9. *Then I said, "I will not feed you. Let what is dying die, and what is perishing perish. Let those that are left eat each other's flesh."*
10. *And I took my staff, Beauty, and cut it in two, that I might break the covenant which I had made with all the peoples.*
11. *So it was broken on that day. Thus the poor of the flock, who were watching me, knew that it was the word of the LORD.*

In the middle of verse 7 an action prophecy begins. *"I took for myself two staffs: the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bonds; and I fed the flock."* Zechariah evidently did this symbolically under the direction of the Spirit, to teach a lesson. When Ezekiel was commanded to take certain actions in Ezekiel 4:1-4, the explanation was given, *"This shall be a sign to the house of Israel"* (Ezekiel 4:3).

Of what then were the two staffs of Zechariah 11:7 to be a sign?

A shepherd's staff is a simple implement used by shepherds to assist them in controlling and looking after their sheep. The two staffs in the prophecy are called *"Beauty"* and *"Bonds"* in the NKJV, and are variously rendered in other versions. The NIV and REB have *"favour"* and *"union"*, the RSV has *"grace"* and *"union"*, Young's literal translation has *"pleasantness"* and *"bands"*, while the Amplified Bible has *"beauty or grace"* and *"bands or union"*.

According to Strong's Concordance, reference 5278, the word translated "beauty" means "agreeableness, that is, delight, suitableness, splendour or grace", and is derived from a primitive root, reference 5276, meaning "to be agreeable (literally or figuratively)". The Variorum and the RV margin have "graciousness", which seems more nearly to convey the meaning of the word.

If then "graciousness" is the name given to the first staff, what is meant by it? It would seem to refer to God's action in being gracious to the houses of Israel and Judah. Everything to do with their return from captivity was by God's grace, that is, favour shown by Him which the children of Israel did not deserve.

They had deserved their humiliation and captivity because they had broken their covenant with God, and had committed idolatry and various evils connected with idol worship. Their leaders as faithless shepherds had received only what they deserved. But, as His prophets had foretold, God then turned His favour toward them, bringing them back to their own land and acknowledging them as His own people. Graciousness is indeed an appropriate word to describe the extent to which God had forgiven them and had shown mercy to them. Gratitude should have been the response of God's people, and such was eloquently expressed by Ezra in his prayer in chapter 9:

6. *And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.*
7. *Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day.*
8. *And now for a little space grace hath been shewed from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage.*
9. *For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.*

Although the grace and mercy of God had been extended to His people, it was only "a little space" or a short time until His people again sinned grievously. The staff of graciousness which would be broken would seem to



mean that God would be gracious and merciful as long as possible, as long as His plan and purpose would permit, for we know He purposed to send His Son to place before the children of Israel and Judah the New Covenant, as Jeremiah had foretold (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

### **The Three Shepherds (vs. 8,9)**

Verses 8 and 9 indicate the length of time during which God's graciousness would be extended toward the children of Israel. The time would be until the rising up of three shepherds who would lord it over the flock of Israel. These shepherds would gain such influence that God and their duty to Him would be long and persistently neglected, even though God had been so gracious in returning them to their own land, giving them the early and latter rain and many additional undeserved blessings.

These three shepherds "*abhorred*" God, Who nevertheless continued to send His prophets and other messengers while the term of graciousness lasted, as indicated by the staff remaining whole and unbroken.

The literal rendering of "*loathed them*" in verse 8 is "was straitened for them". This sense of being "straitened" or "concerned" seems more likely to be the meaning intended, because the fulfilment of this prophecy extends to the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus, as suggested in the preceding comments on verses 8 and 9.

Our Lord in His earthly ministry tried to show the Jewish leaders where they were heading, but this only increased their hatred, as we see in Matthew 21:40-46.

The Lord Jesus also told them that their sin remained because they obstinately refused to acknowledge the evidence that He was their Messiah, in spite of the wonderful miracles He performed in their midst and before their eyes (John 9:13-41).

History shows that, from their return to their own land, while still subject to the rulership of foreign powers, the Jews reacted in different ways to their situation as a subject people.

Some accepted the situation as unavoidable and made the best of it, continuing their worship at the temple and waiting for the promised Messiah.

Others sought to co-operate positively with the appointed governors and officials and gain lucrative appointments for themselves. Others again left political matters alone, and studied heathen philosophies, filling their minds with myths, stories and legends connected with the worship of false gods, of whom there were many, as the Apostle Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 8:5.

Still another class became knowledgeable in the Law, but added voluminous explanations and interpretations that in fact neither explained nor interpreted. The Law of God became buried under a mass of tradition, so that the people became more and more dependent on the doctors of the Law, not only in regard to doctrine, but also in regard to innumerable ordinances and rituals, causing the Lord Jesus to call them *"blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel"* (Matthew 23:24).

Our Lord also said of them that *"they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers"* (Matthew 23:4).

These various schools and trends of thought led to the development of sects and associations, and as a consequence, party identifications and names were adopted. The Pharisees taught that Moses gave an oral law as well as a written law, having, as they claimed, passed on to Joshua the oral law, which was then passed from generation to generation, and also added to from time to time.

The Pharisees claimed to live righteous lives according to the Law, but they burdened themselves and their associates with seemingly endless details.

The Sadducees denied the existence of an oral law handed down from Moses, and also disagreed with the Pharisees concerning the resurrection of the dead, for which belief the Lord Jesus rebuked them, saying to them, *"Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God"* (Matthew 22:28-32).

The Essenes sought to combine the Law with eastern mysticism, but were less influential than were the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The priests and Levites were appointed by God to guide and instruct the people. They were given no inheritance in the land, but were given cities to dwell in, and fields for their flocks and herds. Those cities were scattered among the other tribes, so that the Levites were easily accessible, and could travel about among the people to read and explain the Law to them (Numbers 1:47-54; 35:1-8; Nehemiah 8:1-8).

The priests and Levites failed in this their allotted task, and were condemned by the prophets as largely responsible for the defection of the people. (Jeremiah 5:31) Those who returned from the captivity included genuinely faithful ones, but before long many priests and Levites were again found associating with the idolatrous inhabitants of the land.

It is therefore not surprising that many priests and Levites allied themselves with the Sadducees.

The Essenes were a much smaller sect, and their doctrines and practices had less appeal to the priests and Levites, and also to the people, than did the teachings and practices of the two larger groups.

The Pharisees, including the Scribes, and the Sadducees kept the people interested in religious matters for at least a hundred years before Jesus' earthly ministry, and may well be considered as two of the "*shepherds*" referred to by Zechariah, each seeking to extend its own teachings and practices as a creed or set of rules by means of which to feed the flock of God.

If the Pharisees and Sadducees were two of the three "*shepherds*" mentioned by Zechariah, who or what was the third?

The oldest official body of Israel was the Sanhedrin. Concerning the Sanhedrin the Oxford Teachers' notes say:

"Ezra and Nehemiah left a settled form of government in Palestine, the centre of which was Jerusalem. Here was established a council of elders and priests, who formed an ecclesiastical court, interpreting the law, and enforcing its observance. These were called the "Great Synagogue". They were to the new settlement after the Captivity what the "*elders that overlived Joshua*" (Joshua 24:31) were to the Israelites who came out of Egypt ... This body of elders lasted about 150 years, when it expired in its last survivor, the High Priest Simon the Just, BC 291.

"Ezra and Nehemiah also set up synagogues in country towns, as places of worship on the sabbath, and as schools of instruction and theological discussion during the week. Attached to each was a body of "Rulers", who were both civil magistrates and ecclesiastical presbyters. Palestine was subject to Persia at this time, and formed part of a province under the Satrap (or governor) of Syria, but these elders were allowed to administer the government with the high priest as their responsible head.

"Alexander the Great visited Jerusalem (BC 331) ... Alexander's conquests broke down the barriers separating one kingdom from another, and especially those between the Asiatic and European states. Men learned to understand each other's thought, while Greek literature and intelligence spread over the East, and the Greek language became almost universal.

"Ptolemy Soter's invasion of Judea (BC 320) led to a further settlement of Jews at Alexandria (partly as captives, partly as colonists). Under his successor, Ptolemy Philadelphus (BC 285), learning was fostered, and an alliance was attempted between Jewish revelation and Greek philosophy, each reacting on the other. The most important result of this was the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek (the LXX; that is, the

Septuagint), which became known all over the world, and thus prepared the way for the universal spread of Christianity."

The name "The Great Synagogue" is absent from the Scriptures, but "Council" occurs frequently in the New Testament as the English equivalent of the Sanhedrin, which was the successor and continuation of the "Great Synagogue". Of the Sanhedrin we have this description in the Oxford Bible "Helps":

"The Sanhedrin, "The Council" of the Jewish Church and people, was a theocratic oligarchy (government by a ruling few), which, after Alexander's conquest, if not before, held chief authority in all causes and over all persons, ecclesiastical and civil". It was suggested by the old institution of seventy-two elders (six from each tribe), appointed by Moses, at Jethro's suggestion, to relieve him in the administration of justice (Exodus 18:14; Numbers 11:16). There is no trace of such a tribunal in the Book of Joshua, or in the time of the Judges or of the Kings. It consisted of an equal number (twenty-four) of priests, scribes, and elders, all of whom were required to be married, above thirty years of age, well instructed in the law, and of good report among the people. This constituted the Supreme Court of Judicature, and Administrative Council, taking cognizance of false doctrine and teaching, as well as of breaches of the Mosaic Law, and regulating both civil and ecclesiastical observances peculiar to the Jewish nation. The power of life and death was taken from it by the Roman government (John 18:31; 19:7), which otherwise covenanted to respect its decrees; though during the interval between the death of Tiberius and the accession of Caligula, and in the absence of Pilate at Rome, the opportunity was seized to stone Stephen in contravention of this compact. The name Sanhedrin is not Hebrew but Greek."

It is not improbable that the Sanhedrin was a revival of the Great Synagogue, under another name, with diminished numbers and limited function. The Sanhedrin usually met in the hall Gazith, within the Temple precincts, though special meetings were sometimes held in the house of the high priest (Matthew 26:3), who was generally (but not necessarily) the president.

From the foregoing it is suggested that the *"three shepherds"* dismissed *"in one month"* (verse 8) were as follows:

1. The Sanhedrin or Council, composed of priests, scribes and elders, and official head of the Jewish nation in our Lord's day.
2. The Pharisees, the largest body of influential opinion on both the teaching of the Law and the prophets, and the requirements of a holy life, having among its members priests, Levites, scribes, elders and rulers, as well as ordinary Jews.

3. The Sadducees, the second largest body, differing from the Pharisees in respect of tradition, and denying the resurrection and a future life. Included in its membership were priests, Levites, scribes and elders, rulers of synagogues, as well as ordinary Jews.

For centuries these were the "*shepherds*" watching over Israel, teaching the people what to believe and what to do. The authority of the Council our Lord referred to in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:22) and its activities in the agitation which preceded our Lord's death will be described elsewhere.

The Pharisees, with whom the scribes mostly associated themselves, were spoken of by the Lord as having a care over the people in these words: "*The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.*" (Matthew 23:2,3).

As to the Sadducees, their wide influence is shown by the public denunciations they received from the Lord Jesus and by their actions in opposing the LORD God.

One of the first things said by John the Baptist when taking up his public ministry was a warning to two of these false shepherds. Crowds of people went out to him to be baptised. "*But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.*" Then he likened them, if they did not repent, to chaff, fit only to be burnt. This was the first notice to them that their term as "*shepherds*" was drawing to a close. To be burnt and destroyed like chaff as recorded in Matthew 3:7-12 sounds very much like being "dismissed" as declared in Zechariah 11:8.

When Jesus began His ministry He took the scribes and Pharisees to task saying, "*Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom.*" (Matthew 5:20) "*O generation of vipers*" He said to the Pharisees, "*how can ye, being evil, speak good things?*" (Matthew 12:34).

Although the Pharisees and Sadducees opposed each other, they united their forces against the Lord, trying to "*entangle him in his talk*" (Matthew 22:15), and asking for "*signs*" (John 2:18; 6:30). On one occasion, Jesus said to His disciples, "*Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees*", meaning, as He explained, beware of their teachings (Matthew 16:1,6,11 and 12). So while they differed between themselves, the Pharisees and Sadducees were united in opposition to the Lord, and in their craft, hypocrisy and deceit. They were entirely unsuitable "*shepherds*" for Israel.

And so it was that our Lord, moving about among the people, healing every sickness and every disease that afflicted them, was *"moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd"* (Matthew 9:35,36).

In the records of the Gospel, we read that when Jesus performed a miracle or series of miracles, the Pharisees and Sadducees made disparaging remarks. The Pharisees were willing to use the Herodians or any other faction to *"entangle him in his talk"*, so great was their envy and hatred, disguised at times in flattering words, and were told plainly by the Lord that they were hypocrites, as in Matthew 22:15 to 18.

The Lord Jesus did not mention the Sanhedrin or Council by name, but said many things that amounted to public rebukes of their administration in such statements as the following: *"Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment"* (John 7:24; reminiscent of Deuteronomy 1:16,17).

*"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! (some of whom were surely members of the Council) for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."* (Matthew 23:23).

We know that the Council actively opposed Jesus, so evidently some of His rebukes clearly exposed their hypocrisy and pride. Matthew 26:3 and 4 tell us how some of the members consulted together at the house of the high priest Caiaphas intending *"that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him."*

The Council, before whom Jesus was brought, was composed mainly, if not entirely, of Pharisees and Sadducees, the high priest being mentioned in Acts 4:1 and 6, and 5:17 as closely associated with the Sadducees.

In Acts 5:34, Gamaliel, a Pharisee, is recorded as influencing the Council not to go to extremes in their dealings with the Apostles, Peter and John. The truth of the matter was that they *"feared the people"* (Acts 5:24-27). We therefore see that members of the Council, being afraid of the people, were in no way to be regarded as suitable *"shepherds"*.

### **Dismissed In One Month**

What does it mean that the *"shepherds"* were dismissed *"in one month"*? The meaning is surely that the term of the *"shepherds"* concluded when our Lord, when *"about thirty years of age"* appeared and took up office as the Good Shepherd (John chapter 10; Luke 3:21-23). A prophetic month is thirty days, and in prophecy a day stands for a year (Ezekiel 4:4-6; Numbers 14:34).

This prophetic month of thirty years in question, began with the angelic announcement of the birth of Jesus Christ, the Saviour, the Anointed of God and the rightful Heir of David's throne. The Council, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, with all the rulers, priests, captain, officers, scribes and lawyers, and any who had influence with the people, should have considered what the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, and the remarkable events associated with His birth, would mean. And subsequently, thirty years later, they should also have been persuaded to revise their opinions when John the Baptist preached to them of the arrival of Jesus in their midst.

Outwardly these *"shepherds"* continued in their official capacities during the Lord's ministry, but they were no longer the three shepherds, for the LORD had dismissed them from His favour. Jesus denounced them as *"hypocrites"* and *"blind guides"* and foretold God's judgment against them in Matthew 21:43. The staff of *"graciousness"* was broken, and they were due to experience the wrath of which John the Baptist had forewarned them.

An important factor that helped to determine the length of the period of graciousness is shown in verse 9. Developments came to such a state among the people themselves that God could no longer feed them. The people as a whole chose to follow the false shepherds and no longer wanted God to feed them. God was always willing to feed them spiritually, but they, by their attitude and conduct, rejected Him.

When God said, *"Let what is dying die, and what is perishing perish"* and *"Let those that are left"* destroy one another, He was referring to the time coming when the Law Covenant would be abolished and done away with completely.

The Law Covenant had all along been unsatisfactory in that no-one except the Lord Jesus could gain life from it. Jesus could obey it perfectly, and it was ready to vanish away. Subsequently the prophet Malachi was sent to Israel to encourage them to make another effort to keep the Law, but the outcome was the same. Another better covenant had to be introduced, and Malachi was inspired to tell Israel of the New Covenant and its Messenger, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who would purify the sons of Levi ... *"that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness"* (Malachi 3:1-3).

Verse 10 tells us that the staff of graciousness would be cut in two. The graciousness referred to was that which was granted to the twelve tribes of Israel on their return to their land, and the continuing application to them of the Law Covenant. God was faithful to the Covenant, but the children of Israel were not. God eventually took that Covenant away, the time of graciousness under that Covenant was at an end, and an entirely new arrangement was introduced, under which God's mercy, grace and graciousness became available to everyone.

This sign of God's new arrangement was not understood by the Jewish leaders nor by the people generally. The sign was understood mainly by the poor and humble, rich in faith, spoken of in verse 11. They waited upon God and came to learn that God had never forsaken nor ceased to feed His faithful and true sheep, who continued to worship Him through the Lord Jesus, Who said to them, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 5:3).

### **Thirty Pieces Of Silver (11:12,13)**

12. *Then I said to them, "If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages; and if not, refrain." So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver.*
13. *And the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter" - that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD for the potter.*

In view of its application in the New Testament, verse 12 seems to come in suddenly in the prophecy. This prophecy was made some four hundred years before it was fulfilled, a prophecy that was beyond human ability to make. God revealed what would happen when the Good Shepherd came and was betrayed by a traitor. The three shepherds mentioned in verse 8 were also involved in the betrayal.

When Zechariah wrote *"Then I said to them"* he was caused to take the part of Judas, in continuation of the action prophecy. Thirty pieces of silver was the price of betrayal of the Lord Jesus. In fulfilment of the prophecy there is no question of who it was that weighed out the thirty pieces of silver.

Luke 19:47,48 *"And he (Jesus) taught daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy him. And could not find what they might do: for all the people were very attentive to hear him."*

Luke 20:1 *"The chief priests and the scribes came upon him with the elders."*

Luke 20:19 *"And the chief priests and the scribes....sought to lay hands on him."*

Luke 20:27 *"Then came to him certain of the Sadducees, which deny that there is any resurrection."*

Luke 22:2 *"And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him; for they feared the people."*



Then in Luke 22:3-6 the agreement of betrayal was recorded. Judas subsequently sat at the table with Jesus, outwardly to observe a solemn feast, but inwardly to keep track of Him Whom he would betray.

The Gospel of Matthew tells us how *"the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people"* consulted together (Matthew 26:3-5), and how Judas Iscariot sought out the chief priests, and used the almost identical words of the prophecy: *"And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver"* (Matthew 26:14-16).

We know from Philippians 2 how our Lord humbled Himself, but when we realise the price at which He was valued, we are surely deeply moved at the meanness of His betrayal.

Exodus 21:28-32 lays down the penalties to be imposed if an ox injured a man or a woman. Verse 32 says, *"If the ox shall push a manservant or a maidservant; he (the owner) shall give unto their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned."* So it seems our Lord was priced at the legal value of a slave. The rightful King of Israel, the true Heir of David, the one perfect and sinless Man Who could give Himself a ransom for all, was sold for the price of a slave.

Was there sarcasm in verse 13 in the comment *"that princely price they set on me"*? Possibly the Jewish leaders thought they were paying too much, because they had been trying for a long time to lay their hands on Jesus, preferably without having to pay money, as indicated in John 11:46-53, and verses 56 and 57.

Verse 13 represents God as saying, *"Throw it to the potter"*. This does not mean that God took any responsibility for the conspiracy. The priests would have put the money returned to them into the treasury, but they knew that the price of blood would not be acceptable to the LORD. This is simply another example of divine foreknowledge that the price of betrayal would ultimately go to the potter, for the chief priests bought with the money a field from which potters dug their clay, *"the potter's field, to bury strangers in"* (Matthew 27:6-10).

### **The Second Staff Broken (11:14)**

*14. Then I cut in two my other staff, Bonds, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.*

The *"Bonds"* or *"Union"* (NIV, RSV, and REB) to be broken, symbolised by the breaking of the staff, is that of the brotherhood of Judah and Israel.

Originally the two tribes of Judah and the ten tribes of Israel were brethren, constituting the twelve tribes of Israel. A separation occurred when the ten tribes rebelled. Through Ezra, Nehemiah, Zechariah and others of God's prophets, we learn that after the return from captivity in Babylonia, Judah and Israel became united again, as one staff in the LORD's hand.

Ezekiel prophesied of this so clearly that there is no mistaking the fact that on the return from captivity the rebellious ten tribes of Israel as well as the two tribes of Judah were considered to have been sufficiently punished, so the twelve tribes were united again under the decree of Cyrus. They were again one nation in their own land (Ezekiel 37:15-22). In this connection, God had already made a promise centuries before that all twelve tribes would be visited and brought back after the captivity (Leviticus 26:22-45).

Why then was the union to be broken after being established under Cyrus' decree? The answer lies in the fact that the union was to last only as long as the first staff representing graciousness was kept whole. The graciousness and the union were to preserve the land of Palestine, especially Judea, and the people of Israel until the Messiah came, the King Who would come to Zion, as promised in chapter 9, verse 9.

When our Lord came in fulfilment of the seventy weeks of Daniel's prophecy, (Daniel 9: 24,25) there was no longer any purpose in keeping the twelve tribes together as one nation. The Lord and His apostles set a new covenant before all Israel, and invited them to enter into it. In that new covenant there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile, between one tribe and another, nor any distinction relating to place of residence.

Under the new covenant, prayers may be offered to God in the name of the Lord Jesus anywhere at any time, the worship at the temple at Jerusalem having been brought to its appointed end. All Gentiles and Jews who accept the Lord Jesus Christ are brethren, and their brotherhood will endure, because the new covenant is so much better than the old, and in that New Covenant all believers may rejoice together.

### **The Foolish Shepherd (11:15-17)**

15. *And the LORD said to me, "Next, take for yourself the implements of a foolish shepherd.*
16. *"For indeed I will raise up a shepherd in the land who will not care for those who are cut off, nor seek the young, nor heal those that are broken, nor feed those that still stand. But he will eat the flesh of the fat and tear their hooves in pieces.*
17. *"Woe to the worthless shepherd, who leaves the flock! A sword shall be against his arm and against his right eye; his arm shall completely wither, and his right eye shall be totally blinded."*

This is another action prophecy.

The implements of a good shepherd were a rod and a staff for controlling the sheep. A good shepherd would also have carried a sling and a knife to deal with wild beasts who sought to prey upon the sheep. The foolish shepherd, on the other hand, if he carried rod, staff, sling and knife would have used them to injure rather than care for the sheep.

The word rendered "*foolish*", according to Strong's Concordance, is "evilyi" meaning "silly" or "morally impious" (196), and is derived from a root word "eviyi", meaning "to be perverse" (191). The idea is not a mentally deficient person, who would not know any better, but rather one who knew, or should have known, how to use the implements of care for the sheep, but used them in other ways. The implements of a "foolish" shepherd may well be good implements perverted in their use. Even the Word of God, the Word of life, may be perverted by persons of evil intent with harm to themselves and the misleading of others (Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 3:16,17).

In verse 16 we are told that the foolish or perverse shepherd does nothing a good shepherd ought to do. He does not care for the sheep that are "*cut off*," (KJV margin "hidden") that is, sheep which have been cut off from the flock by falling down a mountainside and becoming hidden in dense scrub. He does not seek or look for the "*young*" (RV "scattered"), he leaves them to die from hunger or cold or both. He does not heal the "*broken*" or injured sheep, and does not feed those that are strong enough to stand, presumably in fields or land where there is little or no grass left to eat.

The only interest the foolish shepherd has in the flock is to "*eat the flesh of the fat*," that is, make use of surviving sheep for his own benefit and advantage. Moreover he is callous and cruel, as stated in the last words of verse 16, in that he tears "*their hooves in pieces*". The word "tear" means to crunch (Strong 6561), that is, "to crush or grind noisily". Such conduct amounts to senseless cruelty or destruction with no benefit or advantage.

In verse 17 the LORD pronounces woe upon the worthless shepherd. The "*worthless shepherd*" pays no attention to the bleating of the sheep but the LORD is well aware of the sheep starved and ill-treated by the neglect and greed of the shepherd, and declares that the worthless shepherd will be punished. It seems reasonable to understand that the worthless shepherd represented the combined forces of the three shepherds previously described, whose time came to an end when the Good Shepherd began His ministry, and began to tell people the truth about them. The three shepherds more or less countered one another by their contradictory theories and practices, so that the sheep, that is, the people, were neglected, starved and left to die.

When, however, it suited them, the three shepherds united with all their hatred, greed and jealousy into a formidable combination. The Sanhedrin, the civil and ecclesiastical judge with the high priest at its head, the Pharisees and Sadducees, the religious and professedly holy people, together with all the rulers, lawyers, captains, scribes, doctors, readers, officers, interpreters, Herodians, and Essenes combined with one purpose: to destroy the Good Shepherd. The flock, who should have been fed by them, were incited by them to hate and put to death the True Shepherd, Who offered the people deliverance from the bondage of their Law, and, what is more important, deliverance from sin and death.

The foolish and worthless shepherd, representing in a single image the three shepherds already described, were punished by the LORD. They suffered a loss described in the words, *"His arm shall completely wither, and his right eye shall be totally blinded"*. The arm is a symbol of power, frequently ruling power, and the arm wields the sword and also the sceptre. The eye is a symbol of perception, understanding, of mental vision and spiritual insight. In the parable of the sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-46), the right hand was for those who behaved rightly, while the left hand was for those who were evil.

And so it was with the foolish, worthless shepherd. The withering of the arm and the loss of the right eye would indicate the loss of ability to do what is correct, and to see or understand the right and good paths to follow. The intelligence and activities of the three shepherds, represented by one worthless shepherd, were biased toward evil. They stubbornly refused to see and acknowledge the goodness and righteousness of the Lord Jesus, and remained unmoved and hard-hearted and stiff-necked, despite the wonderful miracles He performed as a witness before them. They saw only what they regarded as disastrous consequences for themselves, and opposed the Lord Jesus at every opportunity. They behaved wilfully and perversely, and became blind to truth and righteousness. The Lord called them blind leaders of the blind, falling together into a ditch (John 9:40,41; Matthew 15:14).

But after the false shepherds had succeeded in the wicked deed that had united them, there was no further cohesion. They could not agree among themselves about what to do next (Acts 5:21, 26, 33-40). They were without power. They could not prevent God from raising His Son to life, they could not keep the apostles in prison, they could not prevent the apostles from continuing their preaching, and could not prevent the forming of a new sheepfold consisting of believing Jews and Gentiles on equal terms. So all the plotting, anger and conspiracy of three and a half years were all in vain, and the false shepherds lost the place they might have had in the kingdom.

But the LORD had not abandoned all graciousness. His graciousness was made available from time to time until the period of the Law had ended, but a new graciousness was extended to all who would listen. The Gospel was a new message of God's grace. The message was that God was ready to forgive all Jews who would acknowledge their personal guilt and sincerely repent that they had agreed to the death of the Lord Jesus (Acts 3:14,15,19). The message was subsequently extended to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46).

The Jewish people were called upon individually and personally to repudiate the action and activities of the *"foolish shepherd"* with the withered arm and the blind eye. Many of them did so, but the majority did not. Those who remained unrepentant then began to experience wrath *"to the uttermost"* (1 Thessalonians 2:13-16; Luke 21:24).

Jesus had forewarned them of this as recorded in Matthew 23:

37: *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"*

38. *Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."* (KJV)

Only a few years after the LORD's warning the Pharisees and Sadducees were found continuing in dispute, having learnt nothing from the teachings of the apostles and their inspired explanations of Scripture prophecy, nor from the wonderful miracles performed by them in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 23: 6,7).

To this day, the descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel are blind. Many try to hold to the Law Covenant, which was abolished and is no longer in force since it was nailed to the cross of Christ. The majority remain slaves to the traditions of the elders, both those traditions accepted in the Lord's day and traditions added since that time by their Rabbis. Included now in the beliefs of many Jews are Gentile errors concerning the soul, the state of the dead, and the future life, as well as the nature of God. They will remain blind until they accept the Messiah Whom they refused.

If the explanations offered of Zechariah, chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11 are correct, then no-one need give credence to Anglo-Israeli theory, sometimes referred to also as the United States-Israel theory. The claim that the union of Israel and Judah mentioned in Ezekiel and in Zechariah is still in the future is a claim without foundation. That union was brought about during the re-settlement of the Holy Land after the Babylonian captivity under the rulership of the Persian empire, and continued under the Greek and Roman empires up to the time of our Lord, Who said His message was for the *"lost sheep of the house of Israel"* (Matthew 10:5,6; 15:24).

His message was not for Judah only, but for the whole house of Israel, all twelve tribes. Jesus broke the brotherhood of the twelve tribes firstly by calling on everyone out of every tribe to become His disciples, and secondly by taking away the Law Covenant under which their brotherhood as one nation under God had originated and continued.

He opened up the New Covenant with its new way of life, and invited them to enter into it. The new brotherhood for the people of God now is brotherhood in Christ Jesus. The apostle Paul writes: *"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus .... There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."* (Galatians 3:26,28). And our Lord Himself said to those who believed into Him, *"One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren"* (Matthew 23:8).

## **2. THE SECOND ORACLE; 12:1 - 14:21**

### **(a) THE LORD'S CARE FOR JUDAH AND JERUSALEM (12:1-14)**

1. *The burden of the word of the LORD against Israel. Thus says the LORD, who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him:*
2. *"Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem.*
3. *"And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it.*
4. *"In that day," says the LORD, "I will strike every horse with confusion, and its rider with madness; I will open my eyes on the house of Judah, and will strike every horse of the peoples with blindness.*
5. *"And the governors of Judah shall say in their heart, 'The inhabitants of Jerusalem are my strength in the LORD of hosts, their God.'*
6. *"In that day I will make the governors of Judah like a firepan in the woodpile, and like a fiery torch in the sheaves; they shall devour all the surrounding peoples on the right hand and on the left, but Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place-- Jerusalem.*

7. *The LORD will save the tents of Judah first, so that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall not become greater than that of Judah.*
8. *"In that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; the one who is feeble among them in that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the Angel of the LORD before them.*
9. *"It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.*
10. *"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for him as one grieves for a firstborn.*
11. *"In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo.*
12. *"And the land shall mourn, every family by itself: the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves;*
13. *"the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of Shimei by itself, and their wives by themselves;*
14. *"all the families that remain, every family by itself, and their wives by themselves.*

### **Preliminary Reflections**

The LORD frequently used repetition in teaching His people through the prophets. The Jews to whom Zechariah spoke had human frailties, like ourselves, busy with many things, and apt to forget spiritual matters when preoccupied with temporal matters. So the LORD gave them instructions, precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little (Isaiah 28:10)

The "*line upon line*" of the prophecies consisted of repeated warnings against idolatry and other sins, and the Israelites' refusal to heed these warnings led them to fall from favour and come in for punishment (Isaiah 28:9-15). The plans of the Israelites often miscarried because they were arranged without proper consideration or no consideration at all of God's commandments, as written in the Law Covenant.

Prophets of old living at different periods of time were sometimes inspired to speak and write of the same events, both the punishments for disobedience and wrong doing, and the blessings reserved for the obedient and humble-minded who tried their best to do God's will. The prophets were inspired to repeat their messages in a variety of ways, all designed to impress the truth upon their hearers and readers.

Therefore it is not unusual that in Zechariah 12 another sidelight was given on that period of Israel's history which was covered in Zechariah 9:1-8, reaching from Zechariah's day to the time when the King mentioned in chapter 9:9 would ride triumphantly into Jerusalem to the welcoming shouts of the multitude. As was commented previously on chapter 9, certain events preceded that triumphant entry, and certain other events followed that great occasion. It was a time of triumph and a time of sending out a message to Israel urging the people to turn to the Stronghold of their Messiah.

In chapter 12 Zechariah was inspired to tell again of the troubles to be experienced by Israel before their King would come, and to predict what must have seemed to the Israelites to be a contradiction, namely, a great mourning. The LORD, however, would preserve them at Jerusalem, for the great mourning was to take place there. Jerusalem should be understood as being representative of the nation as a whole. At the same time, a spirit of grace and supplication would be poured out upon them by the LORD as they looked upon the One Whom they had pierced.

It would have been difficult, perhaps impossible, for the people of Israel, re-gathered in their own land, to realise that the great mourning foretold by Zechariah was on account of their great King. Some prophecies may be understood long before their fulfilment, while others may be understood as the events predicted are taking place, and others may not be understood until after the events foretold have taken place (Matthew 16:21-23).

Many of the statements and prophecies of Zechariah 12 are sometimes, according to my understanding, wrongly applied in terms of the time of fulfilment by some commentators. The reader is respectfully exhorted to examine the prophecies and their contexts carefully to distinguish between those which apply to earlier times and those which apply to later periods, including even the kingdom age itself.

### **The Word Of The Lord Concerning Israel (v. 1)**

"Burden" means figuratively "utterance" (Strong 4853). The NIV and RSV have simply *"the word of the LORD concerning Israel"*. The verbs in the verse should really be in the past tense: "stretched", "laid" and "formed" as in the Variorum footnote and the RSV. The message was from the LORD, Who knows the end from the beginning and does not need to guess or wait and see what will happen.



The name "*Israel*" signified that the prophecy applied to the whole nation, as at the restoration the twelve tribes of Israel again became one nation with Jerusalem restored and the Temple rebuilt. Much that was said pertained to Judah and Jerusalem, but this is not strange because God had declared that Jerusalem was the place where He had placed His name, the place where the true worship with sacrifices and burnt offerings were to be conducted in the Temple and nowhere else.

Often in the prophecies, Israel was reminded that God, Who created the heavens and the earth, and gave life to the human race, would have the power and ability to carry out other great works such as caring for the Israelites, defending them from their enemies and fulfilling His promises, all of which were beyond their own ability to perform (Isaiah 42:5).

So here, having given Zechariah a "*burden*" or an "oracle", meaning an inspired message, God reminded His people that the message was not Zechariah's forecast, but a message from God Himself, Who knows the future, and can foretell unerringly what will take place, and can plan accordingly. It is for people to wait upon Him, and not He upon them (Isaiah 55:6-11; Acts 15:18).

The prophecy referred to Israel as a whole, though much that was said concerned Judah and Jerusalem. The destiny of the twelve tribes resettled in their various parts of the Holy Land was bound up with the maintenance of Jerusalem and the inhabitants of that city. Jerusalem was not only the place of worship, but also the chief city of defence, being built on a hill surrounded almost entirely by valleys. As an outpost under the Persians, the city was strongly fortified, and these fortifications were strengthened by the Jews themselves for defence against the tribes surrounding them. For nearly five hundred years the successors of Joshua the priest-ruler, endeavoured to carry out the LORD's will in the preservation of the city and nation for the coming Messiah.

### **A Cup Of Bewilderment (v. 2)**

The RV, RSV and NIV all have "*a cup of reeling*", Leeser's translation has "*a cup of confusion*", and the Variorum footnote "*a cup of bewilderment*". "Cup" may be used to represent an experience to be undergone or endured, and was so used a number of times in Scripture, particularly in reference to the Lord Jesus' suffering. It is a fact of history that neighbouring peoples were jealous of Israel's prestige and security, and their invasions of Judah and Jerusalem had frequently to be repulsed. Jerusalem did not tremble or reel, rather it was the peoples round about who trembled and reeled when they attempted to invade Jerusalem.

The whole of Judah would gather to defend themselves and Jerusalem against the invaders. But there were times after the Persian rule had ended and when Alexander the Great's forces were divided, that treachery occurred in Judah, and rebels joined with the invaders to betray Jerusalem to the foreigners. Loyal Jews then had to defend the Temple and the fortified city against their foes who included their own brethren. Truly confusion and bewilderment came upon all who sought to attack Israel, God's chosen people, at that time.

The Septuagint translation reads, *"Behold I will make Jerusalem as trembling door-posts to all the nations round about, and in Judea there shall be a siege against Jerusalem"*. Trembling door-posts remind us of Samson's great achievement in bringing down the temple of the Philistines, and may be an allusion to it. The LORD Who strengthened Samson in his extremity could also cause the actions of Israel's opponents to become their undoing. This thought is repeated in verse 3.

### **A Heavy Stone (v. 3)**

The names of the locations of some of those peoples are mentioned in Zechariah 9:1-6. They are Hadrach, Damascus, Hamath, Tyre, Sidon, Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron and Ashdad. Other peoples not named attached themselves more or less to the forces of *"the king of the north"* and *"the king of the south"* described in Daniel chapter 11. A discussion of those conflicts and their results is presented in the book ***"Notes on the Book of Daniel"*** chapter 11, part 1.

Jerusalem and the Jews were continually menaced by these opposing forces, and sometimes were conquered and forced to pay tribute. But none of the invading forces could hold Jerusalem for any length of time. It was like a heavy stone with sharp and jagged edges that cut their hands, and they were glad to drop it. Leeser's translation reads, *"all that burden themselves with it shall be severely cut"*.

### **Astonishment and Failures (v. 4)**

In prophecy the horse frequently represented military force. The forces of Syria and Egypt were often astonished and unsettled by the difficulties and failures of their campaigns. They did not seem to realise that their inability to retain conquered territory was due to the fact that the God of Israel was watching over Jerusalem and Judah, and consequently the invaders could not succeed beyond certain limits.

This seems to be the meaning of the LORD's striking every horse with confusion, the riders with madness, and every horse of the peoples with blindness. Alexander the Great was said to have been impressed with the strength and calmness of the Jewish High Priest, Jaddus, and the Jewish

leaders when they were faced with Alexander's heavily-armed and disciplined infantry.

### **Strength In The Lord Of Hosts (v. 5)**

The source of the Jewish leaders' calmness and courage is revealed in this verse. The governors of Judah were:

- (1) the High Priest, also called the prince;
- (2) the Levitical priesthood and tribe;
- (3) the heads of the twelve tribes and prominent heads of families;
- (4) the Sanhedrin.

When these governors were obedient and faithful they turned to God for help when in difficulties, and acknowledged that it was to Him that they owed their comparative immunity. The RSV renders the final sentence of this verse in this way: *"The inhabitants of Jerusalem have strength through the LORD of hosts, their God"*. The NIV has *"The people of Jerusalem are strong, because the LORD Almighty is their God"*.

### **A Pan Of Fire And A Torch (v. 6)**

*"In that day"* would be the same period of time as in verses 3 and 4, that is, an undefined time of judgment or visitation by the LORD God.

New figures of speech were introduced in this verse to repeat the teaching in verses 2 to 5, that Jerusalem would retain its place and its kingdom under the Persian and Greek empires, and for a time under the Roman. The same Jerusalem that was *"a cup of bewilderment"* and *"a burdensome stone"* and a place to astonish the *"horses"* with God in its midst for strength, that same Jerusalem during the same period would be like a pan or pot of fire and like a torch of fire.

These two figures of speech well illustrate the position of the Israelites restored to their own land under their own governors. The governors were not to be aggressive like an open flame, but quiet and efficient. Their strength and power were to be concealed, like the pan of fire in the woodpile or the torch of fire in the sheaf. The wood and the sheaf would have represented the Gentile peoples in the midst of whom the children of Israel lived. The pan of fire in the woodpile and the torch in the sheaf would be capable of great destruction once the flame flared up and took hold.

So the peoples round about experienced this destruction when they attacked Judah which had been established by God in the land that He intended. The Gentile nations would have been well advised to beware of what they might try to do to Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel, to which Israelites from all parts of the then known world went up regularly three times a year to observe the feasts required by the Law.

This state of affairs continued right up to our Lord's day and some years beyond. God's over-ruling providence preserved Judah, and liberal concessions were obtained from the governmental authorities to which Judah was subject. The freedom enjoyed by the Jews under the Romans is shown in the New Testament as well as in secular history. The kingdom of Judah remained subject to Rome, and was not attacked or overrun by other nations or peoples in preparation for the coming of the Messiah.

### **The Tents Of Judah Saved First (v. 7)**

The first part of this verse, which says that the Lord shall "*save the tents of Judah first*", is understood by some Christians to mean that at the end of the Gospel Age and the beginning of the Millennial Age, the Lord will save the Jewish nation first and give them everlasting life, then proceed to save the Gentiles. But if we look closely at verse 7 and take the message of the whole verse into account, we can see that this interpretation of "*the tents of Judah*" is not warranted. What the Lord Jesus will do for the Jews at His second advent is another question altogether from that which is involved in Zechariah's prophecy concerning the tents of Judah.

Consideration of God's dealings with the Jews at Christ's second advent must always allow for Peter's statement in Acts 15:7-11 that God "*put no difference*" between Jew and Gentile, purifying the hearts of both in the same way, namely, by faith in Christ Jesus. Paul also wrote in Romans 10:12, "*For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him*". For more information on this subject please refer to the book "***The Hope of Israel***".

When the Israelites returned from Babylonia, the number of descendants of former residents of Jerusalem was very small. Thus it came about that many others were chosen by lot to live in Jerusalem, as we find in Nehemiah 11. There was a danger that the inhabitants of the rebuilt Jerusalem and their descendants might consider themselves as superior to other members of other tribes. God wished to prevent such an attitude on the part of the inhabitants of Judah.

The house of David is also mentioned in the verse. The Lord Jesus was the heir of David, and in Him David's house was magnified above Judah and above Jerusalem. This is the reason why the promise to "*save the tents of Judah first*" must be understood to apply to some period in Judah's history preceding our Lord's first advent. "First" in this context seems to be in the sense of rank rather than time or order, because in Judah were situated God's city and Temple, which were to be preserved for the coming of the Messiah.

### **The Preservation Of Judah (v. 8)**

The LORD's defence of the inhabitants and the city of Jerusalem in this verse was by the preservation of the people of Judah as a nation under its own rulers, even though they were at the same time subject to the successive world empires of Persia, Greece and Rome. In these circumstances of defence, with the LORD as their strength, the inhabitants of Jerusalem could be called upon to go into battle and be, as David, strong in doing so, while the Jewish leaders, who were at that time rulers, and representatives of David's line, could be mighty ones as messengers of God.

The word "god" means "mighty one" and may be used of Yahweh, or even of humans as when Moses was made a god to Pharaoh (Exodus 7:1; Psalm 82:1,6), and when Jesus drew His hearers' attention to the Israelites being spoken of as gods (John 10:34,35). "Angel" means "messenger", and is used in Scripture of both heavenly and earthly beings. In this verse the language used indicates that God would make use of the house or family of David as His representatives and messengers, and have His will done through them.

### **Protection By Rome (v. 9)**

This verse indicates that the defence of Judah and Jerusalem would not be of a temporary nature, and that their enemies would not be able to come against them more often than God would allow. The effective defence of Jerusalem required that aggressive nations round about be destroyed, and this is what happened when the Roman power conquered Syria and Egypt and became master of Palestine.

But to destroy the Roman empire was not God's purpose at that time. The Roman power was the last of the four empires to which God gave a charge to maintain order in the earth, and to which His people were told to be subject, both His people of Judah and Jerusalem, and subsequently His people of the Gospel Age. In the period of the fulfilment of this prophecy, Roman rule served a good purpose, and gave the Jews protection and sufficient liberty to permit them to continue their temple worship until their King came and performed God's mighty works among them.

### **The Spirit Of Grace And Supplication (v. 10)**

In this verse we come to the climax of the chapter, the great mourning to which verses 1 to 9 have led us. This prophesied mourning followed swiftly on the rejoicing and shouts of praise of the multitude. The prophecy extended for some five centuries beyond the reactions of the Jews when they had finished laying the foundations of the restored temple, and had gathered around those foundations. When they heard the trumpets and the cymbals and the song of praise, they were so moved that they both shouted and wept, *"so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people"* (Ezra 3:8-13).

But before the weeping or the rejoicing foretold by Zechariah could come to pass, another development was to take place, as mentioned in the opening words of verse 10. Grace means favour, undeserved favour, and a spirit of grace would mean a disposition of graciousness or favour.

We saw in the previous chapter that the staff of Beauty, or more exactly Graciousness, was broken, indicating that God's favour under the Law would come to an end, and that the union or brotherhood of the twelve tribes, joined together after the return from captivity, would be broken also. But now in chapter 12 we read of a new spirit of graciousness and supplication. This would be poured out upon all Israel from God, and would not be something they devised or invented for themselves.

Zechariah foretold troubles and disputations as the lot of the children of Israel during the long period, some five hundred years, between Joshua, the priest-ruler, and the Messiah. Approximately one hundred years after Zechariah, Malachi was sent to Israel to rebuke the people for their backsliding, unfit offerings, failure to pay tithes, and general neglect of their covenant with God. It seems that in those circumstances two general classes developed, the one class remaining faithful, the other growing careless and indifferent.

The faithful were grieved by the unfaithful, but realised their helplessness and their inability to reform the wayward and unfaithful ones. But in that difficult situation God gave them the spirit of graciousness and supplication, and strengthened the faithful as they longed for the Promised One, the great King and Deliverer.

We see an example of two faithful ones in the temple at the time of our Lord's birth. They had waited and longed for the promised Messiah, Who would establish a new arrangement under which God would forgive iniquity and remember sins no more.

Firstly, Simeon was a just man and devout, *"waiting for the consolation of Israel"*, and when he took the baby Jesus in his arms, the Spirit of God came upon him, and revealed to him that this child was indeed the LORD's Anointed (Luke 2:25-35).

Secondly, Anna, a prophetess, of the tribe of Asher, also attended the temple, and proclaimed to the people that this child was the One Whom God had promised (Luke 2:36-38). Others, however, of those faithful waiting ones had died during the five centuries between Zechariah's prophecies and Jesus Christ's birth at Bethlehem without ever having their longings gratified (Luke 3:15).

## **Mourning For The Pierced One (v. 10)**

Some old manuscripts and the RSV have "him" instead of "me" in the middle clause of verse 10. This is more consistent with the sense, as the verse continues to say, *"they will mourn for him, as one mourns for his only son"*. We are not told in this verse who is meant, but we are blest to have the New Testament with the account of our Lord's crucifixion. This very passage is quoted by John as referring to the piercing of our Lord's body by the Roman soldiers (John 19:34-37).

The Apostle John has told us how he saw the spear-thrust. He and the other disciples were in bitter grief, not knowing what to do or think. They mourned as for a beloved companion, whose place no-one could fill. Even though He had told them of His coming death, they could hardly believe their senses when it actually took place.

But on the third day God raised Him from death, and the resurrected Jesus appeared to them and told them what they must do. Their mourning was turned into joy as they were made His witnesses and messengers to proclaim the glad tidings of His resurrection and the message of salvation from sin and death. Another reference to looking on the pierced One is found in Revelation 1:7. This verse is discussed in detail in the book ***"The Few and the Many"*** chapter 2.

Others mourned also when the words of the apostles made clear to them their great error in killing the Lord of life. They were *"pricked in their heart, and cried, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'"* (Acts 2:37). To these repentant ones came also the spirit of grace and supplication. They cast themselves on the Lord's mercy, and carried out the commands of the apostles so their sins might be forgiven (Acts 4:4). The Jewish people mourned as never before that they had killed the Holy One and the Just (Matthew 27:25; Acts 3:14,15).

A great mourning at Jerusalem had been predicted, and a great mourning there was. Our Lord said in regard to the shouting of the multitude on His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, *"I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out"* (Luke 19:37-40).

From John 12:12-16 we learn that the disciples did not really understand at the time. They did not understand Zechariah 9:9 that told of the great rejoicing, neither did they understand Zechariah 12:10-14 that told of the great mourning. Both eventualities became clear to them after the Lord's resurrection and after the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon them (Luke 24 and Acts 2).

All Israelites who were led to see Jesus as the Messiah would have reason to weep and lament, not only for their breaking of the Law Covenant, their personal sins and failures, but also for the sin and hypocrisy of their rulers in rejecting the Lord and leading the tumult against Him, especially in view of the fact that they had cried, *"His blood be on us, and on our children"* (Matthew 27:25).

So at Pentecost and in the following days, thousands were simultaneously weeping and rejoicing; weeping for their own sins and the sins of their rulers, and for their part in the crucifixion of their Messiah, and rejoicing at Jesus' resurrection and the proclaiming of the Gospel message.

But, in the Scripture under consideration, Zechariah was inspired to dwell only on the mourning. The depth and sincerity of the mourning was compared to the mourning in Israel caused by the death of good King Josiah.

### **The Great Mourning (v. 11)**

Of all the kings of Israel, Josiah was one of the most energetic in correcting abuses, destroying idols and idol temples, cleansing and beautifying the temple, and restoring the priests to their proper place as instructors of the people. A great Passover was held, and the people generally were made to realise that God's blessing was upon them.

But Josiah disobeyed God and made an alliance with the king of Assyria, and consequently Josiah would not give the king of Egypt right of way through the country, and engaged Necho the king of Egypt in battle. Josiah was killed, and a great national mourning for him followed (2 Chronicles 35:25; 2 Kings 23:30).

The comparison made by the prophet was the extent and depth of the two periods of mourning at Jerusalem, the one for Josiah and the other for *"him whom they have pierced"*. In both cases the mourning extended throughout all Judah. But the mourning in both cases was not limited to Judah. In 2 Chronicles 35:25 and 26 we read: *"And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah: and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day and made them an ordinance in Israel; and, behold, they are written in the lamentations."*

Israelites travelling to Jerusalem to attend the three annual feasts, and those who went for business reasons, would have joined in the lamentation for good King Josiah, and would have carried the news home, where there would have been more lamentation. So the whole of Israel wept and mourned in that day and for years afterward as the history of those times became known.



And so it was with the great mourning for *"him whom they have pierced"*. At Pentecost and afterwards, thousands grieved and mourned among the Jews when they learned that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed their Messiah (Acts 2:41).

Gentiles and Jews each had a part in the unjust slaying of the righteous and sinless One, and well may we also mourn even today when we look upon Him in faith and remember that it was for our sins He suffered and died, even the death of the cross. The joint responsibility of Gentiles and Jews was referred to by the apostles, who quoted from Psalm 2 in evidence: *"The kings of the earth stood up and the rulers were gathered together against the LORD, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together."* (Acts 4:26,27).

### **Every Family Apart (vs. 12-14)**

Among the Jews it was customary when fasting for individuals to separate so that the fast might be an individual matter in service to God. This was particularly so on the day of atonement when every individual Jew was commanded by law to afflict his soul (Leviticus 23:24-32). Sackcloth and ashes formed part of the ceremonial rites of fasting and mourning. Mourning was thus something that could be seen. It was a public and yet also an individual confession of grief.

The mourning for the Lord Jesus was to be that of *"every family apart"*. The mourning was to be not simply some private individual regret, but a nationwide mourning, and mourning wherever there were Jews to learn about it in foreign lands. Prominent families were named as taking part in the great mourning; the families or descendants of David the King, Nathan the son of David (from whom Mary was descended), Levi, the head of the priestly tribe serving the Temple, and Shimei. All persons descended from the twelve tribes of Israel were included, no-one being exempted from the mourning, either of high or low estate. All were included as stated in verse 14, *"all families that remain"*.

It is appropriate that certain families were selected for mention:

- (1) the family of King David, the descendants of royalty;
- (2) the family of Nathan, the son of David (from whom Mary was descended);
- (3) the family of Levi, descendants of whom were priests and Levites engaged in the Temple service; and
- (4) the family of Shimei.

But who was Shimei, and why was his family selected with the others whose lives were important in Israel's history?

Sixteen persons named Shimei were mentioned in the Old Testament. One of these was of the tribe of Benjamin in the house of King Saul the first king of Israel. This Shimei was enraged that David should succeed Saul as king, when Saul had sons of his own. But David was God's choice, and David's officers would have killed Shimei if David had not protected him.

It seems that this incident made a great impression on David's mind, and, although Shimei was forgiven after he acknowledged his wrong conduct, David seems never to have felt sure of him. On his deathbed David warned Solomon against him. Solomon granted Shimei a house in Jerusalem with limited privileges, on the condition that he should not leave the city on pain of death. Shimei did leave the city, and was put to death. The accounts of these events are found in 2 Samuel 16:5-13; 19:18; 1 Kings 2:36, 37, 41-46.

It may be that the descendants of this Shimei might have been meant in connection with the great mourning, to show that the descendants of those who opposed the elevation of David and his heirs to the throne of Israel would in later years lament, as they looked upon Him of the house of David Who was pierced, and mourn for Him as for their own son.

Another Shimei of interest was a descendant of Solomon and of Coniah (or Jeconiah), the brother of Zerubbabel (1 Chronicles 3:10-19). This is the only mention of Zerubbabel's brother, but it indicates that Shimei, as a descendant of Coniah, Solomon and David, would have thoughts concerning promises to the heir or heirs of David. But in Shimei's case there was no possibility of royal succession because of God's ban on Jeconiah. Yet in the great mourning, if the family of this Shimei is meant, there is significance in the joining with others in the grief as for an only son. Any thought of rivalry for the throne was lost in grief for *"him whom they have pierced"*, and Whom God had set on Mount Zion to *"rule over the house of Jacob forever"* (Luke 1: 32, 33).

The Septuagint rendering is of interest. Instead of Shimei, it has Simeon. Simeon was Jacob's second son, the first being Reuben, the third Levi, and the fourth Judah. In the blessing by Jacob on his sons, Simeon and Levi are linked together (Genesis 29:33; 49:5-7). Simeon was held hostage by Joseph in Egypt while his brothers returned home to Jacob with the demand that Benjamin be brought to Egypt (Genesis 42:15-24).

In the wilderness, the tribe of Simeon numbered 59,300. When the second census was taken, the number was only 22,200, and Simeon was the weakest of the tribes (Numbers 2:23; 26:12-14). When Moses blessed

Israel, he named all the tribes except Simeon (Deuteronomy 33). The lot of the inheritance of Simeon is described in Joshua 29:1-9. Simeon assisted Judah to conquer the land, and when Judah's inheritance was found to be too large, a part was assigned to Simeon. Therefore Simeon's was an inheritance within an inheritance; which may explain the omission of his name from the blessing of Moses.

Simeon's relations to Judah were friendly, and at the time of Jeroboam's rebellion, Simeon remained attached to Judah, being situated at the south of Judah's inheritance. This is shown in 1 Chronicles 4:41-43, although there are two casual notices in 2 Chronicles 15:9 and 34:6 which appear to imply the presence of members of the tribe of Simeon in the northern kingdom in the reigns of Asa and Josiah. Be that as it may, Simeon himself, the progenitor of the tribe, was of a warlike and lawless disposition, but his family descendants may well have been found at the great mourning for *"him whom they have pierced."*

#### **(b) THE FOUNTAIN AND THE TRUE SHEPHERD (13:1-9)**

1. *"In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness."*
2. *"It shall be in that day," says the LORD of hosts, "that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered. I will also cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to depart from the land."*
3. *"It shall come to pass that if anyone still prophesies, then his father and mother who begot him will say to him, 'You shall not live, because you have spoken lies in the name of the LORD.' And his father and mother who begot him shall thrust him through when he prophesies."*
4. *And it shall be in that day that every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies; they will not wear a robe of coarse hair to deceive."*
5. *"But he will say, 'I am no prophet, I am a farmer; for a man taught me to keep cattle from my youth.'"*
6. *And one will say to him, 'What are these wounds between your arms?' Then he will answer, 'Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.'"*
7. *Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is my Companion," says the LORD of hosts. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; then I will turn my hand against the little ones."*

8. *And it shall come to pass in all the land," says the LORD, "That two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die, but one-third shall be left in it:"*
9. *"I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'This is my people'; and each one will say, 'The LORD is my God.' "*

### **A Fountain Opened (v. 1)**

Chapters 12 and 13 of Zechariah really belong together.

The opening of the fountain in verse 1 was to take place in the same "day" as the mourning mentioned in verses 10 to 15 of chapter 12.

That "day" was the same "day" in which the Apostle John and others looked upon Him Whom the Roman soldiers had pierced; the same "day" in which the "*shepherd*" was struck and the "*sheep*" scattered, as mentioned in verse 7.

The New Testament writers help us to understand chapters 9 and 12 of Zechariah, as we have seen. The New Testament declares and applies for us verse 9 of chapter 9 and verse 10 of chapter 12; and also helps us to understand verse 7 of chapter 13. The New Testament contains so many references to the cleansing provided by God through our Lord Jesus Christ, that there can be no doubt that the "*fountain*" of verse 1 has to do with the "*King*" of chapter 9, the "*mourning*" of chapter 12, and the "*shepherd*" of verse 7.

The problem of sin was the basis of all of Israel's troubles. The twelve tribes were one nation before Jeroboam's revolt, resulting in the separation into two kingdoms - the ten-tribe kingdom referred to variously as 'Israel', 'Ephraim' and 'Samaria'; and the two-tribe kingdom referred to mainly as 'Judah'. During the time of separation some of the ten-tribe people were colonists remaining in Assyria after being taken captive, and most of the two-tribe people were taken captive by Babylonia. After the return from captivity in Babylonia, Israel and Judah, that is, all twelve tribes, were re-united, and were given time and opportunity by God, lasting for some 500 years, to prove themselves worthy to be called God's people, and to have Yahweh to be their God.

God rebuked and punished His people from time to time, but sin persisted, causing the faithful ones to mourn the deplorable conditions that developed in the nation. More and more the Law Covenant was found to be "*weak through the flesh*" (Romans 8:37), as God knew all along that it would be, but the people were very slow to learn this fact.

If the King of chapter 9, verse 9 had come to rule over them after the manner of earthly kings, the problem of sin would have remained, and would have awaited solution, which human beings by themselves could not have found. But the promised King of chapter 9 would accomplish something that humans, with the best intentions of the most conscientious of the rulers and people of Israel, could never do.

### **Cleansing by the Fountain**

The prophecies of Zechariah are among the most important of all the Scriptures. Zechariah's prophecies show, in harmony with Isaiah 53, Jeremiah 31 and Daniel 9, that unless God Himself had provided a means, acceptable to Himself, of cleansing from sin, human beings could never be clean or regarded as cleansed from sin.

We should therefore attempt to define what is meant by 'clean' and 'unclean' as used in the Word of God; and also learn, if we will, how one who is unclean in God's sight may be made clean.

The prophecy in verse 1 limited the fountain to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, without, however, saying that it would not be opened to any others. The whole human race is in need of cleansing from sin, but this need is dealt with in other Scriptures.

The present theme in Zechariah is that the King would come to Zion, there would be a great mourning followed by a great rejoicing; and the prophecy of the opening of a fountain for sin reveals to us that until the fountain was opened, cleansing from sin was not possible.

As the Apostle Paul said of the animal sacrifices, had they been able to take away sin, no other sacrifice would have been needed. If the procedures under the Law had made the people clean, then no further cleansing would have been required. The promise to open a fountain at some time in the future from Zechariah's day was therefore an indication that the sacrifice and the cleansing procedures prescribed by the Law were unsatisfactory.

Long before the Law Covenant was made with Israel at Sinai, sin was in the world. From the very beginning with Adam and Eve, sin has made everyone unclean in God's sight, for that is the meaning of 'unclean' as used in the Scriptures: contamination by sin, sin being defined as disobedience to God.

'Clean' means sinless, without sin, and in complete obedience to God, as Jesus Christ has shown us by His righteous words and conduct. The whole human race inherited from Adam and Eve a disposition to sin, no matter how good the intentions of some might have been or might be.

The Law Covenant brought in further possibilities to sin, that is, to disobey God. God is holy, pure and good, and His commandments to people were, and still are, given to make people strive to do that which is pure and good. (Romans 7:12). The Law given to Israel at Sinai contained many commands and prohibitions not previously given, and so increased the number and variety of sins possible to be committed, since transgression of God's righteous commands and prohibitions constitutes sin, as John told us in 1 John 3:4.

The Law Covenant made by God with Israel was made with Israel only, and not with Gentiles. Only Israel was subject to that law, as recorded in Exodus 24: 3 and 7, "*All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient*". This covenant bound them and their descendants, and no others except individual Gentiles who chose to become proselytes to the Jewish religion. Gentiles in general were not under the Law Covenant, and consequently not obliged to keep it. The Jews' seventh day Sabbath was a requirement not placed on Gentiles.

We can readily see that Israelites under the Law, with its multitude of regulations, commands and prohibitions, would commit many sins daily, since every transgression or disobedience was a sin. The conscientious Israelite would have felt, or should have felt, the weight and burden of those sins. Certainly there was provision in the Law for forgiveness of those trespasses and failings by offerings made at the tabernacle and later at the temple. When the offering was made according to the prescribed manner, and restitution made when necessary, the priest pronounced the sin forgiven.

On the Day of Atonement every year the people had to "*afflict their souls*" for the innumerable other wrong deeds, words and thoughts not covered by specific regulations, and which often involved the tribes as a whole. For all of these a special atonement was provided in the Law. Besides the sacrifices of animals offered for trespasses, transgressions, and sins of all kinds, there were ceremonial cleansings to be performed. The priests and Levites washed at the laver in the temple to ensure that they were clean when carrying out the services of the tabernacle. Bathing the body and washing clothes of all the people were compulsory, and additional washings for health reasons might be ordered by the priests.

Under the Law some animals were clean and others were unclean. Even to touch an unclean beast made an Israelite unclean, as also did the touching of or contact with a dead body. In Numbers 19 is found the provision for cleansing the unclean with the ashes of a heifer prepared in a certain way with water, called "*the water of separation*". For a Jew to become unclean and not be made clean by the use of the water of separation was a serious offence, for which severe punishment was prescribed.

All the detailed regulation of the lives of the Israelites had a wise purpose. This purpose was to separate Israel from the sinful practices and diseases of the nations around them. The idolatrous religions of the heathen nations discouraged rather than encouraged cleanliness and sanitation. So we can see how displeased and angry God became when His commands were ignored, and His special people indulged in the idolatry and sinful practices of heathen nations in spite of all He had done for them.

Under the Law, sanitary regulations were compulsory, as also was the use of the water of separation which involved the sprinkling of the unclean person by a clean person.

However, and what is so important to Christian believers, the apostle tells us that neither the blood of bulls and goats, nor the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer could cleanse the conscience. The ceremonials under the Law helped to keep the obedient Israelites healthy in mind and body, and kept them free from gross sins. It can truthfully be said of some Israelites, such as Zacharias and Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna, that they were *"righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the LORD blameless"* (Luke 1:6; 2:25-38).

Zechariah's prophecy, in keeping with New Testament testimony, teaches us that conscientious observance of the Law was not enough to cleanse the conscience. Something more was needed to take away not only the guilt and the effects of sin, but also the condemnation which comes upon everyone who realises the inadequacy of his or her best efforts, the many and continued shortcomings, and the proneness to evil thoughts.

*"O wretched man that I am,"* said Paul, expressing the position of every conscientious Jew, *"Who shall deliver me from this body of death?"* (Romans 7:24, margin).. Paul referred to the Law as a dead body to which he had been bound by birth and the covenant of the fathers. But then he added, *"I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."* *"There is therefore no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 7:25; 8:1; 5:1).

### **The Blood of Jesus Christ**

The *"fountain"* opened for cleansing from sin and uncleanness was a prophecy of the blood of Jesus Christ. This is shown by Hebrews 9:13, 14: *"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"*

Here the blood of Christ was set opposite to the blood of bulls and goats offered on the Day of Atonement and at other times, and also to the ashes of an heifer used to cleanse the unclean under the Law. From the apostle's explanation it seems clear that the blood of Christ replaced and superseded all of the procedures for cleansing from sin under the Law Covenant.

The blood of bulls and goats offered under the Law atoned for the sins of the people, being sprinkled once a year by the High Priest upon the Mercy Seat in the Most Holy of the tabernacle or temple. But the procedure had to be repeated each year. Christ's sacrifice was *"once for all"* (Hebrews 9:11,12).

The provision of the ashes of a heifer indicated that something more was required to cleanse from additional defilement in personal contacts mentioned in the Law as causing uncleanness, that is, ceremonial cleanness. The offender had to be sprinkled with *"the water of separation"* (mentioned earlier) to enable him or her to be worthy of continuing to be one of God's chosen people. Christ's sacrifice replaced and superseded all such procedures and requirements. Hebrews 9: 13 and 14 teaches us that the efficacy of the blood of Christ is available at any time, at all hours as the one and only true cleansing fountain for all sin.

The cleansing from sin by faith in Christ's blood takes place upon belief into Christ, but the cleansing must continue to be maintained by confession and repentance from sins and failings each day of our lives. The Apostle John told us this in 1 John 1: 6-9: *"If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

### **In That Day (vs. 2-6)**

Before we consider the time described as *"that day"*, it would be profitable to be reminded of developments and events that took place in Israel after the death of Moses, with whom the LORD spoke *"face to face"* (Exodus 33:11). The expression *"face to face"*, in view of Exodus 33:20, should be understood to mean "in a very close relationship".

After Moses' death, the mind of God was revealed by means of the High Priest using the Urim and Thummim (Exodus 28:30; Numbers 27:21). When the sons of Eli, the High Priest, proved themselves unworthy, God raised up Samuel to be His prophet to Israel (1 Samuel 3:11-21). As well as a prophet, Samuel became also a Judge of Israel in place of Eli, and strove to bring the people back to God. He founded the schools of the prophets for the training of suitable persons, and these performed the duties which



originally belonged to the Levites. Those duties were to read the sacred Scriptures to the people, expound to them the meaning of the Law, and familiarise them with their history as God's people.

Some of those prophets from the schools spoke from time to time under inspiration, as recorded in 1 Kings 20: 35-43, but not all were foretellers of the future, nor were all of God's prophets connected with the schools. Eventually the schools of the prophets fell into disuse, probably under pressure from successive kings, such as Ahab, who afterward favoured the prophets of Baal and other heathen deities (Jeremiah 7:30,31).

When they left Egypt, the children of Israel were told to have nothing to do with Egyptian idolatry, or the idolatry of other nations with whom they would come in contact when they entered Canaan. The idols were to be destroyed, and the gods of the nations and their worship were to be left strictly alone. The people of Israel were to serve the LORD their God Who brought them out of the land of bondage into a *"land flowing with milk and honey"*.

Moreover, the children of Israel were told how to distinguish between false prophets and true prophets, and were also told to listen to the true prophets and destroy from among them those who prophesied falsely. The false prophets might sound plausible and appealing, but the people were not to listen because the false prophets would lead them to serve idols and false gods (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). Further, if a prophet (so-called) were to prophesy, and his prophecy did not take place, it was a clear indication that the LORD had not inspired it, and that the prophet was a false prophet, *"Thou shalt not be afraid of him"* they were told in Deuteronomy 18:15-22.

But the children of Israel failed to obey these commands, and were punished for their disobedience. So now, said Zechariah, a change was to take place *"in that day"*. This *"day"* would seem to mean the same *"day"* mentioned in chapter 12, the long period from the return of the Jews under Zerubbabel and Joshua to the first advent of the Lord Jesus, the time of the great mourning and the opening up of the Fountain, some five hundred years.

The history of that long period as it has come down to us reveals that after the re-settling in Canaan, the Israelites did not again revert to the more extreme forms of idolatry practised by the heathen nations. Under the leadership of Joshua the High Priest, Nehemiah, Ezra and others, the Jews clung to the worship of the true God and to observance of the Law Covenant as far as they were able. Just as good King Josiah revived worship of the true God and observance of the Law in earlier times, so also did Ezra when he found out that some of the returned exiles had disobeyed and mingled with the people of the land. Nehemiah also brought about much-needed reforms. But never again were idols set up and false prophets encouraged as had happened in the days of the kings.

In those earlier times Solomon's seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines had previously brought in the gods of the heathen nations and their priests and prophets (1 Kings 11:1-8). Many kings of Israel and Judah after Solomon served other gods and favoured false prophets. The account in 1 Kings 18 of the contest between Elijah, the prophet of God, and 450 prophets of Baal brought in by Ahab and Jezebel, is a case in point. When Baal was proved to be deaf, dumb and blind, while Yahweh both heard and answered, the people readily decided that Yahweh was the true God, and they overturned the idols and slew the false prophets.

Another contest between a true and a false prophet took place in the presence of King Jehoshaphat, as related in 2 Chronicles 18. Jehoshaphat had consulted with Ahab, who had 400 false prophets, but Jehoshaphat would not listen to them, desiring to hear a prophet of the LORD. So Ahab sent a false prophet, posing as a prophet of the LORD, and Jehoshaphat was foolish enough to listen to him rather than the true prophet Micaiah. Jehoshaphat should have known that God would not send him any message through a prophet sent by Ahab, who was associated with idols and prophets of Baal.

But notwithstanding that object lesson, most of Jehoshaphat's successors on the throne, right up to the captivity in Babylonia, listened to the false prophets as Jehoshaphat had done. As a consequence of the rejection of the idols in that day of verse 2, the false prophets lost their main support, as most of the false prophets were associated with idol worship.

Eventually, when the Jews were taken captive to Babylonia, and their land lay desolate, they learned an unforgettable lesson. Some of them fell in with Babylonian idolatry and did not return to Jerusalem under the decree of King Cyrus the Persian, but the majority were sincere worshippers of Yahweh, and joined enthusiastically in the re-establishment of the worship at the temple. As time passed, this worship tended to be carried on by many in a desultory fashion, but it appears there were no false prophets among them after the manner of the prophets of Baal. Troubled times still came upon the Jews, but generally they remained loyal to God and the temple worship.

It seems then that the false prophets referred to in verse 2 were cut off with the cessation of idolatry. Verse 2 concludes with the assertion that God would cause the *"unclean spirit"*, as well as the false prophets *"to pass out of the land"*. These declarations seem to refer to the unclean practices and habits associated with idol worship. Such practices and habits were condemned and forbidden under the Law, but some Israelites went after other gods and unclean practices while under the rulership of Greece and Rome.

It was not until the apostles began their evangelistic labours in Asia Minor, Macedonia and Egypt, that God, by direct preaching of the apostles and disciples, called on the Gentile idolaters to repent. In *"that day"* of which Zechariah wrote, God's determination was to clear false prophets and the unclean out of the land, that is, out of the land of Judah. That was God's purpose, and that purpose was accomplished.

Reference should be made here to sundry desecrations of the temple that took place in *"that day"*, that is, the five hundred year 'day' with which Zechariah's prophecy is concerned. Antiochus Epiphanes plundered the temple in 170 BC, and left a governor in charge of the city. Two years later a force of Syrians occupied and fortified the city, and profaned the altar of the temple by offering on it an unauthorised sacrifice. This fact does not negate Zechariah's prophecy, because it was not the Israelites who desecrated the temple, but rather a foreign invader. The Israelites drove out the invader and subsequently cleansed the temple and continued with their worship and their everyday lives.

Antiochus continued his military campaigns to Parthia and Armenia, and died in 164 BC. He was made to *"pass out of the land"* while the Israelites remained to continue with the worship of the true God. When the Romans took control, the Israelites were permitted to govern themselves according to their Law, as long as they acknowledged the supremacy of Rome, especially in the power of life and death. A brief account of the rise and fall of Antiochus Epiphanes is found in the book ***Notes on the Book of Daniel***, chapter 11, part 1.

### **Idols and False Prophets (vs. 3-6)**

Verses 3 to 6 introduce hypothetical cases, evidently to illustrate the thoroughness with which false prophets were to be discredited, and how effectively they would be dealt with by the people if and when they attempted to practise their art.

Verse 3 is an extreme expression of disapproval of false prophets by saying that any such should be put to death by his parents. Parental discipline was required under the Law, and to refrain from discipline of one's own children was to incur God's displeasure.

However, idolatry was the worst form of disobedience, since it indicated departure from Yahweh their God.

For a prophet to be associated with idolatry and idolatrous practices was perhaps the worst offence of all under the Law.

The Law said (Deuteronomy 13):

1. *If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder,*
2. *And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them;*
3. *Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*
4. *Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him.*
5. *And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee.*
6. *If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers;*
7. *Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth;*
8. *Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him:*
9. *But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people.*
10. *And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.*
11. *And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you." (KJV).*

This reference is quoted in full to show the strictness of the Law and its purpose to be a deterrent. If the Israelites refrained from idolatry, the severe punishment prescribed would not be enacted.

The responsibility for dealing with idolatry, with those who served as enticers to idol worship and with prophets of idolatry, rested upon every member of the nation. Even the most cherished member of any family known to be guilty was to be handed over to the authorities for execution.

Deuteronomy 13:12-16 shows the punishment to be inflicted on an entire city of Israel if, after due enquiry, that city was found to have gone over to idolatry. The command from the LORD was that the inhabitants were to be put to death by the sword, and the city completely destroyed.

Verse 3 of Zechariah 13 states that a person guilty of idolatry should be "*thrust through*" by his father and mother. This expression, "*thrust through*", is often used in the Old Testament to describe execution by sword or other sharp weapon. This verse expresses in a most graphic way the horror with which the children of Israel should regard anyone who would persist in prophesying falsely "*in that day*", that is, the whole period of some five hundred years from the return from captivity to the first advent of the Lord Jesus. The verse also declares the thoroughness with which idolatry was to be put away.

Verse 4 seems to indicate that in the five-hundred year period identified as "*that day*", prophesying would not be popular. It was customary for a prophet to wear "*a robe of coarse hair*" to distinguish him as a prophet,(2 Kings 1:8), as was the case with John the Baptist (Matthew 3:4). The treatment of God's true prophets by the Israelites during the Jewish Age would be very likely to cause the prophets to be reluctant to prophesy and incur the displeasure of the Jewish leaders and people, as evidenced by Stephen's words in Acts 7:51-53. One who would wear "*a robe of coarse hair to deceive*" would be a false prophet, but even false prophets would not seek to prophesy because of the unpopularity of the practice in those times.

Verse 5 seems to mean that because prophesying was so unpopular, the false prophet would disguise himself as a farmer, and would not dare to proclaim himself a prophet for fear of being put to death.

But even the use of disguise would not save the false prophet from being found out, as indicated in verse 6. It seems that he would be suspected of being a prophet and would be wounded because of people's suspicions, wounded but not killed. His wounds would come under notice, and people would say to him, "What are these wounds in your hands?".

The KJV and NKJV have "*in your hands*", but Leeser and the Septuagint have "*between your hands*", the NIV has "*on your body*", the RSV has "*on your back*", the REV has "*on your chest*", while the RV has "*between your*

*arms"* The majority of renderings indicate that the wounds were wounds to the body rather than the hands, leading to the thought that the wounds were more extensive, as though inflicted as punishment for being a prophet.

The purpose of verses 3 to 6 is surely to show that prophesying "in that day" would be so unpopular that no-one would want to be caught at it. Even friends would be willing to wound a prophet, as verse 6 describes.

Verses 2 to 6 convey to the mind in word pictures the thoroughness with which idolatry and false prophets would be either put to death or put out of the land of Judah.

### **Awake, O Sword, Against My Shepherd (v. 7)**

In this verse we see the sword invoked against the One Whom Yahweh acknowledged as not false but true. In the Scriptures the sword was sometimes used as a symbol of authority, and the civil authority was entrusted with it by the Law of Moses. When Gentile powers gained sovereignty over Canaan, the Israelites were directed to submit to that authority. Jeremiah prophesied of the Israelitish subjection to Babylonia, while Daniel prophesied of four world powers who would successively rule over Canaan and each would make the Israelites a subject people.

Centuries later the Apostle Paul wrote to the Roman brethren, declaring that it is right for Christians to be subject to the civil power. Paul wrote, *"For he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doth evil"* (Romans 13:1-7). The Apostle Peter gave the same message in 1 Peter 2:13 to 15.

The *"sword"* in verse 7 is addressed by the words, *"Awake, O sword, against my shepherd"*, which is saying that the civil power, which should be protecting good and honest people and punishing evil people, would be used to punish God's Shepherd instead of protecting Him. The prophecy was given by God, Who alone can foretell the future. He predicted some five hundred years in advance that wicked men out of envy and jealousy would cause the sword to be involved in a matter that did not properly concern it.

The Shepherd was Jesus Christ, Who was sent by God to Israel to gather together the *"lost sheep"*. His mission was to the Jews, but never in word or act did He give any foundation for the accusation brought against Him of disloyalty to Caesar. The Jewish Council was competent to deal with the case, but before them the charge of blasphemy had not been sustained. Pilate found no fault in Him, and would have set Him free but for the insistence of the Jews.

It was this insistence that finally awoke the sword and gained Pilate's verdict that Jesus be crucified. Pilate's conduct was surely brought about because he wanted to win favour with the Jews in case they reported him to the Emperor and endangered his position of authority. So, while saying that he regarded Jesus as innocent, Pilate had Him scourged and turned Him over to the rabble and the executioners.

Thus the prophecy was fulfilled: *"Awake, O sword, against my shepherd"*. The Jews betrayed, condemned and crucified the Good Shepherd Whom God had sent.

In this connection it is helpful to read the parable of the Good Shepherd and the interpretation of it as recorded in John 10:1-6. Detailed comments on this parable and the surrounding context are offered in the book, 'The Parables of Our Lord', chapter 32, pages 187 to 197.

Jesus was called God's Shepherd in that He was the One concerning Whom God inspired the prophets to write. More than two hundred years before Zechariah's prophecy, Isaiah had been inspired to foretell the tender care of this Shepherd for His sheep, as written in Isaiah 40:11, *"He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm."*

Yahweh was the Shepherd of Israel under the Law, as we are told in Psalm 23, and in due time He sent His Son to be a visible Shepherd to the people of Israel, and live among them. Later, Jesus was made the Lord of glory to shepherd by His spirit those who received Him (1 Peter 2:24,25).

The One Whom Yahweh called *"my shepherd"* was in complete contrast to the three false and greedy shepherds and the *"worthless shepherd"* described in Zechariah 11. The Shepherd of Yahweh was vastly superior in origin and character to the shepherds of chapter 11, as the next words declare: *"the man who is my companion"*.

There are many Scriptures that show that the Lord Jesus was an associate of the Father in the work of creation, but such an association does not necessarily mean equality, as many Christians claim. God the Father is the only Self-Existent One, with neither beginning nor ending (Psalm 90:2 and 93:2).

In John 3:1-3, the Lord Jesus is called the Word, and is said to have been in the beginning with God, and also that all things were made by Him. The descriptive title *"the Word"* indicates that He was God's agent in the work of creation, for *"without him was not anything made that was made"* (John 1:3), and it follows from this that Jesus was the only direct creation of God.

This fact is stated in Revelation 3:14, where the Lord Jesus describes Himself as having been the *"beginning of the creation of God"* - not the beginner, as the one to begin creation, but the beginning, the first one created. To make this clear, we say that the letter A is the beginning of the alphabet, the first letter; it is not the beginner.

The prophecy we are considering, as well as the New Testament, shows that the One called *"my Shepherd"* and *"my Companion"* was not Yahweh, and not equal in power and authority with Yahweh, but One Whom God associated with Himself in carrying out various works - firstly creation and secondly redemption, and possibly other works of which we are not told in the Scriptures. God and His Son were always one in mind and purpose (John 10:30, 17:21-23), and so it was that the Son willingly came to give His life for the sheep (Matthew 20:28; Colossians 1:14-17; John 3:13,16; 5:19-23; 6:38; 10:11).

### **The Shepherd Struck, the Sheep Scattered (v. 7)**

It is clear from the first few words of verse 7 that reference is to the Lord Jesus, since no other Being in the whole universe has ever been an associate of the Father. But the quotation in the New Testament of the next words makes assurance doubly certain. It is written in Matthew 26:31 and Mark 14:27, *"I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad"*. This application of the prophecy by our Lord gives to us an interpretation of the passage, and also assists us to understand the rest of the chapter in Zechariah, both what precedes and what follows the words quoted in the New Testament referring to Jesus.

The Gospels tell us that at a crucial moment *"all the disciples forsook him and fled"* (Matthew 26:56; Mark 14:50). Whether through fear or bewilderment or a sense of inability to do anything to help is not stated. Peter and John reached the Judgment Hall, but we are not told where the other disciples went. They evidently missed their Master's constant direction about where to go and what to do. After Jesus' resurrection they went by the Lord's appointment to Galilee, and while there discussed what to do next. The best they could think of was to return to their boats and nets, and it was while they were out in their boats, the Lord Jesus called to them from the shore, having prepared food for them there (Matthew 28:7,10,16; John 21:1-14).

### **The Little Ones (v. 7)**

By coming to them and gathering them together again our Lord fulfilled in part the next prediction of verse 7 - *"Then I will turn mine hand upon the little ones"*. The NKJV has *"against the little ones,"* but no other version supports this rendering.



The "hand" is often a symbol of power and care, and the Lord Jesus after His resurrection was in effect the hand of God sent to gather them and care for them, and give them the guidance they needed. The explanations given to the two on the way to Emmaus include the information that Christ must first suffer and afterward enter into glory. The disciples had looked for a deliverer, but were unable to understand the sufferings and death of their Master (Luke 24:19-27; Acts 1:6).

The "*little ones*" mentioned in Zechariah 7 were not infants or children, but people old enough to hear and believe the Gospel message, the "*little ones which believe in me*" of Matthew 18:6. These "*little ones*" who believed in Him were the ones Jesus gathered together after His resurrection.

God's promise here given, "*I will turn my hand upon the little ones*", reminds us of the many statements in the Old Testament in which God's hand is mentioned in connection with the children of Israel and His care over them. Such statements are too numerous to quote here, but anyone may consult a Bible concordance, and see the full extent of the references to God's hand in caring for His people.

Jesus was God's Shepherd appointed as a Hand to gather together His little ones who believed in Him. The disciples Jesus had gathered together during His ministry were only a few compared with the many other "little ones" to be gathered out from the people who had been kept in Canaan for some five hundred years to be ready to receive their promised Messiah.

At Pentecost the disciples were gathered together at Jerusalem as instructed to wait for the power from on high. They numbered about one hundred and twenty. When they received the Holy Spirit, the power from on high, with the accompanying miraculous gifts, they immediately proclaimed Jesus and the resurrection to the crowds gathered around, who could at that stage be described as other "little ones". Jesus' disciples were really under-shepherds, commissioned by Him to feed His lambs and His sheep (John 21:15-17; Acts 1:2-8, 12; 2:1-47).

The prophecy of Zechariah 13:7 refers only to the "*little ones*" gathered out from the children of Israel, including those scattered abroad among the nations, whose hearts remained zealous for the Law. Many of these came up to the annual feasts, and the apostles preached to them on many occasions. Others were sought out by the apostles and disciples on their missionary journeys in all directions, principally westward. The "*little ones*" referred to were associated with the land of Canaan, as we see in the next verse.

## Two Parts Cut Off (v. 8)

The land referred to in this verse is the land of Palestine to which the Shepherd came. His earthly ministry was confined to the Jewish people. On only a few occasions did He perform a miracle or expound the Gospel truth to a Samaritan or someone other than a Jew from Judea and its environs. He said, *"I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel"* (Matthew 15:24). When He sent out His disciples, He said to them, *"Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."* (Matthew 10:5,6) Three and a half years were spent moving among the cities of Galilee and Judea, where mainly the Jews were settled. This was the land from which two parts should be cut off and die, while a third part would be left. Of what or whom did the three parts consist?

Nothing is said about the sizes or proportions or numbers of people who made up the three parts. Two of the parts were evidently rejected from the LORD's favour because they had by their disobedience rejected God, so they were to be *"cut off and die"*. We are not told whether they were larger or smaller than the third part, as described in the following verse, verse 9.

It would seem that the sizes of the three parts are not as important as their quality, that is, the characters of the people composing them. The two most important groups among the Jews at our Lord's first advent were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Both groups as shepherds were "cut off" when Jesus appeared as the true Shepherd, and exposed their hypocrisy and faithlessness. They had largely substituted tradition for the Word of God, though their reasonings often followed different lines. But the two groups between them had most of the Jewish people as adherents, and when the Jewish leaders rejected the Lord Jesus and their adherents followed them, they cut themselves off from the land.

The land had been given to the Children of Israel for an inheritance, but the nation's tenure depended on their faith and obedience and their attitude to their King when He came to Zion to rule over them, according to God's promise. Psalm 2 was addressed to the nations, but it was equally incumbent upon the people claiming to be God's people to heed the warning of Psalm 2:12: *"Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."*

It is significant that John the Baptist and the apostles spoke of an impending wrath. John said to the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to his baptism, *"O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"* (Matthew 3:7).

At Pentecost, we read of Peter's prophesying to the assembled crowds, *"And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation"* (Acts 2:40).

The Apostle Paul said to the Jews at Antioch, *"Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you"* (Acts 13:40,41). This warning was linked with the message that Jesus was their Saviour, their King, the heir to succeed to David's throne. To reject Him meant that He would reject them (Acts 13:22).

Many of our Lord's parables touched on the responsibility of the leaders, and how they would be cut off from their privileges as heirs of the promises if they despised their King. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is highly significant in this connection. Other important parables throwing further light on Zechariah's prophecy are found in Matthew 21:23-46, particularly the parable of the householder who planted a vineyard (verses 33 to 44). Among the hearers of Jesus' parables were the chief priests and elders, (verse 23) and it was the chief priests and Pharisees (verse 45) who perceived that the Lord spoke of them.

The position of the people in general was determined by their choice of leaders; whether they would follow the leaders of these two main 'parts', or whether they would reject those leaders and come under the "third part", which would call upon the name of the Lord and acknowledge Him as leader.

### **One Part Brought Through The Fire (v. 9)**

The *"one-third"* or third part is distinguished by being the object of God's special care. The fire in verse 9 is not a fire into which the people of the third part were cast, nor is it the kind of fire described in Malachi 4:1, which was to burn up the proud and all that do wickedly, and leave them neither root nor branch. The fire referred to in verse 9 is the refiner's fire, the kind of fire used to refine or purify gold and silver.

Gold and silver are not cast into the fire, but remain in a crucible, protected from the fire itself. So it is with the people of the *"third part"* of verse 9; they are purified by the effect of the fire, and in a sense go *"through"* it, but they are protected. As the refiner of gold and silver watches over the refining process, so the Lord watches over His people according to His promise, *"Lo, I am with you alway"* (Matthew 28:20).

The Apostle Paul wrote of this refining process: *"Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's*

*work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."* (1 Corinthians 3:13-15).

The Apostle Peter also wrote of the "fiery trial" that believers may be called on to undergo, in which they are exhorted to rejoice because they are *"partakers of Christ's suffering"* (1 Peter 4:12,13).

All three 'parts' in verse 9 were dealt with equally and with the same love, justice and kindness. All were blest with the presence of the King, all were invited to repent and qualify for the Kingdom, and all heard His gracious words, of which it was said, *"Never man spake like this man"* (Matthew 7:28,29; John 7:46). Jesus taught, *"as one having authority, and not as the scribes"*.

All who had an inheritance in the land as Israelites, also had an inheritance in the promises of the Law. They also had an inheritance in God's promise made even before the Law was given from Sinai: *"Now therefore if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation."* (Exodus 19:5,6).

When therefore we read in verses 8 and 9 that the third 'part' were to be left in the land, we need to think of God's promise to the nation, dependent upon their faithfulness and obedience, of being made a kingdom and a priesthood. This promise was surely in the Lord's mind when He said to the chief priests, elders and Pharisees that the promised kingdom would be taken from them and given to another people (Matthew 21:43).

This other people had as its nucleus the third 'part' of Israel who received Jesus as their King, and submitted to His rule and His teachings, and to His disciples, all of which had a refining effect on each individual believer. As the Gospel of John tells us, *"He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."* (John 1:11,12).

This *"third part"* was the *"remnant"* foretold in other prophecies. The Apostle Paul quoted and applied Isaiah 10:27 to the work going on in his day in the saving of the *"remnant"* of Israel. *"Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved: for he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the LORD make upon the earth."* (Romans 9:27,28). Recalling how seven thousand men had not bowed the knee to Baal in Elijah's time, he said, *"Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace."* (Romans 11:1-7).

### **They Will Call On My Name (v. 9)**

The next statement in verse 9, *"they will call on my name, and I will answer them"* also assists in the identification of this *"third part"*. The Jews had called on God's name, and been heard, when they approached Him in the manner prescribed in the Law. But when the Good Shepherd came, He opened up a new way of approach to God. He said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"* (John 14:6). This meant that anyone who expected to be heard by the Father must come through, or in the name of, His Son.

The Gospel declares the fulfilment of what the prophecy had foretold, that is, a new development in God's plan for the human race, not new to God, but new to the people who had not been able to understand the prophecies concerning their Messiah and King. While He was still on earth with His disciples, He said to them, *"Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."* He also said, *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he will give it you."* (John 16:23,24).

Jesus had already given His disciples a prayer addressing God as *"Our Father, which art in heaven"*, and containing a small number of requests and petitions. Now He encouraged them to ask the Father in His name for whatever they desired, though with the qualification contained in John 15:7: *"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."*

This was a rare privilege, but it had to be exercised in conformity with their standing and work as true disciples - preaching the word and accepting whatever chastenings or corrections that God would send them, so that they would truly be His and Jesus' disciples.

### **This Is My People (v. 9)**

The next statement is, *"I will say, this is my people; and each one will say, the LORD is my God"*. It is highly significant that the promise here made through Zechariah is in very similar words concerning the New Covenant promised through Jeremiah: *"and will be their God, and they shall be my people"* (Jeremiah 31:33).

There are other clauses that make up the New Covenant, but this clause referred to by Zechariah shows that the relationship is mutually acknowledged by God and His believing people. God does not accept the prayers of anyone who does not believe, and does not know or understand that he or she must come to Him through Jesus Christ, the only way, as we are told in John 14:6; 13:14; 16:23, 24; and Acts 4:12.

When God's Kingdom is set up on earth by Christ in the age to come, the millions who have died without knowing or acknowledging Jesus Christ, will be raised from death and have this knowledge made clear to them. But the section we are considering in Zechariah takes no account of that time.

Zechariah foretold what would happen to the children of Israel when their Good Shepherd came to them. The "remnant" would be accepted by God as His people, and the remnant would call upon Him and say, "*The LORD is my God*". They would be accepted by reason of their faith in God through Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Mediator of the New Covenant, and receive the forgiveness of their sins.

Forgiveness of sins, a basic promise of the New Covenant, takes us back to the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, mentioned in verse 1. As was said in earlier comments, that fountain symbolises the blood of Jesus Christ, the blood which ratified the New Covenant, the blood which was prefigured by the blood of bulls and goats, as well as the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean.

The application of the New Covenant to this "remnant" of believers from the Jews is shown by many New Testament passages. Discussion of these issues are offered in the book ***'Bible Talks for Heart and Mind'***, in the chapter on the Covenants, and also in the book ***'Comparisons and Contrasts'***, in the chapters entitled 'The New Covenant' and 'The Cleansing Blood'.

## **(c) JERUSALEM OLD AND NEW - Chapter 14**

### **Introductory Comments**

As we have seen, Zechariah prophesied during the time of the return of the Jews from Babylonia, and his prophesying greatly encouraged the people in the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 6:4). We saw in chapter 9 a clear prophetic reference to our Lord Jesus Christ and His reception by the Jews as their King, which prophecy was verified and applied in Matthew 21:1-16; Mark 11:1-16 and Luke 19:28-40.

With these facts in mind, accompanied by similar prophecies in other chapters of Zechariah, particularly chapter 13, we can readily understand that the intervening period of some five hundred years following Zechariah's prophecy, and lasting until our Lord's first advent, would fall within the scope of Zechariah's messages.

The Scriptures contain very few historical details of the period between Zechariah and the first advent of the Lord Jesus. Such details as were

recorded for us may be found in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther, and the books of the prophets Daniel, Haggai, Malachi, and Zechariah.

During that period of five hundred years, the LORD preserved the Jews at Jerusalem for a purpose. The purpose was twofold, to have the nation there and a temple in readiness to receive the Messiah. There was, however, no guarantee that the Jews would be maintained in uninterrupted peace and security. The degree of peace and safety would depend on the Jews' manner of living. God's promise still held good, to the effect that obedience would bring blessing, and disobedience would bring punishment.

After the return from Babylonia the Jews did not encourage or tolerate false prophets such as was the case in the earlier days of the Kings, as we saw in chapter 13, but they engaged in other forms of wrong-doing. They neglected to give healthy and unblemished animals for sacrifice as required by the Law, but offered injured, lame and otherwise unsuitable animals instead. They profaned the altar by offering leavened bread. Many of the Jews mixed with the peoples of surrounding nations, and became lost to Law Covenant requirements.

For all such offences, the people were constantly reproved by the prophets and other conscientious Jews, who mourned the degeneracy of their brethren. The right-minded Jews felt helpless to continue with the covetous and evil-minded, but found comfort in the promise of a great Deliverer to come (Malachi 3:16-18; Matthew 5:4; Mark 15:43; Luke 2:25).

Chapter 13 of Zechariah's prophecy featured prophecies down to and including the sending of the Good Shepherd to care for the sheep, pointing forward to our Lord as the Shepherd Who would be struck, and the sheep scattered.

We should note that the opening verses of chapter 14 must not be taken as following chronologically on chapter 13. Rather, these opening verses go back in time and show that unsatisfactory conditions prevailed among the Jews, necessitating a "*day of the LORD*" which was to come upon them.

### **A Day Of The Lord (14:1-5)**

1. *Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst.*
2. *For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city.*

3. *Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle.*
4. *And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south.*
5. *Then you shall flee through My mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with you.*

### **A Day Of The Lord (vs. 1-5)**

The expression "*the (or a) day of the LORD*" is frequently found in the Scriptures, and the context must always be considered in determining the meaning of the expression whenever it is used. For example, some Bible students take "*a day of the LORD*" in verse 1 to have the same meaning as "*the day of the LORD*" mentioned by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:2. This understanding does not appear to be correct because in 1 Thessalonians Paul was referring to events connected with Jesus' second advent, while Zechariah referred to events to take place while the Jews were in their land and under the dominion of one or other of the Gentile world empires.

To reach an understanding of verses 1-5, we need some knowledge of the times and circumstances in which he wrote these words. Cyrus the Persian had conquered ancient Babylonia and provided for the return of the Jews to their own land. The temple was rebuilt, the people were established in their estates, and facilities were fully available for the worship of God under the ministrations and jurisdiction of Joshua, the High Priest. But some of the people and also some priests became dilatory and careless. Both Ezra and Nehemiah, as well as the prophets, were compelled to remonstrate and deal with those who relapsed into disobedience and sin.

Under Persian rule, the high priests in Jerusalem were permitted to govern the land of Judah, being obliged to pay tribute to the Persian king in return for this concession. But at the same time, the Jewish high priests had to see to it that the surrounding Gentile tribes were kept out of the borders of the land.

Subsequently the Persians were defeated by Alexander the Great, and Jerusalem was captured in 333 BC. After Alexander's untimely death in 323 BC, his kingdom was divided among his four generals, as foretold in Daniel 11:1-4. Then followed a period of alternate distress and prosperity



among the Jews by reason of the rivalries between these four rulers, principally the Syrian and the Egyptian, referred to in many verses of Daniel 11 as the Kings of the North and South. The Jewish people were geographically located between Syria in the north and Egypt in the south, and were greatly affected by the conflicts between these two kingdoms.

Under these circumstances, the Jews carried on as best they could, but were also disturbed by rivalries and contentions amongst themselves. So it came about that many Jews became more interested in factional conflict than in obeying the LORD and serving Him by endeavouring to observe the Law Covenant. Therefore a "*day of the LORD*" came upon them. The Jews had fortified Jerusalem and prepared to defend it. But God had determined that the Jews had to be punished for their sins, and used the Syrians, Egyptians and others near at hand to punish His disobedient people.

The statement of verse 2 "*I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle*" should not be taken to mean all the nations of the earth such as people on other continents. The reference should be understood to mean the nations and tribes included in the Greek empire, as well as the independent tribes that lived in the surrounding deserts and mountains and were difficult to control by the Greek and Roman empires. The nations, moreover, were not necessarily gathered against Judah and Jerusalem at one and the same time. Jerusalem, however, was overrun, and the hardships mentioned in verse 2 were suffered by the Jews.

### **The LORD Fought For His People (v. 3)**

After this "*day of the LORD*" had come upon Jerusalem and the people had been punished, God had mercy on His people and used the rising Roman power to defeat and disperse the nations besieging and harassing Jerusalem. The Romans put an end to the besieging of Jerusalem as well as the internal dissensions and factions among the Jewish people.

But, as verse 1 predicted, great spoil was taken from Jerusalem. In 56 BC Pompey, the great Roman general, took much spoil from Jerusalem. Then the Parthians invaded in 40 BC, followed by Herod who had been appointed by the Romans as king of Judea. Herod besieged Jerusalem in 37 BC for some five months with a force of 50,000 to 60,000 soldiers. Eventually the surrounding nations of Egyptians, Syrians, Greeks, Parthians and Romans divided the spoil in the midst of Jerusalem, as verse 1 predicted.

But the LORD continued to fight for His people by using the Roman power, which finally put an end to the continual factional strife among the Jews themselves, as well as putting an end to attacks and invasions by the surrounding nations. The Roman power gave the Jews protection and considerable latitude in the exercise of civil power, as well as freedom to

retain and practise their religion. Thus the sincere and godly Jews could live peaceably and devote their attention to the Scriptures and the coming of their long-promised Messiah.

### **His Feet On The Mount Of Olives (v. 4)**

A time is mentioned in verse 4 *"in that day"*. In keeping with the context, *"that day"* would mean the time when peaceful conditions were brought about by the Roman power, when Jerusalem was once more a city of peace, when the temple had been completely rebuilt by Herod, and the regular order of divine worship under the Law restored.

What is meant by the expression *"his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives"* (KJV)? We should first of all take note that in the figurative language used, God's feet are meant. When the word "LORD" appears in small capitals in the King James Version and the New King James Version, it stands for "Yahweh" in the original Hebrew. Yahweh was the real ruler of Israel, and the prophecy indicates important actions of His providence.

The words in verse 4 should be understood as God manifesting Himself in some way upon the earth in the interest of His people. The timing of the prophetic words was that of the birth of the Lord Jesus and His subsequent ministry. Firstly God sent John the Baptist as the forerunner of the Messiah, as his father Zacharias had said, *"Blessed be the LORD God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people"* (Luke 1:68).

The Mount of Olives was closely associated with our Lord's life and ministry. It was situated to the east of Jerusalem to be seen by all people. On that mount was Bethany, the home of Martha and Mary and their brother Lazarus. In the Mount of Olives was the garden of Gethsemane, where our Lord spent His last night on earth, sorrowful even unto death. Five days previously He had ridden into Jerusalem from the Mount, and received the acclamation of the people. They spread their garments and palm branches before Him and cried out, *"Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the LORD"* (Matthew 21:4-11; John 12:12-16).

We do not question God's ability to stand literally on the Mount of Olives, rend the mountain in two and create *"a very great valley"*, but it seems more reasonable to treat the expressions as figures or symbols.

A mount or mountain in Scripture often stands for a kingdom. The Mount of Olives could well stand for the kingdom of Israel which God had organised and established in the land, with Jerusalem as its capital, and the temple as His sanctuary in which He dwelt among them. Furthermore, the name to be given to God's Son at His birth was *"Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us"* (Matthew 1:23; Isaiah 7:14).

In this symbolic expression we see our Lord Jesus as God's representative to the Jews. He spoke the words the Father gave Him to speak. He came to reveal the Father (Matthew 11:27; John 6:38; 5:19,30).

#### **The Mount Of Olives Split In Two (v. 4)**

The result of Jesus coming to the nation was that it was *"split in two"*, that is, divided into two parts. We read in John 7:42 and 9:16 that there was a "division" among the Jewish nation, and that "division" or rift was indeed *"a very great valley"*.

"One part" of the divided nation (the word translated "half" means simply one of two parts, which may be very unequal in size) was removed *"toward the north"* and the other part *"toward the south"*. *"Toward the north"* is symbolic of the region from which Israel's enemies came, and to where Israel was taken into captivity (Jeremiah 1:14,15), and stands figuratively for God's judgment upon the rebellious and apostate part of the nation. *"Towards the south"* stands for the region of light, warmth and blessing, a figure of the privileged position of acceptance with God.

The words of the Father, spoken by the Lord Jesus, caused a division firstly among the Jewish leaders themselves as they made their choice as to whether or not to accept Him as their Messiah; and secondly between the Jewish leaders and the common people.

Most of the Jewish leaders ignored differences among themselves to present a united front against the Lord Jesus, Whose teachings showed up and discredited their traditions (Matthew chapter 23). In symbolic terms, Yahweh's feet stood upon the Mount of Olives to make a thorough and final effort on behalf of His people Israel, to reveal the hypocrisy and pride of the Jewish leaders both to themselves and to the common people, and to reveal to the common people that they could gain salvation and life through faith in Jesus.

The greatest cause of dissension and separation among the Jews was our Lord's claim to forgive sins (Matthew 9:1-9). The Scribes, Pharisees, priests and doctors of the Law resented any suggestion that they were sinners requiring forgiveness. They thanked God that they were not as other men in that respect (John 8:31-59; Luke 18:9-14). Therefore Jesus said to them that the publicans (tax-gatherers) and sinners would go into the kingdom of God before them, because those despised ones believed and repented when the opportunity was given to them (Matthew 21:28-32).

It is not difficult to understand how the Mount of Olives, representing God's kingdom as it then was in the Jewish system of government and worship, was divided into two parts to form a very great valley. Basically the division

was between the Jewish leaders who considered themselves righteous and in no need of repentance, and the common people who came first of all to John the Baptist to repent, and subsequently to Jesus to humble themselves, confess their sins and seek forgiveness through Him.

The mission of John the Baptist was to prepare a people for the Lord Jesus. He did this by calling the Jewish nation to repentance, symbolised by the cleaving and creating a very great valley, that is a new path for the Jews to follow, a path of humility in which the whole nation was invited to walk. John called on every member of the nation to repent and be baptised in the Jordan as an outward testimony to the sincerity of the repentance. John's disciples went everywhere preaching repentance and works meet for repentance. Six months after John began his ministry, the Lord Jesus came preaching repentance and the kingdom at hand (Matthew 3:1-12; 4:17).

The message to the Jewish people was to flee from their mount or kingdom before its complete rejection. The way God provided for people to flee was the acceptance of Jesus Christ the Saviour and forgiveness of sins in His name. The message was reinforced by Peter on the day of Pentecost when he said, *"Save yourselves from this untoward generation"*. Peter exhorted his hearers to separate themselves from the Jewish nation as a whole which rejected the Messiah, and to join those who repented and who were being baptised in water and with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:14,40).

The application of the prophetic words in verses 1-4 to the end of the Gospel Age or a time still future from our day, wrenches the verses from their context and leaves uncertainty about the meaning of the taking of the city, the plundering and ravaging of the womenfolk, the taking of some of the people captive while some are left in the city.

In any case, if the interpretation of the verses in question is to be found in the Gospel Age, then some indication should be sought in the inspired writings of the New Testament. If such is not to be found, then the lack of New Testament verification should prevent us from speculation and the taking of liberties with prophecies recorded in the Old Testament.

The Mount of Olives, symbolising the kingdom of Israel, became a place to leave, to flee from, to the *"very large valley"*, and the way of escape was clearly indicated to the nation.

### **The Valley Shall Reach To Azal (v. 5)**

In this verse there is an urgent message to flee to the valley with the same haste as that of the people who fled from *"the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah"*. No account of this earthquake is given in the history

of Uzziah's reign, but the book of Amos begins with the statement that his first message from the LORD was delivered in the days of Uzziah, *"two years before the earthquake"*.

This message was a graphic way of urging the Jews to flee from their mount, that is, their kingdom, before its complete rejection. The way of escape was the acceptance of God's Son, their Saviour, Who was also the Saviour of the whole human race, and the gracious blessing of forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name. John the Baptist said to the Pharisees and Sadducees, *"Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"* (Matthew 3:7; Luke 3:7). Peter, on the day of Pentecost said, *"Save yourselves from this untoward generation"* (Acts 2:40). That was the message - separate yourselves from the majority of the Jewish nation who are rejecting their Messiah, and join yourselves to those who are repenting and accepting their Messiah, being baptised in His holy Name; and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. In other words, separate yourselves from those on the *"mount"* and come down into the *"valley"* (Acts 2:14,38).

Two reasons were given for fleeing into the valley:

- (i) because the valley shall reach to Azal; and
- (ii) because *"the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with you"*.

#### **(i) The Valley Shall Reach To Azal**

The word *"Azal"* is found only in Zechariah 14:5, and does not appear on any map. Smith's Bible Dictionary states that it may be taken *"as an appellative"*, that is, a goal or destination. This seems to be an acceptable understanding of the word.

The valley of departure from the mount or kingdom rejected by God after sending His Son to that kingdom to deliver its people, would be a valley with an objective. Those who entered that valley would proceed to a definite goal. That goal would surely be the high calling, the inheritance of the promise to become a kingdom of priests originally offered to Israel at Sinai (Exodus 19:6). This inheritance was taken from the nation of Israel and offered to believers in Jesus Christ, as recorded in 1 Peter 2:9: *"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."* This is truth of the highest importance.

We note in the verses in 1 Peter 2 leading up to verse 9, that the apostle refers to a division of the Jews into two classes: those to whom the stone laid in Zion was precious, who believed in Jesus and followed Him; and those Jews who were disobedient and who did not believe in Jesus, to whom the

precious stone became a *"stone of stumbling and a rock of offence"*. In these New Testament words, the same lesson is taught by Peter as by Zechariah in his prophecy of the divided Mount of Olives and the way of escape through the valley which was opened up for all who would believe and repent.

There is also another thought suggested by the name "Azal". That thought is that the name is associated with the scapegoat. The Hebrew word rendered "scapegoat" is a compound of "azal" meaning departure or going away, and a word meaning "goat". The ceremonies described in Leviticus 16 involving the scapegoat will not be discussed here, but a full discussion of them is given in the book ***"Comparisons and Contrasts"***, pages 349 and 350.

What is relevant to our present purpose is to note that the scapegoat, or as some versions render it, the goat of departure or the goat for removal, had confessed over it all the sins, iniquities and transgressions of the children of Israel, which it then removed or carried away with it into the wilderness. This procedure pointed forward, in a ceremonial or symbolic manner, to the reality of all sins, iniquities and transgressions of believers being taken away from the sight of God by the Lord Jesus, as Peter wrote, *"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body to the tree"* (1 Peter 2:24).

The valley which led to Azal was the way of escape from the condemnation of the Law which rested upon the Jews, whose offerings of bulls and goats could not take away sin permanently (Hebrews 10:1-4). The way of escape made possible the complete removal of that condemnation, making way for the most gracious gift of righteousness by faith, *"Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all that believe"* (Romans 3:22).

God had arranged for the remission of sins through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, so that all who desire reconciliation and favour with God must come in this way. This great privilege of reconciliation with God was there for those Jews who would leave the rejected Mount of Olives and enter the valley of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, Who *"taketh away the sin of the world"* (John 1:29). The epistle to the Hebrews tells us *"So Christ was once offered to bear (that is, bear away) the sins of many"* (Hebrews 9:28). The little One Who was born in a manger at Bethlehem was named Jesus, meaning Saviour, *"for he shall save his people from their sins"* (Isaiah 59:20; Matthew 1:21; Romans 11:26).

We know from Paul's epistle to the Romans that the Israelites as a whole did not obtain the promises originally made to them, but a remnant obtained the things promised (Romans 11:5,7-10,23).

## (ii) The LORD My God Will Come

The second reason for fleeing from the mount into the valley is expressed in the last clause of verse 5, *"Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with you"*. These words are sometimes taken as a prophecy of the second advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. This understanding, however, cannot be sustained because the word is printed in the KJV and the NKJV in small capitals, indicating that the term in the original is Yahweh, the Name by which God Himself desired to be known by the children of Israel. Young's literal translation reads, *"And come in (that is, into the valley) hath Jehovah (Yahweh) my God"*.

In verse 3 the name Yahweh was a reminder of God's covenant to fight for His people. In verse 5 the name pledges that when *"you"* shall flee to the valley from the mountain Yahweh will come also. This meant that Yahweh's feet would not remain on the Mount of Olives after the separation of the true believers from the remainder of the nation. God would not remain in the kingdom of Judah or in Jerusalem where His Good Shepherd was rejected and struck. He would leave the nation as a whole and would accompany the *"little ones"* into the valley and be their God, as pledged in the last verse of chapter 13, *"I will say, this is my people; and each one will say, the LORD (Yahweh) is my God"*.

This relationship, this mutual receiving of one another, is possible because of the New Covenant, the new arrangement God has put in place to bring about reconciliation between Himself and the human race. That Covenant was ratified by the blood shed by Jesus Christ. Jesus said, when He instituted the Memorial Supper after observing the Passover with His disciples, *"This cup is the New Covenant in my blood, which is shed for you"* (Luke 22:20).

An important section of the New Covenant is given to us in Hebrews 8:10, *"and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people"*. This promise is given only to those who believe into Jesus Christ and accept His blood as the blood of the New Covenant *"shed for many for the remission of sins"*, including their own sins and their acceptance of forgiveness on repentance and confession (Matthew 26:27,28; Romans 10: 8-10).

Zechariah was the LORD's instrumentality to forewarn the Jews, centuries before it took place, of the impending change, when His kingdom, represented by the Mount of Olives, the city of Jerusalem and the Most Holy of the temple, would cease to be God's resting place. Yahweh would leave the temple and the city, the nation would be split in two, and he would come down into the valley of escape with the few He would call His people, and whose God He would thenceforth be.

As we have seen, the LORD God will come into the valley of escape with His *"saints"*, meaning *"holy ones"* as rendered in the RV, RSV, NIV and Young's literal translation. The *"holy ones"* are surely the holy angels, beings of a higher order than human beings. We are told in Psalm 8:5 and Hebrews 2:6-8 that humans are created *"a little lower than the angels"*. The Scriptures portray these heavenly angels as waiting upon God and conveying messages to people. In some visions, God is represented as surrounded by a host of angels: *"thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him"* (Daniel 7:9,10). As described in Revelation 4, the glory of the LORD was seen in vision by the Apostle John, and this glory included attendants to do His bidding.

Sometimes these angels appeared in human form, as when three called upon Abraham, and were not at first recognised as other than human beings (Genesis 18). Angels were sent to Daniel to explain to him some of the visions which greatly troubled him (Daniel 8:15; 9:20-22; 10:11). The angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias to tell him that he would have a son who would perform a great mission in Israel (Luke 1:5-19). The angel Gabriel also appeared to Mary with a message of the highest importance (Luke 1:26). Angels comforted Jesus on a number of occasions, and He said that if He had asked, the Father would have sent more than twelve legions of angels to protect Him from Judas and the multitude (Matthew 26:52-54).

Following the Lord Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of heaven, with His many rebukes of the Jewish leaders, pointing out that their behaviour would not guarantee their entrance into that kingdom, the ministration of the holy angels changed (Matthew 5:20). The angels still brought messages, but not for the hypocritical Jewish leaders. The High Priest, clearly unworthy of that office, cast his lot with the opponents of the Son of Man and gave a prophecy in which he said more of truth than he realised (John 11:47-53). No angel is mentioned as having visited him in accordance with the former custom of the LORD to communicate His will to the High Priest by the Urim and Thummim (Exodus 28:30; Numbers 27:21; Ezra 2:63).

The change in the ministrations of the holy angels was indicated by our Lord's words recorded in Matthew 18:1-14, though all the implications were probably not understood by the disciples at the time. Indeed it seems that many Christians today do not grasp the significance of the Lord's words in Matthew 18, in that the angels who appear in God's presence are thought by some to be the souls or spirits of deceased children. This is not the Lord's meaning, as will be suggested. These are the words of Matthew 18:1-6, 10 and 14 as they appear in context:



1. *At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*
2. *And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,*
3. *And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*
4. *Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*
5. *And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.*
6. *But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. ....*
10. *Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. ....*
14. *Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." (KJV)*

These verses, along with the words of Matthew 19:14, "*of such like is the kingdom of heaven*", teach us that the children the Lord took in His arms were used to illustrate the humble, teachable spirit necessary in His disciples. If the Lord's believers humbled themselves, God would appoint His angels to watch over them, and these angels would be in constant and direct communication with God, so believers would be assured of God's love and care for them. Such is part of what it means to be a child of God, and angels are given the responsibility of carrying out this watchful work on behalf of God's people, as we are told in Matthew 18:10 quoted above.

The implication to Jesus' hearers was that those who did not believe in Him and did not humble themselves as little children, would lose the privilege of having angelic guardians to watch over them and promote their welfare.

As the majority of the Jewish nation rejected not only the Lord Jesus, but also His "*little ones*", the further implication is that the ministration of angels would be withdrawn from the Jewish nation. By their persecution of the "*little ones*" who believed in Jesus, the rulers of the nation and the people as a whole lost their privileged position as special recipients of God's care and providence.

These far-reaching results of the Jewish rejection of the Messiah were not realised by them at the time. The LORD's warnings were not heard by all the people, and most of those that did hear did not understand. It was therefore inevitable that the transfer be made from the Jewish nation as a whole to the remnant who humbled themselves and became sincere followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Through the prophet Zechariah this crisis had been foretold. When Yahweh came into the valley which had been opened for the escape of the *"little ones"* from Judaism, the heavenly angels accompanied Him. Being subject to Yahweh's commands, the angels were obliged to transfer their ministrations from the rejected nation to those believers in Christ who had become the heirs of salvation, as we read in Hebrews 6:14, *"Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"*.

Also, as Hebrews 1:6 tells us, all the angels were made subject to the Lord Jesus when He was raised from the dead, so we can see that the angels, who began to minister to the early believers, did so at the direction of the Son as well as the Father.

The whole picture of the division of the Mount of Olives into two parts is both striking and impressive. The Mount was divided into two parts, and a valley was opened for the humble ones as a way of escape from the rejected kingdom. Yahweh left the kingdom of the Jews with His angels, His heavenly messengers, showing Himself as always to be a covenant-keeping God, bringing in the inauguration of the long-promised New Covenant to gather the *"little ones"* out of the bondage of the Law Covenant and bring them into the new liberty of an entirely new relationship with Him.

It is surely sad to look back and think about the abandonment by God of the kingdom of the Jews, made inevitable by the perversity of its rulers. How deep must have been the Lord Jesus' grief as He wept over the city which had meant so much to the nation and also to Him as its rightful King: *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."* (Matthew 23:37,38; KJV).

The King, acclaimed by the shouting multitude, wept over the city of His inheritance as He rode down from the Mount of Olives, as recorded in Luke 19: 37 to 44, of which verses 41-44 are quoted:

41. *And when he was come near, he beheld the city and wept over it,*
42. *Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.*
43. *For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side.*
44. *And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee, and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation. (KJV).*

Nevertheless, in the few years from Jesus' crucifixion to the overthrow of the city, there was still opportunity for the Jews at that time to flee from the Mount into the valley and be with God and with Christ their rightful King, Who is also God's rightful King over all the earth. A few took this opportunity, and were received into the family of "*little ones*" with their sins forgiven and the high calling open to them (Philippians 3:14).

The majority of the Jews, however, through unbelief, lost the privilege of the opportunity to qualify for the high calling, as we are told in Romans 11:20. If we think this situation is severe on those who lost the opportunity, we should understand that the whole arrangement is by the grace of God, and the requirement for forgiveness and salvation were, and are, so simple that any normal person could, and can fulfil them.

The Jew in particular, whose heart would be grateful to the Saviour Who gave His all to deliver Him from the curse of the Law, and from sin and death, could, and can, come into the family of Christ and with the members of Christ's family, inherit the promise originally made to Israel, but forfeited because of unbelief and disobedience (Exodus 19: 5,6; and 1 Peter 2:9,10).

But this may be said: any Jew at any time who will humble himself or herself, and go down into the valley where Yahweh and His holy ones have gone, can still do so. Some have done so and been received, as witness those Jews who believed under the preaching of the Apostles, and some from successive generations since then.

## The Light In That Day (14:6-9)

6. *It shall come to pass in that day that there will be no light; the lights will diminish.*
7. *It shall be one day which is known to the LORD-- neither day nor night. But at evening time it shall happen that it will be light.*
8. *And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea; in both summer and winter it shall occur.*
9. *And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be." The LORD is one," and His name one.*

Verses 6 to 9 all refer to *"that day"*. "Day" in Bible prophecy is not necessarily a twenty-four hour day, but usually a period of time, the duration of which is indicated by the context. In these four verses we are given a prophetic picture of the Gospel Age, the age following the casting-off of unbelieving Jews, thus making way for the gathering of the *"little ones"* out of Judaism. We learn from the New Testament that the purpose of the Gospel Age is to take out a people for God's name. The Gospel Age began with the call to the Jews to believe in Jesus Christ and gain forgiveness and salvation. Only comparatively few Jews believed, called the "remnant" in Scripture, so the call went out to the Gentiles (Acts 15:14; 10:1-48; 13:38-48; Romans 1:16,17; 1 Corinthians 1:22-24).

The figurative language in verses 6 to 9 is singularly apt. It should be kept in mind that this prophecy was given about five hundred years before Jesus began His earthly ministry, and we should appreciate the wonder of it as a description of a period far beyond the ability of humans to foresee. The period was a day known to Yahweh, Who could foreknow it and plan accordingly.

In verse 6 other versions vary from the NKJV which says that *"there will be no light."* The RV has *"the light shall not be with brightness and with gloom."* Leeser's translation reads, *"there shall be no light, but fleeting light and thick darkness"*, while Young's literal translation has *"The precious light is not, it is dense darkness"*. Another reading suggested by the Oxford Bible margin is *"it shall not be clear in some places, and dark in other places of the world"*. The word translated *"clear"* in this reading, and that of the KJV, means *"valuable"* or *"costly"*, and the word rendered *"darkness"* means *"thickness"*. The Hebrew word for *"clear"* is translated as *"brightness"* in Job 31:26, and in 1 Kings 5:17; 7:9, 10 and 11 it is rendered *"costly"*, referring to the huge prepared stones used in constructing the temple of the LORD and Solomon's palace. Some of these prepared stones were of great size, measuring ten and eight cubits, and must have been very expensive to cut and shape in readiness for fitting.

It would seem that "precious" and "costly" best convey the intended meaning in the context. Anything that is "precious" or "costly" is usually scarce and difficult to obtain, hence the light in verse 6 would not be so costly or rare that it is unobtainable.

The word translated as "darkness" in Leeser's and Young's translations, and "dark" in the KJV, "gloom" in the RV is a primitive word meaning "to shrink, i.e. thicken (as unracked wine, curdled milk, clouded sky, frozen water). In Exodus 15:8 the word is rendered "congealed" in Moses' description of what occurred in the depths of the sea when the Israelites crossed on dry land. In Job 10:10 the rendering is "curdled": *"Hast thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese?"* In Zephaniah 1:12 the word in question is rendered "settled": *"and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, the LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil."* The margin to this passage states that the Hebrew word means "curded" or "thickened", and possibly means muddled or confused in mind, as indicated by their comment on God.

The use of different English words to translate the one Hebrew word is often desirable or even necessary according to the sense of the context. When milk thickens, we say it is "curdled", when water thickens, it is said to be "frozen", and when the atmosphere thickens we call it "fog" or "cloud". We also speak of heavy fog and "thick" fog.

In view of all this, what is the meaning of verse 6? Having regard to the context, the idea of cold and ice (thickened water) is ruled out because it is stated in verse 8 that living waters flow, both in summer and in winter. The "day" is passed in the "valley", with the light clear and unobscured, neither scarce nor insufficient, and not blanketed by "thickness" as of clouds or fog. Going down into the valley with Yahweh and His holy ones was not like going into a dungeon or a heavy fog. It was to be an experience of light and joy, with the darkness of Jewish tradition left behind. All the New Testament epistles tell us of the early disciples walking in the light.

But how does this accord with verse 7?

The ordinary day of twenty-four hours has proportions of light and darkness, which vary from season to season according to position of the earth in its orbit. The Jews began their twenty-four hour day at sunset, so that the Jewish day began with darkness which then ended with light at sunrise, but the day continued until the next sunset. But the day of verse 7 was to be different. The beginning of the day would be light: *"at evening time it shall happen that it will be light"*.

And so it was. The apostles and early disciples left Judaism to follow the Lord Jesus Christ into the valley at a time when night was falling upon the nation of Judah. But to the disciples of Jesus, who had the blessing and presence of Yahweh, there was no night.

To them it was light. The Lord Jesus, the true Light, had shone upon them (John 1:9). Jesus said, *"Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have the light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light"* (John 12:35,36).

So while the disciples were for a time bewildered by the course of events and their Master's death, He soon came to them after His resurrection and gave them the light required to understand their position, while the Scribes, Pharisees and Jewish leaders were left in darkness. In the valley of faith, obedience, and humility there was light.

### **One Day Honoured By The LORD (v. 7)**

A Variorum Bible footnote states that two commentators take the rendering of "known" in verse 7 to be "honoured" - *"one day which is honoured to the LORD"*. The same word occurs in Amos 3:2: *"You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities"*.

The same word "known" in this context means more than simply "being acquainted with" or "being aware of". It means known in the sense of having a special relationship with the LORD God, a people to be either protected or punished according to their display of or lack of faith and obedience.

So the thought in verse 6 may well mean a special day that Yahweh has "honoured" by setting it apart for a special purpose. Verses 8 and 9 give further particulars concerning that day.

### **Living Waters (v. 8)**

The *"day"* mentioned in verse 8, as has been said earlier, is the Gospel Age. The *"living waters"* symbolise the message of truth and salvation, which began to be preached at Jerusalem, into which city the Lord Jesus entered as God's rightful King. It was on the neighbouring hill of Golgotha that Jesus was offered as the true sacrifice for sin and the ransom for all. These life-giving waters could not flow from the temple at Jerusalem in the sense that this temple became obsolete, and its ceremonies were no longer acceptable to God after Christ's death and resurrection. But the Gospel message did go forth from the city of Jerusalem, after the apostles and disciples were endued with the power of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

The great valley, referred to in verse 5, into which the humble-minded believers were led from the rejected Kingdom by the preaching of the Lord and His disciples, was the channel provided for these living waters. The *"living waters"* or the water of life flow from the Lord Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, as Jesus said to the woman of Samaria: *"Whosoever drinketh of this water (the water from Jacob's well) shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life"* (John 4:13,14; KJV).

The water of life was shown to Ezekiel in a vision, in similar symbolic language, as flowing eastward from the altar seen in the vision. The stream issued from the altar and flowed out at the east gate. It grew deeper and deeper, and spread wider and wider. It went to the east country, to the desert, and to the sea. The stream of *"living waters"* symbolising the Gospel message spread far and wide, and the stream is still flowing today. For a fuller explanation of Ezekiel's prophecy in chapter 47, verses 1-12, the reader is referred to the book *"Comparisons and Contrasts"*, pages 421 to 433.

Some students of prophecy place the fulfilment of Zechariah 14:8 at the second coming of Christ. Such an interpretation takes no account of the fact that the stream of life-giving water began to flow immediately after the Lord Jesus' ministry and sacrifice. The first to partake of that stream were believing Jews who became His disciples and subsequently were told to convey the knowledge of that life-giving stream to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (John 12:32,33; Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:46-48).

### **The Eastern Sea And The Western Sea (v. 8)**

The valley described in verses 4 and 5 ran eastward and westward, and the course of the stream of life-giving water followed the valley. This means that the humble-minded, who believed in Jesus and left Judaism, were constantly revived and refreshed.

But its benefits were not limited to the "remnant" of the Jews. Its life-giving benefits were for all people of every nation who would believe. This extension of the blessings of forgiveness and reconciliation with God is represented by the living waters flowing to both the eastern and western seas. The eastern sea to the east of Jerusalem, forming the eastern boundary of portion of the tribe of Judah, was the Dead Sea; while the western sea, forming the western boundary of Canaan or Palestine as God gave it to Israel, was the Mediterranean Sea. These seas would represent peoples and nations beyond the borders of Judaism. Seas were used in Scripture as a symbol of people (Jude 1:13 and many verses in the Revelation).

So when we read in verse 8 of the living waters flowing toward the eastern sea and toward the western sea, the understanding need not be confined to those terms as geographical locations, limiting the spread and extent of the message to the land between the Dead Sea on the east and the Mediterranean on the west. We may think of those terms as applying to the peoples toward whom the living waters would flow.

So, in fulfilment of this prophecy and that of Zechariah 9:10, we see that immediately the King had come to Zion, had been rejected and crucified, then on the third day resurrected as Lord of all, the Gospel was sent out with the message of salvation. The message was rapidly extended and expanded as the LORD directed His servants to proclaim it *"in both summer and winter"*, that is, continuously, all the year round, as prophesied also in Isaiah 55:1 to 5.

### **King Over All The Earth (v. 9)**

By right of creation, God has been from the beginning the Supreme Being with authority over all the earth. He has never given, and never will give, that position to another. When He took the children of Israel out of Egypt and gave them a government and a law, He formed a Theocracy with Himself as Sovereign. He maintained this office notwithstanding all their backslidings, idolatry and rebellion.

But from the time the Jews rejected His Son, their rightful King under God's authority, and Gentiles were admitted to God's favour, God discontinued the limitation He had placed on Himself, and asserted His authority as King over all the earth.

Many statements by the apostles support this fact. When the Apostle Peter was given a vision from heaven, and obeyed God's command to go to the Gentile Cornelius, he said, *"Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him"* (Acts 10:34,35). God recognised Cornelius on the basis of his faith, and not of his nationality.

Again, the Apostle Paul on Mars Hill stated that during previous centuries in which the Athenians made images and worshipped them, God "winked at" or took no measures to correct, their errors. But now, Paul said, God *"commandeth all men everywhere to repent"* (Acts 17:30). God, as King over all the earth, gave this command to all nations, and not simply to the Jews only, and it was to be obeyed by all who would hear it.

God has maintained this same attitude during the Gospel Age. In a special sense He is the God of all who believe, for they render Him love and obedience through Jesus Christ His Son. Nevertheless, He is King over all



unbelieving persons and nations as well, and His message is available to everyone everywhere for the purpose of taking out a people for His Name regardless of race, skin colour, or language.

Now, while the Gospel Age lasts, is the time of which the prophets wrote, as we see from quotations in the New Testament. On the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted the prophet Joel, declaring that the "*great and notable day*" had come, and revealed that "*whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be saved*" (Acts 2:16-21).

Paul wrote to the Romans with the same message in Romans 10:

11. *For the Scripture saith, whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.*
12. *For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same LORD over all is rich unto all that call upon him.*
13. *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the LORD shall be saved.* (KJV).

### **The LORD Is One And His Name One (v. 9)**

The last clause of verse 9 requires our consideration. How can this statement "*In that day it shall be - The LORD is one, and his name one*" harmonise with the New Testament application of the second Psalm? If God had set His Son as King upon His holy hill of Zion, and called upon all to make friends with Him, could it still be said that God's Name is one (Acts 4:24-30; 13:32,33)?

The answer to this question presents no difficulties to those who distinguish between God and His Son. God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and remains the Supreme Ruler of the universe. The Lord Jesus, after His resurrection, acknowledged Yahweh as His God as well as His Father (John 20:17; 1 Peter 1:3). There is no confusion of offices.

Psalm 2 foretold that God would set His King upon His holy hill of Zion, and that He (Jesus) would inherit the throne of His father David. The hill of Zion is a figurative reference to the throne of David, which was the throne of the Lord, that throne being left vacant until He, the rightful heir, should come (Ezekiel 21:25-27; Luke 1:32,33).

Therefore God is still King over all the earth, and His Name pre-eminent, that is, His supreme position is not shared by another. The fact that God raised His Son from death, and set Him at His own right hand, testifies to the Father's position as the supreme authority.

The Apostle Paul confirms this in 1 Corinthians 8:

5. *For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many)*
6. *But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him: and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. (KJV).*

The Lord Jesus at the Father's right hand is Heir of all things, but is so at His Father's right hand, and not as an independent ruler. This is seen from the message to the overcomers recorded in Revelation: *"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne"* (Revelation 3:21). This message recognises that the authority of the Father's throne remains supreme.

### **The Arabah and the New Jerusalem (14:10-12)**

10. *All the land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be raised up and inhabited in her place from Benjamin's Gate to the place of the First Gate and the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananeel to the king's winepresses."*
11. *"The people shall dwell in it; And no longer shall there be utter destruction, But Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited."*
12. *"And this shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, And their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths."*

### **The Plain, Or The Arabah (v. 10)**

Some Christians believe that this passage of Scripture means that the topography of the Holy Land will be altered, in that all the country around Jerusalem will be levelled, and made a vast plain. Instead of "plain" the RV, NIV and the REB have "the Arabah". What is meant by "the Arabah"?

The Arabah is mentioned in Deuteronomy 1:1 and 7, and refers to the deep valley running north and south of the Dead Sea. It is part of the rift valley running from Lebanon to Mozambique. The Variorum explanation of the "plain" of Deuteronomy 1: 1 and 7 is "the Arabah (the name given to the chalky depression in the midst of which the Jordan ran)".

Smith's Bible Dictionary gives us more detailed information:

"Arabah. Although this word appears in the AV in its original shape only in Joshua 18:18, yet in the Hebrew text it is of frequent occurrence. It is used generally to indicate a barren, uninhabitable district, but "the Arabah" indicates more particularly the deep sunken valley or trench which forms the most striking among the many striking natural features of Palestine, and which extends with great uniformity of formation from the slopes of Hermon to the Aelanitic Gulf (Gulf of Akabah) of the Red Sea; the most remarkable depression known to exist on the surface of the globe. Through the northern portion of this extraordinary fissure the Jordan rushes through the lakes of Huleh and Gennesareth down its tortuous course to the deep chasm of the Dead Sea. This portion, about 150 miles in length, is known amongst the Arabs by the name of el-Ghor. The southern boundary of the Ghor is the wall of cliffs which crosses the valley about 10 miles south of the Dead Sea. From their summits, southward to the Gulf of Akabah, the valley changes its name, or, it would be more accurate to say, retains its old name of Wady-el-Arabah. There can be no doubt that in the times of the conquest and the monarchy, the name "Arabah" was applied to the valley in the entire length of both its southern and northern portions. Thus in Deuteronomy 1:1 probably, and in Deuteronomy 2:8, certainly (AV "plain" in both cases), the allusion is to the southern portion, while the other passages, in which the name occurs, point to the northern portion. In Deuteronomy 3:17, 4:49; Joshua 3:16, 11:2, 12:3 and 2 Kings 14:25, both the Dead Sea and the Sea of Cinneroth (Gennesareth) are named in close connection with the Arabah. The allusions in Deuteronomy 11:30; Joshua 8:14; 12:1; 2 Samuel 2:29; 4:7; 2 Kings 25:4; Jeremiah 39:4; 52:7, become at once intelligible when the meaning of the Arabah is known. In Joshua 11:16 and 12:8 the Arabah takes its place with "the mountain", "the lowland" plains of Philistia and Esdraelon, "the south" and "the plain" of Coela-Syria, as one of the great natural divisions of the conquered country."

With this information concerning the Arabah in mind, the meaning of the first clause of verse 10 becomes clearer: *"All the land shall be turned into a plain (the Arabah) from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem"*. Instead of a promise of fertility and prosperity, the meaning of the statement indicates a desert condition, in keeping with the Hebrew meaning of "Arabah" as a barren, uninhabitable district.

Geba was one of the cities of Benjamin allotted to the priests, Aaron's sons, as a place of residence (Joshua 21:17; 1 Chronicles 6:60). It is situated almost due north of Jerusalem. Rimmon, as stated, was to the south of Jerusalem. It was one of the cities allotted to Judah by Joshua (Joshua 15:32), and later given to the tribe of Simeon, whose inheritance was within the inheritance of Judah (Joshua 19:7).

At the time of Jeroboam's revolt, and the formation of the northern kingdom, Benjamin and Simeon remained loyal to Judah and to the worship of the temple in Jerusalem.

We can see by consulting a map that if all the land between Geba and Rimmon were to become barren and uninhabitable, it would mean an act of God's displeasure. Under the Law Covenant, obedience on the part of the people brought with it the LORD's blessing, abundant rainfall at the right season, and general prosperity. Disobedience by the LORD's people was punished by absence of rain and consequently famine with stock and crop losses.

These promises and punishments are set forth at length in Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28, and Leviticus chapter 26. Making the Arabah a desert would be a severe judgement, for the territory involved was the very heart of Judah, with a considerable portion of Benjamin and Simeon. To make this land like the Arabah would mean not only desert, but also a decrease and loss of population.

And such was to be the punishment upon the Jews for their disobedience of Yahweh their King, and for the rejection of the Lord Jesus, the King's Son. When the Lord Jesus came to them, there was already a deadness at the heart of Judaism. Judaism was like a fig tree that bore no fruit. The LORD God, however, was prepared, in a figure, to dig around it and fertilise it, and then if it did not come to life He would cut it down (Luke 13:6-9). The Lord Jesus said that the Scribes and Pharisees were like whited sepulchres, full of dead men's bones, and that that generation would be held responsible for the persecution and slaying of the prophets (Matthew 23). Their desert-like condition was such that another prophecy spoke of Jesus as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground (Isaiah 53:2).

In the parable of Matthew 21, the kingdom of Judah was likened to a vineyard that failed to produce fruit, because the servants who were left in charge were wicked men who finally killed the heir when he came to investigate their conduct and mismanagement. This spiritual listlessness of the leaders and lack of fruit-bearing in the nation were their own doing, *"For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing"* (Matthew 13:15). This condition had been long-standing.

Zechariah's prophecy spoke of an act of God in turning a previously fruitful land into a desert. This prophecy found its fulfilment in the deliberate rejection of the nation of Israel as His special people, as declared by the Lord shortly before His crucifixion, *"Your house is left unto you desolate"*, and as executed by the LORD God when He rent the veil of the temple in two from top to bottom, putting an end to the Law, of which the temple services formed

so large a part. The Law was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14), and the Jews were earnestly exhorted to die to it as a widow to a dead husband, that they might be married to another, even to Jesus Christ. (Romans 7:1-6).

There seems special significance in the mention of Geba as included in the Arabah or desert, because it was a place set apart for priests to dwell in, thereby showing that the Aaronic priesthood was no longer acceptable to God. The priestly office after the order of Aaron was a desert, barren and useless when Christ came as High Priest after the order of Melchisedec (Hebrews 7) .

Geba was also a natural defence for Jerusalem. It was re-settled after the return from Babylonia, and was mentioned among the villages in which the singers at the temple made their homes (Nehemiah 11:31,36;12:29). The singers also were included in the desert which Judaism became. Their songs of praise, to be acceptable to God in the new Age, must rise to God through Jesus Christ. In addition, the singers could not render this praise acceptably unless they repented and were converted and were spiritually healed by the Lord (Matthew 13:15).

### **The New Jerusalem (v. 10)**

Zechariah prophesied of the time to come, mainly at the time of our Lord's first advent, when the entire law with its ritual at the temple would no longer apply. Judaism as a whole would become unproductive like the Arabah, a desert without life. The prophet's next statement in verse 10 was, *"Jerusalem shall be raised up and inhabited in her place"*. So if Jerusalem and the temple were to be turned into a desert, how could Jerusalem be raised up?

The meaning of the prophecy seems to be that a new Jerusalem would arise to replace the ruin and desert. The city, the temple and the sacrifices were all figures of heavenly things, hidden until the Gospel was preached, then revealed by the apostles, especially the Apostle Paul, who wrote of *"Jerusalem which is above"*.

The Law Covenant had its beginning at Mount Sinai, having the status of a schoolmaster (Galatians 3:24), whose children (the Jews) were slaves. *"But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all."* (Galatians 4:26).

Until Christ came and was sacrificed on the cross, the New Covenant which God had in His purpose was not ready to come into operation and be revealed, and had no children.

But when the Lord Jesus died on the cross and shed His blood, He nailed the Law Covenant to His cross, and by the shedding of His blood ratified the New Covenant. The blood of Jesus is the blood of the New Covenant "*shed for many for the remission of sins*". The nailing of the Law to His cross "*took it out of the way*". The passages in Colossians 2:11-23 and Galatians 4: 21-31 interpret for us this prophecy of Zechariah.

Galatians 4 presents the Law as a slave cast out with her children, while Colossians 2 presents the Law as brought to an end by Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Zechariah described the Law and Judaism as turned into a desert; while all three passages in Galatians, Colossians and Zechariah show the New Covenant as coming into its own; recognised, exalted and free, the "mother" of all who believe in Jesus.

Paul wrote, "*For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*" (Galatians 3:26), which faith means recognition of Jesus as the Mediator of the New Covenant of liberty, in which the true knowledge of God is revealed, and under which believers receive forgiveness of their sins (Matthew 26:28; Ephesians 2:12-22; Hebrews 8:10-13; 10:9-18).

The New Covenant is exalted and bearing fruit, while the Law Covenant has been rejected, no longer applicable, dried up like a desert, like the Arabah mentioned earlier.

Jerusalem was a walled city with many gates, some of which are mentioned in verse 10. It seems that the mention of them in connection with the exaltation of the New Covenant indicates that all the ground covered by the Law Covenant is covered by the New, but with much better effect on all who are privileged to belong to it, to dwell within its provisions and everlasting promises, as we will see in verse 11.

### **Jerusalem Safely Inhabited (v. 11)**

The New Covenant offered the Jews first, and then the Gentiles, a safe refuge, a place of security and peace. Jerusalem of old, the city of Judah, had been in difficulties frequently with many enemies round about, and its walls and fortifications of great strength often assaulted with disastrous consequences to the inhabitants. Jerusalem of old also suffered from the curse of the Law by reason of the people's inability to obey it fully and properly. But the New Covenant as an essential part of the New Jerusalem is an impregnable fortress.

All who come under the New Covenant, that is, all who agree to be bound by its terms and conditions, have God to be their Protector, the Lord Jesus to be their Advocate and Mediator, and the Holy Spirit to be their Comforter. Christians have many opponents, but they nevertheless dwell in the secure

knowledge that they are God's children, and that they will inherit all that He has promised them in the world to come. Even if their enemies succeed in killing them, Christians know that their future lives are secure in God's hands, and that he will raise them to life again in His own due time and will reward them according to His promise: *"In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee ... No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper"* (Isaiah 54:14,17).

### **The Plague (v. 12)**

Those who come under the New Covenant, who are children of the *"Jerusalem above"*, need have no fear. In it they have safety with the protection of divine providence all around them, and God's promises to sustain them whatever may happen to them.

But those who war against the New Covenant, who *"will not have this man (Jesus) to reign over"* them, and strive in every way to harm the LORD's children, are fighting against God, and the fight is destined to be lost (Luke 19:14,27; Psalm 2:12).

Verse 12 takes a view of the entire Gospel Age, and declares that every one of the peoples and nations that will have warred against His covenant will themselves be struck by the hand of God. God has declared that those who will not come into the light when it is brought to them, will continue to wander in darkness, and will not be permitted to inflict permanent injury to the New Covenant or to the believers covered by it (John 3: 16-21).

*"Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet"* expresses the futility of the persistent efforts of the opponents of the New Covenant, including the continuing consumption of the Papal *"little horn"* while speaking *"great words"* (Daniel 7:11, 20-2, 25-27).

*"Their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets"* means that the opponents of the New Covenant have had no spiritual sight. Not only have many of them lost the sight that they once might have had of the Gospel, but also their sight on other matters has grown dim and has faded away, because they have rejected spiritual truths and embraced worldly, material matters which can never bring mental or spiritual satisfaction.

As to *"their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths"*, history is witness to the confusion and falsity of the creeds and ethical standards of the nations that refuse or ignore New Covenant standards and war against them. Their doctrines and practices have brought only death and destruction upon themselves and others. They do not see, and do not want to see that there is no life apart from the Son of God.

## **A Great Discomfiture (14:13,14)**

13. *"It shall come to pass in that day that a great panic from the LORD will be among them. Everyone will seize the hand of his neighbour."*
14. *"Judah also will fight at Jerusalem. And the wealth of all the surrounding nations shall be gathered together: gold, silver, and apparel in great abundance."*

When people are losing strength and are unsteady on their feet, and perhaps going blind, they naturally try to hold on to a friend or another person for guidance and support. And so it is with nations. Each of them at one time or another has looked to other nations with a view to forming an alliance or reaching trade and commercial agreements. When such endeavours have failed, some nations have raised their hands against other nations and made war upon them. They have raised their hands against their neighbour's hand.

*"A great panic from the LORD will be among them"* is, of course, a consequence of their actions. The word "panic" in the NKJV or "tumult" in the KJV means literally "discomfiture". The English word "discomfit" means "to defeat utterly; frustrate, rout, vanquish". Strong defines the Hebrew verb as meaning "to make an uproar, agitate greatly", and the Hebrew noun as meaning "confusion, or uproar". A similar word with the same basic meaning is used in Joshua 10:10, where the word is rendered "discomfit" in the KJV, and really signifies a confused rout. That word is also used in the same way in Samuel 7:10 and 11.

During the Gospel Age the LORD has allowed His children to endure much hardship and suffering, even to the extent of martyrdom, but the rewards for faithfulness are certain and sure. This statement through Zechariah shows that God has not allowed his opponents to gain stability and a measure of permanence, but has frustrated their plans, broken up their alliances, and exposed their secret understandings. The LORD is still doing this with the nations today who ignore and oppose His Covenant of mercy and forgiveness, and continue in various ways to strive to bring about "peace and safety" without any reference to God, nor any serious understanding of His intention to establish His kingdom over all the earth.

Jerusalem in this section of Zechariah's prophecy is not the literal city, but is used figuratively of the governmental arrangements under the New Covenant in keeping with the context of the prophetic message before and after. Verse 14 prophesies of the attitude of the Jews towards the New Covenant in the Gospel Age.



Translators and commentators differ in their understanding of Judah's "fight". We should be aware that the original Hebrew contains no preposition before Jerusalem, neither "at", "against", nor "in". In some ancient languages, as indeed in some more modern ones, the preposition was indicated by an inflection of the noun, that is, the noun was given a letter or letters at the end in accordance with the meaning intended, leaving the translator or translators to supply what seems to him or them to be the appropriate preposition in English, because English does not inflect its nouns in this manner. So it is understandable that translators differ in their supply of the preposition intended from one context to another.

In the context of verse 14, in view of the Jews' rejection of the Gospel and from the history of the Gospel Age to the present time, the weight of evidence supports the preposition "against" - *"Judah shall fight against Jerusalem"*.

In the time of Jesus' earthly ministry, the leaders in Judah were eager to continue as they were, giving the appearance of holy men, and heaping burdens *"grievous to be borne"* upon their less affluent fellow Jews. Principles of the New Covenant, which Jesus laid before all the Jewish people in the sermon on the mount, and on many other occasions, were rejected by most Jews, because to practise such principles would mean a complete change in attitude and lifestyle. Therefore, in fighting against Jesus and His teachings, the Jews were fighting against the New Covenant, which Jesus came to proclaim to them.

This attitude has been displayed by the Jews throughout the Gospel Age since they cried, *"His blood be on us, and on our children"* (Matthew 27:25). When they rejected their Messiah and brought about His crucifixion, they then turned their persecuting zeal against His disciples, who had accepted the New Covenant and become "children" of the "Jerusalem above".

Galatians 4:19 reads, *"But as then he that was born after the flesh (that is, Ishmael) persecuted him that was born after the spirit (that is, Isaac), even so it is now"*. Ishmael mocked Isaac, as we read in Genesis 21:9-12.

The Jews mocked Jesus often, even when He hung helpless on the cross. They mocked His disciples also, as Jesus said they would: *"The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord .... If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?"* (Matthew 10:24,25).

When sending out the twelve, Jesus described the Jews as "wolves" among whom they would work: *"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But*

*beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues." ... "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved." (Matthew 10:16,17,22; KJV).*

### **Fear Not Them Which Kill The Body**

The true believer in the New Covenant will not live in fear and dread:

- 26. Fear them not therefore; for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid that shall not be known.*
- 27. What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops.*
- 28. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (Gehenna - the second death).*

*(Matthew 10:26-28; KJV).*

The Lord's disciples obeyed these exhortations and preached the Word fearlessly, both among the Jews who fought against Jerusalem, and among the Gentiles, whose idols were threatened by the Gospel message, and the skilled craft of the idol-makers endangered. And it was often the Jews who stirred up the persecuting spirit among the Gentiles (Acts 8:1; 13:45; 14:2,3; 18:12).

Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 2:

- 14. For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews:*
- 15. Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men:*
- 16. Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins always: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost. (KJV).*

Since that early time in the Gospel Age, the Jews themselves have been much persecuted by professing Christians. For centuries now they have been considered as victims by both civil and ecclesiastical rulers who have coveted the Jews' accumulations of wealth. But the aspect which the prophecy emphasises is the Jews' resistance to the New Covenant and to forgiveness of sins on the basis of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The wrath of God upon the Jews has been manifested not only in the political losses inflicted upon them, but also by the blindness to which the Apostle Paul referred in Romans 11:

7. *What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election (the remnant who believed) hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded,*
8. *(According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day.*
9. *And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling block, and a recompense unto them:*
10. *Let their eyes be darkened that they may not see, and bow down their back alway. (KJV).*

Any individual Jew who humbled himself might recover from this blindness, as verse 23 shows, but the majority of the nation has continued in blindness, deafness, and hardness of heart.

The fight of the Jews against Jerusalem (the New Covenant) has consisted of more than open opposition to and persecution of those of their number who have become Christians. They persist in believing that God hears prayer not offered in the name of Jesus, and they strenuously deny that their Messiah is Jesus Christ, and that He is the Son of God.

God has withdrawn His favour from those who had the opportunity but were not sufficiently interested to enter into the high calling when it was opened to them by the Lord, and urged upon them by Peter, Paul and the other apostles and disciples. God graciously grants favours, but wishes to be inquired of concerning them, and have some gratitude shown to Him by those who enquire.

Zechariah's straightforward statement that the worldly prosperity of many Jews avails them nothing is worth our attention. Nor is the collected wealth of the Gentile nations of any assistance in the most important of all callings, the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Not only does Judah, meaning the Jews, now fight against Jerusalem, as it has done throughout the Gospel Age, but the Gentiles also unwittingly use their wealth against the New Covenant.

Zechariah says, *"And the wealth of all the surrounding nations shall be gathered together: gold, silver and apparel in great abundance"* (verse 14). The word translated "wealth" has a wide range of meaning, and some translations render it as "force". Strong's concordance has "probably a force,

whether of man, means, or other resources; an army, wealth, virtue, valour, strength". It is indisputable that wealth in terms of money must be behind any military, naval or aerial force, while even diplomacy may well be a matter of negotiation on the basis of wealth or material advantage. We may gather from the enumeration of *"gold, silver, and apparel in great abundance"* that force was exerted to collect it, and that such material abundance was collected for the purpose of being used by the nations, albeit unwittingly, to fight against Jerusalem (the New Covenant).

This the nations have done throughout the Gospel Age. Nations given to non-Christian worship have in fact been opposed to the New Covenant, and the wealth of nations which have known Christianity cannot be said to have been used by them in favour of the New Covenant conditions of mercy and forgiveness, a holy life, and self-sacrifice for the sake of Jesus Christ. There have been some exceptions in rulers and people, but the history of the Gospel Age is one long record of selfish aggrandisement and worldly amusement on the one hand, and fierce, armed conflicts between nations on the other. Genuine Christians have been a people apart.

### **The Plague On The Beasts Of Burden (14:15)**

15. *"Such also shall be the plague on the horse and the mule, on the camel and the donkey, and on all the cattle that will be in those camps. So shall this plague be."*

The four beasts named in this verse are beasts of burden. Other beasts are referred to but not named in most translations. The NKJV and Young's literal translation render the other beasts as "cattle". It seems that the beasts of burden named represent the agencies by which the gold, silver and apparel of verse 14 were to be conveyed and gathered for the use of the fighters against Jerusalem, that is, against the New Covenant.

The horse as a symbol often stands for war, as horses have been used so frequently in warfare. The mule and the donkey are drudges, while the camel serves in deserts and desert warfare as a burden bearer and a carrier of fighting men.

The lesson seems to be that all agencies for conveying aid and supplies would find that their efforts would be frustrated and would not prevail against the New Covenant and against those who have embraced it as a refuge from sin and death. All human and material sources of both Jews and Gentiles are valueless as hindrances to the accomplishment of God's great purpose for the salvation of the penitent, those who come to God in the only acceptable way, the way which is through Jesus Christ, the only One Who is able to bear away their sins entirely and for ever.

The application of this prophecy to the whole of the Gospel Age is in accord with the facts as recorded in both sacred and secular history. This application in no way discounts or lessens the arrangements made by God for the Kingdom Age, when His Son will reign over all the earth, and will be assisted by the Gospel Age overcomers who have been selected during this Age of trial, testing and suffering. Every one who is so selected will be a joint-heir with Jesus Christ, having been considered by God as eligible to serve as judge of angels and people for one thousand years (1 Corinthians 6:2,3; Revelation 20:6)

The Scriptures make clear to us that when the Lord has established a permanent government able to control all forces, which at present are used largely for evil purposes, many who have been opponents in this life will repent and turn to the LORD. There will no longer be efforts to destroy the Jerusalem of blessing, the New Covenant, except for a few incorrigible people, but the majority of people, despairing of the misgovernments of the past, will gladly fall in line with the righteousness and justice of the Kingdom rule.

### **Go To Worship And Keep A Feast (14:16)**

16. *"And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles."*

Verse 16 continues to portray the situation during the Gospel Age, and makes clear that there have been some people in the nations who were not opposed to the New Covenant, and were thankful for it.

Isaac Leeser's translation uses the future perfect tense in verses 12 and 16, thus emphasising the prophecy as applying to the whole of the Gospel Age and not merely to the end portion. Verse 12 then reads, *"And this shall be the plague wherewith the LORD will afflict all the people that **shall have come** to battle against Jerusalem"*, and verse 16 reads, *"And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left out of all the nations who **will have come** against Jerusalem"*.

Leeser's translation confirms the understanding that the coming against Jerusalem, meaning the New Covenant, has been continuous throughout the Gospel Age by the nations, either one at a time or two or more together, the Jews being conspicuous for their blindness, hardness of heart and unremitting opposition. It is therefore contended that the going up to worship Yahweh and keeping the feast of Tabernacles has also occupied the entire Gospel Age.

One school of thought has it that all the going up against Jerusalem will occupy only a few years at the end of the Gospel Age, and be followed by a great destruction, and that the going up to worship and keeping the feast of Tabernacles will be the occupation of the peoples and nations who survive that onslaught, and live on into the Kingdom Age.

But verse 16 does not say this. It merely states that the individuals, who did not associate themselves with those who opposed the New Covenant, came instead to worship Yahweh under the terms of that New Covenant. As has been said, Jerusalem in this context represents the New Covenant, in respect of which millions during the Gospel Age have registered either their disapproval or ignorance of it by their conduct, or have registered their approval of the New Covenant terms of mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

So we see that the world in general has been divided into two broad classes, those who opposed the New Covenant actively or in ignorance, and those who accepted it and worshipped the King, the LORD of hosts, in spirit and in truth.

In order to oppose or approve of the New Covenant, it has not been necessary to visit or concentrate on any stated place on the earth's surface. God looks at the heart, (Acts 1:24; 1 Samuel 16:7), and is able to read it, regardless of the nation or country to which people belong. It seems that the error of interpretation of going up against Jerusalem is due to a failure to understand that the Law Covenant with its temple and sacrifices was only a temporary arrangement.

There has also been a failure to realise that true worship in spirit and in truth under the New Covenant requires no temple at Jerusalem or anywhere else, neither now nor at any future time. The reality, the substance of God's mercy and forgiveness, has come in Jesus Christ, while the shadow and all that goes with it has gone for ever.

The grace and favour of the mode of the worship the LORD has given us are that we may draw near to Him at any time in any place. The sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ "*once for all*" has provided the way by which we can be reconciled to God, and be received and accepted by Him as His children. Through the Lord Jesus, our Mediator and Reconciler, we may draw near to God with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

### **The Feast Of Tabernacles**

But why was the feast of Tabernacles, a feast prescribed under the Law Covenant, included in the context of verses 16 to 20? To answer this question the origin and purpose of this feast need to be examined.

Under the Law Covenant, three set feasts were prescribed, as mentioned in Exodus and Deuteronomy. We read in Exodus 23:14-17 of the feast of unleavened bread, the feast of harvest, and the feast of ingathering. These three feasts are named again in Deuteronomy 16:16 - the feast of unleavened bread, the feast of weeks and the feast of Tabernacles. In Deuteronomy 16:13 it is explained that the feast of Tabernacles should be kept for seven days, *"after that thou hast gathered in thy corn and thy wine"*, or as in the margin, *"thy flour and thy winepress"*, all of which finished the toil and labour for the year.

Leviticus 23:24 gives the dates for the observance of the feast of Tabernacles. It was to begin on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (the month of Tisri, which corresponds to September-October on our calendar), the same month in which the Day of Atonement was observed, and it was to last for seven days, with a holy convocation or assembly on the eighth day, on which offerings by fire were to be made.

The mention of the feast of Tabernacles has led to a conclusion by some students of prophecy that Jewish feasts will be revived and observed in the Kingdom Age. But such an inference is unwarranted when the meaning and significance of the feast of Tabernacles as kept by the Jews is taken into account. The feast of Tabernacles is also known as the feast of Booths, and the reason for this is explained in Scripture.

While in the wilderness, the children of Israel were gathered together in one encampment. During the forty years of journeying in the wilderness (Joshua 5:6) the camp was formed with the tabernacle in the centre and the tribes in stated positions around it (Numbers 1:51-54; 2:1-34). The observance of all three feasts was then comparatively simple.

After the Israelites entered the promised land, the command was for them to go up from their settlements throughout the land to the place where the tabernacle was set up, first at Shiloh, then afterward at Jerusalem where God had chosen to manifest His presence and to place His name (Exodus 34:22-24; Joshua 18:1; 19:51; 1 Samuel 1:3; 2 Samuel 6:2,17; Deuteronomy 12: 5-7, 11,14).

The Day of Atonement on the tenth day of the seventh month was a solemn occasion on which confession of sin was made, the sacrifice for sin was offered, and the scapegoat bearing Israel's sins was sent away. All the people who made this annual observance with faith and genuine sorrow were cleansed. They received God's blessing through the High Priest, and were thus ready and in a proper frame of mind to observe the feast of Tabernacles beginning five days later.

Leviticus 23:39-43 gives directions for the observance. Branches of a variety of trees were to be used to erect booths, in which the Israelites were to live for seven days. The reason for this observance is given in verses 42 and 43: *"Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God."*

The feast of Tabernacles, or feast of Booths, was therefore a yearly commemoration of God's continued goodness to them following their deliverance from Egypt. God directed the Israelites' passage through countryside in which they could survive. The countryside was wilderness, to be sure, and sometimes the Israelites were far from springs or wells of water, but even in those cases water was miraculously provided. The bitter waters at Marah, for example, were sweetened. (Exodus 15:22-27) On another occasion the LORD brought forth water out of a rock when Moses carried out the command to strike the rock once (Exodus 17:1-7).

In Bible times, the term "wilderness" was applied to any wild and uncultivated region, including well-watered and well-wooded country. Cruden's Concordance states:

"The Hebrews give this name to all places that are not cultivated, but which are chiefly destined to the feeding of cattle, and on which trees grow wild. So when wilderness is mentioned in Scripture, we are not always to imagine it to be a place forsaken, abandoned, void of cities or inhabitants, as this word often represents the soil near a city or village which was appointed for pasture, and where the plough never came. Thus, in Scripture, there are few cities which had not their wilderness, that is, uncultivated places for woods and pastures."

The children of Israel are described as living in tents during the period in the wilderness and for a time after entering Canaan. But, from the command given to them to keep the feast of Booths yearly, and the statement that they did so in the wilderness, it is evident that at the autumn season they were always encamped in or near to timber country from which to cut branches of trees to enable them to make booths.

Different names were given to different parts of the wilderness. The country through which the children of Israel travelled was not extensive, so some of the camps were probably headquarters for considerable periods for the women and children, while the men grew crops for grain to make flour for the cakes which had to be offered with the sacrifices, as mentioned in Leviticus chapter 2, and for food for their flocks and herds. Evidently the grain was not for the people's consumption, as mentioned in Deuteronomy 29:6. This is



understandable in view of the miraculous provision of manna during the entire forty years of wandering.

The men would occupy themselves with the routine of nomadic life, as large numbers of cattle, sheep and goats were needed for the tabernacle services and for food for the people. In addition to milk and meat, the Israelites' flocks and herds provided wool and hides. With regard to clothing and shoes, we remember that at God's command Moses said, *"And I have led you forty years in the wilderness: your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot"* (Deuteronomy 29:5; 8:4; Nehemiah 9:21).

But there were additional members of the tribe born and raised in the wilderness after leaving Egypt, as we read, *"Their children also multipliedst thou as the stars of heaven, and broughtest them into the land"* (Nehemiah 9:23). They would have needed to be provided with new clothes and shoes. In addition, there was a need of covering for new tents and for the repair of old ones, a favourite material being goat hair, which was woven by the women into cloth (Exodus 35:26). The tabernacle of witness, in which God manifested His presence among them, was covered in goat hair with additional coverings of rams' skins died red, and badgers' skins above that (Exodus 26:7; 36:14). Both sheep and goat skins were serviceable for coats and for vessels used to carry water, and also for covering beds and floors.

These details are mentioned to show that while the children of Israel were in the wilderness they were well provided for in respect of food, clothing and shelter; and had every reason to keep the feast of Tabernacles every year with thankful hearts. Moses referred to these mercies of God in his last address to the people in Deuteronomy chapter 32.

They had left Egypt with 603,550 fighting men, in addition to women and children, and the tribe of Levi, which is not numbered. Sadly, many rebelled, and their bodies were left in the wilderness as the only suitable manner of dealing with them to enable the remainder of the nation to be saved from contamination. (Hebrews 3:17-19) When, on the threshold to Canaan, Moses and Eleazar the priest numbered the Israelites in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho, we are told in Numbers 26:

64. *But among these there was not a man of them whom Moses and Aaron the priest numbered, when they numbered the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai.*
65. *For the LORD had said of them, They shall surely die in the wilderness. And there was not left a man of them, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. (KJV)*

In this later numbering the same plan was followed as in the numbering at Sinai. *"Take the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, from twenty years old and upwards, throughout their fathers' house, all that are able to go to war in Israel"* (Numbers 26:1-4). The result of this numbering was 601,730, and to this total must be added those of the tribe of Levi, who were males from a month old and upwards, totally 23,000, making a total of 624,730 in addition to women and children not numbered.

From these two censuses it is estimated that the nation as it left Egypt numbered about 3,000,000 people. At the time the nation entered Canaan, the estimated number would be about the same. The tribe of Levi was relatively small, for, with the infants from a month old and upward included, the count was only 23,000, whereas the much larger count of the other tribes was from twenty years and upward for the fighting men, with no record of infants and children between one month and twenty years of age.

The disobedient Israelites were dealt with on a grand scale. In the forty years of wandering, approximately 600,000 men who left Egypt died in the wilderness, as well as a proportion of women who followed their evil ways or were even instruments of their undoing. But the LORD God showed favour to the survivors, so that the loss of numbers was made good by a corresponding increase in births, which equalled and possibly exceeded the former rapid increase in Goshen (Exodus 1:8-20).

The LORD ensured that His people, in those more or less lawless times, were defended by a large and well-equipped force, discouraging attack from native tribes, and able to outnumber and outmanoeuvre those who did attack them and strove to refuse the entry of the Israelites into the land of promise.

The destruction of the disobedient Israelites in the wilderness, as well as the killing of thousands of Canaanites by the Israelites, has been severely criticised by sceptics and unbelievers, claiming that these acts are repugnant to them, and reinforce the reasons for their denial either of the existence of God, or, if He does exist, that He is not a loving God.

In response to these criticisms it must be emphasised that God has allowed these events to take place, and at times has commanded the slaughter of heathen people, to enable His plans and purposes to go ahead in this evil order of things; but such events have been only for the time being.

The New Testament tells us that millions who died whenever and wherever, will be called forth from their graves by the Lord Jesus Christ in the age to come. In other words, God has not finished with the human race. His plan includes a resurrection, and He will see to it that all members of the race, living and dead, will have full opportunity to learn of the love of God through

Jesus Christ. They will come to see the evil and selfishness of sin and disobedience, and learn of the wonderful provision made in the New Covenant for the forgiveness of sins; and they will also come to appreciate that eternal life will be theirs if they conform to and be obedient in a righteous world order.

It is therefore contended that the experience of the Jews in seeing their disobedient ones fall by the edge of the sword or the plague was at the time counterbalanced to some extent by this rapid increase and preservation of the obedient ones. None of their trials, losses or disappointments ever excused them from the yearly observance of the feast of Tabernacles or Booths, in which they set themselves apart for a week of seven days to meditate on Yahweh's goodness and render Him a portion of their time exclusively for His praise and expression of their gratitude for His mercies.

Right up to the very end of their wanderings, at Mount Hor, complaint was made concerning the manna, the bread from heaven, saying against Moses and against God: *"Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loathed this light bread."* For this contemptuous reference to the miraculously given manna, fiery serpents were sent among them, and many were bitten and died.

The Israelites then realised that they had sinned in speaking against God and Moses, and pleaded with Moses to ask the LORD to take the serpents away. The LORD in His mercy told Moses to make a serpent of copper (brass was unknown in those earlier times), and set it upon a pole, *"that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it shall live"* (Numbers 21:4-9). This incident is referred to by our Lord in these words: *"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life"* (John 3:14,15). This is also a lesson for us not to turn away from the Bread from heaven now provided for us and all believers in God's only Son (John 6:31-37; 48-51).

Yet for all this contempt on the part of many of the Israelites, the LORD did not swerve from the fulfilment of His promises to the nation. None of the fighting men were over sixty years of age when they entered the promised land, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua. Not one who was in the twentieth year when the fighting men were first chosen subsequently entered the promised land. But the LORD, according to His promise, brought the people to a land flowing with milk and honey, a land of the vine, the olive, the pomegranate and every other good thing (Exodus 3:8,17; Deuteronomy 6:10,11; 8:7-16).

The Israelites were finally led to the promised land, and were able to build houses, plant vineyards and establish herds of cattle and flocks of sheep, and begin to accumulate riches. But they were still not satisfied, and retained the spirit that caused them to murmur against Moses and the LORD God. The spirit of murmuring against God and Moses was entirely out of keeping with the purpose and intention of the feast of Tabernacles. The children of Israel presumably observed the feast of Tabernacles or Booths as faithfully as they did the other feasts, although their history shows great neglect of all their obligations. Nevertheless the feast was a part of the Law to be observed, as we remember that when Solomon dedicated the temple he made provision for the regular observance of all feasts (2 Chronicles 8:12,13).

### **The Feast Of Tabernacles In Later Times**

After the return from Babylonia the altar was erected in the seventh month of the year, the month of Tisri. Arrangements were then made to keep the feast of Tabernacles (Ezra 3:1-6).

Further information concerning the feast of Tabernacles is found in Nehemiah's account of an observance held just after the completion of the wall rebuilt under his direction (Nehemiah chapter 8). Ezra the scribe read to the people out of the book of the Law, and found in it the commandment that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month. So it was proclaimed that the people should go forth and gather olive, pine, myrtle and palm branches, and branches of thick trees to make booths. These booths were erected on the roofs of their houses, in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, as well as in broad places by the water gate and the gate of Ephraim, as Nehemiah 8:17 and 18 tells us:

17. *And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness.*
18. *Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner.* (KJV)

### **What Does The Feast Of Tabernacles Mean For Us?**

Zechariah's message was designed to guide the Jews from the earthly Jerusalem, in bondage with her children, to an appreciation and understanding of the heavenly Jerusalem, the Jerusalem from above, with her children who are free.

It is significant that while the Jews under the Law were to go up to the temple at Jerusalem three times a year, only the feast of Tabernacles or Booths is mentioned in Zechariah's prophecy (verse 16). It is significant also that the Jews were to go up to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, Who is now to be recognised as King of the whole world and not of the Jews exclusively, as we have seen in verse 9.

The feast of Tabernacles mentioned in verse 16 is not a revival of the ancient Jewish festival under the Law Covenant, but something more in keeping with the New Covenant, which our Lord made operative for the purpose of the Gospel Age and the salvation of the Church.

The significance referred to above is found in the references to the Jewish feasts provided in the New Covenant. The New Covenant provides the corresponding figure of the Passover as Paul tells us, *"Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."* (1 Corinthians 5:7,8).

The feast mentioned should occupy our whole lives with sincerity and truth, not simply a week as the Jewish Passover did. The corresponding figure of the Passover lamb is the Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God, Whose death on the cross is commemorated yearly by believers on the anniversary date. There is no need to observe the Jewish Passover now because the Law Covenant has been abolished, and indeed such an observance would be impossible because the lamb had to be slain at the temple at Jerusalem and there is no temple there. It is obvious that our Heavenly Father desires us to observe the memorial of the sacrifice of His Son and our deliverance through Him. The memorial commemorating the deliverance of Israel from Egypt no longer applies.

The situation is the same regarding the Day of Atonement, which was to be strictly observed on the tenth day of the seventh month, when the whole nation was to fast and each person was required to humble himself or herself while the special offering for sin was made, and the scapegoat carried away the sins confessed over its head by the High Priest on behalf of all the children of Israel.

The Lord Jesus gave the *"one sacrifice for sins forever"* (Hebrews 10:12), thus rendering the Day of Atonement ceremonies superseded and no longer applicable. Everyone, Jew and Gentile, who repents and believes in Jesus Christ receives the forgiveness of sins, for Jesus was the corresponding figure of the offerings on the Day of Atonement, as well as the corresponding figure of the Passover lamb, mentioned previously.

The feast of Pentecost, called also the feast of Weeks, of Wheat-harvest, and the Firstfruits, was the second of the great festivals of the Jews, the date of which was fixed by the Law in a certain relation to the Passover date, as explained in Leviticus 23:9-21. The correspondence in the Christian worship is indicated by the fact that it was on the day of Pentecost that the Holy Spirit came down on the disciples waiting in the upper room, and was evidence that our Lord Jesus had appeared in heaven on behalf of those for whom He died. The sending of the Holy Spirit was a demonstration of God's blessing and recognition of the finished work of His Son, as well as a testimony of His acceptance of Christian believers as His children under the New Covenant.

The Holy Spirit is given to all who believe in Jesus Christ in their hearts and make confession with their lips. Consequently the true believer who offers himself or herself to God and receives the Holy Spirit, carries figuratively his Pentecost with him or her, the Holy Spirit remaining ever present in the heart. *"And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.* (1 John 3:24; Romans 5:1-5). The Holy Spirit is also called *"the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father"* (Romans 8:14-18).

There remains then the feast of Tabernacles or Booths, which the prophet has said should be observed by all individuals of all nations throughout the Gospel Age who were not actively or passively fighting against the Jerusalem "raised up", which is the New Covenant. There is therefore a corresponding figure of that ancient festival of Israel, which appears when we look closely at the nature of the seven-day feast of Tabernacles or Booths.

### **A Feast Of Gladness And Thanksgiving**

Each of the feasts appointed for the Jews was, in addition to any other features, a time of gladness and thanksgiving. The Passover meal was observed as a yearly commemoration of the deliverance from Egypt. The week following the observance of the meal had its holy convocations or gatherings, its daily offerings and its readings of the Law.

Fifty days later was Pentecost, when the new offering of two loaves was to be made before the LORD. The people were to rejoice and thank God for the prosperous season.

No feast was directly connected with the Day of Atonement. It was a day of fasting and repentance complete in itself, which concluded with God's blessing on the nation and assurance of His continued favour.

The beginning of the seven-day feast of Tabernacles came only five days later, while the memory of repentance and the assurance of forgiveness were still strong. The feast also marked the end of the agricultural year, when all the fruits of their toil and the evidence of God's bounty had been

gathered in. The people had time to look back on the year and thank God for all His mercies; at the same time to read and have read to them the sacred Scriptures, and devote the days to praise and worship at the temple.

### **A Separation Unto The LORD**

But the feast of Tabernacles differed from the other feasts in another particular. Certain sacrifices were to be offered at the temple by the priests on the LORD's altar; but there was something for each individual to do for himself. He was to leave all the proceeds of his own labour, and go and gather what God provided in the forest; bring the boughs and branches to the flat roof of his own home or to its courtyard (if there was one) and there erect the booth in which to live for the seven days allotted to thanksgiving and praise. If he did not have a house or courtyard of his own, he was to erect a booth in the court of his temple or on its wide pavement, or even at the broad place at one of the gates.

Just before our Lord began His ministry, the Day of Atonement had been observed, and those Jews who obeyed the Law had erected their booths and were living in them. Some appear to have been erected near the place where John was baptising, for in John 1 we read that Jesus, Whose home was in Nazareth, was on two different days pointed out by John to his disciples as *"the Lamb of God which beareth away the sin of the world"* (John 1:29, 36). Two of these disciples followed Jesus, and asked, *"Rabbi, where dwellest thou?"* or *"where abidest thou?"* He said unto them, *"Come and see"*. And they came and shared His dwelling, which evidently was His booth, for the remainder of the day, and perhaps for the night, for it was then only two hours before nightfall. Andrew found Simon his brother, and brought him to Jesus. The day following, Jesus returned to Galilee.

This incident gives us some idea of how the Jews were free to erect their booths in the open spaces as well as on the housetops or even in the street. We see also how some of the Galileans, who had heard of John's preaching, took advantage of the seven days set apart to the LORD to remain in Jerusalem and hear the preacher of repentance Who baptised the penitents in the Jordan. And so they came in contact with the Messiah Himself, and heard for themselves the wondrous words of life, which convinced them that He was indeed the Christ, the anointed Son of God and their promised Messiah (John 1:41,45).

### **The Christians' Temporary Booths**

The purpose served by the feast of Booths was stated at the beginning to be: *"Ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year."* (Leviticus 23:40, 41).

Under the terms of the New Covenant, as our Lord and the apostles expounded it, under which covenant we are now accepted as worshippers and God's children, a literal feast was not imposed. But since in the prophecy it was linked with the worship of God as carried on in the Gospel Age by those who recognise the New Jerusalem, the Jerusalem "raised up", there has to be in it a lesson for believing Christians.

The lesson surely is that God's favour to us should be received with a sense of gratitude and a desire to rejoice before the LORD all our days. There should be such a sense of gratitude that we are willing to subjugate and subdue our desires for the material things of this world and this life, and concentrate our efforts and aims towards meditation on His Word and His favour to us, and on our striving to be more like His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in our lives. As God provided temporary blessings in the branches of the forest trees for the Jews, so He provides the means for us to study His Word and appreciate His blessings and His offer of life eternal in Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul spoke of himself and other believers as occupying a "tabernacle": *"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"* (2 Corinthians 5:1). In the preceding chapter Paul had spoken of the things which are seen as being *"temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal"*.

Our natural bodies are seen and are among the temporal things, like a tabernacle or tent. The Greek word here rendered "tabernacle" has the same derivation as "tabernacle" in the expression "feast of tabernacles" used in John 7:2; *"Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand"*. This Scripture appears to confirm that the apostle had in mind as a comparison a dwelling or "booth" such as those that were erected in great numbers by the Jews during the week of the feast of Booths. Paul likened his physical body to such a booth, the temporary nature of which is easily understood.

But in what sense could Paul's physical body be thought of as a booth, bearing in mind that the identity or personality occupying the booth is distinct from the booth itself? In this passage the apostle is not teaching that an immortal soul inhabits the physical body of human beings. In the booklet ***"The Dead - Where Are They?"*** it is shown from the Scriptures that the immortal soul teaching is untrue. The person, the individual, is a soul (Genesis 2:7). That is the situation with all human beings. They are living souls. But Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:1-9 is speaking of an experience limited to Christians, just as the feast of Booths was limited to Jews.



This exclusively Christian experience is that the believer in Jesus, who is filled with gratitude toward God for all His goodness and kindness, is moved to devote himself or herself to the LORD as a thank offering. Paul had given himself entirely to the LORD. Our gratitude includes thankfulness for our food and home and the necessities of life, but our main gratitude should be for the Gospel message and the New Covenant, by which we received the forgiveness of our sins and have been accepted by the LORD as His children. We have responded to the call to walk in the Master's footsteps, having uppermost in our minds the promise that if we remain faithful to death we will be raised to life again as spirit beings to be like our Master and see Him as He is in the glories of the heavenly inheritance (1 Peter 1:3-5; 1 John 3:1,2).

Paul explains the effect of true gratitude further along in 2 Corinthians 5: 14 and 15, *"For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."*

The fact that Christ died for the whole human race proves that all were dead - dead in trespasses and sins, and under condemnation to physical death. Without Christ's sacrificial death and shed blood, the human race would be in a hopeless position. But God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to offer the one and only acceptable sacrifice for sin, and the ransom or corresponding price to meet the requirements of God's justice and so enable the salvation of the human race from sin and death to become an accomplished fact. This is fundamental truth, and the realisation and appreciation of it should move us with such deep gratitude that we will wish to live always unto Him and not unto ourselves.

When we give ourselves fully to the LORD as a thank-offering we become *"new creatures"*, and the physical or natural body of each of us becomes a *"booth"* for the *"new creature"* to dwell in. The proper use of the *"booth"* of the *"new creature"* is to praise and magnify God for all His goodness, to make ourselves familiar with His Word, and in our lives be witnesses for Him and the Gospel message. This is just what Paul taught and did, and all of us with full gratitude in our hearts, should strive to do the same.

Among the Jews the feast of Tabernacles was not for the rich only, or the leisured classes, nor was it exclusive to the poor and outcast, to the priestly class, the Pharisees, the doctors of Law, the rulers of synagogues, or any other class or group of people. Gratitude and thankfulness constitute a response which God has a right to expect from everyone who hears the terms of salvation, and it is within the ability of everyone to render thanks. Thanks, of course, means more than words, though expressions of thanks should be made continually. Thankfulness means, as already mentioned, the desire and effort to live unto Him.

The Apostle Paul made good use of his natural body, his "booth" to praise and glorify God. But he recognised that it was only a temporary dwelling. His hope lay beyond his commission from the Lord (Acts 9:15; 1 Corinthians 1:1), *"Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you"* (2 Corinthians 4:14).

Paul found consolation in this great hope for the tribulations and sufferings of the present life: *"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"* (2 Corinthians 5:1).

While we are still in our tent or booth, many Scriptures encourage us in our efforts to praise and glorify God. *"For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body"* (1 Corinthians 6:20). *"For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually."* (Hebrews 13:14,15).

### **Rain In Season (14:17-19)**

17. *And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain.*
18. *If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.*
19. *This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.*

These verses indicate in figurative imagery that people who hear and understand the Gospel message are expected to respond positively to it and give thanks to God. If they hear and turn away they will suffer loss, symbolised by the words *"on them there will be no rain"*.

In the Jewish Age the Israelites were frequently punished for their sins by being deprived of seasonal rains, causing them loss of crops, pastures, herds and flocks. God's objective in withholding necessary rain was to arouse the Israelites to a realisation of His displeasure and of their sins, and bring about repentance and obedience.

In this prophecy the Holy Spirit made use of that action by God to issue a warning to all nations and individuals during the Gospel Age. The Jews had access to this prophecy for some five hundred years, so the LORD used language they would understand in His dealings with them. But God's dealings with His Christian believing people in the Gospel Age are to withhold that which is symbolised by rain, namely His blessings.

In comments on Zechariah chapter 10, the words in verse 1, *"Ask ye of the LORD rain in the time of the latter rain"* were discussed. The remainder of that chapter shows that the reference is to God's blessing, which was promised for a certain period of the Jews' history, when certain shepherds would be dealt with, and the humble ones who waited upon the LORD would in God's due time experience His favour in the sending of the Good Shepherd.

God's favour and blessing are likened to rain in Psalm 72:6, *"He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth."* A similar meaning is also found in Hosea 6:3, *"Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning: and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth."*

As the earth needs the rain, so the nations need the blessing of God, but His blessing is withheld when they ignore His Son and the call to repentance. The nations who have not heard the Gospel, or have heard and turned from it, are in a deplorable state of ignorance, superstition and worship of evil spirits.

The so-called Christian nations, or those nations which were once called Christian nations, are flouting the precepts taught by Jesus Christ, and are not receiving the "rain", the LORD's blessing on their ways and actions. They are largely in ignorance of the highest honour ever offered, the honour of joint-heirship with Jesus Christ in a far greater kingdom than the world has ever known.

In verse 18 the *"family of Egypt"* is named, but only as an example, for all other nations are dealt with on the same lines. Two stages of obedience are mentioned. The first is to recognise the New Covenant, symbolised by the Jerusalem *"raised up,"* and to *"come up,"* that is, accept the gracious terms of the New Covenant and live by them. The second stage of obedience is *"worship."* Such worship must be a sincere and heartfelt attitude of mind, a reverence for God and His truth, not simply an outward show without the commitment of heart and mind.

It is no wonder that the nations are in such a sorry state today. The lack of success in their efforts to bring about peace and stability should have awakened them to the absence of "rain", that is, the approval of God, and the blessings such approval would bring. Here and there individuals have disassociated themselves from the selfish, cruel and dishonest practices of their governments, and have separated themselves unto the LORD as in a "booth". The individuals who have done this have received the "rain", the blessing of the LORD, and have escaped both the drought and the "plague" of verses 12 and 18. The prophecy states that the plague of verses 12 and

18 will strike all nations which ignore or refuse to acknowledge God, and refuse to enter into the New Covenant, now available and open for acceptance.

In other words, the nations of the past twenty centuries have sinned in ignoring or rejecting the great light of the Gospel. During the whole Gospel Age the warnings, reproof and appeal of Psalm 2:9-12 and other Scriptures have been proclaimed, sometimes in small measure, but in more recent times have been made freely available by the world-wide circulation of the Bible.

The apostles saw the fulfilment of Psalm 2 in the case of the Jews and the Roman government gathered against the LORD and His Anointed. The same opposition has marked the entire Gospel Age from the Christ's crucifixion to the present day. Many nations have suffered, but the final overthrow is still to come: *"Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces as a potter's vessel"* (Psalm 2:9).

Along this same line, much of the book of Revelation warns the nations and foretells the time to come; as also does Daniel chapter 2, when the image symbolising world power will be struck on its feet, ground to powder and blown away as the chaff of the summer threshing-floor.

There is still time, it is important to note, for individuals anywhere in the world, to hear the LORD's warnings, and to look to the New Covenant as the means of blessing to all who accept and believe into the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **The Bells, The Pots And The Bowls (14:20,21)**

20. *In that day "HOLINESS TO THE LORD" shall be engraved on the bells of the horses. The pots in the LORD's house shall be like the bowls before the altar.*
21. *21. Yes, every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holiness to the LORD of hosts. Everyone who sacrifices shall come and take them and cook in them. In that day there shall no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts.*

In verses 20 and 21, conditions during the Gospel Age are foretold by new figures of speech, which indicate a change in the mode of worship from that of the Jewish Age.

The KJV margin has *"bridles"* instead of *"bells"* in verse 20, and *"holy unto the LORD"* instead of *"holiness unto the LORD"*. These slight differences do not change the sense or the figurative meaning. Whether the inscription

*"holiness unto the LORD"* is on the bridles or bells with which the horses are decorated is immaterial, because the meaning appears to be a method of indicating that the horse is dedicated to the LORD's service.

The horse was for ages, and still is to some extent, an important factor in warfare and in controlling uprisings and violent demonstrations of people. The long treks and invasions of Scythians, Tartars, Bulgars, Goths and Turks were made possible by the possession of thousands of trained horses. The preparedness of a ruler of the ancient world was represented by the number of horses in the stalls (1 Kings 4:26; 10:25,26; Habakkuk 1:5-10; Revelation 9:9,16). The Jews were not encouraged to own horses, but when they wanted a king like the other nations, horses and chariots and other instruments of war became necessary.

The teaching of verse 20 seems to be, therefore, that under the New Covenant during the Gospel Age, all instruments hitherto used for war would be dedicated to the LORD and used only in His service.

In the Jerusalem "raised up", which stands for the New Covenant, there are no carnal weapons (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). The Word of God is more powerful and *"sharper than any two-edged sword,"* and more powerful than any number of horses. The Word is the weapon He has given us to use, and it will never fail us when we use it for a holy purpose (Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 6:17).

### **Every Sanctified Vessel Useful**

In the temple were bowls of oil for lamps to give light, bowls and basins for use at the altars, vessels for boiling meat for the use of priests and Levites, and also for the people when they partook of voluntary offerings (Deuteronomy 12:18, 21-27; Exodus 25:29; 27:3; 37:16; 38:3).

Exodus 39:36-40 mentions vessels for various purposes, some to be used at the golden altar of incense, some for the oil and lamps, and some for the brazen altar. All the bowls and pots used in the tabernacle were holy, being dedicated to the LORD.

As pots, bowls and basins are vessels for use, we may understand this prophecy to mean that in the worship of God during the Gospel Age, the distinction between the vessels used for different purposes would pass away. The vessels of clay or metal would symbolise God's people, messengers of Gospel truth.

Of Paul the LORD said, *"He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel"* (Acts 9:15; Romans 1:1; Ephesians 3:7, 8). Although Paul was highly honoured as a

chosen vessel, the more lowly vessels are also honoured, because they carry the same message of peace and goodwill. All of the LORD's people are privileged to convey *"meat in due season"*, sharing with others the precious truth of the Gospel message which will build them up and strengthen them in the faith.

The vessels, symbolised by the pots and the bowls, must be clean, that is, holy, meaning pure and righteous. *"Yes every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holiness to the LORD of hosts"* (verse 21). Some words of Paul make this clear to us. *"For he is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."* (Romans 2:28,29).

So that while the Jews as a nation were left behind, all who believe in Jesus and are received as children of the Jerusalem which is above, are counted as true Jews, the real Israel, the spiritual house of 1 Peter 2:5.

Included under this heading of Jews are believing Gentiles, whose hearts are circumcised, that is, accepted as righteous by God because of their faith. Thus all true believers, whether Jew or Gentile, become, by reason of their faith, members of one household of faith called *"the Israel of God"* (Revelation 7:1-7; Galatians 6:16). All are branches, wrote Paul in Romans 11, of the one olive tree.

If this suggested understanding is correct, namely, that the pots and bowls represent believers in Jesus who are used to bear the Gospel message to others, how could the next part of verse 21 be fulfilled in the Gospel Age Church of believers? How could anyone desiring to sacrifice to the LORD take these vessels and cook or boil his sacrifice in them?

A suitable and satisfactory answer to these questions is not difficult to find. We are all bearers of spiritual food that the LORD has given us, and are at the same time at the service of our brethren in other ways.

We know and understand that the only sacrifice acceptable to God as an atoning sacrifice is that offered by our Lord Jesus on the cross. When we come to God as repentant sinners desiring to be reconciled to Him, as the Gospel invites us to do, it is our acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice and shed blood that removes the barrier to God's forgiveness and love. So in respect of this reconciliation through Jesus Christ, there is no need for pots or bowls as vessels for boiling sacrifices. We should remember in this connection that no sacrifice or portion of it on the Day of Atonement was ever boiled.

Under the Law, those who brought voluntary thank offerings brought them to the priests to be offered. A thank offering was offered by the priest and a portion was retained by him as provided in the Law for his sustenance. A portion was handed back to the offerer to be eaten by himself before the LORD. The offerer was then free to prepare his portion of food at the temple, using the pots kept in readiness for such occasions.

Under the New Covenant, each believer is likened to a bowl or pot, all holy unto the LORD. Everyone who gratefully consecrates himself or herself to the LORD will find brethren to render assistance in any way possible. There will be a feast of good things in discussing the precious truths of God's Word, and mutual encouragement in talking about God's love and providential care.

### **There Shall No Longer Be A Canaanite**

What is meant in verse 21 by *"there shall no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts"*?

When the children of Israel conquered the tribes in possession of the land of Canaan, the LORD told them to destroy those nations because they were idolaters and the cup of their iniquity was full (Genesis 15:16; 1 Kings 21:26; Joshua 11:23). There were, however, some exceptions who escaped destruction, and by agreement became bondservants, hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of God (Joshua 9:3-27).

But even before that, some Midianites were spared and were used to assist the priests and Levites in their heavier labours (Numbers 31:47). Some of these, called Nethinims, went down to Babylonia at the time of the captivity, and returned with the Jews (Ezra 2:3,58; 8:20). These were really foreigners, but they were accepted as servants in the house of God.

Isaac Leeser's translation, the RSV and the REB have "trader" instead of Canaanite, while the RV margin has "trafficker", and Young's literal translation has "merchant".

Nehemiah 13:15-21 records how the people of the land interfered with the Jews' proper observation of the Sabbath by trading. We remember that in our LORD's day it was common practice for money changers and sellers of oxen, sheep and doves to profane the temple precincts. The Lord drove them out (John 2:13-17). Among others who came up to the temple were those whom the Lord declared to be hypocrites.

So that while the temple at Jerusalem was intended to be the home of God and a place of worship for true worshippers, it had become through the indifference of the people *"a house of merchandise"* and *"a den of thieves"* (Matthew 21:12,13).

## **Worship In Spirit And In Truth**

Our Lord supplies the answer as to how it can be said that in the Gospel Age there is no "Canaanite", money-changer or any such person making merchandise in the house of God, that is, among the people of God. Jesus said that the Father seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth, and receives the worship of only those who come to Him in the name of Jesus. From this worship He excluded both the Samaritans and the Jews, as long as they held to their errors (John 4:19-24; 8:42,55; 14:6).

In Christendom today there are many who cannot be said to be worshipping God in spirit and in truth. The messages to the "seven churches" reveal the corruption in the church as a whole during the Gospel Age, and how God has dealt with some and will yet deal with others.

The true worship of God is a worship of mind and heart, not confined to any ceremony or any building. The true worship has been kept inviolate. So in this way, the true worship through Christ Jesus has been continued in fulfilment of Malachi's prophecy in chapter 3:

3. *"And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.*
4. *Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years."* (KJV).

Though the majority of Judah and Jerusalem proved to be hard-hearted and unrepentant, yet a "remnant" was saved out of the "*worn-out garment*" (Hebrews 1:11; 8:13) of Judaism to form the nucleus of the Church of the Firstborn (Hebrews 12:22-24).

## **The Kingdom Age**

Some interpret the last chapter of Zechariah as meaning that the feast of Tabernacles, as the Jews kept it, will be observed in the Kingdom Age.

As we have endeavoured to show, this is not the meaning of the prophecy. The meaning, we believe, is the true worship in the Kingdom Age under the New Covenant, symbolised by the Jerusalem "raised up".

When our Lord went up to Jerusalem for the feast of Tabernacles, as related in John 7, He put no stamp of approval upon it as a ceremony to be taken over into the Christian worship. In the midst of the feast He went up to the temple and said, *"My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself"* (John 7:17).



Also, *"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink"* (John 7:37).

The believer in Jesus must not go back to the Law, but must come and follow Jesus and receive the living water mentioned in John 7:38,39.

A great work of the blessing of all nations and all families of the earth will be accomplished in the Kingdom Age, and comments on this time of great blessing may be found in our publications, in particular ***"The New Era"***.





