

THE NEW HEART.

AUG. 6. – EZEK. 36:25-36.

"A new heart also will I give you."

EZEKIEL wrote the words of our lesson in Babylon. They are not to be esteemed as merely the exhortations of a preacher, altho they do partake of this quality: they are more than this – a prophecy by the Lord respecting his future favors toward Israel. The context preceding reviews Israel's situation – the people in a foreign land, and their own Land of Promise a desolate wilderness because of their sinful neglect of their great King Jehovah, and of their covenant promises as his adopted people. While the Prophet's words declare a future recovery, not only as possible, but as sure to be accomplished, they nevertheless indicate certain changed conditions as necessary to such a recovery: it would not only be necessary for them to abandon idolatry, but they must obtain a new heart, a new mind, a new disposition, favorable to God and righteousness, ere such an abandonment of idolatry and sin would be permanent.

The Prophet does not here declare the time at which this new heart would be given to the people. He merely points out to them the necessity for such a new heart and the blessings of the Lord that would result from such a harmony with him; and tells them, "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." – Vs. 37.

As a matter of fact, this new condition of heart was not attained by Israel on their release by Cyrus from the captivity in Babylon. Altho only a limited number, who had a respect for God and who trusted in the promises made to the fathers, had sufficient interest in the Holy Land to avail themselves of the proclamation made by Cyrus and to return to Palestine, and altho we might say that by means of this captivity the Lord had sifted out of Israel the idolatrous and unfaithful majority, we still cannot say that those who returned with Ezra and

Nehemiah enjoyed the new heart condition which the Lord stipulated through the Prophet was essential to a full reception of his favor.

While, so far as we know, gross forms of idolatry never prevailed in Israel after the return from captivity in Babylon, we nevertheless know that the more refined forms of idolatry continually existed amongst them, as amongst other civilized nations who do not bow to wood and stone, gold and silver – an idolatry of wealth, an idolatry of self, an idolatry of Judaism, prevailed amongst them, and they never attained the condition specified in this lesson. They did not get the new heart and right spirit; they did not get rid of the stony heart; they did not walk in the Lord's statutes and judgments, nor do them; they did not dwell in the land, but were cast out of it because of the stony character of their hearts, in the rejection and crucifixion of Messiah; and they who were called God's people were cast off, and are not called his people now; and they have not been prospered, but have been in fiery trials in the midst of their enemies, scattered amongst all nations from then until the present time. Nor have they yet loathed themselves, their iniquities and their abominations, nor been ashamed and confounded; nor is the desolate land tilled, and as the garden of Eden. Quite the contrary of all this is the truth.

What shall we say, then? Was Ezekiel a false **[R2503 : page 187]** Prophet, or has God failed of accomplishing his good purposes toward Israel because of the weakness of their flesh and the hardness of their hearts? God forbid! On the contrary, we are to understand that the prophecy of this lesson belongs to a future time – to the Millennial Day; and that whatever signs there are at the present time of the return of divine favor toward fleshly Israel and toward the Land of Promise are evidences that the time for the fulfilment of this prophecy is near at hand.

In corroboration of this position we cite Romans 11:25-32. Here the Apostle Paul shows that Israel after the flesh, not having zealously inquired for the new heart and the right spirit, not having sought it of

the Lord, was unprepared in heart to receive Messiah, and instead with wicked hands crucified him. The Apostle shows us that, as a result, only a remnant was gathered out of Israel to be of the "bride" class, and that the nation as a whole stumbled into blindness, darkness, for a time determined of the Father – until the election to the "bride" class should be completed from among the Gentiles. Then, the Apostle assures us, Israel's blindness shall be turned away; they shall all be saved from that blindness. "For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins."

It is this covenant of the Lord to Israel to take away their sins and to give them new hearts and right dispositions that is referred to in our lesson, and we look for the fulfilment with longing anticipation – realizing, as the Apostle points out, that Israel's recovery from blindness will mean nothing less than life from the dead; for if that nation, after crucifying Messiah, and being blind to the fulfilment of the prophecies made to their fathers, shall finally be awakened to see the Lord, and look upon him whom they have pierced, and shall have the spirit of prayer and of supplication poured upon them by the Lord's providential dealing, it will be a miracle similar to the causing of a dead person to live. And if God's mercy will thus be extended toward those who sinned most egregiously, and who crucified his Son, it will mean also the extending of divine mercy to all the families of the earth, according to the statement of the various promises.

More than this, the fulfilment of God's promise mentioned by the Apostle, "So all Israel shall be saved [recovered from blindness]" will not mean *merely* a figurative awakening of the dead: it will mean *also* a literal awakening of the dead; because many of "all Israel," millions of them, have gone down into actual death, and before they could be made the recipients of the favors of this promise, they must be awakened from the sleep of death. And likewise also the promises to the remainder of mankind are similarly brought before the eye of faith by such faithfulness toward Israel; for instance, the promise that all the families of the earth shall be blessed through the

Seed of Abraham must include not only those who will be living at the time of Messiah's second advent and the establishment of his Millennial Kingdom, but must include also all that are in the graves, "who shall hear the voice of the Son of Man and come forth" to a trial for life, secured by the great ransom sacrifice.

The sprinkling of clean water would seem to signify the application of the truth: and this perhaps had some fulfilment in those who returned from the Babylonian captivity – it was the truth, the influence of the promises made to the fathers, that affected the hearts of those who were disposed to return – in all only a remnant of fifty-five thousand out of seven millions. The influence of these promises served to separate them from their previous filthiness of idolatry. Had they earnestly gone forward seeking to realize the lengths and breadths of the divine will, they might have been ready in due time, at the first advent of our Lord, to have received the new heart; but they did not do so, hence that feature of the promise (not failing on account of their failure) carries forward more than eighteen hundred years, and becomes applicable at the second advent. Meantime a new nation, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people, is sought and found by the Lord to be the spiritual Seed of Abraham and to obtain the greatest blessings – the heavenly. – Rom. 9:30-33; 11:26-32.

But we will look down into the future and see what the fulfilment of this prophecy will mean to fleshly Israel, to whom it was made, and to whom it still pertains, because, as the Apostle declares, the gifts and callings of God are things of which he does not repent.

We are not to understand that the removal of the stony heart and the giving of the new heart of flesh will be an instantaneous work or a miraculous work. The Apostle explains the method by which the Lord will do this great thing for Israel, saying, "The deliverer shall come out of Zion [the Church of this Gospel age] and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for **[R2504 : page 187]** this is my covenant with them [Jacob, fleshly Israel]." God has appointed a day for thus

blessing Israel and ultimately blessing all the families of the earth – it is a thousand-year day, the Millennial day, but in it Israel's opportunity will come first. Israel is probably as much, and probably no more, affected with the stony heart condition than other nations. A hard or stony heart represents a selfish condition of mind and sentiment. This hardening process is a result of the fall, and through heredity and practice affects all of Adam's posterity. The stony heart condition is one of self-will as opposed to divine will; of self-gratification as opposed to righteousness; a love of self which hinders the [R2504 : page 188] love of God with all the heart, mind, soul and strength, and a love of the neighbor as oneself. The stony heart condition means "me," "my," "mine," "right if I can, wrong if I must."

The breaking up of this stony heart condition, other Scriptures show us, will be accomplished to a considerable degree by the trouble (political, ecclesiastical, financial and social) which will come upon the whole world in the "day of wrath," which is just before us; and this is particularly emphasized in the Scriptures as also being "the day of Jacob's trouble, – but he shall be saved out of it." (Jer. 30:7.) All men will come to appreciate better than they now do or ever have done in the past that the law of selfishness under which the whole world has been operating for this long time is an unjust law, and one which must ultimately work injury to all. Indeed, the great time of trouble will itself be the grand display of the ultimate tendencies of selfishness with all the brakes and restraints removed. It will speedily work the utter wreck of the highest development of human civilization. Apparently, natural Israel will be the first amongst the nations who will pass through this experience to learn the lesson, and to begin to seek after the new heart, renewed in righteousness and true submission to divine instruction.

The breaking of the stony hearts will come through the afflictions of the "day of wrath," but the transformation of those hearts into hearts of flesh will be more gradual. It will be accomplished by instructions in righteousness; for the glorified Church, with Christ its Head, will

be the great Prophet or Teacher of mankind, and fleshly Israel (their past experiences in many respects serving as a preparation) will speedily become associates in the reformation work. Indeed, all mankind then coming into harmony with the Kingdom will be counted as Israelites – children of the true Israel of God – Christ. All such will be counted as "children of Abraham," who as a type of God is the "father of the faithful" with one Seed (the heavenly, Christ and the Church) as the stars of heaven, and another (faithful fleshly Israelites from all peoples, kindreds and tongues) as the sand by the sea-shore. – Gen. 22:17.

The promise of "hearts of flesh" or restored human perfection shows out strongly in contrast with the Lord's provision for the Church of this Gospel age, which is not to receive human perfection, desirable as that will be, but instead are to become every whit new creatures in Christ Jesus: begotten of the spirit through the Word of truth, they will be in the resurrection born of the spirit to perfect spiritual conditions. The Lord's provision for the world of mankind, described as "hearts of flesh," conveys the thought of restitution, the image and likeness of God, to tender, gentle, sympathetic *human* or earthly conditions, very good, very acceptable to the Creator. Adam's disobedience resulted in the hardening of his heart in sin and selfishness, during the centuries of his degradation, outcast from divine favor as an alien, stranger, foreigner and enemy of God.

God's proposition to give them "a heart of flesh" signifies, therefore, the bringing of fleshly Israel back to the original condition proper to perfect manhood; and the method by which this softening and restitution of the heart sentiments shall be accomplished will involve a new *will*, a new *mind*, a new *disposition*, called in the text "a new spirit." This must really come first, before the new heart condition can be attained, and the new spirit, the new disposition, will be induced by the new view of matters which will then be clearly set before Israel and the world.

The difficulty at the present time is that Satan, the god of this world, deceives mankind into viewing evil things as desirable, and good things as undesirable: he puts light for darkness, darkness for light; and as the Scriptures declare, the whole world is at present blinded and deceived by him. (2 Cor. 4:4; Rev. 20:3.) When in due time the Lord's Anointed shall take the Kingdom authority, purchased with his own precious blood, it will be for the very purpose of scattering the darkness with which "the prince of darkness" has blinded mankind. And not only is the new King designated the true Light, but his Kingdom also is styled the Kingdom of sunshine, when it is declared, "The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his beams." – Mal. 4:2.

It should not be necessary to offer argument, either from facts or Scripture, to show that this Sun of Righteousness did not arise at the first advent, nor during "the dark ages," and that even at the second coming of the King there will be a night-time, and he will come "as a thief in the night" for his bride. (1 Thes. 5:2.) Nor should it be necessary to prove that throughout the entire Gospel age the world has walked in darkness, while the Lord's people have only walked in the light by reason of having his Word as a lamp to their feet, a lantern to their footsteps. (Psa. 119:105.) The promise held out before the Church, and before fleshly Israel, and before the world, is – "The morning cometh;" and the additional assurance is given to the Church, Zion, that "The Lord shall help her *early* in the morning." (Isa. 21:12; Psa. 46:5.) Her deliverance shall come first, and then she "shall shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of the Father." (Matt. 13:43.) Then will come the blessing upon fleshly Israel and the message to her, "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee!" and ultimately this light of the New Jerusalem, reflected from the earthly Jerusalem, shall enlighten all the **[R2504 : page 189]** families of the earth, with the light of the knowledge of God, in Jesus Christ our Lord.

The promise that the Lord would put his spirit within them, and cause them to walk in his statutes and keep his decrees and do them, is in full accord with the foregoing. This does not refer to Spiritual Israel, altho Spiritual Israel has a somewhat similar experience in advance, as we shall shortly show. This putting of the Lord's spirit, the spirit of righteousness, the spirit of truth, the spirit of love, upon fleshly Israel (and similarly upon all the families of the earth), is abundantly stated in the Scriptures to be distinctly separate from the pouring out of the Pentecostal blessing upon the Church, the "little flock," the bride of Christ, during this age, and before the Sun of Righteousness arises, of which Sun of Righteousness these shall form a part.

For instance, note the prophecy by Joel (2:28,29) that this promise of the holy spirit is of two parts. One outpouring of God's spirit upon his servants and handmaidens ("new creatures in Christ") has already had its fulfilment throughout this Gospel age: the other promise, that God would pour out his spirit upon all flesh, still awaits fulfilment, and will be accomplished after the overcoming Church has been glorified and the blessing of all the families of the earth has begun. The matter is covered slightly from the attention of the ordinary reader by reason of the outpouring upon the Church being mentioned last.

This same outpouring of the holy spirit upon fleshly Israel is referred to by the Prophet Zechariah, and directly applied to the end of this age. In connection with telling how the Lord would at his second advent make himself known to Israel, and that they should look upon him whom they pierced, and mourn for him, the explicit statement is, "I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplication." – Zech. 12:10.

The spirit of the Lord, the holy spirit, is the spirit of the truth, and when the truth shall be made known to Israel and mankind, with that truth will go its spirit, its influence, its power to correct the heart and

life, and to bring it into accord with God. For then, in the light of the truth, many will see God's character and plan in Christ as "the desire of all nations," and the great King himself as the one "altogether lovely." And the positive declaration is that all who will not hear (obey) that great Teacher – Prophet, Priest and King – shall be cut off from amongst his people in the Second Death. – Acts 3:23.

In connection with these transformations of heart and will, will come the blessing which the Lord promised upon the earth. It shall yield its increase; the wilderness shall blossom as the rose, and the whole earth shall become a Paradise of God. The beginning of these blessings will be with Israel, and thus all the Gentiles shall have not only the lessons of the Scriptures for their instruction in righteousness, but also the illustration of divine providence operating on behalf of those who are influenced by the truth and its spirit. Thus will be fulfilled the declaration, "This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden." – Ezek. 36:35.

While the Scriptures keep distinctly separate the nation of fleshly Israel and the new nation, Spiritual Israel, nevertheless, under divine providence, fleshly Israel was in many respects made a lesson, a type, an illustration, for Spiritual Israel; so that the Apostle could declare that many of the things done for fleshly Israel were *shadows* of better things coming afterward for Spiritual Israel. Yet these are shadows only to **[R2505 : page 189]** those who discern them, and are profitable only to those who avail themselves of them. – Heb. 8:5.

The Scriptures point out to us that the new heart condition is essential also to Spiritual Israel; that all who would be in harmony with the Lord must first get free from idols, and be separated to the Lord God; and that then they must inquire of the Lord that he may do for them the good things of his promise – working in them both to will and to do of his good pleasure. As the death of Christ was the turning point of fleshly Israel (Dives), and led them into blindness and trouble, so also it was the turning point or beginning of favor to Spiritual Israel

(Lazarus carried to Abraham's bosom) – the poor, the humble, acknowledging themselves to be sinners, were freely cleansed through the merits of Christ's sacrifice and made acceptable as the children of Abraham. This class, from the day of Pentecost to the present, have presented themselves in turn, fully and unreservedly to the Lord; to have his will, his spirit, renewed in them, and such have indeed received a newness of spirit, a newness of heart. But the new heart is not with them a heart of flesh, for they are begotten unto the high calling, to be children and heirs of God, joined in heirship with Jesus Christ their Lord – to partake of the divine nature, which already is reckoned as being begun in them through the begetting by the spirit of adoption. It is for these to remember that in order to develop in the spirit they must walk in the spirit, in the Lord's footsteps, observing to the best of their ability the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus; – that thus they may be transformed by the renewing of their minds (wills) and be enabled to prove the good, the perfect, the acceptable will of God; and thus faithfully doing, to be ultimately received of him into all the exceeding glories promised to the new creatures in Christ, and to be joint-heirs with him in the great work of blessing Israel and the world through the Millennial Kingdom. – Rom. 12:2; 8:17.
