

Zechariah



Albert O. Hudson

Preface

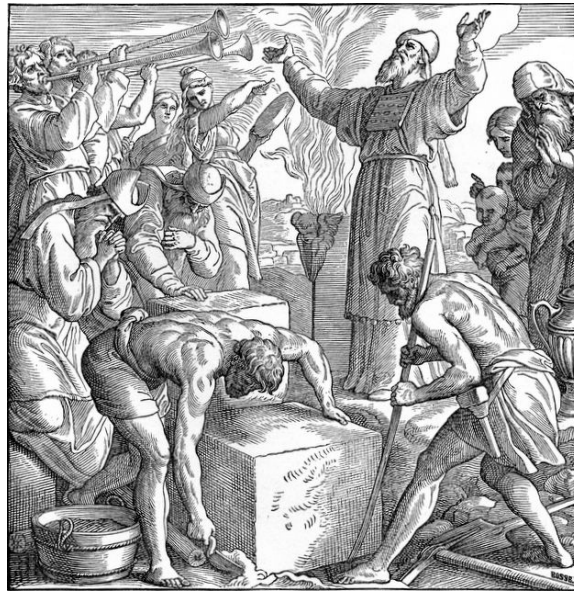
Albert Hudson, of Milborne Port England, was a faithful Christian, Bible Student and Scholar of the twentieth century and the author of many books. He was born in 1899 and died in 2000 at 101 years of age. In his early years he worked as an Electrical Engineer for Standard Telephones. His aptitude for detail served him well in research Biblical details. He had access to the British Museum to reference ancient records in support of this and other studies.

The Bible Fellowship Union began publishing a journal in 1924 "*The Bible Students Monthly*". In 1935 the name was changed to "*The Bible Study Monthly*". The journal was headed by Albert O. Hudson since its inception, and included many of his articles. He had a scholarly approach to Bible study particularly Old Testament history and prophecy concerning God's Kingdom and the practical out-working of God's purpose. In 1942 Albert Hudson wrote a series of articles entitled "*Jacob's Trouble*" that appeared as a booklet later that year. There have been two editions and a reprint resulting in many thousands of copies being dispatched across the world. In 1989 he also published "*Bible Students in Britain — The Story of a Hundred Years*".

He had an exceptional memory but also a very methodical filing system to store the fruit of his extensive reading, research and studies. His knowledge of history and the ancient world was outstanding. He loved the study of the Scriptures and sought to clarify doctrinal aspects of the faith. He had a wonderful gift with words, particularly the written word. His treatises contained much valuable information and wisdom.

The following exposition comprised a series of articles in his journal from 1968-1970. In these articles he occasionally made reference to secular or archaeological dating. This differs somewhat from the strictly Biblical evidence in *Studies in the Scriptures*. A small asterisk [*] is occasionally placed in the text to point the reader to differences.

Zechariah, Prophet of the Restoration



1. The Prophet and the Book

A strange and thrilling time was the Era of the Restoration, when fifty thousand eager pioneers left Babylon and set out across the desert for the ruined country of Judea, there to build a Temple and a homeland. Few of them had seen Judea before; seventy years had elapsed since their fathers had been taken captive to Babylon, fifty-one since the Temple and city of Jerusalem had been destroyed, and most of the returning pilgrims had been born and brought up in Babylon and knew of their ancestors' homeland only by repute and description. But now Babylon was fallen, given into the power of Cyrus the Persian conqueror, and Cyrus had granted leave to all of the Jewish community in his new conquest to go back to the land of their fathers and there restore their Temple, their national worship, and some semblance of their old-time communal life, requiring only that they continue loyal to the suzerainty of Persia. So they came, bearing with them the sacred vessels of the Temple so ruthlessly despoiled by the soldiers of Nebuchadnezzar half a century ago, exhibited as trophies of conquest in the Babylonish Temple of Marduk, and now destined to stand in their rightful place and serve their rightful role in the ritual of the worship of the God of Heaven. No wonder they sang, as the Psalmist says they did sing, on that arduous journey *"When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing; then said they among the nations, The Lord hath done great things for them"*. (Psa. 126:1-2). No wonder they came into the desolated land and camped among the ruined buildings of what had once been Jerusalem *"beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, the city of the great King"*, seeing around them by the eye of faith the scenery and the architecture of the glorious land that was soon to be, and they themselves, the people of the Lord, exalting Israel once again to a place among the nations, mighty in the strength of the God of Israel.

It was not long before the golden vision faded and the old enemies of greed, indifference and moral laxity asserted themselves. Commercialism replaced sacrifice;

the acquisition of property and the building of houses attracted more attention than the erection of the Temple of God. The community suffered accordingly. *“Is it time for you, O ye”* thundered Haggai the prophet *“to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this Temple lie waste? Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled; ye clothe you, but there is none warm. Why? saith the Lord of Hosts. Because of my Temple that is waste and ye attend every man unto his own house!”* (Hag. 1:4-9). Sixteen years it was since the pioneers came to Jerusalem with such high hopes, and this was all there was to shew for it! No wonder Zerubbabel, the governor of the colony, and Joshua the High Priest, were ashamed as they led the people in a great outburst of enthusiasm which sought to rectify the wrongs which had been allowed to develop.

It is at this point that Zechariah comes into the picture. A much younger man than his fellow-prophet Haggai, he had nevertheless shared in the journey from Babylon and from the nature of his prophetic visions shews that he must have known much about life in that notorious city. Like Haggai, he was possessed of a burning zeal for the establishment in Judea of a true theocratic State, and a certainty that all the Divine promises relating to the coming glory of Israel must most certainly come to pass. In this the two prophets were markedly different from the Governor and the High Priest, both of whom seem to have failed to display those qualities of leadership and foresight necessary for so great a purpose.

Zerubbabel had been appointed Governor of the colony by Cyrus, responsible to him for maintaining its loyalty to Persia. The appointment was obviously a diplomatic move; Zerubbabel was the grandson and senior living descendant of Jehoiachin the last legal king of Judah, who died in Babylon. He was probably in his early thirties and does not seem to have been particularly distinguished. Joshua the High Priest was a grandson of Seraiah, High Priest at the time of Jerusalem’s destruction, who was executed by Nebuchadnezzar; he was most likely a much older man. These two figure largely in Zechariah’s prophecy. Zechariah himself was of the priestly tribe. He says of himself that he was the son of Berachiah and grandson of Iddo, although in the Book of Ezra he is described as the son of Iddo. (Zech. 1:1-7; Ezra 5:1 & 6:14). The explanation appears to be that Berachiah died before his father Iddo, that Iddo was the head of one of the twenty-four courses into which the Levitical priesthood was divided and that upon his death this honour passed directly to his grandson Zechariah. (See Neh. 12:16). From this latter text it is evident that Zechariah was still alive in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah some seventy years after the Return, by which time he must have been of a considerable age. Tradition has it that—unusually for a Hebrew prophet—he survived and died peacefully in extreme old age and was buried beside his old friend and colleague Haggai. His prophetic ministry must therefore have spanned at least fifty years.

The Book of Zechariah consists of three main divisions, and the style and subject matter of the third is of a vastly different nature from that of the other two. The first division, occupying chapters 1 to 6, dated in the second year of Darius (520 B.C.) the year in which the building of the Temple was resumed, comprises a series of visions the subject of which is the restoration of Jerusalem and of Judah as a nation, leading onward in time to the consummation of Israel’s history in the Millennial Kingdom and accepted Divine rule over all the earth. These visions are highly symbolic and the imagery is taken from the writings of the prophets who preceded Zechariah; to understand their meaning to any extent even today requires a reasonably detailed knowledge of the Old Testament. Thus in the first vision the prophet sees Israel in captivity to the great nations of then current history—Assyria, Babylon, Persia—and the time come for God to redeem His promise of deliverance for Jerusalem. From that the scene changes to the preparation of the Promised Land for the returning multitudes

and a hint that the complete fulfilment of this must extend into a then far future day. Next comes the preparation of the royal Priest-King who is to rule “in that day” accompanied by the Divine instrument of salvation forged from amongst men—the “servant” of Isaiah, to be a light to the nations to declare God’s salvation to the ends of the earth. Following that comes the promulgation of Divine Law which will root out all evil and establish everlasting righteousness, and finally the regathering of all from the many dispersions which have afflicted God’s people during the course of history, and the full establishment of the Millennial order of things. In these visions Zechariah takes his stand in the land of Judah of his own day and looks forward to the end of time, describing what he realises are the principles of the Divine purpose yet to be worked out. In all of this he gives evidence of a clear-sighted understanding of the basic laws of God and the road which, not only Israel, but all men, must traverse to reach the objective God has set.

The second division, given two years later, whilst the rebuilding of the Temple was actively proceeding, covers chapters 7 and 8 and consists of two “oracles”, or messages from Heaven to be declared to those of the people in Zechariah’s day directly concerned. Although at first sight these chapters appear to be of purely local application to events in the time of Zechariah, closer examination reveals that here is enshrined a statement of the essential principles upon which God ultimately bases His acceptance of Israel at the end of the Age and the manner in which He will use Israel in the work of His Kingdom. The entire picture is presented in the form of what, in mediaeval England, was called a masquerade, a kind of play in which the actors take their places, asking and answering questions in which the message to be given is contained. In this instance representatives from the religious fraternity of Israel come to Zechariah to enquire as to the propriety of certain ceremonial observances; the prophet tells them, in effect, that since their past observances have been characterised by ritualism rather than sincerity, God is not interested in their offerings anyway. This gives opportunity for a stirring exhortation to sincere repentance and reformation of life that they might be truly fitted for the Divine purpose; that purpose is then revealed to be nothing less than the exaltation of Israel and the Israel land as the centre of Divine administration on earth when the due time should come, but all this is dependent upon faith and sincerity. So the terminal point of the oracles is the same as that of the visions of chapters 1-6, the glory and blessing of the Millennial Kingdom. In the visions the necessity as well as the certainty of Divine power and action to establish the “new heavens and earth” is shewn; in the two oracles the necessity of repentance and willing subservience to the Divine will on the part of Israel before the new heavens and earth can become a reality is pictured. With both these factors established the groundwork is laid for the final division of the Book. This tells of events more closely associated with the actual passing of the kingdoms of this world into the Kingdom of God. This third division, chapters 9 to 14, is of a fundamentally different style and nature from the earlier parts. Where chapters 1 to 6 comprise a succession of symbolic pictures based on past Old Testament literature, and 7 to 8 are hortatory, enshrining principles of Divine Law applicable to any Age and generation, these last chapters 9 to 14 are frankly prophetic, foreseeing the shape of things to come in the logical outworking of events determined on a basis of cause and effect. It is easy, and it is true, to say that the revelation of happenings yet in the future is possible by the power of the Holy Spirit, but it has also to be remembered that the Spirit-filled mind of a man like Zechariah, attuned in a very real sense to the mind of God, was of itself empowered to foresee the outcome, in future history, of events and forces belonging to his own time. The prophet clearly comprehended the ultimate purpose of God; he understood the manner in which, and the extent to which, the unbelief and the belief, the opposition and the concurrence, of men in his own day and in future times would influence and modify the road by which that goal would eventually be reached, and by that means the

Spirit was able to guide him to an appreciation of “things which shall be hereafter” in so definite a fashion that he was able to set down in these chapters so detailed a description of things which had not yet—and in great degree have not yet—transpired.

The striking difference between the two earlier divisions of the Book and this one has led a number of scholars of the “Critical” school to claim that chapters 9 to 14 are not by the Zechariah of the Restoration era but by an unknown writer of much later times. The arguments are, in the main, the familiar ones used by such scholars to throw doubt on the genuineness of almost every Book of the Bible, and, being based primarily upon an unwillingness to admit the power of the Spirit in the compilation of these writings, need not be taken seriously. In point of fact, this difference in style is logically to be expected. The first two divisions, written in the second and fourth years of King Darius, are the product of Zechariah’s youthful years; he was a man of round about thirty. Chapters 9 to 14 are not dated, but the general background and a certain amount of internal evidence would point to a time nearly half a century later, at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. It may reasonably be taken that the prophet had reached the maturity and insight of old age after a lifetime spent “in tune” with God and this in itself amply accounts for the difference in style and the rich colouring of his prophetic vision.

This section commences with an outline sketch of the forces that were to affect Israel after the then present Persian domination had passed away. A new ruling power was to come upon the stage, one that we now know to have been the Greek power, which overthrew Persia. In this crisis Jerusalem was to be preserved, for the good work of the Restoration was still bearing some fruit. Hope of the climax to Israel’s expectation would come to the front; the promised King would be manifested and offer Himself to the people. But despite Divine assurance that He would indeed ultimately reign, a darker hue is drawn over the scene. Israel apostasises and rejects the King who is also their Shepherd, and for an Age that rejection endures whilst God as it were turns His back upon the unrepentant people. But He has not done so for ever nor even in reality; in the fulness of time and when some through the generations have shewn themselves ready to serve Him, God arouses to action. There is a regathering of His ancient people to their ancient land, a time of opening of eyes and of repentance, and a great cleansing, preparatory to the coming of Messiah and the Millennial Kingdom. Simultaneously there is a moving of powers of evil in the world in opposition, seeking to destroy what seems to be the incipient establishment of the new and righteous world order. The consequence is a further test of faith, a second apostasy and a second rejection of the Shepherd; but a remnant preserves faith and to this remnant the Lord comes in complete and permanent deliverance. So transpires the great event to which all human history has been tending, the revelation of the Lord from Heaven to all mankind, the overthrow of all evil dominating power and the establishment of Divine sovereignty on earth. The glorious vision closes in the spectacle of, not only Israel, but the whole of humankind, delivered from the darkness of sin and death, fully entered at last into the eternal light and life of the illimitable future.

The Book of Zechariah is a remarkable book; remarkable because of its unshakeable confidence in the ultimate execution of the Divine purpose despite the shortcomings and frailty of man. The prophet lived his life in an age that of itself provided a picture in miniature of the glories he foresaw in prophetic vision, but it was an age that, after Zechariah’s death, belied its early promise and the light faded into darkness again. He himself in full confidence of faith looked toward a day when the darkness would not return, and in so doing coined, at the close of his book, a phrase which has become immortal; *“At evening time it shall be light”*.

2. The Rider in the Myrtle Trees

The series of visions comprising the first six chapters of Zechariah are very similar in style to those of the Book of Revelation, the outstanding difference being that whereas Revelation deals with the Church's conflict, with evil during this present Age, Zechariah's visions include Israel and her conflict with evil during the times before Christ. Both reach to the same period—the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom upon earth. The style of symbolism, based on Old Testament history and prophecy, is common to both and it is likely that Zechariah, like John on Patmos, saw these strange and picturesque tableaux in waking moments, closely attuned to the influence of the Holy Spirit and probably completely unconscious of the everyday world around him. Whether the pictures appeared as optical views before his physical sight or were directly impressed upon his brain is of no consequence; in either case the required understanding was conveyed to his mind so that to Zechariah it was as if he indeed stood and observed in a world where these things were real.

The first vision (chapters 1:8 to 2:13) shewed him, first of all, a man, riding a red horse, standing motionless in a grove of myrtle trees at the bottom of a deep valley or glen. Behind the rider appeared others, also mounted on horses, denoted in the A.V. red, speckled and white. Zechariah enquires as to the identity of these riders, and an angel—the “revealing angel” who remains with the prophet throughout the series of visions—tells him that they are those whom the Lord has destined to wander through the earth. At this point the riders address a cry to their leader on the red horse complaining that in their wanderings they find that all other peoples in the earth are at ease and rest; they alone apparently are compelled to wander eternally. At this the leader on the red horse, who is now called “the Angel of Jehovah”, raises his voice to God, desiring Him that He will shew mercy to Jerusalem and Judah, who have been under His displeasure for seventy years. The Lord replies with an assurance that the time has come for His displeasure to be lifted, for Jerusalem to be rebuilt, and prosperity come to Israel. At this point a pair of horned bulls appear on the scene and the prophet becomes aware of the menace of their four powerful horns. To his further enquiry the angel declares that these horns are the powers which have scattered Israel and Judah over the earth but their power is about to be broken. Behind the bulls come four artificers, craftsmen bearing the tools of their trade; these, said the angel, come to restrain and break the power of the horns and make possible fulfilment of the Divine promise.

The key to this rather strange imagery is contained in verse 12, where the Angel of Jehovah cries “*O Lord of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?*” This is obviously in reference to the Babylonian captivity recently ended, which was always described in terms of a punishment of seventy years. On this basis the subject of the vision is Israel at the time of the Restoration and this is the starting point of all Zechariah's prophecies.

The mounted riders, sent by the Lord to “*walk to and fro through the earth*” are symbols of the people of Israel condemned to banishment, to be wanderers and exiles among all nations. The other nations of mankind, by contrast, “*sitteth still and is at rest*” in their own homes, but Israel has no home. Because of past apostasies the Lord has dispersed Israel thus. Now the time has come for her to be regathered to her own land, symbolised by the myrtle trees in the deep valley. The myrtle, indigenous to Canaan, is used as a symbol of the Holy Land; in Zechariah's day Judah was not, as at other times, exalted to the tops of the mountains, but occupied a very subordinate position as a province of Persia, hence “in the valley” (A.V. “bottom”). There were three groups of horses, distinguished by three colours. The Israelite riders are carried by the

horses “*to and fro through the earth*”; evidently in the horses we are expected to see the hostile nations which conquered and ruled Israel and took the people into captivity. There were three such up to Zechariah’s day, Assyria, Babylon and Persia. One group of horses was red, one “speckled”, and one white. The rendering of “speckled” is open to question; the word only occurs once elsewhere, in Isa. 16:8 where it is translated “principal plant”. Ellicott suggests that “*seruqqim*” here is a corruption of “*shechorim*” which means black, and this supposition if accepted creates a harmony between these horses and those of the later vision in chapter 6, which lends support. On the assumption that this conclusion is justified there is a certain fitness in the colours. The red horses would picture the Assyrian power, the first to exile Israel from the land and carry them away “*through the earth*”; red is the colour of blood and hence a symbol of war, and Assyria more than the others waged frightful and unrelenting war in the pursuit of its ends. The black horses then picture Babylon, the next nation to enslave Israel. The Babylonians were not so outrageously cruel as the Assyrians; they waged war only for the attainment of their object and Israel’s bondage to them was characterised more by the hopelessness of captivity in a strange land without hope of release. The blackness of death was a fitting symbol of Babylonian bondage. “*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion*” (Psa. 137:1). In contrast to that, the Persian rule which succeeded Babylon was one of tolerance and favour, opportunity for the exiles to return and rebuild their homeland. Hence the white horses fitly indicate Persia.

Now the wanderers have returned to the homeland. They stand among the myrtle trees, and with them is their princely champion, the Angel of Jehovah, himself riding a red horse. He also has come forth for war, but in his case it is war for the deliverance of the oppressed people. They have someone to plead their cause before God and to lead them out unto victory. This is not the first time that the Old Testament hints at an other-worldly power pledged to the defence and triumph of Israel. Joshua, contemplating his plans for the conquest of the Promised Land, was met by a celestial visitant, a soldier with drawn sword who told him “*as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come*” (Josh. 5:13-14). In the days of Hezekiah the Angel of Jehovah appeared in the night and decimated the Assyrian army (2 Kings 19:25). In the last great conflict, said the revealing angel to Daniel, Michael the great prince will stand up to deliver Israel and bring the evil powers to an end (Dan. 12:1) and Michael here is but a cover name for the Angel of Jehovah. His true identity is made known in the Book of Revelation, where in chapter 19 the Heavenly Rider appears to make short work of the armies of evil, and reveals his name; the Word of God! Here in Zechariah, then, the Angel of Jehovah is the Divine Word, later to be personified on earth as Jesus Christ the Son of God, but here pictured as superintending the regathering of Israel and the overthrow of Israel’s enemies. In all of this there is a vivid foreview of a greater regathering and a greater overthrow when this same Divine Word, “*this same Jesus*”, is revealed in the power of His Second Advent for the world’s deliverance.

The Angel of Jehovah cried to the Lord for an end to Israel’s exile and suffering; the answer came, not to him but to the revealing angel with a message for the prophet. “*Thus saith the Lord of hosts; I am zealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great zeal*” (“jealousy” in the O.T. has the meaning for which we now use the word “zeal”) “*... I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies; ... my cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad, and the Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem*” (ch. 1:13-17).

Here is the basic promise. The people shall be restored and Israel shall rise again. The national enthusiasm aroused by this message did indeed have the effect of creating a revived Jewish State, even though subject to Gentile rule, for a few centuries, but eventually the heavy hand of the oppressor came down upon them again.

The promise had only a limited fulfilment, for the people were not yet ready for their high destiny.

“Then lifted I up mine eyes and saw and behold, four horns” (ch. 1:18). These were most likely representations of the horns of bulls, used so often in the Scriptures as metaphors for the idea of power or brute force, and by extension of ideas to denote, prophetically, earthly powers or kingdoms. Thus *“the horn of Moab is cut off”* (Jer. 48:25) denoting the end of Moab as a nation; there are many similar instances. The angel explained the horns as symbolising the powers *“which have scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem”* (ch. 1:19). Immediately behind the horns came four *“carpenters”* (A.V.). The Hebrew word means any craftsman or worker whether in wood, metal or stone; perhaps *“craftsmen”* is the happiest rendering since nothing is said as to whether they were carpenters, blacksmiths or stonemasons and perhaps this vagueness is intentional. Whereas the horns pictured the earthly powers which had desolated Israel, the craftsmen, said the angel, represented a further power which was to destroy the horns. *“These are the horns which have scattered Judah, so, that no man did lift up his head; but these”* (the craftsmen) *“are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the nations”* (ch. 1:21). This word *“fray”* is rendered by most modern translators to terrify or frighten; *“fray”* in modern English means to rub or file down or to wear away, but in mediaeval English and therefore in the A.V. it meant to terrify or affright. (This word *“fray”* is the root of our modern words *“afraid”* or *“affray”*). It is tempting to think of the four horns finding their reality in the four successive empires which held Israel in thrall, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, but in such case there would need to be found four individual powers to act as their conquerors. It might well be that since the number four is associated with the idea of universality as respects things on the earth—four winds of the earth, four corners, and so on—the idea here intended to be conveyed is that of the entire assembly of hostile nations at enmity with Israel, helpless in the face of a new development, the appearance of a corps of craftsmen, of builders, who not only cannot be resisted but eventually strike terror into the hearts of the enemy. From this point of view the vision may well picture the commencement of a great development in the outworking purpose of God. Up to this time, the people of God have been helpless in the grip of their enemies. That grip has been loosened and there now appears a company of builders, of craftsmen, who are going to build the Temple of God and make it an architectural and artistic creation to the glory of God, and there is nothing the nations can do to stop it. And when that Temple is complete its builders will become a means in the Lord’s hand to annihilate all evil. No wonder the enemies are terrified. The horns of evil are to be broken and scattered; the craftsmen, rejoicing in the edifice they have erected, will emerge triumphant.

To a degree this vision had an application in the building of the Second Temple and the restoration of the Jewish State in the days of Zechariah, but only to a degree. Other horns were afterwards to appear with their threats of oppression; other builders come upon the scene to build an even greater and spiritual Temple. The symbols must surely find their full scope in the work of all God’s servants, whether Old Testament Jew or New Testament Christian, labouring to build that edifice which will become the meeting place between God and man in the coming Age of blessing. The builders of times gone by, the builders of today, all will find that their combined life’s labours have resulted in the weakening and final downfall of the horns of the nations. Had Israel in the days of the Restoration been all that was indicated, one solitary craftsman could have filled the picture; the fact that four craftsmen, as four horns, are seen, denotes that in them is included the entire, the universal, company of labourers for God in all ages, united together in one great work, the builders of the symbolic Temple of God and the elimination of all evil from among the nations.

All this was still in prospect. Jerusalem as yet was still in ruins and the prophet was painfully conscious that his people needed positive assurance of the future to stimulate their endeavours. That assurance was now given. Chapter 2 opens with a new character in the drama, a man carrying a *“measuring line”*, more properly a surveyor’s cord, for this man is a surveyor, come to measure out the ground and plan the new Jerusalem. This was the answer he gave to the prophet’s enquiry. *“To measure Jerusalem”* he said *“to see what is (to be) the breadth thereof and the length thereof”* (ch. 2:2). This is the first result of the promise given in chapter 1 *“I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies, saith the Lord of Hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem”*. The city destroyed seventy years before by Nebuchadnezzar was to rise again.

But there is a new aspect to this restoration of the ancient city. Whilst the surveyor was getting on with his task, the revealing angel left Zechariah’s side and *“went forth”* to meet *“another angel”* who was advancing towards him. It seems very likely that this *“other angel”* was in fact the *“Angel of Jehovah”* of chapter 1, for the words he speaks in the following verses and the position of authority he seems to occupy are hardly appropriate to anyone of lesser rank. He gives the revealing angel an instruction. *“Run, speak to this young man”* he says, evidently referring to Zechariah, who was a silent observer *“saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein”* (ch. 2:3-4). These few simple words expand the scope of the prophecy at one step to include the glory of Israel at the end of this present Age. The expression *“towns without walls”* is exactly the same as the *“unwalled villages”* of Ezek. 38:13. *“Perazoth”* denotes unfortified country villages, incapable of defence against an enemy. At only one time in history can Jerusalem be described by the epithet *“perazoth”* and that is when the inhabitants thereof have put their entire trust in God for deliverance from their foes. *“For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her”* (ch. 2:5). This is an expression definitely associated with Israel’s final triumph. *“The Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory”* (Isa. 60:19). *“In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city, salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks”* (Isa. 26:1). Verses 4 and 5 are clearly intended to extend the scope of the vision from the Restoration of Zechariah’s own day to the greater and final restoration at the time that God comes in power for the salvation of men. To express the same thing in New Testament language, it is the time of our Lord’s Second Advent and the establishment of His Millennial Kingdom.

On the basis of this promise God now calls His people back from captivity. Here also there is an extension of prophetic view into future times, for at this moment the nation had already returned from Babylon and were engaged in the rebuilding of their national polity. But not all. There were more Jews remaining in Babylon than returned with Zerubbabel and Joshua. In the days of the Book of Esther, only thirty years later, they were to be found in every province of the Persian Empire, from Egypt in the west to India in the east. The vast majority of the Ten Tribes had not come back; they were still in the mountains of Assyria and Media, and most of them never did come back. Here in the prophecy the Lord is looking to a greater and still future Return and a correspondingly greater Restoration.

“Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north, saith the Lord; for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven ... Escape to Zion, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon” (ch. 2:6-7 R.S.V.). There is a two-fold Return envisaged here. Those who still dwell with Babylon are bidden to escape to the homeland whilst yet there is time; those who have been scattered to the four winds of heaven, an expression indicating the widespread lands of all the earth, are called to take their flight homeward. As respects this latter injunction, at the time of the vision Israel had

not yet been scattered, in that sense, to the four winds of heaven, so that here again we have a word which carries us forward in time to the day, to use the words of Jeremiah, when God will send for fishers and hunters to seek out his people from every part of the world and send them home (Jer. 16:16). And the next two verses clinch the argument, for the Lord goes on to declare that He will shake His hand over the enslaving nations and they will become a spoil to Israel (ch. 2:8-9). That cannot be until the close of this world order. In no sense of the word did Persia in Zechariah's day become "a spoil" to Israel, nor have the powers of this world at any time since. Upon the contrary, before many centuries had passed Jerusalem entered that phase foretold by our Lord when He said that Jerusalem would be trodden down of the Gentiles until the Times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled.

Two remarkable statements in verses 8 and 9 deserve notice. It must be remembered that verses 4-13 comprise a declaration by the Angel of Jehovah, a message given to Zechariah that he might proclaim it in turn. In verse 8 this Angel reveals that "*for the sake of your glory hath he sent me to the nations which spoiled you*" (Leeser) "*for*" he said "*he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye*". Now if the Angel of Jehovah here in the vision is indeed the Divine Word personified this clearly is a foreview of the work of Christ during the early stages of His Second Advent, directing the course of events in history so that the nations at the end of the Age relinquish their grasp of Israel. "*I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back; Bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth*" (Isa. 43:6). To a limited extent the Angel of Jehovah can be said to have gone to the nations of that day, to Babylon and Assyria and Persia, to lead out the captive exiles, and this is perhaps well shewn in the beginning of the vision where this same Angel assumes the role of the rider on the red horse leading the horsemen who have "*walked to and fro through the earth*"; nevertheless the fact that in chapter 2 the vision evidently extends to the end of this world order demands that the "sending" of the Divine Lord to the nations must include His work at that time also. This is where the other statement is so significant, "*and ye shall know that the Lord of Hosts bath sent me*". Here surely is indicated the end of Israel's blindness. They shall, at last, recognise and accept the One whom they so ignorantly rejected in the days of His First Advent.

The rest of the vision almost explains itself. "*I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord*" (ch. 2:10). Words of tremendous import, mirrored in John's visions of Revelation "*the dwelling place of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God ... shall be their God*" (Rev. 21:3), and if the Revelator's words in fact take in their scope, not Israel alone but all mankind, that does not destroy the analogy for both are true in point of time. The next verse in Zechariah demonstrates that. "*And many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people, and I will dwell in the midst of thee ... and*" says the messenger again "*thou shalt know that the Lord of Hosts hath sent me unto you*" (ch. 2:10-11). Words such as these can only be true at the end of this Age when Heaven comes down to earth for the salvation of mankind. This entire vision, which begins its story with the return of a band of Jewish exiles to their ruined land in about the year 536 B.C. as riders upon red, black, white horses, led by the Divine Lord on His red horse, closes with the greater return from all countries of the earth and at the end of this world-Age, led still by that same Divine Lord. His name now, in this greater and more momentous context, is called the Word of God. He appears from the heavens, still mounted upon a steed for war, and of Him it is said "*in righteousness he doth judge and make war*" (Rev. 19:11). What wonder that this first of Zechariah's visions closes with the commanding words "*Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord; for he is raised up out of His holy habitation*".

3. The Cleansing of the Priest

“Then he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him” (ch. 3:1 R.S.V.).

A completely new vision appears at this point. The wide view of Jerusalem's building is gone and in its place the prophet stands in spirit, probably in the Court of the Temple, witnessing a ceremony which seems to have much in common with the Levitical consecration of the High Priest to the duties of his sacred office. Joshua was the lawful High Priest in the days of Zechariah, the spiritual head of the nation just as Zerubbabel was its secular head. When the rebuilt Temple was finally completed a few years later it was Joshua who officiated for the rest of his life at the annual Day of Atonement ceremonies. Now Zechariah sees this man standing before the Lord, arrayed in unclean garments, and Satan present to accuse him before God. The accusation is rejected: the Lord commands that Joshua be clothed in new and clean garments and a diadem placed upon his head. Then comes a solemn charge. If Joshua will faithfully discharge the duties of his priestly commission he will inherit an enduring place in the company of God's ministers. In the meantime, and whilst the Divine purpose for Israel is being worked out, he will lead the nation into the promised era of righteousness and peace when every man shall sit under his own vine and fig tree with none to make them afraid. (Micah 4:4).

It is logical to think that the vision was intended to have an immediate although limited application to the situation in Israel as it existed in Zechariah's day, even although its major significance has to do with the wider aspects of the Divine Plan leading on to the days of Christ and the Millennial Kingdom. Thus Joshua in his “filthy garments” fitly pictured the defiled priesthood and Temple worship, consequent upon Israel's national captivity in Babylon and the desecrated Temple with its sacred vessels adorning the shrine of an idol god, Bel of Babylon. Satan, standing to accuse him, symbolised the hostility of the surrounding nations anxious to induce the Persian power to withdraw its support of the newly established Jewish State and bring the whole venture to an end. But here God steps in. *“The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan”* He says *“is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?”* (ch. 3:2). Israel at this time, so recently delivered from Babylon, was in very truth a brand plucked out of the fire. So Joshua is clothed with new garments and crowned with a diadem as a symbol of the restored State and new glory of the returned exiles. This was indeed a fresh start for Israel; now, at last, the failures and apostasies of those five centuries when the kings reigned could be forgotten and under the impetus of the present passion for righteousness the nation go forward to achieve its destiny. So the charge to Joshua (ch. 3:7); if he should walk in God's ways and keep God's charge, then his administration and rulership should be confirmed for ever. He would see the fulfilment of the old-time prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah concerning the emergence of a “branch” of David, a descendant of David's line, who should rule as both King and Priest (Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; Zech. 6:12-13). The outcome of this blessed reign was to be the removal of the iniquity of the land and the eternal peace and prosperity of its inhabitants.

The golden vision was never realised. True, the Temple was built and for a while the zeal of the people for their God was great; probably the lifetime of Joshua was marked by a continuing national allegiance to the covenant. But the old sins of cupidity, lawlessness and irreverence were still under the surface, waiting their chance to break through, and by the time of Ezra fifty years later the nation had relapsed into its old ways, and corruption had penetrated even into the priesthood, among the sons of Joshua. Ezra's notable prayer on the occasion of his coming to Jerusalem (Ezra 9 & 10) highlights the situation. *“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 into the heavens ... O our God, what shall we say after this, for we have forsaken thy commandments ... we are before thee in our trespass; for we cannot stand before thee because of this". It is true that Ezra brought about a national revival and reform, but that was short-lived Thirteen years later Nehemiah was appointed governor of Judah and found on his arrival to assume office that all Ezra's work had been undone and Jerusalem was again a desolation. For twelve years he ruled and laboured among a fickle and at heart unbelieving people; the story of his stalwart defence of the city, its rebuilding under constant threat of attack, the moral rehabilitation of the citizens of Judea and reestablishment of the Temple worship with a purified priesthood, is well known to all who are familiar with the book of Nehemiah, but at the end of the twelve years he was recalled to Persia and immediately the nation relapsed again. He returned to Jerusalem subsequently and instituted further reforms, but as with Joshua, so with Nehemiah, after his death the light went out again, priests and people alike quickly abandoning all pretence of serving God and all belief in the high destiny of their nation. The last of the Hebrew prophets, Malachi, lived only a generation later and from his writings it is clear that Israel was still as far from attaining the Divine ideal as ever. In his short book, the last message from God to Israel in the old dispensation, there is shewn the hopelessness of the case and God's purpose to initiate a new dispensation with the Advent of Christ—an event which occurred four centuries later. So the fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy in the person and work of Joshua and the generation he served as High Priest was not realised because of unfaithfulness and unfitness and the only possible fulfilment is that which runs its course through the Christian Dispensation and the one which follows, the Millennial Era in which the climax of Zech. 3 finds its reality.

It would seem, then, that the vision of this chapter takes us measurably away from the background and the events of the prophet's own day and leads irresistibly into the future. The climax of the vision, the emergence of the "Branch"—a title the Scriptures confine to the Lord Christ in His Messianic glory—the removal of iniquity, and the Millennial setting of verse 10, all point to this. Hence Joshua the High Priest, clothed in unclean garments which are taken away and replaced by clean ones, is clearly a figure of the Christian Church of this Age in process of cleansing and fitting for her future work in the next Age.

On this basis the elements of the vision fall into place. The central figure is the Royal Priesthood of the Millennial Age. A great deal of Old Testament imagery pictures our Lord uniting within Himself the combined offices of King and Priest. The Psalmist lays down the principle that when that Age dawns Christ is to be a "*priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek*" (Psa. 110:4). That is a reference back to the Genesis story of the Priest-King of Salem (Jerusalem) in Abraham's day, the story which the seventh chapter of the book of Hebrews uses so effectively to picture the work of Christ after His resurrection and at His Second Advent. Whereas at His First Advent and in His sacrificial role as the One who "*poured out his life unto death*" He was prefigured by the order of Aaron, a sacrificing and a dying priesthood ordained to "*make reconciliation for the sins of the people*", at His Second Advent and in the power of His glory He appears as a royal priest, a Priest-King, after the order of Melchisedek. But the New Testament shews that He is not alone in this; there is to be associated with Him in that restorative work among mankind of the future Age the company of His faithful disciples of this Age, the Christian Church, all those who in Rev. 17:14 are said to be "*called, and chosen, and faithful*". And it is the Book of Revelation, among others, which indicates that this same Christian Church is to be considered as sharing with her Lord the honoured title of the Royal Priest-King. He "*hath made us kings and priests unto God*". "*They (that have part in the first resurrection) shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years*" (Rev. 1:6; 20:4). Joshua, standing in an unclean condition, cannot possibly be representative of our Lord but certainly can fitly

picture the company of His disciples who, after cleansing, ultimately become part of the “Royal Priest”. Hence verses 1-3 of Zech. 3 can logically represent the Church of this Age standing, by virtue of the consecration of its members to God, in the presence of the Lord, the “angel of Jehovah” of verse 1, clothed with unclean garments, the defiling influence of sin, which is now to be taken away. The clothing with “change of raiment” (verse 4) is easily seen to represent the *“being arrayed in fine linen clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints”* (Rev. 19:8). Justification, reconciliation with God, the life of sanctification and dedication to the High Calling, all this is what is involved in this being arrayed in a change of raiment. How apt in this context are the words of verse 4 *“I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment”*.

Satan, the enemy of Joshua, is equally the enemy of all who would enter into a covenant of service with the Lord. It is noteworthy that he disappears from the vision so soon as the Lord’s reproof is uttered. So in the reality. The Prince of Evil has great power and influence in the world of men but the power of the Lord is greater and every “brand snatched from the burning” and brought to Christ is immune from the Adversary’s devices. There is probably a recollection here of the story of Job. In that drama Satan is depicted as the Accuser, but although he did his worst the man of God came safely through his trials and stood vindicated and triumphant in the end. So it is with all who in these later days have taken their stand for the things of God and have not faltered.

Who are *“those that stood before him”* (i.e. before the angel of Jehovah, the Lord) in verse 4? These are the ones who actually strip the unclean garments from Joshua and array him in the new ones. Probably, just as Satan represents the powers of evil that would endeavour to keep Christian disciples in the way of sin, so “those that stood before” the Lord represent His ministers, whoever they are and from whencesoever they come, who are the instruments employed by the Lord in His work of transforming the hearts and lives of the believers, which is the real fulfilment of the change of garments. What has often been called “the ministry of angels” might well have its place here.

Now comes the indication of royalty, of the kingly aspect. Verse 5 speaks of a *“fair mitre”*—more accurately, a brilliant diadem—being placed on the head of Joshua. It is sometimes thought that this is the “mitre” which formed part of the Levitical priests’—Aaron’s—regalia, but the word used makes it more likely that a royal crown or diadem is intended, as in Isa. 62:3 *“thou shalt be ... a royal diadem in the hand of thy God”*. The symbol could well speak of the insignia of royalty which the prospective “Royal Priesthood” even now possesses, whilst still in this life. *“Ye are ... a royal priesthood”* (1 Pet. 2:9). So the Christian Church, as yet but a prospective heir to the glory that shall be revealed, stands in clean garments and with a royal diadem, acceptable in God’s sight and ready for whatever commission the Lord will lay upon her.

That commission is stated in verses 6-7. *“The angel of the Lord enjoined Joshua, Thus says the Lord of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here”* (R.S.V.). Now this appears to envisage the discharge of a present duty as the essential preliminary to receiving certain administrative authority, and entering into a place or joining a company which stands in close relation to God. It ought not to be difficult to discern the application. The injunction laid upon all who come to the Lord as members of His Church is both to walk in His ways and keep His charge. *“Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected”* (1 John 2:5). If “my house” and “my courts” have anything to do with the mystical Holy City of Rev. 21, the ruling entity of the Millennial Age, which at least is possible, then the promise is clearly paralleled by the many Scripture indications that consecrated Christians of this Age, having been faithful to their calling and having

learned well all that the Divine Providence in the circumstances of life has taught them, will be privileged in the next Age with duties of oversight and instruction of the whole race of mankind then to be called to repentance and reconciliation. The final phrase is then the obvious comment. These who are thus found fitted and qualified for eternal association with the Lord in His future works are destined to be with Him, translated from this terrestrial world to that which is outside the range of human sense, but which is nevertheless the home of radiant beings always and altogether devoted and active in the service of God. Dr. Moffatt may have had more than a flash of insight when he rendered this particular sentence *“I will give you right of access to this company of mine”*. Whatever the precise meaning of the original, it is a definite assurance that the faithful are eventually to be admitted to a condition of being, of life, an eternal home, which is in the presence of God and of those who, metaphorically perhaps, stand before His Throne. *“In my Father’s house are many mansions ... I go to prepare a place for you”* (John 14:2). Something like that must be the “right of access among those who are standing here”.

Now comes the inspiring sequel to the vision, one that reveals in a few simple phrases the inflexible purpose of God to remove evil from the world and lead mankind into a condition of everlasting contentment. *“Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou and thy fellows that sit before thee; for they are men wondered at ...”* (ch. 3:8). This is the prelude to a most important announcement; but first of all the characters thus addressed have to be identified. If Joshua the high priest is a picture of the Church in the flesh, during this present Age, who then are “thy fellows that sit before thee”, “men wondered at”? It is not easy to find a class of men in this present order of things who can fitly be described as “fellows” to the disciples of Christ. The qualifying expression “men wondered at” is difficult to apply; the Hebrew word means a miracle or a sign but the context would certainly not be satisfied by describing them as “miracle men”. Every translator has his own slant on this phrase; thus the R.S.V. renders *“your friends ... men of good omen”*, Dr. Young *“Men of type they are”*, Leeser *“distinguished men are they”*, Rotherham *“men to serve as signs”* and Ferrar Fenton *“they are witnessing men”*. Now most if not all of these expressions have been from time to time applied as descriptive of Israel, the nation that during Old Testament times was God’s witness in the world and became not only a sign to all men of Divine power but a type of the later arrangement in Christ which was to come after His First Advent. Even the expression “miracle men” would not be out of place; the survival of that nation throughout history despite all that has endeavoured to destroy it, and its territorial resurgence in this our own day, has frequently been described as a miracle. And the fact that both Joshua and the “men wondered at” are bidden to heed the Lord’s declaration that He will bring forth His servant the “Branch”. and none among men save the Christian Church and believing Israel could have the faintest idea of the meaning of that expression, goes far to encourage the conclusion that this is the understanding intended.

“For, behold” says the Lord *“I will bring forth my servant the Branch”* (ch. 3:8). This is Millennial prophecy at its best. The “Branch” in Scripture metaphor is Christ—at His Second Advent and during His Millennial reign, for the expression is always associated with the era of His administration of earth in glory and power. It has its origin, of course, in the fact that Jesus, as a man, came in descent of the line of David and so fulfilled in His own person the prediction that Messiah would come of David’s seed. Thus we have Isa. 11:1. *“There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse”* (David’s father) *“and a Branch shall grow out of his roots”*. The rest of the chapter describes the Millennial rule of Christ and its beneficent consequences for men. Says Jeremiah 23:5 *“The days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely ...”* Again the

same prophet declares (ch. 33:14-15) *“The days come, saith the Lord, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David: and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land”*. From these allusions it is obvious that the declaration here in Zech. 3:8 relates to the establishment of the Millennial administration upon earth at the conclusion of this present Age, in which both the Church and regathered Israel, the heavenly and earthly instruments of world conversion in God’s hand, will occupy significant positions.

“For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree” (ch. 3:9-10).

A stone, having seven “eyes”, engraved by the hand of God, becoming the means of removal of evil, resulting in men calling or inviting their fellows to the shelter or benefits of the vine and fig tree. This is the general picture presented to Joshua and the first task is to determine what is meant by the “stone”.

Some of the older commentators took this to be a precious stone, a jewel, to adorn Joshua’s regalia, having seven facets (“eyes”) and engraved in similar fashion to the onyx stones of the Levitical priests, which bore the names of the twelve tribes. The Hebrew word here rendered “stone” (*eben*) may equally well refer to a precious stone, a pebble or a boulder of granite. The context has to decide. In this case the background is that of the coming Millennial Kingdom and immediately the “stone cut out of the mountain without hands” of Daniel 2:34-45, symbolising this same Millennial Kingdom, comes to mind. The “stone set before Joshua” as he stands ready for his destined work of converting the nations could well symbolise this same Kingdom. The usage of the term “engraving” is perhaps not too happy a one; logical if the stone were indeed a jewel and possible also if God is pictured as engraving His Name upon the stone that represents His Kingdom, in much the same fashion as Jesus promises the overcomer in Rev. 3:12 that He will make him a pillar in the Temple of God and write the name of God upon that pillar. *“Pathach”*, however, means primarily to open a thing, as a door, a book, the gate of a city, or to loose a thing, as bonds or girdles, and only secondarily to engrave. In fact it is rendered “open” some 80 times and “engrave” only twice. It may well be therefore that what God is really promising here is that, having “set”, or established, the stone which symbolises the coming Kingdom, He as it were throws it open for all who will to enter, much as the gates of the holy city of Rev. 21:25, again picturing the same thing, are thrown open to redeemed humanity. This would then make sense of the succeeding phrase “I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day”, for the entrance to the “stone” kingdom being thus thrown open the logical consequence is the conversion and reconciliation of mankind and the consequent removal of their iniquity in the Millennial Day—the “one day” which St. Peter in 2 Pet. 3:8 tells us *“is with the Lord as a thousand years”*.

The seven eyes are significant in this connection. In chapter 4:10 they are referred to again as the *“eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth”*. This idea of the all-seeing supervision of His creation by the Most High is very prominent in Scripture. *“The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good”* says the writer of Proverbs (15:3). Elihu, that farsighted young man in the days of Job, said *“his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings”* (Job 34:21). A little known seer, Hanani of Judah, warned King Asa *“the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to spew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him”* (2 Chron. 16:9). And in more poetic frame the Revelator sees and describes the *“seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth”* (Rev. 5:6; 1:4). These various expressions indicate God’s all-comprehensive

awareness of all that goes on in His creation; as the writer to the Hebrews says, *“all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do”* (Heb. 4:13). This does not imply that there are seven literal dissociated eyes—or even seven Spirits—travelling over the earth’s surface to behold what is going on. The seven is the symbol of completeness, and the seven eyes picture the many-sided and universal Divine perception from which nothing is hid. In point of fact *“ayin”* can equally well mean *“aspect”* or *“face of”* and is used in these senses frequently in the Old Testament. It is probably more logical to think that what Zechariah saw in the vision was not a boulder or rock adorned with representations of seven human optic organs, but rather a seven sided stone block, a stone having *“seven facets”* as some translators put it, so that one-seventh of the stone faced in each of seven directions. Thus would be well symbolised the Divine supervision of the Kingdom, seeing and ruling in every direction. *“The glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea”*.

So the stone comes to rest on the ground before Joshua; the Kingdom is established on earth, Joshua and his fellows are ready, and the Millennial work commences. *“In that day”* as Rotherham *“ye shall invite one another to come under the vine and under the fig tree”* or the LXX *“ye shall call together every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree”* or, again, the R.S.V. *“In that day, says the Lord of Hosts, everyone of you will invite his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree”*. The essence of this final scene in the vision is the fact of invitation. Vine and fig tree are symbols of the Millennial Age; in that day men will invite their fellows to share in the blessings of that Age. The basic principle is laid down in Rev. 22:17 *“And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely”*. This is the time when all men every where will have the opportunity to hear and accept the grace of God in Christ and progress, if they will, to a condition of full reconciliation with God and entry into the eternal state of the blessed. It will be by invitation and not of constraint; by persuasion and not of command. But the prospect is that of a world in which sin and evil are done away; the progress and development of the sons of men unhindered and untrammelled by violence, fear, selfishness, disease or death. The extent to which the vine and the fig tree are literally intended has yet to be seen, but that they indicate a condition in which the vast potentialities for advance in knowledge, in development and in activity inherent in man can and will be exploited to a degree at present undreamed of is evident. Man will, at last, have attained his place in creation.



4. The Lampstand and the Olive Trees



The Lampstand and the Olive trees! Picturesque symbolism this, relating somewhat of Israel's ancient ceremonial to its reality in the Kingdom of God. It is evident that this fourth chapter of Zechariah is looking forward into the future much more than it looks back into the past, for it displays as its main feature the active operation of the Holy Spirit in a world where the supremacy of God is unchallenged, and this happy state is not yet.

Zechariah saw a golden lampstand, reminiscent of that which stood in the "Holy" of the Tabernacle and later in Solomon's Temple, similar and yet in some respects different. It had the seven lamps, apparently carried on seven arms diverging from a central column, as did the lampstand made by Bezaleel at Sinai, but there the similarity ended. Each lamp on Bezaleel's construction had its own reservoir for oil which had to be filled daily by the attendant priests. The lampstand seen by Zechariah possessed a central "bowl", a common oil container, from which seven pipes radiated to the lamps so that they drew a continuous supply of oil from the bowl and needed no replenishing. On each side of the lampstand stood an olive tree, with branches overshadowing, and from each tree a "funnel" or connecting pipe leading to the bowl. From the olives on the trees a continuous supply of olive oil flowed through the two funnels into the bowl and from thence to the seven lamps so that their light was continuous; they never went out.

In answer to the prophet's question the revealing angel told him that the vision was a symbolic representation of the manner in which the Holy Spirit of God would execute the Divine purpose. *"This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel"* he said (ch. 4:6-10) *"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, thou, O great mountain, before Zerubbabel shalt become a plain, and he shall bring forth the headstone"*. At first sight there may seem to be no rational connection between a lampstand with two olive trees and a mountain becoming a plain with an emerging headstone. There is, however, one readily discernible link—the work of God denoted by the angel's words is executed by the power of the Holy Spirit; the principal element in the symbol is the olive oil, flowing from the two trees into the lamps and giving light. The Holy Spirit is frequently symbolised by olive oil, as witness its use in the anointing of the Levitical priesthood in symbol of dedication to Divine service, and Peter's application of the same to Jesus; *"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power"* (Acts 10:38). This allusion is almost certainly derived from Psa. 45:7 in which the victorious Messiah in the days of His glory is addressed; *"God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows"*. That the followers of Christ, dedicated to His service, participate in this anointing is clear from 1 Jno. 2:27 and the phrasing of this verse makes crystal clear that it is the possession of the Holy Spirit that constitutes the anointing, and thus the fact that this is the meaning of the oil in Zechariah's vision is confirmed.

Now the two olive trees are called by the angel *"the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth"* (ch. 4:14). "Sons of the oil" is the literal Hebrew expression. These trees are the twin sources of the oil which flows to the lamps and gives universal enlightenment. There is only one time in history when two channels of the Holy Spirit are discharging their duty simultaneously and side by side, and there is sevenfold illumination in consequence, and that is in the Millennial Age, when the Lord's twin instruments, the Christian Church in Heaven and the restored and converted Holy Nation on earth, are engaged in their work of sending the light and life of the Divine call worldwide. *"The nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising"* said Isaiah of the earthly Holy Nation (Isa. 60:3). *"The light of*

the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days” he says again in Isa. 30:26 and this might well be the basis for our Lord’s words describing the position of His followers of this present Age, the Church, when He said of that coming day *“then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”* (Matt. 13:43).

The lampstand, then, represents the Millennial Kingdom on earth, shedding its light—which implies life—upon all mankind, dispelling the darkness of sin and leading men into the light of eternity. The oil, flowing from the trees into the lamps and therein converted to light, indicates the pouring out of the Spirit upon all flesh through the medium of the earthly and heavenly aspects of the “Servant”, the two anointed companies who have been found fitted for the task of world conversion. In Nature, of course, the tree does not create the oil; it is able to produce oil only because it receives energy and power from the sunlight with which so to do. So in the reality. The Lord’s servants are, no originators of the Holy Spirit of power; they are mediums for its transmission and the power comes to them from the centre and source of all life and power—the Eternal.

Fully to appreciate the relation between this lampstand vision and the “headstone” application it is necessary to examine the structure of the chapter. It is very possible that some dislocation of the text has occurred at a very early date; verses 11-14 have to do with verses 1-5 and the message respecting the headstone, which appears in the centre of the chapter, would seemingly be more appropriate at the end. If in fact there has been such dislocation it must have occurred quite soon after the writing of the book, for the Septuagint, which was translated from the Hebrew Scriptures about 250 B.C., has the same arrangement as our A.V. Zechariah probably did not complete his writings until late in his life which would hardly be more than two centuries before the Septuagint. In between these two dates came the time at which the Old Testament canon was closed, reputedly by Ezra, and it might well have been then that the slight confusion in the text occurred. There is no difference to the interpretation of the chapter in either case, but the rearrangement does cause the passage to run more smoothly and understandably, and helps to clear up the very obscure A.V. rendering of verse 10. An endeavour is made here to offer what is thought to be probably the correct reconstruction.

After beholding the lampstand with its seven lamps (vss. 1-4) and asking the revealing angel *“What are these, my lord?”* the narrative proceeds (vs. 5) *“Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No my lord. (6a) Then he answered and spake unto me saying (10b) These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth (11) Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these two olive trees ... (12) And I answered again and said unto him, What be these two olive branches ... (13-14) And he answered me and said ... These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth. (6b) This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit saith the Lord of Hosts (7) thou, O great mountain, before Zerubbabel shall become a plain, and he shall bring forth the headstone shouting, Grace, grace unto it”*. Then the chapter concludes with a personal word from the Lord to Zechariah (8) *“Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me saying, (9) The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of Hosts hath sent me unto you. (10a) For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel”*. This is then the end of the chapter.

Thus arranged, the chapter first describes the vision of the lampstand and olive trees, and the angel’s explanation (vss. 1-6a, 10b-14) picturing the Lord’s two anointed ones, Israel and the Church, commencing their work in the Millennial Age as channels of the Holy Spirit to the world of men; next it presents the angel’s declaration

respecting the demolished mountain and the setting of the headstone (vss. 6b-7) picturing the passing away of the kingdoms of this world at the instance of the victorious Christ in kingly power in the same Age; finally it records the word of the Lord to Zechariah himself (vss. 8-10a) assuring him that the completion of the Temple in his own day under the administration of Zerubbabel was to be a sign to his fellows of the Divine authority behind his prophecy. On this assumption the chapter is consistent and logical.

On this basis, after saying in verse 14 that the two olive trees are the two anointed ones which stand by the Lord of the whole earth, the angel concludes his explanation of the lampstand by saying (in vs. 10b) and referring obviously to the seven lamps, *“those seven are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through all the earth”*. Chapter 3 speaks of the stone, laid before Joshua the High Priest, which had seven facets or eyes, a seven-sided stone, so to speak, picturing the universal surveillance of the “stone” Kingdom, the Kingdom of God, in the earth during the Millennial Age. Now here in chapter 4 the same idea is expressed but this time the universal power and surveillance of the Holy Spirit “in that day” is pictured by the sevenfold light from the lampstand, also going forth into all the earth, the “seven eyes of the Lord”.

With this picture in mind it is easier to comprehend the second section, the angel’s message regarding the mountain and the headstone. The great mountain which is to become a plain is of course the mountain of the kingdoms of this world. *“It shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain or the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and all nations shall flow unto it”* (Isa. 2:2). *“Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain”* (Isa. 40:5). The picture here is that the holy city, the New Jerusalem, comes down to earth out of Heaven (Rev. 21) and as a city crowning the summit of a great mountain (*“the length and the breadth and the height of it were equal”* Rev. 21:6) rules supreme over all the earth. Zerubbabel here is an alias for the Messianic King, the Lord Jesus Christ. Zerubbabel himself neither moved a mountain or saw any earthly kingdom fall prostrate before him. He died as he lived, a governor of Judea subordinate always to the Persian King. But Zerubbabel as the representative of royal power in Judea at that time fitly pictures the King who shall reign in the day which sees the reality of the vision. And this is where the “headstone” comes into the picture.

The “headstone” or “corner stone” was the principal foundation stone of a building and served in ceremonial fashion much as do the “foundation stones” of modern buildings, laid in a formal ceremony by some notability and as often as not blessed by some ecclesiastical dignitary. (At least this was the rule a generation or so ago; the concrete and glass monstrosities of the present are usually put up with too much haste to allow for such leisurely preliminaries). The basic idea was the same; the foundation stone in theory determined the position and size and purpose of the building and was in a sense representative of the building. This principle is used in the Scriptures to delineate the Lord Christ as the foundation and sustainer of the edifice which God is building in this Age; first the Christian Church, of whom He is said in Eph. 2:20 and 1 Pet. 2:6 to be the “chief corner stone”, and later the Holy City of the next Age of which He is both chief corner stone and its everlasting light. *“The stone which the builders refused is become the head of the corner”* sang the Psalmist in Psa. 118:22. *“Behold”* said the Lord through the prophet Isaiah *“I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not be confounded”* (Isa. 28:16). Here in Zechariah this same corner stone is brought forth amid general rejoicings to initiate the building of that new Divinely ordained structure which is to succeed the levelling of the “great mountain” of this world. In this context, the picture is that of the building of the New Jerusalem, the Holy City, upon the ruins

of the destroyed “*kosmos*” of this Age, and the exaltation of Christ as supreme. When earth’s new king once asserts His power and authority in the earth He will not desist until His work is finished by the entire human race being brought to a full knowledge and understanding of the Christian Gospel, and every individual has made his deliberate and final choice for good—or evil. “*He shall not fail nor be discouraged*” says Isaiah of our Lord at this same time “*till he have set judgment in the earth, and the coastlands*”—the extremities of the earth—“*shall wait for his law*”. (Isa. 42:4).

This ends the second section of the chapter. The demolished mountain and the headstone which replaces it, an exhibition of Divine power by the Holy Spirit in contrast to human might and power, of vss. 6-7, have nothing to do with the rebuilt Temple in a “*day of small things*” of vss. 8-10. In any case the one is a revelation to Zechariah by the angel and the other a direct word to him from the Lord. The two sections relate to distinct and dissimilar matters.

It is possible that vss. 8-10 are riot intended to have other than a local and immediate prophetic application. The word of the Lord was to Zechariah directly; it told him that Zerubbabel, who had already started building the Temple, would also finish it, and by this sign, said Zechariah to his hearers or readers, they would know that he was a true prophet, that the Lord of Hosts had in truth sent to them. Those who had despised the “*day of small things*”, the meagre results, so far, of the Jewish restoration in Jerusalem and Judea, would yet rejoice when they saw the plummet— instrument used in building construction—in the hand of Zerubbabel. The R.S.V. puts it very succinctly “*For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel*”.

The predication was certainly literally fulfilled. Zechariah had this word from the Lord in the second year of Darius of Persia (Zech. 1:1) which was 519 B.C. The Temple was started under the administration of Zerubbabel in 536 B.C., stopped by order of Cambyses of Persia in 529, resumed by permission of Darius in 520, and finally completed by Zerubbabel in 516, three years after Zechariah uttered these words. Throughout that frustrating period of twenty years, with the very existence of the new Jewish colony menaced by powerful enemies, it must often have seemed that the people lived in a “*day of small things*”; their present situation bore very unfavourable comparison with the glories of the old days before the captivity, when Solomon’s Temple was still standing and the city Jerusalem the wonder of nations. So those who crowded to hear Zechariah’s colourful predictions on the occasion of their first utterance, seeing, figuratively speaking, “*the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel*”, realised three years later that the words of the prophet had come true and stamped those words with the seal of Divine authority.

It is possible to draw a parallel with the future. Whether that parallel is intended in this passage may be questioned, but it is true that in the day of Christ’s power soon to come, when in the glory of His Kingdom the Holy City shines resplendent and complete, those amongst men who in this day and this life have despised and ignored the apparent weakness and futility of the Divine programme, or have not believed in any God-given destiny for mankind, will “rejoice” at the then evident power and activity of earth’s new rulership. At any rate an earlier prophet, Isaiah, was in no doubt about that fact when he declaimed (Isa. 25:9) “*It shall be said in that day, Lo this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; we will rejoice and be glad in his salvation*”. And if, in the wonder and rapture of that moment, they conveniently forget that in the past they were largely unbelievers and agnostics and were only unknowingly “waiting for him”, there will be no recriminations on that score from our God. Like the father in the story of the Prodigal Son, all He wants is to have his erring sons repent, and reform, and come home. That is why the Holy City comes down to earth.

5. The Flying Roll



Of all the strange visions of Zechariah perhaps that of the flying roll in chapter 5 is the most bizarre. The prophet looked toward the sky and perceived a giant roll, of the kind used in his day for the writing of books, a roll of either parchment or dressed goatskin—probably the latter—but of a size no ordinary roll had ever attained. Thirty feet long and fifteen feet across, it swooped down almost like a modern dive-bomber, and as it swooped it entered into the houses of the wicked, destroying them with the force of its impact, and by reason of the writings it contained—this much is implied though not stated—compelling the occupants to stand and be judged for their misdeeds and separated into the penitent and the impenitent ... the scene changed and now the prophet beheld a large earthenware measure, a store jar, inside which crouched a woman prevented from emerging by reason of a heavy cover of lead. Even as he looked, two flying figures, women with the wings of storks, swooped down from the sky, laid hold of the jar, and flew away carrying it, so the watching prophet was told, into the land of Shinar, where it was to be permanently established. Strange pictures, flickering across his consciousness and without any attempt by the revealing angel at explanation. What did it all mean?

The key to the chapter is the flying roll itself. The angel said of it, in chapter 5:3 *“this is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth”*. The word rendered “curse” means, not only an execration or an imprecation, which is the usage of “curse” in English, but also an oath, and in this sense is associated with the Divine promises and covenants. Thus Deut. 29:12 *“that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath, which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day”*. The “oath” between Abraham and Eleazar in connection with the latter’s commission to find a bride for Isaac (Gen. 29:41) is another instance. Quite often the word appears in connection with the Law Covenant made between God and Israel with Moses as the intermediary. The fact that this “flying roll” is shewn as meting out judgment upon the thieves and perjurers in verse 3, and destroying their houses in verse 4, is sufficient to indicate that the “curse” in this instance refers to the Divine oath, or promise, or covenant, and so the roll becomes the symbol of Divine righteousness or Divine Law by which all things are to be judged. This conclusion is confirmed by the dimensions given—twenty cubits long by ten cubits wide. This was the size of the second compartment of the Mosaic Tabernacle, the Holy, where stood the golden lampstand and the altar of incense. It was also the size of the “Porch” of Solomon’s Temple—and in all probability of the rebuilt Temple of Zechariah’s day—the place from which the High Priest emerged to bless the people. Thus the flying roll is associated with Divine Law, Divine judgment and Divine blessing. The fact that it is effective, destroying evil, judging sin and creating a separation between the righteous and the wicked stamps it at once as having its application in the Millennial Age, the only Age when such things are completely true. So the setting of the chapter becomes evident; this is the Divine Law of the Millennial Age, going out to do the work of that Age to the elimination of evil and the establishment of everlasting righteousness.

Now the A.V. says of this flying roll *“every one that stealth shall be cut off on this side according to it, and every one that swear to shall be cut off on that side according to it ... it shall enter into the house of the thief, and ... of him that swear to falsely ... and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof”* (ch. 5:3-4). The determinant words here are “cut off” and “consume”; it is clear that the A.V. does not have the last word, for various translators offer one or other of two quite contradictory meanings in the case of “cut off”. Thus Leaser has “destroyed”, the LXX “punished”, and Margolis “swept away”, but Rotherham gives “let off”, Young “declared innocent”, R.V. “purged out” and Ferrar Fenton “reformed”. The reason for these variations is that *niqqah*,

which means primarily to be pure, innocent, cleansed, free from blame, pardoned, etc., also has the meaning of being “cleaned out” as we would say, vacant, empty, hence can easily be rendered laid waste or dispersed. The word is rendered “to clear” in Exod. 34:7 where God “will by no means *clear* the guilty”; in Num. 5:19 “be thou *free* from this bitter water”; Exod. 21:19 “he that smote him shall be *quit*”; Job 19:28 “I know that thou wilt not hold me *innocent*”; Jud. 15:3 “now shall I be more *blameless* than the Philistines” and Psa. 19:13 “then shall I be *innocent* from the great transgression”. The cutting off of the sinner, by the flying roll, therefore, means, not his destruction, but the cutting off from his sin, his being made clean, pronounced innocent. Since this can only be achieved by his repentance and conversion, we have here a further insight into the basic principle of the coming Age. As the Wise Man said (Prov. 16:6) “*By mercy and truth iniquity is purged; and in the reverence of the Lord men depart from evil*”.

But it is different with the houses of the wicked. The same Divine standard which cleanses the sinner from his sin makes short work of the erection he has built. It enters into the houses and consumes them with the timber and stones thereof. That is a significant expression. In the Levitical laws for dealing with leprosy in a house it was provided that the priest should “*break down the house, the stones of it, and the timber thereof, and all the mortar of the houses; and he shall carry them forth out of the city into an unclean place*” (Lev. 14:45). Leprosy is a well known symbol of sin in Biblical allegory; there can be little doubt that the reference in Zechariah to the houses being consumed “with the timber and stones thereof” is intended to picture the obliteration of sin by that which is pictured by the flying roll.

These first four verses of Zech. 5, therefore, may well be taken to describe in allegorical language the operation of Divine Law in the Millennial Age, both in its aspect of judgment upon sin and that of conversion of the sinner. The two specific crimes mentioned, that of swearing falsely by God’s name, and that of stealing, relate to the third and eighth commandments of the Mosaic covenant. The roll was written on both sides—“*stealth ... this side*” and “*swareth ... that side*” (vs. 3); on the assumption that in a symbolic sense the roll contained all ten commandments, five on each side, those mentioned would be the middle ones of their respective sides; thus the “stealing” and “swearing” might well be representative of the entire Law. By the impact of this Law the houses—works of men—are utterly destroyed, but by means of repentance and conversion the men themselves may be saved and pronounced clean and free from guilt. This is the work of the flying roll and the result is that repentant sinners are separated from their sin and made acceptable in the sight of God.

What happens to the dominion of evil? Does it remain, possibly to rise again and pollute the cleansed earth, or is it removed for ever? The answer to that question is shewn in the second stage of the vision, the woman in the “ephah”.

The prophet beheld a strange sight. He saw what is described as an “ephah” with a woman sitting inside it. Strictly speaking, the ephah was a Hebrew measure of capacity used for liquids and loose material such as grain, and was equal approximately to nine gallons. But no woman, however diminutive, could possibly have squeezed into an ephah measure. It is clear from Old Testament usage, however, that the word “ephah” was also used as a term for measures of indeterminate value. Thus Deut. 25:14-15 speaks of “*divers measures*” and “*just measures*”; Prov. 20:10 “*divers weights and divers measures are alike abomination to the Lord*”; Micah 6:10 “*the scant measure that is abominable*” are some of the instances where “ephah” is translated “measure”. It is correct therefore to say that Zechariah saw a “measure”, a stone jar, large enough to contain a woman. Such a measure would be the homer, equal to ten ephahs, and this implies a jar say two feet across and five feet high. This is adequate to the vision in which a woman is seen crouching inside.

Now the angel defined the woman—“*this*” he said “*is wickedness*” and he cast her

down inside the measure and imprisoned her therein by sealing the open top of the jar with what is described as a “*talent of lead*” (vs. 7). The talent was a measure of weight roughly equal to an English hundredweight. A piece of lead of that weight made to fit the top of a two foot jar would be some six inches thick—a very effective seal and not much chance of the woman ever getting out. It is to be noted here that the word rendered “talent” is *kikkar* which properly means a circle or sphere, hence anything circular such as a circular tract of country, a loaf of bread (made as a circular flat cake in those days) or a coin or piece of money. It is only therefore necessary to suppose that this *kikkar* or “talent” of lead was merely what the A.V. margin calls it, a “*weighty piece*” of circular form made to fit the top of the earthenware jar in which the woman was imprisoned.

This woman represents the evil and wickedness which had, as it were, been “driven underground” by the work of the flying roll. The earth and its inhabitants are cleansed from the taint, and all sin and evil, symbolised by the woman, has been concentrated in this earthenware jar and by reason of the enclosing cover unable ever again to escape to pollute the earth. Sin has been sealed up for ever. Now the prophet lifts up his eyes again and sees a new apparition in the sky (ch. 5 vs. 9-11), two flying figures, women having long wings like those of the stork, “*and the wind was in their wings*”. Swooping down upon the sealed up measure with its imprisoned occupant, they laid hold of it and soared up again into the sky, flying with strong strokes eastward until they were lost to sight in the distance. “*Whither do they bear the measure?*” asked Zechariah of the revealing angel. “*To build it a house in the land of Shinar*” was the reply “*and when that is ready they will set the measure there in its own place*”. This is an evident picture of evil, finally and for ever overthrown, taken away out of the land and banished to “its own place” whence it can never return to trouble mankind. The stork-winged women are the Divine agents employed to execute this mission. The stork, although an unclean bird in the Levitical law owing to its habit of devouring serpents, frogs, lizards and the like, was given its Hebrew name *chasidah*, “the merciful one” from *chasid* meaning to be merciful or pious, on account of the reputed love and solicitude existing between parent bird and its young, which was famous among the Israelites. It thus became a symbol of love and devotion and of a benevolent protecting power watching over family life, for which reason storks were allowed to nest and breed in and about the homes of men without interference. In point of fact, our English word “stork” is from the Greek *storgos*, meaning natural or family affection; this word appears in the New Testament to render *storgos* several times, such as Rom. 1:31 and 2 Tim. 3:3 “without *natural affection*” and Rom. 12:10 “be *kindly affectioned* one to another”. Thus these stork-like creatures might well picture the powers of mercy and piety which in the next Age will have the effect of removing sin and evil far away. “*The wind was in their wings*” says the prophet; in all the prophetic Scriptures there is a strong association of thought between the blowing of terrestrial wind and the Holy Spirit in active operation in the earth—the same word *ruach* is used for both “wind” and “spirit” and the translators could with equal propriety have rendered “the Spirit was in their wings”. Thus it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that the burden of the world’s evil is lifted up and away from the places of men and taken to a far land from which it can never return.

In the prophecy that land is said to be “the land of Shinar” (ch. 5:11). Shinar as a territorial name had long since passed out of use in Zechariah’s day. Shinar was the ancient Sumir (Sumeria in English), one of whose cities was Ur of the Chaldees in Abraham’s time, and another, Babylon. In Biblical history Sumir, or Shinar, figured in the story of the Tower of Babel and the founding of Babylon. Just as Jerusalem and Judea represented the land of God and His righteousness from the ideal standpoint, so Babylon and Shinar represented all that was anti-God and idolatrous, depraved and evil. The fiercest diatribes of the Hebrew prophets were directed against the evil city

of Babylon and great was the acclamation when that city fell at length, never again to rise. If a place on this earth had to be chosen to represent the home and repository of evil then that place would surely be Babylon. Fittingly, then, the measure with its imprisoned woman was taken, in defiance of the laws of space and time, to the ancient, no longer existing, land of Shinar, to be permanently established there and never return.

The most fitting commentary on that final scene in the vision is a New Testament one. *“And death and hades were cast into the lake of fire. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire”* (Rev. 20:14-15). The lake of fire is, of course, metaphorical, the destruction, passing out of existence, which was suggested by the consuming fires of Jerusalem’s garbage dump, the Valley of Hinnom (Heb. *Gay-Hinnom*, Gk. *Ge-henna*) outside the city. Just so will all evil and all incorrigible, irrecoverable evildoers pass away and be no more when the combined mercy and judgment of the flying roll has completed its work. The way into the New Jerusalem, the city of light and life and love, is open to all who will enter, and the opportunity to be cleansed of all defiling influences in order that entry may be gained will be freely vouchsafed. *“The Spirit and the Bride say, Come ... and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely”* (Rev. 22:17). That is the mercy aspect of the flying roll. But it remains true that *“there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth ... but only they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life”* (Rev. 21:27), and *“the unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers”* and so on *“shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire, which is the second death”* (Rev. 21:8). That is the judgment aspect.

So evil and all wickedness is buried at last in the city of the dead, established in the land of Shinar, “in its own place”. It is a remarkable fact that Isaiah’s magnificent prediction of the doom of Babylon has remained true through the ages when other ancient cities have been rebuilt and restored to human habitation. *“Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldee’s excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there ... but wild beasts of the desert shall lie there: and their houses shall be full of howling creatures, and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there ...”* (Isa. 13:19-21). To this day the site of that ancient city is a waste of broken brickwork and drifting sand, shunned by men and infested with wild animals. The place where once stood the proud Tower whose top was to reach unto heaven is now a reed-grown swamp, every vestige of that one time magnificent edifice gone save a few rows of mouldering bricks. There, in that desolation, Zechariah saw the earthenware jar, with its captive symbol of evil, carried to share the oblivion which has fallen upon that place. Here is the realisation of the promise made to the Kingly Priest in the vision of chapter 3 *“I will remove the iniquity of the land in one day”*. And it is removed to a place from which it can never return. When Zechariah was told that ephah was to be established or set in its own place he must have thought of the famous Temple of Marduk in Babylon, standing in all its glory alongside the great Tower which Genesis calls the Tower of Babel. There, in that centre of world idolatry, devoted to the service of all the false gods of mythology, he must have pictured the final resting place of the ephah. There it would be set *“upon its own base”* in the very centre of the land of Shinar and in its principal shrine. But today all that is left of that proud Temple lies buried beneath sixty feet of alluvial soil and sand, deposited by the annual floods of the River Euphrates through the centuries. That is where Zechariah’s vivid allegory leaves all that is evil and alien to God—buried far underground whence it can never emerge to trouble man again.

6. Chariots of Judgment



The last of the visions is simple in its elements. Two mountains, from between which come four chariots, passing before the watching prophet and his angelic guide to proceed in differing directions until they are lost to sight. Apparently insignificant, but in reality full of meaning.

“There came four chariots out from between two mountains, and the mountains were mountains of brass” (copper) ch. 6:1. What is signified by the two mountains? The Hebrew text has the definite article *“the two mountains”* as though something specific is intended, not just mountains in the general sense. What could such an expression have conveyed to the Israelites who first heard Zechariah’s words? Mountains consisting of solid copper are unnatural to say the least, but every Israelite was well acquainted with the Divine promise to their forefathers concerning the land they were to inherit *“a land ...*

out of whose hills thou mayst dig copper” (Deut. 8:9). Primitive Israel existed in what we call the Bronze Age, in which copper held the place today occupied by steel, and the land of the mountains of copper, to every true Israelite, was the land of Israel. The two mountains of the vision, then, might very well picture the dual kingdoms of Israel and Judah, as they existed side by side in the years before the great captivities.

Against the background of these two kingdoms are displayed the four chariots. The foremost one was drawn by red horses, the second by black, the third by white, and the fourth by what the A.V. calls *“grisled and bay”* horses (ch. 6:3), actually *“dappled strong”* horses. *“Amutstism”*, rendered *“bay”*, is a word meaning strong, active or nimble, as applied to horses. (The A.V. *“bay”*, meaning a deep red, arises from the desire of the A.V. translators to find a place in verse 7 for the red horses appearing in verse 2 who otherwise have no assigned destination, and is based upon the assumption that *amutstism* should be read *adamim*, for which there is no warrant). In reply to the prophet’s query the revealing angel told him that these chariots were the *“four spirits of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of the whole earth”* (ch. 5:5), that the one drawn by black horses goes into *“the north country”* and is followed there by the white, and that the dappled ones go into the south country. Here the A.V. confuses the issue by postulating an extra chariot drawn by the *“bay”* going *“to and fro through the earth”* and this has to be corrected. The sense of vss. 6-7 is that the dappled ones go forth first toward the south country, and that being active or nimble (the *“most strong”* as the Douay version has it) proceed to penetrate other parts of the earth. They *“sought to go”*, says the narrator *“that they might walk to and fro through the earth”* (vs. 7). This expression *“to and fro”* is derived from the verb *halak*, *“to go”* continuously as with settled intent, in specific directions not otherwise defined but not necessarily an alternation on a single path as is meant by the present usage of *“to and fro”*. Our modern term *“hither and thither”* more accurately represents the term to us today.

Now what is the explanation? It will not escape notice that the colours of the first three horses are the same as those of the riders in the first vision (ch. 1:8). (The notes in chapter 1 have already shewn that *“speckled”* in that chapter should properly read *“black”*). The fourth colour, *grisled* or *“dappled”*, is new. It must also be noted that although four chariots come before the prophet’s attention only three are assigned destinations. Of the first, the red, nothing more is said.

As a symbol the chariot pictures judgment, usually Divine judgment. *“For behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury ...”* (Isa. 66:15). *“The chariots of God are twenty thousand ... the Lord is*

among them, as in Sinai ... to God the Lord belong the issues from death, but God will wound the head of his enemies ... such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses" (Psa. 68:17-21). These chariots, said the angel, are synonymous with the "four spirits—or winds—of the heavens", and the four winds of heaven are also used as a symbol of Divine judgment. The eloquent passage in Psalm 18 illustrates that. *"The earth shook and trembled ... he did fly upon the wings of the wind ... the Lord thundered in the heavens ... the foundations of the world were discovered, O Lord ... at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils"* (Psa. 18:7-15). *"With his mighty wind shall he (the Lord) shake his hand over the river and shall smite it"* (Isa. 11:15). Speaking of His judgment on Israel, God says *"But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not"* (Zech. 6:14). Hence these four chariots are vehicles of Divine judgment, symbols of the wrath of God going out to whoever and whatever is represented by the "north country" and the "south country".

Consistently in the Old Testament Babylon is depicted as the "north country", the land of the north; although geographically it lies east of Israel the fact that its invading armies had to descend on the Israelites from the north in order to avoid the intervening desert gave rise to the name. The "south country" is Egypt and Arabia. With these facts in mind the interpretation of the vision begins to take shape. It is a picture of Divine retribution overtaking the powers which through history had oppressed and enslaved Israel, or were yet to do so. The standpoint from which the chariots are viewed is that of Zechariah's own day and this explains the omission of the red horses' onward progress. As in chapter 1, the red horses represented Assyria, the power to which Israel was enslaved in the first of the great captivities, and in Zechariah's day judgment on Assyria had already been executed. Assyria, with its capital city Ninevah, disappeared from history a century before Zechariah lived. That chariot had already passed on its way. *"I will break the Assyrian in my land"* the Lord had said through the prophet Isaiah *"and upon my mountains tread him underfoot ... the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it?"* (Isa. 14:25-26). The red chariot of judgment upon Assyria appeared to Zechariah's prophetic consciousness but he did not see it proceed on its mission because that was already past history. Assyria had fallen and was no more.

Not so the case with the chariot of black horses. That, again as in chapter 1, pictured Babylon and the judgment to come upon that land. Said the angel (vs. 6) *"the black horses which are therein go forth into the north country; and the white go forth after them"*. The white logically picture Persia, as in chapter 1. Divine retribution began to come upon Babylon in Zechariah's own lifetime; he was there at the time and he witnessed the fall of the city and the death of Belshazzar its last king. Although Persian rule commenced there and then the Babylonian nation continued and the city did not disappear at once; something like two centuries elapsed before Babylon completely lost its commercial importance and the city reverted to its dust. Judgment was being executed all that time. And more or less contemporaneous with the latter part of that period the succeeding empire, Persia, began to receive its due at the Lord's hand by the agency of Greece, so that by the time of Alexander of Greece that white-horsed chariot also had completed its mission. Both Babylon and Persia in turn had suffered the fate of Assyria their predecessor even as the Hebrew prophets had foretold. It is of these chariots that the proclamation of vs. 8 is made: *"these that go toward the north country have quieted my Spirit in the north country"*. That word quieted means to permit rest or to pacify. The downfall and destruction of the successive empires, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, as it were satisfied the Divine justice; after the chariots of judgment had completed their work the Divine Spirit was "pacified" so far as those lands were concerned. Something like this must have been in the mind of Jeremiah when he contemplated the same kind of retribution coming upon other of the enemies of God. *"O thou sword of the Lord"* he declaimed *"how long will it*

be ere thou be quiet? Put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still. How can it be quiet, seeing the Lord hath given it a charge ...” (Jer. 47:6). Here in the case of the “north country”, the sword of the Lord, at last, was quiet.

There is still the fourth chariot to consider. This went forth “*to the south country*”. In Zechariah’s day this was yet to come. After the fall of Persia the dispersion and exile of Israel lay in the south and west rather than in the north and east. Greece succeeded Persia as Israel’s overlord but there was no captivity in Greece. From this time the dispersion of Israel was, first, south into Egypt and Arabia, and later, about and after the time of the First Advent, when Rome succeeded Greece, into North Africa and Europe, the west. So the dappled strong horses may well represent the variable but mainly harsh rule of Greece which sent so many of the sons of Israel southward, followed by the fall of Greece and of Egypt before the armed might of Rome. Then came the time when the “strong” of the horses began to go “hither and thither” through the earth. Just as the power of Rome has extended throughout the earth—the Mediterranean world which is what the Old Testament means by the term—and just as the dispersion of Israel has extended similarly, so does the chariot of judgment follow, bringing Divine displeasure upon every vestige of evil rule and evil power until all is destroyed before the coming of earth’s new King. Perhaps this fourth chariot is still going “hither and thither” through the earth and the disruption and disintegration so prevalent today is the final manifestation of its presence. The whole earth has entered into judgment, but afterwards comes the reign of the Prince of Peace.

Thus seen, this last of Zechariah’s visions pictures the progressive judgments of God upon evil powers in the earth preparatory to the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom. From the re-establishment of Israel in the sixth century B.C., pictured in the first vision, the prophet had seen in symbol the development of the Christian Church, the preparation of the earthly Holy Nation, the dawn of the Messianic Age with its light and life, its standards of right and wrong, the elimination of evil, and the completion of retribution upon the evil forces of this world. Now the visions come to an end. As commentary upon the whole he was now to engage in a kind of symbolic charade in which he with his fellows would present in dramatic form a picture of the Millennial world which is yet to be, and this is the meaning of the remaining passage in chapter 6.

Verses 9-15 tell how the word of the Lord came to Zechariah telling him, in effect, that three men were coming from Babylon, apparently bearing gifts of gold and silver to the Jewish community. He was to take a portion of this tribute, and of it construct a crown with which, in a symbolic ceremony, he would crown Joshua the High Priest and proclaim him as the Lord’s anointed, the “Branch”, a Messianic title. Thus consecrated, Joshua was to reign as a royal priest in the day of the completed Temple, and foreigners from far-off lands would come and share with Israel in the work and service of God. All of which was a wonderful ideal never realised in that day; Joshua never became a ruler on a throne, and foreigners were never accepted within the ranks of Israel. The entire proceeding was a prophecy of a then far future day.

“Take from the exiles Heldai, Tobiah and Jedaiah, who have arrived from Babylon, and go the same day to the house of Josiah, the son of Zephaniah. Take from them silver and gold, and make a crown”. This is the R.S.V. rendering of vss. 10-11, supported by other modern translators. The A.V., based on the Vulgate, has confused the text and rendered it difficult to understand. The plural “crowns” as in the A.V. refers to the several circlets of which the single crown is composed (this incidentally is the meaning of the “many crowns” of Rev. 19:12). It was a common thing for visitors from the Jewish community in Babylon to visit their brethren in Judea bringing valuable gifts for the new Temple. None of the four individuals here mentioned can be identified elsewhere in Old Testament history although two Jedaiahs, both priests, were in Judea at the time of Zechariah. Suffice it that these three had come from Babylon with their gifts,

that Zechariah met them and went with them to the home of Josiah the son of Zephaniah, and there made this crown. Evidently Joshua the High Priest was present, and probably a company of others, so that Zechariah was able in an impressive fashion to crown Joshua and declare the Divine decree.

*“Thus saith the Lord of Hosts:
Behold the man whose name is THE BRANCH,
For he shall grow up out of his place,
And he shall build the Temple of the Lord,
And he shall bear the glory,
And shall sit and rule upon his throne.
And he shall be a priest upon his throne.
And the counsel of peace shall be between them both”* (vss. 12-13)

This can only be understood as a Messianic prophecy and the whole proceeding as a tableau depicting the ruling power of the Messianic Age. To depict Joshua himself as a crowned ruler in Judea at that time would not only be treason in the eyes of Persia, for Judea was a subject State, but treason against God, for the one who was to become both king and priest and dignified with the title of “the Branch” (of David) must come of Judah, the royal tribe. Joshua was of Levi, the priestly tribe. Thus the interpretation must be carried forward into the day when the Royal Priest, the one “*after the order of Melchisedek*” (Heb. 7) assumes His office and power “in glory”, and this points unmistakably to our Lord “at His coming and His Kingdom”. To this the language fits. “The Branch” is His title as the scion of David’s house, the “*root and offspring of David*” (Rev. 22:16). He “*grows up out of his place*” from the days of His humanity at His First Advent to the glory of His Second Advent. He shall sit and rule upon His throne both as king and as priest with complete harmony between the two functions; “*the counsel of peace shall be between them both*”. One could picture this declaration as the Divine announcement to all the world at the time of the investiture of earth’s rightful King in the dawn of the Millennial Age, calling all men to take heed to the new world order headed by this Priest-King for their salvation.

It is noteworthy that whereas Joshua was used in chapter 3 to prefigure the cleansing and development of the Church during this present Age he becomes, in chapter 6, the symbol of the reigning Christ in the next; it will not escape notice in this connection that the Church is destined to be associated with her Lord in the kingly-priestly work of that Age so that the use of Joshua as a symbol of both “Christ the Head and the Church which is His body” is perhaps not altogether accidental.

“*And the crown shall be, to Heldai, and to Tobiah, and to Jedaiah, and for the kindness of the son of Zephaniah, for a memorial in the Temple of the Lord. And they that are far off shall come and build in the Temple of the Lord*” (vss. 14-15). Two minor corrections in the text have to be made. “*Helem*” in vs. 14 is obviously “*Heldai*” as in vs. 10, this is evidently a copyist’s error at some early date, the *daleth yod* (DI) at the end of the word having been mistaken for *mem* (M), a mistake due to similarity between the characters if written somewhat carelessly in the manuscript. “*Hen*” in the same verse is not a proper name and by some translators is linked with a word meaning favour or kindness; thus the R.V. and others render “for the kindness of the son of Zephaniah” which removes all disparity between this verse and verse 10. It is now possible to take a look at the apparent meaning of the statement. The crown, following its use for the ceremonial crowning of Joshua, is to be laid up in the Temple as a memorial to the three pious men who brought the original gift from Babylon, and to record the “kindness” of Josiah the son of Zephaniah who received them into his house and provided a place in which the ceremony could be performed. Since the entire proceeding has its setting in the Millennial Age and the “crown” is laid up in the newly built Temple after the Priest-King has been crowned and therefore presumably entered upon

the duties of His office, the Temple can hardly represent other than the edifice built during that Age, the all-righteous system of world government instituted and presided over by our Lord and His Church—corresponding to some extent to the Holy City of Revelation. Within that system of administration there will be a memorial of some who in a past time brought their gifts away from the lands of unrighteousness, and within the confines of a friendly house contributed their symbol of faith that the time for the reign of earth's great Priest-King had come. If we take it that those three unknown men, Heldai, Tobiah and Jedaiah, pictured all of Israel who in the Last Days come in faith, away from the lands of the old world into the friendly land which is to be the nucleus of the Kingdom on earth, and for a short time join concert with those who, like Josiah the son of Zephaniah, are already in that land living in faith and hope, expressing their belief in the imminent coming of earth's new King, then perhaps the house of Josiah can symbolise the land, and the four figures in the tableau, the people, whose faith and works immediately prior to the establishment of the Kingdom in full sight of all people will be remembered for ever—a “memorial in the Temple of the Lord”.

Logically enough, it is then that *“they that are far off shall come and build in the Temple of the Lord”*. In that glorious Age men will come from all nations, from earth's remotest bound, to play their part in the building of the new social system which is described so succinctly in the New Testament as *“a new heavens and a new earth, in which dwelleth righteousness”*.



7. Deputation from Bethel

Two years after the visions the word of the Lord came again to Zechariah, this time in the form of a message to his own generation. The Temple was approaching completion, only two more years and the edifice that had been commenced eighteen years earlier at the return from Babylon was finished and dedicated, and the worship of the God of Israel resumed in His own sanctuary. It was the imminent prospect of this long-looked-for consummation which inspired the sending of the deputation from Bethel to Jerusalem and so gave occasion for the happenings that are recorded in chapters 7 and 8.

“Now the people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-melech and their men to entreat the favour of the Lord ...” This is the R.S.V. rendering of ch. 7:2 and it is the true one. The A.V. has mistaken the word and rendered Bethel “the house of God”, its meaning in Hebrew, without realising that it was the town of Bethel in Samaria that was intended. The import of vss. 2 and 3 is that the Jews living in and around Bethel, for so long the centre of idolatrous worship in Israel before the Captivities and now in the Restoration the most important town in the north, had sent a deputation to Jerusalem with an important question. The leaders of the deputation were these two. Sharezer and Regem-melech, who despite their Babylonian names were certainly Jews. The question was whether the priests and prophets at Jerusalem considered it necessary still to observe the day of mourning associated with the burning and destruction of Solomon’s Temple by Nebuchadnezzar on the tenth day of the fifth month some seventy years earlier, now that the new Temple was almost complete. One would have expected the answer to be almost self-evident; why weep for the destruction of God’s sanctuary now that it was rebuilt? It almost seems as if the questioners were more concerned with ritual observance than realities; they had always observed this day as one of mourning and lamentation, *“these so many years”* they said, and if the ritual so demanded, were prepared to go on doing it even though the situation which called it into being no longer existed. At any rate, the Lord’s reply transmitted through the prophet shewed that He was under no illusion. *“When ye fasted and mourned ... those seventy years, did ye fast to me?”* He demanded. *“Should ye not have heard the words which the Lord cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity ...”* (ch. 7:4-7). In a few short, sharp words the Lord told them that their mourning was only ceremonial, that they were not really weeping for the desolated Sanctuary and the despoil done to God’s glory. They had not listened to the warnings of the prophets in the days of their prosperity, neither were they sincere in their lamentations over the years of adversity, for there was no real remorse or repentance in their hearts. So the first answer from the Lord was a plain and uncompromising intimation that they were not honest in their profession and therefore He was not interested whether they mourned in the fifth month or not.

This was, however, only a first answer. The Lord does not leave His children, even grievously erring children, without guidance and encouragement, and He had a great deal yet to say to these messengers from Bethel. So He expanded His words. As though it might be claimed that the words of the prophets had been forgotten and lost in the troublous times that had for several generations afflicted Israel the Lord gave them a brief resume. *“Execute true judgment, show mercy and compassion, oppress not the widow, the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor: and let none of you imagine evil against his brother”* (ch. 7:9-10). This was the spirit of the Law, the principles by which, if Israel lived in them, everlasting peace and prosperity would be their portion. But they did not so live, so that at the last there had to be penned the sad, regretful words of 2 Chron. 36:15-16 *“The Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his*

prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy". So the penalty of the broken Covenant came upon Israel and they were carried into captivity by their enemies. Therefore the words of the old Chronicler were repeated to the messengers from Bethel by Zechariah. "They refused to hearken" he said "they stopped their ears that they should not hear. They made their hearts as an adamant stone" (diamond) "lest they should hear the law and the words which the Lord of Hosts hath sent by the former prophets ... therefore it is come to pass ... I scattered them among all the nations whom they knew not ... for they laid the pleasant land desolate" (ch. 7:11-14).

Then the Lord turned, and spoke to those messengers in a very different tone. Gone are the words of reproof for the shortcomings of their fathers and the broken covenant, gone the stern admonition as to their own insincerity and formalism, their own failure to mourn the destruction of the Temple in the spirit of remorse and repentance for the sins which led to that destruction. Chapter 8 strikes a different key, one of hope and confidence for the future, one in which blessing and not judgment is the predominant note. The message was primarily for the people of Zechariah's own day, outlining some of the glories which Israel was shortly to enjoy in her renewed national status, but going on into the far distant future when, in the Kingdom of God, Israel should attain her destiny. It is as though God had cast behind His back all thought of the failures and shortcomings and sins of His people, all the reproofs and the penalties and the rejections, and begun to tell them of His plans for their future in the time of their conversion and reformation.

"I am returned unto Zion" He said "and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth" (ch. 8:3). This theme has of course recurred from time to time from the very beginning of Zechariah's prophecy and it refers very definitely to the restoration of Israel in her own land in his day and the flowering of national sovereignty which followed. "Let your hands be strong, ye that hear in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets which were in the day that the foundation of the house of the Lord of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built" (ch. 8:9). Those prophets were Haggai and Zechariah, the two spiritual leaders of the nation at this critical point in their history. But the Lord is nothing if not up to date. "Before these days" He says "there was no hire for man or beast; no peace to him that went out or came in, for I set every one against his neighbour" (ch. 8:10). This is a little picture of the dark days before the Restoration, when the people went into captivity and the land lay desolate, and war and tumult was the order of the day. Now those days were past; they had been ordered of the Lord but now He had turned His face toward His people again. "But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the Lord. For the seed shall be prosperous, the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things ... I will save you, and ye shall be a blessing ... so again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; fear ye not" (ch. 8:11-15). A crowning description of the peace and prosperity that was in store for Israel appears in vss. 4-5 "There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof".

All this was fulfilled in the resurgence of the Jewish State during the centuries intervening between Zechariah and Christ. These words were uttered in the fourth year of Darius of Persia, 518 B.C. The Temple was completed and dedicated two years later. A considerable Jewish population had returned from Babylon during the preceding twenty years and much of Judea and Samaria was being re-colonised by Jews. During the times of Zechariah and Zerubbabel, and later on of Ezra and Nehemiah, and finally the prophet Malachi, a period of nearly a century, the people were relatively prosperous

and enjoyed peace and safety. There were times of backsliding from their allegiance to God but they always returned. Another century of relative peace under Persian rule passed, and then came Alexander the Greek and the end of the Persian empire. But Alexander favoured the Jews and for more than yet another century Judea remained untroubled. Only when the development of the Syrian and Egyptian powers brought upon Judea the terrible oppression of Antiochus Epiphanes was the bright picture shadowed, and although after that there was a short lived period of less than a century during which Judea became completely independent, there began a sad series of wars and tumults which culminated in the annexation of Judea by Rome and the end of all national aspirations and all their glory. For some four hundred years they had enjoyed, in measure, the fulfilment of the promises of chapter 8 but it all came to an end because they did not continue to fulfil the conditions upon which that blessedness depended. The terms were clearly laid down. *“These are the things that ye shall do: speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace, in your gates: and let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, saith the Lord”* (ch. 8:16-17). They did observe these injunctions at first, in the days of Zechariah, when the Temple was new, and the promises began to be fulfilled accordingly; but they slowly abandoned those high standards as time went on, and the promises progressively failed in consequence. The traditional days of national mourning, the fast of the fourth month, remembering the day that Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem; of the fifth, when the Temple was burnt; of the seventh, when Gedaliah, the governor left behind by Nebuchadnezzar, was slain; and of the tenth, when the siege of the city began, all of these, said the Lord in ch. 8, vs. 19 were now to be *“joy and gladness and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace”*. So it was, for a time, but they did not continue in the love of truth and peace, so that once again the land and the city knew siege and battle and murder, and the joy and gladness vanished, and the people of the Lord failed to receive the promises, because they would not believe. Once more the fulfilment of the Divine promise had to be postponed because of continued unfitness on the part of those who were destined to be the Divine agents in the final outworking of that promise. Babylon had not been sufficient after all; Antiochus, the Herods, the Romans, all the oppressors of future days must yet come upon the scene to chasten this people that would not learn, and the full import of the promise be deferred.

The Lord knew that. The last four verses of this chapter enshrine His assurance that the time will surely come when this stiff-necked and hard hearted people will have profited aright by their experiences and been forged in the crucible of trouble into a vessel fitted for His use. *“It shall yet come to pass”* He says *“that there shall come people ... saying, Let us go speedily to seek the favour of the Lord of Hosts ... yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem. In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men out of all languages of the nations shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you for we have heard that God is with you”* (ch. 8:20-23). The numeral ten is used in the Bible for an indefinite number and too much emphasis should not be read into its use here. Thus we have the ten virgins and the ten talents in the parables of Jesus; ten women shall bake in the oven as a symbol of scarcity (Lev. 26:26); Israel proved the Lord “ten times” (Num. 14:22) and Elkanah considered that he meant more to Hannah as a husband than ten sons could mean (1 Sam. 1:8). So here we have an indication that people of all nations will come to the Jew for their blessing, *“in that day”*, and this is precisely what Isaiah meant when he said that the mountain of the Lord’s house would be established in the top of the mountains and *“all nations shall flow unto it”* (Isa. 2:1). These few verses, from 19 to 23, lay down the order in which men will turn to the Lord “at his appearing and his kingdom”. First comes Israel in the land, next Israel from the Dispersion, finally the Gentiles, the nations at large. Perhaps the Douay version gives the most

intelligible rendering here. After saying that the various days of mourning, lamenting the destruction of the Jewish polity by Babylon, shall become “*joy and gladness and great solemnities*” the Lord continues “*only love ye truth and peace, until people come and dwell in many cities, and the inhabitants go one to another saying, Let us go and entreat the face of the Lord, and let us seek the Lord of hosts*” (ch. 8:19, 23). Here surely is depicted the growth of the Holy Nation in the territory of Israel, building the old wastes, raising up the former desolations, repairing the waste cities, the “desolations of many generations” (Isa. 60:4) coming to realise as they do these things that the hand of the Lord is with them, and in the wonder of that discovery progressively casting off their former unbelief and coming to God in faith and trust. The “many peoples and strong nations” will come next and add their quota to the restoration of the ancient land and nation, until at last the whole world of men begins to take notice of this thing that is happening and to a constantly increasing degree begin to ally themselves with Israel and pay allegiance to Israel’s God. “*It shall be said in that day*” says Isaiah again “*Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation*” (Isa. 25:9).

But that wonderful climax will be after the scourge of “Jacob’s Trouble” has come upon the Holy Nation and purified it, leaving it fine gold. The story of Ezekiel 38 and 39, when the hosts of “Gog and the land of Magog” descend upon the Holy Land and are met by the powers of Heaven, has first to be enacted. That is not mentioned here in Zech. 8. A vivid and detailed picture of that momentous happening came later to the prophet in his old age and is recorded in Zech. chapter 14. The Lord’s message here in chapter 8 has to do entirely with the final outcome. At the end of time, when all the tumult and the shouting is over, when all the captains and the kings have departed, the Lord will find humble and contrite hearts waiting for the inspiring and life-giving touch of His Holy Spirit. In the power and wonder of that great moment the new world will be born, and the old one irrevocably pass away. “*And the nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising*” cried Isaiah, the man who saw more of that blessed day than any other prophet. “*Saviours shall come up on Mount Zion*” said his successor Obadiah “*and the kingdom shall be the Lord’s*”. Not one of us can add anything to that.



8. Foreview of History

The six final chapters of Zechariah's prophecy are so markedly different in style and contents from the earlier ones that it is evident they constitute a separate book, or at least a separate part. The difference in style is accounted for by concluding that Zechariah composed these chapters in his old age, some fifty years later than the earlier visions, in the days of Nehemiah when hopes of an immediate manifestation of Messiah had receded and it was becoming evident that a long span of history must run its course before the long-looked for day should dawn. Hence these chapters, nine to fourteen, comprise a vivid—and so far as they have already become history, a remarkably accurate—foreview of the predominant factors in the outworking of God's purposes with Israel and with all men, from a time almost immediately following the close of Zechariah's ministry to the full establishment of the Kingdom of God upon earth. In these six chapters there is a contrast drawn between the political power of the great kings of this world and the overriding power of the Lord Christ; the one is pictured in all the pomp and panoply of human greed and brute force, the other in the selflessness, the devotion and moral power of the Good Shepherd. The conflict between the two continues and accelerates to the final clash and, as in so many of the prophetic Scriptures, in the stress of the conflict many lose faith and apostasise, but a remnant are steadfast and win through at the end. The doctrine of the "Remnant" is very prominent in this second part of Zechariah's prophecy.

The first eight verses of chapter 9 picture the events surrounding the transfer of universal dominion from Persia to Greece, the silver of Daniel's image to the copper. The remarkable correspondence between the details in these verses and the incidents attendant on Alexander the Great's invasion of Asia in 332 B.C. has been realised by practically every commentator of note and the application is reasonably conclusive. Hadrach (the Hatarika of Assyrian inscriptions) Damascus and Hamath (modern Hama) were leading districts and cities of Syria; Alexander's first move was to subdue Syria and capture Damascus, which he did without difficulty. Hence verse 1 "*The word of the Lord is against the land of Hadrach and will rest upon Damascus*" (R.S.V.) "*and Hamath also which borders thereon*". His next move was against Tyre and Sidon, twin commercial cities of Phoenicia; Tyre held out for seven months but fell in 332. Verses 2 and 3 speak of this and add the information that Tyre had built herself a "*stronghold*" but the Lord would smite her power "*in the sea*" and she would be consumed by fire. This is a remarkable statement, for at the time of Alexander the Tyrians had abandoned their seaside city and built a new one on a small island just off the coast which they had fortified and surrounded with a wall a hundred and fifty feet high. They considered themselves impregnable. Alexander built a causeway across the intervening water and so captured the city, which he then burnt. Having thus secured his position he drove southward towards Egypt through the land of the Philistines, capturing Gaza and executing its king, destroying Ashkelon completely, and making Ashdod and Ekron tributary. All of this is stated plainly in verses 5-6 "*Ashkelon shall see it, and be afraid; Gaza too, and shall writhe in anguish. Ekron also, because its hopes are confounded. The king shall perish from Gaza, Ashkelon shall be uninhabited; a mongrel people shall dwell in Ashdod; and I will make an end of the pride of Philistia*" (R.S.V.). Up to this point the Scriptural narrative corresponds in every detail with the progress of Alexander and his Greeks in that momentous year 332. Now in verse 7 the Lord says that there shall no longer be a Philistine nation; it will be absorbed into Judah. The expression "*he that remaineth*" refers to the remnant of the Philistines who survived Alexander's invasion; that remnant shall "*be for our God*"; the word rendered "governor" means a family chief or tribal leader; "*Ekron shall be as Jebus*" (not "as a Jebusite"). All these expressions indicate the complete coalescence of the Philistines into the Jewish nation, just as the Jebusites were coalesced in the time of David. This

is just what happened. The Philistines as a national entity drop out of history after the time of Alexander; what was left of them became indistinguishable from Jews and their land became part of Judea.

This was not the end. Verse 8 declares the Divine intention *“I will encamp about my house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth; and no oppressor shall pass through them any more”*. The army here referred to is the Greek army. Alexander had sent a message to Jerusalem demanding the submission of the Jews. Jaddua, the High Priest, principal citizen of the nation, had refused on the ground that he had sworn allegiance to Persia. Immediately after the fall of Gaza therefore, Alexander marched to Jerusalem to take vengeance. The outcome is recorded by the historian Flavius Josephus. Unable to offer armed resistance, the High Priest, instructed by Heaven, arrayed himself in the splendid robes of his office as Head of the Levitical priesthood and went out to meet the conqueror, followed by the priests and citizens in white. To the astonishment of his own officers, Alexander, instead of giving orders to attack, went forward alone, made obeisance to the sacred Name emblazoned on the High Priest’s mitre, and then saluted Jaddua with every appearance of respect and friendliness. His principal general, Parmenio, ventured to ask the reason for this unexpected behaviour, whereupon Alexander explained that when originally contemplating the invasion of Asia he had seen in a dream a person attired in this same regalia who had assured him that he should embark upon his project and that it would be crowned with success by the defeat of Persia. Never having seen or heard of such a man before, he was convinced that this was the one who had appeared to him in his dream of years past. So saying, he walked with the High Priest into the city and was conducted to the Temple, where Jaddua showed him the prophecies of Daniel which declared that a Greek would overthrow Persia. Thus was Judea saved from the fate that had overtaken Syria, Phoenicia and Philistia, even as verse 8 states in a few telling words.

It has, of course, been suggested by some authorities that Josephus was romancing a little when he recounted this story but there is really reasonable circumstantial evidence for its truth. It is a fact that after Alexander’s visit to Jerusalem he conferred favours upon the Jews that were not conferred upon any other of his conquered nations. Something must have happened to avert the horrors of massacre and pillage which had been the invaders’ intention for Judea as for the other lands he subdued, and to change him into a beneficent patron instead. In any case, the terms of verse 8 were met; God had averted the threat of the army that passed by and returned. With that the picture in Zechariah comes to an end. In history Alexander went on his way, besieged and took Babylon, overthrew the Persian dominion, continued into India and finally met his death, but of all that no notice is taken here. Zechariah has recorded sufficient to indicate the first outstanding event to concern Judea in times yet to come —the transfer of dominion from Persia to Greece with all that it would involve, another step in the progress of the Divine Plan, eventually to culminate in the Kingdom of God.

The prophet now skips some three centuries and lights upon the days of the First Advent. He sees another King presenting himself to Israel for acceptance, not coming as did Alexander with all the pomp and pageantry of military power to establish his rule by force, but in peace to establish a rule founded upon love and persuasion. *“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion”* he cries in verse 9 *“Thy King cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass, upon a colt the foal of an ass”*. It may be, as is sometimes stated, that the traditional manner in which the kings of Israel entered upon their office was to ride into Jerusalem upon a white ass, although there is no specific instance of such a custom in the Old Testament. Asses were more common than horses in the earlier years of Israel’s national existence, but by the time of David and onward through the whole duration of the monarchy horses

were used for ceremonial purposes. Riding upon an ass might well be intended more as a symbol of humility—“lowly, riding upon an ass”. The remarkable correspondence between this verse and the action of Jesus just before His arrest justifies its application and therefore the ensuing passage to the First Advent and the reactions of Israel at that time. Verse 10 defines the peacefulness of His reign and its ultimate conquest—the war-chariot, the war-horse, the battle-bow shall be cut off; *“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”*—universal. This was the promise brought to the men of that day by the Prince of Peace when He presented Himself to them. *“By the blood of thy covenant”* said the Lord *“I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water”* (verse 11). This is addressed to that same generation and the first impulse perhaps is to apply these words to the Mosaic Covenant, sealed at Mount Sinai fourteen centuries previously with the blood of sacrificed animals and now due to come to an end with the institution of something better on the basis of the death of Jesus Christ. But the Mosaic Covenant effected no release of prisoners, either at the First Advent or at any other time. It was in fact the failure of that Covenant to effect any real deliverance for Israel which paved the way for God’s promise of a New Covenant that would achieve success where the old one had failed. Now although the real work of that New Covenant, the writing of God’s laws in the hearts of men and their wholesale turning to Him in repentance and dedication, is the work of the coming Millennial Age, it is true that Jesus referred to His coming death as *“the blood of the New Covenant, shed for many for the remission of sins”* (Matt. 26:28) and that by virtue of this same sacrificial death there is deliverance here and now, and has been since Pentecost, for all, whether Jew or Gentile, who believe. It may well be therefore that verse 11 is a reference to this fact, and that the “blood of the Covenant” there mentioned is a symbol of the death of Christ, the “Ransom for all”. Those who did accept Him at His First Advent are the prisoners who were delivered from the empty well or reservoir (this is the meaning of “pit” here) of the old system of Judaism.

“Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope: even today do I declare that I will render double unto thee, when I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and made thee as the sword of a mighty man” (chap. 9:12-13). This is the only instance in the Old Testament where the word “hope” has the definite article: the expression is properly “prisoners of the hope”. St. Paul was a “prisoner of the hope”. *“For the hope of Israel am I bound with this chain”* said he to the Jews of Rome (Acts 28:20); *“Now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise”* when before Agrippa (Acts 26:6). He uses “prisoner” in the same sense when he calls himself “the prisoner of the Lord”. (Eph. 4:1). These “prisoners of the hope” were the men of Israel at the First Advent, subject to alien powers but in their bondage directed to the stronghold of God’s promise and the hope that one day their servitude would end and their mission as God’s ambassadors to the nations be realised. Hence the promise that God would render to them “double”—not *“shenayim”* which means a double portion, but *“mishneh”* which means the second part, the complement of what has gone before. In the past they had endured sorrow and adversity, but in the future they would experience joy and prosperity. Isaiah voiced the same principle when he said *“For your shame ye shall have double ... in their land they shall possess the double; everlasting joy shall be unto them”* (Isa. 61:7). And with this stirring exhortation to that generation to turn to Jesus and so inherit the glorious promises of the future the prophecy leaves the First Advent behind and passes unrestrained into the mighty deeds of the Kingdom in power, the days of the Second Advent and the Millennial reign. Verse 13 marks the transition. *“When I have bent Judah for me ...”* and so on. The time of the promised “double” is governed by that “when”. A day is to come when God takes Israel—a restored and purified Israel—as His instrument. Using a military metaphor, He likens Judah to His bow, Ephraim the

arrows, the sons of Greece to the armed might of this world, and the sons of Zion to the Holy Nation. But the Lord Himself is the leader and His power is irresistible. Verses 14-17 declare that the Lord shall be seen among His people, implying full acceptance in faith and loyalty; His arrows go as lightning, his whirlwinds devastate the enemy. He defends His people, and the victory is so overwhelming that their rejoicing is as that of a feast of wine and their praises to God as though they had brought so many sacrifices to His altar that the bowls were brimming over with blood and flooding the horns (A.V. “corners”) of the altar—a vivid metaphor taken from the ancient Levitical ritual. So the Lord their God will save them and Israel will be as the precious stones ornamenting the diadem upon His head or an ensign, a display lifted up for all to see. *“For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty”* cries the prophet. *“Corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids”* (vs. 17).

Chapter 10 continues and concludes this theme, the long term prospect of the hope of Israel. It opens by reminding all men that the blessings of that Age will be to those who come to Him in faith. *“Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain; so the Lord shall ... give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field”* (vs. 1). In past times the people were misled by false shepherds but this will be the case no more. *“The teraphim have spoken empty things, and the diviners have seen a lie, and told false dreams; they comfort in vain ... Mine anger was kindled against the shepherds and I punished the goats, for the Lord hath visited the house of Judah and made them as his goodly warhorse”* (vs. 2-3). The Lord is here taking His stand, as it were, in the dawn of the Millennial Age when the apostate leaders and unfaithful pastors have been deprived of their positions and the Lord Himself has come out of His place to feed and exalt Israel. The past times had known the power of idol worship, of false prophets and soothsayers, of rapacious shepherds, and ambitious leaders, the “he-goats” of verse 3. *“Be as the he-goats before the flocks”* was His admonition in the days of the Captivity (Jer. 50:8) when He called upon Israel and Judah to assert themselves and take the lead among the nations; but more often the leaders were themselves apostate as in this case and merited condemnation. “Shepherds” was the term for rulers whether civil or ecclesiastical; the priests were shepherds and so were the kings. *“The priest said not, Where is the Lord? and they that handle the law knew me not; the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal and walked after things that do not profit”* (Jer. 2:8). But now those dark days are past, and the Lord is King; this is the alluring prospect of chapter 10 even although its fulfilment is far away in the future. A dazzling resume of Messianic prophecy, taken from every part of the Old Testament, is the presentation in this gallery of vivid pictures. The time indicated is that at which the Lord of hosts has made the house of Judah His war-horse in the battle, that fixes it at the inauguration of the Messianic Age. From God comes the “corner” (*pinnah*—chief man, or as we would say “the key man”) which harks back to Psa. 118:22 *“The stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner”* and Isa. 28:16 *“I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a chosen corner stone, a sure foundation. He that believeth shall never be confounded”*. (The R.S.V. puts verse 4 in the future tense “out of him shall come” which is logical.) So too, is the “nail” in this same 4th verse, alluding to Isa. 22:23. the nail “in a sure place”, the Messiah upon whom all things will depend. So, also, the battle-bow which symbolises the triumphal progress of Messiah against the forces of evil as in Psa. 45; “thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king’s enemies”. Logically then, the restored and purified people of the Lord shall indeed, as verse 5 declares *“be as mighty men which tread down their enemies ... because the Lord is with them”*.

With this stirring and somewhat martial picture of the victory which righteousness gains in the “Last Day” comes the Lord’s promise to Israel regarding their future destiny and the downfall of their opponents. He will *“strengthen the house of Judah”* and *“save the house of Joseph”* and they will be restored to their land (vs. 6). Ephraim

shall be regathered following the Divine call *“I will hiss for them”* (vs. 8) where *“hiss”* has the meaning of to call by means of playing a pipe or wind instrument. The mention of these three, Judah, Joseph, Ephraim, denotes that the centuries-old rift between the two halves of the nation has been healed; there is now only one people of Israel and that people is a united one rejoicing in the Lord. Verses 9 and 10 promise a return from all parts of the world. *“I will sow them among the people and they shall remember me in far countries”*; this is the Dispersion among all nations, but, *“and they shall live with their children, and turn again”*. This is the final end-of-the-Age restoration. *“I will bring them ... out of Egypt ... and out of Assyria, and I will bring them into ... Gilead and Lebanon, and place shall not be found for them”*. Verse 11 defines the manner in which God will do this great thing. He will *“pass through the sea with straitness”* (the A.V. *“affliction”* in vs. 11 means straitness or tightness) and in this context pictures a deliverance analogous to the Red Sea crossing where God led the hosts while *“the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left”* (Exod. 14:22). He shall *“smite the waves in the sea, and all the deeps of the river shall dry up”* continues vs. 11, a manifest allusion both to the Red Sea passage and the later crossing of Jordan into the Promised Land. *“And the pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the sceptre of Egypt shall pass away”*.

In such fashion will the powers of evil of this world give place when God rises up for that purpose, as surely and inexorably as that of Egypt failed in the days of Moses. So the people of God will be given strength (vs. 12) *“and they shall walk up and down in His name”*, an affirmation of confidence that at that time, the time of the Messianic reign, peace and prosperity shall come, and the dark shadow of evil flee away.

Here the prophet stops for the time being. In chapters 9 and 10 he has conducted his readers through a rapid survey of history outlining the careers of two great personages, both of whom set out to achieve world domination, the one by fear and force, the other by love and persuasion. The first was the Greek, Alexander the Great, conqueror of the world three centuries before the First Advent, a man of whom it was said that after subduing all known countries he sat down and wept because there were no worlds left for him to conquer. Three years later he died and the empire he had built fell to pieces. Verses 1-8 of chapter 9 tell of his progress and his conquests so far as they affected or concerned Israel. The second is Christ the Lord, Prince of Peace, who came, not with fanfare of trumpet and show of force as did Alexander, but in lowliness and love. Verses 9-12 picture His coming and His invitation to men to accept Him. Then the rest of chapter 9 and the whole of chapter 10 foresee the day yet to come when He takes to Himself His great power and reigns, King of the nations. And under that reign there will, at last, be peace.



9. The Rejected Shepherd



Zechariah's 11th chapter is the story of Israel's suffering under false shepherds, and her rejection of the true shepherd who would have fed the flock but was refused. Historically it covers the time between the period of the First Advent, pictured in symbol in chapter 9, and that of the Second Advent with its related events, shewn in chapters 12-14. The background to the description is the land of Israel as it so often appeared when suffering invasion and destruction, and the basis of the picture a pastoral one, the relation between the sheep and the shepherds, bad and good. In the end only a faithful remnant survive, but this remnant enters into the stirring events of chapters 12-14 and emerges triumphant at the end.

The curtain of this chapter rises upon a scene all too familiar and infinitely sad. Judgment upon Israel because of apostasy is being executed by the agency of foreign oppressors, invading the country and desolating the land. *"Open your doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour your cedars! Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen! Wail, oaks of Bashan, for the thick forest has been felled! Hark, the wail of the shepherds, for their glory is despoiled! Hark, the roar of the lions, for the jungle of the Jordan is laid waste!"* (chap. 11:1-3 R.S.V.). Every time the Assyrians or the Babylonians invaded the land they came down from the north, first destroying the stately cedars of Lebanon and the oaks of Bashan, cutting down the standing timber for the construction of their war machines or carrying it away for building purposes in their own land. Then as they swept southward the pastoral country was despoiled, the people's flocks and herds pillaged and their villages burnt. Finally came the turn of the valley of Jordan and the highlands of Judea. All this happened, whenever it happened, in consequence of Israel's apostasy from God, for thus were the terms of the Covenant. These three opening verses constitute the scenery, so to speak, at the back of the stage upon which the drama is to be presented.

"Thus saith the Lord my God; Feed the flock of the slaughter, whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty; and they that sell them say. Blessed be the Lord, for I am rich; and their own shepherds pity them not". This "flock of slaughter" is Israel, doomed to pillage and violence and death at the hands both of alien invaders and her own rulers. This was so often the case in Israel. The people forsook the Lord and followed other gods and then found that those other gods were quite unable to protect them from their enemies. They forsook the principles of righteousness in their national life and found that oppression and injustice rebounded upon their own heads. But this time worse was to come. In the past God had always delivered after a season. *"Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble"* recounted the Psalmist *"and he heard, and delivered them out of their distresses"*. But now, says God, *"I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, but I will deliver every man into his neighbour's hand, and into the hand of his king; and they shall smite the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver them"* (vs. 6). This verse fixes the period to which the whole chapter applies; it is that following the Babylonian captivity. Up to the restoration from that captivity, in Zechariah's own day, God had always delivered. Sooner or later the circumstances which gave rise to the chastisement changed, and God intervened, and the people were restored to their own land, and freed, if only temporarily until the next apostasy, from their oppressors. But not any more. The next apostasy, with its penalty of calamity, was one that was to endure until the end, until the very time of the Kingdom and the final repentance and regathering. That apostasy had not begun at the time Zechariah received this message; the enthusiasm of the Temple rebuilding was still upon the nation and the fervency of Messianic hopes following its recent deliverance from

Babylon, but it began very shortly thereafter and has continued without intermission to this day. The fulfilment of chapter 11 therefore must be held to begin not very long after the death of Zechariah and continue to the present.

From verse 7 onward the speaker is the Shepherd of Israel, the One appointed by God the Father to lead Israel in the right way into their appointed destiny, if so be they would be led. In the Old Testament He is the Divine Word, the *Logos*, the Son. In the New Testament He is the Word made flesh, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This chapter presents Him in both aspects, for although as the Divine Word He ministered to Israel in pre-Christian centuries it was as Jesus the Christ that He manifested Himself to them at His First Advent and was rejected. That is what this chapter is all about.

“So I fed the flock of slaughter, therefore also the godly of the flock. And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock” (vs. 7). Here is action; the Divine Shepherd enters upon a pastoral mission which for all we know might have been God’s final effort to bring Israel to a position of readiness for the opportunity which was to open before them when their Messiah came to them. The three centuries prior to the First Advent was a period of intense nationalism on the one part and fervent expectation of Messiah on the other; Judah became an independent political State for a short time and the Pharisees and Zadokites and other zealous religious sects had their rise. It was a golden age for the God-fearing element in the nation, expecting daily the fulfilment of all that God had promised, but it was also a time which gave increasing scope for the development of a rigid, bigoted view of the Divine purposes and a narrow, arrogant attitude of superiority over all other nations and peoples which ultimately overcame the better things and created the Israel which condemned and slew Jesus Christ. For those three centuries the Shepherd fed the flock, a flock that was doomed to slaughter, and a few, the godly of the flock, profited, but the majority turned away. At the end of those centuries a small minority only were ready to receive and accept Jesus in the way He came, and the rest, even although “all men were in expectation”, were found wanting. They knew not the time of their visitation.

The shepherd’s staff named “Beauty” (properly “Favour”) is explained in verse 10 as picturing the Mosaic Covenant, obligatory upon Israel but so often in their history repudiated and violated. The other staff, named “Bands” (properly “Binders”) is referred in vs. 10 to the organic union of the peoples in the land. Both these staves had their place in the Shepherd’s ministry during those three centuries. The Covenant was reaffirmed and the sect of the Pharisees represented the national adherence to the letter of that Covenant. The pre-Babylonian division into two nations, the two tribes and the ten tribes, was ended at the return from Babylon and now the nation was one; tribal divisions were practically eliminated and the entire nation was known as Judah, the people as Jews. Never in all history had Israel enjoyed so favourable a position and opportunity to go forward in faith and expectation to meet and receive their coming Messiah and with Him fulfil their age-old commission to be a light to the nations and declare God’s salvation to the ends of the earth.

At this auspicious point the Shepherd moves to action, and describes that action in the words *“The three shepherds also I cut off in one month, and my soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me”* (verse 8). In the sequence of events pictured in this chapter this cutting off of the three shepherds, whatever it may mean, is prior to the rejection of the good Shepherd by the flock and their payment of thirty pieces of silver for his services (vs. 12) so that it must have its application during those three centuries before the First Advent. Who or what, then, are the three shepherds thus cut off and what is the significance of the “one month”?

It is only to be expected that so obscure a phrase should be difficult of

interpretation. It is said that among all the commentators and scholars involved with the Book of Zechariah there are extant some forty interpretations of the “three shepherds”. Almost all confess themselves baffled by the “one month”. There are not many expositors who have realised that this chapter constitutes a link in what might be termed a prophetic history of the period between the Restoration and the First Advent occupying chapters 9 to 11 and merging then into the events of the end of this Age in chapters 12 to 14. Once this fact is fully appreciated a pointer to the meaning of the three shepherds is provided. The A.V. has it “Three shepherds ...” but the Hebrew text has the definite article “*The* three shepherds ...” Three specific unworthy shepherds are indicated and they are all cut off together “in one month”. This is before the First Advent. Vs. 15 speaks of a fourth unworthy shepherd who afflicts the flock after the Divine Shepherd has been rejected and therefore after the First Advent.

The term “shepherd” is used either for native rulers or guides, as in Jer. 2:8; 17:16, 23:1-4 and Ezek. 34:2, or for foreign rulers and oppressors, as in Jer. 6:3; 25:34-38 and 49:19. Whatever man or power ruled the people was a “shepherd”. It is interesting in this connection to note that in primitive Semitic languages the same word did duty for “king”, the ruler of the people, and “shepherd”, the keeper of sheep. Since the background of this chapter is the foreign domination of Israel, and an integral part of the action is God’s declaration (vs. 6) that He will deliver them into “*his neighbour’s hand and into the hand of his king, and they shall smite the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver them*” it seems reasonable to conclude that the three shepherds picture foreign ruling powers whose dominion over Israel, permitted by God for a season, is cut off by the Divine Shepherd preparatory to His offering His own self as King.

In such case it is easy to see in the three shepherds the three Gentile powers which by Divine permission, and within the framework of the period known as the “Times of the Gentiles”, exercised control over Israel. Babylon, Persia, Greece; these are the three shepherds whose influence hung heavily over Israel until well within the period covered by this 11th chapter, and then, more or less abruptly, disappeared from the scene.

It is customary to think of each of these powers as ruling Israel in turn and giving place at the end of its term to its successor. Politically this is so. Persia overthrew the Babylonian empire in 538 B.C. when Cyrus captured Babylon, and Greece overthrew Persia in 331 B.C. when Alexander in his turn captured Babylon. But in practice each nation continued and various rebellions and other military adventures make it difficult to say with precision just when each one was truly superseded by the next. In point of fact all three still existed in the days of Zechariah and all three exerted various degrees of influence over Judah. This is where the allusion to the three shepherds being cut off “*in one month*” might have its place. Daniel, in his vision of the four world-empires, says (Dan. 7:12) “*As concerning the rest of the wild beasts (i.e. the three representing Babylon, Persia and Greece) they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time*”. True to this, Babylon, both city and nation, continued after its capture by Cyrus in 538 B.C., until the building of Seleucia on the Tigris by the successor of Alexander about 281 B.C. attracted commerce from the city. Antiochus, the next Greek ruler, rebuilt the old temple in Babylon but the city was doomed and it vanished between 250 and 200 B.C. and this marked the full end of the old Babylonian people and power. The last Seleucid king of the second empire, Persia, was defeated in 236 B.C. by Arsaces I, founder of the Parthian empire and this marked the end of ancient Persia (the modern State and nation of that name developed long afterwards, in the early centuries of the Christian era). Greece, the last of the three powers, was increasingly harassed by the rising power of Rome and lost its independence about 228 to 208 B.C. Thus in a practical sense all three world powers, Babylon, Persia and Greece, came to an end, were “cut off”, as Zechariah has it, during the third B.C. century. This century can therefore quite reasonably be spoken of as the “one month”

of judgment on these powers. A similar usage is met with in Hos. 5:6-7 where the unfaithful of Israel *“go with their flocks and their herds to seek the Lord but they shall not find him; he hath withdrawn himself from them. They have dealt treacherously against the Lord ... now shall a month devour them with their portions”*. The R.S.V. renders that final expression *“Now the new moon shall devour them with their fields”* and the meaning seems to be that the dawn of a new month ushers in a period of judgment and destruction on those who have incurred the Divine displeasure in past time. The month as a short time period compared with the year as a normal time measurement is reminiscent of our Lord’s words *“Except those days shall be cut short there should no flesh be saved”*. Judgment, swift, sure and final, is pictured as taking place within the confines of one month. And in thus cutting off the three oppressive shepherds the Shepherd of Israel expresses His loathing for them, and they for Him, as in verse 8.

So the Shepherd turns to His flock, the flock that is still rebellious and is still in consequence doomed to destruction. Perhaps it is at this point we should begin to see the events of the First Advent taking shape. The history of the period immediately before the Advent shews that the nation as a whole was in no condition to meet or to accept its Lord. The work of the Shepherd for three hundred years, since the golden days of the Restoration, of Zechariah, Ezra and Nehemiah, had produced a faithful *“remnant”* who were ready for Him, but the rest were unworthy and fit only for rejection. So we have verse 9 *“Then said I, I will not feed you: that that dieth, let it die: and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off: and let the rest eat every one the flesh of another”*. That prophecy had its fulfilment in real history when Jesus pronounced over Jerusalem its doom *“How often would I have gathered you as a hen gathers her chickens, and ye would not. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate”*. (Matt. 23:37,38). And at the same time came the reality of verse 10 *“I took my staff, even Beauty, and cut it asunder, that I might break my covenant which I had made with all the people. And it was broken in that day; and so the godly of the flock that waited upon me knew that it was the word of the Lord”*. Jesus cut that staff asunder and abrogated the covenant when He declared to the Scribes and Pharisees *“The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof”* (Matt. 21:43).

Almost immediately the challenge came to Israel of the First Advent formally and finally to accept or to reject the Shepherd. *“If ye think good, give me my price”* (wages), He said to them *“and if not, forbear”* (vs. 12). For three and a half years He had moved amongst them, doing good and offering them the Kingdom of God. Perhaps the point at which this invitation applies is at the end of Jesus’ ministry when He presented himself in formal fashion as Israel’s king, riding into Jerusalem *“upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass”* (Zech. 9:9) and despite the immediate cries of joy and enthusiasm was within a few days rejected with the cry *“not this man, but Barabbas”*. The token of that rejection was the thirty pieces of silver paid to Judas by the priests for his share in the betrayal.

Now here comes an intriguing coincidence of thought. Following the Shepherd’s request for his wages, he goes on to say *“So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter—this magnificent price at which I was assessed by them”*. The latter phrase is the literal Hebrew and is suggestive of the Lord speaking ironically of the amount which in ancient times was the price given for a slave or compensation due for the death of a slave. That was all that Israel would offer in return for the pastoral care of the Shepherd. *“And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord”* (vss. 12-13). There has been a lot of discussion and speculation as to the meaning of this expression. It is not easily apparent why the money should be paid to a potter or why there should be a potter in the Temple anyway. Some have suggested that the word rendered *“potter”* is

a colloquial word for treasury or treasurer and that the Shepherd thus paid the money into the Temple funds but there is no real foundation for this. The most reasonable explanation, bearing in mind God's scornful rejection of this "magnificent price", is that the expression "cast it to the potter" was a saying expressing contemptuous rejection of a worthless thing. We have a somewhat similar phrase today when we speak of a man as having "gone to the dogs". So the picture afforded us is one in which the Shepherd, insulted by the paltry sum of money given him as wages when he might reasonably have expected respect, esteem, gratitude and love in return for his ministrations, goes into the Temple courts and contemptuously throws the money on the floor of the Sanctuary.

Matthew's gospel draws attention to this passage when he recounts the story of Judas and the betrayal of Jesus (Matt. 27). The correspondence is not exact. The Shepherd received the money as wages; Judas received his as the price of betrayal. The priests used the money after Judas threw it on the Temple floor to buy the "potter's field" to bury strangers in; this is not the same thing as casting the money "to the potter" on the floor of the Temple. Matthew suggests a fulfilment of prophecy but there are numerous instances in Matthew's Gospel where he is quite clearly quoting an Old Testament passage as illustrative of, or analogous to, the incident he narrates without really claiming that the one is a prediction of the other. It is not so much in the details of Zechariah's vision on the one hand, and of Judas' betrayal on the other, that the prophecy resides, but in the central principle. In both cases the Shepherd of Israel is rejected by those to whom he had ministered and the symbol of that rejection was a monetary one, thirty pieces of silver, thrown back upon the floor of the Temple in the sight of the ecclesiastical rulers who were primarily responsible for the rejection. Matthew, in the A.V. of Matt. 27:9 credits the prophecy to Jeremiah instead of Zechariah but it is generally agreed that this is probably a mistake of an early copyist; Matthew does not always mention the prophet's name in his allusions and probably he did not do so in this instance and a later transcriber, taking it upon himself to add the name, added the wrong one. This supposition is confirmed by the fact that the Sinai Palimpsest, a 4th century copy of a 2nd century Syriac translation, thought to be the oldest translation of the Gospels into any language, does not include the reference to "Jeremiah the prophet" in this verse, and neither do the Peshitta and the Diatessaron (two 2nd century Syriac versions) or the 2nd century Old Latin versions.

"Then I cut asunder mine other staff, even Bands, that I might break the brotherhood between" (prop. "among") *"Judah and Israel"* (vs. 14). The preposition can mean equally "between" and "among". At the time of the First Advent there was no distinction between the ten tribe and the two tribe nations and no brotherhood which could be broken. There was a very real sense in which the entire nation, Judah and Israel, viewed as an entity, was disrupted and the brotherhood between its individual members destroyed. The brotherhood existing *among* the citizens of the nation was completely and finally broken when, in A.D. 70, Titus quelled the Jewish rebellion against Rome, destroyed Jerusalem, and exiled the entire people, scattering them into all parts of the Roman empire. Even today Israel has not recovered from that Dispersion. This symbolic action of the prophet indicated the fact that following the rejection of Christ the nation was doomed to the breaking of family ties and national bonds, to separation and scattering all over the earth. Judah and Israel, after fifteen hundred years of national existence in the Land of Promise, would be a nation no longer.

Verses 15 to 17 describe the agency by which that scattering was to be accomplished. Three evil shepherds in verse 8, Babylon, Persia and Greece, had already been cut off. The true Shepherd had been rejected. *"We have no king but Caesar"* cried the mob at the time of that rejection. Now they should have Caesar. The "worthless (not

“foolish” as A.V.) shepherd of vs. 15 is the fourth of the shepherds which afflicted the flock and well pictures Rome, the fourth oppressor of Israel. This is one who, according to the R.S.V., *“does not care for the perishing or seek the wandering, or heal the maimed, or nourish the sound, but devours the flesh of the fat ones, tearing off even their hoofs”* (vs. 16). That is a very eloquent description of the Gentile power that has ridden roughshod over Israel throughout the long centuries of this Christian era. But retribution comes. Israel brought this suffering upon herself but that does not excuse the perpetrator. *“Woe to the idol shepherd”* says God. Judgment shall come upon his right arm and his right eye. His power and his perception will be alike destroyed, and in the troubles that are upon the nations in our own day we see the fulfilment of that prediction.



10. Prelude to the Great Day

The last three chapters of Zechariah's prophecy tell the story of the end of this Age. They commence with the rumblings of the coming conflict, the confusion of nations in their hostility to Israel and the incoming Kingdom. They go on to tell of Israel's growing awareness of her Divinely ordained destiny and the development of a "remnant" which will be faithful to God through the fiery trials which lie ahead; of the emergence of new leaders, stalwarts of olden time returned to rule in righteousness during and after the crisis; of God's promise that He will surely defend Jerusalem. A spirit of grace and supplication begins to become manifest among the people, a recognition of their past national failure to accept and believe on Christ, culminating in a campaign against the modern political idolatry which will still have great influence in affairs.

Nevertheless the nation as a whole is not yet truly converted; some there are who face the coming crisis with apprehension and unbelief and some, perhaps, who are in the land only for the material prosperity it brings them and not by reason of any real faith in the Divine purposes. These will be purged out, cut off from the land, exiled, when the test of faith is applied. But a loyal section remains, steadfast while the enemy advances, and at that moment Divine power is manifested for deliverance. The 14th chapter tells in detail of that final phase, when the forces of unrighteousness meet head-on with the powers of Heaven and are destroyed. So the story closes. God's earthly "people for a purpose", the "Holy Nation", is standing secure among the nations and ready to embark upon its destined mission, that of proclaiming God's salvation to the ends of the earth.

Verse 1 of chapter 12 is an introduction to the momentous happenings of chaps. 12 and 13, covering the preliminary events of the period immediately preceding the dramatic moment when God rises up to deliver Jerusalem. It is important to realise that these three chapters do cover happenings occurring over a period of time; the gathering of the nations against Jerusalem and the fiery trial into which the people enter and from which only the faithful "remnant" emerge is not the work of a moment. Many distinct and varied factors enter into the sequence of events which characterises Israel's history at the end of the Age and they have to be viewed in their proper relation one to another. Hence the solemnity of this introductory verse. *"An Oracle!"* says the R.S.V. *"The word of the Lord concerning Israel! Thus says the Lord, who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth and formed the spirit of man within him"*. It is a strange verse, seemingly having little bearing upon the prophetic statement which follows, and yet, of course, it is vitally connected. The predominant theme of these three chapters is the all-pervading power of God, and His absolute supremacy over this earth that He has created and the men thereon to whom He has given life. In these three chapters the armed might of this world's evil is brought to a focus and launched against the earthly citadel of God's holiness, and is utterly broken. Nothing in all the earth can stand against God when He rises up to act. Hence it is fitting that right at the outset He declares Himself the One who brought heaven and earth into being and made men to have the powers they possess. And having thus stated the fact, God goes on to declare His intention. *"Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem"* (vs. 2). The "cup of trembling" is a figure of speech used several times in the O.T. (see Psa. 75:8 and Isa. 51:21-22); it is the cup of wine put into the hands of an enemy to cause stupefaction and confusion, and so assist the ease with which that enemy can be repulsed and defeated. This is what Jerusalem (a figure for all Israel) is to become to the nations. During practically the whole of this century that has been true. Since 1917, when General Allenby captured Jerusalem and liberated the land from Turkish control, the consequent political problems have been

a source of stupefaction and confusion to the world's politicians. And the problem has grown worse with time. *"On that day" God says "I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it shall grievously hurt themselves. And all the nations of the earth shall come together against it"* (ch. 12:3 R.S.V.). The word for "grievously hurt" means to be cut and lacerated by a burden too heavy to hold; how true it has been that in these latter years every political power which concerns itself with the problem of Israel finds it one that is "too hot to hold" to use our modern colloquialism.

The expression "come together against it" seemingly refers to the gradual hardening of opinion against Israel typical of the present time. Judah and Jerusalem are associated together in the crisis and, later on, in the deliverance, this being the implication of the phrase in verse 2. Why it should be thought necessary to stress this fact when it would normally be expected that Judah, the land, would naturally share the fate of the capital city Jerusalem might be thought rather strange, but it may be because in the historic invasion of Judah by Sennacherib two centuries or so before the time of Zechariah Judah was desolated whilst Jerusalem was delivered, and since that invasion was evidently the background against which Zechariah's presentation is set there might be an indication here that in this particular detail the reality does not correspond with the background. Three times in the narrative it is made plain that Judah and Jerusalem come through the crisis together.

Verse 4 pictures the next development in the situation among the nations. The Lord will *"smite every horse with panic"* (not "astonishment" as A.V.) *"the riders with madness, and every horse of the people with blindness"*. Horses in prophecy are metaphors for the military might of nations; the well known passage in Isa. 31:1-3 is a good example of this. Blindness, madness, panic; surely these are the characteristics manifest in the policies of the nations in their dealings with the "Middle East" problem today. That which commenced with the cup of stupefaction, becoming a burdensome stone which lacerates all who pick it up, develops finally into complete failure to apprehend the true nature of what is happening, that the Most High is preparing the way for his intervention in the affairs of earth. Blindness, madness and panic is a very late stage in the period of preparation for the last siege of Jerusalem.

Now the workings of God begin to become outwardly evident. At this point, when blindness, madness and panic begins to grip the nations, *"I will open mine eyes upon the house of Judah"* says the Lord *"and the governors of Judah shall say in their heart, the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in the Lord of Hosts their God. In that day will I make the governors of Judah like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people round about, on the right hand and on the left; and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again"* (ch. 12:4-6). This is a most remarkable statement, for it speaks of a time in the end of the Age, prior to the deliverance of Israel and therefore prior to the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom, when the leaders of Israel avow their own faith and the faith of their people in God. "Our strength" say these governors "is not in the arm of flesh nor in carnal weapons, but in God". This implies an awakening of faith in the nation, a beginning of that turning to God which blossoms into fulness at the time of the actual deliverance. At this moment God has opened his eyes upon the house of Judah and some have responded.

Who are the governors? These are political leaders of a new kind, for none of today's statesmen, even those of present day Israel, would adopt so hazardous a policy as faith in Divine protection, and neither would their peoples. These governors are men of God, raised up from some totally unexpected source. There is good reason for the conclusion that they are none other than the promised heroes of Old Testament days, the "Ancient Worthies", restored from the dead to lead the nation into the Kingdom. If this in fact be so then the chapter has already carried us to a stage in the events of

the end of the Age very near to the final act, the consummation when Divine power is employed to bring the kingdoms of this world to their end and establish the earthly Kingdom of God in their place. By that time the “change” of the Church will have taken place and the work of the Messianic Age be at the point of commencement.

The impact, upon mankind generally, of the advent of these governors will be tremendous. *“Like a blazing pot in the midst of wood, like a flaming torch among sheaves” says the R.S.V., “they shall devour to the right and left all the peoples round about, while Jerusalem shall still be inhabited in its place”* (ch. 12:6). This verse is so momentous that it needs to be viewed in correct relation to the rest of the narrative with some care. It has its place prior to the active intervention of God to save the city at the critical moment; the influence of the “governors” is felt among the nations for a little while before, and it is a consuming influence. It is almost as if the battle commences and rages for some time before God steps in, and during that time the burden of defence rests upon the governors, and the nature of that defence is indicated in this verse. Something of this kind appears to be demanded by the more detailed narrative of chapter 14 where the siege continues with sundry losses to Israel but without harming the faithful remnant, until, after the nation has been purged of its apostates who then go into exile, the time of actual Divine intervention comes and the city is saved.

“The Lord will give victory to the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem may not be exalted over that of Judah” (ch. 12:7 R.S.V.). The expression “tents of Judah” really denotes the dwelling places of the ordinary populace of the land—derived from Israel’s early experiences at the Exodus; “tents” became a term throughout the Old Testament for homes, whether temporary or permanent. There is a contrast here between the people of the land generally and the “upper crust” of society concentrated in the city and the king’s court. Many of the invasions of Old Testament times saw the country dwellers despoiled and enslaved whilst the walled and defended city Jerusalem held out and escaped. There will be nothing like that in this battle of the Last Day. The entire land is to be delivered from the invader; further, in order to intensify the fact that God is fighting for His covenant people as a whole and not just for a few elite, as it were, in the city, the countryside is to be first to experience deliverance, so that neither the royal ruling house of David nor the aristocracy of Jerusalem can claim priority of Divine favour over the masses of the people. The application of this symbolism to the time in question, when no Davidic kings rule nor is there any “aristocracy” element in restored Israel, is a little difficult to perceive. Perhaps it is intended to convey the idea that despite various vivid Old Testament pictures of the siege of Jerusalem, which from the literal viewpoint would involve the subjugation of the surrounding countryside, in this case the whole of the land of Israel is to be inviolate. It is certainly true that the siege of the city is just as truly a siege if the invaders are drawn up around the frontiers of the land instead of just outside the city walls and this would certainly be more appropriate to the idea of an entire nation awaiting the assault of the enemy in perfect trust in God and experiencing deliverance thereby.

“In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them. And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem” (ch. 12:8-9).

This is the final stage. David of old was the champion of Israel; his exploits both as a “guerilla” fighter, as we would say, in his early days, and as a warrior king later on, made his name a legend. “Saul hath slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands” sang the maidens of Israel after one of his resounding victories. Even the weakest of the people “in that day” will be valiant as was David; not by dint of physical

prowess in material warfare, but in the triumphs that faith will then bring. The house of David in ancient times was the ruling house, the royal family. “In that day” the ruling house will be the company of the resurrected Ancient Worthies and they truly will be “as God, as the angel of the Lord before them”. Just as the Angel of the Presence went before Israel in the days of the Exodus, guiding and protecting them, so will the men whom God has appointed prove themselves sure guides and strong defenders in Israel’s time of trial. So the Lord will defend His people and render ineffective all the assaults of their adversaries.



11. "Who is on the Lord's Side?"

From his description of the external forces gathering against regathered Israel in chap. 12:1-9 the prophet now turns to view the attitude of the people in the land. Up to this point the nation has been referred to in general terms as the subject of Divine deliverance soon to be accomplished, but the extent to which the individuals comprising that nation are at heart loyal to God and trusting in His promise has not been declared. As a matter of fundamental principle God can only deliver where there is faith and trust and one of the reasons why it is so repeatedly said in the prophetic Scriptures that only the "Remnant" is ultimately delivered is surely because in all history saving faith is usually found only in the minority; the majority are found unable to pass the test. More than one Old Testament reference to these stirring times indicates that there will be a final purging of the unworthy from the nation on the very eve of Divine intervention and it is only to be expected that Zechariah's very complete foreview of the events should include some reference both to that purging and the turning in faith to God which is characteristic of those who are not thus purged.

This is where the next section of the prophecy, chap. 12:10 to 13:6, has its application. The first half presents a picture of what appears to be almost a universal conversion of the nation and wholehearted sorrow for its former blindness to the workings of the Almighty on its behalf; with that comes the swift response of God in establishing a means of cleansing so that they become acceptable in His sight and acknowledged as His people. But concurrently with this the prophet paints a parallel but darker picture; false teachers and idolatrous, anti-God influences in the land, even whilst in the process of being done away, are still active. The false prophets are "ashamed" of their visions and they make excuses, but they give no evidence of repentance and apparently remain false prophets at heart. And there may yet be such among the people when at the final critical moment God stretches out His hand to deliver. So the stage is set for that seemingly strange paradox of the end of chapter 13 and the beginning of chapter 14 when in the very moment of deliverance some who are still in the land suffer deprivation and cutting-off.

At this momentous time, when the "governors of Israel" of vss. 5-6, the Old Testament stalwarts or "Ancient Worthies", are beginning their task of organising the nation to meet the increasing threat, a strange and wonderful happening occurs. *"I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadad-Rimmon in the valley of Megiddon"* (chap. 12:10-11).

This "spirit of grace and of supplication" is obviously one of repentance and a throwing of themselves upon the Divine goodness. Like Daniel of old, they might well be saying *"we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies"* (Dan. 9:18). So many times there were in Israel's former history when because of their apostasy *"He brought down their heart with labour, and there was none to help. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses"* (Psa. 107:12-13). Now the same thing is to happen again and for the last time. There will be no more apostasy. As Isaiah says (44:3-5), speaking of this same time and event, *"I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring ... one shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel"*. This is definitely a widespread repentance within the nation, from the nature of the description a majority repentance. The dissentients and

the unrepentant would appear to be in the minority, and this raises the question as to what has brought about this major reversal of national feeling. Is it inspired by the evidences of God's moving in the affairs of the nation, or the realisation, at last, of Israel's historic mission and that the time is at hand for its execution; or is it the effect of the reforming zeal of the heaven-sent "governors" and their evident control of the situation and constant exhortation to faith in God? Whatever it may be, there is no doubt that this is a sincere and lasting repentance. The following words show that, "*They shall look upon Me whom they pierced, and they shall mourn for him*". At long last, after so many generations of hard-heartedness, they will "look unto Him, and be saved".

There is a certain amount of doubt as to the textual accuracy of "they shall look unto me". The speaker in this chapter is God Himself and there is a measure of inappropriateness in thinking of the Most High being "pierced"; the word is *dagar*, meaning to thrust through as with a sword or spear, and implies the death of the subject. To think of God as being thus done to death, even in symbol, seems improper. Neither does the sentence read very grammatically; they shall look on *Me* and they shall mourn for *Him* without specifying who is the second person thus introduced. Some give "him" instead of "me", so that some modern translators, including the R.S.V., Moffatt and Ferrar Fenton, adopt "him", whilst the RV and Rotherham give "him" as an alternative. It is of course tempting to look on this verse as referring to the Crucifixion especially as John in ch. 19:37 quotes it in that connection, and his words are rendered in the A.V. "*They shall look on him whom they pierced*". It would appear to be true that on the basis of existing manuscripts there are more or less equal claims for either word. It has been pointed out, however, that the omission at an early date of one letter from the word could transform an original "him" to "me". The Hebrew word rendered "upon me" is a preposition in the first person singular masculine which by the addition of one more letter, the Hebrew *vav*, becomes third person, thus changing "me" to him. The following word in the Hebrew text, *AT*, is given by Gesenius as a demonstrative pronoun corresponding to the Greek *autos*, "*this same*", so that if the hypothetical correction is made the phrase would read "*and they shall look toward him, this same who they pierced*". Now the Greek of John 19:37 rendered literally would read "*they shall look unto whom they pierced*", the "him" being implied. It is possible therefore, that the "*vav*" was in the original text and dropped out at an early date, thus accounting for the alternative renderings in various manuscripts, and that what we have here is a prophetic picture of the repentance of Israel at the Time of the End, and their acceptance of the One whom their forbears crucified. "*They shall mourn for him as one mourneth for an only son*"; this was a term used to denote any unusually intense expression of grief and goes to shew how widespread and deeply felt will be that national contrition which will sweep the nation at that time. A similar expression occurs in Amos 8:10.

Verse 11 colours the picture further, "*In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadad-Rimmon in the valley of Megiddon*". This is a simile which is not easy to understand at first sight. There is no other reference in Scripture to the "mourning of Hadadrimmon" and no such place is known either in the valley of Megiddon or anywhere else. Jerome in the 4th century suggested that it referred to a town called Rummaneh, near Jezreel, but no evidence that there ever was such a place is extant. Hadad in the Aramaic languages means The Mighty, and Rimmon is another name for the Syrian deity Adonis. The story of Naaman the Syrian captain healed by Elisha mentions the house or temple of Rimmon (2 Kings 5:18). The "mourning of Hadadrimmon" therefore may well mean the "mourning of the mighty Adonis". This was a well known ritual observed in the valley of Megiddon as in all lands in and about the territory of Syria. The legend told how Adonis, the youthful god of Nature in her beneficent aspect, had been slain, and descended into the underworld. At his going the sun veiled its face, vegetation withered, the crops failed and the cattle

died. The world became a cold and dark place in which there was no new life. Then Adonis rose from the grave and Nature smiled again and all was well. The entire myth was probably a picturesque story of the coming of winter upon the world and its succession by springtime. So, every year, in early springtime, the festival was held. As soon as the river Adonis began to run red (this was due to the red clay banks crumbling in the sunshine and colouring the water) maidens ran about wailing and mourning the death of the god, whose blood was staining the water. The shepherds pointed to the red anemones blossoming in profusion over the fields—drops of blood from the veins of Adonis. The whole people gave themselves up to this ritual mourning for a week. Then, on the sixth day, the note changed. Adonis was risen! Expressions of joy rose on every hand. The days of mourning were forgotten and all was well.

The same custom prevailed in Babylon and Chaldea where Adonis was known as Tammuz, and Ezekiel refers to it when, in describing the idolatrous practices of the Israelites of his day, he says he saw at the gate of the Temple “*women weeping for Tammuz*” (Ezek. 8:14). So Zechariah was led to liken the mourning of Israel in the Last Days for the “only son” who had suffered death and risen again to that ancient ceremonial with which it had so many elements in common.

The final aspect of this universal mourning in Israel is shewn in verses 12-14 of chapter 12. Each family will mourn in privacy and the womenfolk separated from the menfolk. This is reminiscent of the Mosaic laws respecting the ceremonial for cleansing from defilement caused by contact with the dead. (Num. 19:11-22; 5:2-4; 9:6-10). Seven days’ separation from their fellows, and purification by means of the “water of separation”, had the effect of purifying the man or woman from uncleanness; so here, simultaneously with the great mourning there is a fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. (ch. 13:1).

Four families are specified; the houses of David, Nathan, Levi and Shimei. Two names are well known, the other two not so familiar. About nine individuals named Nathan appear in the O.T., including the famous prophet of King David’s time, and eighteen named Shimei. There could be scope here for a number of interpretations based on any particular selection; perhaps the most reasonable conclusion is that Nathan, the son of David by Bathsheba, and Shimei the grandson of Levi, are intended. We then have David, the leading representative of the royal house of Israel, and Nathan, a minor member of his posterity, with Levi, the head of the priestly tribe, and Shimei, a minor member of his posterity. The combination of the four names would then picture this great mourning extending to all levels of the people, from kings and priests at the forefront to the rank and file of the people below them.

It is probably true that the respective offices of kings and priests will be combined, in that day, in the persons of the “governors”, the princes, but the meaning remains the same. From the leaders to the led there will arise a great expression of repentance for the past and acceptance of God and His ways for the future. This is where ch. 13:1 has its place. A cleansing stream makes its appearance and in the waters of that stream the sin and uncleanness of the past is washed away and the people stand ready to face their final ordeal, standing thus in the strength of their God.

A darker part of the picture now comes into view. Some there are in the nation who do not share the general spirit of repentance and supplication. Idolatry is still present in the land and in ch. 13:2 the Lord declares His intention of rooting out that idolatry and eliminating the false prophets. Idolatry in Zechariah’s day meant the worship of false gods, Baal and Ashtoreth and Molech and others, representative of and associated with the powers of Nature and the more depraved aspects of men’s minds. That kind of worship has long since disappeared, but its equivalent in more modern guise is with us now and to an extent will be present in the regathered nation until consumed in the fire of the final ordeal. Money, commercial gain, political power, control of the minds

and lives of men, these are the modern forms of idolatry and these will have their devotees, the false prophets of this chapter, and to an extent their voices are heard in this nation so soon to be tried in the fire that it may be forged into an instrument for God's purpose. It would seem, though, that chapter 13 envisages a time when national sentiment in general is against them. The great repentance and mourning of chapter 12, the fountain for cleansing of ch. 13:1, are having their effect, and in ch. 13:3 a situation is described in which these false prophets are discredited and rejected when they speak. Again the symbolism of the Mosaic Law is invoked. The parents of the false prophet say to him *"Thou shalt not live, for thou speakest lies in the name of the Lord"* and they thrust him through, i.e. put him to death. This was the penalty for idolatry laid down by Moses and recorded in Deut. 13:6-11. The offender's nearest relative must execute the death sentence. Thus is indicated that the closest of ties will not interfere with the complete separation between the godly and the godless at this critical time. So the false prophets are more or less driven underground, as we would say today. They endeavour to avoid discovery, *"ashamed every one of his vision when he hath prophesied"* as Zechariah puts it in vs. 4, eschewing the distinctive garb of a prophet, the *addereth seir*, the mantle of goatskin or camel skin. They claim instead to be one with the people of the land, and when taxed with an enquiry as to the wounds in their hands they return an evasive reply. *"One shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends"* (vs. 6). The idolatrous priests were accustomed to cut themselves with knives and inflict various wounds upon their bodies in the prophetic frenzy—the priests of Baal did this at the time of Elijah's challenge (1 Kings 25:5-12)—and the possession of such injuries was another mark of a false prophet. But here in this case the men thus taxed deny the imputation and claim that they received their injuries within their social circle; this is the meaning of the expression "house of my friends". Either blood relatives or close companions are implied. The false prophets are at pains to make it appear that they are at one with the prevailing national sentiment of faith and loyalty toward God but in fact their hearts are far from these things. This passage relating to the presence of false prophets at this time is difficult to interpret and it is only because there are other Scriptural references to the presence of just such a class of men when the hostile nations advance to the attack that it is possible to elicit a meaning at all. Thus Zephaniah, speaking of this same time, of the Lord "rising up to the prey", gathering the nations for judgment preparatory to turning His "pure language" to the people (Zeph. 3:8-20) goes on to say *"then will I take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride ... I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord"*. This "remnant of Israel" he says *"shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies, neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth"*. The 5th chapter of Micah, devoted to the same events, pictured as the "Assyrian" invading the land, includes as an integral part of the Lord's deliverance the banishment of witchcraft, *"and thou shalt have no more soothsayers. Thy graven images also will I cut off, and thy standing images out of the midst of thee; and thou shalt no more worship the work of thine own hands"*. Isaiah in his 66th chapter talks of retribution to come upon those who are following idolatrous practices at the very time He has gathered all nations of the world for the final battle; here again the "remnant of Israel" are the only survivors in the land and they are then commissioned to take the knowledge of God to all nations. This is another way of picturing the "pure language" of the Zephaniah passage just quoted. The association of an unbelieving element with the faithful "remnant" in the land at this crucial time seems plainly to be indicated in these passages.

It will not have escaped notice that in all these prophetic foreviews the prevailing sin of the unbelieving element is idolatry—the worship of a rival god. It is perhaps only to be expected that in Israel at the final stage there will still be those whose minds and

hands are given to the perpetuation of this present order of things, those who would advocate collaboration with the powers of this world rather than dedication to the service and the purpose of God. Perhaps in the Divine wisdom such will be allowed to continue their covert resistance to the reforming work of the “governors”—false prophets “ashamed” of their vision, but at heart false prophets nevertheless and hoping still that their policy will ultimately prevail. But the Lord has declared “*I know their works and their thoughts*” (Isa. 66:18) and although their continued presence in the land may well be permitted to constitute a test and a refining influence upon the faithful—and this may well be the inference to be drawn from verses 7-9 of chapter 13—it is certain that all who come short of complete and whole-hearted faith and loyalty towards God will find themselves excluded from the deliverance which God has planned for the people of faith. The fourteenth chapter makes it plain that when, at last, the long expected onslaught takes place and Israel enters into the fire, some of the people are not delivered; they go into exile. That can only be because they are not the people of faith. They have yielded their devotion and efforts to the service of idol gods, and to their idol gods they will be abandoned.



12. Sinners in Zion

We come now to the most difficult passage in the whole of Zechariah's prophecy—difficult, because the opening sentences seem on the surface as though they could apply only to the First Advent whilst almost immediately there appear expressions which can only refer to the Second Advent. The sword is raised against the Lord's Shepherd and in consequence the sheep are scattered. Two parts among them die but the third part is preserved in the fires and becomes the people of the Lord. The Day of the Lord dawns and the nations surround Jerusalem. One part of the citizens is led into exile but the other part is preserved. At this point the Lord rises up to defend Israel and scatter the besiegers. The difficulty lies in reconciling the smiting of the Lord's shepherd with the rising up of God to overthrow all evil and deliver those who trust in Him.

“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones” (ch. 13:7). This “shepherd” who is also the Lord's “fellow” can be none other than Christ; the word rendered “fellow” is literally “my companion”, the “man of my fellowship”, and indicates one bound to the Father by the closest possible ties of association, much more so than the ordinary bonds of friendship. Abraham and Moses were said to be the “friends” of God; Daniel was the “greatly beloved”, but this word indicates a closer and more constant oneness and when associated with God cannot be applied to other than the Son. Zechariah must have known this and seen in the expression a reference to Israel's Messiah. Jesus endorsed this (Matt. 26:31). The R.S.V. adopts a rendering which is peculiarly fitting; “the man who stands next to me”. However the passage is interpreted, this, the central figure, is undoubtedly Christ the Messiah.

The smiting of this Shepherd is then the rejection of Him by the flock; not only that initial rejection which led to His crucifixion in the days of His humanity, but the long-continued rejection which has subsisted throughout the Age and is still true, at least in part, at the Age's end. In this the rejection of chapter 13 differs from the rejection of the same Shepherd in chapter 11, where the reference is only to the First Advent. But to perceive how this can be it is necessary to examine the structure of the passage more closely.

The point that emerges most noticeably is that chap. 13:7 to 14:2 is written in a style dissimilar from that which goes before or comes after. It really forms a self-contained little section in its own right. Up to chap. 13:6 and also from chap. 14:3 onward the style is prose narrative, telling in the one case of the progress of Israel's repentance and cleansing, and in the other of active Divine intervention and the establishment of the Kingdom. But this little section is not narrative and it is not prose; it is poetry written in the characteristic style of Hebrew poetry, and gives every evidence of being a kind of triumph song in highly rhetorical terms inserted at this point to give maximum effect to what it has to say. The passage consists of nine couplets, the typical form of Old Testament poetry, arranged in sets of three each. Couplets 1 to 3 tell of the smitten Shepherd and the consequent scattered flock, of whom two parts die and a remnant is left. Couplets 4 to 6 describe God's care for the “remnant” which is saved out of that scattering, and couplets 7 to 9 sing of the further purifying of that remnant by the elimination of a further part proved unworthy so that a fully tried and tested nucleus remains to experience deliverance. Thus understood, the passage stands in the following fashion.

1. Awake, O sword, against my shepherd;
And against the man that is my fellow.
2. Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered;
And I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.
3. And it shall come to pass that in all the land two parts therein shall be cut off and die;
But the third shall be left therein.

* * * *

4. And I will bring the third part through the fires;
And I will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried.
5. They shall call on my name;
And I will hear them.
6. I will say, it is my people;
And they shall say, the Lord is my God.

* * * *

7. Behold, the day of the Lord cometh;
And thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee.
8. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle;
And the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished.
9. And half of the city shall go forth into captivity;
But the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city.

Now if this is recognised as a “theme song” then its theme is clearly that the rejection of God’s Shepherd has become a means whereby the apostates are separated from the faithful, the dross from the pure metal, until only the true-hearted “remnant” remain in the land of God’s choosing and face the massed evil of the world in complete faith that God will deliver. Perhaps this is why the “song” is inserted at this point, between the account in chaps. 12 and 13 of the preparation of the land and nation for the final battle, and the stirring picture in chap. 14 in which the kingdoms of this world pass away and the Lord becomes King over the whole earth. If this is so it becomes easier to accept the language of this song as covering, in a poetic fashion, the entire story of apostasy and faith from the First to the Second Advents, so that Jesus could logically apply ch. 13:7 to Himself in His earthly life, when the rejection began, and yet prophetically Zechariah could see that rejection still persisting at the time of His coming again, when, as Jesus predicted, there would still be a lack of faith in the earth. At the same time the rapid development of the “remnant” which is to face the final challenge becomes a very real and present part of the picture.

Who are the sheep that are scattered and what is meant by God turning His hand “upon the little ones”. In chap. 11 the sheep are the whole house of Israel and they are abandoned to dispersal and death because of their rejection of the Shepherd. That was fulfilled in full measure at the First Advent. This later picture might well extend the same theme to the whole of the Age with particular relevance to the Age’s end. Throughout the Age, the sword has been smiting the Shepherd and the sheep have been scattered, for Israel has been continually “abiding in unbelief” (Rom. 11:23). And if the whole history of Israel’s rejection of Messiah is looked at from the viewpoint of the resultant situation at the end of the Age a solution to the problem of the two parts that are cut off and die presents itself. Out of all Israel there have always been, and are still, those who remain in the lands of their dispersion, in every part of the world, by choice, having no faith in the promises of God and no intention of taking any part in the rebuilding of the Land of Promise. These constitute one part. Then there are those who do settle and live in the Land, sharing in the creation of that State and people, but either do so from a purely nationalistic motive or, if they start out on the basis of faith in the Divine promise, later repudiate that faith and revert to the

standards and expectations of this present world. These form the second part. One part still in the Dispersion, and one part within the frontiers of Israel, but both parts have rejected the Shepherd and both parts, so far as inclusion in the Divine purpose is concerned, are “cut off and die”. Like their forerunners in the days of Jesus, they see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets, sit down in the Kingdom of God, whilst they themselves are thrust out (Luke 13:28).

There remains the “third part” which is left therein. This third part would seem to be identical with the “little ones” of verse 7. The Shepherd is smitten and the sheep scattered but, says God, *“I will turn mine hand upon the little ones”*. The “little ones” are, literally, those who are esteemed mean, despised, small in others’ view. This can well fit the few who retain their faith in God. The expression “turn mine hand upon” is not so easy to interpret. “Upon” is a word having a negative power, most frequently used in the sense of forbidding or being against a thing, and would be more accurately rendered “against the little ones” which is how the R.S.V. and a number of other modern translations render it. In fact the same word is rendered “against” twice in this same 7th verse, The Septuagint uses the Greek *epi* to translate the Hebrew word all three times in this verse, and *epi* has the sense of being on, upon or over the subject. It might be then that the hand of God is “over” or “upon” the little ones in the sense of protection and this is the view usually taken of this verse. Since however the “third part” is later said to be brought into the fires of testing it might be in this sense that God turns His hand “against” them. Zephaniah, speaking of this same “third part” in the same prophetic setting, says that God will *“leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord”* (Zeph. 3:12). It may be therefore that the expression is intended to indicate that from the onlooker’s point of view the Lord, having allowed His Shepherd to be smitten and the sheep scattered, has indeed turned His hand against His little ones, although from the long term angle it is clear that He is dealing with them, to use Malachi’s expression, as a refiner and purifier of silver.

This is where the second stanza of the poem comes before notice. *“I will bring the third part through the fires, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried. They shall call on my name and I will hear them. I will say, it is my people, and they shall say, The Lord is my God”*. This refined and purified and tested people is, of course, the Remnant, the stalwart nation of faith which will experience the Deliverance. The time can only be the end of the Age and the eleventh hour of the End at that, for at no other time in history will such a national faith in God, and such a consequent Divine acceptance, be true. Despite the smiting of the Shepherd which has subsisted throughout the Age, and the falling away of so many, God has at last completed the formation of His earthly elect. Ready for their glorious destiny they stand in their places in the land they have made ready, waiting.

So to the third stanza, which appears in the A.V. as the first two verses of chapter 14. Were this poem set to music, here most certainly would come the fanfare of trumpets. *“Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee”*. The time has come, the time of Israel’s victory, and nothing can now hold back the march of events already irrevocably ordained in the Divine time-table. The powers of Heaven and earth are drawn up in martial array and they face each other, waiting.

A failure to understand aright the nature of this prophetic picture of the attack upon Jerusalem leads some to see in this expression the division, among the attackers, of spoil taken from Israel at this time. The idea of such proceeding is not consistent with the basic principle that this is the time, not of Israel’s defeat, but of Israel’s victory. Neither does the text read that way. “Thy spoil” means Israel’s spoil. Had it been otherwise the passage would read *“Their spoil shall be divided ...”*. The point here

is that despite the overwhelming physical superiority of the enemy and their proud boast that they have come “to take a spoil and to take a prey” (see Ezek. 38:12-13) it will be the devoted people in the city who will take spoil of their attackers, as Ezekiel again says in 39:10 *“They shall spoil those that spoiled them”*. And the nature of that “spoil” is well described by Isaiah; it will be no less than the allegiance and devotion of the erstwhile godless nations to the standard of righteousness which will be unfurled by the Holy Nation in that day, “spoil” more valuable to the people of God by far than treasures of gold or silver or possessions or lands. *“The nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising ... the wealth of the nations shall come unto thee ... the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee ... ye shall eat the riches of the nations, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves ... and the nations shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory ... thou shalt be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God”* (Isa. chaps. 60-62). The forces of the Lord in that day will have no need of earthly treasures for their spoil; their God already owns “all the gold and silver, and the cattle upon a thousand hills”. The spoil they look for and will take is something much more precious, the hearts and minds and the lives of men, and this it is that will be yielded to them at that historic period of human history.

But first there has to come the peak, the crucial phase, of the refining fire that is to winnow all that is dross from the community of Israel. Chap. 14 verse 2 presents what is to all appearances a strange and unexpected anti-climax. At the momentous hour when God moves in, as it were, to intervene and deliver, the prophet sees the city “taken”, the houses rifled, the women ravished, and half of the inhabitants driven into exile. Nowhere else in all the many Old Testament foreviews of this dramatic time is such an eventuality pictured; in every other instance the attacking forces come immediately up against the irresistible powers of Heaven and are utterly broken. Here in Zechariah the very next verse presents the same theme, and shews the all-powerful Lord advancing to the battle. What then is the significance of this strange diversion, introducing itself as it were at the last minute of the eleventh hour?

It must be remembered that we are still hearing the strains of the “triumph song” which closes with this verse 2. To a great extent the language used reflects past occasions of triumph and rejoicing in Israel’s history, and the nature of the coming event is described in terms reminiscent of past similar happenings in Israel’s history. The man of Israel, hearing or reading the words, was expected to cast his mind back to the former event and visualise the predicted reality within the general background of that event. In this case there is not much doubt that the background is that of Sennacherib’s defeat outside Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah. In both cases the enemy surrounds Jerusalem in confidence that he will capture the city with ease; he openly defies God, God answers the challenge, and he is defeated and expelled from the land—Jerusalem is saved. In both cases that salvation is in consequence of faith and reliance upon God. Hence to understand this verse it is necessary to compare it with the things that happened in the days of Hezekiah. There is an abundance of material upon which to draw, for the record of that celebrated event, the defeat of Sennacherib, is repeated no less than four times in the Old Testament, in 2 Kings 18-19, 2 Chron. 32, Isaiah 22 and Isaiah 37, with another “triumph song” extolling the victory in Isaiah 33. As if all this were not enough, we in our day have the additional advantage of Sennacherib’s own account of the campaign, inscribed on a six-sided cylinder which is at present in the British Museum, and another which is held by the University of Chicago. From all of this the aptness of this incident from history to illustrate the deliverance of Israel at the end of this Age is very marked.

“The city shall be taken” says the A.V. “Taken” is *asaph*, to gather or encompass, as in a net. Hos. 4:3 uses the word of fishes of the sea thus taken, and the meaning here is that the city is surrounded or besieged, but not captured in the sense of a forcible entry being effected. Incidentally the same word is used for “gather” in the same verse where God says He will gather all nations against Jerusalem; the enemy encompasses the city but God encompasses the enemy! It is rather remarkable that Sennacherib uses the same term in his account, *“Hezekiah himself, like a bird in a cage, I shut up within Jerusalem, his royal city”*. And of course Sennacherib, despite his boasting, never did get inside the city! From this picture it would seem justifiable to conclude that in a poetic manner Zechariah is saying what all the other prophets do say, that the enemy will surround the Holy Land but not actually capture it; the intervention of God will come first as it did in the case of Sennacherib.

Now Zechariah expands his theme. *“The houses shall be rifled and the women ravished”* he says. This at first sight would seem to contradict the inviolability of the city. Again the historical precedent can be a guide to the meaning. According to the account in 2 Kings there was a period immediately before the great deliverance when faith on the part of Hezekiah and his people was not as strong as it should have been and they yielded to the Assyrian demands for treasure and tribute. The cylinder of Sennacherib gives a more complete list of the booty the invader took from Hezekiah at this time. *“Thirty talents of gold, eight hundred talents of silver, precious stones of all kinds, pearls, thrones adorned with ivory, tusks of ivory, sandal wood, ebony, the contents of Hezekiah’s treasure house, his daughters, the women of his palace, and his male and female slaves”*. All these did the Assyrian take and send to Nineveh, the treasure for the adornment of his city and the women for the rest of their lives to be at the mercy of their captors. Not only so, but during the actual siege some there were who left the city trusting to the Assyrians rather than in God, and these too were captured and sent also to Nineveh. *“I threw up mounds against him”* goes on the remorseless conqueror *“and I took vengeance upon any man who came forth from the city. All who came outside the great gate of the city were captured and led off”*. That there were a number of such among the leaders of Israel is recorded by Isaiah 22:3 which is an account of this siege. *“All your rulers have fled together, without the bow they were captured. All of you who were found were captured though they had fled far away”* (R.S.V.). So that when Zechariah declares that the houses are rifled, the women ravished, half of the city go forth into exile, he is telling us that just as in the days of Sennacherib there was an element of unbelief which led to the loss of all part in the coming deliverance for some of the people, so will it be now. After all the purging fires of the Age which has resulted in a dedicated people awaiting, in a dedicated land, the onslaught of the enemy, there will be at the last moment a portion whose faith does not hold and who in consequence are abandoned to the powers of this world. The particular details given by Zechariah are symbols only, drawn from the story of Sennacherib. The reality is that, for the last time, unbelief is found in Israel, and because deliverance can only come by faith and God is now waiting to deliver, the unbelievers go forth into exile.

Isaiah seems to have had a keen insight into this position. The language he uses in Isa. 33:14 although primarily directed to the unbelievers who left the city in Hezekiah’s day, is even more cogently applicable to the similar situation at the end of the Age. *“The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites”* he says, and poses their terrified questions *“who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?”* The prophet gives the obvious answer; *“He that walketh righteously ...”* and so on, but from other prophetic writings it is evident that he is not heeded. When Amos comes to speak of the same great Day he says *“All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, which say, the evil shall not overtake us”* (Amos 9:10) and then immediately the Lord proceeds to

“raise up the tabernacle of David, which is fallen” i.e. introduce the opening stage of the Millennial Kingdom.

“But the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city”. That is the concluding triumphant line of this victory song. This word “residue” is the one so often rendered “remnant” in reference to the people of faith found ready for the Divine purpose at the end. And here Zechariah concludes his poem and prepares to draw aside the curtain to reveal the last great act in this wonderful drama. The enemy is in position around the Holy Land, all unbelievers and idolaters have been excluded from within its borders, the “remnant” is fully prepared and strong in faith. All things are now ready.

“Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations as when he fought in the day of battle”.



13. The Valley of the Mountain

“Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations as when he fought in the day of battle” (ch. 14:3).

This is the climax, this the farthest limit of the powers of this world. At this point God breaks through into human history, and for the first time, perhaps, since the days of Jehoshaphat, the armed forces of earth come up against a power which is from heaven, and because it is from heaven cannot be resisted. The Lord comes forth to war, as He did do several times in Israel’s national history, but this time He comes forth not only for the deliverance of the Holy Nation from its immediate enemies, but the deliverance of all mankind from the great enemy. Here, at this time, the dominion of evil is to be overthrown and in its place instituted an order of things “wherein dwelleth righteousness”.

How does the Lord go forth and with what weapons does He fight? There are not wanting expositors who visualise a sanguinary combat in which all the instruments of devilry devised by man are used on both sides, and a victory distinguished by masses of dead and wounded strewn over a blood-soaked land. It is true that many of the prophetic foreviews of this final conflict are couched in such terms but this is because men, accustomed to such scenes, can only visualise a conflict in which one side gains the victory and the other suffers defeat in some such manner. These foreviews must be taken as pictures illustrating the principles involved; the issues to be decided in this battle are greater by far than can be resolved by the indiscriminate slaughter of human beings, most of whom are still so ignorant of the eternal verities that, like the men of Nineveh in Jonah’s time, they cannot “*discern between their right hand and their left hand*”. Just as Jesus said “*the Son of Man is not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them*” so now, when God is pictured as descending upon the Mount of Olives amid awesome cataclysms of Nature it is not that He might destroy men, opposed to His righteousness and unregenerate as they are, but that He might destroy their capacity for accomplishing their evil designs and reduce them to a condition of submissiveness before Him, that He might then “*withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man*” (Job 33:17). It must be expected therefore that the actual concrete actions and events by means of which the prophecy is to be accomplished can be only imperfectly visualised, involved as they are with celestial powers the nature of which is outside our ken. The natural picture presented by Zechariah, the descent, the earthquake, the battle and so on, is to be regarded as a picture, a painting which, when regarded and considered, conveys a message; it is the message that is of importance.

Perhaps the cardinal principle to be built into a satisfactory understanding of this passage is that which was illustrated on those previous occasions when Israel, exercising faith, was delivered in the face of apparently hopeless odds. “*Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord*” said Moses just before the Red Sea crossing. “*The Egyptians whom you have seen today, ye shall see them no more again for ever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace*” (Exod. 14:13-14). The people obeying, in faith stepped down into the sea-bed and were delivered. “*Be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him*” was good King Hezekiah’s exhortation to his people at the time of the siege. “*With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah*” (2 Chron. 32:7-8). And in that night the host of the armies of Assyria melted away. When the forces of Moab and Ammon and Edom invaded Judah, to cut them off from being a people, “*all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives and their children*” while King Jehoshaphat, standing in the Temple court, lifted up his voice to God “*we have no*

might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon thee" (2 Chron. 20:12); their faith was vindicated and Judah was saved. So in this, the greatest and final deliverance, the situation that is pictured is one in which the cleansed and dedicated Nation manifests serene confidence as to the outcome, the enemy surrounds the land with every expectation of an easy victory; the armies of heaven advance to the battle and in an awe-inspiring display of other-worldly power frustrate the invaders' purpose and reduce their armed might to nothingness.

The features which Zechariah saw in his prophetic vision are well known. The people, in the city, waiting. The invaders, having already taken captive and sent into exile the faint-hearted and apostates from among the people, preparing to follow up their advantage. Only the men of faith remain and it seems that even for them there is now no hope. Perhaps they have all gathered in the Temple courts as did their predecessors in the days of Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah to pray for deliverance, the while the enemy is already rifling the houses. And at that moment besieged and besiegers alike look up into the skies and behold a stupendous sight; God Most High, the Ancient of Days, descending, accompanied by His attendants and holy ones, descending upon the Mount of Olives, His feet touching the sacred soil, a mighty earthquake, the Mount cloven in two, a deep chasm from west to east separating the mountain into two parts, that great multitude of exultant foes halting in their tracks as they move in for the kill, finding their eyes being burned out of their sockets by the dazzling radiance, their tongues stilled and destroyed by the terror and thunder of the earthquake, their bodies maimed and destroyed as the earth heaves and opens and swallows them up; a blind unreasoning panic seizes them and they turn each against other, the blind, the dumb and the maimed until, at the end, there are none left. The mountainous districts surrounding Jerusalem which, from time immemorial, had looked down upon the city from their superior height of several hundreds of feet, are broken up by the earthquake and sink down to form a low-lying plain like the plain of Jordan, and within that broken up terrain is buried for ever the remains of the host that had defied the living God. In the centre of the plain stands proudly, Jerusalem upon her hills, exalted "above the tops of the mountains". And so the Nation is saved, and so perish all the enemies of the Lord. That is the picture as drawn in verses 4-15 of Zechariah's 14th chapter. How should it be interpreted?

"And his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives ... and the Mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north and half of it toward the south" (ch. 14:4).

This is an earthquake; but is it a literal or a metaphorical earthquake? It is a very common practice among prophetic students to interpret the whole of this passage upon a literal basis. Geologically, there is nothing against the possibility. The entire land is in an earthquake zone which runs up from the Red Sea and into Galilee and Syria. Earthquakes have occurred there a goodly number of times in history and Zechariah refers to one such in his very next verse. There is nothing in the prophetic description from verse 4 to 11 which is physically—geologically—incapable of realisation. That does not demand, of course, that the prophecy is intended to have such literal fulfilment; the possibility that this is a figurative use of language, in line with practically the whole of Zechariah's prophecy, to picture happenings and processes of a more fundamental nature and involving greater issues, must also be considered. It could also be argued that the prophecy has a dual function, possessing literal and figurative elements. But it has to be shewn that the interpretation suggested has some valid place and purpose in the outworking of the plan, that it contributes towards the attainment of the predetermined end, which in this case is the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom, and this will be the endeavour here.

The descent of the Lord upon the Mount of Olives obviously marks the moment of Divine intervention in earth's affairs. This is true whether the descent is literal, the Deity in visible human form taking His stance upon the mountain top, or figurative. This same theme is dwelt upon elsewhere. "*The Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake*" says Joel (Joel 3:16). "*The Lord cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth, and the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft*" is Micah's contribution (Micah 1:3,4) although here the prophet is talking about Divine judgment imminent upon Israel and Judah of his own day. In like fashion Nahum tells of coming judgment upon Assyria; "*The Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries ... the mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence*" (Nahum 1:2,5). In these latter two instances the language is figurative; history shews that. Likewise the variety of allusions in the Old Testament to the event now under consideration directs the conclusion that the language here is figurative also. In Joel the Lord "roars out of Zion"—Jerusalem. In Daniel 7 He appears on a heavenly throne to conduct the Last Assize and invest the Son of Man with the rulership of earth. In the apocryphal Book of Enoch, quoted by Jude, (Jude 14,15) and possibly enshrining some very ancient prophecy not otherwise included in the canonical books, the place of descent is said to be Sinai, "*The Holy Great One will come forth from his dwelling, and the eternal God will dwell upon the earth, on Mount Sinai, and appear in the strength of his might from the heaven of heavens ... and the high mountains shall be shaken and the high hills shall be made low, and the earth shall be rent in sunder ... and behold, he cometh with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment upon all ...*" (1 Enoch 1:3-9). In any case this whole picture has to be interpreted in the light of the New Testament revelation that it is Christ the Son who comes in person to the earth at this time to deliver Israel and subdue all evil; since this deliverance is but one of the sequence of events occupying the *Parousia*, His presence, the descent on the Mount of Olives becomes the symbol of the first outward evidence that His Presence is an accomplished fact. Up to that point of time many will have continued to say "*where is the promise of his coming, for since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as from the beginning of creation*" (2 Pet. 3:4). Beyond that point, all will realise the fact, and believe.

The impact of that intervention upon men, and its consequences upon the enemy, is likened to an earthquake. At the coming of the Lord the earth will quake, the heavens pass away, the sun and the moon become dark, the stars cease to shine, the works of man be burned up—all these symbols are used to describe the disintegration and utter destruction of man's world, which in this context is synonymous with all evil things, because man's world is predominantly evil. A new world is to follow in which all the good that has survived—for such good as does exist in this present world, because good is lasting, will survive—will blossom forth into greater good under the more favourable conditions of that world. So Zechariah tells of a great earthquake which splits the Mount of Olives into northern and southern parts with a valley between. Geographically that valley, running east-west, would be exactly opposite the East Gate of the Temple; the idea is irresistible that the prophecy intends some notice to be taken of that fact.

The succeeding verse has given translators—and expositors—a great deal of trouble. As it appears in the A.V. the meaning is very obscure. Speaking of this valley the verse says "*ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah King of Judah; and the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee*" (ch. 14:5). When the descent and the earthquake are held to be literal it is said that the citizens of Jerusalem will flee into this valley for protection and shelter—ignoring the fact that people do not run toward the site of an earthquake

for safety but away from it. In any case the text, as with all such obscure passages, needs closer examination before interpreting.

The preposition “to” is in italics, having been supplied by the A.V. translators because there is no preposition in the Hebrew, which should read in the A.V. “ye shall flee the valley” i.e. away from it and not into it.

The word *Azal* has been put in as a place name but no such place in the district is known. Properly, the word is *el-atsal* and some expositors have suggested that this may be intended for the *Beth-ha-etsal* of Micah 1:11 which, say some hopefully, was perhaps to the east of the Mount of Olives. In fact this place was near Beer-Sheba, twenty-five miles in the other direction, so that geographically this could not have been intended.

The mention of the earthquake in the days of Uzziah should next be investigated. Zechariah refers to this as though it was a well known event to the people of his day even although it was by then over two centuries in the past. No account of this earthquake is given in Biblical history, the only other allusion being by the prophet Amos, who says he began his prophetic ministry in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam, king of Israel, “two years before the earthquake” (Amos 1:1). It was evidently a happening which made a deep impression and of which the memory was long lasting. Fortunately Josephus gives an account of it; his account reveals the similarities which led Zechariah to use it as an illustration in this later picture of Divine intervention and Divine judgment. It will be remembered that the books of Kings and Chronicles relate how Uzziah arrogated to himself the priestly duty of offering incense in the Temple, for which sacrilege he was smitten with leprosy. Josephus declares that the earthquake came as Divine judgment for the act. He says (Ant. 9. 10. 4). “*Uzziah was corrupted in his mind by pride ... accordingly, when a general festival was to be celebrated, he put on the holy garment and went into the temple to offer incense to God upon the golden altar, which he was prohibited to do by Azariah the High Priest ... and when they cried out that he must go out of the temple, he was wroth at them and threatened to kill them. In the meantime a great earthquake shook the ground, and a rent was made in the temple, and the bright rays of the sun shone through it, and fell upon the king’s face, insomuch that the leprosy seized upon him immediately; and before the city, at a place called Eroge, half the mountain broke off from the rest on the west, and rolled itself four stadia (about half a mile) and stood still at the east mountain, till the roads, as well as the king’s gardens, were blocked by the obstruction*”. The source of Josephus’ information is unknown and no independent check on its veracity is possible; physically however, the account is consistent with the topography of Jerusalem. His “east mountain” is the Mount of Olives; the “west mountain”, the heights of Ophel at the south-eastern corner of the city half a mile away, on the slopes of which were the “king’s gardens”, and at the foot, the “fountain of the fowler” called En-rogel, the “Eroge” of his account. It would appear that part of Ophel collapsed and fell four hundred feet into the valley separating it from the Mount of Olives and blocked the valley besides burying the king’s gardens. Such a line of cleavage, extended northward, would intersect the Temple area and account for the effect noted by Josephus.

With this background story in mind attention can be turned back to verse 5. The first important factor to notice is the expression “ye shall flee”, appearing twice in the verse. A great many ancient authorities adopt a term meaning “to be blocked up” in lieu of this expression and this rendering, which is also that of the Septuagint, has been adopted by modern translators such as the R.S.V., Moffatt and Rotherham. The determining word in the original Hebrew, which was without vowels, is *ynstm*, which is pointed in some manuscripts as *yenastem*, “ye shall flee”, and in others as *yenistam*, “shall be blocked up”. The expression in the A.V. “*shall reach unto Azal*”, critically rendered, means to turn toward each other so as to touch or join together. Thus the

sense of this verse is not that of anyone fleeing either into or away from, the valley, but of the valley itself being closed or blocked up. This is where the analogy of Uzziah's earthquake holds good; Josephus says that the valley was blocked by the earthquake. So the best translation of this verse, supported by the LXX and the modern translators mentioned, would read "and the valley of the mountains shall be blocked up, for the valley of the mountains shall close together as it was blocked up by the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah".

So far for the rendering, but what does it mean? Why should there be an earthquake, creating a valley through the centre of the Mount of Olives, if the next step is to close up that valley again? Is the solution connected with the remaining element in the verse "*and the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with him*"?

This, in fact, is the answer. This dividing of the Mount of Olives pictures not only the last event of "this present evil world" but also the first event of the "world to come, wherein dwelleth righteousness". It pictures God, in Christ, not only coming to judgment upon the last adversaries to resist the incoming Kingdom, but also His coming in splendour to take up His dwelling with men, as realised in the Millennial Presence. And to appreciate this it is necessary to associate this vision of Zechariah with that of his predecessor Ezekiel when that prophet saw, in like manner, the glory of the Lord coming from the East to take up residence with His people.

The 43rd chapter of Ezekiel's prophecy describes how he took his stand by the East Gate of the Millennial Temple. "*And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory*". And the glory of the Lord came into the Temple by the East Gate, and a proclamation was made to the effect that the Lord was now to dwell with Israel for ever—and then the East Gate was shut, never again to be opened. The reason? "*This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no, man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut*". In figurative sense, the Lord had come, finding the gate open to receive Him. He was never again to go away, for now His people were ready to accept Him and not repudiate Him again. No need for another to come would ever arise, for He will be all-sufficient. So the gate would never need to be used again; it could be shut and the way closed up for all time.

Now this is what Zechariah also saw. Within the limits of his vision he saw Jerusalem and its Temple, with its own East Gate fronting directly upon the Mount of Olives. He saw the enemies of Israel around the city and he knew that God was coming, not only for their overthrow but to dwell with Israel eternally. And the valley through the middle of the Mount of Olives made a passage for the God of Israel, coming from the East straight to that East Gate. That is why, when before his eyes that great chasm appeared in the Mount, and he saw also the Lord advancing through it toward the city he cried out in ecstasy "*And the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with him*".

That explains why the valley is to be blocked up. Just as in Ezekiel's vision the East Gate of his Temple was to be permanently closed after the God of Israel had passed through it into the Temple, so here, the valley is similarly to be blocked up after the God of Israel has passed through it on His way to deliver His people. The symbols used by the two prophets differ, but the principle is the same. There are yet other effects of the earthquake to be described in succeeding verses, but here at this point, the Lord comes, His holy ones with Him, to deliver His people and remain with them forever.

14. Jerusalem Exalted

Following Israel's dramatic deliverance at Jerusalem, marked by the revelation of the Lord from Heaven and his assumption of kingly power, there is a kind of orderly procession of related events which have the effect of leading the whole world into the light and life of the Millennial Kingdom. Here in Zechariah's 14th chapter there is a short passage, verses 6-11, which has its place between the great deliverance and the full establishment of the Messianic reign over all the earth. Only after relating, in symbol, the nature of those happenings does the prophet bring his book to a close in the glories of the Kingdom itself. As with the previous part of the chapter, the physical setting of the prophecy is the literal city and its surroundings, and in fact these verses are closely connected with the earlier description of the besieged city, the advent of Israel's deliverer, and the earthquake.

So, after completing his account of the Lord's coming, with all His holy ones, the defeat of the besiegers and the salvation of the city, Zechariah says (vss. 6-7) "*And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark, but it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day, nor night; but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light*". Not a very lucid passage, but that is because some of the words have proved difficult to translate correctly, and even today scholars are dubious as to their meaning. The consensus of opinion is that in a general way the heavenly luminaries, the stars, and perhaps the moon, lose their brilliancy and fade into obscurity, but that at the close of that day there shall be the full blaze of meridian sunlight. "*The bright stars shall contract their lustre*" says Gesenius "*There shall not be light, but heavy clouds and thick*" suggests the Margolis translation. It is evident that the verses refer to the entire "Day of the Lord" of chapter 14 so that this darkness followed by light at the end becomes a familiar picture. As Joel says in reference to this same period "*the sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining*" (Joel 3:15) and Amos "*the day of the Lord will be darkness, and not light; even very dark, and no brightness in it*" (Amos 5:20). The "one day known to the Lord" of verse 6 is an emphatic expression indicating that this day is a unique day, no other day is just like it; which is just what Jeremiah says in the same connection: "*alas, for that day is great, so that none is like it. It is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it*" (Jer. 30:7). Very fittingly, therefore, do these two verses stand where they do. All that goes before them is the time of darkness, of battle and tumult and the overpowering of evil forces. That which comes after them is of the new day of light, of healing and rejoicing, of life and righteousness. In a very real sense the next verse, verse 7, can be said to picture the beginning of true Millennial blessing.

This verse is quite evidently relative to the coming of new life to the world. The King is now in control and the powers of His Kingdom begin to become evident. "*It shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem, half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be*". The "former sea" (the sea in front) in Zechariah's geography is the Dead Sea, east of Jerusalem. The "hinder sea" (behind) is the Mediterranean, on the west. "Living waters" are perennial streams, not flowing in the rainy season only like so many rivers of the land, but there all the time, "in summer and in winter" so that they become truly rivers of life to the people. In symbol, therefore, rivers of life are to spring up in Jerusalem, one flowing eastward into the Dead Sea and the other westward to the Mediterranean. Zechariah is not the only prophet to take this theme. Joel, in the passage already quoted, follows the deliverance of Jerusalem by saying "*a fountain shall come forth of the house of the Lord, and shall water the valley of Shittim*" (Joel 3:18). The valley of Shittim (acacias) was the name of the region where the Jordan enters the Dead Sea (as indicated by Micah 6:5 and Num. 25:1) so that this river seen by Joel corresponds in symbol to the eastern stream seen by Zechariah. Ezekiel

likewise saw a river proceeding from the restored Temple and going down into that same valley and so into the Dead Sea “*which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed*” (Ezek. 47:1-12). And, of course, the vision of John in Rev. 22:1-2 comes readily to mind, the seer beholding a river of water of life proceeding from the Holy City, with trees of life on its banks, yielding fruit for food and leaves for “the healing of the nations”. Quite evidently, therefore, we have here a vivid picture of the place of the restored and now victorious Holy Land and Holy Nation in the purposes of God, the agency by means of which all the Divine blessings, cleansing from sin and impartation of everlasting life, may come to the nations. Ezekiel and Joel saw this in terms of the cleansing of the land; the Dead Sea was to be made sweet that fish might live in its waters and vegetation surround its shores: but Zechariah was universal. He saw a second river of life making its way in the opposite direction to mingle its waters with the Great Sea which encompassed all the earth, so that eventually the whole world of mankind would draw benefit from its life-giving waters. In no more eloquent fashion could the universal power of Messiah’s Kingdom, bringing life and health and freedom from sin to men in every place under the sun, be pictured than by this vision of the two rivers.

Is it reasonable to expect a literal fulfilment of this verse also? Will there truly be continuous rivers springing up at Jerusalem and making their way across country in the manner here described? There is nothing in the topography of the land to make such a thing impossible, although the relevance of such situation to the necessities of the Divine plans might be questioned. It is not generally realised that two such streams do actually at present exist although they are not perennial; they flow only in the winter. The Kidron, mentioned often in the Scriptures, rises on the north side of the city and flows alongside the eastern wall of the Temple, past the Pool of Siloam and in a south-easterly direction to the Dead Sea. There is the prototype of Zechariah’s stream flowing into the “former sea”. Then on the western side of the city, not far from the present railway station, there commences the Wady al Werd, a stream which flows westward, more or less following the railway, joining other streams en route until at last it falls into the Mediterranean, seven miles south of Tel-Aviv as the Wady Sorek. This is the stream which gave the prophet his figure for that one which flows to the “hinder sea”. In other words, he took as his picture two existing streams and made of them a symbolic scene—twin rivers of life carrying life-giving energy and powers of healing to all the world in the day when God “*turns to the people a pure language*”, that they may call upon him “*to serve him with one consent*”. (Zeph. 3:9).

There are some expositors who amplify the content of verse 8 regarding the two rivers to infer that there is to be a continuous waterway from the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea via Jerusalem, and onward through the south valley to the Red Sea, so that Jerusalem becomes a seaport controlling world trade between Europe and the Far East. Why the Holy City should thus become involved with mundane world affairs does not readily appear and the connection of all this with God’s intention to make Jerusalem the earthly centre of Divine administration is far from obvious. In point of fact the idea is, physically, impracticable. Jerusalem stands more than two thousand feet above sea level, and no city at that elevation could ever be a seaport. The Jordan valley up to the Sea of Galilee is well below sea level so that such a waterway, if it ever came into being, would also flood an appreciable area of the Holy Land. This element of the prophecy is clearly a picture of two separate streams, each having its source in or near the City, flowing outward in opposite directions. In point of physical fact, there is only one known source of spring water in the old city; somewhere below the surface of Mount Moriah, on which stands the site of the Temple, there is a perennial spring which never fails, emerges at the Virgin’s Fountain on the slopes of Ophel in the south-eastern corner, flows through Hezekiah’s tunnel to the Pool of Siloam, and ultimately joins the river Kidron.

What wonder, then, that the Prophet should break out into the fervent declamation of verse 9 *“And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one”*. He might well have had in mind the noble words of Psa. 46 *“the nations raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted. ‘Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations: I will be exalted in the earth’.* *The Lord of Hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our refuge”*. Zechariah in his vision beheld the reality of which these words were a poetic portrayal. Now the Lord had taken His great power and was reigning as King.

Once more the prophet turns his gaze upon the whole land of Israel, viewing it in his mind’s eye much as Moses must have seen it from the top of Mount Pisgah, and he sees the final effect of the earthquake in the promised exaltation of the mountain of the Lord’s house above the tops of the mountains (Isa. 2:2). In this vision he saw the sinking of the highlands of Judea into the plain so that Jerusalem stood proudly erect upon the twin hills of Mount Moriah and Mount Zion in the centre. Physically, the heights of Hebron to the south and Samaria to the north tower anything up to a thousand feet above Jerusalem, so that the expression *“as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people”* (Psa. 125:2) is no figure of speech, but based on reality. Now, symbolically, all the heights of the country sink down to leave the Holy City towering supreme above. *“All the land shall be encompassed as the Arabah”* (the plain of the Jordan valley) *“from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem, and she”* (Jerusalem) *“shall be raised on high, and inhabited in her place”*. So is the opening phrase of verse 10. “Rimmon south of Jerusalem” was to the north of Beer-sheba, forty-five miles from Jerusalem, at the southern end of the Judean highlands; Geba—the name of several places in ancient Israel—a town seven miles north of Samaria, now called Jaba, at the northern end of the highlands where they begin to slope down into the valley of Megiddo, some forty miles north of Jerusalem. *“Geba to Beersheba”* is used in 2 Kings 23:8 as an expression indicating the full extent of the land; here in Zechariah it pictures the exaltation of Jerusalem in the Holy Land and in its extreme symbolic sense the prominence of the Holy Nation and the Holy Land in the sight of all the world, as the people and the city of the Great King. Both Isaiah and Micah spoke of Jerusalem being established in the top of the mountains and exalted above the hills, using the same metaphor as did Zechariah, and in none of the three cases is anything other than the metaphorical meaning intended. Any suggestion that a literal fulfilment is implied would have to take into consideration the fearful havoc and destruction to which the restored and rebuilt Holy Land would be necessarily subjected if something like half its, surface area were suddenly to be precipitated between two and three thousand feet downwards into the bowels of the earth.

But there is yet more to come in this cameo picture of Jerusalem’s prosperity. The same verse goes on to say that *“she shall be inhabited”* (or abide) *“in her place, from Benjamin’s gate unto the place of the first gate, unto the corner gate: and from the tower of Hananeel unto the kings winepresses”*. What is to be made of this bit of geography? The inference is that the city as thus defined has up to this time lain desolate, or at least not in the possession of God’s Israel, but that from now on she shall be permanently established and take her place as the ruling centre of the land, and, according to verse 11 never again be disturbed: *“men shall dwell in it, and there shall be no more utter destruction but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited”*.

It is of no use to look at a map of modern Jerusalem or one as it was at the time of the First Advent in seeking to understand these allusions, for the city in Zechariah’s time was much smaller than in the days of Jesus, and the north and south walls were not in the same places. A number of interpreters have made this mistake. There is a certain amount of uncertainty about the precise boundaries of Solomon’s and

Nehemiah's Jerusalem: the eastern and western walls were practically those of the "Old City" today, but the northern wall was not so far north as at present, running more or less level with the north side of the Temple area, whilst the southern wall extended more to the south, as far as the Pool of Siloam. Zechariah's description has to be understood in this context.

"Benjamin's Gate"—also known as the Gate of Ephraim—seems at that time to have been located at the western end of the north wall not far from the present Jaffa Gate. Some distance east of this point there had been in earlier times a gate known as the "Old Gate" or "First Gate", in Zechariah's time long since blocked up—he calls it "the place of the First Gate" indicating that it was no longer there. There were several points on the wall to which the name "Corner" was applied but the easterly direction implied by this verse seems to demand that the "Corner Gate" here was at the point Nehemiah calls the "Corner"—the eastern end of the wall where it turned south by the Temple area. Today that point is marked by St. Stephens Gate. Hence the full width of the Old City as it was then, from west to east, was defined.

The Tower of Hananeel, one of the defensive structures on the wall, was about half-way along the north wall, where the Tower of Antonia, the Roman garrison, stood in Jesus' day, adjacent to the Temple. The "king's winepresses" were in the gardens of Ophel, then bounded by the south wall. Hence the full length of the city, north to south, was thus indicated.

In this phrase, therefore, Zechariah is saying that the entire city, west to east and north to south, would be the possession of Israel and never again be disturbed or threatened. There can be no doubt that this promise is to be literally as well as spiritually fulfilled. In the latter respect, it is synonymous with the enduring prosperity of the Holy Nation as the Divine instrument in the earth for world conversion. In the former, Jerusalem has already spread over a greater area than that defined by Zechariah but the promise remains; west to east, north to south, to the utmost extent of the Holy City.

There is a rather intriguing parallel to this passage in the writings of Jeremiah. His celebrated 31st chapter, which speaks of the final restoration in the Holy Land and the New Covenant which God will make with His people, concludes with a promise which, obscure on the surface, well repays examination. "*Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the city shall be built to the Lord from the tower of Hananeel to the gate of the corner. And the measuring line shall go forth against it upon the hill Gareb, and shall compass about to Goath. And the whole valley of the dead bodies, and of the ashes, and all the fields unto the brook of Kidron, unto the corner of the horse gate toward the east, shall be holy unto the Lord: it shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down any more for ever*" (Jer. 31:38-40). Both prophets refer to much the same time in history; both take the city of Jerusalem as their stage; what is there in Jeremiah's words which may add to what Zechariah has said?

"From the Tower of Hananeel to the gate of the corner" obviously means the same as the similar expression in Zechariah; this is a promise of the rebuilding of the city, or the Temple, or both. Now Jeremiah departs from Zechariah. From this corner gate, which was at the north-eastern corner of the Temple area, the measuring line is to "go forth" (go straight forward, is the meaning) over the hill called Gareb, sweep round in a curve (the meaning of "compass") to Goath, and then, including the valley of the dead and the fields of the river Kidron, come to the "corner of the horse gate toward the east". This corner was the south-eastern corner of the Temple area. The area thus delineated by the measuring line would therefore apparently be the piece of land lying immediately to the east of the Temple—the Kidron valley and the Mount of Olives.

Gareb and Goath, as place names, appear nowhere else in the Bible and not one commentator or expositor, so far as can be ascertained, has done more than suggest

they must have been places near Jerusalem. It has been necessary to embark upon a little original research therefore to find some meaning in this passage. The meaning of Ha-Gareb is the “Mount of the Lepers”, the word coming from a Hebrew root defining scabs or scurvy, and used for leprosy in Syriac. The only eminence on the east side of Jerusalem is the Mount of Olives, by which name it was known in the days of David, and again by Zechariah and later. But there is reason for thinking that in between these times it bore the more opprobrious name. 2 Kings 23:13, relating to the time of Josiah, knows it as the Mount of Corruption. That at least could be fitting for a place which was the habitation of lepers. The same chapter reveals that Solomon had built, on the Mount of Olives, idolatrous sanctuaries, “high places”, for Ashtoreth and Chemosh and Molech; Josiah pulled them down and defiled them “with the bones of men”. What more natural that in order to complete their desecration the mountain should at that time, or soon afterwards become a place to which lepers were banished and lived their lives, and so earn the name it bore in the days of Jeremiah?

So the line went out from the north side of the Temple over the Mount of Olives, and curved round to Goath. Another difficult word! It comes from the Hebrew term for the lowing of cattle—cows and oxen. “The place of lowing” would be its literal force. How to find where such a place was located in that day? 2 Kings 23:13 helps again here; the narrator says that the high places of Ashtaroah and the rest stood on the “right side” of the Mount of Corruption, i.e. on its southern aspect. Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians, was usually represented as a cow. The measuring line, curving round Olivet to “Goath”, would come to the place where Solomon built the idol sanctuary. The sanctuary itself was destroyed by Josiah; the place where it stood was still known in Jeremiah’s day, perchance, as the “place of lowing”—Goath. From there a straight line back to the Temple would bring in the countryside leading down to the river Kidron, include the valley running along the east wall of the Temple, used then as it has been ever since as a general cemetery for Jerusalem’s dead, and also for the disposal of the ashes from the Temple sacrifices, and finish at the Temple south wall, exactly as described in Jer. 31:40.

What then is the purpose of this geographical exercise? It evidently meant something very real to Jeremiah; can it mean as much to us?

As an addition and a sequel to Zechariah’s vision of the restored city it is full of meaning. Zechariah saw the Lord descend on the Mount of Olives and, as it were, advance upon the city from the great valley that had been created and enter the Temple, never more to depart. The valley itself was closed up, just as in Ezekiel’s parallel vision the East Gate was closed up, because the Lord had entered that way and never again could it be used by others. For all time that way is sacred. Now Jeremiah, seeing the city restored and knowing the Lord has come in, sees the whole tract of land thus hallowed by the Lord’s coming, that whole Mount of Olives, cleansed from its past defilements, measured and marked out and separated from secular uses that it might be, as he says in chapter 31:40 “holy unto the Lord”. When one considers the stirring events in our Lord’s earthly life associated with the Mount of Olives, few would dispute that it could very properly be made a holy place in the new earth that is to be. The spiritual meaning is the more important; the coming of the Lord has sanctified for ever all that formerly was evil and unclean but now is cleansed and good, but a strictly literal fulfilment of this particular vision would also be entirely proper. Perhaps, one day, when the peoples of earth come up to Jerusalem to worship and go to see the place from which the Lord of all creation ascended to His Father, they will meet, in spirit if not in letter, with the injunction “take off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground”.

15. The Sword of the Lord

The prophet's work was done. Through a long series of visions he had traced the story of the deliverance of God's people from captivity and oppression, their cleansing from defilement and the exaltation of the purified and dedicated "remnant" to be the Divine instrument for world evangelism. He had told of the restoration and rebuilding of the City of Peace, its investment by the forces of evil powers resisting the incoming Kingdom of righteousness and the dramatic intervention of God Most High to overthrow the power of evil and take control of earthly affairs. There, at the point where the *"kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ"* (Rev. 11:15) the visions came to an end and left Zechariah contemplating the serene future in which the sovereignty of the Lord God was manifest to all and the knowledge of His glory beginning to *"cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea"*. But even in this sunlit scene there are some shadows, and the prophet has to take note of them before he closes his book at the point where absolute holiness pervades the Millennial Kingdom and evil is no more.

To this end he divides this final stanza of his story into three parts. In the first (chap. 14, vss. 12-15) he looks back, as it were, to the dramatic intervention from above which has saved the Holy City and its people from the despoilers, and ruminates on the details of their destruction, the nature of the calamities by means of which they were defeated and the comprehensive and final nature of that defeat. Then he turns his attention to the early days of the Messianic era which is to follow, and in vss. 16-19 sees the peoples of earth rendering allegiance to their new King and acknowledging earth's new centre of government. At the same time he warns of the consequences incurred by those who refuse to offer that allegiance. But this is only a temporary intermission, for in vss. 20-21 he sees holiness and righteousness supreme. The Temple of the Lord has become, as it was originally intended to become, a house of prayer for all nations, and in that house *"prayer shall be made for him continually, and daily shall he be praised"*. (Psa. 72:15).

So he talks of the judgment which has fallen upon the forces of evil, choosing descriptive symbols suited to the picture he has chosen in which to present that judgment, the destruction of a mighty host outside the walls of Jerusalem. *"This shall be the plague wherewith the Lord shall smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem. Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their sockets, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth"* (ch. 14:12). This is the first of a threefold judgment; this verse pictures what is obviously a supernatural disaster falling upon the host, the intervention of the powers of Heaven to thwart their objective. Next in verse 13 comes internecine strife whereby the invaders fall upon each other and slay each other. Finally in verses 14-15 the forces of Judah, the defenders of Jerusalem, are pictured as though they advance upon the demoralised enemy and gather all their possessions and equipment for themselves. But the commencement of this three-fold judgment is from Heaven.

Their flesh consumes away as they stand, their eyes as they gaze, and their tongue—significantly singular and not plural, in their mouth. How should this be interpreted? Not literally, for if in verse 12 they thus vanish into nothingness they would hardly be in a position in verse 13 to turn weapons upon each other and destroy each other, neither would there be anyone for Judah in verse 14 to fight. Each verse has to be understood as picturing one aspect or phase of this great debacle, and the entire four verses as enlarging in detail upon verse 3 of this chapter, the coming forth of the Lord *"to fight against those nations"*.

The power which executes God's purpose is celestial, from Heaven, but the hosts against whom it is wielded are very much of this earth. The vision demands that there

is in the forefront of the conflict a solid phalanx of armed men surrounding the Holy Land with intention of going in to possess, backed up by all the resources of a world-wide power determined to defy God. It is upon this whole combination that the mysterious catastrophe falls. *"Their flesh shall consume away as they stand upon their feet"*; that could well refer to their man-power and all their equipment of war, a mysterious whittling away of men, perhaps by spontaneous desertion or flight as in the days of Gideon or by pestilence as in the days of Sennacherib, the immobilising or loss of equipment by reason of adverse climatic conditions. In modern warfare tanks are often held fast in mud and rendered useless, planes grounded due to fog and snow, ships confined to harbour on account of hurricanes. It only needs the impact of some of the forces of Nature—wind, rain, snow, storm—to a degree of unprecedented severity to render all the might of the invading host powerless and frustrate all their fell designs. Quite possibly this is the manner in which their flesh will consume away as they stand upon their feet, and in line with this it may be expected that the eyes which consume away in their sockets may well stand for the intelligence service of the host, all their radio detectors and look-out posts, all the means by which they evaluate the forward position and the situation of their intended victims and so plan their course of action. Even today it only needs a severe magnetic storm on the sun to disrupt the world's radio communications for twelve hours; only a super snowstorm blanketing a wide area in white to render the most efficient aerial spy camera useless. The world of Noah's day was brought to an end simply and solely—and most effectively—by the unaided forces of Nature. *"The world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished"* says Peter. And if such unexpected and unexplainable disasters befall the confident host which, in Ezekiel's vision of the same event, boasted that they were going in to an undefended land *"to take a spoil and to take a prey"* what wonder that the tongue is consumed away in the mouth. The tongue, the voice of authority, the power of command, the direction and leadership of the entire adventure—silent, speechless! Is it of some significance that the noun is in the singular here; not "their tongues" but "their tongue"? The supreme control of these forces of evil, frustrated in its purpose by forces it can neither understand nor withstand, stands mute in the face of defeat.

Now this is the first aspect of the three-fold judgment; intervention from Heaven. The second is an earthly one; the hosts begin to fight with each other. *"... a great panic from the Lord shall be among them: and they shall lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbour, and his hand shall rise up against the hand of his neighbour"* (ch. 14:13). This is a case of history repeating itself: on more than one occasion in Israel's history the people were delivered by reason of their enemies falling out with each other and engaging in fratricidal combat. The case of the deliverance under Jehoshaphat is perhaps the most noteworthy. *"For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them: and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another. And when Judah came ... they looked, and behold they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and none escaped"* (2 Chron. 20:23-24). So in this case: a blind, unreasoning panic born of the inexplicable disasters and defeat they had experienced leads to internal dissension and strife in the multitude and they begin to war with each other. To what extent this conflict extends into the countries of the world from which this doomed host has been drawn it is not possible to say, but it may well be that in this verse we have a terse indication of the rapid break-up and dissolution of alliances and associations between the political powers of this world which signals the final submission of these powers to the incoming Kingdom. If so, the third aspect of the judgment, the entry of Judah into the picture, is logically next in sequence.

“And Judah also shall fight at Jerusalem; and the wealth of all the nations round about shall be gathered together, gold and silver, and apparel, in great abundance. And so shall be the plague of the horse, of the mule, of the camel, and of the ass, and of all the beasts that shall be in these tents, as this plague” (ch. 14:14-15). It may seem a little illogical to present Judah in this verse as fighting the enemy when all through the narrative the position is that Judah stands still and leaves the fighting to the Lord. There is no inharmony in reality. It is the Lord who comes forth from His place to render the invaders powerless; it is for the people of the land, here called Judah because that was the name of the people and the land in Zechariah’s day, to accomplish the subsequent “mopping-up”, to use a modern military expression, and to collect the spoil. Here again there is a parallel with the historical deliverance in the days of Jehoshaphat; after the Lord had destroyed the invading armies the people of Judah went out to clear up the battlefield and to gather in the spoil, *“and they were three days in gathering of the spoil, it was so much”* (2 Chron. 20:25). So the picture here is that of the people having a definite part to play in the fight, even although that part involved, at first, remaining passive, in faith, in Jerusalem until the Lord had given victory. Then they could sally forth and collect the spoil.

This can reasonably describe the aftermath of this great event when all nations on earth shall bring their tribute and offerings to the Holy Nation which has been so signally manifested as the beginning of the Divine Kingdom on earth. *“The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts”* (Psa. 72:10). And of course the greatest and most valuable “spoil” will be the sincere allegiance to earth’s new King of such among these nations as will accept the opportunity and become reconciled to God, in consequence of Israel’s evangelistic fervour. *“The nations shall come to thy light and kings to the brightness of thy rising”* (Isa. 60:3). *“Their seed shall be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples; all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed”* (Isa. 61:9).

But all the paraphernalia of war, of strife, of man’s greed and selfishness and cruelty, will be destroyed, offered up to the Lord in a fervour of devotion and repudiation of evil. This is what is meant by the plague upon the horses, mules, camels and so on. In Old Testament days, when Israel had defeated a particularly obnoxious enemy they offered up to God the captured livestock and other spoils of war to indicate that they themselves were not to be defiled by contact with the accursed possessions of the idolators. The valuable spoils were devoted to sacred purposes and the animals and perishable things destroyed by fire. A notable case is that of the booty taken by Joshua at the capture of Jericho. The gold, silver, copper and iron vessels went into the treasury of the Lord and the city with all its other contents was destroyed. Achan sinned by abstracting for his own use some gold and silver and a *“goodly Babylonish garment”* and suffered the death penalty in consequence, having *“trespassed in the accursed thing”*. It is for this reason that the Hebrew word *cherem*, meaning properly something devoted or consecrated to God, is also given the meaning of accursed or a curse, because the thing thus devoted is laid under a curse lest any should touch or take it, as did Achan. It has to be devoted to God and utterly destroyed, because it is inherently evil. Now this is the meaning of verse 15. The various beasts here enumerated were all part of the panoply of war—horses for chariots, mules and camels for carrying goods, and so on. As such they were part of the spoils of war and must be devoted to the Lord and destroyed because they are evil things. So the same plague falls upon them as upon the marauding host and thus all evil is destroyed from the land. Only the valuable things, the good things, remain, and these pass into the custody of the Holy Nation which itself is already consecrated to God.

This is the end of the rule of evil in the earth. Sin has yet to be cleansed out of the hearts of men and this process will occupy the entire Messianic reign now to commence, but the outward practice of evil and oppression ceases henceforth. *“In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth”* (Psa. 72:7). The enemies of the Lord have been overthrown, but in their overthrow they find that the Victor comes to heal, and with the destruction of all in the world that oppresses and afflicts mankind they are left with the opportunity to rebuild their lives on the principles of truth and righteousness, if they will. So the noble Messianic psalm goes on *“He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. All kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him ... men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed”* (Psa. 72:6-17).

So that out of the turmoil and strife of a dying and doomed evil world a new world, wherein dwells justice and love, security and life, is born.



16. The Feast of Tabernacles

The world's deliverance from evil is followed by the last and greatest Feast of Tabernacles. Here, and for the last time, Zechariah draws upon the historical ceremonial of the people of Israel to illustrate the nature of "things to come". Everyone in all the world, he says, (ch. 14:16) will go up to Jerusalem year by year to worship the Lord and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles; these are obviously figurative expressions to denote the response of mankind, in that day, to the blessings of the Kingdom.

The Feast of Tabernacles in Israel was a development of the normal end of year harvest celebrations which are characteristic of every people in every age. It is probable that Israel had some such celebration when in Egypt; this is referred to in Exod. 23:16 as the "feast of ingathering" and was made obligatory under the Mosaic Law. Upon Israel's entry into the land this feast was expanded in its scope; for seven days the people dwelt in temporary shelters made of tree branches and leaves, "booths", from which the feast was re-named the Feast of Tabernacles (temporary dwelling places). This period was one of rejoicing for past deliverance and promise of future blessing. "*Because the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thine increase, and in all the works of thine hands, therefore thou shalt surely rejoice*" (Deut. 16:15). Significantly, the feast was held almost immediately following the close of the annual Day of Atonement ceremonies, which culminated in the formal effecting of atonement for the sins of the assembled people by the officiating High Priest. The typical picture therefore is that of sacrifice and offering on behalf of sin ended; the people cleansed and brought into a state of reconciliation with God, the rigours of the past forgotten, rejoicing in the plenitude of present harvest blessings and joyful anticipation of even greater blessings to come. And this is why Zechariah, looking into the roseate future immediately following the establishment of the Divine Kingdom on earth, sees it as an idealised Feast of Tabernacles.

This going up of all the nations year by year to worship and "keep the Feast of Tabernacles" as related in ch. 14:16 is obviously a picture of world-wide acceptance of the Kingdom. Men everywhere will hail the new administration with relief and joy and hasten to proffer allegiance to earth's new King. It does not follow that this attitude of mind is universal—the process of world conversion is going to occupy a long period of time and the requirements of the text can be considered well fulfilled in the spectacle of successive contingents of converts entering into a state of reconciliation with God and, in the gladness and gratitude thus engendered, thus "keep the Feast of Tabernacles". These are they who, in Isaiah's vision declare "*Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation*" (Isa. 25:9). The delivered Holy Nation is involved in this, for the Lord says through Isaiah again (ch. 66:18, 19) "*I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory ... and I will send those that escape*" (a reference to delivered Israel) "*unto the nations ... and they shall declare my glory among nations*". Here is the missionary work of the Millennial Age in full operation and it is the result of this work which is described in terms of the nations coming up to Jerusalem to worship.

But not all of mankind are thus converted, at least at the beginning. Verses 17-19 of chapter 14 provide for those who do not thus "come up". The penalty is that upon them there shall be no rain. For some reason Egypt is singled out and specifically named among the general mass of earth's peoples and this may well be, as is sometimes suggested, an allusion to the fact that Egypt has virtually no rainfall and obtains all its water for crop-growing purposes from the annual inundation of the Nile. The fact that Egypt is independent of the need for rain will not absolve the dissidents

among them from the penalty. The meaning, of course, is that the unregenerate of the nations have no part nor lot in the life-giving blessings of the river of water of life, the symbolic medium of transmission of Divine life to man in that day. Ezekiel describes this river as he saw it in vision, and so does John the Revelator (Ezek. 47; Rev. 22). The river flows from the sanctuary of God, and together with the trees of life which grow on its banks furnishes both food and healing for the nations. It is obvious of course that the blessing of lasting life which is offered freely to all men must be consciously accepted on the basis of true conversion and allegiance to the Lord Christ who is the channel of that life. *“The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come’. And let him that heareth say, ‘Come’. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely”* (Rev. 22:17). That is the law of the Millennial Age, and that life is available to all who will accept it on the terms offered. Such as may decline it, in the obduracy of their hearts or in their refusal to turn from the ways of evil, *“upon them shall be no rain”*.

So the curtain rises upon the last scene, a glimpse—a very brief glimpse—of the world as it shall be when the elimination of evil is accomplished and all men and all things in the world are holy unto the Lord. *“In that day shall there be upon the bridle bells of the horses ‘Holiness unto the Lord’ and the pots in the Lord’s house shall be like the bowls before the altar”*. That inscription appeared on the golden mitre worn by all of Israel’s successive High Priests from Aaron downward; it denoted the complete dedication of the wearer to the service of God. In those days the High Priest stood out as one specially consecrated and sanctified individual in the midst of a secular society; in the world of the future, says Zechariah, everything from the highest to the lowest will be sanctified to the Divine service—even the beasts of burden. There may be some allusion here to the fact that the horse was peculiarly the symbol of war and the political power of this world; in that day it will be the symbol of Divine power and of peace, for God will have made *“wars to cease to the ends of the earth”*. The “pots in the Lord’s house” were the cauldrons in which the flesh of the sacrifices was boiled, much more lowly in the scale of Divine service than the golden bowls of the altar which were used to carry the blood of the sacrifices into the presence of God. But in that day all will be equal. Whatever service or work is performed, be it lofty or menial, will be of equal value in the sight of God, for all will be done as unto Him and for His glory. Yea, says Zechariah triumphantly, every vessel in Jerusalem and in all Judah shall be holy; the distinction between sacred and secular will stand in direct relation to the eternal purpose of God and nothing that exists, nothing that is done, is outside that purpose. The whole of human life and all its activities will be holy unto God.

“In that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of Hosts”. Of all the alien tribes and peoples with which Israel was daily in contact the Canaanites represented idolatry and defilement in its grossest forms. Repeatedly during Israel’s history the Temple was defiled by alien peoples or alien worship. Not so in that coming day, says Zechariah. The Temple will be cleansed and holy, free from any suspicion of defiling influence. A loftier vision of the same truth was given to John when he looked upon the celestial city which pictured the completed work of God with mankind. *“There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life”* (Rev. 21:27).

Thus ends what is without doubt the most colourful and eloquent book of symbolic imagery in the Old Testament, paralleled only by the Book of Revelation in the New. The two books, separated in time of writing by six centuries, do in fact constitute a remarkable pair. The Book of Revelation is an account of the conflict between good and evil as it affects the Christian Church, the heavenly instrument in God’s hand for world conversion, and closes with the overthrow of evil and the triumph of the Church.

The Book of Zechariah is an account of the conflict between good and evil as it affects Israel, the earthly instrument in God's hand for world conversion, and closes with the overthrow of evil and the triumph of Israel. The two books commence their respective stories at separate periods on the stream of human history, but they coincide at their close, both culminating at the point where the Lord Christ at His Second Advent takes to Himself His great power and commences that reign over the earth which is elsewhere described as "*the desire of all nations*". Perhaps the best commentary upon the whole dramatic story resides in the Lord's words to the prophet, to be repeated to Israel, right at the commencement of Zechariah's ministry. "*Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem*".

THE END

