

E. Dennett

**Comments on
the book of
the Prophet Zechariah**

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Preface

The following pages contain a simple exposition of the prophet Zechariah; and the writer cannot but hope that the reader will be drawn to the study of this book with increasing interest by what he has written. From much observation he has been forced to the conclusion that the prophetic books are losing their hold on the young believers, if not upon those who are older, of the present day. It is not forgotten that the portion of the heavenly saints, and the hope of the Church, are found in the New Testament; but, while this is true, it is of exceeding moment that the believer should be interested in all that concerns the purposes of God, and the glory of His Christ here upon the earth. Without this the heart is apt to become narrowed and contracted, and the zest is wanting for the intelligent perusal of the Old Testament Scriptures. Besides, there is a special interest attaching to the sacred writings in connection with the restored remnant of the post-captivity period, inasmuch as they so often depict morally the position of saints now while waiting for the return of their Lord. For these reasons the writer most earnestly commends to his readers this portion of the

word of God, in the full assurance that both increased intelligence and blessing will be the result of its prayerful study.

Another has said, and the statement is fully endorsed, that his writings express the process of arriving at the truth. This is surely the case; for what with the additional light and understanding given in the course of writing, the feeling is often begotten at the conclusion, that the work should be recommenced. The consolation is that the Lord Himself is the Teacher; and the writer's prayer is that this may be abundantly verified by his readers.

E. D. London, 1888.

Introduction

In the book of Ezra we have the general statement that "Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo,* prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel." (Ezra 5:1) Zechariah, however, did not commence his ministry (as far as has been recorded) until two months after the first prophecy of Haggai, though the first prophecy of Zechariah was at least a month before the last two

of Haggai. They were therefore contemporaneous, and both alike laboured for the encouragement of the children of the captivity in building the temple. (See Ezra 5:2) But Zechariah takes, under the guidance of the Spirit, a far wider range of vision than Haggai. The latter deals mainly with the moral state of the people in relation to the purpose for which they had returned from Babylon; viz., to build the Lord's house, while, for their encouragement, he unfolds the glories of the future when the kingdom should be established. Zechariah includes in his prophetic vision the Gentile kingdoms to whom the Jews were in subjection, the establishment of the Messiah as a Priest on His throne, who should build the temple of the Lord, and "bear the glory." (Zech. 6:13) He also deals with the rejection of the Messiah and its consequences, together with the final siege of Jerusalem by the nations, and its deliverance by the sudden appearance of the Lord Himself. Thereon the remnant, as he points out, are humbled to contrition as they look on Him whom they had pierced; and their enemies are destroyed. Moreover, the prophet exhibits Jehovah as king over all the earth, and all nations ascending yearly to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. Finally, he depicts holiness to the Lord as marking

every detail of the daily life of the people in Jerusalem and Judah. These several points, with their important links and developments, will come before us in our examination of the book. The book divides itself into two parts: Zechariah 1-6, which contain, after the first six verses, a series of prophetic visions vouchsafed to Zechariah; and Zechariah 7-14, which comprise the messages he received for the instruction and encouragement of the people. The first part may be therefore termed apocalyptic, while the second partakes of the ordinary prophetic character.

- * Zechariah, as is stated in the first verse of his prophecy, was the son of Berechiah. Iddo was his grandfather, and inasmuch as Zechariah succeeded Iddo in the priestly office, Berechiah must have died during the youth of his son. Zechariah thus united in himself the offices of prophet and priest.

Zechariah 1.

This short message from Jehovah to the people, which is found in the first six verses, is the introduction to the whole book. In verse 1, the date with the genealogy of the prophet is given; and the reader will note the significant fact that, as in Haggai so here, the date is indicative of the times of the Gentiles. It

was "in the eighth month, in the second year of Darius." Through the failure of the kingdom in man's hand, God had transferred His earthly throne from Jerusalem to Babylon, and to its successors. At this time, Babylon having fallen, Darius was the head of the Gentile monarchy, and hence the introduction of his name.

The commencement of this "word of the Lord" is abrupt and solemn; and it is designed to recall to the minds of the people Jehovah's past ways with their fathers, both as a warning and a ground of appeal. "The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers." (v. 2.) Did not the people know it? Was not their present mean condition, in contrast with the glory and prosperity of the past, an evidence of it? The fact that God's chosen people should have been carried away captive, and that they were only now permitted to return by the will of a Gentile monarch, was surely enough to awaken sad reflections as to the cause of their humiliation and sorrow. But it is easy, as we all know, to become habituated to our circumstances, and to ignore the Lord's hand in them, and thus to blame anything and everything, rather than ourselves. It is on this account that the

prophet goes down to the root of things, and reminds them of their fathers' sin and the Lord's consequent displeasure.

The next verse contains a principle of the utmost importance. "Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts." (v. 3.) "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29); and thus He never gives up the purposes of His grace whatever the practical condition of His people. Their sin may bring down His chastening hand upon them, but He does not break off His relationship with them on this account. As He Himself hath said, "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." (Mal. 3:6.) The unchanging character of His relationships in grace with His people lies, indeed, at the basis of all His dealings with them; and hence, because He is a faithful God, He can send such a message as this before us — "Turn ye unto me, and I will turn unto you." Being what He is, He could not sanction their transgressions and iniquities, and He thus reminds them that the condition of His presence with them, of His actings on their behalf, is that they turn unto Him. As James says, "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you."

(James 4:8; compare 2 Chronicles 15:2.) It is so now. The Lord can say that He will never leave nor forsake His people, that having loved His own that are in the world, He loves them unto the end, but, at the same time, He will never walk with them, or minister to them the consolations of His presence, in their backslidings and sins. The maintenance of dependence and obedience, of communion with Him, is the secret of all blessing. (Compare John 14:21-23.) The reader will remark the solemn sanctions appended to this exhortation. Three times are the words "The Lord of hosts" repeated, seeking in this way to reach the consciences of the people, and to remind them of the power and majesty of their covenant God.

The exhortation is based further upon the sad example of their fathers. The former prophets had cried unto them, in the name of the Lord of hosts, "Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the Lord." (v. 4.) And what was the consequence? Have any of the Lord's people found the path of disobedience to be a path of safety or blessing? No; that were impossible; and Zechariah recalls the fact to the people's mind that, while their fathers and the prophets who had spoken to them the word

of the Lord had passed off the scene, the word of God had not failed. "But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of [margin, overtake] your fathers? and they returned and said, Like as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us." (v. 6.) We thus learn that the word of God never returns to Him void, that it must accomplish that which He pleases; heaven and earth may pass away, but His word will never perish; it will infallibly execute the mission on which it is sent. Woe therefore to him who neglects it, who walks according to his own will instead of by the light which it affords; for sooner or later he will have to confess, as these fathers did, that the word was sure, and that, if its warnings were despised, its threatenings would surely be accomplished. (Compare Joshua 23:14-19.)

Such are the foundation principles with which Zechariah commences his prophetic mission; first, the condition of all blessing (v. 3); second, the evils of disobedience (v. 4); thirdly, the immutable character of the word of God, as unchangeable in its warnings as in its promises; and lastly, that God ever deals with His people, in His government, according to their ways and do-

ings. And these principles are confined to no period, but obtain in and run through all dispensations, because they flow out from what God is in Himself in His unchanging and unchangeable character and nature.

More than three months elapsed, as will be seen from a comparison of the dates in verses 1 and 7, before the word of the Lord came again to Zechariah. His work was simple — to speak when He was commanded, and to be silent when he was without a divine message. Even the Lord Himself, coming to do the Father's will, took the same subject place; as He said, "I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, He gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak." (John 12:49; see also John 14:10) But since the Holy Ghost came, the direction, as for example, to Timothy, is "Preach the word; be instant in season, and out of season." (2 Tim. 4:2.) In all alike such a responsibility could only be met by the maintenance of a dependent spirit, and an opened ear. (See Isaiah 1. 4.)

It was an apocalyptic vision, in this case, vouchsafed to the prophet. He says, "I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that

were in the bottom; and behind him were there red horses, speckled [margin, bay], and white." It is to be observed, as will be seen from verse 11, that the man on the red horse among the myrtle trees is the angel of the Lord. Angels are often spoken of as men. (See Luke 24:4 et passim.) Now a horse, to borrow the definition of another, is "the symbol of divine energy of government in the earth," and hence there will be, in some sort, a correspondence between the horse of the angel, and the three sets of horses standing behind him; and this fact will afford the key wherewith to unlock the mystery of the vision. As every reader of prophecy knows, when God committed the government of the earth, on removing His throne from Jerusalem, to Nebuchadnezzar, it was revealed that three kingdoms would succeed that of Babylon before the kingdom of Christ should be established. At the time of this prophetic vision Babylon had already been judged, and hence there were only these three to follow; viz., Persia, Greece, and Rome.* It is very evident, therefore, that these three empires are represented by the red, speckled, and white horses. Another feature is to be noticed. The colour of the horse on which the angel sits is the same as that of the red horses; that is, the horses which represent the Persian empire. The reason of this may be found in the fact

that, at this time, the throne of Persia was favourable to the restored remnant in Judea, as is seen from Ezra 6; and we learn now that the energy of government, acting at this moment through human hands on behalf of God's people, had its source in God Himself: that it was the angel on the red horse that directed, though unseen, the movements of the red horses of Persia's throne. This indeed is characteristic of God's government of the earth all through the period during which Lo-ammi (see Hosea 1) is written upon His people. Man acts, and apparently according to his own arbitrary will, doing as he pleases, but we gather, especially from the book of Esther, that "the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will." (Prov. 21:1) How calmly, therefore, may God's people rest, in the consciousness of this, in the midst of the busy movements and political agitations of the world!

- * We add some important words of another as to the judgment of Babylon: "The destruction of Babylon had a peculiar importance: first, because it was substituted by God Himself in place of His throne at Jerusalem; secondly, because it was the only Gentile power directly set up by Him, though all power be from Him. The others replaced Babylon providentially. Hence, at the

destruction of Babylon, Jerusalem is restored — however partially it shows the principle — and the power which judges Babylon is the setting up of God's people again in the holy city. Babylon — its setting up, its rule, and its destruction — involved the whole of the direct dealings of God with the Gentiles, and with His people in power. All the rest came in merely as a prolonging, by-the-bye."

The prophet enquires as to the meaning of the vision unfolded before his eyes. (v. 9.) "And the man that stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, These are they whom the Lord hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth." (v. 10) The reader may find instruction in comparing the expression in Revelation 5: "A Lamb ... having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth." (v. 6.) This fixes the interpretation of verse 10; for the Lamb "in the midst of the throne" has in this scene the government of the earth in His hands, although He has not yet taken it into possession. So here, the horses are they "whom the Lord has sent forth to walk to and fro through the earth" — the power of government, universal government, being deposited for the time in their hands. To him — to the angel of the Lord — they also give account of what they found in their mission: "We

have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest." (v. 11)

The meaning of this report is discovered by what follows. Jerusalem was lying desolate, and God's people were in captivity, and the nations, careless of the state of this despised people, and of the thoughts of God towards them, were at rest. Jehovah had used the Gentiles to inflict His chastisements upon His rebellious and apostate people, and had, as we have pointed out, committed the government of the earth into their hands; but, instead of holding it in responsibility to God, they exercised it for their own enrichment and aggrandisement, and for the oppression of the people over whom they had been permitted to triumph. He therefore says, "I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction." (v. 15; compare Isaiah 47:6; Jeremiah 50. 51) Man, as ever, cannot understand the thoughts of God.

On receiving the report as to the state of the earth* "the angel of the Lord answered and said, 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?" (V. 12.) What a comment upon man! Heaven was occupied with Jerusalem and Judah, while man was occupied with his own interests, and seeking only his own ease and prosperity. And what a lesson for the believer! Vain is the help of man, but he can always turn to God. As we read in the psalm (margin), "Shall I lift up mine eyes unto the hills? Whence should my help come? My help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." (Psalm 121:1-2.) The answer came immediately, and it was couched in "good and comfortable words." (v. 13). It is to be observed that the angel bases his plea upon the fact that the indignation had endured for seventy years — the period spoken of by Jeremiah the prophet. (Jer. 25:11-12; see also Daniel 9:2.) The time therefore had come for the Lord to remember Jerusalem; and blessed is it for those who, like Daniel, have understanding of the Lord's mind, and can plead with Him, in communion with His own thoughts, on behalf of His people. But if any would enjoy this privilege they must set themselves, also like Daniel, to understand by books — the books of Scripture — what the will of the Lord is. (Cp. John 15:7.)

- * The horses "have the character of the providentially administering spirits of the empires rather than of the empires

themselves;" and the reader will understand that the state of the earth, above referred to, was existent under Darius, the head of the Persian empire.

The answer of Jehovah of hosts is contained in verses 14-17. In the first place the Lord declares His unalterable love for Jerusalem. The angel thus said to the prophet, "Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy." True that He Himself had caused the beloved city to be desolated, that Nebuchadnezzar was His own rod wherewith He had chastised her; but He had dealt thus with her because of her sins, and because indeed of the place of nearness and blessing which she had enjoyed (see Isaiah 1), but now she had received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins, and He could again speak to her heart. (Isaiah 40) Thus it was that the pent-up fires of His zeal and jealousy could again break out on her behalf; the love, which the sin of His people had driven back into His heart, could once more pour itself forth in efforts for her reestablishment and prosperity. This was the one object Jehovah had at this time on the earth; and hence it was that He was sore displeased with the heathen that were at ease. (v. 15.) God could not rest because of the state of Jerusalem and Zion; the heathen could be at ease, for they had

profited by the sins and sorrows of God's people, and they had no desire for the restoration of a city which, in former days, had been the object of their fear and envy. They had no communion, therefore, with Jehovah's mind. He had been "but a little displeased," and they, wreaking their own revenge, had "helped forward the affliction," and had thus laid the foundation for their own judgment when Jehovah should interpose for the accomplishment of His counsels of grace concerning His people.

After bringing out the contrast in this way between His own mind and that of the heathen, and consequently between His present attitude towards Jerusalem and them, Jehovah announces His unalterable purposes for the full blessing of Jerusalem and Zion. "Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the Lord of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem. Cry yet, saying, 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." (vv. 16, 17.)

The full application of these magnificent promises could only be in the future when Messiah shall have returned and taken His kingdom. But they were given for the present comfort and encouragement of the poor and feeble remnant that had returned from Babylon. They might have well been despondent if occupied with their then circumstances; but man never sees as God seeth, nor thinks according to His thoughts. Jehovah therefore, reveals to this despised few all His heart, and all His counsels for their future prosperity and glory; and He thus gave them a mighty incentive to diligence and zeal, in building the house of their God; and He taught them, at the same time, that their return from Babylon, partial as it was, contained within itself the promise of the fulfilment of every word that He had spoken concerning His ancient people. Nay, more; there is a lesson in this message which God's people would do well to mark in every age. The importance of any work depends not, in anywise, upon its outward magnitude or display, but upon the thoughts of God about it. In all the earth, at this moment, there was nothing to be compared, in the eyes of God, with the work on which His people were now engaged at Jerusalem. And yet what was it to man? A poor and contemptible effort to rebuild a house for the celebration of their national rites and ceremonies!

A movement of no account whatever in the busy political activities of the day — lying outside, as it did, of the sphere of the world's observation! But it was there — on that work — that the mind and heart of God were at that moment concentrated. Let this fact speak to our hearts as with a trumpet-tongue; for how often have we been tempted to love that which looms large in the eyes of the world, which commands the world's attention, instead of seeking to be in fellowship with the mind and heart of God, and to be identified with His aims and ends. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

Upon this follows a vision for the confirmation of the faith of the prophet. "Then I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and behold four horns" (v. 18); and the angel, in answer to his inquiry, said, "These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem." (v. 19) That is, the horns are symbolical of the several powers, or kingdoms, that had been used to punish, and to scatter, both Israel and Judah. It is not here the question as to what kingdoms they were, though they can be easily traced in Scripture; but the number four represents the whole of the powers, as four is often used for completeness on earth. Thereon Jehovah showed him four carpenters; and, in answer

to the prophet, He spake, saying (after repeating the truth as to the horns), "These are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter" (v. 21.) The meaning of the carpenters is not given, only Jehovah assures the prophet, that as He used the four horns to scatter His people, so He will provide four instruments, at the proper moment, to fray (i.e., to terrify, or to drive them away with fear — see Psalm 48:4-6) them, and to cast out the Gentile powers who had served themselves in scattering His people. We thus learn that God still retains the government of the earth in His hands, and that the movements of nations, wars and conquests, are but the means whereby He accomplishes His own purposes in respect of His earthly people. The Gentile powers, or any given nation, may appear never to be so firmly established; but at the appointed moment the carpenters "come upon the scene, and they are frayed," "cast out," and their dominion is swept away.

Zechariah 2.

The connection of this with the next four chapters may be concisely stated in the words of another. "From chapter 2 to the

end of chapter 6 the Spirit presents the circumstances, the principles, and the result of the reestablishment of Jerusalem and of the house [the temple]; and also the judgment of that which was wicked and corrupt. Each chapter has a distinct subject — a vision detached from the others — while forming a portion of the whole. The present responsibility on which the blessing depended, and the sovereign grace that would assuredly accomplish all, are both set before us, each in its place."* This will be more fully seen as we pursue the details.

* Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, by J. N. Darby, vol. ii., third edition.

The subject of our chapter (chapter 2) is the restoration of Jerusalem — full and complete deliverance from the nations which had spoiled her, and her consequent blessing as the result of being once more the dwelling-place of Jehovah. And it will help the reader if he remember that this final deliverance flows out of, and is connected with, the partial deliverance enjoyed by the remnant as returned from Babylon. This has already been touched upon in chap. 1, for it has ever been the way of God with His people to use their partial deliverances as shadows of their full blessing under the promised Messiah.

In verses 1, 2 we have the introductory vision: "I lifted up mine eyes again, and looked, and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof." Two similar passages are found in the Scriptures — the first in Ezekiel 40; and the Second in Revelation 11, and a reference to them will aid in the interpretation. In both of these cases measuring would seem to be preparatory to appropriation for blessing; that is to say, it is an action directed by God on the eve of His once more coming in to re-establish His dwelling-place, and to own His people. It is so also in Zechariah. Jerusalem had been, as indeed it is at the present moment, trodden down by the Gentiles, made desolate for her sins. But the eye and the heart of God were perpetually upon her; and now that the time of her warfare was drawing to a close, now that she was draining the last drops of the cup of her judgment (for the seventy years of the promised desolations were now ended), He remembers His former mercies towards her, and He sends the "man with a measuring line in his hand" to ascertain the breadth thereof, and the length thereof, before taking possession, and establishing in her His royal throne for righteous government in blessing.

That this is the meaning of the symbolical vision is evident, from the following action: "And behold, the angel that talked with me went forth, and another angel went out to meet him, and said unto him, Run, speak to this young man,* saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: 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." (vv. 3-5).

- * This young man is the prophet himself; and it has been contended from the word employed — the same as is used of Jeremiah (Jer. 1:6) — that Zechariah was but a youth when called to the prophetic office. But as the word is sometimes applied to those who are older, expressive perhaps of affection, as in the cases of Benjamin and Absalom, it would be unsafe to draw any definite conclusion.

To understand the import of this magnificent promise, the reader must place himself in the circumstances, at that moment, of the prophet and his people. They had been permitted to return from Babylon, and they were laboriously engaged, under every form of discouragement and active opposition, in rebuilding the temple, and a temple which, from its contrast to that of Solomon amid the former splendours of the kingdom,

only reminded them of their weakness and poverty. The Lord saw the hearts of His people, their fears, faithlessness, and despondency; and He sent them the blessed encouragement of the future — unveiled before their eyes the glory of Messiah's presence, which would eclipse the glory of the past far more than the past did that of their then condition. We should do well to heed this divine method, and learn that the antidote to all despondency, arising out of the confusion and weakness of the present state of the Church, lies in the contemplation of the future, that it is thence we are to draw our sustainment and hope; for just as the joy set before us is given for individual encouragement (see Heb. 12:2; Rom. 5:2), so is the presentation of the bride to Christ in her perfect beauty held out for the comfort and consolation of the Church in her widowed condition. (Eph. 5, Rev. 21) To compare the present with the past is always a source of weakness; but the contemplation of the future — of the future in glory with Christ — is as surely the efficacious remedy for all fear and apprehension.

Two things are contained in this glowing prediction — the fact and character of Jerusalem's future prosperity; and its source and means of preservation. The time of this prosperity is

plainly indicated from its character. Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls; a population that should increase and break out on every side beyond all restraining limits; and the cattle should share in this illimitable blessing — a prosperity which loudly speaks of full earthly blessing under the peaceful sway of Emmanuel. Isaiah, dwelling upon the same period, says, "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thy habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left." (Isaiah 54:2-3.) But the secret of all is found in the next verse. Jehovah Himself will be a wall of fire round about her; a sure protection therefore from her foes, and will also be the glory in the midst of her. It is always so. Jehovah's presence has ever been the source of all blessing for His earthly people, just as the Lord's presence is now in the midst of those who are gathered unto His name. And while His presence is the source of blessing, it is also protection; the wall of fire and the glory are ever connected. (Compare Exodus 14:24-25; Isaiah 4:5.)

Another paragraph commences with verse 61 extending to end of verse 9, and contains an address to those who were still in

the land of their captivity. The connection with the previous verses is very striking. In the prophetic vision Jerusalem, once more restored and inhabited, is again the dwelling-place of Jehovah; and thereon an appeal is made, a summons issued, to those who had not yet returned, to come and share in the blessing. And not only this, but it is also a warning to escape from the judgments about to fall upon those whose captives they at this time were. (Compare Isaiah 48:20; Jeremiah 51:6, etc.) The land of the north is thus clearly Chaldea, the Babylonian empire, throughout which the Jews were scattered — "spread abroad as the four winds of heaven." (See Esther 3:8.)* In this way God sounds the trumpet-call for the assembling of His out-cast people; and in the next verse, addressing them collectively as Zion, He cries, "Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon." (v. 7.) Many thoughts are suggested by this remarkable combination of words. First, we learn that whatever the state and condition of the people they never lose their character before God, neither their place nor their corporate existence. Not only do they belong, equally with the restored remnant, to Zion, but together with them they are Zion. What a seeming contradiction therefore lies in the fact that Zion was dwelling with the daughter of Babylon! What had

God's people to do with such an alliance in such a scene of corruption? Alas! they had long since become Babylonian in character; and hence it was that Jehovah had permitted them to be enslaved, and to be transported to this region of man's corruption and power. But now the cry is raised, "Deliver thyself." So also Jeremiah had cried, "Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul; be not cut off in her iniquity: for this is the time of the Lord's vengeance: He will render unto her a recompence." (Jer. 51:6.) And would that God's people today might hear the same mighty voice, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. 6:17-18.) There is no other way of deliverance from that which ensnares and enslaves us than by coming outside altogether of the scene of its authority and power. Overcoming, even within the sphere of the professing Church, can only be by complete separation in the power of the Spirit from its evil and corruption. In this way alone could the daughter of Zion deliver herself, and return to the dwelling-place of Jehovah Mount Zion, which He loved, where He displayed His

glory, and where He encircled the habitation of His holiness as with a wall of fire.

- * There are several passages in Jeremiah that help to fix the interpretation of the land of the north (Jer. 1:13-14; Jer. 3:18; Jer. 4:6, &c.), and which will thus enable the reader to enter more intelligently upon the study of the events of the last days in which the king of the north plays such a conspicuous part.

The ground of the appeal then is given: "For thus saith the Lord of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you; for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye." (v. 8.) The expression — after the glory — has been, owing to ignorance of dispensational truth, a source of great perplexity to many teachers and readers. But to those who understand that it is not until after the appearing of the Lord in glory that He will gather His scattered people from the four winds of Leaven (Matthew 24:30-31), and thereafter judge the nations (Matthew 25:31-32), it is a beautiful example of the exactitude of Scripture. This is then the order: * after the glory, after the appearing of the Lord, His manifestation to Israel, when, as we read in Zech. 12:10, they will look on Him whom they had pierced, He will establish His earthly throne in Jerusalem, and He will use His people as His battle-axe and weapons of war to

break in pieces the nations, and to destroy kingdoms. (Jer. 51:20.) The reason is given, "For he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye"; i.e., will do himself irreparable damage, or injure himself in the most sensitive part.† "For, behold," the Lord proceeds, "I will shake mine hand upon them, and they shall be a spoil to their servants: and ye shall know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me." (v. 9.) Jehovah will in this manner execute judgment upon the nations, and His people, in the words of another prophet, "shall take them captives, whose captives they were; and they shall rule over their oppressors." (Isaiah 14:2.) And this verification of the message of the prophet should convince the people of the divine mission of the angel of the Lord. (Compare John 17:21-23).

* The reader may be interested in comparing the exact translation of Psalm 73:24: "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and after the glory thou shalt receive me."

† It is contended by many that "the apple of his eye" refers to God. (Compare Deut. 32:10). It is a question of interpretation, not of translation, and while in no wise objecting to this, the above is preferred as more in harmony with the context.

According to a frequent manner of prophecy the prediction is no sooner uttered than it is regarded as fulfilled; and hence the

prophet proceeds to call upon Zion to sing and rejoice, "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord." (v. 10) As the departure of the Lord from Zion, His rejection of the holy city as His habitation, was in consequence of His people's sins (Ezekiel 9, 10), so His return would, at the same time, mark their restoration to His favour, and be the consummation of all His purposes of blessing towards "the mountain of His holiness." It is in anticipation of this, faith being the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not, seen, that the prophet seeks to awaken the daughter of Zion to rejoice — thus teaching, as before pointed out, that our springs of energy and gladness are to be found in the revelation of the accomplished purposes of God.* It should also be again noticed that the source of all blessing for God's people lies in His dwelling in their midst. From the very first this was the sign of their being His redeemed people (Exodus 25:8), and of their having found favour in His sight (Exodus 33:16), even as having His tabernacle with men is the distinctive blessedness in the new heavens and the new earth wherein righteousness will dwell. (Rev. 21) The Church should also be able to prove this blessedness, as the two or three gathered unto the name of the Lord Jesus

Christ have ever done and do. (Matt. 18:19-20) But when Jehovah dwells again in Zion it will be in manifested glory and connected with the splendours of His millennial kingdom.

* There are three other instances in which Zion is similarly addressed — Isaiah 12:6, 54:1; Zephaniah 3:14.

It will be, moreover, a source of blessing for the nations, as the prophet speaks, "And many nations shall be joined [or shall join themselves] to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people." (v. 11) The prophet Isaiah, speaking of the same period when the glory of the Lord shall have risen on Zion, says, "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." (Isa. 60:3.) It is for this period, indeed, the nations are waiting and unconsciously longing (see Haggai 2:7), although they are ignorant that their blessing is dependent upon the restoration of the despised race of Israel. Yet it is so; and no sooner will Jehovah have returned to Zion, judged His enemies and founded His kingdom, than the nations will be attracted to the scene of His power and glory, and count it their highest honour to be enrolled amongst His people. (Compare Isaiah 2:1-5, 19:23-25, etc.) For, as David speaks, Messiah's "name shall endure for ever: his name shall be con-

tinued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed." (Psalm 72:17). Thereon the promise is repeated, "I will dwell in the midst of thee," the repetition affording a double security for His people's faith, as well as an immutable guarantee of its accomplishment; and the fulfilment of this promise of blessing, even as that of judgment upon the nations, is appealed to in proof that Jehovah of hosts had sent His angel. (v. 11)

There is still more: "And the Lord shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again." (v. 12.) God had ever spoken of Israel as His inheritance — His portion (Deut. 4:20, Deut. 9:26, 29; 1 Sam. 26:19, and numberless passages; compare as to the Church, Ephesians 1:18); and though His ancient people are now scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth, He will yet gather them, re-establish them in their own land, and then it is that He will, in the purposes of His grace, inherit Judah — the tribe out of which Christ came according to the flesh — as His portion. The expression is to be observed — "in the holy land" not holy merely on the ground of its being the land of promise; but because its iniquity will be removed in one day (Zech. 3:9), and thus

cleansed from all its defilement, it will again be holy to the Lord — set apart for Him and for His use and service. And He "shall choose Jerusalem again." Ages have passed since these words were uttered, but they have never been, and will never be, recalled, and thus faith knows that, though Jerusalem is trodden down at this moment under the foot of the Gentile, these words will have their fulfilment, and Jerusalem will, in the future, become "the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth," because the object of Jehovah's favour and the seat of His throne.

The chapter concludes with a solemn address to all flesh: "Be silent [or hush] O all flesh, before the Lord: for He is raised up out of His holy habitation." (v. 13). It is a striking appeal. The prophet sees Jehovah in the act of rising up, as it were, out of the habitation of His holiness, coming out in judgment for the accomplishment of the purposes just announced, and, in view of the effect upon men, the prophet cries, "Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord." for when the day of His wrath shall come who will be able to stand? It is at that time the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together, when every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced

Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. (Isa. 40; Rev. 1:7; compare Matt. 24:29-30.) Well, then, might all flesh be hushed in the presence of Him who comes forth to smite the earth in judgment as well as to deliver His people. It is in the prospect of the same event that Isaiah cries, "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty" (Isa. 2:10); and that Habakkuk says, "The Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him." (Hab. 2:20; see also Zeph. 1:7.)

Zechariah 3.

In chapter 2 the Lord has revealed His purposes of grace in the future restoration both of Jerusalem and of His people; chapter 3, while containing a distinct vision and complete in itself, explains how He will accomplish His purposes consistently with His righteousness. Hence we have first of all the state of the people exhibited in the person of Joshua, the high priest, as their representative: "And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord. and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him." (v. 1) There are three parties in this striking scene — Joshua, the angel of the Lord, and Satan.

Joshua as the high priest is, as already stated, viewed as representing the people, and the fact of his being clothed in filthy garments (v. 3) shows their guilty condition before God. The angel of the Lord is really Jehovah — Jehovah as He had been revealed in the midst of Israel; for as was said to Moses, "Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him." (Exodus 23:20-21.) This makes it very clear that it is Jehovah Himself who is meant. Satan is, as given in the margin, the adversary, the adversary to God and to man, and hence is known, as the word here etymologically signifies, as the enemy or adversary. But in order to understand the scene, it is necessary to remember that Satan has acquired certain rights over man through man's sin; and he is thus spoken of as having had the power of death, which indeed he wielded over man as God's just judgment against sin. (See Heb. 2:14.) It was Satan, in these rights which he possessed over the sinner, that our blessed Lord, as we learn from the scripture just cited, through His death destroyed or brought to nought, in order to deliver those who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bond-

age; and this must be borne in mind in the explanation of the Lord's action with reference to Joshua. Satan, therefore, had grounds for resisting Joshua, i.e., for opposing God's purposes of grace towards His people. They were guilty, and this was evident from the very garments with which Joshua was clothed; and the problem here to be solved was, How could God bless, righteously bless, His people, according to His purposes, while they were in this condition, seeing, in fact, that they were amenable to judgment, on account of their iniquity? How could the claims of Satan be discharged, and the people be set in favour and blessing?

The answer is found in verse 2, an answer which not only reveals the way of the nation's deliverance, but also teaches the way of justification for every poor sinner who seeks salvation. "And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan, even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" Satan had rightly read the terms of the law under which the people had been placed; he had also rightly construed his own power accruing from that ministration of condemnation and death; but he had neglected to observe, indeed it was not possible for his evil heart to un-

derstand, the intimations of grace which were scattered here and there throughout the Pentateuch and the Prophets, and he consequently concluded that his claims were irresistible. He was thus but little prepared for the withering answer, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan;" and the rebuke is administered because of grace, that grace which had stepped in and rescued Jerusalem and Israel from the curse under which they had fallen, and made it possible for them to be restored to the favour of God. Hence it is added, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"

This may need a further word of explanation. Grace then is expressed in the words, "The Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem." She had indeed failed in her responsibility, and had fallen under the rod of Jehovah's anger; but she was, notwithstanding, the object of His grace; and the grace that had chosen would in due season declare the righteous ground of its action (for grace can only reign through righteousness), and, in the prospect of its full display in blessing, could even now view Jerusalem as a brand plucked out of the fire. This righteous ground was found in the death of Christ (see John 11:51; Acts 5:31), which is alike the foundation for the salvation of believers in this dis-

pensation, and for the accomplishment of God's purposes of grace towards His ancient people.

A full and complete answer is given to Satan in verse 2. Verse 3 brings out distinctly the state of the nation as seen in the person of Joshua, who was clothed with filthy garments and stood before the angel. In verse 4 Jehovah proceeds to act, on the ground of the grace announced in verse 2, and to show how He will make Israel fit, morally fit, for His own presence. "And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." (v. 4.) First, He commands those that stand before Him to take away Joshua's filthy garments. This is ever the first action of grace when the sinner comes to God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; for the first thing that troubles the soul when divinely awakened to feel its sin is a sense of its guilt, and its consequent unfitness for the presence of God. The answer to this need is discovered in the blood of Christ, which cleanses from all sin. But not only are the filthy garments removed, but Jehovah also says to Joshua, "I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee," etc. So now

God gives the certainty to the soul of being cleansed, even as the Lord Himself when on earth, for example, assured the woman who was a sinner that her sins were forgiven her; for if grace removes our filthy garments, it would also have us know that they are gone.

But this is not all, for there is a further announcement: "And I will clothe thee with change of raiment." And this is effected in the next verse: "And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the Lord stood by." (v. 5.) The change of person in the speaker is worthy of notice — "And I," not He, "said." It would seem as if the prophet had been so brought into communion with the mind of God by the vision which he beheld that he is used to become its expression. He had heard the divine word, "I will clothe thee [Joshua] with change of raiment," and entering into what had thus been promised, he intercedes, as it were, that it might at once be done. In this lies the principle of all prevailing intercession — the soul entering into the thoughts of God and turning them into prayer. (Compare 2 Samuel 7:25-29; Daniel 9; John 15:7.) The word, "fair" would be more accurately rendered "pure," as

the reference is to the high-priestly garments of fine linen (Exodus 28:39), which are specially a type of purity, and in one place of the righteousness of saints (Rev. 19:8); but as worn by the high priest they were a symbol rather of the spotless purity of Christ. And this will enable us to understand the meaning of the action before us. The iniquity of Joshua had been removed, his filthy garments had been taken away, and thus that which disqualified him for the presence of Jehovah was gone; but, now that he was clothed in pure garments, he received his positive fitness and qualification to be before God; and, inasmuch as the mitre was significant of office, he was qualified to be there on behalf of the people. Two things indeed followed upon his receiving the pure garments — he could now stand in righteousness in the presence of Jehovah and he could enjoy continued access there as the ministering priest. Grace thus fully answered the accusations of the adversary, and showed in the completion of its work how "the brand plucked out of the fire," — Jerusalem, or the people — could righteously have a place in the immediate presence of God as a nation of priests.

And it may again be observed that God deals with the individual sinner in precisely the same way; for not only does He,

through the applied efficacy of the work of Christ, remove his guilt, but, through his death and resurrection, He brings him into a new place and standing, makes him the righteousness of God in Christ, so that in that new place and condition the sinner answers fully to the mind of God, and can therefore be in His presence in perfect peace and liberty.

If grace, however, brings into blessings and privileges, it makes the realisation and enjoyment of these dependent upon walk and conduct. Accordingly we find Joshua addressed by the angel, in the name of the Lord of hosts, "If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts; and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by." (v. 7.) To judge the house of God and to keep His courts belonged to the priest's office (see Deut. 17:9-13; Malachi 2:7; also 2 Chr. 26:16-21), but none could do these things truly unless they themselves were walking in obedience to the word; and thus Joshua's occupation of these exalted offices is expressly made conditional upon it, if it be not rather a promise, an encouragement held out to him that he might be enabled to walk in the ways of his God. There is surely a voice in all this for those who take the lead

among the saints of God (compare 1 Tim. 3); for just as in Eli's and Samuel's days, when manifold evils, corruptions, and abuses had crept in among the people, to the dishonour of Jehovah's name, when their sons walked according to their own inclinations, instead of keeping the charge of God, so now when man's will in those who lead sets aside the authority of Christ, there can be nothing but confusion and corruption in the assembly. The priests' lips — and this is ever true — should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; and only in this way are those who have prominence among the Lord's people qualified for the maintenance of discipline in the house of God, as upholders and vindicators of the Lord's name and honour entrusted to their care. Moreover Joshua should, if faithful, have a special position before God, liberty of access, and association with, "places to walk among," those that "stand by" in the presence of Jehovah

Verse 7 deals with Joshua in his then relation to the people, charged as he was with the interests of the house of God; whereas verse 8 takes him up, and presents him, as a type of Christ in the days of the kingdom when He will associate Israel with Himself as a nation of priests. (Compare Rev. 1:5-6.) This

will help to the understanding of the language employed: "Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at [or, men of marvellous signs are they]: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH." (v. 8.) The fellows of Joshua will be the ordinary priests; and as Aaron, together with his sons, ever represents the Church as the priestly family in association with Christ, so Joshua and his companions, in this connection, shadows forth Christ in the midst of His "fellows" (Heb. 1:9), who, through association with Him will then be a "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation." And this exaltation will cause them to be men of signs, wondered at, even as when Christ displays the saints in heavenly glory, He will be glorified in them, and admired, wondered at, in all them that have believed. For truly the world will be astonished in beholding the poor despised race of Israel lifted up into association with the King of kings, and Lord of lords, as indeed the prophets have foretold. (See Isaiah 60:14-22, etc.)

The ground of all is the introduction of the Branch — the Messiah in whom, and by whom, all blessing, whether for the Church or for Israel, is secured. Both Isaiah and Jeremiah had

prophesied of Christ in this character (Isa. 4:2, Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5, Jer. 33:15, etc.), and a single citation from one of these will explain its meaning. "There shall come forth a rod," says Isaiah, "out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." (Isa. 11:1) The figure of a branch is thus evidently derived from the fact that the Messiah has sprung from the family of David according to the flesh, from a root or stock long hidden, as if dead, but which, as will one day be seen, is still full of sap and life. In Revelation we learn that He is the root as well as the offspring of David (Rev. 22:16); for He who became of the seed of David according to the flesh, was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. (Rom. 1:3-4.) He was therefore both David's Son and David's Lord. (Matt. 22:42-45.)

The bringing forth of Jehovah's servant, the Branch, will, then, be the means of the accomplishment of the promised blessing; and hence it is that the actual stone which had been laid before Joshua, the foundation stone of the temple, was a type of Christ as the foundation in Zion, "a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation." (Isaiah 28:16). And there are

three things connected with Him in this character: first, "upon one stone shall be seven eyes." (v. 9.) This "one stone" is Christ; and Christ, inasmuch as the stone is to be laid in Zion, as the foundation of God's government in the earth; and on this stone will be the seven eyes, because there will be seen in it the omniscience of God, His perfect intelligence, as displayed in Messiah's righteous government, from Zion as the centre, of the nations of the earth.* The second thing is, "Behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of hosts." It should receive the exact impression of His own thoughts, have His own endorsement, be graven with His own device or seal, and thus be publicly known as His; and then we have, thirdly, "I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." This will be the consequence of the all-efficacious work of Christ; for it was through His death and resurrection that He became the foundation stone, and when His government is established in Zion, His people will have looked upon Him whom they had pierced (see chapters 12 - 14), and thus will, through repentance and faith, have been brought under the value of His atoning sacrifice, so that Jehovah will righteously remove the iniquity of the land in one day. It looks forward to the time when the nation will be cleansed from their sins by the blood of Christ, and

when it will thus be possible for Jehovah to dwell once more in the midst of His people.

- * For the profit of the reader the following remarks of another are transcribed: "In 2 Chronicles 16 we find the eyes of Jehovah represented as running to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong in behalf of those whose heart is perfect towards Him. This is the faithfulness of God in taking cognizance of all things in His ways of government. In Zechariah the eyes are found upon the stone that is laid in Zion. It is there that the seat of that government is placed which sees everything and everywhere. In verse 10 of the next chapter these eyes, which behold all things, which run through the whole earth, are said to rejoice when they see the plummet in the hands of Zerubbabel, that is to say, the house of Jehovah's habitation entirely finished. In this case they are not presented as established in the seat of government upon earth, but in their character of universal and active oversight, and in this providential activity, never resting until Jehovah's counsels of grace towards Jerusalem are accomplished; and then they shall rejoice. The active intelligence of providence finds its full delight in the accomplishment of the unchangeable purpose of the will of God. Finally these eyes are again seen in Revelation 5, in the Lamb exalted to the right hand of God, who is about to take possession of His inheritance of the earth. Here it is the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all

the earth; for the government is in the hands of the Lamb, although He has not yet exercised it in the earth, of which He is about to be put in possession." — Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, by J. N. D., vol. ii., 3rd edition.

It is interesting to point out the reference to, and the application of, this scripture by the apostle Paul. "Nevertheless," he says, "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal [the graving thereof], The Lord knoweth them that are his. And let every one that nameth the name of Christ [or, of the Lord] depart from iniquity." (2 Tim. 2:19) The foundation no one could overturn; and the Lord knew in a day of confusion and ruin, who were resting upon it; but it was incumbent upon all who professed His name, owned His authority, to depart from iniquity. If in Zechariah it was God stepping in, on His people's repentance, to remove the iniquity of His land, in Timothy it is the responsibility of all who acknowledge Christ as Lord to walk in separation from evil — this being the evidence of the reality of their profession.

But to return. Following, then, upon the purging of the land there is further blessing. "In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under

the fig tree." (v. 10) This is the blessed effect of the reign of the Prince of Peace, of Christ in the character of Solomon, and therefore the fulfilment of the words spoken of Solomon's reign: "Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry." (1 Kings 4:20.) It is the favour and blessing of God, and peace with one another, and, as a consequence in the kingdom, full earthly prosperity — the realisation indeed of the truth of the words of the angels at the birth of Christ. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men [or; in men]." (Luke 2:14.)

Zechariah 4.

The apocalyptic character of this part of the prophecy is seen again from verse 1, showing, as it does, that this is one of a series of visions which passed before the eyes of the prophet. "And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep." The prophet was in the condition of Daniel by the banks of Ulai when Gabriel was sent to make him know what should be in the last end of the indignation. (Daniel 8:15-19) Awakened by the angel, he beheld

"a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof; and two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof." (vv. 2. 3.) Such was the vision. Then we have the angel's explanation of the general meaning of it (vv. 5-7), together, as growing out of this, a special message, "the word of the Lord," to Zechariah (vv. 8-10); and finally, the interpretation of the two olive trees.

Before entering upon these several points, it may be observed that the candlestick is the well-known candlestick — the seven-branched candlestick — of the tabernacle (Exodus 25:31-40), and that it ever was the symbol of the light of God in the perfection of testimony — testimony in the power of the Holy Spirit on the earth — first in Israel, and then in the Church. (Rev. 1) There are several differences from the original candlestick to be noted. First, the bowl upon the top of it; next, each lamp (see margin) would seem to have seven pipes for the conveyance of the oil from the bowl to the lamps; and lastly, the two olive trees with their branches and golden pipes, through which the oil was supplied to the bowl. Generally speaking, it

was no doubt a revelation of the perfect order in government and testimony which Jehovah would establish in Jerusalem in connection with the royal, the Melchisedek, priesthood of Christ. In its full accomplishment it would be, as another has written, — "the royalty and the priesthood of Christ, which maintain, by power and spiritual grace, the perfect light of divine order among the Jews. The work was divine; the pipes were of gold. The thing ministered was the grace of the Spirit, the oil which fed the testimony, maintained in this perfect order."

To comprehend the meaning of the candlestick will enable us to understand the angel's answer to Zechariah. (v. 6.) The time had not yet come, as we know, for the establishment of the kingdom, when Christ will sit as a priest upon His throne; in fact, a poor, feeble remnant only of the people had returned from captivity; and these, without any visible signs of Jehovah's presence, were engaged, amid doubts and fears, in the erection of the temple. But Jehovah watched over the people. His eye and His heart were on their work, and He would animate their drooping spirits, supply them with new energy for their service by directing their gaze, through the prophet, to the

glories of the future, and by teaching them that their feeble work was itself the promise of the fulfilment of all His purposes of grace towards His ancient people. Hence it is that when Zechariah enquires, "What are these, my Lord?" the angel replies, "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. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it." (vv. 6, 7.)

This explains most clearly the application of the vision to the circumstances of the moment. There was, as already stated, the exhibition of the perfection of the light of God's order in the future, a testimony to the fact that God never forgets His ultimate purposes. But there was also a present application; and on this account it is that the explanation of the angel takes the form of a message to Zerubbabel — to Zerubbabel who, as governor of Judah, together with Joshua the high priest, was the leader of the people in the work of building the temple. (Ezra 5:2; Haggai 2:2, &c.) Zerubbabel was therefore taught that the time had not yet arrived for the display of Jehovah's might or power on

behalf of His people; but that if it were, as it was, a time of feebleness, God's Spirit was working to secure, both in the hearts of the people and in their service, all that His name and interests required, and hence that the character of the moment demanded dependence upon, and confidence in, God. This was doubtless a needed lesson for Zerubbabel in his trying position — a position rendered more trying by his own fears. It is comparatively easy, even for the natural man, to engage in the service — the outward service — of God, when He intervenes in power to sustain His servants and to secure the result; but it is only the man of faith who can labour on amid discouragements of every kind, who can trust to a power not seen to uphold and prosper, and is assured that the Spirit, who is invisible in His working to the natural eye, is even more mighty than manifested power. There are many Elijahs indeed who prefer the strong winds and the earthquakes to the all-efficacious still small voice of the Spirit of God.

In the first place then Zerubbabel is to be directed to the only source of power — to the Spirit of God; in the next he is sustained by the promise of the successful issue of his work. The great mountain should "become a plain: and he should bring

forth the headstone [of the temple] with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it." (v. 7.) By the mountain, we apprehend, is symbolized all the obstacles that lay, in the way of the completion of the work. It is a figure gathering up the whole of the difficulties, as well as the opposition encountered, the details of which are given in the book of Ezra. But all these — whatever the activity, power, or influence of the adversaries — are nothing to God; and they are likewise nothing to the man of faith when resting alone upon the power of the Spirit, and when walking in the path of God's will. It is thus that the question is triumphantly, not to say defiantly, put, "Who art thou, O great mountain?" It is indeed an exultant challenge, bringing out the confident assurance that before Zerubbabel it should become a plain. (Compare Isaiah 40:35.) The Lord Jesus, it is more than probable, referred to this scripture when He said to His disciples, "Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig-tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done." (Matthew 21:21.) For what is the mountain in this case? It was doubtless the Jewish nation in its unbelief and opposition to grace, that enmity of the Jews which was ever the obstacle to the proclamation of the

gospel to the Gentiles, and which, overcome by the faith of the disciples, finally disappeared as the Jews were merged in the sea of the nations. But whether this or that, it affords abundant encouragement in the Lord's service, as it will enable His servants to regard the most insurmountable difficulties as occasions only for the display of almighty and victorious power through the working of the Holy Spirit.

The headstone is connected with the completion of the building; the foundation-stone had long since been laid (see Ezra 3:10; Ezra 4:24; Ezra 5:1); and hence the promise refers to the conclusion of the work, which should be accompanied by the joy of the people, and their acknowledgment in their joy that grace, Jehovah's favour, had accomplished all. As a symbol, the headstone, equally with the foundation-stone, points to Christ. This will be seen from the words, "The stone which the builders refused is become the head[stone] of the corner." (Psalm 118:22.) And it is possible that the passage in Ephesians may connect itself with this: "Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone" (Eph. 2:20), teaching that He is both the foundation and the crown, the beginning and the end, of the house of God.

Following upon this, another message is given to the prophet, concerning Zerubbabel, even more explicit as to his completion of Jehovah's house, and adding the assurance that the eyes of the Lord would rejoice when they saw the plummet in his hands, on the work being finished. "Moreover, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, 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. For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shalt see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven: they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth." (vv. 8-10) Here we have, then, a solemn renewal of the assurance that nothing should hinder Zerubbabel from the execution of his work. The hands that laid the foundation of the house should finish it; and we are thereby taught that no opposition or enmity, not all the subtlety of the adversary, can hinder or even impede, the progress of the work of God, when His people labour in dependence on Him, and count alone on His sustainment and protection. Such an assurance could not fail to comfort the hearts of this feeble remnant at such a moment; for it was not only that the house should be completed, but also that Zerubbabel's hands should

finish it. If they did but believe the message, with what courage would they proceed with their labours! Appearances might be, as indeed they were, all against them, but under the influence of faith, they would be able to say, We know that our work will prosper because the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. (Compare 1 Cor. 15:58.) Once again the fulfilment of the prophecy (see Zech. 2:9, 11) is given as a proof of the fact that the Lord of hosts had sent His angel to the prophet.

The question then comes, "Who hath despised the day of small things?" Some, if not all, had been tempted to do this (Ezra 3:12); for they had compared the meanness of the present building with the glory of that of Solomon. They had been thus discouraged by comparing the present with the past, and, in their discouragement, they had low thoughts of the work on which they were engaged. They are now shown that, in this state of mind, they were not in fellowship with the mind and heart of God; that the question was not concerning the outward glory of their work, but what were God's thoughts about it. They had been repining and were unbelieving while God's heart was upon His people, and His eyes were waiting to express their joy when they should see the building completed —

for this is the meaning of the plummet in the hands of Zerubbabel.* It would be well for us if we carefully treasured up this instruction; for we also are slow to learn that the importance of any service depends upon God's estimate of it. If we have once lost fellowship with Him as to our work, our spiritual energy and perseverance are gone, we cease to look to the only source of our strength, and give place, at the same time, to doubts if not despair, because we have commenced to walk by sight instead of by faith. Let us learn then, with these returned captives, that the meanest service, as to its outward character, is worthy, of all our devotedness and zeal if the mind and heart of God are upon it, if He has put it into our hands, and that nothing is to be despised, no day of small things, when it contains in itself the pledge and guarantee of the fulfilment of the purposes of God.

* As to the expression "those seven," "the eyes of the Lord," see Note on Zech. 3:9.

The prophet then proceeds to enquire, "What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick, and upon the left side thereof? And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive branches, which through [or, by means

of, literally 'by the hand of,'] the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves? And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then said he, These are the two anointed ones [sons of oil], that stand by the Lord of the whole earth." (vv. 11-14.) The final answer of the angel gives, as we may see, the key to the whole chapter. The details of the symbol are somewhat difficult to seize; for, as will be perceived, one of the questions of the prophet (v. 12) imports an additional particular into the original vision. We find no mention there of the olive branches. Putting now the whole together, there is, first, the seven-branched golden candlestick; then the bowl on the top thereof with "seven pipes" connected with each of the seven lamps; further, there are the olive trees on either side of the bowl; and finally, we have the two olive branches ["spikes of the olive"], which have their two golden pipes by means of which they empty forth the golden oil out of themselves — presumably, though it is not distinctly said, into the bowl upon the top of the candlestick. One thing more may be noted, before giving the interpretation; viz, that the angel, in replying to the prophet, does not answer his two questions, but, evidently regarding the olive

trees and the olive branches as one and the same, says, These are the two sons of oil, etc.

Now, without attempting to explain the vision in all its features, the main lines of its significance are easily followed by the light of verse 14. First, the candlestick with its seven branches represents Christ as the Lord of the whole earth. It looks onward therefore to the time when He shall have come, have established His throne in Zion, and when all nations will have owned His universal sway, when He will be "a great King over all the earth." (See Ps. 47:2, and the series Ps. 45 - 48 in their connection.) Then it will be, if we understand rightly, that He will be God's golden candlestick on the earth, "the vessel of the light of God on earth ordained in all its perfection. The candlestick was one, but it had seven branches. It was unity in the perfection of spiritual co-ordination, perfect unity, perfect development in that unity," and thus will only find its complete fulfilment in Christ. Israel was set to be God's vessel of testimony on earth, and it failed, how completely we know. After the Jewish nation had been rejected as God's responsible witness, the Church came into its place; and the letter to Laodicea (Rev. 3) informs us also of its failure. After the Church shall

have been removed from the scene, Christ Himself will come, and He will answer to all God's thoughts in the perfectness of His testimony. Already He has been here as the faithful witness (Rev. 1:5), and in that character He was rejected and crucified; on the failure of the Church, which should have borne faithful testimony for God, He presented Himself to her as "the faithful and true witness" (Rev. 3:14), and now we behold Him, again on the earth, in the same character, not now as the rejected One, but as, having made his title good in power and taken possession of His rightful inheritance, the Lord of the whole earth. God's thoughts must be realised (see Psalm 33:11); but the history of the dispensations teaches that they will only be realised in Christ. Man has failed, and will, whatever his privileges, fail in everything, but in Christ all the glory of God will be secured.

In addition to — on either side of — the golden candlestick were there these two olive trees, and the question of the prophet concerning the olive branches would seem to make it plain that the olive trees (the sons of oil) were the two sources whence the light of the candlestick was fed and sustained. What then are these? Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah, Joshua (Zech. 3) was the high priest, and the two combined

were therefore a type of Christ as the priest on His throne; and hence the two olive trees, as another has written, "are the royalty and the priesthood of Christ, which maintain, by power and spiritual grace, the perfect light of divine order among the Jews." These are the sources whence this perfect light is fed and maintained.*

- * If the reader has followed this interpretation, he will be greatly assisted in reading Revelation 11, for there the two witnesses are said to be "the two olive trees and the two candlesticks standing before the God [it should be the Lord] of the earth" From this it would appear that the subject of their testimony will be to the claims of Christ over the earth in connection with His royalty and priesthood.

The reader's attention may also be directed to the term "golden oil." The candlestick is of gold, and though the oil flows from the olive trees, it is through golden pipes, and the oil itself is "golden." The gold, as ever, represents that which is divine, while the oil is the emblem of the Holy Spirit — the Holy Spirit here, inasmuch as it is through Christ as Lord of the earth that the testimony will be borne, in all His divine energy, and manifestly so, and hence it is golden, divine oil. The point is interesting in another way. When Jesus walked here upon the

earth He lived, acted, and wrought in the power of the Holy Ghost. This was the source of His words, acts, and miracles. After His resurrection He acted still by the same mighty power; for it is written, "He was taken up, after that He through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen." (Acts 1:2.) And now, as it appears from Zechariah's vision, when He will be here in the glory of the kingdom, He also will rule, maintain His rights, bear testimony for God, in the power of the Holy Ghost.

Zechariah 5.

The visions in this chapter are more obscure, though sufficiently plain in their general import. Their subject is the judgment of the wicked in Israel in the last days, and the revelation of the true character, God's estimate, of that which claimed to be Israel, but which had really become an apostate nation. The first vision concerns individuals, and the second the people as a whole — the people in its outward public character, as distinguished from the remnant, hidden from man's eyes, but known to God and having, in fact, before Him the place of the nation.

"Then I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a flying roll. And he said unto me What seest thou? And I answered, I see a flying roll; the length thereof is twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof ten cubits." (vv. 1, 2.) The roll is the ordinary form of the ancient Hebrew books; and we accordingly read in Ezekiel, "An hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein; and he spread it before me; and it was written within and without [i.e., on both sides]: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe." (Ezek. 2:9-10, compare Rev. 5:1) But the roll in Zechariah was, as may be seen from its dimensions, of no ordinary kind, being purely symbolic there — beheld as it was in prophetic vision. There are things connected with it demanding distinct notice. The first is its size — a feature which immediately attracts the prophet's attention. It was twenty cubits long and ten broad; and this was the exact size of the tabernacle in the wilderness, as may be gathered from the number and the width of the boards which composed it (Exodus 26:15-25); and it was also the size of the porch of Solomon's temple. (1 Kings 6:3.) These correspondencies cannot be accidental; on the other hand, they must have been designed, and hence they teach, either that the judgment proceeding would be according to the holiness of Je-

hovah's habitation in the midst of Israel, that He was about to weigh the conduct of the wicked in Israel in the balances of the sanctuary, or that judgment would begin at the house of God. (See Ezekiel 9:6.) In either case the holiness of the house, that is, the holiness of Him who dwells therein, according to the revelation of His name to His people, would be the standard of judgment.

The second point is the contents of the roll. The angel explaining, says to Zechariah, "This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth: for every one that stealeth shall be cut off as on this side according to it; and every one that sweareth shall be cut off as on that side according to it." (v. 3.) It has been a question whether "the whole earth" is universal, or whether it should be rendered, as it might be, the whole "land." The expression in the next verse "that sweareth falsely by my name" would point rather to the latter interpretation; and thus the curse which was written in the roll was one pronounced upon the thieves and the perjurers in the midst of God's professing people — an inexorable curse; for it is to be remembered that the time spoken of is subsequent to the day of grace, and connected with the acting of Jehovah in the land just

previous and preparatory to the establishment of Messiah's throne in righteousness. Hence all thieves and false swearers were surely to be cut off, according to the curse on the roll. But what a contradiction — that such open sinners should be found amongst the professing people of God! This is Satan's most successful effort — to introduce his servants among the Lord's people (see Jude), knowing as he does that a little leaven leavens the whole lump. The very fact, however, that God Himself is compelled to step in and vindicate His name, and the holiness of His house, reveals a sad state of general declension. When the consciences of the saints are in exercise, and they are walking humbly before God, they are necessarily, as being in the enjoyment of fellowship with Him, intolerant of evil, and zealous to maintain His honour.

When, on the other hand, they are careless, and the word of God is no longer looked to as the guide of their path and conduct, a spurious charity ensues, discipline is neglected, and iniquity vaunts itself in the open light of day. Such a state of things constrains God, as in the case before us, to interpose that He may cause His people to hear the rod and who hath appointed it. This is an unchangeable principle of His acting, as, for

example, we read in Ezekiel, after the details of the evil conduct of Israel in their captivity, "And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them." (See Ezekiel 36:17-23.)

Lastly, we are told that He who pronounces the curse will cause it to be executed. "I will bring it forth, saith the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name: and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof." (v. 4.) Well might the prophet Jeremiah say, "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." (Jer. 23:24.) Thus in the cases before us the thief and the perjurer might flatter themselves that their iniquity was unknown, that they had succeeded in covering up from it all human eyes; and they might even be mixing with their neighbours without a known stain on their character. They might have gone further and said, "The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it." But "he that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?" (Psalm 94:7, 9.) Sooner or later all such are here warned

that their false security will surely be disturbed, and that God's swift curse will enter their houses for their destruction. It does not follow, we apprehend, that the judgment here spoken of will of necessity be public or sudden. The language is peculiar — the curse enters, remains in their houses, and the houses are consumed. It would seem to be in the way of God's governmental dealing. Whether in this or in any other way, the lesson is the same, that sinners cannot harden themselves against the Lord and prosper, that His strong arm will as surely overtake them in judgment as that His eyes behold the secrets of their hearts; and thus with the arrival of the day of the Lord He will destroy the sinners out of His land. (Isaiah 13:9.)

The most cursory reader will not fail to notice the difference, in the ways of God in government, between the present time and that spoken of by the prophet. Now in this day of grace, wherein the gospel is proclaimed, God, while He does not give up any of His rights, does not always interpose in judgment, for He is not willing that any should perish, but desires that all should come to repentance. As soon, however, as this day closes, and when once again He begins to act in the earth in righteousness, He will then deal with sinners in the way unfol-

ded to the prophet in this vision. It is necessary to understand these dispensational distinctions in order to read intelligently the Scriptures. It should, however, be added, to prevent misconception, that God does not pass by sin even in this day of grace. He waits upon and pleads with the sinner, to see if he will bow in repentance before Him, and receive, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, salvation; but should the sinner refuse to listen to the voice of God's love and mercy in the gospel, he will but aggravate his doom when judgment is finally executed. (See Romans 2:4-11.)

The next vision is more mysterious in its form and symbols, although its main significance is clearly seen. "Then the angel that talked with me went forth, and said unto me, Lift up now thine eyes, and see what is this that goeth forth. And I said, What is it? And he said, This is an ephah that goeth forth. He said, moreover, This is their resemblance through all the earth [or their look or aspect in all the land]. And, behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead: and this is a woman that sitteth in the midst of the ephah. And he said, This is wickedness. And he cast it into the midst of the ephah; and he cast the weight of the lead upon the mouth thereof." (vv. 5-8.) This is the first part of

the vision, the remaining verses comprising a distinct development, revealing the final consummation of the wickedness first seen among the Jews. And this may explain perhaps the term found so frequently in this chapter — "goeth forth" — a term indicating not only movement, but also, in relation to the subject of the visions, progress in or the development of evil. The beginnings, the germs, were visible in the days of Zechariah; and just as the apostle John speaks of many antichrists having already appeared and looks upon these as the certain precursors of the antichrist, so these germs are taken up in the vision as the foreshadowings of the complete manifestation of the evil which they go on to depict. The exact meaning of the ephah, beyond the fact that it was a measure in use among the Jews,* is not revealed; but, in accordance with what has been said as to progress, its "going forth" would seem to point to the spread of evil throughout the land (Judea); and the fact that it was a known measure may signify that whatever its virulence and power the evil would be, in the government of God, confined within certain limits; or that there were determined bounds, beyond which the long-suffering of God would not pass. Our Lord speaks for example to the Jews, "Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. "

- * Its size even cannot be now ascertained. It is said, on the authority of Josephus, to have contained something over a bushel.

The evil itself was personified by a woman sitting in the midst of the ephah. This is explained in verse 8: "This," said the angel, speaking of the woman, "is wickedness. And he cast it [i.e. the woman] into the midst of the ephah." So that the end of verse 7 gives the result of the action at the beginning of verse 8; that is, it is the angel who casts the woman (wickedness) into the midst of the ephah, and the prophet beholds her, as a consequence, sitting there. There is yet another action — the angel also "cast the weight of lead [probably the talent of lead named in verse 7] upon the mouth thereof" (of the ephah). A woman is a well-known symbol in Scripture for the expression of a system, sometimes personifying a nation — as, for example, the daughter of Zion and the daughter of Babylon — and sometimes, as in the Apocalypse, setting forth a religious organization. As an illustration of the latter meaning, we have the woman sitting upon a scarlet-coloured beast, arrayed in every kind of human glory and grandeur. with her. name written upon her forehead, "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth." (Rev. 17:5.) And we know from verse 18 of that same chapter that Rome — the Romish

system, what we understand by the Papal religion — is presented under the form of this woman. This enables us at once to perceive, and the more certainly from the fact that she is sitting in the midst of a Jewish measure, that the woman of our chapter is the expression of organized wickedness among the Jews of the last days. Having rejected Christ, and, as He foretold, having received another who will have come in his own name, they will become the sport and prey, as well as the dwelling-place, of the seven wicked spirits of idolatry, and thus their last state will be worse than the first. (See Matt. 12:43-45.) This then is wickedness — an organized system of idolatry. She sits in the midst of an ephah, as indicating the Jewish character of her outward form and habitation; and her "sitting" (compare Rev. 17:3, 9, 15) sets forth the fact of her supremacy over the Jewish nation, that Judaism is the seat of her throne and government.

It is more difficult to seize the precise meaning of the casting the weight of lead upon the mouth of the ephah, but we judge that it points to the immense energy of the wickedness as contained in the ephah. The great weight of lead was cast upon its mouth; some severe repression exercised, it may be, in the way

of government, rather than directly, to hinder further expansion and development; and yet, as the remaining part of the vision shows, the wickedness was irrepressible, and flowed out in its true form and character. In a similar way evil is restrained at the present moment, according to that word in 2 Thess. 2: "And now ye know what withholdeth, that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth, will let, until he be taken out of the way, And then shall that Wicked be revealed," etc. (vv. 6-8) In like manner the weight of lead may represent the restraint for a time of the power of the wickedness, symbolized by the woman, through human government, or by other means, confining it to the Jewish ephah until God permits it to overflow and reveal its true origin and habitation. If this be so, verses 9-11 may not follow as to time immediately upon verse 8, but may refer, as before suggested, to the full development of the wickedness which in an organized form had found a home in Judaism. This is the more probable, as there is a distinct break in the vision, if it be not indeed the commencement of a new, though intimately connected, one in verse 9, as shown by the words, "Then lifted I up mine eyes" — words which so frequently are used as introductory to a new subject. (See Zech. 2:1; 5 Zech.: 1, 5)

When the prophet had again lifted up his eyes, he says, I "looked, and, behold, there came out two women, and the wind was in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heaven. Then said I to the angel that talked with me, Whither do these bear the ephah? And he said unto me, To build it an house in the land of Shinar: and it shall be established, and set there upon her own base." (vv. 9-11) The primary feature of this vision is, that two women come out of the ephah where there had been but one; and, holding to the Scripture symbolism of the woman, the meaning will be, that two systems, united but distinct, are developed out of that which had been contained in the Jewish measure. Then it had a Jewish form as well as a Jewish home, but now its component parts are resolved into two, both of which are represented by a woman. And what are these? An examination of the state of the Jews, as unfolded in the Scriptures, leaves little doubt that they are the twin sisters, SUPERSTITION and INFIDELITY. It was these our Lord Himself had to contend with in the form of the Pharisees and Sadducees, they are conjoined in their baleful work at this moment in the professing church, and nowhere more apparently than in Romanism, and they will be seen exercising all their frightful

influence over the souls of men under the sway of the anti-christ, who calls in superstition to his aid when he is permitted to make fire to come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men; and he avails himself of her sister infidelity when he opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or is worshipped.

Such are the two women that came out of the ephah; and then we are told that "the wind was in their wings, for they had wings like the wings of a stork: and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heaven." (v. 9.) The wings, we conceive, are merely a detail of the symbol, signifying perhaps rapidity of movement, — the wings of a stork being a figure derived from what often met the eye of the Jew in the annual departure of the storks from their country. The only point of importance to be noted is, that the wind was in their wings. When the disciples were crossing the sea of Galilee by night to go to Bethsaida, we are expressly told that "the wind was contrary unto them" (Mark 6), a figure doubtless of the fact that all the influences of this world, governed as it is by Satan, are against the Lord's people in their passage across the stormy sea of this life. On the other hand, that same wind always swells

the sails of Satan's vessels, and we find accordingly in this prophetic vision that the wind was in the wings of these two symbolic women, teaching that all the influence and energy of this world were aiding them in their design. They were doing the work of Satan, and all his forces were therefore at their service. It is ever so, and this accounts for the fact that wicked men are often seen to succeed beyond all expectation in their enterprises. The wind is in their wings, bearing them aloft and onward to their goal.

Zechariah enquires, "Whither do these bear the ephah? And he said unto me, To build it an house in the land of Shinar: and it" (the house) "shall be established, and set there upon her own base."* (vv. 10, 11) This answer of the angel reveals the whole truth of the vision and of the ephah. The ephah, as we have seen, represents a Jewish form of wickedness, an organized system of evil, but retaining the outward forms of Judaism. This produces, develops, the twin sisters of evil, superstition and infidelity; and these now lead on to full apostasy, and hence they are seen bearing the ephah to the land of Shinar, the place and the home of avowed opposition to God (see Genesis 11:2), where this incarnation of wickedness should have a

house established, and be set upon her own base. The Jewish nation — that is to say, that which is publicly owned as such, although there will be a true remnant which will have this place before God — will become openly apostate, and will then be seen in its real Babylonish character. The fulfilment of all this will take place during the sway of the anti-christ, who will be an apostate Jew (Daniel 11:37) as well as the denier of the Father and the Son. (1 John 2).

* The last clause, "set there upon her own base," refers to "wickedness," as the previous one does to the house. This is shown by the difference in the genders of the words.

The reader will not fail to perceive the similarity in this to the course of Christianity. At the end of Rev. 3 Laodicea retains the name and the form of the church, but even then she corresponds with the woman sitting in the ephah; for Christ is outside. Rejected by Christ because she is lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, she progresses in evil with frightful rapidity until, in Rev. 17, she is seen to be Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth. She has thus been borne, as it were, on the wings of the wind, and has had a house built for her in the land of Shinar. This is the final goal of Christendom, no less than that of Judaism. and there in the land of

Shinar the two will probably coalesce. Mat solemn reflections rise up within our hearts as we behold the future both of Judaism. and Christendom, both alike having possessed the Scriptures; but, turning aside from the light of this sure and infallible guide, both alike fall under the terrible power of Satan, who, transforming himself into an angel of light in man's estimation, and appealing to man's pride and vanity, succeeds in leading both into the denial of all that they had once learned from the word of God. And it were easy, if this were the time and place, to point the reader to existing things which are the sure precursors of this open apostasy; for already the fundamental doctrines of Christianity are being ignored or denied, and man's wisdom and man's power are being vaunted above the wisdom and power of God. There was never more need therefore than at the present moment for the exhortation of the apostle — "Let that therefore abide in you which ye have heard from the beginning." (1 John 2:24). For the only safety of the believer in these perilous times lies in adhering in every particular to, in testing all things by, and in treasuring up in his heart, the word of the living God.

Zechariah 6.

Another vision now dawns upon the soul of the prophet. "And I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came four chariots out from between two mountains; and the mountains were mountains of brass." (v. 1) We are passing now again, it is evident, into the sphere of the world's empires, and God's government of the earth by their means. In chapter 1 there were horses representing the three empires — Persia, Greece, and Rome — that succeeded Babylon; here all these four empires are shown under the symbol of chariots and horses. And they come out from between two mountains of brass. We may be helped in ascertaining the meaning of this expression by the statement in verse 5: "These are the four spirits of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth." The chariots thus come out from the presence of the Most High; and the mountains (which are sometimes figuratively used for seats of government, Psalm 72:3; Rev. 17:9, etc.) may be regarded as the pillars of His throne. (Compare Ps. 75:3.) Their being mountains of brass tends also to the same interpretation; for brass is an emblem of divine righteousness testing man (as, for example, in the brazen altar) in responsibility, and hence it is connected with judgment, as indeed in the

present vision. (v. 8.) God is taking cognizance of the events of earth as He is about to judge all on the eternal principle of His own righteousness as displayed in His government. Thus the Psalmist says, "Thy righteousness is like the great mountains"; and, "The mountains of God" (Psalm 36:6), an expression which confirms our interpretation.

The following remarks of another are so striking, and so vividly express, as we judge, the significance of this vision that we give them entire. "In chapter 6 we are shown the government of God in the four monarchies, but neither as immediate government on God's part, nor merely that of human government. We have seen power committed to man in the person of Nebuchadnezzar, and that he had failed therein. But it was not the will of God immediately to resume the reins of government in the earth, neither to leave the earth to the wickedness and the will of man without any providential bridle, without any government. He controls them, not by acting directly, so as to maintain the testimony of His character and His ways, but by means of instruments whom He employs, the result of whose activity is according to His will. The only wise God can do this; for He knows all things, and directs all things to the ac-

complishment of His purposes. This is the reason that we see all sorts of things morally in disagreement with His ways in government, which yet succeed; a chaos as to the present, but the issue of which will furnish a clue that will make manifest a wisdom even more profound and admirable than that which was displayed in His own immediate government in Israel, perfect as this was in its place. It is that universal providence which, in its results, satisfies the moral exigencies of the nature of God; while in the intermediate course of things free scope is left to the active energies of man's will.

This mediate power, exercised by means of instruments proceeding from the presence of the Most High God is employed in connection with His rights over the whole earth. This is the character of God in the prophecy of Zechariah. It is the character also of His government for the time being, that is, during the four empires. When Christ shall reign, the government will again be immediate in His person, and Jerusalem be its centre.

I think the judgment executed upon Babylon answers to that which is said in verse 8. We know that Chaldea was always the north country to Israel. The spirits employed by God have accomplished His will there. The seventh verse appears to indic-

ate the Roman empire, comprising everything from its first establishment to the present time, and its historical character at all times. The white horses would be the representatives of that which God has done by means of the Greek empire. The grised and bay appear to indicate a mixture of Greek and Roman power; at least, these horses have a double character, which becomes afterwards two distinct classes (the last only having the character of universality, which goes to and fro throughout all the earth). I doubt not that all these proud instruments of His government will be found again as spheres of judgment in the last days, when God begins to assert His rights as the God of the whole earth, unless Babylon geographically may be an exception in virtue of what is said in verse 8."*

* Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, by J. N. Darby, 3rd edition.

The principles laid down at the commencement of the above extract are of all importance for the understanding of God's ways in the government of the earth during the long interval between the removal of His throne from Jerusalem, on the destruction of the city and temple by Nebuchadnezzar, and the establishment of Messiah's throne in Zion. If, however, the reader should be disappointed at not finding a more precise and de-

tailed interpretation of the chariots and their horses, he must remember that full light will only be thrown back on these symbols when Jehovah again asserts His claims over the earth, and that in the meantime we must be contented with an outline of His working through and by means of these successive world empires. Still, great assistance may be gained in the study of these prophetic visions by a careful examination of all that has been written in other books concerning the empires of the world, as, for example, in Daniel 2:7 - 11, etc. Two things he will at least learn. First, that the four monarchies, represented by four chariots, are but successive instrumentalities in the hand of God for the accomplishment of His will; and that the various political crises, whether as arising from wars or changes of territory, both in "the north country," and in "the south country," are the result of His working through man's will and man's schemes in view of His immutable purposes of blessing in Israel; and secondly, that the issue of the government of the earth by the hands of man will be the two beasts of Rev. 13, who will be the incarnation of all human wickedness, as seen in the vain attempt to eradicate from the hearts of men all belief in the existence of God. (See Rev. 13)* Happy are those who, through the grace of God, have their portion outside

of this scene; who know that their citizenship is in heaven; and who therefore, while they, in obedience to the word of God, are subject to the powers that be and obey magistrates, stand aloof from all political agitations and movements, expecting nothing from man's vain and futile efforts to improve the world, but wait continually for the return of the Lord.

- * Strange to say, this is the first article in the creed of that Nihilism which men at present affect to despise and hate, because it wages war against ordered government and society, and thus disturbs their peace. The time is soon coming when they will welcome and applaud the Anti-christ who will proclaim the very doctrines they now abominate.

As arising out of the vision, Zechariah now receives a distinct message, which gives us the full result of God's ways in government in the introduction of the Messiah, who should be as "a priest upon his throne," between whom and Jehovah as we shall see, there will be "the counsel of peace." First, we have the occasion of the message, and a symbolic action, which becomes a shadow of the complete blessing predicted. "And the word of the Lord came unto me saying, Take of them of the captivity, even of Heldai, of Tobijah, and of Jedaiah, which are come from Babylon, and come thou the same day, and go into

the house of Joshua the son of Zephaniah; then take silver and gold, and make crowns, and set them upon the head of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest." (vv. 9-11) We find no other reference to these names, and it would seem that they had come from Babylon with offerings for the Lord's work in building the temple. They had not availed themselves of the liberty given, through the proclamation of Cyrus, to return to Judah with their brethren; but though they had not faith for this, they had fellowship with the object of those who had returned.* The prophet is commanded to go into the house of Josiah — where these godly Jews lodged, it may be — and take silver and gold, of the offerings they had brought, if this were the purpose of their visit to Jerusalem, and to make crowns and set them upon the head of Joshua the high priest. Thus crowned with many crowns (see Rev. 19:12), he stood in the midst of his brethren as a type of Christ in His future glory. It was no mean privilege for Joshua, as the crowned priest, to become the symbol of the Messiah; but this honour was accorded to him by Jehovah through His messenger. And while he thus stood before these children of the captivity, Zechariah was charged to speak unto him, saying, "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH, and he shall grow up

out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord: even 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." (vv. 12, 13.)

* It has been noticed that the names of the deputation (for they probably represented others as well) are most expressive spiritually. Thus Tobijah is "The Lord is my good"; Jedaiah, "Jehovah knoweth"; Josiah, "Jehovah supporteth"; Zephaniah, "The Lord hideth." Heldai, or Cheldai, is not so clear.

The message explains most fully the meaning of the symbolical act of crowning Joshua the high priest. He thus became, as already shown, a type of Christ as the true Melchizedek.* The several features of the Messiah in His future glory are very interesting. He is first presented to us as the man whose name is The BRANCH.† According to promise He should spring forth after the flesh from the stock, and thus be the offspring of David; and hence it is added that "He shall grow up out of His place"; i.e. He should be regarded as born in Zion, according to the word in the Psalm — "The Lord shall count, when He writeth up the people, that this man" (Christ) "was born there." (Psalm 87:6.) For though Bethlehem was the place of David's

nativity (also of David's Son and Lord), Zion was the seat of that royal grace displayed in the kingdom, and the place to which therefore Messiah is said to belong. Then moreover it is said, "he shall build the temple of the Lord: even he shall build the temple of the Lord." In this way the faith of Joshua, and the remnant whom he represented, would be encouraged. They were labouring to erect a house for Jehovah amid the desolations of the once beautiful Jerusalem; and the Lord directs them to look upon their work as the promise of a time, which should eclipse the glory of the past far more than the past overshadowed the present, when Messiah Himself should build the temple — one therefore commensurate with the splendours of His own glorious reign, and as such worthy to be the habitation of the Lord their God.

- * It should be said that it is not certain whether the word rendered "crowns" should not be given in the singular as "crown." The only difference is, if "crown" it is more distinctly the Melchizedek character of the Messiah brought before us; if "crowns" it would rather be His wider glory as King of kings and Lord of lords, His universal dominion.
- † See our remarks on Zech. 3:8 for the meaning of this expression.

The fact is interesting in itself, and should be noted by every reader of prophecy, as it throws a flood of light upon the future. The temple now being erected was to last till the days of Herod; for he really rebuilt, or made such alterations and renovations as were tantamount to rebuilding the temple. This was destroyed, as we know, by the Romans, and from that day to this, Jerusalem trodden under foot by the Gentiles, has been without a house for Jehovah and will continue to be so as long as the day of grace shall be extended. The time, however, will come when the Jews, restored to their own land, will in their unbelief — unbelief as to Jesus being their Messiah — build another temple; for it is found existing and associated with wickedness. (See Isaiah 66:6; Matt. 24:15.) This temple will also be destroyed (Daniel 8:11), and thus the way is prepared for the advent of the Messiah in His kingdom, when He will fulfil the prediction here given through Zechariah. It will be then for the first time that there will be One to govern upon earth adequate to all the requirements of the glory of God: He shall bear the glory. This is the One of whom the prophet Isaiah had spoken as a nail fastened in a sure place, who should be for a glorious throne to his father's house, upon whom they should hang "all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the

issue, all vessels of small quantity, from the vessels of cups even to all the vessels of flagons." (Isa. 22:23-24.) Yea, He shall bear the glory; for He has shown, proved, both His worthiness and ability to do so. On the cross He was tested as to this, and it was abundantly demonstrated that He could sustain the whole weight of the glory of God in respect of His people's sins. In the place of sin and for sin He endured all that was necessary to vindicate the name of His God before the universe; for He devoted Himself to such a death for the divine glory, and He to whom He thus offered Himself has declared His satisfaction, His joy, in the death of His beloved Son by raising Him from the dead, and setting Him down at His own right hand in heaven. Already He has glorified Him there with the glory which He had with the Father before the world was; and very soon He will display Him in that glory on the earth, and then it is that He will execute the decree already promulgated — "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." And He will do this in connection with establishing Him as King upon His holy hill of Zion, where the accomplishment of these words, "he shall bear the glory," will be verified, the glory of God in the earth, is He already bears it in heaven. That it is in connection with government is seen from what follows. He

"shall sit and rule upon his throne" — the throne of His father David — when "he shall reign over the house (of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke 1:32-33.)

Two other things are added; first, that He shall be a priest upon His throne — the true Melchizedek — King of Righteousness, and also King of Peace — the two characters foreshadowed by David and Solomon, and together with these ever maintaining the place and office of the Priest on behalf of His people. (See Psalm 110) Lastly, the counsel of peace shall be between Him and Jehovah; and this, as the result of His bearing the glory, and, governing according to God's perfect standard, the expression in His government of the character and ways of God, and that in the fulness of their perfection; and thus it will be the foundation and the guarantee of the peace and blessing of all who accept from the heart His perfect and righteous rule. (Compare Psalm 72) It is for this blessed future the earth now sighs and waits; for unconsciously to themselves this Royal Priest is the desire of all nations, and when He once comes and takes His power, He will not only satisfy, but far transcend, the most longing expectations. Hence in the prospect of this the

psalmist cries, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth; make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise. Sing unto the Lord with the harp; with the harp, and the voice of a psalm. With trumpets and sound of cornet make a joyful noise before the Lord, the King. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof, the world, and they that dwell therein. Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be. joyful together before the Lord; for he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity." (Psalm 98:4-9.)

We have now another action. First of all, the crowns (or crown) having been made, were put upon the head of Joshua, who became thus a type of Christ in the glory of the kingdom. Having served this purpose, the crowns (or crown) were to be laid up in the temple of Jehovah as a memorial "to Helem, and to Tobiah, and to Jedaiah, and to Hen the son of Zephaniah." (v. 14.) There is something touchingly beautiful in this act of grace. These godly Jews, as we have before pointed out, had not returned with their brethren from Babylon to unite in the work of building the temple; but, while they had not risen to the call of God in this respect, they were in fellowship with those who

had, and had travelled all the way from Babylon to bring their offerings for the work. The Lord had noted all this. His eyes were upon them, for this act of theirs was precious in His sight; and He directed that the crowns which had been made should be kept as a memorial of their fellowship with the work of their brethren — yea, with His own work — In the erection of His habitation in Jerusalem.* Not only so, but these true Israelites in their journey from distant Babylon should themselves become a figure of those who, in the day of Messiah's glory, should come to build in the temple of the Lord. (v. 15.) The prophet Isaiah also speaks of these when he says, "The sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee. Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces [wealth] of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought ... The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious." (Isaiah 60:10-13) Thus while Messiah Himself shall build the temple of the Lord (v. 12) He will permit in His grace the association of others with Him, labouring under His direc-

tion and control, in this glorious work. It is the same in principle now in the present dispensation. "On this rock." He says to Peter, "I will build my church." And Paul says, "We are labourers together with God," or fellow-labourers belonging to God, and this, as he explains, in connection with building His church. (1 Cor. 3) How great the grace! How unspeakable the privilege in being thus associated with the Lord in the execution of His designs! And the prophet appeals to this verification of his prophecy as a proof of his mission from Jehovah.

- * Monarchs, warriors, and others, under the influence of sacerdotalism and superstition, in ignorance of the teaching of this scripture, as well as of the character of the day of grace, have sought to imitate the action of these pious Jews, and to commend themselves thereby to God by adorning the "churches" of Christendom and the shrines of saints with costly gifts of gold and precious stones.

The chapter concludes with placing the remnant under the responsibility of obedience. "And this shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God." (v. 15.) In this way the Lord connects the fulfilment of His promises with their obedience, and thus the present with the future. Doubtless the gifts and calling of God are without repentance, and there-

fore He will surely accomplish His own purposes; but, on the other hand, He ever proposes blessing to His people, on condition of walking in His ways. Thus in Acts 3. by the mouth of Peter, the return of Christ to the Jewish nation was offered on condition of their repentance. And for the Christian it is no less true that obedience is the way of all blessing. In the address therefore to Philadelphia, the Lord says, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." (Rev. 3:10) In like manner the remnant from Babylon would only be guarded, prospered, and brought into the enjoyment of present blessing in building the temple, even as the remnant in a future day, of whom they were the representatives, would only be permitted to see the fulfilment of these glorious predictions, if they diligently obeyed the voice of the Lord their God.*

- * Before passing on to the next section of this book, we desire again to call attention to the special characteristic of that now considered. The following remarks present it clearly and concisely: "We may remark that in Zechariah (Babylon being already judged) we have neither man invested with the government, nor the moral character of the empires presented under

the form of an image, or that of beasts, but the government of God, hidden, providential, but real, in connection with these empires. This is an element of much importance, if we would understand the whole system existing from the time of Nebuchadnezzar and the return from captivity until the end, when Christ shall reign in righteousness." — Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, vol. ii., third edition.

Zechariah 7.

Together with this chapter we pass out of the region of apocalyptic visions into the domain of pure and proper prophecy; and this extends to the close of the book. The main object of this portion is to bring in the introduction of Messiah, and to show the consequences of His rejection, issuing finally in the attack of the enemy, in the last days, on Jerusalem, and the interposition of God on behalf of His people, as preparatory, to the establishment of Messiah's throne in righteousness, when the Lord shall be King over all the earth.

The chapter commences with the date of the occurrence of the incident which becomes the occasion of, and forms a kind of preface to, the following prophecies. It was "in the fourth year of king Darius." — two years, therefore, after the date of the

previous visions (see Zech. 1:1) - "that the word of the Lord came unto Zechariah in the fourth day of the ninth month, even in Chisleu" (v. 1); and this message was received by the prophet with reference to a special embassy which had been sent "to pray before the Lord." The character of this embassy is somewhat obscured by a mistranslation in verse 2. It should probably be rendered as follows: "When Bethel had sent Sherezer and Regem-melech, and their men, to pray before the Lord."* It appears that the Jews who had returned from Babylon, and had fixed their abode at Bethel (see Nehemiah 11:31; Ezra 2:28), had sent this deputation to Jerusalem for a twofold purpose: "To pray before the Lord, [and] to speak unto the priests which were in the house of the Lord of hosts, and to the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?" (vv. 2, 3.)

- * The mistake has arisen from translating the proper name, "Bethel," by the "house of God"; for it would seem that, in the words of another, "the house of God is nowhere in Scripture called Bethel. Bethel is always the name of the place. The house of God is designated, by historians, psalmists, prophets, by the name, Beth-elohim, more commonly Beth-Ha-elohim, or [the house] of Jehovah."

The fifth month was the anniversary of the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar, a memorable day to the Jew, significant as it was of the Lord's departure from His people, in the removal of His throne from Jerusalem, and one which, as it would seem from this chapter, was annually celebrated by, a solemn fast. But, as is seen in Christendom as well as among the Jews, the most solemn fasts are often proclaimed and observed with little or no humiliation before God. And so, by the answer sent to this deputation, it must be concluded to have been with this fast of the fifth month. Those who observed it drew near to God with their lips, while their hearts were far from Him; and, moreover, they had become weary of its annual recurrence. This was the motive of their sending men to Jerusalem, to entreat the face of the Lord, and to enquire if it were necessary to continue to weep and to "separate" themselves as they had done for so many years. Were they not restored to the land? and was not the temple nearly completed? * Might they not now, therefore, lay aside the badges of mourning and sorrow, and give themselves up to enjoyment?

* In fact it was two years from this time before the temple was finished.

The reader, even before the answer is pondered, will easily detect the selfishness that prompted this enquiry, which was addressed to the priests and to the prophets. A fast should be the expression of a state of heart, or it could have no value before God. If, therefore, the men of Bethel had the state of heart which the fast should have expressed, they could not have asked if it were needful to continue its observance. If they had realized the significance of their captivity in Babylon, or the present mournful condition of the restored remnant, they would have welcomed the return of the fast as an opportunity to pour out unitedly before God their tears and supplications; instead of which they felt it a burden, and desired its abolition. It seemed a pious thing to send men to pray before the Lord, and to put this question; but the Lord is not mocked. His eyes behold the heart, its motives, the springs of action; and hence He sends an answer which exposes all to view. The question had been sent by a few, the answer is addressed to all the people of the land, and to the priests. "Then came the word of the Lord of hosts unto me, saying, Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, [even] to me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink,

did not ye eat for yourselves?" (or, more exactly, Is it not ye who eat, and ye who drink?) (vv. 4-6.)

In this manner the Lord lays bare the hearts of His people. It was true that they had punctiliously observed for seventy years the fasts of the fifth and the seventh months* with all the external signs of lamentation and mourning; but they fasted not to the Lord, but as He enquires, by the mouth of the prophet, "Did ye at all fast unto me, to me?" No, whether fasting, or eating and drinking, it was done for themselves, and to themselves, God and His claims not being in all their thoughts. It is a striking illustration of how far man may go in self-deception in religious observances. A similar instance is met with in the prophet Isaiah. The Jews of his day had complained, "Wherefore have we fasted, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?" They had vainly imagined that they were commending themselves to the Lord by their mournful ceremonials; but the prophet, by the solemn answer he gives, strips them of their illusions. "Behold," he says, "in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours. Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to

make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?" (Isaiah 58:3-5.) The natural man never learns the lesson, that while man looks on the outward appearance God regards the heart, and hence, as the Lord Jesus told the Pharisees, that the thing which is highly esteemed amongst men is abomination with God.

- * As the fast of the fifth month commemorated the destruction of the temple, that of the seventh month recalled the assassination of the governor of the land, and of the Jews that were with him, by Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, an event which was followed by the remnant, in disobedience to the word of the Lord, taking refuge in Egypt. (Jer. 41 - 44)

It is a mistake religious man is ever making, that God must be pleased with him if he attend to outward forms and ceremonies, even when these ritualistic forms are of his own devising. The Lord Jesus Himself has dealt with this in solemn words in Matthew 15, wherein He shows that the iniquity of the Pharisees found its highest expression in teaching for doctrines the commandments of men, and that, as long as the heart is untouched,

nothing, however religiously done, can be acceptable to God. This was the case with the Jews in our chapter; for the inhabitants of Bethel were but a sample of the state of all, and hence Zechariah is directed to recall to their minds God's former messages by the prophets, and the fact that all the sorrows which had befallen Jerusalem, as well as themselves, had resulted from their neglect of, and disobedience to, Jehovah's word. He thus, after exposing the insincerity of their pretended fasts, proceeds, "Should ye not hear the words which the Lord hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, when men inhabited the south and the plain?" (v. 7.)

Herein lies a principle of abiding importance. Instead of wondering whether they had not mourned sufficiently over their national disasters, significant of Jehovah's anger against His people, they should have gone back and enquired into the causes of their sorrows, and they would then have learned, that their rebellion against God had procured for them their adversities; and, furthermore, they should have examined themselves as to whether in their fastings they had judged and humbled themselves before God, and whether they were now

accepting for themselves the admonitions, the warnings, and the directions of His word. And surely, there is a loud voice in all this instruction for the people of God at the present moment. In our sorrows, our weaknesses, and our chastisements under the Lord's hand, are we also not too often content with meetings for confession and humiliation, while we forget to enquire into the causes of our failures, and to ascertain what departures from the word of God may, have brought us into our low condition? Let us be warned by the case before us, and at the same time learn that, however sincerely even we may humble ourselves before God on account of past sins, there can be no restoration of blessing until we have gone down to the roots of our failure, and tested all by the word of God. The slightest departure from God's order, if known and allowed, is sufficient to grieve the Spirit of God, and to hinder blessing. If therefore we would discover the causes of the broken and captive condition of the church, we must go back to Pentecost, even as the Jews were here commanded to go back to the time of Jerusalem's prosperity, and when we have done this we may, by comparing the present with the past, easily learn the means of restoration and blessing.

The eighth verse would seem at first sight to be the commencement of a new message, but a closer examination reveals the fact that the Lord does but give a summary, through Zechariah of the words which He had "cried by the former prophets." Thus verses 9 and 10 give the substance of His former messages to His people, verses 11 and 12 point out the way, in which His word had been refused; and verses 13 and 14 show that the withering judgments which had fallen upon Israel and the land were the consequence of their hardened hearts and sinful rebellion. We have then first a compendium of what God required of His people as a condition of being retained in blessing in the land. Israel was under law, mingled however with grace after the sin of the golden calf, yet still under law, and therefore under responsibility. Thus the first part of the book of Deuteronomy insists again and again upon obedience as the condition of blessing and of remaining in the land; and Jeremiah, in very similar language to this in Zechariah, teaches the same lesson. He says, "Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these. For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless,

and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever." (Chap. 7:4-7.)

It will be perceived that it is the second table of the law — love to their neighbours — to which the Lord had recalled the attention of His people in the days of their prosperity. It is, in fact, love to their neighbour in its spiritual measure of love to themselves; and hence they had been called upon to execute true judgment, not to show respect of persons; to have a tender and compassionate heart; to abstain from oppressing the helpless, the widow, the fatherless, the stranger, and the poor; and finally, they were not to imagine (i.e. devise, see Micah 2:1-3) evil against their brethren in their hearts. All this shows the value God attaches to our practical conduct, to a walk in relation to others as formed and ordered by His word. And He had recalled Israel to these moral features, because it was precisely in these things, as may be gathered from their history, that they were lacking. Unless therefore they listened to these divine admonitions judgment awaited them.

How then had they received them? Can anything be more solemn than the description of the way in which these divine communications were treated? "They refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent in His Spirit by the former prophets." (vv. 11, 12.) There was thus not only indifference, but there was also positive enmity to the word of God, even open rebellion against Him and His claims. Nehemiah confessed the sins of his people in almost the very words which are here used by the prophet. He said, "They dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments. ... and withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their necks, and would not hear." (Nehemiah 9:29.) Isaiah also points out the same moral characteristics, in evidence of the utter obduracy of the people, in the well known and often cited words, "This people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed." (Matthew 13:15.) Thus it was the will of Israel not to hear; for they "refused to hearken" — stopped their ears, "made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear," and in this way resolutely turned away from the pleadings and admoni-

tions of the prophets. The apostle Paul speaks of a time when, in like manner, professing Christians "will not endure sound doctrine ... and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." (2 Tim. 4:3-4.) All this, whether among Jews or Christians, is a sign of terrible moral corruption; for nothing betrays more fully the wickedness of the heart than the rejection of the word of God, and when this is openly done it is also the sure precursor of coming judgment. This is simply a matter of fact, as recorded in the Scriptures, but the reader must judge for himself whether the refusal of the divine word is not a characteristic of the present moment; not so much by the infidel and the atheist, who have never received it, as by numbers who claim the Christian name, and even by many among these who assume the place of Christian teachers. To throw doubts upon the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures is but the first step in the development of that rationalism which affects to be wiser than God, which denies the foundations of the faith, and which interprets whatever of the Bible it professes to believe in accordance with the desires of the natural man. God's own word is rejected, and the word of foolish man is substituted in its place; and this is the fruit of the boasted wisdom of the nineteenth century!

Let us now see the consequences of this high-handed rebellion against God. The reader will mark the connection as shown by the word "therefore." "Therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts. Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear, so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the Lord of hosts: but I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate." (vv. 12-14.) The returned remnant knew very well the past history of their nation, that the pleasant land (the land of desire) had been ravaged and laid waste by Nebuchadnezzar, and that even their present condition, though they had returned from exile, was a testimony to what had been suffered. But whenever we get off the ground of the word of God there is a tendency to lose sight of the hand of God in our chastenings; and it is more than likely that the Jews, forgetting their special place in the dealings of God, were taking up in spirit a position like that of the surrounding peoples. If therefore they had been conquered and carried away captive, so, they might have reasoned, have other nations. To counteract any such thought, and to compel them to see the root of all the evils that had befallen them, the Lord reminds them of the con-

duct of their fathers, and tells them that it was His wrath they had suffered in judgment; and hence that it was in His favour alone prosperity could be enjoyed, and that obedience to His word was the only way by which His favour could be regained. It was for this reason the prophet was instructed to hold up this picture of the past, that they might learn a lesson, take warning, for themselves. They might fast and separate themselves for ever; but if this were unaccompanied by self-judgment and obedience to the Word, they did but fast in vain. Our Lord also taught the same thing when He said to His disciples, "When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto Thy Father who is in secret: and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."* (Matthew 6:16-18). The Jews and the priests to whom Zechariah was sent, in their desire to commend themselves to one another, had too much forgotten Him who "seeth in secret," and thus betrayed the state of their hearts. Nor are we free from the same danger; and hence it is that the apostle insists upon the true heart and the full assurance of faith in our approaches

to God. (Hebrews 10; compare 1 John 3:20-22.) It was then in consequence of disobedience to the word of God that judgment had fallen upon His people. The various stages of His dealings with them are very solemn. First, "there came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts." This failing to produce contrition, "He cried," and they would not hear, and then when they, awakened at length, though too late, did cry to Him, the Lord would not hear. (Compare Prov. 1:24-31) And thus there came, finally, the crowning woe and judgment in their being scattered with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land, bereaved of its inhabitants, had been desolate; for they, they by their sins, had laid the pleasant land desolate. In this solemn way the prophet is made to lay bare the bitter root of all the sorrows of the people, that they might learn what an evil and bitter thing it was to depart from the living and true God.

- * The word "openly" in this scripture, as also in verses 4 and 6 in the same chapter, should be omitted, as having no sufficient evidence for its insertion.

The subject then of the chapter is the failure of God's people when in possession of the land, under responsibility, and the judgment which consequently fell upon them from the Lord

through the instrumentality of Nebuchadnezzar. In the next chapter we shall see God restoring and securing in grace what His people had forfeited through their transgressions.

Zechariah 8.

While this chapter contains a distinct prophecy, it flows from, and is connected with, that which precedes. It is divided into two parts — the first, from verse 1 to verse 17, and the second, from verse 18 to the end. The first part is characterised by a seven-fold "Thus saith the Lord of hosts" — one of these, "Thus saith the Lord" only. The second has, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts" three times. This to the human ear might seem to be useless repetition, but by those taught of the Spirit it will be regarded as a solemn affirmation of the truth of the prophetic message, and that, from the number of the times the words are repeated, in a very especial way. There is indeed no variation, even in the form of the divine communications, that does not contain instruction for the devout mind.

The subject of this chapter, in contrast with Zech. 7, reveals the whole truth of God's ways with Jerusalem and the house of Judah, and indeed with man. In the latter part of chapter 7 we

have seen the failure of Jehovah's people under responsibility and their consequent judgment. In this chapter we find the revelation of God's purposes, immutable purposes of blessing, according to His counsels of grace. In like manner Adam was tested in the garden, placed under the responsibility of obedience as the condition of blessing. By his transgression he lost all, and then, on his failure, the Man of God's counsels, the seed of the woman, was introduced as the One in and by whom God would accomplish all the thoughts of His heart. Thus it was with Israel. They accepted the law in responsibility, and their blessing was dependent upon their keeping the commandments. Their history is but the record of their transgressions, and chapter 7 brings before those to whom the prophet was sent the conduct of their fathers, and shows them how the land had been forfeited through their disobedience and sin. But the gifts and calling of God are without repentance, and thus, in grace triumphing over His people's sin through Him who was to die for that nation, He can announce His unalterable love for Zion, and His purpose to effect her restoration. It is necessary for the reader to comprehend these principles of God's ways with Israel, if he would read the prophets with intelligence.

The chapter opens then with a real gospel, not the gospel of the grace of God, but the gospel of blessing to Zion. "Again the word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury." (vv. 1, 2.) In these words we have the revelation of the ground of God's intervention on behalf of His people; it is His unchanging love for Zion. He says, I "am," not I "was," jealous for Zion.* Her present mournful condition moved Him, as it were, to compassion, excited His jealousy† on her behalf, and constrained Him to step in for her restoration. The intensity of Jehovah's feelings for this beloved city may be gathered from many scriptures. In Isaiah, for example, we read, "Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me." (Isa. 49:14-16.) It is this same unchanging affection for Zion that finds expression through Zechariah, and, if the words may be reverently used, stirs up Jehovah to interpose for her deliverance and restoration. She may still have to wait, centuries may have to roll by,

owing to her yet greater sin in the crucifixion of the Messiah; but the eyes and heart of Jehovah will perpetually rest upon her, and He will infallibly fulfil the word that has gone out of His mouth, and make her yet once more, and in a more perfect way, the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth. (Lam. 2:15.)

* Thus in the French version of J. N. D. it is given, "Je suis jaloux pour Sion," and Dr. Pusey translates, "I have been and am jealous for Sion."

† Compare as to the word jealousy Canticles 8:6.

The prophet then proceeds to point out the way in which Jehovah will accomplish His purposes. "Thus saith the Lord; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts the holy mountain." (v. 3.) Jehovah had departed from His dwelling-place at Jerusalem, because of His people's sins (see Ezekiel 11:23), and He had given up the land for "a desolation and an astonishment" for seventy years (Jer. 25:11); but now that this period had been fulfilled He had, according to that same word, visited His people, and performed His good word toward them in causing them to return. (Jeremiah 29:10) Hence it is that He says, by

the mouth of the prophet, "I am returned unto Zion"; for in truth, as He spake through Haggai, He was with His people, and His spirit remained among them. (Haggai 2) It is true that they were but a poor feeble few, yet it was on them the Lord's eyes and heart were set. He had been with them in their journey from the land of their exile, and He was now with them in their laborious work in the erection of the temple; for it was His work in which they were engaged. He was thus "returned" to Zion.

He also says, "I will dwell at Jerusalem." He does not say, I do, but I will dwell at Jerusalem; for though His people were building a temple to His name, and it was according to His mind that they should do so, and He delighted in their work, He would not yet dwell in Zion — not indeed until many weary years should have passed, not until the establishment of Messiah's kingdom. But, as we have before seen in Haggai, and in the former parts of this book, the work which the children of the captivity, were at this moment doing, contained in itself the promise and the guarantee, of the fulfilment of all that God had spoken concerning the future glory of Jerusalem. A long interval of centuries, therefore, must be interposed between the

words, "I am returned unto Zion" and I "will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem," though the two are linked together as a cause and effect in the divine mind.

Then the consequence follows, "And Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the Lord of hosts the holy mountain." Formerly Jerusalem had been full of iniquity. Isaiah thus speaks, "How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers"; and then, denouncing judgment upon her, and describing how it should be executed, he says, "Afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city." (Isaiah 1:21-26.) So here. When the Lord shall have once more taken up His abode in Jerusalem, when there shall have come out of Zion the Deliverer, and have turned away ungodliness from Jacob the city will be, a city of truth, and Zion, God's holy mountain, sanctified by His own glory (compare Exodus 29:43), and undefiled by His worshippers, shall be preserved in holiness. Wherever God condescends to dwell, whether in the tabernacle, temple, or in the church, truth and holiness must be maintained.

We have, in the next place, the presentation of the prosperity and happiness of the inhabitants of the city. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; 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." (vv. 4, 5.) It must be remembered that the fulfilment of this promise will take place under the sway of Messiah in the thousand years, when "there shall be no more thence an infant of days" (i.e. death in infancy, a child who shall live but for a few days), nor an old man that hath not filled his days; for health and strength will be possessed by all who are subject to Christ as King. Even under the law this would have been so, had the people been obedient. They would have escaped the diseases of Egypt, and prolonged their days in the land (see Exodus 15:26; Deut. 4:10, Deut. 5:16, 33, Deut. 6:2, Deut. 11:9, etc.); but they forfeited all by their disobedience and sin.* But in the future God will cause His people to realize all, and more than all, the blessings which He had promised of old under the condition of keeping the law. Hence this beautiful picture of temporal prosperity, old men and women enjoying in tranquility a peaceful old age, and able still to be in the streets, though bending under the weight of

"the multitude of days," supported by their staff, while the streets should, at the same time, resound with the jocund cries of boys and girls in the merriment of their play. It is a scene of perfect natural happiness, and one that reveals the interest, the pleasure, God takes in the temporal prosperity of His people, and the more, it should not be forgotten, because it is one of the blessings consequent on Messiah's righteous reign.

- * Faith-healing in all its varieties, confounding the dispensations — that is, transferring the promises given to the earthly people to Christians — bases its teaching on such scriptures as are quoted above; and hence maintains that health of soul will be inevitably followed by health of body. But as soon as the distinction is perceived between Israel (the earthly people) and the Church (the heavenly people) the error is at once detected. That God answers the prayer of faith, as in James 5, all admit; but there is not the shadow of a foundation for the thought that sickness is an indication of a bad spiritual condition. On the other hand, John desires that Gaius might prosper and be in health, even as his soul prospered (3 John 2); and there is not a single instance in the New Testament of any of the apostles healing Christians "by faith." Paul thus says, "Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick" (2 Tim. 4:20) and he directs Timothy to use a remedy for his "often infirmities" (1 Tim. 5:23); and he himself

had a thorn in the flesh (whatever it may signify), not because he was in, but to prevent his falling into, a bad condition.

The accomplishment of this promise would be a source of astonishment to those who should witness it. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these* days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the Lord of hosts." (v. 6.) Nothing is too hard for the Lord, and it was always His thought to bless His people abundantly. We are too apt to forget this, and to accept a low, enfeebled condition as our normal state, instead of perceiving that it is only we ourselves who limit, by our unbelief and disobedience, our blessing. So when the Jews emerge at length from their down-trodden and oppressed condition into the full light and blessing of the kingdom, they will be astounded at the display of God's power and grace on their behalf, and at the character of the wealthy place into which they have been brought. But with God it will only be His long-looked and waited-for opportunity for the execution of all His gracious designs, when He will rejoice over His people with joy, rest in His love, and joy over them with singing. (Zephaniah 3:17.)

- * This should rather be "those," referring as given above, to the remnant in Messiah's day.

The next two verses explain the accomplishment of His purposes. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country, and I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness." (vv. 7, 8.) Such is the way in which Jehovah will effect the prosperity and blessing of His people. The details are not found here, but we know from other scriptures that the gathering of the Jews from other lands will be after the appearing of the Son of man (see, for example, Matthew 24:29-31), and after therefore He shall have taken to Himself His rightful power and throne. Sought out and brought back by the intervention of their glorious Messiah, they shall dwell in "the city of the great King," and shall be introduced into relationship with Him as their God. It is of great moment to observe that all the happiness and prosperity above described will flow from their established relationship with God. They shall be His people, and He will be their God in truth — in the truth of what He is as revealed in His covenant relationship with Israel — and in righteousness, this characterizing the government under which they will be placed. The blessings of Christians are, in like manner, determined by the character of their relationship

with God. He is their God and Father, because the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and, as the epistle to the Ephesians shows, all the spiritual blessings which are ours in heavenly places in Christ are connected with this twofold relationship. Jehovah is the name of relationship which God has been pleased to take in reference to Israel, and it is this name — this name in all that it involves as expressive of what God is as thus revealed — which will give character to their millennial blessing; hence the words, we doubt not, of "truth and righteousness" — terms which could hardly be applied to the God of grace in His relationship to Christians as their God and Father. It will be profitable for the reader to mark these distinctions, which are significant of the different dispensations in the course of God's revelations of Himself at different epochs, and thus of the relationships on which He has been pleased to enter with the objects of His grace. To confound these is to miss the key to the interpretation of Scripture.

Having disclosed by the word of the Lord the future restoration, prosperity, and blessing of Jerusalem and Judah, the prophet returns to their present circumstances, as connected with the building of the house of the Lord; and this part of

Zechariah's message, though divided into two parts, extends to verse 17. From verse 9 to verse 13 we have the message; in verses 14, 15 the ground is stated — viz., the change in the Lord's attitude towards His people; and then in verses 16, 17 the responsibility of the people is given, showing, as everywhere under the old dispensation, that their blessing was dependent upon their walking according to Jehovah's commandments.

First then we have the message — "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; 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." The prophet's meaning is not at first sight apprehended. It would seem that he is recalling to the minds of his hearers the words that had been spoken by the prophets on the day when the foundation of the temple was laid. Thus, "Ye that hear in these days," would refer to his present audience, and, "These words by the mouth of the prophets, which were in the day," etc., will relate to the special messages given at the time when the foundation was laid for the encouragement of the builders in their work. It is this of

which Zechariah reminds the people as he appeals to present facts in confirmation of the word then spoken. What then were the words spoken at that time by the prophets? There is little doubt, from what follows in this chapter, that the reference is to Haggai. We read there, after a description of the state of things that existed, because the people had neglected building the Lord's house, "Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? Yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive-tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless you." (Haggai 2:18-19) It is to "these words" that Zechariah doubtless refers; for he also points back to the sorrowful condition of the people before they commenced the work of the house. He says, "Before these days there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast, neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction: for I set all men every one against his neighbour." (v. 10) The people, as we learn from Haggai, had all been seeking their own things, had been building their own houses, while saying that it was not the proper moment to build the Lord's house. But the Lord saw, and He loved the people too well to

allow them to prosper while forgetting Him and His claims. He thus came in, stirred up "affliction" for them on every hand, brought in trial and adversity, and exposed them to the enmity of their neighbours. But when, aroused by the prophets, and thus recalled to the object and purpose of their restoration from exile, they commenced to lay the foundation of the temple, God began to bless them in all the work of their hands. Seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, they found that all other things — things which before they sought to obtain without God — were now added to them. Hence the Lord says, "But now" (the "now" dating, as we judge, as in Haggai, from the laying of the foundation of the temple) "I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the Lord of hosts. For the seed shall be prosperous" (see margin); "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." (vv. 11, 12.)

It were well for the people of God in every age to remember this principle. How often is it that they are tempted, for the sake of temporal advantage, or even, as they think, from the ne-

cessity of daily duties, to give their own things the first place, a superior place to the Lord's things. Whenever this temptation is yielded to, nothing but sorrow can be the result. It may not be now as with the Jew, to whom temporal prosperity was a sign of Jehovah's favour, that there will be no success in worldly things; but there will be certainly trials and afflictions of one kind or another for every believer whose mind is on earthly things. The only path of blessing, whether in the past or in the present, lies in devotedness to the Lord's service. If in our several measures we follow, however feebly, in the Lord's footsteps, and find it our meat to do His will, we shall assuredly find it a path in which we shall walk in the enjoyment of His favour and blessing.

There was still more: "And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing; fear not, but let your hands, be strong." (v. 13.) They had been scattered, in the Lord's anger, among all the nations (7:14), and, though they alone of all the nations of the earth had known Jehovah's name, and should therefore have been His witnesses (compare Acts 8:1-4), they had been a curse through their idolatrous

practices. As indeed God spake through Ezekiel, "I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went." (Ezekiel 36:21) It was on this ground, "For mine holy name's sake" (Ezekiel 36:22), that God would act, and save His people, according to His word through Zechariah, a promise that embraces, in its entire fulfilment, the restoration of the people according to verses 7, 8, when "the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men." (Micah 5:7.) It is for the accomplishment of this promise that Jehovah will sprinkle clean water upon His people, "and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." (Ezekiel 36:25-27.) It is then, and then alone, that Israel will blossom and bud and fill the face of the world with fruit, and thus be a blessing.

Together with this divine and glorious encouragement there is the exhortation, "Fear not, but let your hands be strong." The latter part of it is repeated from verse 9. God was now for them, and they were thus not to be afraid, and their hands were to be strong for the work on which they were engaged. This is explained in the following verses. "For thus saith the Lord of hosts, As I thought to punish you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, saith the Lord of hosts, and I repented not: So again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear ye not." (vv. 14, 15.) His chastisements had been irrevocable, and so should be His blessings; and He would have His people therefore to rest in Him, to count upon all that He was on their behalf, and thus not to fear. Once indeed realise that God is for His people, and all fear is dispelled. As the apostle writes, "We may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." (Hebrews 13:6; compare Psalm 27) And not only so in this case, but the prophet also pledges the word of the Lord that it was now His purpose to "do well" both to Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. They were therefore not to fear, and they were confidently to count on His favour and blessing.

Together with the announcement of His gracious purposes towards His people, Jehovah once more sets forth His requirements. "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 hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath for all these are things that I hate, saith the Lord." (vv. 16, 17.) The reader's especial attention may be drawn to the principle involved in this divine requirement from the people. God had announced His purpose, as we have seen, to bless both them and Jerusalem, and what He thus announced was altogether independent of the state and conduct of the remnant. All had been forfeited by the nation under responsibility, but God, on the ground of the death of Christ, will accomplish, and righteously accomplish, all the good which He had spoken concerning His people.* But the remnant in the land are reminded that for their enjoyment of the promise given in verses 11-13, for their realization of the favour of God, connected with His change of attitude towards them, they were dependent on their walk; that, in other words, they would never themselves receive their promised blessings unless their walk were governed by the word of God. It is so with the Christian, also if in another way. Once

really a believer, salvation is assured, and he will be infallibly put in possession of the inheritance, with all the saints of God, at the return of the Lord. While, however, this is certain, yet as long as the believer is in this world, there is no possible enjoyment for him of the favour and blessing of God if he be not walking in God's ways according to His word. All is of grace, all that he has received, or will yet receive; but the practical possession and enjoyment of the blessings secured in Christ, while down here, must depend on his own condition. This is the principle proclaimed by the prophet to the children of the captivity; and he says, as it were, God is now intent on blessing you, but you, if you would enter into and enjoy what he has promised, must be careful of your walk and ways. And remark how practical these injunctions are — all affecting their mutual relationships. They were to speak the truth one to another (compare Ephesians 4:25); they were to "judge" the judgment of truth and peace in their gates; for the effect of righteous judgment is always peace (see Isaiah 32:17); they were not to meditate† evil in their hearts against their neighbour, and they would not if they loved their neighbour as themselves, and they were to abstain from false oaths. They were to be in commu-

nion with the mind of the Lord as to these things, hating them because they were abhorrent to Him.‡

* It is very interesting to observe in this connection the language of the apostle Peter in his second epistle. He says, "To them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 1:1) These words, we apprehend, could not have been written to Gentile believers.

† See the French translation in loco by J. N. D.

‡ Compare on these requirements Psalm 15.

Having thus revealed His counsels respecting Jerusalem and Judah, the Lord now gives another message to the prophet, and first of all concerning the feasts about which Bethel had sent men to the house of the Lord to enquire. "And the word of the Lord of hosts came unto me saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the last of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace." (vv. 18, 19) All the feasts named would seem to have been connected with the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, and what followed thereon. Allusion has been made in the previous chapter, on verse 5, to those of the

fifth and seventh month; that of the fourth month sprung probably from the date of the opening of the gates of Jerusalem to the princes of Nebuchadnezzar (see Jeremiah 39:2-3); and it was in the tenth month that the siege was formally opened. (Jeremiah 52:4.)* All these days therefore brought mournful recollections to the Jew, reminding him not only of national disasters, but also of the anger of Jehovah and it was their humiliation and sorrow which they profess to express in the institution of their fasts. But, as we have seen, there were many who were wearied of their continual observance, and thus they desired to know if, now that they had been restored to the land, they were to be continued. The full answer is now returned. In the previous chapter Jehovah had made them see what it was that led to the terrible chastisements that had fallen upon their nation, and at the same time had put before them the condition of blessing. Now He sends Zechariah to tell them that the time is coming — not yet come, but coming — when all these fasts should become joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts. Until that time therefore fasting would be the proper expression of their feeble state and condition; but then He would "give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." (Isaiah 61:3.) In the time of

our Lord the Pharisees complained that His disciples did not fast. He answered that they could not fast while they had the Bridegroom with them; but, He said, when the Bridegroom should be taken from them, in those days they would fast. (See Matt. 9:14-15.) So with the Jews. Fasting was the true expression of their condition as long as Jehovah had not returned in glory to dwell once more in Jerusalem; but that time was coming, and then, and not till then, their fasts would be turned into festal celebrations of praise. Therefore (such is the exhortation) love the truth and peace, not peace and the truth, but the truth and peace; and herein lies the condition, for all times, of real and abiding blessing. These Jews would not live to see their fasts superseded by feasts, but the path of blessing in the abiding favour of God is here indicated for them in loving the truth and peace.

- * It is said that the Jews in more modern times added that it was in the fourth month Moses brake the tables of the law; and that in the fifth month the rebellion of the people took place, when the spies brought an evil report of the land. But this is conjectural, and there can be little doubt that the fasts originated as above.

The rest of the chapter is taken up with a declaration of universal blessing, as resulting from the return of the Lord to His people. Israel, once more restored and blessed under their Messiah, should become the means of blessing to all the earth; and the temple in which Jehovah would again dwell should become the point of attraction for all nations. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts. It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another saying, Let us go speedily* to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord." (vv. 20-22.) Bethel — one small city — had sent men to pray before the Lord (Zech. 7:2); and this incident is taken up to shadow out the time when the house of God should be the house of prayer for all people (see Isa. 56:7; also Isa. 2:1-3; Ps. 65: -7; and Zech. 14:16); when such embassies as that which had been sent from Bethel should proceed from many cities to the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, for in that day all nations will own the Messiah as their King and be His servants.

* This word is translated in different ways, The margin says, "Or, continually"; another version renders, "Let us go on and on"

(i.e. perseveringly); while J. N. D.'s French version has, "Al-lons, allons," i.e., "Let us go, let us go."

Moreover, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts. In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even 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." (v. 23.) In the time of their captivity and dispersion through the nations the Jews have ever been a despised if not a hated race; but when the Lord shall bring them back to Zion, "the sons of them that afflicted thee," as we read in Isaiah, "shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee" (Zion), "The city of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy, One of Israel." (Isa. 60:14.) So in our passage the Jew, once more blessed with the favour of Jehovah becomes an object of admiration to the Gentiles, who desire to share in the blessing of which they have heard, and who are represented here by the ten men* as taking hold of the skirt of the Jew, thus assuming a place of subjection and entreaty, as they say, "We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you." The news, the testimony, going forth that Jehovah hath appeared for, and was dwelling with, His people becomes a mighty

power to attract others to the place of His manifested presence. (Compare 2 Chr. 15:9) The same thing is often seen now in another way in the assembly. Whenever there is a real action of the Holy Spirit, whenever the presence of the Lord is demonstrated in power in the midst of His people, others are drawn in through the desire thus begotten in their hearts to participate in the blessing. (See 1 Cor. 14:25.) There is no testimony indeed so powerful as that which declares, and declares with unmistakable proofs, that the Lord is with His people.†

* The number ten is evidently a representative number, standing, we judge, for all the nations. (Compare Lev. 26:26; Matt. 25:1)

† The Rabbis, as also the patristic theology of a later date, claim that the Jew in this scripture was the Messiah, an evidence, we judge, rather of their intellectual subtlety than of their spiritual perception. The former not possessing the key of the interpretation of their own scriptures, and the so-called church "fathers" being ignorant of all dispensational truth, and also of the true character of the church, could not but, both alike, be liable to be led astray by their own imaginations.

Zechariah 9.

Jerusalem and Judah restored to blessing, as announced in the previous chapter, the neighbouring peoples come into view in connection with judgment. "The burden of the word of the Lord in the land of Hadrach, and Damascus shall be the rest thereof: when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward the Lord." (v. 1.) Very careful consideration must be given to this first verse, as it is the key for the understanding of what follows. Instead of reading the burden of the word of the Lord "in" the land of Hadrach, it should probably be "concerning" or "upon." The preposition is so translated, for example, in Isaiah 9:8. The Lord sent a word "into" Jacob and it hath lighted "upon" Israel, where both "into" and "upon" represent the same word.* Then there is the question of the time to which the prophecy refers. Some maintain that the prophet is foretelling the judgment that was visited upon the places named by means of Alexander, the king of Greece.† Others contend that the events here described are to be referred to the future, to the time when the Lord Himself will have returned to establish His kingdom. And we cannot question that these, for reasons immediately to be given, are right, though there is no doubt, at the same time, that the march of Alexander through

these regions was, if not the fulfilment, yet a fulfilment of Zechariah's predictions. It is often so in prophecy that some near event is contemplated, which becomes in its turn a striking presage of a larger accomplishment of the prophetic word.‡ Our reasons for the conclusion that this prophecy remains to be fulfilled are found in verses 1 and 8. It says in verse 1 that the time shall be "when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward the Lord." Now at the time of Alexander the tribes of Israel, save the two tribes which had been restored under Cyrus, were still in captivity, or scattered through the nations, and there was not even the semblance of the eyes of men being turned towards the Lord; for idolatry was almost, if not quite, universal, and held undisputed sway over their minds. And these words will never be verified until the events foretold in the previous chapter (vv. 20-23) have had their accomplishment. Secondly, verse 8 is decisive of the point. The language, "I will encamp about mine house," &c., could not be used of anything short of the actual presence and interposition of Jehovah to shield His house and dwelling-place from the attack of an enemy. It is quite true that Jerusalem was unexpectedly delivered from the hands of Alexander by the impression made on his mind at the sight of the high priest;*** but the utmost that

could be said, is that while it might have been effected in a providential way, it in no wise corresponded to the terms of this prophecy. It is clear therefore that the Spirit of God looked onward in these predictions to a still future period, to that time when the rights of Israel's Messiah, and of the Son of Man, shall be made good on the earth.

- * The Revised Version in Zechariah gives the word "upon," while J. N. D.'s French version renders, "L'oracle de la parole de l'Eternal (qui vient) dans le pays de Hadrac."
- † Thus one writes: "The foreground of this prophecy is the course of the victories of Alexander, which circled round the holy land without hurting it, and ended in the overthrow of the Persian empire. The surrender of Damascus followed first, immediately on his great victory at the Issus; then Sidon yielded itself, and received its ruler from the conqueror, Tyre he utterly destroyed; Gaza we know perished. He passed harmless by Jerusalem. Samaria, on his return from Egypt, he chastised."
- ‡ As an illustration of this we subjoin a note from J.N.D.'s translation of the New Testament. "'In order that it might be' hina (see Matt. 1:22); 'so that it might be,' hupos (Matt. 2:23); and, 'then' tote (Matt. 2:17), 'was fulfilled,' are never confounded in the quotations of the Old Testament. The first is the object of the prophecy; the second, not simply its object, but an event

which was within the scope and intention of the prophecy; the third is merely a case in Point, where what happened was an illustration of what was said in the prophecy." (Note to Matt. 2:23.)

** Those interested in the history will find the record in Josephus' Antiquities, xi. 8, 3-5.}

This part of the prophecy itself need not detain us at any length. The expression in verse 1 — "And Damascus shall be the rest thereof" (or "its resting-place") — would seem to mean that the word of the Lord should rest upon or in Damascus in the sense of bringing judgment upon it. Hadrach was probably in the neighbourhood of Damascus,* and, according to this prophecy, will one day reappear,† and reappear for judgment. (Compare Jeremiah 46 - 49)

* A modern writer, who cites Sir H. Rawlinson, says, "it is now certain that there was a city called Hadrach in the neighbourhood of Damascus and Hamath, although its exact site is not known."

† This is one of the striking facts learnt from prophecy, that the cities and nations formerly in the vicinity of Palestine, in external relationship with Israel, though now utterly lost sight of, will be found again in their old places in the last days.

What we have then is God's judgment upon these cities, as connected with the final deliverance of Jerusalem and Israel from their enemies. There remain two or three things to be indicated. First, the territories on which the stroke of judgment will descend. The places named, as the reader will perceive, are on the north of Israel's territory, and that tract of country on the west of Judea which is known throughout the Scripture history as the dwelling-place of the Philistines; and all alike were at some period or other — the Philistines perpetually — the enemies of the people of God, perhaps owing to the fact that they were immediately contiguous to, if not within, the borders of their territory.* Hadrach, Damascus, and Hamath are situated in what was, and is, known as Syria, and these cities are only mentioned as the objects of judgment.† Tyre and Sidon (Tyrus and Zidon) are specified with more detail; and we are taught that neither wisdom (V. 2), nor strength, nor riches — the three things in which man puts his confidence and glories — can avert the sure judgments of God. (vv. 3. 4.) The language concerning Tyrus (compare Ezekiel 28) is both striking and sublime. She "did build herself a strong hold, and heaped up silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets. Behold, the Lord will cast her out, and he will smite her power in the sea;

and she shall be devoured with fire." Truly man and all his resources are but vanity in the day of the Lord's anger. (Cp. Isa. 2) Then with a few rapid touches the prophet relates the character of the judgment on Philistia. "Ashkelon shall see it, and fear. Gaza also shall see it, and be very sorrowful, and Ekron, for her expectation shall be ashamed; and the king shall perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon shall not be inhabited. And a bastard shall dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines. And I will take away his blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth: but he that remaineth, even he, shall be for our God, and he shall be as a governor in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite." (vv. 5-7. Cp. Jeremiah 47; Zephaniah 2:4-7.)

- * It is not quite clear whether Tyre and Sidon were not within the territory of Asher — Sidon certainly was (Judges 1:31; also Joshua 19:28-29) — even as the cities of the Philistines were comprised in that of Judah.
- † The judgments here denounced are, it would appear, preparatory to the putting of Israel in possession of all the territory promised to them.

It is more than probable, as we have before pointed out, there is a twofold fulfilment in these predictions; that is, that there has

already been a partial accomplishment, though not a complete one, in so far as the temporal judgments on these cities are concerned; for nothing can be more certain than that the power of Tyrus in the sea has been smitten, or that these cities of the Philistines have been visited. But the careful reader will not fail to notice that the whole prophecy has not been fulfilled, for it speaks of a spared remnant from the Philistines that shall be "for [or to] our God." This must be future, and points unmistakably to the fact when these cities shall be revived, judgment will again fall upon them; and the Lord, by His chosen instruments, will stain all the pride of their glory, while at the same time He will restore a remnant for blessing. The statement that Ekron shall be as a Jebusite is most likely a reference to the fact that as the Jebusites, not having been driven out by the children of Judah, dwelt with them at Jerusalem (see Joshua 15:63), so the spared Philistines will be found in a future day, in the time of the kingdom, mingled with Israel.*

- * The expressions concerning those spared of the Philistines are very striking, for there is little doubt that "he that remaineth" does refer to such. Cleansed from their idolatries (the "blood" and his "abominations" being connected with his idol worship),

he shall be as a governor ("a captain of a thousand") in Judah, etc. The reader will carefully consider these statements.

The future application of this prophetic word is especially seen, as we have shown, by what follows: "And I will encamp about mine 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: for now have I seen with mine eyes." (v. 8.) We gather then that, after Israel is restored to their own land and the temple has been rebuilt (see Zech. 6) by Messiah Himself, the land will be invaded, and Jerusalem will be the object of his attack. This is undoubtedly the last attack of the Assyrian, so often alluded to by the prophets. As King of the North (for the king of the north is identical with the Assyrian) he enters the land before the appearing of Christ (in the interval between the rapture of the saints (1 Thess. 4), and their return with Christ in glory), and after succeeding for a while in his designs, he will "stand up against the Prince of princes, but he should be broken without hand." (Daniel 8:25.) He has, however, a successor, who, after the return in glory to Jerusalem, also invades the holy land, and seeks likewise to capture the holy city. But the Lord is now there, as will be explained more at length when we reach Zech. 12 - 14, and terrified by

what he and his confederates discover, as the psalmist describes, "They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away. Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail." (Psalm 48:5-6.) Not simply the angel of the Lord, but the Lord Himself will encamp round about His house and His people, and deliver them once for all from their oppressors; "for now," as we read, "have I seen with mine eyes."* The expression is strikingly beautiful. It is as if the Lord had come down to behold the state of His people, even as we read in Genesis that He came down to see the city and the tower which the children of men builded (Gen. 11:5); and perceiving how they were beleaguered by the enemy, and pitying their distress, He Himself undertakes their defence, and secures their deliverance. "The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." (Ps. 46:6-7.)

- * Compare the expression, "And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians," etc. (Ex. 14:24-25).

The prophet having gone on to the final emancipation of Judah and Jerusalem from their oppressors through the direct intervention of the Lord Himself, now turns back a little to introduce the person of Him for whom they waited, and in whom alone their deliverance would be found. Viewing in prophetic vision the accomplishment of all that God had promised to His people, he turns with delight to the One who would thus bring salvation, and exclaims, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." (v. 9.) He thus calls upon the daughter of Zion to rejoice in the glorious prospect unfolded, and reminds her at the same time that all she looked and longed for was bound up with the advent of the Messiah. He places the daughter of Jerusalem and of Zion on an eminence, as it were, whence she can behold the King approaching, and calls upon her to shout with joy as she beholds Him.

But how different in character is this presentation of Israel's King from that of the world's monarchs in all their pomp and splendour! Remark that it is "thy" King. As another has written, "He does not say a king, but thy King, thine own, the long-

promised, the long-expected"; for in truth He is the One of whom God had spoken, "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion" (Psalm 2); and He comes now to sit upon the throne of His father David, and to reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke 2:32-33; see also Isaiah 9:6-7.) Then we have two characteristics. First, He is just, or righteous. This is put first because it represents the character of His reign. He will found His kingdom and reign in righteousness. (Psalm 72:) Next, He has salvation; i.e., He brings salvation, not so much here to the individual soul that trusts in Him, as salvation, or deliverance, to His people from their enemies (Compare Luke 1:67-75; Luke 2:29-32), together with all the blessings into which they would be consequently introduced. We have, furthermore, what He is in Himself, and the manner of His approach. He is "lowly." This is to be much observed. That He was the lowly One here all know; but we are apt to forget that meekness is His abiding character, not a feature produced by His circumstances of trial and sorrow when He was down here to do the will of God, but a trait of His perfectness as man; and hence, whether in the glory at the right hand of God, or appearing to Israel as their long looked-for Messiah, He is still the lowly or meek One.

Blessed thought! For who could fear, who of His people, however timid and feeble they might be, could shrink from His presence when this divine and perfect lowliness is written on His face? It is in this manner that He is presented to His poor and afflicted people when He comes for their salvation, and as "riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." The sons of judges rode upon asses (Judges 10:4; Judges 12:14), but, as a devout writer has remarked, "There is no instance in which a king rode on an ass, save He whose kingdom was not of this world." We all know how exactly this promise was fulfilled, though Zion was not then prepared to receive Him, and did not therefore shout for joy at His approach, at His first coming. True, the crowd that went forth to meet Him, "took branches of palm trees ... and cried, Hosanna! blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord" (John 12:13); but their momentary enthusiasm soon passed away, and, swayed by their rulers, they cried, "Crucify Him, crucify Him."*

- * As a proof of the wonderful accuracy of Scripture, the reader will be interested to note the omission of some of the words in the citation from Zechariah both in Matthew and John. In Matthew the words "just" and "having salvation" are not found; and

in John, where the characteristic presentation of Christ is as the Son of God, the word "lowly" is also omitted. The reason is evident to the spiritual mind. Though Jesus was the Messiah, rejected as He was, He did not then enter Jerusalem as righteous (it was rather in grace), and as having salvation — nor could He while rejected, but He did enter as the lowly One; and hence this word is retained in Matthew, while John leaves out this also, as before said, because of the aspect in which, as led of the Holy Ghost, he portrays the life of our blessed Lord. Observe also that neither Matthew nor John calls upon the daughter of Sion to rejoice or to shout. The former says, "Tell ye the daughter of Sion"; the latter, "Fear not," etc. The time of rejoicing could not come as long as the King was rejected.

From this point to the end of the chapter the consequences of the advent of the Messiah are depicted. First, the Messiah will remove all the false confidences of His people. He says, "I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off." (v. 10) All these things were the symbols of human strength, human grounds of confidence in conflict; and hence the psalmist says, "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God." (Psalm 20:7.) Speaking also by the prophet Hosea, Jehovah says, "I will have mercy upon the

house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen." (Hosea 1:7.) And again in Micah: "I will cut off thy horses out of the midst of thee, and I will destroy thy chariots." (Micah 5:10) For in that day His people will have to learn that God alone is their refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble — a lesson which even Christians are slow to apprehend. And consequent upon the deliverance of His people, "he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth." For when once the King is established upon the holy hill of Zion, He will ask and receive the heathen for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession. What is here predicted is the universal sway of Christ in His kingdom, after His return in glory, as depicted in Ps. 72.

The introduction of Ephraim in this chapter, both in verse 10 and verse 13, should be especially remarked. It shows that the prophet passes from the coming of the King to the restoration of all Israel. Judah and Jerusalem are his subject, but the moment he names Ephraim he implies the restoration of the ten

tribes to their own land. This will not take place until after the deliverance and blessing of Judah and Jerusalem; but here the prophet has the consequences of the coming of the King to Zion for all Israel before his mind. And hence the chariot shall be cut off from Ephraim, as well as the horse from Jerusalem; for when Messiah goes forth against His enemies, He, while associating His people with Himself, for they will be all willing in the day of His power, will be independent of all human sources of strength, and He will, at the same time, teach His people that they can only be strong in His strength, as He leads them forth conquering and to conquer, when He will strike through kings in the day of His wrath.

The prophet turns again, in the next place, to the daughter of Zion; and, speaking in the name of the Lord, he says, "As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water." (v. 11) "Thy prisoners" will refer to the "sons of Zion" who may at this time be found in captivity, their captivity being set forth by the figure of a pit wherein is no water. Such was their condition — shut in on every side, and deprived of all sources of life; and yet they will be "sent forth," delivered. And the ground of their deliver-

ance is the covenant which God had been pleased to establish with them by blood. Even the first covenant was of this kind (Ex. 24); but it is not on the covenant of Sinai that Jehovah will interpose for the salvation of Israel, but upon that new and better covenant which derives its efficacy and certainty of fulfilment from the precious blood of Christ. Hence the Lord Himself said, as He took the cup, "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matt. 26:28.) And it is to this the apostle alludes when he says, "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant." (Heb. 13:20.) And when we learn from Zechariah that the foundation on which God brought our Lord Jesus up from the grave is that also on which He will send forth, in the day of Messiah's glory, those of His people who may be found as prisoners in the pit wherein is no water.

The exhortation of the next verse is based upon this assurance, and thus the prophet proceeds, "Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even today do I declare that I will render double unto thee." (v. 12.) The strong hold is Zion, now a strong hold because God is in the midst of her (see Psalm 46);

and it is to Zion the prisoners of hope are exhorted to turn, because it is from thence that their Redeemer is to come. The addition of the words "of hope" to the term "prisoners" indicates the class who will participate in the salvation the King brings to Zion; it is those who in their captivity cherish the expectation of the coming Messiah, and who are therefore prisoners of hope. Then the Lord will render double — double in comfort and blessing as compared with what they have suffered. (See Isaiah 40:1-2.)

The time of this expected blessing is now declared, and this again makes it clear that the prophecy looks on to future days; it is, "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." (v. 13). The "sons of Greece" are here used as representing generally the Gentiles; but they are named for the reason already given that the invasion of the holy land by Alexander is in the foreground of the prophecy as the shadow of the attacks which will be made upon Israel on the eve of, and especially after, the appearing of their Messiah. In that day, as we gather from this and other prophecies, Christ will employ His people Israel to

subdue the Gentiles. Jeremiah thus speaks of Israel in the Lord's name, "Thou art my battle-axe and weapons of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms," etc. (Jer. 51:20-23.)

The next two verses describe the manner of the Lord's going forth, and His defence of them in the conflict. "And the Lord shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning: and the Lord God shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south. The Lord of hosts shall defend them, and they shall devour, and subdue with sling stones and they shall drink, and make a noise as through wine and they shall be filled like bowls, and as the corners of the altar."* (vv. 14, 15.) This is a vivid description of the irresistible might of Jehovah's armies when He Himself leads them forth to battle. And it is to be observed that He will be seen over them; i.e., there will be some visible tokens of His presence with His people, as there were also when He led them through the wilderness — and He will fight for them, as, for example, He did of old when He cast down hail stones upon their enemies (Joshua 10:11); only here it is the lightning He will employ as His weapon, even as Habakkuk says, "At the light of thy ar-

rows they went, at the shining of thy glittering spear." (Hab. 3:11) Not only so, but there will also be every accompaniment of terror to strike dismay into the hearts of the foe. In days of old, the priests were, in times of war, to "blow an alarm with the trumpets, and ye shall be remembered before the Lord your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies" (Num. 10:9); but here the Lord God will Himself, in all His majesty and power, sound the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south. (See Isaiah 21:1) So also we read in Psalm 18, "He rode upon a cherub, and did fly; yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind. ... Yea, He sent out His arrows, and scattered them.; and He shot out lightnings, and discomfited them." (vv. 10-14.)

- * The question is sometimes raised as to what particular conflict allusion is here made, as also in Zech. 9:10, whether it refers or not to the final overthrow of Gog in the land. This is to import a consideration not found in the chapter, the point of which is rather Jehovah's defence and lead of His victorious people than to indicate the foes. That they are Gentiles is clear, and thus it may be the last confederacy of the nations against Israel.

As verse 14 gives the action of God as against the enemy, verse 15 sets forth the effect of His presence upon His people whom He is leading forth to the conflict. In the first place He will de-

fend them; that is, He will so protect them that they shall not be harmed by their foes, even as when Israel went forth to battle with the Midianites, and returned without the loss of a man (Num. 31); and then their victorious energy will be so great that they shall devour and subdue all that opposes. As another has said, to explain the metaphor of the sling stones, "Their enemies shall fall under them, as harmless and as of little account as the sling stones which have missed their aim, and lie on the road to be passed over." The two remaining figures are more difficult, though the first, "they shall drink, and make a noise as through wine," is probably to be referred to the exhilaration produced by the conflict as comparable to the effects of wine. The second, "they shall be filled like bowls" may flow from the first, indicating that they will overflow with the holy excitement called out in them by the presence of the Lord of hosts; but the addition, "like the corners of the altar," cannot be explained with certainty, unless it refers to some practice, now unknown, in connection with the drink-offerings presented with the sacrifices, in which case it would be an allusion to the fact that their zeal was in communion with that of their divine Leader.

Finally, it is added: "And the Lord their God shall save them in that day as the flock of His people: for they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land." (v. 16.) Together with the Lord's anger against His foes, His protecting shield, as already noticed, is thrown over His people, so that He will save them in that day as the flock of His people from the lions and bears that will be round about them; for no weapon formed against Israel shall then prosper. It is in contrast with the destruction of their enemies that it is said, "They shall be as the stones of a crown," "stones selected for their beauty and preciousness, and as suited to adorn the diadem of their King;" but if so, because they have now been beautified with His beauty, and because all His preciousness now attaches to them. (See 1 Peter 2) And as such they shall be lifted up as an ensign upon His land. First, they will be His battle-axe for conflict, and then, when His enemies shall be have been subdued under Him, His people will be lifted up, or, as it might be, "lifted on high" as an ensign upon His land, to the end that all might behold the place of honour and exaltation in which, by the grace of their King, they have been set, as He thus displays them in all their beauty and excellency as His own royal standard, as

the sign of His presence with them, and as the symbol of His universal dominion.

The prophet then concludes with one short word as significant of the greatness of Jehovah's grace and beauty, and of the consequent happiness of His people: "For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids." (v. 17.) All the blessing into which they have been introduced has flowed from the goodness of their God, and their eyes being opened they see the King in His beauty, already become to them the altogether lovely. And feasting upon Him as upon the firstfruits, the true corn of the land in which they now dwell, the young men are made cheerful; and the maids, drinking of the new wine of the kingdom, are made glad. It is a picture of the millennial joy of Messiah's kingdom as flowing from His own heart of goodness or grace.

Zechariah 10.

Before entering upon this chapter it may help the reader to be reminded of a special feature or two of the prophetic writings. This chapter is undoubtedly connected with Zech. 9, but it

would be a mistake to suppose that on this account there is a direct sequence in the narration of events. The last verse of the preceding chapter presents, however briefly, the blessing, earthly blessing, which flows from the advent of the Messiah in His kingdom, and thus in a measure reaches down to the end, or rather gives the general character of His peaceful reign. The first verse of this chapter goes back to a time prior to the prosperity and happiness there described. And this is a constant characteristic of all the prophets. Pursuing their theme in some one aspect, they proceed until they have reached the consummation looked for, and then, returning, they will give details or other aspects of the subject. The reader therefore must be on his guard, or otherwise, expecting chronological order, he will be landed in perplexity and confusion. But, if he reads with attention, he will find that there are always landmarks to be discovered — the great central facts of prophecy, round which the details are grouped, or from which certain known consequences ensue, which will guide him through what otherwise might seem an inextricable maze, and enable him to comprehend the object, meaning, and scope of the prophetic word. Then also the warning of the apostle Peter is to be remembered, "that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpreta-

tion"; that is, as another has written, it "is not explained by its own meaning as a human sentence. It must be understood by and according to the Spirit that uttered it. The 'prophecy' is, I take it, the sense of the prophecy, the thing meant by it. Now this is not gathered by a human interpretation of an isolated passage which has its own meaning and its own solution, as if a man uttered it; for it is a part of God's mind, uttered as holy men were moved by the Holy Ghost to utter it."* The remembrance of these principles will keep the reader in dependence, and thus in a condition to be guided and taught, and, holding the imagination in check, enable him to receive the thoughts of God.

* Note to J. N. D.'s new translation On 2 Peter 1:20.

The prophet commences with an exhortation to the believing remnant. "Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain; so the Lord shall make bright clouds,* and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field." (v. 1) It had been the original promise of Jehovah to Israel, that if they would "hearken diligently unto my commandments ... to love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, that I will give you the rain of your land in its due

season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle," etc. (Deut. 11:13-15.) But Israel, by their disobedience and departure from their God, had forfeited this promise, and God in chastisement had withheld both the early and the latter rain. Now, however, inasmuch as it was His thought to do well unto Jerusalem and to His people, He encourages them to seek His face for a return of their former blessing. He was minded to bless them now out of His own pure grace; for the restored remnant, or rather the believing remnant that shall be in those days, will have no claim upon Him, only He would have them learn their dependence upon Him for the blessing they sought, and thus be brought into a condition to receive it. This is surely a lesson for all dispensations. God never withholds from His people except to draw out their sense of need, and to teach them that He alone is the source whence their need can be supplied. If therefore they will but ask the Lord He will give. It is thus He invites the prayers of Israel; and remark, that they were to ask rain in the time of the latter rain, at the season when it should be expected. If withheld, this should be only a provocative to their prayers, and, thus praying, they should be heard, and Jehovah would

make lightning, and give them showers of rain to every one grass (or the green herb) in the field.

* Or lightnings, as in margin. See Jer. 10:13; Ps. 135:7.

It is, however, of great interest to remark the omission of all reference to the early rain, the prophet only speaking of the time of the latter rain. The reason is, that the time of the early rain had for ever passed away. God sent the first rain on the day of Pentecost; and while many individual hearts were opened to receive it, the nation refused its blessed vivifying influence. And on that very occasion Peter spoke of another — even the latter rain — in the words of the prophet Joel, "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my hand-maidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy." (Acts 2:17-18.) This is the period of which Zechariah speaks, as he urges the people to wait on the Lord, even as the disciples waited in Jerusalem for the descent of the Holy Ghost, for the fulfilment of His word.

Zechariah then contrasts the impotence of heathen vanities with Jehovah's power, in allusion to the time when God's people, having turned away from Him, had sought help from idols. "For," says he, "the idols have spoken vanity, and the diviners have seen a lie, and have told false dreams, they comfort in vain: therefore they went their way as a flock, they were troubled, because there was no shepherd." (v. 2.) Jeremiah refers to the same thing when he says, "Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? art not thou he, O Lord our God? therefore we will wait upon thee: for thou hast made all these things." (Jer. 14:22.)* Israel then in their unbelief had turned to idols and their prophets for succour, but found no relief or comfort; and the prophet depicts them as going their way as a flock, in their disappointment, troubled, because there was no shepherd — none to lead and to tend them; and thus since they had turned away from God, they were cast now in their sins upon their own resources. Jehovah saw and pitied their condition, even as we read of the Lord Jesus, that "when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." (Matt. 9:36.) He pitied the flock, but His anger was

"kindled against the shepherds, and I punished the goats: for the Lord of hosts hath visited his flock the house of Judah, and hath made them as his goodly horse in the battle." (v. 3). It was thus the shepherds He held as chiefly responsible for the condition of the flock.† In Ezekiel this principle is directly asserted: "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand." (34:10) It is a solemn thing therefore to occupy a place of responsibility, of lead, among the saints of God. Everyone is individually responsible for his own state, but the leaders are held accountable for the state of the assembly; and it is on this account, as in our chapter, that God's anger is kindled against the shepherds when they lead astray the flock of God.‡ In addition to the shepherds, the he-goats (they are really goats, though claiming to be sheep, if not shepherds) are mentioned as being punished. Ezekiel also speaks of these, and distinguishes them from the rams; and from Matthew 25, where the Lord separates the sheep from the goats, we should gather that these, though with the people of God, are not really such, but those who have pushed themselves into places of prominence and dignity,** which they use for their own selfish and evil ends.

- * For a constant and instructive contrast between Jehovah and idols, as showing the tendency of Israel to idolatry, the reader may consult Isaiah 40 - 48.
- † In the same way in the letters to the seven churches, in Rev. 2, 3, the angels of the several assemblies are charged with their sin and condition.
- ‡ Read the whole of Ezekiel 34 and Jeremiah 23:1-4 On this subject.
- ** We infer this from the fact of their being he-goats, and as such leaders, and from Isaiah 14:9, where the term "chief ones" should rather be, as in margin, "great goats."

There is an instructive play upon the words here used. "I visited upon the goats, for the Lord of hosts hath visited His flock the house of Judah." The time therefore of the judgment upon the shepherds and upon the he-goats (if indeed these be not one and the same class — claiming to be shepherds while they were not even sheep) is the time of God's interposition on behalf of the house of Judah. There may well have been a present application of these words in the days of the prophet, but their full accomplishment can only take place at the return of the Lord to Zion. This is the more certain from the last clause in

the verse, where Judah becomes Jehovah's goodly horse in the battle, an expression which links itself as to time with verses 14-16 in the previous chapter.

This leads, in the next place, to a statement of the pre-eminent place which Judah will have in the kingdom, and also of their victorious power in Jehovah's battles. "Out of him came forth the corner, out of him the nail, out of him the battle bow, out of him every oppressor together. And they shall be as mighty men, which tread down their enemies in the mire of the streets in the battle: and they shall fight, because the Lord is with them, and the riders on horses shall be confounded." (vv. 4, 5.) That the sovereign favour of God had been bestowed on Judah is declared in that Messiah should spring from that tribe; for the two expressions, "the corner" and "the nail," are both to be referred to Him. The word "corner" indeed is the same as that found in Isaiah, where we read, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner [stone]." * (Isa. 28:16.) In Isaiah also is to be found the interpretation of the term "nail." Speaking of one who was taken up as a figure of the Messiah, Jehovah says, "And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house. And

they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house," etc. (Isa. 22:23-24.) There can be therefore no doubt as to the significance of these figurative terms. The next, however, the battle-bow, which is also said to come out of Judah, will refer to Judah itself, to what Judah will be when taken up by Jehovah for His service in conflict. The One who comes out of Judah, God's anointed King, will employ that people as His battle-bow† when He goes forth to "strike through kings in the day of His wrath." (Psalm 110) And in this fact, we judge, must be sought the explanation of the following clause, "Out of Him every oppressor together." It is an abrupt transition to the effect of Jehovah thus using Judah as His "weapons of war"; viz., that the oppressors of His people should for ever be expelled, according to His promise in chapter 9, "No oppressor shall pass through them any more" (v. 8), so that, as the Lord had also spoken by the mouth of Isaiah, "Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders." (60:18.)

* The French translation before cited renders it "la pierre angulaire," and the English Revised Version "corner stone."

† The reader will remember that the term battle-axe is used in the same way in Jeremiah 51:20 of Israel.

The next verse unites this last expression with the close of verse 3, as showing how the victory is gained over their oppressors through the irresistible might which flows to them from the presence of the Lord. It is He who makes them as mighty men, and enables them to tread down their enemies in the mire of the streets in the battle. (Compare 2 Samuel 22:43, and Micah 7:10) With the shout of the King in their midst, His people are invincible; for, animated with the courage which His presence inspires, they fight, and the riders on horses are confounded. It is a description of the Lord Himself leading forth His people to battle, when He commences to put down all rule, and all authority and power, and to reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet (1 Cor. 15:24-25), though here it is in special reference to the salvation of His people from the hand of their enemies. The period, therefore, is that which dates from His appearing in glory and His return to His dwelling-place in Zion.

As consequent upon the subdual of Messiah's enemies, through the instrumentality of Judah, we find, in the next place, the restoration of all Israel, and their blessing in the land. "And I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of

Joseph, and I will bring them again to place them; for I have mercy upon them: and they shall be as though I had not cast them off: for I am the Lord their God, and will hear them. And they of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as through wine: yea, their children shall see it, and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the Lord." (vv. 6, 7.)

The exactitude of the expressions used will scarcely fail to strike the intelligent reader. Thus, I will "strengthen" the house of Judah, and I will "save" the house of Joseph, and "bring them again" etc. Judah would already be in the land before the appearing of their Messiah, and being delivered, He would "strengthen" them. The house of Joseph, Ephraim, i.e. the ten tribes,* will still be scattered among the nations, and undiscovered, spite of modern pretensions, until after the return of Christ to Zion, and hence the terms employed in our passage.† It is indeed the declaration of God's unchangeable purposes of grace towards His ancient people, revealing the depth of His long-suffering and immutable love, in spite of their persistent transgressions and sins, and hence saying, "I have mercy upon them," according as we read in Hosea, "I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which

were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God." (Hosea 2:23.) Then, when once more the objects of Jehovah's mercy, in the beautiful and tender language here employed, "They shall be as though I had not cast them off: for I am the Lord their God, and will hear them." After, therefore, Jehovah has returned to His dwelling-place in Zion, He will perform this His word concerning all Israel. (See Rom. 11:26 - 29) Restored again to their own land, they will abound, together with their children, in joy and gladness in the Lord. Their heart shall rejoice as through wine, the elevated character of their joy being thus indicated; and then, to show that it is something more than mere natural gladness, it is added, "Their heart shall rejoice in the Lord," in Jehovah their God, who had sought them out in all the places where they had been scattered, brought them up again to their own land, and made them joyful in His own presence and blessing. And it is also touchingly said, "Their children shall see it, and be glad" — glad in the gladness of their parents, and thus the reflectors of their parents' joy.

- * Ephraim is constantly used in the prophets to designate the northern kingdom after the division took place during the reign

of Rehoboam. It is called indifferently the kingdom of Israel or Ephraim, in contradistinction from Judah.

- † It is astonishing how conscientious interpreters, who are ignorant of dispensational truth, can persuade themselves that such scriptures as these have already been fulfilled. For example, one, whose uprightness and piety can scarcely be doubted, writes, "With regard to them (Ephraim), human victory retires out of sight, though doubtless, when their wide prison was broken at the destruction of the Persian empire, many were free to return to their native country, as others spread over the west in Asia Minor, Greece, Rome; and so some may have taken part in the victories of the Maccabees." As if "free to return" and "may have taken part in the victories of the Maccabees" answered to the promise, "I will bring them again to place them." (See also v. 8.) As though feeling this, our author adds, "Yet not victory, but strength, gladness beyond natural gladness, as through wine, whereby the mind is exhilarated above itself; and that, lasting, transmitted to their children, large increase, holy life in God, are the outlines of the promise." And yet he has not the courage to draw the conclusion that, therefore, the promise has not yet been fulfilled!

In the next verse the prophet returns, and describes as the Lord's mouthpiece how they will be gathered, and how their

restoration will be effected, and this extends to the end of the chapter. "I will hiss for them, and gather them; for I have redeemed them: and they shall increase as they have increased." (v. 8.) The word "hiss" is often used in Scripture to express the idea of summoning (see, for example, Isa. 5:26; Isa. 7:18), and teaches here that the Lord in His own way will arrest the attention of His scattered people, make His mighty call to reach their hearts, and at the same time create in them a response to His word before He works out their deliverance. The ground of His action is contained in the words, "I have redeemed them." just as the blood of the Passover Lamb in Egypt was the all-efficacious ground on which God acted to deliver His people from Egypt, to bring them through the wilderness, and to put them in possession of Canaan, so the redemption, which has been wrought out through the death of Christ, will be the foundation on which God will work in rescuing His people from the hands of their enemies, and in re-gathering them to the land of their fathers. And when they are once again settled in their land they shall increase as they have increased. Jacob had said, "Joseph, is a fruitful bough," as he had said before, that Ephraim should become "a multitude of nations;" and Moses had also spoken, "They are the ten thousands of Eph-

raim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh," both alike predicting that increase in numbers should characterise Ephraim, and Jehovah now says, "They shall increase" — i.e. when restored under His sway and kingdom — "as they have increased," as they had done, that is, in former days.

The next verse would seem to take us back a few steps. "I will sow them among the people: and they shall remember me in far countries; and they shall live with their children, and turn again." (v. 9.) The "people" should be rendered "peoples;" i.e. nations. Jehovah would sow his people among the nations; and it is said that the word "sow" is never used in the sense of scattering, and hence that it must mean for increase or blessing. The similar expression in Hosea, "I will sow her unto me in the earth," with its connection, bears out this statement. If so, it will signify that, previous to God's interposition to regather the ten tribes, He will cause them to prosper and multiply where they are among the nations, and, at the same time, begin to act in their hearts just as He did with His people in Egypt, and so cause them to remember Him in far countries. As a consequence of this it is said, "They shall live with their children, and turn again." It is worthy of remark that this is the second

time the children are mentioned in this chapter, even as the reader knows that the children of His people are ever the objects of God's tender care and solicitude. Moses insisted, as having the mind of God, that the children must accompany their parents out of the land of Egypt; and now in this second "redemption" Jehovah promises that the children shall live with their parents, and shall turn again — turn again first to God, and then with their faces towards Zion in their homeward march. (Compare Jer. 31:7-9; Ezekiel 6:9.)

The countries are now specified whence Israel is to be brought — viz., Egypt and Assyria (see Isa. 11:10-16) — and then it is said, "I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon and Place shall not be found for them." (v. 10) The land of Gilead, the reader may recall, was on the east of the Jordan, and was within the territory of the two and a half tribes — Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh. Lebanon was on the east, and is here used to designate the territory occupied by the remainder of the ten tribes, so that the promise is, they should be settled again in their old habitations. And when there, place should not be found for them, owing to their increase in num-

ber and prosperity as before promised. (v. 8; compare Isaiah 49:20.)

If, however, Israel shall be restored, judgment will fall upon the nations amongst whom they have been scattered. The prophet thus says, "And he shall pass through the sea with affliction, and shall smite the waves in the sea, and all the deeps of the river shall dry up: and the pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the sceptre of Egypt shall depart away." (v. 11) A few words are necessary, first of all, to elucidate the meaning of the expressions employed. In the translation as thus given, the word "with" has been added before "affliction" as an explanation. It simply reads in the Hebrew, "He shall pass through the sea, affliction," as if affliction were the sea figuratively intended.* If "the sea" is a figurative term, it will apply to the nations (compare Rev. 17:15) that have oppressed Israel; and then the following words, "And shall smite the waves of the sea," will signify that Jehovah Will at this period step in, when the nations rise up against and threaten to engulf His people, and smite the proud waves of their power, in order to effect their deliverance. And this, in our judgment, is the interpretation of the passage; while at the same time there is un-

doubtedly an allusion to the past history of Israel, when God smote the proud waters of the Red Sea and brought His people through on dry land. This is the more certain from the next clause: "And all the deeps of the river shall dry up;" for "the river" in Scripture, with one exception (Daniel 12:5), always means the Nile.

- * The French version before cited renders in a note, "Mer d'affliction"; while in the text it gives "Il passera par la mer, [par] l'affliction." The Revised Version has, "He shall pass through the sea of affliction"; while the Septuagint, taking the word "affliction" in the sense of narrow or restricted, reads, "en thalasse stene."

The two references ("the sea" and "the river") speak then of judgment, and especially upon Egypt; for the drying up of the Nile would involve the entire deprivation of her sources of life and fertility; so that consequent on such a disaster, dependent as she is upon the waters of her river, the whole land would, in an incredibly short space of time, become a barren wilderness. The pride of Assyria is to be brought low, and the sceptre of Egypt shall depart away. As to the former, Isaiah also speaks, "I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot: then shall his yoke depart from off them,

and his burden depart from off their shoulders" (Isa. 14:25); and also as to the latter, "And the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dry-shod. And there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt." (Isa. 11:15-16.) And Ezekiel says, "There shall be no more a prince in the land of Egypt." Assyria and Egypt, the enemies of God's people on the north and on the south, shall thus fall under judgment when the Lord brings out His scattered people from under their power; and not only these two, for these are named — these historical enemies of Israel — as symbolic also of all the nations that will hold Israel captive. (See Isaiah 11:11) Then it will be seen that no weapon formed against Israel shall prosper; and, moreover, that when Messiah shall take their cause in hand, He will judge among the nations, "he shall fill the places with dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries" (Psalm 110), in connection with the salvation of Israel from the ends of the earth.*

* The express statement here as to the sceptre of Egypt, as well as the passage cited from Ezekiel, are very significant as to the fu-

ture of this interesting land. The intelligent reader will at once perceive that the place and status of Egypt will not depend upon the political plans and treaties of statesmen, but solely and entirely upon the purposes of God. This fact should guard the Christian from being drawn away into other thoughts by political speculations.

In the last verse we have again, in few words, the happy condition of restored Israel. "And I will strengthen them in the Lord, and they shall walk up and down in His name, saith the Lord." (v. 12.) Now they will learn that their strength is not in their armies, or in their alliances, but in the Lord alone (cp. Eph. 6:10); and at liberty before him, they will walk up and down, not to please themselves, or to serve their own ends, but as His servants and representatives, and thus in His name. And this, as we gather from Micah, is what will distinguish them as the Lord's people. "For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever." (Micah 4:5.) Together with their restoration, therefore, their hearts will be changed, according to the terms of the new covenant, "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people." (Heb. 8:10)

Zechariah 11.

In this confessedly difficult chapter great care is needed in attending to the exact language employed by the Spirit of God. It may aid the reader to remind him that it was "the Spirit of Christ" which was in the prophets of old, and "testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory [glories] that should follow." (1 Peter 1:11) This will explain the fact that often, as in this chapter, the prophet himself is taken up as a figure, as a personation of Christ, and is used to speak words which could only be true of Christ. (See vv. 7-14, especially (vv. 12, 13.)

The subject brought before us here is the rejection of the Messiah, together with some of the details connected with it, and "the circumstances of the last days in consequence of this rejection. It is the history of Israel in connection with Christ." The first three verses describe the condition of the land after some great public calamity, the effects perhaps of some invasion by the Gentiles. "Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars. Howl, fir tree, for the cedar is fallen; because the mighty are spoiled: howl, O ye oaks of Bashan; for the forest of the vintage* is come down. There is a voice of the

howlings of the shepherds; for their glory is spoiled: a voice of the roaring of young lions; for the pride of Jordan is spoiled." (vv. 1-3.) All this language is highly figurative though the meaning is easily apprehended. In the previous chapter Lebanon is named as indicating the part of the land on the west of the Jordan which Israel, when restored, will again inhabit; but here, we judge, it is not so much the actual devastation of the land or of the forest that is intended, as that the destruction of the cedars is employed as an emblem of the slaughter of the great ones of Israel. (Compare Ezekiel 17)† This, indeed, is evident from the next verse, in which the "mighty" are placed between the fir, the cedar, and the oaks of Bashan.‡ All these terms therefore, cedars, firs, oaks, and the defenced forest, represent the strength and glory of Israel, the sources of their natural confidence; and the prophet sets forth the fact that all these were swept away, destroyed, and consumed before the Gentile aggressor, who is sent of Jehovah as Nebuchadnezzar of old, to chastise His sinful and rebellious people. In the third verse, the shepherds, the rulers, are heard howling, bemoaning the calamities by which they have been overtaken (see Jer. 25:34-36), as also the young lions, because the pride of Jordan is spoiled. The young lions may be an emblem of princes (see Ezek. 19),

who also sound out their grief because of the destruction of their pride and shelter.**

- * The margin renders "the defenced forest"; J. N. D.'s French version "la forêt inaccessible."
- † To take Lebanon as a figure of the temple, and then to apply it to the Church because of the words, "Open thy doors," etc., as some of the old expositors do, is puerile in the extreme. Nothing indeed is more pitiful than the straits to which those are reduced who seek to apply all the prophecies to the Church, and thus to "spiritualize" all these descriptions.
- ‡ Bashan was on the east of the Jordan, and fell within the possessions of the two and a half tribes, and this again makes it more plain that it is an invasion of the northern kingdom, Ephraim, that is here indicated.
- ** The exact meaning of the expression — the pride of Jordan — is not clear. An old writer, says, "'The pride of Jordan' are the stately oaks on its banks, which shroud it from sight, until you reach its edges, and which, after the captivity of the ten tribes, became the haunt of lions, and their chief abode in Palestine." If this be so the wailing of the young lions, the princes or rulers of Israel, would be on account of the destruction of that — whatever it may have been — which had been hitherto their shelter, their protection and refuge; and this is probably the true

interpretation. The Jordan was also, it will be remembered, especially at certain seasons, a natural barrier to the incursions of the enemies of Israel.

We pass now to a direct message from the Lord: "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." (vv. 4, 5,) The reader will notice the unusual form of words, "Thus saith the Lord my God," for undoubtedly Christ Himself, as personated by the prophet, is here brought in, that is to say, it is to Him the charge is given, "Feed the flock of the slaughter" - the flock devoted to slaughter by their oppressors. We give the following words of another, as explaining the character and scope of these verses: "Their (the flock of the slaughter) possessors (though I have doubted it), I apprehend, must be the Gentiles their own people, those that sell them to the Gentiles Herod for example, and the preceding chief priests and princes, or an such characters; some who owned Jehovah, but sold His people. The Lord does not think it necessary to say who they are, as He does not own them at all; they (the flock of the slaughter) are possessed by those who slay them, and sold by persons more or less owning the Lord's

openly, but loving covetousness, anything but the Lord's care as to their present estate. This flock of the slaughter — their own shepherds (who they are there can be no doubt), their own leaders and rulers, pity them not. Verse 4 is the delivery of them, under these circumstances, into the Lord Christ's hands to feed, or to take charge of them."* There are therefore three classes in this scene; first, the Gentile possessors, who seem to have the dominion over God's people (as they will indeed in the last days); then the leaders of the nation who will be in league and friendly alliance with their Gentile masters, and "the flock of the slaughter" — the true remnant of God's people, who cleave to Him and to their national hopes in spite of dominant evils and the oppression to which they are subjected, and who, on that very account, are exposed to the deadly enmity both of the chiefs of their own nation and of their Gentile rulers.

* The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby, vol. ii. Expository, P. 368.

It is to be remarked, moreover, as showing the frightful wickedness of the leaders of the Jewish nation, and of the haters of God's people, that they use the forms of piety to cloak

their evil covetousness in making gain by handing over the "flock of the slaughter" to the Gentiles. Receiving the wages of their iniquity, like the brethren of Joseph, when they sold him to the Ishmaelites, they say, "Blessed be the Lord; for I am rich." Their hearts were hardened, and thus it was that, while the true Israelites were killed all the day long, and were accounted as sheep for the slaughter (Ps. 46:22) their own shepherds, those who filled that place, pitied them not. But Jehovah saw and He pitied, and in His compassion He commissioned the Messiah to feed, to tend, to take care of, the flock of the slaughter. This is full of consolation for the persecuted saints of God at all times, even as the apostle points out when speaking of the unchangeable love of Christ. "Who shall separate us," he enquires, "from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." And then he tells us that "in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us;" for, as he goes on to say, there is no power on earth or under the earth, whether present or future, that is able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:35-39.)

Jehovah's declaration follows, that He will give the godless nation up to judgment. "For I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, saith the Lord: but, lo, I will deliver the men every one 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." (v. 6.) "The inhabitants of the land" are the mass of the Jewish people, as distinguished from the believing remnant, those who identified themselves with their Gentile rulers; and "his king," inasmuch as these events are connected with the life of Christ in Israel, will probably be Caesar, he whom the chief priests, the religious heads of the nation, accepted, and indeed claimed as their king, when, in the madness of their enmity against Christ, they cried, "We have no king but Caesar." (John 19:15). Into his hands Jehovah did surrender the inhabitants of the land, and the Romans did smite the land, and Jehovah did not then deliver his people. Jehovah had been in their midst, and had sought to gather them together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and they would not; and, as a consequence of their refusal to listen to His pleading cry, strong, withering, and desolating judgments fell upon Jerusalem and the land, and their house was left unto them desolate. (Matt. 23:37-38.)

The results of this judgment visited upon them because of their rejection of Christ are now given with some detail. "And I will feed the flock of slaughter, even you, O poor of the flock. And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands, and I led the flock. Three shepherds also I cut off in one month, and my soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me. Then said I, I will not lead 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." (vv. 7-9.)

Attention may once more be called to the peculiarity of the language. It is Zechariah who speaks, but it is Zechariah, not only in the name of, but also as impersonating, Messiah, so that his words are those of Messiah. Whether Zechariah performed the symbolic actions, such as taking and afterwards breaking the two staves, is not mentioned, nor is it necessary to know, as the main thing is to perceive the connection of all with the life of Christ in the midst of the Jews. It will be noted moreover that it is Jehovah who is the Messiah, according to the word of the angel to Joseph, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus" (that is, Jehovah the Saviour); "for He shall save His people from their sins." (Matt. 1:21.)

Returning to our scripture, the Lord again distinguishes His little flock. Delivering up the nation, that which was publicly owned as such, to judgment, He says to those who had separated themselves from the ungodly nation, and had attached themselves to Him, "I will feed the flock of the slaughter, even you, O poor of the flock." Poor indeed they were in the estimation of their fellow-countrymen, and also despised, as well as marked out as the objects of their scorn and enmity, really accounted as sheep for the slaughter, and yet, in truth, because of all this, how precious to Christ! He called His own sheep by name, and led them out, found them pasture, and, as the Good Shepherd, He gave His life for the sheep, and also comforted their hearts by telling them that they should never perish, that none should ever pluck them out of His hand. (John 10) What a contrast between "the inhabitants of the land!" and the "poor of the flock!" And how blessed to belong to those who are under the shepherd-care of Christ!

Thereon Messiah took to Him two staves, the explanation of which will be seen afterwards. It will suffice here to say, that they are connected with His Messiahship in relation to Israel, and with His authority over the nations which he will wield

through Israel, in virtue of which He will unite the nations, as well as bind together Judah and Israel as one people, under His sway. And then, having assumed His true place in Israel — a place, it is true, only to be morally discerned, but still really taken — He fed the flock, for all who entered in through Him went in and out and found pasture; so that every one of this flock of slaughter could say, "Jehovah is my Shepherd; I shall not want." But if He thus cared for His own, He acted in judgment towards those who hated and rejected Him. "Three shepherds," He says, "I cut off in one month." The shepherds, as before seen, are the self-constituted heads or leaders of the Jewish people, or those that were publicly in that position; but who these shepherds were that were cut off is not revealed.* It is quite probable — nay, it would be consistent with God's ways in government at that period — that these shepherds may have passed off the scene apparently in a natural way; but here it is revealed that they were cut off by the hand of Jehovah. "And," He proceeds, "my soul loathed† them, and their soul also abhorred me," Who can wonder that the Messiah was weary of the unbelieving nation? He came unto His own, and they received Him not. They hated Him without a cause. His soul was burdened with their state and condition. Thus on one occasion,

when they watched Him to see whether He would heal the man with the withered hand on the sabbath day, that they might accuse Him, He "looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts." (Mark 3) They repaid His goodness with evil, and His love with enmity; and then He went to die for that nation. Well might He have felt the burden of their sin, and have been weary of their unbelief. "And their soul also," He says, "abhorred me." This they proved at every step of His journey through the whole course of His sojourn in their midst; and their hatred culminated in their choice of Barabbas, and in their demand that Jesus should be crucified. But their abhorrence of Christ brought down judgment upon them, for He declared that He would not feed them; and He gave them up to death, to destruction, and to mutual enmity.

* There has been endless speculation on the subject; but where God has not drawn back the curtain of concealment, it is impossible for man to penetrate into His secrets.

† This word does not seem to express the force of the original. In the margin it is "straitened for them." The Revised Version translates "weary of them"; and the French version, cited in this book, gives, "Mon âme fut ennuyée d'eux;" while the Septuagint renders, "kai barunthesetai e psyche mon ep autous."

In the Psalms this aspect of the suffering of Christ is very clearly distinguished. When the Messiah suffers under the hand of God, as in Psalm 22, nothing but grace flows out to all around; but when He is seen suffering from the hands of men, as in Psalm 69, the consequence is sure and certain judgment. Thus, for example, in this psalm He says, "They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. Let their table become a snare before them: and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake. Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them." (Psalm 69:21-24.) This is easily explained. In the first case God, on the ground of the atoning work of Christ (and it must never be forgotten that atonement lies in what He suffered from the hands of God), is able, and delights to be able, righteously to assume the attitude of grace towards all, and to bless all that come to Him in the name of Christ. In the second case He acts according to the eternal principles of His government, and judges every man according to his works. Hence if any do not approach Him in and through Christ, they must receive the due reward of their deeds. So here — where we are entirely in the

sphere of righteous government — judgment is pronounced upon those who "abhorred" the Messiah. But this in nowise intercepted the presentation of grace to them through the apostles, even after they had by wicked hands taken and crucified their Messiah; nay, this very presentation was secured for them by Him whom they had crucified, through his intercession for them, while on the cross — "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34.) But when they rejected the testimony of the Holy Ghost through the apostles and through Stephen, even as they had refused that of Christ on earth, they were left exposed to all the consequences of their sins, and especially to the stroke of this particular judgment here pronounced; and, as a matter of fact, this judgment literally fell upon them in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

Consequent then upon His rejection the Messiah, or the prophet in the name of Messiah, performs two symbolic actions with the staves He had taken. "And I took my staff, even Beauty, and cut it asunder, that I might break my covenant which I had made with all the people." (v. 10) "All the people" should read "all the peoples," in the sense of all the nations, for it is un-

doubtedly the Gentiles that are here in view. When Jacob uttered his prophetic blessing on his sons, he said, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." (Gen. 49:10) Here again it should be "peoples" instead of "people;" and in the light of this prediction may be perceived the meaning of the words in Zechariah. The promise then had been given, that when Messiah came the nations should be gathered unto Him, unto him in subjection, in the acknowledgement of His authority and power, even as Isaiah also writes, "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising."* (Isaiah 60:3.) But when Messiah came He was rejected; and hence the gathering of the peoples unto Him, though it will surely take place, is postponed — postponed until He comes the second time to Israel in power and glory. It is this which is indicated by the breaking of the staff Beauty. Messiah was there, and ready to perform the word spoken (the covenant He had made) concerning the nations; but inasmuch as He was refused by Israel, and it is through Israel that He will govern the nations on earth, He necessarily put off the assembling of the peoples under His sway and authority. Herein, as the apostle explains, is seen the depth of the riches,

both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, because the sin of Israel in refusing the Messiah is made the occasion for the unfolding of His counsels concerning the Church. Well therefore may we cry with the apostle, "How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33.)

* This is spoken of Jerusalem, as a matter of fact, only "thy light" is the presence of Messiah in His glory, so that the application is to Him.

The effect of breaking the staff upon the remnant is next described: "And it was broken in that day — and so the poor of the flock that waited upon me knew that it was the word of the Lord." (v. 11) The designation of the remnant is very beautiful. they are "the poor of the flock:" it reminds us of the Lord's own words, "Blessed be ye poor: for your's is the kingdom of God." (Luke 6:20) They were the poor in spirit (Matt. 5:3.), though mainly also composed of the poor of this world. If, however, they were poor they were yet rich (Rev. 2:9) in that they had found their treasure in the Messiah; for it was on Him they "waited;" they waited on Him to hear His word, yea, for all their need. (Compare Psalm 123:2.) They are those who attached themselves to Christ during His earthly sojourn, "the children" whom Jehovah had given Him, as Isaiah speaks

8:18), who were for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts. The rejection of their Messiah might, according to human thoughts, have proved a stumbling-block to His disciples; but, as we gather from this scripture, they recognised in it, together with its consequences, a fulfilment of the word of the Lord, through its correspondence, we judge, with what had been foretold by the prophets.

The next verses bring the nation again before us. "And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I look the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord." (vv. 12, 13.) The fulfilment of this prophecy is known to all, but we give its record in order to have the subject fully before the reader. In Matthew we read, "Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver." (Matt. 26:14-15.) In Zechariah it is "I said unto them," whereas in Matthew it is Judas who speaks to the chief priests (the repres-

entatives of the nation). This brings out a very interesting principle in the ways of God. It was Judas' sin that betrayed the Lord, but Jehovah used the sin of Judas to test the chief priests as to their estimate of Christ, and thus, passing by the intermediate instrumentality, he says, "I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price." They did "think good," and what was the price, the value at which they estimated Jesus, the Son of God, their Messiah? If we turn to the book of Exodus, we may read, "If the ox shall push a manservant or a maidservant; he" (that is, the owner) "shall give unto their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned." (Ex. 21:32.) It was therefore the value of a slave; and this was the contemptuous price the Jewish leaders offered for the life of Him who was Jehovah and Immanuel. Who would have dared to think that man, and man in such a position, with such light as the word of God in his hand afforded, could have fallen so low? And who can fathom the unspeakable grace that led the only begotten of the Father, the Word Who had become flesh, Jehovah the Saviour, to submit Himself to such degradation? Ah! herein lies the revelation of man's heart, and of God's heart, and, together with it, the need — the need as displayed by the heart of man, and the

secret — as disclosed by the heart of God in His ineffable grace — of redemption.

The reader will observe in verse 13 the striking words interposed between the command to "cast it unto the potter" and the execution of the thing commanded. The Lord (speaking in Zechariah) interjects, as it were, the words, "a goodly price that I was prised at of them" words which reveal how deeply He felt His contemptuous rejection by "His own," "Reproach," He says in Psalm 69, "hath broken my heart," and so here the knowledge of the goodly price at which He was "prised" wounded His soul. A goodly price indeed at which to value Him who redeemed them out of Egypt, and who had now come into their midst as Jehovah — the Saviour! Such is man; and it was by the presentation of Christ that the state of man was revealed.

The fulfilment of the second part of the prophecy is also found in Matthew: "Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed,

and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy* the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me." (Matt. 27:3-10.) It will be observed again that the Lord passes over all the instrumentalities by which this prediction was accomplished. He says in Zechariah, "I" (either the Lord Himself or the prophet symbolically) "took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord." In the gospel we find that it was Judas who cast down the pieces of silver in the temple (in the house of the Lord), and that it was the chief priests who bought with them the potter's field, but as both alike were but the instruments (even while acting according to the suggestions of their own evil hearts), in the Lord's hands, both actions are here connected with the prophet.

- * The substitution of Jeremiah's name for that of Zechariah has never been satisfactorily explained. If not a simple error in the copyists, it may be that the name of Jeremiah, as some suggest, was on the roll — as commencing it — which contained the section of the prophets in which Zechariah was found. In this case, it would be naturally cited under the name of Jeremiah. No importance, however attaches to the explanation one way or the other.

It is not the place to comment upon the wickedness of the chief priests, shown by their affectation of the forms of piety, and their distinction between what was lawful and unlawful in regard to the treasury, even while bribing a disciple to betray his Lord, further than to point out that it was the consummation of their enmity against Christ, and the expression of their determination to secure, at all costs, His death. It is on this account that it is accepted, in Zechariah, as their final rejection of the Messiah, and as constituting the breaking off for that time His relationships with the Jewish nation.

This is signified by His now sundering His remaining staff. "Then I cut asunder mine other staff, even Bands, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel." (v. 14.) Ever since the separation of the ten tribes under Jeroboam, on the

succession of Rehoboam, from the house of David, there had been more or less enmity, with some occasional alliances, between the two kingdoms; and the prophets had continually spoken of the reunion of the two peoples under the Messiah. Isaiah had thus said, "The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim." (Isa. 11:13.) in Ezekiel also we find an action which is entirely explanatory of that in Zechariah. "Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: and join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand." And this symbolic action is explained as follows: "I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all." (Ezekiel 37:15-22.) When therefore Messiah returns and establishes His kingdom this promise will be fulfilled, and it would have been fulfilled when He first came had He been received by His people. Having been rejected, as we have seen, the re-

union of Judah and Ephraim was necessarily, like the gathering of the nations, postponed; and this was set forth in our passage by the cutting asunder of the staff Bands. And thus the brotherhood between the two nations is irrevocably broken, and can never be re-established, even though both were found again in the land, until both are united under the sway of the true Son of David. Thus it was through the sin of man — of Judah in particular, although grace has abounded over the sin in bringing to light the eternal counsels of God — that the blessing of the nations, as dependent upon that of Israel under their Messiah, has been delayed, and will now be delayed, until the last of the co-heirs with Christ shall have been brought in to the glory of Him who has known how to make the wrath of man to praise Him, and also to bind the actings of Satan to the chariot-wheels of His purposes for the exaltation and glory of His beloved son.

When our blessed Lord was down here on the earth, He said to the Jews, "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive." (John 5:43.) This is the truth exhibited by the next symbolical action. "And the Lord said unto me, Take unto thee yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd. For, lo, I will raise up a

shepherd in the land, which shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that that is broken, nor feed that that standeth still: but he shall eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their claws in pieces."* (vv. 15, 16.) This passage brings antichrist before us as the foolish shepherd, the shepherd of "nought," whom the Jews will by-and-by receive. just as they chose Barabbas in preference to Christ, so, having refused Jehovah as their Shepherd, they will open their arms to welcome this shepherd of "nought." Zechariah was commanded to portray this in figure by assuming the instruments of a foolish shepherd. The next verse gives the character of this shepherd after their own, not after God's, heart — a character which cannot but recall Ezekiel's description of "the shepherds of Israel:" "Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them." (Ezek. 34:2-4.) All these characteristics will be seen in their

full development in this last false shepherd over God's people, who will exalt himself not only over them, but also against God and His Christ. (See 2 Thess. 2: and Rev. 13)

- * The Revised Translation renders verse 16 as follows: "Which shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek those that be scattered, nor heal that that is broken; neither shall he feed that which is sound, but he shall eat the flesh of the fat, and shall tear their hoofs in pieces." The French version gives it thus: "Qui ne visitera pas ce qui va périr, qui ne cherchera pas ce qui est dispersé, qui ne pansera pas ce qui est blessé, qui ne nourrira pas ce qui est en bon état; mais il mangera la chair de ce qui est gras, et rompra la corne de leurs pieds."

Having introduced the foolish shepherd in connection with the rejection of Christ, the prophet then pronounces his judgment — "Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened." (v. 17.) Jeremiah in like manner utters "woe," woe in judgment, from the mouth of God upon "the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep" of Jehovah's pasture. (Jer. 23:1: compare Ezek. 34) The iniquity of this shepherd of "nothingness" (for such is the force of the word "idol" here) lies in his leaving, forsaking

the flock — a word which sums up the several descriptions of the preceding verse. He had abandoned all that needed the shepherd's care, and used the remainder for his own purposes. Like the thief in the parable, he only came to steal, to kill, and to destroy, and, like the hireling, "whose own the sheep are not," when he seeth the wolf coming, he "leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep." (John 10) Therefore he will incur the just judgment of God as expressed in this irrevocable woe — a woe which will bear its bitter fruit throughout eternity. Then the particular form of the judgment is given. "The sword shall be upon his arm and upon his right eye." The sword is the executor of the judgment, the mighty word of God, which, when uttered, accomplishes all His will. The effect is, that his arm shall be clean dried up, his power is entirely paralysed, and his right eye is utterly darkened; his perception, his intelligence is blinded. It is thus that God will deal with him who assumed the place of shepherd over his people, and the enemy of His Christ, reducing him to utter impotence under the withering stroke of His judgment. And if this shepherd is antichrist,* as he doubtless is, the judgment here denounced is only preparatory to that other, which will be inflicted by Messiah Himself at His appearing; for He

"shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked" [one]. (Isaiah 11:4.) And from the book of Revelation, where we are permitted to see still further, we learn that his final doom, together with the beast, is to be "cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone." (Rev. 19:20.) Such will be the awful end of this false shepherd, this antichrist, towards the development of which man is already hastening with such rapid strides.†

* It is quite possible that this idol shepherd is so described as to prefigure all the false shepherds that might be found amongst the Jews, all of whom in their turn foreshadowed this final one, in whom all their worst features will be concentrated and intensified.

† The reader may peruse with great advantage a most valuable paper on this chapter in J. N. D.'s Collected Writings, vol. ii. Expository.

Zechariah 12.

After the introduction of Antichrist, at the close of the preceding chapter, the prophet is occupied with the events of the last days, or those events which circle around Jerusalem, and which are connected with her siege and deliverance. Looking in the

power of the Spirit into the future, he depicts event after event, until he sees, at the end of the book, the kingdom established, with Jerusalem as the religious metropolis of the whole earth, and all nations owning the authority of the King in Zion.

This chapter commences with a solemn "burden" for Israel. "The burden of the word of the Lord for Israel, saith the Lord, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him. 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." (vv. 1. 2.) It is a striking feature that the "burden" is for (or "upon") Israel, for its contents seem to be concerned almost entirely with Judah and Jerusalem. It is contended by some, from this circumstance, that Israel, i.e. the ten tribes, must therefore have been restored before the siege of Jerusalem takes place, and that, as a consequence this siege is conducted by the Assyrian and his confederates subsequent to the destruction of the Antichrist, to which allusion is made in the foregoing chapter.* This question must be decided by the reader himself as he considers the words of the prophet, only it is necessary to remind him again that prophecy often employs

language that may apply to different though connected events; and the main point of this chapter, we judge, is the deliverance of Jerusalem and Judah rather than the exact specification of the enemy who is destroyed, although it is clear that there will be at this time a confederacy of the Gentiles against Judah and Jerusalem. The head of this confederacy is not specified.

- * We subjoin the following note from the writings of another to make the above remark more intelligible, and to help the reader who may desire to enter further upon this interesting subject. "The departure of God from the direct government of the earth with Israel for the centre, His throne being in their midst, sitting between the cherubim, and His return to the government of the earth, is of immense importance. In Ezekiel we see this judgment (God's departure) on Jerusalem. God comes (Nebuchadnezzar being the instrument); He executes judgment, leaves them and goes into heaven. The Gentiles are left to rule (subject to God's providence and final judgment). Israel, and God's throne in their midst, are set aside. Four great empires arise successively — Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. The Roman empire, while devastating everywhere, does not succeed in getting all nations under its power, but continues the great power of the world till the judgment, though in a special form. Then the Assyrian comes on the scene again at the close, that is, geo-

graphically in what is now Turkey in Asia, and part of Persia; but in the last days Assyria will appear on the scene in the Russian power" (that is, we apprehend, upheld by, as allied with or subject to, Russia), "according to the testimony of Ezekiel 37, 38, [so that] the world, as connected with Israel and God's ultimate purposes on the earth, is divided into Western Europe, and the basin of the Mediterranean, the Roman Empire; and Eastern Europe, or the Russian" (that is, Eastern Europe will fall within the territory of the Russian Empire). "These two are never confounded in Scripture. The Assyrian was the power that warred against Israel when God owned them (before He wrote the sentence upon them of Lo-ammi, and suffered them to be carried away captive), and the other (the Roman Empire) that oppressed and held them captives when they were not owned." (Lectures on the Second Coming. By J. N. Darby, pp. 156, 157.) We add to this, that both of these powers will be judged by the Lord Himself, and in connection with Jerusalem. First, He will destroy both the head of the Roman Empire and the Antichrist, as described in Rev. 19, and, subsequently, He will destroy the Assyrian, who will come up against Israel after their restoration, and will then meet with his final overthrow. The question then raised above is simply whether the siege spoken of is connected with the overthrow of the Roman power, together with Antichrist, or with that of the Assyrian? If we confine ourselves to

the language of the chapter, we shall see that neither is mentioned, that it says merely that all the people (peoples), that is, all the nations, will be in the siege.

Jehovah in this "burden" upon Israel is presented as the Creator — the Creator of the heavens and the earth, as also of "the spirit of man." This is often so in the prophets (see, for example, Isa. 43:1, Isa. 44:18); for indeed this is God known in connection with the first creation, and it became therefore the distinctive Jewish testimony. (See Jonah 1. 9.) Jehovah thus lays the foundation of His demonstrated power in creation for the faith of His people as to the accomplishment of His word as to Jerusalem. When Zechariah prophesied the temple was not yet completed, and the city was still desolate; but by the word of Jehovah the people are bidden to look onward to the time when Jerusalem should be once more restored in its beauty and strength, and be made, if the object of the hostility of all the peoples (or all the nations) round about, to strike terror into the hearts of her foes. It is a solemn asseveration of what the Lord would do: "Behold, I will make;" and the next verse does but take up the divine assertion, with a change of figure, and intensify the promise. "And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people [again it is all peoples or na-

tions]: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people [peoples] of the earth be gathered together against it.'" (v. 3.) That the time of the end is referred to is shown by the use and the repetition of the phrase, "In that day." It is found, including the next chapter, eight times, and it is therefore abundantly clear that one and the same period is indicated which will comprise all the events which form the subject of Zechariah's "burden;" and, inasmuch as the conversion of the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem is one of these, as also the manifestation to them of the Messiah, the period is defined to be that connected with the Lord's appearing.*

- * It is astonishing how godly persons, with verses 9 and 10 before their eyes, can either apply this chapter to any of the past sieges of Jerusalem, or endeavour to spiritualize its meaning, so as to adapt it to the progress of the gospel. We append one comment of the latter kind: "The gospel claiming obedience to the faith among all nations, provoked universal rebellion. Herod and Pontius Pilate became friends through rejection of Christ; the Roman Caesar and the Persian Sapor, Goths and Vandals at war with one another, were one in persecuting Christ and the Church!"

At this time then the nations will be gathered together against Jerusalem, as well as against Judah. What has drawn them together is not here stated, but manifestly their object is to reduce into subjection both the city and the people of Judah. It is an outburst of enmity really against God and His Christ, the fulfilment, in this aspect, of the second Psalm: "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion." (vv. 1-6.) And so here divine judgment falls upon the assembled nations. In verse 2 Jerusalem becomes "a cup of trembling" to all the nations who encompass her in the siege, and in verse 3 she is "a burdensome stone" for them, and "all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces." (Compare Matt 21:44.) Then once more in the world's history it will be seen that if man in his daring impiety ventures to rush upon "the thick bosses of the bucklers" of God it is only for his instant and complete destruction.*

- * As chapter 14 brings before us larger details of the final siege of Jerusalem, we postpone any further remarks on this subject until that chapter is reached.

In the following verses we have Jehovah's interposition for the defence and salvation of His people. Already, as we have noted, it is what he would do — "I will make Jerusalem," etc. (vv. 1-3); and now His action with reference to the enemy is described: "In that day, saith the Lord, I will smite every horse with astonishment, and his rider with madness: and I will open mine eyes upon the house of Judah, and will smite every horse of the People" (rather, all the horses of the peoples) "with blindness." (v. 4.) "The horse and his rider," as has been said, "had, through Moses' song at the Red Sea, become the emblem of worldly pride and power." But it is not here as in the Red Sea, into which both the horse and his rider were cast; for here they are smitten suddenly with a divine stroke, and the effect is "astonishment and madness." The forces of the nations are thus paralyzed; and so thrown into utter confusion, dismay and disaster are the necessary consequence. The object, if not the motive, of this divine action is beautifully indicated in the midst of the description; it lies in the words, "I will open mine eyes upon the house of Judah."* Though all is of grace, we yet

learn that Jehovah was moved by compassion for the house of Judah. He opens His eyes upon, beholds, and is touched by, their sorrowful condition; and, if the words may be permitted, hastening to their rescue, He smites all the horses of the people with blindness. Thus at one stroke all the flower and strength of the enemies' armies are destroyed as suddenly as in days of old, when an angel was sent to smite with pestilence the Assyrian host. At once the hearts of the leaders of Judah, as well they might be, are encouraged. "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."† (v. 5.) It will be observed that the reference is to an inward conviction wrought in the hearts of the governors of Judah, a conviction wrought doubtless by the Lord Himself, and, if unknown to them, is the sign of the commencement of His work of deliverance. To human eyes at such a moment the inhabitants of Jerusalem, besieged in their city by the nations, would be in the very jaws of destruction, alike helpless and exposed to the fury of the foe; but it is to these apparently doomed ones the heads of Judah look, and are led to feel that their strength would be found in them; but, if in or through them, only from the Lord their God. The very name of God is significant in this connection; it is the

Lord of hosts in contrast with man's hosts that were gathered against His people; and it is this name, as identified with the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that is here used to impart confidence to the governors of Judah.

- * This expression has been deemed to point to the fact that this interference of Jehovah is rather in connection with the beast and the false prophet (the antichrist) than with the siege of the Assyrian. The phrase "all the peoples" of the earth might be thought to point to the latter. The reader will consider and form his own judgment, remembering, however, what has been already observed, that in the text nothing is said beyond the fact that "all the peoples" are combined in the scene.
- † The translation, as the marginal rendering shows, is a little difficult. J. N. D.'s French version gives, "Les habitants de Jérusalem seront ma force, par l'Eternel des armées, leur Dieu." Others render, "Strength to me are the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the Lord of hosts their God." The sense either way is much the same.

First, then, the Lord works in the heart of these princes, and then, in the next place, He demonstrates their strength — "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" (again, all the peoples) "round about, on the right hand and on the left: and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own Place, even in Jerusalem." (v. 6.) As ever, the Lord first prepares His instruments in secret, and then, when the time comes for their use, He displays their fitness for their work. He thus trained David, while tending his father's flocks, through his conflicts with the lion and the bear, to vanquish Goliath, the foe of Israel. In like manner these princes of Judah have been trained, and now, when He launches them against the nations, nothing can stand before them; for they are like a raging, devouring fire, consuming all that comes before it. The result is at once stated, "Jerusalem shall again be inhabited in her own place." And the fact that the result is thus given explains the character of the verse, that the Spirit of God has crowded into it the whole deliverance of Jerusalem, together with her consequent restoration and blessing. This will enable the reader to perceive how pregnant these sentences are. Thus, for example, "I will make the governors of Judah," etc., is now seen to include the actual coming of Jehovah and His taking them up as His weapon for the destruction of the nations. The verse therefore forms a kind of summary, a compendious statement of the rescue of Jerusalem from the grasp of the foe, the

means employed for that end, and her consequent prosperity. In the succeeding verses more details, details of the same event, will be found.

"The Lord also shall save the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem do not magnify themselves against Judah. 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." (vv. 7-9)

In the beautiful language of another, "God would judge the power of man, but would raise up His people in sovereign grace. He would destroy the nations that had come up against Jerusalem. The deliverance of the people by the power of Jehovah comes first. This is sovereign grace to the chief of sinners, the feeble but beloved Judah, who had added to all her rebellion against God the despisal and rejection of her King and Saviour. The grace of God takes the lead over all the resources of man. The audacity of the enemies of God's people stirs up His affection, which never diminishes; and thus, by compelling

God to act, this very audacity becomes the means of proving the faithfulness of His love. Judah, guilty yet beloved Judah, is delivered — that is to say, the remnant to whom the affliction of Israel had been a burden — but the question of her conduct towards her God remained."† And this, as will be seen, is dealt with afterwards.

* Rather, "He that stumbleth among them."

† Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, by J. N. Darby, vol. ii. p. 635.

It is clear indeed that sovereign grace alone explains the statement that Jehovah first delivers the tents of Judah; and the reason, or rather the object, is very striking — that the glory of the house of David, and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, do not magnify themselves against Judah. The deliverance of Jerusalem, and the dwelling of Jehovah in her midst, and the fact that the Messiah is the true Son of David, could not fail to reflect glory upon both the city and the house of the King; and knowing what man is, this might lead both the city and the family of David to exalt themselves over Judah. But Jehovah will prevent this by exhibiting His love to Judah in appearing first on her behalf. But if He deliver Judah, it is only, as

it were, while on His way to the succour of the beloved city; for He will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem. So also we read in Isaiah: "The Lord of hosts shall come down to fight for mount Zion, and for the hill thereof. As birds flying, so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it; and passing over he will preserve it." (Isa. 31:4-5.) Together with His appearing for the defence and succour of the city, He will endow its inhabitants, as it appears, with superhuman strength. Reduced to helplessness, they are in the place and condition to receive strength; for it is ever true, in all dispensations, that when God's people are weak then they are strong, because His strength is made perfect in weakness. Hence he that is feeble, or stumbles from weakness among them, shall be as David — as David when he went forth and overcame all the power of the enemy; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of Jehovah who was now again at their head as the Captain of the Lord's host (Joshua 5) and leading them forth to battle. There is, in truth, no limit to the power of God's people when they are taken up by Him, and when, in dependence upon Him, they are following Him in conflict with their foes.

The next verse merely gives the fact, afterwards expanded in chapter 14 that Jehovah in that day will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. Here it is not so much the execution of His judgment, as the declaration of His purpose to execute it, the announcement that when all nations come against Jerusalem they would come for their entire and total destruction. In the prophetic view they are undoubtedly destroyed, only the words, "I will seek to destroy," speak rather of the purpose in the divine mind, than of its actual accomplishment.

Judah and Jerusalem succoured, we have in the next place a divine action in the hearts of the people. "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: 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." (v. 10) It was in Jerusalem that our Lord was rejected and condemned to be crucified (He suffered without the gate); it was in Jerusalem the gospel was first preached, and the first work of grace commenced; and now we find that it is in Jerusalem Jehovah will

first commence the work of grace when he returns to Zion. Nothing could more magnify His grace and unchanging love; and nothing could more fully reveal the impotent condition of man than the fact here recorded, that it is Jehovah — Jehovah who had been rejected in the person of Jesus — who will pour out upon His people the spirit of grace and of supplication. All things truly are of God; and hence, as the apostle writes, it is "by grace ye are saved through faith; and that not of ourselves: it is the gift of God." It is the heart of God moved with compassion for the condition of the people whom He had chosen, and whom He loves; and who, on this account, bestows the spirit of grace and of supplications to prepare them to receive, and to own, their Messiah. Hence the next thing is, "They shall look upon me* whom they have pierced." This is ever the divine order; first, conviction of sin, and then, the presentation of Christ. It was so with Saul of Tarsus; for no sooner had he been charged with, and made to feel, the sin of which he had been guilty in persecuting the saints by the question, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" than, in answer to the response, "Who art thou, Lord?" he received the reply, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." (Acts 9) So also with the brethren of Joseph, who foreshadow, in this particular, what we have here; it was

after their exercises of heart and compunctions of conscience that Joseph, said, "I am Joseph, your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt."

- * There have been many discussions concerning this reading — "on me"; for Jewish writers have attempted to set aside this plain identification of Jehovah with the crucified Jesus. The result has only been to justify, on irrefutable grounds, the translation in the text.

And what a moment this will be for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem when, as they see their Messiah come in glory for their deliverance, the conviction is begotten in their hearts that it is Jesus whom they had nailed to the bitter tree. For it was through the sin of the house of David, as also that of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that the kingdom was subverted by Nebuchadnezzar (see 2 Chr. 36:11-20); and Jerusalem had added to all her transgressions that greatest sin of all, the denial and rejection of her Lord. And yet He comes for their deliverance, and, when their eyes are opened, they behold their Deliverer, and recognize that He is Jesus of Nazareth! Then for the first time they will understand by the very magnitude of the grace, the turpitude of their sin, and, transfixed with the arrows of conviction, will be bowed in the dust before their God in

true penitence and sorrow for their guilt. As another has written, "To be loved by a God against whom one has so deeply revolted, melts the heart. Grace then goes farther, and presents to the people the Messiah whom they had pierced. The rejected One is the Jehovah that delivers them. It is now no longer merely the cry of distress that has no refuge, but Jehovah Israel, more strictly Judah, no longer a prey to the terrible anxiety which her distress occasioned, is entirely occupied with her sin felt in the presence of a crucified Saviour. It is no longer a common grief, that of a nation crushed and trodden down in its most cherished sentiments. It is now hearts melted by the sense of what they had been towards One who had given Himself up for them."*

* Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, by J. N. Darby, vol. ii.

There follows a description of this unparalleled grief and first its character is noted: "They shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son," etc. It is a comparison to illustrate the intensity of their grief, even as Amos also speaks, "I bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day," (Amos 8:10); and then, to enhance the

conception of the sorrow, it is said to be "bitterness for Him. as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." Blessed grief, we may add; for it partakes of that sorrow according to God, which works a repentance, not to be repented of, and the end of which will prove to be light, blessing, and joy. Such weeping may endure for the night, but joy will surely come in the morning, the first streaks of which, indeed, have already appeared through the clouds of their darkness and grief.

The prophet proceeds still further to illustrate this penitential mourning of the people: "In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon." (v. 11) It is the same mourning as described in the previous verse; that is, the mourning consequent upon their discovery that the One they had pierced was no other than Jehovah and now to show its depth and intensity reference is made to one of the most calamitous events that had ever befallen the nation; viz., the death of Josiah, who was mortally wounded in battle with Necho, king of Egypt, in the valley of Megiddon. For in truth the death of this monarch was the sunset of the kingdom of Judah. A few gleams of light may have lingered afterwards in Jehovah's mercy; but these soon

faded away (for both kings and people were deaf to the pleadings of the prophets) into utter night. The significance of the death of Josiah seems to have been instinctively apprehended; for we read that "all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah; and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day, and made them an ordinance in Israel: and, behold, they are written in the lamentations."* (2 Chr. 35:24-25.) It was therefore a true national sorrow, and it is to this the Holy Spirit here points back to illustrate the mourning that will ensue upon the revelation of their crucified and glorified Messiah to their hearts.

* Hadadrimmon was situated in the northern kingdom, south of mount Carmel, and a few miles west of Jezreel. It has been remarked that the name is compounded of the appellations of two Syrian idols, and is therefore "a witness how Syrian idolatry penetrated into the kingdom when it was detached from the worship of God."

There is also another feature distinguished: "And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Levi

apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; all the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart." (vv. 12-14.) If a national, it is also a household, nay, an individual sorrow, a sure proof of the thoroughness of the work of penitence which will be wrought in their hearts by the Spirit of God. Every family, and every individual in the family, will own the sin of having crucified the Lord. "Each family, isolated by, its personal convictions, confesses apart the depth of its sin while no fear of judgment or punishment comes in to impair the character and the truth of their sorrow. Their souls are restored according to the efficacy of the work of Christ. It is this which definitely brings the people into relationship with God." We thus see that, while it is true that Christ died for the nation, and that the nation (i.e. the remnant that comes into that place before God) will own its sin in the rejection of the Messiah, every individual must own his sin "apart," alone in the presence of God, in order to be brought under the value and efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ. This was foreshadowed indeed in the directions for the day of atonement; "for whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his people." (Lev. 23:20.)

Four families are specified amid "all the families that remain." That of the house of David is mentioned for the reason given in an earlier part of the chapter; viz., that it was the sin of this house, for the kings were held responsible for the state of the nation, that brought the kingdom to its judicial end. Nathan is named perhaps as the representative of the prophets, inasmuch as he was the prophet in the days of David. The house of Levi will stand here more especially for the priestly family; for, in setting forth the causes of God's intervention in judgment in the reign of Zedekiah, the Holy Spirit says, "Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem." (2 Chr. 36:14.) And it was the chief priests who, to secure the condemnation of Jesus, cried, and thus deliberately denied their national history and their national hopes, "We have no king but Caesar." (John 19:15) The family of Shimei is more difficult of interpretation.* A reference is sometimes made to Num. 3:21, where we read of the family of the Shimites as belonging to Gershon, one of the sons of Levi. If this be the family intended, we have in the list the royal family, the prophetic and priestly families, as well as that of those who were Levites in the ordinary sense of

that term, besides all the families that remain. In that case every class of the nation is here represented, and all are brought in for the purpose of showing how general will be the humiliation and contrition of all the people, when at length God once again takes them up for the accomplishment of all His counsels respecting them, and when the first lesson they will have to learn is the nature of their sin in having crucified Jesus of Nazareth.

- * The Septuagint gives Simeon, but, as it would appear, with questionable authority.

Zechariah 13.

The subject of the previous chapter is here continued, and, in this case, in progressive order; for Jehovah is still concerned, in the actings of His grace, with the house of David, and with the inhabitants of Jerusalem. "In that day," says the prophet, "there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." (v. 1) That the period is the same as in Zech. 12 is shown from the repetition of the words, "In that day" — the day introduced by the appearing of the Messiah; a day therefore marked and even waited for in the counsels Of God; and a day which will be dis-

tinguished for ever in the annals of the history of His earthly people, because it is then that their relationships with Jehovah will be restored.

The fountain of which the prophet speaks is a fountain of water. The word employed is indeed the same as found in Jeremiah, where we read, "They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters."* (Jeremiah 2:13.) There is a beautiful moral order seen in the introduction of the fountain in this place. At the close of the last chapter we have seen the remnant brought under the efficacy of the sacrifice, the value of the blood; for as soon as they looked believingly on Him whom they had pierced, their sins, their transgressions, were all taken away, their guilt was for ever removed. The moment, however, this was (or will be) accomplished another need would arise, and that is, a provision for daily cleansing from sin and uncleanness; and this is made by the fountain; for water, an emblem of the word of God, is ever His means of removing the defilements which His people contract in their daily walk and warfare, as is so strikingly shown in the Lord's washing the feet of His disciples. (John 13) It was symbolized too by what took place at the cross, when the soldier pierced the side of the

blessed Lord as He hung dead upon the tree; "and forthwith," as the apostle relates, "came there out blood and water" (John 19:34) — the blood for expiation or atonement, and the water for cleansing. (See 1 John 5:6 et seq.) This makes all clear, and enables us to perceive that the fountain is God's blessed provision for maintaining His people in a cleansed walk before Him.

- * That the word "fountain" could only be used of water is so apparent that there were no need to refer to it, were it not that Cowper's popular hymn -

"There is a fountain filled with blood,

Drawn from Immanuel's veins," etc.,

which is based upon this scripture, has so connected it with the blood of Christ, that the mass of believers have come to regard this as its proper meaning.

Having removed the guilt of His people, and opened up the sources of their daily purification, Jehovah proceeds in the next place to cleanse His land. "And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land." (v. 2.) Idols and false prophets were Satan's two successful instrumentalities by which he led both Judah

and Israel to forsake the worship of the Lord their God. The golden calf, while it was their first open rebellion and apostasy, did but exhibit a tendency which never was eradicated while the kingdom lasted. As soon as they were in the land they went after other gods. (See Judges 2:12, etc.) Even Solomon fell into the prevailing snare; and, with some few exceptions, his successors followed in his steps. (See both 2 Kings and 2 Chr. And wherever idolatry prevails false prophets abound. Thus when Jehoshaphat wished, after he had pledged himself to go to war with the Syrians in alliance with Ahab, to quiet the scruples of his conscience by enquiring "at the word of the Lord," four hundred false prophets were found to prophesy as Ahab desired, whereas there was but one prophet of Jehovah In that other scene too on Mount Carmel Elijah had to confront four hundred and fifty of the prophets of Baal. Nor was it otherwise in the kingdom of Judah; for we often find Jeremiah alone and single-handed in conflict with lying prophets (See Jer. 23:25-40; Jer. 28:1-11) but now, at the time here spoken of, the Lord Himself will cut off the names of the idols, and cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land. Kings had often endeavoured to purify the land in this way, but the power of evil was too strong for them. Jehovah will do the

work effectually. and for ever. One expression proves this; it is, that "the names of the idols shall no more be remembered." For in this day the Lord will put His laws into the minds of His people, and write them in their hearts; and He will put his fear into their hearts, that they shall not depart from Him. (Jer. 32:38-40; cp. Ezek. 36:25-38.)

The term "lying spirit" is significant. In the scene already alluded to, in which the false prophets prophesy before Ahab and Jehoshaphat, we are expressly told that the Lord put a "lying spirit" in their mouths (2 Chr. 18:22); that is, He left them, or put them judicially, in the power of Satan, that they might lure Ahab on to his destruction. But the point we desire the reader to notice is, that it is a "lying spirit" that animates false prophets; not merely that they are ignorant of the truth, and follow the bent and inclination of their own evil hearts, but that they are absolutely in the power and control of the evil one. There might be sincere men among them — men of thought and intellect, the leading spirits of the time, "princes" of the age; but let it not be overlooked that, be they what they may in the world's estimation, they are energized and led by a "lying spirit." Is it any otherwise with the false prophets of Christendom? And

who are these? They are those who deny the scripture presentation of the atonement those who question the inspiration of the Scriptures those who are not "sound" on the truth of the person of our Lord; those who in any way undermine the foundations of Christianity, and seek to substitute their own thoughts in the place of the truth of God. These are the false prophets of modern days, and many of them occupy chairs in colleges and universities. Some are amongst our foremost men in science; and others, alas! are found in the pulpits of churches and chapels. But wherever they are, if they refuse the teachings of the word of God, they are led of a "lying spirit." Happy day will it be then for restored and blessed Judah when both idolatry and false prophets are removed for ever; and when they will be enabled to distinguish instantly between the voice of truth and the voice of error!

The people, moreover, will be in full communion with the mind of God as to the false prophets; for Zechariah says, "And it shall come to pass, that when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live, for thou speakest lies in the name of the Lord: and his father and his mother that begat him shall thrust him

through when he prophesieth." (v. 3.) The truth in that day will hold its rightful place in the hearts and consciences of God's people, and thus be more precious to them than the dearest earthly objects. Then will be seen, once more upon the earth, the spectacle of saints loving the Lord more than father or mother, husband or wife, or children; and they will therefore hold fast His word at all costs, and be, as this scripture teaches, the first to denounce those, be they connected with them by the closest of all ties, who shall seek to supersede the truth of God with their own lying imaginations. (Compare Deut, 13:6-11.) Well it would have been for the Church of God had there been something of this zeal for the truth. Lacking it, and falling into Laodicean indifference, teachers of error have been permitted to pursue their deadly work until the truth, in the estimation of many, has become a mere matter of opinion; and, its certainty being thus lost, souls have been "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." (Eph. 4:14.)

The effect of this holy zeal for God against the false prophets is most salutary: "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the

prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he hath prophesied; neither shall they wear a rough garment" (a garment of hair) "to deceive." (v. 4.) "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you;" and so, when the faces of God's people are set against the false prophets, they will disappear, or, if any should continue under the power of Satan, and still have their visions, they will no longer boast of it, as before, but be ashamed, and will lay aside the garment of hair as symbolic of their office. For in truth the vocation of the prophet — and God's people will know it — will be gone. The prophet was sent in times of backsliding and apostasy to recall the people to the claims of Jehovah and His law, and their function was therefore to appeal to the conscience, denouncing judgments upon the rebellious, and encouraging the obedient with the glorious prospects of the future connected with the advent of the Messiah. Now, therefore, when Messiah shall have come, and when the law shall be written in the hearts of the people, and they shall receive a heart of flesh in the place of the heart of stone, and it will be consequently their delight to be found walking in the ways of the Lord, the prophet will have no more place. Hence restored and converted Israel, Judah here and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, will instantly know that any who

claim to have seen visions are not the prophets of Jehovah and will accordingly, as having the mind of the Lord, execute judgment upon them.

The next verse demands careful consideration: "But he shall say, I am no prophet, I am an husbandman, for man taught me to keep cattle * from my youth." (v. 5.) Two things must first be noted; the connection and the translation. At first it would seem that the words "he shall say" referred to the false prophets in the preceding verse, but the language that follows makes this to be impossible. The question then arises, Who is the speaker? If now the sixth verse is examined, it will be at once seen that it could be no other than the Messiah Himself. The transition is abrupt in the extreme, but there can be no manner of doubt, in the light of the following verses, that the Messiah is here introduced. And the ground of it may be explained. Following upon Zech. 12, down to the end of verse 4, the blessed consequences of Jehovah's intervention on behalf of Judah and Jerusalem, and of His return to Zion, are given; and then, on the mention of the false prophets, Christ is brought forth as the One through whose work, as connected with His rejection, all these blessings will be inherited; and as the One, at the same time, who

had been the Prophet in their midst, according to Deut. 18, but whose words they would not receive. It is, therefore, the mention of the false prophets that gives the occasion for showing how all had been made to depend upon Christ. Then, secondly, the translation must be weighed. As it stands it gives no distinct meaning, and many suggestions have been made to clear up the difficulty. The one which harmonizes most with the truth, and which also is justified critically, gives as the rendering of the last clause, "for man has acquired me [as a slave] from my youth."† The meaning of these words may be given in the language of another: "Christ takes the humble position of One devoted to the service of man in the circumstances into which Adam was brought by sin (that is, with respect to His position as a man living in this world)." He was a, nay, the prophet, and God had said that He would require it from the man who would not hearken to the words which Christ should speak in His name. But refused from the very outset, He became a husbandman, a sower of seed (Matt. 13), a dresser of the vineyard (Luke 13), in a word, He became the servant of man for the glory of God. He thus said to His disciples, "I am among you as He that serveth;" for indeed He took upon Him the form of a servant, and became in the likeness of men; and being found in

fashion is a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. This verse, therefore, opens out to us the lowly place of service which Christ took, on His first coming, in the midst of Israel, and reveals that unquenchable love which led Him to devote Himself to their true interests in spite of all that they were, and of their enmity and hatred. It contains, in a word, the secret of redemption.

- * The reader may remember that a garment of hair, setting forth their moral separation from the evils around, was often worn by the prophets. Elijah (2 Kings 1:8), and John the Baptist (Matt. 3:4), may be cited as examples.
- † Thus Luther translates, "Denn ich habe Menschen gedienet von meiner Jugend auf"; J. N. D.'s French version is, "Car l'homme m'a acquis [comme esclave] dès ma jeunesse"; and the Revised Version gives, "For I have been made a bondman from my youth."

The following verse thus tells of His rejection: "And 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." (v. 6.) What a contrast! He had in love become the servant of man, and for His love He had hatred, rejection, and crucifixion, and this, as He explains, in the house of His

friends. For, according to the flesh, He was a Jew, Son of David, heir of the promises, and as such he come into the house of His friends. For Him, too, they waited; all their hopes were centred on His advent, and yet they would not receive Him, but met Him with the enmity of their evil hearts, and rested not until they had pierced His hands and His feet. All this is familiar to us, but we never weary of meditating upon it, because the cross, and the cross alone, is the measure of His love. One further remark may be added. He cannot conceal His love for His people; for though showing the wounds He had received while in their midst, He yet says, "the house of my friends." Truly, blessed Lord, thy love is both unchangeable and unquenchable!

He was wounded by His friends, but He was smitten of Jehovah and thus we read, "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." (v. 7.) The application and fulfilment of this scripture have been indicated by the Lord Himself. After the Passover feast, "when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives. Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night:

for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." (Matt. 26:30-31.) This makes it plain that the death of Christ in His character as the Shepherd is signified, and thus supplies the key to the interpretation of the passage. The address is to the sword, the sword being a figure of the judicial stroke that fell upon Christ in His death (compare Jer. 47:6); and the command to smite reveals that while the Jews by wicked hands took and crucified their Messiah, He was yet delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. Wounded in the house of his friends was man's work and man's wickedness, smitten by the sword of judgment, though man was the instrument, brings in rather God's action; and thus in these two verses we have indicated His sufferings from the hands of man, and His sufferings from the hand of God. Under the hand of man He died for righteousness' sake a martyr, as suffering under the hand of God, because He offered Himself for the glory of God in expiation, He died as the sacrifice for sin. The sixth verse is therefore the sixty-ninth, and the seventh is the twenty-second Psalm.

Then the character in which the Messiah is here presented must be noticed. First He is termed "My Shepherd." This title is es-

pecially used in relation to Israel. We thus read in Ezekiel, "I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd." (Ezek. 34:23.) And the Lord when down here claimed for Himself that He was the Good Shepherd, even as also the apostle speaks of Him as the great Shepherd of the sheep. (Heb. 13) As here used the title describes Him as the Messiah, who, in the words of Isaiah, "shall feed His flock like a shepherd, He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." (Isa. 40:11; compare Ps. 23, Ps. 78:70-72, etc.) Since, moreover, He is termed "my" Shepherd, He is brought before us as the One of God's providing and appointment, and as the One who answers to His mind. In a word, the Messiah will be God's Shepherd for His people when they are once again restored and blessed in the land; and He was presented as such on His first coming, but, refused, He laid down His life for the sheep. He was smitten of Jehovah's sword in the language of our Scripture. If, however, the term shepherd points to His official place as the King, "the man that is my fellow" reveals to us His divinity; for of no other than He, who was one with the Father (John 10), who subsisted in the form of God, and

thought it not robbery to be equal with God (Phil. 2), and who, as the Word was with God and was God (John 1), could such language be employed. Wondrous words are they to be spoken of the meek and lowly Jesus, of Him whose "visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men" (Isa. 52:14); but being used, they unfold the truth that Jesus of Nazareth was in very deed God manifest in flesh. And remark, as has often been done, that, addressed here in His humiliation as the "fellow" of Jehovah, in His exaltation where He is addressed as God, the saints are spoken of as His "fellows." (Psalm 45; Heb. 1.)

The Messiah then, as the Shepherd of Israel, and as the One who is described as the fellow of Jehovah is seen here as smitten* — smitten by the sword of judgment because, as the Good Shepherd, He laid down His life for the sheep, thus intercepting the stroke that was their due, that He might, on their behalf, meet all God's holy claims, and glorify Him concerning their sins.

- * We do not enter here upon the question as to whether this smiting can be distinguished, in so far as His Messiahship and the position of His people Israel are concerned, from atonement. As Daniel speaks, He was in this sense cut off, and had nothing;

that is, His taking possession of the kingdom was postponed, the delay serving, as we know, as the occasion for the unfolding of God's eternal counsels as to the Church. But inasmuch as the smiting was death, and atonement was thereby accomplished, we have spoken of it in that aspect and character.

A twofold immediate effect here follows. First, the sheep are scattered. This was fulfilled literally on the night of His apprehension, when all His disciples, those who had acknowledged Him as the Shepherd of Israel, forsook Him and fled; and in another way, we cannot doubt, it has been accomplished in the scattering of the Jews over the face of the whole earth; for it is written, "He that scattereth Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock." (Jer. 31:10) He came to gather His sheep, but when they as a people refused to listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd, and He was smitten, God in His government, and judicially, "scattered" the flock. It is also added, "And I will turn mine hand upon the little ones."* Thus while judgment should descend upon the sheep who did not know the voice of their Shepherd, and who, instead of following Him, demanded His crucifixion, God would cover with His hand the "little ones" who had recognized their Messiah, the

remnant, in fact, who had attached themselves to Him during His earthly ministry, in that day of evil and trouble.

- * The point is much discussed whether it is "over" or "upon the little ones. As to the translation either would be correct. The question then arises, Whether the action described is for protection or judgment? Fully admitting that, from usage, the latter sense is to be preferred, we yet judge that, from the context, the former is that intended; viz., that "I will turn mine hand upon [or over] the little ones" — means for their protection.

Lastly, we have the consequences of the smiting of the Shepherd in their final results for God's people. "And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the Lord, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, 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." (vv. 8, 9.) It is clear, we judge, that the whole of the present interval of grace must be interposed between the seventh and eighth verses; for while judgment, and terrible judgment, did fall upon the Jewish nation some thirty or forty years after the death of Christ, no such result as the bringing a third part through the fire into rela-

tionship with God was then reached. The accomplishment of this word, therefore, must be looked for in the future, when the Jews shall have been brought back to their land in unbelief, when God will resume His dealings with them, and when, as we know from other scriptures (Matt. 24; Rev. 13) they will be subjected to hitherto unheard of persecutions. It is then that God will deal with them on account of their sin in rejecting their Messiah, and when, as we read here, two parts "shall be cut off and die," and when, as the Lord foretold, "except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." (Matt. 24:22.) But a third part shall be brought through this fire, a fire seven times hotter than even Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, and God will purify them in the process, refining them as silver, and trying them as gold (compare Malachi 3:2-3, also 1 Peter 1:7), and thereby bring them back into relationship with Jehovah their God.* This represents the end of all God's ways, in His judicial dealings, with the Jews. Because of their sins He had written the sentence of Lo-ammi (not-my-people), upon them; and now the sentence is reversed, and He, out of the fullness of His heart, on His part declares, It is my people; and they, brought back, repentant and restored, in gratitude re-

spond, The Lord is my God. Blessed, happy, consummation for which God still waits, and for which too His ancient people unconsciously wait, but which will surely arrive in its own time; and when it comes it will usher in the peace and blessing of the millennial day.

* This purified remnant will doubtless be the same as the hundred and forty-four thousand of Rev. 14.

Zechariah 14.

At the close of the preceding chapter the end of God's ways has been reached in respect of Judah — restored, as she has been, to relationship with Jehovah her God. And thus, as another has said, "the effect of the staff being broken, which united Judah and Israel, is here realized. The prophet speaks only of Judah, of the people who in the land were guilty of rejecting the Messiah, and who will suffer the consequence of so doing in the land during the last days, the mass of them at that time joining themselves to antichrist." It is on this very account that Judah will have to endure the "fire" spoken of in the previous verses, and through which only a third part will be preserved, and, as thus preserved, will be brought into blessing through their recognition and acceptance of Messiah, who appears in glory. Is-

rael will yet have to wait, but only for a season; and then Judah and Israel will once more be united under one King, the true Son of David.

Chapter 14 gives the details, to speak generally, of the result for the nations of the coming of Jehovah as the Messiah (see verses 9-16); but, when more closely examined, it is seen to fall into two parts, the first of which closes with "Uzziah king of Judah" in the fifth verse. From that point the prophet returns and describes the coming of Jehovah with His saints, and in so doing "takes up the subject of the relationship of Jehovah with the whole earth," showing that His coming for the succour and blessing of His ancient people is but the occasion for the perennial flowing forth of "living waters" to the ends of the earth.

The chapter opens abruptly with the solemn proclamation, "Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee." (v. 1) The "day of the Lord" has a fixed significance in the prophets, and is ever connected with judgment; as, for example, in Isaiah, "The day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one, that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up." (Isa. 2:12. Cp. Joel 2; 2 Peter 3:10) And the context shows that it has this meaning here, that it is the

day when Jehovah will appear for judgment upon His enemies, and for the deliverance of those who have waited for Him. (Isa. 25) The "spoil" spoken of is probably the spoil taken from the nations (see verse 14), which the prophet says shall be divided in the midst of Jerusalem. In one sentence therefore, before he gives the details, the full result is placed before the reader — the full result of the assembling of the nations against Jerusalem. They will come to despoil it, but they shall be spoiled; and the people who were on the very eve of destruction shall divide the spoil of their enemies.

But before this end is reached, there will be terrible experiences. "For," says Jehovah "I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished, and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city." (v. 2.) In Zech. 12 mention is also made, as we have seen, of the siege of Jerusalem, but there in reference rather to the effect upon the peoples who besiege her. Here we have the revelation that at first, before Jehovah appears, the enemy will triumph and capture the city. Jehovah permits this for the punishment of the apostates of Judah under

the influence of the antichrist. Isaiah thus speaks, "Wherefore hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place. And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it." (Isa. 28:14-18; see also Isa. 8 - 10)* The scripture makes it also plain that Jehovah will suffer Jerusalem to be taken before He intervenes. Micah may allude to the same thing when he says, "This man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land: and when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against him seven shepherds, and eight principal men." (v. 5.)

- * All these Scriptures refer either to the Assyrian or the confederacy of the nations against Jerusalem, and not to the antichrist. The reader will remember that it has already been pointed out that there will be a siege by the beast (head of the western empire) and the false prophet (the antichrist) and another subsequently by the Assyrian. Which of these two sieges Zechariah speaks of it is difficult to decide; but for the help of the reader we recall a principle before laid down. Before God had written the sentence, "Lo-ammi" (not-my-people), on Judah and Israel, the Assyrian was always the enemy in view; and hence the antichrist is not found in the pre-captivity prophets as a rule. During the interval, after the disowning of His people, and before Jehovah brings them back again into relationship with Himself, their enemy is antichrist. Inasmuch therefore as the capture of Jerusalem in our chapter precedes the appearance of Jehovah for its deliverance, it would almost seem that it must be the first of the two sieges intended. But it is evident from the latter part of the chapter that Jerusalem is finally and completely delivered, and made the religious metropolis of the whole earth, which now acknowledges the undisputed sway of the Messiah. It is possible therefore that both sieges are found in this chapter — the first in verse 2; and the second, or a reference to it, in verse 12. This, however, is not certain; and it must always be remembered that in the prophetic perspective the features of more

than one event may be blended, and hence that the description may cover both. The fulfilment will make all plain, and the godly remnant of that day will behold with wonder that the details of what they will be passing through have been depicted for their guidance and sustenance. While, however, it is impossible to dogmatize on this subject, it is yet certain that the events here foretold will all be connected with, and have their accomplishment in, the appearing of the Messiah in glory, in order to succour His people and to establish His kingdom. For all exhaustive examination of the subject of "the Assyrian" the reader is referred to Part xiii. of Notes and Comments on Scripture, by J. N. Darby.

It is in this way that God will teach Judah and Jerusalem that it is an evil and bitter thing to have rejected Christ, to have forsaken the living God; for now in their extremity, if they should call, there will be none to answer. Allying themselves with the enemy of Jehovah and identifying themselves with his idolatries, they must now pass through these days of vengeance. "And" according to this word of the Lord, "the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished, and half of the city shall go forth into captivity." No city in the world has undergone such frightful sieges. Jeremiah has signalized

the sorrows of its capture by Nebuchadnezzar in his Lamentations, and a description of the horrors of the siege by the Romans has been preserved in the pages of Josephus; and, as we gather from this scripture, the sorrows of this chosen city are not yet ended. Does the reader enquire for the reason? The answer is found in the lament of our blessed Lord Himself: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. 23:37.) And since that day Jerusalem has added to all her sins in crucifying her Lord; and she will aggravate her guilt yet more by receiving him who will deny both the Father and the Son.

A remnant will not be cut off from the city; and the next verse tells us of Jehovah's mighty intervention: "Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when He fought in the day of battle." Whether the Lord appears immediately, or whether indeed this event is subsequent upon the capture of the city, is not evident. The fact is stated, and care must be exercised not to go beyond the fact, that the Lord goes forth against His enemies and the enemies of His people. It is possible that

allusion to the same event may be made by Isaiah, when he says, "A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of the Lord that rendereth recompense to His enemies." And again, "For, behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with His chariots like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by His sword will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the slain of the Lord shall be many." (Isa. 66:6, 15, 16; compare Joel 3:9-17, and Rev. 16:13-14.) In such a manner Jehovah will render recompense to His enemies; for He will gird His sword upon His thigh, and His arrows will be sharp in the heart of the king's enemies, whereby the people fall under Him, and then the nations of the World will have to learn what Pharaoh learnt at the Red Sea — the irresistible might of Him against whom they have dared to set themselves in battle array. "The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them. Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters." (Exodus 15:9-10)*

* It would almost seem from Rev. 19, in connection with other scriptures, that the beast (the head of the Western or Roman

Empire) and the kings of the earth will be gathered together against Jerusalem on the eve of the appearing of Christ with His "armies" from heaven, and that when He appears, and descends to the earth, the beast in his impious rage turns, with the kings of the earth and their armies, to make war against Him that sat on the horse (Christ) and His army (the saints in glory). But whether the scene in Zechariah is identical with that in Rev. 19 is not certain; but if not, both are connected with the appearing of Christ in glory, with no long interval between, and, on the one hand, with the deliverance of His people, and, on the other, with the judgment of His foes.

In the next verse we have one of the most remarkable predictions to be found in the prophetic scriptures: "And His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, 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." (v. 4.) It was from the mount of Olives, as the reader will remember, that our Lord ascended up to heaven (Acts 1:12), and, after a cloud had received Him out of the sight of the disciples, and while they were still wistfully gazing after their departed Lord,

two angels said to them, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:9-11) No words could be more precise or state more definitely that Jesus Himself should return to the earth, and that in a visible manner; and now we learn from Zechariah that He shall return to the very spot whence He ascended, and that the very same feet that once trod Olivet, in company with His disciples, shall once again stand in the same place. No ingenuity whatever can explain away the simple words, "His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives,"* and in this way, as another has pointed out, "Jehovah identifies Himself, so to speak, with the meek and lowly Jesus formerly on the earth, in order that the identity of the Saviour and Jehovah should be clearly acknowledged."

- * Nor can their importance as to the nature of the fulfilment of prophecy be exaggerated. The writer once, in conversation with one who maintained that all prophecy must be spiritually explained, enquired what was the spiritual significance of the above, and the answer was frankly given that it was impossible to tell. On rejoining that the passage meant what is said, he replied, "If that is contended for I have nothing to say, though I do not understand it."

But when Jehovah thus comes, in the person of the Messiah, He comes with power and great glory; the earth will acknowledge the presence of her rightful Lord, and thus the mountain, on which He will stand, cleaves in the midst. As we read indeed in the psalm, "The earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because He was wroth" (Psalm 18:7), so will it be again on this eventful day. The effect will be that a great valley will be formed by half of the mountain removing toward the north, and half toward the south, running east and west, its western end being immediately opposite to the eastern side of the city of Jerusalem, and its eastern end terminating, it would seem, at Azal.* Isaiah cries, "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, as when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence! When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence." (Isa. 64:1-3.) So will it also be in this day of which Zechariah speaks, and the wonders flowing from the presence of Jehovah will strike terror into the hearts of the beholders, for they will flee as they

fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah.†

* Nothing is now known of the locality of Azal, but it will doubtless reappear in the last days.

† There is no other reference in the Scriptures to this notable earthquake. It is said by scientists that Judea does not lie within the region of earthquakes. God, however, is sovereign, and natural laws are but His servants, and hence we find that there were also earthquakes both at the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ. If they were otherwise of rare occurrence, so much the more loudly, would they attest the mighty power of God. It is the fatal defect of men of science that, in searching for the laws that govern any class of phenomena, they lose sight of the Creator and rest in second causes.}

The prophet does not pursue this aspect of his subject. Jehovah has come, and His feet stand upon the mount of Olives, and He has thus renewed His relationship with Judah, or at least the remnant, of whom the disciples (who saw their Lord ascend, and who received the promise of seeing Him return) were the representatives. He now recommences (the second part of the chapter beginning at this point) with the coming of the Lord. He says, as if addressing Jehovah "And the Lord my God shall

come, and all the saints with thee." (v. 5.) The introduction of the saints as accompanying, or forming the cortège of Jehovah is an additional feature; and the instructed reader will see in this a remarkable confirmation of what he has learnt of the Lord's coming from the New Testament. Here, as it is His return to Israel, it is His public manifestation — when every eye shall see Him, and when, therefore, as Zechariah states, the saints shall come with Him. If, however, the glorified saints return with Christ, they must have been caught up to be with Him previously; and this is what the New Testament scriptures teach. Thus, in 1 Thess. 4, we learn that when the Lord descends from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, both the sleeping and the living saints will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so will be ever with the Lord. Here there is no question of any being caught up; the Lord comes to His own on the earth for their succour and temporal salvation. This shows the difference between the hope of the Church and the hope of Israel. Believers now wait daily to be caught up to meet Christ, and hence, afterwards, "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory" (Col. 3:4), whereas the believing remnant, in the day of which

the prophet speaks, will await the coming of the Messiah in glory, as described in this chapter. The confusion of the Lord's coming for the Church with His coming with His saints in glory for the restoration and blessing of Israel on the earth has been the source of continual perplexity in the interpretation of the word of God.*

* The reader who may desire further light on this subject may; consult *The Blessed Hope*, by the writer of this book.

The character of the day in which Jehovah comes with His saints is next given: "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." (vv. 6, 7.) The translation of the sixth verse is doubtful, and many suggested alterations have been made.* But the meaning is tolerably apparent, and may be given in another's words: "It shall not be a day of mingled light and darkness, but a day appointed by Jehovah a day characterized by His intervention and mighty presence, and that could not be characterised by the ordinary vicissitudes of night and day; but, at the moment when the total darkness of night might be expected, there should be light." For

in truth it will be the day of Jehovah, and will therefore have its own character, and one that will be so manifestly outside of all ordinary days as to arrest the attention of all beholders.

- * In the Revised Version it stands, "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be with brightness and with gloom." J. N. D., in his French version renders, "Et il arrivera, en ce jour-là, qu'il n'y aura pas de lumière, les luminaires seront obscurcis."

Our attention is now directed to another consequence of Jehovah's coming. "And 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." (v. 8.) That is, living waters shall flow out to the Dead Sea on the one side, and to the Great, or the Mediterranean Sea on the other, and neither the heat of summer nor the cold of winter shall interrupt the perennial flood. Two things must be carefully noted: the time when this shall occur, and the meaning of the living waters. We learn from Ezekiel (47) that these waters will not flow forth until after the rebuilding of the temple, and after the glory of God has returned to His dwelling-place in the midst of His people. This fact will supply the reader with a needed caution. He will learn from it that he can-

not define the order of events at the Lord's appearing from any one of the prophets, that therefore it is only by the study and comparison of all he will be able to trace the footsteps of the Lord in that day. We thus find that Zechariah passes from the coming of Jehovah over a number of intervening events, to the issuing forth of the living waters "from under," as we gather from Ezekiel, "the threshold of the house eastward: for the forefront of the house stood toward the east, and the waters came down from under, from the right side of the house, at the south side of the altar." (Ezek. 47:1-8; cp. Rev. 22:1) The very term used, "living waters," will, in consonance with its employment in other scriptures, explain its meaning. In the gospel of John the Lord speaks of the living water which He would give (John 4), and we learn from the same Gospel that He used the words as a figure of the Holy Spirit, "which they that believe on Him should receive" (John 7:39); and hence we know that the living water in John is an emblem of the Holy Ghost as the power of life — life eternal. Ezekiel also, who speaks of the same river of water as we find in Zechariah, says, "And it shall come to pass, that everything that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live ... and everything shall live whither the river cometh." (Ezek. 47:9.) There is thus

again the quickening and life-giving power seen in the waters — the waters that carry life with them wherever they flow.

In the light then of these scriptures the significance of the passage in Zechariah is at once apprehended. The living waters flow out from Jerusalem — Jerusalem which is now the city of the Great King, and more exactly, as we find in Ezekiel, from the temple which is the dwelling-place and throne of Jehovah as the Messiah. (Compare Psalm 46) We gather, therefore, the blessed truth, that streams of life-giving power and blessing will flow out, unhinderedly and perpetually, to all the world from His throne, as the result of His righteous sway. It will be thus a universal dispensation of blessing as flowing from His government and rule. And yet there will be exceptions to the universality of the blessing; for, as we read in Ezekiel, "The miry places thereof and the marshes thereof shall not be healed." (Ezek. 47:11) Even the dispensation of a righteous government will not be perfect. Flesh will remain flesh, and many will be found, who, only yielding a "feigned obedience," will in their hearts refuse the proffered blessing. Alas! such is man — even in the presence of the display of Jehovah's power, grace, and glory. Perfection, perfection within and without, will

be only found in the heavenly city, and in the eternal state. But while there will be some barren places, some unyielding hearts, during the thousand years, Jerusalem will be, in some sense, a representation of the Jerusalem above — the city celestial; for John says, "And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." (Rev. 22:1) The city below has therefore its correspondency with the city above, being, as it will be, the forecourt, or vestibule, to that where "there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever."* (Rev. 22:3-5.)

* Compare the description of the earthly city as found in Isaiah 60:19-20.

Two things follow as the result of the establishment of Jehovah's throne in Jerusalem: "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and His name one. All the land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rim-

mon south of Jerusalem: and it shall be lifted up, and inhabited 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 king's wine-presses. And men shall dwell in it, and there shall be no more utter destruction; but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited." (vv. 9-11) The supremacy of Messiah over all the earth is a constant theme with the prophets. David thus speaks, "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. ... Yea, all kings shall fall down before Him: all nations shall serve him." (Ps. 72:8-11.) And in that day idolatry will cease (see Isa. 2:18-22), and the one Lord shall be the true God, and His name, not many, but one; for He will then make good His claim and title as Lord of all the earth. (See Joshua 3:11-13.) Jerusalem, moreover, as the metropolis, will be exalted above all cities, be blessed with overflowing prosperity, and be guarded by divine power; for that we conceive to be the meaning of verses 10, 11. Geba and Rimmon mark the northern and southern boundaries of the kingdom of Judah — "a long mountain chain which is pictured as sinking down into a plain that Jerusalem alone might be exalted." (Compare Isa. 2:1-4.) The abounding prosperity of the city in these days is indicated by the mention of the limits of

the city.* And lastly, as Isaiah also sings, "Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise" (Isa. 60:18); for God Himself will be in the midst of her (Psalm 46), so that she will never more be moved.

* It is difficult to identify the gates mentioned, though many plausible conjectures are offered. The Jews in this future day will doubtless delight to see the exact fulfilment of the prophetic word; for us the general idea alone is of importance.

In the next place the prophet, having traced out the blessed consequences of the advent of Messiah, proceeds to speak of the special judgment which Jehovah will visit upon the nations that have fought against Jerusalem. He says, "And this shall be the plague wherewith the Lord will smite all the people" (peoples or nations) "that have fought against Jerusalem. Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth." (v. 12.) It is not definitely stated whether this awful plague will fall upon the nations while in the siege, though it probably will from what follows; it is the fact to which our attention is directed in evidence of the Lord's indignation against those who have fought against His

beloved city.* And be it observed that the plague is of such a character as will compel every beholder to own the punitive hand of God. The most hardened heart of unbelief could not account for such an awful visitation on any other ground than that of a divine stroke of judgment. (Compare Isaiah 37:35-36.)

- * The reader may learn the difference between God's actings in grace at the present time and His ways in righteousness in the age to come, by the contrast between the Lord's dealings with Saul of Tarsus, who persecuted His saints, and His judgment upon these nations who shall have fought against Jerusalem. The former He converted, the latter He will destroy.

Moreover, we are told, "And it shall come to pass in that day, that a great tumult 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." (v. 13.) A panic, for such is the force of the word "tumult," shall seize upon the nations who will be besieging Jerusalem, like to that which fell upon the Midianites when attacked by Gideon and his three hundred men, or that other which came into the host of the Ammonites, the Moabites, and the Edomites, who were advancing against Judah in the days of Jehosaphat (2 Chr. 20), so that the huge host will melt away, and be mutually des-

troyed. "And Judah also shall fight at Jerusalem, and the wealth of all the heathen round about shall be gathered together, gold and silver, and apparel, in great abundance." (v. 14; compare 2 Chr. 20:15.) In this way will Jehovah enrich His beloved Judah, hitherto oppressed and persecuted, but now delivered and blessed; and then they will be able to take up in truth the words of one of their psalms, "Thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried. Thou broughtest us into the net; thou laidst affliction upon our loins. Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place." (Psalm 66:10-12.)

From the following verse we learn that even the cattle — the horse, the mule, the camel, and the ass, together with all the beasts "that shall be in these tents" (v. 15) — will be smitten with the same awful plague as that which will destroy their owners. Truly it is a fearful thing to be found identified with the enemies of the Lord, and an impossible thing to escape His arm when He once rises up to judgment.

The remaining verses of the chapter suppose the establishment of Messiah's throne, inasmuch as He is named the King. Jerusalem therefore has been delivered from the hand of her en-

emies; judgment has been executed upon those that have fought against her; the Redeemer has come to Zion, and has ordered all things in accordance with His own mind in the establishment of His righteous throne. This having been done, Zechariah speaks now of the consequences for the nations. "And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the Lord will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the least of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles." (vv. 16-19.) The several points of this ordinance must be touched upon in detail. In the first place, it will be a law in Messiah's kingdom that all nations shall come annually to Jerusalem for worship. Isaiah will probably include this in his larger statement, when he says, "And it shall come to pass that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to an-

other, shall all flesh come [it is not here said "to Jerusalem"] to worship before me, saith the Lord." (Isa. 66:23.) Zechariah deals only with the anniversary of the feast of tabernacles. And it should be specially observed that this coming up of the nations year by year is not to be a matter of choice or privilege, great as the privilege will be, but they will be put under the obligation and necessity of making this annual journey. Herein is seen again the difference between grace and law, Now at the present time it is the attraction of grace that draws believers to worship their God and Father; but in the kingdom it will be the compulsion of righteousness. Now it is, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10); then it will be, that "the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish" (Isa. 60:12); for when the King commands, His subjects must obey.

There is, secondly, a twofold object in this universal assemblage. First, to worship the King, the Lord of hosts. The King, as we know, is no other than Jesus of Nazareth, of whom the angel said, when announcing His birth, that the Lord God should give unto Him the throne of His father David (Luke 1); and yet, as the Spirit of God delights to indicate, He is also Je-

hovah Sabaoth, the Lord of hosts. He, then, that was once down here as the Root out of a dry ground, with no form nor comeliness to the natural eye, the lowly Nazarene, shall in the coming age, as the exalted and glorified One, as King over all the earth, be the object of the adoration and worship of all nations. In the very contemplation of this time of blessing for this poor weary earth, well might we say with the psalmist, "Blessed be His glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with His glory; Amen, and Amen." (Psalm 72:19) In connection with this annual worship there will be also the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. The Passover and Pentecost, as often observed, have had their antitypical fulfilment in Christianity; but the Feast of Tabernacles still waits for its accomplishment, because it was a figure of millennial joy; and, as held on the eighth day (Lev. 23), it betokened also that this joy will be shared in by the saints in resurrection. It is primarily Israel's feast of joy when they shall have ended their wanderings in the wilderness, and will be in the possession of the land. And, as another has observed, it "took place after the increase of the earth had been gathered in, and as we learn elsewhere ... after the vintage also; that is, after separation by judgment, and the final execution of judgment on the earth, when heavenly

and earthly saints should be all gathered in;" and when therefore Christ Himself shall be the spring and centre of all the joy, for it will be the time of His manifestation to the world. (John 7) Then, as we read in Psalm 22, "all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee." (v. 27); and all alike, both Israel and the nations, in the rejoicing of that day will gladly own that the King, the Lord of hosts, is the source and means of all the blessing which will fill their hearts to overflowing with adoration and praise.

But, as before shown, it will not be a perfect scene and hence thirdly, there is the proclamation of penalties for those who refuse to yield obedience to the King's laws. Rain will be withheld, with all its consequences of barrenness and famine, from the families of the earth who do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King; and upon the family Egypt, who are not dependent on rain, if they "go not up," there shall be the plague; that is, we apprehend, the pestilence. In such ways will the King vindicate His authority, and punish the transgressors of His laws.

The last two verses bring before us the positive character of holiness that will distinguish the Lord's house and Jerusalem and Judah. "In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts." (vv. 20, 21.) Formerly there had been clean things and unclean, holy and unholy, but now all such distinctions shall be abolished, inasmuch as all alike will be holy as separated unto the Lord. Now at length Jehovah's own requirement, "Ye shall be holy; for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44), is met and satisfied, so that even the horses, unclean as they were under the law, have written upon their bells or bridles, "Holiness to the Lord."* The pots in the Lord's house, moreover, should be as holy as the bowls before the altar; and every pot in Jerusalem and Judah should be alike "holiness unto the Lord of hosts," and thus should be used by the worshippers for their sacrifices. The homes of the people shall be in that day as holy as the house of the Lord. In Christianity this is anticipated in another way (see 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 2 Cor,

6:14-18; Col. 3:17; 1 Peter 1:15-16, etc.); but this will be a universal consecration of all and everything to the Lord here upon the earth. Finally there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord. Jehovah's house had often been profaned by the introduction of such (see Ezekiel 44:6-7); but now, secured and sanctified by the presence and glory of Jehovah Himself, all will be maintained in the holiness suited to Him who has condescended to make it His dwelling-place. Then will be fulfilled the word of the Lord by Ezekiel, "My tabernacle also shall be with them; yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And the heathen shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore.

- * It is very interesting to observe in this connection that the Lord Jesus, and the armies that follow Him out of heaven, are represented in the Apocalypse as riding on white horses, white because a symbol of perfect purity. (Ezek. 37:27-28.)