

## The Prophecy of Zephaniah (6)

—H. L. Rossier

### Chapter 3 (Continued)

#### *Spiritual Condition of the Remnant*

When the last phase of their restoration has been reached, what we read in Zechariah 14:6 and Micah 5:3 will become a reality for the nation of Israel. The small, tried remnant that has remained behind in Jerusalem will then find shelter in the name of the Lord. And finally, when the feet of Christ again stand on the Mount of Olives, the unfaithful part of the nation will be removed; they shall flee from the midst of Jerusalem. It will be hit by the blows of God's wrath, but the small remnant will with shouts of joy meet their long-awaited King (Zech. 14:3-5). "The remnant of Israel shall not work unrighteousness, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: but they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid" (v. 13).

Here we find the description of the spiritual condition of the remnant. The sorrow and the humiliation, added to their faith in the name of Christ, whom they will see coming as their Saviour in glory, will be accompanied by the absence of sin in their behaviour, with truth and uprightness. Then they will feed and lie down without anyone making them afraid. That will no longer be the partial rest, such as that of Judah's remnant (ch. 2:7), but a general rest of the entire remnant. Because their enemies have been destroyed, every cause of fear will be gone and *no one* will make them afraid any longer. All those blessings — and this we ought to notice well — follow after the destruction of the nations and apostate Jewry. Then they enter the blessings of the Millennium. The Lord will grant His people food, rest, and safety under the guidance of the Upper-Shepherd of Israel. We find the same tokens of grace in Psalm 23, but there in connection with the walk through the wilderness, the going through the valley of the shadow of death, and the persecution by the enemies. In this beautiful psalm, faith causes these blessings to be a reality beforehand in the midst of the innumerable difficulties, just as we saw at the end of Habakkuk's prophecy. In Zephaniah faith is finally rewarded and changed into seeing. Then the reign of peace begins for Israel's flock. Her bread is secured; it no longer sees the proud nation. Jerusalem is the safe habitation, a tent that will not be removed. And the remnant sees its King in His beauty! (Isa. 33:16-17, 19-20).

#### *Restoration under the Reign of the King*

*"Exult, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; rejoice and be glad with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem: Jehovah hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy" (vv. 14-15a).*

Then Jerusalem and Israel have reached the end of their trials and humiliation and have found pasture and undisturbed rest. Therefore they will be encouraged to raise songs of joy and to be wholeheartedly glad. The prophet Habakkuk, too, knew this song of joy when he sang on his stringed instruments, and his eye of faith saw this glorious moment beforehand. But in Zephaniah 3:14ff it is presented as if the Lord's flock has already *entered* its rest. The reality which God gives surpasses to a large degree the hope. In Psalm 3:6-7 and Psalm 4:8 we read that David, when he fled from Absalom, though experiencing the greatest trials, still laid himself down in peace and slept without fear. How much greater will the rest be for the people of Israel when it will be tasted in all its mighty reality!

What we, Christians, enjoy bears a heavenly character. We "rest in hope" and await "the rest that remains for the children of God." But that rest is, through faith, even now *our possession*. Soon we will enter it through the resurrection. Beforehand, however, we have tasted and enjoyed this rest in full assurance that it is ours. Hasn't it been written: "We will enter into the rest" (Heb. 4:3)?

The discipline that God had to execute over His people Israel, the punishments He had to impose on them to make them partakers of His glory, will soon be past for ever. "Jehovah hath taken away thy judgments, He hath cast out thine enemy" (v. 15). Thine enemy: not merely the hostile nations, but also the Antichrist, who will lead the nation to its ruin under the leadership of Satan himself, the great enemy of God's people.

"The King of Israel, Jehovah, is in the midst of thee; thou shalt not see evil anymore" (v. 15). He who before that time was in the midst of Jerusalem as Judge (v. 5) will then be present there as her King. More than that, as her God (v. 17). What a privilege. Not a single reason for Zion to be afraid, for it is no longer the God of Sinai who condescended to dwell in

Jerusalem, the God whose presence had to be one continual condemnation for Israel; no, this King, this God is the Saviour of His people: "Jehovah thy God is in thy midst, a mighty One that will save" (v. 17).

### *Foundation of Blessings*

Just as in other prophets, Zephaniah mentions the work of salvation that He has accomplished, and the foundations on which Millennial blessings can be established. Zephaniah, however, only shows how the Lord will restore Israel after a work of conversion in the heart of the remnant. To create a new people suited for the splendour of His reign, He will take the little ones of the flock. "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust; from the dung-hill He lifteth up the needy, to set *him* among nobles; and He maketh them inherit a throne of glory" (1 Sam. 2:8). "He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous, but with kings on the throne doth he even set them for ever; and they are exalted" (Job 36:7).

We can apply these words to the remnant when it will enjoy full fellowship with its King and Saviour.

*"In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear not; Zion, let not thy hands be slack. Jehovah thy God is in thy midst, a mighty One that will save: He will rejoice over thee with joy" (vv. 16-17).*

Then it will be possible to say: The remnant rests, and its King rests; the remnant is joyful of heart, and its Saviour exults over it with joy; the remnant utters shouts of exultation, and its Saviour is joyful over it with songs of triumph. *They* exult over the triumph that *He* has gained for them. *He* exults because He has gained it for them.

This sentiment will be mutual. The joy will be of a height equal to the circumstances of Christ's glorious reign. No more opposition, sufferings, offense, nor trouble. A perfect balance between the heart's condition of the faithful ones and their environment has been established. More than that, a glorious harmony between their feelings and those of their Saviour will exist. Their joy depends entirely upon Him; He is mighty, He is the Hero who saves. He exults over them whom He has redeemed after He so clearly has protected them during the days of their trouble. It will be the *ultimate deliverance*. In the past He was the Judge (v.5), then He will be the Conqueror and Saviour forever.

Zion will be a resting place forever (Ps. 132:14). His Assembly, His heavenly bride, the new Jerusalem, will also be His resting place. He will see the fruit of the travail of His soul, and be fully satisfied by it (Isa. 53:11).

In verse 17 we also read: "He will rest in His love." That will be the part *of Him alone*. Christ will rest in all the results of the great work that His love has undertaken. Then He will possess all that His heart has so greatly desired: a bride (here the Jewish bride), whom He has obtained at the cost of His suffering. She, for whom He gave up His own glory, will then be the centre of the new glory He has obtained as Man.

"Thou shalt be called," He says. "My delight is in her, and thy land, Married; for Jehovah delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married... With the joy of the bridegroom over the bride, shall thy God rejoice over thee" (Isa. 62:4,5). "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, *my* spouse... How much better is thy love than wine!" (Song 4:9,10). To obtain Jerusalem He has suffered, and He will be alone in the battle against the nations. To obtain His Assembly, He has, dying on the cross, triumphed alone over the prince of this world, Satan He has consecrated His entire priesthood to the cleansing of His bride during her sojourn here below, that He might present her to Himself according to all the longings of His heart, without spot or wrinkle, holy and blameless, to possess her forever.

### *True Children of Jerusalem*

*"I will gather them that sorrow for the solemn assemblies, who were of thee: the reproach of it was a burden unto them" (v. 18).*

This verse describes a supplemental characteristic of the remnant of Jerusalem, which in verse 12 was called "afflicted and poor." These are those who "sorrow for the solemn assemblies."

In trouble they will be kept from the Passover and the feast of tabernacles, just as the fleeing Jewish remnant. Their public and direct relationships with God will be interrupted. The faithful remnant that has been driven from Jerusalem will say: "They say unto me all the day, Where is thy God? These things I remember and have poured out my soul within me: how I passed along with the multitude, how I went on with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, a festive multitude" (Ps. 42:3-4).

After a period of relative rest, they will see how in Jerusalem the abomination of desolation is set up in the temple (Mt. 24:15) and because of it, they will flee. The worship service will end, the continual sacrifice taken away (Dan. 8:11). Although they will be deprived of all that in the past was their joy, they will yet be the true children of Jerusalem, of the city of God. This is why it says in verse 18: "who were of thee," in contrast with the unfaithful part of the people, which will follow the Antichrist. Psalm 87:4-5 says: "This [man, i.e. Christ] was born there" and "This one and that one [the faithful ones of the remnant] was born in her." But they will have a sign on their foreheads, just as the "men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that are done in the midst thereof" (Ezek. 9:4).

"The reproach of it was a burden unto them" (v. 18), just as it had burdened the Messiah (Ps. 69:20-21). But the Lord will bring them together, He will gather them and place Himself as the Shepherd of the flock at the head of them (Mic. 2:12-13).

### *The Best Hiding Place*

*"Behold, at that time I will deal with all them that afflict thee; and I will save her that halted, and gather her that was driven out; and I will make them a praise and a name in all the lands where they have been put to shame" (v. 19).*

The Shepherd of Israel will intervene: trouble and dispersion, fruits of their unfaithfulness, will only remain in their memory. So it will also be with the Assembly, who as a result of her unfaithfulness is scattered in all kinds of places. The Lord will gather them together in one moment and take her up into the heavenly mansions, where there will be only one flock and one great Shepherd of the sheep. What compassion, what love is there in His divine heart!

The poor are the subject of His loving care; He is the great Physician, just as He is the good Shepherd. He will set the crippled sheep free, for He knows the means of healing it. He will have a safe hiding place for those driven away, He Himself will be that hiding place, that refuge: "I will gather."

The nations had allied themselves to trouble Israel, to humiliate her, to cover her with reproach. The Lord will destroy these powers and execute His plans: *"At that time will I bring you, yea, at the time that I gather you; for I will make you a name and a praise, among all the peoples of the earth, when I shall turn again your captivity before your eyes, saith Jehovah" (v. 20).*

The prophet Micah announced the same things: "I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation; and Jehovah shall reign over them in mount Zion, from henceforth even for ever" (Mic. 4:7). This name, this praise they will not receive in the lands to which they had been driven. Everywhere, among all peoples of the earth, the fame of the Lord's people will be spread, for He will "turn their captivity."

"I will gather you." What a glorious prospect is this for us, Christians, as well, as it is for Israel!

As a just result of our unfaithfulness, Christendom is divided through our own fault, while it really was the intent of Christ's death to gather all into one unity. Humbly we wait, and, let us hope, with true remorse as well, for we have heaped so much dishonour on the name of our Redeemer! But hear, a cry reaches our ears: The day dawns in which we will be gathered together! The morning star arises in our *hearts*. Soon it will appear *in the heavens*. And afterwards the Sun of Righteousness will rise, lighting heaven and earth. Just as He will bring about a turn in Israel's lot, so He will do in ours!

With this beautiful portrayal of fellowship, joy, victory, and song of praise of eternal, glorious, and definite rest, Zephaniah's book concludes. He had to testify of Israel's sin, but he was also allowed to speak of its restoration, reconstruction, regeneration, of the new position that the new people will enter into, brought forth out of the womb of the dawn. The Assembly, too, will enter there, when "the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Mt. 13:43).

*The End*

### **The Lord's Voice**

—A. E. Bouter

The challenge for us today is to listen to the Lord's voice. This is the only real and effective solution for our problems. The source of all authority is God's truth, Christ's voice. Christ is the supreme King. A king according to God's thoughts is to maintain God's rights in this world. He is to represent Him, especially there where His rights are rejected and where He is despised and dishonoured. John's Gospel unfolds in a very special way the qualities and glories of our Lord Jesus, the greatness of His Person, even as King. In John 18:37 we learn that He has been born for a purpose: "I have come into the world that I might bear witness to the truth." The One who is in the bosom of the Father from all eternity stepped down into this world, but His humble appearance presented to the eye of faith His moral glories. What a mystery is His greatness: God and Man in one Person: God's King!

Pilate, the governor and judge, representative of the Roman Emperor, placed in authority over the Jews, was respected as such by the Lord (Mt. 22:21; in. 19:11). Although he had this place given by God (see Rom. 13), morally Pilate represented Satan, the prince and god of this world. However, in John 18:37 we see the Lord Jesus, the only true King and Judge, as God's true Representative, giving faithful witness to the truth. Here the accused One becomes the Accuser in bearing witness to the truth: "Every one that is of the truth hears My voice."

There is no doubt at all in the Lord's mind that He would have followers who were going to continue on the same path He had walked in this world. What a privilege it is to hear His voice! But to hear His voice requires a real love for Him who speaks, as well as a readiness to suffer for Him. Those who desire to be overcomers must hear His voice. And those who hear must daily give faithful witness to the truth. We cannot do so unless we first listen to the truth, to Him who is the Truth and who has given us the Spirit of truth. He is the Just One who has come to maintain God's rights in this world and to suffer for this cause (1 Pet. 3:18).

### *The Voice of the Son of God*

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, that an hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that have heard shall live" (Jn. 5:25). It is the voice of Him who spoke to Nicodemus at night about God's wonderful love, the Son of man who is in heaven, but who was also willing to become the Son of man who was to be "lifted up." That night He spoke about truth and light, and Nicodemus (Jn. 3:1-12) was brought to life by His voice! It is the same voice that spoke to the woman at Sychar's well, causing her to become a true worshipper (Jn. 4). What tremendous power is in His voice!

It is the voice of Him who healed the sick, the lame, and the blind, of Him who made them to live and walk for God's glory, to do God's will. It is this voice which called Lazarus back to life, thereby revealing the glory of God, and so the Son of God was glorified as well. It is the voice that called me to life: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that he that hears My word, and believes Him that has sent Me, has life eternal, and does not come into judgment, but is passed out of death into life" (Jn. 5:24). It is the voice of Him who communicates to us the depths of God's heart, the blessings of eternal life. It is the voice of the One who continually draws all men to Himself. And soon His voice will be heard once more in irresistible power to open the tombs for "those that have practiced good, to resurrection of life, and those that have done evil, to resurrection of judgment" (v. 29). John 11 gives us a preview of this. We meet there the Son of God and hear His voice of power. Although His works, His words, and even His blessed Person, had been rejected by the Jews, He gives, in entire dependence upon the Father and in full communion with Him, a testimony of His greatness and glory. The word "loud" in verse 43 has the sense of "great." The One who shortly afterward would use a great voice when laying down His life, and stepping voluntarily into death, is the Same who speaks now with a great voice, to bring Lazarus back to life.

With the same great voice He will execute God's judgments (Rev. 1:10), since the Father has given Him "authority to execute judgment also, because he is Son of man" (John 5:27). He fulfills what He said, "Wonder not at this, for an hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall go forth..." (vv. 28-29). There is this difference, though, that here He only calls for Lazarus, otherwise all would have come out. This is the voice that has brought us to life, and that leads us as His sheep, all on the basis of His own resurrection (Heb. 13:20f).

All God's promises will be fulfilled because of Him who has this tremendous resurrection power to introduce life in a scene of death. God places that which has value for Himself on the foundation of resurrection. When Lazarus came out, the people around were told what to do: "Loose him and let him go." No human arrangements, plans, or values can be maintained in the presence of the Son of God. The true liberty of the sons of God can only be enjoyed by walking and acting for God's glory in fellowship with the Father and the Son, obeying His voice.

### *The Shepherd's Voice*

"He calls His own sheep by name... He goes before them, and the sheep follow Him, because they know His voice" (Jn. 10:3f). The voice of the good Shepherd forms an unbreakable link between Himself and His sheep, a link based on His sacrificially laying down His life for them and taking it again. Without His death and resurrection, they would be wandering, always-straying sheep. But now they are His, and they know Him and His voice, and He knows them: "As the Father knows Me and I know the Father!" In this world, which is a wilderness wide, we could not survive without the voice of the Good Shepherd. It is not just the voice of Him who brought us to life, who introduced us into a blessed communion with the Father, it is also the voice of Him who brings us together, keeping us together in true unity. In His flock (which is not a closed system of rules and regulations, as suggested by "the fold"), there is no room for legalism, religiousness, Judaism, or worldliness. There is "merely" His voice — a wonderful "link" between the Good Shepherd and His sheep, a relationship which surpasses our understanding.

It is most important to realize that there exists not just an individual link between Him and us, there is also the thought of unity (one flock). All sheep are seen together, apart from any human bonds whatsoever, as being attracted to and led by His voice. This is closely related to the idea of union: all sheep are linked with the only good and true Shepherd. By His own power He attracts them to Himself and keeps them together in living communion with Himself and with one another. He introduces them, although they are still in this wilderness, to the enjoyment of eternal life: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give them life eternal" (Jn. 10:27f). The enjoyment of this is implied when He says, "Dine with Me" (Rev. 3:20).

### *The Spirit's Voice*

"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (Jn. 3:8 NASB). The Greek word translated "wind" is the same word elsewhere translated "spirit." In Genesis 1:2 we read that the "Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." In Genesis 1:1 the Holy Spirit is implied in "God created." God (the Hebrew word is in the plural, in a form that denotes more than two) is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as we know from the New Testament. Generally speaking, we suggest that the Father is especially in the foreground in connection with the plans of the Godhead; the Son is the One who executes these plans, doing so in the power of the Holy Spirit. A wonderful harmony and cooperation exists between Divine Persons in the Triune God. Thus, we may link "My voice" with the Spirit's voice.

The Holy Spirit has always played an important role in the realization of God's plans, and so it is today. In fact, without the Holy Spirit there would be no work of God in you or me. In John 3:3 we see how the Holy Spirit brings light into the soul: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (NASB). This new birth ("born again"), implies that life is coming from an entirely new source, from above. It is the result of the combined working of the living Word of God and the Spirit. Here "water" is not the water of baptism, which speaks of death, but rather the purifying work of the Word of God under the action of the Holy Spirit in the soul. Thus a newborn soul is introduced into the kingdom of God, the realm where everything is in harmony with God and under His control, and where all is characterized by love, God's nature (Col. 1:13).

The Spirit's voice is not to be subjected to human methods, experiences, or systems. The Spirit cannot be controlled by such, or measured or explained by human reasoning. He is entirely above them and acts independently of them. John 3, especially at the end of the chapter, shows how His voice prepares us for receiving heavenly blessings. These in turn prepare us to become true worshippers as well (Jn. 4:24; Eph. 1:3). Since Acts 2 we live in the age of the Spirit, whose mission it is to set Christ before the hearts of the believers and to glorify Him.

### *The Father's Voice*

"Father, glorify Thy name. There came therefore a voice out of heaven, I both have glorified and will glorify it again" (Jn. 12:28). When we fail to honour the Son, the Father will take care of this. The first time the Father's voice was heard at the Lord's baptism. On the mountain "such a voice" (2 Pet. 1:17) was heard only by true disciples, willing to do God's will. The last time it was heard at the end of the Lord's public ministry, just before the cross, the multitude of unbelieving Jews did not discern the voice from heaven (Jn. 12:29). Are we ready to hear the Father's voice? Or are we too much occupied with our own glory, efforts, plans, or ideas? In John 12 we read the Lord's last public discourse to the Jews. Earlier they had already rejected Christ's works (Jn. 5) and His words (ch. 8). He therefore started to lead His own sheep out of the fold (ch. 9-10), for they would hear His voice and obey Him. This is followed by a definite rejection of the Lord Himself (10:30-39). Yet, He showed the greatness of His Person once more, in raising Lazarus from the dead, which was the seventh sign in John's gospel. After this event, the Jewish leaders systematically planned Christ's death (ch. 11).

However, the Lord received a threefold and wonderful testimony regarding the greatness of His Person. First as the Son of God, He is honoured in the supper prepared for Him by Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. Secondly, His triumphal entry into Jerusalem shows the greatness of the King of the Jews. Thirdly, He is glorified as the Son of man (12:23-24), even the Father's voice is heard in support of the Son. Yes, the Father's voice glorified the Son, and this is the more remarkable since it had never been heard before by the public (Jn. 5:37). The Father had glorified His Son in giving Him power to raise Lazarus from the tomb. He would glorify Him again by raising the Son of man from among the dead, and by giving Him authority to lay down His life and take it again (Jn. 10:17-18; cf. Rom. 1:4).

### *A Voice Sheep Do Not Know*

"They will not follow a stranger, but will flee from him, because they know not the voice of strangers" (Jn. 10:5). In contrast to the Lord's, the Father's and the Spirit's voice — witnessed to by the prophet's (John the Baptist's) voice — this unknown voice is mentioned in John's ministry. Was it not the cause of the problems at the beginning of Church history that they had started to listen to a stranger's voice? In John 10, Christ's love, care, power, attractiveness, and faithfulness are demonstrated, in contrast to the "qualities" of thieves, robbers, wolves, strangers, and hirelings. Perhaps one of the most dangerous attributes of "strangers" is that they present themselves under the guise of the good shepherd, whereas they represent in reality the prince of this world and the god of this ("new") age, which is not so new after all. Most of the Epistles and part of John's Gospel have been written to give adequate answers to the claims of strangers and to unmask them (cf. also Paul's warnings in Acts 20:28-32).

In John 10:5 the Lord does not mean to say that the sheep should not know anything about these strangers. Obviously, the New Testament writers were well familiar with the subtle attacks of the enemy. However, they did not "know" the voice of strangers: there was no inward, conscious knowledge of this voice, no mental link with these doctrines, no response in their souls. The only response these writers could give related to the voice of the Good Shepherd. They showed, with a single eye and an undivided heart, that they knew His voice and were following Him, and only Him.

Despite the immense army of old and new "strangers" in sheep's clothing or would-be shepherds surrounding us today, we may rejoice in the voice of our Shepherd. A good remedy to be kept from the wiles of the stranger's voice is to be appreciatively occupied with the things our Shepherd has given us. "I am come that they might have life, and might have it abundantly" (Jn. 10:10). What wonderful resources we have here to enjoy! All the blessings of the heavenly land, of the Father's house, are made available to Christians, in order to make them overcomers. Still, we often are dissatisfied, unthankful, and murmuring like the people of Israel of old. This is a golden opportunity for the "stranger's voice." Let us not give him a chance.

### *The Lord's Voice from Heaven*

How much can we learn from a passage like Acts 9:4-6 (cf. Acts 22; 26; Gal. 1:15-17; 1 Cor. 15:8; 1 Tim. 1). There are three questions, one by the Lord in the glory and two by Saul. Each question contains important truths and lessons for believers, even if found in a Laodicean condition.

1. The first question, "Why dost thou persecute Me?" shows that that which is of the flesh always persecutes that which is of the Spirit. It also brings out the marvelous truth of the unity of the body of Christ: union between the glorified Lord in heaven, the Head of the body, and its members on earth. It implies the unity and interrelationship between the members as well. Do we realize and enjoy this truth?

2. The shocked and convicted Saul answers his own question, "Who art Thou, Lord?" In a sense the question cannot really be answered: the greatness of the Person of the Lord surpasses all definitions and descriptions. However, in a sense it is answered, namely in Paul's recognition of and submission to Christ's Lordship. Could it be that this attitude is lacking with us? Are we still impressed by His greatness and authority?

3. "What shall I do Lord?" The Lord has a plan for our lives, even for believers who have back-slidden. In the many and minute details of our daily lives, the Lord would like to see more of Himself displayed. Are we ready for this, ready for Him? Or are we still unwilling to bow to Him, kicking against the pricks? The union between Christians on earth with the exalted Christ in heaven is what characterized Paul's ministry, and we still need it. Today we also need — in a living and real way — the continuing enjoyment of the relationship found in John's writings. Though Paul presents Christ in heaven as the Object for believers, he does so by referring to Christ's life on earth, it being the perfect Model to follow. John shows that Christ is the true God and the eternal life (1 Jn. 5:20) and that He dwells in us while we are still on earth. Peter puts these things together in the context of the Kingdom of God; since the King was rejected, so are His followers. Peter,

who also was instructed by a voice from heaven (Acts 10:13,15), provides needed help for this situation as it involves sufferings. James and Jude present different lines of truth, but are in harmony with the other apostles. A renewed appreciation of these wonderful ministries, or in other words a real desire to hear the voice of the Lord through them, is what we need today.

### *The Voice of the Bridegroom*

"He that has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices in heart because of the voice of the bridegroom" (Jn. 3:29). In John's Gospel the personal glories of the Son of the Father, always in the bosom of the Father, are unfolded before our wondering eyes. The Eternal Son, made known to us in manhood, the Creator and Upholder of the universe, the Word become flesh, God and Man in one Person — unsearchable mystery! — is presented to us in His greatness and attractiveness.

Notice that John the Baptist speaks about the bridegroom. Is it possible to have a personal relation with this wonderful Person, a relationship of love with Him? In this passage we see how the One who is above all (Jn. 3:13, 30-35), in whose hand the Father has given all things, is called the Bridegroom. What a thrill for John's heart to hear Him, what a joy for him as a friend to be in His presence! What can we learn of this? Although John did not belong to the bride, he showed great admiration for the Bridegroom. Every Christian belongs to the bride of Christ and thus to the Bridegroom, therefore we ought to have more admiration and love for our Bridegroom than John had. In the world in which we live, everything is directed to make our love to the Lord cool down. Let us therefore pay attention to His voice and cultivate an intimate relationship with the greatest Person of the universe! Let us rejoice in the voice of the Bridegroom! Even when He has to correct or chastise (as we have seen earlier), His voice confirms His love toward us, who live in a scene where He is rejected.

Who can resist when He speaks, or refuse the voice of the Beloved? Again His greatness is set before us! Sometimes His voice may come to us in apparent weakness, this is because the Lord adapts Himself to our condition and situation, not because He lacks power! Compare "a soft gentle voice" in connection with Elijah's failure (1 Ki. 18:12). Thus the Lord adopted a condition of apparent weakness because of our lost condition, but He did so to overcome the enemy's power (cf. 2 Cor. 13:3-4). Let us be alert, so that we may discern and obey His gentle voice (Mt. 11:29-3), even when it takes much courage, as it will when it comes to separation from idolatry (Rev. 18:4; 2 Cor. 6:14-18). In conclusion I'd like to point out how Paul's glad tidings and the voice of the Bridegroom ("the preaching of Jesus Christ," Rom. 16:25) together present the mystery concerning Christ's wondrous Person. Surely, Christ is the sum-total of all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3; cf. Heb. 2:9).

### **Democracy in the Light of Scripture**

(Extracted from *Scripture Truth* Vol. 12, 1920, page 108.)

—F. B. Hole

(Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references in this article are taken from the King James Version.)

### *Imperialism and Democracy*

At the present time two great ideas prevail in the world, as far as its national, political, and social life is concerned. They are radically different, and upon the surface wholly inconsistent the one with the other, yet the present drift of things would lead us to suspect that a way may yet be found by which they shall be brought together in a certain kind of amalgamation; and the voice of the prophetic Scriptures confirms this expectation.

The two great ideas are, respectively, the democratic and the imperialistic. Both have fairly arrived on the scene.

Democracy presents itself to us as the finished product of the wisdom of the ages. History gives us, it may be said, the long and dismal record of human experiments in the art of government, and profiting by past experience the democratic idea has been evolved, and now holds the field amongst enlightened nations. It is — to use Abraham Lincoln's famous phrase — "Government of the people, by the people, for the people." In practice it comes to this, that the people are to be governed by a *majority* of the people — for they are never unanimous, and hence the minority must give way — and that majority should rule by its accredited representatives for the good of *all* the people and not for the majority's interests only. Whether it really does so is of course another thing.

The imperialistic idea has as its watchword that "union is strength." In national life it leads to groups of nations and powerful alliances and leagues. In politics it expresses itself in groups of parties to achieve together what they cannot hope to enforce singly. Socially it produces giant trusts, federations of industries, unions. It even threatens to appear in the religious world in the form of a federation of "churches." It is really a reversion to the old idea which animated the antediluvians in their schemes at Babel (See Gen. 11:1-9).

Our present concern is not at all with the political advantages or disadvantages of Democracy; we do wish, however, to get the light which the Word of God sheds upon it, thereby discerning its true character, and anticipating the sure end to which time will carry it.

In the first place, then, we must enquire of Scripture as to what God's way for the government of the earth may be. He has of course a mind on the subject, and the more clearly we apprehend it the more shall we be in a position to judge of any and every theory that man has proposed.

In the beginning, Adam, as yet unfallen, was placed in the position of sole authority. He was God's image or representative and had dominion over the lower ranks of created beings (Gen. 1:26). No thought of authority over other men comes in here. This point was not raised until sin had come in. His authority, such as it was, was absolute, and his responsibility was to God alone.

Sin having invaded creation, a long period elapsed during which there was no further authority delegated to man by God, and hence no man had any authority over his fellow men. That age terminated in the flood.

#### *Patriarchal Authority*

The first post-diluvial age opened, however, with a further delegation of authority. Noah and his sons after him were responsible to maintain God's rights in man, especially as regards the sacredness of human life (See Gen. 9:5-6). God hereby delegated to certain men authority over men even to the execution of capital punishment. Patriarchal authority was thus established.

Among those who soon thereafter cast off the fear of God, not liking "to retain God in their knowledge," as Romans 1:28 puts it, this authority evidently changed its form. It was no longer patriarchal in character, but fell into the hands of men of prowess and renown, such as Nimrod (Gen. 10: 8-10), and after the confusion of speech at Babel, nations with their "kings" appear (Gen. 12:15; Gen. 14:1-2).

However, those who still feared God adhered to the patriarchal order until God set His hand to deliver Israel from Egypt and raised up Moses. This marked a new departure. Moses was invested by God with an authority in the midst of Israel far beyond anything that Noah received. True, at first his authority was rejected. The wrongdoer "thrust him away saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?" (Acts 7:27) but we read also, "This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush" (v. 35). Moses was indeed "king in Jeshurun" (Dt. 23:5), but it was a kingship of an informal order. Properly speaking, Theocracy was established in Israel with Moses as the spokesman and mediator, and therefore in that sense king.

For centuries such authority as was administered in Israel was of that order, but the power of it declined; those who wielded it were far inferior in faithfulness and in force. "There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Dt. 34:10).

#### *Absolute Authority*

The resultant feebleness led to an outcry for a king like the nations (1 Sam. 8:5), and after the episode of the wilful king of the people's choice, God raised up David and established kingly authority on a proper basis. He was to be ruler over God's people, and the executor of judgment on their enemies (2 Sam. 7:8, 9). He was also to "feed" Israel His inheritance." So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands" (Ps. 78:71-72). David's authority was absolute, and he was to *rule*. He was to *execute judgment* if and as needs be, but also to feed his subjects and to *guide* them. His rule was to be absolute but wholly beneficent.

With the failure of David's descendants, the glory of this power structure departed, and at last God transferred authority into Gentile hands. It was entrusted first of all to Nebuchadnezzar, as stated in Daniel 2:37-38, and though the great king's dream, as recorded in that chapter, foreshadowed the changes that would supervene as to forms of government, yet it showed that the authority that lay behind government, whatever its form, would remain in Gentile hands until the sudden execution of divine wrath on all man's pride and abuse of the entrusted power should be an accomplished fact. Then should appear the kingdom which "shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44), and that kingdom is to be vested in the Son of man, who will wield absolute dominion for the blessing of men (Dan. 7:13, 9). He will be pleased, however, to take up and use in connection with His government the saints "of the Most High" or "of the high places" (vv. 18,22), and also a "people" who will possess the kingdom "under the whole heaven," i.e., on its earthly side. This people of course is Israel.

This rapid sketch of the course of government amongst men is enough to show that one feature marks it all through. The ultimate authority is always God — and God alone.

No man has any prescriptive right to exercise authority over his fellows except he has received it from God. Hence in such passages as Romans 14:1-6 and 1 Peter 2:13-15 obedience to the ruling authorities is enjoined upon the Christian. The Apostle Paul tells us "There is no authority except from God; and those that exist are set up by God" (JND).

### *The Practice of Earthly Power*

Turning now from government as presented to us in Scripture to the practice of it by those to whom it has been entrusted on earth, we immediately see that it has been terribly abused, as has all else that has been entrusted to fallen man. Tyranny and self-seeking have flourished everywhere, and history is a record of the long and painful struggles which have turned nations from one form of government to another, or have introduced modifications into their various governmental systems in the vain hope of evolving ideal conditions. Of all these changes, democracy is the latest, and its advent is not surprising to anyone who is versed in the abuses that gave it birth.

Comparing it not with its predecessors, however, but with the ideals of Scripture, which are to be fully realized in the millennial age, we see that it is more hopelessly condemned than any other form of government which has yet appeared because it frankly and unblushingly deposes God as the foundation and source of authority and puts man — i.e., "the people" — in His place. The gulf between these two is as wide as that between heaven and hell.

To the thoroughgoing Democrat only one question really matters, viz., What is the will of the people? To ask what may be *right* — *what*, in other words, may be the will of God, is quite irrelevant. What the people desire is regarded as the right thing, and a truly democratic government ought to carry out the people's desires, and to function as the humble servant of the people's will — whether right or wrong.

In this matter, as in all others, the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ provides the Christian with a supreme test. At that solemn hour, Pontius Pilate the governor was the representative of Caesar, and at his autocratic bar Christ was arraigned. Yet in an unusual moment of weakness, autocracy abdicated its functions. The record runs thus:

"When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it" (Mt. 27: 24).

"And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that He might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed. And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required" (Lk. 23: 23,24).

As Caesar's representative, Pilate washed his hands of the whole business, while, acting as executive officer of a democracy which held sway for just a brief hour: *he "gave sentence that it should be as they required."*

Viewed as an exercise of democratic principle, this might pass as all *right*. Viewed from every other standpoint, it was the most outrageous *wrong* of the world's history.

Reverting again to Nebuchadnezzar's dream as recorded in Daniel 2 we may now be better able to grasp the significance of the clay which entered into the image when the feet of it were reached.

Daniel's vision in Daniel 7 sets forth the course of the four great Gentile empires in their dealings among men, and they are pictured as wild beasts in their powers of destruction. Nebuchadnezzar's dream, on the other hand, gives us the same four empires but sets forth the character and quality of their governments. Therefore, what marks them is a steady deterioration in the metals that appear.

God started the "Times of the Gentiles" with an ideal form of government, though the man who wielded its power was far from ideal. That it was an ideal form is proven by the fact that God will revert to it for the millennial age, when the ideal Man appears, by whom He will "judge the world in righteousness." Then, all will soon be peace and blessing.

As the empires developed, men deviated from the golden ideal and introduced human modifications, and the government became silver, brass, and iron, as more and more divine thoughts were forgotten and human policies came to the fore.

In the last stage of the last empire, however — the Roman — we first find the introduction of clay — a non-metallic substance. This was an evident prediction that before the end a principle should be introduced into the prevailing governmental system that should be not as much a further modification of the old, as radically and fundamentally different one. Because of it "the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly broken" or "brittle" (Dan. 2:42, see margin). Daniel's interpretation of the clay and iron mixed is "they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay" (Dan. 2:43).

The "they" of this passage appears to mean those in whose hands authority for the time being rests.

A prediction of the uprising and prevalence of a democracy in the last days is evident here. The authority which finds its source in God and that which finds its source in man are as different from one another as gold, or iron, or any other metal are from clay. The two things may be mingled — they are in part inextricably mixed in our modern theory and practice of government, but only weakness and brittleness is induced, and soon will come the death-blow administered by the stone "cut out without hands."

If any have difficulty reconciling what is said above with the prophecies concerning the coming Satan-inspired head for the revived Roman empire, we would ask them to remember that in practice the transition from democratic to imperialistic forms is very easy. Let a man of transcendent genius appear, who seems to embody in himself the very spirit of "the people," and nothing is easier than for him to assume for himself the powers that theoretically belong to the people, and the people, fickle and easily led, will be glad to have it so. The career of Napoleon I springing out of the French Revolution is a case in point. The coming "beast" of Revelation 13 rises "out of the sea," i.e., masses of people in a state of agitation and unrest.

It is therefore more than likely that this coming "super-man" will quite ardently uphold democratic institutions in theory whilst carrying on autocratic rule in practice — iron mixed with clay.

### *The Christian's Hope*

The reader who has patiently followed us up to this point may be inclined to ask what we hope to achieve in writing all this, if we have, as we say, no political ends before us. We therefore avow without hesitation that our aim is a far more thorough heart separation from this present evil world for ourselves and all believers.

We know full well that nothing but an abiding sense of the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord can effectually lift our souls above the level of the world and its thoughts, yet the exposure of world politics and schemes by the light of Scripture has its value, and this has been our present endeavour.

Second Peter 1:19 tells us that the lamp of prophetic scripture shines in a dark or "squalid" place. Let the lamp cast its rays on the much-vaunted principles of social democracy and how squalid they appear. The sticky clay may be gilded, but it certainly is not gold! The enlightened Christian will not waste much enthusiasm upon it.

And what clear light it sheds upon the vexed question of whether a Christian should vote and interest himself in politics generally! We are asked to accept the position of being a little cog in that machine called "the people" which has usurped to itself that function in the sphere of government which belongs to God alone. Shall we do it? YES! — if we believe in the modern humanistic "gospel" which humanizes Jesus and deifies man. But if we believe that salvation is not of the people but of the Lord, NO!

The world system is doomed. Let there be no hesitancy in our witness to this fact. Out of the impending catastrophe souls are being rescued by the abounding grace of our Lord. It is ours to seek them, bearing witness to our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us then not waste time in vain attempts to shore up the tottering fabric, but let us busy ourselves in that which is the great work which our Lord has allotted to us. To be thoroughly for Him and His interests is to be thoroughly outside the world system and its hopes.

We do not look for a perfected system of democracy, but for "the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body" (Phil. 3:20-21), and as for this earth, we look for the setting up of the kingdom of Christ by the God of heaven, which shall never be destroyed but shall stand for ever.