

The Book of the Prophet Zechariah (5)

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THE BOOK OF THE ORACLES OF GOD — Chapters 7-14

The Book of Visions dated from the second year of Darius; the second book, which now calls for our attention, dates from the fourth year of the same king. We give it the title: The Book of the Oracles of God. It is divided into three parts. The first part contains chapters 7 and 8, the second chapters 9-11, and the third chapters 12-14.

The Word of the Lord of Hosts — Chapters 7-8

Days of Fasting

The contents of chapter 7 stands in remarkable contrast to that of chapter 6. There we saw how the three witnesses of the Lord had come to Jerusalem. Here two chiefs, Sherezer and Regem-melech with his men, are sent by Bethel *"to supplicate Jehovah, and to speak unto the priests that were in the house of Jehovah of hosts, and to the prophets"*. The names of these chiefs seem to indicate that they occupied an office at the king's court. At any rate, their names differ totally from those of Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Josiah. Bethel had sent them to ask whether they ought to continue to observe the fast of the fifth month: *"Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done now so many years?"*

The people had instituted four days of fasting after the destruction of Jerusalem. The fast of the tenth month, when Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to the city (Jer. 52:4-5), the fast of the fourth month, when it was invaded (Jer. 52:6), that of the fifth month, in which the temple had gone up in flames (2 Ki. 25:8-9), and finally the fast of the seventh month prompted by the murder of Gedaliah by Ishmael, which caused the people to flee to Egypt (2 Ki. 25:25-26). It seems that the most important one had been the day commemorating the burning of the temple. When they saw that the new temple would soon be rebuilt, the question could arise whether it was still necessary to fast; yet there was some doubt about it, for in the fourth year of king Darius the temple was not yet completed (Ezra 6:15). The consecration had not yet been celebrated, although the temple already served as a place of worship. It seems as if the Lord would have approved of these days of fasting, for why should one not mourn over Jerusalem's calamities? But should one, now that better days dawned, cease to fast? The Lord answered by means of the prophet: *"And the word of Jehovah of hosts came unto me."* God calls Himself here: "Jehovah of hosts," for He could no longer be the God of Israel. This expression we read seventeen times in chapters 7 and 8. It is as if the Lord withdrew Himself into heaven, to remain there the God of the myriads of angels after His people had despised Him and deserved His wrath. God had said: "It is not My people; they will not receive mercy," therefore He called Himself the God of the heavenly host. But can the unfaithfulness of the people change God's nature in a single aspect? Absolutely not! God will execute His counsels of grace while maintaining His Son's rights to the possession of the earth.

What was the Motive for Fasting?

"Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and in the seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye really fast unto Me, even unto Me? And when ye ate, and when ye drank, was it not you that were eating and drinking? Are not these the words that Jehovah cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and at peace, and her cities round about her when the South and the lowland were inhabited?" (vv. 5-7).

Rather than answering Bethel's question, the Lord addressed the consciences of all, both people and priests, and inquired after their reason for fasting and mourning. Had they fasted unto the Lord or unto themselves? Had they mourned because the evil had come over themselves, because the evil resulted from the dishonour and shame they had rendered to God? The earlier prophets had announced judgment at a time when they still enjoyed rest and peace. Had they fasted then? Then it had surely been the time to sit in sackcloth and ashes so the Lord might remove His wrath. Nineveh, a Gentile city, had acted better than Israel, and God had not executed the predicted judgment (Jon. 3:5,10). No, they had fasted unto themselves and cried over their own calamity, but had failed to repent. They had lamented about their own fate rather than asking what caused God's judgments and mourning over their condition. To be sad about ruin is not the

same as humbling before the Lord. Fasting must be for Him; it must express our feelings of humiliation, because we have been unfaithful to Him from the very beginning. True humiliation will always bring us back to the point where our path deviated from God's path.

The Reasonable Demands of the Law

The word of the Lord came for the second time to Zechariah (vv. 8-14) to remind the people of what He had asked them by means of the earlier prophets. That was doubtless based on the law, but the Lord had softened the demands of the law to such an extent that the hearts of the people, if they still could obey, would find these demands neither too high, nor too severe. Was it too much to demand, as He wished them to: "*Execute true judgment, and show loving-kindness and mercies one to another, and oppress not the widow and the fatherless, the stranger and the afflicted; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart*" (vv. 9-10)? In short, the prophets had preached uprightness and love for the neighbour. In this time of decline, God, who loved them, had not even asked them to return love to Him. He only impressed upon them to leave their self-love, their selfwill, and to think of others and do the will of God. In chapter 8:17 the Lord still added to this a second reasonable demand of the law: "Love no false oath," meaning: do not use the Lord's name to affirm a lie. In chapter 5:3 we saw that a curse came over the people precisely because they had transgressed the very first principles of practical righteousness. This is how it always goes when man is placed under the demands of the law, no matter how lenient they are. Law can only bring one under a curse. But another day will come, the day of the new covenant, in which the law will be written in the hearts of the people, because the Lord has erased all their unrighteousness and given them a new heart. Then they will be placed under "the law of liberty," under which the new man will delight in doing God's will.

Grace Working Restoration

In chapter 8 the word of the Lord of hosts came for the third time to the prophet. Although *they* had "*laid the pleasant land desolate*" (ch. 7:14) — for they themselves had been the cause of its ruin — yet God's counsel of grace had not changed: "*Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great fury. Thus saith Jehovah: I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and Jerusalem shall be called, The city of truth; and the mountain of Jehovah of hosts, The holy mountain*" (vv. 2-3). The day would come in which God would again take up the cause of Jerusalem, for Zechariah does not speak about the entire nation, but about Jerusalem and Judah. Their disobedience would not in the least thwart God's counsels of grace.

Jerusalem would be called: the city of truth and the holy mountain. There would again be men and women of high age in the streets of Jerusalem, boys and girls would play on the streets and squares of the city (vv. 4-5). Then the Lord added: "*If it be wonderful in the eyes of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be wonderful in Mine eyes?*" (v. 6). A thing like this can only be brought about through grace, grace accompanied by power. And when we, Christians, like the remnant of Israel, look at the ruin that we have caused we too must say: Such blessings are impossible. But when we look upon God, we know that for Him nothing is impossible.

Call to Faithfulness

In verses 9-17 the Lord came back on the theme of the then-existing time, on "the day of small things." He encouraged the people when "*the foundation of the house of Jehovah of hosts, [the temple] was laid*" (v. 9). He told them — for they still were under the law — the same things He had commanded them through the earlier prophets (vv. 16-17; cf. Ch. 7:9-10). This way they would once again receive strength. They would become the true remnant if they returned to the mentioned moral precepts of the law. And just as they had been a curse among the nations, so they would become "a blessing" according to the promise once given to Abraham (v. 13; Gen. 12:2).

Let us apply these promises to ourselves. For us they were much easier to obtain, for we are not under law like Israel, that had thereby become unable to satisfy the divine demands. We possess new life and have the Holy Spirit as the power of this life. To us in particular the Lord can say: "Let your hands be strong." We know the love of Him who gave His life for us, and we are to give our life for our brethren (1 Jn. 3:16). That is far more than not imagining evil in our heart against our brother. Alas, we too have been unfaithful in our calling, just as the old people of Israel. But what the remnant from the captivity could not do — because, being confronted by the same demands of God, they [like us] always had their same human nature [to contend with] — we [through the indwelling Spirit] can do, even if we are only with a few in the midst of the ruin, by walking in newness of life, pleasing God with our actions.

The word of the Lord of Hosts came for the fourth time to the prophet (vv. 18-23). A day will come in which all the results of earlier unfaithfulness will be removed; then there will be no more sorrow or sadness; neither fasting of the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth month about the unsalvageable ruins. All these trials and experiences will have no more reason of existence but will be changed in "*joy and gladness, and cheerful gatherings*" (v. 19). "Grief, nor cry, nor distress shall exist anymore," and "He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Rev. 21:40). The prophet adds to this a promise regarding the nations and their relation to the Jewish people: "*Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: Yet again shall there come peoples, and the inhabitants of many cities; and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to supplicate Jehovah, and to seek Jehovah of hosts... In those days shall ten men take hold, out of all languages of the nations, shall even 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*" (vv. 20-23). The nations will go up to Jerusalem to worship, and acknowledge that once-humiliated nation that lay under God's judgment as the people of Immanuel, "God with us." We, Christians, may even now experience such a blessing when we are faithful in our testimony. Paul wrote to the assembly at Corinth, that when they would be gathered together in the power of the Holy Spirit, then an unbeliever coming in would be "convicted... judged of all; the secrets of his heart are manifested; and thus, falling upon his face, he will do homage to God, reporting that God is indeed amongst you" (1 Cor. 14:24-25).

Christ, King and Shepherd — Chapter 9-11
The Purpose of Prophecy. The King — Chapter 9

Relationship Between Fulfilled and Unfulfilled Prophecy

We have seen that the first part of the book of divine oracles (ch. 7-8) were characterized by the words: "The word of the Lord of hosts came to me." The second part, with which we will now occupy ourselves (ch. 9-11), like the third part, begins with the words: "*The burden of the word of Jehovah.*" This more external division has no doubt nothing to do with the deep significance of the presented subjects, but it is therefore not less important and worthy of attention.

We find in the ninth chapter a very remarkable example of the relationship between fulfilled and not-fulfilled prophecy, and it is important to say a few words about this.

Verses 1-8 refer to events that were still future when Zechariah pronounced them, for they occurred only 174 years after the fourth year of Darius (cf. Ch. 6:1). These predictions were literally fulfilled when the third empire under Alexander the Great destroyed the Persian empire. The battle at Issos (333 BC) opened the land of Hadrach.¹

The city of Damascus was mentioned as the first "dwelling place" on which the burden of the Lord "rested." It "rested" because the word pronounced against Damascus received its final fulfillment. Tyre resisted with might and main, but it was destroyed and burned. Afterward, before he tried to conquer Egypt, he conquered one Philistine city after the other, especially Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ashdod. Philistea was spared, particularly Jerusalem. Therefore it says: "*I will encamp about My house because of the army, because of those that pass by and that return*" (v. 8). Though most of these things were then literally fulfilled, yet one particular thing that the prophet added to it did not take place at all. "*The exactor shall not pass through them any more*" (v. 8). Since Alexander oppressors have continuously ruled over Jerusalem, beginning with the Roman Empire till the present-day rulers. This city has always been trodden down by the nations and it still has to wait for the day that she will be fully delivered from the oppressor's yoke. "*For now have I seen it with Mine eyes*" (v. 8). This word is confirmed by Isaiah 18, where we read that the unbelieving nation will be brought back to its land to come under the yoke of the antichrist. During that time, the Lord will remain "at rest," looking forward to the coming harvest time. At that time He will see it with His own eyes and deliver Jerusalem. This moment of the ultimate deliverance is described at the end of this prophecy and at many other places.

Lo, Thy King Cometh

Verses 1-8 are immediately followed by another, more remarkable word about the relationship between fulfilled and unfulfilled prophecy: "*Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion; shout, daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, thy King cometh to thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass*" (v. 9). The salvation verse 8 speaks of would take place at the Messiah's coming. But this latter fact has already been told; the King has entered Jerusalem, lowly and riding on an ass, a colt of an ass. That entrance into Jerusalem is told us in the four Gospels. Two of these quote this verse from Zechariah, taking what took place then as a fulfillment of it. Matthew 21:4 reads: "All this came to pass, that that might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying, Say to the daughter of Zion,

¹ This is the only time this name is found in the Bible. Likely it refers to Syria.

Behold thy King cometh to thee, meek, and mounted upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."

This verse does not mention the utterances of joy of Jerusalem. They are replaced by the simple statement: "Say to the daughter of Zion." Nor do we find the words: "He is just, and having salvation" (a Saviour). Only His lowly, meek character is mentioned, for, being rejected by the Jews, He did not show Himself then as the King of Righteousness. It would have meant their destruction. Nor did He show Himself as Saviour, for the salvation could only be found on the basis of His work accomplished on the cross. In the Gospels His entry into Jerusalem was a last offer of the Messiah to the nation for receiving Him of whom the prophets had spoken, but they did not want Him.

In John 12:15 this verse from Zechariah is quoted even shorter: "Fear not, daughter of Zion: behold your King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt." The joy of Jerusalem has been omitted, just as the character of Christ as Saviour. Even His lowliness is not mentioned here, for in this Gospel He is portrayed as the Son of God, of whose kingship the Father testified at the moment He laid down His life.

The prophecy of Christ's entrance into Jerusalem has therefore been fulfilled in part, but in its true character and fullness it will only take place in a future day. Only then Jerusalem will be delivered from the yoke of the oppressor and rejoice with glad songs of praise when its King, the King of righteousness and King of peace will have His victorious entrance there.

The two characteristics of His kingship will indeed be: righteousness and peace, for He will *"cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem"* (v. 10; cf. Mic. 5:10-11), and *"He shall speak peace unto the nations."* He will be the true Melchizedek. Even more: *"His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth,"* something that has never happened under the glorious reign of Solomon. And thus, the fulfilled prophecy is but a pointer to the future glory of Christ.

Deliverance

Speaking of Jerusalem, the prophet adds: *"As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant, I will send forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water. Turn again to the stronghold, prisoners of hope!"* (vv. 11-12) Here we find a few additional details about what will happen to the remnant at the moment that the King of glory will come to take His reign. The prophet alludes to what has happened to Jeremiah when he had encouraged the people to surrender to the Chaldeans: "Then they took Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon... which was in the court of the guard... in the dungeon there was no water" (Jer. 38:6). When Christ appears, He will deliver these prisoners, this small remnant that will then dwell in Jerusalem and of which a portion will have suffered martyrdom. The other faithful ones of the remnant of Judah, who will have fled when the idol will be placed in God's temple, will then be invited "to return to the stronghold," Jerusalem. All this is therefore still to take place.

The Maccabees

In verses 13-17 we again find the principles we have previously set forth. *"For I have bent Judah for Me, I have filled the bow with Ephraim; and I will raise up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and make thee like the sword of a mighty man. And Jehovah shall be seen over them, and His arrow shall go forth as the lightning; and the Lord Jehovah will blow the trumpet, and will march with whirlwinds of the south. Jehovah of hosts will defend them; and they shall devour, and shall tread down the sling-stones; and they shall drink, and make a noise as from wine; and they shall be filled like a bowl, like the corners of the altar"* (vv. 13-15).

In this portion we recognize the history of the Maccabees in their warfare against Greece, under the successors of Alexander. Here we see their battles, their victories, their resistance in Jerusalem, their faithfulness — at least that of the early Maccabees — the obvious help and protection with which God favoured them. On the other hand we find in Daniel 11:29-35 how they have suffered for their testimony, and were purified through their trials. Here we have therefore to do with a prophecy that has been fulfilled some three-hundred years after it had been pronounced. But it was only a forerunner of what we will find in chapter 10 about the time of the end and about the struggle of the princes of Judah against the future Assyrian. After the mention of the Maccabees, the end of chapter 9 takes us to the time in which "the King of Zion, who is a Saviour," will appear to His people and, from then on, recognize it as His flock: *"And Jehovah 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 upon His land"* (v. 16).

This glory of Israel, which will form the crown of the Messiah, will only be seen in the future, for in the entire period

between the Babylonian captivity and the future appearance of Christ in glory the Lo-Ammi (not-My-people) over Israel will remain.

The three great events of this chapter: the victories of Alexander, the entrance of the Lord into Jerusalem, and the victories of the Maccabees confirm in an excellent way that which is told us in the second Epistle of Peter: "Knowing this first, that the scope of no prophecy of Scripture is had from its own particular interpretation."

The Shepherds and the Flocks—Chapters 10-11

For Clarity's Sake

Before we will discuss these two chapters, we would once more like to draw the attention to a certain characteristic of Zechariah's prophecies, which, if well understood, will remove more than one obscurity encountered in the study of this prophecy. Indeed in this portion of Scripture things are found that "are hard to interpret." But for the greater part they become transparent and clear once one realizes that Zechariah in his prophecy generally links *without any transition whatever* Christ's first coming on earth with His future appearance for Israel. The entire interim period of the Assembly, which besides falls never within the framework of old-testament prophecy, is silently passed by. There is no indication at all to be found of one or the other period of time between the first and the second coming of the Messiah. Chapter 9, which we already dealt with, is in this respect a remarkable example. In it the King who would enter Zion is mentioned just as it has already occurred according to the Gospels. Immediately upon this, however, the Lord is rejected, but of this no trace is to be found in Zechariah. It is not difficult to discern in reading that this portion speaks of two events that are separated from each other by centuries. For immediately after the entrance we find the blessings for Israel that will flow from it, for the appearance as King in Zion is the sign of His reign.

Wrath and Compassion

In chapters 10 and 11 the Lord's past service on earth and His future presence in the midst of Israel are once again flowing together. At the beginning of chapter 10 it is mentioned that the blessing is near. *"Ask of Jehovah rain in the time of the latter rain; Jehovah will make lightnings, and he will give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field" (v. 1)*. There is no mention at all of the early rain, a picture of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. But before the second rain predicted by Joel in chapter 2:23-30 will come, the condition of Judah is described. *"For the teraphim have spoken vanity, and the diviners have seen a lie, and have told false dreams: they comfort in vain. Therefore they have gone away as a flock, they are in distress, because there is no shepherd. Mine anger is kindled against the shepherds, and I will punish the he-goats; for Jehovah of hosts visiteth His flock, the house of Judah, and maketh them as His majestic horse in the battle" (vv. 2-3)*. These verses are clear evidence of what we have maintained. The prophet returned to Israel's idolatry, showing its results. They had roamed as "a flock in need," the nations oppressed them and they had no shepherd to lead them. That was exactly the condition of the people at the Lord's first coming. He came to present Himself as Israel's Shepherd: "Jesus saw a great crowd, and He was moved with compassion for them, because they were as sheep *not having a shepherd*" (Mk. 6:34). After this the prophet said: "Mine anger is kindled against the shepherds, and I will punish the he-goats." When the Lord Jesus visited His flock, the house of Judah, He said: "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" while looking at them in anger. In chapter 11 we will see that these circumstances will repeat themselves in the last days. This portion, which doubtless has the first coming of Christ in view, is without transition connected to a future event, when the Lord's wrath will be kindled against the shepherds. Only then will He make the house of Judah to be "His majestic horse in the battle" (v. 3)

From this we must conclude that the relationship which Christ once had on earth to His flock will be followed in the last days by a resumption of that same relationship with Judah, a relationship that had suddenly been broken by the rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah. Only then the events will take place of which the end of this chapter speaks. These verses are therefore an example of the difficulty of which we spoke earlier. This is instructive as well, for from it we see that nothing can prevent the fulfillment of God's counsels. The ways leading to their fulfillment follow an unchangeable course. It is as with the sun that hides behind a cloud. A few hours later we see her appearing again; uninterrupted she continued her course, she is the same as before, although she now stands at a different point in the sky. There has been no delay in her course, nor has she changed direction. The void only exists in the eyes of men, who see the cloud while the sun is hidden from their view.

The Preeminence of Judah

"From him [Judah] shall come forth the cornerstone, from him the nail, from him the battle bow, from him every exactor together. And they shall be as mighty men, treading down the mire of the streets in the battle; and they shall fight, for Jehovah is with them, and the riders on horses shall be put to shame" (vv. 4-5). As we have seen in the previous chapter, the remnant of Judah will flee during the Great Tribulation, but afterward it will return to the land. The Lord will own it as the flock of which He will be the Shepherd. In that kingdom, Judah will take the first place, for from Judah the Christ has come forth. He is the cornerstone, the nail fastened in a firm place on whom all the glory of David's house will hang (v. 4; Isa. 22:23-24). The battle bow, every ruler in Israel, will come from Judah, according to Jacob's prophecy: "The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and to Him will be the obedience of peoples" (Gen. 49:10).

In those days the Lord will call upon Judah to resist the Assyrians. They will, after he has entered Palestine and conquered Egypt, be stopped by the remnant. Under the leadership of the seemingly powerless princes of Judah the remnant will gain one victory after another (Mic. 5:5-6).

In the last portion of this chapter (vv. 7-12) we no longer find Judah, but Ephraim, "the house of Israel" gathered out from the nations (predominantly from Assyria and Egypt), to be brought back into the land of Israel. From then on, it will, together with Judah, form one nation, the Lord's people (cf. Isa. 11:12-16; 27:12-13).

Who are the Flock of Slaughter?

Chapter 11:1-3 describes the judgment over Israel, the destruction by fire of all who will rule over the people, the high and mighty. It will fall primarily upon the *shepherds*, the leaders of the nation, against whom Christ's wrath will be kindled (ch. 10:3). The kingship had already been taken from these leaders, for rather than feeding the flock, they fed themselves (Ezek. 34:1-10). In the days of the Lord they all had displayed the same character. In the last days, when the nations will invade Judah, the shepherds of the nation will experience the same fate under the antichrist.

In verses 4-6 we see a *new shepherd* appearing in the person of the prophet Zechariah himself. This portion illustrates again the fact that the prophecy of Zechariah links without any transition Christ's first coming as Man on earth with His coming for the redemption of Judah and judgment over His enemies. This shows itself even clearer when one compares this portion with Ezekiel 34 which speaks only about the destruction of the wicked shepherds and the appearance of the Lord, the Son of David, as Shepherd of the sheep. In Ezekiel this appearance *refers only to the future* when the Lord will be acknowledged as the Leader of His people. Here we find something entirely different: "*Thus saith Jehovah my God: Feed the flock of slaughter; whose possessors slay them without being held guilty; and they that sell them say, Blessed be Jehovah! for I am become rich; and their own shepherds pity them not. For I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, saith Jehovah, and behold, I will deliver men, every one into his neighbour's hand, and into the hand of his king; and they shall smite the land, and I will not deliver out of their hand*" (vv. 4-6). Here Zechariah portrayed Christ as Shepherd, just as earlier Joshua and Zerubbabel had portrayed Him as Priest and King. This Shepherd who would appear so suddenly, after all shepherds of Israel have met their fate, has a special calling. He must feed the flock of slaughter. This flock will have three features: 1. Its possessors, the nations that oppress these sheep, will slay them to take advantage of their flesh, without feeling any guilt about this; 2. Those who sell them, the leaders of the people, will then have taken on the work of the nations; 3. Its shepherds, the secular or religious leaders, will not spare her. These three features characterized also the nation of Israel as the Lord found it at His first coming.

Personally I believe not at all that this flock of slaughter has reference to Judah's future remnant, as some have maintained. I see in them the Jewish people at the time the Lord Jesus was on earth. He was sent to Israel as Shepherd when the people were under the threefold yoke of the Romans, of Herod and their own leaders. Christ entered through the door into the sheepfold. He answered to all the characteristics required of a good shepherd; He appeared in grace in the midst of the people, moved with deep compassion. What He found there — indifference, enmity, hatred, open resistance which brought death to Him — will bring the last judgment over the nation: "I will not deliver [the inhabitants of the land] out of their hand" (v. 6). They will devour each other and finally *fall into the hand of their king*, the antichrist, who in prophecy is often called "the king." And the Shepherd whom they have rejected will no longer look at them.

"*So I fed the flock of slaughter, truly the poor of the flock*" (v. 7). In the midst of this flock of slaughter, to whom He came in vain to feed them, there were a few, the poor of the flock, who gathered around Him, hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd. These are the ones of whom He said: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens... blessed the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Mt. 5:3,5). Those were the characteristics of the disciples who surrounded the Lord during His walk on earth.

The Two Staves

"And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock" (v. 7). These two staves, signs of authority, but also shepherd's tools, have a significance as we will see in the following verses.

If the nation had at that time accepted its Messiah, the kingdom would have been established and the nations would have *assembled* around the King; as before, Judah and Israel, would again have become one nation under His scepter. But the enmity of the leaders, of those who pretended to be the shepherds of the flock, but who in reality were thieves and robbers, did not cease persecuting the Lord. Therefore it says: *"I destroyed three shepherds in one month; and my soul was vexed with them, and their soul also loathed me" (v. 8).* To what does this destroying of three shepherds refer? Some have seen in it the defeat of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Herodians during the last weeks of the Lord's life on earth (Mt. 22:15-16). Whatever it be, we must take it as a fact, even without having an explanation, on the authority of God's Word. *"And I said, I will not feed you: that which dieth, let it die; and that which perisheth let it perish; and let them which are left eat every one the flesh of another" (v. 9).* As a result of the enmity among the people, the Lord laid off His shepherd character and gave them over to ruin and destruction. For the time being He took leave of His privilege: *"And to Him will be the obedience of peoples" (Gen. 49:10).* He broke His staff Beauty, the covenant with all the nations; He also broke His staff Bands, the brotherhood between Judah and Israel (vv. 10,14). The general gathering together was delayed till a future time, as we read in Ezekiel 37:15-28. But *"the poor of the flock that gave heed to me knew that it was the word of Jehovah" (v. 11).* These poor, however were called "the wise ones," for they valued the person of the Lord. They understood that their Jewish expectations could not be realized while the King was rejected; they received the instruction as from Him in whom they had put their trust, when He answered their question: "Lord, is it at this time that Thou restorest the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Their Master had been rejected; a new order of things was about to begin, a thousand times more lofty than what these poor creatures had dared to hope for as long as their Master had been among them. Until that time they had hoped "that He was the One who would deliver Israel" (Lk. 24:21), but by the death and resurrection of the Saviour they were incorporated into the heavenly part of the kingdom, and they acknowledged that "it was the word of Jehovah."

The Value of a Slave

"And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my hire; and if not, forbear. And they weighed for my hire thirty silver-pieces. And Jehovah said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prized at by them. And I took the thirty silver-pieces, and cast them to the potter in the house of Jehovah" (vv. 12-13). This is how much they figured the shepherd of Israel to be worth! Thirty silver pieces was the value of a slave. The priests, who knew the Law and Prophets so well, fulfilled what the Scriptures had said of them. So did Judas (Mt. 26:15-16). God's Word will judge them in the last day.

The Foolish Shepherd

After this, Zechariah was called to portray another shepherd. *"And Jehovah said unto me, Take unto thee yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd. For behold, I will raise up a shepherd in the land, who shall not visit those that are about to perish, neither shall seek that which is strayed away, nor heal that which is wounded, nor feed that which is sound; but he will eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their hoofs in pieces. Woe to the worthless 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 utterly darkened" (vv. 15-17).*

This will be the result of the rejection of the Good Shepherd. The nation will be delivered into the hand of the foolish shepherd, the unworthy shepherd. All the compassion of the Lord toward those who are in danger of perishing, toward the scattered and the wounded ones, will find its mirror-image in the terrible tribulation with which the antichrist will oppress the flock of slaughter, the nation, that itself will have chosen this satanic man to be king. But he himself, the unworthy shepherd, will fall under God's judgment. His power will be destroyed and simultaneously he will be made totally blind, lest he sees what fate will suddenly come over him.

At the end of this chapter let us linger once more at the fact that the Lord is here portrayed as the Shepherd in Judah. There He only finds the poor who heed Him. He is rejected and delivered for thirty silver pieces. Then, as a result of this rejection, suddenly a foolish shepherd appears on the stage, without there having been any mention, not even with one word, of the entire period between these two events.

To be cont'd

The Breaches In The Wall (2)

Isaiah 22: 5-14.

—Hamilton Smith.

Three Great Movements Of The Spirit Of God

First, no true believer can ever cease to thank God for that mighty work of the Spirit in the early part of the sixteenth century by which we have gained an open Bible in a language to be understood, and the general knowledge of gospel truths by which the soul is saved and established in its individual relationships with God. The peace and religious liberty we enjoy today, we owe, under the good hand of God, to that noble band of reformers who in the face of deadly opposition, proclaimed the truths which in many cases cost them suffering, persecution, and a martyr's death.

We must not, however, make the Reformation the measure of divine truth. The movement, in the hands of men, essentially took a reforming character. It left believers associated together in reformed churches, but it in nowise attempted to gather believers after the pattern of the primitive Church. Indeed the question of the true nature and character of the Church was never directly raised by the Reformers. The Church was not in any true sense separated from the world; on the contrary, the reformation placed the Church, in general, under subjection to the State in order to free it from subjection to the Pope. The movement did not give Christ His place, in heaven, as the Head of the Church which is His body, nor did it give the Holy Spirit His place on earth as dwelling in and with believers as the House of God. National churches were instituted and, as it has been truly said, "Churches finding their limits in the circumference of the countries inhabited by those of whom they formed part, is that which the Word of God makes not the least allusion to. Such churches cannot either in fact or in affection be the Bride of Christ. They are necessarily in relation with the country wherein they are formed. The unity of the body of Christ is lost to them."

With the nationalization of churches there speedily set in the decay of vital power. The name and doctrines of Christianity were still adhered to as a creed, to which the natural man could subscribe, but only a few names left in the book of life (Rev. 3: 5). The great reformation movement has resulted in a vast number that profess Christ with comparatively few that have life in Christ. The movement which, in the power of God, commenced so brightly soon degenerated in the hands of men, into a system of orthodox profession of which the Lord has to say, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."

At the dawn of the eighteenth century this lifeless profession had reached its deepest depths of darkness and decline. "Natural theology without a single distinctive doctrine of Christianity, cold morality, or barren orthodoxy, formed the staple teaching in church and chapel. Sermons everywhere were little better than moral essays utterly devoid of anything likely to awaken, convert, or save souls." But when all was at the worst there was, amongst English speaking races in the early part of the eighteenth century, a second great movement of the Spirit of God, who wrought in mighty saving power. Evangelists were raised up to proclaim the glad tidings. Whitfield, Wesley, Grimshaw, Berridge, and many other earnest and devoted servants of the Lord went throughout the land warning sinners of judgment to come, arousing consciences to a sense of need, and bringing relief and salvation to thousands upon thousands through the preaching of Christ and Him crucified. We may truly thank God for this devoted band of preachers without shutting our eyes to the weakness of the movement in the hands of men. It is manifest that at its best it did not go beyond a gospel that aims to meet the need of man. It stopped short of that fuller gospel preached by the Apostle Paul that, entirely setting aside man in the flesh, links the believer with Christ in the glory, thus constituting the Christian a heavenly man. It brought blessing to the sinner, but left him in the world with the idea of making it a better, brighter place. As a result worldliness, ecclesiastical and political, became a prominent characteristic of the evangelical movement. In the sincere desire to reach the masses, every endeavour has been made to popularize the truth and make it more or less attractive to the natural mind. Every effort was made to impress the natural man by the aid of music and other human means. Hence the levity, and often even vulgarity, that so largely disfigures this movement today. Also, another great weakness of the movement is its individualism. Its great aim and end is the blessing of individuals; it presents no true conception of the Church whether in its formation, its present administration or its future glory. All these essential Christian truths are wholly outside the scope of the Evangelical movement. Souls are truly converted, for which we may thank God, but the movement as such leaves the converted souls in the various religious systems of men.

Coming now to the early part of the nineteenth century we find a third movement of the Spirit of God. Between 1829 and 1830 a few devoted Christians in Dublin seceded from the established Church and met together, at first in a private way, to remember the Lord in the breaking of bread and for prayer and study of the Word. Very shortly, in different parts of the United Kingdom, others separated from the National Church and independent bodies, and met together in a similar way in simple faith in God without any human leadership. Taking the Scriptures as their only and sufficient authority and in dependence upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they speedily learned the great truths concerning "Christ and the Church" which had been lost to the Lord's people from the days of the apostles. They realized that Christ is the Head of the

Church, and that all believers are members of one Body on earth united to the Head in heaven, and to one another, by the Holy Spirit. Having thus discovered the great central truth of the dispensation, at once every other truth received a fuller and deeper meaning. The gospel was seen and preached in its fullness. The prophetic Scriptures were opened up more fully and the coming of the Lord was seen to be the immediate hope of the Church. In connection with the revival of these truths there was a corresponding life of "good works" and separation from every form of worldliness. It is, however, of the first importance to see the distinctive character of this movement. It was essentially a separative movement. Hitherto the true people of God had been held captive in the great religious systems of men whether Papal, National, or Nonconformist. Though converted they remained in these religious systems. Now, for the first time, large numbers were set free from the bondage of these man-made systems. The reason of this separating action of the Spirit of God is clear. The moment had at last come when God, in His mercy, was about to revive the truth concerning Christ and His Church. Anyone instructed according to Scripture, will at once see that it was impossible to remain in connection with the systems of men, and, at the same time, hold and practice the truths concerning the Church whether viewed as the body of Christ or the House of God. It was indeed as with Israel of old; when the moment came to rebuild the House of God, it became an absolute necessity to set free a remnant of Israel from the mass of the nation in captivity, and bring them back to the Land, the true ground for God's people in that day.

Moreover, as with Israel of old the adversary attacked, both by subtlety and open hostility, the little remnant that sought to build the Lord's House, so the enemy set to work to mar the testimony of those who were again seeking to walk according to the principles of God's House. Alas! he has so far succeeded that this little remnant of God's people, who were once united in the truth, have by numerous divisions, been scattered and broken up into various companies. What then we may ask has been the cause of divisions?

The Cause of Divisions

We may well ask ourselves how is it that the enemy has been allowed to bring about these disastrous divisions among this little remnant of God's people? In order to understand the underlying causes of division let us remember there are two great facts on which hang all the distinguishing truths of Christianity which were recovered by this last movement of God. First that Christ is seated as Son of Man in the glory of God: second that the Holy Spirit as a Divine Person is dwelling in and with believers on the earth. We do not forget that every blessing enjoyed by the saints in this dispensation, as well as in the past and in the future, is secured by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, but the particular blessings which belong exclusively to Christianity are secured by these two immense facts, only true in this dispensation, that there is a Man in the highest place in glory, and a Divine Person on earth. By the Holy Spirit believers on earth have been united to one another to form that mystic body of which Christ in heaven is the Head. Then, as we have already seen, these truths, and all that they involve, can only be known in power by those who have taken a place in separation from the great religious systems of men which, by their constitution, their teaching, and their practice, are a denial of the truth of the Church as unfolded in Scripture. In the light of these truths we judge the root causes of all divisions will be found to lie in three solemn facts: 1st. We have failed to walk in the Spirit. 2nd. We have not held the Head. 3rd. We have not maintained that holy separation without which it is impossible to act in accordance with these truths.

This, however, calls for further explanation. The movement of the last century to which we have referred was essentially a spiritual movement. The return, in any measure, to the principles and practice of the great truths of the Assembly, as unfolded in the Epistles, was a return to ground on which there was no room for the activity and devices of religious flesh. It was ground which, being divine, could only be taken and maintained in the power of the Spirit. We cannot read the early chapters of the Acts without being struck by the fact that the Church on earth was not only formed by the Holy Spirit, but was maintained by men who were filled with the Holy Spirit, and acting in the power of the Spirit by spiritual means. On the day of Pentecost the disciples were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Brought before the rulers, Peter is filled with the Spirit when he confounds his opponents. Later we read, "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost and they spake the word of God with boldness." To meet the temporal needs of believers, men were appointed full of the Holy Ghost. The adversaries of Stephen could not resist the Spirit by which he spoke, and at his martyrdom "he, being filled with the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God."

From this rapid survey of these early scenes it is manifest that whether it was the formation of the Church, or the maintenance of the Church against the attacks of the enemy; whether it was preaching to sinners or ministering to the saints, all was one in the power of the Holy Spirit, and by men who were filled with the Spirit. There was an entire absence of all the religious machinery and carnal methods by which the varied religious systems of today seek to conduct their services and retain their hold on the people.

It must be plain that if all were walking in the Spirit, we should be perfectly joined together, in the same mind and in the

same judgment. There would be no occasion for a divided judgment. There may indeed be different apprehensions of divine truth — some see farther than others — but if controlled by the same Spirit all look in the same direction. There may be different views of the same object even as the Gospels present different views of the life of Christ, yet all are in perfect accord because presented by the same Spirit. (1 Cor. 12:4, 8, 9, 11).

What then is the cause of strife and divisions? Does it not lie in the fact that in the Christian there are two opposing powers, the flesh and the Spirit, and these are contrary the one to the other. To be in agreement with one another we must be controlled by the same power. If two Christians are controlled by the Holy Spirit they will be in accord. If both are controlled by the flesh they may be in accord. But if one is controlled by the Spirit and the other by the flesh there must be conflict, for "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." There must be strife when the flesh and the Spirit come into collision whether it be in an individual or in a company. (Gal. 5: 17)

Now the movement to which we have referred called for and necessitated a spirituality for which the mass were not prepared. So it came to pass with the increase of numbers there was a decrease of spirituality. The flesh acted and fleshly methods crept in with the result that there was collision between those seeking to walk together in the line of the Spirit and those acting in a more fleshly way. It has been truly said "the more we investigate, the better we shall see that the cause of strife generally between any two Christians is, that one has allowed human considerations of some kind to sway him, while the other, with a more single eye, considers for the Lord only."

Here then lies one great root cause of all divisions. We have not walked, nor held the truth, in the power and grace of the Holy Spirit; nor submitted to His guidance and control, with the result that there has been the increasing intrusion of the flesh, and its methods, leading to endless strife, confusion, and division.

There is, however, as we have said, another great cause of divisions; we have not held the Head. One has said, "While we have theorized about Christ as Head (and consequently as our Resource, instead of the machinery of the denominations) we have never known how to use Him when difficulty has come in. Where we should have referred the matter to Him, and waited for His solution, there has been the impatience and zeal of the flesh that would put forth its hand for the steadying of the Ark with the resultant smiting from the hand of the Lord." We have held the truth of the Head, we would have died for the truth, and yet all the time it may be, we have not held the Head. To hold the truth of the Head is merely to hold the doctrine, and so far right; but to hold the Head is to turn to the One who is the Head and use the resources that are in Him as the Head. We have made the mistake of looking for power and wisdom and guidance in the Church and our conceptions of it; and thus in our difficulties and perplexities we have looked to teachers, leaders, and gifted men in the Church, rather than to the One who is the Head of the Church and in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead. We have not turned to Him and spread out before Him all our difficulties and differences of judgment. With a measure of knowledge of divine principles we have assumed competency to apply these principles in the difficulties that have arisen, forgetting that however correct our principles they can only be rightly applied under the direction, and by the wisdom and perfect knowledge of the Head. We have discussed difficulties amongst ourselves, and trusted in men rather than in Christ the Head; with the result that we have been left very largely to our own devices. As we read of the godly Hezekiah, there came a moment in his history when "God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart" (2 Chr. 32: 31). We have failed to hold the Head and we have been "left" to do what is right in our own eyes, and the outcome has been sorrow upon sorrow and division upon division.

Moreover, have we not failed in the maintenance of that holy separation which in the beginning was such a prominent mark of this spiritual movement, and without which all else is in vain? In the history of the remnant who returned from the captivity to build the house of the Lord, the first attack of the enemy was an effort to break down their holy separation by the attempt to form an unequal alliance to do the work of the Lord (Ezra 4: 2). And so also in regard to those who, in obedience to the Word, have gone forth from the great religious systems which have been formed by sincere men after the pattern of the Camp (Heb. 13: 13), has there not been a constant effort by the enemy to entangle them again in these systems, and thus lead them to surrender or nullify the great truths concerning Christ and the Church which can only be held and enjoyed by a separated people? As we have seen with the remnant in the days of Ezra, the plea of service to the Lord's people and furthering the Lord's work, has been constantly advanced in order to justify a return to, or service in connection with, these corrupt religious systems in which so many of God's dear people are held in bondage. Those caught by this snare forget that the measure of our preparation for the Master's use is the measure of our separation from all that is contrary to the Lord outwardly and inwardly (2 Tim. 2: 19-22). We do well to remember that if we have separated from these systems in spite of true people of God being in them, it cannot be right to return to these systems because they are there. Furthermore, we must not forget that the Lord knows full well how to care for His beloved sheep wherever they may be found, and that He will not let them suffer because we, in obedience to His word and faithfulness to Himself, refuse to go back to the systems in which they may be found.

These then are, we believe, the great root causes of division: we have not maintained separation; we have not walked in

the Spirit; we have not held the Head. Moreover, a little thought will show that the root causes of the divisions that have marred this last great movement of the Spirit of God, are the same causes that brought all the ruin into the early Church. The practical setting aside of the Holy Spirit by fleshly expedients, the absolute ignoring of the Church's Head in heaven by setting up a visible head on earth, and the formation of unholy alliances with the world, are the outstanding sins of Christendom, which have involved the ruin of the Church on earth and are leading to the final apostacy. As we have seen, the Spirit of God, in the last century, led a great number of the people of God to separate from the systems of men to walk in the light of the truth as taught in the Epistles, and maintained in the Church at the beginning; but, alas, very soon there came breakdown in practice by falling into the failures of the Church in its early days, when it departed from first love and allowed the world a place inside. The result is, as with Israel of old, the enemy is at the gate and there are breaches in the wall.

To be cont'd