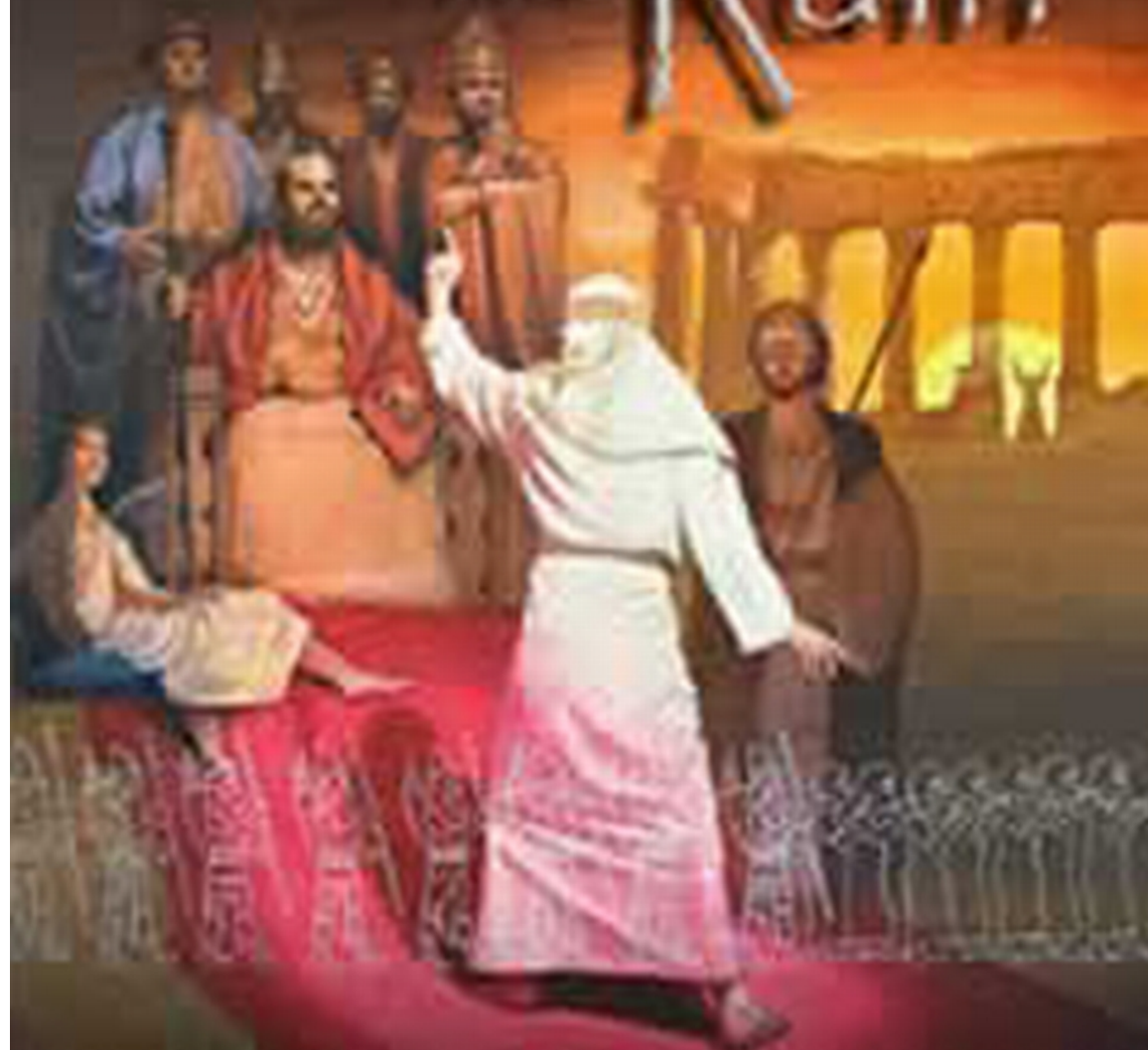


PROPHETS AND KINGS • AN ADAPTATION IN
TODAY'S LANGUAGE

ROYALTY, AND Ruin



CONFLICT OF THE AGES • ELLEN G. WHITE

Royalty and Ruin

Ellen G. White

2008

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About the Author

Ellen G. White (1827-1915) is considered the most widely translated American author, her works having been published in more than 160 languages. She wrote more than 100,000 pages on a wide variety of spiritual and practical topics. Guided by the Holy Spirit, she exalted Jesus and pointed to the Scriptures as the basis of one's faith.

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An adaptation in today's language of *Prophets and Kings*.

[3]

Contents

Information about this Book	i
Foreword	ix
The Glorious Destiny Israel Might Have Had	10
Solomon's Spectacular Beginning	13
Solomon's Dream From God	13
How to Succeed as a Leader	14
Solomon's Brilliant Success	14
Solomon's Magnificent Temple	16
The Surpassing Beauty of the Temple	16
God's Glory Fills the Temple at Its Dedication	17
Solomon's Prayer	17
The Lord Warns the King Against Backsliding	18
Israel's Greatest Glory	19
Prosperity and Pride Bring Disaster	21
The Warning and Solomon's First Wrong Step	21
Wealth and Fame Bring a Curse	22
Attractive Women Prove a Snare	22
None of Us Is Wiser Than Solomon	23
How Solomon Missed His Chance	25
Steps That Led to Apostasy	26
Visit of the Queen of Sheba	27
Another Gross Perversion of God's Plan	28
Christ and Solomon Contrasted	28
Solomon's Deep Repentance	30
A Prophetic Warning Startles Solomon	30
Solomon Acknowledges His Sin	31
Counsel to Youths	31
Only Obedience Keeps From Apostasy	32
The Effects of Solomon's Apostasy	32
Rehoboam's Arrogance: The Kingdom Torn Apart	34
The Mistake That Could Never Be Undone	35
Rehoboam Fails	36
The Aftereffects of Rehoboam's Apostasy	36
Jeroboam Leads Israel Back to Idol Worship	38
The King's Defiance Rebuked	38
How a Prophet Was Tricked Into Disobeying	39
God's Judgment on Jeroboam	40
National Apostasy Brings National Ruin	41
King Asa's Good Rule	41
A Remarkable Victory Gained by Trusting God	41
Ahab's Wicked Reign Begins	42

Elijah Confronts King Ahab	44
Priests of Baal Keep the People Deceived	45
Drought and Famine for Two Years	46
The Voice of Stern Rebuke	47
Hospitality Rewarded	47
Three Years of Drought	48
The People Are Finally Ready for Reformation	50
Brave Prophet, Guilty King	50
Need of Reform Today	51
God Vindicated on Mount Carmel	53
No One Has the Courage to Stand With Elijah	54
The Prophets of Baal Give Up	55
Fire From Heaven Answers Elijah's Simple Prayer	56
The Priests of Baal Unrepentant	56
The Prophet Loses Faith and Panics	57
Jezebel Threatens Elijah's Life	58
Elijah's Lack of Faith	58
Elijah's Complete Despondency	59
"What Are You Doing Here?"	61
Many Today Have Not Bowed to Baal	62
In Times of Weakness, Trust in God	63
God's Call to Modern Apostates	65
How Christ Upheld the Sabbath	66
Elijah Is Needed Today!	67
The Test That Will Come to All	68
Jehoshaphat, the King Who Believed God	70
Jehoshaphat Makes a Mistake	71
Armies That Threaten to Destroy Judah	72
A Battle Won by a Choir Singing	73
The Fall of the House of Ahab	75
Ahaziah Follows the Ways of His Father and Mother	76
Modern Satanic Forms of Worship	77
Jehu Takes the Kingship	78
Elisha Called to Succeed Elijah	80
A Young Man Who Rejected Christ's Call to Service	81
The Great Results of Elijah's Work	82
Many Will Be Translated Without Tasting Death	83
The Healing of the Waters	84
The Lord Still Heals the Bitter Springs	84
Elisha, Gentle Prophet of Peace	86
A Family's Hospitality Is Rewarded	86
The Poisoned Stew Made Edible	87
Captain Naaman Healed of Leprosy	89
A Captive Girl Encourages Naaman to Seek Healing	89
Elisha's Servant Has the Spirit of Judas	90

Elisha’s Closing Ministry	92
God Honors Elisha’s Prophecy	93
Elisha’s Message Reached the Honest in Heart	94
Talk Courage and Hope	94
Elisha’s Last Days	94
Elisha Faithful to the End	95
Jonah, the Prophet Who Ran Away	96
Jonah Cast Overboard	96
Jonah’s Day, and Ours	99
The Decline and Fall of Israel	101
Hosea’s Gracious Appeals	101
Judgments Held Back for a Season	102
Swiftly the End Came	103
A Nation “Destroyed for Lack of Knowledge”	105
Israel to Be “Wanderers Among the Nations”	106
Prophet With a Message of Hope	108
Isaiah Sent When God’s Plans Seemed to Be Failing	108
Final Success Assured	109
Isaiah’s Message: “Behold Your God!”	111
The Gospel to All the World	111
God Will Accept Unworthy Sinners	112
The Lord Will Receive You	112
Ahaz Almost Ruins the Kingdom	114
Great Peril for the Chosen Nation	114
King Hezekiah Repairs the Damage	117
Celebrating the Passover	118
The Reformation Spreads	119
Visitors from Babylon See the Wrong Things	120
Hezekiah’s Tragic Pride	121
Our Words Can Help Others	122
An Angel Destroys the Assyrian Army	123
Faith Inspires Faith	123
Judah’s Leaders Pray With Contrition	124
The Taunts of the Enemy	125
The Lord Responds to Judah’s Pleadings	125
Deliverance Comes	126
Lessons From the Proud Assyrian Empire	127
Isaiah’s “Good News” for All the Nations	129
The Captivity Brought “Good News” to Many	130
The Church Takes the “Good News” to the World	131
Manasseh and Josiah: the Worst and the Best	133
Josiah Resolves to Be True to His Trust	134
Habakkuk Bows in Submission to the Lord	134
Faith Will Sustain God’s People Today	135
The Long-lost Law Book Discovered	137

Young Josiah Does All He Can Do	138
The King Consults the Lord's Prophetess	138
Three-Hundred-Year-Old Prophecy Fulfilled	139
Jeremiah, the Man Who Felt God's Anguish	141
A True Prophet Always "Builds"	141
God's Marvelous Loving-kindness	143
Jeremiah's Courage Saves His Life	144
Jeremiah's Peaceful, Shrinking Disposition	144
Judah's Amazing Stubbornness	146
The Faithful Youth Were Encouraged	147
The Perversity of King Jehoiakim	148
How God Tries to Save Us	149
Jeremiah's Second Book	150
Zedekiah, Judah's Last King	151
Why Submission Was So Important	151
Jeremiah Opposed by Arrogant False Prophets	152
Ezekiel Shown Abominations in the Temple	153
Zedekiah Fails His Last Chance	155
A Vacillating King's Secret Rendezvous	155
An Ethiopian Saves Jeremiah's Life	156
Zedekiah Has No Moral Stamina	157
The Babylonians Respect Jeremiah	157
Not All Was Lost!	159
Jeremiah Overwhelmed With Temptation to Doubt	160
Encouragement When All Seemed Lost	160
The Church of God Comforted	161
The New Covenant Will Solve the Problem of Apostasy	161
Daniel, a Captive in Babylon	162
Idolatry and Seductive Temptation	162
Daniel Appeals to Another Authority	163
The Great Results of True Health Reform	164
The Secret of Daniel's Success	164
Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of World Empires	166
Daniel's Opportunity Has Come	166
Daniel's Refreshing Honesty	167
The King Is Humbled	168
Why Nations and Empires Fail	168
Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace	170
The Golden Image: The Eternal Glory of Babylon	170
The King Tries to Pressure the Hebrews	171
God in the Furnace	172
A Time of Trouble Such as Never Was	172
Nebuchadnezzar's Seven Years of Madness	174
The Attempt to Discover the Meaning	174
Nebuchadnezzar's Short-lived Repentance	175

Belshazzar's Feast: Babylon's last night	177
A Sign of Doom to the King and Guests	177
Daniel Holds the King's Sin Up Before Him	178
Interpretation of the Writing on the Wall	179
God's Restraining Hand Removed	179
Prophecy Fulfilled	179
A Power Overrides Human Affairs	180
Daniel in the Lions' Den	182
A Vain King's Remorse	183
Daniel Is Thrown in the Lions' Den	183
God Is Able to Deliver	183
Daniel the Same in Adversity or Prosperity	183
Cyrus Sets the Exiles Free	185
The Time Prophecy Unfolds	185
Faithful Daniel Identifies Himself With Unfaithful Israel	186
A Carryover From Israel's Ancient Unbelief	188
Bitter Opposition Fails	190
Why the Samaritans' Help Was Refused	190
God's People Must Guard Against Subtle Influences	191
The Battle Behind the Scenes	191
God's Work Grinds to a Halt	192
God Sends a Comforting Message	192
The Promise of Temporal Prosperity	193
The Encouraging Visions of Zechariah	194
Satan, the Accuser; Christ, the Defender	195
How Satan Works	196
Satan Tries to Discourage God's People	197
The Blotting out of Sins	198
The Secret of Success in God's Work	199
Human Ways Contrasted With God's Way	199
The True Glory of the Second Temple	200
Esther, the Hebrew Girl Who Became Queen	201
The Death Decree Against God's People	201
The Great Prayer Meeting	202
Ezra, the King's Trusted Friend	204
Ezra Studies to Show Himself Approved	204
Ezra Becomes a Mouthpiece for the Lord	204
The Third Decree Makes Complete Provision	205
God's Leading Evident in Artaxerxes' Decree	205
Only the Trustworthy Are Chosen	206
Ezra Sparks a Spiritual Revival	208
The Beginning of Reformation	209
The Cause of Corruption: Setting Aside God's Law	209
We Are Entering the Last Battle of the Controversy	209
Nehemiah, Man of Prayer and Action	211

Nehemiah Waits for God's Opportunity	211
God Gave Nehemiah Courage	212
Nehemiah Accomplishes the "Impossible"	213
How Nehemiah Won Support	213
Nehemiah's Example Wins the Day	214
Building With One Hand, Fighting With the Other	215
Nehemiah Bravely Rebukes Selfishness	217
The Gospel Can Cure Modern Economic Injustice	218
Union With the World Hinders God's Cause	219
God's Servant Sees Through the Plot	220
The Joy of Forgiveness and Healing	222
Nehemiah's Painful Work of Reformation	224
The Leaders Had Favored Wrong	224
Constant Struggle With Opposing Elements	225
"Nehemiahs" Today Lead Out in Sabbath Reformation	226
Darkness Precedes the Dawn	228
How the Sanctuary Services Revealed the Savior	229
The True Character of the Messiah Revealed	230
The Important Work: Deliverance From Sin	231
The Time of Christ's First Coming Specified	233
Where Is God's True Israel?	235
Malachi Reveals the Secret of Prosperity	235
How the Sanctuary Services Were Perverted	236
Israel Rejects Her Messiah	237
A Self-application	237
The Assignment to Spiritual Israel	238
Light Will Penetrate the World's Darkness	239
Visions of a Glorious Future	241
Human Pride Will Be Laid Low	242
The Resurrection From the Dead	242
What Life Will Be Like in the New Earth	243

Foreword

Does history have meaning? Does human life have lasting significance? Is God involved in events on earth?

To these questions the author of this book answers Yes. Then, with deep insight into providential workings, she draws the curtain aside and reveals a philosophy of history which shows that events among the nations have eternal significance.

This volume is an adaptation of *From Splendor to Shadow*, a 1984 condensed edition of Ellen G. White's classic volume, *Prophets and Kings*. The condensed volume included all the chapters of the original, using only Mrs. White's own words but shortening the account.

The current adaptation goes a step beyond this, using some words, expressions, and sentence constructions more familiar to twenty-first century readers. Most of the Bible quotations are taken from the New King James Version, which sounds much like the King James Version that Mrs. White used most often. It is hoped that readers who are new to Mrs. White's writings will enjoy this adaptation and will develop a desire to read the original editions of her works.

Royalty and Ruin begins with the account of Solomon's glorious reign over Israel. Here we review the history of a favored and chosen people, wavering between allegiance to God and to the gods of the nations around them. More importantly, in fascinating character studies of the kings, leaders, and prophets of a turbulent age, we find dramatic evidences of the raging conflict between Christ and Satan for the hearts of men and women. The book's final chapters tell of Christ's coming to the Jewish nation and the world as their true Royalty and of His reign that will finally undo all the ruin that humanity—royal or not—has brought on the earth through sin.

There are five powerful volumes in the "Conflict of the Ages" series, this book being condensed and adapted from the second of the five. That many more readers may be drawn to God through these books and their presentation of Bible themes is the hope and prayer of

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[6]

[7]

The Glorious Destiny Israel Might Have Had*

To bring the best gifts of Heaven to all peoples, God called Abraham from his idol-worshiping family and told him to establish his home in Canaan. “I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing.” **Genesis 12:2**. Abraham was called to a high honor—to be the father of the people who would preserve the truth of God, the people through whom all nations would be blessed by the advent of the promised Messiah.

People had nearly lost the knowledge of the true God. Idolatry had darkened their minds. Yet God in His mercy did not blot them out of existence. He planned that His people should live out the principles that would help to restore the moral image of God in human beings.

God’s law must be exalted, and He gave the people of Israel this great work. God separated them from the world and determined to preserve the knowledge of Himself through them. In this way all peoples would hear a voice appealing to them to turn from idol worship to serve the living God.

God brought His chosen people out of Egypt so that He might bring them to a good land that He had prepared as a haven from their enemies. In return for His goodness they were to glorify His name in the earth. He preserved them miraculously from the perils of the wilderness and finally established them in the Land of Promise as a favored nation.

With touching emotion Isaiah told the story of Israel’s call and training: “My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it; so He expected it to bring forth good grapes.” **Isaiah 5:1, 2**.

“The vineyard of the Lord of hosts,” the prophet declared, “is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant.” **Isaiah 5:7**. God’s people were walled in by the instructions of His law, the everlasting principles of truth, justice, and purity. Obedience was to be their protection, for it would save them from destroying themselves by sinful practices. God placed His holy

[8]

temple in the midst of the land, like the tower in the vineyard. Christ was their instructor, their teacher and guide. In the temple His glory beamed from the holy Shekinah above the mercy seat.

Moses had plainly shown the purpose of God and the conditions of their prosperity. “You are a holy people to the Lord your God,” He said. “The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.” “Today the Lord has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you, that you should keep all His commandments, and that He will set you high above all

* *Author’s Introduction*

nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to the Lord your God, just as He has spoken.” **Deuteronomy 7:6; 26:18, 19.**

God intended to draw people to Himself through Israel’s revelation of His character. The gospel invitation was to go to all the world. Through the teaching of the sacrificial service, Christ was to be uplifted, and all who would look to Him were to unite themselves with His chosen people. As Israel’s numbers increased, they were to enlarge their borders until their kingdom embraced the world.

But ancient Israel did not carry out God’s plan. The Lord declared, “I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality. How then have you turned before Me into the degenerate plant of an alien vine?” “Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; and break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will lay it waste.’ ... He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry.” **Jeremiah 2:21; Isaiah 5:4-7.**

By refusing to keep His covenant, God’s people would cut themselves off from His blessings. Often in their history they forgot God, robbed Him of the service He required of them, and robbed their neighbors of religious guidance and a holy example. Their covetousness and greed caused even the heathen to despise them. Their behavior gave opportunity to misinterpret the character of God and the laws of His kingdom.

With a father’s heart, God patiently set their sins before His people and waited for them to acknowledge their wrongs. He sent prophets and messengers to urge His claim, but instead of welcoming them, the people treated these men of wisdom and spiritual power as enemies. God sent still other messengers, but they too were hated and persecuted.

The withdrawal of God’s favor during the Exile led many to repent, yet after they returned to the Land of Promise the Jewish people repeated the mistakes of former generations and brought themselves into political conflict with surrounding nations. The prophets whom God sent to correct their evils, they received with suspicion and scorn. So from century

[9]

to century, the keepers of the vineyard added to their guilt.

Israel despised the choice vine that the divine Gardener planted on the hills of Palestine, and they finally threw it over the vineyard wall. The Gardener removed it and planted it again, but on the other side of the wall and in such a manner that the stock was no longer visible. The branches hung over the wall, and grafts might be joined to it, but God placed the stem itself where human power could not harm it.

Of special value to God’s church today—the keepers of His vineyard—are the messages given through the prophets. They clearly reveal His love for the lost race and His plan for their salvation. The story of Israel’s call, their successes and failures, their restoration to God’s favor, their rejection of the Master of the vineyard, and a remnant’s carrying out of His plan—this has been the theme of God’s messengers to His church throughout the centuries that have passed.

The Master of the vineyard is now gathering from among all nations and peoples the precious fruits for which He has been waiting so long. Soon He will come for them, and in

that glad day His eternal purpose will finally be fulfilled. “Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit.” **Isaiah 27:6.**

[10]

[11]

Solomon's Spectacular Beginning

In the reign of David and Solomon, Israel had many opportunities to exert a mighty influence for truth and right. Jehovah's name was exalted and held in honor. People from heathen lands seeking truth did not go away unsatisfied. Conversions took place, and the church of God on earth prospered.

Solomon became king in the closing years of his father David. His early life was bright with promise, and God intended that he would grow more and more like the character of God. In this way he would inspire the people to fulfill their sacred trust as God-appointed witnesses of divine truth. David knew that for Solomon to fulfill the trust with which God honored him, the youthful ruler must be not merely a warrior and statesman but a good man, a teacher of righteousness, an example of loyal obedience. David earnestly appealed to Solomon to be noble, to show mercy to his subjects, and in all his dealings with the nations to honor the name of God and to reveal in his life the beauty of holiness. "He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." [2 Samuel 23:3](#).

In his youth Solomon made David's choice his own, and for many years he lived in strict obedience to God's commands. Early in his reign he went to Gibeon, where the tabernacle built in the wilderness still was, and with his chosen advisers and "every leader in all Israel, the heads of the fathers' houses," joined in offering sacrifices to God and consecrating themselves fully to the Lord's service. [2 Chronicles 1:2](#). Solomon knew that those carrying heavy responsibilities must seek the Source of wisdom for guidance. This led him to encourage his counselors to unite with him in making sure that God accepted them.

Solomon's Dream From God

More than anything else on earth, the king desired wisdom and understanding, a compassionate heart, and a tender spirit. That night the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream and said, "Ask! What shall I give you?" In his answer the young ruler voiced his feeling of helplessness and his desire for aid. "You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. ... Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern

[12]

between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"

"The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.

"'Because you have asked this thing,' God said to Solomon, 'and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. And I have also

given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days.

“So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.” **1 Kings 3:5-14**; see also **2 Chronicles 1:7-12**.

The language Solomon used before the altar at Gibeon reveals his humility and his strong desire to honor God. In his heart there was no selfish longing for a knowledge that would raise him above others. He chose the gift that would enable his reign to bring glory to God. Solomon was never so rich or so wise or so truly great as when he confessed, “I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in.”

As people occupy higher positions, they exert wider influence and need to depend on God all the more. They are to stand before God in the attitude of a learner. Position does not give holiness of character. Honoring God and obeying His commands is what makes anyone truly great.

The God who gave Solomon the spirit of wise discernment is willing to grant the same blessing to His children today. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” **James 1:5**. The person carrying heavy responsibilities who desires wisdom more than wealth, power, or fame will not be disappointed.

How to Succeed as a Leader

As long as they remain consecrated, those to whom God has given discernment and ability will not be eager for high positions nor seek to rule or control. Instead of striving for supremacy, true leaders will pray for an understanding heart, to discern between good and evil. Leaders have no easy path. But they are to see in every difficulty a call to prayer. Strengthened and enlightened by the Master, they will stand firm against unholy influences and will discern right from wrong.

The wisdom that Solomon wanted more than riches, honor, or long life, God gave him. “God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore. ... For he was wiser than all men ... and his fame was in all the surrounding nations.” **1 Kings 4:29-31**.

“And all Israel ... stood in awe of the king, because they perceived

[13]

that the wisdom of God was in him, to execute justice.” **1 Kings 3:28**, NRSV. The hearts of the people turned toward Solomon. “Solomon ... was strengthened in his kingdom, and the Lord his God was with him and exalted him exceedingly.” **2 Chronicles 1:1**.

Solomon’s Brilliant Success

For many years Solomon maintained a clear devotion to God and strict obedience to His commands. He managed the kingdom’s business matters wisely. The magnificent buildings and public works that he constructed during the early years of his reign, the piety, justice, and spirit of generous grace that he revealed in word and deed, won the loyalty of

his subjects and the admiration of the rulers of many lands. For a time Israel was like a light to the world, displaying to others the greatness of Jehovah.

As the years went by and Solomon's fame increased, he did his best to honor God by adding to his mental and spiritual strength and by continuing to share with others the blessings he received. He understood fully that these gifts were granted him so that he might give to the world a knowledge of the King of kings.

Solomon took a special interest in natural history. Through a diligent study of all created things, both living and non-living, he gained a clear concept of the Creator. In the forces of nature, in the mineral and animal world, and in every tree, shrub, and flower, he saw a revelation of God's wisdom; and his knowledge of God and his love for Him constantly increased.

Solomon's inspired wisdom found expression in songs and in many proverbs. "He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five. Also he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree of Lebanon even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall; he spoke also of animals, of birds, of creeping things, and of fish." **1 Kings 4:32, 33.**

The proverbs outline principles of holy living and high ambition. Solomon spread these principles far and wide while recognizing God as the One to whom all praise and honor belong. This made Solomon's early reign a time of moral uplift as well as of material prosperity.

"Happy is the man who finds wisdom," he wrote, "and the man who gains understanding; for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her. Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand riches and honor." **Proverbs 3:13-16.** "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate." **Proverbs 8:13.**

If only Solomon in his later years had heeded these wonderful words of wisdom! He who had taught the kings of the earth to offer praise to the King of kings, in "pride and arrogance" took to himself the glory due to God alone!

Solomon's Magnificent Temple

For seven years Jerusalem was filled with busy workers leveling the chosen site of the temple, building huge retaining walls, laying broad foundations, shaping timbers brought from the Lebanon forests, and constructing the magnificent sanctuary. See **1 Kings 5:17**. At the same time the furnishings were being made under the leadership of Hiram of Tyre, “a skillful man, ... skilled to work in gold and silver, bronze and iron, stone and wood, purple and blue, fine linen and crimson.” **2 Chronicles 2:13, 14**.

The building on Mount Moriah went up noiselessly with “stone finished at the quarry, so that no hammer or chisel or any iron tool was heard in the temple while it was being built.” **1 Kings 6:7**. Its beautiful furnishings included the altar of incense, the table of showbread, the lampstand and lamps, with the vessels and instruments connected with the holy place, all of “purest gold.” **2 Chronicles 4:21**. The bronze altar of burnt offering, the laver supported by twelve oxen, with many other vessels—“in the plain of Jordan the king had them cast in clay molds.” **2 Chronicles 4:17**.

The Surpassing Beauty of the Temple

The palatial building Solomon constructed for God and His worship had no rival in its splendor. Adorned with precious stones and lined with carved cedar and smoothed gold, the temple with its rich furnishings was a suitable emblem of the living church of God on earth, which through the ages has been building with materials that have been compared to “gold, silver, [and] precious stones,” “sculptured in palace style.” **1 Corinthians 3:12; Psalm 144:12**. Christ is “the chief Cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.” **Ephesians 2:20, 21**.

At last the temple was completed. “All that came into his heart to make in the house of the Lord,” Solomon had “successfully accomplished.” **2 Chronicles 7:11**. Now, in order that the palace crowning Mount Moriah might indeed be a dwelling place “not for man but for the Lord God” (**1 Chronicles 29:1**), there remained the solemn ceremony of dedicating it.

The spot on which the temple was built had long been considered holy. Here Abraham had revealed

[15]

his willingness to sacrifice his only son in obedience to Jehovah's command, and here God had renewed the glorious Messianic promise of deliverance through the sacrifice of the Son of the Most High. See **Genesis 22:9, 16-18**. Here, when David offered sacrifices to stop the avenging sword of the destroying angel, God had answered him by fire. See **1 Chronicles 21:26**. And now once more worshippers were here to meet their God and renew their vows of allegiance to Him.

God's Glory Fills the Temple at Its Dedication

Solomon chose the Feast of Tabernacles for the dedication. This feast was above all an occasion for rejoicing. The labors of the harvest were over, and the people were free from care and could give themselves up to the joyous influences of the hour.

The multitudes of Israel, with richly-dressed representatives from many foreign nations, assembled in the temple courts. The scene was one of unusual splendor. Solomon, with the elders and influential men, had brought the ark of the covenant from another part of the city. The ancient "tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels" in it, had been transferred from Gibeon. **2 Chronicles 5:5**. These cherished reminders of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness now found a permanent home in the splendid building.

With singing, music, and great ceremony "the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the Lord to its place, into the inner sanctuary of the temple, to the Most Holy Place." **Verse 7**. The singers, dressed in white linen, having cymbals and harps, stood at the east end of the altar with one hundred twenty priests blowing on trumpets. See **verse 12**.

As "the trumpeters and singers" made themselves heard together "in praising and thanking the Lord, and when they lifted up their voice with trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, ... the house of the Lord was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God." **Verses 13, 14**.

Solomon's Prayer

In the midst of the temple court a brass platform had been built. On this Solomon stood, and with hands lifted up he blessed the vast multitude before him. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who has fulfilled with His hands what He spoke with His mouth to my father David, saying, ... 'I have chosen Jerusalem, that My name may be there.'" **2 Chronicles 6:4-6**.

Solomon then knelt on the platform, lifted his hands toward heaven, and prayed: "Heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built! ... May You hear the supplications of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and when You hear, forgive. ...

[16]

"If Your people Israel ... have sinned against You, and return and confess Your name, and pray and make supplication before You in this temple, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of Your people Israel. ...

"When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against You, when they pray toward this place and confess Your name, and turn from their sin because You afflict them, then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your servants. ...

"When their enemies besiege them in the land of their cities; whatever plague or whatever sickness there is; whatever prayer, whatever supplication is made by anyone or by all Your people Israel, when each one knows his own burden and his own grief, and spreads out his hands toward this temple: then hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, ... that

they may fear You, to walk in Your ways as long as they live in the land which You gave to our fathers.

“Moreover, concerning a foreigner, who ... has come from a far country for the sake of Your great name ..., when they come and pray in this temple; then hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, that all peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You. ...

“When Your people ... sin against You (for there is no one who does not sin) and You become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to a land far or near; yet when they come to themselves in the land where they were carried captive, and repent, and make supplication to You in the land of their captivity, saying, ‘We have sinned, we have done wrong and committed wickedness’; and when they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, ... then hear from heaven Your dwelling place their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive Your people who have sinned against You. Now, my God, I pray, let Your eyes be open and let Your ears be attentive to the prayer made in this place.

“Now therefore, arise, O Lord God, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength. Let Your priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, and let Your saints rejoice in goodness.” *Verses 18-41.*

As Solomon ended his prayer, “fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices.” The priests could not enter the temple because “the glory of the Lord had filled” it. *2 Chronicles 7:1, 2.* Then king and people offered sacrifices. “So the king and all the people dedicated the house of God.” *Verse 5.* For seven days the multitudes kept a joyous feast. They spent the week following in observing the Feast of Tabernacles. At the close of the celebrations the people returned to their homes “joyful and glad of heart for the good that the Lord had done for David, for Solomon, and for His people Israel.” *Verse 10.*

[17]

The Lord Warns the King Against Backsliding

Now once more, as at Gibeon early in Solomon’s reign, God gave him evidence of divine acceptance. In a night vision the Lord appeared to him with the message: “I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. ... For now I have chosen and sanctified this house, that My name may be there forever; and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually.” *Verses 12-16.*

If Israel had remained true to God, this glorious building would have stood forever, a perpetual sign of God’s special favor. “The sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants—everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, ... even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make

them joyful in My house of prayer. ... For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.” *Isaiah 56:6, 7*.

The Lord made the path of duty very plain before the king: “If you walk before Me as your father David walked, and do according to all that I have commanded you, and if you keep My statutes and My judgments, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom, as I covenanted with David your father, saying, ‘You shall not fail to have a man as ruler in Israel.’” *2 Chronicles 7:17, 18*.

If Solomon had continued to serve the Lord, his entire reign would have exerted a powerful influence over the surrounding nations. Foreseeing the terrible temptations that come with prosperity and worldly honor, God warned Solomon against apostasy. The beautiful temple that had just been dedicated, He declared, would become “a proverb and a byword among all peoples” if the Israelites “forsook the Lord God of their fathers” and persisted in idol worship. *Verses 20, 22*.

Israel's Greatest Glory

Strengthened and cheered by the message from Heaven, Solomon now entered the most glorious period of his reign. “All the kings of the earth” began to seek his presence, “to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart.” *2 Chronicles 9:23*. Solomon taught them about God as the Creator, and they returned with clearer ideas of the God of Israel and of His love for the human race. In nature they now saw a revelation of His character, and many were led to worship Him as their God.

Solomon's humility when he acknowledged before God, “I am a little child” (*1 Kings 3:7*), his reverence for things divine, his distrust of self, and his exaltation of the infinite Creator—all these traits of character were evident at his dedication prayer

[18]

when he knelt as a humble petitioner. Christ's followers today should guard against the tendency to lose the spirit of reverence and godly fear. They should approach their Maker with awe, through a divine Mediator. The psalmist has declared:

Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.

Psalm 95:6

Both in public and in private worship it is our privilege to bow on our knees when we offer our petitions to God. Jesus, our example, “knelt down and prayed.” *Luke 22:41*. His disciples, too, “knelt down and prayed.” *Acts 9:40*. Paul declared, “I bow my knees to the Father.” *Ephesians 3:14*. Daniel “knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God.” *Daniel 6:10*.

True reverence for God comes from a sense of His infinite greatness and a realization of His presence. The hour and place of prayer are sacred because God is there. “Holy and awesome is His name.” *Psalm 111:9*. Angels veil their faces when they speak that name. With what reverence, then, should we take it on our lips!

After beholding the vision of the angel, Jacob exclaimed, “The Lord is in this place, and I did not know it. ... This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!” **Genesis 28:16, 17.**

In what he said during the dedication services, Solomon tried to remove the superstition about the Creator that had clouded the minds of the heathen. The God of heaven is not confined to temples made with hands, yet He would meet with His people by His Spirit when they assembled at the house dedicated to His worship.

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord,
The people He has chosen as His own inheritance.
Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary; ...
You are the God that does wonders;
You have declared Your strength among the peoples.

Psalm 33:12; 77:13, 14

God honors the assemblies of His people with His presence. He has promised that when they come together to confess their sins and pray for one another, He will meet with them by His Spirit. But unless those who assemble to worship put away every evil thing, their gathering will be of no benefit. Those who worship God must worship Him “in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.” **John 4:23.**

Prosperity and Pride Bring Disaster

At first, as wealth and worldly honor came to him, Solomon remained humble. He “reigned over all kingdoms from the River [Euphrates] to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt.” “He had peace on every side all around him.” **1 Kings 4:21, 24.**

But after a morning of great promise, apostasy darkened Solomon’s life. He had received such remarkable evidences of God’s favor that his wisdom brought him worldwide fame. He had led others to give honor to the God of Israel. Now he turned from Jehovah to bow before the idols of the heathen.

Foreseeing the dangers that would come to the rulers of Israel, the Lord gave Moses instruction to guide them. “He shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom.” **Deuteronomy 17:19, 20.**

The Warning and Solomon’s First Wrong Step

The Lord especially cautioned anyone who might be anointed king not to “multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.” **Verse 17.**

For a time Solomon obeyed these warnings. His greatest desire was to live and rule in harmony with the laws given at Sinai. His way of administering the kingdom contrasted sharply with the customs of the rulers around him who trampled God’s holy law underfoot.

When he set about to strengthen relations with the powerful kingdom south of Israel, Solomon ventured on forbidden ground. Satan knew the results that would follow obedience, and he worked to undermine Solomon’s loyalty to principle and to cause him to separate from God. “Solomon made a marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt; he took Pharaoh’s daughter and brought her into the city of David.” **1 Kings 3:1, NRSV.**

From a human point of view, this marriage seemed to prove a blessing, for Solomon’s heathen wife united with him in worshipping the true God, and Solomon apparently

[20]

strengthened his kingdom along the Mediterranean seacoast. But in forming an alliance with a heathen nation and sealing the treaty by marriage with an idol-worshipping princess, Solomon rashly disregarded God’s provision for keeping His people’s purity. The hope that he could convert his Egyptian wife was a feeble excuse for the sin.

In His mercy, God overruled this terrible mistake for a time, and by following a wise course the king could have done much to stop the evil forces that his poor choices had set in operation. But Solomon had begun to lose sight of the Source of his power and glory. Self-confidence increased, and he reasoned that political and commercial alliances with

surrounding nations would bring these nations to a knowledge of the true God. Often he sealed these alliances by marriages with heathen princesses.

Solomon deceived himself into thinking that his wisdom and example would lead his wives to worship the true God and that the alliances would draw the nations into close touch with Israel. Foolish hope! Solomon made a fatal mistake by thinking he was strong enough to resist the influence of heathen associates.

The king's contacts with heathen nations brought him fame, honor, and riches. "The king made silver and gold as common in Jerusalem as stones, and he made cedar trees as abundant as the sycamores which are in the lowland." **2 Chronicles 1:15**. In Solomon's day an increasingly large number of people became wealthy, but the fine gold of character was marred.

Wealth and Fame Bring a Curse

Before Solomon was aware of it, he had wandered far from God. He began to trust less in divine guidance. Little by little he withheld unswerving obedience from God and followed more closely the customs of the surrounding nations. Yielding to temptations that came with his honored position, he forgot the Source of his prosperity. Money that should have been held in sacred trust for the worthy poor and to extend the principles of holy living throughout the world was selfishly absorbed in ambitious projects.

To glorify himself before the world, Solomon sold his honor and integrity. He imposed heavy taxes to supplement the enormous income acquired through trade. Pride, ambition, and indulgence bore fruit in cruelty and unjust demands. From the wisest and most merciful of rulers, he degenerated into a tyrant. The God-fearing guardian of the people became oppressive and despotic. He levied tax after tax to support the luxurious court. The respect and admiration that the people had cherished for their king changed into hatred and disgust.

Attractive Women Prove a Snare

More and more the king came to regard luxury, pleasing himself, and the favor of the world as marks of greatness. He brought hundreds of beautiful women from Egypt, Phoenicia, Edom, Moab, and other

[21]

places. Their religion was idol worship, and they had learned its cruel and degrading rites. Swept away with their beauty, the king neglected his duties.

His wives gradually got him to unite with them in their worship of false gods. "For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites." **1 Kings 11:4, 5**.

Opposite Mount Moriah, Solomon erected impressive buildings as shrines for idol worship. To please his wives, he placed huge idols in the groves. There before the altars of heathen deities, worshipers practiced the most degrading rites of heathenism. See **verse 7**.

Solomon's separation from God was his ruin. He lost the mastery of himself. His moral compass was gone. His fine sensibilities became blunted, his conscience seared. In his early reign he had displayed so much wisdom and sympathy in restoring a helpless baby to its unfortunate mother see **1 Kings 3:16-28**. Later he fell so low as to set up an idol to whom people offered living children as sacrifices! In his later years he departed so far from purity that he no longer opposed the sexcentered, revolting rites connected with the worship of Chemosh and Ashtoreth. He mistook license for liberty. He tried—but at what cost!—to unite light with darkness, good with evil, purity with impurity, Christ with Belial.

Solomon let his unholy passions rule, and he became the tool and slave of others. His character became effeminate. Atheistic doubts replaced his faith in God. Unbelief weakened his principles and degraded his life. The justice and generosity of his early reign changed to despotism and tyranny. God can do little for people who lose their sense of dependence on Him.

During these years of apostasy the enemy worked to confuse the Israelites in regard to true and false worship. He deadened their keen sense of God's holy character. The Israelites transferred their allegiance to the enemy of righteousness. It soon became a common practice to intermarry with idol worshipers. People accepted polygamy. In the lives of some, idolatry of the worst kind replaced the pure religious service God had instituted.

God is fully able to keep us while we are *in* the world, but we are not to be *of* the world. He watches over His children with a care beyond measure, but He requires undivided loyalty. "No man can serve two masters. ... You cannot serve God and mammon." **Matthew 6:24**.

People today are no stronger than Solomon; they are just as likely to yield to the influences that caused his downfall. God today warns His children not to risk their eternal life by joining with the world. "Come out from among them," He pleads, "and be separate. ... Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive

[22]

you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." **2 Corinthians 6:17, 18**.

None of Us Is Wiser Than Solomon

Throughout the ages, riches and honor have come with danger to humility and spirituality. It is not the empty cup that we have difficulty carrying; it is the cup full to the brim. Hard times may cause sorrow, but prosperity is most dangerous to spiritual life. In the valley of humiliation, where people depend on God to guide their every step, there is comparative safety. But those who stand, as it were, on a lofty peak and who are supposed to possess great wisdom—these are in the greatest danger.

Pride feels no need, so it closes the heart against the infinite blessings of Heaven. Those who aim at glorifying self will find themselves completely lacking the grace of God, through whose strength they may win the truest riches and the most satisfying joys. But those who give all and do all for Christ will find the promise fulfilled, "The blessing of the Lord makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it." **Proverbs 10:22**. The Savior banishes unrest and unholy ambition from the heart, changing strife to love and unbelief to confidence. When

Jesus speaks to the heart, saying, "Follow Me," He breaks the spell of the world's attraction. At the sound of His voice, greed and ambition flee from the heart, and we arise, set free to follow Him.

[23]

How Solomon Missed His Chance

Part of what led Solomon to oppress his people was that he failed to keep the spirit of self-sacrifice. At Sinai, when Moses told the people of God's command, "Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them," "everyone came whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing," and brought offerings. Building the sanctuary required a large amount of precious and costly material, but the Lord accepted only freewill offerings. "From everyone who gives it willingly with his heart you shall take My offering" was the command to the congregation. **Exodus 25:8; 35:21; 25:2.**

David made a similar call to self-sacrifice when he asked, "Who then is willing to consecrate himself this day to the Lord?" **1 Chronicles 29:5.** Those who constructed the temple should always have kept this call to consecration in mind.

For constructing the wilderness tabernacle, God gave special skill to certain men whom He chose. "The Lord has called by name Bezalel ..., of the tribe of Judah; and He has filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom and understanding, in knowledge and in all manner of workmanship ... to do all manner of work of the engraver and the designer and of the tapestry maker, ... and of the weaver. ... Bezalel and Aholiab, and every gifted artisan, in whom the Lord has put wisdom and understanding." **Exodus 35:30-36:1.** Heavenly intelligences cooperated with the workmen whom God Himself had chosen.

To a large degree, the descendants of these workmen inherited the talents given to their ancestors. But gradually, almost imperceptibly, they lost their hold on God and their desire to serve Him unselfishly. They asked higher wages because of their superior skill in the finer arts. Often they found employment in the surrounding nations. In place of their ancestors' noble spirit, they became covetous, grasping for more and more. To gratify their selfish desires, they used their God-given skill in the service of heathen kings and bent their talent to create works that dishonored their Maker.

Among these men Solomon looked for a master workman to oversee the construction of the temple. Detailed specifications for every portion of the sacred structure had been entrusted to the king, and he could

[24]

have looked to God in faith for consecrated helpers who would have received special skill for doing the work required. But Solomon missed this opportunity to exercise faith. He sent to the king of Tyre for a man "skillful to work in gold and silver, in bronze and iron, in purple and crimson and blue, who has skill to engrave with the skillful men ... in Judah and Jerusalem." **2 Chronicles 2:7.**

The Phoenician king sent Hiram, "the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre." **Verse 14.** On his mother's side Hiram was a descendant of Aholiab, to whom, hundreds of years before, God had given special wisdom for constructing the tabernacle. So at the head of his workmen Solomon placed a man who was not prompted

by an unselfish desire to serve God. The principles of selfishness were woven in the fibers of his being.

Because of his unusual skill, Hiram demanded large wages. Gradually, as his associates worked with him day after day, they compared his wages with their own, and they began to lose sight of the holy character of their work. The spirit of self-denial left them. They demanded higher wages, and they received them.

Steps That Led to Apostasy

The evil influences that began here extended throughout the kingdom. High wages enabled many to indulge in luxury and extravagance. The rich oppressed the poor; the spirit of self-sacrifice nearly vanished. The far-reaching effects of these influences became one of the principal causes of Solomon's terrible apostasy.

A deeply significant lesson lies in the sharp contrast between the spirit and motives of the people building the wilderness tabernacle and of those constructing Solomon's temple. Selfishness rules the world today. Everywhere people are seeking the highest position and the highest wage. We seldom see the joyous self-denial of the tabernacle workers. But this is the only spirit that should drive Jesus' followers. When He said, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" ([Matthew 4:19](#)), He offered those men no stated sum as a reward for their services. They were to share His self-denial and sacrifice.

We are not to make wages the goal in our work. Unselfish devotion and a spirit of sacrifice always will be the first requirement of acceptable service. Our Lord intends to have not one thread of selfishness woven into His work. We are to bring the same tact and skill, precision and wisdom to our efforts that God required of those who built the earthly tabernacle; yet we are to remember that the greatest talents or most splendid services are acceptable to God only when we lay self on the altar as a living sacrifice.

Another deviation from principle that led to Solomon's downfall was that he took to himself the glory that belongs to God alone. From the day that Solomon was entrusted with building the temple to its completion, his stated purpose was "to build a temple for the name of the Lord God

[25]

of Israel." [2 Chronicles 6:7](#). He expressed this purpose before the assembled people of Israel at the time the temple was dedicated. One of the most touching portions of Solomon's prayer was his plea to God for the strangers that would come from countries afar to learn more of Him. In behalf of these strangers Solomon had prayed, "Hear ... and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, that all peoples of the earth may know ... that this temple, which I have built, is called by Your name." [1 Kings 8:43](#).

One greater than Solomon was the designer of the temple. Those who did not know this fact naturally admired and praised Solomon as the architect and builder, but the king disclaimed any honor for its design or construction.

Visit of the Queen of Sheba

It was still this way when the Queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon. Hearing of his wisdom and the magnificent temple he had built, she determined to “test him with hard questions” and to see his famous works for herself. Attended by many servants, she made the long journey to Jerusalem. “And when she came to Solomon, she spoke with him about all that was in her heart.” Solomon taught her of the God of nature, of the great Creator, who dwells in heaven and rules over all. And “Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing so difficult for the king, that he could not explain it to her.” **1 Kings 10:1-3**; see **2 Chronicles 9:1, 2**.

“When the Queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, ... there was no more spirit in her.” She acknowledged, “It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. However I did not believe the words until I came and saw with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard.” **1 Kings 10:4-7**; see **2 Chronicles 9:3-6**.

Solomon had so fully taught the queen regarding the source of his wisdom and prosperity that she was compelled not to praise the human agent, but to exclaim, “Blessed be the Lord your God, who delighted in you, setting you on the throne of Israel! Because the Lord has loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness.” **1 Kings 10:9**. This is the impression that God intended to be made on all peoples.

If Solomon had continued to turn attention from himself to the One who had given him wisdom, riches, and honor, what a history might have been his! But, raised to the heights of greatness, Solomon became dizzy, lost his balance, and fell. Constantly praised, he finally permitted others to speak of him as the one most worthy of praise for the matchless splendor of the building that had been planned and built to honor the name of the Lord God of Israel.

So the temple of Jehovah came to be known throughout the nations as “Solomon’s temple.” The human agent had taken to himself the glory

[26]

that belonged to the One “higher than the highest.” **Ecclesiastes 5:8**. Even to this day the temple of which Solomon declared, “This temple which I have built is called by Your name” (**2 Chronicles 6:33**) is spoken of as “Solomon’s temple.”

We cannot show greater weakness than by allowing others to give us the honor for gifts that are Heavenbestowed. When we are faithful in exalting the name of God, He controls our impulses and enables us to develop spiritual and intellectual power.

Jesus, the divine Master, taught His disciples to pray, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.” And they were to acknowledge, “*Yours* is ... the glory.” **Matthew 6:9, 13**, emphasis supplied. Jesus was so careful to direct attention from Himself to the Source of His healing power, that the multitude, “when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing,” did not glorify Him, but “glorified the God of Israel.” **Matthew 15:31**.

“Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands

and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,' says the Lord." [Jeremiah 9:23, 24](#).

Another Gross Perversion of God's Plan

Another perversion of the divine plan accompanied the drift toward self-glorification. God had designed that the glory of His law was to shine forth from His people. To carry out this plan, He had placed the chosen nation in a strategic position among the nations of earth. In the days of Solomon the kingdom extended from Hamath on the north to Egypt on the south, and from the Mediterranean Sea to the river Euphrates. Many natural highways of the world's commerce ran through this territory, and caravans from distant lands were constantly traveling on them. Because of this, Solomon and his people had opportunity to reveal to all nations the character of the King of kings and to teach them to reverence and obey Him. Through the sacrificial offerings, Christ was to be uplifted so that all might learn about the plan of salvation.

Solomon should have used his God-given wisdom and influence in directing a great movement to enlighten those who were ignorant of God and His truth. Multitudes would have been won, Israel would have been shielded from the evils that the heathen practiced, and the Lord would have been honored. But Solomon lost sight of this high purpose. He failed to share the light with those who were continually passing through his territory.

A spirit of commercialism replaced the missionary spirit that God had implanted in the hearts of all true Israelites. People used the opportunities presented by contact with many nations to enrich themselves. Solomon set out to strengthen his position politically by building fortified cities at the gateways of

[27]

trade. He developed the commercial advantages of an outlet at the head of the Red Sea by constructing "a fleet of ships ... on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom." "The servants of Solomon" manned these vessels on voyages "to Ophir, and acquired ... gold from there" and "great quantities of almug wood and precious stones." [1 Kings 9:26-28; 10:11](#).

This greatly increased the kingdom's wealth, but at what a cost! Through the greed of those whom God had entrusted with His Word, the countless multitudes who crowded the highways of travel were allowed to remain ignorant of Jehovah.

Christ and Solomon Contrasted

In striking contrast to Solomon, the Savior possessed "all power" but never used this power to exalt Himself. No dream of worldly greatness marred the perfection of His service for others. Those who enter the service of the Master Worker should study His methods. He took opportunities to meet people along the great highways of travel.

In His journeys here and there, Jesus lived at Capernaum. Located on the highway from Damascus to Jerusalem and Egypt and to the Mediterranean Sea, it was well suited to be the center of the Savior's work. People from many lands passed through the city. There Jesus met people of all nations and all ranks, and they carried His lessons to other countries. This

awakened interest in the prophecies pointing to the Messiah and brought His mission before the world.

In our day, such opportunities are much greater than in the days of Israel. The routes of travel have multiplied a thousandfold. Like Christ, messengers of the Most High should take their position in these great routes, where they can meet the passing multitudes from all parts of the world. Hiding self in God, they are to present before others the precious truths of Holy Scripture that will take root and spring up into life eternal.

Solemn are the lessons of Israel's failure, when ruler and people turned from the high destiny God had called them to fulfill. In the ways that they were weak, today's representatives of heaven must be strong, for on them falls the task of finishing the work committed to God's people and of ushering in the day of final rewards. Yet the same influences that Israel faced when Solomon reigned are still with us. Only by the power of God can we gain the victory. The conflict calls for a spirit of self-denial, distrust of self, and dependence on God alone so that we may use every opportunity wisely for saving souls.

The Lord will bless His people as they advance unitedly, revealing to a world in error's darkness the beauty of holiness, shown in a Christlike spirit of self-sacrifice, in exalting God rather than anything human, and in loving service to those in need of the gospel.

Solomon's Deep Repentance

God gave Solomon plain instructions and wonderful promises, yet the Bible says, "He did not keep what the Lord had commanded." "His heart had turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods." **1 Kings 11:10, 9**. His heart was so hardened in transgression that his case seemed nearly hopeless.

From the joy of fellowship with God, Solomon turned to the pleasures of the senses. He says, "I made great works; I built houses and planted vineyards for myself; I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. ... I bought male and female slaves. ... I also gathered for myself silver and gold. ...

"So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. ... Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them; I kept my heart from no pleasure. ... Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun." "So I hated life. ... I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun." **Ecclesiastes 2:4-11, 17, 18, NRSV**.

By bitter experience, Solomon learned that life is empty when it seeks its highest good in earthly things. Gloomy, disturbing thoughts troubled him night and day. He no longer had any joy or peace of mind, and the future was dark with despair.

Yet the Lord did not forsake him. By reproof and severe judgments He tried to awaken the king to the sinfulness of his course. He permitted enemies to harass and weaken the kingdom. "The Lord raised up an adversary against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite." And "Solomon's servant, Jeroboam," "a mighty man of valor," "also rebelled against the king." **1 Kings 11:14, 26-28**.

A Prophetic Warning Startles Solomon

At last a prophet delivered to Solomon the startling message, "I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; I will tear it out of the hand of your son." **Verses 11, 12**.

Awakened as from a dream by

[29]

this sentence of judgment, Solomon began to see how foolish he had been. With mind and body enfeebled, he turned from earth's polluted water sources to drink once more at the fountain of life. Because he seemed unable to turn from folly, the fear of utter ruin had long troubled him. But now, in the message given him, he detected a ray of hope. God stood ready to deliver him from a slavery more cruel than the grave, and from which he had no power to free himself.

Solomon Acknowledges His Sin

In repentance Solomon began to retrace his steps toward the high position of purity and holiness from which he had fallen. He could never hope to escape the terrible results of sin, but he would humbly confess the error of his ways and warn others so that they would not be hopelessly lost because of the evil influences he had set in operation. The truly repentant person thinks of those he or she has led into evil and tries to lead them back to the true path. Such people do not gloss over their own wayward course, but lift the danger signal so that others may take warning.

Solomon acknowledged that “the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts.” “Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God. ... But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days.” *Ecclesiastes 9:3; 8:12, 13.*

By inspiration the king recorded the history of his wasted years with their lessons of warning. In this way his lifework was not wholly lost. With lowliness, in his later years Solomon “taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs.” He “sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright—words of truth.” *Ecclesiastes 12:9, 10.*

“Fear God, and keep His commandments,” he wrote, “for this is the whole duty of everyone. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.” *Verses 13, 14, NRSV.*

Counsel to Youths

Solomon's later writings reveal that as he realized more and more the wickedness of his actions, he gave special attention to warning the youth against the errors that had led him to squander Heaven's best gifts. With sorrow and shame he confessed that in the prime of manhood, when he should have found in God his comfort, his support, his life, he put idolatry in the place of the worship of God. And now his greatest desire was to save others from the bitter experience through which he had passed.

With touching appeals he wrote concerning the privileges before the youth: “Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these God will bring you into

[30]

judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity.” *Ecclesiastes 11:9, 10.*

Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth,
Before the difficult days come,
And the years draw near when you say,
“I have no pleasure in them.”

Ecclesiastes 12:1

The life of Solomon is full of warning. When his character should have been like a sturdy oak, he fell under the power of temptation. When his strength should have been the firmest, he was found to be the weakest. The only safety for both young and old is in watchfulness and prayer. In the battle with inward sin and outward temptation, even the wise and powerful Solomon was conquered. His failure teaches that whatever our intellectual qualities may be and however faithfully we may have served God in the past, we can never trust our own wisdom and integrity.

It is as true now as when Moses spoke to Israel about obedience to God's commandments: "This is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples." **Deuteronomy 4:6**. Here is the only safeguard for individual integrity, the purity of the home, or the stability of the nation. "The statutes of the Lord are right," and "he who does these things shall never be moved." **Psalm 19:8; 15:5**.

Only Obedience Keeps From Apostasy

Those who heed the warnings of Solomon's apostasy will shun the first approach of those sins that overcame him. Only obedience to Heaven's requirements will keep anyone from apostasy. As long as life lasts, we will need to guard the affections and passions firmly. Not for a moment can we be secure except as we rely on God, the life hidden with Christ. Watchfulness and prayer are the safeguards of purity.

All who enter the City of God will enter through the narrow gate, for "there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles." **Revelation 21:27**. But none who have fallen need to give up in despair. Aged men and women, once honored of God, may have defiled their souls, sacrificing virtue on the altar of lust, but if they repent, forsake sin, and turn to God, there is hope for them. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." **Isaiah 55:7**. God hates sin, but He loves the sinner.

The Effects of Solomon's Apostasy

Solomon's repentance was sincere, but he could not undo the harm that his example had brought. During his apostasy some people in the kingdom maintained their purity and loyalty, but the repentant king could not easily stop the forces of evil that idol worship and worldly practices had set in operation. He had greatly weakened his influence. Many hesitated to place full confidence in his

[31]

leadership. The king could never hope to destroy entirely the terrible influence of his wrong deeds. Made bold by his apostasy, many continued to do evil. And in the downward course of many of the rulers who followed him we can see the sad influence of Solomon's corrupting of his God-given powers.

In anguish as he reflected bitterly on his life choices, Solomon declared, "Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroys much good." "Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment, and cause it to give off a foul odor; so does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor." **Ecclesiastes 9:18; 10:1**.

Beyond our knowledge or control, our influence affects others in blessing or cursing. It may be heavy with the gloom of discontent and selfishness, or poisonous with the deadly taint of cherished sin; or it may be charged with the life-giving power of faith, courage, and hope, and sweet with the fragrance of love. But potent for good or for evil it will be.

One soul misled—who can estimate the loss! And yet one rash act, one thoughtless word on our part, may exert so deep an influence on the life of another that it will prove to be the person's ruin. One blemish of character may turn many away from Christ.

Every act, every word, will bear fruit. Every deed of kindness, of obedience, of self-denial, will reproduce itself in others, and through them in still others. So every act of envy, malice, or discord will spring up in a “root of bitterness” that will defile many. **Hebrews 12:15**. Thus the sowing of good and evil goes on through the centuries.

Rehoboam's Arrogance: The Kingdom Torn Apart

“Solomon rested with his fathers. ... And Rehoboam his son reigned in his place.” **1 Kings 11:43.**

Soon after coming to the throne, “Rehoboam went to Shechem,” where he expected to receive formal recognition from all the tribes, “for all Israel had gone to Shechem to make him king.” **2 Chronicles 10:1.** Among those present was Jeroboam, who during Solomon's reign had been known as “a mighty man of valor,” and to whom the prophet Ahijah had delivered the startling message, “Thus says the Lord, ... ‘I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and will give ten tribes to you.’” **1 Kings 11:28, 31.**

Through His messenger, the Lord had spoken plainly to Jeroboam. This division must take place, He had declared, because Solomon “has forsaken Me, ... and has not walked in My ways, doing what is right in My sight and keeping My statutes and My ordinances, as his father David did.” **Verse 33, NRSV.** Yet Jeroboam had also been instructed that the kingdom was not to be divided before the close of Solomon's reign: “I have made him ruler all the days of his life for the sake of My servant David, whom I chose because he kept My commandments and My statutes. But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand and give it to you—ten tribes.” **Verses 34, 35.**

Although Solomon had longed to prepare Rehoboam to meet the coming crisis wisely, he had never been able to exert a strong influence for good over his son, whose early training he had sadly neglected. Rehoboam had received the stamp of a weak character from his mother, an Ammonite woman. At times he tried to serve God, but in the end he yielded to the evil influences that had surrounded him from infancy. In the mistakes of Rehoboam's life and in his final apostasy we see the fearful result of Solomon's union with idol-worshiping women.

The tribes had long suffered under the oppressive measures of their former ruler. Extravagance had led Solomon to tax the people heavily and to require much lowly service. Before crowning a new ruler, the leading men determined to find out whether Solomon's son intended to lessen these burdens. “Jeroboam and all Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam, saying, ‘Your father made our yoke heavy; now therefore,

[33]

lighten the burdensome service of your father and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, and we will serve you.’”

Wanting to counsel with his advisers before outlining his policy, Rehoboam answered, “‘Come back to me after three days.’ And the people departed. Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who stood before his father Solomon while he still lived, saying, ‘How do you advise me to answer these people?’ And they spoke to him, saying, ‘If you are kind to these people, and please them, and speak good words to them, they will be your servants forever.’” **2 Chronicles 10:3-7.**

The Mistake That Could Never Be Undone

Dissatisfied, Rehoboam turned to younger men who had been his companions during his youth: "What advice do you give? How should we answer this people who have spoken to me, saying, 'Lighten the yoke which your father put on us?'" **1 Kings 12:9**. The young men suggested that he deal sternly with his subjects and make plain to them that he would tolerate no interference with his personal wishes.

So it happened that on the day appointed for Rehoboam to make a statement concerning his policy, he "answered the people roughly, ... saying, 'My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!'" **Verses 13, 14**. Rehoboam's expressed determination to increase the oppression of Solomon's reign conflicted directly with God's plan for Israel. In this unfeeling attempt to exercise power, the king and his counselors revealed their pride of position and authority.

Many people had become thoroughly alarmed over Solomon's oppressive measures, and these now felt that they had no other choice than to rebel against the house of David. "When all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, saying, 'What share have we in David? ... To your tents, O Israel! Now, see to your own house, O David!' So Israel departed to their tents." **Verse 16**.

The breach that Rehoboam's rash speech created proved beyond repair. The twelve tribes of Israel were divided. Judah and Benjamin composed the southern kingdom of Judah, under Rehoboam. The ten northern tribes formed a separate government, the kingdom of Israel, with Jeroboam as ruler. This fulfilled the prediction of the prophet that the kingdom would be torn apart. "The turn of events was from the Lord, that He might fulfill His word." **Verse 15**.

When Rehoboam saw the ten tribes withdrawing their loyalty from him, he realized that he must act. Through Adoram, one of the influential men of his kingdom, he made an effort to appeal to them and win them back. But "all Israel stoned him [Adoram] with stones, and he died." Startled, "King Rehoboam mounted his chariot in haste to flee to Jerusalem." **Verse 18**.

At Jerusalem "he assembled all the house of Judah with the tribe of

[34]

Benjamin, one hundred and eighty thousand chosen men who were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel, that he might restore the kingdom to Rehoboam. ... But the word of God came unto Shemaiah, ... 'Thus says the Lord, "You shall not go up nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel. Let every man return to his house, for this thing is from Me.'" Therefore they obeyed the word of the Lord." **Verses 21-24**.

For three years Rehoboam tried to profit by his sad experience, and in this effort he prospered. He built fortified cities "and made them very strong." **2 Chronicles 11:12**. But the secret of Judah's prosperity during the first years of Rehoboam's reign lay in recognizing God as the supreme Ruler. This is what gave the tribes of Judah and Benjamin an advantage. The record reads, "Those from all the tribes of Israel, such as set their heart to seek the Lord God of Israel, came to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the Lord God of their fathers. So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong

for three years, because they walked in the way of David and Solomon for three years.” **2 Chronicles 11:16, 17.**

Rehoboam Fails

But Solomon’s successor failed to exert a strong influence for loyalty to Jehovah. He was naturally headstrong, confident, self-willed, and inclined to idol worship. Nevertheless, if he had placed his trust wholly in God, he would have developed firm faith and submission to the divine requirements. But as time passed, the king put his trust in the power of his position and in the strongholds he had fortified. Little by little he gave way to inherited weaknesses until he threw his influence entirely on the side of idol worship. “When Rehoboam had established the kingdom and had strengthened himself, ... he forsook the law of the Lord, and all Israel along with him.” **2 Chronicles 12:1.**

The people whom God had chosen to stand as a light to the surrounding nations were seeking to become like the nations about them. As with Solomon, so with Rehoboam—the influence of his wrong example led many astray.

God did not allow the apostasy of Judah’s ruler to remain unpunished. “And it happened in the fifth year of King Rehoboam that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the Lord, with twelve hundred chariots, sixty thousand horsemen, and people without number who came with him out of Egypt. ... And he took the fortified cities of Judah and came to Jerusalem.

“Then Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and the leaders of Judah, who were gathered together in Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said to them, ‘Thus says the Lord: “You have forsaken Me, and therefore I also have left you in the hand of Shishak.”’” **Verses 2-5.** In the losses they suffered by Shishak’s invasion, the people recognized the hand of God

[35]

and for a time humbled themselves. “So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king’s house; he took everything. He also carried away the gold shields which Solomon had made. Then King Rehoboam made bronze shields in their place. ... When he humbled himself, the wrath of the Lord turned from him, so as not to destroy him completely; and things also went well in Judah.” **Verses 9-12.**

The Aftereffects of Rehoboam’s Apostasy

But as the nation prospered once more, many turned again to idol worship. Among these was King Rehoboam himself. Forgetting the lesson that God had tried to teach him, he fell back into the sins that had brought judgments on the nation. After a few inglorious years, “Rehoboam rested with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David. Then Abijah his son reigned in his place.” **Verse 16.**

At times during the centuries that followed, men of moral worth occupied the throne of David. Under their rulership the blessings resting on Judah extended to the surrounding nations. But no one ever entirely uprooted the seeds of evil already springing up when

Rehoboam ascended the throne, and at times the once-favored people of God were to fall so low as to become a symbol of scorn among the heathen.

Despite these idol-worshiping practices, God in mercy would do everything in His power to save the divided kingdom from complete ruin. And as the years rolled on and His plan for Israel seemed entirely defeated by people inspired by satanic agencies, He still showed His gracious intentions through the captivity and restoration of the chosen nation.

The tearing apart of the kingdom was only the beginning of a wonderful history that reveals the long-suffering and tender mercy of God. And the worshipers of idols, in the end, were to learn the lesson that false gods are powerless to uplift and save. Only in loyalty to the living God can anyone find rest and peace.

Jeroboam Leads Israel Back to Idol Worship

Under Solomon's rulership, Jeroboam had shown ability and sound judgment. His years of faithful service fitted him to rule with wisdom. But Jeroboam failed to trust in God.

His greatest fear was that his subjects might be won over by the ruler occupying David's throne. He reasoned that if the ten tribes often visited the ancient seat of the monarchy, where the temple services were still conducted as in Solomon's reign, many might renew their allegiance to the government at Jerusalem. He determined to reduce this probability with one bold stroke. Within his newly formed kingdom he would create two centers of worship, one at Bethel, the other at Dan. He would invite the ten tribes to worship God in these places instead of at Jerusalem.

In arranging this transfer, Jeroboam thought to appeal to the imagination of the Israelites by some visible object to symbolize the presence of the invisible God. He placed two calves of gold in shrines at the centers of worship. In doing this, he violated the plain command, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image. ... You shall not bow down to them nor serve them." **Exodus 20:4, 5**. He failed to consider the great peril of setting before the Israelites the symbol their ancestors had known during centuries of Egyptian slavery. His desire for the northern tribes to stop their annual visits to the Holy City led him to adopt the most unwise policy. "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem," he urged. "Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!" **1 Kings 12:28**.

The king tried to persuade the Levites within his realm to serve as priests in the new shrines at Bethel and Dan, but in this he failed. So he elevated men to the priesthood from "every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi." **Verse 31**. Alarmed, many of the faithful fled to Jerusalem, where they could worship in harmony with God's requirements.

The King's Defiance Rebuked

The king had boldly defied God in setting aside His appointed worship, and God did not allow this to pass without rebuke. During the dedication of the strange altar at Bethel, a man of God from Judah appeared before the king, sent to denounce him for daring to introduce new forms of worship. The prophet

[37]

"cried out against the altar ..., and said, ... 'Behold, a child, Josiah by name, shall be born to the house of David; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and men's bones shall be burned on you.'

"And he gave a sign the same day, saying, 'This is the sign which the Lord has spoken: Surely the altar shall split apart, and the ashes on it shall be poured out.'" Immediately the altar "was split apart, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the Lord." **1 Kings 13:2, 3, 5**.

On seeing this, Jeroboam attempted to restrain the one who had delivered the message. In anger he cried out, "Arrest him!" His rash act met with swift rebuke. The hand outstretched against the messenger of Jehovah suddenly became withered and useless. Terror-stricken, the king appealed to the prophet: "Please entreat the favor of the Lord your God," he pleaded, "'and pray for me, that my hand may be restored to me.' So the man of God entreated the Lord, and the king's hand was restored to him, and became as before." **Verses 4, 6.** This experience should have led the king of Israel to renounce his wicked plans, which were turning people away from the true worship of God. But he hardened his heart and determined to follow his own way.

The Lord seeks to save, not to destroy. He gives His chosen messengers a holy boldness, that those who hear may come to repentance. How firmly the man of God rebuked the king! In no other way could the evils have been rebuked. The messengers of the Lord are to stand for the right without flinching. As long as they put their trust in God, they don't need to be afraid, for He who gives them their commission also gives them the assurance of His protecting care.

How a Prophet Was Tricked Into Disobeying

The prophet was about to return to Judea, when Jeroboam said to him, "Come home with me and refresh yourself, and I will give you a reward."

"If you were to give me half your house," the prophet replied, "I would not go in with you; nor would I eat bread nor drink water in this place. For so it was commanded me by the word of the Lord, saying, 'You shall not eat bread, nor drink water, nor return by the same way you came.'" **1 Kings 13:7-9.**

While traveling home by another route, the prophet was overtaken by an aged man who claimed to be a prophet but who lied to him: "I too am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the Lord, saying, 'Bring him back with you to your house, that he may eat bread and drink water.'" Again and again he repeated the lie until the man of God was persuaded to return.

God permitted the prophet to suffer the penalty of transgression. While he and the one who had invited him were sitting together at the table, the false prophet "cried out to the man of God who came from Judah,

[38]

saying, 'Thus says the Lord: "Because you have disobeyed the word of the Lord, and have not kept the commandment which the Lord your God commanded you, ... your corpse shall not come to the tomb of your fathers.'" **Verses 18, 21, 22.**

This prophecy of doom was soon fulfilled. "So it was, after he had eaten bread and after he had drunk, that he saddled the donkey for him. ... When he was gone, a lion met him on the road and killed him. And his corpse was thrown on the road, and the donkey stood by it. The lion also stood by the corpse. And there, men passed by and saw the corpse thrown on the road. ... Then they went and told it in the city where the old prophet dwelt. Now when the prophet who had brought him back from the way heard it, he said, 'It is the man of God who was disobedient to the word of the Lord.'" **Verses 23-26.**

If the prophet had been permitted to go on in safety after disobeying, the king would have used this to justify his own disobedience. The split altar, the withered arm, and the terrible fate of the one who dared disobey an express command of the Lord—these judgments should have warned Jeroboam not to persist in wrongdoing. But, far from repenting, Jeroboam not only sinned greatly himself, but “made Israel sin”; and “this thing was the sin of the house of Jeroboam, so as to exterminate and destroy it.” **1 Kings 14:16; 13:34.**

God’s Judgment on Jeroboam

Toward the close of a troubled reign of twenty-two years, Jeroboam met with disastrous defeat in a war with Abijah, the successor of Rehoboam. “Jeroboam did not recover strength again in the days of Abijah; and the Lord struck him, and he died.” **2 Chronicles 13:20.**

The apostasy introduced during Jeroboam’s reign finally resulted in the utter ruin of the kingdom of Israel. Even before the death of Jeroboam, Ahijah, the aged prophet who many years before had predicted Jeroboam’s elevation to the throne, declared: “The Lord will ... uproot Israel out of this good land. ... And He will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who sinned and who made Israel sin.” **1 Kings 14:15, 16.**

Yet the Lord did all He could to lead Israel back to allegiance to Him. Through long, dark years when ruler after ruler boldly defied Him, God sent message after message to His backslidden people. Through His prophets He gave them every opportunity to return to Him. Elijah and Elisha would live and labor, and the tender appeals of Hosea, Amos, and Obadiah would be heard in the land. Never was the kingdom of Israel left without noble witnesses to the mighty power of God to save from sin. Through these faithful ones the eternal plan of Jehovah was finally to be fulfilled.

National Apostasy Brings National Ruin

From Jeroboam's death to Elijah's appearance before Ahab, Israel experienced a steady spiritual decline. The majority of the people rapidly lost sight of their duty to serve the living God and adopted practices of idol worship.

Nadab, the son of Jeroboam, who occupied the throne of Israel for a few months, was suddenly killed with all his relatives in the line of succession, "according to the word of the Lord which He had spoken by His servant Ahijah the Shilonite, because of the sins of Jeroboam, which he had sinned and by which he had made Israel sin." **1 Kings 15:29, 30.**

The idolatrous worship that Jeroboam had introduced brought the judgments of Heaven, and yet the rulers who followed—Baasha, Elah, Zimri, and Omri—continued the same fatal course of evildoing.

King Asa's Good Rule

During the greater part of this time, Asa was ruling in Judah. He "did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God, for he removed the altars of the foreign gods and ... commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to observe the law and the commandment. ... And the kingdom was quiet under him." **2 Chronicles 14:2-5.**

The faith of Asa was put to a severe test when "Zerah the Ethiopian ... with an army of a million men and three hundred chariots" invaded his kingdom. **Verse 9.** In this crisis Asa did not put his trust in the "fortified cities in Judah" that he had built, with "walls around them, and towers, gates, and bars," nor in the "mighty men of valor" in his army. **Verses 6-8.** The king's trust was in Jehovah. Setting his forces in battle array, he sought the help of God.

A Remarkable Victory Gained by Trusting God

The opposing armies now stood face to face. It was a time of test and trial to those who served the Lord. Had they confessed every sin? Did Judah have full confidence in God's power to deliver? From every human viewpoint the huge force from Egypt would sweep everything before it. But in time of peace Asa had not been giving himself to amusements and pleasure; he had been preparing for any emergency. He had an army trained for conflict, and he had tried to lead his people to make peace with God. Now his faith did not weaken.

[40]

Having sought the Lord in prosperity, the king could now rely on Him in adversity. "It is nothing for You to help," he pleaded, "whether with many or with those who have no power; help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on You, and in Your name we go against this multitude." **Verse 11.**

God rewarded King Asa's faith dramatically. "The Lord struck the Ethiopians before Asa and Judah, and the Ethiopians fled. ... They were broken before the Lord and His army." **Verses 12, 13.**

As the victorious armies were returning to Jerusalem, "Azariah the son of Oded ... went out to meet Asa, and said to him, ... 'The Lord is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.'" "Be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded!" **2 Chronicles 15:1, 2, 7.**

Greatly encouraged, Asa soon led out in a second reformation. He "removed the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin." "Then they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul." "And He was found by them, and the Lord gave them rest all around." **Verses 8, 12, 15.**

Some mistakes marred Asa's long record of faithful service. On one occasion, when the king of Israel entered Judah and seized Ramah, a city only five miles from Jerusalem, Asa sought deliverance by an alliance with Ben-Hadad, king of Syria. Hanani the prophet sternly rebuked this failure to trust God. He appeared before Asa with the message, "Were the Ethiopians and the Lubim not a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because you relied on the Lord, He delivered them into your hand. ... You have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars." **2 Chronicles 16:8, 9.**

Instead of humbling himself before God, "Asa was angry with the seer, and put him in prison. ... And Asa oppressed some of the people at that time." **Verse 10.**

"In the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa became diseased in his feet, and his malady was severe; yet in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but the physicians." **Verse 12.** The king died in the forty-first year of his reign and was succeeded by Jehoshaphat, his son.

Ahab's Wicked Reign Begins

Two years before the death of Asa, Ahab began to rule in Israel. From the beginning a strange, terrible apostasy characterized his reign. He "did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him," acting "as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat." **1 Kings 16:33, 31.** He boldly led the people into the grossest heathenism.

Having married Jezebel, "the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians" and high priest of Baal, Ahab "served Baal and worshiped him. Then he set up an altar for Baal

[41]

in the temple of Baal, which he had built in Samaria." **Verses 31, 32.**

Under the leadership of Jezebel, Ahab set up heathen altars in many "high places," until nearly all Israel followed after Baal. "There was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up." **1 Kings 21:25.** Ahab's marriage with an idol-worshiping woman brought disaster both to himself and to the nation. The determined spirit of Jezebel easily molded his character. His selfish nature was unable to appreciate the mercies of God to Israel and his own obligations as guardian and leader of the chosen people.

Under Ahab's rule Israel wandered far from the living God. The dark shadow of apostasy covered the whole land. Images of Baal and Ashtoreth were everywhere. Idolatrous temples multiplied. The smoke of sacrifices offered to false gods polluted the air. Hill and valley resounded with the drunken cries of a heathen priesthood who sacrificed to the sun, moon, and stars.

The people were taught that these idol gods were deities, by their mystic power ruling the elements of earth, fire, and water. The running brooks, the streams of living water, the gentle dew, the showers of rain which caused the fields to bring forth abundantly—all were credited to the favor of Baal and Ashtoreth instead of to the Giver of every good and perfect gift. The people forgot that the living God controlled the sun, the clouds of heaven, and all the powers of nature.

Through faithful messengers the Lord sent repeated warnings to the apostate king and the people, but these words of reproof were in vain. Captivated by the gorgeous display and the fascinating rites of idol worship, the people gave themselves up to the intoxicating, degrading pleasures of sensual worship. The light God had so graciously given them had become darkness.

Never before had the chosen people of God fallen so low in apostasy. Of the "prophets of Baal" there were four hundred fifty, besides four hundred "prophets of Asherah." **1 Kings 18:19**. Nothing short of the miracle-working power of God could preserve the nation from complete destruction. Israel had voluntarily separated from Jehovah, yet in His compassion the Lord still yearned after those who had been led into sin, and He was about to send them one of the mightiest of His prophets.

Elijah Confronts King Ahab

This chapter is based on 1 Kings 17:1-7.

Among the mountains east of Jordan there lived a man of faith and prayer whose fearless ministry was to stop the rapid spread of apostasy. Though he occupied no high position in life, Elijah entered on his mission confident that God would give him abundant success. His was the voice of one crying in the wilderness to rebuke sin and press back the tide of evil. And, while he came as a reprover of sin, his message offered comfort to sin-sick souls.

As Elijah saw Israel going deeper into idolatry, he became indignant. God had done great things for His people “that they might observe His statutes and keep His laws.” **Psalm 105:45**. But unbelief was quickly separating the chosen nation from the Source of their strength. Viewing this apostasy from his mountain home, in anguish of soul Elijah called for God to stop the people in their wicked course, to bring judgments on them if need be, that they might come to repentance.

Elijah’s prayer was answered. The time had come when God must speak by means of judgments. The worshipers of Baal claimed that dew and rain came from the ruling forces of nature, and that through the creative energy of the sun the earth brought forth abundantly. The apostate tribes of Israel must be shown the foolishness of trusting to Baal for material blessings. Until they turned to God with repentance, neither dew nor rain would fall on the land.

God entrusted Elijah with the mission of delivering Heaven’s message of judgment to Ahab. He did not seek to be the Lord’s messenger; the word of the Lord came to him. To obey the divine call seemed to invite swift destruction at the hand of the wicked king, but the prophet set out at once and traveled night and day until he reached the palace. Dressed in the coarse garments usually worn by the prophets, he passed the guards apparently unnoticed and stood for a moment before the astonished king.

Elijah made no apology for his abrupt appearance. One greater than the ruler of Israel had commissioned him to speak. “As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand,” he declared, “there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.”

[43]

On his way to Samaria, Elijah had passed by ever-flowing streams and stately forests that seemed beyond the reach of drought. The prophet might have wondered how streams that had never ceased their flow could become dry, or how those hills and valleys could be burned with drought. But he allowed no doubts to linger. God’s word could not fail. Like a thunderbolt from a clear sky, the message of judgment fell on the ears of the wicked king; but before Ahab could recover from his astonishment, Elijah disappeared. And the Lord went before him, making the way plain. “Turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.”

The king inquired diligently, but the prophet was not to be found. Queen Jezebel, angered over the message that had locked up the treasures of heaven, lost no time in conferring with the priests of Baal, who united in cursing the prophet and defying Jehovah. News quickly spread throughout the land regarding Elijah's denunciation of Israel's sins and his prophecy of swift-coming punishment. Some became concerned, but in general the people received the heavenly message with scorn and ridicule.

The prophet's words went into immediate effect. The earth, unrefreshed by dew or rain, became dry, and vegetation withered. Streams never known to fail began to decrease and brooks to dry up. Yet the leaders urged the people to have confidence in Baal and to ignore the prophecy of Elijah as idle words. Do not fear the God of Elijah, they urged. It is Baal who brings the harvest and provides for man and beast.

Priests of Baal Keep the People Deceived

Against the assurances of hundreds of idol-worshipping priests, the prophecy of Elijah stood alone: If Baal could still give dew and rain, then let the king of Israel worship him and the people say that he is God. Determined to keep the people in deception, the priests of Baal continued to call on their gods night and day to refresh the earth. With a zeal and perseverance worthy of a better cause they lingered alongside their pagan altars and night after night prayed earnestly for rain. But no clouds appeared in the heavens, no dew or rain refreshed the thirsty earth.

A year passed. The scorching heat of the sun destroyed what little vegetation had survived. Streams dried up, and moaning herds and bleating flocks wandered in distress. Once-flourishing fields became like desert sands. The forest trees, gaunt skeletons of nature, afforded no shade. Dust storms blinded the eyes and nearly stopped the breath. Hunger and thirst affected people and animals with fearful mortality. Famine, with all its horrors, came closer and still closer.

Yet Israel did not repent or learn the lesson that God wanted them to learn. Proudhearted, fond of their

[44]

false worship, they began to look around for some other cause to blame for their sufferings.

Determined to defy the God of heaven, Jezebel united with nearly all of Israel in denouncing Elijah as the cause of their misery. If only they could put him out of the way, their troubles would end. Urged on by the queen, Ahab began a diligent search for the prophet. He sent messengers to surrounding nations to seek for the man whom he hated, yet feared. In his anxiety he required an oath from these kingdoms that they knew nothing of the prophet's location. But the search was in vain. The prophet was safe from the malice of the king.

When her efforts against Elijah failed, Jezebel determined to kill all the prophets of Jehovah. The infuriated woman massacred many, but not all of them. Obadiah, the governor of Ahab's house, "had taken one hundred prophets," and at the risk of his own life had "hidden them, fifty to a cave, and had fed them with bread and water." **1 Kings 18:4.**

Drought and Famine for Two Years

The second year passed, and still the merciless heavens gave no sign of rain. Fathers and mothers were forced to see their children die. Yet apostate Israel seemed unable to detect in their suffering a call to repentance, a divine intervention to save them from taking the fatal step beyond the boundary of Heaven's forgiveness.

Israel's apostasy was an evil more dreadful than all the horrors of famine. God was trying to help His people recover their lost faith, and He had to bring great affliction on them. "Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?" says the Lord God, "and not that he should turn from his ways and live?" "I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord God. "Therefore turn and live!" **Ezekiel 18:23, 32.**

God had sent messengers to Israel, with appeals to return to their loyalty. But they had only become angry with the messengers, and now they regarded the prophet Elijah with intense hatred. If only he would fall into their hands, gladly they would deliver him to Jezebel—as if by silencing his voice they could prevent his words from being fulfilled!

For stricken Israel there was only one remedy—turning away from the sins that had brought upon them the Almighty's correcting hand. God had given them the assurance, "When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." **2 Chronicles 7:13, 14.** To bring about this blessed result, God continued to withhold the dew and the rain until a thorough reformation would take place.

The Voice of Stern Rebuke

This chapter is based on 1 Kings 17:8-24; 18:1-18.

For many months God miraculously provided Elijah with food in his mountain hiding place by the brook Cherith. When the brook dried up because of the continued drought, God told His servant: “Arise, go to Zarephath [known in New Testament times as Sarepta]. ... See, I have commanded a widow woman there to provide for you.”

This woman was not an Israelite. She had never had the privileges that the chosen people of God had enjoyed, but she was a believer in the true God and had walked in all the light shining on her pathway. And now, when there was no safety for Elijah in Israel, God sent him to this woman to find refuge in her home.

“So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, ‘Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink. ... Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.’”

In this poverty-stricken home the famine was causing severe hardship, and the widow feared that she would lose the struggle to sustain life. But in her great need she bore witness to her faith. In response to Elijah’s request she said, “‘As the Lord your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.’ And Elijah said to her, ‘Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord God of Israel, “The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth.”’”

No greater test of faith could have been required. Regardless of the suffering that might result to herself and her child, and trusting in the God of Israel to supply her need, the widow met this supreme test of hospitality by doing “according to the word of Elijah.”

Hospitality Rewarded

God wonderfully rewarded her faith and generosity. “She and he

[46]

and her household ate for many days. The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke by Elijah.”

“After these things ... the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. And his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him. So she said to Elijah, ... ‘Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?’

“And he said to her, ‘Give me your son.’ So he ... carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed. ... And he stretched himself out on the child

three times, and cried out to the Lord. ... Then the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived.

“And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house, and gave him to his mother. And Elijah said, ‘See, your son lives!’ Then the woman said to Elijah, ‘Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth.’”

The widow of Zarephath shared her meager food with Elijah, and in return her life and that of her son were preserved. And to all who give sympathy and assistance to others more needy, God has promised great blessing. His power is no less now than it was in the days of Elijah. “He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward.” **Matthew 10:41.**

“Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.” **Hebrews 13:2.** In the pathway of His children our heavenly Father still places opportunities that are blessings in disguise, and those who improve these opportunities find great joy. “If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then ... you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.” **Isaiah 58:10, 11.**

Today Christ says, “He who receives you receives Me.” No act of kindness done in Christ’s name will fail to be rewarded. And Christ’s care includes even the lowliest of the family of God: “Whoever gives one of these little ones”—those who are as children in faith and knowledge— “only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.” **Matthew 10:40-42.**

Three Years of Drought

Through the long years of famine, Elijah prayed earnestly and waited patiently while the hand of the Lord lay heavily on the stricken land. As he saw suffering and need on every side, his heart filled with sorrow, and he longed to bring about a reformation quickly. But God was working out His plan, and His servant was to pray on and await the time for action.

The apostasy in Ahab’s day resulted from many years of evildoing. Step by step Israel had been departing from the right way, and at last

[47]

the great majority had yielded themselves to the powers of darkness.

About a century had passed since Israel, under King David, had united in hymns of praise to the Most High in recognition that they depended entirely on Him for daily mercies. Then they had sung:

O God of our salvation, ...
 You make the outgoings of the morning and evening rejoice.
 You visit the earth and water it,
 You greatly enrich it;
 The river of God is full of water;
 You provide their grain,

For so You have prepared it. ...
 You crown the year with Your goodness,
 And Your paths drip with abundance.

Psalm 65:5, 8, 9, 11

He causes the grass to grow for the cattle,
 And vegetation for the service of man,
 That He may bring forth food from the earth,
 And wine that makes glad the heart of man.
 O Lord, how manifold are Your works!
 In wisdom You have made them all.
 The earth is full of Your possessions.

Psalm 104:14, 15, 24

The land to which the Lord had brought Israel was flowing with milk and honey, a country where they need never suffer for lack of rain. “The land which you go to possess,” He had told them, “is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and watered it by foot, as a vegetable garden; but the land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven, a land for which the Lord your God cares.”

The promise of abundance of rain had been given on condition of obedience: “If you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the Lord your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain.”

“Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest ... He [the Lord] shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the Lord is giving you.” *Deuteronomy 11:10-14, 16, 17.*

“If you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes,” “your heavens which are over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you shall be iron. The Lord will change the rain of your land to powder and dust.” *Deuteronomy 28:15, 23, 24.*

These commands were plain, yet as the centuries passed, apostasy threatened to sweep aside every barrier of divine grace. Now the prediction of Elijah was meeting terrible fulfillment. For three years the messenger of woe was hunted. Many rulers had

[48]

given their oath of honor that the strange prophet could not be found in their lands. Jezebel and the prophets of Baal hated Elijah and spared no effort to bring him within reach of their power. And still there was no rain.

The People Are Finally Ready for Reformation

At last “the word of the Lord came to Elijah ..., saying, ‘Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth.’” In obedience to the command, Elijah set out on his journey.

About this time Ahab suggested to Obadiah, who was in charge of his household, that they search for springs and brooks in the hope of finding pasture for their starving flocks. Deeply concerned over the outlook for his household, the king decided to unite personally with his servant in a search for some favored spots where pasture might still exist. “Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself.” “As Obadiah was on his way, suddenly Elijah met him; and he recognized him, and fell on his face, and said, ‘Is that you, my lord Elijah?’”

During the apostasy of Israel, Obadiah had remained faithful. The king had been unable to turn him from his allegiance to the living God. Now Elijah honored him with a commission: “Go, tell your master, ‘Elijah is here.’”

Terrified, Obadiah exclaimed, “How have I sinned, that you are delivering your servant into the hand of Ahab, to kill me?” This was to invite certain death! “As the Lord your God lives,” he explained to the prophet, “there is no nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to hunt for you; and when they said, ‘He is not here,’ he took an oath from the kingdom or nation that they could not find you. And now you say, ‘Go, tell your master, ‘Elijah is here’”! And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from you, that the Spirit of the Lord will carry you to a place I do not know; so when I go and tell Ahab, and he cannot find you, he will kill me.”

With a solemn oath Elijah promised Obadiah that the errand would not be in vain. “As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely present myself to him today.” With this assurance, “Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him.”

In astonishment mixed with terror the king listened to Obadiah deliver the message from the man he feared and hated, and for whom he had searched untiringly. Could it be possible that the prophet was about to pronounce another woe against Israel? The king’s heart was filled with dread. He remembered the withered arm of Jeroboam. Ahab could not avoid obeying the summons, neither did he dare lift up his hand against the messenger of God. With a bodyguard of soldiers, the trembling monarch went to meet the prophet.

Brave Prophet, Guilty King

The king and the prophet stood face to face. In the presence of

[49]

Elijah, Ahab seemed weak and powerless. In his first faltering words, “Is that you, O troubler of Israel?” he unconsciously revealed the inmost feelings of his heart and tried to blame the prophet for the heavy judgments resting on the land.

It is natural for the wrongdoer to hold the messengers of God responsible for the disasters that come as the result of departing from the way of righteousness. When the mirror of truth is held up before those in Satan’s power, they become offended at receiving reproof.

Blinded by sin, they feel that God's servants have turned against them and are worthy of severest criticism.

Standing in conscious innocence, Elijah made no attempt to excuse himself or to flatter the king. Nor did he seek to evade the king's anger by the good news that the drought was almost over. Indignant, and jealous for the honor of God, he fearlessly declared to the king that it was his sins, and the sins of his fathers, that had brought this terrible disaster. "I have not troubled Israel," Elijah boldly asserted, "but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and have followed the Baals."

Need of Reform Today

Today there is need of the voice of stern rebuke, for terrible sins have separated the people from God. Unbelief is fashionable. "We will not have this Man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14) is the language of thousands. The smooth sermons often preached make no lasting impression; the trumpet does not give a certain sound. The people are not cut to the heart by the plain, sharp truths of God's Word.

Many say, What need is there of speaking so plainly? They might as well ask, Why did John the Baptist have to provoke the anger of Herodias by telling Herod that it was unlawful for him to live with his brother's wife? The forerunner of Christ lost his life by his plain speaking.

This is how those who should be guardians of God's law have argued, till expediency has taken the place of faithfulness and sin is allowed to go unrebuked. When will the voice of faithful rebuke be heard once more in the church?

"You are the man!" 2 Samuel 12:7. Words as plain as these that Nathan spoke to David are seldom heard in pulpits today, seldom seen in the public press. The Lord's messengers should not complain that their efforts are fruitless until they repent of their desire to please others, which leads them to suppress truth.

It is not from love for their neighbor that ministers smooth down the message entrusted to them, but because they are self-indulgent and ease-loving. True love seeks first the honor of God and the salvation of souls. Those who have this love will not evade the truth to save themselves from the unpleasant results of plain speaking. When souls are in peril, God's ministers will speak the word given them, refusing to excuse evil.

[50]

If only every minister would show the courage that Elijah showed! Ministers are to "convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching." 2 Timothy 4:2, NRSV. In Christ's name they are to encourage the obedient and warn the disobedient. Worldly considerations are to have no weight with them. They are to go forward in faith. They are not to speak their own words, but their message is to be, "Thus says the Lord." God calls for people like Elijah, Nathan, and John the Baptist, people who will bear His message regardless of consequences, people who will speak the truth though it requires the sacrifice of all they have.

God calls for men and women who will do faithful battle against wrong, warring against spiritual wickedness in high places. To such He will speak the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant. ... Enter into the joy of your Lord." Matthew 25:23.

[51]

God Vindicated on Mount Carmel

This chapter is based on 1 Kings 18:19-40.

Standing before Ahab, Elijah commanded, “Send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.”

Ahab obeyed at once, as if the prophet were monarch and the king his subject. He sent swift messengers with the summons. In every town and village the people prepared to assemble at the appointed time. As they journeyed toward the place, a strange dread filled the hearts of many. Why this summons to gather at Carmel? What new disaster was about to fall?

Mount Carmel had been a place of beauty, its streams fed from neverfailing springs and its fertile slopes covered with flowers and flourishing groves. But now its beauty withered under a curse. The altars to Baal and Ashtoreth stood in leafless groves. On the summit of one of the highest ridges was the broken-down altar of Jehovah.

Carmel’s heights were visible from many parts of the kingdom. At the foot of the mountain were vantage points from which people could see much of what took place above. Elijah chose this elevation as the most conspicuous place for God to display His power and vindicate His name.

Early on the morning of the appointed day, the people of Israel gathered near the top of the mountain. Jezebel’s prophets marched in impressive array. In regal pomp the king appeared at the head of the priests, and the idol-worshippers shouted his welcome. But the priests remembered that at the word of the prophet the land of Israel had been destitute of dew and rain for three and a half years. Some fearful crisis was at hand, they felt sure. The gods in whom they had trusted had been unable to prove Elijah a false prophet. The objects of their worship had been strangely indifferent to their frantic cries, their prayers, their revolting ceremonies, and their costly sacrifices.

Facing King Ahab and the false prophets, and surrounded by the assembled people of Israel, Elijah stood, the only one who had come to vindicate the honor of Jehovah. He was apparently defenseless in the presence of the king, the prophets of Baal, the men of war, and the surrounding

[52]

thousands. But around him were angels that excel in strength.

Unashamed, unterrified, the prophet was fully aware of his commission to carry out the divine command. In anxious expectancy the people waited for him to speak. Looking first on the broken-down altar of Jehovah and then on the crowd, Elijah called out in trumpet tones, “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.”

No One Has the Courage to Stand With Elijah

The people answered not a word. Not one in that vast assembly dared to reveal loyalty to Jehovah. Deception and blindness had overspread Israel, not all at once but gradually. Each departure from rightdoing, each refusal to repent, had deepened their guilt and driven them further from Heaven. And now, in this crisis, they persisted in refusing to take their stand for God.

The Lord hates indifference in a time of crisis. With inexpressible interest the whole universe is watching the closing scenes of the great controversy between good and evil. What can be more important to the people of God than to be loyal to the God of heaven? All through the ages, God has had moral heroes, and He has them now—those who, like Joseph, Elijah, and Daniel, are not ashamed to identify themselves as His distinct people. His special blessing accompanies men and women of action, those who will not swerve from duty, but who will inquire, “Who is on the Lord’s side?” (*Exodus 32:26*, NRSV)—people who will demand that those who choose to identify with the followers of God step forward and reveal their allegiance to the King of kings. Such people yield their will to the law of God. For love of Him they do not count their lives dear to themselves. Loyalty to God is their motto.

While Israel hesitated on Carmel, the voice of Elijah again broke the silence: “I alone am left a prophet of the Lord; but Baal’s prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Therefore let them give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it. Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord; and the God who answers by fire, He is God.”

Elijah’s proposal was so reasonable that the people answered, “It is well spoken.” The prophets of Baal dared not refuse. Elijah directed them, “Choose one bull for yourselves and prepare it first, for you are many.”

With terror in their guilty hearts, the false priests laid the wood and the victim on their altar. Then they began their unholy rites. Their shrill cries echoed through the forests and the surrounding heights: “O Baal, hear us!” Leaping, writhing, and screaming, with tearing of hair and cutting of flesh, the priests pleaded with their god to help them. Morning passed, noon came, and yet there was no reply to their frantic prayers. The sacrifice remained unconsumed.

As they continued their frenzied

[53]

worship, the crafty priests continually tried to find some way to kindle a fire on the altar. But Elijah watched every movement; and the priests, hoping in vain for some opportunity to deceive, continued their senseless ceremonies.

“And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, ‘Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.’ So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them. ... But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention.”

Gladly would Satan have helped those who were devoted to his service. Gladly would he have sent lightning to ignite their sacrifice. But Jehovah had set Satan's limits, and he could not carry one spark to Baal's altar.

At last, their voices hoarse with shouting, the priests became desperate. With great frenzy they mixed terrible cursings of their sun-god in with their pleading. Elijah continued to watch intently. He knew that if by any means the priests succeeded in lighting their altar fire, he would instantly be torn to pieces.

The Prophets of Baal Give Up

Evening drew on. The prophets of Baal were weary, faint, and confused. One suggested one thing, and another suggested something else, until finally in despair they withdrew from the contest.

All day long the people had witnessed the baffled priests' wild leaping around the altar, as if they would grasp the burning rays of the sun to serve their purpose. The people had looked with horror on their self-inflicted mutilations and had reflected on the follies of idol worship. Many were tired of the exhibitions of demonism and now waited with deep interest to see what Elijah would do.

At the hour of the evening sacrifice, Elijah invited the people, "Come near to me." He turned to the brokendown altar where once Israel had worshiped the God of heaven, and he repaired it. To him this heap of ruins was more precious than all the magnificent altars of the heathen world. Choosing "twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, ... he built an altar in the name of the Lord."

The disappointed, exhausted priests of Baal waited to see what Elijah would do. They hated the prophet for proposing a test that had exposed their gods, yet they feared his power. Almost breathless with expectancy, the people watched. The prophet's calm manner stood in sharp contrast to the senseless frenzy of Baal's followers.

When he completed the altar, the prophet made a trench around it. He put the wood in order and prepared the bull, then laid the victim on the altar. "Fill four waterpots with water," he directed, "and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood." Then he said, "Do it a second time," and they did it a second time; and he said, "Do it a third time," and they did it a third time. So the water ran all around the altar; and he also filled the trench with water."

[54]

Reminding the people of their long apostasy, Elijah called on them to humble their hearts and turn to the God of their fathers, that the curse on the land might be removed. Then, bowing reverently before the unseen God, he raised his hands toward heaven and offered a simple prayer. Baal's priests had screamed and leaped from early morning until late in the afternoon. But as Elijah prayed, no senseless shrieks echoed over Carmel's height. He prayed simply and fervently, asking God to show His superiority over Baal so that Israel might be led to turn to Him:

"Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again."

A silence, heavy and solemn, rested on all. The priests of Baal trembled with terror, conscious of their guilt.

Fire From Heaven Answers Elijah's Simple Prayer

No sooner had the prayer of Elijah ended than flames of fire, like flashes of lightning, descended from heaven on the altar, devouring the sacrifice, licking up the water in the trench, and consuming even the stones of the altar. The brilliance of the blaze illuminated the mountain and dazzled the eyes of the multitude. In the valleys below, where many were watching, they could clearly see the fire descend, and all were amazed at the sight.

The people on the mountain threw themselves to the ground. They dared not continue to look on the Heaven-sent fire. Convicted of their duty to acknowledge the God of Elijah as the God of their fathers, they cried out with one voice, "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!" The cry resounded over the mountain and echoed in the plain below. At last Israel was awakened, undeceived, and repentant. At last the people saw how greatly they had dishonored God. The character of Baal worship stood fully revealed, in contrast with the reasonable service that the true God required. The people recognized God's justice and mercy in withholding the dew and rain until they had given Him their complete loyalty.

The Priests of Baal Unrepentant

But the priests of Baal refused to repent, even in their defeat and in the presence of divine glory. They would still remain the prophets of Baal. In this they showed themselves ripe for destruction.

To protect repentant Israel from those who taught them to worship Baal, the Lord directed Elijah to destroy these false teachers. The people's anger had already been aroused, and when Elijah gave the command, "Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let one of them escape!" they were ready to obey. They took them to the brook Kishon, and there, before the close of the day that marked the beginning of decisive reform, the ministers of Baal were killed.

The Prophet Loses Faith and Panics

This chapter is based on 1 Kings 18:41-46; 19:1-8.

With the prophets of Baal killed, the way was opened for a mighty spiritual reformation. The judgments of Heaven had been executed. The people had confessed their sins and acknowledged the God of their fathers. Now the curse was to be withdrawn and the land refreshed with rain. “Go up, eat and drink,” Elijah said to Ahab, “for there is the sound of abundance of rain.” Then the prophet went to the top of the mountain to pray.

He saw no clouds in the heavens; he heard no thunder. All that day he had revealed his complete confidence in God’s word, and now he knew that Heaven would bestow the blessings predicted. The same God who had sent the drought had promised rain as the reward of rightdoing. In humility, Elijah pleaded with God in behalf of repentant Israel.

Again and again he sent his servant to a point overlooking the Mediterranean, to see whether there was any visible evidence that God had heard his prayer. Each time the servant returned with the word, “There is nothing.” The prophet did not lose faith but continued pleading. Six times the servant returned with the word that there was no sign of rain. Undaunted, Elijah sent him once more. This time the servant returned with the word, “There is a cloud, as small as a man’s hand, rising out of the sea!”

This was enough! In that small cloud, by faith Elijah saw an abundance of rain. He acted in harmony with his faith, sending his servant quickly to Ahab with the message, “Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you.”

Because Elijah was a man of large faith, God could use him. His faith grasped the promises of Heaven, and he persisted in prayer. He did not wait for the full evidence that God had heard him but was willing to commit everything on the slightest sign of divine favor. And what he was enabled to do under God, all may do in their own sphere in God’s service. “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.” **James 5:17.**

Faith such as this is needed today—faith that will lay hold of the

[56]

promises of God’s Word, faith that brings strength for coping with the powers of darkness. Through faith God’s children have “conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, ... won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.” **Hebrews 11:33, 34, NRSV.**

Faith is an essential element of effective prayer. “He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” **Hebrews 11:6.** With the persistence of Elijah, we may present our requests to the Father. He has staked the honor of His throne on the fulfillment of His word.

Night was approaching on Mount Carmel as Ahab prepared for the descent. “Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a

heavy rain. So Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel.” As he traveled toward the royal city through the darkness and blinding rain, he was unable to see in front of him. That day Elijah had humiliated him before his subjects and killed his idolatrous priests, but the prophet still acknowledged Ahab as Israel’s king. Now, as an act of homage, Elijah ran before the royal chariot, guiding the king to the city.

There is a lesson in this gracious act shown to a wicked king for all who claim to be servants of God. Some people hesitate to perform humble duties, fearing that they will be doing the work of a servant. Elijah had been dramatically honored by God as fire had flashed from heaven and consumed the sacrifice; his prayer for rain had been granted. And yet, after God had been pleased to honor his public ministry, he was willing to perform the service of a footman.

Jezebel Threatens Elijah’s Life

At the gate of Jezreel, Elijah and Ahab separated. The prophet, choosing to remain outside the walls, wrapped himself in his cloak and lay down on the bare earth to sleep. The king soon reached the shelter of his palace and reported to his wife the events of the day. As Ahab told about how the idolatrous prophets had been killed, Jezebel, hardened and unrepentant, became infuriated. She refused to recognize the overruling hand of God and, still defiant, boldly declared that Elijah must die.

That night a messenger awoke the weary prophet and delivered the word of Jezebel: “So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.”

It would seem that after showing such unflinching courage, and after triumphing so completely over king and priests and people, Elijah could never afterward give way to discouragement or become frightened and timid. But in this dark hour his faith and courage forsook him. Bewildered, he was startled from his sleep. The rain was pouring from the heavens, and darkness was all around. Forgetting that three years before,

[57]

when God had directed him to a place of safety, the prophet now ran for his life.

Elijah’s Lack of Faith

Elijah should not have run. He should have met Jezebel’s threat with an appeal for protection to the One who had commissioned him. He should have told the messenger that the God in whom he trusted would protect him against the queen’s hatred. If he had made God his refuge and strength, he would have been shielded from harm. The Lord would have sent His judgments on Jezebel, and the impression made on king and people would have brought about a great reformation.

Elijah had hoped that after the miracle on Mount Carmel Jezebel would no longer have influence over Ahab and that reform would come quickly to all Israel. All day on Carmel he had gone without food. Yet when he guided the chariot of Ahab to Jezreel, his courage was strong despite the physical strain. But a reaction frequently follows high faith and glorious success. Elijah feared that the reformation begun might not be lasting, and depression seized

him. In this time of discouragement, with Jezebel's threat sounding in his ears and Satan still apparently in control, he lost his hold on God.

Elijah's Complete Despondency

Forgetting God, Elijah ran on and on, until he found himself in a dreary wasteland, alone. Bone weary, he sat down to rest under a juniper tree and requested that he might die: "It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" His spirit was crushed by bitter disappointment, and he wanted never again to look on a human face. At last, exhausted, he fell asleep.

Times of keen disappointment and discouragement come to everyone—days when it is hard to believe that God is still kind, days when troubles follow us till death seems preferable to life. Then many lose their hold on God and become slaves of doubt and unbelief. At such times, if we could unravel the meaning of God's leadings, we would see angels seeking to save us from ourselves, working to plant our feet on a firm foundation; and new faith, new life, would spring into being.

In his trouble and darkness faithful Job declared:

"May the day perish on which I was born."

"Oh, that I might have my request."

"My soul chooses ... death. ... I loathe my life."

Job 3:3; 6:8; 7:15, 16

But though he was weary of life, Job was not allowed to die. To him was given the message of hope:

"You will forget your misery; you will remember it as waters that have passed away.

And your life will be brighter than the noonday; its darkness will be like the morning."

Job 11:16, 17, NRSV

[58]

From the depths of despair Job rose to the heights of trust in God. Triumphant he declared:

"For I know that my Redeemer lives,
And He shall stand at last on the earth;
And after my skin is destroyed, this I know,
That in my flesh I shall see God."

Job 19:25, 26

When Job caught a glimpse of his Creator, he abhorred himself and repented in dust and ashes. **Job 42:6**. Then the Lord was able to bless him and make his last years the best of his life.

Despondency is sinful and unreasonable. God is willing to bestow “more abundantly” (**Hebrews 6:17**) on His servants the strength they need. The enemies of His work may make plans that seem firmly established, but God can overthrow the strongest of these. For the disheartened there is a sure remedy—faith, prayer, work. Are you tempted to give in to worry, dread, or hopelessness? In the darkest days, when things appear at their worst, don’t be afraid. God knows your need. His infinite love and compassion never run out. He will never change the covenant He has made with those who love Him. And He will give His faithful servants the efficiency that their need demands. Paul has testified: “He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ ... For when I am weak, then I am strong.” **2 Corinthians 12:9, 10**.

Did God forsake Elijah in his ordeal? No! He loved His servant no less when he felt forsaken by God and man. And now a soft touch and pleasant voice awoke him. The pitying face bending over him was not the face of an enemy, but of a friend. God had sent an angel with food. “Arise and eat,” the angel said. “Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water.”

After Elijah had eaten and drunk, he slept again. A second time the angel touched the exhausted man, and said with pitying tenderness, “Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.” In the strength of that food he was able to journey “forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God,” where he found refuge in a cave.

“What Are You Doing Here?”

This chapter is based on 1 Kings 19:9-18.

Elijah’s hideout on Mount Horeb was known to God, and He did not leave the discouraged prophet to struggle alone with the powers of darkness. At the cave where Elijah had taken refuge, God met with him through a mighty angel to inquire into his needs and to make plain God’s plans for Israel.

Elijah could not complete his work until he learned to trust entirely in God. The triumph on Carmel had opened the way for still greater victories, yet Jezebel’s threat had turned Elijah away from the wonderful opportunities opening before him. The man of God needed to understand the position of strength the Lord wanted him to have.

“What are you doing here, Elijah?” I sent you to the brook Cherith and to the widow of Zarephath. I commissioned you to stand before the idolatrous priests on Carmel and to guide the chariot of the king to Jezreel. But who sent you into the wilderness? What errand do you have here?

In bitterness Elijah complained, “I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.”

The angel told the prophet to stand and listen to the Lord’s word. “And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.”

By “a still small voice” God chose to teach Elijah that the most successful work is not always the one that makes the greatest demonstration. Elijah’s anger was silenced, his spirit subdued. He now knew that relying firmly on God would always find him help in time of need.

Hearts are not reached by eloquence or logic, but by the Holy Spirit. The still, small voice of the Spirit of God has power to change the heart.

[60]

“What are you doing here, Elijah?” the voice inquired; and again the prophet answered, “The children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.”

The Lord answered Elijah that the wrongdoers would not go unpunished. Men were to be chosen to punish the idol-worshipping kingdom. There was stern work to be done. Elijah must return to Israel and share with others the burden of bringing about a reformation.

“Go,” the Lord commanded Elijah, “anoint Hazael as king over Syria. Also ... anoint Jehu ... as king over Israel. And Elisha ... you shall anoint as prophet in your place. ...

Whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill.”

The One who reads the hearts of all revealed to the prophet that there were many others who had remained true to Him through the long years of apostasy. “I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal.”

The apostasy today is similar to the one that overspread Israel in Elijah’s day. By exalting the human above the divine, by praising popular leaders, by worshiping money, and by placing science above the truths of revelation, multitudes today are following Baal. Many are substituting human theories for the Word of God. People teach that human reason should be exalted above the teachings of the Word. They declare the law of God to be of no effect. The enemy is working to cause men and women to forget God’s provisions for the happiness and salvation of the human family.

Many Today Have Not Bowed to Baal

Yet this widespread apostasy is not universal. Not all are lawless and sinful. God has many who long to understand more fully about Christ and the law, many who are hoping that Jesus will come soon to end the reign of sin and death, many with whom the Spirit of God is still working.

These need the personal help of others who know God and His Word. As those who understand Bible truth seek out the men and women who are longing for light, angels will go with them. As a result, many will stop giving honor to human institutions and will take their stand fearlessly on the side of God and His law.

Satan makes every possible effort to cause the obedient to lose sight of their mission and become satisfied with the pleasures of this life. He leads them to settle down at ease or, for the sake of worldly advantages, to move away from places where they might be a power for good. Others he causes to flee from duty in discouragement because of persecution. To every child of God whose voice the enemy of souls has succeeded in silencing, the question comes, “What are you doing here?” I commissioned you to go into all the world and preach the gospel, to

[61]

prepare a people for the day of God. Who sent you here?

The joy that sustained Christ through sacrifice and suffering was the joy of seeing sinners saved. This should be the joy of every Christian. Those who realize what redemption really means will be moved to compassion as they see the moral and spiritual destitution of people who are under the shadow of a terrible doom, with which physical suffering cannot compare.

In many churches there are families who might move to places in need of the ministry they can give. God calls for families to go to the dark places of earth and work wisely for those who are wrapped in spiritual gloom. This requires selfsacrifice. While many wait to have every obstacle removed, souls are dying without hope and without God. For worldly advantage, or to acquire scientific knowledge, people endure hardship and privation. Where are those who are willing to do as much for the sake of telling others of the Savior?

In Times of Weakness, Trust in God

If, under difficult circumstances, people of spiritual power who are pressed beyond measure become discouraged, this is nothing strange or new. One of the mightiest of the prophets ran for his life from the rage of an infuriated woman. Bitter disappointment crushed the spirits of the weary fugitive, and he asked that he might die. But when hope was gone and his lifework seemed threatened with defeat, he learned the possibility of trusting God under circumstances that seemed the most unlikely to turn out well.

Those who, while spending their life energies in self-sacrificing labor, are tempted to give way to hopelessness may gather courage from the experience of Elijah. God’s watchful care, His love, His power, are especially revealed in behalf of His servants when people reject their counsels and reproofs and repay their efforts toward reform with hatred and opposition.

At the time of greatest weakness Satan attacks the believer with the fiercest temptations. In this way he hoped to prevail over the Son of God, for by this method he had gained many victories over others. When willpower weakened and faith failed, then those who had stood long and valiantly for the right yielded to temptation. Wearied with forty years of wandering and unbelief, Moses failed just on the borders of the Promised Land. Elijah had maintained his trust in Jehovah during the years of drought, but in a moment of weariness he allowed the fear of death to overcome his faith in God.

So it is today. When we are awash in doubt or afflicted by poverty or distress, Satan seeks to shake our confidence in Jehovah. He tempts us to distrust God, to question His love. He hopes to discourage us and break our hold on God.

Those who stand in the forefront of the conflict will frequently feel a reaction when the pressure is off. Discouragement may shake the faith

[62]

and weaken the will. But God understands. He still pities and loves. He reads the motives of the heart. To wait patiently, to trust when everything looks dark, is the lesson that leaders in God’s work need to learn. Heaven will not fail them in tribulation. Nothing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness and relies entirely on God.

He who was Elijah’s strength is well able to uphold every struggling child of His, no matter how weak. To everyone He grants power according to the need. In the might of God we may overcome evil and help others to overcome. Satan can never gain advantage over us if we make God our defense.

Satan knows your weakness; therefore cling to Jesus. The righteousness of Christ can give you power to turn back the tide of evil sweeping over the world. Bring faith into your experience. Faith lightens every burden, relieves every weariness. By continued trust in God you may come to understand God’s workings that are now mysterious. The records of sacred history are written so that the same faith shown in God’s servants of old may work in us. The Lord will work now in no less remarkable a manner wherever there are hearts of faith to be channels of His power.

Christ will never abandon those for whom He died. We may leave Him and be overwhelmed with temptation, but Christ can never turn from one for whom He has paid the

ransom with His own life. If our spiritual vision could be awakened, we would see people bent under oppression, burdened with grief, and ready to die in discouragement. We would see angels flying quickly to help these tempted ones, forcing back the hosts of evil. The battles between the two armies are real. Eternal destinies depend on the outcome of the spiritual conflict.

God's messengers are not to feel that His work depends on them. He who never slumbers will carry forward His work. He will thwart the plans of the wicked and bring to confusion the counsels of those who plot evil against His people. He who is the King, the Lord of hosts, sits between the cherubim, and amid the strife and tumult of nations He still guards His children. When the arrows of His wrath strike through the hearts of His enemies, His people will be safe in His hands.

[63]

God's Call to Modern Apostates

Through long centuries the record of Elijah's lifework has brought inspiration and courage to those who have been called to stand for the right in the midst of apostasy. For us it has special significance. History is being repeated. Our age is one of idolatry as truly as was the one in which Elijah lived. No outward shrine may be visible, yet thousands are following after the gods of this world—riches, fame, pleasure, and the fables that permit people to follow the inclinations of the unrenewed heart. Multitudes have a wrong concept of God and are as truly serving a false god as were the worshipers of Baal. Even among those who claim to be Christians, many have allied themselves with influences that are firmly opposed to God and His truth.

The prevailing spirit of our time is one of unbelief and apostasy. People exalt human theories and place them where God and His law should be. Satan tempts men and women with the promise that in disobedience they will find freedom that will make them as gods. We see a spirit that exalts human wisdom like an idol above divine revelation. People seem to have lost all power to tell the difference between light and darkness, truth and error. They believe that the opinions of a few philosophers, so-called, are more trustworthy than the truths of the Bible. They think that faith such as actuated Paul, Peter, and John is old-fashioned and unworthy of the intelligence of modern thinkers.

In the beginning, God gave His law to humanity as a means of their attaining happiness and eternal life. Satan's hope is to lead men and women to disobey this law. He constantly tries to misrepresent it and belittle its importance. His master stroke has been to attempt to change the law itself, so as to lead people to violate its instructions while they profess to obey it. One writer has compared the attempt to change God's law to an ancient mischievous practice of taking a signpost where two roads met and turning it in a wrong direction. This often caused great perplexity and hardship.

God set up a signpost for those journeying through this world. One arm pointed out willing obedience to the Creator as the road to life, while the other indicated disobedience as the path to death. But in an evil hour for our race, the great enemy of all

[64]

good turned the signpost around, and many people have mistakenly taken the wrong way.

Through Moses the Lord instructed the Israelites, "Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you." "It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed." **Exodus 31:13, 17.**

The Lord clearly defined obedience as the way to the City of God, but the "man of sin" has changed the signpost. He has set up a false sabbath and has caused men and women to think that by resting on it they are obeying the command of the Creator. When "the heavens

and the earth ... were finished,” God exalted the seventh-day Sabbath as a memorial of His creative work. “God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.” **Genesis 2:1, 3.**

At the time of the Exodus God brought the Sabbath prominently before His people. In Egypt their taskmasters had tried to force them to labor on the Sabbath by increasing the amount of work required each week. But God delivered the Israelites from slavery and brought them to a place where they could freely observe all the instructions of the Lord. At Sinai God spoke the law and delivered a copy of it to Moses on two tables of stone, “written with the finger of God.” **Exodus 31:18.** And through forty years of wandering the Israelites were constantly reminded of God’s appointed rest day because every seventh day the manna did not fall, but the double portion that fell on the preparation day was miraculously preserved.

The Lord intended that by observing the Sabbath command, Israel would be reminded of Him continually as their Creator and Redeemer. While they kept the Sabbath in the proper spirit, idol worship could not exist; but if Israel set aside the claims of this divine instruction, they would soon forget the Creator. Yet “they rejected My ordinances and did not observe My statutes, and profaned My Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols.” **Ezekiel 20:16, NRSV.**

In calling the attention of Judah to the sins that finally brought the Babylonian Captivity on them, the Lord declared: “You have ... profaned My Sabbaths.” “Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads.” **Ezekiel 22:8, 31.**

When Jerusalem was restored in the days of Nehemiah, he challenged the people’s Sabbathbreaking by asking them, “Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath.” **Nehemiah 13:18.**

How Christ Upheld the Sabbath

During His earthly ministry, Christ emphasized the binding claims of the Sabbath. He showed

[65]

reverence for the institution He Himself had given. In His days people had so perverted the Sabbath that their observance of it reflected selfish human character rather than the character of God. Christ set aside the false teaching that had misrepresented Him. Although the rabbis followed Him with merciless hostility, He went straight forward, keeping the Sabbath according to the law of God.

In unmistakable language He testified of His regard for the law. “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets,” He said. “I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” **Matthew 5:17-19.**

The great enemy of our happiness has made the Sabbath of the fourth commandment an object of special attack. Satan says, "I will work at cross purposes with God. I will set aside God's memorial, the seventh-day Sabbath. I will show the world that the day God sanctified has been changed. I will obliterate the memory of it. In its place I will establish a day that does not bear the credentials of God, a day that cannot be a sign between God and His people. Through my representative, I will exalt myself. The first day will be praised, and the Protestant world will receive this false sabbath as genuine. I will be the prince of this world. I will so control minds that God's Sabbath will be a special object of contempt. A sign? I will make the observance of the seventh day a sign of disloyalty to the authorities of earth. Human laws will become so strict that men and women will not dare to observe the seventh-day Sabbath. For fear of being without food and clothing, they will join the world in transgressing God's law. The earth will be entirely under my dominion." Through setting up a false sabbath, the enemy thought "to change times and law." But has he really succeeded in changing God's law? He who is the same yesterday, today, and forever has said this about the seventh-day Sabbath: "It is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations." "It is a sign ... forever." **Exodus 31:13, 17**. The changed signpost is pointing the wrong way, but God has not changed. He is just as jealous for His law now as in the days of Ahab and Elijah.

Elijah Is Needed Today!

But how that law is disregarded! Look at the world today in open rebellion against God. People neglect the Bible and hate truth. Jesus sees His law rejected, His love despised, His ambassadors treated with indifference. His mercies have gone unacknowledged, His warnings unheeded. The temple courts of the human soul have been turned into places of unholy commerce. Selfishness, envy, pride, malice—all are cherished.

[66]

Many do not hesitate to sneer at the Word of God. They ridicule those who believe it just as it reads. There is a growing contempt for law and order, directly traceable to a violation of Jehovah's plain commands. Violence and crime are the result of turning aside from the path of obedience.

Just look at the nearly universal disregard of the Sabbath commandment. See also the daring wickedness of those who, while enacting laws to safeguard the supposed sanctity of the first day of the week, at the same time are making laws legalizing the liquor traffic. They attempt to force the conscience while lending their approval to an evil that destroys the beings created in the image of God. Satan inspires such legislation.

Almost the whole world is following after idols. But the Lord will not always allow His law to be broken and despised without consequences. Skepticism may treat the claims of God's law with joking and denial; the cause of God may hold its ground only by great effort and continual sacrifice. Yet in the end truth will triumph gloriously.

In God's closing work on earth, the standard of His law will be exalted again. False religion may prevail, people may lose sight of the cross of Calvary, darkness may spread over the world, and the popular current may turn against the truth. But in the hour of greatest

danger the God of Elijah will raise up human instruments to bear a message that will not be silenced. In the places where people have gone to the greatest lengths in speaking against the Most High, the voice of stern rebuke will be heard. Those whom God has appointed will boldly denounce the union of the church with the world. They will call earnestly on men and women to turn from a man-made rite to observe the true Sabbath. “Fear God and give glory to Him,” they will proclaim to every nation, “for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth. ... If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation.” **Revelation 14:7-10**. The world will be arraigned in the courtroom of Infinite Justice to receive sentence.

Today, as in the days of Elijah, the line between God’s commandmentkeeping people and the worshipers of false gods is clearly drawn. “How long will you falter between two opinions?” Elijah cried. “If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” **1 Kings 18:21**. And the message for today is, “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen.” “Come out of her, My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.” **Revelation 18:2, 4, 5**.

The Test That Will Come to All

The test will come to everyone. People will be urged to observe the false sabbath. The contest will be

[67]

between the commandments of God and mere human laws. Those who have yielded step by step to worldly demands and customs will yield to the earthly powers rather than subject themselves to derision, insult, threatened imprisonment, and death. At that time the gold will be separated from the dross. The distinction will be clear between true godliness and the appearance and tinsel of it. Many a star that we have admired for its brilliance will then go out in darkness. Those who are not clothed with Christ’s righteousness will appear in the shame of their nakedness.

Scattered in every land are those who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Like the stars of heaven that appear only at night, these faithful ones will shine out when darkness covers the earth. In Africa, in Europe, in South America, in China, in India, in the islands of the sea, and in all the corners of the earth, God has many chosen ones in reserve who will yet shine brightly in the darkness, revealing clearly to an apostate world the transforming power of obedience to His law. In the hour of deepest apostasy, when Satan makes his supreme effort to cause “all,” under penalty of death, to receive the sign of loyalty to a false sabbath, these faithful ones, “blameless and harmless, children of God without fault,” will “shine as lights in the world.” **Revelation 13:16; Philippians 2:15**. The darker the night, the more brilliantly they will shine.

Elijah could count only one on the Lord’s side when he said, “I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.” But the word of the Lord surprised him: “Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal.” **1 Kings 19:14, 18**.

Then let no one attempt to number Israel today, but let everyone have a heart like the heart of Christ, a heart that reaches out for the salvation of a lost world.

[68]

Jehoshaphat, the King Who Believed God

Called to the throne at the age of thirty-five, Jehoshaphat had the benefit of good King Asa's example. In nearly every crisis Asa had done "what was right in the eyes of the Lord." **1 Kings 15:11**. During his own reign of twenty-five years, Jehoshaphat aimed to walk "in all the ways of his father Asa. He did not turn aside from them." **1 Kings 22:43**. He tried to persuade his subjects to take a firm stand against idol worship. Many in his realm "offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places." **1 Kings 22:43**. From the beginning the king tried to safeguard Judah from the sins that characterized the northern kingdom under Ahab. Jehoshaphat "did not seek the Baals, but sought the God of his father, and walked in His commandments and not according to the acts of Israel." The Lord was with him, and "established the kingdom in his hand." **2 Chronicles 17:3-5**.

Jehoshaphat "had riches and honor in abundance." As time passed, the king "removed the high places and wooden images from Judah." **Verses 5, 6**. "And the rest of the perverted persons, who remained in the days of his father Asa, he banished from the land." **1 Kings 22:46**. In this way he gradually freed the inhabitants of Judah from dangers that had threatened their spiritual development.

Throughout the kingdom the people needed instruction in the law of God. If they brought their lives into harmony with its requirements, they would become loyal both to God and to one another. Knowing this, Jehoshaphat took steps to see that his people received thorough instruction in the Holy Scriptures. By royal appointment instructors "went throughout all the cities of Judah and taught the people." **2 Chronicles 17:9**. And, as many put away sin, a revival took place.

Great gain comes from obeying God's law. If the teachings of God's Word were the controlling influence in the life of every man and woman, the evils that now exist in national and social life would disappear. From every home an influence would go forth that would make men and women strong in spiritual insight and in moral power.

For many years the surrounding nations did not threaten Jehoshaphat. "The fear of the Lord fell on all the kingdoms of the lands that were around Judah." "Jehoshaphat

[69]

became increasingly powerful, and he built fortresses and storage cities in Judah. ... Men of war, mighty men of valor ... served the king." **2 Chronicles 17:10, 12-19**. Blessed with "riches and honor" (**2 Chronicles 18:1**), he was able to exert a mighty influence for truth and righteousness. But at the height of his prosperity Jehoshaphat consented to the marriage of his son Jehoram to Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. This union formed an alliance between Judah and Israel that in a time of crisis brought disaster to the king and to many of his subjects.

On one occasion Jehoshaphat visited the king of Israel at Samaria. The royal guest from Jerusalem was shown special honor, and Ahab persuaded him to unite with Israel in war

against the Syrians. Ahab hoped that by joining with Judah he might recapture Ramoth Gilead, one of the old cities of refuge, which, he claimed, rightfully belonged to Israel.

In a moment of weakness Jehoshaphat rashly promised to join him against the Syrians. His better judgment, however, led him to seek the will of God concerning the matter. "Please inquire for the word of the Lord today," he asked Ahab. In response, Ahab called four hundred false prophets, and said, "Shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?" They answered, "Go up, for God will deliver it into the king's hand." **Verses 4, 5.**

Unsatisfied, Jehoshaphat asked, "Is there not still a prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of him?" **Verse 6.** "There is still one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord," Ahab answered, "but I hate him, because he never prophesies good concerning me, but evil." **1 Kings 22:8.** Jehoshaphat was firm in his request that they call the man of God. Micaiah said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the Lord said, 'These have no master. Let each return to his house in peace.'" **Verse 17.**

Jehoshaphat Makes a Mistake

Neither ruler felt like obeying the warning. Ahab had planned his course and was determined to follow it. Jehoshaphat had given his word, "We will be with you in the war" (**2 Chronicles 18:3**), and after making such a promise he was reluctant to withdraw his forces. "So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth Gilead." **1 Kings 22:29.** During the battle that followed, Ahab was shot by an arrow and died.

From this disastrous battle Jehoshaphat returned to Jerusalem. The prophet Jehu met him with the reproof: "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Therefore the wrath of the Lord is upon you. Nevertheless good things are found in you, in that you have removed the wooden images from the land, and have prepared your heart to seek God." **2 Chronicles 19:2, 3.** Jehoshaphat spent his later years mostly in strengthening Judah's

[70]

national and spiritual defenses. He "went out again among the people from Beersheba to the mountains of Ephraim, and brought them back to the Lord God of their fathers." **Verse 4.**

One important step the king took was to establish efficient courts of justice. He "set judges in the land," and in the instructions given them he urged: "Take heed to what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment. ... With the Lord our God [there is] no partiality, nor taking of bribes." **Verses 5-7.**

The king called on the judges of the appeals court at Jerusalem to be faithful. "Amariah the chief priest is over you in all matters of the Lord. ... The Levites will be officials before you. Behave courageously, and the Lord will be with the good." **Verse 11.** In safeguarding the rights and liberties of his subjects, Jehoshaphat stressed the fact that every member of the human family receives from God, who rules over all. Those who are appointed to act as judges under Him are to "defend the poor and fatherless," and "do justice to the afflicted and needy." **Psalms 82:3.**

Armies That Threaten to Destroy Judah

Toward the close of Jehoshaphat's reign, "the people of Moab with the people of Ammon ... came to battle against Jehoshaphat." News of this invasion reached the king through a messenger, who appeared with the startling word, "A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea, from Syria." **2 Chronicles 20:1, 2.**

Jehoshaphat was a man of courage. For years he had been strengthening his armies and fortified cities. He was well prepared to meet almost any enemy. Yet in this crisis he did not put his trust in human strength. Only by a living faith in God could he hope to gain the victory over these heathen who boasted of their power to humble Judah in the eyes of the nations.

"Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. So Judah gathered together to ask help from the Lord." Standing in the temple court before his people, Jehoshaphat poured out his soul in prayer: "O Lord God of our fathers, ... do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You? Are You not our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel? ...

'And now, here are the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir—whom You would not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they ... did not destroy them—here they are, rewarding us by coming to throw us out of Your possession which You have given us to inherit. ... We have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You.'" **Verses 3, 4, 6, 7, 10-12.**

For years Jehoshaphat had taught the people to trust in the One who

[71]

had so often saved His chosen ones from destruction, and now he did not stand alone: "All Judah, with their little ones, their wives, and their children, stood before the Lord." **Verse 13.** Unitedly they pleaded with the Lord to put their enemies to confusion:

O God, do not keep silence; do not hold Your peace or be still,
O God!

Even now Your enemies are in tumult. ...

They say, "Come, let us wipe them out as a nation; ..."
against You they make a covenant. ...

Let them be put to shame and dismayed forever;
let them perish in disgrace.

Let them know that You alone, whose name is the Lord,
are the Most High over all the earth.

Psalm 83, NRSV

As the people joined with their king in humbling themselves before God, the Spirit of the Lord came on Jahaziel, a Levite, and he said, "Thus says the Lord to you: 'Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's. ... You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still, and see the salvation

of the Lord, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem! Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the Lord is with you.” **2 Chronicles 20:15-17.**

A Battle Won by a Choir Singing

Early in the morning as they advanced into the wilderness of Tekoa to battle, Jehoshaphat said, “‘Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper.’ And ... he appointed those who should sing to the Lord, and who should praise the beauty of holiness.” **Verses 20, 21.** These singers went before the army, lifting their voices in praise to God for the promise of victory.

It was a most unusual way of going to battle—singing and exalting the God of Israel! This was their battle song. They possessed the beauty of holiness. Wouldn’t more praising of God strengthen the hands of the valiant soldiers who are standing in defense of truth today?

“The Lord set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated. For the people of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir to utterly kill and destroy them. And when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, they helped to destroy one another.” **Verses 22, 23.**

God was Judah’s strength in this crisis, and He is the strength of His people today. We are not to trust in princes or to set anyone in the place of God. In every emergency we are to feel that the battle is God’s. His resources are limitless. Apparent impossibilities will make the victory all the greater.

Loaded down with plunder, the

[72]

armies of Judah returned “with joy, for the Lord had made them rejoice over their enemies. So they came to Jerusalem, with stringed instruments and harps and trumpets, to the house of the Lord.” **Verses 27, 28.** They had put their trust completely in God, and He had proved to be their fortress and deliverer. Now they could sing with understanding the inspired hymn of David:

God is our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble.
He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two;
He burns the chariot in the fire.
Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!
The Lord of hosts is with us;
The God of Jacob is our refuge.

Psalm 46:1, 9-11

Through the faith of Judah’s ruler and of his armies “the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries when they heard that the Lord had fought against the enemies

of Israel. Then the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest all around.” 2
Chronicles 20:29, 30.

[73]

The Fall of the House of Ahab

This chapter is based on 1 Kings 21; 2 Kings 1.

The evil influence that Jezebel exercised over Ahab bore fruit in deeds of shame and violence. “There was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up.” Strengthened in wrongdoing by Jezebel, Ahab had followed the desires of his evil heart until selfishness controlled him fully. He felt he had a right to whatever he wanted.

We see this dominant trait in an incident that took place while Elijah was still a prophet in Israel. Next to the palace was a vineyard belonging to Naboth. Ahab determined to possess it. “Give me your vineyard,” he said to Naboth, “that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near, next to my house; and for it I will give you a vineyard better than it. Or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its worth in money.”

Naboth’s vineyard had belonged to his ancestors, and he refused to part with it. “The Lord forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you!”

Naboth’s refusal made the selfish king ill. “Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased. ... And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food.” Jezebel soon learned what had happened and was offended that anyone would refuse the request of the king. She assured Ahab that he did not need to be sad any longer. “You now exercise authority over Israel!” she said. “Arise, eat food, and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth.”

Jezebel immediately began to carry out her wicked plan. She wrote letters in the name of the king and sent them to the elders of the city where Naboth lived, saying, “Seat Naboth with high honor among the people; and seat two men, scoundrels, before him to bear witness against him, saying, ‘You have blasphemed God and the king.’ Then take him out, and stone him, that he may die.”

The leaders obeyed this command. “The men of his city, the elders and nobles ..., did as Jezebel had ... written in the letters which she had sent to them.” Then Jezebel went to the king and told him to take

[74]

the vineyard. So Ahab went down to take possession of the coveted property.

The king was not allowed to enjoy what he had gained by fraud and bloodshed without hearing from God. “The word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, ‘Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel ... in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone down to take possession of it. You shall speak to him, saying, “Thus says the Lord: ‘Have you murdered and also taken possession?’”’” The Lord further instructed Elijah to pronounce a terrible judgment on Ahab.

The guilty ruler, startled at meeting the stern prophet face to face in the vineyard, expressed his fear: “Have you found me, O my enemy?”

Without hesitation the messenger of the Lord replied, "I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the Lord: 'Behold, I will bring calamity on you. I will take away your posterity.'" The house of Ahab was to be completely destroyed. And the Lord declared concerning Jezebel, "'The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.' The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Ahab and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field."

When the king heard this terrifying message, "he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning.

"And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 'See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days. In the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house.'"

Ahaziah Follows the Ways of His Father and Mother

Less than three years later King Ahab met his death at the hands of the Syrians. Ahaziah, his successor, "did evil in the sight of the Lord. ... He served Baal and worshiped him, and provoked the Lord God of Israel to anger," as his father Ahab had done. Judgments followed. A disastrous war with Moab, and then an accident that threatened his own life, bore witness to God's wrath against him. Having fallen "through the lattice of his upper room," Ahaziah, seriously injured, sent his servants to inquire of Baal-Zebub whether he would recover. Through his priests, the god of Ekron was supposed to give information concerning future events. But the predictions came from the prince of darkness.

A man of God met Ahaziah's servants and directed them to return to the king with this message: "'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?' Now therefore, thus says the Lord: 'You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.'"

The astonished servants hurried back to the king and repeated to him the words of the man of God. The king inquired, "What kind of man

[75]

was it?" They answered, "A hairy man wearing a leather belt around his waist." "It is Elijah the Tishbite," Ahaziah exclaimed. He knew that if it was indeed Elijah, the words of doom would surely be fulfilled.

Anxious to reverse the judgment, he decided to send for the prophet. Twice Ahaziah sent soldiers to intimidate Elijah, and twice the wrath of God fell on them in judgment. The third company of soldiers humbled themselves before God, and their captain "fell on his knees before Elijah, and pleaded with him, ... 'Man of God, please let my life and the life of these fifty servants of yours be precious in your sight.'"

"The angel of the Lord said to Elijah, 'Go down with him; do not be afraid of him.' So he arose and went down with him to the king. Then he said to him, 'Thus says the Lord: "Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of His word? Therefore you shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.'"

During his father's reign, Ahaziah had seen the terrible evidences God had given apostate Israel of how He regards those who set aside the claims of His law. Ahaziah had acted as

if these awful realities were nothing more than baseless tales. He had followed Baal, and at last had boldly done this, his most daring rejection of God. Rebellious and unwilling to repent, Ahaziah died “according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken.”

Modern Satanic Forms of Worship

People today may not bow to heathen gods, yet thousands are worshipping at Satan’s shrine as surely as did the king of Israel. The spirit of idol worship is everywhere, although it has taken forms that are more refined and attractive than when Ahaziah sent messengers to the god of Ekron. Faith in the sure word of prophecy is decreasing, and in its place superstition and satanic witchery are captivating the minds of many. The mysteries of heathen worship are replaced by the dark arts and wonders of spiritistic mediums. Thousands who refuse to accept light from God’s Word welcome the disclosures of these mediums. Many who shrink from the thought of consulting spirit mediums are attracted by more pleasing forms of spiritism. Others are led astray by Christian Science and by the mysticism of Theosophy and other Oriental religions.

The apostles of nearly all forms of spiritism claim to have power to heal. And many people go to these healers instead of trusting in the living God and the skill of well-qualified physicians. The mother, watching by the sickbed of her child, exclaims, “Is there no physician who has power to restore my child?” Someone tells her about the cures performed by some psychic, and she trusts her dear one to his charge, placing the child as surely in the hand of Satan as if he were standing by her side. In many cases the future life of the child is controlled by a satanic power.

God had reason to be displeased at Ahaziah’s unfaithfulness. What

[76]

had He not done to inspire Israel with confidence in Himself? Yet now the king of Israel, turning to ask for help from the worst enemy of his people, proclaimed to the heathen that he had more confidence in their idols than in the God of heaven. Men and women dishonor Him when they turn from the Source of strength and wisdom to ask help or counsel from the powers of darkness.

Those who give themselves up to the sorcery of Satan may boast of receiving great benefit, but does this prove that their course is wise or safe? What if life is prolonged? What if they do secure temporal gain? In the end, will it pay to disregard the will of God? All such apparent gain will prove at last to be a complete loss.

Ahaziah was followed as king by Jehoram, his brother, who reigned for twelve years. Throughout these years Jezebel was still living and continued to exercise her evil influence over the nation. Jehoram “did evil in the sight of the Lord, but not like his father and mother; for he put away the sacred pillar of Baal that his father had made. Nevertheless he persisted in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin; he did not depart from them.” *2 Kings 3:2, 3.*

During Jehoram’s reign over Israel Jehoshaphat died, and his son, also named Jehoram, ascended the throne of Judah. By his marriage with the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, Jehoram of Judah was closely connected with the king of Israel and followed after Baal

“just as the house of Ahab had done.” “Moreover he ... caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit harlotry, and led Judah astray.” **2 Chronicles 21:6, 11.**

God did not permit the king of Judah to continue his terrible apostasy without rebuke. The prophet Elijah could not remain silent while Judah was following the same course that had brought the northern kingdom nearly to ruin. The prophet sent Jehoram of Judah a written communication, in which the wicked king read the awful words:

“Thus says the Lord God of your father David: Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father, ... but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and have made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the harlot, ... and also have killed your brothers, those of your father’s household, who were better than yourself, behold, the Lord will strike your people with a serious affliction—your children, your wives, and all your possessions; and you will become very sick.”

In fulfillment of this prophecy “the Lord stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines and the Arabians. ... And they ... carried away all the possessions that were found in the king’s house, and also his sons and his wives, so that there was not a son left to him except Jehoahaz [Ahaziah, Azariah], the youngest of his sons.

“After all this the Lord struck him in his intestines with an incurable disease. Then it happened in the course of time, after the end of two

[77]

years, ... he died in severe pain.” “Then Ahaziah [Jehoahaz] his son reigned in his place.” **Verses 12-19; 2 Kings 8:24.**

Ahaziah ruled only one year, and during this time, influenced by his mother Athaliah, who “advised him to do wickedly,” “he did evil in the sight of the Lord.” **2 Chronicles 22:3, 4.** Jezebel, his grandmother, was still living, and he allied himself boldly with Jehoram of Israel, his uncle.

The surviving members of the house of Ahab were indeed “his counselors, to his ruin.” **2 Chronicles 22:4, NRSV.** While Ahaziah was visiting his uncle at Jezreel, God directed the prophet Elisha to send one of the sons of the prophets to Ramoth Gilead to anoint Jehu king of Israel. At that time the combined forces of Judah and Israel were engaged in a military campaign against the Syrians. Jehoram had been wounded in battle and had returned to Jezreel, leaving Jehu in charge of the armies. The messenger of Elisha solemnly gave Jehu a special commission from heaven: “You shall strike down the house of Ahab your master, that I may avenge the blood of My servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord. ... For the whole house of Ahab shall perish.” **2 Kings 9:6-8.**

Jehu Takes the Kingship

After the army proclaimed him king, Jehu hurried to Jezreel, where he began his work of execution. Jehoram of Israel, Ahaziah of Judah, and Jezebel the queen mother, with “all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel,” were killed. “All his great men and his close acquaintances and his priests” were put to the sword. The temple of Baal was laid in ruins, the idolatrous images burned. “Thus Jehu destroyed Baal from Israel.” **2 Kings 10:11, 28.**

News of this general execution reached Athaliah, Jezebel’s daughter, who still occupied a commanding position in the kingdom of Judah. When she saw that her son, the king

of Judah, was dead, “she arose and destroyed all the royal heirs of the house of Judah.” **2 Chronicles 22:10**. This massacre killed all the descendants of David who were eligible for the throne except one, a baby named Joash, whom the wife of Jehoiada the high priest hid in the temple. For six years the child remained hidden, while “Athaliah reigned over the land.” **Verse 12**.

At the end of this time, “the Levites and all Judah” (**2 Chronicles 23:8**) united with Jehoiada the high priest in crowning the child Joash and proclaiming him their king. “And they clapped their hands and said, ‘Long live the king!’” **2 Kings 11:12**.

“When Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she came to the people to the temple of the Lord.” **2 Chronicles 23:12**.

“When she looked, there was the king standing by a pillar according to custom; and the leaders and the trumpeters were by the king. All the people of the land were rejoicing and blowing trumpets.

[78]

“Athaliah tore her clothes and cried out, ‘Treason! Treason!’” **2 Kings 11:14**. But Jehoiada commanded the officers to lay hold of Athaliah and her followers and lead them out of the temple to be executed.

In this way the last member of the house of Ahab died. The terrible evil that Ahab’s alliance with Jezebel had unleashed continued till the last of his descendants was destroyed. Immediately after the execution of the unrepentant Queen Athaliah, “all the people of the land went to the temple of Baal, and tore it down. They thoroughly broke in pieces its altars and images, and killed Mattan the priest of Baal.” **2 Kings 11:18**.

Reformation followed. Those who took part in recognizing Joash as king had made a solemn pact “that they should be the Lord’s people.” And now that the daughter of Jezebel had been removed from Judah and the priests of Baal had been killed and their temple destroyed, “all the people of the land rejoiced; and the city was quiet.” **2 Chronicles 23:16, 21**.

[79]

Elisha Called to Succeed Elijah

God had told Elijah to anoint another to be prophet in his place— “Elisha the son of Shaphat.” **1 Kings 19:16**. In obedience to the command, Elijah went to find Elisha. As he journeyed northward, how different the scene was from what it had been only a short time before! Everywhere vegetation was springing up as if to make up for the time of drought and famine.

Elisha’s father was a wealthy farmer whose household had not bowed the knee to Baal. God was honored in their home. In the quiet of country life, under the teaching of God and nature and the discipline of useful work, Elisha received training in habits of simplicity and of obedience to his parents and to God. This training helped fit him for the high position he would occupy later.

The prophetic call came while he was plowing in the field. He had taken up the work that lay nearest. His spirit was quiet and gentle, yet he was energetic and steadfast. He gained strength of character in his humble toil, constantly increasing in grace and knowledge. While cooperating with his father in homelife duties, he was learning to cooperate with God. By faithfulness in little things, he was preparing for larger trusts. Day by day he gained a fitness for a higher work. In learning to serve he also learned how to instruct and lead. No one can know God’s intentions in His discipline, but all may be certain that faithfulness in little things is the evidence of fitness for greater responsibilities. Only someone who in small duties proves to be “a worker who does not need to be ashamed” (**2 Timothy 2:15**) can be honored by God with higher service.

Many feel that their lives are useless, that they are doing nothing to advance God’s kingdom. Because they can serve only in little things, they think they are justified in doing nothing. In this they make a mistake. One may be in active service for God while performing ordinary, everyday duties—felling trees, clearing the ground, or following the plow. The mother who trains her children for Christ is working for God just as surely as is the minister in the pulpit.

Many long for special talent with which to do a wonderful work, while they lose sight of duties close at hand. Let them take up the duties lying directly in their pathway. It is

[80]

not splendid talents that enable us to give acceptable service, but the conscientious performance of daily duties, the contented spirit, the sincere interest in others. The most common tasks, done with loving faithfulness, are beautiful in God’s sight.

As Elijah passed the field in which Elisha was plowing, he put his own cloak on the young man’s shoulders in consecration. During the famine the family of Shaphat had become familiar with the work and mission of Elijah, and now the Spirit of God impressed Elisha that God had called him to be Elijah’s successor.

“And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, ‘Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.’” “Go back again,” was Elijah’s answer, “for what have I

done to you?” **1 Kings 19:20**. This was not a repulse, but a test of faith. Elisha must count the cost—to accept or reject the call. If his desires clung to his home and its advantages, he was at liberty to remain there.

But Elisha understood the meaning of the call, and he did not hesitate to obey. Not for any worldly advantage would he pass up the opportunity to become God’s messenger or sacrifice the privilege of associating with His servant. He “took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen’s equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant.” **1 Kings 19:21**. Without hesitation he left a home where he was loved, to minister to the prophet in his uncertain life.

A Young Man Who Rejected Christ’s Call to Service

Similar to the call that came to Elisha was the answer Christ gave to the young ruler who asked Him, “What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” “If you want to be perfect,” Christ replied, “go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” **Matthew 19:16, 21**.

Elisha accepted the call, casting no backward glance at the pleasures and comforts he was leaving. In contrast, the young ruler “went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” **Verse 22**. His love for his possessions was greater than his love for God. He proved himself unworthy of a place in the Master’s service.

Not all of us are asked to serve as Elisha served, nor to sell everything we have; but God asks us to give His service first place in our lives, to allow no day to pass without doing something to advance His work. One person may be called to a foreign land, another to give money to support gospel work. God accepts the offering of each. What is necessary is to consecrate the life and all its interests.

To everyone who experiences His grace, the Lord appoints a work for others. We are to say, “Here am I! Send me.” See **Isaiah 6:8**. Whether we serve as ministers of the Word, as physicians, merchants, farmers,

[81]

professional people, or mechanics, it is our work to reveal the gospel to others.

No great work was required of Elisha at first. He is spoken of as pouring water on the hands of Elijah. He was willing to do anything the Lord directed, and at every step he continued to prove faithful in little things. With a dedication that grew stronger every day, he devoted himself to the mission God had appointed him.

After uniting with Elijah, Elisha was tempted to think of the home he had left. But he had resolved not to turn back, and through test and trial he proved true to his trust.

Ministry involves far more than preaching. It means training young people as Elijah trained Elisha, giving them responsibilities in God’s work—small at first, larger as they gain strength and experience. Ministers of faith and prayer can say, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life ... we declare to you.” **1 John 1:1-3**. Young, inexperienced workers should be trained in connection with experienced servants of God.

God has honored young people by choosing them for His service, and they should be faithful, obedient, and willing to sacrifice. If they submit to God's discipline, choosing His servants as their counselors, they will develop into high-principled, steadfast workers whom God can trust with responsibilities.

The Great Results of Elijah's Work

As the gospel is proclaimed in its purity, people will be called from the plow and from common commercial business vocations and will be educated in connection with experienced workers. As they learn to labor effectively, they will proclaim the truth with power. Through God's wonderful workings, mountains of difficulty will be thrown into the sea. The message that means so much to the dwellers on earth will be heard and understood. The work will advance more and more until the whole earth will have been warned, and then the end will come.

For several years Elijah and Elisha worked together. Elijah had been God's instrument to overthrow gigantic evils. His efforts had brought a stop to the idolatry with which Ahab and the heathen Jezebel had seduced the nation. Baal's prophets had been executed. Israel had been deeply stirred, and many were returning to the worship of God. By careful, patient instruction, Elisha must guide Israel in safe paths. His association with Elijah, the greatest prophet since Moses, prepared him for the work he was soon to take up alone.

From time to time during these years Elijah had to meet open evils with stern rebuke. When Ahab seized Naboth's vineyard, the voice of Elijah prophesied his doom and the doom of all his house. And when Ahaziah turned from the living God to Baal-Zebub, Elijah protested earnestly.

[82]

The schools of the prophets that Samuel had established had fallen into decay during Israel's apostasy. Elijah reestablished them, making provision for young men to gain an education that would lead them to magnify the law and make it honorable. Three schools are mentioned in the record—at Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho. Just before Elijah was taken to heaven, he and Elisha visited these centers of training. Elijah now repeated the lessons that he had given on former visits. Especially did he instruct them about maintaining their loyalty to the God of heaven. He also impressed on their minds the importance of keeping every feature of their education free of pride and show. Only in this way could they be molded into heaven's likeness and work in the ways of the Lord.

Elijah rejoiced as he saw what these schools were accomplishing. The reformation was not complete, but he could see the truth of the Lord's word, "Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal." **1 Kings 19:18.**

As Elisha accompanied the prophet from school to school, his faith and commitment were tested once more. The prophet invited him to turn back: "Stay here, please," Elijah said, "for the Lord has sent me on to Bethel." **2 Kings 2:2.** But Elisha had learned not to become discouraged, and now he would not leave his master, as long as opportunity remained to become better qualified for service.

God had revealed to Elijah that he was to be translated, but Elijah did not know that He had also revealed this to his disciples in the schools of the prophets and to Elisha. And now

Elisha kept close beside him. As often as Elijah gave the invitation to turn back, Elisha's answer was, "I will not leave you!" **Verse 2.**

"So the two of them went on. ... Now Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water [of the Jordan River]; and it was divided this way and that, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground. And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, 'Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?'" **Verses 6-9.**

What Elisha craved most was a large measure of the Spirit that God had bestowed on Elijah, who was about to be honored with translation. He knew that nothing but the Spirit which had rested on Elijah could fit him to fill the place in Israel to which God had called him, and so he asked, "Please let a double portion of your Spirit be upon me." **Verse 9.**

In response Elijah said, "'You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so.' Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." **2 Kings 2:10, 11.**

[83]

Many Will Be Translated Without Tasting Death

Elijah foreshadowed the experience of God's people who will be living at the time of Christ's second advent and who will be "changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet," without tasting death. **1 Corinthians 15:51, 52.** As a representative of those who will be translated, Elijah was permitted to stand with Moses by the Savior's side on the mount of transfiguration. The disciples saw Jesus clothed with the light of heaven; they heard the voice that came "out of the cloud" (**Luke 9:35**), acknowledging Him as the Son of God. They saw Moses, representing those who will be raised from the dead at the Second Advent. And there also stood Elijah, representing those who will be changed from mortal to immortal at the close of earth's history, translated to heaven without seeing death.

In the desert, discouraged and lonely, Elijah had prayed that he might die. But God still had a great work for Elijah to do; and when his work was done, he was not to perish alone and in discouragement. Going down into the tomb was not his destiny. He would ascend with God's angels to the presence of His glory.

"And Elisha ... saw him no more. And ... he also took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood by the bank of the Jordan. Then he took the mantle ... and struck the water, and said, 'Where is the Lord God of Elijah?' And when he also had struck the water, it was divided this way and that; and Elisha crossed over.

"Now when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw him, they said, 'The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.'" **2 Kings 2:12-15.**

When the Lord sees fit to remove from His work those to whom He has given wisdom, He strengthens their successors, if they will look to Him for aid and will walk in His ways. They may be even wiser than their predecessors, for they may profit from their experience.

After this Elisha stood in Elijah's place. Faithful in that which was least, he was to prove himself faithful also in much.

[84]

The Healing of the Waters

After crossing the Jordan, the people of Israel had camped in the Jordan Valley, rich with fields of grain and forests of fruit-bearing trees. Before them had stood Jericho, the center of the worship of Ashtoreth, the most immoral of all the Canaanite forms of idolatry. Soon its walls were thrown down, and at the time of its fall Joshua made the solemn declaration, “Cursed be the man before the Lord who rises up and builds this city Jericho; he shall lay its foundation with his firstborn, and with his youngest he shall set up its gates.” [Joshua 6:26](#).

Five centuries passed. The spot lay in ruins, cursed by God. Even the springs suffered the terrible effects of the curse. But when Jezebel’s influence revived the worship of Ashtoreth, Jericho, the ancient seat of this worship, was rebuilt, but at a fearful cost to the builder. Hiel the Bethelite “laid its foundation with Abiram his firstborn, and with his youngest son Segub he set up its gates, according to the word of the Lord.” [1 Kings 16:34](#).

Not far from Jericho was one of the schools of the prophets, and here Elisha went after Elijah was taken to heaven. While he stayed among them, the men of the city came to him and said, “The situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees; but the water is bad, and the ground barren.” The spring that had been pure and life-giving was now unfit to use. In response Elisha said, “Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it.” When he received this, “he went out to the source of the water, and cast in the salt there, and said, ‘Thus says the Lord: “I have healed this water; from it there shall be no more death or barrenness.”’” [2 Kings 2:19-21](#).

God’s miraculous intervention was what healed the waters of Jericho. Through this token of compassion, He who “makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust,” saw fit to reveal His willingness to heal Israel of their spiritual ills. [Matthew 5:45](#).

The restoration was permanent. Through the ages the waters have flowed on, making that portion of the valley an oasis of beauty.

The Lord Still Heals the Bitter Springs

In casting salt into the bitter spring, Elisha taught the same spiritual lesson that the Savior gave

[85]

centuries later when He declared, “You are the salt of the earth.” [Matthew 5:13](#). Salt mingling with the polluted spring purified its waters. When God compares His children to salt, He is teaching them that He wants them to become agents in saving others, that through them the world may receive the grace that brings salvation.

The world needs to see genuine, sincere Christianity. The poison of sin is at work at the heart of society. Cities and towns are deep in moral corruption, suffering, and evil. People in poverty and distress are weighed down with guilt and are dying for lack of a saving

influence. The gospel of truth is kept before them, yet they die because those who should be a fragrance of life to them are a stench of death. Their souls drink in bitterness because the springs are poisoned.

Salt must be mingled with the substance to which it is added; it must penetrate and infuse it, so that the food may be preserved. Similarly, the saving power of the gospel reaches people through personal association. Personal influence is a power to work with the influence of Christ, to lift where Christ lifts, to instill correct principles, and to halt the progress of the world's corruption. This influence is to uplift, to sweeten the lives of others by uniting a pure example with faith and love.

The polluted stream at Jericho represents the life of those who are apart from God. Sin destroys in the human soul both the desire and the ability to know God. The whole human organism is deranged, the mind perverted, the imagination corrupted. For lack of moral force to overcome, the life is debased.

But to the heart that God has purified, all is changed. The Spirit of God produces a new life in the soul, bringing the thoughts and desires into obedience to the will of Christ and renewing the inward being in the image of God. Weak and erring men and women show to the world that the redeeming power of grace can change a faulty character to one that is well-developed and fruitful.

The heart that receives the word of God is not like a broken water bottle that loses its treasure; it is like the mountain stream, fed by unfailing springs, whose sparkling waters refresh the weary, the thirsty, the heavily-burdened. It is like a river that constantly flows and, as it advances, becomes deeper and wider, until its life-giving waters spread over all the earth. The stream leaves its gift of fruitfulness behind it. When the earth lies bare and brown under summer's scorching heat, a line of green marks the river's course.

This is how it is with the true child of God. When we open our hearts to the heavenly influence of truth and love, these principles will flow out like streams in the desert, making things fruitful where now they are barren and dry.

Those who have been cleansed through a knowledge of Bible truth will drink every day from the inexhaustible fountain of grace and

[86]

knowledge. They will find that their own hearts are filled to overflowing with the Spirit of their Master; and through their unselfish ministry many will benefit physically, mentally, and spiritually. The weary are refreshed, the sick restored to health, and the sin-burdened relieved.

“Give, and it will be given to you,” for the word of God is “a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.” [Luke 6:38](#); [Song of Solomon 4:15](#).

[87]

Elisha, Gentle Prophet of Peace

This chapter is based on 2 Kings 4.

God had committed messages of condemnation and judgment to Elijah, who raised his voice in fearless reproof. Elisha's mission was more peaceful—to strengthen the work Elijah had begun, to teach people the way of the Lord. The Bible pictures him as coming into personal touch with the people, bringing healing and rejoicing.

Elisha had a mild and kindly spirit, but he could also be stern, as when some ungodly youth mocked him on his way to Bethel. They had heard of Elijah's ascension and made this solemn event into a taunt for Elisha, saying, "Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!" **2 Kings 2:23**. Under the Almighty's inspiration the prophet pronounced a curse on them. The awful judgment that followed came from God. "Two female bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two" of them. **Verse 24**.

If Elisha had allowed the mockery to pass unnoticed, he would have continued to be ridiculed by the rabble, and his mission in a time of national danger might have been defeated. This one example of severe judgment was sufficient to command respect throughout his life. For fifty years he went from city to city, passing through crowds of rude, unrestrained youth, but none mocked him as the prophet of the Most High.

Even kindness should have its limits. The so-called tenderness of parents who coax and indulge their young people is one of the worst evils that can come on the youth. In every family, firmness and positive requirements are essential.

Every child should be taught to show true reverence for God. Never should His name be spoken lightly or thoughtlessly. Children should show reverence for God's representatives—ministers, teachers, and parents, who are called to act in His place. In respecting them, young people honor God.

A Family's Hospitality Is Rewarded

Elisha's kindly spirit enabled him to exert a powerful influence over many in Israel. We see this in the story of his friendly dealings with a family at Shunem. In his travels here and there, one day "Elisha went to

[88]

Shunem, where there was a notable woman, and she persuaded him to eat some food. So it was, as often as he passed by, he would turn in there to eat some food." **2 Kings 4:8**. The lady of the house recognized that Elisha was a "holy man of God," and she said to her husband, "Let us make a small upper room on the wall; and let us put a bed for him there, and a table and chair and a lampstand; so it will be, whenever he comes to us, he can turn in there." Elisha often came to this retreat. God took notice of the woman's kindness. She had been childless, and now the Lord rewarded her hospitality by the gift of a son.

Years passed, and the child was old enough to be out in the field with the reapers. One day he was stricken by the heat, “and he said to his father, ‘My head, my head!’” A young man carried the child to his mother, and “when he had ... brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died. And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, shut the door upon him, and went out.”

In her distress, the woman determined to go to Elisha for help. She set out immediately with her servant. “When the man of God saw her afar off, ... he said to his servant Gehazi, ‘Look, the Shunammite woman! Please run now to meet her, and say to her, “Is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child?”’” But the stricken mother did not reveal the cause of her sorrow until she reached Elisha. When he learned of her loss, Elisha told Gehazi, “Take my staff in your hand, and be on your way. ... Lay my staff on the face of the child.”

But the mother would not be satisfied till Elisha himself came with her. “I will not leave you,” she declared. So “he arose and followed her. Now Gehazi went on ahead of them, and laid the staff on the face of the child; but there was neither voice nor hearing. Therefore he went back to meet him, and told him, saying, ‘The child has not awakened.’”

When they reached the house, Elisha went into the room where the dead child lay, “shut the door behind the two of them, and prayed to the Lord. And he went up and lay upon the child, and put his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands; and he stretched himself out upon the child, and the flesh of the child became warm. He returned and walked back and forth in the house, and again went up and stretched himself out on him; then the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.” The faith of this woman was rewarded. Christ, the great Life-Giver, restored her son to her.

His faithful ones will be rewarded too, at His coming, when Jesus robs the grave of the victory it has claimed. Then He will restore to His servants the children that have been taken from them by death.

Jesus comforts our sorrow for the dead with a message of infinite hope: “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive

[89]

forevermore. ... And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.” **Revelation 1:18**. “The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” **1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17, KJV**.

Elisha’s ministry combined the work of healing with teaching. All through his long and effective labors, Elisha fostered the educational work of the schools of the prophets. The deep movings of the Holy Spirit confirmed his instruction to the earnest groups of young men.

The Poisoned Stew Made Edible

On one of his visits to the school at Gilgal, Elisha healed the poisoned stew. “There was a famine in the land. Now the sons of the prophets were sitting before him; and he said to

his servant, 'Put on the large pot, and boil stew for the sons of the prophets.' So one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered from it a lapful of wild gourds, and came and sliced them into the pot of stew, though they did not know what they were. Then they served it to the men to eat. Now it happened, as they were eating the stew, that they cried out and said, 'Man of God, there is death in the pot!' And they could not eat it. So he said, 'Then bring some flour.' And he put it into the pot, and said, 'Serve it to the people, that they may eat.' And there was nothing harmful in the pot."

Also at Gilgal, while the famine was still in the land, Elisha fed one hundred men with the present "a man from Baal Shalisha" brought to him— "twenty loaves of barley bread, and newly ripened grain in his knapsack." When the offering came, he said to his servant, "Give it to the people, that they may eat.' But his servant said, 'What? Shall I set this before one hundred men?' He said again, 'Give it to the people, that they may eat; for thus says the Lord, "They shall eat and have some left over.'" So he set it before them; and they ate, and had some left over, according to the word of the Lord."

Again and again since that time, though not always so clearly and noticeably, the Lord Jesus has worked to supply human need. If we had sharper spiritual perception we would recognize more quickly than we do God's tender dealings with the human family.

In Christ's earthly ministry, when He performed a similar miracle by feeding the multitudes, people showed the same unbelief as did those associated with the prophet: "What? Shall I set this before one hundred men?" And when Jesus told His disciples to give that large assembly food to eat, they answered, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless we go and buy food for all these people." [Luke 9:13](#). What is that among so many?

[90]

When the Lord gives a work to be done, let no one stop to ask whether the command is reasonable or what the results of their efforts to obey are likely to be. The supply in their hands may seem to fall short of the need, but in the hands of the Lord it will prove more than enough. The servant "set it before them; and they ate, and had some left over, according to the word of the Lord."

We should not waste time worrying about how small our resources appear. Energy and trust in God will develop resources. The gift we bring to Him with thanksgiving and prayer for His blessing, He will multiply as He multiplied the food Elisha gave to the sons of the prophets and that Jesus Himself gave to the weary multitude.

[91]

Captain Naaman Healed of Leprosy

This chapter is based on 2 Kings 5.

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor, but a leper.

Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, had defeated Israel in the battle that resulted in Ahab's death. Since that time the Syrians had maintained a constant border warfare against Israel. In one of their raids they had carried away a little maid who, in the land of her captivity, "waited on Naaman's wife." A slave, far from her home, this little captive was one of God's witnesses, fulfilling the purpose for which God had chosen Israel as His people. In that heathen home, her sympathies were aroused in behalf of her master, and, remembering the wonderful miracles of healing that God had performed through Elisha, she said to her mistress, "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy." She believed that by the power of Heaven Naaman could be healed.

The captive maid's conduct in that heathen home is a strong witness to the power of early home training. There is no higher trust than that committed to fathers and mothers in the care and training of their children.

Happy are the parents whose lives reflect the divine, so that the promises and commands of God awaken gratitude and reverence in the child. These are parents whose tenderness, justice, and long-suffering interpret to the child the love and justice and long-suffering of God. They teach the child to love, trust, and obey the Father in heaven. They endow that child with a treasure as enduring as eternity.

Our children may spend their lives in common occupations, but God calls them all to be ministers of mercy to the world. They are to stand by the side of Christ in unselfish service.

A Captive Girl Encourages Naaman to Seek Healing

Naaman heard what the maid had said to her mistress. After getting permission from the king, he went in search of healing, taking "ten talents of silver, six thousand

[92]

shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing." He also carried a letter from the king of Syria to the king of Israel: "I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy."

When the king of Israel read the letter, "he tore his clothes and said, 'Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy? Therefore please consider, and see how he seeks a quarrel with me.'"

News of these developments reached Elisha, and he sent word to the king: “Why have you torn your clothes? Please let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.”

“Then Naaman went with his horses and chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha’s house.” Through a messenger the prophet told him, “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean.”

Naaman had expected to see some wonderful display of power from heaven. “I said to myself, ‘He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.’” When Elisha’s messenger simply told him to wash in the Jordan, it wounded his pride: “‘Are not the Abana and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?’ So he turned and went away in a rage.”

The rivers Naaman mentioned were beautified by surrounding groves, and many people flocked to the banks of these pleasant streams to worship their idols. Naaman would not have needed any humility to go down into one of those streams to wash. But only by following the prophet’s specific directions could he find healing.

Naaman’s servants urged him to carry out Elisha’s directions: “If the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, ‘Wash, and be clean?’” The proud Syrian yielded his pride and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, “according to the saying of the man of God.” And God honored his faith: “His flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.”

Gratefully “he returned to the man of God, he and all his aides,” and acknowledged, “Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel.”

In keeping with the custom of those days, Naaman asked Elisha to accept a costly present. But the prophet refused. It was not fitting for him to take payment for a blessing given by God. “So he departed from him.”

Elisha’s Servant Has the Spirit of Judas

Gehazi, Elisha’s servant, had had opportunity to develop the spirit of self-denial that characterized his master’s lifework. The best gifts of Heaven had been within his reach for a long time; yet, turning from these, he had instead coveted worldly wealth. And now the hidden

[93]

longings of his greedy spirit led him to yield to a great temptation. “My master has spared Naaman this Syrian, while not receiving from his hands what he brought; ... I will run after him and take something from him.” In secrecy “Gehazi pursued Naaman.”

“When Naaman saw him running after him, he got down from the chariot to meet him, and said, ‘Is all well?’ And he said, ‘All is well.’” Then Gehazi told an absolute lie. “My master,” he said, “has sent me, saying, ‘Indeed, just now two young men of the sons of the prophets have come to me from the mountains of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of garments.’” Naaman gladly agreed to this request, pressing upon Gehazi two talents of silver instead of one, “with two changes of garments,” and sending servants to carry the treasure back.

As Gehazi neared Elisha's home, he dismissed the servants and placed the silver and the clothes in hiding. With this done, "he went in and stood before his master." In response to Elisha's inquiry, "Where did you go, Gehazi?" he answered, "Your servant did not go anywhere."

Elisha knew all. "Did not my heart go with you," he asked, "when the man turned back from his chariot to meet you? Is it time to receive money and to receive clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants? Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever." The guilty man's punishment followed swiftly. He went out from Elisha's presence, "leprous, as white as snow."

This experience teaches solemn lessons. Gehazi placed a stumbling block in the pathway of Naaman, whose mind had received wonderful light and who felt favorably toward the service of the living God. There could be no excuse for the deception Gehazi practiced. To the day of his death Gehazi remained a leper.

"A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies will not escape." **Proverbs 19:5**. "All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." **Hebrews 4:13**. God revealed to His prophet every detail of the scene between Gehazi and Naaman.

Truth comes from God; deception in all forms comes from Satan. Whoever departs in any way from the straight line of truth is betraying himself into the power of the wicked one. Those who have learned from Christ will be straightforward and true, for they are preparing for the fellowship of those holy ones in whose mouth is found no deceit. See **Revelation 14:5**.

The Savior presented Naaman's wonderful faith as an object lesson. "Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet," He declared, "and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." **Luke 4:27**. God passed over many lepers in Israel because their unbelief closed the door to them. In God's sight a heathen nobleman who had

[94]

been true to his convictions of right was more worthy of His blessing than the afflicted in Israel who had despised their God-given privileges. God works for those who appreciate His favors, who respond to the light Heaven gives them.

If those who are honest in heart follow what they understand to be duty, God will give them increased light until, like Naaman, they will acknowledge that "there is no God in all the earth" except the living God, the Creator.

[95]

Elisha's Closing Ministry

Elisha lived to see many changes in the kingdom of Israel. Hazael the Syrian had afflicted the apostate nation. Jehu had executed all the family of Ahab. Jehoahaz, Jehu's successor, had lost some of the cities east of the Jordan to invaders. For a time it had seemed that the Syrians might gain control of the entire kingdom. But the reformation Elisha carried forward led many to turn to God. These forsook the altars of Baal, and slowly yet surely God's purpose was being fulfilled in those who chose to serve Him with all their heart.

Out of His love for erring Israel, God permitted the Syrians to afflict them. Because of His compassion for those whose moral power was weak, He raised up Jehu to kill Jezebel and the whole line of Ahab. Once more, through God's merciful workings, the priests of Baal and Ashtoreth were set aside and their heathen altars thrown down. God foresaw that if temptation were removed, some would turn away from heathenism. This is why He permitted disaster after disaster to come to them. And when His purpose was accomplished, He turned the tide in favor of those who had learned to seek Him.

While Satan was doing all in his power to complete the ruin he had accomplished during the reign of Ahab and Jezebel, Elisha continued to bear his testimony. He met with opposition, yet none could refute his message. Many came to him for counsel. Joram, king of Israel, sought his advice; and once, in Damascus, messengers from Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, visited him. To all, the prophet bore faithful witness in a time when the great majority of the people were openly rebelling against Heaven.

And God never forsook His chosen messenger. On one occasion, the king of Syria tried to destroy Elisha because he told the king of Israel about the plans of the enemy. The Syrian king had counseled with his servants, saying, "My camp will be in such and such a place." The Lord revealed this plan to Elisha, who "sent to the king of Israel, saying, 'Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are coming down there.' Then the king of Israel sent someone to the place of which the man of God had told him. Thus he warned him, and he was watchful there, not just once nor twice.

[96]

"Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was greatly troubled by this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, 'Will you not show me which of us is for the king of Israel?' And one of his servants said, 'None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom.'" **2 Kings 6:8-12.**

Determined to capture the prophet, the Syrian king commanded, "Go and see where he is, that I may send and get him." On learning that the prophet was in Dothan, the king sent "horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots." **Verses 13-15.**

In terror Elisha's servant came to him. "Alas, my master!" he said. "What shall we do?"

“Do not fear,” the prophet answered, “for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Then, so that the servant might know this for himself, Elisha prayed, “Lord, ... open his eyes that he may see.” So “the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” An encircling band of heavenly angels had come in mighty power to protect the Lord’s helpless ones. **Verses 15-17.**

The Syrian soldiers advanced boldly, ignorant of the unseen armies of heaven. “Elisha prayed to the Lord, and said, ‘Strike this people, I pray, with blindness.’ And He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. Now Elisha said to them, ‘This is not the way, nor is this the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek.’ But he led them to Samaria.

“So it was, when they had come to Samaria, that Elisha said, ‘Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see.’ And the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw; and there they were, inside Samaria! Now ... the king of Israel ... said to Elisha, ‘Shall I kill them?’ But he answered, ‘You shall not kill them. Would you kill those whom you have taken captive with your sword and your bow? Set food and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master.’” **Verses 18-22.**

God Honors Elisha’s Prophecy

For a time after this, Israel was free from the attacks of the Syrians. But later, under king Hazael, the Syrian armies surrounded Samaria and besieged it. Never had Israel been brought into so great a crisis as during this siege. The horrors of prolonged famine were driving the king of Israel to desperate measures, when Elisha predicted deliverance for the following day.

The next morning, before dawn, the Lord “caused the army of the Syrians to hear the noise of chariots and the noise of horses—the noise of a great army.” Overcome with fear, “they fled for their lives,” leaving “the

[97]

camp intact,” with rich stores of food. **2 Kings 7:6, 7.**

During the night, four leprous men at the gate of the city, made desperate by hunger, had proposed to visit the Syrian camp and throw themselves on the mercy of the besiegers, hoping to obtain food. To their astonishment, when they entered the camp, they found that “no one was there.” **Verse 10.** With no one to stop them, “they went into one tent and ate and drank, and carried from it silver and gold and clothing, and went and hid them; then they came back and entered another tent, and carried some from there also, and went and hid it. Then they said to one another, ‘We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent.’” **Verses 8, 9.** Quickly they returned to the city with the glad news.

The supplies on that day were so abundant that “a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel” (**Verse 16, KJV**), as foretold by Elisha the day before.

Elisha's Message Reached the Honest in Heart

In ways like these the man of God labored year by year, drawing close to the people, and in times of crisis standing by the side of kings as a wise counselor. The dark shadow of apostasy was still everywhere, yet here and there were those who had firmly refused to bow to Baal. As Elisha continued his work, many learned to rejoice in the service of the true God. These miracles of divine grace cheered the prophet, inspiring him with a great longing to reach all who were honest in heart.

From a human point of view the outlook for regenerating the nation spiritually was as hopeless then as it is today. But Christ has empowered the church to do a special work, and if she is loyal to God, obedient to His commandments, no power can stand against her. The dawn of a bright, glorious day is before her if she will put on the robe of Christ's righteousness and withdraw from all allegiance to the world.

Talk Courage and Hope

God calls on His faithful ones who believe in Him to talk courage to those who are unbelieving and hopeless. Show humble faith in God's power and His willingness to save. When in faith we take hold of His strength, He will change, wonderfully change, the most hopeless, discouraging outlook. He will do this for the glory of His name.

Elisha continued to take an active interest in the schools of the prophets. God was with him. On one occasion "the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, 'See now, the place where we dwell with you is too small for us. Please let us go to the Jordan, and let every man take a beam from there, and let us make there a place where we may dwell.'" **2 Kings 6:1, 2.** Elisha went with them, encouraging them, giving instruction, and even performing a miracle to aid them.

"As one was cutting down a tree, the iron ax head fell into the water; and he cried out and said, 'Alas,

[98]

master! For it was borrowed.' So the man of God said, 'Where did it fall?' And he showed him the place. So he cut off a stick, and threw it in there; and he made the iron float. Therefore he said, 'Pick it up for yourself.' So he reached out his hand, and took it." **Verses 5-7.**

Elisha's Last Days

Elisha's ministry had been so effective that as he lay on his deathbed, even the youthful King Joash, an idol worshiper with little respect for God, recognized that the prophet had been a father in Israel. The king acknowledged that Elisha's presence among them was of more value in time of trouble than an army of horses and chariots. See **2 Kings 13:14.**

To many a troubled soul the prophet had acted the part of a wise father. And in this instance he did not turn from the godless young king before him, so unworthy of the position of trust he was occupying, and yet so greatly in need of counsel. God was bringing the king an opportunity to redeem the past and exalt his kingdom once again. God intended to

drive out the Syrian enemy. Once more God was to display His power in behalf of wayward Israel.

The dying prophet told the king, "Take a bow and some arrows." Joash obeyed. Then the prophet said, "Put your hand on the bow." Joash "put his hand on it, and Elisha put his hands on the king's hands. And he said, 'Open the east window'"—toward the cities under Syrian control beyond Jordan. **2 Kings 13:15-17**. When the king had opened the window, Elisha told him to shoot. As the arrow sped on its way, the prophet was inspired to say, "The arrow of the Lord's ... deliverance from Syria; for you must strike the Syrians at Aphek till you have destroyed them." **2 Kings 13:17**.

And now the prophet tested the faith of the king. Instructing Joash to take up the arrows, he said, "Strike the ground." Three times the king struck the ground. "You should have struck five or six times," Elisha cried in dismay, "then you would have struck Syria till you had destroyed it! But now you will strike Syria only three times." **Verses 18, 19**.

The lesson is for everyone in a position of trust. When God gives assurance of success, His chosen agents must do all in their power to bring about the promised result. Success will come in proportion to the enthusiasm and perseverance with which they carry forward the work. God can work miracles for His people only as they act their part with untiring energy. People of devotion, of moral courage, with a zeal that never wearies, will labor on without flinching until apparent defeat is turned to victory. Not even prison walls will cause them to swerve from their purpose of building up God's kingdom.

Elisha Faithful to the End

With the counsel and encouragement given to Joash, Elisha's work closed. He had proved faithful to the end. Never had he lost his trust in God's omnipotent power. Always he

[99]

had advanced by faith, and God had honored his confidence.

Elisha was not called to follow his master in a fiery chariot. Rather, the Lord permitted a lingering illness to come upon him. As on the heights of Dothan he had seen the encircling armies of heaven, so now he was conscious of the presence of sympathizing angels, and he was sustained. As he had grown in knowledge of God's merciful kindness, his faith had ripened into an abiding trust in God, and when death called him he was ready.

"The righteous has a refuge in his death." **Proverbs 14:32**. Elisha could say in all confidence, "As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness." **Psalms 17:15**.

[100]

Jonah, the Prophet Who Ran Away

This chapter is based on Jonah 1-4.

Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, was one of the greatest cities of the ancient world. Located on fertile land by the Tigris River, it had become “an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent.”

Nineveh was a center of crime and wickedness— “the bloody city ... full of lies.” The prophet Nahum compared the Ninevites to a cruel lion. “Upon whom,” he inquired, “has not your wickedness passed continually?” *Nahum 3:1, 19.*

Yet Nineveh was not entirely given over to evil. In that city many were reaching out for something better. If they were given opportunity to learn about the living God, they would put away their evil deeds. And so God revealed Himself to them, unmistakably, to lead them to repentance.

The word of the Lord came to the prophet Jonah, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.” The prophet was tempted to question the wisdom of the call. It seemed as if there was nothing to be gained by proclaiming such a message in that proud city. He forgot that the God he served was all-wise and all-powerful. While Jonah hesitated, Satan overwhelmed him with discouragement, and he “arose to flee to Tarshish.” Finding a ship ready to sail, “he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them.”

God had entrusted Jonah with a heavy responsibility. If the prophet had obeyed without questioning, God would have blessed him abundantly. Yet in Jonah’s despair the Lord did not desert him. Through trials and strange interventions, God would revive the prophet’s confidence in Him.

God did not permit Jonah to go very long in his frantic attempt to escape. “The Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, ... so that the ship was about to be broken up. Then the mariners were afraid, and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep.”

The captain of the ship, distressed beyond measure, found Jonah and

[101]

said, “What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.”

Jonah Cast Overboard

But the prayers of Jonah, who had turned aside from duty, brought no help. As a last resort, the mariners proposed casting lots, “that we may know,” they said, “‘for whose cause this trouble has come upon us.’ So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said

to him, 'Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?'

"So he said to them, 'I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.'

"Then ... the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.

"Then they said to him, 'What shall we do to you, that the sea may be calm for us?'—for the sea was growing more tempestuous. And he said to them, 'Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me.'"

"So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.

...

"Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

"Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish's belly. And he said:

'I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction, And He answered me. ...

For You cast me into the deep,

Into the heart of the seas,

And the floods surrounded me;

All Your billows and Your waves passed over me.

Then I said, "I have been cast out of Your sight;

Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple." ...

When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord;

And my prayer went up to You, Into Your holy temple. ...

I will pay what I have vowed.

Salvation is of the Lord."

Jonah 2:2-4, 7, 9.

At last Jonah had learned that "salvation belongs to the Lord." *Psalm 3:8*. With repentance and a recognition of God's saving grace, deliverance came. Jonah was released from the perils of the mighty deep; the fish cast him up on the dry land.

Once more God commissioned His servant to warn Nineveh: "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you." This time he did not question or doubt, but "arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord."

As Jonah entered the city, he began at once to "cry out against" it with the message: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" From street to street he went, sounding

[102]

the warning. The cry rang through the streets of the godless city until all the inhabitants heard the startling announcement. The Spirit of God pressed the message home to every heart, and multitudes repented in deep humiliation.

"Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed

and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, ‘Let ... every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?’”

As king and nobles, the high and the low, “repented at the preaching of Jona” (**Matthew 12:41**), they received mercy. “God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.” Their doom was averted, and throughout the heathen world the God of Israel was honored and His law respected. Not until many years later, by forgetting God and cherishing boastful pride, did Nineveh fall a prey to the surrounding nations.

When Jonah learned of God’s intention to spare the city, he should have been the first to rejoice. But he allowed his mind to dwell on the possibility of his being considered a false prophet. The compassion God had shown toward the repentant Ninevites “displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.” “Was not this what I said,” he inquired of the Lord, “when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.”

Once more he was overwhelmed with discouragement. Losing sight of the interests of others, he exclaimed, “Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

“Then the Lord said, ‘Is it right for you to be angry?’ So Jonah went out of the city. ... There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city. And the Lord God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant.”

Then the Lord gave Jonah an object lesson. He “prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah’s head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, ‘It is better for me to die than to live.’”

Again God spoke to His prophet: “‘Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?’ And he said, ‘It is right for me to be angry, even to death!’”

“But the Lord said, ‘You have had pity on the plant. ... And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred

[103]

and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left?’”

Jonah had fulfilled his commission to warn that great city; and though the event predicted did not come to pass, yet the message of warning was nonetheless from God, and it accomplished the purpose God designed. His grace was revealed among the heathen. The Lord “saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death.” “He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.” **Psalm 107:13, 14, 20.**

Christ referred to the preaching of Jonah and compared the inhabitants of Nineveh with the professed people of God in His day: “The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and

indeed a greater than Jonah is here.” **Matthew 12:41**. Into the busy world where people were trying to get all they could for themselves, Christ had come; and above the confusion came His voice, asking, “What will a man give in exchange for his soul?” **Mark 8:37**.

Jonah’s Day, and Ours

Like the people of Nineveh, the cities today are in need of knowledge of the true God. Christ’s ambassadors are to point sinners to the nobler world. According to the Scriptures, the only city that will endure is the city whose builder and maker is God. Through His servants the Lord is calling on men and women to secure the immortal inheritance.

Because of the steady increase of determined wickedness, an almost universal guilt is coming rapidly on the cities. Every day brings fresh revelations of strife, bribery, fraud, violence, lawlessness, indifference to human suffering, and brutal destruction of human life. Every day testifies to increasing insanity, murder, and suicide. People boast of our age’s progress and enlightenment, but God sees the earth filled with iniquity and violence. Many declare that the law of God has been done away with; as a result, a tide of evil is sweeping over the world. To gratify their lust for forbidden things, people barter away nobility of soul, gentleness, and piety.

With patience and tender compassion God deals with the transgressors of His law. And yet, we are rapidly approaching the end of God’s restraint concerning those who persist in disobedience.

Should anyone be surprised over a sudden change in the dealings of the Supreme Ruler with the inhabitants of a fallen world? Should they be surprised that God would bring destruction on those who have become rich through fraud? Many have chosen to remain under the banner of the one who started the rebellion against the government of heaven.

God’s patience has been so great that we marvel. The All-powerful One has been restraining His own attributes. God allows people a period of probation, but His patience is not unlimited. The Lord bears long with them, giving warnings to save

[104]

them, but a time will come when He will blot out the rebellious element, in mercy to themselves and to those whom they would influence by their example.

God is withdrawing His Spirit. Disasters follow one another in quick succession—earthquakes, tornadoes, fire, and flood. Apparently these calamities are random outbreaks of disorganized, unregulated forces of nature, beyond human control; but they are among the agencies by which God seeks to awaken men and women to a sense of their danger.

God’s messengers in the great cities are not to become discouraged over the wickedness and depravity they face while proclaiming the good news of salvation. In wicked Corinth the Lord gave Paul a message: “Do not be afraid, ... for I am with you, ... for I have many people in this city.” **Acts 18:9, 10**. In every city there are many who with proper teaching may learn to become followers of Jesus.

God’s message for the inhabitants of earth today is, “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” **Matthew 24:44**. The conditions in the great cities proclaim in thunder tones that the hour of God’s judgment has come and that the

end of all things earthly is at hand. In quick succession the judgments of God will follow one another—fire, and flood, and earthquake, with war and bloodshed. The angel of mercy cannot shelter much longer those who do not repent. The storm is building; and those only will stand who respond to the invitations of mercy and become sanctified through obedience to the laws of the divine Ruler, as did the inhabitants of Nineveh under the preaching of Jonah.

The Decline and Fall of Israel

The closing years of the kingdom of Israel saw violence and bloodshed beyond even the worst periods under Ahab's dynasty. For two centuries the ten tribes had been sowing the wind; now they were reaping the whirlwind. King after king was assassinated. "They set up kings, but not by Me," the Lord declared of the godless usurpers. "They made princes, but I did not acknowledge them." **Hosea 8:4**. Those who should have stood before the nations of earth as the depositaries of divine grace "dealt treacherously with the Lord" and with one another. **Hosea 5:7**.

Through Hosea and Amos God sent message after message, urging repentance and threatening disaster. "You have plowed wickedness," declared Hosea, "you have reaped iniquity. You have eaten the fruit of lies, because you trusted in your own way, in the multitude of your mighty men." "At dawn the king of Israel shall be cut off utterly." **Hosea 10:13, 15**. Unable to discern the disastrous results their evil course would bring, the ten tribes were soon to be "wanderers among the nations." **Hosea 9:17**.

Some leaders felt keenly their loss of prestige and wanted to get it back. But they continued in evil, deceiving themselves into thinking that they would get the political power they desired by alliances with the heathen—making "a covenant with the Assyrians." **Hosea 12:1**.

The Lord had repeatedly shown the ten tribes the evils of disobedience. But in spite of reproof and appeals, Israel had sunk still lower in apostasy. The Lord declared, "My people are bent on backsliding from Me." **Hosea 11:7**.

During the last half century before the Assyrian captivity, the iniquity in Israel was like that of the days of Noah. In their worship of Baal and Ashtoreth the people broke their connection with everything uplifting and ennobling and became an easy target for temptation. The misguided worshipers had no barrier against sin and yielded themselves to the evil passions of the human heart.

The prophets lifted their voices against the rampant oppression, flagrant injustice, the unbridled luxury and extravagance, the shameless feasting and drunkenness, and the gross immorality. But their protests were in vain. "They hate the one who rebukes in the gate," declared Amos, "and they abhor the one

[106]

who speaks uprightly." **Amos 5:10**. Finally nearly all the land's inhabitants had given themselves over to the alluring practices of nature worship. Forgetting their Maker, Israel became "deeply corrupted." **Hosea 9:9**.

Hosea's Gracious Appeals

The transgressors were given many opportunities to repent. In their hour of deepest apostasy God gave them a message of forgiveness and hope. "O Israel," He declared, "you

are destroyed, but your help is from Me. I will be your King; where is any other, that he may save you?" **Hosea 13:9, 10.** "Come, and let us return to the Lord," the prophet pleaded, "for He has torn, but He will heal us. ... Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth." **Hosea 6:1-3.**

"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely," the Lord declared. "I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall grow like the lily. ... Those who dwell under His shadow shall return.' ... For the ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them." **Hosea 14:4-9.**

"Seek Me," the Lord invited, "and live." "So the Lord God of hosts will be with you, as you have spoken. Hate evil, love good; establish justice in the gate. It may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph." **Amos 5:4, 14, 15.**

The words of God's messengers were so contrary to the people's evil desires that the idolatrous priest at Bethel sent a message to the ruler in Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words." **Amos 7:10.**

The evils that overspread the land had become incurable, and God pronounced the dread sentence on Israel: "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone." "The days of punishment have come; the days of recompense have come. Israel knows!" **Hosea 4:17; 9:7.** The ten tribes of Israel were now to reap the harvest of the apostasy that had begun when Jeroboam set up the strange altars at Bethel and at Dan. God's message was: "All the sinners of My people shall die by the sword, who say, The calamity shall not overtake nor confront us." **Amos 9:10.**

"The houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end." "Israel shall surely be led away captive from his own land." "Because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" **Amos 3:15; 7:17; 4:12.**

Judgments Held Back for a Season

For a while God delayed these predicted judgments, and during the long reign of Jeroboam II the armies of Israel gained great victories. But this time of apparent prosperity brought no change in the hearts of the unrepentant ones, and it was finally decreed, "Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely

[107]

be led away captive from their own land." **Amos 7:11.**

The boldness of this utterance was lost on the unrepentant king and people. Amaziah, a leader among the idol-worshipping priests at Bethel, was stirred to anger by the plain words spoken against the nation and their king. He said to Amos, "Go, you seer! Flee to the land of Judah. There eat bread, and there prophesy. But never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is the royal residence." **Verses 12, 13.**

To this the prophet firmly responded: "Israel shall surely be led away captive." **Verses 17.**

The words Amos spoke against the apostate tribes were fulfilled literally, yet the destruction of the kingdom came gradually. In judgment the Lord remembered mercy. When

the “king of Assyria came against the land” (2 Kings 15:19), Menahem, then king of Israel, was permitted to remain on the throne as a vassal of the Assyrian realm. The Assyrians, having humbled the ten tribes, returned for a while to their own land.

Menahem, far from repenting of the evil that had brought ruin to his kingdom, continued in “the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin.” Verse 18. A little later, “in the days of Pekah” his successor (verse 29), Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, invaded Israel and carried away a multitude of captives living in Galilee and east of the Jordan. These he scattered among the heathen in lands far removed from Palestine. The northern kingdom never recovered from this terrible blow. Only one more ruler, Hoshea, was to follow Pekah. Soon the kingdom was to be swept away forever.

In that time of sorrow and distress God still remembered mercy. In the third year of Hoshea’s reign, good King Hezekiah began to rule in Judah and instituted important reforms in the temple service at Jerusalem. He arranged for a Passover celebration and invited not only Judah and Benjamin but the northern tribes as well.

“Then the runners went throughout all Israel and Judah” with the pressing invitation, “Children of Israel, return to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel; then He will return to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. ... Now do not be stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves to the Lord; and enter His sanctuary. ... For if you return to the Lord, your brethren and your children will be treated with compassion by those who lead them captive, so that they may come back to this land; for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn His face from you if you return to Him.” 2 Chronicles 30:6-9.

From city to city Hezekiah’s couriers carried the message. But the remnant of the ten tribes who still lived within the once-flourishing northern kingdom treated the royal messengers with indifference and even contempt. “They laughed at them and mocked them.” A few, however, “from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves

[108]

and came to Jerusalem ... to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread.” Verses 10, 11-13.

Swiftly the End Came

About two years later, the Assyrian armies besieged Samaria, and multitudes perished miserably of hunger and disease, as well as by the sword. The city and nation fell, and the broken remnants of the ten tribes were scattered in the provinces of the Assyrian realm.

The destruction of the northern kingdom was a direct judgment from Heaven. Through Isaiah the Lord referred to the Assyrian armies as “the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hand,” He said, “is My indignation.” Isaiah 10:5.

Because the children of Israel refused steadfastly to repent, the Lord “afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of plunderers, until He had cast them from His sight,” in harmony with the plain warnings He had sent them “by all His servants the prophets.”

“So was Israel carried away from their own land to Assyria,” “because they did not obey the voice of the Lord their God, but transgressed His covenant.” 2 Kings 17:20, 23; 18:12.

In the terrible judgments on the ten tribes the Lord had a wise and merciful purpose. What He could no longer do through them in the land of their fathers He would seek

to accomplish by scattering them among the heathen. Not all who were carried captive were rebellious and unrepentant. Some had remained true to God, and others had humbled themselves before Him. Through these He would bring multitudes in Assyria to a knowledge of His character and the blessings of His law.

[109]

A Nation “Destroyed for Lack of Knowledge”

God’s favor toward the Israelites had always been conditional on their obedience. At Sinai they had entered into covenant with Him as “a special treasure to Me above all people.” “All that the Lord has spoken we will do,” they had promised. **Exodus 19:5, 8**. God had chosen Israel as His people, and they had chosen Him as their King.

Near the close of the wilderness wandering, on the very borders of the Promised Land, those who remained faithful renewed their vows of allegiance. Moses called on them to remain separate from the surrounding nations and to worship God alone. See **Deuteronomy 4**.

Moses had specially charged the Israelites not to lose sight of the commandments of God. He warned them clearly and strongly against the neighboring nations’ customs of idol worship. “Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the Lord your God has forbidden you.” **Deuteronomy 4:23**.

Calling heaven and earth to witness, Moses declared that if, after having lived long in the Land of Promise, the people bowed down to carved images and refused to return to the worship of the true God, they would be carried away captive and scattered among the heathen. “You will soon utterly perish from the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess,” he warned them. “You will not prolong your days in it, but will be utterly destroyed. And the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you.” **Verses 26, 27**.

This prophecy, partly fulfilled in the time of the judges, met a more complete and literal fulfillment in the captivity of Israel in Assyria and of Judah in Babylon. Satan had tried repeatedly to cause the chosen nation to forget “the commandment, ... the statutes, and the judgments” that they had promised to keep forever. **Deuteronomy 6:1**. He knew that if he could lead Israel to “follow other gods, and serve them and worship them,” they would “surely perish.” **Deuteronomy 8:19**.

However, the enemy of God’s church on the earth had not taken into account the Lord’s compassionate nature. It is His glory to be “merciful

[110]

and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity.” **Exodus 34:6, 7**. Even in the darkest hours of their history, God graciously spread before Israel the things that would benefit the nation. “I taught Ephraim to walk,” He declared through Hosea, “taking them by their arms; but they did not know that I healed them.” **Hosea 11:3**.

Tenderly the Lord had dealt with them, instructing them by His prophets. If Israel had obeyed the messages of the prophets, they would have been spared humiliation. But because they persisted in turning aside from His law, God was compelled to let them go into captivity.

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge,” was His message. “Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you ...; because you have forgotten the law of your God.” **Hosea 4:6.**

In every age, the same result has followed transgression of God’s law. In the days of Noah, when iniquity became so deep and widespread that God could no longer tolerate it, the decree went forth, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth.” **Genesis 6:7.** In Abraham’s day the people of Sodom openly defied God and His law; they passed the limits of God’s patient mercy, and the fire of God’s vengeance was kindled against them.

The time preceding the captivity of Israel’s ten tribes was one of similar wickedness. Hosea declared: “The Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land. ‘There is ... swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed.’” **Hosea 4:1, 2.**

Israel to Be “Wanderers Among the Nations”

The ten tribes, long unrepentant, received no promise of complete restoration to their former power in Palestine. Until the end of time they were to be “wanderers among the nations.” But a prophecy through Hosea offered them the privilege of having a part in the final restoration of God’s people at the close of earth’s history. “Many days,” the prophet declared, the ten tribes were to abide “without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Afterward,” the prophet continued, “the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days.” **Hosea 3:4, 5.**

In symbolic language Hosea presented God’s plan of restoring to every repentant one the blessings granted Israel in the days when they were loyal to Him in the Promised Land. Referring to Israel the Lord declared, “‘I will give her her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. And it shall be, in that day,’ says the Lord, ‘that you will call Me, “My husband,” and

[111]

no longer call Me, “My Master.””” **Hosea 2:15, 16.**

In the last days of earth’s history, God will renew His covenant with His commandment-keeping people. “I will betroth you to Me forever; ... in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy. ... And you shall know the Lord.” “And I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; then I will say to those who were not My people, ‘You are My people!’ And they shall say, ‘You are my God!’” **Verses 19, 20, 23.**

From “every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” some will gladly respond to the message, “Fear God and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment has come.” They will turn from every idol that binds them to earth and will “worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.” They will free themselves from every entanglement and will stand before the world as monuments of God’s mercy. Obedient to the divine requirements, they will be recognized as those who have kept “the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” **Revelation 14:6, 7, 12.**

“I will bring back the captives of My people Israel. ... I will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be plucked up from the land I have given them.” **Amos 9:14, 15.**

[112]

Prophet With a Message of Hope

For many years King Uzziah ruled wisely over Judah and Benjamin. He rebuilt and fortified cities, and the riches of the nations flowed into Jerusalem. Uzziah's fame "spread far and wide, for he was marvelously helped till he became strong." **2 Chronicles 26:15.**

Spiritual power, however, did not accompany the outward prosperity. The temple services continued, and multitudes assembled to worship the living God, but pride and formality took the place of humility and sincerity. Of Uzziah the Bible says, "When he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction, for he transgressed against the Lord his God." **Verse 16.** In violation of the Lord's plain command, the king entered the sanctuary "to burn incense on the altar." Azariah the high priest and his associates rebuked him: "You have trespassed!" they told him. "You shall have no honor from the Lord God." **Verses 16, 18.**

Uzziah was filled with anger over being reproved. But he was not permitted to profane the sanctuary against the united protest of those in authority. While standing there in hot rebellion, he was stricken with leprosy. To the day of his death he remained a leper, a textbook example of the folly of departing from a plain "Thus says the Lord." He could plead neither his position nor his long service as an excuse for the presumptuous sin that brought the judgment of Heaven on him. God shows no partiality. See **Numbers 15:30.**

Uzziah's son Jotham ascended to the throne after his father's death. "He did what was right in the sight of the Lord; he did according to all that his father Uzziah had done. However the high places were not removed." **2 Kings 15:34, 35.**

The reign of Uzziah was drawing to a close when Isaiah, a young man of the royal line, was called to the prophetic role. He was to witness the invasion of Judah by the armies of Israel and Syria; he was to see the Assyrian armies camped before the chief cities of the kingdom. Samaria was to fall, and the ten tribes were to be scattered among the nations. Judah was to be invaded by Assyrian armies and Jerusalem suffer a siege that would have resulted in her downfall if God had not miraculously intervened. The divine protection was being removed, and Assyrian forces were about to overrun Judah.

[113]

Isaiah Sent When God's Plans Seemed to Be Failing

But the dangers from outside were not as serious as the dangers from within. By their apostasy and rebellion the people who should have been light bearers among the nations were inviting the judgments of God. Many of the evils of the northern kingdom, which Hosea and Amos had denounced, were fast corrupting Judah. In their desire for wealth, many people were adding house to house and field to field. See **Isaiah 5:8.** They perverted justice and showed no pity to the poor. God declared, "The plunder of the poor is in your houses." **Isaiah 3:14.** Even magistrates turned a deaf ear to the cries of the poor, the widows, and the fatherless. See **Isaiah 10:1, 2.**

With wealth came love of display, drunkenness, and revelry. See [Isaiah 2:11, 12](#); [3:16, 18-23](#); [5:22, 11, 12](#). And idol worship itself no longer provoked surprise. See [Isaiah 2:8, 9](#). The few who remained true to God were tempted to despair. It seemed as if God's plan for Israel was about to fail.

It is not surprising that when Isaiah was called to bear God's messages of reproof, he shrank from the responsibility. He knew he would meet resistance. As he thought of the stubbornness and unbelief of the people, his task seemed hopeless. Should he in despair leave Judah undisturbed to their idol worship? Were the gods of Nineveh to rule the earth in defiance of the God of heaven?

Such thoughts as these were crowding through Isaiah's mind as he stood under the portico of the temple. Suddenly there rose up before him a vision of the Lord sitting on a throne high and lifted up, while "the hem of His robe filled the temple." [Isaiah 6:1](#), NRSV. On each side of the throne the angels united in the solemn invocation, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" until pillar and cedar gate seemed shaken with the sound, and the house was filled with praise. [Isaiah 6:3](#).

Isaiah was overwhelmed with a sense of God's purity and holiness. "Woe is me!" he cried, "for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." [Verse 5](#). He realized that if left to his own inefficiency, he would be utterly unable to accomplish the mission to which God had called him. But an angel placed a glowing coal from the altar on his lips with the words, "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged." Then the voice of God was heard saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" and Isaiah responded, "Here am I! Send me." [Verse 7, 8](#).

Final Success Assured

The prophet's duty was plain—he was to lift his voice against the prevailing evils. But he dreaded to undertake the work without some assurance of hope. "Lord, how long?" he inquired. [Verse 11](#). Are

[114]

none of Your chosen people ever to repent and be healed?

His mission was not to be completely fruitless, yet the evils that had been multiplying for generations could not be removed in his day. He must be a patient, courageous teacher—a prophet of hope as well as of doom. A remnant would be saved. To bring this about, he was to deliver messages of pleading to the rebellious nation.

The ten tribes of the northern kingdom were soon to be scattered among the nations. The destroying armies of hostile nations were to sweep over the land again and again. Even Jerusalem was finally to fall and Judah to be carried away captive. Yet the Promised Land was not to remain forsaken forever. The assurance of the heavenly messenger to Isaiah was:

"A tenth will be in it,
And will return and be for consuming,
As a terebinth tree or as an oak,

Whose stump remains when it is cut down,
So the holy seed shall be its stump.”

Verse 13

This assurance brought courage to Isaiah. He had seen the King, the Lord of hosts. He had heard the song of the seraphim, “The whole earth is full of His glory!” Verse 3. He had the promise that the convicting power of the Holy Spirit would accompany the messages of Jehovah, and the prophet was braced for the work before him. Throughout his long, difficult mission he carried the memory of this vision. For sixty years or more he stood as a prophet of hope, predicting the future triumph of the church.

[115]

Isaiah's Message: "Behold Your God!"

Satan had long tried to lead people to see their Creator as the author of suffering and death. Those whom he had deceived in this way regarded Him as eager to condemn, unwilling to receive the sinner as long as there was a legal excuse for not helping him. Satan had misrepresented Heaven's law of love as a restriction on human happiness, a yoke from which anyone should be glad to escape. The archdeceiver declared that no one could obey its requirements.

The Israelites had no excuse for losing sight of God's true character. Often God had revealed Himself to them as "full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth." **Psalm 86:15**. The Lord had dealt tenderly with Israel in their deliverance from slavery in Egypt and in their journey to the Promised Land. "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them." **Isaiah 63:9**. Moses instructed them fully concerning the character of their invisible King. See **Exodus 34:6, 7**.

At the height of Israel's rebellion the Lord had proposed to make the descendants of Moses into "a nation greater and mightier than they." **Numbers 14:12**. But the prophet pleaded the promises of God in behalf of the chosen nation. And then, as the strongest of all pleas, he urged the love of God for fallen humanity. See **verses 17-19**.

Graciously the Lord responded, "I have pardoned, according to your word." Then He gave Moses a glimpse of His plan concerning the final triumph of Israel: "Truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord." **Verses 20, 21**. God's glory, His character, His tender love, were to be revealed to people of all nations. And He confirmed this promise by an oath. As surely as God lives and reigns, His glory would be declared "among the nations, His wonders among all peoples." **Psalm 96:3**.

The Gospel to All the World

Today this prophecy is meeting rapid fulfillment. Soon the gospel message will have been proclaimed to all nations. Men and women from every tribe, tongue, and people are being "accepted in the Beloved," "that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." **Ephesians 1:6; 2:7**.

[116]

In the vision in the temple court, Isaiah received a clear view of God's character. "The high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy," had appeared before him in great majesty; yet he was made to understand the compassionate nature of his Lord. He who dwells "in the high and holy place" dwells "with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." **Isaiah 57:15**.

In beholding God, the prophet had not only seen his own unworthiness, there had come to his humbled heart the assurance of forgiveness, full and free; and he had come from the

experience a changed man. He could testify of the transformation that came to him through beholding Infinite Love. Ever after, he longed to see erring Israel set free from the burden and penalty of sin. “Why should you be stricken again?” “‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the Lord, ‘though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.’” **Isaiah 1:5, 18.**

The God whose character they had misunderstood revealed Himself as the great Healer of spiritual disease. Anyone who had been backsliding in heart could find healing by turning to the Lord. “I have seen his ways,” the Lord declared, “and will heal him.” **Isaiah 57:18.**

The prophet exalted God as Creator. His message to the cities of Judah was, “Behold your God!” **Isaiah 40:9.** “‘To whom then will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal?’ says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, by the greatness of His might and the strength of His power; not one is missing.” **Isaiah 40:25, 26.**

God Will Accept Unworthy Sinners

To those who feared that God would not accept them if they turned to Him, the prophet declared: “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” **Verses 28-31.**

The heart of Infinite Love yearns after those who feel powerless to free themselves from the snares of Satan. “Fear not,” He bids them, “for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.” “Fear not, I will help you.” **Isaiah 41:10, 13.**

Many who knew nothing of God’s attributes were yet to behold the glory of the divine character. To make plain His merciful intent, He

[117]

kept sending His prophets with the message, “Repent now everyone of his evil way.” **Jeremiah 25:5.** “For My name’s sake,” He declared through Isaiah, “I will defer My anger, and for My praise I will restrain it from you, so that I do not cut you off.” **Isaiah 48:9.**

The Lord Will Receive You

The call to repentance was clear, and all were invited to return. “Seek the Lord while He may be found,” the prophet pleaded; “call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” **Isaiah 55:6, 7.**

Have you wandered far from God? Have you sought to feast on the fruits of transgression, only to find them turn to ashes on your lips? And now, your plans thwarted and your hopes dead, do you sit alone and desolate? That voice comes to you distinct and clear, “Arise and depart; for this is not your rest; because it is defiled, it shall destroy.” **Micah 2:10.** Your

Father invites you, saying, "Return to Me; for I have redeemed you." "Come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live." [Isaiah 44:22; 55:3](#).

Do not listen to the enemy's suggestion to stay away from Christ until you have made yourself better, until you are good enough to come. Repeat the promise of the Savior, "The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." [John 6:37](#). Tell the enemy that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. Make the prayer of David your own: "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." [Psalm 51:7](#).

The prophet's appeals to Judah were not in vain. Some turned from their idols. They learned to see love, mercy, and tender compassion in their Maker. And in the dark days that were coming, the prophet's words were to continue bearing fruit in decided reformation. Many would behold the One altogether lovely. God would forgive their sins, and they would boast in Him alone. They would exclaim, "The Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King; He will save us." [Isaiah 33:22](#).

The messages Isaiah bore to those who chose to turn from their evil ways were full of comfort and encouragement:

"O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me!
I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions,
And like a cloud, your sins.
Return to Me; for I have redeemed you."

[Isaiah 44:21, 22](#)

"In that day you will say:
'O Lord, I will praise You;
Though You were angry with me,
Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me. ...'
Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion,
For great is the Holy One of Israel in your midst."

[Isaiah 12:1-6](#)

Ahaz Almost Ruins the Kingdom

The crowning of Ahaz as king brought Isaiah face to face with conditions more appalling than any that had ever existed up to that time in Judah. Many were now being persuaded to worship heathen deities. Princes proved untrue to their trust; false prophets led people astray; some priests worked only for the money. Yet the leaders in apostasy still kept up the forms of divine worship and claimed to be the people of God.

The prophet Micah declared that sinners in Zion, while blasphemously boasting, “Is not the Lord among us? No harm can come upon us,” continued to “build up Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with iniquity.” **Micah 3:11, 10.** Isaiah lifted his voice in stern rebuke: “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me? ... When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts?” **Isaiah 1:11, 12.**

Inspiration declares, “The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination; how much more when he brings it with wicked intent!” **Proverbs 21:27.** It is not because God is unwilling to forgive that He turns from the transgressor; rather, because the sinner refuses the abundant provisions of grace, God is unable to deliver from sin. “Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.” **Isaiah 59:2.**

Isaiah called the attention of the people to the weakness of their position among the nations and showed that this was the result of wickedness in high places: “The Lord, the Lord of hosts, takes away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stock and the store, the whole supply of bread and the whole supply of water; the mighty man and the man of war, the judge and the prophet, and the diviner and the elder; the captain of fifty and the honorable man, the counselor and the skillful artisan, and the expert enchanter. ‘I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them.’” “For Jerusalem stumbled, and Judah is fallen; because their tongue and their doings are against the Lord.” **Isaiah 3:1-4, 8.**

“Those who lead you,” the prophet continued, “cause you to err.” **Verse 12.** Scripture says about Ahaz, “He walked in the way of the kings of Israel; indeed he made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out from before the children of Israel.” **2 Kings 16:3.**

[119]

Great Peril for the Chosen Nation

In the kingdom of Judah the outlook was dark. The forces for evil were multiplying. The prophet Micah had to exclaim, “The faithful man has perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among men.” “The best of them is like a brier; the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge.” **Micah 7:2, 4.**

In every age, because of His infinite love, God has borne long with the rebellious and urged them to return to Him. This is how it was during the reign of Ahaz. God sent

invitation after invitation to erring Israel. And as the prophets stood before the people, earnestly pleading for repentance and reformation, their words bore fruit.

Through Micah came the wonderful appeal, “O My people, what have I done to you? And how have I wearied you? Testify against Me. For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, I redeemed you from the house of bondage.” **Micah 6:3, 4.**

Throughout probationary time God’s Spirit is urging men and women to accept the gift of life. “Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die?” **Ezekiel 33:11.** Satan leads them into sin and then leaves them there, helpless and hopeless, fearing to seek pardon. But God invites the sinner to “take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me.” **Isaiah 27:5.** In Christ every provision has been made, every encouragement offered.

In Judah and Israel many were inquiring: “Shall I come before the Lord ... with burnt offerings? ... Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousands of rivers of oil?” The answer is plain: “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” **Micah 6:6-8.**

From age to age these counsels were repeated to those who were falling into a religion of ceremonies and were forgetting to show mercy. When a lawyer approached Christ with the question, “Which is the great commandment in the law?” He said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” **Matthew 22:36-39.**

We should receive these plain statements as the voice of God. We should lose no opportunity to perform deeds of mercy, of tender regard and Christian courtesy for the burdened and oppressed. If we can do no more, we may speak words of courage and hope to those who do not know God. Rich are the promises to those who bring joy and blessing into the lives of others: “If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness be as the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.” **Isaiah 58:10, 11.**

[120]

Ahaz’s pursuit of idols despite the prophet’s earnest appeals could have only one result: “The wrath of the Lord fell upon Judah and Jerusalem, and He has given them up to trouble, to desolation, and to jeering.” **2 Chronicles 29:8.** The kingdom suffered a rapid decline, and invading armies soon endangered its very existence. “Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to make war.” **2 Kings 16:5.**

If Ahaz and the people of his realm had been true servants of the Most High, they would have had no fear of an alliance as unnatural as this one that had been formed against them. But stricken with a nameless dread of an offended God’s judgments, the heart of the king “and the heart of his people were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind.” **Isaiah 7:2.** In this crisis the word of the Lord came to Isaiah. He was to tell the trembling king, “Do not fear or be fainthearted. ... Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah

have plotted evil against you, ... thus says the Lord God: ‘It shall not stand, nor shall it come to pass.’” **Verses 4-7.**

It would have been well for Judah for Ahaz to receive this message as from heaven. But choosing to lean on human strength, he sought help from the heathen. In desperation he sent word to Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria: “I am your servant and your son. Come up and save me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who rise up against me.” **2 Kings 16:7.** With the request he sent a rich present from the king’s treasure and the temple storehouse.

The help came and King Ahaz had temporary relief, but at what a cost to Judah! The large gift awakened Assyria’s greed, and soon that nation threatened to overflow Judah and take all her wealth. Ahaz and his unhappy subjects were now haunted by the fear of falling completely into the hands of the cruel Assyrians. “The Lord brought Judah low” (**2 Chronicles 28:19**) because of continued transgression.

In this time of affliction, instead of repenting, Ahaz “became increasingly unfaithful to the Lord. ... For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus.” “Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them,” he said, “I will sacrifice to them that they may help me.” **2 Chronicles 28:22, 23.**

As the apostate king neared the end of his reign, he ordered the doors of the temple to be closed. No longer were offerings made for the sins of the people. Deserting the house of God and locking its doors, the people of the godless city boldly worshiped heathen deities on the street corners throughout Jerusalem. Heathenism seemed to have triumphed.

But some people in Judah maintained their allegiance to Jehovah. Isaiah and Micah looked to these in hope as they surveyed the ruin brought about during the last years of Ahaz. Their sanctuary was closed, but the faithful ones were assured, “God is with us.” “The Lord of hosts, Him you shall hallow; let Him be your fear. ... He will be as a sanctuary.” **Isaiah 8:10, 13, 14.**

King Hezekiah Repairs the Damage

Hezekiah came to the throne determined to save Judah from the fate that was overtaking the northern kingdom. The prophets offered no halfway measures. Judah could avoid the threatened judgments only by a genuine reformation.

No sooner had Hezekiah ascended the throne than he began to plan and execute. He determined first to restore the temple services and solicited the cooperation of priests and Levites who had remained true. “Our fathers have trespassed,” he confessed, “and done evil in the eyes of the Lord our God; they have forsaken Him.” “Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel, that His fierce wrath may turn away from us.” **2 Chronicles 29:6, 10.**

The king reviewed the situation—the closed temple and the suspended services; idol worship practiced in the streets of the city and throughout the kingdom; the apostasy of multitudes who might have remained true if the leaders had set a right example; and the decline of the kingdom and loss of prestige among the surrounding nations. Soon the northern kingdom would fall completely into the hands of the Assyrians and be ruined. This fate would come to Judah as well, unless God would work mightily through His chosen representatives.

Hezekiah appealed to the priests to unite with him in bringing about reform. “Do not be negligent now,” he exhorted them, “for the Lord has chosen you to stand before Him, to serve Him.” “Now sanctify yourselves, sanctify the house of the Lord God of your fathers.” **Verses 11, 5.**

The priests began at once. Enlisting the cooperation of others, they put heart and soul into cleansing and sanctifying the temple. Remarkably soon, they were able to report their task completed. They had repaired the temple doors and thrown them open, assembled and put in place the sacred vessels, and made everything ready for reestablishing the sanctuary services.

In the first service held at the reopened temple, the rulers of the city united with King Hezekiah and the priests in seeking forgiveness for the sins of the nation. On the altar the priests placed sin offerings “to make an atonement for all Israel.” Once more the temple courts echoed with praise. The songs of David and Asaph were sung with joy, as the worshipers

[122]

realized that they were being delivered from the bondage of sin and apostasy. “Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced that God had prepared the people, since the events took place so suddenly.” **Verses 24, 36.**

God had prepared the hearts of Judah’s chief men to lead out in a determined reform movement, in order to stop the apostasy. The kingdom of Israel had rejected his messages, but in Judah a good remnant remained, and to these the prophets continued to appeal. Hear

Isaiah urging, “Return to Him against whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted.” **Isaiah 31:6**. Hear Micah declaring with confidence, “I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my case and executes justice for me. He will bring me forth to the light; I will see His righteousness.” **Micah 7:9**.

These and similar messages had brought hope to many in the dark years when the temple doors remained closed. Now, as the leaders began a reform, a multitude of the people, weary of the slavery of sin, were ready to respond.

Those who sought forgiveness had wonderful encouragement from Scripture. “When you return to the Lord your God,” Moses had said, “and obey His voice (for the Lord your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them.” **Deuteronomy 4:30, 31**.

And at the dedication of the temple Solomon had prayed, “When Your people Israel are defeated before an enemy because they have sinned against You, and when they turn back to You and confess Your name, and pray and make supplication to You in this temple, then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your people Israel.” **1 Kings 8:33, 34**. By night the Lord had appeared to Solomon to tell him that He would show mercy to those who would worship there: “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” **2 Chronicles 7:14**. These promises met abundant fulfillment during the reformation under Hezekiah.

Celebrating the Passover

In his zeal to make the temple services a real blessing, Hezekiah determined to gather the Israelites together for the Passover feast. For many years the Passover had not been observed as a national festival. The division of the kingdom after Solomon’s reign had made this seem unachievable. But the stirring messages of the prophets were having their effect. Royal messengers heralded the invitation to the Passover at Jerusalem “from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, as far as Zebulun.” The bearers of the invitation were usually repulsed; nevertheless some “humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem.” **2 Chronicles 30:10, 11**.

In Judah the response was widespread, for God gave “them singleness of heart to obey the command of the

[123]

king and the leaders”—a command in accord with the will of God as revealed through His prophets. **Verse 12**.

The desecrated streets of the city were cleared of the shrines to idols placed there during the reign of Ahaz. The people observed the Passover and spent the week in offering peace offerings and in learning what God would have them do. Those who had prepared their hearts to seek God found pardon. A great gladness swept the multitude. “The Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, singing to the Lord, accompanied by loud instruments.” All were united in their desire to praise Him. **Verse 21**.

The seven days of the feast passed all too quickly, and the worshipers determined to spend another seven days in learning the way of the Lord more fully. The teaching priests

continued their instruction from the book of the law. Daily the people assembled to offer praise and thanksgiving. And as the great meeting drew to a close, it was evident that God had worked marvelously to convert backsliding Judah. “There was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem.” *Verse 26.*

The Reformation Spreads

The time had come for the worshipers to return to their homes. God had accepted the broken-hearted who had confessed their sins and resolutely turned to Him for forgiveness and help.

There was still an important work in which those who were returning to their homes must take part, and its accomplishment showed that the reformation was genuine: “Now when all this was finished, all Israel who were present went out to the cities of Judah and broke the sacred pillars in pieces, cut down the wooden images, and threw down the high places and the altars—from all Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh—until they had utterly destroyed them all. Then all the children of Israel returned to their own cities, every man to his possession.” *2 Chronicles 31:1.*

“Throughout all Judah” the king “did what was good and right and true before the Lord his God. And in every work that he began ..., he did it with all his heart. So he prospered.” *Verses 20, 21.*

The Assyrians’ success in scattering the remnant of the ten tribes among the nations was leading many to question the power of the God of the Hebrews. Made bold by their successes, Nineveh’s inhabitants had long since set aside the message of Jonah and had become defiant in their opposition to Heaven. A few years after the fall of Samaria the victorious armies reappeared in Palestine, directing their forces against the walled cities of Judah. But they withdrew for a while because of difficulties in other parts of their realm. Not until near the close of Hezekiah’s reign would the world see whether the gods of the heathen would finally prevail.

Visitors from Babylon See the Wrong Things

In the midst of his prosperous reign King Hezekiah was suddenly stricken with an illness beyond human power to help. When Isaiah appeared with the message, “Thus says the Lord: ‘Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live’” (Isaiah 38:1), his last hope seemed removed.

The outlook was dark, yet the king could still pray. So Hezekiah “turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the Lord, saying, ‘Remember now, O Lord, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what was good in Your sight.’ And Hezekiah wept bitterly.” 2 Kings 20:2, 3.

The dying ruler had served God faithfully and strengthened the confidence of the people in their Supreme Ruler. Like David, he could now plead:

Let my prayer come before You;
Incline Your ear to my cry.
For my soul is full of troubles.

Psalm 88:2, 3

Do not forsake me when my strength fails.
O God, do not forsake me,
Until I declare Your strength to this generation,
Your power to everyone who is to come.

Psalm 71:9, 18

“Before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court, ... the word of the Lord came to him, saying, ‘Return and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, “Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father: ‘I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the Lord. And I will add to your days fifteen years. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake, and for the sake of My servant David.’”’” 2 Kings 20:4-6. Directing that a lump of figs be laid on the diseased part, Isaiah delivered the message of mercy.

Hezekiah pleaded for some sign that the message was from heaven. “What is the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the Lord the third day?” “This is the sign to you from the Lord,” the prophet answered, “that the Lord will do the thing which He

[125]

has spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees or go backward ten degrees?" "It is an easy thing," Hezekiah replied, "for the shadow to go down ten degrees; no, but let the shadow go backward ten degrees."

Only by the intervention of God could the shadow on the sundial be made to turn back ten degrees. So "the prophet cried to the Lord, and He brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down on the sundial of Ahaz." *Verses 8-11.*

Restored to strength, Hezekiah vowed to spend his remaining days in willing service to the King of kings:

I said, "In the prime of my life I shall go."

"But You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption,
For You have cast all my sins behind Your back."

"We will sing my songs with stringed instruments
All the days of our life, in the house of the Lord."

Isaiah 38:10, 17, 20

In the fertile valleys of the Tigris and the Euphrates lived an ancient race that was destined to rule the world. Among its people were wise men who gave attention to astronomy. They noticed the shadow on the sundial turn back ten degrees. When King Merodach-Baladan learned that this miracle was a sign to the king of Judah that the God of heaven had granted him a new lease on life, he sent ambassadors to Hezekiah to congratulate him and to learn, if possible, more of the God who was able to perform so great a wonder.

The visit of these messengers gave Hezekiah an opportunity to give glory to the living God, the upholder of all created things, through whose favor his own life had been spared when all other hope was gone. What groundbreaking transformations might have taken place if these seekers after truth had been led to the living God!

Hezekiah's Tragic Pride

But pride and vanity took possession of Hezekiah's heart. In self-exaltation the king "showed them the house of his treasures—the silver and gold, the spices and precious ointment, and all his armory—all that was found among his treasures. There was nothing in his house or in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them." *Isaiah 39:2.* He did not stop to consider that these men from a powerful nation did not have the love of God in their hearts and that it was unwise to show them the temporal riches of the nation.

The visit of the ambassadors was a test of Hezekiah's gratitude and devotion. "However, regarding the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, whom they sent to him to inquire about the wonder that was done in the land, God withdrew from him, in order to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart." *2 Chronicles 32:31.* If Hezekiah had

[126]

borne witness to the goodness and compassion of God, the report of the ambassadors would have been like light piercing darkness. But he magnified himself above the Lord of hosts, "for his heart was lifted up." *Verse 25.*

How disastrous the results! To Isaiah God revealed that the king of Babylon and his counselors would plan to enrich their own country with the treasures of Jerusalem. Hezekiah had sinned disastrously. “Therefore wrath was looming over him and over Judah and Jerusalem.” *Verse 25*.

“Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah, and said to him, ... ‘What have they seen in your house?’ So Hezekiah answered, ‘They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them.’ Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, ... ‘Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,’ says the Lord. ‘And they shall take away some of your sons ...; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.’” *Isaiah 39:3-7*.

Filled with remorse, “Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the Lord did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah.” *2 Chronicles 32:26*. But the evil seed he had sown would yield a harvest of woe. His faith would be severely tried, and he was to learn that only by putting his trust fully in Jehovah could he triumph over the powers who were plotting his ruin and the destruction of his people.

Our Words Can Help Others

Far more than we do, we need to speak of the mercy and lovingkindness of God, of the matchless depths of the Savior’s love. When mind and heart are filled with the love of God, this will not be difficult. Noble ambitions, clear perceptions of truth, yearnings for holiness, will find expression in words that reveal the character of the heart’s treasure.

Those with whom we associate day by day need our help, our guidance. Tomorrow some may be where we can never reach them again. Every day our words and acts are making impressions on those with whom we associate. One reckless movement, one unwise step, and the surging waves of strong temptation may sweep someone into the downward path. If the thoughts we have planted in others’ minds have been evil, we may have set in motion a tide of evil we are powerless to stop.

On the other hand, if by our example we help others to develop good principles, we give them power to do good. In their turn they exert the same beneficial influence on others. In this way hundreds and thousands are helped by our unconscious influence. Before an unbelieving, sin-loving world, the true followers of Christ reveal the power of God’s grace and the perfection of His character.

An Angel Destroys the Assyrian Army

When the armies of Assyria were invading Judah and it seemed as if nothing could save Jerusalem, Hezekiah rallied the forces of his realm to resist the oppressors and to trust in the power of Jehovah to deliver: “Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid nor dismayed before the king of Assyria, nor before all the multitude that is with him. ... With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles.” **2 Chronicles 32:7, 8.**

The boastful Assyrian, whom God used for a time to punish the nations, was not always to prevail. See **Isaiah 10:5, 24-27**. In a prophetic message given “in the year that King Ahaz died,” Isaiah had declared: “The Lord of hosts has sworn, ... ‘I will break the Assyrian in My land, and on My mountains tread him underfoot. ... For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it?’” **Isaiah 14:28, 24-27.**

In the earlier years of his reign, Hezekiah had continued to pay tribute to Assyria, in harmony with the agreement Ahaz had made. Meanwhile the king had done everything possible for the defense of his kingdom. He had made sure of a plentiful supply of water within Jerusalem. “He also made weapons and shields in abundance. Then he set military captains over the people.” **2 Chronicles 32:5, 6.** He had left nothing undone in preparation for a siege.

When Hezekiah came to the throne of Judah, the Assyrians had already carried captive a large number from the northern kingdom; and while he was strengthening the defenses of Jerusalem, the Assyrians captured Samaria and scattered the ten tribes among the Assyrian provinces. Jerusalem was less than fifty miles away, and the rich spoils in the temple would tempt the enemy to return.

The king of Judah determined to resist. Having accomplished all that human planning and energy could do, he told his forces to be of good courage. With unwavering faith the king declared, “With us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles.” **2 Chronicles 32:8.**

Faith Inspires Faith

Nothing more quickly inspires faith than the exercise of faith. Confident that the prophecy against the Assyrians would be fulfilled, the king put his trust fully on God.

[128]

“And the people were strengthened by the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.” **2 Chronicles 32:8.** What did it matter if the armies of Assyria, fresh from conquering the greatest nations, and triumphant over Samaria, would now turn against Judah? What did it matter if they would boast, “As I have done to Samaria and her idols, shall I not do also to Jerusalem and her idols?” **Isaiah 10:11.** Judah had nothing to fear, for their trust was in Jehovah.

The long-expected crisis finally came. The forces of Assyria appeared in Judea. Confident of victory, the leaders divided their forces. One army was to meet the Egyptian army to the south, while the other was to surround Jerusalem.

Judah's only hope now was in God. All possible help from Egypt had been cut off, and no other nations were near to lend a friendly hand.

The Assyrian officers haughtily demanded the surrender of the city. They accompanied this demand with blasphemous insults against the God of the Hebrews. Because of the weakness and apostasy of Israel and Judah, the name of God was no longer feared among the nations, but had become a subject for continual scorn. See [Isaiah 52:5](#).

"Say now to Hezekiah," said the Rabshakeh, one of Sennacherib's chief officers, "Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: 'What confidence is this in which you trust? You speak of having plans and power for the war; but they are mere words. And in whom do you trust, that you rebel against me?'" [2 Kings 18:19, 20](#).

The officers were outside the city but within the hearing of the sentries on the wall. As the Assyrian king's representatives loudly urged their proposals on the chief men of Judah, these men requested them to speak in the Syrian rather than the Jewish language, in order that those on the wall might not follow the proceedings of the conference. The Rabshakeh, rejecting this suggestion, lifted his voice still higher in the Jewish language:

"Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria! Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you; nor let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord, saying, "The Lord will surely deliver us; this city shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria." ... Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, "The Lord will deliver us." Has any one of the gods of the nations delivered its land from the hand of the king of Assyria? ... Have they delivered Samaria from my hand? Who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their countries from my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?'" [Isaiah 36:13-20](#).

Judah's Leaders Pray With Contrition

The Jewish representatives returned to Hezekiah "with their clothes torn, and told him the words of the Rabshakeh." [Verse 22](#). The king "tore his clothes, covered

[129]

himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord." [2 Kings 19:1](#).

Hezekiah dispatched a messenger to Isaiah: "This day is a day of trouble, and rebuke, and blasphemy. ... It may be the Lord your God will hear all the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to reproach the living God, and will rebuke the words which the Lord your God has heard. Therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left." [Verses 3, 4](#).

"Now because of this King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, prayed and cried out to heaven." [2 Chronicles 32:20](#).

God answered His servants. Isaiah was given the message for Hezekiah: "Thus says the Lord: 'Do not be afraid of the words which you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. Surely I will send a spirit upon him, and he shall hear

a rumor and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.” **2 Kings 19:6, 7.**

The Taunts of the Enemy

The Assyrian representatives communicated at once with their king who was with his army guarding the approach from Egypt. Sennacherib wrote “letters to revile the Lord God of Israel, and to speak against Him, saying, ‘As the gods of the nations of other lands have not delivered their people from my hand, so the God of Hezekiah shall not deliver His people from my hand.’” **2 Chronicles 32:17.**

The boastful threat brought with it the message: “Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, ‘Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.’” **2 Kings 19:10.**

When the king of Judah received the taunting letter, he took it into the temple and “spread it before the Lord” and prayed with strong faith for help from heaven, that the nations of earth might know that the God of the Hebrews still lived and reigned. **Verse 14.** The honor of Jehovah was at stake; He alone could bring deliverance.

“O Lord God of Israel,” Hezekiah pleaded, “hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. Truly, Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire; for they were not gods. ... Now therefore, O Lord our God, I pray, save us from his hand, that all the nations of the earth may know that You are the Lord God, You alone.” **Verses 15-19.**

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, ...
And come and save us!
Restore us, O God;
Cause Your face to shine,
And we shall be saved!

Psalm 80:1-3

The Lord Responds to Judah’s Pleadings

Hezekiah’s pleadings for Judah and for the honor of their Supreme Ruler were in harmony with the mind of God. Solomon had prayed for the Lord to maintain “the cause

[130]

of His people Israel, ... that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no other.” **1 Kings 8:59, 60.** Especially was the Lord to show favor when, in times of war or oppression by an army, the leaders of Israel would enter the house of prayer and plead for deliverance. See **verses 33, 34.**

Isaiah sent to Hezekiah saying, “Thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘Because you have prayed to Me against Sennacherib the king of Assyria, I have heard.’ This is the word which the Lord has spoken concerning him: ...

“Whom have you reproached and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised your voice, and lifted up your eyes on high? Against the Holy One of Israel. By your messengers you have reproached the Lord.” “I know your dwelling place, your going out and your coming in, and your rage against Me. Because your rage against Me and your tumult have come up to My ears, therefore I will put My hook in your nose, and My bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way which you came.” **2 Kings 19:20-23, 27, 28.**

The army of occupation had laid Judah waste, but God had promised to provide miraculously for the people. To Hezekiah came the message about the king of Assyria: “‘He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor build a siege mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return; and he shall not come into this city,’ says the Lord. ‘For I will defend this city, to save it for My own sake and for My servant David’s sake.’” **Verses 32-34.**

Deliverance Comes

That very night deliverance came. “The angel of the Lord went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand.” **Verse 35.** “Every mighty man of valor, leader, and captain in the camp of the king of Assyria” was killed. **2 Chronicles 32:21.**

News of this terrible judgment on the army that had gone to take Jerusalem soon reached Sennacherib, who was still guarding the approach to Judea from Egypt. Stricken with fear, the Assyrian king left quickly and “returned shamefaced to his own land.” **Verse 21.** But he did not have long to reign. In harmony with the prophecy concerning his sudden end, he was assassinated by those of his own home. “Then Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.” **Isaiah 37:38.**

The God of the Hebrews had prevailed. His honor was vindicated in the eyes of the surrounding nations. In Jerusalem the people were filled with holy joy. Their pleas for deliverance had mingled with confession of sin and with many tears. They had trusted wholly in the power of God to save, and He had not failed them. The temple courts resounded with songs of solemn praise.

The stouthearted were plundered;
They have sunk into their sleep;

[131]

And none of the mighty men have found the use of their hands.
At Your rebuke, O God of Jacob,
Both the chariot and horse were cast into a dead sleep.
You, Yourself, are to be feared;
And who may stand in Your presence
When once You are angry? ...
Make vows to the Lord your God, and pay them;
Let all who are around Him bring presents to Him who ought to be feared.

He shall cut off the spirit of princes;
He is awesome to the kings of the earth.

Psalm 76:5-12

Lessons From the Proud Assyrian Empire

Inspiration has compared Assyria at the height of her prosperity to a noble tree in the garden of God, towering above the surrounding trees: “In its shadow all great nations made their home.” “All the trees of Eden envied it.” **Ezekiel 31:6, 9.**

But the rulers of Assyria, instead of using their blessings for the benefit of the people, became the scourge of many lands. Merciless, with no thought of God or their fellowmen, they pursued the policy of causing all nations to acknowledge the supremacy of Nineveh’s gods, whom they exalted above the Most High. God had sent Jonah to them with a message of warning, and for a time they humbled themselves before the Lord of hosts and sought forgiveness. But soon they turned again to idol worship and to the conquest of the world.

The prophet Nahum, in listing the sins of the evildoers in Nineveh, exclaimed:

Woe to the bloody city!
It is all full of lies and robbery.
Its victim never departs.
Horsemen charge with bright sword and glittering spear.
There is a multitude of slain,
A great number of bodies,
Countless corpses—
They stumble over the corpses—
“Behold, I am against you,” says the Lord of hosts.

Nahum 3:1, 3, 5

With unerring accuracy the Infinite One still keeps account with the nations. While He offers His mercy with calls to repentance, this account remains open. But when the figures reach a certain sum that God has fixed, the ministry of His wrath begins. The account is closed.

“The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked.” “Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger?” **Nahum 1:3, 6.**

This is how Nineveh became a desolation, “where the lion walked, the lioness and lion’s cub, and no one made them afraid.” **Nahum 2:11.**

Zephaniah prophesied of Nineveh: “The herds shall lie down in her midst, every beast of the nation.

[132]

Both the pelican and the bittern shall lodge on the capitals of her pillars; their voice shall sing in the windows; desolation shall be at the threshold; for He will lay bare the cedar work.” **Zephaniah 2:14.**

The pride of Assyria and its fall serve as an object lesson to the end of time. “The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him. But with an overwhelming flood He will make an utter end” of all who try to exalt themselves above the Most High. **Nahum 1:7, 8.**

This is true not only of the nations that arrayed themselves against God in ancient times, but also of nations today who fail to fulfill the divine purpose. In the day of final awards, when the righteous Judge of all the earth shall “sift the nations” (**Isaiah 30:28**), heaven’s arches will ring with the triumphant songs of the redeemed. “You shall have a song,” the prophet declares, “as in the night when a holy festival is kept, and gladness of heart as when one goes with a flute, to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the Mighty One of Israel. ... Through the voice of the Lord Assyria will be beaten down, as He strikes with the rod.” **Verses 29-31.**

Isaiah's "Good News" for All the Nations

Isaiah was commissioned to make very plain to Judah that many who were not physical descendants of Abraham were to be numbered among the Israel of God. This teaching was not in harmony with the theology of his age, yet he fearlessly proclaimed the message and brought hope to many a heart reaching out after the spiritual blessings promised to Abraham's descendants.

Isaiah "is very bold," Paul declares, "and says: 'I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.'" **Romans 10:20**. Often the Israelites seemed unable or unwilling to understand God's purpose for the heathen. Yet it was this very purpose that had established them as an independent nation. God had called Abraham, their father, to set out for the regions beyond, so that he might be a light bearer to the heathen. The promise to him included descendants as numerous as the sand by the sea, yet it was for no selfish purpose that he was to become the founder of a great nation in Canaan. God's covenant with him embraced all the nations of earth: "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing." **Genesis 12:2**.

Shortly before the birth of Isaac, the child of promise, God again made plain His purpose for all humanity: "All the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him." **Genesis 18:18**. The all-embracing terms of this covenant were familiar to Abraham's children and grandchildren. The Israelites were delivered from Egyptian bondage so that they might be a blessing to the nations and God's name might be made known "in all the earth." **Exodus 9:16**. If obedient, Israel was to be far in advance of other peoples in wisdom. But this supremacy had only one purpose: that through them God's design for "all the nations of earth" might be fulfilled.

The miraculous events connected with Israel's deliverance from Egypt and their occupancy of the Promised Land led many of the heathen to recognize the God of Israel as the Supreme Ruler. Even proud Pharaoh had to acknowledge His power: "Go, serve the Lord," he urged Moses, "and bless me also." **Exodus 12:31, 32**.

The advancing armies of Israel found that news of God's mighty

[134]

workings had gone before them. In wicked Jericho a heathen woman said, "The Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath." **Joshua 2:11**. By faith "Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe." **Hebrews 11:31**. And her conversion was not an isolated case. The Gibeonites renounced their heathenism and united with Israel, sharing the blessings of the covenant.

God recognizes no distinction of nationality, race, or caste. All people are one by creation; all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple courts, so that every person may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere. It lifts

out of Satan's influence those who have been deluded by his deceptions and places them within reach of the throne of God. "All the ends of the world," the psalmist was inspired to sing, "shall remember and turn to the Lord, and the families of the nations shall worship before You." "Ethiopia will quickly stretch out her hands to God." "The nations shall fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth Your glory." "From heaven the Lord viewed the earth, to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to release those appointed to death, to declare the name of the Lord in Zion, and His praise in Jerusalem, when the peoples are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the Lord." **Psalm 22:27; 68:31; 102:15, 19-22.**

If Israel had been true to her trust, all the nations of earth would have shared in her blessings. But as Israel lost sight of God's plan, they came to look on the heathen as beyond the reach of His mercy. So the nations were left under a veil of ignorance. The love of God was little known, and error and superstition flourished.

This was the situation that Isaiah faced. Yet he was not discouraged, for ringing in his ears was the chorus of the angels, "The whole earth is full of His glory!" **Isaiah 6:3.** And his faith was strengthened by visions of God's church in glorious conquests when "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." **Isaiah 11:9.**

The Captivity Brought "Good News" to Many

God gave the prophet a revelation of His plan for a greater good in scattering unrepentant Judah among the nations of earth. "My people shall know My name," the Lord declared. **Isaiah 52:6.** In their exile they were to give to others a knowledge of the living God. Many among the strangers were to learn to love Him as their Creator and Redeemer; they were to begin to observe His holy Sabbath as a memorial of His creative power. "All the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God." **Verse 10.** Many of these converts from heathenism would unite with the Israelites and go with them on the return journey to Judea. Ever after they would be counted among spiritual Israel—His church on earth.

[135]

"The sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants—everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast My covenant—even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. ... For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." **Isaiah 56:6, 7.**

God allowed the prophet to look down the centuries to the coming of the promised Messiah. Many were being led astray by false teachers; others were not bringing true holiness into their daily living. The outlook seemed hopeless. But soon a wondrous vision spread before the eyes of the prophet. He saw the Sun of Righteousness, and in wondrous admiration he exclaimed, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined." **Isaiah 9:2.**

This glorious Light of the world was to bring salvation to every nation and people. The prophet heard the eternal Father declare, "It is too small a thing that You should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth." **Isaiah 49:6;** see also **verses 8, 9, 12.**

Looking on still farther through the ages, the prophet saw the bearers of salvation's glad tidings going to the ends of the earth. He heard the commission, "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; do not spare; lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes. For ... your descendants will inherit the nations." **Isaiah 54:2, 3.**

How beautiful upon the mountains
Are the feet of him who brings good news, ...
Who proclaims salvation,
Who says to Zion,
"Your God reigns!"

Isaiah 52:7

Isaiah heard the voice of God calling, that the way might be prepared to usher in His everlasting kingdom. The message was plain.

Arise, shine;
For your light has come!
And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you.
For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth,
And deep darkness the people;
But the Lord will arise over you,
And His glory will be seen upon you.
The Gentiles shall come to your light,
And kings to the brightness of your rising.
"Look to Me, and be saved,
All you ends of the earth!
For I am God, and there is no other."

Isaiah 60:1-3; 45:22

[136]

The Church Takes the "Good News" to the World

These prophecies are being fulfilled today in the unenlightened regions of earth. The prophet compared gospel workers to banners set up to guide those looking for the light of truth: "It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people who are left. ... He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth." **Isaiah 11:11, 12.**

Among all nations the Lord sees men and women praying for light. They grope as if blind. But they are honest in heart. With no knowledge of the written law of God or of His Son Jesus, their lives show the working of a divine power on mind and character. At times those who have no knowledge of God other than what they have received through

divine grace have protected His servants at the risk of their own lives. The Holy Spirit is implanting the grace of Christ in the hearts of many noble seekers after truth, awakening their sympathies contrary to their former education. The “Light which gives light to every man” ([John 1:9](#)) is shining in their minds, and, if heeded, will guide their feet to the kingdom of God.

God will not permit anyone to be disappointed who longs for something higher and nobler than anything the world can offer. Constantly He is sending His angels to those who, surrounded by discouraging circumstances, pray in faith for some power higher than themselves to bring deliverance and peace. In various ways God will place them in touch with events He has arranged that will establish their confidence in the One who has given Himself a ransom for all.

Unto all “the upright” in every land “there arises light in the darkness.” [Psalm 112:4](#). God has spoken: “I will bring the blind by a way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight.” [Isaiah 42:16](#).

Manasseh and Josiah: the Worst and the Best

The kingdom of Judah was brought low once more during Manasseh's wicked reign. Paganism had revived, and many were led into idolatry. "Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel." **2 Chronicles 33:9**. Gross evils sprang up and flourished—tyranny, oppression, hatred of all that is good. Justice was perverted, and violence prevailed.

Yet the trying experiences that Judah had safely passed through during Hezekiah's reign had developed in many a strength of character that now served as a barrier against iniquity. They spoke up for truth, and this sparked the anger of Manasseh, who tried to silence every voice of disapproval. "Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another." **2 Kings 21:16**.

One of the first to fall was Isaiah, who had stood for more than half a century as the appointed messenger of Jehovah. "Others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword." **Hebrews 11:36, 37**.

Some who suffered persecution during Manasseh's reign had brought special messages of reproof from God. The prophets declared that the king of Judah "has acted more wickedly than all ... who were before him." **2 Kings 21:11**. Because of this, the inhabitants of the land were to be carried captive to Babylon, there to become "victims of plunder to all their enemies." **Verse 14**. But those who in a strange land would put their trust wholly in the Lord would find a sure refuge.

Faithfully the prophets spoke to Manasseh and his people, but backsliding Judah paid no attention. As an example of what would happen to the people if they continued unrepentant, the Lord permitted their king to be captured by Assyrian soldiers who "bound him with bronze fetters, and carried him off to Babylon." **2 Chronicles 33:11**. This affliction brought the king to his senses. He "humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and ... He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was

[138]

God." **Verses 12, 13**. But this repentance came too late to save the kingdom from the influence of years of idol worship.

Among those whose life had been shaped beyond recall was Manasseh's own son, who came to the throne at the age of twenty-two. King Amon "walked in all the ways that his father had walked." "He forsook the Lord God of his fathers." **2 Kings 21:21, 22**. The wicked king was not permitted to reign long. Only two years from the time he came to the throne, his own servants killed him in the palace, and "the people of the land made his son Josiah king in his place." **2 Chronicles 33:25**.

Josiah Resolves to Be True to His Trust

When Josiah came to the throne, where he was to rule for thirty-one years, the faithful people began to hope that they had seen the end of the kingdom's downward course. The new king, though only eight years old, "did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the way of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left." **2 Kings 22:2**. Warned by the errors of past generations, Josiah chose to do right. His obedience made it possible for God to use him as a "vessel for honor."

At the time Josiah began to rule, and for many years before, the truehearted were questioning whether God's promises to Israel could ever be fulfilled. The apostasy of former centuries had grown stronger; ten tribes had been scattered among the heathen; only Judah and Benjamin remained, and they seemed now to be on the verge of moral and national ruin. The prophets had begun to predict the destruction of their beautiful city, where the temple built by Solomon stood. Was God about to turn aside from His plan of bringing deliverance to those who put their trust in Him? Could those who had remained true to God hope for better days?

Habakkuk gave voice to such anxious questions: "O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? even cry out to You, 'Violence!' and You will not save. ... Plundering and violence are before me; there is strife, and contention arises. Therefore the law is powerless, and judgment never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore perverse judgment proceeds." **Habakkuk 1:2-4**.

God answered His loyal children. Through His prophet He revealed His determination to punish the nation that had turned to serve heathen gods. Within the lifetime of some who were even then inquiring regarding the future, He would bring the Chaldeans upon the land of Judah as a divinely appointed scourge. The princes and the best of the people were to be carried captive to Babylon; the Judean cities, villages, and cultivated fields were to be laid waste.

Habakkuk Bows in Submission to the Lord

"Are You not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One?" Habakkuk exclaimed. Then the

[139]

prophet's faith laid hold of the precious promises that reveal God's love for His children, and he added, "We shall not die." **Verse 12**. With this declaration of faith he rested the case of every believing Israelite in the hands of a compassionate God.

This was not Habakkuk's only experience in exercising strong faith. On one occasion he said, "I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me." Graciously the Lord answered, "Write the vision and make it plain upon tablets, that he may run who reads it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith." **Habakkuk 2:1-4**.

Faith Will Sustain God's People Today

The faith that strengthened Habakkuk in those days of trial was the same faith that sustains God's people today. Under the worst circumstances, the believer may keep his trust firmly on the Source of all light and power. Through faith in God, he may renew his courage. "The just shall live by his faith." The Lord will more than fulfill the highest expectations of those who put their trust in Him. He will give the wisdom their needs demand.

We must cultivate the faith that lays hold on God's promises and waits for deliverance in His chosen time and way. The sure word of prophecy will meet its final fulfillment in the glorious advent of our Savior as King of kings and Lord of lords. The time of waiting may seem long, and many in whom we have had confidence may fall by the way. But with the prophet who tried to encourage Judah in a time of apostasy, let us declare, "The Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him." **Verse 20.**

O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years!
In the midst of the years make it known;
In wrath remember mercy.

Habakkuk 3:2

Though the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines;
Though the labor of the olive may fail,
And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,
And there be no herd in the stalls—
Yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.
The Lord God is my strength.

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Habakkuk was not the only one to whom God gave a message of hope and future triumph as well as of present judgment. During the reign of Josiah the word of the Lord came to Zephaniah, telling the results of continued apostasy and calling attention to the glorious prospect beyond. His prophecies of judgment

[140]

on Judah apply with equal force to the judgments that will fall on an unrepentant world at the second coming of Christ:

The great day of the Lord is near;
It is near and hastens quickly.
The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter;
There the mighty men shall cry out.
That day is a day of wrath,

A day of trouble and distress,
A day of devastation and desolation,
A day of darkness and gloominess,
A day of clouds and thick darkness,
A day of the trumpet and alarm
Against the fortified cities
And against the high towers.

Zephaniah 1:14-16

Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath. But the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy, for He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land. *Verse 18.*

Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth,
Who have upheld His justice.
Seek righteousness, seek humility.
It may be that you will be hidden
In the day of the Lord's anger.

Zephaniah 2:3

In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:

“Do not fear;
Zion, let not your hands be weak.
The Lord your God in your midst,
The Mighty One, will save;
He will rejoice over you with gladness,
He will quiet you with His love,
He will rejoice over you with singing.”

Zephaniah 3:16, 17

The Long-lost Law Book Discovered

The prophets' messages regarding the Babylonian captivity did much to prepare the way for a reformation in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign. This reform movement came about unexpectedly through the discovery of a portion of Holy Scripture that had been misplaced and lost for many years.

Nearly a century before, during Hezekiah's first Passover celebration, provision had been made to read the book of the law publicly. Observing the statutes recorded in the book of the covenant (a part of Deuteronomy) had made Hezekiah's reign prosperous. But during Manasseh's reign the temple copy of the book had become lost.

Hilkiah, the high priest, found the long-lost manuscript in the temple while the building was undergoing repairs. He handed the precious volume to Shaphan, a learned scribe, who took it to the king with the story of its discovery.

Josiah was deeply stirred as he heard for the first time the warnings recorded in this ancient manuscript. Never before had he realized how Israel had been urged repeatedly to choose the way of life, that they might become a blessing to all nations. See [Deuteronomy 31:6](#). The book held many assurances of God's willingness to save those who would place their trust fully in Him. As He had worked in their deliverance from Egyptian slavery, so would He work mightily in placing them at the head of the nations of earth.

As the king heard the inspired words, in the picture set before him he recognized conditions similar to those existing in his kingdom. In these prophetic descriptions of departure from God, he was startled to find plain statements that the day of disaster would follow and that there would be no remedy. He could not mistake the meaning of the words. And at the close of the volume, in telling of future events, Moses had declared:

“[Israel] forsook God who made him,
And scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation. ...
They sacrificed to demons, not to God. ...
Of the Rock who begot you, you are unmindful,
And have forgotten the God who fathered you.
And when the Lord saw it, He spurned them,

[142]

Because of the provocation of His sons and His daughters.
And He said: ‘I will hide My face from them,
I will see what their end will be,
For they are a perverse generation,
Children in whom is no faith.’”
“How could one chase a thousand,

And two put ten thousand to flight,
 Unless their Rock had sold them,
 And the Lord had surrendered them?"
 "Vengeance is Mine, and recompense;
 Their foot shall slip in due time;
 For the day of their calamity is at hand,
 And the things to come hasten upon them."

Deuteronomy 32:15-20, 30,
 35

Young Josiah Does All He Can Do

As King Josiah read the prophecies of swift judgment, he trembled for the future. The sins of Judah had been great. What would be the result of their continued apostasy?

"In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young," he had consecrated himself fully to the service of God. At the age of twenty he had removed "the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images." "They broke down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and the incense altars ... and the wooden images ... he broke in pieces, and made dust of them and scattered it on the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. He also burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem." **2 Chronicles 34:3-5.**

The youthful ruler extended his efforts to the portions of Palestine formerly occupied by the ten tribes of Israel, only a feeble remnant of which now remained. "So he did," the record reads, "in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, as far as Naphtali." **Verse 6.** Not until he had crossed the length and breadth of this region of ruined homes, and "had broken down the altars and the wooden images, had beaten the graven images into powder, and cut down all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel," did he return to Jerusalem. **Verse 7.**

Thus Josiah had tried as king to exalt God's holy law. And now, while Shaphan the scribe was reading to him out of the book of the law, the king recognized that this volume was a powerful ally in the work of reform he so much desired to see. He resolved to do all in his power to acquaint his people with its teachings and to lead them, if possible, to reverence and love the law of heaven.

The King Consults the Lord's Prophetess

But was it possible to bring about the needed reform? Israel had almost reached the limit of God's patience. Overwhelmed with sorrow and dismay, Josiah bowed before God in agony of spirit, seeking pardon for the sins of an unrepentant nation.

At that time the prophetess Huldah was living in Jerusalem near the temple. The king determined to inquire of the Lord through her whether

[143]

there was anything he could do to save erring Judah, now on the verge of ruin.

He held the prophetess in high respect, so he chose the leaders of the kingdom as his messengers to her: “Go, inquire of the Lord for me, for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found.” **2 Kings 22:13.**

Through Huldah the Lord sent Josiah word that he could not prevent Jerusalem’s ruin. The people could not escape their punishment. Their senses had been deadened by wrongdoing for so long that, if judgment did not come, they would soon return to the same sinful course. “Tell the man that sent you to me,” the prophetess declared, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Behold, I will bring calamity on this place and on its inhabitants—all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read. ... My wrath shall be aroused against this place and shall not be quenched.’” **Verses 15-17.**

But because the king had humbled his heart before God, he also received this message: “‘Because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a desolation and a curse, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard you,’ says the Lord. ‘Surely, therefore, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place.’” **Verses 19, 20.**

The king must leave the events of the future with God. But the Lord had not withdrawn opportunity for repentance and reformation, and Josiah determined to do all in his power to bring about definite reforms. He arranged at once for a great gathering, to which he invited the elders, magistrates, and common people.

To this vast assembly the king himself read “all the words of the Book of the Covenant which had been found in the house of the Lord.” **2 Kings 23:2.** The royal reader was deeply affected, and he delivered his message with the pathos of a broken heart. His hearers were profoundly moved. The intensity of feeling that the king’s face revealed, the solemnity of the message itself, the warning of impending judgments—all these had their effect. Many determined to join the king in seeking forgiveness.

Josiah now proposed that those highest in authority unite with the people in a solemn covenant before God to make major changes. The response was greater than the king had dared hope for: “All the people took a stand for the covenant.” **Verse 3.**

They had followed the customs of the surrounding nations for so long in bowing down to images that it seemed almost beyond human power to remove every trace of these evils. But Josiah persevered in his effort to cleanse the land. See **verses 20, 24.**

[144]

Three-Hundred-Year-Old Prophecy Fulfilled

Centuries before, in bold defiance of God, Jeroboam had set up an unconsecrated altar at Bethel. During the dedication of this altar, a man of God from Judea had suddenly appeared who “cried out against the altar,” declaring: “O altar, altar! Thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, a child, Josiah by name, shall be born to the house of David; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and men’s bones shall be burned on you.’” **1 Kings 13:2.**

Three centuries had passed. Josiah the king found himself in Bethel, where this ancient altar stood. The prophecy spoken so many years before was now to be literally fulfilled.

“The altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he broke down; and he burned the high place and crushed it to powder. ... As Josiah turned, he saw the tombs that were there on the mountain. And he sent and took the bones out of the tombs and burned them on the altar, and defiled it according to the word of the Lord which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words.” [2 Kings 23:15, 16](#).

On the southern slopes of Olivet, opposite the beautiful temple of Jehovah on Mount Moriah, Solomon had placed shrines and images to please his idol-worshiping wives. See [1 Kings 11:6-8](#). For upwards of three centuries the great, misshapen images had stood, silent witnesses to the apostasy of Israel’s wisest king. Josiah destroyed these, too.

The king set about further to establish the faith of Judah by holding a great Passover in harmony with the instructions in the book of the law. “Such a Passover surely had never been held since the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah.” [2 Kings 23:22](#). But the zeal of Josiah could not atone for the sins of past generations, nor could the piety of the king’s followers bring a change of heart in many who stubbornly refused to turn from idolatry to worship the true God.

Josiah continued to reign for more than a decade following the Passover. At thirty-nine he was mortally wounded in battle with the forces of Egypt. “All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. Jeremiah also lamented” for him. [2 Chronicles 35:24, 25](#).

The time was rapidly approaching when Jerusalem was to be completely destroyed and the inhabitants of the land carried captive to Babylon. There they would learn lessons they had refused to learn under more favorable circumstances.

Jeremiah, the Man Who Felt God's Anguish

Jeremiah had hoped for a permanent reformation under Josiah. He had been called by God to the prophetic office while still a youth. As a member of the priesthood, Jeremiah had been trained from childhood for holy service. In those happy years he little realized that God had chosen him from birth to be "a prophet to the nations." When the divine call came, he was overwhelmed. "Ah, Lord God!" he exclaimed, "I cannot speak, for I am a youth." **Jeremiah 1:5, 6.**

In the young Jeremiah, God saw one who would be true to his trust and stand for the right against great opposition. In childhood he had proved faithful, and now he was to endure hardship as a soldier of the cross. "Do not say, 'I am a youth.' ... Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you." "Speak to them all that I command you. Do not be dismayed before their faces, lest I dismay you before them. For behold, I have made you this day a fortified city and an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land. ... They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you. For I am with you," says the Lord, "to deliver you." **Verses 7, 8, 17-19.**

For forty years Jeremiah would stand as a witness for truth and righteousness. In a time of unparalleled apostasy he was to give an example in life and character of the worship of the true God. He was to be the mouthpiece of Jehovah. He was to predict the downfall of the house of David and the destruction of the beautiful temple built by Solomon. Imprisoned, despised, hated, rejected by others, he was finally to share in the sorrow and woe that would follow the condemned city's destruction.

Yet Jeremiah was often permitted to look beyond the distressing scenes of the present to the glorious future, when God's people would be planted again in Zion. "Their souls shall be like a well-watered garden, and they shall sorrow no more at all." **Jeremiah 31:12.** Jeremiah wrote, "The Lord said to me, 'Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant.'" **Jeremiah 1:9, 10.**

A True Prophet Always "Builds"

Thank God for the words, "to build and to plant." The Lord's purpose

[146]

was to restore and to heal. Jeremiah was fearlessly to deliver prophecies of swift-coming judgments, yet he was to accompany these messages with assurances of forgiveness to all who would turn from their evildoing.

Jeremiah worked to encourage the people of Judah to lay spiritual foundations broad and deep by thorough repentance. For a long time they had been building with material that Jeremiah likened to dross: "People will call them rejected silver, because the Lord has rejected them." **Jeremiah 6:30.** Now he urged them to build for eternity, throwing away the

rubbish of apostasy and using as material pure gold, refined silver, precious stones—faith, obedience, and good works—which alone are acceptable to God.

The word of the Lord was, “‘Return, backsliding Israel, ... and I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I am merciful,’ says the Lord, ... ‘for I am married to you.’” **Jeremiah 3:12-14.**

And in addition the Lord gave His erring people the very words with which they could turn to Him: “We do come to You, for You are the Lord our God.” “We lie down in our shame, and our reproach covers us. For we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even to this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God.” **Verses 22, 25.**

The reformation under Josiah had cleansed the land of shrines to idols, but the hearts of the multitude were not transformed. Thorns had choked the seeds of truth that had sprung up and given promise of an abundant harvest. Another backsliding like that would be fatal.

Jeremiah called attention repeatedly to the counsels given in Deuteronomy. He showed how these could bring the highest spiritual blessing to the nation. “Ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls.” **Jeremiah 6:16.**

On one occasion, at one of the principal entrances to the city the prophet urged the importance of keeping holy the Sabbath day: “‘If you heed Me carefully,’ says the Lord, ‘to bring no burden through the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but hallow the Sabbath day, to do no work in it; then shall enter the gates of this city kings and princes sitting on the throne of David, ... and this city shall remain forever.’” **Jeremiah 17:24, 25.** If the people did not act on the appeals to obey the God of their fathers and to hallow His Sabbath, the city and its palaces would be utterly destroyed by fire. Only by the firmest measures could they bring about a change for the better; therefore the prophet worked most earnestly for the unrepentant. “O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved.” **Jeremiah 4:14.**

But the great mass of the people left the call to repentance unheeded. Those who ruled the nation had been untrue to their trust and had been leading many astray. From the beginning of Jehoiakim’s reign, Jeremiah had little hope of saving his beloved

[147]

land from destruction and captivity. Yet he was not to remain silent while complete ruin threatened the kingdom. He must encourage those loyal to God to continue in rightdoing, and if possible he must persuade sinners to turn from iniquity.

The Lord commanded Jeremiah to stand in the court of the temple and speak to all who went in and out. He must not soften a word!

The prophet obeyed. He lifted his voice in warning and pleading. “‘Hear the word of the Lord, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates.’ ... ‘Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Do not trust in these lying words, saying, “The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these.’”” **Jeremiah 7:2-4.**

God's Marvelous Loving-kindness

This account shows vividly that the Lord is unwilling to chastise. He yearns over His erring children. In every way possible He seeks to teach them the way of life. See [Jeremiah 9:24](#). Though the Israelites had wandered in idolatry for a long time and ignored His warnings, yet He now declares His willingness to postpone punishment and grant yet another opportunity to repent. He makes plain that they could avoid the coming doom only by complete heart reformation. Their trust in the temple and its services would be in vain. Ceremonies could not atone for sin. Only reformation of heart and of the life practice could save them from the result of transgression.

Thus “in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem” the message of Jeremiah was, “Hear the words of this covenant”—the instructions of God as recorded in the Scriptures—“and do them.” [Jeremiah 11:6](#). The Lord inquired, “Why has this people slidden back, Jerusalem, in a perpetual backsliding?” [Jeremiah 8:5](#). It was because they had refused to be corrected. See [Jeremiah 5:3](#). “Even the stork in the heavens knows her appointed times; and the turtledove, the swift, and the swallow observe the time of their coming. But My people do not know the judgment of the Lord.” “Shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?” [Jeremiah 8:7; 9:9](#).

While Josiah had been their ruler, the people had some ground for hope. But he had fallen in battle. The time for intercession had nearly passed. “Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Me,” the Lord declared, “My mind would not be favorable toward this people. Cast them out of My sight.” [Jeremiah 15:1](#).

A refusal to accept God's current invitation would bring the judgments that had fallen on the northern kingdom more than a century before. The message now was: “If you will not listen to ... the words of My servants the prophets whom I sent to you, ... then I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth.” [Jeremiah 26:4-6](#).

Those who stood in the temple court listening to Jeremiah clearly understood this reference to Shiloh,

[148]

when in Eli's days the Philistines had carried away the ark of the covenant. Eli's sin consisted in treating lightly the evils prevailing in the land. His neglect to correct these evils had brought a fearful disaster on Israel. Eli lost his life, the ark had been taken from Israel, thirty thousand people had been killed—all because sin had flourished unrebuked and unrestrained. Israel had foolishly thought that, despite their sinful practices, the ark would ensure victory over the Philistines. Likewise, during the days of Jeremiah, the people of Judah tended to believe that performing the appointed temple services would preserve them from punishment for their wicked course.

What a lesson this is to people holding positions of responsibility in the church! What a warning to deal faithfully with wrongs that bring dishonor to the cause of truth! Let no one accuse the servants of God of being too zealous in trying to cleanse the camp from evil-doing. Jerusalem's desolation in the days of Jeremiah is a solemn warning that we cannot disregard the counsels given through God's chosen instruments and expect no consequences to follow.

Jeremiah's message stirred up the angry opposition of many. They cried out, "Why have you prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying, 'This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without an inhabitant'?" And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the Lord." **Verse 9.** Priests, false prophets, and people turned on him who would not speak smooth things or prophesy deceit. They threatened God's servant with death.

Jeremiah's Courage Saves His Life

Soon the princes heard the news of Jeremiah's words, and they hurried from the palace to learn for themselves the truth of the matter. "And the priests and the prophets spoke to the princes and all the people, saying, 'This man deserves to die! For he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your ears.'" **Verse 11.** But Jeremiah boldly declared: "The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city with all the words that you have heard. Now therefore, ... obey the voice of the Lord your God; then the Lord will relent concerning the doom that He has pronounced against you. As for me, here I am, in your hand; do with me as seems good and proper to you. But know for certain that if you put me to death, you will surely bring innocent blood on yourselves, on this city, and on its inhabitants; for truly the Lord has sent me to you." **Verses 12-15.**

If the prophet had been intimidated by those high in authority, he would have lost his life. But the courage with which he delivered the solemn warning earned the respect of the people and turned the princes in his favor. They reasoned with the priests and false prophets. In this way God raised up defenders for His servant.

[149]

The elders also united in protesting against the priests' decision regarding Jeremiah. Through the pleading of these influential men the prophet's life was spared, although many priests and false prophets would gladly have seen him put to death on the charge of stirring up revolt against the authorities.

To the close of his ministry, Jeremiah stood as "a fortress" (**Jeremiah 6:27**) against which human wrath could not prevail. "They will fight against you," the Lord had forewarned His servant, "but they shall not prevail against you." **Jeremiah 15:20.**

Jeremiah's Peaceful, Shrinking Disposition

Jeremiah was naturally timid, and he longed for a place of quiet seclusion where he would not need to witness the continued rebellion of his beloved nation. His heart was broken with anguish over the ruin that sin had brought. "Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears," he mourned, "that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! Oh, that I had in the wilderness a lodging place for travelers; that I might leave my people, and go from them!" **Jeremiah 9:1, 2.**

The arrows of scorn hurled at him pierced his sensitive soul. "I have become a laughing-stock all day long; everyone mocks me." "Let us denounce him!" All my close friends are watching for me to stumble. 'Perhaps he can be enticed, and we can prevail against him.'" **Jeremiah 20:7, 10, NRSV.**

But the faithful prophet was strengthened daily. "The Lord is with me as a mighty, awesome One," he declared in faith. "Therefore my persecutors will stumble, and will not prevail. They will be greatly ashamed." **Jeremiah 20:11**. He learned to pray, "O Lord, correct me, but with justice; not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing." **Jeremiah 10:24**.

When tempted in his misery to say, "My strength and my hope have perished from the Lord" (**Lamentations 3:18**), Jeremiah recalled the workings of God in his behalf and exclaimed: "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I hope in Him!' The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord." **Lamentations 3:22-26**.

Judah's Amazing Stubbornness

The first years of Jehoiakim's reign were filled with warnings of approaching doom. All of a sudden a new world power, the Babylonian empire, was rising in the east and swiftly overshadowing Assyria, Egypt, and all other nations.

The king of Babylon was to be the instrument of God's wrath on unrepenting Judah. Again and again the armies of Nebuchadnezzar would enter Jerusalem. Tens of thousands would be taken captive in forced exile. One after another, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah were to become vassals of the Babylonian ruler, and all in turn were to rebel. Severe punishments would be inflicted on the rebellious nation, until at last Jerusalem would be burned, the temple that Solomon built destroyed, and Judah fall, never again to occupy its former position among the nations.

Through Jeremiah, many messages from Heaven marked those times of change. The Lord gave the children of Judah ample opportunity to free themselves from alliances with Egypt and to avoid controversy with Babylon. Jeremiah taught the people by acted parables, hoping to awaken them to a sense of obligation to God and to encourage them to maintain friendly relations with the Babylonian government.

To illustrate the importance of obedience to God, Jeremiah gathered some Rechabites into the temple and set wine before them. As expected, he met with absolute refusal: "We will drink no wine, for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying, 'You shall drink no wine, you nor your sons, forever.'" "Then came the word of the Lord to Jeremiah, saying, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, ... "The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, which he commanded his sons, not to drink wine, are performed; for to this day they drink none, and obey their father's commandment.'" [Jeremiah 35:6, 12-14](#). But the people of Judah had not obeyed the words of the Lord and were about to suffer severe judgments.

The Lord declared, "I have sent to you all My servants the prophets, sending them persistently, saying, 'Turn now everyone of you from your evil way, and amend your doings, and do not go after other gods to serve them, and then you shall live in the land that I gave to you and

[151]

your ancestors.' But you did not incline your ear or obey Me." "Therefore, ... I am going to bring on Judah and on all the inhabitants of Jerusalem every disaster that I have pronounced against them." [Verses 15, 17](#), NRSV.

When people turn from correction until their hearts become hardened, the Lord permits them to be led by other influences. Refusing the truth, they accept falsehood that leads to their own destruction. The Chaldeans were to be the instrument by which God would punish His disobedient people. Their sufferings would be proportional to the light they had despised and rejected. God now would bring His displeasure on them as a last effort to stop their evil course.

God pronounced a continued blessing on the Rechabites: “Because you have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, ... ‘Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not lack a man to stand before Me forever.’” **Verses 18, 19.** The lesson is for us. If the requirements of a wise father were worthy of strict obedience when he took the most effective means to secure his family—present and future—against the evils of intemperance, surely God’s authority should be held in much greater reverence! By His servants He predicts the dangers of disobedience. He sounds the warning and reproves sin. His people are kept in prosperity only by His mercy, through the vigilant watchcare of His chosen instruments. He cannot uphold a people who reject His counsel.

The Faithful Youth Were Encouraged

Jeremiah never lost sight of the importance of heart holiness in the service of God. He foresaw the scattering of Judah among the nations, but with faith he looked beyond this to restoration. “‘The days are coming,’ says the Lord, ‘that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.’” **Jeremiah 23:5, 6.**

Those who would choose to live holy lives amid apostasy would be enabled to witness for Him. The days were coming, the Lord declared, when people would no longer say, “‘As the Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,’ but, ‘As the Lord lives who brought up and led the descendants of the house of Israel ... from all the countries where I had driven them.’ And they shall dwell in their own land.” **Verses 7, 8.** Such were the prophecies that Jeremiah spoke when the Babylonians were surrounding the walls of Zion.

These promises fell like sweetest music on the ears of the steadfast worshipers of God. In homes that still held in reverence the counsels of a covenant-keeping God, even the children were mightily stirred. Their receptive minds received lasting impressions. Their observance of Holy Scripture gave Daniel and his companions opportunities to exalt the

[152]

true God before the nations of earth. The instruction these Hebrew children received in the homes of their parents made them strong in faith. When Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem for the first time and carried away Daniel and his friends, the faith of the Hebrew captives was tested to the utmost. But those who had learned to place their trust in the promises of God found these promises to be all-sufficient, a guide and a support.

As an interpreter of the judgments beginning to fall on Judah, Jeremiah stood nobly in defense of God’s justice. He extended his influence beyond Jerusalem by frequent visits to various parts of the kingdom. In his testimonies he constantly emphasized the importance of maintaining a covenant relationship with the compassionate Being who on Sinai had spoken the Ten Commandments. His words reached every part of the kingdom.

The Perversity of King Jehoiakim

At the very time Jeremiah was urging messages of impending doom on princes and people, Jehoiakim, who should have been leading a reformation, was spending his time in selfish pleasure. He proposed, “I will build myself a wide house with spacious chambers, ... paneling it with cedar and painting it with vermilion.” **Jeremiah 22:14**. This house he built with money and labor he obtained through fraud and oppression.

God inspired Jeremiah to pronounce judgment on the faithless ruler: “Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness and his chambers by injustice, who uses his neighbor’s service without wages and gives him nothing for his work.” “Therefore thus says the Lord concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: ‘They shall not lament for him. ... He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey, dragged and cast out beyond the gates of Jerusalem.’” **Verses 13, 18, 19**.

Within a few years Jehoiakim would experience this terrible judgment. But first the Lord in mercy informed the rebellious nation of His plan: “Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah,” pointing out that for more than twenty years he had borne witness of God’s desire to save, but that the people had despised his messages. See **Jeremiah 25:1-3**. And now, “thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Because you have not heard My words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, ... and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land. ... This whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.’” **Verses 8-11**.

The Lord compared the fate of the nation to the draining of a cup filled with the wine of divine wrath. Among the first to drink from this cup was to be “Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, its kings and its princes.” **Verse 18**. Others would partake of the same cup—Egypt and many other nations. See **Jeremiah 25**.

[153]

To illustrate further the coming judgments, God instructed the prophet to “take with you some of the elders of the people and some of the senior priests, and go out to the valley of the son of Hinnom” (**Jeremiah 19:1, 2**, NRSV) and there dash to pieces a “potter’s earthenware jug” (**verse 1**) and declare in behalf of the Lord, “Even so I will break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter’s vessel, which cannot be made whole again.” **Verse 11**. Returning to the city, he stood in the court of the temple and declared, “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Behold, I will bring on this city and on all her towns all the doom that I have pronounced against it, because they have stiffened their necks that they might not hear My words.’” **Verse 15**.

The prophet’s words stirred the anger of those high in authority, and they imprisoned Jeremiah and placed him in the stocks. Still, his voice could not be silenced. The word of truth, he declared, “was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not.” **Jeremiah 20:9**.

About this time the Lord commanded Jeremiah to write his messages. “Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah until today. It may be that when the house of Judah hears of all the disasters that I intend to do to them, all of them

may turn from their evil ways, so that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.” **Jeremiah 36:2, 3**, NRSV.

In obedience to this command, Jeremiah called his faithful friend, Baruch the scribe, and dictated “all the words of the Lord which He had spoken to him.” **Verse 4**. Written on a parchment scroll, these words constituted a warning of the sure result of continued apostasy and an earnest appeal for them to renounce all evil.

Jeremiah, still a prisoner, sent Baruch to read the roll to the crowds at the temple on a national fast day. “It may be,” the prophet said, “that they will present their supplication before the Lord, and everyone will turn from his evil way. For great is the anger and the fury that the Lord has pronounced against this people.” **Verse 7**.

Baruch read the scroll before all the people. Afterward the princes summoned the scribe to read the words to them. They listened with great interest and promised to inform the king, but they counseled Baruch to hide himself, for they feared the king would try to kill those who had prepared and delivered the message.

Jehoiakim immediately ordered the scroll read in his hearing. One of the royal attendants, Jehudi, began reading the words of reproof and warning. It was winter, and the king and princes were gathered around an open fire. The king, far from trembling at the danger facing himself and his people, seized the scroll and in a frenzy of rage “cut it with

[154]

the scribe’s knife and cast it into the fire ... until all the scroll was consumed.” **Verse 23**.

Neither the king nor his princes “was afraid, nor did they tear their garments.” Certain of the princes, however, “implored the king not to burn the scroll; but he would not listen to them.” The wicked king sent for Jeremiah and Baruch to be arrested, “but the Lord hid them.” **Verses 24-26**.

God was graciously seeking to warn the people of Judah for their good. He pities those who struggle in the blindness of self-will. He seeks to enlighten the darkened understanding. He tries to help the selfcomplacent become dissatisfied and seek for a close connection with heaven.

How God Tries to Save Us

God’s plan is not to send messengers who will please and flatter sinners. Instead, He lays heavy burdens on the conscience of the wrongdoer to prompt the agonizing cry, “What must I do to be saved?” **Acts 16:30**. But the Hand that humbles to the dust is the Hand that lifts up the repentant one. He who permits the punishment to fall inquires, “What do you want Me to do for you?” **Mark 10:51**.

But King Jehoiakim and his lords, in their arrogance and pride, would not accept the warning and repent. The gracious opportunity offered to them at the time of the burning of the sacred scroll was their last. God declared He would bring special wrath on the man who had proudly lifted himself up against the Almighty. “Thus says the Lord concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: ‘He shall have no one to sit on the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat of the day and the frost of the night.’” **Jeremiah 36:30**.

Jeremiah's Second Book

The burning of the scroll was not the end of the matter. It was easier to dispose of the written words than of the swift-coming punishment that God had pronounced against rebellious Israel. But even the written scroll was reproduced. "Take yet another scroll," the Lord commanded His servant, "and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll which Jehoiakim the king of Judah burned." **Verse 28**. The words were still living in the heart of Jeremiah, "like a burning fire," and the prophet reproduced what human anger had destroyed.

Taking another scroll, Baruch wrote on it "all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire. And besides, there were added to them many similar words." **Verse 32**. Jehoiakim's very attempt to limit the prophet's influence gave further opportunity for making the divine requirements plain.

The spirit that led to the persecution of Jeremiah exists today. Many refuse to heed warnings, preferring to listen to false teachers who flatter their vanity and overlook their evil-doing. In the day of trouble such

[155]

people will have no sure refuge. God's chosen servants should courageously meet the sufferings that come to them through accusation, neglect, and misrepresentation. They should discharge faithfully the work God has given them, ever remembering that the prophets, the Savior, and His apostles also endured persecution for the Word's sake.

It was God's intention for Jehoiakim to obey the counsels of Jeremiah and so win favor with Nebuchadnezzar and save himself much sorrow. The young king had sworn allegiance to the Babylonian ruler, and if he had remained true to his promise he would have won the respect of the heathen. But Judah's king willfully violated his word of honor and rebelled. This brought bands of raiders against him. Within a few years he closed his disastrous reign in disgrace, rejected by Heaven, unloved by his people, and despised by the rulers of Babylon, whose confidence he had betrayed.

Jehoiachin [also known as Jeconiah, and Coniah], the son of Jehoiakim, occupied the throne only three months and ten days when he surrendered to the Chaldean armies that were once more surrounding the doomed city. Nebuchadnezzar "carried away Jehoiachin captive to Babylon. The king's mother, the king's wives, his officers, and the mighty of the land," several thousand in number, were also taken, together with "craftsmen and smiths, one thousand," and "all the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house." **2 Kings 24:15, 16, 13**.

The kingdom of Judah, broken in power and robbed of its strength, was nevertheless still permitted to exist as a separate government. At its head Nebuchadnezzar placed Mattaniah, a younger son of Josiah, and changed his name to Zedekiah.

[156]

Zedekiah, Judah's Last King

At the beginning of his reign Zedekiah had the full trust of the king of Babylon. He also had Jeremiah the prophet as his counselor. He could have kept the respect of many in high authority and communicated a knowledge of the true God to them. If he had done so, the captive exiles already in Babylon would have been granted many liberties, God's name would have been honored, and those who remained in Judah would have been spared the terrible disasters that finally came.

Through Jeremiah, God counseled Zedekiah and all Judah to submit quietly to the temporary rule of their conquerors. Those in captivity should seek the peace of the land where they had been carried. However, Satan took advantage of the circumstances and caused false prophets to arise in Jerusalem and in Babylon. They declared that the yoke of bondage would soon be broken and the nation restored to its former prestige.

Heeding such flattering prophecies would have led the king and exiles to make fatal mistakes. To prevent an uprising, the Lord commanded Jeremiah to meet the crisis without delay by warning the king of Judah about the sure consequences of rebellion. He also admonished the captives not to be deluded into believing that their deliverance was near. "Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you," he urged. **Jeremiah 29:8**. He mentioned the Lord's plan to restore Israel at the close of seventy years' captivity.

God knew that if false prophets persuaded His captive people to look for a speedy deliverance, their position in Babylon would become very difficult. Any revolt on their part would lead to further restriction of their liberties. Suffering and disaster would result.

Why Submission Was So Important

God wanted them to submit and make their servitude as pleasant as possible. His counsel was: "Build houses, and dwell in them; plant gardens. ... Seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you shall have peace." **Verses 5-7**.

Among the false teachers in Babylon were two men whose lives

[157]

were corrupt. Jeremiah had warned them of their danger. Angered by reproof, they tried to stir up the people to act contrary to the counsel of God concerning submitting to the king of Babylon. The Lord testified through Jeremiah that these false prophets would be delivered to Nebuchadnezzar and executed. Not long afterward, this prediction was fulfilled.

To the end of time, people will arise to create confusion and rebellion among those who claim to be representatives of God. Those who prophesy lies will encourage people to look on sin as a light thing. They will seek to make the one who has warned them responsible

for their difficulties, even as the Jews charged Jeremiah with their evil fortunes. But, as anciently, God's messages will prove to be certain today.

Jeremiah had followed a consistent course in counseling submission to the Babylonians. Ambassadors from Edom, Moab, Tyre, and other nations visited Zedekiah to learn whether he would join them in a united revolt against Babylon. While these ambassadors were awaiting a response, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: "Make yourself a yoke of straps and bars, and put them on your neck. Send word to the [neighboring kings] ... by the hand of the envoys who have come to Jerusalem." **Jeremiah 27:2, 3**, NRSV. God had given them all into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, and they were to "serve him and his son and his grandson, until the time of his own land comes." **Verse 7**, NRSV.

The ambassadors were further instructed that if they refused to serve the Babylonian king, they would be punished "with the sword, with famine, and with pestilence." "You, therefore, must not listen to your prophets," the Lord declared, "your diviners, your dreamers. ... For they are prophesying a lie to you, with the result that you will be removed far from your land. ... But any nation that will bring its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will leave on its own land, says the Lord, to till it and live there." **Verses 8-11**, NRSV. The lightest punishment a merciful God could inflict on so rebellious a people was submission to the rule of Babylon, but if they warred against this they were to feel the full strength of His punishment. The amazement of the assembled council of nations knew no limits when Jeremiah made known the will of God.

Jeremiah Opposed by Arrogant False Prophets

Jeremiah stood firmly for the policy of submission. Prominent among those who opposed the counsel of the Lord was Hananiah, one of the false prophets. Thinking to gain the favor of the royal court, he declared that God had given him words of encouragement for the Jews: "Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, ... 'Within two full years I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the Lord's house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place and carried to Babylon. And I will bring back to this

[158]

place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah ..., for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.'" **Jeremiah 28:2-4**.

Jeremiah cited the prophecies of Hosea, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, whose messages had been similar to his own. He referred to events that had taken place, exactly fulfilling God's purpose as revealed through His messengers. "As for the prophet who prophesies of peace," Jeremiah proposed in conclusion, "when the word of the prophet comes to pass, the prophet will be known as one whom the Lord has truly sent." **Verse 9**.

The words of Jeremiah stirred Hananiah to make a daring challenge. Taking the symbolic yoke from Jeremiah's neck, Hananiah broke it, saying, "Thus says the Lord: 'Even so I will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all nations within the space of two full years.'" **Verse 11**.

Apparently Jeremiah could do nothing more than to withdraw from the scene of conflict. But God gave him another message: "Go and tell Hananiah, saying, 'Thus says the Lord:

“You have broken the yokes of wood, but you have made in their place yokes of iron. ... I have put a yoke of iron on the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him.””

“Then Jeremiah the prophet said to Hananiah the prophet, ‘Hear now, Hananiah, the Lord has not sent you, but you make this people trust in a lie. Therefore thus says the Lord: ... “This year you shall die, because you have taught rebellion against the Lord.”’ So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month.” *Verses 13-17*. The false prophet had wickedly declared himself to be the Lord’s messenger, and he died as a result.

The unrest caused by the false prophets brought Zedekiah under suspicion of treason, and only by quick action on his part was he permitted to continue reigning as a vassal. The king accompanied a prince on a mission to Babylon. *Jeremiah 51:59*. During this visit to the Chaldean court, Zedekiah renewed his oath of allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar.

Through Daniel and other Hebrew captives, the Babylonian monarch had become acquainted with the power and supreme authority of the true God; and when Zedekiah once more solemnly promised to remain loyal, Nebuchadnezzar required him to swear to this in the name of the Lord God of Israel. If Zedekiah had respected this renewal of his covenant oath, his loyalty would have had a profound influence on many who were watching those who claimed to honor the God of the Hebrews. But the Bible records that Zedekiah “rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear an oath by God; but he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the Lord God of Israel.” *2 Chronicles 36:13*.

[159]

Ezekiel Shown Abominations in the Temple

While Jeremiah continued to bear testimony in the land of Judah, God raised up the prophet Ezekiel among the captives in Babylon to warn and to comfort the exiles. Ezekiel made plain how foolish it was to trust the predictions of an early return to Jerusalem. God also instructed him to use a variety of symbols to predict the siege and destruction of Jerusalem.

In the sixth year of Zedekiah’s reign, the Lord revealed to Ezekiel some of the abominations being practiced in Jerusalem, even within the inner court of the Lord’s house. See *Ezekiel 8:10*. Those who should have been spiritual leaders—“elders of the house of Israel” (*verse 11*)—were offering incense before the pagan images brought into hidden chambers within the temple court. “The Lord does not see us,” they declared blasphemously. *Verse 12*.

The prophet was shown “women sitting there weeping for Tammuz,” and “about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east, and they were worshiping the sun toward the east.” *Verses 14, 16*. Now the glorious Being who accompanied Ezekiel during this astonishing vision inquired of the prophet: “Is it a trivial thing to the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they commit here? ... My eye will not spare nor will I have pity; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them.” *Verses 17, 18*.

Through Jeremiah the Lord had declared, “Both prophet and priest are profane; yes, in My house I have found their wickedness.” *Jeremiah 23:11*. In the closing account of

Zedekiah's reign, this charge of violating the temple was repeated: "All the leaders of the priests and the people transgressed more and more, according to all the abominations of the nations, and defiled the house of the Lord which He had consecrated in Jerusalem." **2 Chronicles 36:14.**

The day of doom for the kingdom of Judah was fast approaching. Again "the word of the Lord came to" Ezekiel: "Son of man, what is this proverb that you people have about the land of Israel, which says, ... 'Every vision fails'?" "Therefore say to them, ... 'The word which I speak will be done,' says the Lord God." **Ezekiel 12:21, 22, 28.**

Chief among those rapidly leading the nation to ruin was Zedekiah their king. Forsaking the counsels of the Lord, forgetting the debt of gratitude he owed Nebuchadnezzar, violating his solemn oath of allegiance taken in the name of the God of Israel, Judah's king rebelled against the prophets, against his benefactor, and against his God. In his own wisdom he turned to the ancient enemy of Israel, "sending his ambassadors to Egypt, that they might give him horses and many people." **Ezekiel 17:15.**

"Will he prosper?" the Lord inquired. "Will he who does such things escape? Can he break a covenant and still be delivered? ... Nor

[160]

will Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company do anything in the war. ... Since he despised the oath by breaking the covenant, and in fact gave his hand and still did all these things, he shall not escape." **Verses 15-18.** "Remove the turban," the Lord decreed, "and take off the crown." Not until Christ Himself sets up His kingdom will Judah again have a king. "Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown!" was the divine edict concerning the throne. "It shall be no longer, until He comes whose right it is, and I will give it to Him." **Ezekiel 21:26, 27.**

[161]

Zedekiah Fails His Last Chance

In the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign "Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army came against Jerusalem." **2 Kings 25:1**. The outlook for Judah was hopeless. "Behold, I am against you," the Lord Himself declared through Ezekiel. "I will pour out My indignation on you; I will blow against you with the fire of My wrath, and deliver you into the hands of brutal men who are skillful to destroy." **Ezekiel 21:3, 31**.

The Egyptians attempted to come to the rescue, and the Chaldeans, in order to keep them back, abandoned their siege for a while. Hope sprang up in Zedekiah's heart, and he sent a messenger to Jeremiah, asking him to pray to God for the Hebrew nation.

The prophet's fearful answer was: "Do not deceive yourselves. ... For though you had defeated the whole army of the Chaldeans who fight against you, and there remained only wounded men among them, they would rise up, every man in his tent, and burn the city with fire." **Jeremiah 37:9, 10**. The remnant of Judah were to go into captivity and learn through adversity the lessons they had refused to learn under more favorable circumstances.

Among the righteous still in Jerusalem were some who determined to safeguard the sacred ark containing the tablets of stone on which God had written the Ten Commandments, placing it beyond the reach of ruthless hands. With mourning they concealed the ark in a cave. It was hidden from Israel because of their sins and was never to be restored to them. That sacred ark is still hidden.

Now, as the doomed city was about to fall into the hands of the heathen, Jeremiah considered his work done and tried to leave. He was prevented by an officer who reported that he was about to join the Babylonians. The prophet denied the lying charge, but "the princes were angry with Jeremiah, and they struck him and put him in prison." **Verse 15**.

The hopes that had sprung up when the armies of Nebuchadnezzar turned to meet the Egyptians were soon dashed to the ground. The military might of Egypt was no more than a broken reed. Inspiration had declared, "I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, but the arms of Pharaoh shall fall down; they shall know that I am the Lord, when

[162]

I put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon and he stretches it out against the land of Egypt." **Ezekiel 30:25**.

A Vacillating King's Secret Rendezvous

While the princes were still vainly looking toward Egypt for help, King Zedekiah was thinking of the prophet of God who had been put in prison. After many days the king sent for him and asked him secretly, "Is there any word from the Lord?" And Jeremiah said, 'There is.' Then he said, 'You shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon!'

"Moreover Jeremiah said to King Zedekiah, ... 'Where now are your prophets who prophesied to you, saying, "The king of Babylon will not come against you or against this

land"? Therefore please hear now, O my lord the king ... and do not make me return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there." **Jeremiah 37:17-20.**

At this Zedekiah commanded that they commit "Jeremiah to the court of the prison, and that they should give him daily a piece of bread from the bakers' street, until all the bread in the city was gone." **Verse 21.**

The king dared not openly show any faith in Jeremiah. Though fear drove him to seek information privately, he was too weak to risk the disapproval of his princes and people by submitting to the will of God as the prophet had declared it.

Jeremiah continued to advise submission to the Babylonian rule: "He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but he who goes over to the Chaldeans shall live." **Jeremiah 38:2.**

At last the princes, enraged over the counsels that were contrary to their policy of resistance, protested vigorously to the king. The prophet was an enemy to the nation. He should be put to death!

An Ethiopian Saves Jeremiah's Life

The cowardly king knew that the charges were false, but to satisfy those who were high and influential in the nation, he gave Jeremiah to them to do as they pleased. They put the prophet "into the dungeon of Malchiah ..., and they let Jeremiah down with ropes. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire. So Jeremiah sank in the mire." **Verse 6.** But God raised up friends for him, who made request of the king and had him again removed to the court of the prison.

Once more the king sent privately for Jeremiah and asked him to relate God's intention concerning Jerusalem. Jeremiah inquired, "If I declare it to you, will you not surely put me to death? And if I give you advice, you will not listen to me." The king entered into a secret agreement with the prophet. "As the Lord lives, ... I will not put you to death, nor will I give you into the hand of these men who seek your life." **Verses 15, 16.**

There was still opportunity for the king to heed the warnings and in this way dilute with mercy the judgments falling on city and nation. "If you will only surrender to the

[163]

officials of the king of Babylon," was the message Jeremiah gave the king, "then your life shall be spared, and this city shall not be burned with fire, and you and your house shall live. But if you do not surrender ..., then this city shall be handed over to the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and you yourself shall not escape from their hand." **Verses 17, 18, NRSV.**

"I am afraid of the Judeans who have deserted to the Chaldeans," the king replied, "for I might be handed over to them and they would abuse me." But the prophet promised, "That will not happen." And he added the earnest plea, "Just obey the voice of the Lord in what I say to you, and it shall go well with you, and your life shall be spared." **Verses 19, 20, NRSV.**

If the king had chosen to obey, lives might have been spared and the city saved from fire; but he thought he had gone too far to retrace his steps. He was afraid of ridicule, afraid for

his life. After years of rebellion against God, Zedekiah thought it would be too humiliating to say to his people, I accept the word of the Lord as spoken through the prophet Jeremiah; I dare not venture to war against the enemy.

Zedekiah Has No Moral Stamina

With tears Jeremiah pleaded with Zedekiah to save himself and his people. He assured him that unless he obeyed the counsel of God, he could not escape with his life, and all his possessions would fall to the Babylonians. But the king would not retrace his steps. He decided to follow the counsel of the false prophets. He became a cowering slave to public opinion. With no real intent to do evil, he also had no determination to stand boldly for the right.

The king was even too weak to be willing for people to know that he had held a conference with Jeremiah. If Zedekiah had bravely declared that he believed the words of the prophet, already half fulfilled, what desolation he might have prevented! He should have said, I will obey the Lord and save the city from utter ruin. I love truth, I hate sin, and I will follow the counsel of the Mighty One of Israel.

The people would have respected Zedekiah's courageous spirit, and those who were wavering between faith and unbelief would have taken a firm stand for the right. The fearlessness and justice of this course would have inspired admiration and loyalty. Judah would have been spared the untold woe of bloodshed, famine, and fire.

Zedekiah's weakness was a sin for which he paid a fearful penalty. The enemy swept down like a resistless avalanche and devastated the city. The Hebrew armies were beaten back in confusion. Zedekiah was taken prisoner, his sons executed before his eyes. The king was led from Jerusalem as a captive, his eyes were put out, and after arriving in Babylon he perished miserably. The beautiful temple that for centuries had crowned Mount Zion was not spared. "They burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem,

[164]

burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious possessions." **2 Chronicles 36:19**. The chief of the priests, officers, and princes were taken to Babylon and executed as traitors. Others were carried captive to live in servitude to Nebuchadnezzar and his sons.

The Babylonians Respect Jeremiah

Of Jeremiah it is recorded, "Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon gave charge concerning Jeremiah to Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, saying, "Take him ... and do him no harm; but do to him just as he says to you.'" **Jeremiah 39:11, 12**.

Released from prison by the Babylonian officers, the prophet chose to stay with the feeble remnant left by the Chaldeans to be "vinedressers and farmers." **Jeremiah 52:16**. Over these the Babylonians set Gedaliah as governor. Only a few months passed before the governor was treacherously killed. After passing through many difficulties, the people were persuaded to take refuge in Egypt. Jeremiah lifted his voice in protest against this move: "Do not go to Egypt," he pleaded. But the people did not listen to the inspired counsel,

and “all the remnant of Judah” fled into Egypt. “They did not obey the voice of the Lord.” *Jeremiah 43:2, 5, 7.*

The Book of Lamentations reveals the prophet’s sorrow over the stubborn rebellion of those who should have been the light of the world and over the fate of Zion and the people carried captive to Babylon. Jeremiah left these laments on record as a memorial of the folly of turning from the counsels of Jehovah to human wisdom. Amid the ruin, Jeremiah could still declare, “Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed.” His constant prayer was, “Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord.” *Lamentations 3:22, 40.*

But now Zion was completely destroyed, and the people of God were in captivity. Overwhelmed with grief, the prophet exclaimed:

How lonely sits the city that once was full of people!
 How like a widow has she become, she that was great among the nations!
 She that was a princess among the provinces has become a vassal.
 She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks;
 among all her lovers she has no one to comfort her;
 all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they have become her enemies.
 Judah ... finds no resting place; ...
 all her gates are desolate, her priests groan;
 her young girls grieve, and her lot is bitter.
 Her foes have become the masters, her enemies prosper.
 How the Lord in His anger has humiliated daughter Zion!
 He has thrown down from heaven to

[165]

earth the splendor of Israel;
 He has not remembered His footstool in the day of His anger.
 He has bent His bow like an enemy, with His right hand set like a foe;
 He has killed all in whom we took pride in the tent of daughter Zion;
 He has poured out His fury like fire.
 Remember, O Lord, what has befallen us. ...
 Our ancestors sinned; they are no more, and we bear their iniquities.
 Slaves rule over us;
 there is no one to deliver us from their hand.
 Restore us to Yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored;
 renew our days as of old.

*Lamentations 1:1-5; 2:1, 4; 5:1-8, 21,
 NRSV*

[166]

Not All Was Lost!

Through His prophets Jeremiah in Jerusalem, Daniel in Babylon, and Ezekiel on the banks of the Chebar, the Lord in mercy made clear His eternal purpose. What He had said He would do for those who proved true to Him, He would surely bring to pass.

In the wilderness wandering the Lord had made abundant provision for His children to remember His law. After they settled in Canaan, the people were to repeat the divine instructions daily in every home. They were to set these things to music. Priests were to teach them, and the rulers were to make them their daily study. The Lord commanded Joshua concerning the book of the law: “Do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” **Joshua 1:8.**

If they had put this counsel into practice through the centuries that followed, how different Israel’s history would have been! It was regard for the law that gave Israel strength during the reign of David and the earlier years of Solomon’s rule. Through faith in the living word, the nation experienced reformation in the days of Elijah and Josiah. In Jeremiah’s efforts toward reform, he appealed to these same Scriptures, Israel’s richest heritage. He met the people with the plea, “Hear the words of this covenant.” **Jeremiah 11:2.**

As the armies of the Chaldeans came for the last time to surround Jerusalem, hope fled from every heart. But God did not leave the faithful remnant in the city to hopeless despair. Even while Jeremiah was under close watch in prison, fresh revelations came to him concerning Heaven’s willingness to forgive and to save.

By an acted parable, Jeremiah illustrated to the inhabitants of the doomed city his faith that God would ultimately fulfill His purpose for His people. In the presence of witnesses, he purchased an ancestral field in the neighboring village of Anathoth. From every human point of view this purchase of land already under Babylonian control appeared foolish. The prophet himself had been predicting the destruction of Jerusalem and a long period of captivity in Babylon. Already advanced in years, he could never hope to receive benefit from the purchase he had made.

[167]

However, he had a firm conviction that the Lord intended to restore the Land of Promise to the children of the captivity. With the eye of faith Jeremiah saw the exiles returning and reoccupying the land of their fathers. Through the purchase of the Anathoth property he would inspire others with the hope that brought comfort to his own heart.

Having signed the deeds of transfer and secured the signatures of witnesses, Jeremiah instructed Baruch his secretary, “Take these deeds, ... and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. For thus says the Lord of hosts ...: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.” **Jeremiah 32:14, 15, NRSV.**

Jeremiah Overwhelmed With Temptation to Doubt

After arranging for the preservation of the written records, Jeremiah found his faith severely tested. Had he acted presumptuously? Had he given the people ground for false hope? Could the promises to the chosen nation ever meet with complete fulfillment?

Perplexed in spirit, the prophet appealed to God for further light concerning the divine purpose. Nebuchadnezzar's armies were about to take the walls of Zion by storm. Thousands were perishing in a last desperate defense of the city. More thousands were dying of hunger and disease. The siege towers of the enemy's forces were already overlooking the walls. "Look, the siege mounds!" the prophet prayed to God. "They have come to the city to take it; and the city has been given into the hand of the Chaldeans who fight against it, because of the sword and famine and pestilence. What You have spoken has happened; there You see it! And You have said to me, O Lord God, 'Buy the field for money, and take witnesses'!—yet the city has been given into the hand of the Chaldeans." *Verses 24, 25.*

God graciously answered this prayer. "The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah" in that hour of distress: "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?" *Verses 26, 27.* Soon the city's gates and palaces were to be burned; destruction was imminent and the inhabitants were to be carried away captive; nevertheless the eternal purpose of the Lord would still be fulfilled. The Lord declared concerning those on whom His judgments were falling:

"I will bring them back to this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely. They shall be My people, and I will be their God; then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them."

"Just as I have brought all this great calamity on this people, so I will bring on them all the good that I have promised them. And fields will be bought in this land of which you say, 'It is desolate, without man or beast; it has been given into the hand of the Chaldeans.' Men will buy fields

[168]

for money, sign deeds and seal them." *Verses 37-39, 42-44.*

Encouragement When All Seemed Lost

"Concerning the houses of this city and the houses of the kings of Judah, which have been pulled down to fortify against the siege mounds and the sword: ... 'Behold, I will bring it health and healing; I will heal them and reveal to them the abundance of peace and truth. And I will cause the captives of Judah and the captives of Israel to return, and will rebuild those places as at the first. I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities. ...

"'Again there shall be heard in this place—of which you say, 'It is desolate, without man and without beast'—in the cities of Judah, in the streets of Jerusalem ..., the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who will say, 'Praise the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for His mercy endures forever.' ... For I will cause the captives of the land to return as at the first,' says the Lord." *Jeremiah 33:4, 6-8, 10, 11.*

The Church of God Comforted

In this way the church of God was comforted in one of the darkest hours of her long conflict with the forces of evil. Satan had seemingly triumphed, but the Lord was overruling events. His message to the church was, “I am with you, ... to save you.” “I will restore health to you and heal you of your wounds.” **Jeremiah 30:11, 17.**

In the glad day of restoration, the tribes of divided Israel were to be reunited as one people. The Lord declared, “I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the ends of the earth, among them the blind and the lame. ... They shall come with weeping, and with supplications I will lead them. ... For I am a Father to Israel.” **Jeremiah 31:8, 9.**

The New Covenant Will Solve the Problem of Apostasy

Humbled in the sight of the nations, those whom Heaven had once favored above all other peoples of the earth were to learn in exile the lesson of obedience. “I will correct you in justice, and will not let you go altogether unpunished,” He declared. **Jeremiah 30:11.** Yet before all the nations of earth He would demonstrate His plan to bring victory out of apparent defeat, to save rather than to destroy. God gave the prophet the message:

“He who scattered Israel will gather him,
and will keep him as a shepherd a flock.” ...
They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, ...
their life shall become like a watered garden,
and they shall never languish again. ...
I will turn their mourning into joy,
I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.

Jeremiah 31:10-13, NRSV

[169]

“Behold, the days are coming ... when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” **Verses 31-34.**

[170]

Daniel, a Captive in Babylon

This chapter is based on Daniel 1.

Among the children of Israel carried captive to Babylon were men and women as true as steel to principle, who would honor God even at the loss of all things. In the land of their captivity these were to carry out God's purposes as His representatives. They were to bear their faith and their name as worshipers of the living God as a high honor.

The Babylonians claimed that their religion was superior to that of the Hebrews. As evidence, they pointed out that the Hebrews were captives and that the vessels of God's house were in the temple of the Babylonian gods. Yet the Lord gave Babylon evidence of His supremacy, of the holiness of His requirements, and of the sure results of obedience.

Daniel and his three companions provided outstanding examples of what people may become who unite with God. From the simplicity of their home, these youth of royal line were taken to Babylon, the most magnificent city, and into the court of the world's greatest monarch. They were "young men in whom there was no blemish, but goodlooking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand."

Seeing in these youth remarkable ability, Nebuchadnezzar determined that they should be trained to fill important positions. He arranged for them to learn the language of the Chaldeans and for three years to be granted the unusual educational advantages afforded to princes of the realm.

The king did not compel the Hebrew youth to renounce their faith in favor of idolatry, but he hoped to bring this about gradually.

By giving them names based in idolatry, by bringing them daily into close association with customs of idol worship, and under the influence of the seductive heathen rites, he hoped to persuade them to renounce their religion and unite with the worship of the Babylonians.

Idolatry and Seductive Temptation

At the very start the young men faced a decisive test of character. Arrangements had been made for them to eat the food and drink the wine that came from the king's table. In

[171]

this the king thought to express his interest in their welfare. But the food from the king's table was consecrated to idols, and partaking of it would be seen as offering worship to the gods of Babylon. If they did this, Daniel and his companions would deny their faith and dishonor the principles of the law of God. Nor did they dare to risk the weakening effect of luxury and wrong habits of living on their physical, mental, and spiritual development. They were acquainted with the intemperance of Nadab and Abihu and its results (see [Leviticus 10:1-11](#)), and they knew that wine would injure their own physical and mental powers.

Daniel and his associates had been taught that God would hold them accountable for their capabilities and that they must never dwarf or enfeeble their powers. The temptations in that corrupt and luxurious court were strong, but these Hebrew youth remained uncontaminated. No influence could sway them from the principles they had learned in early life by studying the Word and works of God.

Daniel might have found a plausible excuse for departing from strictly temperate habits. He might have argued that if he held to the divine teaching, he would offend the king and probably lose his position and his life. By disregarding the commandment of the Lord, he would secure intellectual advantages and flattering worldly prospects.

But Daniel did not hesitate. He determined to stand firm. He “purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank.” His three companions supported him in this.

In reaching this decision the Hebrew youth did not act presumptuously. They did not choose to be different, but they would accept being different rather than dishonor God. If they took the first wrong step, it would lead to others until, with their connection to Heaven broken, they would be swept away by temptation.

“God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs,” and the request was received with respect. Yet the chief hesitated. “I fear my lord the king,” he explained to Daniel. “For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king.”

Daniel Appeals to Another Authority

Daniel then appealed to Melzar, the officer in special charge of the Hebrew youth. He asked that the matter be tested by a ten-day trial, the Hebrew youth eating simple food, while their companions ate the king’s rich provisions.

Despite his concerns, Melzar consented. At the end of ten days, the result was the opposite of the officer’s fears. “Their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king’s delicacies.” As a result, Daniel and his associates were permitted their simple diet during their entire course of training.

[172]

For three years the Hebrew youth studied, depending constantly on God’s power. It was not pride or ambition that had brought them to the king’s court; they were captives in a strange land. Separated from home, they wanted to perform well for the honor of their downtrodden people and for the glory of Him whose servants they were.

The Lord approved their purity of motive, and He “gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.” God fulfilled His promise, “Those who honor Me I will honor.” [1 Samuel 2:30](#). While Daniel was receiving human instruction in the duties of court life, God was teaching him to read the mysteries of the future and to record for coming generations, through figures and symbols, events covering history till the close of time.

The Great Results of True Health Reform

When the time came for the Hebrew youth to be examined for the service of the kingdom, “among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.” Their keen comprehension, their wide knowledge, their exact language, testified to the unimpaired strength and vigor of their mental powers. “Therefore they served before the king.”

At the court of Babylon men of the highest talent had gathered from many lands. They were richly endowed with natural gifts and exhibited the broadest culture the world could bestow. Among them all, the Hebrew youth were without an equal in physical strength, mental vigor, and literary attainment. The erect form, the firm step, the admirable appearance, the undimmed senses, the untainted breath—all were marks of the nobility with which nature honors those who obey her laws.

Daniel and his companions were far more successful than their fellow students in acquiring the wisdom of the Babylonians. They obtained their knowledge under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, having made the knowledge of God the foundation of their education. They prayed for wisdom, and they improved every opportunity to become intelligent in all lines of learning. They followed the rules of life that could not fail to give them strength of mind. Praying constantly, studying faithfully, keeping in touch with the Unseen, they walked with God as did Enoch.

True success in any line of work is not the result of chance or accident or destiny. It is the outworking of God’s leading, the reward of faith and discretion, of virtue and perseverance. Fine mental qualities and a high moral tone are not the result of accident. God gives opportunities; success depends on the use made of them.

Here we can see the divine principle of cooperation. To make God’s grace our own, we must act our part. He gives his grace to work in us to will and to do, but never as a substitute for our effort.

As the Lord cooperated with Daniel, so He will cooperate with all

[173]

who strive to do His will. By His Spirit He will strengthen every true purpose, every noble resolution. Those who walk in the path of obedience will encounter many difficulties, but the Lord is able to counteract every agency that works for the defeat of His chosen ones. In His strength they may overcome every temptation, conquer every difficulty.

The Secret of Daniel’s Success

God brought Daniel and his associates into connection with the great men of Babylon so that they could represent His character. Faithfulness in little things set the tone for their whole life. They honored God in the smallest duties as well as in larger responsibilities.

As God called Daniel, so He calls us to be His witnesses in the world today. He desires us to reveal the principles of His kingdom. Many are waiting for some great work while they fail to fulfill wholeheartedly the little duties of life each day. While they wait for some large work in which they may use their supposedly great talents, their days pass away. We shall be judged by what we ought to have done but did not accomplish because we did not use our powers to glorify God.

A noble character is not the result of accident. It results from selfdiscipline, from subjecting the lower nature to the higher, from surrendering self to the service of God and humanity.

Today there is need of men and women who, like Daniel, will do and dare for the cause of right. Pure hearts, strong hands, fearless courage are needed. To every soul Satan comes with many alluring temptations on the point of indulging appetite.

The body is a most important medium through which the mind and soul are developed for character building. For this reason the adversary directs his temptations toward enfeebling and degrading the physical powers. Success here often means that the person surrenders the whole being to evil. Unless placed under the dominion of a higher power, the tendencies of the physical nature will work ruin and death. The passions are to be controlled by the will, which is itself to be under the control of God. The kingly power of reason, sanctified by grace, is to rule in the life. Intellectual power, physical stamina, and length of life depend on unchangeable laws. Through obedience to these laws, we may stand conquerors of self, conquerors of our own inclinations, conquerors of “the rulers of the darkness of this age.” **Ephesians 6:12.**

Daniel and his companions had the same passions as we do, yet they stood firm, because they depended on a strength that is infinite. A heathen nation saw in them an illustration of the goodness of God and the love of Christ. And in their experience we have an example of the triumph of principle over temptation, of purity over depravity, of devotion and loyalty over atheism and idolatry.

The youth of today may draw from the same source of strength

[174]

and reveal the same grace in their lives, even under circumstances just as unfavorable. Though surrounded by temptations, especially in large cities where gratifying the senses is easy and inviting, by divine grace they may withstand every temptation that attacks the soul. But only those who determine to do right will gain the victory.

As these noble Hebrews said goodbye to their childhood home, little did they dream what a high destiny would be theirs. They yielded to the divine guiding so that through them God could fulfill His purpose!

The life of Daniel and his friends is a demonstration of what God will do for youth and children today who yield themselves to Him and seek with the whole heart to accomplish His purpose.

[175]

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of World Empires

This chapter is based on Daniel 2.

Soon after Daniel and his companions entered Nebuchadnezzar's service, events occurred that revealed the power of God to the idol-worshipping nation. Nebuchadnezzar had a dream by which "his spirit was so troubled that his sleep left him." But when the king awoke, he found it impossible to recall the particulars.

In his perplexity Nebuchadnezzar assembled his wise men—"the magicians, the astrologers, the sorcerers"—and requested them to reveal to him the meaning, to bring relief to his mind.

The wise men responded, "Tell your servants the dream, and we will give the interpretation." Dissatisfied with their evasive answer, the king commanded his wise men to tell him not only the interpretation but the dream itself. "If you do not make known the dream to me, and its interpretation, you shall be cut in pieces. ... However, if you tell the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts, rewards, and great honor."

Still the wise men answered, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will give the interpretation."

Nebuchadnezzar was thoroughly angered by the apparent disloyalty of those he had trusted. He declared, "You have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the time has changed. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can give me its interpretation."

The magicians attempted to show the king that his request was unreasonable. "No king, lord, or ruler has ever asked such things of any magician, astrologer, or Chaldean. ... And there is no other who can tell it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh."

Then "the king was angry and very furious, and gave the command to destroy all the wise men of Babylon."

Daniel's Opportunity Has Come

According to the decree, Daniel and his friends also must die. When Daniel learned this, "with counsel and wisdom" he asked Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, "Why is the decree from the king so urgent?" Arioch told him the story of the king's perplexity over his dream and of his

[176]

failure to find help. Upon hearing this, Daniel took his life in his hands, venturing into the king's presence to beg for time so that he could ask his God to reveal to him the dream and its interpretation.

The monarch agreed to this request. "Then Daniel went to his house, and made the decision known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions." Together they sought wisdom from the Source of knowledge. Their faith was strong that God had placed them where they were, that they were doing His work. In times of perplexity they had always turned to Him for guidance. Now they submitted themselves anew to the Judge of the earth, pleading that He would grant deliverance. And the God whom they had honored, now honored them. He revealed the king's dream and its meaning to Daniel "in a night vision."

"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever," Daniel exclaimed. "He reveals deep and secret things. ... I thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers; You have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of You, for You have made known to us the king's demand."

Going immediately to Arioch, Daniel said, "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; take me before the king, and I will tell the king the interpretation." Quickly the officer ushered Daniel in before the king, with the words, "I have found a man of the captives of Judah, who will make known to the king the interpretation."

Daniel's Refreshing Honesty

In his first words the Jewish captive disclaimed honor for himself and exalted God as the source of all wisdom. When the king asked, "Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen, and its interpretation?" Daniel replied, "There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. ... As for me, this secret has not been revealed to me because I have more wisdom than anyone living, but ... that you may know the thoughts of your heart.

"You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.

"You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

"This is the dream," Daniel declared confidently; and the king, listening with closest attention, knew it

[177]

was the very dream that had troubled him. So his mind was prepared to receive and accept the interpretation. He was to be awakened, if possible, to a sense of his responsibility to Heaven. God would open before him the events of the future down to the end of time.

"You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory. ... You are this head of gold.

"But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours, then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth.

“And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others.

“Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay.

“And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. ... The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.”

The King Is Humbled

The king was convinced. In humility he “fell on his face, prostrate before Daniel,” saying, “Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret.”

Nebuchadnezzar revoked the decree to destroy the wise men. Their lives were spared because of Daniel’s connection with the Revealer of secrets. And “the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts; and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon. ... Also Daniel petitioned the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego over the affairs of the province of Babylon; but Daniel sat in the gate of the king.”

In history, the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as if dependent on human will and ability. But the Word of God draws the curtain aside, and we see the agencies of the All-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will.

Hundreds of years before certain nations came on the stage of action, the Omniscient One looked down the ages and predicted the rise and fall of the universal kingdoms. God declared to Nebuchadnezzar that Babylon would fall and a second kingdom would arise. When it failed to exalt the true God, its glory would fade. A third kingdom also would pass away; and a fourth, strong as

[178]

iron, would subdue the nations of the world.

Why Nations and Empires Fail

If the rulers of Babylon had always kept the fear of the Lord before them, they would have been given wisdom and power that would have kept them strong. But they made God their refuge only when they were perplexed. At such times, failing to find help in their great men, they sought it from men like Daniel who honored the living God and were honored by Him. Though the rulers of proud Babylon were of the highest intellect, they had separated

themselves so far from God that they could not understand the revelations and warnings given them concerning the future.

Babylon, shattered and broken at last, passed away because in prosperity its rulers regarded themselves as independent of God and gave credit for the glory of their kingdom to human achievement. God brought His wrath on the Medo-Persian realm because in it His law had been trampled underfoot. The fear of the Lord found no place in the hearts of the vast majority of people. Wickedness and corruption prevailed. The kingdoms that followed were even more base and corrupt, and they sank lower and still lower in the scale of moral worth.

The power that every ruler on earth exercises comes from God, and the ruler's success depends on the use he makes of this power. To each the word is, "I arm you, though you do not know Me." *Isaiah 45:5*, NRSV.

The Word of God alone reveals that the strength of nations, as of individuals, is not found in the opportunities or facilities that appear to make them invincible. It is not found in their boasted greatness. It is measured by their faithfulness in fulfilling God's purpose.

Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace

This chapter is based on Daniel 3.

God had given Nebuchadnezzar the dream of the great image so that he would understand the relationship that his kingdom would have to the kingdom of heaven. The dream's interpretation had given him clear instruction regarding the establishment of God's everlasting kingdom. "The God of heaven will set up a kingdom. ... It shall ... consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." **Daniel 2:44.**

The king had acknowledged God, saying to Daniel, "Truly your God is the God of gods, ... and a revealer of secrets." **Daniel 2:47.** For a time the fear of God influenced Nebuchadnezzar, but his heart was not yet cleansed from a desire to exalt himself. Filled with pride, in time he returned to his idol worship with increased zeal. The words, "You are this head of gold," had made a deep impression on the ruler's mind. Taking advantage of this, the wise men of his realm proposed that he make an image similar to the one in his dream and set it up where all could see and admire the head of gold, interpreted as representing his kingdom.

Pleased, he determined to go even farther. His image would not deteriorate in value from the head to the feet, but be entirely of gold—symbolic of Babylon as an indestructible, all-powerful kingdom.

Establishing a dynasty that would endure forever appealed strongly to the ruler before whose weapons the nations of earth had been unable to stand. Forgetting the remarkable acts of God connected with the dream of the great image, and that in connection with the interpretation the great men of the realm had been spared a dreadful and shameful death, the king and his counselors determined that they would work to exalt Babylon as supreme.

Daniel's interpretation was to be rejected and forgotten; truth was to be misapplied. The symbol God had designed to reveal important events of the future was to be used to conceal the very knowledge God wanted the world to receive. Satan knew that truth unmixed with error is a power mighty to save, but when used to exalt self it becomes a power for evil.

[180]

The Golden Image: The Eternal Glory of Babylon

From his rich treasure, Nebuchadnezzar made a great golden image, similar to what he had seen in vision, except in one particular: the material of which it was composed. The Chaldeans had never before produced anything so impressive as this splendid statue. It is not surprising that in a land where idol worship prevailed everywhere, the priceless image on the plain of Dura would be consecrated as an object of worship. A decree went out that on the day of the dedication all should show their supreme loyalty to Babylon by bowing before the image.

A vast crowd from all “peoples, nations, and languages” assembled. When the music played, the whole company “fell down and worshiped the gold image.” The powers of darkness seemed to be gaining a victory, permanently connecting the worship of the gold image with the established forms of idolatry recognized as the state religion. Satan hoped in this way to defeat God’s purpose of making Israel in Babylon a means of blessing to all nations.

But God decreed otherwise. Not all had bowed to the idolatrous symbol of human power. Three men firmly resolved not to dishonor the God of heaven. Their God was King of kings; they would bow to no other.

Certain wise men, jealous of the faithful companions of Daniel, brought word to Nebuchadnezzar that some had dared to disobey his mandate: “There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; these men, O king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up.”

The King Tries to Pressure the Hebrews

The king commanded that the men be brought before him. Pointing to the fiery furnace, he reminded them of the punishment awaiting them if they persisted in their refusal to obey his will. But firmly the Hebrews testified to their allegiance to the God of heaven and their faith in His power to deliver.

As the three Hebrews stood before the king, he was convinced that they possessed something the other wise men did not have. He decided to give them another chance. If only they would unite with the multitude in worshiping the image, all would be well. “But if you do not worship,” he added, “you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.” Then with his hand stretched upward defiantly, he demanded, “Who is the God who will deliver you from my hands?”

The king’s threats were in vain. Calmly facing the furnace, the three Hebrews said, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case [if this is your decision], our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king.” Their faith strengthened as they declared that God would be glorified by

[181]

delivering them. With assurance born of complete trust in God, they added, “But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”

The king’s anger knew no bounds. “Full of fury,” “the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego,” representatives of a despised, captive race. Directing that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than usual, he commanded the mighty men of his army to bind the worshipers of Israel’s God.

“Then these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.” And “the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego.”

God in the Furnace

But as the Lord's witnesses were cast into the furnace, the Savior revealed Himself to them in person, and together they walked in the midst of the fire. In the presence of the Lord of heat and cold, the flames lost their power to consume.

From his royal seat the king looked on, expecting to see the men who had defied him completely destroyed. But his face grew pale as he jumped up from the throne and looked intently into the glowing flames. In alarm he asked, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? ... Look! ... I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

How did that heathen king know what the Son of God was like? The Hebrew captives in Babylon had represented the truth before him in their life and character. When asked for a reason for their faith, they had given it without hesitation, teaching those around them of the God whom they worshiped. They had told of Christ, the Redeemer to come; and in the form of the fourth in the midst of the fire the king recognized the Son of God.

Forgetting his greatness and dignity, Nebuchadnezzar cried out, "Servants of the Most High God, come out." Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came out before the vast multitude, showing themselves unharmed. The presence of their Savior had guarded them from harm, and only the ropes that bound them had been burned.

The great image, set up with such pomp, was forgotten. "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego," the humbled king acknowledged, "who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve or worship any god except their own God!" "There is no other god who can deliver like this."

The king of Babylon set about to spread before all the peoples of earth his conviction that the God of the Hebrews was worthy of supreme adoration. And God was pleased

[182]

with the effort of the king to make the royal confession as widespread as was the Babylonian realm.

By delivering His faithful servants, the Lord declared that He takes His stand with the oppressed and rebukes all earthly powers that rebel against the authority of Heaven.

In the hour of their great test the three Hebrews remembered the promise, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you." *Isaiah 43:2*. The news of their amazing deliverance was carried to many countries by representatives of the nations that Nebuchadnezzar had invited to the dedication.

A Time of Trouble Such as Never Was

The lessons to be learned from the experience on the plain of Dura are important. In our day many of God's servants will suffer humiliation and abuse at the hands of those who are filled with envy and religious bigotry. Especially will they become angry with those who keep holy the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, and finally a universal decree will denounce them as deserving death. God's people must make it clear that nothing can

persuade them to make the least concession to false worship. To the loyal heart, mere human commands will sink into insignificance beside the word of the eternal God. They will obey truth, even if the result be death.

The Lord will work mightily in behalf of those who stand for the right. He who walked with the Hebrews in the fiery furnace will be with His followers wherever they are. In the time of trouble His chosen ones will stand unmoved. Jehovah will reveal Himself in their behalf as a “God of gods,” able to save completely those who put their trust in Him.

Nebuchadnezzar's Seven Years of Madness

This chapter is based on Daniel 4.

After Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image, the thought that the Babylonian Empire was finally to fall had profoundly influenced his mind. In the end, God would set up a kingdom that would replace all earthly kingdoms.

Nebuchadnezzar later lost sight of his noble understanding of God's plan concerning the nations. Yet when his proud spirit was humbled on the plain of Dura, he once more acknowledged that God's kingdom is "an everlasting kingdom." [Daniel 7:27](#). He had an inborn sense of justice and right, and God was able to use him as an instrument for punishing the rebellious and fulfilling the divine purpose. As he added nation after nation to the Babylonian realm, he added more and more to his fame as the greatest ruler of the age.

It was not surprising that the successful, proud-spirited monarch was tempted to turn aside from the path of humility, which alone leads to true greatness. Between his wars of conquest he gave much thought to beautifying his capital, until the city of Babylon became "the golden city," "the praise of the whole earth." [Isaiah 14:4](#); [Jeremiah 51:41](#). His success in making Babylon one of the wonders of the world fueled his pride, until he was in grave danger of spoiling his record as a ruler whom God could use.

In mercy God gave the king another dream to warn him of his danger. In vision Nebuchadnezzar saw a great tree, its top towering to the heavens and its branches stretching to the ends of the earth. Flocks and herds enjoyed shelter beneath its shadow, and birds built their nests in its branches. "And all flesh was fed from it."

As the king gazed on the tree, he saw "a Watcher," even "a Holy One," who approached the tree and in a loud voice cried: "Cut down the tree and cut off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. ... Nevertheless leave the stump and roots in the earth... . Let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let him graze with the beasts on the grass of the earth. Let his heart be changed from that of a man, let him be given the heart of a beast, and let seven times pass over him. This decision is by the decree of the

[184]

watchers ... in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, [and] gives it to whomever He will."

The Attempt to Discover the Meaning

Greatly troubled, the king repeated the dream to the wise men. But although the dream was very explicit, no one could interpret it. In his perplexity the king sent for Daniel, who was admired for his integrity and unrivaled wisdom.

After relating the dream, Nebuchadnezzar said, "Declare its interpretation, since all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation; but you are able, for the Spirit of the Holy God is in you."

The meaning of the dream was plain to Daniel, and its significance startled him. Seeing Daniel's hesitation and distress, the king expressed sympathy for his servant. "Do not let the dream or its interpretation trouble you."

The prophet realized that God had laid on him the solemn duty of revealing to Nebuchadnezzar the judgment about to fall on him because of his pride and arrogance. Although its dreadful meaning had made him hesitate, he must state the truth, whatever the consequences to himself.

"The tree that you saw," he said, "is you, O king, ... for your greatness has grown ... to the end of the earth. And inasmuch as the king saw a Watcher, a Holy One, ... saying, 'Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave its stump,' ... this is the interpretation. ... They shall drive you from men, your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make you eat grass like oxen. They shall wet you with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses. And inasmuch as they gave the command to leave the stump and roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be assured to you, after you come to know that Heaven rules."

Daniel urged the proud monarch to repent in order to avert the threatened disaster. "Break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity."

Nebuchadnezzar's Short-lived Repentance

For a time the counsel of the prophet weighed strongly on Nebuchadnezzar; but self-indulgence and ambition still lived in the king's heart, and later these traits reappeared. His rule, which up to then had been just and merciful to a great degree, became oppressive. He used his God-given talents for self-glorification, exalting himself above the God who had given him life and power.

For months the judgment of God lingered. But instead of being led to repentance by God's restraint, the king indulged his pride until he lost confidence in the interpretation of the dream and laughed at his former fears.

[185]

A year after the warning, while walking in his palace and thinking with pride of his power as a ruler and of his success as a builder, Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?"

While the proud boast was still on the king's lips, a voice from heaven announced that God's appointed time of judgment had come: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses."

In a moment the once mighty ruler was insane. He was no longer able to rule. Stripped of the power his Creator had given him, and driven from society, Nebuchadnezzar “ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles’ feathers and his nails like birds’ claws.”

For seven years Nebuchadnezzar was an astonishment to all his subjects and was humbled before all the world. Then God restored his reason and he recognized the divine hand in his affliction. In a public proclamation he acknowledged the great mercy of God in restoring him: “I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever... .

“And for the glory of my kingdom, my honor and splendor returned to me. My counselors and nobles resorted to me, I was restored to my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added to me.”

The once proud monarch had become a humble child of God, a wise and compassionate king. He now acknowledged the power of the Most High and earnestly sought to promote the fear of Jehovah and the happiness of his subjects. At last Nebuchadnezzar had learned the lesson that all rulers need to learn—that true greatness consists in true goodness. He acknowledged the living God, saying, “I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.”

God’s purpose was now fulfilled. This public proclamation, in which Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the goodness and authority of God, was the last act of his life recorded in sacred history.

Belshazzar's Feast: Babylon's last night

This chapter is based on Daniel 5.

Great changes were taking place in the land to which Daniel and his companions had been carried captive more than sixty years before. Nebuchadnezzar had died, and Babylon had passed under the unwise rule of his successors. Gradual but sure decline was resulting.

Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, gloried in his power and lifted up his heart against the God of heaven. He had known that God's decree had banished his grandfather from human society. He was familiar with Nebuchadnezzar's conversion and miraculous restoration. But he allowed pleasure and self-glorification to erase the lessons he should never have forgotten. He neglected to use the means within his reach for becoming better acquainted with truth.

It was not long before reverses came. Cyrus, commanding general of the Medes and Persians, put Babylon under siege. But within its massive walls and gates of bronze, protected by the river Euphrates and stocked with abundant provisions, the pleasure-seeking monarch felt safe and passed his time in merriment and partying.

In his pride and arrogance, with a reckless feeling of security, Belshazzar "made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand." Beautiful women with their enchantments were among the guests. Men of genius and education were there. Princes and statesmen drank wine and partied under its maddening influence.

With reason dethroned through drunkenness and with lower impulses and passions controlling him, the king himself took the lead in the riotous orgy. He "gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which ... Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem." The king would prove that nothing was too sacred for his hands to handle. "They brought the gold vessels ...; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone."

A Sign of Doom to the King and Guests

A divine Watcher, unrecognized, looked on the scene, heard the

[187]

sacrilegious mirth, saw the idolatry. Soon the uninvited Guest made His presence felt. When the partying was at its height, a bloodless hand wrote on the palace walls characters that gleamed like fire—words that foreshadowed doom.

The boisterous mirth was hushed while men and women watched in terror as the hand slowly traced the mysterious characters. As if in panoramic view, the deeds of their evil lives passed before them. They seemed to be on trial before the judgment bar of the eternal

God whose power they had just defied. Where a few moments before had been hilarity and blasphemous joking, were ashen faces and cries of fear.

Belshazzar was the most terrified of them all. His conscience had awakened, and “his knees knocked against each other.” Now he realized that he could offer no excuse for his wasted opportunities and defiant attitude.

In vain the king tried to read the burning letters. He turned to the wise men for help. His wild cry rang out in the assembly, “Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.” But heavenly wisdom cannot be bought or sold. “All the king’s wise men ... could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation.” They were no more able than the wise men of a former generation had been to interpret the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar.

Then the queen mother remembered Daniel. “O king,” she said, “do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change. There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar ... made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers. ... Now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation.”

“Then Daniel was brought in before the king.” Making an effort to regain his composure, Belshazzar said to the prophet, “I have heard of you, that you can give interpretations and explain enigmas. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.”

Unmoved by the promises of the king, Daniel stood in the quiet dignity of a servant of the Most High. “Give your rewards to another,” he said, “yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation.”

Daniel Holds the King’s Sin Up Before Him

The prophet first reminded Belshazzar of Nebuchadnezzar’s sin and fall, of the divine judgment for his pride, and his subsequent acknowledgment of the power and mercy of the God of Israel. Then in bold, emphatic words he rebuked

[188]

Belshazzar for his great wickedness and pointed out the lessons he might have learned but did not. Belshazzar had not heeded the warning of events so significant to himself. He was about to reap the consequence of his rebellion.

“You ..., Belshazzar, ... have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone ...; and the God who holds your breath in his hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified. Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written.”

Interpretation of the Writing on the Wall

Turning to the message on the wall, the prophet read, "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UP-HARSIN." The hand was no longer visible, but these words were still gleaming with terrible distinctness; and now, holding their breath, the people listened while the aged prophet declared: "This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."

God's Restraining Hand Removed

In that last night of insane folly Belshazzar and his lords had filled up the measure of the Chaldean kingdom's guilt. No longer could God's restraining hand hold off the impending evil. "We would have healed Babylon," God declared of those whose judgment was now reaching unto heaven, "but she is not healed." **Jeremiah 51:9**. God had finally found it necessary to pass the irrevocable sentence. Belshazzar's kingdom was to pass into other hands.

When the prophet stopped speaking, the king commanded that he be awarded the promised honors.

More than a century before, Inspiration had foretold that "the night of ... pleasure" (**Isaiah 21:4**, KJV), during which king and counselors would blaspheme God, would suddenly be changed into a time of fear and destruction. And now, while still in the festival hall, the king is informed that "his city is taken" by the enemy. **Jeremiah 51:31**. Even while he and his nobles were drinking from the sacred vessels and praising their gods of silver and gold, the Medes and Persians, having diverted the Euphrates out of its channel, were marching into the heart of the unguarded city. The army of Cyrus now stood under the walls of the palace. The city was filled with the soldiers of the enemy, "like a swarm of locusts" (verse 14, NRSV), and their triumphant shouts could be heard above the despairing cries of the astonished party-goers.

"That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain," and a foreign king sat on the throne.

[189]

Prophecy Fulfilled

The Hebrew prophets had spoken clearly concerning the manner in which Babylon would fall:

"Babylon has suddenly fallen and been destroyed." "The Lord is the God of recompense, He will surely repay. 'And I will make drunk her princes and wise men, her governors, her deputies, and her mighty men. And they shall sleep a perpetual sleep and not awake,' says the King, whose name is the Lord of hosts." **Jeremiah 51:8, 56, 57**.

So "Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride," became like Sodom and Gomorrah—a place forever accursed. "It will never be inhabited, nor will it be settled from generation to generation; nor will the Arabian pitch tents there, nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there. But wild beasts of the desert will lie there, and their

houses will be full of owls; ostriches will dwell there, and wild goats will caper there. The hyenas will howl in their citadels, and jackals in their pleasant palaces.” *Isaiah 13:19-22*.

Come down and sit in the dust, virgin daughter Babylon!
 Sit on the ground without a throne... .
 You said, “I shall be mistress forever,”
 so that you did not lay these things to heart or remember their end.
 Now therefore hear this, you lover of pleasures,
 who sit securely,
 who say in your heart,
 “I am, and there is no one besides me;
 I shall not sit as a widow or know the loss of children”—
 both these things shall come upon you in a moment, in one day:
 the loss of children and widowhood shall come upon you in full measure... .
 You felt secure in your wickedness; you said, “No one sees me.”

Isaiah 47:1, 7-10, NRSV

Prophecy has outlined the rise and progress of the world’s great empires—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. With each, as with nations of less power, history has repeated itself. Each has had its period of test; each has failed, its glory faded, its power departed. Nations have rejected God’s principles and have brought about their own ruin, yet a divine, overruling purpose has been at work throughout the ages.

A Power Overrides Human Affairs

This is what the prophet Ezekiel saw when before his astonished gaze God portrayed symbols that revealed a Power overruling the affairs of earthly rulers. Wheels intersecting one another were moved by four living beings. High above all these “was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man.” *Ezekiel 1:26*.

The wheels, so complicated that at first sight they appeared to be in confusion, moved in perfect harmony. Heavenly beings were powering those wheels. The complicated

[190]

play of human events is under divine control. Amidst the strife and tumult of nations, He that sits above the cherubim still guides the affairs of this earth. To every nation and individual God has assigned a place in His great plan. By their own choices, men and nations today are deciding their destiny, and God is overruling all to accomplish His purposes.

The prophecies that the great I AM has given in His Word tell us where we are in the procession of the ages. Everything that prophecy has foretold until the present time has been recorded on the pages of history, and all which is yet to come will be fulfilled in its time.

The signs of the times declare that we are standing on the threshold of great and solemn events. Everything in our world is in agitation. The Savior prophesied of events to precede His coming: “You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. ... Nation will rise against nation,

and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.” *Matthew 24:6, 7*. Rulers and statesmen recognize that something great and decisive is about to take place—that the world is on the verge of a stupendous crisis.

The Bible, and the Bible only, gives a correct view of events that already are casting their shadows before. The sound of their approach is causing the earth to tremble and people’s hearts to fail them for fear. “Behold, the Lord makes the earth empty and makes it waste, distorts its surface and scatters abroad its inhabitants.” “Because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, and those who dwell in it are desolate.” *Isaiah 24:1, 5, 6*.

“Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it.” *Jeremiah 30:7*.

Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge,
Even the Most High, your dwelling place,
No evil shall befall you,
Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling.

Psalm 91:9, 10

God will not fail His church in the hour of her greatest danger. He has promised deliverance. All beneath the sun will honor the principles of His kingdom.

Daniel in the Lions' Den

This chapter is based on Daniel 6.

Darius the Mede at once proceeded to reorganize the government. He “set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, ... and over these, three governors of whom Daniel was one, that the satraps might give account to them, so that the king would suffer no loss. Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm.”

The honors that the king bestowed on Daniel stirred up the jealousy of the kingdom's leading men. But they could find no basis for complaint against him, because “he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him.”

“We shall not find any charge against this Daniel,” they acknowledged, “unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God.”

So the officials and princes asked the king to sign a decree forbidding any person to ask anything of any god or any person, except of Darius the king, for thirty days. Violation of this decree would be punished by casting the offender into a den of lions.

Appealing to Darius's vanity, they persuaded him that carrying out this edict would add greatly to his authority. Ignorant of the subtle motive of the princes, the king signed it.

Satanic agencies had stirred the princes to envy. They had inspired the plan for Daniel's destruction; and the princes, yielding themselves as instruments of evil, carried it into effect.

The prophet's enemies counted on Daniel's firm adherence to principle for the success of their plan. He quickly read their evil purpose but did not change his course. Why should he stop praying now, when he most needed to pray? He performed his duties as chief of the princes and at the hour of prayer went to his chamber to offer his petition to the God of heaven. He did not try to conceal his act. He would not allow it even to appear to those plotting his ruin that he had broken his connection with Heaven. In this way the prophet boldly yet humbly declared that no earthly power has a right to come between an individual and God. His determination to do right was a bright light in the moral darkness of that heathen court.

[192]

For an entire day the officials watched Daniel. Three times they saw him go to his chamber and heard him lift his voice in prayer. The next morning they laid their complaint before the king. Daniel had defied the royal decree! “Have you not signed a decree,” they reminded him, “that every man who petitions any god or man within thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?”

“The thing is true,” the king answered, “according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter.” In triumph they now informed Darius, “That Daniel, who is of the captives from Judah, does not show due regard for you, O king, or for the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.”

A Vain King's Remorse

The monarch saw at once the snare that these men had set. It was not zeal for kingly honor but jealousy against Daniel that had led to the royal decree. "Greatly displeased with himself," he "labored till the going down of the sun" to deliver his friend. The officials came to him with the words, "Know, O king, that it is the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed." The decree must be carried into effect.

Daniel Is Thrown in the Lions' Den

"So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, 'Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you.'" A stone was laid on the mouth of the den, and the king himself "sealed it with his own signet ring. ... Now the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting."

God permitted evil angels and wicked men this far to accomplish their purpose; but through the courage of this one man who chose to follow right, Satan was to be defeated and the name of God to be exalted.

Early the next morning King Darius hurried to the den and "cried out with a lamenting voice, ... 'Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?'"

God Is Able to Deliver

The prophet replied: "'My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you.'

"Now the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God.

"And the king gave the command, and they brought those men who had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions."

The wicked opposition to God's servant was now completely broken. "Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian." And through association with him these heathen monarchs

[193]

had to acknowledge his God as "the living God, and steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed."

Daniel the Same in Adversity or Prosperity

Anyone whose heart is set firmly on God will be the same in the hour of greatest trial as in times of prosperity. Faith grasps eternal realities. Christ identifies with His faithful people; He suffers in the person of His chosen ones. It is possible for the servant of God to be faithful under all circumstances and to triumph through divine grace.

The experience of Daniel reveals that a person in business is not necessarily designing and self-serving. God may instruct such a person at every step. Daniel had like passions as ourselves, yet the Bible describes him as without fault. His business transactions, even under the closest scrutiny of his enemies, were found to be without flaw. He was an example of what every businessperson may become with a converted heart.

By his noble dignity and unswerving integrity, even while he was young Daniel won the “favor and goodwill” of the heathen officer in whose charge he had been placed. **Daniel 1:9**. He rose quickly to the position of prime minister of Babylon. He was so wise, so courteous, so true to principle, that even his enemies had to confess that “they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful.”

God honored Daniel as His ambassador and gave him many revelations of the mysteries of ages to come. Even the prophet himself did not fully understand his prophecies in chapters 7 to 12, but God gave him assurance that in the closing period of this world’s history he would again be permitted to stand in his lot and place. “Shut up the words, and seal the book,” the angel directed him concerning his prophetic writings, “until the time of the end.” **Daniel 12:4**.

The prophecies of Daniel demand our special attention, because they relate to the time in which we are living. We should read them along with the last book of the New Testament. The promise is plain that special blessing will accompany the study of these prophecies. “The wise shall understand.” **Verse 10**. And the promise concerning the revelation that Christ gave to John is, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it.” **Revelation 1:3**.

From the books of Daniel and Revelation we need to learn how worthless is worldly glory. For all its power and magnificence, how completely Babylon has passed away! So perished Medo-Persia, Grecia, and Rome. And so perishes all that does not have God for its foundation.

A careful study of God’s purpose in the history of nations and in the revelation of things to come will help us to learn what the true aim of life is. Viewing time in the light of eternity, we may, like Daniel, live for those things that are true and enduring. Learning the principles of the kingdom of our Lord and Savior, at His coming we may enter in and possess it.

Cyrus Sets the Exiles Free

More than a century before the birth of Cyrus, Inspiration had mentioned the work he would do in taking Babylon by surprise and in preparing the way for the release of the children of the captivity: “Thus says the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held—to subdue nations before him ..., to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut: ‘I will go before you and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze and cut the bars of iron.’” **Isaiah 45:1, 2.**

The Persian conqueror’s army unexpectedly entered the Babylonian capital by way of the river whose waters they had turned aside and through the inner gates that had carelessly been left open and unprotected. In these events the Jews had abundant evidence that Isaiah’s prophecy had been fulfilled literally. This should have been an unmistakable sign to them that God was shaping the affairs of nations in their behalf, for inseparably linked with the prophecy outlining Babylon’s capture and fall were these words:

“Thus says the Lord, ... ‘who says of Cyrus, “He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, ‘You shall be built,’ and to the temple, ‘Your foundation shall be laid.’”’” “‘He shall build My city and let My exiles go free, not for price nor reward,’ says the Lord of hosts.” **Isaiah 44:24, 28; 45:13.**

The writings of Jeremiah set forth plainly the time for Israel’s restoration: “When seventy years are completed, ... I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity.” **Jeremiah 25:12.** “I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.” **Jeremiah 29:14.**

Daniel had studied these prophecies and others like them. Now, as events indicated the hand of God at work, Daniel gave special thought to the promises made to Israel. The Lord had declared, “Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.” **Verses 12, 13.**

[195]

Shortly before Babylon’s fall, when Daniel was meditating on these prophecies and seeking God for understanding, he received a series of visions concerning the rise and fall of kingdoms. With the first vision, recorded in **Daniel 7**, God gave an interpretation, yet it did not make every point clear to the prophet. “My thoughts greatly troubled me,” he wrote, “and my countenance changed; but I kept the matter in my heart.” **Daniel 7:28.**

The Time Prophecy Unfolds

Another vision threw further light on future events. At the close of this vision Daniel heard “a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one that spoke, ‘For how long is

this vision?” **Daniel 8:13**, NRSV. The answer was given: “For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.” **Verse 14**.

Filled with perplexity, Daniel tried to understand the relationship between the seventy years’ captivity and the 2,300 years that would elapse before the cleansing of God’s sanctuary. When the prophet heard the words, “The vision ... refers to many days in the future,” he “fainted and was sick for days.” He wrote of his experience: “Afterward I arose and went about the king’s business. I was astonished by the vision, but no one understood it.” **Verses 26, 27**.

Jeremiah’s prophecies were so plain that Daniel understood “the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.” **Daniel 9:2**.

Faithful Daniel Identifies Himself With Unfaithful Israel

Daniel pleaded with the Lord to fulfill these promises speedily and to preserve the honor of God. He identified himself fully with those who had fallen short of the divine plan, confessing their sins as his own. Though Heaven had called Daniel “greatly beloved,” he now appeared before God as a sinner, urgently presenting the need of the people he loved. His prayer was eloquent in its simplicity:

“O Lord, ... we have sinned. ... Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings and our princes, to our fathers.”

“O Lord, according to all Your righteousness, I pray, let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people are a reproach to all those around us.”

“O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God.” **Verses 4-6, 16, 19**.

Even before the prophet had finished his prayer, Gabriel appeared to him again, called his attention to the vision he had seen, and outlined in detail the seventy weeks that were to begin at “the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem.” **Verse 25**.

The beginning of Cyrus’s reign marked the completion of the seventy

[196]

years since Nebuchadnezzar had taken the first company of Hebrews to Babylon. God had used Daniel’s deliverance from the den of lions to create a favorable impression on the mind of Cyrus. The noble qualities of the man of God as a statesman of farseeing ability led the Persian ruler to show him great respect and to honor his judgment. And now God moved on Cyrus to understand the prophecies written about him and to grant the Jewish people their liberty.

The king saw the words that more than one hundred years before his birth had foretold the manner in which Babylon would be taken. He read the message that the Ruler of the universe had addressed to him: “I will gird you, though you have not known Me, that they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that there is none besides Me.” “I have named you, though you have not known Me.” As he viewed the inspired record, “He shall build My city and let My captives go free, not for price nor reward,” his heart was profoundly

moved, and he determined to fulfill his divinely appointed mission. *Isaiah 45:5, 6, 4, 13*. He would let the Judean captives go free!

In a proclamation published “throughout all his kingdom,” Cyrus made known his desire: “The Lord God of heaven ... has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem ... and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.” *Ezra 1:1-4*.

“Let the house be rebuilt,” he further directed regarding the temple, “the place where they offered sacrifices. ... Let the expenses be paid from the king’s treasury. Also let the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple which is in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and taken back to the temple which is in Jerusalem.” *Ezra 6:3-5*.

News of this decree reached the farthest provinces, and there was great rejoicing. Many, like Daniel, had been studying the prophecies and had been seeking God for His promised intervention in Zion’s behalf. And now their prayers were being answered!

When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion,
We were like those who dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
And our tongue with singing.

Psalm 126:1, 2

About fifty thousand of the Jews in exile determined to take advantage of the wonderful opportunity to “build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.” Their friends “encouraged them with articles of silver and

[197]

gold, with goods and livestock, and with precious things.” “King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of the Lord.” *Ezra 1:5-7*.

They accomplished the long journey across the desert in safety, and the happy company immediately began the work of reestablishing what had been destroyed. “The heads of the fathers’ houses” (*Ezra 2:68*) led in offering of their own funds and possessions to help defray the expense of rebuilding the temple, and the people, following their example, gave freely of the little they had. See *verses 64-70*.

The leaders built an altar on the site of the ancient altar in the temple court. The people “gathered together as one man” and united in reestablishing the sacred services that had been interrupted when Jerusalem was destroyed, and “they also kept the Feast of Tabernacles.” *Ezra 3:1, 4*. Setting up the altar greatly cheered the faithful remnant. They gathered courage as preparations for rebuilding the temple advanced from month to month. Surrounded by many sad reminders of their ancestors’ apostasy, they longed for some permanent token of divine forgiveness and favor. More than regaining personal property, they valued the approval of God. They felt the assurance that He was with them, yet they desired greater

blessings. They looked forward to the time when they might see His glory shining out from within the rebuilt temple.

Among the ruins the workmen found some of the immense stones brought to the temple site in the days of Solomon. These they made ready for use, and much new material was provided. Soon the foundation stone was laid in the presence of many thousands assembled to witness the progress of the work. While the cornerstone was being set in position, the people “sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord.” **Verse 11.**

A Carryover From Israel’s Ancient Unbelief

Everyone present should have entered heartily into the spirit of the occasion. Yet a discordant note mingled with the music and shouts of praise heard on that glad day: “Many of the ... old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice.” **Verse 12.** These aged men thought of the results of many years of rebellion. If they and their generation had carried out God’s purpose for Israel, the temple built by Solomon would not have been destroyed and the captivity would not have been necessary.

But conditions were different now. The Lord had allowed His people to return to their own land. Sadness should have given way to joy. God had moved Cyrus to aid them in rebuilding the temple! But instead of rejoicing, some cherished thoughts of discontent and discouragement. They had seen the glory of Solomon’s temple, and they mourned because the building now to be constructed was not as grand.

The murmuring and complaining had a depressing influence on many. The workmen began to question whether they should proceed

[198]

with constructing a building that was so freely criticized and was the cause of so much grief. Many, however, did not view this lesser glory with such dissatisfaction. They “shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off.” **Verses 12, 13.**

Those who failed to rejoice at the laying of the foundation stone did not realize the weight of their words of disapproval and disappointment. Little did they know how much their dissatisfaction would delay the completion of the Lord’s house.

The first temple’s magnificence had been a source of pride to Israel before their captivity; but the glory of the first temple could not recommend them to God, for they did not bring Him the sacrifice of a humble and contrite spirit. When people lose sight of the vital principles of God’s kingdom, ceremonies multiply and become extravagant. When they despise the simplicity of godliness, their pride and love of display demand magnificent church buildings, splendid adornings, and impressive ceremonies.

But God values His church for the sincere piety that distinguishes it from the world. He judges its worth by how much its members have grown in the knowledge of Christ and in spiritual experience. He looks for love and goodness. Beauty of art cannot compare with beauty of character revealed in Christ’s representatives. A congregation may be the poorest in the land, but if the members possess the principles of Christ’s character, angels will unite in their worship.

Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good!
For His mercy endures forever.
Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,
Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy.

Psalm 107:1, 2

[199]

Bitter Opposition Fails

Close beside the Israelites lived the Samaritans, a race that had sprung up through intermarriage of heathen colonists from Assyria with the remnant of the ten tribes left in Samaria and Galilee. In heart and practice they were idol worshipers. True, they held that their idols were only to remind them of the living God, but the people tended to worship images.

These Samaritans came to be known as “the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin.” Hearing that the “descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the Lord God of Israel,” they expressed a desire to unite in its construction. “Let us build with you,” they proposed, “for we seek your God as you do.” But the leaders of the Israelites declared, “We alone will build to the Lord God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us.” [Ezra 4:1-3](#).

Only a remnant had chosen to return from Babylon, and now, as they began a work seemingly beyond their strength, their nearest neighbors came with an offer of help. “We seek your God as you do,” the Samaritans declared. “Let us build with you.” But if the Jewish leaders had accepted this offer, they would have opened a door for idolatry. They discerned that the Samaritans were not sincere.

Regarding Israel’s relationship to surrounding peoples, the Lord had declared through Moses: “You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. ... For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods.” “The Lord has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.” [Deuteronomy 7:2-4; 14:2](#).

Moses had plainly foretold the results of making a covenant with surrounding nations: “The Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods. ... And among those nations you shall find no rest.” [Deuteronomy 28:64, 65](#).

Why the Samaritans’ Help Was Refused

Zerubbabel and his associates were familiar with these and many similar scriptures, and the recent captivity had provided many evidences of their fulfillment. And now, having turned with all the heart to

[200]

God and renewed their covenant relationship with Him, they had been permitted to return to Judea to restore what had been destroyed. At the beginning of their efforts, should they enter into a covenant with idolaters? They had rededicated themselves to the Lord at the altar set up before the ruins of His temple. Now they refused to form an alliance with those who were familiar with God’s law but would not yield to its claims. Never can God’s people afford to compromise principle by allying themselves with those who do not fear Him.

God's People Must Guard Against Subtle Influences

God's people must strictly guard against every subtle influence that seeks entrance by flattering suggestions from enemies of truth. They are pilgrims and strangers in this world. It is not the open and declared enemies of the cause of God whom we should fear the most. Those who come with smooth words and appealing speeches, apparently seeking friendly alliance with God's children, have greater power to deceive. Every Christian should be on the alert, not to be taken by surprise by some concealed and masterly snare. The Lord requires a vigilance that never relaxes.

But none are left to struggle alone. Angels protect those who walk humbly before God. As His children draw near to Him for protection from evil, in love He lifts up for them a banner against the enemy. Touch them not, He says, for they are Mine.

Never tiring in their opposition, the Samaritans "tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia." [Ezra 4:4, 5](#). But for many years the powers of evil were restrained, and the people in Judea had liberty to continue their work.

The Battle Behind the Scenes

While Satan was trying to influence Medo-Persia to show disfavor to God's people, angels worked in behalf of the exiles. Daniel gives us a glimpse of this struggle between good and evil. For three weeks Gabriel wrestled with the powers of darkness, seeking to counteract the influences at work on the mind of Cyrus; and before the contest closed, Christ Himself came to Gabriel's aid. "The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twentyone days," Gabriel declared, "and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia." [Daniel 10:13](#). The victory finally came. The forces of the enemy were held back all the days of Cyrus and all the days of his son Cambyses.

The highest agencies of heaven were working on the hearts of kings, and the people of God should have spared no effort to restore the temple and its services and to reestablish themselves in their Judean homes.

[201]

But their enemies opposed them relentlessly, and gradually the builders lost heart. Some could not forget the scene at the laying of the cornerstone, when many had expressed lack of confidence in the enterprise. And as the Samaritans grew bolder, many of the Jews questioned whether the time had come to rebuild. This feeling soon became widespread. Workmen, discouraged and disheartened, took up the ordinary pursuits of life.

During the reign of Cambyses work on the temple progressed slowly. And during the reign of the false Smerdis the Samaritans persuaded that impostor to issue a decree forbidding the Jews to rebuild their temple and city.

For more than a year the temple was almost forsaken. The people lived in their homes and worked to attain earthly wealth, but they did not prosper. Nature seemed to conspire against them. Because they had let the temple lie waste, the Lord sent drought. God had

given them the fruits of field and garden as a sign of His favor, but because they had used these gifts selfishly, He removed the blessings.

God's Work Grinds to a Halt

These were the conditions during the early part of the reign of Darius Hystaspes. The Israelites were in a sad state. They complained and doubted and chose to make their personal interests first. Seeing the Lord's temple in ruins did not stir them to action. Many had lost sight of God's purpose in restoring them to Judea, and these were saying, "The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." **Haggai 1:2.**

But God raised up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to meet the crisis. These appointed messengers revealed to the people the cause of their troubles. Their lack of prosperity resulted from neglecting to put God's interests first. If the Israelites had honored God by making the building of His house their first work, they would have invited His presence and blessing.

Haggai raised the pointed inquiry, "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?" **Verse 4.** Why do you feel concern for your own buildings and unconcern for the Lord's building? The desire to escape poverty has led you to neglect the temple, but this neglect has brought on you the very thing you feared.

"You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but do not have enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes." **Verse 6.**

Then the Lord revealed the cause that had brought them to poverty: "'You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?' says the Lord of hosts. 'Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house. Therefore ... I called for a drought on the land.'" **Verses 9-11.**

[202]

"Consider your ways! Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified." **Verses 7, 8.**

Haggai's hearers took the message to heart. The leaders and people dared not disregard the instruction sent—that prosperity, both temporal and spiritual, depended on faithful obedience to God's commands. Stirred to action, Zerubbabel and Joshua, "with the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet." **Verse 12.**

God Sends a Comforting Message

Less than a month after work on the temple resumed, the builders received a comforting message: "Take courage, O Zerubbabel, ... take courage, O Joshua, ... take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord; work, for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts." **Haggai 2:4, NRSV.**

To His children today the Lord declares, "Take courage, ... work, for I am with you." Zechariah, whom God raised up to stand by Haggai's side, added to the earnest pleadings and encouragement God had given through Haggai. Zechariah's first message was an assurance

that God's word never fails and a promise of blessing to those who would obey the sure word of prophecy.

With their small supply of provisions rapidly dwindling, and surrounded by unfriendly peoples, the Israelites moved forward by faith and worked diligently to restore the ruined temple. Message after message came through Haggai and Zechariah, with assurances that their faith would be rewarded and that the future glory of the temple whose walls they were building would not fail. In the fullness of time, in this very building the Desire of all nations would appear as the Savior of mankind.

The Promise of Temporal Prosperity

With repentance and willingness to advance by faith came the promise of temporal prosperity: "From this day I will bless you." **Verse 19**. God gave a precious message to Zerubbabel their leader, who had been so severely tested through all the years since their return from Babylon. The day was coming when the enemies of God's people would be thrown down. "In that day," says the Lord of hosts, "I will take you, Zerubbabel, My servant, ... and will make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you." **Verse 23**.

Now the governor of Israel could see how God had led him through discouragement and perplexity. God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led if they could see the end from the beginning and discern the glory of the purpose that they are fulfilling.

Haggai and Zechariah rallied the people to put forth every possible effort for rebuilding the temple, but the Samaritans and others devised many roadblocks. On one occasion the provincial officers of Medo-Persia visited Jerusalem and requested the name of the person who had

[203]

authorized restoring the building. If the Jews had not been trusting in the Lord for guidance, this inquiry might have had disastrous results. But the Jews answered so wisely that the officers decided to write to Darius Hystaspes, directing his attention to Cyrus's original decree, which commanded that the house of God at Jerusalem be rebuilt and the expenses be paid from the king's treasury.

Darius searched for this decree and found it, and then he directed the inquirers to allow the rebuilding of the temple to proceed. "Let the work of this house of God alone," he commanded; "let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God on its site.

"Moreover I issue a decree as to what you shall do for the elders of these Jews, for the building of this house of God: Let the cost be paid at the king's expense from the taxes on the region beyond the River; this is to be given immediately to these men, so that they are not hindered." **Ezra 6:7, 8**.

The king further decreed severe penalties for any who would alter the decree, and he closed with the remarkable statement: "May the God who causes His name to dwell there destroy any king or people who put their hand to alter it, or to destroy this house of God which is in Jerusalem." **Verse 12**. For months before the king issued this decree, the Israelites had kept on working by faith, with the prophets helping them by means of timely messages.

The Encouraging Visions of Zechariah

Two months after Haggai's last recorded message, Zechariah had a series of visions regarding the work of God in the earth. These messages, given in the form of parables and symbols, came at a time of great anxiety and were particularly significant to the people advancing in the name of God. It seemed as if the king was about to withdraw permission to rebuild. The future appeared dark.

Zechariah heard the angel of the Lord inquiring, "O Lord of hosts, how long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which You were angry these seventy years?" And the Lord answered the angel who talked with me," Zechariah declared, "with good and comforting words.

"So the angel who spoke with me said to me, ... 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: ... "I am exceedingly angry with the nations at ease; for I was a little angry, and they helped—but with evil intent." Therefore thus says the Lord: "I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy; My house shall be built in it."'" *Zechariah 1:12-16*.

The prophet was now directed to predict, "The Lord will again comfort Zion, and will again choose Jerusalem." *Verse 17*.

Zechariah then saw the powers that had "scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem," symbolized by four horns. Immediately afterward he saw four craftsmen—agencies used by the Lord in restoring His people and the house of His worship. See

[204]

verses 18-21. "'Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls, because of the multitude of men and livestock in it. For I,' says the Lord, 'will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst.'" *Zechariah 2:4, 5*.

God had commanded that Jerusalem be rebuilt. The vision offered assurance that He would give comfort and strength to His afflicted ones and fulfill the promises of His everlasting covenant. What He was accomplishing for His people was to be known in all the earth. "Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel in your midst!" *Isaiah 12:6*.

[205]

Satan, the Accuser; Christ, the Defender

Because God had chosen Israel to preserve the knowledge of Him in the earth, Satan was determined to cause their destruction. While they were obedient he could do them no harm. Therefore he had focused all his power and evil trickery on drawing them into sin. Caught in his traps, they had transgressed and had become the prey of their enemies.

Yet God did not forsake them. He sent His prophets with warnings, spurring them to see their guilt. When they returned to Him with true repentance, He sent messages of encouragement, declaring that He would deliver them from captivity and once more establish them in their own land. Now that this restoration had begun and a remnant had already returned to Judea, Satan threw his energies into frustrating the divine plan. To this end he was seeking to stir up the heathen nations to destroy them.

But in this crisis the Lord strengthened His people with “good and comforting words.” **Zechariah 1:13**. Through an impressive illustration He showed the power of Christ their Mediator to vanquish Satan, the accuser of His people.

“Joshua the high priest,” “clothed with filthy garments” (**Zechariah 3:1, 3**), stands before the Angel of the Lord. As he pleads for the fulfillment of God’s promises, Satan points to Israel’s transgressions as a reason why God should not restore them to favor. Satan claims them as his prey and demands that they be given into his hands.

The high priest does not claim that Israel is free from fault. In filthy garments, symbolizing the people’s sins that he bears as their representative, he stands before the Angel, confessing their guilt yet pointing to their repentance, and in faith relying on the mercy of a sin-pardoning Redeemer.

Then the Angel, who is Christ the Savior of sinners, puts the accuser to silence: “The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?” **Verse 2**. Because of their sins Israel had been nearly consumed in the flame that Satan and his agents lit for their destruction, but God had now set about to rescue them.

As the Lord accepted Joshua’s intercession, He commanded, “Take away the filthy garments from him.” Then he said to Joshua, “I have removed your iniquity from you, and I

[206]

will clothe you with rich robes.’ ... So they ... put the clothes on him.” **Verses 4, 5**. The Lord pardoned his sins and those of his people. Israel was clothed with “rich robes”—the righteousness of Christ imputed to them. Despite Joshua’s former sins, he was now qualified to minister before God in His sanctuary. If obedient, he would be honored as the judge, or the ruler, over the temple and would walk among attending angels even in this life. At last he would join the glorified throng around the throne of God.

“Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, ... I am bringing forth My Servant the Branch.” **Verse 8**. In the “Branch,” the Deliverer to come, lay the hope of Israel. By faith in the coming

Savior Joshua and his people had received pardon and had been restored to God's favor. On the basis of His merits they would be honored as the chosen of Heaven among the nations of earth.

In all ages Satan is "the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night." **Revelation 12:10**. The controversy is repeated over every sinner rescued from the power of evil. Never is one received into the family of God without awakening the enemy's determined resistance. But He who was Israel's defense, their justification and redemption, is the hope of the church today.

How Satan Works

Satan accuses those who seek the Lord, but not because he is displeased with their sins. He gloats over their defective characters, for he knows that he can only obtain power over them as they transgress God's law. His accusations arise solely from hatred for Christ. As he sees in people the evidences of Christ's supremacy, he works to pull away from Him those who have accepted salvation. He leads men and women to lose confidence in God and separate from His love. He tempts them to break the law and then claims them as his captives, disputing Christ's right to take them from him.

Satan knows that those who ask for pardon will receive it, so he presents their sins before them to discourage them. He tries to make even their best service appear corrupt. In countless ways, subtle and cruel, he works to gain their condemnation.

In our own strength, we cannot meet the charges of the enemy. But Jesus our Advocate presents a decisive plea in behalf of all who commit themselves to Him by repentance and faith. He wins complete victory over their accuser by the mighty arguments of Calvary. His perfect obedience to God's law has given Him all power in heaven and earth, and to the accuser of His people He declares: "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! These are the purchase of My blood, brands plucked from the burning." See **Zechariah 3:2**. And He assures those who rely on Him in faith, "I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes." **Verse 4**.

All who have put on the robe of Christ's righteousness will stand

[207]

faithful and true. The promise to Joshua is given to all: "If you will ... keep My command, ... I will give you places to walk among these who stand here." **Verse 7**. Angels will walk on either side of them even in this world, and they will stand at last among the angels that surround the throne of God.

Zechariah's vision applies with special force to God's people in the closing scenes of the great day of atonement. The remnant will then come into great distress. Those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus will feel the anger of the dragon and his armies. Here is a little company resisting his supremacy. If he could blot them from the earth, his triumph would be complete. In the near future he will stir up the wicked powers of earth to destroy the people of God.

Those who are true to God will be denounced and discriminated against. They will be "betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends," even unto death. **Luke 21:16**.

As Joshua pleaded before the Angel, so the remnant church, with brokenness of heart and unflinching faith, will plead for pardon and deliverance through Jesus their Advocate. They are fully conscious of their sinfulness and unworthiness, and they are ready to despair.

Satan Tries to Discourage God's People

The tempter stands by to accuse them. He points to their filthy garments, their defective characters, their weakness and folly, their sins of ingratitude, their unlikeness to Christ, which have dishonored their Redeemer. He tries to frighten them with the thought that their case is hopeless. He hopes that they will yield to his temptations and turn from their loyalty to God.

Satan has an accurate knowledge of the sins he has tempted God's people to commit, and he urges his accusations against them. He declares that they have forfeited divine protection by their sins; they are as deserving of exclusion from the favor of God as he is. "Are these," he says, "to take my place in heaven, and the place of the angels who united with me? They profess to obey the law of God, but have they not been lovers of self? Have they not placed their own interests above God's service? Have they not loved the things of the world? Look at their selfishness, their malice, their hatred of one another. Justice demands that God pronounce judgment against them."

But the followers of Christ have repented of their sins and turned to the Lord in sorrow, and the divine Advocate pleads in their behalf. He who has been most abused by their ingratitude declares, "I gave My life for these people. They may have imperfections of character, but they have repented, and I have forgiven and accepted them."

The assaults of Satan are strong. The flames of the furnace seem about to consume God's people, but Jesus will bring them through as gold tried in the fire. Their earthliness will be removed, that Christ may perfectly reveal His image through them.

[208]

At times the Lord may seem to have forgotten His church, but nothing in the world is so dear to the heart of God. He does not leave His people to be overcome by Satan's temptations. He will punish those who misrepresent Him, but He will be gracious to all who repent.

In the time of the end the people of God will sigh and cry for the abominations done in the land. With tears they will warn the wicked of their danger in trampling on the divine law, and they will humble themselves before the Lord in repentance. The wicked will ridicule their solemn appeals. But the anguish of God's people is evidence that they are regaining the nobility of character lost as a result of sin. It is because they are drawing nearer to Christ, because their eyes are fixed on His perfect purity, that they discern clearly the sinfulness of sin. A crown of glory awaits those who bow at the foot of the cross.

God's faithful, praying ones do not know how securely He shields them. Urged on by Satan, the rulers of this world seek to destroy them, but if the eyes of God's children could be opened, they would see angels camped around them.

As the people of God plead for purity of heart, Christ places on them the spotless robe of His righteousness. The despised remnant are clothed in glorious garments, never again

to be defiled by the corruptions of the world. Their names remain in the Lamb's book of life. They have resisted the tricks of the deceiver. Now they are eternally secure, their sins transferred to the originator of sin.

The Blotting out of Sins

While Satan has been urging his accusations, holy angels, unseen, have been placing the seal of God on the faithful ones. These stand on Mount Zion, having the Father's name written in their foreheads. They sing the song that no one can learn except the 144,000 redeemed from the earth. "In their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault." **Revelation 14:5.**

Now the words of the Angel to Joshua have reached their complete fulfillment: "I am bringing forth My Servant the Branch." Christ is revealed as the Redeemer and Deliverer of His people. Now the remnant have become "a wondrous sign" (**Zechariah 3:8**) as the tears and humiliation of their pilgrimage give place to joy and honor in the presence of God and the Lamb. See **Isaiah 4:2, 3.**

The Secret of Success in God's Work

After Zechariah's vision of Joshua and the Angel, the prophet received a message regarding Zerubbabel: "The Angel who talked with me came back and wakened me, ... 'and there is a lampstand of solid gold ... with seven pipes to the seven lamps. ... Two olive trees are by it... .'"

"So I ... spoke to the Angel, ... 'What are these, my Lord?' ... So He answered ..., 'This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord of hosts.'" "And I further answered and said to Him, 'What are these two olive branches that drip into the receptacles of the two gold pipes from which the golden oil drains?' ... So He said, 'These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth.'" *Zechariah 4:1-6, 12-14.*

From the anointed ones that stand in God's presence divine light, love, and power flow to His people, so that they may give light and joy and refreshing to others. Those whom God has enriched are to enrich others with His love.

In rebuilding the house of the Lord, Zerubbabel had worked in spite of many difficulties. Enemies had "tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building," "and by force of arms made them cease." *Ezra 4:4, 23.* But the Lord now spoke through His prophet to Zerubbabel, "Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'" *Zechariah 4:7.* Throughout history, great mountains of difficulty have loomed up before those trying to carry out God's will. The Lord permits such obstacles as a test of faith. This is the time to trust in God. When we exercise living faith, we increase our spiritual strength and develop unfaltering trust. Satanic obstacles will disappear before the demand of faith. "Nothing will be impossible for you." *Matthew 17:20.*

Human Ways Contrasted With God's Way

The way of the world is to begin with pomp and boasting. God's way is to start the glorious triumph of truth with the day of small things. Sometimes God trains His workers by disappointment and apparent failure. He wants them to learn to master difficulties.

[210]

Often we are tempted to become discouraged when we meet perplexities and obstacles. But if we will hold our confidence unbroken, God will make the way clear. Success will come. Mountains of difficulty will become a plain; and he whose hands have laid the foundation, even "his hands shall also finish it." *Zechariah 4:9.*

Human power did not establish the church of God. The church was not founded on the rock of human strength, but on Christ Jesus, the Rock of Ages, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." *Matthew 16:18.* God's glorious work will never come to nothing.

It will go on, “not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the Lord of hosts.” **Zechariah 4:6.**

The promise to Zerubbabel was fulfilled literally. See verse 9. “The elders of the Jews ... built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar.” **Ezra 6:14, 15.**

The second temple did not equal the first in magnificence, nor was it made holy by those visible signs of the divine presence that the first temple had. No supernatural power marked its dedication—no cloud of glory filled the newly built sanctuary, no fire from heaven consumed the sacrifice on its altar. The Shekinah no longer rested in the Most Holy Place. The ark, the mercy seat, and the tablets of the law were not found there.

The True Glory of the Second Temple

And yet this was the building of which the Lord had declared, “The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former.” “The Desire of All Nations” would come. **Haggai 2:9, 7.** Jesus, the Desire of All Nations, made the temple holy by His personal presence. Yet many have refused to see any special significance in His advent. Their minds are blind to the true meaning of the prophet’s words.

God honored the second temple, not with the cloud of His glory, but with the presence of the One in whom was “all the fullness of the Godhead bodily”—God “manifested in the flesh.” **Colossians 2:9; 1 Timothy 3:16.** In this alone did the second temple exceed the first in glory. The “Desire of All Nations” had indeed come to His temple when the Man of Nazareth taught and healed in its sacred courts.

Esther, the Hebrew Girl Who Became Queen

Nearly fifty thousand children of the captivity had taken advantage of the decree permitting their return. These, however, were no more than a mere remnant. Hundreds of thousands of Israelites had chosen to remain in Medo-Persia rather than endure the hardships of the return journey and of reestablishing their ruined cities and homes.

After twenty or more years passed, Darius Hystaspes, the monarch then ruling, issued another favorable decree. In this way God mercifully provided another opportunity for the Jews to return to the land of their ancestors. The Lord foresaw the trouble-filled times that were to follow during the reign of Xerxes (Ahasuerus of the book of Esther), and He inspired Zechariah to plead with the exiles to return:

“‘Up, Zion! Escape, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon.’ For thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘He sent Me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye. For surely I will shake My hand against them, and they shall become spoil for their servants. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me.’” [Zechariah 2:7-9](#).

It was still the Lord’s intent that His people should glorify His name. He had given them many opportunities to return to Him. Some had chosen to listen, and some had found salvation in the midst of affliction. Many of these were among the remnant that would return.

Those “whose spirits God had moved” ([Ezra 1:5](#)) returned under the decree of Cyrus. But God did not stop pleading with those who remained voluntarily in the land of exile, and in various ways He made it possible for them also to return. However, most of those who failed to respond to the decree remained unimpressible, and even when Zechariah warned them to escape from Babylon, they did not accept the invitation.

The Death Decree Against God’s People

Meanwhile conditions in Medo-Persia were changing rapidly. Darius Hystaspes was followed on the throne by Xerxes the Great. During his reign those who had failed to leave faced a terrible crisis. Having refused the way of escape God had provided, now they came face to face with death.

[212]

Through Haman the Agagite, an unprincipled man high in authority in Medo-Persia, Satan worked to oppose God’s plans. Haman cherished bitter hatred against Mordecai, a Jew. Mordecai had done no harm to Haman but had simply refused to show him worshipful reverence. Not satisfied to “lay hands on Mordecai alone,” Haman plotted “to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.” [Esther 3:6](#).

Haman misled Xerxes, persuading him to order the massacre of all Jews “scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces” of Medo-Persia. [Verse 8](#). The decree set

a certain day on which to destroy the Jews and take their property. Satan was behind the scheme; he was trying to rid the earth of those who preserved the knowledge of the true God.

“In every province where the king’s command and decree arrived, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.” *Esther 4:3*.

The decree of the Medes and Persians could not be revoked; apparently all the Israelites were doomed to destruction. But in the wise provision of God, Esther had been made queen. Mordecai was her near relative. In their desperation they decided to appeal to Xerxes in behalf of their people. Esther would dare to enter into his presence to plead for their lives. “Who knows,” said Mordecai, “whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” *Verse 14*.

The Great Prayer Meeting

The crisis Esther faced demanded quick action; but both she and Mordecai realized that unless God would work to help them, their efforts would not succeed. So Esther took time to commune with God. “Go,” she directed Mordecai, “gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!” *Verse 16*.

The events that followed—Esther’s appearance before the king, the favor he showed her, the banquets of the king and queen with Haman as the only guest, the king’s troubled sleep, the public honor shown Mordecai, and Haman’s humiliation and fall—all these are parts of a familiar story. God acted marvelously for His people. The king issued a counter decree, allowing God’s people to fight for their lives. Mounted couriers “went out, hastened and pressed on by the king’s command,” to communicate the decree to the realm. “The Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday. Then many of the people of the land became Jews, because fear of the Jews fell upon them.” *Esther 8:14, 17*.

On the day appointed for their destruction, “the Jews gathered together in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could withstand them, because fear of them fell upon all people.” *Esther 9:2*. God had

[213]

commissioned angels to protect His people while they “gathered to defend their lives.” *Verse 16, NRSV*.

The king promoted Mordecai to be “second to King Ahasuerus, and he was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren.” *Esther 10:3*. He worked to promote the well-being of Israel. In this way God brought His chosen people once more into favor at the Medo-Persian court, making possible His plan to restore them to their own land. But not until the seventh year of Artaxerxes I, who followed Xerxes the Great, did any large number return to Jerusalem, under Ezra.

The experiences that came to God’s people in Esther’s day were not unique to that age. John the revelator, looking down the ages, declared, “The dragon was enraged with the

woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” **Revelation 12:17**. Some today will see these words fulfilled. The spirit that led people long ago to persecute the true church will lead to similar efforts against those who maintain their loyalty to God. Even now preparations for this last great conflict are underway.

The final decree against God’s remnant people will be similar to the one Ahasuerus issued against the Jews. In the little company keeping the Sabbath commandment, the enemies of the true church see a Mordecai at the gate. God’s people reverence His law, and this is a constant rebuke to those who have cast off the fear of the Lord and are trampling on His Sabbath.

Satan will stir up resentment against the minority who refuse to accept popular traditions. Important, famous people will join the lawless and the low against God’s followers. Wealth, genius, and education will combine to heap contempt on them. Persecuting rulers, ministers, and church members will plot against them. With voice and pen, by threats and ridicule, they will try to overthrow the faith of God’s people. By false reports and angry appeals, they will stir up the passions of the people. Not having a “Thus says the Scriptures” to bring against the Bible Sabbath, they will resort to oppressive edicts to make up for the lack. Legislators will yield to the demand for Sunday laws. But those who fear God cannot accept an institution that violates one of the Ten Commandments. The last great conflict in the controversy between truth and error will be fought on this battlefield. As in the days of Esther and Mordecai, the Lord will give the victory to His truth and His people.

Ezra, the King's Trusted Friend

About seventy years after the first exiles returned, Artaxerxes Longimanus came to the throne of Medo-Persia. Ezra and Nehemiah lived and worked during his reign. In 457 b.c. he issued the third decree for Jerusalem's restoration. He often showed favor to God's people during his long rule, and in his trusted Jewish friends, Ezra and Nehemiah, he recognized men whom God had appointed.

Ezra, living among the Jews who remained in Babylon, attracted the favorable notice of King Artaxerxes. He talked freely with the king about the power of God and the divine purpose in restoring the Jews to Jerusalem.

Ezra had received priestly training and had also become familiar with the writings of the Medo-Persian realm's wise men. But he was not satisfied with his spiritual condition. He longed to be in full harmony with God. And so he "prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it." **Ezra 7:10**. This led him to search the books of the Bible to learn why the Lord had permitted Jerusalem to be destroyed and His people taken captive to a heathen land.

Ezra Studies to Show Himself Approved

Ezra studied the promise God made to Abraham and the instruction He gave at Mount Sinai and through the wilderness wandering. Ezra's heart was stirred, and he experienced a thorough conversion. As he learned to yield his mind and will to divine control, the principles of true sanctification came into his life. In later years these helped shape the character of all associated with him.

God chose Ezra so that He might put honor on the priesthood, whose glory had nearly vanished during the captivity. Ezra developed into a man of extraordinary learning and became "a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses." **Verse 6**. These qualifications made him stand out as an important man in the kingdom.

Ezra Becomes a Mouthpiece for the Lord

During the remaining years of his life, whether near the court of Medo-Persia or at Jerusalem, he communicated to others the truths he learned. He was the Lord's witness to the world that Bible truth has power to ennoble daily life.

Ezra's efforts to revive interest in studying the Scriptures yielded

[215]

permanent results because of his painstaking, lifelong work of preserving and multiplying the Sacred Writings. He gathered all the copies he could find and had these transcribed and distributed. The pure Word, placed in the hands of many people, gave knowledge that was of priceless value.

Ezra's faith led him to tell Artaxerxes that he wanted to return to Jerusalem to help his people restore the Holy City. As he declared his perfect trust in God, the king was deeply impressed. His confidence in Ezra was so great that he granted the request, gave him rich gifts for the temple, and conferred on him extensive powers for carrying out the intentions in his heart.

The Third Decree Makes Complete Provision

The decree of Artaxerxes for restoring and building Jerusalem, the third since the close of the 70 years of captivity, is remarkable for its references to the God of heaven and for its liberal grants to the people of God. The king offered freely "to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem," and he made provision for meeting many heavy expenses "from the king's treasury." *Verses 15, 20.*

"You are being sent by the king," Artaxerxes declared to Ezra, "to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, with regard to the Law of your God which is in your hand." "Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it diligently be done for the house of the God of heaven." *Verses 14, 23.*

Artaxerxes arranged to restore the members of the priesthood to their ancient privileges. "It shall not be lawful to impose tax, tribute, or custom" on them. He also arranged for civil officers to govern the people. "You, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom," he directed, "set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are in the region beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know them." *Verses 24, 25.*

Thus Ezra had persuaded the king to enable the return of all the people of Israel and of the priests and Levites in the Medo-Persian realm, who "volunteer to go up to Jerusalem." *Verse 13.*

This decree brought great joy to those who, with Ezra, had been studying God's plans concerning His people. "Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers," Ezra exclaimed, "who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart." *Verse 27.*

God's Leading Evident in Artaxerxes' Decree

In this decree by Artaxerxes, God's leading was evident. Some saw this and gladly took advantage of the privilege of returning under such favorable circumstances. At the appointed time those going to Jerusalem assembled at a designated place of meeting for the long journey.

But the number who responded was disappointingly small. Many who had acquired houses and lands were satisfied to remain. Their example proved to be a wrong influence on

[216]

others who might have chosen to advance by faith.

As Ezra looked over the assembled group, he was surprised to find none of the Levites, those set apart for the service of the temple. The Levites should have been the first to respond. During the captivity, they had enjoyed liberty to minister to the Israelites in exile.

Synagogues had been built; the priests conducted the worship of God and instructed the people. All were allowed to observe the Sabbath freely.

But after the captivity ended, conditions changed. The temple at Jerusalem had been rebuilt and dedicated, and more priests were needed as teachers of the people. Besides, the Jews in Babylon were in danger of having their religious liberty restricted. During the uneasy times of Esther and Mordecai, the Jews in Medo-Persia had been plainly warned to return to their own land. It was dangerous for them to live any longer in the midst of heathen influences. In view of these changed conditions, the priests in Babylon should have been quick to see in the decree a special call to return to Jerusalem.

The king and his princes had provided abundant support, but where were the sons of Levi? A decision to go with their brethren would have led others to follow their example. Their strange indifference is a sad revelation of the attitude the Israelites in Babylon showed toward God's plan for his people.

Once more Ezra sent the Levites an urgent invitation to join with his company. Trusted messengers hurried with the plea, "Bring us servants for the house of our God." **Ezra 8:17**. Some who had been hesitating decided to return. In all, about forty priests and two hundred twenty ministers, teachers, and helpers came to the camp.

All were now ready. Ahead of them was a journey of several months. The men were taking their wives and children, their possessions, and treasure for the temple. Enemies lay in wait, ready to rob and destroy Ezra and everyone with him, yet he had not asked the king for an armed force for protection. "I was ashamed," he explained, "to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, 'The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and wrath are against all those who forsake Him.'" **Verse 22**.

For this reason they determined to put their trust wholly in God. They would ask for no soldiers. They would not plant one doubt in the minds of their heathen friends about their sincerity in depending on God. Strength would come not through human power, but through the favor of God. They would have protection only by earnestly seeking to obey the law of the Lord.

This knowledge lent a solemn air to the consecration service Ezra and his company held just before they set out. "I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava," Ezra declared, "that we might humble ourselves before

[217]

our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. ... So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer." **Verses 21-23**.

Only the Trustworthy Are Chosen

The blessing of God, however, did not make it unnecessary to exercise caution and careful planning. To safeguard the treasure, Ezra "separated twelve of the leaders of the priests ... and weighed out to them the silver, the gold, and the articles, the offering for the house of our God." **Verses 24, 25**. He solemnly charged these men to act as vigilant protectors over the treasure. "Guard them and keep them until you weigh them before the

chief priests and the Levites and the heads of families in Israel at Jerusalem.” **Verse 29**, NRSV.

Ezra chose only those who had proven trustworthy. He recognized that order and organization were necessary in the work of God.

“We departed,” Ezra writes, “on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. And the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road.” **Verse 31**. The journey took about four months. God restrained their enemies from harming them, and on the first day of the fifth month, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, they reached Jerusalem.

Ezra Sparks a Spiritual Revival

Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem brought courage and hope to many who had long worked under difficulties. Since the return of the first exiles more than seventy years before, the people had accomplished much. They had finished the temple and partially repaired the city walls. Yet much remained undone.

Many of the exiles had remained true to God, but a large number of the children and grandchildren lost sight of the sacredness of God's law. Even some in responsible positions were living in open sin. Their lifestyle was largely neutralizing efforts to advance God's cause, for as long as no one rebuked flagrant violations of the law, Heaven's blessing could not rest on the people.

Those who returned with Ezra had had special times when they sought the Lord. Their journey from Babylon, unprotected by any human power, had taught them rich spiritual lessons. Many had grown strong in faith, and when they mingled with the discouraged and indifferent in Jerusalem, their influence was a powerful factor in the reform soon begun.

Soon a few of the chief men of Israel approached Ezra with a serious complaint. Some of "the people of Israel and the priests and the Levites" had disregarded the holy commands of Jehovah so far as even to intermarry with the surrounding peoples. "They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons," Ezra was told, "so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples" of heathen lands. "Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass." [Ezra 9:1, 2](#).

Ezra had learned that Israel's apostasy was largely because they had mingled with heathen nations. He had seen that if they had kept separate they would have avoided many sad experiences. Now when he learned that prominent men had dared transgress the laws given to safeguard them against apostasy, his heart was stirred. He was overwhelmed with righteous indignation. "When I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe. ... Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive." [Verses 3, 4](#).

At the time of the evening sacrifice Ezra fell on his knees and

[219]

unburdened his heart to Heaven. "O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You," he exclaimed. "Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been very guilty, and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and to humiliation, as it is this day." "For we were slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judea and Jerusalem." "Should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people committing these abominations?" [Verses 7, 9, 14](#).

The Beginning of Reformation

The sorrow of Ezra and his associates brought repentance. Many who had sinned were deeply affected. “The people wept very bitterly.” **Ezra 10:1**. They saw how sacred was the law spoken at Sinai, and many trembled at the thought of their transgressions.

One of those present, Shechaniah, acknowledged Ezra’s words as true. “We have trespassed against our God,” he confessed, “and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land.” Shechaniah proposed that all who had transgressed should forsake their sin and be judged “according to the law.” “Arise,” he told Ezra, “for this matter is your responsibility. We also are with you. Be of good courage, and do it.” **Verses 2-4**.

This was the beginning of a wonderful reformation. With tact and careful consideration for the rights and welfare of every individual concerned, Ezra and his associates worked to lead Israel into the right way. Ezra gave personal attention to every case. He tried to impress the people with the holiness of the law and the blessings they would gain through obedience.

Wherever Ezra worked, a revival in the study of the Scriptures sprang up. The law of the Lord was exalted and made honorable. The passages in the prophetic books foretelling the coming of the Messiah brought hope to many a heart.

In this age of the world, when Satan is seeking to blind men and women to the claims of God’s law, there is need of people who can cause many to “tremble at the commandment of our God.” **Verse 3**. We need people who are mighty in the Scriptures, who seek to strengthen faith. We need teachers who will inspire hearts with love for the Scriptures!

The Cause of Corruption: Setting Aside God’s Law

When people set aside the Word of God, they reject its power to restrain the evil passions of the natural heart. They sow seeds of the flesh and reap a harvest of corruption. As a part of setting aside the Bible, they turn away from God’s law, weakening the moral sense and opening the floodgates of iniquity.

[220]

Lawlessness and moral decline are sweeping in like an overwhelming flood. Everywhere we see hypocrisy, alienation, strife, and indulgence of lust. The whole system of religious principles, the foundation and framework of social life, seems ready to fall in ruins.

People have set their will against the will of God, but the human mind cannot evade its obligation to a higher power. Some may try to set science against revelation, and so do away with God’s law, but still stronger comes the command, “*You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.*” **Matthew 4:10**. There is no such thing as weakening or strengthening the law of God. It always has been—and always will be—holy, just, and good. No one can repeal or change it.

We Are Entering the Last Battle of the Controversy

We are now beginning the last great battle of the controversy between truth and error—a battle not between rival churches but between the religion of the Bible and the religions of tradition. God’s Holy Word, handed down to us at so great a cost of suffering and bloodshed,

is little valued. Creation as the inspired writers present it, the fall of humanity, the atonement, the eternal nature of the law—these doctrines are practically rejected by a large share of the professedly Christian world. Thousands regard it as weakness to place full confidence in the Bible. They think that spiritualizing and explaining away its most important truths is a proof of learning.

God calls for a revival and a reformation. The words of the Bible alone should be heard from the pulpit. In many sermons today there is not that divine power which awakens the conscience and brings life to the soul. The hearers cannot say, “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” **Luke 24:32**. Let the word of God speak to the heart. Let those who have heard only tradition and human theories hear the voice of Him who can bring renewal that leads to eternal life.

The Reformers, whose protest has given us the name of Protestant, felt that God had called them to give the gospel to the world. To do this they were ready to sacrifice possessions, liberty, even life itself. In the face of persecution and death, they and their followers carried the Word of God to all classes, high and low, rich and poor, learned and ignorant. In this last conflict of the great controversy, are we as faithful as the early Reformers?

“Blow the trumpet in Zion... . Let the priests, who minister to the Lord, weep ...; let them say, ‘Spare Your people, O Lord, and do not give Your heritage to reproach.’” **Joel 2:15-17**.

Nehemiah, Man of Prayer and Action

This chapter is based on Nehemiah 1 and 2.

Nehemiah, one of the Hebrew exiles, held an influential position in the Persian court and had free access to the royal presence. He had become the monarch's friend and counselor. However, in the midst of the pomp and splendor, he did not forget God or His people. His heart turned toward Jerusalem. Through this man God determined to bring blessing to His people.

Nehemiah learned from messengers from Judea that the returned exiles in the chosen city were suffering. Opposition hindered the restoration work, the temple services were disturbed, and the walls of the city were still mostly in ruins. Overwhelmed with sorrow, Nehemiah could neither eat nor drink. In grief he turned to the divine Helper. "I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven." He pleaded that God would support the cause of Israel, restore their courage and strength, and help them build the devastated city.

As Nehemiah prayed, his faith and courage grew. He pointed to the dishonor that would be cast on God if His people remained weak and oppressed. He urged the Lord to fulfill His promise to Israel given through Moses before they entered Canaan. See [Deuteronomy 4:29-31](#). God's people had now returned to Him in repentance, and His promise would not fail.

Now Nehemiah resolved that if he could get the consent of the king and the necessary material, he would himself take up the task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and restoring Israel's national strength. And he asked the Lord to grant him the king's favor so that his plan could be carried out. "Let Your servant prosper this day, I pray," he pleaded, "and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."

Nehemiah Waits for God's Opportunity

Nehemiah waited four months to present his request to the king. Though his heart was heavy with grief, he tried to be cheerful in the royal presence. In those halls of luxury, everyone must appear lighthearted and happy. But when Nehemiah was alone, concealed from human sight, he offered many

[222]

prayers and tears that were heard and witnessed by God and angels.

Finally, sleepless nights and care-filled days left their mark on his face. The king, jealous for his own safety, was accustomed to read facial expressions and to see through disguises. He saw that some secret trouble was eating away at his cupbearer. "Why is your face sad," he inquired, "since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart."

Would the king be angry that while Nehemiah was outwardly engaged in his service, his thoughts had been far away with his afflicted people? His cherished plan for restoring

Jerusalem—was it about to be overthrown? “So,” he writes, “I became dreadfully afraid.” With tearful eyes he revealed the cause of his sorrow: “Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?”

This awakened the monarch’s sympathy. “What do you request?”

The man of God did not dare to reply till he had asked for direction from One higher than Artaxerxes. He needed the king’s help, and he realized that much depended on his presenting the matter in such a way as to secure his aid. “I prayed,” he said, “to the God of heaven.” In that brief prayer Nehemiah pressed his way into the presence of the King of kings and won to his side a power that can turn hearts.

In the busy walks of life, when we are almost overwhelmed with perplexity, we can send up a prayer to God for divine guidance. Travelers, when threatened with some great danger, can commit themselves to Heaven’s protection. In times of sudden difficulty the heart may send up its cry for help to the One who has pledged to come to the aid of His believing ones when they call on Him. When temptation comes at its fiercest, the believer may find support in the unfailing power and love of a God who keeps His promises.

God Gave Nehemiah Courage

In that brief moment of prayer Nehemiah received courage to ask Artaxerxes for authority to build up Jerusalem and make it once more a strong city. Results that were enormously important to the Jewish nation hung on this request. “And,” Nehemiah declared, “the king granted me what I asked, for the gracious hand of my God was upon me.” NRSV.

Nehemiah set about making arrangements to assure the success of the project. While he knew that many Israelites would rejoice in his success, he feared that some might stir up the jealousy of their enemies and perhaps bring about the defeat of the whole effort.

The king had received his request so favorably that Nehemiah felt encouraged to ask for still more help. He asked for a military escort to give authority to his mission. He obtained royal letters to the governors of the territory he must pass through on his way to Judea and a letter to the

[223]

keeper of the king’s forest in Lebanon, directing him to furnish timber. Nehemiah was careful to have the authority given him clearly defined. God’s children are not only to pray in faith but to work with diligent and wise care.

Nehemiah did not think his duty was done when he had wept and prayed before the Lord. He united his petitions with holy effort. He asked for the means he lacked from those who were able to give it. And in behalf of the cause of truth, the Lord is still willing to move on the hearts of people who are in possession of His goods. Those who work for Him are to secure these gifts by which the light of truth will go to many dark lands. The donors may have no faith in Christ, no acquaintance with His Word; but this is no reason why their gifts should be refused.

[224]

Nehemiah Accomplishes the “Impossible”

This chapter is based on Nehemiah 2; 3; and 4.

The royal letters to the governors of the provinces along Nehemiah’s route obtained prompt assistance for him. No enemy dared give trouble to the official guarded by the power of the Persian king!

However, his arrival in Jerusalem with a military escort, showing that he had come on some important mission, sparked the jealousy of heathen tribes who had often heaped injury and insult on the Jews. Leading out in this evil work were certain chiefs of these tribes, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. They watched Nehemiah with critical eyes and tried to obstruct and hinder his work.

Knowing that bitter enemies stood ready to oppose him, Nehemiah concealed his mission from them until he could study the situation and form his plans. He hoped to set the people at work before his enemies knew what was happening.

Choosing a few men whom he knew, Nehemiah told them what he wanted to accomplish and the plans he proposed. He enlisted their interest and assistance at once.

On the third night after his arrival Nehemiah rose at midnight and went out with a few trusted companions to view the ruins of Jerusalem. On his mule, he passed from one part of the city to another, surveying the brokendown walls and gates of the city. Painful thoughts filled his sorrowful heart as he gazed on the shattered defenses of Jerusalem. Memories of Israel’s past greatness stood in sharp contrast with the evidences of her humiliation.

In secrecy and silence Nehemiah completed his circuit. “And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others who did the work.” The remainder of the night he spent in prayer, for the morning would call for earnest effort to rally his dispirited countrymen.

Nehemiah carried a royal order requiring the inhabitants to cooperate in rebuilding the walls of the city, but he preferred to gain the sympathy of the people, knowing that a union of hearts was essential in the work. When he called the people together he presented arguments designed to unite the various groups.

[225]

Nehemiah’s hearers did not know of his midnight circuit the night before. But the fact that he was able to speak of the condition of the city with accuracy and in detail astonished them.

How Nehemiah Won Support

Nehemiah presented before the people their disgrace among the heathen—their religion was dishonored, their God blasphemed. He told them that in a distant land he had earnestly asked for the favor of Heaven in their behalf and had determined to request permission from

the king to come to their aid. He had asked God that the king might also grant him authority and give him the help needed for the work. And his prayer had been answered in such a way as to show that the plan was of the Lord!

Then Nehemiah asked the people directly whether they would take advantage of this opportunity and rise up to build the wall. With new courage they said with one voice, “‘Let us rise up and build.’ Then they set their hands to this good work.”

Nehemiah’s enthusiasm and determination were contagious. Each man became a Nehemiah in his turn and helped to strengthen the heart and hand of his neighbor.

When Israel’s enemies heard what the Jews were hoping to accomplish, they laughed. “‘What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?’” But Nehemiah answered, “‘The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build.’”

Nehemiah’s Example Wins the Day

Among the first to catch Nehemiah’s spirit were the priests. Because of their influential position, they could advance or hinder the work, and their cooperation at the beginning contributed much to its success. The majority came up nobly to their duty, and these faithful men have honorable mention in the book of God. But a few, the nobles from Tekoa, “‘did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord.’” In every religious movement some hold back, refusing to help. Heaven keeps a record of every neglected opportunity to do service for God; and there, too, every deed of faith and love is held in everlasting remembrance.

The people in general acted from patriotism and zeal. Able men organized the citizens into companies, each leader making himself responsible for a certain part of the wall. Some built “‘each in front of his own house.’” With tireless vigilance Nehemiah supervised the building, noting the problems and providing for emergencies. Along the entire three miles of wall the people constantly felt his influence. He encouraged the fearful, motivated the slackers, and approved the diligent. And he kept a constant eye on the movements of their enemies at a distance, who were conversing as if plotting mischief.

Nehemiah did not forget the Source of his strength. He constantly

[226]

lifted up his heart to the great Overseer of all. “‘The God of heaven Himself,’” he exclaimed, “‘will prosper us.’” The words thrilled the hearts of all the workers on the wall.

But Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem tried to cause division among the workmen. They ridiculed the efforts of the builders, predicting failure. “‘What are these feeble Jews doing?’” exclaimed Sanballat mockingly. “‘Will they fortify themselves? ... Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish—stones that are burned?’” Tobiah added, “‘Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall.’”

Soon the builders had to guard continually against the plots of their adversaries, who conspired to draw Nehemiah into their traps. Falsehearted Jews helped the treacherous effort. The report spread that Nehemiah was plotting against the Persian monarch, intending to set himself as king over Israel, and that all who aided him were traitors.

But “‘the people had a mind to work.’” The project went forward until the gaps were filled and the entire wall built up to half its intended height.

Building With One Hand, Fighting With the Other

The enemies of Israel were filled with rage. They had not dared use violence, for they knew of the king's orders and feared that actively opposing Nehemiah might bring on them the monarch's displeasure. But now they themselves became guilty of the crime of which they had accused Nehemiah. "All of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem." At the same time some of the leading Jews turned against the project and tried to discourage Nehemiah. "The strength of the laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall."

Discouragement came from still another source. "The Jews who dwelt near them," taking no part in the work, repeated the reports of their enemies to create discontent. But ridicule and threats only inspired Nehemiah to greater watchfulness. His courage remained high. "We made our prayer to our God," he declares, "and set a watch against them day and night." "Therefore I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. And I ... said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, 'Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.'"

"All of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work. So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked on construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor. ... Those who carried burdens loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at

[227]

construction, and with the other held a weapon."

Priests were stationed on different parts of the wall, bearing the sacred trumpets. They sounded the alarm if danger approached any part of the wall. "So we labored in the work, and half of the men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared."

Nehemiah now required those who had been living outside Jerusalem to camp within the walls, to guard the work and to be ready for duty in the morning. This would prevent the enemy from attacking the workmen as they went to and from their homes. Not even during the short time given to sleep did Nehemiah and his companions put off their clothing or lay aside their armor.

The opposition that the builders in Nehemiah's day met from open enemies and pretended friends is an example of the experience that people who work for God today will have. Enemies and friends hurl scorn and accusations at them, and if conditions allow, the enemy uses more cruel and violent measures.

Among those who profess to support God's cause are those who lay His cause open to the attacks of His bitterest foes. Even some who desire the work of God to prosper will weaken the hands of His servants by reporting and half believing the slanders of His adversaries. But, like Nehemiah, God's people are neither to fear their enemies nor despise them. Putting their trust in God, they are to go steadily forward, committing to His care the cause for which they stand.

In every crisis God's people may confidently declare, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" **Romans 8:31**. However craftily Satan may lay his plots, God can bring all the schemes to nothing. He is in the work, and no one can prevent its ultimate success.

[228]

Nehemiah Bravely Rebukes Selfishness

This chapter is based on Nehemiah 5.

Nehemiah became aware of the unhappy condition of the poorer classes of people. Grain was scarce, and in order to get food the poor had to buy on credit at exorbitant prices. They also had to borrow money at interest to pay the heavy taxes Persia imposed. To add to the distress, the wealthier Jews had taken advantage of their need, enriching themselves.

The Lord had commanded Israel to raise a tithe every third year for the benefit of the poor and every seventh year to leave the spontaneous products of the land to those in need. Faithfulness in devoting these offerings to relieving the poor would have kept fresh before the people God's ownership of all, eradicating selfishness and developing noble character. "You shall not charge interest to your brother—interest on money or food or anything." **Deuteronomy 23:19**. "For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'" **Deuteronomy 15:11**.

Wealthy Jews had done the very opposite of these commands. When the poor needed to borrow to pay taxes to the king, the wealthy had exacted high interest. By taking mortgages they had trapped the debtors in deep poverty. Many had been forced to sell their sons and daughters into slavery, and there seemed to be no future before them but perpetual need and bondage.

At length the people presented their situation to Nehemiah: "Some of our daughters have been brought into slavery. It is not in our power to redeem them, for other men have our lands and vineyards."

Nehemiah was indignant. "I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words." He saw that he must take a firm stand for justice.

The oppressors were wealthy people whose support he needed in restoring the city. But Nehemiah sharply rebuked the nobles and rulers, and he set before the people God's requirements. He reminded them of events during the reign of King Ahaz. Because of their idolatry,

[229]

God had delivered Judah into the hands of still more idolatrous Israel. The Israelites had seized women and children, intending to keep them as slaves or sell them to the heathen. Because of Judah's sins, the Lord had not prevented this, but by the prophet Oded He rebuked the victorious army: "You propose to force the children of Judah and Jerusalem to be your male and female slaves; but are you not also guilty before the Lord your God?" **2 Chronicles 28:10**.

When they heard these words, the armed men left the captives and spoil before the assembly. Then the leading men of Ephraim "took the captives, and from the spoil they clothed all who were naked among them, dressed them and gave them sandals, gave them

food and drink, and anointed them; and they let all the feeble ones ride on donkeys. So they brought them to their brethren at Jericho.” **Verse 15.**

Nehemiah and others had ransomed certain Jews who had been sold to the heathen, and he now contrasted this course with the conduct of those who were enslaving their brethren to enrich themselves. Nehemiah himself, carrying authority from the Persian king, might have demanded large contributions for his personal benefit. But instead he had given liberally to relieve the poor. He urged those guilty of extortion to restore the lands of the poor and the interest on money exacted from them, and to lend to them without security or interest.

“We will restore it,” the rulers declared, “and will require nothing from them; we will do as you say.” “And all the assembly said, ‘Amen!’ and praised the Lord. Then the people did according to this promise.”

The Gospel Can Cure Modern Economic Injustice

This history teaches an important lesson. In this generation wealth often comes by fraud. Many people are struggling with poverty, compelled to work for small wages, unable to afford even the necessities of life. Worried and oppressed, they do not know where to turn for relief. And all this so that the rich may live extravagantly or indulge their desire to accumulate more!

Love of money and display has made this world a den of thieves. “Come now, you rich,” James wrote. “You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth [hosts]. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.” **James 5:1, 3-5.**

Even some who profess to fear God are repeating what the nobles of Israel did. Because it is in their power to do so, they become oppressors. And because the lives of those who have taken the name of Christ show such greed, people hold the religion of Christ in contempt. Extravagance and extortion are

[230]

corrupting the faith of many and destroying their spirituality. The church gives approval to evil if she fails to lift her voice against it.

Every unjust act is a violation of the golden rule—done to Christ Himself in the person of His people. Every attempt to take advantage of another person’s ignorance or misfortune is registered as fraud in the books of heaven. Just to the extent that we may try to gain personal advantage at the disadvantage of another, to that extent will we become unresponsive to the influence of the Spirit of God.

The Son of God paid the price for our redemption. He became poor that through His poverty we might be rich. By helping the poor liberally we may prove the sincerity of our gratitude: “Let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” **Galatians 6:10.** “Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” **Matthew 7:12.**

[231]

Union With the World Hinders God's Cause

This chapter is based on Nehemiah 6.

With increasing hatred, Sanballat and his allies continued their secret efforts to discourage and injure the Jews. When the wall around Jerusalem would be finished and its gates set up, these enemies could not force an entrance into the city. So they were eager to stop the work. Finally they devised a plan to draw Nehemiah from his post of duty and kill or imprison him.

Pretending to desire a compromise, they invited him to meet them in a village on the plain of Ono. But enlightened by the Holy Spirit about their real intentions, he refused. "I sent messengers to them," he wrote, "saying, 'I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?'" Four times the tempters sent similar messages, and each time they received the same answer.

Finding this unsuccessful, they resorted to a more daring ploy. Sanballat sent an open letter that said: "It is reported among the nations, and Geshem says, that you and the Jews plan to rebel; therefore, according to these rumors, you are rebuilding the wall, that you may be their king. And you have also appointed prophets to proclaim concerning you at Jerusalem, saying, 'There is a king in Judah!' Now these matters shall be reported to the king. So come, therefore, and let us consult together."

Nehemiah was convinced that the reports the letter mentioned were completely false. Strengthening this conclusion was the fact that the letter was sent open, evidently so that the people might read the contents and become alarmed and intimidated. He promptly returned the answer: "No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart." Nehemiah knew that these were attempts to discourage the builders and stop their efforts.

Now Satan set a trap that was still more subtle and dangerous for the servant of God. Sanballat hired men who claimed to be friends of Nehemiah to give him bad counsel as the word of the Lord. The chief one was Shemaiah, who previously had a good reputation with Nehemiah. This man shut himself in a

[232]

chamber near the sanctuary, as if fearing that his life was in danger. The temple was protected by walls and gates, but the gates of the city were not yet set up. Professing great concern for Nehemiah's safety, Shemaiah advised him, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you."

If Nehemiah had followed this deceitful counsel, he would have sacrificed his faith in God and would have appeared cowardly. In view of the confidence he claimed to have in God's power, it would have been inconsistent for him to hide. The alarm would have spread among the people, they would all have looked after their own safety, and the city would

have been left to its enemies. This one unwise move on Nehemiah's part would have been a virtual surrender of all that he had gained.

God's Servant Sees Through the Plot

Nehemiah understood the true intent of his counselor. "I perceived that God had not sent him at all," he says, "but that he pronounced this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him ... that I should be afraid and act that way and sin, so that they might have cause for an evil report."

More than one of Nehemiah's "friends" who were secretly in league with his enemies seconded Shemaiah's counsel. But Nehemiah answered fearlessly, "Should such a man as I flee? And who is there such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!"

Despite the enemies, in less than two months from Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem the builders could walk on the walls and look down on their defeated and astonished foes. "When all our enemies heard of it," Nehemiah wrote, "they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God."

Yet even this evidence of the Lord's controlling hand was not enough to restrain rebellion and corrupted loyalties among the Israelites. "The nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came to them. For many in Judah were pledged to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shechaniah." A Judean family had intermarried with the enemies of God, and the relationship had compromised their commitments. Others had done the same. These were a source of constant trouble.

The nobles of Judah who had married idol-worshippers and who had held traitorous correspondence with Tobiah now represented him as an able and perceptive man, someone with whom the Jews would do well to make an alliance. At the same time they betrayed Nehemiah's plans to him. In this way they gave opportunity to misinterpret Nehemiah's words and acts and to hinder his work.

Satan has always directed his assaults against those who advance the work of God. Though often repulsed, he renews his attacks with

[233]

fresh vigor, using new approaches. But the attack we should fear the most is when he works secretly through the "friends" of God's work. Open opposition may be fierce and cruel, but it carries far less danger to God's cause than does the secret scheming of those who, while professing to serve God, are at heart the servants of Satan.

The prince of darkness will use every trick that he can suggest to persuade God's servants to form an alliance with his agents. But, like Nehemiah, they should reply, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down." God's workers must refuse to let threats or mockery or falsehood divert them from their work. Enemies are continually on their track. They must always "set a watch against them day and night." **Nehemiah 4:9.**

As the time of the end draws near, Satan will use human agents to mock and condemn those who "build the wall." The builders should work to defeat the plans of their adversaries, but they should not allow anything—not even friendship or sympathy—to call them from

their task. Those who discourage their fellow workers by any unguarded act bring a stain on their own character that they cannot easily remove, and they place a serious obstacle in the way of their future usefulness.

“Those who forsake the law praise the wicked.” **Proverbs 28:4**. When those who are uniting with the world urge joining with those who have always opposed the cause of truth, we should shun them as firmly as did Nehemiah. We should resist such counsel resolutely. We must strongly withstand whatever influence would tend to unsettle the faith of God's people in His guiding power.

The reason Nehemiah's enemies failed to draw him into their power is that he relied so firmly on God. Evil finds little foothold in the life that has a noble aim, an absorbing purpose. God's true servants work with a determination that will not fail, because they depend constantly on the throne of grace. God gives the Holy Spirit to help in every difficulty. If His people are watching the signs of His leading and are ready to cooperate, they will see mighty results.

The Joy of Forgiveness and Healing

This chapter is based on Nehemiah 8; 9; and 10.

It was the time of the Feast of Trumpets. Many were gathered at Jerusalem. The wall had been rebuilt and the gates set up, but a large part of the city was still in ruins.

On a platform constructed in one of the widest streets, surrounded by sad reminders of Judah's departed glory, stood Ezra, now an old man. At his right and left his fellow Levites had gathered. The children of the covenant had assembled from all the surrounding country. "And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. Then all the people answered, 'Amen!' ... And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord."

Yet even here was evidence of sin. Because the people had intermarried with other nations, the Hebrew language had become corrupted, and the speakers needed to use great care to explain the law in language everyone could understand. Certain priests joined Ezra in explaining its principles. "They read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."

The people listened intently and reverently to the words of the Most High. They were convinced of their guilt and mourned because of their transgressions. But this was a day of rejoicing, a holy gathering that the Lord had commanded the people to keep with gladness and to rejoice because of God's great mercy to them. "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep. ... Send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

Part of the day was devoted to religious services. The people spent the remainder of the time enjoying the abundant food God had provided. They also sent portions to the poor. The words of the law had been read and understood.

On the tenth day of the seventh month the priests performed the services of the Day of Atonement. From the fifteenth to the twentysecond of the month the people and their rulers kept the Feast of Tabernacles. "In all their cities and in Jerusalem ... the people ... made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their

[235]

court-yards or the courts of the house of God. ... And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, [Ezra] read from the Book of the Law of God."

As they had listened from day to day to the words of the law, the people had been convicted of their nation's sins in past generations. It was because they had departed from God that He had withdrawn His protecting care and the children of Abraham had been scattered in foreign lands. Now they determined to pledge themselves to walk in His commandments. Before entering into this solemn service, they separated themselves from the heathen among them.

Their leaders encouraged them to believe that, according to His promise, God heard their prayers. They must not only repent, they must believe that God pardoned them. They must show their faith by praising Him for His goodness. “Stand up,” said these teachers, “and bless the Lord your God.”

Then from the great assembly, standing with hands outstretched toward heaven, arose the song:

“Blessed be Your glorious name,
Which is exalted above all blessing and praise!
You alone are the Lord; ...
The host of heaven worships You.”

When the song ended, the leaders related the history of Israel, showing how great had been God’s goodness and how great their ingratitude. They had suffered punishment for their sins. Now they acknowledged God’s justice and pledged to obey His law. They wrote out a memorial of the obligation they had taken on themselves, and the priests, Levites, and princes signed it as a reminder of their duty and a barrier against temptation. The people took a solemn oath “to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes.” The oath included a promise not to intermarry with the people of the land.

The people still further showed their determination to return to the Lord by pledging to stop desecrating the Sabbath. In an effort to save the people from yielding to temptation, Nehemiah bound them by a solemn promise not to transgress the Sabbath by buying from the heathen traders, hoping that this would put an end to the Sabbath commerce.

They also made provision to support the public worship of God. In addition to the tithe, the congregation pledged to contribute a stated sum each year for the service of the sanctuary. “We made ordinances,” Nehemiah writes, “to bring the firstfruits of our ground and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, to the house of the Lord.”

Israel had returned to God with deep sorrow for backsliding. Now they must show faith in His promises. God had accepted their repentance. They were now to rejoice in the assurance that their sins were forgiven and that they were restored to divine favor.

[236]

Nehemiah’s efforts had met with success. As long as the people were obedient to God’s word, the Lord would fulfill His promise by pouring rich blessings on them.

For those who are convicted of sin and weighed down with a sense of unworthiness, this story contains lessons of faith and encouragement. The Bible faithfully presents Israel’s apostasy, but it also shows the deep repentance, the earnest devotion and sacrifice, that marked their return to the Lord.

When sinners yield to the Holy Spirit, they see themselves as transgressors. But they are not to allow themselves to despair, for their pardon has already been secured. It is God’s glory to encircle repentant human beings in the arms of His love, to bind up their wounds, to cleanse them, and to clothe them with salvation.

[237]

Nehemiah's Painful Work of Reformation

This chapter is based on Nehemiah 13.

The people of Judah had pledged to obey the law of God. But when for a time they were without the influence of Ezra and Nehemiah, many departed from the Lord. Nehemiah had returned to Persia. During his absence from Jerusalem, evils crept in that threatened to pervert the nation. Idol worshipers contaminated even the sacred temple area. Through intermarriage, a friendship had developed between Eliashib, the high priest, and Tobiah, the Ammonite, Israel's bitter enemy. As a result of this unholy alliance, Tobiah occupied an apartment connected with the temple, which had been used as a storeroom for tithes and offerings.

Because of the Ammonites' treachery toward Israel, God had declared that they were to be forever shut out from the congregation of His people. See [Deuteronomy 23:3-6](#). The high priest defied this, emptied out the offerings stored in God's house, and made a place for this enemy of God and His truth. He could not have shown greater contempt for God!

When Nehemiah returned from Persia, he took prompt action to expel the intruder. "I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room. Then I commanded them to cleanse the rooms; and I brought back into them the vessels of the house of God."

The priests had profaned the temple and misapplied the offerings. This had discouraged the people's liberality. They did not give to keep the treasuries of the Lord's house full; many of the temple workers who had not received sufficient support had left to work elsewhere.

Nehemiah began at once to correct these abuses. This inspired the people with confidence, and all Judah brought "the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil." Men who "were considered faithful" were made treasurers, "and their task was to distribute to their brethren."

Mingling with idol worshipers also led the people to disregard the Sabbath. Nehemiah found that the heathen merchants coming to Jerusalem had persuaded many Israelites to buy and sell on the Sabbath. Some could not be lured into sacrificing principle, but many dared to violate the Sabbath openly. "In those days,"

[238]

Nehemiah wrote, "I saw people in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. ... Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold them on the Sabbath to the children of Judah."

The Leaders Had Favored Wrong

A desire to advance their own interests had led the rulers to favor the ungodly. "What evil thing is this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day?" Nehemiah demanded

sternly. "Did not your fathers do thus ...? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath." He then gave command to shut the gates of Jerusalem "before the Sabbath" and not open them again till the Sabbath was past.

"The merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice," hoping to do business with the people. Nehemiah warned them: "'Why do you spend the night around the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you!' From that time on they came no more on the Sabbath."

Now Nehemiah turned to the danger from intermarriage and association with idol worshippers. "In those days," he wrote, "I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah."

Some men who entered into unlawful marriages were rulers to whom the people had a right to look for counsel and example. Foreseeing the ruin that would come to the nation if this evil continued, Nehemiah pointed to the case of Solomon. Among all the nations there had never been a king like this man, yet idol-worshipping women had turned his heart from God, and his example had corrupted Israel. "Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil," Nehemiah sternly demanded, "transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women?" Their consciences were awakened, and they began a work of reformation that brought God's approval and blessing.

Some in sacred office protested that they could not bring themselves to separate from their heathen wives. But Nehemiah showed no respect for rank or position. Whoever refused to cut his connection with idol worshippers was immediately separated from the service of the Lord. A grandson of the high priest, who had married a daughter of the notorious Sanballat, was not only removed from office, he was banished from Israel.

Constant Struggle With Opposing Elements

Only the judgment will reveal how much anguish of soul this necessary severity cost the faithful worker for God. Advancement came only by fasting, humiliation, and prayer.

Many who had married idol worshippers chose to go with them

[239]

into exile and join the Samaritans. Some who had occupied high positions in the work of God went over fully to their side. The Samaritans promised to adopt the Jewish faith more completely, and the apostates, determined to outdo their former brethren, constructed a temple on Mount Gerizim as a rival to the house of God at Jerusalem. Their religion continued to be a mixture of Judaism and heathenism, and their claim to be the people of God was the source of strife between the two nations from generation to generation.

In the work of reform today, there is need of people like Ezra and Nehemiah who will not excuse sin, not remain silent when others do wrong, nor cover evil with a false kindness. Severity to a few may prove mercy to many. They will remember also that the one who rebukes evil should always reveal the spirit of Christ.

Ezra and Nehemiah confessed their sins and the sins of their people as if they themselves were the offenders. Patiently they worked and suffered. What made their work most difficult

was the secret opposition of pretended friends who gave their influence to the service of evil. These traitors furnished the Lord's enemies with material to use in their warfare on His people. Their rebellious wills were always at war with God's requirements.

Nehemiah's success shows what prayer, faith, and wise action will accomplish. Nehemiah was not a priest; he was not a prophet; he was a reformer. It was his aim to set his people right with God. As he came into contact with evil and opposition to right he took a stand so firmly that the people could not help but recognize his loyalty, his patriotism, and his deep love for God. Seeing this, they were willing to follow where he led.

An important part of true religion is being diligent in whatever God-appointed duty we may have. Decisive action at the right time will gain glorious triumphs, while delay and neglect result in failure and dishonor to God. If the leaders show no zeal, if they are indifferent, the church will be lazy and pleasureloving; but if they are filled with a holy resolve to serve God and Him alone, the people will be united, hopeful, eager. The pages of God's Word that describe the hatred, falsehood, and treachery of Sanballat and Tobiah also describe the devotion and self-sacrifice of Ezra and Nehemiah. We are left free to copy either, as we choose.

“Nehemiahs” Today Lead Out in Sabbath Reformation

The work of reform carried on by Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah presents a picture of spiritual restoration in the closing days of this earth's history. Through the remnant of Israel God determined to preserve a knowledge of Himself in the earth. They were the guardians of true worship, the keepers of the holy Scriptures. Strong was the opposition they had to meet, heavy the burdens the leaders bore. But these men moved forward, firmly relying on

[240]

God and believing that He would cause His truth to triumph.

Isaiah outlined the spiritual restoration that the work in Nehemiah's day symbolized: “Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.” *Isaiah 58:12, NRSV.*

A breach has been made in God's law—the wall that He placed around His chosen ones for their protection. Obeying its principles of justice, truth, and purity is to be their perpetual safeguard. The prophet points out the specific work of this remnant people who built the wall: “If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on My holy day; if you call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs; then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth.” *Isaiah 58:13, 14, NRSV.*

In the time of the end every divine institution is to be restored. The breach made in the law when mere mortals tried to change the Sabbath is going to be repaired. God's remnant people are to show that the law of God is the foundation of all enduring reform. In clear, distinct lines they are to show how necessary it is to obey all of the Ten Commandments. Impelled by the love of Christ, they are to cooperate with Him in building up the waste places. They are to be repairers of the breach, restorers of streets to live in.

[241]

Darkness Precedes the Dawn

Through the long centuries, from the day our first parents lost their Eden home to the time the Son of God appeared as the Savior, the hope of the fallen race centered in the coming of a Deliverer to free men and women from the slavery of sin and the grave.

Adam and Eve first received hope in Eden when the Lord declared to Satan, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” **Genesis 3:15**. As the guilty pair listened, hope filled their hearts, for they saw in this a promise of deliverance from ruin. They did not have to yield to despair. With His own blood the Son of God would atone for their transgression. Through faith in the power of Christ to save, they could become the children of God once more.

By turning our first parents from obedience, Satan became “the god of this world.” **2 Corinthians 4:4**, NRSV. But the Son of God proposed not only to redeem the human race but to recover the dominion they had lost. “O Tower of the flock, ... to You shall it come, even the former dominion.” **Micah 4:8**.

This hope of redemption has never become extinct. From the beginning there have been some whose faith has reached out beyond the present to the future—Adam, Seth, Enoch, Methuselah, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Through these the Lord has preserved His revealed will. To the chosen people through whom the promised Messiah would come, God gave a knowledge of salvation to be provided through the atoning sacrifice of His beloved Son.

At the call of Abraham God promised, and later repeated, “In you all families of the earth shall be blessed.” **Genesis 12:3**. The Sun of Righteousness illuminated Abraham’s heart, scattering his darkness. When the Savior Himself walked the earth, He spoke of the patriarch’s hope: “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.” **John 8:56**.

The blessing that Jacob pronounced on Judah foreshadowed the same “blessed hope”:

“The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes;

[242]

And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.”

Genesis 49:10

Again, Balaam foretold the coming of the world's Redeemer:

“A Star shall come out of Jacob;
A Scepter shall rise out of Israel.”

Numbers 24:17

Through Moses also, God kept Israel aware of His purpose to send His Son as the Redeemer. Moses declared, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear.” *Deuteronomy 18:15*.

How the Sanctuary Services Revealed the Savior

The sacrificial offerings constituted a perpetual reminder that a Savior was coming. Throughout Israel's history types and shadows taught the people each day the great truths of Christ as Redeemer, Priest, and King. And once each year the Day of Atonement services carried their minds forward to the closing events of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. The earthly sanctuary was “symbolic for the present time.” Its two holy places were “copies of things in the heavens,” for Christ is today “a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.” *Hebrews 9:9, 23; 8:2*.

When Adam and his sons began to offer ceremonial sacrifices designated as a type of the coming Redeemer, Satan recognized in these a symbol of a close relationship between earth and heaven. During the long centuries he has constantly tried to intercept this relationship, to misrepresent God and misinterpret the rites that point to the Savior. The chief enemy of the human race has portrayed God as one who delights in destroying people. God designed the sacrifices to reveal His love. But Satan has perverted them into a means by which sinners have hoped—in vain—to appease the wrath of an offended God. At the same time, he has worked to strengthen evil passions so that, through repeated transgression, he can lead multitudes far from God and keep them hopelessly bound with the chains of sin.

In the parchment rolls of the Old Testament Scriptures Satan read the words that outlined Christ's work among us as a suffering sacrifice and as a conquering king. He read that the One who was to appear was to be “led as a lamb to the slaughter,” “His visage ... marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men.” The promised Savior was to be “despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief ..., smitten by God, and afflicted.” *Isaiah 53:7; 52:14; 53:3, 4*. These prophecies caused Satan to tremble, yet he determined to blind the people to what they really meant in order to prepare the way for them to reject Christ at His coming.

Before the Flood, success had crowned Satan's efforts to bring

[243]

about a worldwide rebellion against God. After the Flood, with sly insinuations he again led humanity into bold rebellion. He seemed about to triumph, but through the descendants of faithful Abraham, God intended to raise up messengers to call attention to the meaning of the sacrificial ceremonies, and especially to the promise of the One toward whom all the services pointed.

God carried out His plan, but not without determined opposition. In every way possible the enemy worked to cause Abraham's descendants to forget their holy calling. For centuries before Christ's first advent, darkness covered the earth, and deep darkness the people. Multitudes were sitting in the shadow of death.

The True Character of the Messiah Revealed

With prophetic vision David had foreseen that the coming of Christ would be "like the light of the morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds." **2 Samuel 23:4**. And Hosea testified, "His going forth is established as the morning." **Hosea 6:3**. Quietly and gently the daylight breaks on the earth, dispelling the darkness and waking the earth to life. Isaiah exclaimed:

For unto us a Child is born,
 Unto us a Son is given;
 And the government will be upon His shoulder.
 And His name will be called
 Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6

The loyal ones among the Jewish nation strengthened their faith by dwelling on these and similar passages. They read how the Lord would anoint One "to preach good tidings to the poor," "to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives," and to declare "the acceptable year of the Lord." **Isaiah 61:1, 2**. Yet with sadness and deep humiliation of soul they noted the words in the prophetic scroll:

He is despised and rejected by men,
 A Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief.
 And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him;
 He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.
 Surely He has borne our griefs
 And carried our sorrows;
 Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
 Smitten by God, and afflicted... .
 All we like sheep have gone astray;
 We have turned, every one, to his own way;
 And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 53:3-6

As the substitute and the One taking responsibility for sinful humanity, Christ was to suffer under divine justice. Through the psalmist the Redeemer had prophesied concerning Himself:

Reproach has broken My heart,
And I am full of heaviness;

[244]

I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none;
And for comforters, but I found none.
They gave Me also gall for My food,
And for My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink.

Psalm 69:20, 21

He prophesied: “They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” **Psalm 22:16-18.**

These portrayals of the bitter suffering and cruel death of the Promised One, sad though they were, were rich in promise; for “it pleased the Lord to bruise Him” and put Him to grief, so that He could become “an offering for sin.” **Isaiah 53:10.**

Love for sinners led Christ to pay the price of redemption. No one else could ransom men and women from the power of the enemy. His life bore no taint of self-assertion. The world honors position, wealth, and talent, but the Son of God would present none of these. The Messiah was not to use any of the means that people employ to win allegiance. The Bible foretold his renunciation of self:

He shall not cry out, nor raise His voice,
Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.
A bruised reed He will not break,
And smoking flax He will not quench.

Isaiah 42:2, 3

The Important Work: Deliverance From Sin

The Savior was to conduct Himself on earth entirely differently from the teachers of the day. His life would reveal no noisy arguing, no act to gain applause. The Messiah was to be hid in God, and God would be revealed in the character of His Son. Without divine help, men and women would sink lower and lower. He who made the world must give them life and power.

The Son of God was to “exalt the law, and make it honorable.” **Verse 21.** He was to free God’s commandments from the burdensome rules people had placed on them, which had discouraged many in their efforts to serve God.

“The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. ... With

righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.”
Isaiah 11:2-4.

A fountain was to be opened “for sin and for uncleanness.” **Zechariah 13:1.** Sinners were to hear the blessed invitation:

“Incline your ear, and come to Me.
 Hear, and your soul shall live;
 And I will make an everlasting covenant with you—
 The sure mercies of David.”

Isaiah 55:3

In word and deed the Messiah was to reveal the glory of God the Father, to make known to fallen humanity the infinite love of God.

[245]

He will feed His flock like a shep herd;
 He will gather the lambs with His arm,
 And carry them in His bosom,
 And gently lead those who are with young.

Isaiah 40:11

“These also who erred in spirit will come to understanding,
 And those who complained will learn doctrine.”

Isaiah 29:24

Thus God spoke to the world concerning the coming of a Deliverer from sin. Inspired prophecy pointed to the advent of “the Desire of All Nations.” **Haggai 2:7.** God had even specified the place of His birth and the time of His appearance. The Son of David must be born in David’s city. Out of Bethlehem “shall come forth ... the One to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.” **Micah 5:2.**

“But you, Bethlehem, ...
 Out of you shall come a Ruler
 Who will shepherd My people Israel.”

Matthew 2:6

God revealed the time of the first advent to Daniel. “Seventy weeks,” said the angel, “are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.” **Daniel 9:24.**

The Time of Christ's First Coming Specified

A day in prophecy stands for a year. See [Numbers 14:34](#) and [Ezekiel 4:6](#). The 70 weeks, or 490 days, represent 490 years. The prophecy gives a starting point for this period: “Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks” ([Daniel 9:25](#))—69 weeks, or 483 years. The command to restore and build Jerusalem by the decree of Artaxerxes Longimanus went into effect in the autumn of 457 b.c. See [Ezra 6:14](#); [7:1, 9](#). From this time, 483 years extend to the autumn of a.d. 27. According to the prophecy, this period was to reach to the Messiah, the Anointed One. In a.d. 27, at His baptism, Jesus received the anointing of the Holy Spirit (see [Acts 4:27](#); [John 1:33](#)), and soon afterward He proclaimed the message, “The time is fulfilled.” [Mark 1:15](#).

Then, said the angel, “He shall confirm a covenant with many for one week [seven years].” For seven years after the Savior entered on His ministry, the gospel would be preached especially to the Jews—for three and a half years by Christ Himself, and afterward by the apostles. “In the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.” [Daniel 9:27](#). In the spring of a.d. 31, Christ, the true Sacrifice, was offered on Calvary. Then the veil of the temple was torn (see [Mark 15:38](#)), showing that the time had come for the earthly sacrifices to end.

[246]

The one “week”—seven years—ended in a.d. 34. By the stoning of Stephen the Jews sealed their rejection of the gospel. The disciples “went everywhere preaching the word” ([Acts 8:4](#)), and shortly after, Saul the persecutor became Paul the apostle to the Gentiles.

The prophecies concerning the Savior led the Hebrews to live in a state of constant expectancy. Many believed and “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” [Hebrews 11:13](#). The promises repeated through patriarchs and prophets had kept alive the hope of His appearing.

God had not at first revealed the exact time of the first advent; and even when the prophecy of Daniel made this known, not everyone interpreted the message correctly.

Century after century passed. Finally there were no more prophets. As the Jews departed from God, hope almost ceased to brighten the future. Those whose faith should have continued strong were ready to exclaim, “The days are prolonged, and every vision fails.” [Ezekiel 12:22](#). But heaven’s council had determined the hour for the coming of Christ. “When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman.” [Galatians 4:4, 5](#).

God must give lessons to humanity in the language of humanity. People must hear the Messenger of the covenant in His own temple. The author of truth must separate truth from the chaff of human opinion. God must clearly define the plan of redemption.

When the Savior finally appeared “in the likeness of men” ([Philippians 2:7](#)), Satan could only bruise His heel, while by every act of suffering Christ was bruising the head of His adversary. The anguish that sin has brought was poured into the heart of the Sinless One. Yet Christ was breaking the slavery that had held humanity. Every pang of anguish, every insult, was working out the deliverance of the race.

If Satan could have gotten Christ to stain His perfect purity by one act or even one thought, the prince of darkness would have triumphed and gained the whole human family. But while Satan could distress, he could not contaminate. He could cause agony, but not defilement. He made the life of Christ one long scene of conflict and trial, yet with every attack he was losing his hold on humanity.

In Gethsemane and on the cross, our Savior went personally to battle with the prince of darkness. When Christ hung in agony on the cross, then indeed Satan bruised His heel. But that very act was crushing the serpent's head. Through death Jesus destroyed "him who had the power of death, that is, the devil." **Hebrews 2:14**. This act made the plan of salvation secure forever. In death, in rising again, Jesus opened the gates of the grave for all His followers. Our Redeemer has opened the way so that the most sinful, the most needy, the most oppressed and despised, may find access to the Father.

[247]

Where Is God's True Israel?

In proclaiming the everlasting gospel to every nation, God's church is fulfilling the prophecy, "Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit." **Isaiah 27:6**. As the result of the efforts of Jesus' followers, an abundant harvest is developing, bringing the benefits God hinted at in His promise to Abraham, "I will bless you ... and you shall be a blessing." **Genesis 12:2**.

This promise of blessing should have met major fulfillment during the centuries following the Israelites' return from captivity. God intended that the whole earth would be prepared for the first advent of Christ, even as today He is preparing the way for Jesus' second coming. See **Zechariah 8:3, 7, 8**.

God did not want Israel to repeat the sins that had characterized her prior to the captivity. "Execute true justice," the Lord told those engaged in rebuilding. "Speak each man the truth to his neighbor; give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace." **Zechariah 7:9; 8:16**.

God promised rich rewards to those who would practice these principles: "Just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you, and you shall be a blessing." **Zechariah 8:13**.

The Babylonian captivity cured the Israelites of image worship. After their return, under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah they repeatedly pledged to keep all the commandments of the Lord. The times of prosperity that followed gave evidence of God's willingness to forgive. Yet with fatal shortsightedness they selfishly kept for themselves the blessings that would have brought healing and life to multitudes.

This failure was plainly visible in Malachi's day. In his rebuke against transgressors, the prophet spared neither priests nor people. Only by sincere repentance could they experience God's blessing. "But now," the prophet pleaded, "entreat God's favor, that He may be gracious to us." **Malachi 1:9**.

However, God would not allow His plan to redeem the human race to be frustrated by any temporary failure of Israel. "From the rising of the sun to its setting," the Lord declared through His messenger, "My name is great among the nations." **Verse 11, NRSV**.

[248]

Malachi Reveals the Secret of Prosperity

Through transgression, those who once had been spiritual leaders had become "contemptible and base before all the people." **Malachi 2:9**. Yet God left none without hope. Malachi's prophecies of judgment came with invitations to the unrepentant to make peace with God. "Return to Me," the Lord urged, "and I will return to you." **Malachi 3:7**. The God of heaven is pleading with His erring children to cooperate with Him in carrying forward His work on the earth. The Lord holds out His hand to Israel to help them to the path of

self-sacrifice, to share with Him the heirship as children of God. Will they recognize their only hope and respond?

How sad that in Malachi's day the Israelites hesitated to yield their proud hearts in hearty cooperation! Their self-justification shows plainly in their response, "In what way shall we return?"

The Lord reveals to His people one of their special sins. "Will a man rob God?" He asks. "Yet you have robbed Me!" Still unconvicted of sin, the disobedient inquire, "In what way have we robbed You?"

"In tithes and offerings... . Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,' says the Lord of hosts, 'if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such a blessing... . And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground... . And all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land,' says the Lord of hosts."

Verses 7-12.

God gives the sunshine and the rain; He causes vegetation to flourish; He gives health and ability to earn income; and He desires men and women to show their gratitude by returning tithes and offerings so that His vineyard may not remain a barren wasteland. They are to reveal an unselfish interest in building up His work in all the world.

Through messages such as those that Malachi bore, as well as through oppression from heathen foes, the Israelites finally learned that true prosperity depends on obedience to the law of God. But with many, obedience did not flow from faith. Their motives were selfish. They gave outward service as a way to achieve national greatness. The chosen people did not become the light of the world, but shut themselves away from the world as a safeguard against idol worship. They perverted the restrictions forbidding intermarriage with the heathen and joining in the pagan practices of surrounding nations so that they built up a wall of partition between themselves and all other peoples. This shut from others the blessings God had commissioned Israel to give to the world.

How the Sanctuary Services Were Perverted

At the same time, by their sins the Jews were separating from God. They were unable to discern the spiritual meaning of their symbolic services. In self-righteousness they trusted their own works—the sacrifices themselves—instead of relying

[249]

on the merits of Him to whom these things pointed. "Seeking to establish their own righteousness" (**Romans 10:3**), they built up a self-sufficient system of forms. Not content with the regulations God Himself had appointed, they invented countless detailed rules of their own. The greater their distance from God, the more rigorously they observed these forms.

With all these burdensome rules it was practically impossible for the people to keep the law. The glorious truths shadowed in the symbolic services were buried under a mountain of human tradition. Those who really wanted to serve God groaned under a heavy burden.

Israel Rejects Her Messiah

The people of Israel had separated themselves so far from God that they could have no true understanding of the promised Redeemer's character or mission. Instead of wanting redemption from sin, they set their hearts on regaining worldly power. They looked for the Messiah to exalt Israel to rulership over all nations. In this way Satan had prepared the people to reject the Savior when He would appear. Their pride and false conceptions would prevent them from honestly weighing the evidences of His Messiahship.

For more than a thousand years the Jewish people had waited for the promised Savior's coming. His name had been enshrined in song and prophecy, in temple rite and household prayer. Yet when He came they did not recognize Him. "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him." [John 1:11](#). They recognized in Him no beauty that they should desire Him. See [Isaiah 53:2](#).

Jesus' life among the Jewish people rebuked their selfishness. They hated His example of truthfulness, and when the test came they rejected the Holy One of Israel and became responsible for His crucifixion.

In the parable of the vineyard, Christ called the attention of the Jewish teachers to the blessings bestowed on Israel and showed God's claim on their obedience. He pulled back the veil from the future and showed how the whole nation was bringing ruin on itself:

"There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country.

"Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. And the tenants took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son'. But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him."

Christ now asked them, "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard

[250]

comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?" The priests joined with the people in answering, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons."

A Self-application

They had pronounced their own doom! Under Jesus' searching gaze they knew He read the secrets of their hearts. They saw a picture of themselves in the tenants.

Regretfully Christ asked: "Have you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it." [Matthew 21:42-44](#).

The Jewish nation determined that they would not receive Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. From that time on, darkness surrounded their lives like midnight. The predicted

doom came on the Jewish nation. In their blind rage they destroyed one another. Their rebellious pride brought the wrath of their Roman conquerors on them. The Romans destroyed Jerusalem, laid the temple in ruins, and plowed its site like a field. Millions were sold as slaves in heathen lands.

The Assignment to Spiritual Israel

What God intended to do for the world through Israel, the chosen nation, He will finally accomplish through His church. He has entrusted “His vineyard to other vinedressers,” who faithfully “render to Him the fruits in their seasons.” These witnesses for God are the spiritual Israel, and God will fulfill to them all the covenant promises He made to His ancient people.

For many centuries, secular and religious law prohibited preaching the gospel in its purity. As a result, the Lord’s great moral “vineyard” was almost unoccupied. The people were deprived of the light of God’s Word. Error and superstition threatened to blot out true religion. God’s church was as surely in captivity during this long period of persecution as the children of Israel were during the exile in Babylon.

But, thank God, the privileges given the people of God when they were delivered from Babylon have been restored to spiritual Israel. In every part of the earth, men and women are responding to the Heavensent message, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come.” **Revelation 14:7**.

“Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city,” which has “made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.” God has given spiritual Israel the message, “Come out of her, My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.” **Verse 8; 18:4**. As the captive exiles obeyed the message, “Flee from the midst of Babylon” (**Jeremiah 51:6**), so those who fear God are withdrawing from spiritual Babylon. Soon they are to stand in

[251]

the heavenly Canaan as trophies of divine grace.

When the promised Messiah was about to appear, the message of Christ’s forerunner was, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” **Matthew 3:2**. Today, in the spirit and power of John the Baptist, messengers whom God has appointed are alerting a judgment-bound world to the closing of probation and Christ’s appearance as King of kings and Lord of lords. The responsibility rests on His church to warn those who are standing on the brink of eternal ruin. The principles in the great controversy must be made plain to every human being who will listen.

In these final hours the Lord expects His church to rally to action as never before. Those whom Christ has made free through His precious truth are to proclaim the praises of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. The blessings He so liberally bestowed, they are to communicate to every people. Every true disciple is to radiate an influence of life, courage, and true healing.

Light Will Penetrate the World's Darkness

The coming of Christ will take place in the darkest period of earth's history, when Satan will work "with all unrighteous deception." **2 Thessalonians 2:10**. We see his working in the many heresies and delusions of these days. His deceptions are even contaminating the professed churches of Christ. The great apostasy will develop into darkness deep as midnight. But out of that darkness God's light will shine. To His people God says, "Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you." **Isaiah 60:1**.

At Nazareth Christ said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." **Luke 4:18, 19**. This was the work He commissioned His disciples to do, "to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out. ... Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard." **Isaiah 58:7, 8**.

Thus in the night of spiritual darkness God's glory is to shine out through His church. All around us we hear the wails of a world's sorrow. On every side we find the needy and distressed. We are called to help relieve life's hardships and misery. If Christ is abiding in us, our hearts will be full of divine sympathy.

There are many who are without hope. Bring back the sunshine to them. Many have lost their courage. Pray for them. Read to them from the Word of God. Upon many there is a soul sickness that no physician can heal. Bring them to Jesus.

[252]

The whole earth, wrapped in darkness and pain, is to be lighted with the knowledge of God's love. The light is to reach every class of people. No longer are the heathen to be wrapped in midnight darkness.

Christ has made every provision for His church to be a transformed body, every Christian surrounded with a spiritual atmosphere of light and peace. He wants us to reveal His own joy in our lives.

Christ is coming with power and great glory. While all the world is shrouded in darkness, there will be light in every home of God's people. They will catch the first light of His second appearing. While the wicked run in panic, Christ's followers will rejoice in His presence.

Then the redeemed will receive their promised inheritance. Here God's design for Israel will meet its literal fulfillment. God's plans have been moving steadily forward toward their accomplishment. This is how it was with Israel through the history of the divided monarchy, and it is this way with spiritual Israel today.

The apostle John testifies, "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"

“He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.” *Revelation 7:9, 10; 17:14.*

[253]

Visions of a Glorious Future

In the darkest days of the long conflict with evil, the people of God have been given revelations of Jehovah's eternal plan. He has permitted them to look beyond the trials of the present to the triumphs of the future, when the redeemed will possess the Promised Land. Today the controversy of the ages is rapidly coming to a close, and the promised blessings will soon arrive. Despised, persecuted, and forsaken, God's children in every age have looked forward to the time when He will fulfill His assurance, "I will make you an eternal excellence, a joy of many generations." *Isaiah 60:15*.

The church will triumph, but not without severe conflict. "The bread of adversity," "the water of affliction" (*Isaiah 30:20*), these are common to all of us; but none will be overwhelmed if they put their trust in the One mighty to deliver. "Thus says the Lord, who created you, ... 'I have called you by your name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.'" *Isaiah 43:1-3*.

There is forgiveness with God; there is acceptance full and free through the merits of Jesus, our crucified and risen Lord. "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins." "You shall know that I, the Lord, am your Savior." *Verse 25; 60:16*.

"No weapon formed against you shall prosper,
And every tongue which rises against you in judgment
You shall condemn.
This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord,
And their righteousness is from Me,"
Says the Lord.

Isaiah 54:17

Wearing the armor of Christ's righteousness, the church is to enter on her final conflict. She is to go out into all the world, conquering and to conquer. The darkest hour of the struggle comes just before the day of final deliverance. When "the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall," God will be to His church

[254]

"a refuge from the storm." *Isaiah 25:4*.

The word of the Lord to His faithful ones is, "Come, My people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation is past. For behold, the Lord comes out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity." *Isaiah 26:20, 21*.

Human Pride Will Be Laid Low

In visions of the great judgment day, God gave His inspired messengers glimpses of the distress of those unprepared to meet their Lord. “Behold, the Lord makes the earth empty and makes it waste, distorts its surface and scatters abroad its inhabitants.” “Because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant.” **Isaiah 24:1, 5.**

“The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be brought low; the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.” “In that day a man will cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which they made, each for himself to worship, to the moles and bats, to go into the clefts of the rocks, and the crags of the rugged rocks, from the terror of the Lord and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily.” **Isaiah 2:17, 20, 21.**

Of those times when human pride will be laid low, Jeremiah testifies: “Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it.” **Jeremiah 30:7.**

The day of wrath to God’s enemies is the day of final deliverance to His church. The Lord “will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken.” **Isaiah 25:8.** And as the prophet sees the Lord descending from heaven with all the holy angels to gather the remnant church from among the nations of earth, he hears the elated cry:

“Behold, this is our God;
 We have waited for Him, and He will save us.
 This is the Lord;
 We have waited for Him;
 We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.”

Verse 9

The Resurrection From the Dead

The voice of the Son of God calls the sleeping saints out from the prison house of death. “Your dead shall live; together with My dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust.” **Isaiah 26:19.**

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
 And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.
 Then the lame shall leap like a deer,
 And the tongue of the dumb sing.

Isaiah 35:5, 6

In the prophet’s visions, those who have triumphed over sin and

the grave are now seen as happy in the presence of their Maker, talking freely with Him as Adam and Eve talked with God in the beginning. “I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying.” “The inhabitant will not say, ‘I am sick’; the people who dwell in it will be forgiven their iniquity.” *Isaiah 65:19; 33:24.*

Waters shall burst forth in the wilderness,
And streams in the desert.
The parched ground shall become a pool,
And the thirsty land springs of water.

“Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.” *Isaiah 35:6, 7; 40:2.*

“Violence shall no longer be heard in your land,
Neither wasting nor destruction within your borders;
But you shall call your walls Salvation,
And your gates Praise.”
“Your people shall all be righteous;
They shall inherit the land forever,
The branch of My planting,
The work of My hands,
That I may be glorified.”

Isaiah 60:18, 21

The prophet caught the sound of music there, such music and song as no mortal ear has heard or mind imagined outside of visions from God. “Joy and gladness will be found in it, thanksgiving and the voice of melody.” *Isaiah 51:3.* “Both the singers and the players on instruments say, ‘All my springs are in you.’” *Psalms 87:7.*

What Life Will Be Like in the New Earth

In the earth made new, the redeemed will engage in the activities and pleasures that brought happiness to Adam and Eve in the beginning. They will live the Eden life, the life in garden and field. “They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.” *Isaiah 65:21, 22.* They will develop every power, increase every capability, engage in the grandest activities, and realize their highest ambitions.

The prophets to whom God revealed these scenes longed to understand their full meaning, inquiring “about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated. ... They were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you.” *1 Peter 1:11, 12, NRSV.*

Struggling friend, we are still in the shadows and turmoil of earthly activities, but soon our Savior will appear. Soon we will see Him who is the focus of our hopes of eternal life. And in His presence the trials of this life will seem like nothing. The former

[256]

things “shall not be remembered or come to mind.” “Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: ‘For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry.’” *Isaiah 65:17; Hebrews 10:35-37.*

Look up, and let your faith continually increase. Let this faith guide you along the narrow path that leads through the gates of the city into the wide, limitless future of glory. “Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.” *James 5:7, 8.*

The nations of the saved will know no other law than the law of heaven. All will be a happy, united family. The morning stars will sing together, and the sons of God will shout for joy, while God and Christ will unite in proclaiming, “There shall be no more sin, neither shall there be any more death.”

“‘From one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me,’ says the Lord.” “For the Lord will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places; He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord.”

“As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.” *Isaiah 66:23; 51:3; 62:5.*