

ZECHARIAH

Ezra mentions Zechariah in the same breath with the prophet Haggai. It is, therefore, logical, after having studied Haggai, to continue with the study of his prophecy. We read in Ezra: “Now Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, a descendant of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them.” And: “So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo. They finished building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia.”¹

Zechariah begins his prophetic career in the eighth month of the second year of the reign of King Darius. His message fits between the third and the fourth prophecy of Haggai. Zechariah’s prophecies go farther than the condensed versions of Haggai’s addresses. He is more prophetic in the sense that God shows him visions.

The first part of his book consists of eight visions (chapters 1-6:8); the second part consists of admonitions, promises, and, what I would like to call, apocalyptic utterances (chapters 6:9-14:21).

Haggai found probably a good audience among the older generation. Whether we may conclude from this that he was no longer young himself, I do not know. Haggai’s question: “Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?”² does not necessarily imply that the prophet was part of that group. But it is logical to conclude from the words in ch. 2:4 of this book: “Run, tell that young man, ‘Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of men and livestock in it’ ” that Zechariah was still a young man when he received God’s revelations. He must have had great influence upon the younger generation of his time. The opening verses of his book would also point in this direction.

We may divide the book as follows:

- A. Introduction 1:1-6
- B. Eight visions 1:7-6:8
 - 1. The vision of the horsemen 1:7-17
 - 2. The vision of the four horns and the four craftsmen 1:18-21
 - 3. The vision of the man with the measuring line 2:1-5
 - 4. Intermezzo – Admonition to return to Jerusalem 2:6:13
 - 5. The vision of Joshua standing before God 3:1-10
 - 6. The vision of the gold lampstand and the olive trees 4:1-14
 - 7. The vision flying scroll 5:1-4
 - 8. The vision of the woman in the measuring basket 5:5-11
 - 9. The vision of the chariots coming out from between two mountains of bronze 6:1-8
- C. Apocalyptic utterances and other exhortations 6:9-14:21
 - 1. The announcement of the coming of “The Branch” 6:9-15
 - 2. Questions from the people regarding fasting in connection with the fall of Jerusalem 7:1-14
 - 3. Promises of redemption 8:1-23
 - 4. God’s attitude toward other nations 9:1-8
 - 5. The triumphal entry of the King 9:9,10
 - 6. God’s victory by means of Israel 9:11-17
 - 7. Return from captivity 10:1-12
 - 8. The destruction of Lebanon and Bashan 11:1-3
 - 9. The shepherds of Israel 11:4-17
 - 10. Jerusalem besieged and delivered 12:1-9
 - 11. Lament over the Messiah 12:10-14
 - 12. False prophets 13:1-6
 - 13. The striking of the Good Shepherd 13:7-9
 - 14. God’s revelation and kingship 14:1-21

A. Introduction 1:1-6

¹ Ezra 5:1; 6:14

² Hag. 2:3

1 *In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo:*

2 *"The LORD was very angry with your forefathers.*

3 *Therefore tell the people: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Return to me,' declares the LORD Almighty, 'and I will return to you,' says the LORD Almighty.*

4 *Do not be like your forefathers, to whom the earlier prophets proclaimed: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Turn from your evil ways and your evil practices.' But they would not listen or pay attention to me, declares the LORD.*

5 *Where are your forefathers now? And the prophets, do they live forever?*

6 *But did not my words and my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets, overtake your forefathers?*

"Then they repented and said, 'The LORD Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve, just as he determined to do.'"

It may sound strange to us that Zechariah preaches a message of conversion to people who had voluntarily returned from captivity and who had given free-will offerings for the rebuilding of the temple. The work on the temple had already been resumed in the sixth month of the second year of the reign of King Darius. Zechariah's prophetic message came two months later! But God says to people who are up to their ears in the Lord's work that they must be converted. There was a danger that these people had merely returned to the city of their ancestors rather than to the place of God's revelation. It could be that, in rebuilding the temple, they were more concerned about national unity than about God's dwelling place. If the Lord God no longer occupies the central place in the work of the Lord, it is time for us to be converted.

In studying Haggai, we found that there was a spirit of dishonesty among people who participated in the building. We read: "When anyone came to a heap of twenty measures, there were only ten. When anyone went to a wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were only twenty. I struck all the work of your hands with blight, mildew and hail, yet you did not turn to me," declares the LORD."³ There had not been a complete inner change, which is so necessary in those who find themselves standing before God.

Zechariah opens his prophecy with a subject that may have been a favorite for the younger generation of Jews: The sins of the forefathers.

In studying Haggai, we saw that the difference between the old temple and the new was not in the measurements but in the presence of the Shekinah of the God of Israel. Now the Lord promised to return to the Jews if they would return to Him. The alternative is illustrated with a clear example. The previous generation had experienced what God through Moses had told centuries before would befall them if they refused to obey.⁴ Throughout the ages, the issue had always been the confrontation with the Word of God. Centuries had passed but the Word of God had caught up with man. This same Word now came to this younger generation. It is the same Word that still comes to us today. We think of the impressive words by the apostle John in his First Epistle: "The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."⁵

B. Eight visions 1:7-6:8

1 The vision of the horsemen 1:7-17

7 *On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo.*

8 *During the night I had a vision-and there before me was a man riding a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine. Behind him were red, brown and white horses.*

9 *I asked, "What are these, my lord?"*

The angel who was talking with me answered, "I will show you what they are."

10 *Then the man standing among the myrtle trees explained, "They are the ones the LORD has sent to go throughout the earth."*

³ Hag. 2:16,17

⁴ See Deut. 28:15-68

⁵ I John 2:17

11 And they reported to the angel of the LORD, who was standing among the myrtle trees, "We have gone throughout the earth and found the whole world at rest and in peace."

12 Then the angel of the LORD said, "LORD Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these seventy years?"

13 So the LORD spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me.

14 Then the angel who was speaking to me said, "Proclaim this word: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion,

15 but I am very angry with the nations that feel secure. I was only a little angry, but they added to the calamity.'

16 "Therefore, this is what the LORD says: 'I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt. And the measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem,' declares the LORD Almighty.

17 "Proclaim further: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'My towns will again overflow with prosperity, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem.'"

The words of the introduction are the only ones spoken during the time Haggai prophesied. Haggai spoke his last message on the 24th of the 9th month in the second year of King Darius. Zechariah spoke when Haggai fell silent. Zechariah not only spoke to the younger generation, he also built on the pioneer's work that Haggai had begun. As in the relationship between Paul and Apollos, Paul "planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow,"⁶ so Haggai began the work and Zechariah built on it. It is important to keep this division of tasks in mind.

Zechariah receives his first vision on the 24th of the 11th month in the second year of Darius, two months after Haggai's last prophecy, exactly five months after the resumption of the work on the temple. He sees a ravine with myrtle trees. Among the bushes is a horseman on a red horse. Behind this man are a number of other horses of various colors: red, brown, and white. We assume that "red" here is fox colored. The Hebrew word used is *'adom*, which refers to the color of blood. Myrtle trees are evergreens with red flowers. The leaves were used to adorn a bride and at the Feast of Tabernacles. It has a pungent odor and is widely used. The myrtle trees in this vision, undoubtedly, accentuate the mood of the scene. They present a festive background. But the figures in the foreground do not give the same impression. The key to understanding the symbols is found in vs. 12: "LORD Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these seventy years?" The horseman had reported: "We have gone throughout the earth and found the whole world at rest and in peace," to which the words "how long?" are a reaction. The rest and peace are not wholesome phenomena; they are the rest and peace of death. The whole earth is as dead as a moonscape. There is no sign of life anywhere. All this is due to the fact that Jerusalem lay in ruin. It was the result of a seventy-year-long cessation of God's revelation on earth.

We must remember that this is said after the rebuilding of the temple had already begun. The report of the deadness refers to the condition of the whole earth. In the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, God had His eye on the whole world. We must also remember that the rebuilding of the temple does not mean that God's revelation had returned to the place. The house was still uninhabited.

It is not clear whether the horseman is the same as "the angel of the LORD." The location mentioned "among the myrtle trees," could also point to another spot and person. The Second Person of the Trinity, however, is often called "the angel of the LORD" in the Old Testament.

This vision of the horsemen and the horses brings to mind a similar vision of the apostle John in Revelation.⁷ The differences between the two visions, however, are greater than the similarities. What John depicts in Revelation are images of the great tribulation that will come upon the earth. The white horse and his rider represent the triumph of the Antichrist. The horses that follow his army are war, hunger, and death. We could conclude from the fact that, in the vision in Revelation the red horse represents war, that the horse in Zechariah's vision also points in the direction of a battle. But in his vision the war is over because death reigns supremely. All the factors in this vision contribute to the riddle of it. There is the festive character of the myrtle trees, there are the horsemen on their war-horses, there is a report that death reigns over the whole earth, and yet this was the time in which the temple was being rebuilt. People were

⁶ See I Cor. 3:6

⁷ See Rev. 6:4-8

working on the restoration of God's revelation. This vision is as complex as life itself. The myrtle trees are there to decorate the festivities but without feasting humans the picture makes little sense.

The comparison may be strange, but the beginning of the vision makes one think of the opening scene of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, where three witches arouse a murderous plan in the heart of Macbeth with their prediction. The comparison throws, of course, more light upon Shakespeare than upon the Bible, but we may see this vision as the opening scene of a tremendous act of a theater in the heavenly places, in which the high priest Joshua plays the leading role. That would make us better understand the mood of this scene.

The question "how long?" appears several times in the Scriptures. In Moses' Psalm, we read: "Relent, O LORD! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants."⁸ When God commissions Isaiah to announce His punishment over Israel, we read: "Then I said, 'For how long, O Lord?'"⁹ We see the souls of the martyrs in Revelation. "They called out in a loud voice, 'How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?'"¹⁰ Throughout the whole Bible, we see this paradox of God's patience and impatience. It sounds as if the plan God made for the completion of the ages seems to go too slowly even for Himself. We ought to participate in God's impatience, so that we can cry out: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."¹¹

The words the Father speaks to the Son in this vision are not recorded for us. Zechariah describes them as: "kind and comforting words." Maybe the experience the apostle Paul had, which he recorded in his epistle to the Corinthians can throw some light on this matter. He writes: "he was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell."¹² There are holy words and concepts that would sound profane in a human mouth. I am not in favor of Transcendental Meditation, but in their keeping secret of their mantra, they may come closer to the truth than many Christians do. I do not mean to say that a mantra would be holy. It is a surrogate of holy heavenly things. Zechariah was not initiated in these secrets; he heard them but did not understand them. They did, however, have a salutary influence on him, and they took away the sorrow of his soul.

Then he received the command to preach. All genuine preaching on earth is rooted in words that are spoken in heaven. Preaching also is a shadow of a heavenly reality. I do not mean to say that preaching is transcendental, that is occupies itself with invisible things that are outside the realm of sensory and spiritual observation, but a preacher ought to be conscious of the fact that the Word of God which he passes on goes beyond himself. This makes the Word of God such a surprising experience for a human being. In the same way, Beethoven could find comfort in his own music. A sermon represents more than the thoughts of a preacher. His own thoughts are not left out, but what comes forth as the Word of God is not something that is conceived in the human mind. It requires an act of God's revelation. This was true, not only for the Old Testament prophets, it is the same for modern man as he is inspired while studying and explaining the message of the Bible. I have often been aware of this in preparing a sermon.

The contents of Zechariah's sermon is that God has become "very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion." This does not mean that God is fixed upon the locations of Jerusalem and Zion, but as people have begun to devote themselves to the rebuilding of the temple and have started, however hesitantly, to reach out for God's revelation of Himself, God can not longer be held back. The relationship between God's jealousy or eagerness and that of the people of Israel can be compared to the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The boy goes back home with a heavy heart, full of hope and fear. The father rushes from the place where he has watched daily for his son's return and embraces him. Such is God's jealousy for those who want to build His house. Are those not "kind and comforting words?" The culmination of God's jealousy is expressed in the words: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son."¹³

God had used other nations to administer His punishment to Israel. But in their rage they went far beyond their call of duty. God used Satan in the same way to achieve His goal with Job. Satan also will try to go beyond the limitations of his mandate. He will always try to bring about the complete corruption that he has set as a goal for all of God's creation, including himself. In this way, he will always remain guilty before God, although he serves sometimes as God's instrument.

⁸ Ps. 90:13

⁹ Isa. 6:11

¹⁰ Rev. 6:10

¹¹ Rev. 22:20

¹² II Cor. 12:4

¹³ John 3:16

The announcement of the measuring of Jerusalem corresponds to the topic of the third vision in the next chapter. The restoration of the temple and the restoration of God's revelation will result in an abundance of blessing, which is represented here as material affluence. In a later dispensation this will come in the form of "every spiritual blessing in Christ in the heavenly realms."¹⁴

2. The vision of the four horns and the four craftsmen 1:18-21

18 Then I looked up-and there before me were four horns!

19 I asked the angel who was speaking to me, "What are these?" He answered me, "These are the horns that scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem."

20 Then the LORD showed me four craftsmen.

21 I asked, "What are these coming to do?" He answered, "These are the horns that scattered Judah so that no one could raise his head, but the craftsmen have come to terrify them and throw down these horns of the nations who lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter its people."

We do not know whether Zechariah saw this vision on the same day as the first one. It is possible that all eight visions came to him in the form of a dream and followed each other in the same night. There does not seem to be a direct connection among the different visions, except that they all occurred on a heavenly level. Zechariah was given insight in the heavenly reality of things on earth. We read in the Book Daniel that the powers on earth are represented as horns. "After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast-terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns. While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully."¹⁵

It is more than likely that the four beasts in Daniel's vision are identical with the four horns in this one. In Daniel's vision, the first beast was like a lion with wings of an eagle, the second was like a bear, the third like a leopard with bird wings, and the fourth was the most terrifying and powerful one with ten horns. The four empires are probably the same as the statue King Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream, with a head of pure gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, and its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay.¹⁶ The common interpretation of the parts of this statue is that they represent the Babylonian Empire, the Mede-Persian Empire, the Macedonian Empire, and the Roman Empire. What King Nebuchadnezzar saw with his human eyes, rather subjectively, as a beautiful statue, Daniel saw with spiritual eyes as empires governed by horrible demons.

If it is true that Zechariah's horns refer to the same empires, half of what he saw had already occurred and the other half was still in the future. Zechariah lived in the time of the Persian Empire. The fact that, in answer to Zechariah's question, the angel says: "These are the horns that scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem," does not necessarily mean that, at that moment all this had already taken place in world history. Our reckoning of time may be just as different from the time reckoning in the heavenly places as ours is from the time in C. S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*. In Daniel's vision, the coming of "the prince of Greece" is not represented as an event that still lay one hundred years or more in the future. There is also a possibility that the future is not included in Zechariah's vision but that the horns only represent the empires that had been responsible for the destruction of Samaria and Jerusalem, namely Assyria and Babylon. This is not clear.

God has a craftsman for each horn. The KJV calls them "carpenters," TLB uses the word "blacksmiths." The Hebrew word *charash* is a generic word for any kind of workman. "Blacksmith" seems to be the most appropriate in the context.

3. The vision of the man with the measuring line 2:1-5

1 Then I looked up-and there before me was a man with a measuring line in his hand!

2 I asked, "Where are you going?"

He answered me, "To measure Jerusalem, to find out how wide and how long it is."

¹⁴ Eph. 1:3

¹⁵ Daniel 7:7,8

¹⁶ See Dan. 2:32,33

**3 Then the angel who was speaking to me left, and another angel came to meet him
4 and said to him: "Run, tell that young man, `Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of men and livestock in it.
5 And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,' declares the LORD, `and I will be its glory within.'**

This vision is almost completely identical to the vision John had of the heavenly Jerusalem that an angel measured with a rod of gold.¹⁷ Zechariah saw a man who was on his way to measure Jerusalem; or rather, to lay out the line where Jerusalem would be rebuilt. Remarkably, he never came to the point where he took the measurements. Another angel caught up with him with the message that Jerusalem will be an open place without walls or city limits. It is not clear who "that young man" in the text is. This could refer to Zechariah or to the man with the measuring rod. We said earlier that this verse suggests that Zechariah was still a young man when he prophesied, but this may be wrong.

As Haggai's prophecy about the glory of the new temple far surpassed the reality of the place, so in this prophecy, the glory of the city refers to something beyond the place on earth. Here also, things on earth are a reflection of things above. The city of Jerusalem in itself was not much different from other cities on earth. We read in Nehemiah that the city wall was rebuilt and this was, obviously, done with the blessing of the Lord. Here also, God has more in mind than a city in the land of Palestine.

We ask again the question why these images are necessary. People devote themselves to the task, they labor and die for what is a shadow of reality. What Joshua and Zerubbabel did here, and what Nehemiah would do later in rebuilding the wall, turns out to be more than a game played in preparation for the reality to come. I used to sit in my office writing, with four little kittens who could not stop running after everything that moved. When it didn't move they made it move. What is the purpose of that? Why does a child play with toys? How essential the playing is becomes evident when we notice that a child who doesn't learn to play also doesn't learn to live responsibly. In the same manner everything we do on earth unto the Lord is like a game we play in preparation for the ultimate responsibility that will be given to us in heaven. This does not make our games less serious. To the contrary: nothing on earth is more serious than a game! For this reason God allows us to see glimpses of the reality, so that we would imitate it more seriously on earth. The excitement of every game is that it is like the real thing. God plays the flute for us so that we would dance. The essence of all our planting, building, and traveling is the city that has foundations¹⁸ of which the Lord declares: "I myself will be a wall of fire around it and I will be its glory within." As always in Scripture, this prophecy draws a line from time into eternity. The meaning and honorability of this labor that occupied Joshua and Zerubbabel only becomes evident when God lets His light shine upon it from eternity.

4. Intermezzo – Admonition to return to Jerusalem 2:6:13

6 "Come! Come! Flee from the land of the north," declares the LORD, "for I have scattered you to the four winds of heaven," declares the LORD.

7 "Come, O Zion! Escape, you who live in the Daughter of Babylon!"

8 For this is what the LORD Almighty says: "After he has honored me and has sent me against the nations that have plundered you-for whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye-

9 I will surely raise my hand against them so that their slaves will plunder them. Then you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me.

10 "Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the LORD. 11 "Many nations will be joined with the LORD in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you.

12 The LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem.

13 Be still before the LORD, all mankind, because he has roused himself from his holy dwelling."

Much of the material in this prophecy is given in condensed form. There are four words that catch the eye, which appear to indicate the development of the theme: "Flee" (vs. 6), "Escape" (vs. 7). "Shout" (vs. 10), and "Be still" (vs. 13).

The prophecy is a call to those who had not yet returned to Israel. This call emphasizes at the same time the importance of those who had already come to Jerusalem. The captivity had been forced upon the

¹⁷ See Rev. 21:15

¹⁸ See Heb. 11:10

people. God had driven His children out of the land in order to let them escape judgment in the same manner as Lot fled Sodom. Now the roles were reversed. Judgment would come upon the people who had ransacked Israel. Now there must be a fleeing toward God. Believers can be led into captivity, but they have to take care not to fall under the same judgment as unbelievers. How this can happen we see illustrated in the experience of Lot, and particularly of Lot's wife.¹⁹ We are in danger if we are so attached to our home, our furniture, and our family that we find it impossible to separate ourselves from them. That is also the meaning of Paul's word, written in connection with the Lord's supper: "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world."²⁰ We always have to ask ourselves the question if our vision remains sufficiently clear to see what is important and what is not.

Fleeing from the land of the North represents the negative aspect of the flight. We must always say "No" to that which is negative and forms an obstacle to our fellowship with God. A German philosopher once said: "He who says a strong 'no' should also say a strong 'yes!' " Fleeing the world has no meaning in itself if it does not go together with fleeing toward God. Unless that is the case we go from the frying pan into the fire. The RSV brings this out more clearly than the NIV with: "Ho! Escape to Zion, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon." Lot's wife looked back because she had no place to look forward to. Zion is still the place of God's revelation. Listen to the authority of Zechariah's words: "The Lord of Glory has sent me against the nations that oppressed you."²¹

The reason for our flight is in who we are and what we are. As God's children we are "the apple of His eye." The issue is always that man is the bearer of God's image. He who denies God and does not recognize His image in man ceases himself to be the bearer of God's image. That robs man of his value and makes him ripe for destruction. Zechariah points to the destruction of the Persian Empire as proof of his divine calling. We can imagine what those words must have meant for people who, fifteen years earlier, had been forced to stop the work on the temple and who still remembered vividly the pogrom that had terrorized them.²² The message of this prophet gave them the hopeful assurance that the beast's sting had been pulled out.

The third key word is: "Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion." In spite of all the sorrow and suffering that can befall a child of God, the essence of fellowship with Him remains joy. Peace and joy are guaranteed in our relationship with Him. A few hours before His own horrible death, Jesus passed on this legacy to His disciples: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid," and: "Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."²³

As we saw in Haggai's prophecy, the marked difference between the old temple and the new one was the absence of the ark.²⁴ The Jews under the leadership of Zerubbabel must have had the feeling that they were rebuilding and empty shell. That is why God promised that He would come Himself and dwell again among His people. That this would happen in a manner that was more glorious than in the dispensation of the ark nobody could have foreseen. The fulfillment of this promise would be in the coming of "Immanuel" -which means, 'God with us,'²⁵ and yet more wonderful in the presence of the Holy Spirit, which Paul describes as "Christ in you, the hope of glory."²⁶

There is another direct link between Paul's statement and this prophecy. God's presence was meant, not only for the Jews, but for many nations. As in vs. 8, Zechariah appeals to this glory as proof of his being sent by God. If a human life, such as the life of Zerubbabel and his contemporaries were limited only to the time they lived on earth, Zechariah's appeal would have been meaningless.

¹⁹ See Gen. 19:23-26

²⁰ I Cor. 11:28-32

²¹ TLB

²² See Ezra 4:23

²³ John 14:27;16:24

²⁴ See Hag. 2:8-10

²⁵ Matt. 1:23

²⁶ Col. 1:27

The third phase of this prophecy is described in vs. 12: "The LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem." The choosing of Jerusalem refers most likely to the future when our Lord will establish His Millennium on earth.

The fourth key word is "Be silent!" This means: "stand in awe." This respect gives Him the highest honor, not by bursting out in shouts but in being still. Silence can be more meaningful than shouts. That is what makes the opening of the seventh seal in Revelation so impressive: "When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour."²⁷ David also sings: "There will be silence before You, and praise in Zion, O God."²⁸ In that psalm, silence is the highest expression of praise. The scene is so overwhelming and so extraordinary that every living creature holds his breath. God Himself, the almighty Creator, the purpose and meaning of all that lives, stands up from His throne to go to that small speck on earth, called Judea, to claim it as His inheritance. We have never looked at the Incarnation in that way, but yet, that is what it is.

5. The vision of Joshua standing before God 3:1-10

1 Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him.

2 The LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?"

3 Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel.

4 The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you."

5 Then I said, "Put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the LORD stood by.

6 The angel of the LORD gave this charge to Joshua:

7 "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here.'

8 "'Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch.

9 See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it,' says the LORD Almighty, 'and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day.

10 "In that day each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree,' declares the LORD Almighty."

This vision is probably the best known in the book of Zechariah because it appeals directly to us. The high priest Joshua stands before God, dressed in filthy clothes. He is cleansed and given a charge.

The beginning of this vision reminds us of the opening of the Book of Job where Satan tries to discredit Job before God. We see there that what happens with man on earth is determined by what is decreed about him in heaven. The main difference between Job and Joshua is that, in Zechariah's vision, Joshua himself is present. Job would have reacted quite differently if he had been able to read the first two chapters of his own book. A great deal of Job's suffering consisted in the fact that he did not understand what happened to him. This misunderstanding has since been removed for us since we can read the whole of Job's experience. Yet, there are still millions in the world today who do not understand the purpose of life, although this can be known. We may know it and we can face what overcomes us in a more conscious way, more positively and with a greater vision than Job ever could. God does not give Satan the same chance twice, and the devil is smart enough not to ask for it. Yet, his experience with Job has not cured him of the practice to accuse. Even with people who have consciously chosen God's side, he comes forward, over and over again, to indict them. In Revelation he is called: "he accuser of our brothers."²⁹

Why does Satan do this? Does it bother him that we have not yet reached perfect sanctification? In the case of Job, Satan's accusations bounced back on Job's attestations of innocence. Evidently, Job's knowledge of God was not such that it gave him a clear conviction of sin. One of the truths everyone learns

²⁷ Rev. 8:1

²⁸ Ps. 65:1 (NASU)

²⁹ See Rev. 12:10

from the Book of Job is that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”³⁰ On the basis of this acquired knowledge, Satan launches his attacks on the believers. One of our problems is that he is correct when he accuses us. We all stand before God in filthy clothes. It must give the devil a great deal of satisfaction that he can play off our sin against God’s holiness. God could do nothing against that at that moment, except announcing that Satan would not escape his own punishment. When Zechariah had this vision the moment had not come yet on which the Lord would “remove the sin of this land in a single day.” For us that day lies in the past.

There is an anecdote about Martin Luther that one day Satan came to him to remind him of his sin. He wrote all of Luther’s sins on a sheet of paper. When he finished Luther gave the list back to him and said: “Write across it: ‘Atoned for by the blood of Christ!’” That is the dispensation in which we presently live. The day will come, however when will be accomplished what is written in Revelation: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.”³¹ Then the punishment God announced for Satan in this vision will be executed. All sin will then be removed lock, stock, and barrel.

What is shown to us in this vision is the heavenly side of what Ezra described as: “Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, helping them,”³² and of Haggai’s statement: “So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God.”³³ This stirring up of the spirit is what Joshua experienced while standing before God and being cleansed of his sin.

The way we read it, it was Zechariah who had this vision. Whether Joshua actually participated in it, we are not told. It is more likely that Zechariah reported the vision to Joshua and that the high priest simply accepted by faith what he was told. If that is true, the case becomes even more relevant for us. Joshua was justified in the basis of his faith. A person’s actions are always related to what he thinks and believes. Even the acts of unbelievers are determined by his world philosophy. Our work in the Kingdom of Heaven is shaped by our vision of God and our relationship with Him.

The fact that Joshua is the high priest Zechariah sees standing before God is of great importance. He was the middleman between God and men, the great intercessor. God’s work depends on the prayer of men. Without prayer nothing spiritual ever comes about. God refuses to act if there are no people whom He can involve. He only gives to us when we ask. That was the reason the work of rebuilding the temple had stopped for fifteen years because there had been no intercessors.

Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes. This means that there was sin and there were irregularities that had hindered the free flow of prayer. This interaction of forgiveness of sins, intercessory prayer, and labor of love shows us the complicated relationships in the Kingdom. God’s share in the cleansing that stimulates prayer, and there is man’s urge to pray after being forgiven. There are always people who want to participate in the building of God’s house, but, as the psalmist says: “Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain.”³⁴

It is worthy of note to see how God reacts to Satan’s accusations. First of all, He says: “The LORD rebuke you, Satan!” The Lord speaks those words Himself, but they sound as if He speaks of someone else. This reminds us of Jesus’ words: “Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.”³⁵ This is, undoubtedly, the meaning of the words of the Father to Satan here. It was the Son who would bring about the atonement for sin. That gives Him the right to punish the author of sin.

“The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem” is given here as one of the names of God. His choosing of Jerusalem is as one of His attributes; it is in complete accordance with God’s character. This name is of

³⁰ Rom. 3:23

³¹ Rev. 12:10

³² Ezra 5:2

³³ Hag. 1:14

³⁴ Ps. 127:1

³⁵ John 5:22,27

the same kind as the one given in Exodus: “Jehovah Raphah,” “I am the LORD, who heals you.”³⁶ It is the same kind of name that Paul attributes to God: “God, who raises the dead.”³⁷

“A burning stick snatched from the fire.” It is the designation of someone who had been condemned to death and who had been saved at the last moment. Is not this the experience of everyone who has discovered that God has forgiven his sin? It expresses the amazement that resounds in the question: “Why has this happened to me?” Because Joshua stood before God as the representative of the whole nation, all shared this amazement.

Being saved from the fire does not mean that all sin was gone. Joshua stood before God in filthy clothes. Those clothes represented his own sin as well as the sin of the people. The filthy clothes are symbolic of the sins of egoism and dishonesty Haggai rebuked in his prophecy: “Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house,” and “When anyone came to a heap of twenty measures, there were only ten. When anyone went to a wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were only twenty.”³⁸

We are witnessing the redressing of the high priest whose own clothes are taken off and who is dressed in his robes of office, as are described in Leviticus.³⁹ The taking off of the filthy clothes is, of course, symbolic for the atonement of sin. One of Joshua’s duties was to atone the sins of the people, but before he could do that, he first had to bring the blood of a sacrificial animal to atone for his own sins. In Zechariah’s vision, however, Joshua was unable to do anything for himself. There was no lamb he could take. He stood before the Angel of the Lord, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The great reality shimmers vaguely through the shadows of this vision; a person cannot save himself or others if God does not save him first. Jesus takes away our filthy clothes and declares us pure. In cleansing Joshua, Jesus reached out to the day of His own death. He did that also while living on earth every time He forgave a person’s sin and rehabilitated him.

The vision shows us what is essential in the rebuilding of the temple. The temple stood for the presence of God in the midst of Israel, which made the nation into a kingdom of priests. It was God’s intention that they would all stand before God and be instrumental in the atonement of the sin of the whole world.

The Lord said to Joshua: “See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you.” The KJV renders the Hebrew word *machalatsah* as: “a change of raiment.” *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* defines it as “costly clothes, which were only worn on festal occasions.” Joshua’s new garments are the uniform worn for the work in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Once, one of our students in the Kebo Bible school in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, brought back to me a sock he had stolen when our daughter Viviane had sold some old clothes. He had come under conviction during a revival meeting in school. It was an insignificant incident in itself; after all, what is one sock? I saw this, however, as a feast when the dirt in one’s life comes floating to the top. The Lord cleanses our life and makes our heart healthy and glad.

Zechariah’s request: “Put a clean turban on his head,” is significant and contributes to the spirit of celebration. God gets people involved, not only in case of judgment, but also in the feast of restoration. In the words of Nehemiah: “The joy of the LORD is your strength.”⁴⁰ The very fact that Zechariah’s remark, who meddled as a human being in heavenly things, is taken to heart and executed, is amazing to us. It demonstrates the same principle our Lord communicated to His disciples when He said: “I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”⁴¹ The man of God becomes involved in the work of God. No one can be a casual bystander in the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the other side of the coin. Isaiah became personally involved when God told him to announce the coming judgment. We read: “Then I said, ‘For how long, O Lord?’”⁴² Amos experienced the same involvement when God showed him a vision of locusts devouring the harvest of the

³⁶ Ex. 15:26

³⁷ II Cor. 1:9

³⁸ Hag. 1:9; 2:16

³⁹ See Lev. 16:4

⁴⁰ Neh. 8:10^b

⁴¹ Matt. 18:18

⁴² Isa. 6:11^b

land. We read: "When they had stripped the land clean, I cried out, 'Sovereign LORD, forgive! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!'"⁴³

When Joshua is dressed, he is sent back with a charge, a promise, and a prophecy. The charge consists in two parts: one concerning walking in the way of the Lord, and the other concerning the accomplishing of a task. Walking in the Lord's way is an indication as to how things must be done. It stands for a life that is being led in the will of the Lord, a life of obedience. We come back to Haggai's prophecy. It is clear that the interruption of the building on the temple was related to the sins of the builders. Now as those sins are forgiven, there must be manifested a wholehearted consecration to the work. As confession of sin is an act of the will, so the will is clearly involved in the putting of the hand on the plough.

The governing of the Lord's house and the being in charge of His courts was not automatically part of the task of the priest. This kind of spiritual authority is dependant upon obedience and faithfulness. God sketched for Joshua, in a few lines, the way that lay before him and He assured him that glory would await him at the end of the road. God never sends a person into His vineyard without first giving him a glimpse of the glory to come. In this respect also, we are in this world, the same way He was. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews admonishes us: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."⁴⁴

Verse 8 states more clearly than in Haggai's prophecy that the men who are rebuilding the temple owed their value and importance to the one they represented. Haggai proclaimed the same truth regarding the temple and the person of Zerubbabel, the governor. Zechariah says that Joshua and his coworkers "are men symbolic of things to come." They foreshadowed the coming of God's servant, "the Branch," the Messiah. Thus the Holy Spirit connects this prophecy to Isaiah's words regarding the stump of a tree cut down. We read: "And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land," and: "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit."⁴⁵ If Joshua understood the meaning of these words, he must have done his work and lived his life with a deeper awareness and a greater sense of satisfaction. That is what made Jesus' life on earth so magnificent that He knew so well who He was and what He did. This consciousness is also the dividing line between a Christian and other human beings.

A stone with "seven eyes" was placed in front of Joshua and God promised that He would engrave an inscription on it. It is unlikely that this stone is the same as is mentioned in the next chapter: "Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of 'God bless it! God bless it!'"⁴⁶ Because there is mention of eyes and engraving it is more likely that a precious stone is meant. It may be that this is a reference to the breastplate and the ephod worn by the high priest, as mentioned in Exodus. We find there mention of two onyx stones engraved with the names of the sons of Israel.⁴⁷ And twelve stones, each engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.⁴⁸ It may also contain a reference to the Urim and the Thummim,⁴⁹ which were used to determine the will of God in certain matters. Nothing is known of their origin or usage, however, and unfortunately we cannot say with any certainty that the stone with seven eyes that was placed in front of Joshua belonged to any of the above mentioned categories. Some rabbis suggest that the stone may have been placed in the sanctuary to replace the ark that was absent. *Barnes' Notes* suggests: "To interpret it by other prophecy, one stone there is, of which God says, 'Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation, he that believeth shall not make haste' (Isa 28:16); that stone, of which our Lord reminded the Jews, 'the stone which the builders refused is become the head-stone of the corner' (NOTE: Ps 118:22; Matt 21:42; add Acts 4:11. The passages of the Psalm and of Isaiah are united 1 Peter 2:4-7); 'Jesus Christ Himself, the chief cornerstone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth into an holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit' (Eph 2:20-21)."

⁴³ Amos 7:2

⁴⁴ Heb. 12:2

⁴⁵ Isa. 6:13;11:1

⁴⁶ Ch. 4:7

⁴⁷ See Ex. 28:9

⁴⁸ See Ex. 28:17-21

⁴⁹ See Ex. 28:30

The little word “and” establishes a direct link between the stone and the removing of the sin of the land in a single day. There is obviously a connection between the fact that there is one stone and one day. The combination of the two elements is of great importance. It may be that the Lord wants to impress upon us that the Lord wants to impress upon us that the elements of our salvation are all in one: forgiveness of sin, (represented by the two stones the high priest wore on his shoulders), protection from sin, (expressing intercessory prayer in the twelve stones the high priest wore on his heart), and guidance (as exemplified in the Urim and the Thummim). All is concentrated in the one day on which God washed away the iniquity of the land in the death of Jesus Christ.

The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament observes: “This one day is the day of Golgotha. Accordingly, the thought of this verse is the following: Jehovah will cause His servant Tsemach⁵⁰ to come, because He will prepare His kingdom gloriously, and exterminate all the sins of His people and land at once. By the wiping away of all guilt and iniquity, not only of that which rests upon the land... but also of that of the inhabitants of the land, i.e., of the whole nation, all the discontent and all the misery which flow from sin will be swept away, and a state of blessed peace will ensue for the purified church of God. This is the thought of the tenth verse, which is formed after Mic 4:4 and 1 Kings 5:5, and with which the vision closes. The next vision shows the glory of the purified church.”

It may be difficult to determine the meaning of the seven eyes upon the stone. Some suggest that there are seven eyes looking at the stone, not that the stone had seven eyes engraved on it. That could imply that the stone is an image of the Lamb of God of whom John says in Revelation: “He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.”⁵¹ The number seven often occurs in the Bible as a figure for divinity, especially of the Spirit of God.⁵² If we look at this stone as a die, we could see one eye on each of the die’s surfaces. Human dice, however, have only six sides; God’s stone has an extra dimension that is not found among men. Maybe we are speculating too much in this matter. The fact, however, that it is God who does the engraving is proof of the fact that the stone is an object that belongs to the heavenly sanctuary. It is not made by human hands.

Zechariah mentions the “single day” in vs. 9 and “in that day” in vs. 10 in the same breath. He saw both days in a prophetic telescopic perspective. He looked at them as a person looks from far at a mountain range; he can see the peaks but not the valleys that lie in between. The day on which Jesus died to take away the sin of the land is not the same as the period of peace, joy, and fellowship, expressed in the words: “each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree.” I cannot resist the temptation to spiritualize the trees. We think of the lesson our Lord teaches us about the vine John’s Gospel.⁵³ In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus says: “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near.”⁵⁴ In the first illustration we learn a lesson about fellowship, in the second about spiritual insight. Both will be prevalent when Jesus returns and establishes His millennial reign.

6. The vision of the gold lampstand and the olive trees 4:1-14

- 1 Then the angel who talked with me returned and wakened me, as a man is wakened from his sleep.*
2 He asked me, "What do you see?" I answered, "I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lights on it, with seven channels to the lights.
3 Also there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left."
4 I asked the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?"
5 He answered, "Do you not know what these are?" "No, my lord," I replied.
6 So he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.
7 "What are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of 'God bless it! God bless it!'"
8 Then the word of the LORD came to me:
9 "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands will also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you.

⁵⁰ The Hebrew word translated “Branch.”

⁵¹ Rev. 5:6

⁵² See Rev. 4:5

⁵³ See John 15:1-8

⁵⁴ Matt. 24:32

10 "Who despises the day of small things? Men will rejoice when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. "(These seven are the eyes of the LORD, which range throughout the earth.)"

11 Then I asked the angel, "What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?"

12 Again I asked him, "What are these two olive branches beside the two gold pipes that pour out golden oil?"

13 He replied, "Do you not know what these are?" "No, my lord," I said.

14 So he said, "These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth."

This vision is the most striking in the whole book of Zechariah. The introduction is interesting. Zechariah was aroused from a kind of sleep. The statement throws a remarkable light upon the character of the person who has the vision. We usually think of visions as a form of trance that comes over a person like sleep. We believe that visions are extensions of dreams. This suggests that seeing a vision lifts us up above reality and shows us things that have little or no connection with reality. Zechariah overturns this theory by saying that the angel who talked with him returned and wakened him, "as a man is wakened from his sleep." It was not so that Zechariah was asleep and the angel woke him up. He was wide-awake, but when the angel spoke to him he became more alert than he had ever been before in his life. His new condition of being awake was comparable to a level of consciousness that was so real, as being awake is related to sleeping. That is the opposite of how we tend to see the relationship of being awake and seeing visions. If we compare our consciousness to the reality of heaven, we are the dreamers and angels are the realists. Sin constricts our consciousness. Fellowship with God wakes us up to reality.

Zechariah's sense of reality is enhanced by the angel's question: "What do you see?" In that way, Zechariah is not only forced to concentrate on what is before him, he also gets involved. In the most literal sense of the word, he becomes a witness. Zechariah sees a lampstand that is not operated mechanically but organically. The object is identical with the one that was found in the tabernacle.⁵⁵ The lampstand Zechariah saw was probably the same as the one that was shown to Moses on the mountain.⁵⁶ This lampstand is the original one. It differs from the copy that was found in the tabernacle in that the priests in the tabernacle had to daily replenish the oil in the lamps, whereas the real lampstand is being fed organically by two olive trees that grow on either side of it and which directly feed the oil in the lamps.

The angel seems to show amazement over the fact that Zechariah did not know what this meant. In the angel's opinion, the vision represented one of the most elementary parts of spiritual reality. John sees the Lord Jesus standing among seven gold lampstands.⁵⁷ Each of the lampstands represents one of the churches.⁵⁸ To the church in Ephesus, our Lord says: "If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place."⁵⁹

What then is the meaning of the lampstand? Simply this: light! The lampstand is the material expression of the most elementary spiritual reality. Physics have thus far not been able to define light, yet everyone knows what light is, even though no one can tell what its composition is. It ought to add to man's sense of humility that he is unable to define some of the most basic elements of his existence, such as light and life. Man's ignorance cause great amazement to angels. This makes us realize how senseless our rebellion against God is when we compare our ignorance with the knowledge of angels. God can expose our ignorance with the one single question: "What is light?"

The lampstand produces light by burning the oil provided by the two olive trees. If the trees were to die, the process would cease. John expresses this truth in connection with the person of Jesus Christ: "In him was life, and that life was the light of men."⁶⁰ Our own body temperature demonstrates the truth of the fact that burning is a proof of life.

The angel did not give an explanation in answer to Zechariah's question, but he applied the image to the situation of that day. What we hear is not an objective exegesis of the text but a practical one. The lampstand gives light and this means for man that the insurmountable mountain of difficulties is not being overcome by human means of might or power by the Holy Spirit. It is important to note that the answer contains both a negative and a positive. It is a human tendency to answer violence with violence. God

⁵⁵ See Ex. 25:31-41

⁵⁶ See Ex. 25:40

⁵⁷ Rev. 1:12,13

⁵⁸ See Rev. 1:20

⁵⁹ Rev. 2:5

⁶⁰ John 1:4

reduced Gideon's army from 32,000 to 300 to demonstrate that it was the Lord's victory and not the human effort.⁶¹ If we are on the Lord's side, everything that turns against us is darkness, and the only means of conquering darkness is light. A light that can never be extinguished will only be available if the Spirit of God takes over from human ingenuity and human organization.

The lampstand symbolizes obviously the superior power of the Holy Spirit. The content of that power is light and the enormity of that power is light. We are reminded of John's words: "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."⁶² And: "His life is the light that shines through the darkness-and the darkness can never extinguish it."⁶³ There are also verses that apply this light to us personally. Jesus says: "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden."⁶⁴ And Paul wrote to the Ephesians: "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)."⁶⁵ Those words are of enormous importance to us.

As we saw above, Jesus demonstrates in Revelation that the lampstand is the essence and characteristic of the church.⁶⁶ If the lampstand is removed from the church, nothing remains but an empty hull. Our well-organized churches, however, show that the removal of the lampstand does not always hinder or interrupt the running of the church!

We have to remind ourselves of the circumstances in which the Jews lived when Zechariah had this vision. Ezra describes for us how Zerubbabel and Joshua resumed the restoration of the temple by faith.⁶⁷ The governor of Trans-Euphrates, Tattenai, had just sent a letter to King Darius inquiring about the legality of the labor that was being done on the temple. Israel lived in the shadow of an enormous mountain. At that moment God told them that they are the light that shines in that darkness. Government permissions are not obtained because we know people in high places, or by armed resistance, but by not quenching the light of the Holy Spirit.

It is interesting to see that the mountain is addressed as a person, not as an object, as the NIV's: "What are you, O mighty mountain?" would make us believe. The Hebrew word *miy* does not refer to an object but it is an interrogative pronoun of persons. Circumstances have no significance in themselves. Resistance always comes from the one who manipulates circumstances, the devil. It was his doing that the work on the temple had been interrupted for fifteen years. He upset the inhabitants of Judea and the Persian government against the Jews, and at the same time, he sowed the seed of selfishness and complacency in the hearts of the builders on the temple. Now God asks this colossus the question: "Who do you think you are?" That is an embarrassing question to ask the devil. "Who" stands for a name. A name belongs to a person, and personality is related to God. When Satan fell, he had to give up all of this. He is now no longer a person in the sense that human beings are persons. The mere question: "Who are you?" enquires about his identity, which implies a victory over the Evil One. Jesus confronted the demons in the possessed man in the Gerasenes: "What is your name?" and the demons answered: "My name is Legion for we are many."⁶⁸ The devil does not deal with names, only with numbers. "Legion" is not a name it is a number. Satan called himself here: "Mighty Mountain." God says here the same as Jesus said to Peter in Matthew's Gospel: "I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."⁶⁹ Here He says to Zerubbabel: "You are Zerubbabel, and on this rock I will rebuild My temple and the mountain that obstructs the completion of the temple will become level ground." Over against the mighty mountain, God places a man, a bearer of His image and personality. God uses people, living stones to build a building that will make the gates of hell crumble. Zerubbabel is here the picture of Jesus Christ.

The capstone represents the completion of the temple of salvation. When the last stone is put in place, salvation will be complete. Jesus Christ laid the foundation of this building when He became man in Bethlehem and a sacrifice on Golgotha. His work will be complete when the last sinner will take His Name

⁶¹ See Judg. 7:2-7

⁶² I John 1:5

⁶³ John 1:5 (TLB)

⁶⁴ Matt. 5:14

⁶⁵ Eph. 5:8,9

⁶⁶ See Rev. 2:5

⁶⁷ See Ezra 5:2

⁶⁸ Mark 5:9

⁶⁹ Matt. 16:18

on his lips and calls upon Him for salvation. All of creation will then break out in shouts of victory because the last enemy, death will be vanquished and everything will be subject to our Lord's authority.

The promise that the hands of Zerubbabel, who laid the foundation, will also complete the building of the temple must have meant a tremendous encouragement during those first days after the resumption of the work. While the people were still waiting for the answer of King Darius to the complaint that had been sent to him, this Word of God kindled in the hearts of the people the faith they needed to resume the work. As earlier in the book, Zechariah connects the reality of his calling to the fulfillment of this prophecy.⁷⁰ The completion of the temple will be proof of the fact that the prophet did not merely utter human words but that he brought the creative Word of God. True prophecy always proves itself in its fruit. If the Word of God that is brought does not contribute to the building of the temple, the one who speaks is not a prophet.

Vs. 10^a: "Who despises the day of small things?" is one of the jewels of Scripture. We tend to believe that all of God's revelation consists in flashes of lightning, peals of thunder, and the sounding of trumpets, such as happened on Mount Sinai and Mount Carmel. Even Elijah had to learn that God sometimes comes as "a gentle whisper." We read in the book of First Kings: "The LORD said [to Elijah], 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.' Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'"⁷¹ We get the impression about Elijah that he was a mighty man, maybe someone with a hang for what is sensational. God had to teach him that He most often reveals Himself in "small things." It is important for us to realize this, because the greater part of our lives consists in small things. We are rarely involved in events that shock the world. We are also poor judges as far as understanding the importance of the events in our life. The reason we seek great things is that we believe that they will make us increase in importance. We believe to be unimportant in ourselves and we hope for compensation in the occurrence of sensational happenings. When we judge ourselves to lack importance we use the wrong measuring stick. A person who is created in God's image and likeness can never be unimportant. Only those who have no eye for the image of the Creator make a distinction among important people and unimportant ones.

In the same way we mistakenly call people "little" we also believe events to be "small things." God often mocks our illusions of greatness by purposely choosing what is small and despised in the eyes of men in order to put our sophistication to shame. The Seventeenth Century Dutch poet Vondel said: "Heaven has chosen that which is small. All those who have been born again in humility are of heavenly descent." Frances Schaefer said: "There are no little people." Only our Lord Jesus Christ had the gift to determine the importance of events in every situation in His life. We see how He always drew a line to heaven from the point in time where He was to establish the correct perspective. In many instances He erected monuments of eternal value to commemorate the importance of the moment. When the centurion asked Him to heal his servant, Jesus said: "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."⁷² When Mary anointed Jesus' head and feet, He announced: "I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."⁷³ And when Peter made the confession: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus replied: "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."⁷⁴ Such a day was the day at which Zerubbabel took the level and line to stake out the places where the walls of the temple were to be built.

⁷⁰ See ch. 2:8

⁷¹ I Kings 19:11-13

⁷² Matt. 8:11,12

⁷³ Matt. 26:13

⁷⁴ Matt. 16:17-20

None of the great of the earth of that time understood the importance of what happened in Jerusalem, but in heaven it was the day for which all had waited. As we saw earlier, the rebuilding of the temple was God's priority. It is a moving thought that God takes so much trouble to interest people in that which means their own salvation.

The second part of the verse: "These seven are the eyes of the LORD, which range throughout the earth," is difficult to interpret. The words probably refer to the seven eyes of the stone, mentioned in the previous chapter. In that case they would allude to the Holy Spirit. The words are almost identical to those spoken by the prophet Hanani to King Asa: "For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him."⁷⁵

The ranging throughout the earth is suggestive of the dove sent out by Noah as the waters of the flood receded. We read in Genesis: "Then he sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground. But the dove could find no place to set its feet because there was water over all the surface of the earth; so it returned to Noah in the ark. He reached out his hand and took the dove and brought it back to himself in the ark."⁷⁶ God's Spirit was reaching for a place on earth where He could dwell with men and He found it in Jerusalem. This emphasizes the fact that the essence of the rebuilding of the temple was God's work and not the religious fervor of human impulse. Is not this the real difference between true religion and all other religions of the world? It is true, however, that the verse leaves much to be desired in clarity, although it gives ample opportunity for meditation. The transmission of the text may be corrupted.

Verses 11-14 answer Zechariah's question about the olive trees and the branches. The prophet actually asked two separate questions, which are answered with one single answer. As in the verses 5 and 6, the angel who gives the vision to Zechariah seemed amazed that the prophet does not know the answers himself. To him they appeared to be fundamental issues. As in verses 5 and 6, the answer is not an explanation of facts but a practical application of truth. The image demonstrates the direct connection between the burning of the lamps and the two olive trees. Whoever, or whatever they may be, the fact that there are two anointed ones who stand before the Lord guarantees that there is light on the lampstand.

We cannot read this without referring to what John says in Revelation about the two olive trees. Speaking about two witnesses who prophesy during the great tribulation, John says: "These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth."⁷⁷ John's reference is, obviously, to Zechariah's vision. From Revelation chapter eleven, we get the impression that the whole history of salvation is personified in these two trees. The same chapter makes reference to the fire of the prophet Elijah,⁷⁸ the draught during the reign of King Ahab,⁷⁹ and the plagues of Egypt under Moses.⁸⁰ The angel's answer to Zechariah's questions must probably be sought in that direction. Nowhere it is explained who these witnesses are; we only learn what they do. It is clear that the image does not merely refer to two specific persons who will perform miracles and prophesy during the great tribulation; the character of their ministry contains too much of a synthesis of features to limit it to a certain period of world history. It seems that the whole complex of prophetic witness throughout the ages is combined in the image. Yet, Zechariah's vision is not identical to John's vision in Revelation. In John's vision there is mention of two lampstands, and the olive trees seem to be identical with the lampstands. If we ask the question what makes the lamps burn and what gives power to the testimony of Elijah and Moses, the answer is, the Word of God and the Spirit of God. Those two are the content and power of every testimony. Such is the case with the two olive trees in Zechariah's vision. The fact that John calls the witnesses: "the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth" does not contradict this. The Lord always identifies Himself with those who identify themselves with Him.

7. The vision flying scroll 5:1-4

1 I looked again-and there before me was a flying scroll!

2 He asked me, "What do you see?" I answered, "I see a flying scroll, thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide."

⁷⁵ II Chr. 16:9

⁷⁶ Gen. 8:8,9

⁷⁷ Rev.11:4

⁷⁸ See II Kings 1:1-12

⁷⁹ I Kings 17:1ff.

⁸⁰ Ex. Chapters 7-12

3 And he said to me, "This is the curse that is going out over the whole land; for according to what it says on one side, every thief will be banished, and according to what it says on the other, everyone who swears falsely will be banished.

4 The LORD Almighty declares, 'I will send it out, and it will enter the house of the thief and the house of him who swears falsely by my name. It will remain in his house and destroy it, both its timbers and its stones.'"

In this sixth vision, Zechariah sees a flying scroll 30'x15'. The scroll is called "the curse." This does not mean that the scroll would only contain a curse. The Word of God is two-edged: it is food and life for those who believe and it is a curse for those who refuse to turn to God. It is called "the curse" here because the people to whom it comes have disregarded the Word of God. The meaning of the vision is, obviously, that the Word of God catches up with sinners.

The size of the scroll is enormous. It corresponds to some of the measurements of Solomon's temple. The place where the burn offering altar stood had the same dimensions. *The Pulpit Commentary* affirms: "The careful statement of the size of the roll indicates that some special meaning is attached to these measurements. We do not know that any symbolical signification was recognized in the porch of the temple; but these dimensions may well contain a reference to the sanctuary and the altar, as Knabenbauer explains, 'The curse is of the same measure as that altar which was the instrument of expiation and reconciliation, and as that sanctuary which was the entrance to the holy of holies.' "

Most translations render the Hebrew text as if there are written things on both sides of the scroll. The NIV, for instance, reads: "for according to what it says on one side, every thief will be banished, and according to what it says on the other, everyone who swears falsely will be banished." The Hebrew does not have the word "side." Some versions, therefore, fill the empty spot with a reference to time. The RSV reads: "for every one who steals shall be cut off henceforth according to it, and every one who swears falsely shall be cut off henceforth according to it." A Dutch version uses the expression "from this moment on" The implication of the vision is that the Law of God catches up with people who sin. The prophecies of both Haggai and Zechariah meant a new confrontation with the law of God. In Paul's words: "through the law we become conscious of sin."⁸¹ Haggai, as we have seen, exposed the dishonesty of the people's trade.⁸² Their dishonesty was nothing else but theft.

The other sin, the false oath, is mentioned first. Calling upon the Name of the Lord illegally is proof of the fact that one has lost sight of the spiritual reality. Zechariah speaks about the house of the thief and the liar and about the destruction of the stones on the woodwork. These houses are the same "paneled houses" Haggai mentioned in his first chapter.⁸³ The people who had been frustrated in their rebuilding of the temple had said: "The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built."⁸⁴ Now the Word of God reveals to them the true intent of their hearts. Behind those pious words were hidden theft and false oaths. The people would have been shocked if anyone had said to them that they were thieves and a liar. Only when the Holy Spirit applied the Word of God to a heart can there be conviction of sin, which makes man decide to turn from the rottenness of his acts and turn to God for healing. The destruction of our own buildings is our only hope of salvation. All that is not built upon the foundation of God will be destroyed.

8. The vision of the woman in the measuring basket 5:5-11

5 Then the angel who was speaking to me came forward and said to me, "Look up and see what this is that is appearing."

6 I asked, "What is it?" He replied, "It is a measuring basket." And he added, "This is the iniquity of the people throughout the land."

7 Then the cover of lead was raised, and there in the basket sat a woman!

8 He said, "This is wickedness," and he pushed her back into the basket and pushed the lead cover down over its mouth.

9 Then I looked up-and there before me were two women, with the wind in their wings! They had wings like those of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between heaven and earth.

10 "Where are they taking the basket?" I asked the angel who was speaking to me.

⁸¹ Rom. 3:20

⁸² See Hag. 2:16

⁸³ See Hag. 1:4

⁸⁴ Hag. 1:2

11 He replied, "To the country of Babylonia to build a house for it. When it is ready, the basket will be set there in its place."

The opening words of this section indicate the great amazement of the angel who showed the vision to Zechariah. He knew what it was but he could not comprehend the mystery of evil that was depicted in this image. It is as if he could not understand that human being could be caught up in so much wickedness and foolishness. The measuring basket is called an *ephah* in Hebrew, which is the word used by the KJV. It is the equivalent of a bushel, or about 35 liters in metric measurements.

Zechariah saw a normal measuring basket such as was used at that time; outwardly there was nothing unusual to it. The iniquity was inside. A woman represented this iniquity. Ever since Eve was tempted as the first of God's creatures on earth, the woman is a symbol of temptation in Scriptures. The corruption of the best is always the worst kind of corruption that exists. This is, at the same time, a compliment and an accusation to "the weaker sex."

The angels, also represented by women, came and carried away the basket somewhere between heaven and earth. This reminds us of Jesus' words: "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."⁸⁵ We may, therefore, see the act of the two angels as representing the act of atonement. The basket is carried off to the country of Babylonia. Most versions use the name Shinar, which is what the Hebrew says. There is a play-on-words in the use of this name because Shinar also means, "to empty" in Hebrew. We can, therefore, read that the ephah was taken away to be emptied or to be taken into captivity.

To the Jews, the mention of the name Shinar could not be separated emotionally from the captivity. The mention of a house that must be built there seems to refer to the letter Jeremiah had sent to the captives, in which the same words were used. Jeremiah had written: "This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 'Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.' Yes, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,' declares the LORD. This is what the LORD says: 'When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.'"⁸⁶

We may also detect a covert reference to the ritual of the scapegoat in this vision. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "Orelli and some others see in these two visions an analogy to the two goats on the Day of Atonement, of which one was sacrificed for the sins of the people, and the other bore away their iniquity to the demons' abode, the wilderness (Leviticus 16.)."

The sin of the people is carried away, taken away and dumped where it belongs. John depicts Babylon in Revelation as a woman, the mother of prostitutes. We read: "Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished."⁸⁷ John's vision shows us the horrible aspects of sin. The apparently innocent picture of a basket used to measure wheat turns out to contain murder, blasphemy, and filth of the most abhorrent kind. The consolation of this vision is in the lesson that this sin is lifted up between heaven and earth, carried away, and shaken out. The profound symbolism of the vision depicts what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. An ephah is not meant to contain a woman; its purpose is to measure food. If we allow ourselves to be shaken out and emptied by God, He will fill us. Jesus said: "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."⁸⁸

⁸⁵ John 12:32

⁸⁶ Jer. 29:4-10

⁸⁷ Rev. 17:3-6

⁸⁸ Luke 6:38

9. The vision of the chariots coming out from between two mountains of bronze 6:1-8

1 I looked up again-and there before me were four chariots coming out from between two mountains-mountains of bronze!

2 The first chariot had red horses, the second black,

3 the third white, and the fourth dappled-all of them powerful.

4 I asked the angel who was speaking to me, "What are these, my lord?"

5 The angel answered me, "These are the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world.

6 The one with the black horses is going toward the north country, the one with the white horses toward the west, and the one with the dappled horses toward the south."

7 When the powerful horses went out, they were straining to go throughout the earth. And he said, "Go throughout the earth!" So they went throughout the earth.

8 Then he called to me, "Look, those going toward the north country have given my Spirit rest in the land of the north."

This last in this series of vision is the hardest to understand. The explanation, given in vs. 8: "Look, those going toward the north country have given my Spirit rest in the land of the north," only speaks of the north. But there are four chariots that cover the surface of the earth in every direction.

There is an obvious resemblance with the first vision in which we saw four horsemen who crisscrossed the earth. The report they brought there to the angel of the Lord was a supplication to the Lord to ask for mercy for Jerusalem. That constituted the beginning of a process of renewal. In this vision we see the completion of that process. The chariots and horses travel again through the whole earth and give God's Spirit rest in the land of the north.

Earlier we made a comparison with the condition of the world at the end of Noah's flood. At that time the dove could find no place to set its feet.⁸⁹ As the Spirit of the Lord was restlessly seeking a place to live on earth at that time, so here. God found this place again in Jerusalem. The expedition described in this vision is, at the same time, universal and localized. The need was worldwide but the crisis came to a head in the land of the north, the place of Israel's captivity.

It seems that what happened between Zechariah's first vision and his last must be seen as necessary and vital steps needed to assure the completion of God's plan. The craftsmen who shattered the horns were angels who bound the powers of evil. The man with the measuring line symbolized the faith that clings to God's promises. The cleaning of the intercessor, Joshua, and the light of the Holy Spirit that shines through the church signify the cleansing of sin in the daily life of the individual and in the social and economical relations of a society through which the Holy Spirit can find a place to dwell among men.

Some Bible commentators disagree with the above explanation. They see in the four chariots the same empires as represented in Daniel's visions.⁹⁰ Only *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "That the four chariots are to be identified with the four powers of Daniel's visions (2 and 7.) — the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Macedonian, and Roman — is an opinion that does not commend itself. These four kingdoms and their fate have been already symbolized in the horns of the second vision (...Zechariah 1:19-21), and it is most unlikely that they should be again introduced under a different figure. This would mar the orderly development of the revelation. And how could these kingdoms, such as they were, be said to issue from the seat of the theocracy and to be attentive to God's commands? Further, how could the chariots symbolize the kingdoms which were to be the objects of punishment, when at the same time they are themselves the instruments which inflict the chastisement? Neither does the angel's explanation suit this notion; for kingdoms are nowhere found under the figure of winds, and such a symbol would have been unintelligible to the prophet without further elucidation."

There remain several details in this vision for which it is difficult to find a satisfactory explanation. What is the significance of the two mountains of bronze? What do the chariots represent? Why are the different colors of the horses given in such great detail? In John's vision in Revelation, the colors of the horses are easily interpreted, but such interpretation would make little sense in this context. Maybe, one day we will understand all this more clearly!

This brings us to the end of the visionary part of this book.

⁸⁹ See Gen. 8:9

⁹⁰ See Daniel ch. 2,7

C. Apocalyptic utterances and other exhortations 6:9-14:21**1. The announcement of the coming of "The Branch" 6:9-15**

9 The word of the LORD came to me:

10 "Take [silver and gold] from the exiles Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah, who have arrived from Babylon. Go the same day to the house of Josiah son of Zephaniah.

11 Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest, Joshua son of Jehozadak.

12 Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD.

13 It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two.'

14 The crown will be given to Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah and Hen son of Zephaniah as a memorial in the temple of the LORD.

15 Those who are far away will come and help to build the temple of the LORD, and you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you. This will happen if you diligently obey the LORD your God."

Zechariah is instructed here to give an object lesson, based on Isaiah's prophecy about the "Branch." Isaiah had prophesied: "And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land."⁹¹ And earlier, the prophet had said: "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit."⁹² Israel is depicted here as the stump of an oak tree. The "holy seed," is the man whose name is "Branch," our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the opening verses we are told that a new group had arrived in Jerusalem who had brought gold and silver for the building of the temple. The transit place for such people was, evidently, the house of Josiah, son of Zephaniah. Zechariah is ordered to go to Josiah's house and receive the gifts that were brought by Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah and to improvise a crown with the precious metals. This crown must then be placed on the head of Joshua, son of Jehozadak.

It was understood that this coronation was symbolic. Joshua did not wear the crown for himself but for someone else. It was also made clear that the rebuilding of the temple they had been doing was not the actual work to be carried out. A man, who had not come yet, would build the actual temple.

No date is given for this prophecy. It dates probably earlier than the fourth year of the reign of King Darius, because that is the date given in the next chapter. According to Ezra's report, the temple was finished in the sixth year of Darius.⁹³ There is, however, a strong suggestion in this chapter that the temple built by "the Branch" was another edifice than the one these people were working on. They must have come to this conclusion after the temple they rebuilt had been completed and "the Branch" had not yet arrived.

It must have been puzzling to the people of Zechariah's time that the crown was placed on the head of Joshua and not on Zerubbabel. In Israel's history in the Old Testament, there is a sharp line drawn between the priesthood and the royal throne. No one ever crossed that line with impunity. It must have been obvious that "the Branch" could be no one else but the fulfillment of the archetype, who was like Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God Most High,⁹⁴ the Messiah Himself. The men of Zechariah's day must have been familiar with Psalm One Hundred Ten, which reads: "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.' The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies... The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.'"⁹⁵ If they understood the relationship between this psalm and Zechariah's prophecy, it must have been a tremendous stimulus to them. They must have concluded that the Messiah would come when the rebuilding of their temple was completed.

Here also, Zechariah connects the genuineness of his prophetic call to the fulfillment of his prophecy. How hard it must have been for him and for his people to have to acknowledge that the

⁹¹ Isa. 6:13

⁹² Isa. 11:1

⁹³ See Ezra 6:15

⁹⁴ See Gen. 14:18

⁹⁵ Ps. 110:1,2,4

fulfillment had not come in their time. The only key that could form the solution to this mystery was the fact that the improvised crown must be placed in the temple as a memorial to the men who had brought the gold and silver. This, however, required a great measure of spiritual insight, which the builders may not have possessed. To understand that the whole rebuilding of this temple and all the people who were involved in it was a shadow of the coming reality of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ was, of course, beyond their horizon.

The actual content of this prophecy is found in verses 12, 13, and 15. As mentioned above, the name “Branch” evoked images of Isaiah’s prophecies. The background against which the Messiah would appear was a completely hopeless situation, as represented in the trunk of a tree cut down. The miracle of “The Branch” is that He lives where life is completely unexpected and impossible. Politically seen, that was Israel’s condition during the captivity. In the destruction of Jerusalem and the carrying off of the captives, the tree had been cut down; it was all over for Israel. The very fact that, at that point, Israelites were rebuilding the temple was as the miracle of the sprouting out of new life from a dead trunk. But this also was a shadow of a greater reality to come. When our Lord hung on the cross, the tree, the real tree, the only tree was actually cut down. The disciples on the road to Emmaus were right when they said: “We had hoped ... [but] it is the third day since all this took place.”⁹⁶ But the Lord branched out more gloriously on the trunk of His death than ever before. The One whose Name is “Branch” says: “I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”⁹⁷ That is the foundation upon which God builds His temple. In John’s Gospel He had said: “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” And John added: “The temple he had spoken of was his body.”⁹⁸ God’s temple consists of the resurrected bodies of those who are united with the Lord Jesus Christ in His death. It is quite possible that Jesus quoted Zechariah’s prophecy when He opened the Scriptures for the two men on the road to Emmaus.

The people who believe that the dispensation of the church of Jesus Christ is merely an interruption of God’s plan with Israel are only partly correct. It is true that God’s plan with Israel is not complete yet. The Bible is clear enough on this point and the great events of the twentieth century surely point in that direction. But I cannot imagine that God, by grafting in again the natural branches into the olive tree, to use Paul’s words,⁹⁹ would go back to the time of rituals and shadows of reality. It does not seem possible to me that God’s plan with Israel would bypass the church of Jesus Christ. “He will ... build the temple of the LORD” is a parallel to “I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”¹⁰⁰

How this building will be done, what the principles are that will govern the building, and the power that brings it about is expressed in the prophecy that the Branch will be clothed with majesty and will rule on His royal throne and be a priest. This states concisely the subject of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Zechariah does not use the word “king,” but the majesty of the royal priest is obvious. This corresponds with the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews: “Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”¹⁰¹ The message of Hebrews is that Jesus, by force of His resurrection from the dead, is high priest “in the order of Melchizedek.”¹⁰² We find all the elements of the theme of Hebrews in this passage of Zechariah: there is the branching out as the equivalent of the resurrection; there is the unification of priesthood and kingship in one person; the rebuilding of the resurrection of the body.

The words: “And there will be harmony between the two” is the translation of the Hebrew *Wa`atsat shaalown*, “a counsel of peace.” This harmony will be the fruit of Jesus’ priesthood, His intercession, and His omnipotence. This will mean complete salvation for all those who put their trust in Him.

As in chapter three, the relationship between intercession and temple building is obvious. The essence of Jesus’ priesthood is that He lives eternally to intercede. The writer to the Hebrews states:

⁹⁶ Luke 24:21

⁹⁷ Rev. 1:18

⁹⁸ John 2:19,21

⁹⁹ See Rom. 11:17-24

¹⁰⁰ Matt. 16:18

¹⁰¹ Heb. 2:8,9

¹⁰² See Heb. 5:5,6

“Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”¹⁰³ The glory of the new temple is the complete salvation of the living stones.

Vs. 14 gives an unexpected turn to this prophecy. The keeping of the crown in the temple was a memorial to the men who had brought the gold and the silver. God honors those who honor Him. There seems to be a change in the names of these men, when we compare them to the names given in vs. 10. This has puzzled Bible scholars and there is no agreement as to the meaning of this.

The Jews may have understood the words: “Those who are far away” to mean the remainder of the Jews who had been taken into captivity. The real meaning of this prophecy, however, seems to be that the Gospel would reach non-Jews and they would become living stones to build, together with the Jews, the body of Christ. If the Jews of that time had understood this truth, they might have been deeply shocked. Not too long before, they had incurred the enmity of the people of the land by refusing their cooperation in the rebuilding of the temple.¹⁰⁴ That refusal seemed to have been the source of all their problems. Had they suspected that gentiles would yet come and build the temple, they might have lynched Zechariah. It may be that Jesus’ prophecy in Matthew’s Gospel was based on Zechariah’s prophecy: “I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”¹⁰⁵

The problem presents itself again that Zechariah links the genuineness of his prophetic office to the fulfillment of this prophecy. God does not seem to be bothered by the limitations of our perspective! We are reminded again of the words of the author of the Hebrew Epistle: “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance,” and “Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God.”¹⁰⁶

It is also remarkable to observe that the fulfillment of this prophecy is conditional. “This will happen if you diligently obey the LORD your God.” Jesus’ prophecy, quoted above, indicates that God’s Word will be fulfilled but disobedience excludes itself.

2. Questions from the people regarding fasting in connection with the fall of Jerusalem 7:1-14

1 In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, the month of Kislev.

2 The people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-Melech, together with their men, to entreat the LORD

3 by asking the priests of the house of the LORD Almighty and the prophets, "Should I mourn and fast in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?"

4 Then the word of the LORD Almighty came to me:

5 "Ask all the people of the land and the priests, `When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted?

6 And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves?

7 Are these not the words the LORD proclaimed through the earlier prophets when Jerusalem and its surrounding towns were at rest and prosperous, and the Negev and the western foothills were settled?"

8 And the word of the LORD came again to Zechariah:

9 "This is what the LORD Almighty says: `Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. 10 Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other.'

11 "But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears.

12 They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the LORD Almighty was very angry.

13 "When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen," says the LORD Almighty.

14 `I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations, where they were strangers. The land was left so desolate behind them that no one could come or go. This is how they made the pleasant land desolate.'"

¹⁰³ Heb. 7:25

¹⁰⁴ See Ezra 4:1-3

¹⁰⁵ Matt. 8:11

¹⁰⁶ Heb. 11:13,16

This prophecy is dated the fourth day of the ninth month of the fourth year of King Darius' reign, which is approximately two years after the resumption of labor on the temple, according the Haggai's prophecy¹⁰⁷ and two years before the completion.¹⁰⁸

The topic of this chapter is the fast in the fifth and seventh month of the year. Seen the fact that the question was asked in the ninth month, it seems that it had little practical value. The fast the tenth day of the fifth month was to commemorate the destruction of Jerusalem.¹⁰⁹ The fast of the seventh month was to remember the murder of Gedaliah.¹¹⁰

The question came from the inhabitants of Bethel who sent a delegation led by Sharezer and Regem-Melech to the priests and the prophets of Jerusalem. The question was: "Should I mourn and fast?"

In answer to the question, God spoke by mouth of Zechariah, giving, in this chapter, a summary of the history that led to the destruction of the city, and in the next chapter, a review of the prophecies regarding the rebuilding. We could summarize the content of chapter seven with: "It was much worse than they thought," and of chapter eight with: "It was much more glorious than they hoped." The answer thus draws a line to the content of the Gospel.

Verses 3 and 5 mention only the fast of the fifth and seventh month. Chapter 8:19 also adds a fast in the fourth and tenth month. The fast of the fourth month commemorated the fall of Jerusalem.¹¹¹ The fast of the tenth month was in commemoration of the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem, which began on the tenth day of the tenth month.¹¹²

The Lord answers the question with counter question: "Was it really for me that you fasted?" This question, unerringly, penetrates to the core of the problem. Is our religion, whatever form it may take, a service to God, or a service to ourselves? God demonstrated in His answer also that it was not a matter of an incidental keeping of a fast at certain dates, but of a life style. Because in the same breath, the question is asked: "And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves?" It is impossible for us to fast unto the Lord if we do not eat and drink as unto the Lord. And we can hardly eat and drink unto the Lord if our bodies do not belong to Him. That is why the apostle Paul says: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."¹¹³ This leads us to the crucial point about fasting, namely that it is not a means of chastising our body but it is the result of the surrender of our body to the Lord, just as much as our eating and drinking must be a result of our surrender.

In fasting and weeping because of the siege and capture of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and the murder of Gedaliah, the Jews were not on the Lord's side but on the human side.

The tragic events that led to the captivity and the dispersion meant more for the Jews than the end of their existence as a nation, it was the breaking down of God's revelation on earth. Their grief in connection with the destruction of the temple had been more a loss of self-preservation. To them, God had been the crown of their national existence. This may not have been the viewpoint of every individual. There were, undoubtedly, people who had a better relationship to God and who recognized Him as the Lord of heaven and earth, the God of all nations. But the majority, when they thought about God, thought only about themselves and from the perspective of themselves.

The greatest problem for man has always been that, throughout the ages, he can occupy himself with God, without ever approaching God or surrendering to Him. It is said about the Netherlands that there are more theologians than Christians in the country!

Only a personal and intimate relationship with God can lead to a healthy relationship with fellowmen. The prophets from before the captivity did not preach a social Gospel, but they demonstrated that a lack of social justice was an indication of a lost of fellowship with God. The words that stand out for us are: "In your hearts do not think evil of each other." If a human being does not regard his fellowman positively as a product of God's creativity, he invariably comes to the opposite and negative position of purposely wanting to destroy the other. There is no in-between situation. There is no position of merely not doing any harm. We either do good, or we do evil. We either love our brother or we are murderers. The apostle John writes: "Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has

¹⁰⁷ See Hag. 2:1

¹⁰⁸ See Ezra 6:15

¹⁰⁹ See Jer. 52:12-14

¹¹⁰ See II Kings 25:25,26; Jer. 41:1-3

¹¹¹ II Kings 25:3; Jer 39:2; 52:6-7

¹¹² II Kings 25:1; Jer 52:4; Ezek 24:1-2

¹¹³ I Cor.10:31

eternal life in him."¹¹⁴ God not only expects us not to harm our fellowmen, He wants us to be willing to give our life for the other.

The keyword in verses 11 and 12 is "listen." The key to life in fellowship with God is hearing God's Word. Sin came into the world when man no longer listened to the Word of God. When Eve began to abandon the Word of God and to doubt it, the word of the Evil One began to exercise its influence upon her. We rarely sound the full depths of Moses' words "that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."¹¹⁵ The very Word that created the universe and all life within it, addresses man as a moral light to show him the way. The person who does not hear this Word is not merely a poor beggar, who is too hard of hearing to hear what is being said, but a rebel who, purposely, resists and hardens his heart. The result for such a person is the same as for the man who tries to single-handedly hold back a landslide: it will crush him.

In the crisis of the moment, the Jews called out to God, but He would not listen to them. These words shed a new light upon the words: "And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."¹¹⁶ Salvation is not an automatic result of calling on the Name of the Lord. Or rather, merely pronouncing the Name of God has no meaning in itself. It often happens that a person comes to a real change of heart under the pressure of circumstances. But our cry of despair addressed to God also often is nothing but a desire to be saved from a difficult situation, without the slightest inclination to surrender our souls to God. In the case of Israel during the period of captivity, there had been no fundamental change in their attitude toward God, and their calling on His Name was nothing but an empty sound. When the time came for the captivity and the land was destroyed, the people were fully responsible for the disaster, not God. They were the ones who had "made the pleasant land desolate."

3. Promises of Redemption 8:1-23

1 Again the word of the LORD Almighty came to me.

2 This is what the LORD Almighty says: "I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her."

3 This is what the LORD says: "I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain."

4 This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age.

5 The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there."

6 This is what the LORD Almighty says: "It may seem marvelous to the remnant of this people at that time, but will it seem marvelous to me?" declares the LORD Almighty.

7 This is what the LORD Almighty says: "I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west.

8 I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God."

9 This is what the LORD Almighty says: "You who now hear these words spoken by the prophets who were there when the foundation was laid for the house of the LORD Almighty, let your hands be strong so that the temple may be built.

10 Before that time there were no wages for man or beast. No one could go about his business safely because of his enemy, for I had turned every man against his neighbor.

11 But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as I did in the past," declares the LORD Almighty.

12 "The seed will grow well, the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will produce its crops, and the heavens will drop their dew. I will give all these things as an inheritance to the remnant of this people.

13 As you have been an object of cursing among the nations, O Judah and Israel, so will I save you, and you will be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong."

14 This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Just as I had determined to bring disaster upon you and showed no pity when your fathers angered me," says the LORD Almighty,

15 "so now I have determined to do good again to Jerusalem and Judah. Do not be afraid.

¹¹⁴ I John 3:15

¹¹⁵ Deut. 8:3

¹¹⁶ Joel 2:32; Rom. 10:13

16 These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts;

17 do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this," declares the LORD.

18 Again the word of the LORD Almighty came to me.

19 This is what the LORD Almighty says: "The fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months will become joyful and glad occasions and happy festivals for Judah. Therefore love truth and peace."

20 This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come,

21 and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, 'Let us go at once to entreat the LORD and seek the LORD Almighty. I myself am going.'

22 And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the LORD Almighty and to entreat him."

23 This is what the LORD Almighty says: "In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.'"

As chapter seven gave a summary of the prophetic Word of the past, so chapter eight gives an overview of the present. As we mentioned before, chapter seven showed that the situation from before the captivity was much worse than people thought and chapter eight clarifies that the renewal is much more glorious than could be hoped. This section now introduces us to this glory that surpasses our understanding.

Many utterances in this chapter are repetitions of previous statements. The promise: "I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem" in vs. 3, is an elaboration of ch. 1:14: "I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion." Verses 7 and 8: "I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west. I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God" says the same as ch. 2:5,6,10 in other words: " 'And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,' declares the LORD, 'and I will be its glory within. Come! Come! Flee from the land of the north,' declares the LORD, 'for I have scattered you to the four winds of heaven,' declares the LORD. 'Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you,' declares the LORD."

The promises in verses 1-8 are far reaching. Some pertain to the immediate future, as verses 4 and 5 regarding old people and young children, others clearly refer to the end times, as the exultation of Jerusalem to become "the Holy Mountain." Also the bringing back of the people from the east and the west speaks of greater things than the return of only a few thousand Jews from Babel.

Beginning with vs. 9, the messages are addressed to the people who heard Zechariah's voice at that moment.

The opening verses of this chapter are very impressive. The eternal, almighty God declares to a handful of people who have returned from captivity that He is burning with jealousy for Jerusalem. Behind this poor bunch of paupers stands the Almighty, the living God. If the temple is rebuilt and the walls of Jerusalem are standing again, it will not be because of Zerubbabel's vision or Nehemiah's organization, but because of God's initiative. It is God's project, not the work of man, or of a little group of people.

How far is our vision of God often removed from reality! If our eyes were open to the reality of God's character, we would cease trying to interest Him in what we are doing; we would rather endeavor to receive some of the Spirit of zeal that inspires God. As Christians, we must constantly correct our course in this matter. How wonderful it is when God burns with jealousy for Jerusalem! We would burn more ourselves if we were not so much occupied with surrogates.

Every time when an individual takes the Lord's side, and even more when a group of people agrees to do this together, we discover that God has chosen to stand on our side. Chronologically seen, it begins, of course, with God's choosing for us. But the experience of God's zeal in our behalf will only become clear to us when we make the choice ourselves. If we have any reservations regarding complete obedience or unconditional surrender, the concept of God's positive presence will become less clear to us.

God said: "I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem." This not only reverses the process Ezekiel saw, when he had his vision of God's leaving of the temple,¹¹⁷ God returned to Jerusalem in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is difficult to describe in a few words what this means. Paul's words are right on target when he writes to Timothy: "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God

¹¹⁷ See Ezek. 10:4,18,19; 11:23

was manifested in the flesh.”¹¹⁸ Or John’s proclamation: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”¹¹⁹ “Immanuel – God with us.”¹²⁰ “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”¹²¹ We see the final fulfillment of this promise in Revelation, where John says: “I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.”¹²² This also expresses, at the same time, the value and the perspective of the building of the temple. The building of stone was a picture of the heavenly reality. This reality is the presence of God and our relationship with Him in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first result of the realization of this fellowship with God is a change of status for Jerusalem and the mountain on which the city is built. Jerusalem becomes “the City of Truth,” and the mountain, “the Holy Mountain.” God does not change in this relationship, but it is impossible for us to experience fellowship with God without being changed in His image. This is true, both individually as well as collectively.

We could almost say that the words “Truth” and “Holy” are used ironically. If there ever was a city that could not be called “Truth” it was Jerusalem, and there was no more unholy mountain to be found on earth. The miracle of fellowship with God is that the deepest corruption is changed into glory. In Paul’s words: “All things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.”¹²³

It is also marvelous that such deep, spiritual values can be expressed in every day images of old men and women sitting on a park bench and children playing in the street. We can see such scenes daily and never realize what they mean. Our lives are filled with happenings of which we fail to see the meaning. Things only acquire meaning in fellowship with God.

Life in Zechariah’s day was not normal. The majority of the people who had returned from captivity must have been young. There were no small children or very old, gray haired people. The city was probably not safe enough for older people to sit on park benches and for children to play in the streets. The people had probably become so accustomed to this abnormality that they had forgotten what normal life was. I remember the moving testimony of a missionary who had spent several years in a Japanese concentration camp in Indonesia. The only people he knew for several years had been adult men. All of a sudden, he saw a few children playing and he realized how abnormal his life had been. God assured the inhabitants of Jerusalem that life would be normal again. The city would again be a safe place to live; it would give protection to older people and young children. With our limited vision, we consider that normal but we still have to learn the meaning of it.

The salvation mentioned in verses 7 and 8 is much more than the return of the remnant of Israel from Babel. The verses suggest that their return was a mere shadow of a much larger return, a return on a higher level than in the physical realm. We must be cautious in spiritualizing verses such as these, but the fact that the scope represented is much greater than the events of that day must give us food for thought. There is, first of all, the difficulty in a literal interpretation of the words that Jerusalem could not possibly provide living space for millions of people who would come to her from the east and the west. Only the heavenly Jerusalem, which John describes in Revelation, which measures “12,000 stadia in length, and [is] as wide and high as it is long”¹²⁴ can accommodate such a crowd.

We find the practical application in vs. 9. God did not expect the temple builders to fully understand the meaning of what they were doing, but He expected them to finish their work and give their all to it. The result of God’s Word in our lives is not necessarily that we fully understand everything, but that we faithfully fulfill our obligations. In the words of the apostle Paul: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”¹²⁵ The very fact that God speaks to us ought to give us a sense of reality. Fellowship with God always helps us to focus on the present in a healthy way. This does not mean that we must not remember the past or look to the future, but we may not do so as a compensation for the present in which we live and which we do not want to accept. The essence of our fellowship with

¹¹⁸ I Tim. 3:16 (NKJV)

¹¹⁹ John 1:14

¹²⁰ Matt. 1:23

¹²¹ Col. 1:27^b

¹²² Rev. 21:22

¹²³ Eph. 5:13 (NASU)

¹²⁴ Rev. 21:16

¹²⁵ I Cor. 10:31

God by means of the hearing of the prophetic Word is peace with God, with ourselves, and with the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Like Haggai, Zechariah emphasizes the relationship between material prosperity and renewed fellowship with God. Inflation, poor harvests, and unrest in the land will disappear when the Lord returns to Jerusalem. The real meaning of the blessing is expressed in vs. 13: "As you have been an object of cursing among the nations, O Judah and Israel, so will I save you, and you will be a blessing." By saving them God blesses them, and the person who is blessed will be a blessing for others. God said to Abraham: "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."¹²⁶ Paul applies this blessing others by saying: "[Christ] redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."¹²⁷

God works according to a well-defined plan. His attitude toward the generation of Zechariah's day was not the same as toward the previous one. This does, of course, not mean that God would be fickle. We can understand that God would be open to those who seek Him. The mystery is not in the fact that God gives Himself to those who turn toward Him, but that the Spirit of God worked in the hearts of those people so that they would turn to Him. We don't know how this principle works, but we may conclude that the process must be in agreement with God's perfect character. If we, as humans, understand that capriciousness and fickleness are features that are less than perfect, how much more would God reject such a conduct for Himself. So God's change of attitude from one generation to another is not inconsistent with His nature.

Sanctification is always based on fellowship with God. It begins with a restoration of fellowship with God, after which the slow process of transformation of our lives begins to take effect. Even at the moment Zechariah spoke, there was among the builders of the temple still lying, an unfair system of justice, and murder of fellowmen. The incongruity between the call and the lifestyle did not disappear automatically. Holiness is the result of a constant and conscious comparison between God's character and us. For us, who live in the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, it is difficult to comprehend how the people must have lived before the death of the Lord Jesus, when the Spirit did not yet live in the heart of the believer and the measure of God's holiness could be applied upon the acts of human beings from within. Yet, at that time also, there must have been some influence of the Holy Spirit upon the lives of the believers. We see traces of this in the story of Ezra and Nehemiah and in the prophets of their time. A melting together of God's Spirit with the spirit of man, as we know it now, was, however, impossible. We do well to realize how privileged our present position is.

At the same time, though, we find in Zechariah's message a prophecy about the time when the miracle of fellowship with God in the Holy Spirit will be the main factor of spiritual life. The seeking of the nations for the grace of God in Jerusalem suggests that God's presence would be manifested in Jerusalem. And what do those ten men, who get a hold of the hem of the robe of a Jew, see in him other than the fullness of the Holy Spirit? This is the reason the days of fasting, mentioned in the previous chapter, "will become joyful and glad occasions and happy festivals for Judah." This occurs, not only, because will be a change of mood, but because from the destruction of the outer symbols of God's presence, we come to the experience of God's presence within us.

The testimony of this Jew is culminated in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The name "Jew" is the translation of the Hebrew *Yehuwdiy*, which may also be translated: "a descendant of Judah." Since our Lord belonged to the tribe of Judah, this prophecy can certainly be applied to Him. It cannot be said more truly that "God is with you" than of Jesus Christ. He is " 'Immanuel' -which means, 'God with us.' "¹²⁸

We have not yet seen the fulfillment of this prophecy. No great political powers have so far turned openly to the Lord. If this is meant to be fulfilled literally, it is still in the future. We can hardly consider the conversion of the Emperor Constantine to be a great blessing for the world, although that event would fit the concept of a literal fulfillment.

4. God's attitude toward other nations 9:1-8

1 An Oracle

¹²⁶ Gen. 12:2,3

¹²⁷ Gal. 3:14

¹²⁸ Matt. 1:23

The word of the LORD is against the land of Hadrach and will rest upon Damascus- for the eyes of men and all the tribes of Israel are on the LORD-

2 and upon Hamath too, which borders on it, and upon Tyre and Sidon, though they are very skillful.

3 Tyre has built herself a stronghold; she has heaped up silver like dust, and gold like the dirt of the streets.

4 But the Lord will take away her possessions and destroy her power on the sea, and she will be consumed by fire.

5 Ashkelon will see it and fear; Gaza will writhe in agony, and Ekron too, for her hope will wither. Gaza will lose her king and Ashkelon will be deserted.

6 Foreigners will occupy Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines.

7 I will take the blood from their mouths, the forbidden food from between their teeth.

Those who are left will belong to our God and become leaders in Judah, and Ekron will be like the Jebusites.

8 But I will defend my house against marauding forces. Never again will an oppressor overrun my people, for now I am keeping watch.

Some Bible scholars have doubts about this prophecy, whether it is part of Zechariah's original text or whether it found its place there by an editorial mistake and should be considered as part of the Book of Jeremiah or some other pre-captivity prophet.

The word "oracle" in Hebrew is *massa*, which literally means: "a burden." Figuratively, it can be construed as a pronouncement of doom. The word if found the context of a load carried by an animal or person. "If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it."¹²⁹ The object of the prediction is the land of Syria. The tone is not completely negative and condemnatory. Although the prophecy states that the Lord is against Syria, we also read: "The eyes of men and all the tribes of Israel are on the LORD." The tribes of Israel and the surrounding nations are put on the same level in relation to God's revelation of Himself. The result for both is the same for the heathen nations as it is for Israel. God's revelation always means a judgment for rebellious man.

The fortresses of Tyre and Sidon would be torn down and become ruins and the gold and silver would disappear. Isaiah intones a lament over Tyre and Sidon, describing the ruin the Lord would bring over those places.¹³⁰ And Ezekiel prophesied extensively about their destruction.¹³¹ He predicted: "They will destroy the walls of Tyre and pull down her towers; I will scrape away her rubble and make her a bare rock. Out in the sea she will become a place to spread fishnets, for I have spoken, declares the Sovereign LORD. She will become plunder for the nations, and her settlements on the mainland will be ravaged by the sword. Then they will know that I am the LORD."¹³² About Sidon, he said: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'I am against you, O Sidon, and I will gain glory within you. They will know that I am the LORD, when I inflict punishment on her and show myself holy within her. I will send a plague upon her and make blood flow in her streets. The slain will fall within her, with the sword against her on every side. Then they will know that I am the LORD.'"¹³³ This judgment brought destruction but it also created circumstances in which God could reveal Himself to those heathen nations as He had revealed Himself to Israel. There can never be a glorious resurrection without complete death.

5. The triumphal entry of the King

9:9-10

9 Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

10 I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

¹²⁹ Ex. 23:5

¹³⁰ See Isa. Ch.23

¹³¹ See Ezek. Chapters 26-28

¹³² Ezek. 26:4-6

¹³³ Ezek. 28:22,23

Two Gospel writers refer to this prophecy in connection with Jesus' entry in Jerusalem.¹³⁴ The other synoptic Gospels record the entry but do not quote this prophecy. We understand from Matthew's Gospel that Jesus' triumphal entry in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was not the only entry, and probably not even the most important one. After reporting this event, Matthew records the Lord's words in a later chapter: "I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" ¹³⁵ That moment has yet to arrive. Zechariah's prophecy has not yet been fulfilled in its totality.

When Jesus requisitioned the foal of a donkey, He did not play games; he came in gentleness and all sincerity to be the King. But the people were not ready to receive Him, which is the reason why the essence of this prophecy has so far remained unfulfilled. The fulfillment of some prophecies seems to depend upon the spontaneous collaboration of man. It is difficult to comprehend how Jesus' sincere desire to enter Jerusalem as King can be reconciled with His knowledge that He had come to earth to give His life as a ransom for many but evidently the one does not exclude the other. Luke reports: "As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace-but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.'" ¹³⁶ And in Matthew's Gospel, we read how Jesus cursed the fig tree because it had not produced fruit.¹³⁷ These portions of Scripture can only be understood against the background of Zechariah's unfulfilled prophecy.

The donkey on which Jesus rode was the foal that was tethered next to its mother, a stallion that had never been ridden before.¹³⁸ From the complete picture Matthew and the other Gospels give us, we have the impression that both the mother and the colt were brought to Jesus. The mother donkey marched up front and the foal, on which Jesus was riding, followed the mother. The picture is full of tenderness.

In Zechariah's prophecy, the donkey is contrasted with the war-horses of Ephraim and Jerusalem. The emphasis is on a donkey, which is a beast of burden. Our Lord came as a servant to take upon Himself the heaviest load of all. "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve."¹³⁹ The crowd in Jesus' day never understood the glory and royal majesty of Jesus' servanthood. Humility means the cessation of wars.

These verses distinguish among four different actions that did not happen simultaneously. The Lord's entry, seated on a beast of burden, undermined man's pride, which is the basis for his rebellion against God. The taking away of the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the braking of the battle bow represent God's direct intervention, probably in the form of a war in which the nations destroy each other till none are left. The proclamation of peace to the nations must refer to Christ's return, accompanied by mass evangelization of the world and the rule that "will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth" stands for the Kingdom of God which rules over all nations.

6. God's victory by means of Israel 9:11-17

11 As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.

12 Return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.

13 I will bend Judah as I bend my bow and fill it with Ephraim. I will rouse your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and make you like a warrior's sword.

14 Then the LORD will appear over them; his arrow will flash like lightning. The Sovereign LORD will sound the trumpet; he will march in the storms of the south,

15 and the LORD Almighty will shield them. They will destroy and overcome with slingstones. They will drink and roar as with wine; they will be full like a bowl used for sprinkling the corners of the altar.

16 The LORD their God will save them on that day as the flock of his people. They will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown.

¹³⁴ See Matt. 21:6; John 12:15

¹³⁵ Matt. 23:39

¹³⁶ Luke 19:41-44

¹³⁷ See Matt. 21:18-22

¹³⁸ See Matt. 21:2; Mark 11:2; Luke 19:30; John 12:14,15

¹³⁹ Matt. 20:28

17 How attractive and beautiful they will be! Grain will make the young men thrive, and new wine the young women.

The keywords in this section are “the blood of my covenant.” What occurs happens on the basis of the blood of the covenant. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews gives us a clear definition of the meaning: “May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”¹⁴⁰ The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ was brought about “through the blood of the eternal covenant.” The freeing of all prisoners from the pit ultimately reflects the greatest event in the whole universe: the resurrection from the dead of our Lord Jesus Christ and of all who belong to Him. The Psalmist sings: “When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train.”¹⁴¹ And the apostle Paul picks up this hymn: “This is why it says: ‘When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.’”¹⁴² The waterless pit is a picture of death, the power of which belonged to the devil. Joseph’s experience of being thrown in a waterless cistern,¹⁴³ as well as Israel’s captivity in Babylon are images of the same reality, which is the death of man. Because of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, the cover is taken from the cistern. The door of the grave in which our bodies decompose will open.

The Viet Cong took Betty Mitchell’s husband, Arnie, captive during the Viet Nam war. Betty read Zechariah’s prophecy and concluded that God promised her the release of her husband. But no word was ever received from him or from the others who were taken with him. It is assumed that all died. This presents us with an enormous question mark. Evidently, Betty had subjectively interpreted this verse, going by the sound of the words, and believed that it applied to the physical release of her husband. If she had left the prophecy in its context, it would not have been a short-term message, which gave her momentary comfort, but it would have been more realistic. As time elapsed, she must have realized that there was another perspective to this promise.

Several people have taken Zechariah’s words and applied them to their hopes for relief. Only Jesus knew how to draw a straight line from points in time on earth to heaven. In spite of the fact that we have a Bible and read it, we understand little of what happens to us or of what we do. This is not meant to be a criticism of Mrs. Mitchell. I have always deeply respected her for the way in which she accepted her severe trials. God does not make mistakes, but we do not always understand what He says to us.

The content of this tremendous section is the hope of the resurrection from the dead. The apostle Paul summarized his confession in these words when he stood on trial before the Sanhedrin: “I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead.”¹⁴⁴ This hope makes the sons of Judah and Ephraim into sharp weapons in the war against the sons of Greece. Paul’s ministry in Philippi, Corinth, and Athens are proof of the truth of this prophecy. Zechariah speaks in the same context about the coming of the Lord as flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet. The parts are inseparably connected with one another. Jesus uses the same expression, speaking about His return: “For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.”¹⁴⁵

The overwhelming exorbitant joy, which is compared to drunkenness, can be nothing else but the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

7. Return from captivity 10:1-12

1 Ask the LORD for rain in the springtime; it is the LORD who makes the storm clouds. He gives showers of rain to men, and plants of the field to everyone.

2 The idols speak deceit, diviners see visions that lie; they tell dreams that are false, they give comfort in vain. Therefore the people wander like sheep oppressed for lack of a shepherd.

3 "My anger burns against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders; for the LORD Almighty will care for his flock, the house of Judah, and make them like a proud horse in battle.

¹⁴⁰ Heb. 13:20,21

¹⁴¹ Ps. 68:18

¹⁴² Eph. 4:8

¹⁴³ See Gen. 37:24

¹⁴⁴ Acts 23:6

¹⁴⁵ Matt. 24:27

4 From Judah will come the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler.

5 Together they will be like mighty men trampling the muddy streets in battle. Because the LORD is with them, they will fight and overthrow the horsemen.

6 "I will strengthen the house of Judah and save the house of Joseph. I will restore them because I have compassion on them. They will be as though I had not rejected them, for I am the LORD their God and I will answer them.

7 The Ephraimites will become like mighty men, and their hearts will be glad as with wine. Their children will see it and be joyful; their hearts will rejoice in the LORD.

8 I will signal for them and gather them in. Surely I will redeem them; they will be as numerous as before.

9 Though I scatter them among the peoples, yet in distant lands they will remember me. They and their children will survive, and they will return.

10 I will bring them back from Egypt and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them to Gilead and Lebanon, and there will not be room enough for them.

11 They will pass through the sea of trouble; the surging sea will be subdued and all the depths of the Nile will dry up. Assyria's pride will be brought down and Egypt's scepter will pass away.

12 I will strengthen them in the LORD and in his name they will walk," declares the LORD.

The rain mentioned in the first verses of this chapter is the rain necessary for the ripening of the harvest. Harvest time had come and it was time for the rain to come, but it remained dry. God wants people to pray. He wants us to understand the times in which we live. Our eyes ought to be open for the plan of God and, on the basis of our understanding, we must begin to pray for rain.

It is quite possible that Israel's physical condition provided a reason for this prophecy. A persistent drought may have threatened the harvest. But the deeper lesson of this section is, undoubtedly, about a spiritual harvest. Jesus' words about harvests confirm this conclusion. We read: "He said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'"¹⁴⁶ And: "Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."¹⁴⁷

The prayer for rain for the harvest is identical to the prayer of workers into God's harvest field and for the full power of the Holy Spirit for the preaching of the Word. The apostles prayed such a prayer in the Book of Acts.¹⁴⁸ Recognizing when it is harvest time is of the same importance as the prayer for rain. Jesus set the example for us in this respect also when He said: "I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest."¹⁴⁹ In order to recognize the importance of the times, we must have intimate fellowship with God.

A dear brother in a church in Brussels, Belgium, remarked once that, if we pray for rain, we must also expect to have thunderstorms. The KJV reads: "the LORD shall make bright clouds," but the meaning of this may be the flashing of lightning. Boldness to witness does not always come in the form of a slight drizzle. In the prayer of the apostles in Acts, an earthquake accompanied the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Recognizing the importance of the moment does not always call for smooth sailing. Elijah realized that only a three-and-a-half year of draught could save Israel from an immediate moral collapse. His prayer for the draught and afterwards for the return of rain drained him of all human energy and left him an emotionally burned-out wreck.

If we do not understand the time in which we live, Zechariah's prophecy will only have an academic significance for us. The importance of people like Francis Schaeffer in the twentieth century is that he recognized clearly that we are living in a "Post Christian Era." This is the time in which the Gospel bounces back on the callous attitude of people who know it all already. Everything is "déjà vu." The pertinent question of the moment is whether the clearly preached message of the resurrection from the dead

¹⁴⁶ Matt. 9:37,38

¹⁴⁷ John 4:35-38

¹⁴⁸ See Acts 4:23-31

¹⁴⁹ John 4:35

will still have an effect upon society in Western Europe and North America. All that remains is “the sign of the prophet Jonah.”¹⁵⁰ Hundreds of people must have been present at the raising from the dead of the widow’s son in Nain, and a larger crowd may have witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus. Those tremendous events had failed to make a crack in the wall of unbelief. “The sign of the prophet Jonah,” which is a figure of the resurrection of Christ, ultimately brought the large city of Nineveh to its knees. Maybe our day needs another emphasis on “sign of Jonah!”

Israel’s sin had been that, in their time of need, they had turned to their idols. Every human being has enough intelligence to know when he faces an emergency, and that he will perish in an emergency if his cry for help is not answered. The problem in Zechariah is reduced to its simplest formula: It is harvest time and the rain has not come. The formula can be reduced to an algebraic rule that applies to all emergency conditions. There are always “idols,” substitutes of the living God, to whom one can turn. The result will always be that man believes a lie instead of the truth.

There was no shepherd in Zechariah’s day. The expression “like sheep without a shepherd” is found several times in Scripture. The best-known place is probably in Matthew’s Gospel where we read: “When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”¹⁵¹ The phrase originates with Moses who prayed: “May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the LORD’s people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.”¹⁵² The prophet Micaiah used the words when foretelling the death of King Ahab. We read: “I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the LORD said, ‘These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.’”¹⁵³ The shepherd was the same person as the king. A recurring theme in the Book of Judges is “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.”¹⁵⁴ The shepherd was the man in whom God’s standards had become flesh and blood, who was a living and practical example of the realization of God’s demands. We know this shepherd and king to be our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who knows the times, who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, the one whom the writer of Hebrews calls: “that great Shepherd of the sheep.”¹⁵⁵ Our prayer for the gift of understanding the time in which we live and for the needed “rain” must be addressed to Him.

When God says that Israel lacks shepherds, it is not because there were no people who presented themselves as shepherds. God addresses those shepherds in vs. 3. They were men who led the people but did not measure up to God’s standards. They are mentioned several times in Zechariah’s prophecy. Their corruption is represented with two images: that of shepherds, and of goats. Not only among the leaders of the flock, but within the flock itself there are elements who do not participate in the divine nature. The matter is even more complicated in that there is something of a goat in each sheep. The Lord makes a distinction here between “sheep” and “goats,” between those in whom a fundamental change has taken place and those whose heart remained unchanged.

These verses reveal two things that God will do: He will confront the shepherds in judgment and He will visit the flock as the LORD Almighty in order to bring salvation and redemption. God’s visitation transforms the house of Judah from a flock of wandering sheep into a magnificent warhorse. From a defenseless flock they would become an army of able-bodied men. Forgiveness and healing make poor sinners into strong heroes. Heroism may take on forms that a superficial bystander would not recognize as such. For our Lord, heroism consisted in being broken on the cross and it means the same for His followers. Yet this is the kind of heroism that defeats the enemy, which is what matters. The Lion of Judah appears in the form of a Lamb that is slain.¹⁵⁶ Satan knows what Jesus’ heroism is all about. We also ought not to be deceived by the outward appearance.

When we speak about the individual transformation of the believer, we run ahead of the facts. These verses apply, first of all, to one person: Jesus Christ. He is the cornerstone and the tent peg. He is the personification of heroism. A strange feature in this prophecy is that part of it is in the singular and part in the plural. Yet it is clear that it pertains to one person. This must mean that this person is unique in some

¹⁵⁰ Matt. 12:39

¹⁵¹ Matt. 9:36

¹⁵² Num. 27:16,17

¹⁵³ I Kings 22:17

¹⁵⁴ Judg. 17:6

¹⁵⁵ Heb. 13:20

¹⁵⁶ See Rev. 5:5,6

aspects, such as in being the cornerstone. But in other facets, He has features in common with other human beings. The great difference is that He has “all authority in heaven and on earth,”¹⁵⁷ whilst other person only have limited authority. The prophecy also reveals how the Lord shares His gifts with people who have placed themselves at His disposal.

There is a beautiful lesson in the use of the words “cornerstone” and “tent peg.” The cornerstone is the foundation of an eternal building. The Scriptures mention the cornerstone several times as applying to our Lord Jesus Christ. We read in the Psalms: “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.”¹⁵⁸ The apostle Paul says: “No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”¹⁵⁹ And Peter writes: “You come to him, the living Stone-rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him.”¹⁶⁰

The tent peg speaks of our life on earth, our transient existence here below. In this respect also, Jesus is the foremost and the greatest. “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”¹⁶¹ Or, as the Amplified Bible renders the verse: “And the Word [Christ] became flesh (human, incarnate) and tabernacled – fixed His tent of flesh, lived awhile – among us.” The tent is the perfect image of our earthly abode. Israel lived in tents during the desert journey. Even when the people had resided in Canaan for several centuries, the ark still remained in a tent. “[David] said to Nathan the prophet, ‘Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent.’ ” And God answered him: “I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, ‘Why have you not built me a house of cedar?’ ”¹⁶²

Both the apostles Paul and Peter speak about their life on earth as living in a tent. Paul writes: “Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.”¹⁶³ And in Peter’s Second Epistle we read: “I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.”¹⁶⁴ The author of Hebrews writes about Abraham: “By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”¹⁶⁵

In the same way as the Lord Jesus Christ is the foundation and cornerstone of God’s eternal building, He is the tent peg of our temporal existence. This truth places both the Incarnation, as well as our human existence, in a glorious light. The cornerstone and the tent peg are the same person. This means hope of the imperishable as long as we live a perishable life, and it permeates our perishable existence with elements of the imperishable.

Interestingly again, God makes no distinction between single and plural in these verses. This prophecy pertains, without doubt, to our Lord Jesus Christ, and yet we read: “Together they will be like mighty men.” The Lord Jesus and His followers are melted together into one organic whole that cannot be separated. That which pertains to Him, pertains to us also. After all, what is a tent peg without a tent and a cornerstone without a building?

The emphasis in these verses is upon defensibility. Although the adversary is not specifically named, it is obvious that there can be no war without an enemy. The purpose of it all is victory. The struggle takes place in the mud but the end result is purity and glory. The impression we get is that Christ’s

¹⁵⁷ Matt. 28:18

¹⁵⁸ Ps. 118:22,23. See also Matt. 21:42

¹⁵⁹ I Cor. 3:11

¹⁶⁰ I Peter 2:4

¹⁶¹ John 1:14

¹⁶² II Sam. 7:2,6,7

¹⁶³ II Cor. 5:1-5

¹⁶⁴ II Peter 1:13,14

¹⁶⁵ Heb. 11:9,10

militia tramples through the mud, but the enemy rides on horseback without being splattered. The Lord is with us in the mud but the horsemen will end up defeated. Those who base their faith on the cornerstone will not be put to shame. Quoting the prophet Isaiah, Peter says: “For in Scripture it says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’”¹⁶⁶ The psalmist says: “It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.”¹⁶⁷ All this can be stated in the words Paul wrote in his Epistle to the Romans about the people of Israel: “Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.”¹⁶⁸

God’s anger against the shepherd is based on the fact that they try to shepherd the sheep without recognizing the head shepherd. They had put themselves on the same level with the Lord of glory without knowing what they were doing.

The remainder of this chapter is strangely apocalyptic. It seems as if history and future tumble together like the figures in a kaleidoscope. It seems odd that these words are spoken to a people that left Egypt almost two millennia earlier and of which part had been banned to Assyria and never returned. Maybe God intends to say that history repeats itself, or that features from the past will play a part in the future? As we saw earlier, things that happen on earth are shadows of a spiritual heavenly reality. Every captivity and return, every destruction and reconstruction are pointers to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. “The song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb” turns out to be the same hymn.¹⁶⁹

The words: “I will strengthen the house of Judah and save the house of Joseph. I will restore them because I have compassion on them” not only pertain to what is to follow but also to what went on before. The salvation of Judah and Joseph lies in the fact that it is from them that originates the cornerstone and the tent peg, which is our Lord Jesus Christ. The return from captivity is ultimately related to this fact. If there is mention of another return from captivity that means that there will again be another dispersion also. We can hardly deny the fact that there is a relationship between Israel’s rejection of Jesus as the Messiah and God’s subsequent dispersion of Israel.

Zechariah uses some interesting pictures to illustrate the character of Israel’s restoration. First of all, their return is God’s act. The words “I will restore them,” “and I will answer them” are an indication of the importance of prayer in the context of the restoration. This important principle is also illustrated in the prayer of Daniel prior to the return of Israel from captivity.¹⁷⁰ God did not allow robots to return to the land but only people who wanted to be totally involved in its freeing and restoration. Prayer is like a thermometer. “Their hearts will be glad as with wine” points toward being filled with the Holy Spirit.

The NIV is rather dignified with its rendering: “I will signal for them and gather them in.” The Hebrew word *sharaq* means, “to whistle or hiss.” Which is the more correct rendering of the NKJV: “I will whistle for them and gather them.” To us this evokes the picture of a dog that has learned to obey the voice of his master. That, of course, is a modern interpretation because Old Testament dogs were not of the kind that listened to “His Masters’ Voice.” But the implied thought of spontaneous obedience is of great comfort to me. We can almost hear the sound of God’s exuberant joy in these words. The words almost tumble over each other. There is hardly any breathing space between the lines. The Lord piles up words of salvation and redemption. How glorious is the promise of fruitfulness! We are never redeemed and blessed to be alone and lonely but to burst out into a mass of people.

Strangely enough, the words “Though I scatter them among the peoples” are put in the present tense. This scattering took place, as we said, after Israel’s rejection of their Messiah. The most amazing thing, however, is that this scattering is only mentioned in passing. God is not untouched by suffering, but He puts all the emphasis upon the restoration and redemption. It is under demonic influence of life on earth that people have a tendency to blow suffering out of proportion. Speaking through the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul brings this back in perspective with: “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ I Peter 2:6; Isa. 28:16

¹⁶⁷ Ps. 118:8

¹⁶⁸ Rom. 9:4,5

¹⁶⁹ See Rev. 15:3

¹⁷⁰ See Dan. 9:1-4

¹⁷¹ Rom. 8:18

Verses 10-12 bring together all the images of rejection and redemption. The exodus from Egypt stands for more than only a historical event. The return from Assyrian captivity never even occurred in world history. Israel's passing through the Red Sea has its spiritual antitype in the resurrection from the dead. Everything that has happened (or should have happened) only has meaning because there is redemption, adoption, and life in Jesus Christ. This does not mean that history has ceased to be of importance. The restoration of Israel as a state is proof of the fact that this part of the prophecy is still being fulfilled. The drying up of the River Nile, the passing away of Egypt's scepter, the bringing down of Assyria's pride, together with the fall of Babylon, of which we read in Revelation, stand for the demolition of all monuments of human rebellion. But when everything else crumbles, those who have put their faith in the Lord will be strengthened in the LORD and walk in His Name.

The Bible mentions several instances of people who were "strengthened in the Lord." We read of David: "David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the LORD his God."¹⁷² This strengthening is the positive result of a flight toward God.

Daniel had the same experience. We read: "While he was saying this to me, I bowed with my face toward the ground and was speechless. Then one who looked like a man touched my lips, and I opened my mouth and began to speak. I said to the one standing before me, 'I am overcome with anguish because of the vision, my lord, and I am helpless. How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe.' Again the one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength. 'Do not be afraid, O man highly esteemed,' he said. 'Peace! Be strong now; be strong.' When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, 'Speak, my lord, since you have given me strength.'"¹⁷³ Daniel may have been more passive than David was, but it appears that the intensity of his emotions were much deeper than David's.

The Lord Jesus received direct physical strength in Gethsemane from an angel. We read that when He was in agony: "An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him."¹⁷⁴

The promise of God's strength is not only for some chosen ones. Isaiah promises: "He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."¹⁷⁵ These promises do not guarantee us one hundred percent continuous physical fitness. The above illustrations indicate under what circumstances God gave His strength. Circumstances will never be the same from person to person, but we can know when to ask the Lord for a renewal of strength.

The words "I will strengthen them in the LORD" cause us to ask the question, who is speaking. It seems that more is implied than that God says: "I will strengthen them in Myself." Someone else is speaking who introduces us into the strength of God. Who else can this be than our Lord Jesus Christ, who said: "No one comes to the Father except through me."¹⁷⁶ Walking in the Name of the Lord is "Life on the Highest Plane." Walking in the Name of the Lord means that God's character is the space in which we move. In Paul's words: "For in him we live and move and have our being."¹⁷⁷ Walking in the Name of the Lord presupposes that we have abandoned our own name; we enter into the Name of the Lord by leaving our own name behind. It also means that we can act in the Name of the Lord, as David did when he went against Goliath. He said: "I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied."¹⁷⁸ Acting in the Name of the Lord is not only done against enemies but also in our relationship with all our fellowmen. Our testimony is in the Name of the Lord. Paul says: "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us."¹⁷⁹ Finally, it means that we know His Name and we call ourselves by it.

8. The destruction of Lebanon and Bashan 11:1-3

¹⁷² I Sam. 30:6

¹⁷³ Daniel 10:15-19

¹⁷⁴ Luke 22:43

¹⁷⁵ Isa. 40:29-31

¹⁷⁶ John 14:6

¹⁷⁷ Acts 17:28

¹⁷⁸ I Sam. 17:45^b

¹⁷⁹ II Cor. 5:20

1 Open your doors, O Lebanon, so that fire may devour your cedars!

2 Wail, O pine tree, for the cedar has fallen; the stately trees are ruined! Wail, oaks of Bashan; the dense forest has been cut down!

3 Listen to the wail of the shepherds; their rich pastures are destroyed! Listen to the roar of the lions; the lush thicket of the Jordan is ruined!

It is very difficult to place these verses in the context in which judgment is pronounced. Lebanon and Bashan are destroyed. The power and wealth of both kingdoms are compared to a pine tree and a cedar. The relationship with the preceding prophecy is most likely in the mention of Lebanon, which turns out to be too small for Israel. The link with the following may lie in the shepherds who bewail the judgment, which is also the subject of the next verses.

Lebanon has always been known for her cedars. In the days of Solomon, King Hiram was the provider of cedar wood for the temple and for Solomon's palace, which was called: "the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon."¹⁸⁰ The time in which the people of Sidon volunteered to contribute for the building of the temple was long past. We do not read how Lebanon had sinned against the Lord. It is also strange that only Lebanon is mentioned by name in Zechariah's prophecy in connection with God's judgment. In the chapters 1 and 14 nations are only mentioned in general in the light of God's judgment at the end of time.

God ordered Lebanon to open its door. We may assume that this was an order that had to be obeyed. It was not a matter of choice, such as the opening of the heart to invite Christ in. It is also possible that the prophet used divine sarcasm as Isaiah did at some places.¹⁸¹ If that is the case, it means that Lebanon played with fire and God warns them of the consequences. This interpretation seems to be more typical for God's warnings as we find them in the Old Testament. The Lebanese were be proud of their cedars and pine trees but they were not the ones who had made them. It is God who makes trees grow.

There is no real difference between this judgment and the fall of Babylon as John describes it in Revelation.¹⁸² There the kings, the merchants, and the sea captains bewail the fall, here it involves the shepherds who are unhappy because the pastures have been ruined. It is as C. S. Lewis says in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, that there are different witches for each epoch, but they are all essentially the same. Whether it is Tyre, or Sidon, or Babylon, or the United States, or Russia, all represent in one way or another barricades behind which the enemy hides, boroughs of rebellion that will not be able to hold out when the Kingdom comes.

Shepherds and young lions ought to be archenemies; here we see them united in bewailing the ruin of Jordan. The sheep are not mentioned in this context, but they are the most important feature in this prophecy. This makes us understand that the shepherds and the lions are not on the Lord's side. They are both on the same side, but it is not the Lord's.

9. The shepherds of Israel 11:4-17

4 This is what the LORD my God says: "Pasture the flock marked for slaughter.

5 Their buyers slaughter them and go unpunished. Those who sell them say, 'Praise the LORD, I am rich!' Their own shepherds do not spare them.

6 For I will no longer have pity on the people of the land," declares the LORD. "I will hand everyone over to his neighbor and his king. They will oppress the land, and I will not rescue them from their hands."

7 So I pastured the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the oppressed of the flock. Then I took two staffs and called one Favor and the other Union, and I pastured the flock.

8 In one month I got rid of the three shepherds. The flock detested me, and I grew weary of them

9 and said, "I will not be your shepherd. Let the dying die, and the perishing perish. Let those who are left eat one another's flesh."

10 Then I took my staff called Favor and broke it, revoking the covenant I had made with all the nations.

11 It was revoked on that day, and so the afflicted of the flock who were watching me knew it was the word of the LORD.

¹⁸⁰ See I Kings 5:1-10; 7:1-12

¹⁸¹ See *i.e.* Isa. 6:9-13

¹⁸² See Rev. ch. 18

12 I told them, "If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it." So they paid me thirty pieces of silver.

13 And the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter"-the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter.

14 Then I broke my second staff called Union, breaking the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

15 Then the LORD said to me, "Take again the equipment of a foolish shepherd.

16 For I am going to raise up a shepherd over the land who will not care for the lost, or seek the young, or heal the injured, or feed the healthy, but will eat the meat of the choice sheep, tearing off their hoofs.

17 "Woe to the worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! May his arm be completely withered, his right eye totally blinded!"

As the previous chapter, so this chapter also is very difficult to understand. The clearest part is about the thirty pieces of silver that are thrown to the potter in the house of the Lord. Matthew applies this prophecy to Judas' betrayal of Jesus.¹⁸³ A superficial glance at Matthew's quotation of this prophecy would make us conclude that the Gospel writer made a mistake in attributing it to Jeremiah instead of to Zechariah. It is true that the scroll in which Zechariah is found bears the name of Jeremiah, as being the first prophet in it. Yet, Matthew seems to have taken some unusual liberty in his quotation, which makes us think that he may have wanted to convey more than the quote suggests. Jeremiah mentions a potter in his prophecies;¹⁸⁴ he also speaks of a jar of clay made by a potter;¹⁸⁵ and finally he tells the story of the purchase of a field in a time when the buying and selling of real estate was the most unlikely thing in the world to be done, since the Babylonians were laying siege to Jerusalem and the war was lost.¹⁸⁶ It seems that Matthew intended to combine all those features in a quotation that he "mistakenly" attributed to Jeremiah.

His "mistake" opens tremendous spiritual perspectives. In mentioning Jeremiah, the evangelist emphasizes God's omnipotence. He is the potter and we are the clay in His hand. God can make man what He wants him to be. He not only forms us, but the of clay of our existence is a temporal one. There will come a moment at which each human life will be smashed to shards. Solomon describes the death of a human being in terms of sublime poetry in Ecclesiastes: "Remember him-before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well."¹⁸⁷ Human life is in the hand of God and God will pass judgment on each human being. One of the moments of greatest need, if not *the* moment was the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Seen in the right light, this was the end of all. This was, in comparison, worse than when Jeremiah was kept in prison at the time Jerusalem was being besieged, and God gave him the apparently senseless order to buy a field. In the same way, God said at the death of His Son, that there would again be buying and selling of real estate. Life must go on in a deeper sense than the saying usually warrants.

This section opens in a negative way, but the message it conveys is positive. It pertains to one Shepherd as opposed to the shepherds who are not concerned with the fate of the sheep. It is very likely that Jesus had this chapter of Zechariah in mind when He pronounced His great statement about being the good shepherd in John's Gospel.¹⁸⁸ In both chapters, this one of Zechariah and in John's Gospel, the good shepherd is contrasted with "the hired hand," or "the foolish shepherd." Although in both chapters the emphasis is upon the shepherd, we also learn a lot about the sheep. It is remarkable that Zechariah calls them "the flock marked for slaughter." The fate of people who have entrusted themselves to God is sealed; they are "marked for slaughter" in whatever form this may be. The apostle Paul writes: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."¹⁸⁹ Jesus shows us what this means, as is stated in Isaiah's prophecy: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his

¹⁸³ See Matt. 26:14,15; 27:3-10

¹⁸⁴ See Jer. Ch. 18

¹⁸⁵ See Jer. Ch. 19

¹⁸⁶ See Jer. Ch. 32

¹⁸⁷ Eccl. 12:6

¹⁸⁸ See John 10:1-21

¹⁸⁹ Rom. 8:36

mouth.”¹⁹⁰ This may for us not always mean a physical slaughter, but it always involves a counting ourselves as dead unto sin, and knowing to be crucified with Christ.

God’s judgment of men is determined by their attitude toward the flock marked for slaughter. There will come a time when God withdraws His hand from the population of this world so that they will start to kill each other like wild animals and make this planet into a desert because they have killed the sheep without feeling guilty about it, and have even praised God for making them rich. We could apply these verses to all suppressed minorities of this world, but the Scriptures apply it, first of all, to the children of God.

The Bible teaches that God judges with the standard of human relationships. In the Books of First Kings and Second Kings, the ruling monarchs are judged according to their relationship to the prophets of their time. In the Books of First and Second Chronicles, the important factor is the relationship to the priests. In the parable in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus says: “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me,” and: “I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.”¹⁹¹

It is not easy to determine what is meant with the words: “Pasture the flock marked for slaughter.” If this is the command of the Father to the Son, we find the Son’s answer in vs. 7: “So I pastured the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the oppressed of the flock. Then I took two staffs and called one Favor and the other Union, and I pastured the flock.” The New Testament seems to confirm this interpretation.

It is also possible, however, that the first person singular in these verses is the prophet Zechariah himself. In that case, he performs a series of symbolic acts, which represent the future of Israel and the role the Messiah would play in Israel’s history. Ezekiel had to perform such symbolic acts to depict the siege and fall of Jerusalem.¹⁹² If it is true that Zechariah plays several roles in the unfolding drama, (the role of pasturing the flock, of refusing to pasture, of throwing the pay for the potter in the house of the Lord, and taking on the equipment of a foolish shepherd) it would only make sense, if these roles are meant to be symbolic acts. It is of course possible for one person to play several roles in a play: the role of Christ, another role of Judas who would betray Christ, and another of the Antichrist who imitated the real Christ. But if we see Zechariah’s words as only a prophecy about the coming and ministry of Jesus, we get bogged down in inconsistencies. It seems more logical to see here one person who plays various roles in the same play.

This dramatic representation of the future history of salvation is profoundly moving. The very fact that God would express in the form of a play what will happen to His Son indicates how deeply God Himself is affected by it all (if we may use such a human expression). It also demonstrates how important and meaningful playacting can be. It is difficult to imagine how all this must have affected Zechariah. It was impossible for him to fully understand what he did. We don’t even know how he carried out the commands that were given to him. His playacting was not the same as that of Ezekiel, but he had this in common with all the other prophets that he became totally involved in the message he had to convey. God would not permit him to be left untouched by the events he predicted.

Zechariah knew that the sheep he had to pasture were sheep for the slaughter. He knew what their fate was and that their fellowmen would do this to them. This must have kindled in him the conflict that every person faces who has come to know the Lord and then witnesses the cruelty and injustice that rules this world. Under the guise of piety, one person will enrich himself at the expense of someone else.

The result of mishandling the flock would be that the sheep would destroy one another. “Let those who are left eat one another’s flesh.” As in Gideon’s victory over Midian, when “the LORD caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords”¹⁹³ so mankind as a whole will cause its own destruction. Man will make the world God has given to him into a desert. Up to a point, the presence of God had kept evil at bay, but when God withdraws His hand all restrictions fall away.

So Zechariah begins to pasture the flock marked for the slaughter. He testifies that they constitute the lowest and most miserable of people who would easily qualify as “the poor in spirit” of the Beatitudes.¹⁹⁴ In the words of the apostle Paul, they are “not many ... wise by human standards; not many

¹⁹⁰ Isa. 53:7

¹⁹¹ Matt. 25:40,45

¹⁹² See Ezek. 4; 12; 24:15-27

¹⁹³ Judg. 7:22

¹⁹⁴ See Matt. 5:3

... influential; not many ... of noble birth.”¹⁹⁵ They are what the world considers “foolish.” Their present condition is miserable and their future is slaughter. Zechariah calls them “oppressed.”

He guides them by using two staffs, called “Favor” and “Union.” The Hebrew words are *no`am*, which means: “splendor or grace,” (the KJV renders it: beauty) and *chebel*, which literally means: “a rope.” There is among this bunch of miserable people a spirit of love and beauty that can only be explained by the presence of the Lord. From a human standpoint, these people had nothing that would make life worth living. Yet, in spite of their circumstances, the essence of all that is important in life was present with them, obviously because the Lord Himself was in their midst.

The same things can be said regarding the staff called “Union.” There is among some men a unity that would be inexplicable without the presence of the Lord. David sings in one of the Songs of Ascent: “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.”¹⁹⁶

We find a remarkable parallel between Zechariah’s prophecy in these verses and the Twenty-Third Psalm. They both speak about shepherding sheep. In Psalm Twenty-Three the shadows of want and suffering fade away in the peaceful setting of pastoral bliss. There is also mention of two staffs: “Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”¹⁹⁷

The idyllic condition of these verses is not lasting. It is not so that God does not want His children to live together in unity. But there are hostile elements that disturb the peace. The enemy is both outside and in.

It is difficult to determine what is meant with: “In one month I got rid of the three shepherds.” Evidently, some people, who did not love God and who had no personal relationship with Him, but yet wanted to serve as shepherds, pushed themselves to the front. The enemy always tries to infiltrate God’s ranks by placing his moles in the church. They deviate from the truth and who break up the unity by practicing sin. The fact that Zechariah not only loses his patience with the shepherds but also with the sheep indicates that the enemy is also within. The mention of the three shepherds leads to the lowest point in these verses. God look for worthy people, but He found nobody besides His own Son.

We find this theme reoccurring throughout the Scriptures. In Ezekiel, we read: “I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none.”¹⁹⁸ And John’s moving account in Revelation reads: “And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?’ But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.’ Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne.”¹⁹⁹

This brings us in the middle of the confusing problems of these verses. It seems incomprehensible that God would give over to destruction that which was the object of His tender love. We can only see the solution to this enigma in the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Without giving them away, God reveals His deepest secrets to Zechariah in these verses. The enemy has never been able to decode the message of the Gospel until it was too late for him. Only the most miserable of people, those who were closest to God when this deepest point in world history was reached, would understand that this “was the word of the LORD.” No one could suspect that “the punishment that brought us peace was upon him.”²⁰⁰ During His life on earth, Jesus Himself must have known what these verses meant. On the night before His

¹⁹⁵ I Cor. 1:26

¹⁹⁶ Ps. 133:1-3

¹⁹⁷ Ps. 23:4

¹⁹⁸ Ezek. 22:30

¹⁹⁹ Rev. 5:2-7

²⁰⁰ Isa. 53:5

death, quoting Zechariah, He told His disciples: "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'" ²⁰¹

So the staff "favor" was broken. This does not mean a change in God's character, making Him unmerciful instead of compassionate. The condition is like the life of an ideal family, who live together in love and close harmony. One day a bomb falls on their home, killing the oldest son and severely wounding the father. The love for one another is still there, but the happy home is ruined. The breaking of the staff means here the death of the Son and the wounding of the Father. Zechariah says that this event affected God's covenant with all the nations of the world. This does not merely pertain to the sin of a few people, but to the sin of the world.

The breaking of the staff "favor" represents the breaking of the covenant with all the nations. In spite of the fact that corruption had penetrated the whole of creation, there had always remained some beauty in man; there were still visible traces of God's image. Breaking this staff means a being completely forsaken by God. This horror covered all of mankind when it came over Him who is the representative of all men, Jesus Christ. "The punishment that brought us peace was upon him!" This breaking of the staff "favor" occurred when Jesus hung on the cross and experienced to be forsaken by God. What happened at that moment was most awesome and horrible. It ought to have caused the end of mankind and the destruction of our planet. It did, however, bring forth life for man and the renewal of creation. It was, at the same time, the deepest and the highest point of world history. No one understood the importance of this event when it occurred. We are not even sure if Jesus, as man, could oversee the far-reaching consequences of His suffering and death. Had He understood, He would not have cried: "'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?'" - which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' ²⁰² His victory, therefore, is so much the greater, because He believed without being able to see. At that point, He was the most afflicted of all the sheep. He may have been the only one who knew that "it was the word of the LORD." In His greatest need He clung to the Word of the Lord. The very words: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" are quoted from the Book of Psalms, ²⁰³ the Word of the Lord.

In vs. 12, we come back to what we said at the beginning of this chapter. There can be no doubt about it but the paying out of the thirty pieces of silver refers to Judas' betrayal of Jesus and His subsequent internment. Here again, Zechariah plays the role of more than one person. It was Judas who made the transaction, but these verses show that Judas was merely a puppet whose strings were being pulled. The pay is the price for Jesus, not for Judas. The Lord asks His people how much He is worth to them. They assess the value of the eternal, immortal God, the Lord of glory, at thirty pieces of silver. We can imagine how this piece of evidence will be presented on the last day before the judgment seat of God. The fright of Joseph's brothers, who had sold him for twenty pieces of silver, will be nothing compared to the terror of the Sanhedrin, when they see before them the living Lord for whom they had paid \$30. The question how much the Lord is worth is the determining factor for the content and direction of every human life. If we don't want to pay Him everything we have and are, there will be only one way for us: back to the potter! The jar of our life will be smashed to pieces and the clay goes back on the wheel.

As mentioned earlier in connection with Matthew's quote of this prophecy, there is a lesson full of rich meaning. We encounter the potter several times in Scripture as a picture of God, the Creator. Jeremiah is sent to the potter's house, where he sees that Israel is like the clay in the potter's hands. ²⁰⁴ In his Epistle to the Romans, the apostle Paul uses the image for all of mankind: "One of you will say to me: 'Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?' But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? 'Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ' 'Why did you make me like this?' ' Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath-prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory.'" ²⁰⁵ It is also significant to note that the ground from which the potter takes his clay is being used to bury people. We hear the echo of God's words to Adam after his fall into sin: "By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the

²⁰¹ Matt. 26:31

²⁰² Matt. 27:46

²⁰³ Ps. 22:1

²⁰⁴ See Jer. 18:1-10

²⁰⁵ Rom. 9:19-23

ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."²⁰⁶ And finally, there is the promise that generates hope in desperate circumstances, that fields will again be bought and sold. This assures us that life does not end when we think it does. This hope is the hope of resurrection.

The money is thrown to the potter in the house of the Lord. Judas did indeed throw the pieces of silver in the temple. It is awful to realize that this betrayal was carried out in the presence of God and plotted by people who ought to have been the mediators between God and men. The hardening of the heart that made such hypocrisy possible accounts for the breaking of the staff "Union." Here happens in a spiritual sense what occurred physically and mentally at the building of the Tower of Babel. When man isolates himself from God, he isolates himself from his fellowmen also. This does, in fact, not mark a new development; it merely reveals an existing condition. In the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ becomes evident what man's actual condition is. Man's physical and spiritual misery, his utter loneliness is exposed. When Jesus cried: "It is finished!" He also finished our being forsaken by God. As He procured our pardon for sin in taking upon Himself the punishment for our sin, so He procured fellowship with God and with one another by being forsaken by God.

When Zechariah pronounced this prophecy, the break between Judah and Israel had been made long before. That happened after the death of King Solomon. In Zechariah's day the Northern Kingdom of Israel did no longer exist. In reaching back in history, the prophet establishes a connection between the death of our Lord and the break between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. Chronologically, this seems strange to us, but we can understand the purpose of this. Every discord, every rupture between human beings, every isolation and loneliness is expressed and resolved in the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus.

The last three verses of this chapter take us to the end times. Zechariah is told to play the role of a foolish shepherd. The chapter ends as it began with men who, not only reneged their responsibility toward the sheep, but who demonstrated that they were totally corrupt. The foolish shepherd who will appear in the last days of world history will evince all these evil qualities. He can be no one else but the Antichrist. He will present himself as the shepherd of all men but there will be no trace of love or compassion in him. God calls him "worthless" because he will not take God into account. The withering of his arm and the blinding of his right eye are probably indications for the most miserable among the sheep, who have their eyes on the Lord, to observe that this also is the Word of the Lord.

10. Jerusalem besieged and delivered 12:1-9

1 An Oracle

This is the word of the LORD concerning Israel. The LORD, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him, declares:

2 "I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem.

3 On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves.

4 On that day I will strike every horse with panic and its rider with madness," declares the LORD. "I will keep a watchful eye over the house of Judah, but I will blind all the horses of the nations.

5 Then the leaders of Judah will say in their hearts, 'The people of Jerusalem are strong, because the LORD Almighty is their God.'

6 "On that day I will make the leaders of Judah like a firepot in a woodpile, like a flaming torch among sheaves. They will consume right and left all the surrounding peoples, but Jerusalem will remain intact in her place.

7 "The LORD will save the dwellings of Judah first, so that the honor of the house of David and of Jerusalem's inhabitants may not be greater than that of Judah.

8 On that day the LORD will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the LORD going before them.

9 On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem.

It is difficult to establish the chronology of Zechariah's prophecies. The expression "on that day," which occurs six times in this chapter, three times in chapter 13 and again seven times in chapter 14, obviously refers to the future. Zechariah's message is written in code and unless we find the key that fits all the locks, much will remain dark for us.

²⁰⁶ Gen. 3:19

The message of chapter 12 was, obviously, only partly fulfilled at the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. At that time there was no question of an international movement against Israel. All that happened then was that the Romans put down a revolt in one of their colonies. We may, therefore, suppose that there will one day be a general campaign against Israel during which the Israelis will manage to keep their heads above the water.

The opening words of this chapter are very imposing. The Lord reveals Himself as the Creator of the universe, particularly of planet earth. He also indicates that man owes to Him the fact that he is a spiritual being. That this is stated at the beginning of this "oracle" means that the following message must be interpreted in that light. What follows relates to the truth that the God of heaven and earth has created man. The reason all nations turn against Israel is that they do not recognize God as the author of all. Israel is the nation through which God reveals Himself in this world. The exodus from Egypt and the conquest of Canaan were proof in the Old Testament that there is a living God who occupies Himself with the affairs of man. In the New Testament, God enters this world through Israel in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Before the nations of this world begin to react to God's revelation through Israel, Israel must again become conscious of that fact that they are God's chosen people, and the guardians of His revelation. At present, Israel does not meet these requirements. Israel's birth as a nation and its survival under the overwhelming pressure of attacks by the Arab world are, undoubtedly, the work of God. Yet, the present-day average Israeli does not believe that God has anything to do with this. It can, therefore, hardly be expected that the nations of this world will, at present, turn against God in Israel. This cannot happen until Israel experiences a massive spiritual revival.

When Israel becomes again conscious of her role in God's revelation in this world, she will become to the nations of the world a cup that makes them reel and a rock that causes injury. The image of a cup that causes intoxication makes us think that the people will confuse the principles of the matter. They will not say: "Israel presents God as Creator of all; we rebel against God; this is the reason we want to destroy Israel as a nation." The intoxication will delude the points of controversy and make them into clichés and propaganda slogans that have little or nothing to do with the truth. This is not difficult for us to understand, since most political campaigns are characterized by empty slogans.

The nations of this world will also underestimate Israel. They will think that its eradication is the easiest thing in the world. They will believe that Israel can simply be swept into the Mediterranean Sea. But those who try to lift the rock called Israel, will strain themselves so badly that they decide that international cooperation will be necessary to obtain the desired result. It may very well be that this will happen soon. But we cannot state with dogmatic certainty that it will be the next event in world history. Whenever it happens, Zechariah's message is that Israel will be able to stand. This point distinguishes the message in this chapter from the one in chapter fourteen. If it were not for the fact that, at present, Israel does not see any relationship between what happened in the last three Middle East wars and the hand of God, we could say that what is written here has already been fulfilled. In spite of all the fighting, Jerusalem still stands at the same place. But the city never issued a communiqué, ascribing the strength of its inhabitants to the Lord.

The mention of a priority of redemption for Judah makes us wonder if the fulfillment of this prophecy ought not to be seen on a level different from the political one. Ever since God became man in the Lord Jesus Christ, the dwellings of Judah have occupied a unique place in world history. There is no greater redemption of Judah than the resurrection of our Lord. It is on the basis of this redemption that Jerusalem still stands today, and not only this city as a shadow of the real Jerusalem, but also the original one, the heavenly one. This does not mean that political events do not have any meaning. The real struggle, however, is never against flesh and blood, but against the powers of darkness.²⁰⁷ There are in this world wars and political tensions but they are never self-existing phenomena. They are always a reflection of the actual conflict that goes is fought on a higher level.

How ought we to interpret the images of "a firepot in a woodpile, like a flaming torch among sheaves?" In the Book of Judges, we read how Samson avenged himself upon the Philistines by torching their shocks and standing grain, together with the vineyards and olive groves.²⁰⁸ We could see in this text how Israel would become the instrument in God's hand to judge the nations of the world. But there is probably a deeper meaning to this than only that Israel will be the instrument of God's judgment. It is true that God used Israel in the past in that manner, as in the conquest of Canaan.

²⁰⁷ See Eph. 6:12

²⁰⁸ See Judg. 15:3-5

If Israel represents the fire that consumes the other nations, the other nations are obviously combustible material. Paul uses the image when speaking about the building up of the church. We read in First Corinthians: "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."²⁰⁹ What Paul says about the edifice, called the church, applies to every structure in this world. The material man uses for the building up of human society and the infrastructure of nations is extremely perishable. It will not stand in eternity. The imperishable can only be found in the Word of God. The fire in this image does not only constitute judgment of that which is combustible, it also produces purification for that which is fireproof. God's judgment means salvation for the child of God. He who judges himself in the presence of God will not be judged because he is already included in the judgment that consumed the Lord Jesus. In this manner, a person will himself become fire that gives light and warmth and consumes that which cannot stand before God. Paul expresses this as follows: "For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life."²¹⁰

Furthermore, we read in vs. 8 why the Lord begins His salvation with Judah. As we mentioned already, this salvation consists in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. If this salvation were something else meant for other people, it could hardly serve as a means to reduce the pride of Judah and Jerusalem. To the contrary, Judah and Jerusalem would have boasted in the fact that God had given them preferential treatment. But those who boast in the resurrection of Christ, boasts in God alone. This kind of boast means the death of human pride. And pride is rooted so deeply in all men, even among those among whom the facts of salvation occurred, that only the death and resurrection of the Lord Himself could overcome it. The fact that Jesus died and rose from the grave is too much to swallow for all human pride, mine included.

As soon as the proud head bows itself and surrenders, God gives His precious promise of protection. All the riches of forgiveness is contained in the words: "The feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the LORD (who is Jesus) going before them." We acquire knowledge of salvation through the forgiving of our sins. Corrie ten Boom once said: "In order to advance in this world, one must pass his tests. With God you must fail them." Our fall means God's victory. People who have been forgiven become like Jesus Christ Himself. Being partakers of the divine nature, as Peter calls it, means being like God. This was God's original plan for man. The devil tried to thwart this, but he has not been able to prevent God's plan from being carried through. He will try again by means of all the nations who want to conquer Jerusalem, but God's omnipotence will oppose all that oppose Him and what is His.

11. Lament over the Messiah

12:10-14

10 "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.

11 On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo.

12 The land will mourn, each clan by itself, with their wives by themselves: the clan of the house of David and their wives, the clan of the house of Nathan and their wives,

13 the clan of the house of Levi and their wives, the clan of Shimei and their wives,

14 and all the rest of the clans and their wives.

This prophecy regarding the pouring out of the spirit of grace and supplication and the mourning over the first-born son was partly fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. After Jesus' ascension, the disciples were baptized with the Holy Spirit, and when they were filled with the Spirit their prayer became more intense. Zechariah calls the Holy Spirit here the "spirit of grace and supplication." As a result of the coming of the Holy Spirit, people began to understand who is this Jesus who was crucified. Mourning of His

²⁰⁹ I Cor. 3:10-15

²¹⁰ II Cor. 2:15,16

crucifixion means, therefore, accepting Him as the Messiah and asking for forgiveness of sin. This happened after Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost.²¹¹

Yet, we believe that an important part of this prophecy is still awaiting fulfillment. John predicts in Revelation that there will be a universal lament about the rejection of Christ upon His return to earth. We read: "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen."²¹² All the peoples of this earth will ask themselves the question in despair: "What have we done to Him?" This will include Israel, "those who pierced Him." Pentecost gives us a foretaste of what the fulfillment of this prophecy will be. We see that this lament occurs at the leaving of the Lord and at His return. At His leaving, the bitter sorrow pertains to what could have been but what they had rejected in evil ignorance. The shock at His return will be the discovery that everything that is said about Jesus turns out to be true and that no one had geared his life to it accordingly. The person who had "betted on the wrong horse" will make himself bitter reproaches.

The amazing thing is that the Bible says that this lament is the result of the coming of "a spirit of grace and supplication." The Holy Spirit will be the conclusive factor in the grace of God as in the prayers of the people. It is a great mystery that the Holy Spirit stimulates at the same time God and man. The fact that this Spirit comes from God makes the mystery more glorious and deeper. The grace of God and the love He wants to reveal to man He created is activated by the Holy Spirit. It may be better to say that the grace that is demonstrated by the Holy Spirit is revealed to man as grace in action. God's grace is never, at any moment, non-active. All God's attributes are always infinitely perfect. God's grace does not increase. If that were the case, it would mean that it would have been less before than it is now. But man does not understand that there is grace with God and what it contains until the Holy Spirit comes to him. It is the revelation by the Holy Spirit that makes us see through the fog and grasp what is meant by grace. Even a vague understanding of the meaning of grace is enough for most of us to stop us in our track and implant a new life in us.

Before we go any further and look into the meaning of the word "supplication," we must understand that there is a connection between God's revelation and the lament over the Lord Jesus. As in everything God does and gives, so here also, the Spirit not only shows us God's grace and makes us experience it, but He Himself is that grace. God is what He gives; He always gives Himself.

So God's grace is poured out over the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The apostle Paul says that we are baptized in the Spirit. We read in his Corinthian Epistle: "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."²¹³ The result of this baptism is that people begin to pray. Grace is not the product of human endeavor. It is God who has taken the initiative and revealed Himself, but it is man who prays. We are no automated turning prayer wheels. We are responsible for what we say in our prayers. The fact that we are responsible for what we say and do cannot be overemphasized. Yet, prayer cannot exist without the Holy Spirit. He impregnates our spirit so that our soul becomes full of desire to commune with God and prayer is born. Paul explains this in his Epistle to the Romans: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."²¹⁴

Man has always played an active role in the history of salvation. God determined that the facts of salvation would not occur without man's involvement. Mary had to give her consent before she could become pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Jesus was born when there were at least a few people who were "waiting for the consolation of Israel."²¹⁵ The return of the Jews from the Babylonian Captivity would, undoubtedly, not have taken place if it were not for the prayer of Daniel.²¹⁶ This is the reason the Holy Spirit generates prayer in the hearts of those to whom He reveals Himself. This is the reason that the return of the Lord Jesus will be preceded by the greatest revival of prayer this chapter mentions. Jesus will only return when a certain number of people will eagerly look for His coming. The last prayer, recorded in the

²¹¹ See Acts 2:37,41

²¹² Rev. 1:7

²¹³ I Cor. 12:13

²¹⁴ Rom. 8:26,27

²¹⁵ See Luke 2:25,38

²¹⁶ See Dan. Ch. 9

Bible, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus"²¹⁷ plays an important part in the Second Coming. This is obvious from the fact that the coming of the Holy Spirit and the seeing Him they have pierced is mentioned in the same breath.

The Lord will come to those who are His, and under the influence of the spirit of grace and supplication, those that are His, who had rejected Him for generations, will come to the realization of what they have done. Their weeping suggests that, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they will come to see the historic perspective. A person who is spiritually blind will live in isolation in his own age. The spiritual man knows that he has a heritage, both in the good and the bad sense of the word. Because, for instance, the people who lived in the seventeenth century did not understand what they were doing and did not accept responsibility for their share of slave trading, the race problems in the twentieth and twenty-first century as so difficult to solve. The same can be said about the blunders of colonialism committed in the nineteenth century. It was not only the Jews who nailed Jesus on the cross!

The lament will be the mourning as over an only child, a firstborn son. This was the lament that was heard in Egypt during the night of Passover. Jesus is the oldest Son, who was destroyed by the angel of death. It is God's pure grace that people mourn about Jesus when they see the scars in His hands and feet. At the same time this lament is the beginning of the greatest joy. For those who weep in this way, it will open the gates of eternal joy.

The lament is compared to "the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo." It is not clear whether this refers to the death of King Josiah.²¹⁸ The lament will be, at the same time, general and individual. Men and women will weep separately. "The clan of the house of David and their wives, the clan of the house of Nathan and their wives" stands for the royal lineage from which the Messiah would come. According to Luke's genealogy, Jesus was a descendant of David via his son Nathan.²¹⁹ "The clan of the house of Levi and their wives" stands for those who performed the duties of the priesthood. But who is Shimei? In the story of David's life there is mention of a certain Shimei from the lineage of King Saul. He cursed David while he was fleeing from his son Absalom. David pardoned him upon his return and Solomon put him under house arrest. He was put to death when he broke the promise to stay within the boundaries imposed upon him.²²⁰ If this is the same Shimei to whom Zechariah refers here, the reference is certainly meaningful. Shimei embodies everything that revolted against the kingship of David, which was a shadow of the Kingdom of Heaven.

These verses give us a strange assortment of samples of generations that rejected their Redeemer: David, Nathan, Levi, and Shimei. In the last day, David will stand next to Shimei; both will beat their breasts because in their lives they had rejected Jesus Christ, who is the perfect image of God for man.

12. False prophets 13:1-6

1 "On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.

2 "On that day, I will banish the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more," declares the LORD Almighty. "I will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land.

3 And if anyone still prophesies, his father and mother, to whom he was born, will say to him, 'You must die, because you have told lies in the LORD's name.' When he prophesies, his own parents will stab him.

4 "On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his prophetic vision. He will not put on a prophet's garment of hair in order to deceive.

5 He will say, 'I am not a prophet. I am a farmer; the land has been my livelihood since my youth.'

6 If someone asks him, 'What are these wounds on your body?' he will answer, 'The wounds I was given at the house of my friends.'

This section consists of two parts: verse 1 and the following verses 2-6. Vs.1 contains a wonderful and glorious promise. There will be a fountain for cleaning and removal of sin for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. There can be no doubt about it but this refers to "a fountain filled with blood,

²¹⁷ Rev. 22:20

²¹⁸ See II Chr. 35:22-25

²¹⁹ See Luke 3:31

²²⁰ See II Sam. 16:5-13; 19:18^b-23; I Kings 2:36-36

drawn from Emmanuel's vein,"²²¹ as the hymn writer says. The blood that flowed on the hill just outside the city walls brings forgiveness of sin and cleansing of unrighteousness. This is not a reservoir containing a certain amount of standing water but a fountain that produces an unlimited, uninterrupted flow. Forgiveness and cleansing are constant and continuous.

The verse makes a distinction between sin and impurity. We may see in this the removal of that which is negative and addition of that which is positive. Jesus takes the load of sin from our shoulders. The consequences and the damages of sin are now His. The cleansing means, in the words of the apostle Paul, "that in him we might become the righteousness of God."²²² The recipients of this salvation are the house of David (the man after God's own heart), and those who live where God lives (Jerusalem). This means that there are certain conditions to be met. David is the only king who consistently acknowledged that Israel was a theocracy. He acknowledged God as Israel's King and himself as ruling "by the grace of God." Acknowledgment of God's absolute sovereignty and living in fellowship with Him are prerequisites for the experience of the cleansing from sin and impurity from the fountain that God has opened for us. Chronologically, this verse actually belongs to the previous section.

There appears to be a direct link between the forgiveness and justification of vs. 1 and the nationwide turning from idols toward God. For most people who have strayed from the truth and have fallen into idol worship, the first event is a breaking with idolatry, followed by surrender to the true God. Here we see that the extermination of the false gods and their prophets is the result of a complete surrender to God. There are idols and prophets of lies we only recognize as such when the Holy Spirit gives us the gift of discernment. This spiritual gift is needed to unmask what the devil presents as the message of truth. Paul recognized the lying spirit in the fortune telling slave girl in Philippi.²²³ The apostle John states that every Christian ought to exercise this gift of discernment. We read in his First Epistle: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood."²²⁴

The statement that the false prophets and the spirit of impurity will be removed from the land points to a period in which Satan will no longer be able to exercise a direct influence upon the life of man. This must refer to the Millennium.²²⁵ If that is true, this section belongs chronologically before the preceding one, and the fountain of cleansing flows then particularly for Israel when the Lord is King in Jerusalem.

If we understand this correctly, the binding of Satan does not necessarily mean that that man in that period of history will be freed from his sinful nature. The very fact that people who live at that time, when there will be no longer any direct demonic influence, feel the need to prophesy lies, indicates that the absence of the devil and the presence of the Lord does not automatically sanctify man. Sanctification never occurs without the involvement of our will.

The content of vs. 3 is very difficult to digest emotionally. We must take into account the time in which it was written and the time in which it will be fulfilled. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: "The form of phraseology here is drawn from Deut 13:6-10; 18:20. The substantial truth expressed is, that false prophecy shall be utterly abolished. If it were possible for it again to start up, the very parents of the false prophet would not let parental affection interfere, but would be the first to thrust him through. Love to Christ must be paramount to the tenderest of natural ties (Matt 10:37). Much as the godly love their children, they love God and His honor more." It is a terrible thing when parents must turn against their children and surrender them to be executed. As the quoted commentary states, the attitude proves, however, that father and mother love the Lord more than their child. The Bible

²²¹ Text by William Cowper

²²² II Cor. 5:21

²²³ See Acts 16:16-18

²²⁴ I John 4:1-6

²²⁵ See Rev. 20:1-3

demands this kind of love. It is the “first love” mentioned in Jesus’ letter to the church in Ephesus.²²⁶ It is the love that cedes the first place to the Lord.

Our problem in understanding the situation described here is that we do not know a world in which Satan had no longer any influence at all. The presence of the Lord during this period would be so overwhelming that Satan would have little space to maneuver in Israel. If, in our present condition, parents would turn thus against their son, it would be murder. But imagine a couple that knows to have escaped the hell of this sinful world and who have been eyewitness of the Lord’s Second Coming. They have experienced the cleansing of their lives in the fountain that flows from Jerusalem. Then they see how corruption is about to be brought back into the world by means of their son. They face the choice of sparing their son and open the door for the return of sin into a cleansed world, or to surrender him. Would it be an ethical response to spare the son and let the rest of the world go to hell? May God spare us from ever having to make that kind of choice!

This verse repeats the injunction of Deuteronomy where Moses states: “If your very own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, ‘Let us go and worship other gods’ (gods that neither you nor your fathers have known, gods of the peoples around you, whether near or far, from one end of the land to the other), do not yield to him or listen to him. Show him no pity. Do not spare him or shield him. You must certainly put him to death. Your hand must be the first in putting him to death, and then the hands of all the people. Stone him to death, because he tried to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and no one among you will do such an evil thing again.”²²⁷

In verses 4-6, which conclude this section, we see depicted how the prophetic movement goes underground. The prophets will no longer prophesy openly. They will feel ashamed and will no longer wear a clerical garb to openly show that they are prophets. They will go about like farmers or serfs. But in reality they will belong to the guild of the false prophets who worship idols and who mutilate themselves for their idols’ sake. That is supposedly the meaning of the wounds on their bodies. Some people have applied these words to the suffering and crucifixion of Christ. That interpretation focuses rather on the sound of the words than upon the context. Jerome, however, connecting them to the following sections, sees a prophecy about Jesus’ crucifixion in these words.

13. The striking of the Good Shepherd 13:7-9

7 "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!" declares the LORD Almighty. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones.

8 In the whole land," declares the LORD, "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it.

9 This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.'"

Jesus quotes vs. 7 in a paraphrased form in connection with His suffering and death, and Peter’s denial, as being part of the general abandon by all His disciples. We read in Matthew’s Gospel: “Then Jesus told them, ‘This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’”²²⁸ Jesus’ quotation sheds a clear light for us on this passage. The shepherd is, obviously, our Lord Jesus Christ. We get the impression, though, that this prophecy was not only fulfilled at the time of the death of our Lord. It rather seems that these verses span the ages. It is true that the sheep were shattered when the disciples fled the scene of the crucifixion, but two-third of the population did not perish on that day. This may have been what happened in the heavenly realms. John speaks in Revelation about percentages of the world population that will die. During the reign of the Antichrist, “a fourth of the earth [will be killed] by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.”²²⁹ And when the Antichrist invokes the assistance of demonic powers, we read: “A third of

²²⁶ See Rev. 2:4

²²⁷ Deut. 13:6-11

²²⁸ Matt. 26:31

²²⁹ Rev. 6:8

mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths.”²³⁰ Zechariah obviously uses here an apocalyptic language; although the death of the Lord and the extermination of two-third of mankind are mentioned in the same breath, the two are probably separated by several centuries. This is the prophetic perspective we often see in the Bible, when the prophet sees the mountain peaks but not the valleys that separate one from the other.

The emphasis in the last verses is not on the third part that perishes but on those that are saved. Whether this will be literally one-third of the whole world population is a hypothetical question. As in the Parable of the Sower in Matthew’s Gospel,²³¹ we are probably dealing here also with symbolic percentages. The Bible speaks of a minority; whether large or small, we do not know. The important thing is that those who remain will be purified. God is interested in our faith. Peter states this clearly in his First Epistle: “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith-of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”²³² These words embrace the whole complex of Christian experience. All pressure, struggle, and the hand of God uses suffering for the specific purpose of strengthening our faith and bringing us to the place where we can pray and receive an answer. The result of this purification is a unique experience of mutual fellowship. There is not only man’s confession that he knows God, but above all God’s confession that He knows man. Man does not even take any initiative in this; it all begins with God. We seldom realize how important we are to God. If we understood this better, our attitude toward Him and our fellowmen would be different. True humility is only possible if we are conscious of our worth. Jesus demonstrates this when, in His rebuttal to the Jews, He says: “I am not possessed by a demon but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge.”²³³

14. God’s Revelation and Kingship 14:1-21

1 A day of the LORD is coming when your plunder will be divided among you.

2 I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city.

3 Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle.

4 On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south.

5 You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.

6 On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost.

7 It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime-a day known to the LORD. When evening comes, there will be light.

8 On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter.

9 The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name.

10 The whole land, from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem, will become like the Arabah. But Jerusalem will be raised up and remain in its place, from the Benjamin Gate to the site of the First Gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the royal winepresses.

11 It will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed. Jerusalem will be secure.

12 This is the plague with which the LORD will strike all the nations that fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths.

13 On that day men will be stricken by the LORD with great panic. Each man will seize the hand of another, and they will attack each other.

²³⁰ Rev. 9:18

²³¹ See Matt. 13:3-9, 18-23

²³² I Peter 1:6,7

²³³ John 8:49,50

14 Judah too will fight at Jerusalem. The wealth of all the surrounding nations will be collected-great quantities of gold and silver and clothing.

15 A similar plague will strike the horses and mules, the camels and donkeys, and all the animals in those camps.

16 Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.

17 If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, they will have no rain.

18 If the Egyptian people do not go up and take part, they will have no rain. The LORD will bring on them the plague he inflicts on the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.

19 This will be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.

20 On that day HOLY TO THE LORD will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in the LORD's house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar.

21 Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the LORD Almighty, and all who come to sacrifice will take some of the pots and cook in them. And on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD Almighty.

The words “A day of the LORD is coming” evidently usher in a completely new era outside world history as we know it now. This epoch seems to correspond to the one John describes in Revelation when the Millennium has come to an end and the rebelling nations of the earth march against Jerusalem and besiege it.²³⁴ This will mark the return of the Lord to the Mount of Olives. It appears that a most severe earthquake that will change the character of the landscape will accompany His return. In Revelation, we see the heavenly antitype of the events that occur on earth. Satan will be captured and put in eternal confinement, which will make all resistance crumble on earth also.

What follows is a description in very earthy terms of a heavenly reality. The glory of the heavenly Jerusalem is portrayed in terms of “the Benjamin Gate,” “the First Gate,” “the Corner Gate,” “the Tower of Hananel,” and “the royal winepresses.” This description reminds us of C. S. Lewis’ *Chronicles of Narnia*, where in the book *The Last Battle*, the children find England back in heaven. We may find heaven to be like the hometown of our childhood. God’s greatness and glory will make heaven into the place of safety and comfort we knew as a child. I heard the story of a man on his deathbed, who could not detach himself from the old antique dresser he cherished. If he had put his trust in the Lord instead of in his possession, he would have found the same possessions again in glory. The New Jerusalem will contain the same nostalgia in glory of that which was so precious to us on earth.

Verses 12-15 deal with the plague with which the Lord will strike man and beast that have fought against Him. Bodily decomposition will begin in people who are still alive. I don’t understand how this will happen. While we are alive now, our spirit keeps decay at bay, but evidently, that will no longer be so at that time. That the spirit of life will still be present in man while decomposition sets in is obvious from the fact that, having in despair sought support with others and not having found it, he will turn to the others to destroy them. The break with God reaches here its deepest point. The image of the Creator will have completely disappeared from man. Every trace of his, both physically and spiritually, will have been wiped out. Even some people in Judah will fit in this category.

The conclusion of this chapter depicts the new heaven and new earth in lines and colors of a great Feast of Tabernacles. The law of the feast is found in Leviticus and Numbers.²³⁵ This feast was one of the most festive celebrations unto the Lord. There were decorations of fruit and branches of trees, similar to what we do at Christmas. The purpose was, in the words of Leviticus: “So your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.”²³⁶ Israel’s desert journey is, in many respects, a picture of the life of a Christian. We pass through this spiritual desert, which we call “world,” on our way to our homeland. When arrive in the New Jerusalem, God doesn’t want us to forget from where we came. The elements of our heavenly joy will be a reminder of our experiences on earth. A Dutch poet wrote a hymn in which the words occur: “There our “alienship” will be forgotten

²³⁴ See Rev. 20:7-10

²³⁵ See Lev. 23:33-36; Num. 29:12-28

²³⁶ Lev. 23:43

and we are home in our fatherland.” This must be incorrect. God does not want the memory to fade. There will be decomposition and dryness if we refuse to remember what we went through on earth.

There is a remarkable connection between the Egyptians, who kept Israel in slavery, and the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. Those who had been instruments in the hands of the Evil One to hinder the execution of God’s plan will have the option to go to the place of God’s revelation and share in the glory of His presence.

“On that day HOLY TO THE LORD will be inscribed on the bells of the horses.” The horse had always been a foreign animal in the life of the Israelite. In the early days, horses had to be imported from Egypt.²³⁷ King Solomon kept a large number of horses. We read in First Kings: “Solomon had four thousand stalls for chariot horses, and twelve thousand horses. The district officers, each in his month, supplied provisions for King Solomon and all who came to the king’s table. They saw to it that nothing was lacking. They also brought to the proper place their quotas of barley and straw for the chariot horses and the other horses.”²³⁸ This transgression of the law may have contributed to the king’s downfall. But we see in the New Jerusalem both the Egyptians as well as the horses. And those horses are the Lord’s horses; they belong to Him.

There will no longer be a distinction between that which is holy and the profane. There will be no difference between the cooking pots in the temple, the sacred utensils of the altar, and the common pots in the kitchen of a household. Since God became man and tabernacled among us, there will no longer be any difference between that which is religious and irreligious. In the story of the disciples picking grain on the Sabbath while walking through a grain field, Jesus says: “So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”²³⁹ Because Jesus is the Lord of our life, everything we do becomes a sacrament unto God. God accepts our “pots and pans” as the most sacred objects.

Zechariah’s final statement is that “on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD Almighty.” When Abraham arrived in Canaan, we read: “At that time the Canaanites were in the land.”²⁴⁰ Those were people who had strayed away so far from God that they could not longer find their way back. They had passed the point of no return. An example was the condition of the cities Sodom and Gomorrah. When Israel conquered Canaan the sin of the Amorites had reached its full measure.²⁴¹ We read in Deuteronomy that the Ammonites and Moabites were forbidden to come into the house of the Lord: “No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation. For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you. However, the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you. Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them as long as you live.”²⁴² Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab, who are mentioned by Nehemiah,²⁴³ probably belong to this group of Canaanites also. Zechariah’s mention of these people suggests that the problem had not been solved yet in his day. This was not so much a racial discrimination as an objection to the works of the Canaanites. Ruth, who was a Canaanite, was accepted in Israel and the Lord Jesus has some Canaanite blood in His veins. But the practices of these people excluded them from a life of fellowship with God. In the words of the apostle Paul: “Nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”²⁴⁴ This corresponds to John’s words in Revelation: “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”²⁴⁵

This prophecy was originally spoken in connection with the rebuilding of the temple. The work had stopped on orders of the Persian king. The result of Zechariah’s prophecy was that the work was

²³⁷ See Deut. 17:16

²³⁸ 1 Kings 4:26-28

²³⁹ See Mark 2:23-28

²⁴⁰ Gen. 12:6

²⁴¹ See Gen. 15:16

²⁴² Deut. 23:3-6

²⁴³ See Neh. 2:19

²⁴⁴ I Cor. 6:10

²⁴⁵ Rev. 21:8,27

resumed. But the content of his message goes much deeper than the erection of a construction of stone in Jerusalem. It points to a heavenly reality, to the Jerusalem that has the glory of God, in which no temple will be found because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ Rev. 21:22