

# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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“O my dove, in the clefts of the rock,  
In the secret places of the cliff,  
Let me see your face,  
Let me hear your voice;  
For your voice is sweet, and  
your face is lovely.”  
(Song of Solomon  
2:14 NKJV)



# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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The Bible Study Monthly, published to promote knowledge of the Bible, sees the Scriptures as a true record of God's dealings with the human race, needing to be understood in our generation. It stands for the pre-millennial advent of our Lord, and His reign of peace and justice on the earth.

*"Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ."* (Ephesians 4:15 NRSV)

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## THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

*"O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely."* (Song of Solomon 2:14 NKJV)

Doves can be seen from time to time around the odd dovecote you may see in a British village. Occasionally they are seen among the feral pigeon population in the towns and cities in Britain as well as in other cities in the world where they are mainly viewed as a pest or nuisance.

The dove is first found in the Biblical account of Noah and the flood where Noah sends one out that comes back with an olive leaf to show that the water had almost gone. (Gen. 8:11) Perhaps it was the homing aspect which guided Noah to use the dove. But when he sends it out a week later the dove did not return to the ark and Noah realised the land was beginning to return to normal.

Nahum 2:7 uses the mourning of the dove to show the depth of feeling at the death of a loved one. Doves are well-known for pairing for life. In Nahum it was used to describe the sorrow of the queen and her maids at the death of the king of Assyria and the demise of that once great city, Nineveh. The prophet Isaiah also uses the imagery in chapter 59 and v.11.

Peace is symbolised by the dove which is why it was used to open every Olympic Games from Antwerp, Belgium in 1920 to Seoul, South Korea in 1988 after which they decided not to use real animals but often try and use the symbol of the dove somewhere in the opening ceremony to keep the

peace-loving symbolism going. The very attendance of those nations shows the state of peace between those nations competing.

Diametrically opposed to the dove would be the lion or the leopard. Like Babylon is symbolised by the lion to show her power as the first world empire. (Daniel 7) The opposite in the bird world is the hawk. The hawk is very aggressive to birds like doves and also against each other when they are in their own territory. Hence the expression hawkish. Jacob had to think about how to approach his brother Esau whether in a hawkish or dovish way when he returned to the promised land with his two wives and twelve children.

A dove also symbolises humility, meekness, tenderness and affection. How often God chose those qualities in the men He chose. Was not David a humble shepherd when God was looking for a king to rule his chosen nation? Did not some of the prophets come from humble backgrounds like Amos the herdsman. Were not most of the disciples ordinary men of Galilee and fishermen. Was not Jesus brought up as the son of a carpenter and his mother Mary an ordinary young woman, not a princess, albeit of the line of David?

When Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist, at the river Jordan, the spirit of God descended like a dove from heaven saying “This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matt. 3:16-17) What more suitable bird this was to describe someone from the spirit plane and the attributes of this one to be a man of peace, not of war.

In this world we are told to be “harmless as doves.” (Matt. 10:16) This indicates how we should behave in this world at the present time of division and aggression.

But going back to the mourning dove, mourning is a consequence from the death of a loved one. The Song of Solomon uses the language of the dove to express the love between Christ and the church which is how it is used in chapter 2 and verse 14. John in his epistle shows how Jesus loved us first. (1 John 4:19) It also shows how God loved us in sending his son. (1 John 4:10) But the love match in that Old Testament book shows how that love develops and is reciprocated and over time leads to a blessed state.



## THE SHINING ONES

*A quiet meditation*

*“Though ye have lien among the pots yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.” (Psa. 68:13)*

This little gem appears to be out of place in a song of David which seems full of superlatives ascribing to God power and salvation on behalf of a nation, even a world, held in captivity. From among its stirring sentiments peeps this homely vignette of the dove among the pots, those broken fragments of earthenware flung carelessly upon the flat house-top after the Eastern fashion.

The poet-king may have been sitting upon his own royal roof, thoughtfully plucking the strings of his instrument while seeking inspired words in which to express his unbounded confidence and praise to “him that rideth upon the heavens.” (v.33) His mind may suddenly have been arrested by a flight of doves from some humbler roof, a common enough sight, their wings gleaming in the sunlight. If so, he was led to include it in the colourful imagery by which he described God’s ways with man.

It is the theme of the obscure brought to beauty from unlikely places by unlikely methods. As David’s eye followed the track of the gentle, domesticated dove, the flashing wings became a flash of insight. Although the bird of peace had made her nest and reared her brood among discarded household rubbish, yet she and her young ones spread wings of silver and gold as they soared untrammelled into the clear air.

Some of the world’s finest and most useful people have come from obscure corners and humble homes to shine in the affairs of men like knights in silver armour with breastplates of gold presented to all the fiery darts of a malicious opposition. David himself was one chosen from the sheepcote to be anointed king of Israel. Sallying forth in his shepherd’s tunic, armed with sling and pebbles, he was the knight of God, battling with giant opposition, planting a victorious foot on a loud-voiced, bragging foe.

God’s choice of men, women and circumstances rarely coincide with those of human choice. History has proved how wise and fitting are his arrangements, far above and infinitely better than those thought out by man’s wisdom.

*God nothing does, nor suffers to be done  
But thou thyself would'st do  
Could'st thou but see,  
The end of all events, as well as He.*

As Jesus remarked, “They that wear soft clothing are (live) in kings’ houses.” (Matt. 11:8) When God was preparing a herald for his Son he did not choose a prince from a royal court but a young man bred in the solitude of the wilderness, clad in a coat of camel’s hair. John the Baptist is a far more arresting figure than the cunning, self-indulgent Herod who put him to death. His place in history is assured for all time as a hero of faith, a prophet of God and much more than a prophet; he prepared the way for the Son of the Highest.

Had human wisdom chosen the birthplace of that Son, nothing less than a golden crib in the palace of earth’s mightiest ruler would have satisfied a fastidious choice. But God chose a stable with the manger of the tired donkeys for a cot and that lowly place of birth has captured the imagination of the world. Pilgrims of all nations find their way to Bethlehem, there to bend the knee, to bow head and heart upon that unlikely spot from which emerged the Light of the World. Artists have employed their finest talents endeavouring to depict the scene, when men and angels adored the birth of One who has left an indelible mark upon the history of humanity. Yearly the scene of that humble nativity is enacted in song and story, the theme vaguely understood but closely connected with the life and hopes of humanity.

*“Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee...Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising...Thy light (shall) rise in obscurity.”* (Isa. 60:1,3; 58:10).

The prophets of Israel understood the mind of God. They had grasped his purpose. That He was no respecter of persons, that He passed by the pomp and vanities of this world, seeking and finding his gems, his shining ones, where no one else would look for them, was a facet of Divine character with which they became familiar. There were proud matrons in Israel who would have been prouder still to have mothered their long-awaited Messiah, but the choice fell on an obscure village maiden, descendant of an obscure branch of David’s royal line. Humility, meekness, tenderness and affection, qualities seen in the little dove of the house tops, shone radiantly in her as they did in all fullness in Jesus who exhorted his hearers to “*learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.*” (Matt. 11:29)

On his way to Calvary women cried out their envy of the woman who had borne him, who had nourished his childhood and cherished his youth, who had stored in her heart so many unspeakable memories as yet untold. But it was she who stood at the foot of his cross, the sword of anguish through her soul, her sorrow like that of the mourning, forsaken dove.

From the obscurity of a despised Galilean village, from a humble carpenter's bench, emerged that light which shone upon the darkness of the world, a light men would not or could not accept, because "*men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*" (John 3:19)

The Gentiles saw and recognised that light. Many in the western world in turn rose from obscurity, sending out a light where none had been expected. David foresaw his own small nation, emerging from the obscurity of Egyptian bondage, rising again and yet again as did the dove, from the shattered remnants of other civilisations, educated, disciplined, humbled, but covered with the silver and gold of a dearly bought wisdom, to become the head instead of the tail of many nations; an agent of blessing according to an ancient oath-bound promise.

The Apostles followed the prophets with the vision of a still higher creation, a still brighter light risen from the obscurity of human weakness to shine with the bright glory of God. Still following this theme in his letter to the Corinthians, the inspired apostle says, "*Not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are.*" (1 Cor. 1:26-28).

Indeed God's ways and thoughts are not as man's. When finally the curtain rises on a new Age with a great burst of light from the ascending Sun of Righteousness in the new Heavens, seen shining with him in that bright firmament will be some of those humble, foolish, weak, despised outsiders, who in their lifetime wore neither crown nor mitre, who occupied no important office, who played no central role in any assembly, who were not clever enough to be scholars, but who were wise and loving enough to be saints. "*Though ye have lien among the pots*" applies to goodness, wisdom, and beauty in whatever form they have been shrugged off and neglected by the short-sightedness of the policies of self-seeking peoples.

The dove is the emblem of peace. With her olive branch she is part of the pictorial language of nations. Fidelity, purity, gentleness are essential parts of her nature. This home loving bird was used to carry messages to convey love from one absent friend to another. The tame, leaf-carrying, letter-carrying gentle-eyed creature who readily came to rest on an outstretched hand, stirs in the responsive heart a sense of affection. When God would identify himself at Jordan with the well-beloved Son, the Spirit, like a dove, descended upon him. The bird of the housetops became the bird of heaven, its wings clad in the radiant silver and gold of the Divine Spirit.

Nations in their heraldry have chosen the eagle, the lion, the leopard, the bear, to carry upon their shields or emblazon upon their standards. These fearsome creatures, equipped with talons, beaks, claws and fangs, whose only function is the rending and tearing of flesh, "Nature, red in tooth and claw," (Tennyson) have in their way expressed the war-like tendencies of man, the savagery by which men have exterminated men from time to time. There is something proud, arrogant, and ruthless about these emblems of national pomp. The dove of peace, so gentle by comparison, has fallen victim to the birds of prey. To fight is not her nature. Flight is her only weapon, nor will she feed on flesh. Her food is the clean grain, the wholesome fruit of the earth. The undefiled dove is the emblem of purity, quick to forgive and forget injuries, affectionate, faithful, mourning with deep sadness when forsaken, yet joyous in company, loving the haunts of men. So has peace haunted the minds of men, with a longing, a deep desire to be at rest, to be free, not only from the carnage of war but from the tumults and quarrels of social, political, and domestic life. Forever seeking peace and forever losing it in the brittle divisions of opinions, it remains only a name, an unattainable ideal, except to those rare few who have allied themselves in mystic union with Jesus, the Prince of Peace. The world can neither give peace nor get peace, nor will it ever know peace until that same Jesus rebukes its angry roar and nations bow in submission to his rule of love and justice.

*"He will lift up an ensign to the nations from far."* (Isa. 5:26) An ensign for the people, for the nations, is a rallying place, a standard, a banner, enlisting and uniting them in a common cause. It is a sign of challenge and of victory over opposing forces. When the King of kings and Lord of lords goes out to make final war against the forces of evil which have so long riddled society and destroyed the happiness of mankind, his banner will be unfurled above the fallen standards of this world. Not on his breastplate will leap the quartered leopards or the staff-hugging bear; not

on his spotless flag the lion rampant or the double-headed eagle. If there is a natural emblem at all it will be the dove of peace, the emblem of love and goodwill, whose harmlessness he recommended to his followers. God's ways are the opposite of man's. In the new heavens and new earth where all things will be created new, the differences between his kingdom and those of this world will be in strong contrast. Righteousness, right living, right thinking, justice, and love will dominate and permeate the earth, for "*He shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth.*" (Zech. 9:10).

Neither the lion of the tribe of Judah, the star of David or the lamb bearing the cross, commendable though these emblems are, will so emphasise the spirit of the reigning Prince of peace, as that form of the dove which descended upon him at Jordan. When Jesus cleared the bustling merchandise out of the Temple he forbore to overturn the cages of the doves. Sheep and oxen he drove before him with a hastily made whip of rushes; the tables of the moneylenders he threw to the floor, caring nothing for the coinage rolling in all directions, but at the seats of those who sold doves he issued a command and that they should be carried out. The gentle emblems of purity received his gentle consideration.

The will of God, the law of God, the word of God, the person of Jesus Christ and his gospel of peace and love, which have for so long lain among the broken pots of creeds, systems and vain philosophies, of stubborn rebellion, of doubts and careless rejection, will at last emerge in their truth and beauty, too evident to be denied and too bright to be unobserved.

"Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD." (Zech. 4:6) Not by fire, storm, or earthquake, but by the still, small voice, will the human race be gentled into peace. Its evil regime may perish from its own violence but its reformation will be achieved under the shining banner of peace. As the early Christian religion overthrew the gods of the pagan world so will the peace of God under its Divine emblem subdue the nations, tame their savage impulses, and create in man a new and clean heart.

*Then shall all shackles fall; the stormy clangour  
Of wild war music o'er all the earth shall cease;  
Love shall tread out the baleful fires of anger,  
And in its ashes plant the tree of peace. (J. G. Whittier)*

TWW



## DANIEL IN BABYLON

*The story of a great man's faith*

### 10. The Beginning of the End

It was two years after Daniel's dream of the four world-empires, in the guise of four ravenous wild beasts, that the aged prophet's eyes were opened again. Perhaps it was the quickening tempo of political events around him that sharpened the old man's faculties and enabled him to apply himself more devotedly to the leading of the Spirit. For more than ten years past the name of a military leader, Cyrus of Anshan, descendant of the kings of Elam, had been familiar to him as it was to all dwellers in Babylon. Cyrus with his armies was rapidly bringing all the lands of the Middle East into subjection to the rising power of the Medes, who with Babylonians had destroyed Assyria some hundred years previously and in the days of Nebuchadnezzar had ranked as a friendly power to Babylon. Queen Amytis, the wife of Nebuchadnezzar, was herself a princess of Media. But Nebuchadnezzar had been dead now for thirteen years and Queen Amytis was destined to follow him only a year after this particular vision of Daniel, and Cyrus had ambitious designs on Babylon. His army was engaged in the siege of Sardis, capital of Lydia, the only power beside Babylon which remained unsubdued, and Daniel, astute politician that he was, must have known that Babylon's turn could not be much longer delayed.

So it is not surprising that in the eighth chapter of Daniel we are taken right into the centre of happenings which were to transfer the sovereignty of the world, first from Babylon to Medo-Persia, and then from Medo-Persia to Greece. This vision and this prophecy is one of the easiest in the whole of the Bible to interpret for the reason that its application is given by the revealing angel in terms of the plain names of the countries concerned. The correspondence with history is so marked that there can be no doubt about the matter. The factor that requires a little more thought, and yet is of greater importance than the interpretation, is the question: of what value is this strictly "history-book" prophecy to us? But that question can be looked at after we have considered the vision itself.

According to chap. 8, verse 2, Daniel was "*at Shushan in the palace...in the province of Elam.*" It is fairly obvious from the text that he was there only "in the spirit," not literally. Elam and Babylon were virtually in a state of war at this time and Daniel could hardly have been in the capital city of the enemy. He might very well have been a visitor in his earlier years when the two countries were on friendly terms; official business might well have taken him thither, so that it may not be at all strange to

think of him seeing, in his dream, surroundings which were already familiar, and realising, perhaps for the first time, that here was a future stage for later acts of the Divine Plan when Babylon had ceased to be a power in the hands of God. Shushan eventually became the capital city of Persia, and was the home of Queen Esther and the scene of the events narrated in the Book of Esther, some seventy years later on.

The vision itself was a vivid and clear-cut one, easily remembered because of its simplicity and restrained symbolism. A ram, having horns of unequal length, the higher coming up last, was butting its way irresistibly west, north and south—obviously therefore coming from the east—until it stood supreme and none challenged its authority. For a moment Daniel saw it thus, and then beheld a furious he-goat bearing one great horn advancing from the west, charging the ram, casting it to the ground, and stamping upon it. So the he-goat in its turn stood supreme.

Now the great horn was broken and in its place there grew up four smaller horns; but the force and power of the goat was not the same; it was spent. Then there appeared, budding out from one of those horns, a little horn, a little horn which began to wax greater and greater, turning itself toward the east and south, and towards the land which was always in Daniel's heart, the land of Israel. With that thought the background of the vision changed, and Daniel realised that the horn was some strong power that would arise; he saw that power reaching up to heaven as though to challenge God in his own domain, and tearing down some of the stars from heaven, and stamping upon them.

Now Daniel was in the land of his desires, standing in the holy city, Jerusalem, and beheld the Temple of his longings, rebuilt and purified, the morning and the evening sacrifices offered in their due order by the appointed priests according to the law of Moses, the fulfilment of all that he had waited and sought through so many years. Here, at last, was the answer to his prayers. And he watched until that godless power revealed itself a ruthless despot which led its followers to bring to an end those morning and evening sacrifices, to profane and defile the holy Temple, to destroy and cast down all that was sacred to the One God, and persecute and slay those who maintained their loyalty and faith.

So the prophet's hopes and short lived joys were dashed as he saw the fair vision of Zion's glory crumble again into the dust and ashes of a ruined Temple and scattered people, as his fellows in Judea had seen it happen in reality forty years before. But that was all in the past, and God had

promised that he would restore Israel and dwell again with them in the Holy place; this vision spoke of the future, and declared the heart-breaking truth that after that restoration had become an accomplished fact and Israel had been delivered from captivity, the forces of evil would again prevail. With what painful intensity must Daniel have listened for the answer to the angel's question (v.13), for "*How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot?*" For what further long period of time must the desolation of the sanctuary and the oppression of God's people persist, before the final consummation of eternal glory for Israel? It was a gleam of hope; the desolation was not to be for ever; and Daniel listened anxiously for the answer.

*"Unto two thousand and three hundred evenings and mornings; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed."* (v.14 RV) Two thousand three hundred omissions of the daily morning and evening offerings of the sacrificial lamb. After that the oppressor's hand would be lifted, the profaned and defiled Temple be ceremonially purified and rededicated and then the worship of God be resumed without let or hindrance. That was the message to Daniel and that the end of the vision proper. At that point the revealing angel came forward to explain to Daniel what it was all about.

*"The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia."* (v.20) That is a plain, categorical statement admitting of no argument. The higher horn, which came up last, is plainly Persia. Media as an empire came into existence at the death of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, in 711 B.C., when the Medes revolted from Assyrian domination and established themselves as an independent kingdom under Deioces. Persia owed its rise largely to Cyrus more than a hundred and fifty years later, but in fact Persia did not become the acknowledged dominant factor in the Medo-Persian partnership until the time of Darius Hystaspes, the third king after Cyrus. Hence "*the higher came up last.*" (v.3) Daniel was perfectly familiar with the political set up of the nations in his own day and he would readily grasp the significance of this part of the vision. Next he was brought face to face with something that was still two centuries future, the overthrow of the Persian empire by Greece. "*The rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king.*" (v.21) That king is known in history, he was Alexander the Great, who led the Greeks into Asia round about the year 330 B.C. and subdued every nation in his path to the frontiers of India—and died at Babylon on his return journey a few years later. Thus was the great horn broken even as the prophecy foretold, and the empire built up by Alexander in those

few years was divided between four of the leading generals. “*Now that being broken, whereas four (horns) stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power.*” (v.22) Continued strife between contending leaders, ambitious for power, was resolved at last in the formation of four separate kingdoms something like twenty-two years after Alexander’s death. Macedonia passed into the control of Cassander; Thrace to Lysimachus; Syria, Judah, Babylon and Persia to Seleucus, and Egypt to Ptolemy. Israel was sandwiched between Syria in the north and Egypt in the south and her fortunes were bound up with these two contending powers. On this basis is built the further prophecies in Daniel picturing warfare between the “king of the north” and the “king of the south.” (Dan. 11)

Up to this point this vision follows and amplifies both Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the great image and Daniel’s dream of the four wild beasts, but whereas those dreams only showed the succession of four empires, gold, silver, copper, iron; and lion, bear, leopard and strange beast, this vision gives certain distinctive details of the second and third empires and distinguishes them by name. In verse 22 of chap. 8 therefore we are brought in history to about the year 300 B.C. by which time the contending factions in the break-up of Alexander’s empire had settled their differences and the four kingdoms were more or less firmly established.

Now the revealing angel ceases to use definite names. The “little horn” which came out of one of the four horns is defined as a fierce king who will arise “*in the latter time*” (v.23) of these four kingdoms and will be manifested as an enemy of God and a defiler of the sanctuary, but at the end he “*shall be broken without hand*” (v.25) and it is here that possible interpretations vary. The most natural understanding of the expression “*in the latter time of their kingdom*” (v.23) would appear to be the virtual ending of this four-kingdom set-up and its replacement by the fourth empire of prophecy, Rome, the iron of the image and the strange beast in Daniel’s dream. In point of fact three kingdoms—Macedonia, Thrace and Egypt—were all absorbed by Rome during the century before the birth of Christ. Of the fourth, Syria and the terrain west of the Euphrates were added to the Roman Empire at the same time, but the eastern provinces of the “*king of the north*” Assyria, Babylon, Persia, never did become part of Rome, but merged instead into the not inconsiderable empire of Parthia, the one great power Rome never did subdue. Parthia in turn disappeared before the Saracen armies early in the Christian era. It would seem therefore that the “*little horn*” in the “*latter time of their kingdom*” (the four-kingdom quartet), must have arisen during that century or so during

which Rome was pressing inexorably upon them.

The Romans originated from Greece in the 8th century B.C. but built up their power in Italy for some four centuries before manifesting interest in the Eastern lands. The death of Alexander and the consequent confusion amongst the four subsequent kingdoms awakened their interest and about sixty years after his death the then ruler of Egypt sent an embassy to Rome soliciting their help on his behalf in his conflict with Syria, to which the Jews were at the time subject. From then onwards Rome had an increasing influence in Eastern affairs.

Fifty years later Rome sent an embassy to Greece and from then on increasingly interfered in the political struggle between the four successors of Alexander gradually bringing them under their own control. The process culminated after a couple of centuries with Pompey's capture of Jerusalem in 63 B.C. at which point the Jews passed from the control of Greece to that of Rome. A century later the Romans subdued Judah and Galilee, destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple and scattered the Jews all over the world.

Of the various interpretations of this vision which have been current through the centuries three have to be noticed. The immediate one, current in Jewry immediately prior to the First Advent, and carried over into early Christian thought, was that the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes of the 2nd century B.C. filled the role of the "little horn" and the "fierce king" of this chapter. Prophetic writers have described his conduct in such detail that there is no need to repeat it here; the Jews themselves have never been in any doubt as to his place in this prophecy. Antiochus launched a furious persecution against Jewish worship; he plundered the Temple and desecrated it by offering a sow upon the Brasen Altar; this was the defilement from which the sanctuary was later to be cleansed. Plenty of calculations exist interpreting the two thousand three hundred days as the literal number of days—about three and a half years—during which the Temple was to lie defiled. It is a fact that the cleansing and re-dedication of the Temple by Judas Maccabeus in 165 B.C. was approximately three and a half years after its defilement in 168 B.C. It is claimed that the two thousand three hundred "evening-mornings"—repetitions of the morning and evening sacrifices—equals eleven hundred and fifty literal days, and this was approximately, but only approximately, the interval between defilement and cleansing. So far as can be discovered from the histories of the period, the actual time was about eleven hundred and ninety two days.

This interpretation, viewed from the present time, has one serious defect. Although not stated in so many words, it is implied that once the “sanctuary” is “cleansed,” Israel’s troubles are over and the Messiah would appear to establish his kingdom, sitting on the throne of the Lord at Jerusalem. At that time this could be held to be reasonable. According to Jewish expectation that event was to take place six thousand years from Creation, and their own Scriptures of that era claimed that the time was close at hand. Only two centuries later, when Jesus did appear at his First Advent, it is stated that “all men were in expectation.” The reality was different. Christ did appear, but the time of his reign upon earth was still two thousand years away.

It is also true that the constant warfare between Syria and Egypt, between the death of Alexander and the Roman supremacy three centuries later, involved repeated acts of desecration of the Temple and robbery of its treasures. The Jews themselves were not without blame. Much of the severity of Antiochus Epiphanes was due to his efforts to quell the fratricidal conflicts between the supporters of contending High Priests, each endeavouring to secure the coveted position for themselves, shedding much blood in consequence. It is said by dispassionate historians that Ptolemy Philopator of Egypt at much the same time was a greater oppressor of the Jews than was Antiochus Epiphanes of Syria.

The other major interpretation is that the “little horn” is Mahomet (Muhammad) the prophet of Islam and that the defilement of the sanctuary occurred when at the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem in A.D. 637 the holy places were handed over to the forces of the Caliph Omar. This ignores the fact that at the time the Holy City had been in possession of the Christians for many years and in fact the Jews at the time were better off under the Muslims than they had been under the Christians. This hypothesis is a centuries old conception born of the detestation of the Muslims felt by the then Christian world and since from the nature of the case the end of the 2,300 days must lie somewhere near the seven times of Gentile rule in the earlier account of the Babylonian king’s experience, this explanation would appear rather irrational.

Somewhere during the three centuries the enthusiasm of those pioneers who returned from Babylon in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah faded away and was lost, submerged in a sea of self-seeking and violence between antagonistic parties under which true worship disappeared. The lesson of Babylon had not been learned; that was the true defilement of the sanctuary and that was more than two thousand years ago. Perhaps not

only Antiochus, but also Titus, pagan Rome, the forces of Islam, Papal Rome, the powers of this world as they now exist, are all part of this little horn, this fierce king, who is to give way at the appointed time to a cleansed sanctuary. When Ezekiel in his vision of the Last Days pictured the last great conflict, he declared “*so the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day and forward.*” (Ezek. 39:22) In that case, although the end of the 2,300 days has manifestly not yet come, it must certainly be imminent, in this our day when the world as we know it is going to pieces. The Kingdom for which Daniel looked and prayed is not now a long way off; it might well be “at the doors.” So the most reasonable identification of the “little horn,” arising out of the original four may well be Rome, originating from the Greek “horn” of Cassander, defiling the “sanctuary” of Israel by wars and oppression through the centuries of Rome pagan, Rome Papal, until at the end the fourth world-empire seen by Daniel comes to its end at the coming of the Millennial Kingdom of our Lord. The cleansing of the sanctuary is then synonymous with the deliverance of Israel in the day of “Jacob’s Trouble” (Ezek. 38 & 39) at the end of this Present Age.

Suffice it that Daniel perceived from this vision the probably very unwelcome truth that even though Israel be delivered from the power of Babylon and Jerusalem be restored, the days of Israel’s darkness were not ended; trouble and distress were yet to be their lot because of renewed unfaithfulness and apostasy. The end of all evil and the time of the kingdom were still a long way off.

The realisation came slowly. Even yet Daniel was not permitted to perceive the details of wars and rumours of wars which were to fill the long Gospel Age and terminate in a time of trouble which had not been since there was a nation. That was reserved for his final vision, the one that is recorded in his tenth to twelfth chapters, and that vision was vouchsafed to him something like fifteen years after the one we are now considering. Slowly, through the whole of his long life, Daniel was brought to realise that the ways of God, sure and unchangeable though they be, require for their accomplishment what seems to the mind of man, long and sometimes weary terms of years. One little human life is a very short span in the vast time-scale of the Creator’s outworking purpose.

Perhaps that is the real lesson for us in Daniel chapter 8. Whether the little horn is descriptive of Antiochus or Mahomet or both; whether the mystic 2,300 represents literal days or symbolic years, or only evenings and mornings, half-days, is all of very little consequence compared with the

great central truth embedded in this chapter. The downfall of the Gentile powers which oppressed Old Testament Israel, the return of the captives to Jerusalem, the rebuilding of their Temple and their city, would not of itself abolish evil and bring in everlasting righteousness. Righteous zeal and true worship would flourish again, but it would flag and fade. Apostasy and iniquity would certainly return, and with it the distress and oppression which under Israel's covenant was the logical and inevitable consequence. Again must the rod of the Lord be wielded, and whether that rod be Antiochus the scourge of Israel or Mahomet the scourge of Christendom matters little, for the principle is the same. Both Daniel's people and all the world must needs wait for two great things, both of which are necessary to bring in the golden age for which Daniel longed. One is the First Advent and the other is the Second Advent. In visions yet to come Daniel was destined to see each of those great events pictured and only with both of them accomplished facts did he at last see the glad vision of resurrection.

So it must be with us. We have been privileged, as Daniel was never privileged to know that we live in the days of the Second Advent but we do not see the work of the Advent completed—in fact it is scarcely begun. Like Daniel, we still do not know “how long.” Blessed are we if, again like Daniel, we rest firm in our conviction that, though it tarry, “*it will surely come, it will not tarry.*” (Hab. 2:3) Even though still like Daniel, we are destined first to “*rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.*” (Dan. 12:13) Daniel died in Babylon without seeing that for which his heart had waited his whole life long; we like so many of our forebears in the past, may have to do the same. Happy we if, notwithstanding that, we are found steadfast in faith until the end.

*(To be continued)*

AOH

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“*No cross, no crown*” is a famous saying of William Penn, the Quaker founder of Pennsylvania. It is illustrated by the experience of Simon of Cyrene, who was compelled by the Roman soldiers to bear Jesus' cross. Simon had come from North Africa to attend the Passover, and his feelings can be better imagined than described on that day when this fate befell him. He had doubtless made his own plans for the day, but these were upset by this unexpected incident. Believers are always encountering experiences of that type, and they are always finding the abundant blessings into which the Cyrenian Jew stumbled. One was immortality. Wherever the Gospel is preached his name will be honoured to the end of the age. Another appears to have been eternal life, for Mark writes of him as the father of two well-known Christians, Alexander and Rufus. (Mark 15:21)

September / October '78



## A KING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

*A short study in the Millennial Visions of Isaiah*

### Part 1

*Isaiah, the statesman-prophet, lived in the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah and Manasseh, five successive kings of Judah; his prophetic ministry covered a term of more than sixty years. A priest by descent and legal right, he was a close student of the political developments of his day and a constant adviser to the royal court—especially to Ahaz and Hezekiah. The first thirty-five chapters of his prophecy record his utterances during the first thirty years or so of his ministry, up to the early years of Hezekiah. They comprise prophetic glimpses of the order of things in the Millennial Age set against the background of the evils of his own day. His understanding of the virtues and vices of kings, priests and peoples, and the principles upon which God will act to accomplish his purposes with them, fitted him very specially to be the prophet of the Millennial Age. More than anything else, therefore, his prophecies enshrine in symbol the principles that will govern that Age.*

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The theme of Isaiah's message in chapters 30 and 32 is kingship. This resolute, upstanding man of God had much experience of kings; he spent his life more or less in and out of the royal presence in the palace at Jerusalem, and he was by no means without knowledge of the kings of nations round about. Judah at this time was a flourishing state; its boundaries were extended almost as far as they had been in the days of Solomon, its armies were a power not to be ignored, and it was able to play off its two powerful neighbours, Assyria and Egypt, the one against the other in the best diplomatic tradition. A new power, Babylon, was coming into prominence—rather, an ancient power that had been eclipsed by Assyria for several centuries and was now coming into its own again—and Judah was flirting with that power too. Isaiah, the farsighted and astute statesman, warned the kings of Judah, one after another, of the risks they ran, but his warnings were very usually ignored and during his own life-time the nation came perilously near to disaster, being saved only by Divine intervention in the destruction of Sennacherib's host; and a century or so after his death it did suffer the inevitable consequence of its political mistakes and was taken captive into Babylon.

But Isaiah also knew of another king, one who would, in time to come, reign in righteousness and bring peace and prosperity to the people. He knew that it would not be in his own time; like Abraham of old, he had to

look forward into the then far distant future, but look forward he did, and, again like Abraham, he “*rejoiced to see*” that day, “*and was glad.*” (John 8:56) So, when the prophetic power was strong upon him, he thought first upon the kings he knew in his own experience, their weaknesses and their folly, and warned his hearers of the ruin that must surely come; then as the vision of the present dissolved into that of the future his mind took a great bound forward into the coming Age, and he told of the better King who would accomplish all the good for humanity that kings ought to accomplish now, but which the kings that men set up, or suffer to take the dominion, have never and will never accomplish.

The thirtieth chapter opens with a message of condemnation upon Israel for seeking alliance with Egypt instead of trusting in the Lord their God for protection from the menace of Assyria. “*Woe to the rebellious children, saith the LORD, that take counsel, but not of me...that walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt!*” “*Woe to them that go down unto Egypt for help...but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel.*” (Isa. 30:1-2; 31:1). Israel had been delivered from this same Egypt seven centuries previously; now of their own volition they were becoming entangled with its fortunes again.

Not for nothing has Egypt been accepted as a symbol of the world. Many a time since the days of Isaiah have those who should have trusted in God chosen instead to entangle themselves with worldly policies, and methods and alliances; the result has always been what it was to Israel in that far-off day—disastrous. Now in our own day the same determination is manifest in the world’s counsels and councils. “*In...all his (their) thoughts are, ‘There is no God!’*” (Psa. 10:4 RSV) is a true quotation when applied to the great men of the earth today. It is not so much that they do not believe in the existence of God; many of them are quite sincere in the profession of some orthodox form of the Christian faith. But they are persuaded that salvation can only come by the strong right arm of human power—reasoning and agreement, if possible, and if that fails, then by force. Under no circumstances will they risk either the “loss of face” or the—to them—appearance of weakness involved in casting their dependence upon God. Israel was like that too, here in this thirtieth chapter of Isaiah, and onward until faced with a crisis, when Egypt had manifestly failed to deliver, and Sennacherib’s army stood before the gates of Jerusalem...

But *that* great deliverance was still future. Here Isaiah is pronouncing

Divine judgment upon this unbelieving generation and its king. *“Go, write it before them...in a book, that it may be for the time to come...that this is a rebellious people...that will not hear the law (word) of the LORD.”* (vv.8-9). From that he goes on to declare the utter destruction that will inevitably come, and that did in fact come in the days of Nebuchadnezzar. Even in this extreme the Father again appeals to his erring children. (v.15-16) *“For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; ‘In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength:’”* and Isaiah adds, sadly but sternly, *“and ye would not. But ye said ‘No; for we will flee upon horses...’”* So he passes sentence; they shall indeed flee, and be broken, and be scattered, until none be left in the land.

Now although this is the pass to which Judah’s kings have brought their subjects, and the people have been willing to have it so, God is by no means prepared to let matters rest there. True, the people must endure the judgment they have brought upon themselves. The weakness of Egypt will be made manifest; the Assyrian power in their own day, and the Babylonian power in their children’s day, must stalk through the land, burning, destroying and slaying, but God has a plan that extends beyond all this, and will yet reach out for their deliverance. So, at this point, Isaiah begins to see into the future. What he beholds is dim and shadowy at first, and he speaks only in general terms; later on in the thirty-second chapter, he perceives more distinctly and speaks more clearly. But even now he apprehends the promise of deliverance. The Lord will wait *“that he may be gracious unto you...for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him. For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shalt weep no more: He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when He shall hear it, He shall answer thee.”* (vv. 18-19).

Here again the one unalterable, indispensable principle is reiterated. The people have entered into the bitterness and retribution for their fault; they have spurned the word of the Lord and rejected his prophet, and have reaped the consequences. But there is to be another opportunity for them; for God is a God of a second chance and a third chance and as many chances, as may be necessary to teach his wandering ones their lesson, always provided that the proffered further chance is based upon some real possibility, some reasonable hope, that it will bring the wanderer somewhere nearer to God. So, once again, Israel may return and be delivered, *if they believe*, and trust no longer in Egypt. *“He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry;”* there must be the cry of faith and repentance before He can hear, and hearing, answer with his graciousness.

From that time forward, says Isaiah, peace and security will return. *“The increase of the earth...shall be fat and plenteous: in that day shall thy cattle feed in large pastures.”* (v.23). The images of gold and silver will be cast away and the curse of idolatry lifted from the land. (v.22). The true and sincere worship of God and absolute trust in him will go hand in hand with a restored and luxuriant earth that will meet man’s every need.

There will be discipline. In this coming golden age, man, who is still imperfect and weak, will need strict parental care and training before he can be trusted with full liberty in life. The old depraved tastes and desires, will shout to have their way and they must be restrained. The old impulses of selfishness and greed, mayhap even of hate and strife, will struggle for expression; and they must not be allowed to have free rein. There will be swift and certain retribution for every attempt to do evil. All of these disabilities will still afflict humanity, albeit in diminishing degree as the Age proceeds in its work of reconciliation, but there will be teachers at work, teachers who are no longer despised and rejected, but standing before men in the full light of day. *“Though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction,”* as He must do, even in the day of light and gladness, cries Isaiah (v.20) *“yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers; and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand...(or) to the left.”* (v.21) That is the distinguishing characteristic of the Millennial Age; the presence of experienced and qualified teachers ever on the alert to perceive the slightest deviation from the path of true rectitude and uprightness, and to guide the traveller with unerring wisdom into the ways of peace.

Who are these teachers? They are, first, the faithful consecrated Christian disciples of this present Age, of this period between Pentecost and now, and, second, the “Ancient Worthies,” faithful men of previous ages, before Pentecost. Both companies alike, by reason of their past lives’ experiences with man and his sinfulness, and of God and his power in their own lives, will be able to turn men from the power of sin to serve the living God. These will be the sure teachers of mankind “in that day.”

Thus it is that in the words of verse 26, the *“light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD bindeth up the breach of his people...”* In Scripture symbolism the sun is often put to represent the light of the Gospel, and the moon that of the Law of Sinai, which preceded the Gospel and yet is only truly illuminated by the Gospel. So, in that day, the

light of those teachers who were of the days of the Law, and the light of these teachers who are of the days of the Gospel, will together shine resplendently “as the light of *seven* days” upon men being healed. If it is true that the history of humankind on earth can be said to cover seven days, seven prophetic periods of time, and if it is true—as we know it is true—that each of those historic “days” will contribute its share of “teachers,” either earthly or heavenly teachers, to the work of the Millennial Day, then surely it may be said with truth, that the light of the moon and the sun will then be as the light of seven days; the accumulated wisdom and experience of the seven ages of human history will be laid under tribute in the teaching and training of all men in the Millennial Age.

These few fragments are fugitive glimpses of Millennial conditions, stray gleams of light, shooting as it were across the dark background of Isaiah’s present message of reproof and condemnation; the full glory of his vision has yet to come. There is a further message to be given first, a further aspect of the judgment that must precede the blessing. Israel’s chastisement has been foreseen and described, and that of humankind in general under the figure of Israel, and there is no concealment of the fact that the judgment is directly in consequence of unfaithfulness and unbelief. But what of the agent of judgment, the scourge of God to ready his hand for the purpose? What of the Assyrians who were so ready to ravage Judah and to carry out the Divine work of retribution? Are they themselves without guilt, and has the Lord no account to settle with them? By no means are they without guilt; and a very heavy account the Lord does have to settle with them. Even though they have, unwittingly, played a part in the execution of the Divine purpose, their own personal responsibility for the evil they have done remains; they did not undertake the invasion and ravaging of Judah from any consciousness of effecting God’s purpose or any desire to do him service. They entered the land completely and entirely from motives of greed and hate and lust and every other vicious attribute. They too were alien from God and fighting against him, and they too must enter into judgment, before in their turn they can stand before the Great White Throne and hear the terms of life, and turn to find those same teachers waiting to teach them also. So Isaiah has a word for the Assyrians, a word of fierce denunciation and ruthless determination. In reading that message let us not forget that those Assyrians pictured the forces of this world in this, the end of the old Age, that fight against the incoming Kingdom of Christ, that indeed stand as it were between us and the Kingdom. Every institution, every organised power, whether financial, political or religious, that sets itself up as instead of God, and leaves God out of its counsels, and suppresses the things of God in its domain, is of

those to whom the prophet addresses these words; and the judgment is certain, and the end thereof sure.

*“The name of the LORD cometh from far, burning with his anger...His lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire: and his breath, as an overflowing stream...and the LORD shall cause his glorious voice to be heard, and shall show the lighting down of his arm...with the flame of a devouring fire...and tempest, and hailstones. For through the voice of the LORD shall the Assyrian be beaten down...”* (vv. 27-31).

Here it is that the prophet’s understanding widens immeasurably and his field of vision takes in the broad sweep of colour that is the Millennial Age. The strife and confusion and shouting, the darkness and tempest and earthquake, of that Armageddon which marks the time of judgment humanity has brought upon itself at this end of the present Age dissolves and metamorphoses into the radiant glory of a great Throne set up upon earth, and the resplendent figure of a King, a king such as earth has never before known. Here it is that Isaiah embarks upon a detailed description of the kingship of the Millennial Age, of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth. Raising his eyes to drink their fill of the resplendent scene, he cries out in tones of exultation. *“Behold,”* he cries, *“Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment.”* (Isa. 32:1). The King is Jesus Christ, returned to earth in the glory of his Second Advent, in the exercise of that power which He could have wielded at his First Advent, but refused so to do because only in being led “as a lamb to the slaughter” and giving “his soul an offering for sin” (Isa. 53:7,10) could He establish the transcendent truth that the only one who can be trusted with absolute power over mankind is the One Who has demonstrated his willingness to share the sufferings and the death that is the lot of all humanity. But now the time of suffering and death is past and the King comes forth in glory and power and takes his place upon the throne of earth, an absolute monarch indeed, but a monarch to whom all men can give unqualified loyalty and obedience, for He is a King Who will reign in righteousness. So, in another place, Isaiah cries rapturously *“It shall be said in that day, ‘Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and He will save us’.”* (Isa. 25:9). David, seeing the same thing, sang (Psa. 72:2,7,13,17) *“He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and the poor with judgment...in his days shall the righteous flourish...He shall spare the poor and needy...men shall be blessed in him: and all nations shall call him blessed.”*

Men have never known an absolutely righteous king and have no conception of the benefits such a monarch can bring to his people. It has

been well said that “power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely” and power in the hand of fallible men, however well-intentioned, has very generally been abused to a greater or lesser extent. Some of the most ruthless men known to ancient as well as modern history have commenced their conquering careers with the best of motives and have ended them to the accompaniment of tears and curses from those who have suffered under them. In our own day men of the people have risen to positions of power, loudly proclaiming that they will administer freedom and equality for all; too late, their hapless dupes have realised that the shackles of bondage have been riveted upon them more firmly than ever. Those rulers were sincere enough when they started out; the possession of power has been more than their integrity could withstand.

A king who will reign in righteousness, then, is a new thing to this world and the results of his reign will be new too. The first reaction of his people will be one of relief and growing confidence. A new hope will be born in the hearts of men, a hope that at last the long-desired but ever elusive peace and prosperity may indeed be within reach.

This is the theme of the remainder of the thirty-second chapter. Having passed from the reign of death and evil, and seen the last of earth’s evil powers perish in Armageddon, the prophet is free to devote himself to a detailed picture of the benefits which the king who reigns in righteousness brings to his subjects.

*(To be continued) AOH*

### MY HEARTFELT GREETING



THE best of all good wishes flow from my heart to-day:  
That God’s great loving-kindness may bless thee on thy way;  
For with it comes all favour, the warmth of His embrace,  
Sweet fragrance of His presence in every time and place.

TIS joy for me to wish thee the fulness of His love,  
So strong, so good, so mindful, and gentle as a dove.  
Without this loving favour what would to us remain?  
All earthly treasures worthless, and life spent here in vain.

O PRECIOUS thought to wish thee, the best He has to give,  
To all who truly love Him who through His Word do live.  
The glory of His purpose, with plan so wide and deep.  
Brings hope to His beloved who will His precepts keep.

FRIEND, when these wishes reach thee, O breathe the prayer for me,  
The echoes will arise to God in sweetest melody,  
Then heart to heart we shall respond to Heaven’s glad refrain,  
Which tells of joyous life to come beyond the hour of pain!

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## THOUGHT ON 2 TIMOTHY 1:13

*“Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Tim. 1:13).*

Throughout the ages the progress and development of Christianity has been marred by doctrinal strife. Intolerance, discord and persecution has stained many a fair page of the Church’s history with its indelible markings. Men and women whose loyalty to the cause of Christ was beyond question have nevertheless so utterly failed to grasp the essence of Christian teaching that they have soured their lives and blemished their good works with the evil fruits of religious controversy. And realising, as one must do, that the seed of these things lies in individual conscientiousness and zeal for the Truth it is a matter for wonder that greater thought has not been and is not being given to the essential place of theological teaching in the Christian life. That it is an important—perhaps the most potent—of the external forces shaping and influencing our development cannot be denied. That it is of all aspects of our fellowship together the one most productive of misunderstanding, division, and the waxing cold of that love which constitutes the evidence that we have passed from death into life, is unhappily only too true. That we in this day have been blessed with an insight into the deep things of God far exceeding the portion of past generations is so tacitly accepted that the position is never questioned. Yet current thought still tends to gravitate to the extremes; we are told on the one hand that salvation comes by reason of an intellectual appreciation of true theology, and by means of which faith remains unshaken in the evil day; upon the other hand that doctrinal understanding is of such relatively little importance that nothing more than a mental acceptance of Jesus Christ, coupled with a life of good works, is asked of those who would follow in the steps of the Master.

Somewhere between these extremes the truth must lie, and it is with sober and reverent minds that we should enquire, first as individuals, and then in communal discussion, if we are to occupy our rightful place as ambassadors for Christ to this generation. The Apostle Paul, writing to his son in-the-faith Timothy, leaves us in no doubt as to his own outlook on the matter. *“If anyone...will not give his mind to wholesome precepts—I mean those of our Lord Jesus Christ—and to good religious teaching, I call him a pompous ignoramus. He is morbidly keen on mere verbal questions and quibbles, which give rise to jealousy, quarrelling, slander, base suspicions, and endless wrangles; all typical of men who have let their reasoning powers become atrophied and have lost grip of the truth.” (1 Tim. 6:3-5)*



N.E.B.). That is all too often where the doctrinal enthusiast finishes—the doctrinal enthusiast, that is, who finds no place for the other side of the Christian way. That other side is defined by St. Paul in this same passage “*Pursue justice, piety, fidelity, love, fortitude and gentleness. Run the great race of faith and take hold of eternal life. For to this you were called...Turn a deaf ear to empty and worldly chatter, and the contradictions of so-called ‘knowledge,’ for many who lay claim to it have shot wide of the faith.*” (1 Tim. 6:11,12,20,21 NEB)

AOH



**THE BRIDEGROOM’S DOVE**

Song of Solomon 2:14



“MY Dove!” The bridegroom speaks to whom?  
 Whom think’st thou, meaneth He?  
 Say, O my soul! canst thou presume  
 He thus addresseth thee?  
 Yes, ’tis the Bridegroom’s voice of love,  
 Calling thee, O my soul! His Dove!

As the poor Dove, before the Hawk,  
 Quick to her refuge flies,  
 So need I, in my daily walk,  
 The wings which *faith* supplies  
 To bear me where the Bridegroom’s love  
 Places beyond all harm His Dove!

The Dove is gentle, mild and meek:  
 Deserve I, then the name?  
 I look within in vain to seek  
 Aught which can give a claim:  
 Yet, made so by redeeming love,  
 My soul, thou art the Bridegroom’s Dove!

My soul, of native power bereft,  
 To Calvary repairs:  
 Immanuel is *the rocky cleft*,  
*The secret of the stairs!*  
 Since placed *there* by the Bridegroom’s love,  
 What evil can befall His Dove?

Methinks, my soul, that thou mayst see,  
 In this endearing word,  
 Reasons why Jesus likens thee  
 To this defenceless bird;  
 Reasons which show the Bridegroom’s love  
 To His poor, helpless, timid Dove!

My soul, now hid within a rock,  
 (The “Rock of Ages” called),  
 Amid the universal shock  
 Is fearless, unappalled.  
 A cleft therein, prepared by love,  
 In safety hides the Bridegroom’s Dove!

The Dove hath neither claw nor sting,  
 Nor weapon for the fight;  
 She owes her safety to her wing,  
 Her victory to flight.  
 A shelter hath the Bridegroom’s love  
 Provided for His helpless Dove!

O happy Dove! thus weak, thus safe;  
 Do I resemble her?  
 Then to my soul, O Lord! vouchsafe  
 A *dove-like* character.  
 Pure, harmless, gentle, full of love,  
 Make me in spirit, Lord, a Dove!

*Poems of Dawn*

## ELIJAH AND ELISHA—FINAL JOURNEY

References from NKJV unless otherwise specified

*“And it came to pass, when the LORD was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal...”*  
(2 Kings 2:1)

In the very last book of the Old Testament, in fact the very last two verses of the Old Testament, we have a prophecy which reads: -

*“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”* (Malachi 4:5,6 KJV)

Elijah’s literal life seems to have been directed by God so that its details typified or prefigured certain future events.

1. John the Baptist was declared to be similar to Elijah in some respects: -  
*“And if you are willing to receive it, he [John] is Elijah who is to come.”* (Matthew 11:14; see also Luke 1:17)
  
2. Jesus also implies that he [in his flesh] was similar to Elijah in some respects: -  
*“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise, the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.’ Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.”* (Matt. 17:11-13)
  
3. Scripture also implies that the church in the flesh is similar to Elijah in some respects. The drought in Elijah’s life was 3½ literal years [1260 days]; the church in the flesh was 3½ symbolic years [a day for a year—1,260 literal years] in the wilderness condition, during which there was a spiritual famine because of the lack of truth—the living water—Compare Revelation 12:6 & 11:3.

We will not elaborate further on these points, which would take another article, but this current article will consider some thoughts about Elijah’s “final journey,” and what the significance of that may be.

All of Elijah’s life, from the no rain pronouncement (1 Kings 17:1) to the “*still small voice*” (1 Kings 19:12), seems to be a sequential picture, or type, of the church’s experiences in the flesh. After Jezebel’s threats Elijah fled to Mt. Horeb, “*the mountain of God.*” (Exod. 3:1) Here he had

the experience with the wind, earthquake, fire and “*still small voice*.” Arriving at Mt. Horeb, and experiencing the wind, seems to be the chronological equivalent of the great World War of the last century. It seems reasonable that the consecutive narrative of Elijah’s life [as a type of the church in the flesh] ends with 1 Kings 19:12 or so. After the 3½ years drought, the contest with Baal vs. Jehovah, the heavy rain, the fleeing into the desert and the mountain, and then the wind, earthquake, fire, and “*still small voice*”—this seems to bring the picture, or type, to an end in the Kingdom.

The succeeding stories of Elijah, such as selecting Elisha; Naboth’s vineyard and fire from heaven destroying the 50s of men are each essentially complete in themselves, and need to be interpreted in their own time frame and will not be considered here.

The same seems to be true with 2 Kings 2 and the various stopping places of our text. These places are not dates, but conditions or stages of the church’s journey, somewhat similar to the seven stages of the church as portrayed in Rev. 2 & 3.

The view presented here in 2 Kings 2 is that the “final journey” pictures the *Church Age* (Gospel age)—beginning to end. Elisha and Elijah were together all the way. All during this time, in antitype, the Christian believers [variously represented by Elijah, Elisha, sons of the prophets] were expecting the soon return of Jesus and the completion of the faithful church, i.e., the “*taking*” of Elijah. So, the “*day*” when Elijah was expected to be taken has actually been about 2,000 years long (although none knew that ahead of time), and is still ongoing.

1. Gilgal, where the Tabernacle was briefly located, may represent the early church in its purity, from 33 A.D., through the apostles, and through the lifetime of those who knew the apostles. This is where the Israelites camped immediately after crossing Jordan. It may be that this Gilgal near Jericho is not the same as the Gilgal of Elijah and Elisha—[some question this.]

2. Bethel, the Tabernacle was also briefly here, but later it became a centre of gold-calf worship. It may represent the rise of the Nicolaitan spirit in the church, (Rev. 2:15) and then Christianity becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire. At this time, and onwards, things began to go very bad in respect to the beliefs and arrangements of true Christianity.

3. Jericho where after capturing the city, Joshua [Jesus in the Greek] put a curse on and may represent false Christianity i.e. churchianity in its prime during the Dark Ages. This is the time of the man of lawlessness, the antichrist, etc.

4. Jordan. The impact of the Second Advent movement [William Miller and forward], while considerable among certain religious elements, was very little among denominational “religion” as such, and none among the worldly. There was only one time in history where hard truth [rolled-up mantle; 2 Kings 2:8] struck and divided the people, both religious and political. This was the great Reformation of the 16th century—Justification by faith. Scripture only!

5. Elijah and Elisha walked on for a time [some 500 years now]. At some point yet future, the fiery horses and chariot will separate the two, and Elijah will be “*taken*.”

You will notice, this follows the Rev. 12 sequence—a pure virgin woman; then pregnant, crying with pain and delivering a child; this child then becomes the grown-up Man of Lawlessness and dominates for a long time.

Once Elijah [the true church] is “*taken*,” who will be the Lord’s earthly representative? It would seem that the type changes, and Elisha [from this time forward] typifies the Ancient Worthies. They will have Elijah’s mantle of authority; they will have an extra measure of the holy spirit. So, once the true church is gone, the *Elijah type, or picture*, ends, and the scene now shifts to Elisha [the Ancient Worthies], whose first work is smiting the Jordan this second time.

What is the significance when Elisha strikes the water (2 Kings 2:14), which once again divides, and he crosses over? This is a future event, so we should not be too positive about the details. But this crisis point in time may also involve some remaining Christian believers with various degrees of character development and sincerity, and Jewish people, now converted to Messiah. (Zechariah 12:10-14).

From that time of Elijah being “*taken*,” re-crossing Jordan, and onward, Elisha may well represent the Ancient Worthies in the ongoing Kingdom arrangements.

The actual striking of the water the second time would be similar to the

first time, but even more profound. This message, it seems, will be the announcement that the *“kingdoms of this world have become the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ (Messiah)”* (Rev. 11:15 NKJV Footnote).

This will be the second time in history where hard truth [rolled-up mantle] strikes and divides the people, both religious and political.

Perhaps the hard truth will sound something like these Scriptures:-

*“The LORD also will roar from Zion,  
And utter His voice from Jerusalem;  
The heavens and earth will shake;  
But the LORD will be a shelter for His people,  
And the strength of the children of Israel.”* (Joel 3:16)

*“Be still, and know that I am God;  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth!”* (Psalm 46:10)

*“Therefore, prophesy against them all these words, and say to them:  
‘The LORD will roar from on high,  
And utter His voice from His holy habitation;  
He will roar mightily against His fold.  
He will give a shout, as those who tread the grapes,  
Against all the inhabitants of the earth.  
A noise will come to the ends of the earth—  
For the LORD has a controversy with the nations;  
He will plead His case with all flesh.  
He will give those who are wicked to the sword,’  
say the LORD.”* (Jeremiah 25:30-31)

*“For behold, the LORD will come with fire and with His chariots, like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by His sword the LORD will judge all flesh; and the slain of the LORD shall be many.”* (Isaiah 66:15-16)

*“Behold, a whirlwind of the LORD has gone forth in fury—A violent whirlwind! It will fall violently on the head of the wicked. The anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has executed and performed the thoughts of His heart. In the latter days you will understand it perfectly.”* (Jer. 23:19-20)

*“Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace, be*

*still! And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.” (Mark 4:39)*

Thus, there is no “smiting the Jordan” message for the Christians of the present time. The first smiting is centuries past; the second smiting (by Elisha) is yet future, and will be after Elijah is “*taken*.”

Such reflections about the future, contrasted with the privileges of the present, should stimulate every consecrated child of God to make diligent use of the present grand opportunities and privileges of this “*narrow way*.”

### **Final Thought**

*“Afterward I will return and restore the fallen kingdom of David. I will rebuild its ruins and restore it, so that the rest of humanity might seek the LORD, including the Gentiles—all those I have called to be mine. The LORD has spoken—He who made these things known so long ago.” (Acts 15:16-18 NLT margin)*

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## **THOUGHT ON 2 PETER 1:12**

*“Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.” (2 Pet. 1:12).*

While we are, in the words of the old hymn, “straining our eyes for the tarrying day” and the scenes around us are still shrouded in semi-darkness, we may perhaps be forgiven for failure to comprehend the full significance of the events and portents which our eyes behold. Throughout the present age the Watchers have, like Habakkuk of old, taken their stand on the tower and *watched* to see—significant words—what God would say unto them. And to what good effect that watching has been we are witnesses, if we hold a definite and clear-cut expectation of the manner of his appearance and his Kingdom. That expectation is none the less definite for the fact that as time goes on we find it necessary to modify our earlier immature conceptions of the manner in which God will work out his purpose.

That which in the dim light of early dawn seems to be a haystack turns out to be a house, and the seemingly grotesque animal becomes a shapely tree. So with our watching; we must expect it to show in greater and more accurate detail the “shape of things to come” as the light “shineth more

and more unto perfect (meridian) day.” (Prov. 4:18).

*“It is because of this failure to comprehend the gradually unfolding nature of God’s Plans that many today are walking in darkness when they might be walking in the light—”*

Those words are not original, and some will recognise the source from which they are quoted. Today, a century after they were written, they are truer than ever. If only more of those who profess to hold and guide their lives by the “Present Truth” of Peter’s Epistle had learned the implications of his words better there would not be one-tenth of the doubt, the fear, the lack of confidence and the waxing cold of faith and love that modern times have seen amongst Christians. So many have accepted gladly and zealously the understanding of the Divine Plan which the nineteenth century produced but have failed to make increase with it. They have failed to live up to the opportunity and favour which was theirs. Like their prototypes, knowing not the time of their visitation, they have taken all that the favour of God held out to them and failed to make that progress in its light which would enable them in turn to contribute toward the further unfolding of the Plan of God.

So is it always. *“They that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.”* (Matt. 25:10) The work of service to which the Father has appointed us is so stupendous, demanding so high a standard of Christ-likeness and so great a depth of spiritual wisdom, that only those who have demonstrated their utter loyalty to Christ can hope to hear the final “Well done.” (Matt. 25:21,23). Knowledge, of itself, will not bring one to this consummation; but knowledge rightly applied is an indispensable handmaiden to that spiritual development which is so essential; and without knowledge we shall be as those who, in the parable, were asleep when the Bridegroom came.

AOH



Map of central Israel showing river Jabbok—see page 152

## JACOB AT JABBOK

Israel in turmoil. The time to favour Zion is come. Israel returns exactly on time and according to the prophetic Word of God. Why then the struggle now taking place?

Look at the headlines of not too long back: thousands of Jews have been transported from Ethiopia and the collapse of the USSR. Who would have thought it? At the centre of it all is Israel! Jacob is at the ford of Jabbok.

“He (Jacob) rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok. And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had. And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him.” In the Hebrew, rather as it comes over in the English, the name Jabbok is a phonetic word-play on the name, Jacob. It denotes, we are told, “wrestling,” an appropriate setting for the struggle that is here to take place. (Gen 32:22-24)

The ford of the river Jabbok was the place where there was a conflict between two paths. It was at the confluence between two streams. It was also the only place where it is possible to brave and wade through the torrent that crosses the path of the road or trek that passes on further into the land of Israel. At certain times of year this was quite a struggle, and especially if there were goods to be carried over, and cattle and flocks to be got across, not to mention family and children...a lot of children at that! (Twelve with his daughter, Dinah.) The very youngest arrival was Joseph, the very precious first-born of Rachel, and it was his coming into the world that seemed to mark the fresh surge in the old urge to return to the land. Now, after so long a time, that return was taking tangible shape. It appears to have been shortly after Joseph arrived (prefiguring Jesus,) that the Lord tells Jacob to return to the land of promise. “Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee.” (Gen. 31:3)

Now Israel, or rather Jacob, is on the march. He is already in the land. The very place he now walks on is within the boundaries. But there is a very important sense in which Jacob has yet to arrive, yet to know and receive the full blessing the Lord intends to bestow. What Mt. Moriah was to Abraham, Jabbok is to Jacob. It is here that the Lord’s work on human trust and faith is to reach its peak. Jacob is to leave that place a changed man, ready, prepared for the full blessedness of his role in the divine purpose—an instrument of blessing and happiness for all.



But at this moment he sits there at sundown, the effort of getting his family and flocks thus far across those troublesome waters has wearied him, and he is glad to now wait behind on the former bank alone with his thoughts, his conflicts, his fears of what awaits both him and his seed. Doubtless he recalls the experiences of past years, and the memories of former days, and looks for some pattern, some meaning in his life. Perhaps he remembers how he once laid himself down in loneliness and foreboding that very first night of exile when he fled from his family home for fear of his life. The cause of his plight, his estranged brother, Esau. It does not yet occur to Jacob even now that his twin brother represented part of himself, his own flesh and blood.

### **Esau and Jacob**

Esau seems to represent that within each human mind and character which tends always to resist the ways of the Lord his God. It is that which despised the birthright given him and values the promises of God and His declared purpose far below the exigencies (demands) of the moment, the appetite that demands immediate though, oh so transitory, a satisfaction.

“The babies (Esau and Jacob) jostled each other within her, and she said, ‘Why is this happening to me?’ So she went to inquire of the LORD.” (Gen. 25:22 NIV) “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.” (Gal. 5:17)

Jacob was not himself defiant of the divine promises, nor did he undervalue them. He simply lacked the faith to believe that the Lord could fulfil them without Jacob’s human scheming, craftiness, wiles, and cunning. So, he had found himself ready to comply with the idea to deceive to obtain. How many Christian people have still this same lesson to learn who glory in appearance? Jacob put on a skin with the intent to deceive even his own father with that which was superficial and pretentious. Oh, what a lesson to us all! The promise was his. The blessing would be his. The Lord would see to that in His own way regardless of Isaac’s intent. But Jacob trusted his own wiles and craftiness, his own judgment and ability to achieve this, rather than the Lord’s. Thus, for lack of faith in his God to bring about that full blessing, Jacob had found himself running for his life, cast out of the land of promise.

### **Ladder up to heaven**

Yet even this was overruled, and the very first night of his exile the Lord had granted Jacob that first vision of heavenly involvement in Jacob’s

life. In total, seven visions, according to the records, were granted to Jacob. This was the first. There in weariness he had fallen asleep, a pile of small stones for a pillow in that rugged stony place. Then, in his dream, he had seen stone laid against stone, ascending, and ascending still upwards till the very topmost step of this great stairway reached, it seemed, into heaven itself. There, above all, stood the Lord. Jacob had found himself gazing up at the Lord. Then, as he watched with great awe this astounding spectacle, angels appeared. First he noticed their ascent up that stairway, then that others came down to replace them here on earth, right next to where he lay...and he heard the voice of God, and received that message from His own lips, a message specially for Jacob, personal and reassuring. *“I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.”* (Gen. 28:13-15)

Next morning early Jacob rose knowing he would never forget that experience or that place where human thought is drawn up that steep ascent to the thoughts of God. How could he forget that continual ascending and descending of angels, overruling, intervening, a vision so transforming of the daily trial of human life. Have we seen that stairway? Can we forget once we have glimpsed that vision of the Lord’s concern in our life?

“And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God’s house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.” (Gen 28:20-22) This may sound a rather mercenary attitude as it reads, a kind of “ten per cent” agent’s fee, but the word “If” at the outset should read rather “since,” and this statement seems to be prophetic of Israel’s future appreciation of divine overruling, when they will pay to the Lord their dues of gratitude and trust and loving obedience. As Mal. 3:10 says, “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

**Meditating on the bank of Jabbok**, Jacob listened to those waters dashing through the rocks, rocks that seemed to stick out and intrude in the life, just to demonstrate that conquering overcoming power of that relentless flow of the river of God's pleasure. Nothing that great purpose can thwart. Over the sound of those many waters Jacob may have thought he could still hear that voice of God speaking above the troubles of his mind, the travail of his soul. "The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed." Certainly, the Lord had fulfilled His word thus far, though the path for Jacob had been sorely trying to his faith.

### **Jacob with Laban at Padan-aram**

As an exile from the land Jacob had spent the years in servitude. He had known no place of his own, not even a home life, for he had been a shepherd for Laban, a most menial task of a slave, and this had entailed much hardship. As shepherd, Jacob had been held responsible for the flock of that mean and grasping master, and that was the story behind the tanned face of Jacob. Through the burning of the noon-tide heat of the sun he had watched against the wild beasts culling the flock. When Jacob said to Laban, "*That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day, or stolen by night. Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes.*" (Gen 31:39-40)

Isa. 42:24-25 "Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? Did not the LORD, he against whom we have sinned? For they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law. Therefore he hath poured upon him the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle: and it hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart." (Cp. Isa. 49:10 "They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.")

That was an awful moment too, so recently behind him, for after the Lord had told him to depart from alien lands and return to the land of promise such animosity arose in Laban's heart that he threatened to completely wipe out the chosen race, Jacob's seed. Only the Lord's intervention achieved Jacob's escape. Antisemitism first reared its ugly head in Gen. 31:1&2, because even in those adverse conditions the Lord made Jacob to prosper. For "he heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's; and of that which was our father's hath he gotten all this glory. And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before." Laban was prevented from

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**(1 Peter 2:21)**  
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**Gone from us**

Aimee Guard (Seaton, formerly Rugby)

his evil design to destroy the people of Jacob, “It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt: but the God of your father spake unto me yesternight, saying, Take thou heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad.” (Gen. 31:29) We cannot miss the parallel here to the similar attempt of Hitler after the Lord had said it was time for the return of Jacob to the land of promise. Satan is at enmity with the seed to this day, both the natural and the spiritual.

Oh, why was life so hard? Looking back Jacob would recall how it was, as it were, his own nature that had been played back upon him. He now found what it was like to be at the receiving end of deceit, and pretence, the victim of scheming and plots against him. What it was like to be taken advantage of, as when he had taken advantage himself of his brother’s weakness to his own ends said, “Sell me the birthright”? (See Isa. 42:24-25 p155)

*To be continued*

*DJH 2008*

## THE BIBLE'S SONG OF LOVE

Verse by verse through the Song of Songs Part 6a Chapter 8:5-6  
All references RV unless otherwise stated

These final passages of the Song picture for us how close those with bridal love can get to our Lord even during this present life. The Daughters of Jerusalem have been watching the Bride's deepening affection and in the closing words of Part 5 the Lord had to remind them that love is not something to be commanded or worked for. In other words love is called forth by love alone. "We love, because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19) In Chapter 3 verses 6-11 they were witnesses of the Bridegroom's ascent out of the wilderness. Then followed a time of bewilderment for the maiden until He revealed Himself to her once more. In the last verse of Chapter 6 the daughters were wondering where the Bride had gone, for there was that much lacking in their love to keep them from witnessing His glowing and affectionate tribute to her beauty. When the Heavenly Bridegroom confesses to being carried away with loving ecstasy (as in Chapter 6:5,11-12) they are words for His beloved alone. The daughters did not know of His words of Chapter 6:8,9 where He contrasted their love with hers. In fact the last they had known of her was that she was sick because of a love that could not be satisfied except in His company.

**8:5** And so Part 6 opens on a note of some surprises as the Daughters ask "WHO IS THIS THAT COMETH UP FROM THE WILDERNESS, LEANING UPON HER BELOVED?" The phrase suggests the culmination of Christian experience.

This part, which seems to have a particular application to the closing days of the Church's pilgrimage, suggest a recognition by many of the reality of the Lord's Return and that there are those who give evidence of close communion and fellowship with the Lord. How appropriate are the words of the Lord—"I will come again, and receive you unto Myself." (John 14:3 KJV)

"Leaning on her beloved" is something new. This translation of the Hebrew word occurs only here and signifies "a clinging to, or strengthening oneself upon another."

The bride is in company with her beloved, protected by him, and led in the path of his choice, not hers.

"Believers only go upward as they lean on Christ...spiritual growth marked by conscious weakness leaning on perfect strength...The

believer's life is a laborious one—an upward journey through a wilderness, a pleasant one—the company of the Beloved, a safe one—His arm to lean on” (Robinson)

“Alas.” There are but few comparatively who *really know* and love Jesus Christ, and who trust their *whole being* to Him and yet *he loves* to be *trusted*, and to be recognised as the *only* support of the heart that leans upon Him, for He is our only support, and He *loves* to be so, and we cannot please Him more than by leaning our *whole weight* on Him as we journey, coming up out of life's wilderness.” (Marcus Rainsford)

From here on to the end we have what seems at first sight to be a disconnected series of statements. But the Bridegroom and the Bride speak after the manner of two deeply in love. And so in words of close and intimate communion the Beloved reminds the espoused of the earlier days when first her love for Him was awakened; “UNDER THE APPLE TREE I AWAKENED THEE: THERE THY MOTHER WAS IN TRAVAIL WITH THEE, THERE WAS SHE IN TRAVAIL THAT BROUGHT THEE FORTH.”

In Chapter 2:3 Christ was likened to “the apple tree among the trees of the wood” and the Maiden “sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste.”

How like two who are in love to speak of how they met and how love was first stirred in her heart. In this brief reference the Bridegroom shows how the Covenant of Grace—the mother of the Bride class was God's provision in Christ. Moreover the apple tree was a “shade” reminding us that the Hebrew word for “atonement” means “to cover”—Christ has been the “cover” for all under the Covenant of Grace.

“The legal system could never bring forth the spouse; it could not minister the love of Christ, nor could it form affections responsive on liberty to Christ. It needed an altogether different mother to bring about such a result, and that mother is ‘Jerusalem above’...Our mother brought us forth ‘under the apple tree,’ and the Beloved awoke us there. ‘The apple tree’ is undoubtedly a figure of Christ...As brought forth by our mother, and awakened by Christ, we find ourselves under His shadow...who is a Tree of life...” (C.A.C.) It is rather striking that the explanation of how the spouse came into being is reserved until the last chapter. In the early stages of our spiritual history we are indebted to grace for every spiritual movement of our souls. A young convert may think that things began on

his side, but after a time he comes to see that all was of God from the beginning.

**8:6** But the picture of the Bride under the apple tree is of the early days. Between then and the time portrayed in these closing verses the Bride has not always been constant in her love so now the Bridegroom asks her to confirm her constancy: “SET ME AS A SEAL UPON THINE HEART, AS A SEAL UPON THINE ARM.”

The figure of a seal suggests many precious thoughts. First its primary reference appears to be to the high priesthood of Jesus. Second, a seal is used for ratifying and confirming. (Rom. 4:11) Third, it is also a token of peculiar honour and affection. Compare Jer. 22:24 and Haggai 2:23. Fourth, a seal leaves an impression and we are to be conformed to the image of His Son. Lastly, this sealing process is evidence of the operation of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul refers in several places to our sealing in Christ but here the Bridegroom seems rather to be reminding the Bride that mature love must be unwavering and He asks her to show to Him (upon thine heart) and to others (upon thine arm) that she is His absolutely and completely. The earlier expressions of His love have been tinged with long suffering and pity but now that she has grown to bridal stature His love and hers partake of great power “FOR LOVE” He says “IS STRONG AS DEATH.”

No one could say this with such deep meaning as He, for He laid down His life for His bride. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends”; “I lay down my life for the sheep”; “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the uttermost.” (John 15:13; 10:15; 13:1 Mar.) His love was strong as death, for even death could not vanquish it.

The Bride is now His in the very firmest and completest sense. In the past He had compassion on her waywardness and inconstancy but now her love is perfect and He asks her to face the full measure of responsibility which love calls forth. She is His and “such is the intensity of His love that any thought of a rival which would steal our hearts away from Him is intolerable to Him.” (CAC) “JEALOUSY” He tells her “IS AS CRUEL (EXACTING) AS THE GRAVE.”

“Jealousy, as known in Christ, is very wondrous.” (CAC) This jealousy is

expressive of that intensity of appropriation which is the privilege of every individual believer.

“THE FLASHES THEREOF ARE FLASHES OF FIRE, A VERY FLAME OF JEHOVAH.” (Mar.)

This is the only reference to God in the whole Song. It reminds us of the occasions when God told Israel that He was a jealous God—that is a God who was not willing to share the object of His love with false gods.

Fire, as an expression of divine action, speaks of the cleansing away of dross and the destruction of that which is false and bad. Divine love has these qualities. Paul tells us that it shall “try every man’s work of what sort it is.” (1 Cor. 3:13 KJV) In 1 Kings 18:38 God’s jealous love for Israel was revealed in the fire that burnt the sacrifice offered by Elijah, and Peter speaks of the trial of our faith in the fires of adversity and affliction.

This divine symbol was present with Israel throughout their wanderings. There was the fire by night and in the day-time a pillar of cloud which would seem to Israel as the smoke of the fire.

God’s everlasting love for Israel was also pictured in similar terms for He said through the prophet Zechariah “I...will be unto her a wall of fire round about.” (Zech. 2:5)

“Flashes of fire, flames of Yah,” remind us that the chapter in the New Testament which speaks much of divine chastening ends with the solemn statement—“For our God is a consuming fire.” (Heb. 12:29) But there is ever behind all the divine ways, however searching and severe they may be, the burning power of an unquenchable love. That love is against all the influences that tend to divert us; it ever acts to consume and destroy them; but this is to liberate us from their power, that we may enjoy, and respond to, the love of Christ.” (CAC)

EEA/LB

When ends life’s transient dream,  
When death’s cold, sullen stream  
Shall o’er me roll,  
Blest Saviour, heav’nly dove,

Fear and distress remove;  
Bear me on wings of love,  
A ransomed soul.



*My Faith looks up to Thee,  
Ray Palmer*

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