

Consider
your Ways!

A VERSE BY VERSE EXPOSITION
OF
THE BOOKS OF THE PROPHETS —

ZEPHANIAH

AND

HAGGAI

By H. P. Mansfield.





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Foreword

The prophets Zephaniah and Haggai ministered in different epochs of Judah's history, and it might at first sight seem strange to publish verse by verse expositions of these Books under one cover. But all Scripture is closely inter-related, and if reason is needed to justify what we have done, it is not difficult to provide it!

Zephaniah wrote just before the Babylonian captivity, and warned the people of Judah that this national calamity was both imminent and inevitable because of the prevailing apostasy; Haggai prophesied after the return from the captivity, and warned the people that the sacrifices they had made in order to return to the land would be fruitless unless they roused themselves from the deadly lethargy into which they had fallen.

The messages of both prophets, therefore, are summed up in the title of this exposition, as taken from the Book of Haggai: "Consider your ways!"

If further reason is required for combining the expositions of these two books under one cover, we point to the fact that they appear side by side in the Bible, and are both short books, and so admirable for brief study! There are other reasons, too, but they are personal, and do not concern the reader.

*When using our notes to study these two books, we suggest that the reader avail himself also of the incomparable expositions of Brother J. Thomas. He will find many allusions to the words of Zephaniah and Haggai in *Elpis Israel*, *Eureka* and the other writings of our pioneers, that are very illuminating to the better understanding of this section of the Word.*

As regards our exposition, we apologise for any imperfections of style. The notes have been prepared under very difficult conditions whilst on a world speaking tour, and in a race against time (the deadline for publication in connection with a Bible school always looming ahead like a dark stormy cloud). In addition, a further disadvantage has been that we have not had ready access to any textbooks outside the notes in the wide-margin Bible before us. We mention this for two reasons: Firstly, that the reader may understand the reason for any evidences of haste in exposition or imperfection of style; and, secondly, to illustrate that a wide-margin Bible is adequate to contain all the notes necessary for an exposition of any part of the word.

We have published these notes that the Reader may have some guide to study and mark up his Bible. It is not intended that he slavishly accept every detail of exposition that

we have advanced, but that by comparing Scripture with Scripture he may reach his own conclusions based upon a "thus saith the Lord."

Such an exercise will enrich spiritually, and will impress with the importance of the basic message that is implied by Zephaniah, and stated by Haggai: "Consider your ways!" We obviously live at a time when the consummation of the prophetic vision relating to the last days is at hand, so that there is a tremendous urgency associated with such an appeal at this time. Present-day world events must surely impress us with the fact that the times are significant; the issues are vital; and that we owe it to ourselves and our families to seek and preserve God's way.

The personal, detailed, verse by verse study of Scripture, can strengthen and guide us in and along that path. May Yahweh's blessing be with us to that end. — H. P. MANSFIELD.

THE FOLLY OF SLACKNESS

The theory that the truth once known will abide with us, and render diligent Bible reading an unnecessary trouble is hurtful because it is false. The truth will not remain with us in power unless we daily deal with it. The human mind has no power to retain anything apart from regular use. The memory of everything grows dim without renewal. This is true even of things for which the mind has a natural affinity; how much more true it is of divine ideas to which the mind is naturally alien. The daily intercourse with the mind of God, as displayed in the Scriptures (here and there throughout, in the most miscellaneous and diversified manner) is essential to the maintenance of that mind within us.

— R. Roberts.

Suggestions for Bible Marking

These study notes are designed for Bible marking, and in case you have not as yet developed a system of your own, we herewith present a few hints.

Firstly, have you an adequate Bible?

Your Bible is your most precious possession; it represents the Word of God in your hand, and you should daily open your mind to its message. Because you use it so frequently, you need a good Bible with a binding that will last. An investment in a first-class Bible will pay good dividends both in this life, as well as in that which is to come (1 Tim. 4:8).

A first-class Bible is even more necessary if you intend to mark it. To do so along the lines we are going to suggest will occupy some time, but the pleasure and profit that will result will make it well worth while.

There are a number of really good Bibles available, and we recommend the Oxford Wide-margin Bible. This Bible is printed upon specially treated India paper designed to take ink. It has a full margin around the whole of the text, wide enough to take brief notes adequate for the explanation or amplification of any part of the Bible including such difficult books as *Song of Solomon* and the *Revelation*.

Oxford Wide-margin Bibles are obtainable from any Ecclesial librarians, or from *Logos Publications*. They come in various bindings, and it will pay to obtain a good one that will stand up to the hard work that any true Bible student will give it. In addition to the normal wide-margin Bibles, *Logos Publications* are able to offer an exclusive edition providing the following additional advantages:

- An extra wide margin giving added space for your notes;
- A better sewn binding in which, we have been assured, even greater care has been taken;
- An additional sheet for notes in the front of every book of the Bible (66 in all), enabling you to set out thereon an analysis, the background, and any particular features of the book that follows;
- Additional blank sheets for note-taking in the front and back of the Bible; the former to act as an index and the latter as an appendix.

For your Bible notes use only good quality Indian ink. We have found Pelikan brand Indian ink extremely good. Purchase it in the smallest bottles, as Indian ink has a tendency to dry up if it stands too long.

Use mapping pens for your printing (either the conventional nib or the fountain pen). They will enable you to print with a fine, clear line.

We suggest that you use different color inks to provide variety in your marking. A system that has been used with great success is the following: Underline the word or phrase you intend to comment upon in green ink, and number it in the same color, commencing the numbers at the beginning of every chapter. Then place the corresponding number in the margin in the same color. Use black ink for writing your comments in the margin against this green number. Any supporting references add in red ink. The variety of color enables each aspect of your Bible marking to stand out from the other, and is a great aid for quick reference.

It is also helpful to set out a chapter in a series of sub-headings which can be placed in the margin of your Bible at the appropriate places. These sub-headings will provide a general outline of the chapter, whilst your verse by verse notes will give more detailed explanation of the text of Scripture.

An Example

We present herewith a portion of Haggai taken from an actual Bible:

HAGGAI

(Text of the Bible)

CHAPTER 1

1. In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month,¹ in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD² by Haggai³ the prophet unto Zerubbabel,⁴ the son of Shealtiel,⁵ governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech,⁶ the high priest, saying,

(Marginal Comments)

CHAPTER 1

* A MESSAGE TO AROUSE —

Vv. 1-11

Introduction — V. 1

1. Zechariah commenced to prophesy 2 months later, so that they were contemporaries (Zech. 1:1).

2. Thus the message is authoritative (Isa. 55: 11; II Pet. 1:20; Jer. 20:9; Neh. 9:20).

3. Signifies "Festival," from "Hag" a Feast (cp. Exod. 12:14; 13:6). Related particularly to the Passover, thus signifying a gathering together to rejoice in deliverance. Haggai called the people together for that purpose.

4. Sig. "Shoot of Babylon" indicating that he was born in captivity. In Ezra 3:2-8; 5:2; Neh. 12:1; Mat. 1:12; Luke 3:27 he is given as son of Shealtiel, but in I Chron. 5:19 his father's name is given as Pedaiah. Thought to have been the son of the latter, but adopted by Shealtiel, Pedaiah's brother (I Chron. 3:17-18).

5. Sig. "I have asked, or enquired of El" (God). Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel signifies: "The Seed of Promise sown in Babylon." With Joshua he was a type of Christ (cp. Zech. 3:8 mg.). He rep. Christ as king, whilst Joshua rep. Christ as priest. He was typical of the Branch shooting forth from the withered stem of Jesse.

6. Sig. "Yahweh shall save for Yahweh hath cleansed." Typical of Christ the saviour.

It is suggested that the numbers and underlining be in green; the comments in black; the supporting references in red.

A Final Suggestion

You will find it profitable to have a notebook by your side, and to jot down in this notebook the comments you intend to place in your Bible. Then let the matter rest for some days before you go back to your handwritten comments to check if they are sufficiently clear to express and convey the relevant thoughts. Then mark them in your Bible.

Use determination and persistence in Bible marking. Set aside a regular time each day (15 minutes is sufficient!) for this practice. See that it is done every day without exception — and you will be amazed at the amount you will accomplish in the course of a year, and the pleasure and profit that will accrue to you.

If you wish to ask any further questions on this matter, do not hesitate to direct your enquiry to the Editor of *Logos*, West Beach Post Office, South Australia, 5024.

Remember, too, that Yahweh has promised His blessing upon such study. James writes: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed" (James 1:5-6).

Therefore, before you open your Bible to study, utter a short, silent prayer that your reading of this precious word might be blessed. Manifest the same attitude as David who prayed: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Ps. 119:18).

Proverbs tells us: "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honor of kings is to search out a matter" (Prov. 25:2). As kings in prospective (Rev. 5:9-10), it is our honor to search out the wisdom of God that He has concealed in His word.

He has promised to help us:

*Good and upright is Yahweh;
Therefore will He teach sinners in the way.
The meek will He guide in judgment:
The meek will He teach His way.
The secret of Yahweh is with them that fear Him;
He will shew them His covenant.*

(Psalm 25:8, 9, 14.)

Zephaniah : Prophet of Doom and Destiny

THE PROPHET AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

Very little is known of Zephaniah. His name means *Yahweh has hidden*, and if it be asked, "What has He hidden?" the answer would be: "His face from Israel." His prophecy contains stern denunciation and dire threatening against a people who, according to Jeremiah, "had turned not unto Yahweh with their whole heart, but feignedly" (Jer. 3:6, 10). But Zephaniah's message also includes hope, and the concluding chapter sweeps on to tell of the glorious future of Israel after judgments have been poured out upon the nation because of its guilt.

He prophesied during the reign of king Josiah, and it was probably his ministrations, combined with those of Jeremiah, that gave impetus to the reforms of the king. At what time he began his prophetic ministry is not revealed, but as he makes reference to the "king's sons" (Ch. 1:8), and indicts them for their wickedness, it is obvious that it must have been some time after the king had ascended the throne, which he did at the early age of eight years.

In Josiah and Jeremiah, Zephaniah had two remarkable and colorful contemporaries whose influence on the times was very great. He was probably personally related to the king, for he is listed as a descendant of Hezekiah (Ch. 1:1), and though we cannot be sure that this was King Hezekiah, the detailed genealogy given in this verse (so unusual in the case of the prophets) would suggest that it was. Hezekiah evidently had more than one son (Isa. 38:19), in which case, Zephaniah would have been connected with the royal house through Amariah, brother of Manasseh, and probably had ready access to the king.

A PERIOD OF SUPERFICIAL RESTORATION

Josiah instituted the greatest religious reform of any of the kings of Israel; but the words of the prophets contemporary with him must have been depressing to those who had the spiritual welfare of the nation at heart. Both Jeremiah and Zephaniah revealed that the efforts of the king had not really moved the hearts of the people except for a minority. This was shown in the next reign when the discipline of Josiah was relaxed, and the people quickly reverted to their old ways. The hypocritical attitude of the nation justified the predictions of punishments that Zephaniah and Jeremiah thundered against it.

Jeremiah looked towards the north and saw "the rod of an

almond tree" and "a seething pot" (Jer. 1:11-13) and was told what it signified: "Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon the inhabitants of the land" (v. 14). This came to pass some years later when the Babylonians swept down upon Jerusalem and destroyed the city, in the "Day of Yahweh" of which Zephaniah warned.

He declared that total destruction, the like of which the nation had never previously experienced, would fall upon guilty Judah (Zeph. 1:2-3). None would be exempt except the king. All classes of society, even the king's children were involved, and would be punished (Zeph. 1:8).

In other words, the reform which seemed so complete was, in fact, quite superficial. The people had heeded neither the teaching of Yahweh, the warning of history, nor the example of their king. Zephaniah's fiery words of indignation scorched the whole nation, as he expressed Yahweh's dissatisfaction with the insincerity of the people, and revealed His intention of making a clean sweep of all hypocrisy. All classes were to be involved in the common calamity, for all were guilty.

HOPE FOR THE RIGHTEOUS

Yahweh is not only just, however, but merciful, so that Zephaniah's prophecy is not limited to rebuke. His closing chapter looks to the time when Israel's judgments "shall be taken away," and Yahweh will "dwell in the midst" of His rejuvenated people in the person of His son. That time will unfold a glory for Israel far transcending anything in the past, and God's people will "receive praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame."

Meanwhile Zephaniah's indictment of the nation in spite of the reformation revealed that mere association with such a movement is insufficient, and that something deeper, more personal and enduring is required. Enthusiasm is a splendid thing, but if it has nothing to sustain it but emotion or its own impetus, it soon wanes and dies. Enthusiasm energised by faith is pleasing to God. Faith comes through knowledge (Rom. 10:17), and without it, "it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6). Despite all the excitement for reform in the days of Josiah, the nation, as distinct from individuals, lacked this attribute essential to Divine favor, and fully deserved the judgments announced against it, and which finally took effect.

INSPIRED OF GOD

Zephaniah spake and wrote by the inspiration of God. He was the amanuensis, rather than the author, of the book that bears his name. It is prefaced by the statement that "the word of Yahweh came unto Zephaniah," and throughout the book, God is

declared to be responsible for all that is proclaimed therein. It is Zephaniah's book only to the extent that he was responsible for the peculiarity of literary style by which the ideas of God were expressed.

A prophet was one who proclaimed the will and purpose of God, and who, when inspiration took hold of him, found himself under an influence that he could not resist. That was the experience of Jeremiah. He had concluded that no good came from proclaiming the message of Yahweh and had determined that no longer would he do so.

"I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name."

So powerfully and irresistibly did the compelling utterances of the Spirit well up in the heart of Jeremiah, however, that he could not hold them back, and found that he had to proclaim Yahweh's revelation whatever man might do about it.

"But His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay" (Jer. 20:9).

The experience of Balaam was similar. Employed by Balak to curse Israel, the prophet from Babylon would willingly have done so for the sake of the hire, but, instead, was forced to proclaim: "How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed? How shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied?"

"What hast thou done unto me?" remonstrated Balak. "I took thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast blessed them altogether!"

"Behold," replied Balaam, "I have received commandment to bless; and He hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it. All that Yahweh speaketh, that I must do" (Num. 23).

When inspiration seized a prophet he was compelled to deliver his message.

Peter defined it as a first principle that "No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation" (2 Pet. 1:20). The word he used, and which is here translated "interpretation", is *epilusis*, and conveys the idea of "unloosing" rather than that of explaining. Peter was stressing that prophecy was the result of Divine inspiration, and not merely the "unloosing" of the prophet's idea. "For," he continued, "the prophecy came not in old times by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

This was one of the "divers manners" that God employed to make known His purpose (Heb. 1:1). Paul felt the urge in a different way. "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel," he wrote.

Elihu spake of Divine inspiration in his reply to Job. He had listened attentively to the arguments of the four friends, and found that though Job had silenced the other three, yet God's way had not been truly expressed in the controversy. He was much

younger than the others, and had remained silent in their presence. But, finally, in wrath, he spake:

"I am young, and ye are very old; wherefore I was afraid and durst not shew you mine opinion. I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom."

But whilst experience is valuable, it does not always express truth. The Divine way of life is not natural to man, and mere experience will not reveal it. When Elihu contrasted the remarks of these older men with God's revelation, he discovered a higher wisdom than that which mere experience reveals. Experience is no adequate substitute for revelation. Elihu gave expression to this truth in these words:

"There is a spirit (or capacity to comprehend) in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding" (Job. 32:6-8).

Coverdale translated Elihu's words:

"Every man (no doubt) hath a mind; but it is the inspiration of the Almighty that giveth understanding."

Man must look to a higher Source than mere flesh if he would attain unto Truth. It is because men ignore this revelation, that Elihu could justly conclude: "Great men are not always wise, neither do the aged understand judgment."

Zephaniah was one of those into whom the "Almighty breathed knowledge," and by whom He "spake in times past unto the fathers" (Heb. 1:1). Therefore it is of comparative unimportance that little is revealed of his personal circumstances; for the true Author of the book is Yahweh.

The world worships success, which is the passport to its favour and admiration. Not so with Him, whose servants we claim to be. He commends and rewards the merits of his brethren, although they may not have been attended with success. He does not forget his own failure, when he "laboured in vain" and spent his "strength for nought," and in vain, in the work of bringing Jacob again to Yahweh (Isa. 49:4, 6). We prove and brighten our own faith in labouring under difficulties and discouragements to develop faith and good conduct in our contemporaries. Let us then, be of good courage, and, nothing daunted though the clerical and editorial "spirituals of the wickedness in high places" be as thick or multitudinous as the tiles upon the houses of Birmingham, or the shingles upon those of New York.

— J. Thomas.

Historical Background to the Message

A PERIOD OF POLITICAL STRESS

Zephaniah prophesied "in the days of Josiah" (Zeph. 1:1). According to the accepted dating, this was approximately B.C. 641-610. It was a period of international stress and turmoil that culminated in the doom of Nineveh which the prophet predicted (Zeph. 2:13).

Asia was invaded by the Scythians. They appeared suddenly from the north, from behind the long mountain barrier formed by the Himalaya, Caucasus, Taurus and Haemus mountain ranges, fierce, uncivilised and uncouth, to fall upon the sophisticated peoples of the south, menacing Assyria, Babylon, Syria, and Egypt. One division swept south along the coastal plains of Palestine towards Egypt, penetrating Philistia to the southern border of Palestine. They were met and stopped by Psammetichus of Egypt after sacking the Temple of Astarte at Ascalon (Herod. 1; 105). They left one permanent trace of their passage as they scoured through the plain of Esdraelon, for the city of Bethshan on its eastern extremity received from them the name Scythopolis that it subsequently bore.

The Scythians were bribed by the Egyptians to turn back northwards, which they did, ravaging the countryside, burning and plundering as they went. They returned along the plain of Esdraelon, by-passing most of Judah so that it escaped the devastation that most of the other nations felt from the depredations of these barbarians. Within ten years they had retired behind their mountain barrier, disappearing like an evil apparition leaving an Assyria seriously weakened by the attack.

When the Scythians retired, the world breathed with relief, but it was soon convulsed by war again. With the death of Ashurbanipal, the sudden and rapid collapse of Assyria began. To the north-east, Cyaxeres came to power in Media, and uniting all Asia beyond the Halys, marched against Nineveh. In the south-east of Mesopotamia, Nabopolassar (approx. B.C. 625) founded the Neo-Babylonian Empire. The sudden appearance of the wild, barbaric Scythians delayed the death of Assyria. When they had disappeared, the attack was renewed. The Medes and Babylonians bore down upon the Assyrians on two fronts, north and south, and the brutal Empire was crushed as in a vice. The great city fortress of Asshur on the Tigris fell in 614. It was the last stronghold protecting Nineveh which was now open to the enemy. Cyaxeres was the first to enter the city with his army, and Nabopolassar met him in the ruins of the city. By mutual agreement they divided up the Assyrian Empire and the world. Cyaxeres lay claim to the

north and north-east; Nabopolassar to the south and south-west. This brought Syria and Palestine under the shadow of Babylonian invasion, and plans were made to acquire this territory.

These happenings caused anxiety not only in Judah but also in Egypt. Pharaoh Necho decided to march to the help of Assyria, and against the rising power of Babylon:

"Necho King of Egypt came up to fight against Charchemish by the Euphrates: and Josiah went out against him" (2 Chron. 35:20).

The account does not say against whom Necho went forth to fight, and the RSV renders it: "to fight at Charchemish." History reveals that Necho went to assist the Assyrians probably preferring a weakened Assyria to a powerful Babylon. A fragment of cuneiform text in the British Museum reads:

"In the month of Du'uz (June/July 609) the king of Assyria procured a large Egyptian army and marched against Harran to conquer it. . . . till the month of Ulul (August-September) he fought against the city, but accomplished nothing."

After the fall of Ninevah, the remnants of the Assyrian forces retreated to northern Mesopotamia, where their king embarked upon the forlorn hope of reconquering from that centre what he had lost. Necho had hastened to help him, but when, after two months of fighting, not even Harran had fallen, he realised that it was a hopeless cause, and retired, leaving Assyria to its fate.

THE TRAGEDY OF JOSIAH'S DEATH

As the Egyptian army moved north to assist the Assyrians and challenge the Babylonians at Charchemish, "Josiah went out against him" (2 Chron. 35:20). He did so in the valley at Esdraelon by Megiddo (v. 22). What was his purpose in so doing? Evidently he wanted to keep his country free from foreign domination. He probably reasoned that if Egypt were successful in the north, and Assyria received strength to resist the power of Babylon and Media, all of Palestine would fall under Egyptian control.

Therefore, despite the comparative weakness of the forces under his command, Josiah stood against the might of the Egyptian army, perhaps expecting that Yahweh would intervene to assist him as He had helped Hezekiah against Sennacherib. He evidently had not sought Divine counsel, and to the grief of the nation, and Jeremiah in particular, he was mortally wounded in battle.

This was really a blessing in disguise, for the time had come when the Divine punishments threatened against the nation by both Jeremiah and Zephaniah were about to be fulfilled, and the king was mercifully taken from the scene that he might not witness the humiliation of the nation for which he had labored so hard,

JOSIAH'S REIGN AND REFORMATION

Josiah's reign had commenced in an atmosphere of tragedy. His father, Amon, was murdered when Josiah was eight years old, with the result that he ascended the throne at that early age. By the time he was sixteen, he revealed a sincere reverence for the worship of Yahweh. As he advanced in years, he determined to bring the nation back to a wholehearted acceptance of the true worship from which it had drifted during the long and wicked reign of Manasseh, and the short rule of Amon.

At the age of twenty, therefore, he commenced a general reform. Politically, he was in a favorable position to implement his desires. The declining power of Assyria provided greater independence for Josiah. As King of the dominant nation among the smaller kingdoms of Palestine and Syria, he was in a position to assert his authority beyond his own borders. He therefore extended his reforms beyond the limits of Judah into the adjacent territory of what was once Israel, so that they were both widespread and sweeping. They not only involved Judah, but extended to "all the cities of Manasseh and Ephraim and Simeon, even unto Naphtali" (2 Chron. 34:6). People were compelled to accept the worship of Yahweh, and indignation was heaped upon the pagan priests.

In his twenty-sixth year (the eighteenth of his reign), Josiah turned his attention to repairing and adorning the Temple. Ample money was provided, and workmen of integrity were engaged who could be trusted to dispose of it to the greatest advantage. The account declares: "There was no reckoning made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand, because they dealt faithfully" (2 Kings 22:7).

During the repair of the Temple, a notable discovery was made that revealed to Josiah the urgency of the work in which he was engaged, and gave further impetus to his reform. Hilkipah the priest came upon the book of the Law that was normally kept in the Most Holy place. After examining it, he showed it to the King. This was the first time the King had read the book. He was perturbed at its contents, particularly Moses' warnings to Israel, and the extent of punishment with which the nation was threatened if it committed the very sins that the King knew it had been doing.

From Deuteronomy 28 and 29 he learned of the prophetic curses that overshadowed Judah. He was convinced that a state of spiritual emergency existed. He realized that the nation could only be saved from the judgments threatened by a complete change of heart and conduct on the part of the people. A conference was called between Josiah, Hilkipah the priest, and various scribes and persons of state. After discussion upon the problem, it was decided to seek further information from Huldah the prophetess, as to what was likely to be the future development. The result was not

encouraging. In the name of Yahweh, Huldah declared that the outpouring of the punishment upon the guilty nation was inevitable, though it would be delayed until after the King's death.

These words acted as an incentive to the King. He accepted them as a challenge, and as an intimation that the mercy of God would preserve the nation from harm if the people sought Him in truth and righteousness. His enthusiasm for reform was doubled. A general gathering of the people was called, and the newly-found Law, with its blessings and cursings, was read in their ears. This was followed by an exhortation calling upon them to give their hearts to God, and by a public appeal inviting them to wholeheartedly enter into a solemn covenant with Yahweh to keep His statutes.

Urged on by the King, indeed fearing his wrath, the people agreed to his demand, and the Mosaic covenant was renewed. The celebrations were attended by the greatest enthusiasm. It was a wonderful occasion for the King who felt that the foundations of permanent reform had been laid. But a note of soberness was introduced by the warnings of Zephaniah and Jeremiah, who both revealed its weakness. Despite appearances to the contrary, they claimed that the hearts of the people were not in the reform, and they decried the hypocritical attitude of the nation as displeasing to God.

These messages of warning caused the King to intensify the reformation. Every effort was made to completely stamp out the sin of idolatry. The pagan priests were put to the sword; Josiah personally supervised the destruction of all false gods and altars, breaking them into pieces, grinding them into powder, and strewing the dust upon the graves of their previous worshippers; the so-called holy places, dedicated to idolatrous worship, were thrown down and desecrated with the bones of dead men; the altar made by Jeroboam to serve the false worship he set up, was broken down and destroyed, together with the sepulchres of those who had supported him; whilst the sepulchre of the man of God who had publicly testified against him was honored. Externally, at least, the land was cleansed of idolatry (2 Kings 22, 23).

Thus Josiah fulfilled the prophecy of the "man of God" who had interrupted the initial service of Jeroboam at the new altar he had set up. The prophet had declared:

"O altar! altar! thus saith Yahweh, 'Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee'" (1 Kings 13:2).

Josiah then inaugurated a national fast that exceeded any that preceded it in solemnity or extent. At the same time, he ruthlessly crushed any abominations that had been permitted to

develop in the land contrary to the Law of Moses. The record states:

"Like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to Yahweh with all his heart and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him" (2 Kings 23:25).

This is surely a wonderful record. It is in striking contrast to that of Jeroboam, whose apostasy he revenged, and of whom it is recorded that he "made Israel to sin."

THE LIMITATIONS AND BENEFITS OF THE REFORM

Despite all the apparent enthusiasm behind the facade of reformation, the people were still pagan at heart. Ezekiel portrayed what the very elders of the land did "every man in the chambers of his imagery" (Ezek. 8:12), as they secretly worshipped pagan gods. The reform had been forced upon them, and they reluctantly complied to its demands because they feared the King, and not because they loved Yahweh. Jeremiah declared that Judah had turned unto God "feignedly, and not with the whole heart" (Jer. 3:10). It was thus hypocritical, and distasteful to God. It stemmed from fear and not from love; it was enforced by compulsion, not by the warming influence of the Word; it was the influence of a minority imposing its will on the majority, and not the result of wholehearted and widespread acceptance of divine principles. A few years later, when Josiah's sons reigned in his stead, the people returned to their former ways. The popular demand was expressed by some who claimed:

"Since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offering unto her we have wanted, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine" (Jer. 44:18).

They eagerly seized the opportunity to revert back to their evil ways.

Discerning the true spirit of the people, the voice of Zephaniah, like that of Jeremiah, was raised against them. He revealed that God knew the thoughts and intents of the heart, and was not misled by external appearances: by the splendid Temple again opened for worship, the sacrifices that smoked upon its altar, the companies of priests and levites who officiated there, nor the thronging multitudes that crowded its courts. Something more than all that was required by Him before He would accept the people. "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at My word" (Isa. 66:2).

The reformation was not a complete failure however, and Zephaniah had a special word of encouragement for those influenced by it (Ch. 2:1-3). It produced a minority who worshipped Yahweh in truth and righteousness in spite of the prevailing apostasy. Men such as Ezekiel, Daniel and his friends, and others were brought to spiritual maturity through the labors of the

King. They were the "good figs" that ultimately went into captivity "for their good" (Jer. 24:5). However, they were in the minority; the greater number followed the reform because it was the fashion.

How like the work of the truth in every age! Yet none of it is really wasted, though God's workmen are not always in a position to correctly assess the value of what they might do. So often their labors seem completely without fruit; a waste of time, energy and money. Even Jeremiah thought so. "I will no longer speak in His name," he declared. But he learned the lesson later stressed by Paul, that God's workmen are called upon to labor on in faith, leaving it to God to give the increase, as did faithful Noah in the face of the depressing circumstances of his times. Times of apathy are a challenge to faith.

We can only view the efforts of Josiah with admiration. For thirty-one years, until his death, his determined efforts virtually held the threatened judgments of God at bay, and made possible the development of such characters as Ezekiel and Daniel. Thus the fruits of his reform continued on after the judgments the king feared had been poured out upon the nation he loved. They continued to bring forth fruit in the labors of Ezekiel, Daniel and others, for these men were greatly responsible for the development of a faithful minority who returned under Zerubbabel and Joshua after the seventy years captivity in Babylon.

Josiah's end was sudden. He opposed Pharaoh Necho in battle, and was mortally wounded. With his death Judah passed under the temporary domination of Egypt, and then under Babylon. Jehoahaz succeeded his father, but was deposed, and Jehoiakim, his brother, was elevated to power. The nation rapidly declined spiritually and politically, and within twenty-three years of the death of Josiah, it was completely overwhelmed by Babylon, and taken into captivity. The judgments Josiah feared had fallen upon it.

Summary of Zephaniah's Message

Zephaniah informs us that he prophesied "in the days of Josiah, the son of Amon, King of Judah" (Ch. 1:1). He says that notwithstanding the reforms introduced by Josiah, the people continued to worship Baal and the host of heaven, which he denounces. He then pronounces judgment on the surrounding nations of Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia, and Nineveh (Ch. 2, 3), but finally treats of the sequel to all such judgments: Israel's restoration, and their blessed position at the head of all the nations.

Analysis of Zephaniah's Prophecy



THE THEME

The *Book Of Zephaniah* is a scathing indictment of the sins of Judah, a fearless warning of impending judgment, and a thrilling revelation of future hope and glory. Zephaniah's style is poetical; his theme is: "The day of Yahweh is at hand" (cp. Ch. 1:7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 18; 2:2, 3; 3:8, 11, 16).

The Day of Yahweh is one in which He will be vindicated in judgment upon His people (Ch. 1:1-2:3), in judgment upon the Gentiles who oppress them (Ch. 2:4-3:7), and in the consummation of His purpose in the earth (Ch. 3:8-20).

OUTLINE OF THE PROPHECY

"The day of Yahweh hasteth."

1. Judgment Upon Judah — Chapter 1:1-2:3.

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|--|-------|------------|
| a. The Prophet Introduces Himself | | v. 1. |
| b. He Warns Of The Judgment Decreed | | vv. 2-6. |
| c. He Proclaims The Terms of Yahweh's Sacrifice | | vv. 7-13. |
| d. He Declares the Nearness of the Day of Yahweh | | vv. 14-18. |
| e. He Offers Mercy To The Meek | | Ch. 2:1-3. |

2. Judgment Upon The Gentiles — Chapter 2:4-15.

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|---|-------|------------|
| a. Philistia (the West) To Be Punished | | vv. 4-7. |
| b. Moab and Amon (the East) To Be Rebuked | | vv. 8-11. |
| c. Ethiopia (the South) To Be Subdued | | v. 12. |
| d. Nineveh (the North) To Be Overwhelmed | | vv. 13-15. |

3. The Vindication Of Yahweh's Judgment — Chapter 3:1-7.

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|--------------------------------|-------|----------|
| a. Why Judgment Was Inevitable | | vv. 1-7. |
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4. A Final Message Of Hope — Chapter 3:8-20.

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|---|-------|------------|
| a. The Nations To Be Curbed And Converted | | vv. 8-10. |
| b. Israel To Be Shamed And Sanctified | | vv. 11-13. |
| c. Yahweh To Be Manifested And Magnified | | vv. 14-20. |



"For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of Yahweh to serve Him with one consent."

Impending Judgment for Guilty Judah

Chapter 1:1 - 2:3

Zephaniah's prophecy opens with a stern denunciation of the widespread sins of Judah, and a dire threat that the day of Yahweh was approaching. When this is considered in the light of the historical background of the times, a most powerful exhortation is presented to the mind. For Zephaniah wrote "in the days of Josiah," when the most sweeping reform of all Israel's history had been instituted. To a superficial observer, it must have seemed that the nation was ascending a peak of spiritual revival, but Zephaniah's words of indictment revealed the true character of the people. His words may have caused consternation, and even bewilderment, among the people, but they illustrated, and continue to illustrate, that righteousness cannot be forced upon a nation nor produced through legislation, but must spring from the heart. The reform of Josiah was enforced upon a reluctant people by royal decree, and did not spring from an appreciation of God's Word. The people obeyed because they feared the king, not Yahweh. And though the pagan temples might be overthrown, and the priests slaughtered, the hearts of the people were still with the gods they once openly served (see Ezekiel 8).

Zephaniah therefore revealed the hypocrisy of a people who gave only lip service to Yahweh. His words can well be summarised by the statement of Amos: "Woe unto you that desire the day of Yahweh! To what end is it for you?" (Amos 5:18). The Day of Yahweh was impending in Zephaniah's day, but it would be a day of woe and evil to His people because they refused to heed His word. This constitutes a warning to us. A similar Day of Judgment is impending today. How important it is to take heed to the spirit of the prophet's message, and by sincere, loving service, render unto Yahweh that which is due to His holy name.

In this section, the prophet briefly introduces himself, and then, abruptly, without warning or explanation, launches into an indictment of the people, and announces Yahweh's intention to pour out upon the nation the judgments threatened against it in the Law. "I will utterly consume," "I will cut off," "I will punish," are the re-occurring statements of this section (cp. vv. 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 17, etc.). If these phrases are marked by a distinguishing color, the full impact of the threatening communication will be better revealed. Zephaniah's message confirmed the answer that the King received from Huldah the prophetess, when he sent to enquire whether the judgments threatened by the Law would fall upon the nation (2 Kings 22:14-19). She replied that such was inevitable; and Zephaniah revealed the scope and extent

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of these judgments. He declared that the day of Yahweh was impending; the Day in which God would be vindicated and shown to be just and true by the punishment He would pour out upon a people who had rejected His mercy and truth. References to the Day of Yahweh, or to "that day" are made no less than seventeen times in this section of the prophecy. It will be found helpful in highlighting this feature of the first section of the prophecy to mark references to this impending day with a distinguishing color so that they stand out above the text.

The Prophet Introduces Himself — V. 1

He gives his genealogy in such detail as is unusual in the record of a prophet. It is traced back to Hezekiah, perhaps because this related to King Hezekiah, and thus indicated that Zephaniah was of royal descent. If so, he would be related to Josiah.

VERSE 1

"The word of Yahweh"—This word is authoritative, and will accomplish its purpose (Isa. 55:9-11). It also brings responsibility to those to whom it is directed (Amos 3:2; Acts 17:30). When the spirit took hold of a prophet, he found the impulse to utter the Word of Yahweh irresistible, and was compelled to speak whether he wanted to or not (Amos 3:8; 2 Pet. 1:20; Jer. 20:9; Num. 23:20). The prophet's message, therefore, constituted the voice of Yahweh, though conveyed through the channel of the speaker's peculiar mannerisms and personality (Heb. 1:1).

"Zephaniah"—His name means, *Yahweh has hidden*; and if it were asked, what has He hidden? the answer would be, His face from His people. The prophet's name, therefore, is a caption to his message. His genealogy suggests that he was of royal descent; and he states that he ministered in the "days of Josiah." That is all that we know of Zephaniah. His brief message having been given, he apparently retired into obscurity until death claimed him. The time will come when he will stand be-

fore his Judge to receive the fruits of his faithful testimony on behalf of Yahweh which he proclaimed at a most difficult time in the history of His ecclesia (Acts 7:38).

"Cushi" — His name means "black."

"Gedaliah" — His name means "Yah is great."

"Amariah" — His name means "Yah has spoken."

"Hizkiah"—A variation of Hezekiah, signifying "Yah is strength."

This could have been Hezekiah the king, in which case Zephaniah would have been a relative of Josiah. This would mean that Hezekiah would have had at least one other son in addition to Manasseh, even Amariah (cp. Isa. 38:19).

When these names are linked together, a most significant sentence is formed which actually captions the message delivered by the prophet. Commencing from Hezekiah, from whom the genealogy is traced, the sentence reads:
H Yahweh is strength, He has spoken,
G He is great, but C blackness has
come (to His people) because
Z He has hidden His face!

"In the days of Josiah"—Josiah signifies "Yahweh healeth." The record of his reign is contained in 2 Kings 22, 23; 2 Chronicles 34, 36. In his reforming zeal he destroyed paganism throughout Judah, broke down the altar set up by Jeroboam, and thus fulfilled the prophecy of 1 Kings 13:2. He was a good king, sincere and zealous in his ways, and because of

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this was carefully excluded by Zephaniah from those who were to receive punishment (cp. v. 8). See the Introduction for details of his reign. Yahweh proclaimed His intention of punishing Judah despite the reforms of Josiah because the people had not responded with all their hearts. They worshipped by decree of Josiah and not that of Yahweh (See Jer. 3:6, 10; 25:2-3; 2 Kings 23:26.)

The Judgment Decreed — Vv. 2-6

The most sweeping judgments are pronounced against the guilty nation, involving all classes of society, including the pagan priests. Josiah, himself, was to perform portion of this judgment by completely rooting out all semblance of pagan worship.

VERSE 2

"I will consume all things from off the land"—This declaration repeated the threat of the Law (Deut. 4:25-26), which Josiah had read in the copy that had been found when the Temple was being repaired. He had caused it to be read in the ears of the nation, and now Zephaniah confirmed that Yahweh would carry out His threat.

VERSE 3

"I will consume man and beast"—By a figure of speech, Yahweh is described as destroying His political creation, and reducing it to the primeval state of being empty or void. See Jer. 4:22-26 where a similar figure is used for a similar purpose. In the books of the prophets, natural creation is often used to type political creation. Thus heavens and earth (Isa. 1:2), mountains and hills (Dan. 2:35), rivers and sea (Rev. 17:15), animals and birds (Jer. 12:9) are used as national symbols. Jeremiah described how the "mountains" (empires) would tremble at the advance of Nebuchadnezzar, and how the earth itself (the nation of Israel) would become "without form, and void," as a result of

his attack (Jer. 4:23). Zephaniah used similar language to illustrate the thoroughness of the destruction of the Jewish State consequent upon the outpouring of Divine wrath. The land is figuratively described as void, completely emptied of all forms of true life.

"The stumbling-blocks with the wicked"—The margin interprets the "stumbling-blocks" as "idols" and the declaration of the prophet shows that both the cause of the offence (idolrous worship), and those deluded thereby (the wicked), will be consumed.

"I will cut off"—It is Yahweh Who threatened to do it, though Nebuchadnezzar was the agent through whom this cutting off was performed. He did it as the "servant" of God (Jer. 27:6).

VERSE 4

"I will stretch out Mine hand upon Judah"—In this statement, Yahweh represents Himself as the Father of Judah, stretching out His hand to chasten His children (cp. Isa. 5:25; 9:12, 17, 21). "If I be a Father," He declared through Malachi, "where is Mine honor?" (Mal. 1:6). In treating with His children, Yahweh has insisted upon receiving the respect due to His position and status. When this has not been given, He has used disciplinary methods to correct them, such as He has inculcated throughout His word for the guidance of parents. He has laid it down that to spare the rod is to spoil the child. "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying" (Prov. 19:18). "The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame" (Prov. 29:15). "Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul" (Prov. 29:17). Modern child psychology challenges these divine precepts, and advocates the utmost freedom of expression and conduct in a child; but this is neither God's way nor

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the best way, as is evidenced by the incidence of juvenile delinquency in the world today. A wise son or daughter will heed discipline. Naomi did so when she set out to return from the land of Moab. She explained to her daughters in law, that the reverses she had experienced in that land were evidence that "the hand of Yahweh is gone out against me." The expression she used is that of a loving father stretching out his hand to correct a disobedient child (Ruth 1:13).

"I will cut off the remnant of Baal"—Josiah destroyed the external evidences of this worship, but, as Ezekiel revealed, the people still worshipped at these pagan altars "in the chambers of their imagery" (Ezek. 8:12). The very leaders of the nation were doing this "in the dark" (vv. 11-12), in consequence of which, the nation was abandoned to its fate by God Who would otherwise have saved it.

"The Chemarims" — This word is derived from the root *kamar*, "to be black," and therefore related to black-frocked priests in contradistinction to the white-gowned Levites and Priests of Israel. The one symbolised sin, the other righteousness. Those black-frocked priests were unlawfully appointed by Jeroboam to attend the calves set up by him for worship when he "caused Israel to sin." See Hos. 10:5 mg.; 1 Kings 13:33. Adam Clarke, in commenting upon the black-frocked priests destroyed by Josiah (2 Kings 23:5 mg) writes: "Why we should imitate in our sacerdotal dress those priests of Baal, is strange to think and hard to tell!" The reason, of course, is that the black-frocked priests of today are the modern counterpart of the Chemarim put to death by the righteous Josiah. The antitypical Josiah (the Lord Jesus Christ) will destroy the modern Chemarim in due course (see 2 Thess. 2:8).

VERSE 5

"Them that worship the host of heaven"—There were worshippers of the heavenly bodies in Judah (2 Kings 17:16). Altars to such were erected on the flat roofs of houses for family worship (2 Kings 23:12; Jer. 19:13), and even though Josiah eradicated the external aspects of this worship, it still lingered on in the hearts of the people, and found expression in their demands after his death: "We will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done ... for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil" (Jer. 44:17). This was the slumbering spirit of the people even during the course of the reformation, underlining the fact that large meetings, enthusiastic gatherings, and attractive forms of worship are no guarantee that the spirit of the truth has found a lodgment in the hearts of the members so gathered together. Judah had all those externals in the days of Josiah, and yet was displeasing to God because it lacked the latter.

"Them that worship and that swear by Yahweh"—The margin provides an alternative rendering: "That swear to Yahweh." This describes waverers who mouthed the name of Yahweh, and vowed to worship in truth, but only did so to conform to the general popular trend. They were such as are described in 2 Kings 17:33: "They feared Yahweh, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations."

"That swear by Malcham"—Malcham is a variation of Molech. Reference to the idolatrous worship of this evil god is found in 2 Kings 23:10 and elsewhere. Molech is from the same root as the Hebrew word for king, and is sometimes described as the king-god, challenging the rule of Yahweh. Molech-worship was a cruel, bru-

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tal form of fire worship. The idol was posed with outstretched arms heated red hot by blazing fires. On those terrible, devouring, burning arms were placed babies offered in sacrifice by the deluded people, whilst drums beat loud to drown the shrieks of the expiring children. This horrible worship was an abomination to Yahweh, the God of love.

VERSE 6

“And them that are turned back from Yahweh”—Rotherham renders: “Them who turn away from following Yahweh.” These were the apostates, the renegades who forsook His service to please themselves (cp. Ps. 78:56-58).

“And those who have not sought Yahweh”—These were those who showed complete religious indifference.

“Nor enquired for Him”—These were those who grew apathetic, and neglected the study of His law. (The Hebrew word is *darash*, frequently rendered “to seek” as 1 Chron. 28:9.) They were the spiritually lazy ones. Thus the apostates, the indifferent, and the neglectful are condemned together.

The Impending Day of Yahweh's Sacrifice — Vv. 7-13

A Day of Yahweh is an epoch when He is vindicated in judgment (Isa. 2:11-12). The term does not relate exclusively to the future, for there have been Days of Yahweh in the past. The destruction of Babylon, for example, was such a Day (Isa. 13:1, 6). The Divine judgments on guilty Judah implemented first through Nebuchadnezzar, and later through the Romans were Days of Yahweh in which God's righteousness was vindicated. With each outpouring of judgment, however, mercy was inevitably extended to the repentant (cp. Zeph. 2:3).

VERSE 7

“Hold thy peace”—Rotherham

renders: “Hush!” The guilt of the people having been clearly stated, excuses were completely out of place, and every mouth was therefore stopped (Rom. 3:19). The people had despised the messengers of Yahweh, and mocked His word, until there was “no remedy” (2 Chron. 36:16). Now He was about to vindicate His name on a grand scale by the outpouring of judgment that would leave no doubt as to the enormity of the crime.

“The Day of Yahweh is at hand”

—The day was impending when Yahweh would be completely vindicated in judgment upon the guilty or in mercy upon the righteous.

“Yahweh hath prepared a sacrifice”

—The sacrifice that Yahweh had prepared was the nation. He was about to put it to death as a punishment for sin, but inasmuch as He was prepared to extend mercy and salvation to those who acknowledged His right to do so and acted in accordance with that knowledge (see Zeph. 2:3) it was sacrificial in its scope, and designed to provide a way to life. Divine judgment is always designed to reclaim. It first underlines the enormity of sin, and reveals its true character from God's standpoint; it then shows what is necessary to conquer sin: death to the old way of wickedness. If God did not intervene at times of evil, sin would completely triumph, and there would be no restraining wickedness. The flesh stands aghast at great punishments, but who trembles to equal extent at great sins. It is sensitive when humanity suffers, but not so much when Yahweh is mocked. Punishment, however, reveals the true measure of sin, and is as beneficial as pain which prevents a person from mortally hurting himself. The very judgments that Zephaniah thundered against the guilty nation awoke in the faithful minority a consciousness of sin which, if it had slumbered, could have brought about its complete rejection as well. Upon the terms of acknowledging

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God's righteousness in judgment, He was prepared to deliver them from its fatal consequences, and provide them with redemption. Thus, though they also suffered, it was "for their good" (Jer. 24:5). Armageddon is similarly sacrificial in its scope (see notes on Ezekiel 39:17). It is a case of "When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants thereof will learn righteousness" (Isa. 26:9).

"He hath bid His guests" — In the Hebrew, the word "bid" is "sanctified" or "prepared." Yahweh had sanctified His guests in that He had "set apart," or "appointed" them for the work in hand. His guests constituted the Babylonians who would act as His priests in slaying the Israel sacrifice. Yahweh has frequently used the nations to that end. In Isaiah 13:3, the Medes are also described as His "sanctified ones" in that they were consecrated, or set apart, to slay the Babylonian sacrifice on what is described as another "Day of Yahweh" (v. 6). The word "guests" is *quara* in the Hebrew, and signifies "invited" or "called out ones." Yahweh called out those whom he selected to slay the sacrifice, and consecrated, or set them apart, as His typical priests for that purpose. As far as Israel was concerned, Nebuchadnezzar became His "servant" to that end (Jer. 27:6).

VERSE 8

"The princes and the king's children" — The nobles are mentioned first in the condemnation because of the responsible positions they held. The king's sons likewise are brought up for censure because they so completely failed to follow and thus maintain the noble example of their father. In fact, they became leaders of principal in the general spiritual decline and calamity. It is significant that Josiah, the king himself, is not mentioned. This shows that his reform was not a matter of mere political expediency, but was a sincere attempt to bring the people to

God. The mention of his sons in this verse shows that Zephaniah ministered sufficiently late in the reign of Josiah, for his sons to manifest their ways.

"Such as are clothed with strange apparel" — Rotherham renders: "foreign apparel," and this is the meaning of the word. The people of God are called upon to be exclusive in their ways and habits. As Yahweh's peculiar people, consecrated to His service, Israelites were called upon to be careful in dress. They were required to have attached to their garments a fringe of blue, to remind them of their heavenly calling (Num. 15:37; Deut. 22:12). But some were imitating the Egyptian way of dress, and despising the manner of attire that God required. The women were particularly condemned for this habit (Ezek. 20:32). It is significant that Isaiah warns that a hankering after the extremes of Gentile fashion will be condemned at the Judgment Seat (Isa. 3:16-24). Paul exhorted: "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2).

VERSE 9

"I will punish all those that leap on the threshold" — This statement can be rendered "over the threshold." It seems to relate to those who figuratively "leap over the threshold" or violently invade houses for pillage at the bidding of their master. Servants are warned that they cannot evade responsibility merely because they do evil at the bidding of those who bear rule over them.

"Which fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit" — The R.V. renders this as "their master's house." Moffatt translates: "I will punish the officials and the royal house who by their violence and fraud enrich the palace." If this reading is accepted it would imply that the nobles robbed the people on the authority of the

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palace, and employed their servants to that end. Josiah would be exempt from this censure, of course. Those nobles perished in Babylon (2 Kings 25:18-21).

VERSE 10

"A noise of a cry from the fish gate"—The Fish Gate was in the northern wall, opening out to the Joppa road from whence came the fish (Neh. 3:3). This would be the first place where an alarm would be raised in the event of an attack from the north. Zephaniah thus dramatically described the cry of alarm that would be heard from that quarter when the enemy approached.

"An howling from the second"—In ancient times Jerusalem was divided by the Tyropoean Valley that intersected the city (2 Kings 20:4; 22:14; 2 Chron. 34:22 mg). The term "second city" described the lower part, sometimes called the "second part." The prophet predicts that the cry of alarm, first heard at the northern extremity, would sweep through the whole city.

"From the hills"—The cry of alarm, consequent upon the Babylonian attack, would be heard from every part of the city, and would reverberate throughout the surrounding hills.

VERSE 11

"Howl ye inhabitants of Maktesh"—Maktesh signifies "depression," and therefore points to lower Jerusalem as distinct from the upper city. This was probably the trading centre. Rotherham translates "Maktesh" as "the lower city." The inhabitants of this section of the city would howl as they saw their commercial interests ruined by the invader.

"All the merchant people are cut down"—"The merchant people" are literally "the people of Canaan," a term used for unscrupulous and dishonest traders. The word "Canaanite" is derived from a root *kanah*, to bend the knee, hence to humiliate oneself for

gain. The term often has a religious significance, identifying it with such spiritual traders as "the merchants of the earth" who trade in the "bodies and souls of men" as described in Rev. 18:11. It is in that sense that the term is used in Zech. 14:21: "There shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of Yahweh of hosts." In Zephaniah 1:11, however, the word is used in its normal commercial usage, and there denotes an unscrupulous trader.

"All they that bear silver are cut off"—The prophet dramatically describes the destruction of the city as though he were an eye-witness. He hears the cries of horror that are raised as the enemy approaches; he witnesses the rapid progress of panic throughout the city; he describes how the very hills re-echo with the sound of battle and dismay; and in vision he sees the Babylonians "cutting down" the wealthy of the people that they might take their possessions as spoil. The silver possessed by the wealthy would not be of any use to them, nor be able to purchase their safety. Rotherham renders "they that bear silver" as "they that were laden with silver."

VERSE 12

"I will search Jerusalem with candles"—Yahweh will see that the city be searched with "lamps" in the day of gloominess and thick darkness" (V. 15), and under such close scrutiny none of the guilty would escape.

"Will punish the men that are settled on their lees"—Those who were confirmed, hardened and inveterate in their evil habits. The metaphor is taken from old wine not racked off, which retains all its flavor and odor, but becomes thick and viscid. See margin.

"That say in their heart"—Whatever external appearance of righteousness they may have had, in their hearts they despised God. They were "fools" because in their

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cogitations they set God aside: "The fool hath said in his heart—no God" (Ps. 14:1). If the words in italics are excluded, as they are above, the fool is described as one who does not acknowledge God in his life, and not merely one who is atheistic in belief. He says it "in his heart" and not openly on his lips. His way of life denies the profession of his lips, and whilst he may worship God in word, he does not do so in action.

"Yahweh will not do good, neither will He do evil"—This is the fool's philosophy; he treats God as though He is nothing but a theory, an abstraction. This is insulting to Yahweh, the living God (Ps. 94:7).

VERSE 13

"Their goods shall become a booty"—The Hebrew word for "goods" is *chayil*, "strength." It is rendered "wealth" by the R.V. The extensive possessions of these wealthy nobles were the cause of their self-sufficient impiety, and were to be taken from them to become the spoil, or "booty" of their enemies (cp. Ps. 73:1-18).

"Their houses a desolation"—In the Hebrew, the term "houses" not only applies to dwelling places, but also to families. The wealthy, in their arrogance, imagined that their fortunes would provide immunity from trouble to their posterity; but both their houses and families were to become desolate. This is the fate of all who put confidence in their wealth instead of in God. (See the wise comments of the Psalmist—Ps. 49:11.)

"They shall build houses but not inhabit them"—This was the curse threatened against those who despised Yahweh's Law (Deut. 28:30-31). Amos warned: "Forasmuch as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat; ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them" (Ch.

5:11). This state of things will not continue in the day when Christ reigns, for then men will be guided to live according to Divine principles, and will benefit in consequence (Isa. 65:21-22).

The Near Approach And Terrible Nature Of The Day Of Judgment — Vv. 14-18

A further warning of the imminence of the judgment, together with a further description of its terrible nature, is now given. The Day of Yahweh would be a gloomy day of trouble for Israel. Terror would sweep the city, as the frightening sound of the trumpet's alarm would be heard, and destruction would be seen within the gates on all sides. Similar judgment awaits Gentiles in the latter days (Jer. 25:29).

VERSE 14

"The great day of Yahweh is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly"—Zephaniah introduces a note of utmost urgency into his message, an urgency that should be imitated by modern Zephaniahs in their preaching today. Israel's Day of Yahweh typed that which now awaits the Gentiles (Jer. 25:27), and the greatest service is rendered men and women by impressing them with that fact. A time of unprecedented trouble awaits the world about us (Dan. 12:1), and as we possess both the knowledge of this, and the key to salvation, our voices should be raised in such a way as to arrest attention and startle those who otherwise would drift to destruction. Nor should such a warning be limited to those "outside," but it should likewise be directed to the members of the multitudinous Body of Christ when necessary. Zephaniah's words were directed to Judah which constituted the Ecclesia of those times.

"The mighty man shall cry there bitterly"—So terrible would be the destruction on Jerusalem, so

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awful and sweeping the judgments, that warriors, hardened to scenes of violence and bloodshed, would break down into weeping at the fate of the beloved city.

VERSE 15

"That day is a day of wrath"—Expressions of calamity and terror, dictated by the Divine Judge and expressed by Zephaniah were calculated to draw a fearful and yet realistic pen-picture of the judgment that was then hastening. This was to be the day of the blazing forth of Divine indignation!

"Of trouble and distress"—Whereas "wrath" expresses Yahweh's reaction, "trouble and distress" define the feelings of those who are to experience His indignation.

"Wasteness and desolation"—This describes the immediate result of the outpouring of divine wrath. Such terms were used to describe the primeval chaos (Gen. 1:2), and, as we have already indicated earlier, are those used by Yahweh to describe the political void into which Judah (the political creation of God—Mark 13:19) would be turned. Jeremiah uses the same figure (Jer. 4:23-28). The order and beauty once established when Israel was formed into a nation at Sinai under Divine guidance and law had been marred by the people and was to be broken up by the Babylonians, and dissolved into its component political elements, and then dispersed among the nations. The *kosmos*, or order, would become a void.

"Darkness and gloominess"—This dark gloominess would be brought about by the eclipse of the sun. Symbolically the sun represented Judah's Government which was threatened with a political eclipse (Joel 2:2). Micah predicted: "The sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them" (Micah 3:6). Amos declared: "Woe unto you that desire the day of Yahweh! to what

end is it for you? the day of Yahweh is darkness, and not light" (Amos 5:18). This state was brought about by the destruction wrought by Nebuchadnezzar.

"A day of clouds and thick darkness"—The impending destruction of the Jewish state at the hands of the Babylonians is fittingly described as a day of fierce storm, when the heavy clouds of Divine anger would roll over the political heavens, obliterating the light of the sun, moon and stars.

VERSE 16

"A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities"—A day of such fury of war as would overthrow every form of defence. (Cp. Jerem. 4:19-21.)

VERSE 17

"I will bring distress upon men"—The overthrow of Judah by Babylon specifically fulfilled the warning of Deut. 28:36: "Yahweh shall bring thee, and *thy king* which *thou shalt set over thee*, unto a nation which neither thou nor your fathers have known..." This was proclaimed before Israel had a king, and was fulfilled when Zedekiah, the last king to sit upon the throne of David, was led as captive to Babylon. It is significant that Moses predicted two captivities (see also vv. 48-52), and that in relation to the second (fulfilled A.D. 70) he does not mention a king. In complete conformity with this, no king went into captivity on the second occasion. How wonderfully the word of God is fulfilled!

"They shall walk like blind men"—This was fulfilled in the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. The Jews staggered like blind men in their terror and confusion because they lacked effective leadership. They thus fulfilled the prediction of Deut. 28:29. On that dark and gloomy day, when king Zedekiah, blinded and bound with chains, was led stumblingly away to Babylon and to prison (Jer. 52;

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11), he was as a symbol of the whole nation which he had so foolishly led into disaster. It was a case of "the blind leading the blind."

"Their blood shall be poured out as dust"—This signifies that they should die in a hopeless and worthless cause (2 Kings 13:7).

"Their flesh as the dung"—Left unburied to rot on the ground.

VERSE 18

"Their silver and gold unable to deliver"—There comes a time when material "riches profit not," and only "righteousness delivereth from death" (Prov. 11:7). This was the case when Divine judgment was poured out upon guilty Judah as both Zephaniah and Ezekiel warned (Ezek. 7:19). Such a time will come for the Gentiles (Isa. 2:20).

"The whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy"

—The forbearance of Yahweh suffereth much, but there comes a time when He will no longer restrain Himself, and in the "fire of His jealousy" He speaks and acts. The phrase describes the blazing forth of His feelings. The word "jealousy" is from a Hebrew root *qana*, "to flush up red," as in extreme emotion. Yahweh is "a consuming fire, a jealous El" (Deut. 4:24; 6:15), demanding the undivided loyalty and love of His creatures (Exod. 34:14), and justly punishing those who hate Him (Deut. 5:9). In this He is inflexible (as the word "cruel" in Song 8:6 can be rendered), and His people should likewise manifest an inflexibility in their love and loyalty to Him (Num. 25:11). He will not share our love with others; and to attempt to do so is to engage in a form of spiritual adultery (James 4:4) which arouses His jealousy. The same Hebrew word rendered "jealous" is also frequently translated "zealous." The jealousy with which He guards the honor of His name, land, people or purpose ensures that His inten-

tions will be fulfilled.

"A speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land"—The reference is to the land of Israel; but the same Power will consume the Gentiles at the time of the end (Zeph. 3:8). The destruction of the Jewish State, therefore, typed the coming judgment on the Gentile world.

Chapter 2

Judgment Tempered With Mercy Vv. 1-3

The Day of Yahweh is a Day when He will be vindicated by the outpouring of judgment. But with judgment there is invariably the offer of mercy. Mankind is therefore invited to behold both the goodness and the severity of God (Rom. 11:22) that they might learn to appreciate the former and fear the latter. The Divine character is a blend of mercy, grace, long-suffering, and compassion, combined with a vigorous repudiation of evil, for Yahweh will "by no means clear the guilty" (Exod. 34:6-7). Both aspects of His character are revealed when He is vindicated in the sight of men. In anticipation of that, and in view of the impending Day of Yahweh, Zephaniah proclaimed a threefold warning, and a threefold appeal. The threefold warning is prefaced by the word "before;" the threefold appeal by the word "seek."

VERSE 1

"Gather yourselves together"—

The words "gather yourselves" are translated from the Hebrew *qashash*, which signifies "to become sapless" through drought. The word *qash* which forms the base of this word is the Hebrew word for "straw." Saulez in *The Romance of the Hebrew Language* states of this word: "The verb in Hithpoel conjugation signifies "collect your thoughts..." Possibly a slight irony is intended by the prophet, as much as to say, "Your thoughts are not worth much, but such as they

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are, gather them together and see if there is no sense of shame, no consciousness of sin in you." Rotherham renders the phrase: "Collect your thoughts, aye collect them, O nation depressed." In view of the impending Day of Yahweh, the nation is called upon to consider its ways, to meditate upon its doings, and then submit to God, as a final opportunity of escaping the judgment that then threatened.

"O nation not desired"—The R.V. mg renders this as the nation "that hath no longing." The people had no longing to serve God, no vision to create an incentive or ambition to seek Him. They were quite satisfied to give nominal, lukewarm service, and had no taste for the promises of Yahweh, nor desire to sacrifice to attain unto them. See Prov. 29:18; Hos. 12:8; Rev. 3:17.

VERSE 2

"Before the decree bring forth"—The word "before" is used four times in this verse. However, the second occurrence is in italics, indicating that there is no comparable word in Hebrew. Eliminating that use of the word, therefore, we are left with three warnings by Zephaniah that the day of opportunity was about to close for the people of Judah. He likened the Divine purpose to a woman in travail and about to "bring forth." This is a frequently used figure of speech in Scripture, and a most significant one. The pangs of childbirth are not continuous. They come on and recede with greater strength, in three main developments until birth. In conformity with that, Zephaniah connects three warnings with the allusion to a woman "bringing forth." A further link with this thought was the sounding of the shofar trumpet on the first day of the seventh month in anticipation of the Day of Atonement, ten days later. It, also, sounded three distinct warning notes constituting three calls to contrition and penitence, and reminders of the need for self-examination and of humble

petition for the forgiveness of sins. Zephaniah's threefold warnings were like the strident, ear-splitting sounds of the shofar trumpet, or the troublous warning pangs of childbirth. They could not be ignored if people wanted to escape. There was thus an urgency about them that could not be overlooked. A similar state exists today, inasmuch as another Day of Yahweh impends. The world has experienced two great warning shocks in World War I and World War II. The first saw the doors of Palestine swing open to receive the Jewish people; the second saw the establishment of the Jewish State. The third, World War III, will lead to the birth of the New World Order under Christ. We cannot afford to ignore these matters, and should therefore heed and "behold."

Meanwhile, in Zephaniah's day, though the time was short, there still remained opportunity to heed (Rom. 9:22-23; 2 Pet. 3:15). Previously, the Scythians had attacked Nineveh, seriously weakening Assyrian power. For the time, Judah was free of foreign domination, and Josiah was able to institute his reforms. Soon the ugly cloud of Babylonish power and domination would overshadow Jerusalem, and the nation would be sifted as chaff. Meanwhile, the door of opportunity still remained open.

"Before"—This word is in italics in the A.V. indicating that there is not here an equivalent word in Hebrew. That leaves three warnings, prefaced by the word "before." Rotherham renders the words "before the day pass as the chaff," as "like chaff the day have vanished." Zephaniah warned that the day of opportunity would quickly pass away. His exhortation is true of today as well (2 Cor. 6:2).

VERSE 3

"Seek ye Yahweh"—Now Zephaniah commences his three appeals, all prefaced by the word "seek" (cp. Psalm 105:4). Amos exhorted: "Seek Yahweh, and ye shall live;

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lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there be none to quench it in Beth-el" (Amos 5:6). As we see the signs that are so clearly indicative of Christ's early return, and as we bear in mind what the day of judgment will reveal, we need to give modern application to Zephaniah's appeal: "Seek Yahweh."

"All ye meek of the earth" — It is the meek, but not the weak, who are exhorted to seek Yahweh. Both Moses (Num. 12:3), and the Lord Jesus (Matt. 11:29) were meek men, but they were not weak men. Meekness expresses a mind strong enough to be pliable to Divine instruction. It springs from knowledge and wisdom. The word is derived from a Hebrew root *Hanah* signifying "to be downcast, or depressed." A person can be brought to that state either through circumstances or the recognition of his own unworthiness. As he exercises his mind upon these matters in the light of God's word there is induced in him a spirit of humility, gentleness and meekness. It is such whom Yahweh desires to seek Him (John 4:23), and

who will ultimately "inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5).

"Which have wrought His judgment" — Rotherham renders: "Who have wrought, what he appointed." The meek obey the ordinances of Yahweh's law, and by so doing show their love of God. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (John 14:21).

"Seek righteousness" — The righteousness that they were to seek is that which comes by faith (Gal. 2:21; Rom. 3:22; 4:3-9; Ct Rom. 10:3-6). To do that they had to manifest the spirit of the Law (2 Cor. 3:6), and recognise that its sacrifices were but provisional offerings leading to the one great sacrifice for sin, the one in whom alone redemption is possible. The Law was designed to emphasise the need of such (Gal. 3:24).

"Seek meekness" — In this statement, the meek are told to "seek meekness." This means that they must be constantly developing it. By so doing, those under the law imitated the virtue of their leader, Moses (Num. 12:3), and those in Christ follow his example (Matt. 11:29).

"SEEK MEEKNESS" (Zephaniah 2:3)

This is a virtue that all the sons of God are called upon to manifest and develop. The Scriptures speak much concerning the character and destiny of the meek. They show that:

● The meek are those who are amenable to the teaching and guidance of the Gospel (Ps. 25:9; James 1:21; Isa. 61:1).

● The meek are sometimes oppressed (Amos 2:7), but always blessed (Matt. 5:5).

● Meekness is a characteristic of the King-Messiah (Ps. 45:5; Matt. 21:5), and is therefore to be emulated by his followers (2 Cor. 10:1).

● Meekness is described as a fruit of the spirit-word (Gal. 5:23), an ornament of grace (1 Pet. 3:4).

● Meekness is to be revealed in preaching (1 Pet. 3:15), and is to be shown towards opponents (2 Tim. 2:25; Tit. 3:2).

● Meekness should be manifested in Ecclesial arrangements, and towards one another (Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12).

● The meek will be cared for (Ps. 22:26), receive justice (Isa. 11:4), be saved (Ps. 76:9), increase their joy (Isa. 29:19), be beautified with salvation (Ps. 149:4), elevated (Ps. 147:6), and will inherit the promises (Ps. 37:11).

Judgment on the Gentiles

Chapter 2:4-15

Jeremiah declared: "Lo, if I begin to bring evil on the city which is called by My name, shall ye be utterly unpunished? Ye shall not be unpunished: for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, saith Yahweh of hosts" (Jer. 25:29). Zephaniah now treats with this theme. The Day of Yahweh would not only rest heavily upon guilty Judah, but would involve all the surrounding nations. Four nations situated on the east, west, south and north of the holy land were selected as representative of the whole world. By extension, therefore, the judgments outlined in Zephaniah Chapter 2 incorporate all mankind.

Why introduce these judgments here? Not merely to prognosticate the future, but as a salutary warning to Judah. Mighty nations were to be involved in calamitous judgment; how important, then, that the people of God should take heed. If those nations could not resist the Divine judgment how could comparatively weak Judah! Meanwhile, the sudden attack of the Scythians involved all nations, and was a grim reminder of how quickly the whole political order could be shaken.

The remarkable way in which Zephaniah's prophecies, as outlined in this chapter, have been completely fulfilled has been a matter of wonder to students of the Word. It provides striking confirmation that he spoke by Divine inspiration.

PHILISTIA PUNISHED

Vv. 4-7

Philistia comprised a confederation of five main cities, four of which are mentioned by Zephaniah. The fifth, Gath, had been destroyed by Sargon in 712 B.C., since when it disappeared from history. Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, and the Maccabees each in turn attacked the Philistines and, weakened by these successive hammer blows, they finally faded from the historical scene.

VERSE 4

"Gaza shall be forsaken"—In the Hebrew there is a play upon the words: "Azzah will be *azubhah*." Gaza signifies "strong," so the play on words is also a play on ideas: the strong will be forsaken. This was literally fulfilled. Though there is a modern Gaza, the ancient city was forsaken so that all that remains today are a few ruins among the hills some distance from the modern town.

"Ashkelon a desolation"—This is another play on words. Ashkelon

means the "weighing place," or the Mart where the people throng for business. Zephaniah predicted that it would become a desolation instead of a place of business. Nevertheless in spite of the successive attacks of such as Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander and the Jewish Maccabees, Ashkelon lingered on long after Gaza. It was very beautifully situated on the sea-coast in a well-watered and fertile area, and was held by the Turks as late as the early 17th century. Since then, however, it became a complete desolation. With

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the return of the Jews to the land Ashkelon is being revived. The site is imposing, and the ruins impressive, and it is being developed as a tourist centre.

"They shall drive out Ashdod"—Ashdod is the Azotus of Acts 8:40. It is situated about 35 miles north of Gaza, and about 3 miles from the sea. The word signifies "the waster." It is significant that Zephaniah says nothing about the town being destroyed, but only that the Philistines would be driven therefrom. The town still survives, as the prophecy requires, but not the Philistines who have long been driven therefrom.

"At the noon day"—This is the hottest time of the day when normally, in the east, people take a siesta. The term is therefore suggestive of the suddenness of the attack at a time when people are off guard. Cp. Jer. 15:8.

"Ekron shall be rooted up."—Ekron signifies "deep-rooted," suggesting that no matter how deep-rooted the people or town might be, it would be rooted up. Zephaniah makes a play on each of these Philistine towns. Military power (Gaza) and commercial interests (Ashkelon) will alike be removed; the waster (Ashdod) and the deep-rooted (Ekron) will together be destroyed. The site of Ekron ultimately became a ploughed field, and the only evidence that remains of the ancient city are the ruins that are occasionally turned up.

VERSE 5

"Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea coast"—The inhabitants of the sea coast were the Philistines. Their territory consisted of an undulating plain rising from fifty to one hundred feet above sea level, and extending for some 32 miles from Ekron to Gaza. It bordered the Mediterranean Sea.

"The nation of the Cherethites"—The word means "cutters-off," and is an appropriate one for the

Philistines. The Septuagint renders the phrase as: "Sojourners of the Cretans." The Philistines were supposed to have emigrated from Caphtor or Crete (Amos 9:7), and entered Palestine via Egypt. According to the *Westminster Historical Atlas of the Bible*, archaeological evidence suggests that the Philistines invaded Egypt, but were driven from there to Palestine which is derived from the name, Philistine. Kitto quotes Herodotus to show that the "Philitis" dwelt in Egypt as shepherds, and he identified them with the Hyksos, or shepherd kings who dominated that country at one time, but, having been driven out, settled in Palestine. He gives Philistine as signifying "shepherds" (Strong—"migratory"), and Palestine as "shepherdland."

"O Canaan"—Canaan signifies "a bower-down," i.e. an unscrupulous trader, one in whom no trust should be imposed. See note on Ch. 1:11.

"The land of the Philistines"—The land of the Wanderers, or Shepherds. See note above. An appropriate name for the land today occupied by Jewry.

"I will even destroy thee that there shall be no inhabitant"—In these terms Zephaniah predicted that all Canaanites or unscrupulous traders, whether literally or spiritually considered will be punished. There exist today those who unscrupulously trade "in the bodies and souls of men" (Rev. 18:13 mg.). All such will ultimately be destroyed (Isa. 25:7; Jer. 16:19; Zech. 14:21) and only Truth will prevail (Hab. 2:14).

VERSE 6

"The sea coast shall be dwellings"—The R.V. renders "dwellings" as "pastures." Instead of the warlike and belligerent Philistines, Zephaniah declared that there would be pastures for sheep, and peaceful conditions.

"Cottages for shepherds"—The ruins of the once populous cities have been used since for that very purpose.

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VERSE 7

"The coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah"—This gracious promise teaches the indestructibility of the Jewish people. Despite the warning message and judgment proclaimed in Chapter 1, here is a promise of restoration of the people back to their land.

"In the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down"—Ashkelon was the most beautifully situated of all the Philistine cities, and is there-

fore selected doubtless to indicate that the restored of Judah will be given the best places for themselves.

"In the evening"—Rotherham renders this as "at evening tide." As the Jewish day commenced at evening-tide, this time period can well point to the present epoch just prior to the millenium. At such a time, the prophet declared, "Yahweh their Elohim shall visit them, and turn away their captivity." We see evidence of that today.

MOAB AND AMMON HUMBLED — Vv. 8-11

Having considered the land west of Israel, the prophet now turns to the east. The joint nations of Moab and Ammon were descendants of the sons of Lot, conceived in incestuous union (Gen. 19:37-38). Moab signifies "tribal," or "inbred," and relates to Gentile nations or peoples. Because of their relationship, Israel was forbidden to attack them as they marched towards the land (Deut. 2:9). However, the Moabites hired Balaam to curse the children of Israel (Num. 22:4), whereupon the Divine attitude hardened towards them (Deut. 23:3-6; Neh. 13:1). Zephaniah makes reference to the boasting of Moab, and this has found permanent record in the Moabite Stone (discovered at Dibon in 1868) in which Mesha (2 Kings 3:4-5) proclaimed his independence, and boasted that his victories against Israel had caused it to "perish with everlasting destruction."

Moab and Ammon showed unremitting hostility to Israel. Their women were used to entice Israel as they were about to enter the land (Num. 25), and they evinced hostility towards David (2 Sam. 8:2), Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 20:22), Jehoiakim (2 Kings 24:2), Nehemiah (Neh. 4:3, 7), and others.

Ammon joined with Moab in hiring Balaam (Deut. 23:4), and likewise manifested hostility towards Israel at various points of their history (1 Sam. 11:1-3; 2 Sam. 10:1-6).

VERSE 8

"They magnified themselves against their border"—Moab and Ammon violated the borders of Judah by attacking the nation. The Septuagint renders it as "My borders." Yahweh has established the borders of Israel and of all other nations (Deut. 32:8; Acts 17:26, and to violate them is to violate His borders.

VERSE 9

"Therefore as I live, saith Yahweh of hosts"—Yahweh has living existence, though many act as though He does not. Abraham was told to "walk before" Him and be perfect (Gen. 17:1). To walk before Him, is to walk in the sight of His living presence, as though He is visibly in one's presence.

Yahweh Sabaoth is His militant title, and speaks of the Divine army of the heavens. It is a title expressive of His power to perform His will.

"The God of Israel"—This addition to His name and title reveals His dedication to Israel's cause.

As Yahweh is a prophetic name, signifying *He will be* the Name and Titles of Deity in association, as in this verse, proclaim His purpose to manifest Himself in armies of the Mighty Ones (Elohim) of Israel. The fulfilment of this name is predicted in Rev. 19:11-16.

"Surely Moab shall be as Sodom"—As Moab was adjacent to the Dead Sea, the people could see what it meant to be as Sodom—utterly destroyed. The nation experienced the

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fulfilment of this prophecy when it was overthrown by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 27:3-6), and later by the Maccabees (B.C. 175-163). Gradually, the country became desolate as the towns fell into ruins, and the territory became the haunt of the Bedouin Arabs who had no inclination or ability to cultivate the soil. The one-time fertile land of Moab became a wilderness of nettles and saltpits (Jer. 48:8, 12, 28, 42).

"A perpetual desolation"—The word "perpetual" is *olahm* in the Hebrew, signifying a "hidden period." Rotherham renders: "A desolation unto times age-abiding." The land of Moab will not always remain desolate, for, as Jeremiah showed (Jer. 48:47), it is to flourish again in the "latter days."

"The residue of My people shall spoil them"—This is yet to come to pass when Israel extends her borders west of the Jordan. It had a partial fulfilment in the times of the Maccabees, for Judas Maccabaeus smote Ammon (1 Macc. 5:6), and Alexander Jannaeus smote the Moabites (Jos. Ant. 13, 13, 5), but the complete fulfilment awaits the future (Isa. 14:1-2; 49:23).

"The remnant shall possess them"—See Hos. 1:10; Zech. 13:8-9.

VERSE 10

"This shall they have for their pride"—Cp. Isa. 16:6.

"They have magnified themselves against the people of Yahweh of hosts"—The use of the belligerent, militant title of Deity shows

what mighty power the nations oppose when they magnify themselves against Israel (cp. Rom. 9:29). The Israelites are still "His people," in spite of their many sins. "Israel hath not been forsaken nor Judah of his God, of Yahweh of hosts, though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel" (Jer. 51:5). Yahweh still calls them "My people of Israel" (Ezek. 38:16). See also Zech. 1:15; Isa. 9:7. This same power is available to the true Israel of God (cp. Isa. 54:17). For manifestations of Yahweh of Armies in the past, see Josh. 5:13-14 mg.; 2 Kings 6:15-23; 2 Chron. 32:7-8).

VERSE 11

"Yahweh will be terrible unto them"—The word "terrible," in its Hebrew form, signifies to cause one to fear so as to revere.

"He will famish all the gods of the earth"—When the veil of superstition will be removed from the hearts of the inhabitants of the earth, Yahweh will everywhere be recognised as the Creator and Sustainer and Omnipotent Ruler of the universe. No more offerings shall be made to false gods and idols, and thus, by way of figure of speech, the gods of the earth shall be made "lean" (cp. Acts 19:26-27; Jer. 16:19; Isa. 25:7).

"Even all the isles of the heathen"—The most distant parts of the earth will acknowledge the truth in the age to come (Ps. 72:10; Isa. 11:11; 60:12).

ETHIOPIA SUBDUED — V. 12

Having predicted the future of the west (Philistia) and the east (Moab and Ammon), the prophet now directs his attention towards the south. The Ethiopians were reckoned among the best of Egypt's forces (2 Chron. 12:3; Nah. 3:9), but they were overthrown by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezek. 30:4; Jer. 46:9; Amos 9:7). Geographically they represented the remote south.

VERSE 12

"Ye Ethiopians"—Ethiopia was settled by the descendants of Cush. For many years they were dominated by the Egyptians, but about 720 B.C., an Ethiopian ruler, Pi-

ankhi, took advantage of internal strife, and became the first conqueror of Egypt in a millennium. For about sixty years Ethiopian rulers controlled the Nile Valley. One of them, Tirkakah, seems to

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have been Hezekiah's ally, and attempted to forestall Sennacherib's invasion (2 Kings 19:9; Isa. 37:9). Nahum 3:9 refers to the glory of this period: "Ethiopia was her (Egypt's) strength." Invasions by Assyrians reduced the Ethiopian-Egyptian kingdom to tributary status. The Ethiopians fought in Pharaoh Necho's army at Carchemish, and thus were involved in the over-

throw of his forces. Ethiopia was overpowered by Nebuchadnezzar's forces (Ezek. 30:4; Jer. 46:9; Amos 9:7), and came later under Persian control (Esth. 1:1; 8:9).

"Ye shall be slain by My sword" — Nebuchadnezzar is described as the sword of Yahweh (Ezek. 30:24; Jer. 27:6), but Yahweh's sword of the future will be the Lord Jesus (Isa. 45:14; Ps. 68:31).

NINEVEH TO BE OVERWHELMED — Vv. 13-15

The mighty North will likewise be compelled to bow to Yahweh. It did so in the past and it will do so in the future (Mic. 5:6). Nineveh, the metropolis of the Northern Power, was situated on the Tigris or Hiddekel. It was about 21 miles long, 9 miles broad, and 60 miles in circumference. It comprised a complex of four cities in one, forming a vast quadrangle. Based on a trigonometric survey, the full area has been computed as 350 square miles, equivalent to the area of modern London. Of course, greater Nineveh included spacious orchards, gardens, pastures, and grain fields. Its walls were 100 feet high, broad enough for three chariots to ride abreast, and interspersed by 1500 fortified towers each 200 ft. high (Diodorus Siculus).

Nineveh was the mart of the ancient world. Into it flowed the wealth of Persia, India, China and the west (Nah. 3:16). Her spiritual influence and authority was enforced by her military power (Isa. 37:10-12), and by a most brutal exercise of this power, she endeavoured to bend all other nations to her will. That such a vast and powerful city with such tremendous fortifications as were hers could be completely obliterated, would have been considered absolutely impossible; and yet that was what Zephaniah predicted, and what Yahweh accomplished, and the wonder of it still staggers historians.

VERSE 13

"He will stretch out His hand against the north" — Yahweh was about to stretch out His hand against Judah (Ch. 1:4) for correction, and should then the adversaries of His people go unpunished? By no means! (Cp. Jer. 25:29.) The expression, "the north," as used in this verse is significant, for Assyria is used as a type of Gog, the power from the north (cp. Micah 5:5-6 with Ezek. 38:15).

"And destroy Assyria" — Assyria signifies to "go forth," i.e. inexplorably, and by implication, to be successful (Dr. Strong). It was a symbol of fleshly power. Nineveh, its capital, was founded by Nimrod through violence (Gen. 10:10-11; Mic. 5:6). Nahum calls it "the bloody city" (Nah. 3:1).

"Nineveh a desolation" — The complete destruction of so vast,

powerful, and strongly fortified a city was highly improbable under normal conditions; yet so completely was the prophecy fulfilled that by the second century A.D. the site of the city had become uncertain, and remained thus until the ruins were excavated by Layard in the 19th century. Two hundred years after its overthrow, Xenophon the Greek, passed the ruins and concluded that they were the remains of a Parthian city. Even at that early stage the city had faded from the memory of most people.

"Dry like a wilderness" — It had been a fertile city, well irrigated by the Tigris, but when it was overthrown, the irrigation channels filled in, and it became as described by the prophet.

VERSE 14

"And flocks shall lie down in the

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midst of her—The word “flocks” should here not be understood as flocks of sheep or cattle, but rather droves of wild beasts. The word *hayder* signifies “a muster” or a “drove,” and although the word is often used in connection with sheep, the context implies that droves of wild beasts are meant. Zephaniah thus predicted that the once busy city would become the lonely and desolate haunt of droves of wild beasts.

“The cormorant”—The Hebrew word *qaath* is rendered “pelican” in Lev. 11:18 and Deut. 14:17. There this bird is identified as “unclean” and “an abomination.”

“The bittern”—It is very probable that the Hebrew word *qippod* that is here used relates to the “bittern,” a wader of the bird family which includes also the heron and the egret. These were to be considered as “unclean” and abominable (Lev. 11:19). Concerning the bittern it has been said: “Its strange, booming note, disturbing the stillness of the night, gives an idea of desolation which nothing but the wail of the Hyena can equal.”

“In the upper lintels”—Or in the capitals of the columns left standing in the ruins.

“Their voice shall sing”—This can be literally rendered: “The voice of the songster” (see Strong’s Concordance). Birds shall sing in the apertures of the ruins.

“For he shall uncover the cedar work”—The margin renders this: “When he shall” do it. To uncover the cedar work is to expose the panelling to the sky. The phrase is expressive of the destruction that would be wrought upon the once splendid palaces of Nineveh.

VERSE 15

“This is the rejoicing city”—This still, dreary waste, where once pompous palaces have fallen into complete ruin; this haunt of wild beasts, which echoes with the desolate cry of strange birds, was once

the mighty, populous and rejoicing city of Nineveh. The boldness of Zephaniah’s prediction must have been startling to those who heard it, and probably many who heard the message never believed it.

“That dwelt carelessly”—Nineveh dwelt in false security, confident in her might and prowess—but she came to destruction. It is significant that Assyria is used as typical of modern Gentile power (Micah 5:5-6), for that, too, is self-confident in its power and ability.

“That said in her heart I am”—This is a most expressive statement, indicative of the tremendous ego manifested by the flesh when in power both then and now. Notice that the word “am” is in italics, indicating that it is not in the original. The statement is more expressive when this word is eliminated. Then we read: “That saith in her heart: *I*, and none beside me.” Flesh lives for self, and is completely absorbed by its own importance.

“How is she become a desolation”—In a remarkably short time, the city of Nineveh was overthrown and fell into ruin. Thus the nation that had dominated all others with extreme brutality was brought to a complete end; the thriving site became a wilderness until the very ruins were covered over, and Nineveh ceased to exist (Isa. 47:8-11).

“Every one that passeth by her shall hiss”—Nineveh was hated by all, and the whole world rejoiced to see it go. They hissed in scorn (Jer. 19:8; Mic. 6:16), for the brutal power had not only harshly dominated mankind, but had contributed absolutely nothing to the progress of civilisation.

“And wag his hand”—Those who pass by the ruined city will wag their hands in derision, as though as to say, I am glad to see you go. Nahum declared that they would “clap the hands” over it, for “upon whom has not its wickedness passed continually?”

The Vindication of Yahweh

Chapter 3:1-7

In this brief section of his prophecy, Zephaniah completely vindicates Yahweh by showing how just His punishments are. Every warning had been given Judah, but in vain. The people had ignored both the judgments poured out upon the nations, and the appeals of Yahweh given through the prophets. Princes, priests, and people were alike condemned, and woe was pronounced upon all.

Why Jerusalem Would Be Punished — Vv. 1-7

Her sin is clearly outlined in V.2 She "obeyed not," "received not," "trusted not," "drew not near." Packed into these verses are the details of her transgression.

VERSE 1

"Woe to her that is filthy"—The R.V. renders this as "rebellious," which is supported by the context (see v.2). The verse before us lists the three main sins of Jerusalem. It was: (1)—rebellious towards Yahweh; (2)—polluted with sin in herself; (3)—"oppressive," and therefore cruel towards her children.

VERSE 2

"She drew not near to her God"—Four acts of rebellion are cited against Judah in this verse: She "obeyed not," "received not," "trusted not," "drew not near." She drew not near to God in prayer, communion nor worship. This is laid to her charge in spite of Josiah's reformation, for mere external formalism is not the drawing near in which Yahweh delights. He has promised that if His servants draw near to him, He will draw near to them (James 4:8; Heb. 10:22). If they do not do this, they can only blame themselves for the consequences. He is ever accessible, ever approachable, and ever invites His creatures to avail themselves of His means of grace and strength.

VERSE 3

"Her princes within her are roar-

ing lions"— Instead of confidence, Judah's princes instilled fear into the people by their rapacious demands. See Prov. 28:15; Isa. 1:23.

"Her judges are evening wolves"—An "evening wolf" is one that has fasted during the day and is very hungry and ravenous at night. He is therefore fierce and treacherous, and hunts under cover of night. He is used here as a symbol of the hypocritical princes of Judah. Cp. Micah 3:11.

"They know not the bones till the morrow"—The R.V. renders this phrase: "They leave nothing till the morning." These avaricious wolves devoured even the bones of their victims. See Ezekiel 22:27; Matt. 23:4.

VERSE 4

"Her prophets are light and treacherous persons"—The word "light" is from a Hebrew word *pachaz*, "to bubble up" or "froth." Such prophets were all effervescence, recognising no responsibility to the Word (Jer. 5:31; 6:13). They were treacherous in that they claimed Divine authority, and led people astray. Jeremiah declared that they "caused the people to err by their lies, and by their lightness" (Jer. 23:32). Their lies constituted false doctrine; their lightness related to their superficial teaching.

"Her priests have polluted the sanctuary"—In what way did the priests pollute the sanctuary? Ezekiel declared that they did so "in that they brought therein strangers, uncircumcised in heart and

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flesh, to be in it, to pollute it" (Ezek. 44:6-8). They failed to carefully discriminate between the holy and the profane, with the result that they extended fellowship to those who should have been excluded. Contrast the attitude and action of faithful Nehemiah (Neh. 13:7-9).

"They have done violence to the law"—They did violence to the law by distorting its meaning (Hab. 1:4).

VERSE 5

"The just Yahweh is in the midst thereof"—The Law declared that Yahweh is "just and right" (Deut. 32:4). As such He cannot look upon sin with allowance, nor tolerate evil. His very character demanded that He oppose the prevailing wickedness of Zephaniah's day.

The prophet's statement that He was in the "midst" of Israel, taught that He had not at that stage withdrawn His presence from the nation, as he did later on. Later, Ezekiel, in captivity, saw in vision the Divine glory withdrawn preparatory to the destruction of the city and temple (see Ezekiel 10:19; 11:23).

"Every morning doth He bring His judgment to light"—Zephaniah's statement was a warning to the nation that Yahweh, Who is just, would not tolerate the wickedness then rampant in its midst. The punishment he had predicted would fall upon the surrounding nations (Ch. 2) revealing that guilty Judah could not expect to go unpunished.

"The unjust knoweth no shame"—The unjust are quite impervious to the lessons of history, or the warnings of Yahweh. See Jer. 3:3; 6:15.

VERSE 6

"I have cut off the nations"—Yahweh's judgment on the nations should have constituted a salutary warning; instead of that, Judah refused to heed the lesson. Jere-

miah declared: "Yet for all this (i.e. the punishment administered to Israel) Judah hath not turned to me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith Yahweh" (Jer. 3:10).

"Their towers are desolate"—The mighty fortresses of Gentile nations were unable to protect them against the Divine judgment that was poured out upon them.

"I made their streets waste"—Their cities became depopulated as their citizens were taken into captivity.

VERSE 7

"I said, Surely thou wilt fear Me"—The statement means: Surely you would heed the warning. See Ps. 81:12-14. Yahweh, of course, knew the end from the beginning and realised that they would not, but He used this style of language through the prophet, to impress upon the people that He had done everything for their good, and that they were alone responsible for the evil that would come upon them.

"Thou wilt receive instruction"—It was in order that they might be instructed and reform, that Yahweh proclaimed His warnings unto the people and expounded to them the lessons of history. They were invited to "consider them well, look upon them, and receive instruction" (Prov. 24:32; Heb. 12:5-7). Jeremiah declared: "O Yahweh, are not Thine eyes upon the truth? Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; Thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction; they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return" (Jer.5:3).

"So their dwelling should not be cut off"—It was the promise of Yahweh that if they would "amend their ways and their doings," He would cause them to "dwell in this place" (Jer. 7:3, 7).

"Howsoever I punished them"—If they refused to receive in-

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struction, their dwelling would be cut off in accordance with the punishment God had decreed for them.

"They rose early"—The people took no heed of the Divine message and warning, but instead rose early in order to better pursue their wickedness. Yahweh also represented Himself as rising early

to refrain them; but in vain (Jer. 7:13, 25; 2 Chron. 36:15).

"Corrupted all their doings"—In corrupting their ways, they repeated the sin of the antediluvians (Gen. 6:12). This attitude stemmed from their failure to recognise the reality of Yahweh's living existence, and to keep Him in their thoughts (Ps. 14:1).

"THE WICKED" — Psalm 50:16-20

The wicked are to a great extent very pious and religious people. They have a "zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." Being ignorant of God's righteousness they go about with great diligence and enormous cost, to establish their own righteousness, not having submitted to God's. They compass sea and land to make proselytes; they make long prayers; sing with the sweetest music the praises of Him they profess to worship. The world is full of their piety; for it is fashionable to be religious, or rather to "profess religion"; so that Christianity is thought to be habited in "fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet"; to walk in silver sandals; and to be "adorned with pearls and precious stones" (Apoc. 18:12). But, be this as it may, there is a characteristic of wickedness which no sect, party, name, or denomination, regarded as "orthodox" can repudiate as inapplicable to itself. That characteristic is, "THOU CASTETH MY WORDS BEHIND THEE," saith God. No man, sect, or party, can offer a greater insult to Yahweh than this; for it is testified, that He hath magnified His word above all the attributes of His name (Ps. 138:4); and it was foretold in the commendation of Messiah, that when he should be revealed, he would "magnify the law and make it honorable" (Isa. 42:21). "I came not," said he, "to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil; for the heaven and the earth may pass away, but not one jot or tittle shall pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." He continually impressed upon his hearers the necessity of believing the words of God and of doing His commands: and never ceased to make "the obedience of faith" the test of men's devotion and affection for him (John 14:15, Rom. 13:10).

— J. Thomas.

The Glorious Consummation

Chapter 3:8-20

Having proclaimed His message of warning and rebuke, and having shown the urgency of this by His prophecies of punishment on the nations for their iniquity, Zephaniah concluded with an outline of the glorious consummation yet to be revealed in the earth. Thus he blended his message of warning and rebuke, with one of hope and mercy, such as is well calculated to provide an incentive for reform.

He showed that it is the purpose of Yahweh to both judge the nations and convert them to the Truth; to both shame and sanctify Israel; to both occupy and glorify Jerusalem, and to both restore and elevate the nation. His vision of a transformed world concluded on the thrilling note: "I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith Yahweh."

The time is at hand for that to be accomplished.

The Gentiles To Be Humbled And Converted—Vv. 8-10

Though the Gentiles have long triumphed over Israel, the time is coming when they shall be made subservient to them, and will be forced to acknowledge the God of Israel in Truth. At that time, they will co-operate in the restoration of the people of Israel.

VERSE 8

"Wait ye upon Me, saith Yahweh"—The message to "wait for Yahweh" was directed to the meek (Ch. 2:3), those who mourned in Israel because of prevailing wickedness (cp. Ezek. 9:4; Hab. 2:3; Isa. 26:9). It assured them that Divine justice demanded the outpouring of judgment upon the guilty which, however, would be followed by the conversion of many to righteousness. Whilst "mourners in Zion" might become impatient at the seeming delay of God's intervention, they must remember that "the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation" (2 Pet. 3:15), in that it gives opportunity for some to repent and be saved. So, whilst they patiently wait for the day of redemption and blessing, they have the assurance that Yahweh does likewise (Isa. 30:18). Thus, those who are waiting are in conformity with His mind and desire,

"Until the day that I rise up to the prey"—Rotherham, following the Septuagint version, renders this as: "rise up to witness." It is Yahweh's intention to "be a swift witness" against all who have opposed His purpose (Mal. 3:5). In the verse before us, He proclaims His intention to gather the nations that He may witness against them.

"My determination is to gather the nations"—See also Joel 3:2; Zech. 14:1; Rev. 16:16. The nations will be gathered to Jerusalem to battle (Zech. 14:1), and will there experience the fierce outpouring of Divine judgment (Ezek. 38:18-23).

"The fire of My jealousy"—See notes on Zeph. 1:18. The fire of Yahweh's jealousy will purge the world of evil so that a Divine order may be established on earth. The word "jealousy" is used in relation to this purpose, because Yahweh's anger is aroused at the desecration of His land and people, and the pollution of His truth, all of which is hateful to Him. The Hebrew word translated "jealousy" is also rendered "zeal." The use of the word throughout Scripture shows that His zeal shall be expended in preserving the remnant of Israel (Isa. 37:32), in arming His warriors to fight (Isa. 59:17), in prosecuting the war against the nations

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(Isa. 42:13; Zech. 8:2), in gathering them for judgment (Zeph. 3:8), in establishing the throne of David, and extending its influence throughout the world (Isa. 9:7). All this is summed up in the statement, "He will be zealous for His holy name," for that name is expressive of His purpose.

VERSE 9

"Then will I turn to the people"—The word is in the plural: "peoples," and relates to the Gentiles.

"A pure language"—The pure language of the future age will doubtless be Hebrew, the unifying language of faith. However, the word in the Hebrew signifies "lip," and lips are accounted as polluted when they take up the names of false gods (Ps. 16:4). The Hebrew word here translated "language" is used in scripture to describe both doctrine (Isa. 32:4; 33:6), and language (Isa. 19:18), and doubtless both are implied in this place. The fact that Egypt will be required to speak "the language of Canaan" suggests that the universal language of the future will be Hebrew—the Divine language among men (cp. Isa. 19:18).

It is claimed that the previous verse is the only verse in Scripture that contains the whole of the Hebrew alphabet, and it is suggested that this is deliberate, as preparing for the prophecy that all mankind shall one day use that pure language.

"That they may all call upon the name of Yahweh"—This principle shall become a basic feature of Divine worship in the Age to come, for men shall then "extol Him by the name of Yah" (Ps. 68:4). Yahweh declared through Jeremiah: "I will this once cause them to know, I will cause them to know Mine hand and My might; and they shall know that My name is Yahweh" (Jer. 16:21). The Psalmist prayed: "Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek Thy name, O Yahweh; let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea, let them be put to shame,

and perish; that men may know that Thou, whose name alone is Yahweh, art the most high over all the earth" (Ps. 83:16-18). The full import of the Name will be universally known and applied at that time, as Zephaniah shows.

"To serve Him with one consent"—The literal rendition of the Hebrew word for "consent" is "shoulder" (see mg.). Instead of pulling away the shoulder, or shrinking from the yoke (see Zech. 7:11; Hos. 4:16), men then will willingly bear the Gospel yoke (Matt. 11:28-30).

VERSE 10

"From beyond the rivers"—The R.V. mg. renders this verse: "From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia shall they bring my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed for an offering unto Me." This rendition implies the conversion of Gentiles who then assist Israel to return back home as an offering to the king. Isaiah, also, predicted that those dwelling "beyond the rivers of Ethiopia" will bring "a present... unto Yahweh of hosts of a people scattered and peeled" (Isa. 18:1, 7). This has been identified with the English speaking world. The statement of Isaiah 18 and Zephaniah 3:10, therefore, can be linked with such passages as Psalm 72:10, which speaks of Tarshish bringing presents to the Lord, or of Isaiah 60:9, which predicts that the ships of Tarshish shall be first to bring the people of Israel back home from afar, and Isaiah 66:20, which states that "they (the Gentiles) shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto Yahweh out of all nations." At first the nations will resist the large-scale restoration of the Jewish people; but the Divine fiat will go forth: "Fear not: for I am with thee; I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring My sons from far, and My daughters from the ends of the earth..." As Christ's power extends throughout the earth, he will command those nations sub-

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duced under him, to render this service as a token of their submission.

"Of Ethiopia"—See notes on Ch. 2:12. To the people of Zephaniah's day, Ethiopia represented the remote south, and as such, today points to the English speaking world. The influence of this group of nations extends beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, as far south as Australasia, the most remote of all the continents. It is significant that Zephaniah says nothing about the north at this stage, implying that the English speaking world will be the first to render this service to the King, a suggestion that is confirmed by Isaiah 60:9 and other places.

"My suppliants"—These are described as "the daughter of My dispersed," and therefore constitute scattered Israel. They will become Yahweh's suppliants in that they will ultimately recognise their spiritual blindness, and the need to seek forgiveness through the Lord Jesus Christ. They will be brought to this state of mind through the labors of Elijah who will be sent forth to the Jews scattered abroad to reveal to them that their Messiah is in the land, and who will then supervise the work of Israel's redemption and restoration (Mal. 4:5). As a result of this revelation, they will be caused to "sorrow for the burden of the king of princes" (Hos. 8:10), after which they will make every effort to return to the land of their forefathers. Where their attempts to do so are resisted, they will fight their way back (Ezek. 20:33-38), and God being with them, this will be successfully accomplished by mighty victories against overwhelming odds that will cause the whole world to wonder (Micah 7:14-17). They will finally enter the land from two directions: from the north through the Euphrates, or from the south through the Red Sea (Isa. 11:11, 16; 27:12-13; Hos. 2:14-19). As in the days of Moses (see 1 Cor. 10:1-2), this will constitute a national baptism, but instead of being baptised

into Moses, Israel will be baptised into Christ. The people will thus become the suppliants of Yahweh, and their supplications having been accepted, they will be granted forgiveness of sins through the covenant which they shall accept (Jer. 31:31-34). Ultimately they will be segregated into twelve tribes, and as such will inherit the land as outlined in Ezekiel 48. Thus their restoration will be upon a basis of faith (Rom. 11:23), through which, as Yahweh's suppliants, they will receive mercy (see Ezek. 36:25-29), for He has declared: "I will also save you from all your uncleanness."

"Shall bring Mine offering"—

The Hebrew word for "offering" is *Minchah* which signifies a bloodless meal-offering. The offering referred to, which the Gentiles shall bring to Yahweh's King-priest, will constitute the people of Israel, described by Paul in Rom. 11:16 as the lump, or *plurama* in the Greek. This word signifies that which is mixed or kneaded, such as dough, and is a reference to the loaf of the firstfruits which Israel was required to offer up (Num. 15:19-21). The Gentiles will help convey this lump or offering of firstfruits back to the land to be waved before Yahweh (Zeph. 3:10). In doing so, they will endorse the hope of Israel, and this will provide the basis of their conversion also.

Israel Shamed And Sanctified — Vv. 11-13

The realisation that they crucified their Messiah and that he has returned to the earth, together with the crushing defeat inflicted upon Israel by the invading Gogian confederacy will humble them in shame, and will force them to turn to their God to seek His pardon and help in their extremity. Thus softened in heart, they will be taught the truth, and brought into covenant relationship with Yahweh through His son.

VERSE 11

"In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings"—

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They will indeed! They will come to "loathe themselves in their own sight for their iniquities" (Ezek. 36:31), for they will "look upon" the pierced one "and shall mourn" (Zech. 12:10). As they enquire regarding the wounds in his hands, they will hear his words of reproach that he received such "in the house of his friends" (Zech. 13:6). They will then view their past history from a new and Divine standpoint, and will come to recognize that "Yahweh has not done without cause all that He has done" (Ezek. 14:23). Thus "shame shall devour them," preparatory to them being restored to favor (Jer. 3:24).

The Hebrew word *bosh*, here rendered "ashamed" signifies "to become pale." Such paleness cannot be pretended—it is brought about by a changed heart-beat.

"I will take away out of the midst of thee"—Israel is to be figuratively "sifted in a sieve," that the true grain might be separated from the chaff (Amos 9:9). This will be brought about, as far as those Jews in the land are concerned, through the extremities leading up to and coinciding with Armageddon. Thus those who are unfit for the kingdom will be purged out (Zech. 13:8; 12:7). Those Jews who still remain in dispersion will also be subjected to a careful pruning, in order that all rebels might be eliminated, for such shall not enter into the land of Israel (Ezek. 20:38). The purged remnant will form the mortal population of Israel in the Kingdom Age. As a completely transformed nation they will become the "first dominion" in the empire Christ will set up on earth (Micah 4:8). This transformation will be brought about by educating the people in Divine principles (Rom. 11:23; Zech. 13:9).

"Them that rejoice in thy pride"—Those who are lifted up in pride shall be cut off. Unfortunately, there will be many such found in Israel in that day. Ezekiel 38:11 makes reference to them "dwelling

safely" or "confidently" (mg.) in the land, and Ezekiel 39:25-26 reveals that such an attitude is displeasing to Yahweh, and will form the basis of His complaint against the people. Their confidence will be misplaced, because it does not take sufficient heed of Divine help. Therefore they "shall bear their shame, and all their trespasses whereby they have trespassed against Me when they dwelt safely (confidently) in the land, and none made them afraid." The current pride of Israel will then be humbled.

"Thou shalt no more be haughty because of My holy mountain"—What has Mount Zion to do with reducing the pride of Israel? From Ezekiel's Temple prophecy, it is obvious that Yahweh's holy mountain will form the centre of the spiritual life of the Kingdom (Ps. 24:3-4), and will provide an essential feature of the "House of Prayer" to be set up (Ezek. 40:2). This huge building will be so constructed that the "top of the mountain" which forms the huge Altar will be "most holy" (Ezek. 43:12). Representatives of Israel will be brought to that Temple to see the King in his glory (Ezek. 43:7), and to be reminded of their past failures (vv. 7-8). They will be invited to reform their ways (v. 9), and if they "be ashamed of their iniquities" will be shown the pattern and laws of the house that they might ultimately participate in the worship (vv. 10-11). Thus Yahweh's "holy mountain," from whence will proceed His word and law, will humble Israel so that the nation "shall no more be haughty."

VERSE 12

"I will leave in the midst of thee"—The "thee" of this verse is the nation of Israel consisting of the twelve tribes restored to the land (Ezek. 37:22; 48), and over whom the Apostles will reign as subordinate kings under the direction of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 19:28).

"An afflicted and poor people"—These comprise the individuals

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of the nation. The afflictions they experience will cause them to recognise that they have not the ability or strength to surmount them unaided. They will be forced to recognise their own spiritual poverty and their absolute need of God.

"They shall trust in the name of Yahweh"—The name of Yahweh expresses in a word the Divine character and purpose. It guarantees the fulfilment of the promises made to the fathers of the Jewish race (Deut. 9:5); and proclaims His power (Ps. 106:8), mercy (Isa. 43:25), and glory (Isa. 48:11). The Name also announced the purpose of God to reproduce His characteristics in members of the Adamic race in such a way as to reflect to His glory (Isa. 43:6). On the merits of the Name, Israel will be restored; and because of it, great mercy will be extended to the people (Isa. 54:1-10). As a result of this, they will become a blessing among the nations instead of a curse (Zech. 8:13). In the past, Israel failed to reflect the glory of this name because the people "would not hear" (Jer. 13:11). The time is coming, however, when they will do so, and their changed state in consequence, will cause men to "fear and tremble" at this evidence of Divine power (Jer. 33:9). Rotherham renders the phrase in Zephaniah 3:12 as "they who shall seek refuge in the name of Yahweh." The Proverbs likens the Name to a strong tower, in which those sheltering find safety (Prov. 18:10). Thus the Lord Jesus prayed unto the Father on behalf of his disciples: "Keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given me" (John 17:11). There is salvation in this Name, as Israel will find in the age to come, when they will again become the people of the Name (Acts 15:14).

VERSE 13

"The remnant"—This is a phrase constantly occurring throughout the prophets and applied to those of Israel who shall be brought back (see Isa. 10:21; Micah

7:18; Romans 11:5). The remnant are defined in Zechariah 13:8-9 as those who escape the judgments of Armageddon.

"Shall not do iniquity"—As such they will reflect the character of the Father, for in v.5 the prophet declared: "Yahweh will not do iniquity." The Law called upon Israel to be holy because Yahweh is holy (Lev. 19:2), and the future will reveal Israel as a truly holy people, dedicated to His purpose.

"Nor speak lies"—In the Scriptural sense of the term, to proclaim false doctrine is to speak lies. This will not be permitted in the age to come (Zech. 13:2-3).

"For they shall feed and lie down"—The prophet likens restored Israel to a flock of properly pastured sheep, lying down in safety and contentment. Micah declares that the Good Shepherd shall feed them "in the strength of Yahweh, in the majesty of the name of Yahweh his Elohim" (Ch. 5:4). Thus the principles and teaching of the Truth will be fed to the people of Israel by the pastors, or shepherds, that the Lord will provide (Jer. 3:15). The glorified redeemed will assist the Good Shepherd in this labor of love, and as a result he shall provide Israel with true peace and security (see Ezekiel 34:23-31).

"None shall make them afraid"—This is the blessing that was promised to Israel if the people kept the statutes and commandments of the Law. On that same basis they will be offered security in the future (Lev. 26:3-6).

Israel Comforted And Blessed Through The Manifestation Of Yahweh — Vv. 14-20

In view of the glorious prospect of final blessing for the nation, the prophet burst into a spontaneous psalm of praise to Yahweh for His goodness. The restoration will be complete and lasting, and all the world will witness the glory of Israel.

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VERSE 14

"Sing, O daughter of Zion" — In this verse, Zephaniah expressed a triple note of exultation, as his heart thrilled to the vision of ultimate glory to which the nation shall attain. It should be contrasted with the triple warning and plea of Chapter 2:2-3. He calls upon the people to express their pleasure in anthems of praise, shouts of acclamation, and general demonstration of joy to the King. He makes mention in turn of Zion, Israel and Jerusalem, for these are expressive of different aspects of the restored nation. The first speaks of the Temple, the second of the nation, and the third of the political order. All these aspects of national life will reflect to the glory of Yahweh. See the invitation to sing and shout consequent upon similar manifestations of glory in Zech. 2:10; 9:9 etc.

VERSE 15

"Yahweh hath taken away thy judgments" — Rotherham renders this as "set aside" thy judgments. This means that the sins of the people will be forgiven. It is the first cause of rejoicing as suggested in the notes on V. 14, and is associated with the Temple.

"He hath cast out thine enemy" — He has saved the nation. This is the second cause of rejoicing, and emphasises the hope of Israel.

"The king of Israel, even Yahweh, is in the midst of thee" — The theocracy is restored (Acts 1:6; Exod. 29:46). Jerusalem is again constituted the throne of Yahweh (Jer. 3:17; Ezek. 43:9). This is the third cause of rejoicing, as expressed in these verses. The king, or the Lord Jesus, is here described as Yahweh because Christ "shall come in the glory of his Father" (Matt. 16:27).

"Thou shalt not see evil any more" — This is fulfilment of the Davidic promise (2 Sam. 7:10). See also Zech. 14:11; Amos 9:15).

VERSE 16

"It shall be said, Fear not" —

The return of the Lord Jesus, and his manifestation in glory and power, will bring fear to the people of Israel (Zech. 12:10). Their forefathers crucified him, and they have rejected and insulted him; but they will receive words of encouragement and consolation. The Lord will fulfil the type of Joseph who told his fear-stricken brethren: "Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life" (Gen. 45:5; 50:20). A similar message will be conveyed to Israel.

"Let not thine hands be slack" — Be not despairing nor faint-hearted; work with energy and confidence; bring an offering unto God (cp. Isa. 35:3).

VERSE 17

"Yahweh thy God in the midst of thee" — *Elohim* (God) is a plural word, so that the name Yahweh thy Elohim is expressive of Yahweh manifested through a multitude. This is the name that will be named on the glorified saints (Rev. 3:12), as the perfected multitudinous body of Christ. The aggregate number of the Redeemed is not revealed (Rev. 7:9), but though it will be large, there will be manifested a unity throughout the Body that will constitute it as one. Zechariah declared: "Yahweh shall be king over all the earth; in that day there shall be one Yahweh, and His name one" (Zech. 14:9). Though men will see vast numbers of glorified saints, it will be noted that they act in complete unison, and that through them the glory of the Father is revealed (Matt. 13:43). In that day, therefore, Yahweh will dwell in the midst of His people by manifestation in the redeemed (Ezek. 43:2-4). Yahweh thy Elohim is the name of the mystical Body of the glorified Christ.

"Yahweh is mighty" — The Hebrew word rendered "mighty" is *gibbor*, Mighty One, Warrior, or Conquering Hero. It is found in the title of "mighty God" applied to the Lord Jesus in Isaiah 9:6-7,

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"Mighty God" is *El Gibbor* in Hebrew, and signifies "mighty warrior" or "warrior of God." In Zephaniah 3:17 the word is used collectively of the saints in glory. They will be revealed in belligerent manifestation as a mighty conquering army: a collective warrior who shall overthrow Israel's enemies rendering vengeance upon them (Deut. 32:36-43). Moses proclaimed that Yahweh is a Man of War (Exod. 15:3, 6, 7), for the overthrow of Pharaoh at the Red Sea typed the triumph of the Yahweh warrior at the second advent of Christ when his enemies shall be destroyed. Then the Song of Moses and the Lamb will be sung (Rev. 15:3), to commemorate an even greater victory than that of the past. Christ as "commander of the people" (Isa. 55:4) will have led forth the saints as the army of the political heavens of the future (Rev. 19:11-16), and as a result of his amazing prowess (Ps. 45:3-4), he shall have caused "wars to cease unto the end of the earth" (Ps. 46:9).

"He will save"—The name of Jesus proclaims his mission to save (Matt. 1:21). It is compounded of two words: *Yah* and *Shua*, and signifies Yahweh Will Save, (for which see 2 Cor. 5:19). In V. 16 Zephaniah invited the people to "fear not," and the basis of his reassuring message is the fact that the Lord Messiah will come to save.

"He will rejoice over thee with joy"—He will joy over the people because their iniquity will have been purged, and they will have been united to Him as a chaste, redeemed people. He will rejoice over them as He unites them to the land, as a bride is united to her groom (Isa. 62:5). They will experience the goodness of Yahweh (Jer. 32:41), as they are restored to their previous privileged status before Him for ever (Hos. 2:19).

"He will rest in His love"—The Hebrew word for love is *charach* and signifies "to be quiet"

(see mg.). There will no longer be the fretting anxieties of the present or the past, for the people will be obedient to the Divine will. However, the Septuagint renders the phrase as "he will renew thee in love." This is certainly a more expressive statement, and involves only the alteration of one consonant, the change of *resh* into *daleth*; or of *charash* into *chadash*. The two consonants, "d" and "r" are very similar in Hebrew, and one could easily be mistaken for the other. See comment by Roth-erham.

"He will joy over thee with singing"—Sorrow and sighing will be out of place in that age of happiness and peace. See Isaiah 65:19.

VERSE 18

"He will gather them that are sorrowful"—What will cause any to be sorrowful at that time? Hosea declares that the Jews will sorrow for the "burden of the king of princes" (Hos. 8:10). The realisation that their forefathers crucified him will be followed by a national mourning (Zech. 12:10-11).

"For the solemn assembly"—These feasts were discontinued at the time of the Babylonian captivity (Lam. 1:4; 2:6), and though re-instituted when the Jews returned under Zerubbabel and Joshua, they are not kept properly today. They will be observed in the future however (Ezek. 43:26-27), and will constitute set times of meeting with Yahweh. The chief feast was the Passover by means of which Israel was brought to God in fellowship. A new meaning will be given to this feast as far as the Jews are concerned for they shall then see its fulfilment in Christ.

"Who are of thee to whom the reproach of it was a burden"—Those who are to be gathered, to make their peace with Yahweh, must qualify under two heads: (1)—They must be of thee (i.e. of Israel), and therefore must embrace the Israelitish hope; (2)—They must feel the reproach of Israel's fallen

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state. Apart from identification with Israel by belief, and the deep feeling of sorrow for past blindness, they will not be invited to the solemn assembly designed to wipe out sins, and bring men into covenant with Yahweh.

VERSE 19

"I will undo all that afflict thee"—The R.V. renders this as "I will deal with all that afflict thee." The cup of trembling and of fury will be taken out of the hands of Israel, and given into those of the Gentiles, so that those who once afflicted the people of God will become themselves afflicted (Isa. 51:22-23). These afflicted Gentiles will then seek the help of Zion and of Israel (Isa. 60:14).

"I will save her that halteth"—Micah also expounded upon this theme (Mic. 4:6-7), predicting Israel's progressive stages of re-development: "her that halteth" will become a remnant, then a strong nation, finally a theocracy. The reference to halting is particularly significant, inasmuch as Jacob was caused to halt upon his thigh after wrestling with the angel (Gen. 32:24-32). The anti-typical Jacob (Israel after the flesh) likewise has wrestled with God down the centuries, in that the nation has resisted His truth, and has been caused to figuratively limp upon its thigh (cp. Heb. 12:13). But Jacob prevailed to be redeemed, and to receive the blessing of a new status with God, expressed in the name of Israel. Though he entered the land filled with fear, he was reconciled to his brother, and settling there in peace, built the altar of *EI-Elohe-Israel* (Gen. 33:20). The altar represented Jesus Christ (Heb. 13:10), and its name (The Strength Of The Powerful Ones Of Israel) points to the means whereby Christ's glorified brethren will be associated with him as the mighty ones of the age to come (see Phil. 4:13). So, in the case of Jacob, the Supplanter (Jacob) became a *Prince with God* (Israel), and typified his seed both spiritual and natural. It will be

around the Christ altar, and in association with the glorified saints, that Israel after the flesh will be restored to the land, will recover from her halting condition, and will find a new status before Yahweh and His son. Thus the supplanter will become a princely nation, and the lame sheep (halting Israel) will be gathered in and healed by the Good Shepherd.

"Gather her that was driven out"—This is the work of the Good Shepherd in restoring the Israel flock (Ezek. 34:4; Zech. 10:8-12).

"I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame"—This implies the extension of Christ's rule to embrace all nations (Dan. 2:44; Zech. 14:9; Rev. 11:15; Dan. 7:27; Ps. 22:27-28 etc.), and a healthy respect on the part of all peoples towards the hope of Israel (Zech. 8:20-23). The Hebrew expresses the thought a little differently: "I will set them for a praise..." (see mg.). Yahweh's treatment of His people constitutes an object lesson to all nations setting clearly before them the scope of Divine mercy that will be available, not only to Jews, but also to Gentiles, and plainly revealing the terms upon which reconciliation with God must be sought. By this means, the promise of Deut. 26:19 will be fulfilled.

The glorified redeemed will also receive "praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame," because as king-priests of the age to come who have been taken out of every people, tongue, and nation (Rev. 5:9-10), they will be sent back into those very territories to proclaim the Truth (Rev. 10:11), and to exercise authority (Luke 19:17-19). By this means, Yahweh will be honored and worshipped throughout the earth (Mal. 1:11), but the Temple in Jerusalem will provide the focal centre of both political and spiritual rule.

VERSE 20

"At that time will I bring you

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again— Rotherham renders this: "At that time will I bring you in." This slight change is made significant in the light of Deut. 6:23 which states that Israel was brought *out* of Egypt that they might be brought *in*. This was not successfully accomplished under Moses, but will be under Christ.

"The time that I gather you"— This "time" is contrasted with the period under Moses when the people failed to reach the land. There will be no such failure in the future restoration.

"I will make you a name"— This was Yahweh's purpose in the past (Deut. 28:10), and it will yet find its fulfilment in the future.

"A praise among all people"— All true saints look to the time when this will be the case, and for it they constantly pray in ac-

cordance with the will of Yahweh (Isa. 62:7; 60:18).

"I turn back your captivity before your eyes"— It will be made absolutely evident to Israel that their restoration is of God and not of themselves. This will be brought about by the tremendous victory at Armageddon. Ezekiel records: "The house of Israel will know that I am Yahweh their God from that day and forward" (Ezek. 39:22). In thus rescuing His people, He will fulfil His promise (Deut. 30:3), and will demonstrate His purpose before all mankind (Jer. 33:6-9).

"Saith Yahweh"— Thus the short book begins and ends with the endorsement of Yahweh, as though authenticating every detail, and giving added emphasis and power to the prophet's utterances. See notes on Ch. 1:1.

"Mankind have not yet learned that the world's redemption from all its evils is from God; nor are they aware, such is the impenetrability of human ignorance, that they have neither virtue, knowledge, power, nor wisdom, enough to deliver themselves from their miseries, and to reconstitute society to the promotion of their own happiness, and to the glory and honour of the Most High. There is no man, nor any combination of men, under the heavens, that is competent to the work of social regeneration. If individuals be unable to regenerate themselves, which is unquestionable, no association of persons, however multitudinous, can renew the world, and make it what it ought to be. That it needs regeneration is self-evident to all the "sons of light"; and that it cannot of itself compass that necessity is equally apparent to all, save those who are of the night. What, then, is the hope of the believer in the world's extremity? Let the "testimony of God" be our oracle; and let Him reveal to us the help He has provided, the deliverance in reserve.

— Elpis Israel, p. 308

Summary

Eureka, vol. 1, includes a summary of the Apocalypse as contained in Zephaniah of which the following is the substance.

Zephaniah was contemporary with Jeremiah, and prophesied in the reign of Josiah, king of Judah. Yahweh declared by him, that He would utterly consume all things, constituting Judah's commonwealth, from off the Holy Land. This was to come to pass, because Jerusalem "obeyed not the voice; received not correction; trusted not in Yahweh; drew not near to her Elohim. Her princes within her were as roaring lions; her judges as evening wolves; her prophets light and treacherous persons; and her priests had polluted the sanctuary, and done violence to the law."

The light of history reveals how terrible has been the indignation of Yahweh, and how completely the words of the prophet have been fulfilled. The sea coast of Palestine, once so rich and flourishing in the hands of the Philistines, became, as Zephaniah predicted, "dwellings and cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks." The Philistines, and Moab, and Ammon, and Nineveh, and Ethiopia have all experienced the fulfilment of the prophet's words, and today the modern state of Israel testifies that the remaining prophecies are about to be fulfilled.

The prophet predicted that the "sea coast" would be "for the house of Judah," for "Yahweh their Elohim shall visit them, and turn away their captivity." There is a token fulfilment of those very words in the land today, for Judah does dwell along the sea coast as predicted. The prophet declared that this change in the fortunes of Israel would occur at a period when Yahweh's wrath would be about to be let loose against the nations. Yahweh, through the prophet, declared what His determination is with respect to the world at the coming crisis. Addressing the meek, He says: "Wait ye for me, until the day that I rise up to the prey, for My determination is to gather the nations, to assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them Mine indignation, even all My fierce anger; for with the fire of My jealousy all the earth shall be devoured."

The result of this manifestation and outpouring of wrath will be sevenfold:

1. The Apocalypse of Yahweh, the King of Israel in Jerusalem;
2. The taking away of judgments from Jerusalem;
3. The purification and pardon of the remnant;
4. The exaltation of Israel to fame and praise throughout the world.
5. Their restoration to the Holy Land from all parts of the earth;
6. The abolition of all the "Names and Denominations," and other superstitions of every form, shade, and color, that now bewilder and divide mankind; and which are sustained as elements of the civil and ecclesiastical polity of the nations; and,

7. The establishment of One Religion and One Government for all the world.

In view of these things, the prophet exclaims, "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem," the "Mother of us all" (Gal. 4:26). Yahweh hath taken away thy judgments, He hath cast out thine enemy; the King of Israel, Yahweh, is in the midst of thee: **THOU SHALT NOT SEE EVIL ANY MORE.** Yahweh thine Elohim (that is, the Mystical Christ) in the midst of thee is mighty: He will save; He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love; He will joy over thee with singing. Behold at that time I will undo all that afflict thee; and I will save her that halteth, and will gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame.

It is manifest, however, to every thoughtful person, that this glorious result for Israel and the Saints (for the one is not redeemed without the other) can only be consequent upon the binding of the Dragon and conquest of the kings of the earth, as represented in the Apocalypse. The governments must be broken as a potter's vessel, or Israel, the Saints, and the nations, cannot attain the blessing promised. The testimony of all the prophets concurs in this; and that when broken, the grand obstacle to the world's blessedness will be removed; and that "then will Yahweh turn to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of Yahweh, to serve Him with one consent. For He will furnish all the gods of the earth (among whom are the clerical soul-traders of the Apocalypse), and men shall worship Him, every one from his country, all the isles of the nations" (Zeph. 1:1; 2:6, 7, 9, 11; 3:1-4, 8, 9, 14-19).

We see definite and clear signs of the fulfilment of these things today, and can therefore appreciate better the great privilege that is ours to be called to a knowledge of the Truth. May the influence of Zephaniah's warning counsel, his powerful words of exhortation, and his thrilling vision of coming glory so move us as we study them that they will play a part in fitting us for a place in the glorious kingdom of which he spoke so eloquently, and that being found among the meek (Zeph. 2:2-3) we might be accepted in that day.

"Therefore wait ye upon me, saith Yahweh, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy" (Zeph. 3:8).

CONSIDER YOUR WAYS!



A VERSE BY VERSE EXPOSITION

of the

BOOK OF THE PROPHET

HAGGAI



“Build the house and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith Yahweh” (Haggai 1:8).

The Life and Times of Haggai the Prophet

THE JEWS RETURN UNDER ZERUBBABEL

Haggai lived at a most significant epoch of Jewish history. The seventy years captivity in Babylon, predicted by Jeremiah (Jer. 25:12; 29:10; Dan. 9:2) had come to an end; Babylon had fallen before the Medo-Persian onslaught, and Cyrus had assumed sole authority over the Empire.

He immediately instituted a policy of religious tolerance. One of his first acts was to issue a decree inviting the Jewish exiles to return to their homeland, and rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2). This fulfilled the two hundred years' old prophecy of Isaiah who had actually named Cyrus as the one who would pave the way for the Jews to return (Isa. 44:28).

The greatest excitement was generated among spiritually-minded Jews in Babylon when the decree was made public (Ps. 126). Two men, Zerubbabel and Joshua, commenced to organize the return. Zerubbabel (known also as Sheshbazzar — cp. Ezra 5:16 with Zech. 4:9) was a descendant of David (1 Chron. 3:9-19), and became the acknowledged leader of the people; Joshua was high priest. Together they combined the civil and religious offices.

Some 49,697 exiles (Ezra 2:64-65) of all the tribes of Israel and from all classes of society responded to the call. Among them were the prophets Haggai and Zechariah through whom Yahweh subsequently revealed His purpose. This large company of people uprooted themselves from Babylon to commence the long and wearying trek back to the land of their forefathers. A difficult four months' journey lay before them (Ezra 7:9), but they commenced it full of enthusiasm, and undeterred by the difficulties facing them. They were stirred by religious zeal. They knew that Yahweh was with them, and they believed that they had sufficient faith to surmount any problem that might face them. Moreover, they had the full support of the powerful Persian Government. The decree of Cyrus had not only invited them to return, but actually granted them the vessels of the Temple that Nebuchadnezzar had seized 70 years before (Ezra 1:7), as well as permitting them to raise a large sum of money to assist them in the work they had set themselves to do (v. 4).

What more could they wish for? With the backing of the most powerful monarch of the day, with sufficient wealth to accomplish their project, and with the assured blessing of Heaven above, they could not fail!

The only thing they lacked (but they did not then realise this) was sufficient faith to enable them to "remove mountains". They were to be faced with mountains of difficulties that would test them greatly, and find them wanting.

THE WORK IS COMMENCED

On arrival in the land, they saw the full extent of the work before them: cities neglected, Jerusalem in ruins, the site of the Temple a charred mass of burnt debris. But this they had expected, and it did not deter them. Anxious to commence the work of reconstruction, they took up their abodes in various places, and awaited the seventh month when, appropriately, they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles that commemorated their deliverance from Egypt (Lev. 23:39-43). At this time, also, they set up the Altar, arranged for regular services of worship, and made initial preparations for the building of the Temple (Ezra 3).

Meanwhile, the surrounding nations viewed the activity with hostility; and gradually the Jews became conscious of this growing hatred towards them. Though still full of enthusiasm for the work before them, it was now intermixed with a measure of fear, as they sensed the growing antagonism (Ezra 3:3). There were many enemies who did not want to see a powerful Judah arise again on their borders.

The work began in this uneasy atmosphere. The Temple site was cleared of the rubble and rubbish of many years of desolation, and the foundations were laid. At last some tangible results were to be seen for the labor expended, and the people celebrated with manifestations of the greatest joy, in a special service of thanksgiving.

But there were mixed feelings at that gathering. Some, who were old and had seen Solomon's Temple in its glory, wept when they saw the state of the ancient site, and compared the poverty of the new foundations with the glory of seventy years before. They could not resist shedding tears of grief as they recalled the past glory of Israel. But their lamentations were drowned by the excited shouts of joy that arose from thousands of throats, as younger people saw the evidence of their accomplishment. Their cries of exultation triumphantly echoed among the hills and valleys of Jerusalem, until the whole city seemed wrapped in sounds of joy (Ezra 3:13).

THE WORK IS HINDERED

A shortlived joy it was! When the adversaries of the Jews, and particularly the Samaritans, heard that the children of the captivity were building the Temple, they took counsel together and laid plans to defeat the project.

They first tried cunning; they offered to assist in the work, hoping to take the Jews off guard, and sabotage the work from

within. But Zerubbabel was too astute to be deceived by such false offers of friendship. "Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God," was his response (Ezra 4:13).

Nothing daunted by this opposition, the adversaries tried other means: "They weakened the hands of the people, and troubled them in building" (v. 4). They corrupted the Persian officials with bribes, so that the promised help was delayed and tardy (Ezra 4:5, 7). They petitioned the court of Persia, making false accusations against the Jews, and calling upon the Government to stop the rebuilding of the Temple.

In the meantime, Cyrus had died, and their requests were given sympathetic consideration by his successor.

It was a troublous time for the Persian administration. The death of Cyrus had been followed by the reign of his son, Cambyses, who continued for a little over 7 years. On his death, the throne was seized by an usurper, known to history as Smerdis, but called Artaxerxes in Ezra 4:7. His position as ruler was precarious, for he was opposed by many enemies. Desperately searching for allies, he was not prepared to support such an unpopular cause as that of the Jews. Pressed by the powerful adversaries of Zerubbabel, seeking to placate them and secure them as allies, he issued a decree that the building of the Temple should cease forthwith (Ezra 4:21).

This seemed to toll the death-knell of all Jewish hopes. Triumphantly their enemies demanded that the work cease in compliance with the Persian decree. By "force and power" (Ezra 4:23) they saw that it was carried out.

The work stopped. No longer was the Temple site a hive of activity. It became deserted. The people had turned to their own affairs, thoroughly discouraged by the course of events.

A state of depression settled over the nation. The enthusiasm of the people had evaporated. They turned from the work of God, and gave themselves to building their own material resources, spending lavishly on their homes whilst the Temple lay neglected (Haggai 1:4). They claimed that "the time had not come for Yahweh's house to be built" (v. 2), thus using Scripture to justify their indolence in His work.

Why should this happen? Why did Yahweh permit the adversaries of Judah to triumph, and His work to languish, even if only temporarily?

Such questions are often asked as though the work of the Lord should never suffer reverse, and as though the labor of the Truth should reveal a triumphant procession from one success to the next. And when temporary reversals are experienced (for absolute defeat is impossible in the work of God), it is sometimes interpreted as an indication that we should lay down our tools,

declare that the "time is not ripe," and turn to other things.

Thus the work of Yahweh is permitted to "lie waste" (Hag. 1:4).

These reversals are permitted because God desires to test His workmen. The opposition that Judah received was the people's opportunity to demonstrate faith and courage. They should have considered it as a test on the part of Yahweh "to see what was in their hearts" (Deut. 8:2). Even though the time period decreed had not been fully met, there was no need to so completely turn from the work in hand. They should have heeded the example of David. He desired to build the Temple; but when told that the time was not ripe, he did the next best thing, and made preparations for the building that Solomon later took in hand (1 Chron. 29:2-5). The Jews could have done likewise in the days of Zerubbabel, patiently awaiting the time when God would remove the difficulties then facing them. Instead, they let their opportunity for a practical demonstration of faith pass by, and their enthusiasm withered because it rested in their own strength.

So the work ceased for a time.

THE PROPHETS REVIVE THE WORK

It was at that time that the two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, arose to revive the flagging enthusiasm of the people. Ezra records:

"Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them" (Ch. 5:1).

They co-operated together in a wonderful work, supplementing the labors of each other. Haggai was presumably the older of the two, for he wrote as though he had seen the first Temple in its glory (Hag. 2:3); Zechariah was a younger man, for his grandfather had returned to the land at the same time (Neh. 12:4). In these two men, experience and youth co-operated in a work that enthused the people to activity. How valuable are such labors! How frequently the Word provides examples of age and youth co-operating in the work of Yahweh. The experience of a Paul is greatly aided by the enthusiasm and virility of a Timothy (though Timothy was naturally timorous), whilst the exuberance of youth is more profitably expended when guided by the experience of age.

The labors of the two prophets had the desired effect. They enthused the people to the work. Once again Zerubbabel and Joshua took the lead in reviving the labor of building the Temple. The people became re-energised by a new-found zeal. The work of building was recommenced, and once again Jerusalem became the scene of enthusiastic labor.

But the adversaries of the Jews looked upon this activity with anger. They challenged the Jews as to their right to commence a

work prohibited by the Persian authorities. They threatened to complain to the government if it continued. But the people were now determined to proceed come what may, and they refused to capitulate to these threats. "The eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease till the matter came to Darius" (Ezra 5:5).

THE WORK COMPLETED

Darius Hystaspes now ruled in Persia, and a great change had been wrought in the Persian administration. The adversaries of the Jews had sought the help of the usurper Smerdis to obtain a decree forcing the Jews to cease their labors, but he had been overthrown in favor of the legitimate ruler. Whilst the Jews had been opposed by Smerdis, they were now supported by Darius. He refused to take the complaint of the Samaritans on its face value, and made proper investigation into the matter. The archives of Persia were searched, and a copy of the decree of Cyrus was discovered. Darius endorsed this, and added to its provisions in favor of the Jews, by calling upon their very adversaries to assist in forwarding the work (Ezra 6:7-12)!

This was an evidence of Divine blessing. It caused jubilation among the people, and enabled the work to be brought to a successful completion. Ezra records:

"And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, and they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel" (Ch. 6:14).

Thus, through much tribulation, the work was completed. And yet, the external evidence of work accomplished, was only incidental to the real purpose of God, which was to perfect characters for the Kingdom yet to be established. The temple, which the Jews were at such pains to build, and that God desired to be built, would, in time (in A.D. 70), be again overthrown, to be finally restored by Christ at his second coming. Haggai prophesied this (Hag. 2:9). In other words, the people should have recognised that there was nothing permanent in the work that they were then doing, apart from the transformation of their characters, to fit them for the Kingdom of the future. That is the case with work in every age, and it shows the need of ever having in mind the ultimate result, and of striving to that end. There is nothing permanent, even in the establishment of an ecclesia, as the messages to the seven ecclesias in Asia show. The ministry of Haggai also revealed that fact, and continues to teach us to avoid the mistake of viewing present activities (even though associated with the work of Yahweh) as an end in themselves.

Haggai witnessed dramatic events that typified the work of the Lord Jesus. As Zerubbabel and Joshua labored to first lay the foundation, and then build the Temple, so the Lord laid the

foundation of his spiritual temple 1900 years ago (1 Pet. 2:4-6), and will return to complete it in the near future. At the same time, he will also supervise the erection of a literal Temple in Jerusalem. His work, in both particulars, is foreshadowed in the stirring, heroic times of Zerubbabel and Joshua when the Jews struggled against tremendous odds to perform the work of God, and bring it to a successful completion.

In view of the imminence of the times that will see the completion of Christ's labors, we need to heed the exhortation of Haggai, and "Consider our ways!"

THE EASE-LOVING

The doctrine of Purgatory is false. So is that of the larger hope. Akin to these untruths is the notion that we can idle away our Master's time without imperilling our salvation. Whilst contemptuously thrusting aside the first two errors, let us not nurse the last. They are equally bad and fatal. Unbelief — a refusal to take God at His word — is at the bottom of them all. Each is a repetition of the old, old story: "Ye shall not surely die." We require to be very much on our guard against these and similar truth-hating, ease-loving, duty-procrastinating doctrines. Now is the day of salvation — the day for work and for exhibiting faithfulness — and we shall have no other. No work, no wage; this is the inexorable decree of the Scriptures. Are we disposed to idleness? — to look on with folded arms whilst others toil?

Are we merely living on the labour of others?—allowing day after day to pass without the slightest effort to further the interests of our absent Master? If so, let us bestir ourselves ere it is too late. Night, when no man can work, is approaching for us all. In the hour of death, and much more in the hour of judgment, the sluggards of Christ's household will bewail their folly. "Woe to the christian brother (said Bro. Thomas) who presents himself at the tribunal of Christ with nothing else to offer but a hidden truth." Are we drones? Then let the shameful end of the slothful servant in the parable of our Lord sober and energize us (Matt. 25:26). Let us unstop our ears to the voice which speaks so solemnly from heaven: "Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be."

— A.T.J.

Chronological Background

(See Isaiah 45:1-13; Jer. 25:11-12; Jer. 29:10.)



- B.C. 606** 1st invasion by Nebuchadnezzar. The captivity begins and is to last 70 years (Jer. 25:11-12; 27:8).
- B.C. 589-7** Final invasion by Nebuchadnezzar in the 9th year of Zedekiah which resulted in a two years' siege (2 Kings 25:1-2; 2 Chron. 36:21).
- B.C. 535** 2nd month. The foundation of the Temple laid (Ezra 3:8).
- B.C. 535-20** Samaritan opposition — the work ceases until the completion of 70 years from the final invasion B.C. 587, when the Temple was destroyed (Ezra 4).
- B.C. 529** Cyrus died — succeeded by Cambyses his son, then by Smerdis and Darius Hystaspes (522), a relative of Cyrus who reigned 35 years.
- B.C. 520** 2nd year of Darius. Haggai (6th month), and Zechariah (8th month) prophecy. The work is renewed amid blessing (Hag. 2:19). By a new decree, Darius supported the Jews (cp. Ezra 4:24 with Ch. 6).
- B.C. 516** Temple completed and dedication celebrated (Ezra 6:15).

The Second Year Of Darius.

The prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah are carefully dated. The two prophets labored in conjunction with each other, rousing the people to give themselves completely to the work before them. They ministered in the second year of Darius, king of Persia (Haggai 1:1; Zech. 1:1; Ezra 4:24; 5:1). Significant dates of this year are as follows:

- 6th Month** Haggai's first prophecy (Hag. 1:1-15).
7th Month Haggai's second prophecy (Hag. 2:1-9).
8th Month Zechariah's first prophecy (Zech. 1:1).
9th Month Haggai's 3rd and 4th prophecies (Hag. 2:10-23).
B.C. 519 11th Month Zechariah's 2nd prophecy (Zech. 1:7).
B.C. 518, 4th Darius Zechariah's 3rd prophecy (Zech. 7:1).
B.C. 516, 6th Darius Temple finished (Ezra 6:15).

We have followed the conventional dating above, though evidence strongly suggests that the period of time referred to was much closer to the birth of Jesus than that mentioned. There is support for this conclusion in both profane and sacred history, but for the purpose of this study, it is not necessary to go into the matter. It would engage our attention if we were considering the books of Nehemiah or Esther.

Analysis of the Prophecy

The style of Haggai is plain and direct. He constantly affirms that what he proclaimed had Divine authority (see Ch. 1:1, 2, 3, 7, 12, 13; Ch. 2:1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23. He uses the militant title of Deity (Yahweh Sabaoth — Yahweh of armies) at least twelve times, to bring to the minds of the Jews, the strength of that One who would fight on their behalf. The key word of his book is the word "Consider!" (see Ch. 1:5, 7; Ch. 2:15, 18).

Haggai provides a pattern to follow in the work of Yahweh. He ever had a "thus saith the Lord" to confirm his message. He not only rebuked, he also encouraged; he not only criticised, he also commended. Above all, he provided hope by speaking of the glory of the future age, which he set before his hearers as an incentive, urging them to the work of the Lord.

Haggai was no mere theorist. He not only preached, he also practised, for he, too, labored with his hands (Ezra 5:1-2). His short book is divided into five distinct messages, each of which is severally dated, and in our analysis, accepting September 1st as the time of the first message (the "first day of the sixth month" in the Jewish calendar would be around about that time — Hag. 1:1), we have given the approximate date upon which each of the five messages were delivered.

HAGGAI — "Consider Your Ways!"

A five-fold message of Grace, Comfort and Hope!

1. A Message TO AROUSE (1st of 6th month) — Ch. 1:1-11.
"Build the house" (v. 8).

a. Introduction	v. 1.
b. Consider Your Ways	vv. 2-6.
c. Consider God's House	vv. 7-11.
2. A Message TO COMMEND (24th of 6th month) — Ch. 1:12-15.
"They obeyed the voice" (v. 12).

a. The People Respond	v. 12.
b. The People Commended	vv. 13-15.
3. A Message TO ENCOURAGE (21st of 7th month) — Ch. 2:1-9.
"I am with you" (v. 4).

a. Be Strong and Work	vv. 1-5.
b. A Greater Glory Yet To Come	vv. 6-9.
4. A Message TO CONFIRM (24th of 9th month) — Ch. 2:10-19.
"From this day I will bless" (v. 19).

a. Previous Defilement Of The People	vv. 10-14.
b. Present Blessings For The Faithful	vv. 15-19.
5. A Message TO ASSURE (24th of 9th month) — Ch. 2:20-23.
"In that day I will make" (v. 23).

a. Future Judgment On Israel's Enemies	vv. 20-22.
b. Future Blessings For Israel's Sons	v. 23.

A Message to Arouse

Chapter 1:1-11

Haggai's initial message was delivered to the people on the 1st day of the sixth month which would approximate to August/September. The Spirit came upon him, and moved him to call the people together in solemn assembly (Ezra 5:1) that he might deliver the message of Yahweh. It commenced with a well-merited rebuke because of the spiritual apathy they were manifesting. Discouraged by the opposition they had received from the Samaritans, they had justified their inaction by claiming that the time was not ripe for the building of the Temple. However, as the prophet shrewdly observed, they did not permit opposition to restrain their efforts to build up their personal material resources. They had not merely homes, but panelled homes, and yet Yahweh's house was permitted to lie waste! Therefore the prophet called upon them to "consider their ways!" Though they worked hard in their own cause, they did not prosper. They earned good wages, but the money went nowhere! Haggai likened it to being put into a bag with holes. They labored hard, but they received little return. Haggai showed that though poor harvests and adverse conditions were the cause of this, such were brought upon them by Yahweh because they were neglectful of His work, occupying themselves exclusively with their own affairs. He called upon them to correct this state of affairs: "Go up to the mountain and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith Yahweh" (v. 8). Haggai thus exhorted that active labor is always in fashion in the Lord's service, and that His servants should be "always abounding" in it (1 Cor. 15:58).

Introduction — V. 1

The prophet announces the authority of his message, and makes reference to the principal characters connected therewith. The first day of the month was an appropriate time for this purpose, because it was the day selected for the regular monthly festival of the new moon (Num. 10:10), commemorating a new beginning. It was a fitting time to urge the building of the Temple for in its absence the festival of the new moon could not be celebrated.

VERSE 1

"In the sixth month" — See Ezra 5:1; Zech. 1:1. Zechariah commenced to prophesy two months later.

"Came the word of Yahweh" — This stamps the message as authoritative (Isa. 55:11). Prophetic utterances were the utterances of the Spirit (Heb. 1:1; Neh. 9:30; Heb. 10:15). When the Spirit came upon the prophets, they could not withstand the impulse to speak (Jer. 20:9; 1 Pet. 1:20). Haggai repeatedly stated that the message he delivered was the "word of Yahweh" — Vv. 1,2,3,5,7,8,9,12,13.

"Haggai" — The name of the prophet signifies "The Festal One," from *Hag*, "a feast," "sacrifice," "solemnity," and thus a gathering together to meet with, and rejoice before, Yahweh (cp. Isa. 30:29). It had particular reference to the Passover which was recognised as the feast, and which was a solemn

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gathering to celebrate the deliverance from the captivity in Egypt, and to rejoice before Yahweh. Haggai's name indicated his mission. He was appointed of God to call the people together to remind them of their deliverance from Babylon, to impress upon them their privileged position, and to remind them of their personal responsibilities. Fourteen years had passed since the decree of Cyrus had invited the people to return to the land, and rebuild the Temple, but a succession of frustrating difficulties plus bitter and unremitting opposition had caused the work to lapse, and apathy now held the people in its grip. Haggai's message was designed to rouse them into activity once again (Ezra 4: 23-24; 5:1-3).

"Zerubbabel" — His name means *Shoot of Babylon*. He was probably given this name because he had been born in captivity. In Ezra 3:2-8; 5:2; Neh. 12:1; Matt. 1:12; Luke 3:27, he is called the "son of Shealtiel," but in 1 Chron. 3:19, his father's name is given as Pedaiiah. It is suggested that he was the son of Pedaiiah, but was adopted by Shealtiel his uncle on the death of his father (1 Chron. 3: 17-18, mg.)

"Shealtiel" — His name signifies *Enquired of El (God)*. Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel can signify, *The Seed of Promise Sown in Babylon*. He was a branch shooting forth from the withered stem of Jesse, and was both a type and the predecessor of the Lord Jesus (Zech. 3:8; Matt. 1:12). As governor of Jerusalem he held the civil and royal authority, and in that capacity, typified the future work of the Lord Jesus.

"Joshua" — Joshua was high-priest. His name means *Yah shall save*. He was also a "man of sign" (Zech. 3:8), and foreshadowed the priestly duties of the Lord Jesus. Joshua is the Hebrew form of the Greek, Jesus, and proclaims both the mission of the Lord, and the way in which it would be accom-

plished. *Jesus* did not triumph in his own strength merely, but in that derived from God, for "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). Jesus means more than *Saviour*; it means *Yah will save*; his name reveals that the work of Salvation was a work that Yahweh effected through the willing co-operation of His son. Flesh unaided could not have obtained the victory; it must ever seek a greater strength than its own (see Phil. 4:13). That is the paramount lesson of Christ's work of atonement. Zerubbabel and Joshua combined to labor in the service of God, and jointly represented the Lord Jesus in his dual position of King-Priest. The strength of Yahweh was with them through the encouraging messages of the prophets.

"Josedeck" — This name means *Yahweh hath cleansed*. Joshua's name in full was most significant: *Yahweh shall save for Yahweh hath cleansed*.

Consider Your Ways — Vv. 2-6

The prophet gives a vigorous call for self-examination with the object of reform. He suggests that the people consider their ways and observe how meagre were the results received from the labor expended. This showed that there was something wrong with their approach to God and to their labor.

VERSE 2

"The LORD (Yahweh) of hosts" — Yahweh Sabaoth is the militant title of Deity, used for when He belligerently manifests Himself on behalf of His people (see Rom. 9:29) or in rebuke of them. As such, it is a name to be feared, because it commands such mighty power. It will be the zeal of Yahweh Sabaoth that will establish the throne of David in spite of the opposition of Gentilism in the age to come (Isa. 9:7). In the past, Israel was helped by the heavenly host suggested by this title. Joshua met its captain whose appearance

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with drawn sword outside of Jericho, indicated that the Divine help would be with Israel in the impending attack (Josh. 5:14-15). Elisha's servant had his eyes opened to the tremendous forces available to defeat the enemy, if Yahweh saw fit to use them (2 Kings 6:17). Hezekiah was able to reassure the people with the exhortation that there were more with them than with the Assyrian, for "with him is an arm of flesh, but with us is Yahweh our God to help us" (2 Chron. 32:7-8). David declared that "the angel of Yahweh encampeth around those who fear Him" (Ps. 34:7). The Lord Jesus, on the other hand, revealed that sometimes those forces are withheld because it is the purpose of Yahweh that His sons be brought under trial for their own benefit (Matt. 26:54).

The Hebrew word *Tzavaoth* (Sabaoth—Rom. 9:29) is the normal word for "armies." Yahweh Sabaoth, therefore, signifies He Who will be (manifested in) Armies. The armies through which Yahweh's strength will be manifested are those displayed as following the Lord Jesus in (the political) heaven, and waging successful war against the Gentiles (Rev. 19:13-16). The Lord Jesus has been made commander-in-chief of these forces (Isaiah 55:4); so that the call of the Gospel is a recruiting call to join his army (2 Tim. 2:3-4). The mission of those Divine hosts in the future age will be to "execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute upon them the judgment written; this honor have all his saints" (Ps. 149:7-9).

Meanwhile, Haggai's use of the militant title of Deity reminded the people to whom he spoke, of the tremendous resources of power that were available to them in their emergency. That Power is still available to us today.

"The time is not come" — Jere-

miah had announced that a period of seventy years would be occupied in captivity (Jer. 25:11-12; Jer. 29:10), and the decree of Cyrus had been proclaimed seventy years after the first invasion by Nebuchadnezzar in B.C.606. This was some 15 years before the final destruction of the Temple, however (see Chronological outline), and the people justified their inactivity by claiming that the time had not fully come for the Temple to be built. Though there may have been partial truth in their claim, they could, at least, have prepared their resources to build, as David did when he was told that the Temple would not be built until in the days of Solomon, but nevertheless "set his affection to the house of God" and gathered wealth that it might ultimately be built (1 Chron. 29:3). Now, however, with the passing of time, the returned exiles could not even claim that the time had not come for them to build. As Haggai reminded them, they neglected the Temple, whilst putting all their energy into building up their own homes. Against this attitude they were warned.

VERSE 3

"Then came the word of Yahweh" — This short book states no less than 23 times that the message was the word of Yahweh, showing the authoritative nature of it, and the urgency of its appeal.

VERSE 4

"Cieled" — They dwelt in "panelled" homes. They not only provided houses for themselves, but lavishly decorated them, though allowing the Temple to lie waste. We need to exercise care that we do not allow the same spirit to dominate us, causing us to place all our thought into building up our possessions to the exclusion of the things of God.

VERSE 5

"Consider" — The Hebrew sig-

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nifies: "Set your hearts on your ways" (see mg.). This is a key word in the prophecy. The prophet called upon the people to deeply consider their ways, to carefully, honestly and ruthlessly examine their action and motives.

"Your ways"—They were indifferent to the requirements of Yahweh, and He repaid their indifference by turning His face from them. They are warned five times in this book to "consider" ((v. 5, 7; Ch. 2:15, 18). We need to heed that warning today.

VERSE 6

"Ye have sown much, and bring in little"—They labored hard, but reaped little profit. They blamed their lack of results on to natural causes—to poor seasons, drought, etc. (v. 10), but Yahweh was behind these natural causes (v. 11). He had warned Israel in the Law that if they neglected Him they would suffer in such a manner (Deut. 28:38; Lev. 26:26). On the other hand, He has promised a blessing on those who are liberal towards Him. This liberality must not be merely in money, but can be shown by the time we dedicate to the study of His word, and it can manifest itself in other forms of patient loving service. Let us render Him His dues and He will abundantly repay (Malachi 3:10; Prov. 3:9-10).

"Wages in a bag with holes"—The people were afflicted with acute inflation; the money they earned went nowhere!

Consider God's House — Vv. 7-11

Having drawn attention to their selfish attitude in providing for their own material wellbeing at the expense of the things of Yahweh, the prophet proceeded to outline the measure of service expected of them.

VERSE 7

"Thus saith Yahweh of hosts; Consider your ways"—This is

the second appeal to that end. Previously it was coupled with a suggestion that they consider their ways in relation to their state of material wellbeing; this time it is coupled with the suggestion that they do so in the light of the state of Yahweh's house.

VERSE 8

"Go up to the mountain"—This was a personal challenge, and involved effort and toil. Whether the people would be ready to respond and perform such tiring labor in the face of adversity, depended upon the measure of their faith.

"Bring wood, and build"—Yahweh did not require an elaborate building, but He did want the people to labor with their hands to accomplish what they could. It is not the results that count with Him, but the motive and measure of faith that is reflected in work. Haggai exhorted the people to work actively in the service of God, with the assurance that no matter how humble the work might be, He would take pleasure in it. Thus his first message was one designed to arouse them to the need for work!

"I will be glorified"—Yahweh is glorified, or honored, in the faithful, willing, cheerful, though humble, labors of His children.

VERSE 9

"I did blow upon it"—They had anticipated great harvests from their labor, but had gathered little; and what was gathered in, was quickly expended in the high cost of living. The expectations of the Jews were not realised because their labors lacked the divine blessing. Their material poverty stemmed from the poverty of their worship. It was the result of divine chastisement "for their good" (Heb. 12:5-7). Unfortunately they did not recognise that, but blamed their reverses on to natural causes. When labor in God's field does not seem to bear fruit, let us analyse the cause; perhaps it is due to the

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poverty of our worship towards Him!

"Why?" — Haggai anticipated the question that might be asked. The Jews blamed their poverty on to crop failures, drought, natural causes; everything but the true reason: the poverty of their worship towards Yahweh. Haggai now revealed and publicly announced that God had brought all these reverses on them that they might be profitably exercised thereby (see Hag. 2:17; Lev. 26: 3-5; Mal. 3:10; Matt. 4:4).

VERSE 11

"I called for a drought" — Yah-

weh had warned that He would bring a drought on the land if the people proved disobedient (Lev. 26:18-21), and on the other hand, Naomi described the breaking of a drought as a visitation of Yahweh "in giving them bread" (Ruth 1:6). Men call these things the laws of nature, but the Scriptures reveal them in a different light. The most dreadful drought and famine is that of "hearing the words of Yahweh" (Amos 8:11). Such a drought, with all its disastrous consequences, is inevitable where His word is neglected. In Haggai's day, the drought on the land, symbolised the spiritual state of the people.

"If salvation is not worked out, it will die out. Nothing blights and kills our prospects like inattention and neglect. Everybody sees how true this is of our present fleeting fortunes: how few remember its equal truth in respect of that great and endless fortune which lies out yonder, substantial in its eternity (though covered at present with a golden mist) beyond the tomb. Neglect, like rust and rot, will ruin all. Most men know what it is to tremble in presence of solemn issues, so let each brother grow grave with his profound responsibility; be filled with that fear which is no terror, and tremble, though not with dismay. Salvation is worth working for; gained, it is glory; missed, it is doom!"

A Message to Commend

Chapter 1:12-15

What a grand experience it is when an appeal made to people finds ready response. How Haggai must have been encouraged thereby! Zerubbabel and Joshua immediately acted upon Haggai's exhortation and set a noble example before the people which they quickly followed. Their motives for doing so were good, for "they feared Yahweh" (v. 12), and in return they felt the Divine influence with them (v. 13). A spirit of exhilaration permeated all Judah. Enthusiasm had been engendered in both leaders and people, and thus encouraged they all worked together vigorously in Yahweh's cause.

This second message came twenty-four days after the first one, indicating that the people had favorably considered Yahweh's first message by the hand of Haggai, and had been moved by it to the point of action. The prophet now encouraged the people because they had "obeyed the voice" that they had heard (v. 12). To do so then or now is to honor God, and with such action He is well-pleased.

The People Respond — V. 12

After considering the message (cp. v. 15) both leaders and people willingly gave themselves to the work.

VERSE 12

"Obeyed the voice"—Stirred by Haggai's searching criticism and stimulating appeal the leaders gave a splendid example by enthusiastically taking up the work. Thus encouraged, the people also gave themselves to it (Ezra 5:1-2).

"The words of Haggai the prophet"—Though Haggai does not express this, the people were not stirred into action by his words only, but also by his example. Together with Zechariah, Haggai labored with the people, and thus demonstrated in deed what he proclaimed in doctrine (Ezra. 5:2).

"The people did fear before Yahweh"—To "fear" Yahweh is to reverence Him as the meaning of the word signifies. The people did this by taking heed to His word and obeying it. The "fear" of Yahweh includes a fear of offending Him, and when such is exhibited,

it will be seen in obedience (Prov. 1:7, 29; 2:5; 3:7; 8:13). He has elevated His word above all His holy name, and true reverence finds expression in submissive hearkening (Ps. 138:2; Isa. 66:1-2, 5; Malachi 3:16; 4:2; Psalm 147:11).

The People Commended — Vv. 13-15

With the general enthusiasm for labor there came a message of commendation from Yahweh: "I am with you!"

VERSE 13

"I am with you, saith Yahweh"—How thrilling it must have been to the governor, priest, prophet and people to receive words of commendation from Yahweh. Shortly after this, further words of encouragement were received from God through Zechariah. His name is indicative of his message. The names Zechariah (*Yah hath remembered*), Berechiah (*Yah hath blessed*), and Iddo (*The appointed time*) proclaim the message: "Yah hath blessed and He hath remembered at the appointed time." Zechariah's

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name is also a caption to his message. See Zech. 1:1.

VERSE 14

"Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel" — The word "spirit" is often used in the Bible as expressive of the state of mind and feeling (cp. Matt. 5:3; 1 Chr. 5:26; 2 Chr. 36:22). Despite the opposition still being experienced by the Jews from the Samaritans (Ezra 5:3), Zerubbabel was stirred up by the message of the prophet to re-organise the work, and he, in turn, stimulated others. How valuable is such a spirit when applied to the work of the Truth. We have been granted so many privileges, and experience so many blessings, that we should never be discouraged by opposition or reverses. Yet the flesh is so weak! The spirit we should constantly strive to manifest is that engendered by the words of the Lord to the Apostles: "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

"All the remnant of the people" — The "remnant of the people" comprised those comparatively few in number who had returned to the land.

"They came and did work in the house of Yahweh" — It was not merely work that they did, but work in the house in accordance with the will and direction of Yahweh. He took pleasure in this

labor (Hag. 2:5), though some despised the poverty of it (cp. Ezra 3:12 with Zech. 4:10). That God takes pleasure in small things and humble service is a great encouragement for us today who labor in a day of "small things." We are exhorted to "be instant in season and out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2), and such labors should be performed as "unto the king," and not in the light of results obtained. No matter how humble our efforts might be, He will take pleasure in them if they are performed in faith (cp. 1 Sam. 16:7; Mark 12:41-44).

VERSE 15

"The four and twentieth day" — A period of twenty-four days separated the two messages (cp. v. 1), and doubtless during that time some considerable discussion had taken place among the people as to how they should react to the appeal. Finally, a decision had been reached to obey the word of God and follow after righteousness. They had "considered their ways," and had reformed.

Other prophets have spoken in similar strain (Matt. 6:25-34; Amos 4:6-13; Micah 6:6-9). Their appeals and exhortations have come echoing down the corridor of time to our own day, and constitute a stirring challenge for the present generation! Is our first concern for the things of God? Are we busy building in His house (Eph. 2:19-22)? Let us consider our ways!

Summary

Israel was warned that evil would befall it if the people neglected to serve God with "joyfulness and gladness of heart" (Deut. 28:47). What circumspection this should have provoked. Is our service to the Truth rendered with "joyfulness and gladness of heart"? Or do we set about it grudgingly and complainingly — seldom with cheerfulness — overlooking that it is the Lord primarily who should be kept in view (Col. 2:23).

A Message to Encourage

Ch. 2:1-9

Almost another month passed, and again the voice of Haggai was heard. This time, on the twenty-first day of the seventh month, approximately September/October, it proclaimed a timely message of encouragement. With the resumption of labor, on the part of the Jews, the Samaritans had mouthed threats, and had even approached the king of Persia to bring the work to a standstill. But Ezra recorded: "The eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease" (Ezra 5:5). This endorsed the vital message that Haggai delivered to the people: a message calculated to encourage them in their labors, and give them the incentive to continue in spite of opposition. For, after exhorting the people to "be strong," Haggai revealed that they were not working merely for the immediate benefits, but for ultimate glory. The Temple they were building was "contemptible" in the eyes of those who had seen the glory of Solomon's Temple, but the prophet showed that the work should not be despised. Haggai, with true prophetic vision, revealed that there will yet be erected a latter-day Temple, that will exceed in glory anything previously seen on earth, and that those who labored faithfully in the face of discouraging circumstances will obtain an honored position in the glorious future. In anticipation of that they were to "quit themselves like men and be strong (1 Cor. 16:13).

Be Strong And Work — Vv. 1-5

Haggai exhorted them not to be deterred or discouraged by the poverty of their efforts, but to faithfully labor in the realisation that they had Yahweh on their side, and ultimately could not fail.

VERSE 1

"In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day"—The period here defined was most significant, for it was the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:34-36). Israel were called together to that feast to celebrate the joy of deliverance from Egypt, and to rejoice before Yahweh. Those who had returned under Zerubbabel now had plenty to rejoice about, for the work already accomplished was the tangible result of Yahweh's blessing on them. However, as the humble results of their efforts could still discourage some, it was im-

portant to point out to those laboring that they could anticipate a greater reward in the future. Therefore Haggai stood up before the people at the appointed time indicated in this verse, to publicly deliver unto them a further invigorating message.

VERSE 2

"Zerubbabel, Joshua, the residue" — As Zerubbabel and Joshua were "men of sign" (Zech. 3:8 mg.), and represented the dual offices of the Lord Jesus as king-priest, so the "residue of the people" represented his brethren. They are all encouraged to the work before them.

VERSE 3

"Who is left" — When the foundation of the Temple was laid in the second year of Cyrus (B.C. 535) only 52 years had elapsed since the destruction of the Temple

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in the year B.C.587. Some still remembered the glory of the former Temple (cp. Ezra 3:12-13). Now, 15 years later, there still remained some who could recall the past and compare it with the present. In doing so, they could only view the present Temple as contemptuous in comparison with that which Solomon built.

“Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?”—There is a tendency to deprecate a humble work, and view it with contempt. This can be most discouraging to those who are doing the work under difficulties. The antidote to discouragement, however, is greater dedicated labor. There is nothing more calculated to destroy depression or defeatism than faithful activity, but this is only possible when the objects and value of labor are properly recognized. Haggai tried to set this clearly before the people. A little later, Zechariah blended his voice with Haggai’s in an appeal to the laborers to “despise not the day of small things,” for great rejoicings would ultimately unfold for them (see Zech. 4:9-10).

VERSE 4

“Be strong . . . and work”—Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6), but faith must be blended with courage and determination to produce its best fruits. There is a need for activity on our part if we are to reap the fruits of faith. Yahweh was ready to bless the Jews, but they had to provide the basis whereby this could be done. Nehemiah not only “made his prayer unto God,” but he also set a watch (Neh. 4:9), and the blessing of Yahweh brought success to his vigilance. It is not sufficient to pray for the Divine blessing, we must also use the means that He has made available to us to that end. He will bless all efforts in accordance with His will if we labor with our hands by the means He has granted us, and seek His help in prayer.

“I am with you, saith Yahweh of hosts”—The Samaritans were seeking the help of Persia to hinder the work of the remnant, but Judah could draw upon the help of Yahweh of Armies (see note Ch. 1:2). Samaritan opposition (Ezra 4:4-5), decrees of kings (Ezra 4:23-24), depression and discouragement (Ezra 3:12) all failed in the face of the Almighty Power which was available to the Jews. If He is for us, Who can successfully oppose us (Rom. 8:31; Heb. 13:6; Isa. 54:17).

VERSE 5

“The word that I covenanted”—Israel was brought out of Egypt by virtue of the covenant made to Abraham (Ps. 105:8-10), and that same covenant has preserved them throughout the ages (Deut. 8:18). The same covenant is restoring them to the Land today, and will transform them into a great nation in the future (Gen. 12:2).

“So my spirit remaineth among you”—When Israel was brought out of Egypt, Yahweh placed His holy spirit within the nation (Neh. 9:20; Isa. 63:11), and will do so again in the future (Ezek. 36:27). What is meant by such expressions. They are used to describe the power of Divine teaching which is delivered through the Spirit (see John 6:62; Eph. 6:17; 1 John 5:7). This teaching announces His purpose to preserve and restore Israel, and make it a great nation. On the basis of such promises the Jews had been restored to the land in the days of Haggai, and the Temple was in the process of being rebuilt. Thus, despite the sins of Israel, God had not abandoned the nation, for unlike flesh He changeth not (see Jer. 51:5; Mal. 3:6).

A Greater Glory Yet To Come — Vv. 6-9

In this section of his message and prophecy, Haggai provided the Jews with an incentive to be strong

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and to work with enthusiasm, for he revealed what Yahweh has in store for them in the Age to come if they did so.

VERSE 6

"Yet once."—Paul cites these words in Hebrews 12:26, 27, and interprets them. He declares that the word "once" limits the extent of things to be "shaken": for they could only be shaken once—not twice. According to the Apostle, the use of this word in Haggai 2:6, demonstrates "the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain." In application of this principle he declared: "Therefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be removed . . ."

Paul, therefore, contrasted the eternal Kingdom of Christ with the temporary Kingdom established under Judaism, and quoted Haggai 2:6 to show that the latter was to be removed as imperfect, and to make way for that which cannot be removed. To that end, the Jewish political "heavens and earth" were to be shaken once only.

He used the word "removing" to describe the affect of this shaking. It is translated from the Greek *metatithemi*, and signifies "to transfer to a new basis, to transpose, to change" (Heb. 12:27). The Jewish "heavens and earth" were shaken out of position in A.D.70 in order that they might be transferred to a new basis in the Age to come. The Apostle wrote that the things that were then about to be shaken out of position were those "things that are made," or things that are finite and temporary, in contrast to those that are eternal and unchanging.

"I will shake the heavens and the earth"—These are the things to be "once" shaken in order that they might be changed to a new basis. The terms are used symbolically throughout Scripture for the upper and lower political

orders, for the rulers and the ruled. "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth," declared Isaiah (Ch. 1:2), and he later defined his terms as "Ye rulers of Sodom" and "people of Gomorrah" (v. 9. See also Deut. 32:1). As, in nature, the sun rules the day and the moon the night, so the civil and ecclesiastical systems govern the people. Thus Christ's rule is likened to the Sun of righteousness with healing in his beams (Mal. 4:2; 2 Sam. 23:4). Likewise, as in nature, the moon reflects the light of the sun, so this is also reproduced in the symbol, for the moon is likened to the bride of Christ, or the Ecclesia (Song 6:10; cp. 1 Cor. 15:41), she who is called to reflect the glory of her Lord.

In Psalm 89:36-37 the symbol is used with beautiful effect, for there the throne of David is described as the sun in conjunction with the moon shining as "a faithful witness in heaven." At nighttime, when the sun is not in evidence, the brightly shining moon witnesses to its existence for it reflects its light. Its presence assures mankind that there will be a tomorrow, and that dawn will ultimately appear. How appropriate this is as a symbol of the faithful witnessing of the Ecclesia (the moon), at a time when the sun is absent from the earth. In the "heavenlies" to which she has been elevated (Eph. 1:3), she testifies to the existence of the absent Sun by reflecting his light, and demonstrates that there will be a "tomorrow" by shining forth with that message out of the darkness that encompasses her. It is said that the moon affects the tides of the sea, and in accordance with the symbol, the rise and fall of nations (symbolised as the sea—Isa. 57:20) is said to be for ultimate benefit of the Ecclesia (Acts 17:26; 2 Cor. 4:15).

There is frequent use of the symbol throughout Scripture. In Isaiah 34:4-5, the terms are used for Gentile powers. Yahweh declared His intention to dissolve

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"all the host of heaven," so that the stars (statesmen) shall fall to the earth (be deposed). He declared that His sword would be "bathed in heaven," and in explanation thereof, proclaimed: "It shall come down upon Idumea to judgment." His sword bathed in heaven, therefore, represented His judgment executed upon the ruling powers of Idumea. A similar use of the symbol is found in Isaiah 51:6: "The heavens shall vanish away like smoke, the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner." This is obviously not literal, for it would contradict those Scriptures that proclaim that the literal heavens and earth are to remain forever (Ps. 148:6; Eccles. 1:4; Ps. 125:1); and, moreover, it would teach that not only are the "heavens" to be destroyed, but "they that dwell therein" will be likewise destroyed, and that would include the angels and even God Himself!

The significance of the symbol is clearly explained in Isaiah 65: 17-18: "I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy." The new heavens, or form of rule, that will find Jerusalem a rejoicing and "her people" or Israel, a joy, will be the rule of Christ. He will entirely transform both government and nation of Israel, so that it will radiate truth and power. The tremendous influence of that government is symbolised by Isaiah thus: "The light of the moon shall be as the light of seven days, in the day that Yahweh bindeth up the breach of His people, and healeth the stroke of their wound" (Isa. 30:26). In the natural order of things, a seven-fold shining forth of the sun would destroy the earth, but the symbolic use of the terms implies the complete shining forth of Divine truth and authority by Christ and his

Ecclesia as the Sun and Moon of the future political heavens. The Lord, himself, took up this symbol, and declared that "the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:43).

The Jewish "heavens and earth" referred to by Haggai, were "shaken" in A.D.70 when the Romans overwhelmed the Jewish State, and took its people into captivity. Once having been thus "shaken" the terms of the prophecy are explicit that they will never again be so treated. That is the point Paul is making in Hebrews 12:27. The Kingdom shall be "restored to Israel" (Acts 1:6) upon a permanent foundation never again to be overthrown (Zech. 14:11; 2 Sam. 7:10; Ezek. 39:28-29).

"The sea and the dry land" — Whilst "heavens and earth" in this passage relate to Israel, "sea and dry land" are symbolic of Gentile nations (Isa. 57:20; Dan. 7:2-3; Rev. 13:1). This difference is carefully preserved by the Apostle in his treatment of the passage before us in Hebrews 12:26-28. He limits his observation to the "heavens and earth" and says nothing of the "sea and dry land" for he was concerned only to show the affect of the impending "shaking" of the Jewish heavens and earth by the Romans. Haggai's prophecy, however, took in Yahweh's intentions with both Judah and the Gentiles. He would first "shake" the former, and then the latter, and the result would be to retain only the unshakeable Kingdom of God. Thus "all nations" shall be shaken.

VERSE 7

"I will shake all nations" — By the use of this phrase, Haggai does not mean that the nations will be caused merely to tremble, but that they will be completely shaken out of position. At the time he spake, the nations were opposing the building of the Temple by the Jews, and by their threats were bringing the workers under the in-

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fluence of fear. The prophet, however, showed that they were working for One far greater and more powerful than all the nations of men, and that He will in due time destroy all opposition to His will and purpose. For this tremendous "shaking" of Gentile powers, see Zeph. 3:8. There will be both political and literal earthquakes in that day (Rev. 16:18; Isa. 2:12, 19).

"The desire of all nations shall come"—How can the "desire of all nations come" seeing that their "desires" and policies are so antagonistic? For example, the "desire" of Russia is to communise the world; the "desire" of China is to annihilate the influence of America; the "desire" of the western world is to establish its power and prestige. Obviously Haggai's words do not mean that all the contradictory desires of the nations will be realised. A change in the rendition of this statement therefore is necessary. Brother Thomas renders it as: "The Excellency of the nations, they shall come in." He shows that the Hebrew noun is in the singular, but is connected with a verb in the plural number. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Excellency of the nations in that he is the greatest of the sons of Adam who ever trod the earth. But his power and influence will be manifested through his brethren. He is both singular and plural, for there is a personal Christ and a multitudinous Christ. The phrase therefore describes Christ and his brethren.

Brother Thomas' translation is supported by Rotherham's translation, and is confirmed by Lexicons. *Davies Hebrew Lexicon* renders "desire" as: "object of delight," which centres attention upon an individual. *Fuerst's Hebrew Lexicon* gives it as "the noblest of all peoples." Gesenius comments: "Desire, delight (i.e. the desirable, precious things) of all nations." G. A. Smith observes: "The Hebrew has a singular noun, 'costly

thing or desirableness," but the verb "shall come" is in the plural, and the Septuagint has *ta eklektia*, the "choice things."

Christ and the saints comprise the most precious things found among men, as far as Yahweh is concerned. They are His special treasure (Mal. 3:17), and because of them and through them, He will fill the earth with His glory.

But where shall they come, or, as Brother Thomas and others render it: "Come in?" The answer is supplied by the context in Haggai. They shall come into the Temple, and in so doing, will fill it with Divine glory (Ezek. 43:1-2). This was lacking in the Temple built in Haggai's time. Unlike that built by Solomon, it had no Shekinah glory shining between the Cherubim and above the Mercy Seat (Ps. 80:1). There was then no priest with Urim and Thummim, as Zerubbabel noted (Ezra 2:63). That Divine glory is vested in Christ (John 1:9, 14, 16), and will be manifested by his brethren (Col. 2:9-10). They imperfectly reflect it now in knowledge and character; but in the future they will possess it in its fullness (Rom. 5:2), in nature (2 Pet. 1:4), and in name (Rev. 3:12); and being the complete manifestation of the *Shekinah* or indwelling glory shall take their place in the Temple of the future age, and thus fill it with a glory that was lacking in that built by Zerubbabel.

"I will fill this house"—In these words the spirit closely connected the Temple that Zerubbabel was then building with the glorious "house of prayer for all nations" to be erected in the Age to come (Isa. 56:7). The Lord did likewise when he described the Temple in Jerusalem as "his house" (Mark 11:17), though the Jews had converted it into a "den of thieves." He confirmed the words of Isaiah, that it will be one day called "of all nations the house of prayer" though, in the meantime, it would be completely thrown down (Mark 13:2). The Temple that the Lord

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will cause to be rebuilt in the future (Zech. 6:12) is thus treated as one with those edifices that were erected in the past (see Ezek. 43:7-8), so that when Haggai spake of "the house," he did not mean the building then in construction but rather, the Temple which is one, whether built by Solomon, by Zerubbabel, or by Christ.

"With glory"—In the past the *Shekinah* glory shone as a light above the Mercy Seat, and between the Cherubim (Ps. 80:1). Ezekiel, in vision, saw this withdrawn (see Ezek. 8:4; 10:4, 18; 11:23), but also predicted its return in a different form: "His voice was like a noise of many waters, and the earth shined with his glory" (Ezek. 43:2). This is obviously a description of one individual dominating a multitude. The individual, Christ Jesus, is suggested by the statement, "his voice," which swells into the noise of a multitude, implied by the description, "the noise of many waters." The multitudinous and glorified Christ-body will constitute the Divine glory in the Age to come.

VERSE 8

"The silver is mine and the gold is mine"—The primary application of these words is to the literal Temple to be erected in the age to come. It will be beautiful both in construction and decoration. The Divine plans will provide the former, and the precious things extracted from the Gentiles will supply the latter. The silver and gold of the nations belong to Yahweh, and He will demand it of them in due course. Isaiah 60:9-11 declares that the "wealth of the Gentiles" will flow unto Zion (see margin).

References to the millennial Temple are found in profusion throughout the Word. It is described as a "house of prayer for all nations" (Isa. 56:7; Mark 11:15-17), the erection of which will be supervised by Christ (Zech. 6:12). Isaiah declares that, like Solomon's Temple, it will be built with the assistance of foreign labor (Isa. 60:10),

and this will possibly form part of the tribute that those nations that submit to Christ will be compelled to pay (Ps. 72:10). When opened for service, Christ will officiate therein as King-priest (Ps. 110; Zech. 6:13; Ezek. 43:7), assisted by his glorified brethren who will constitute the royal aristocracy of king-priests of that age (Rev. 5:9-10). All nations that survive the judgments of Armageddon will be compelled to send representatives to worship there (Zech. 14:16), whilst it will be always open to receive those voluntary worshippers who may like to present themselves there for that purpose on their own account (Zech. 8:22-23; Isa. 2:2-3; 66:23). The Divine glory, manifested through Christ and the saints, will fill the Temple (Ezek. 43:1-2; Dan. 12:3; Matt. 13:43) for all to see (Isa. 66:18), acting as an incentive to the mortal population to strive to attain unto a similar glory at the end of the age (Rev. 20:12; 1 Cor. 15:28).

This literal Temple is typical of the spiritual Temple that Christ is also building, and to which the Apostles made frequent reference (2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Pet. 2:5-9). Silver and gold are required to glorify that Temple also, for these metals are likewise used symbolically throughout Scripture. Silver is the metal of redemption (cp. Lev. 5:15; Exod. 30:11-16), whilst gold is that of a tried faith (1 Pet. 1:7). The "precious sons of Zion" were likened to gold, until they revealed that they were but earthen pitchers. Being not of faith, they were rejected (Lam. 4:2). Symbolic silver and gold (acts of redemption and of faith) will decorate the spiritual Temple, as the literal metals will that of the literal Temple. Peter likens these metals to the means of redemption found in "the precious blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Those redeemed from "out of the nations" (Acts 15:14) constitute the precious things of Yahweh, His "silver and gold" extracted from the Gentiles, by which He will glorify His spiritual Temple,

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VERSE 9

"The glory of this latter house"—The Revised Version renders this: "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former." This is a reference to the glory of the Millennial Temple, because the glory of Zerubbabel's Temple never equalled, let alone excelled, that of Solomon's. The Shekinah glory was absent from the second Temple, but it will be manifested in that of the future Age, revealed through Christ and the saints.

"Shall be greater than the former"—The latter-day glory shall excel that of Solomon's Temple, for in the latter, the glory appeared only as a light over the Mercy Seat and between the Cherubim, whereas the Divine glory to be manifested in the future age will be revealed through the family of Yahweh, each member of which will show forth "the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2). Zerubbabel and his co-laborers were encouraged to labor in the hope of participation in this glory. The apocalypse of it in the latter days (see Isa. 66:18) is closely connected with world peace (see v. 9; Isa. 9:6; 60:18), and this will bring to consummation that initiated when the Tabernacle was first set up in Israel. The four aspects of the one Temple (for the Tabernacle is sometimes so described) are thus associated with Law; Grace, and Glory. The Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple were associated with Law; the second Temple witnessed grace (in the restoration of Israel and the ministry of the Lord Jesus therein); the Millennial

Temple will manifest the apocalypse of glory. The second Temple was destroyed by war (in A.D.70), and did not witness the peace promised by Haggai, showing that the fulfillment of his words still awaits the future.

"In this place I will give peace"—*Shalom*, the Hebrew word for "peace" is derived from a root signifying "to join as one." The peace thus suggested is not merely the cessation of war, but a complete fusion in fellowship of the two parties involved (see John 17:21). "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you," declared the Lord Jesus to his apostles, as he brought home to them the unique relationship they enjoyed with him and the Father (John 14:27). This is the real *shalom*! As far as world-peace in the future is concerned, it is associated with Mount Zion and the Temple to be erected there (see Zeph. 3:11, 15), for the sacrifices and services to be provided in that place will unite the world as one (see Ps. 85:8-9; Jer. 3:16-18; Ezek. 43:7; Isa. 2:2-4; Ps. 122). Jerusalem will constitute the "throne of Yahweh" (Jer. 3:17; Matt. 5:35), and to it the nations will assemble for worship (Zech. 14:16). The peace that will then "flow as a river" from Zion was prefigured in the days of Zerubbabel, inasmuch as Yahweh blessed the work of the returning exiles with success and a measure of peace (see Ezra 5:5-6; 6:14-15, 22).

"My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer" (Mark 11:17). In these words the Lord Jesus identified the Temple in Jerusalem as his house and indicated that the time would come when universal homage should be paid to Yahweh from these precincts.

A Message to Confirm

Chapter 2:10-19

Encouraged by the words of the prophet and the action of their leaders, the people now worked with enthusiasm, defying the opposition shown by the Samaritans and others. Over two months had passed since the previous re-assuring message had been delivered to them, and now they could see some tangible results for their labor. The opposition of their enemies had been successfully countered, and the walls of the Temple were beginning to rise. But what about their own affairs? Were they still to experience the frustrations of the past, when they labored hard but brought in little, and even that came to less? Haggai had declared that the curse of God had rested on their efforts; was that to continue? In another message delivered to the people, Haggai revealed that a change for the better could be expected. The previous frustrating and difficult conditions had been due to the poverty of their worship towards God which revealed that they were spiritually "dead". As such, the defilement of their state was reflected in their problems; but now that they had given themselves enthusiastically to the work of God, they could expect a change for the better, for He had turned His face towards them, and they would be blessed. The prophet revealed that they would receive both temporal blessings then, and the promise of eternal blessings in the future. Whilst the material blessings that they subsequently received were evidence of God's goodness towards them, it must not be interpreted to mean that the possession of material things is inevitably an indication of Godliness. On the contrary, many of the heroes of faith have "wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented" (Heb. 11:37), whereas the spiritually decadent Laodiceans were "rich and increased with goods" (Rev. 3:17). It is necessary to search deeply into circumstances to ascertain whether material prosperity is a blessing or a curse from God. Moses warned Israel that when "Jeshurun waxed fat he kicked" (Deut. 32:15), for flesh has a tendency to do that. If material blessings come, it is our duty to act as custodians of that which has been received from God's bounty (1 Tim. 6:17).

Previous Defilement Of The People Vv. 10-14.

By a reference to the Law of defilement, Haggai showed the people why it was that they had previously suffered reverses: they had been dead to the things of God.

VERSE 10

"In the four and twentieth day

of the ninth month"— This was a little over two months since the previous message. See v. 1.

VERSE 11

"Ask now the priests"— Haggai posed a question of Law to the people in order to demonstrate to them their true state in the sight of God. He called their attention

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to two dead bodies: one slain in sacrifice called "holy flesh," the other dead through natural causes. Anybody touching the former was constituted holy, though that holiness could not be passed on to others; each had to make personal contact with the holy flesh for himself. On the other hand, anybody touching the body dead through natural causes was not only defiled thereby, but also defiled whom he touched. A twofold lesson was brought home to the people: (1)—As a nation they had been previously spiritually dead and defiling; but now having sacrificed their self-interest to serve Yahweh they had manifested the attitude becoming the holy nation; (2)—It is far easier to defile than to make holy.

VERSE 12

"Holy flesh"—Holy flesh is flesh slain in sacrifice, and constituted "holy" because it is separated unto Divine use. It is here contrasted with that which is dead through the mortality that came through sin (v. 13). The death of Jesus was the culmination of a perfect and complete sacrifice, and therefore it cleansed (Rom. 6:2; Acts 2:38), whereas normal death in a person would, under the Law, ceremonially defile. By contact with Christ we are constituted "holy brethren" (Heb. 3:1).

"The priests answered"—The priests were divinely appointed to interpret the Law and expound it to the people (Deut. 17:8-9; Mal. 2:7; Lev. 10:10).

"No"—The question was, If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his garment touched some other person, would this make that other person holy? The answer was in the negative because personal contact with the sacrifice that sanctified was necessary, in order to be constituted holy. This answer should have impressed the Jews that membership of the holy nation availed nought unless they had personal contact with that which would

sanctify them in the sight of Yahweh. To make contact with a sacrifice, however, also availed little unless the people were prepared to apply the principles of the sacrifice in their lives. Previously they had been pleasing themselves by building up their personal wealth at the expense of the Temple; but now they were sacrificing self-interest to serve God. The question and answer is interesting in the light of our standing in the sight of God. Only those are accounted "holy brethren" (Heb. 3:1) who have made personal contact with that which sanctifies: the slain lamb through baptism (John 17:17, 19; Heb. 10:10; 13:12; Eph. 5:26; Heb. 2:11). It is possible, however, for such to become "defiled" by spiritual death.

VERSE 13

"Then said Haggai"—A second question is posed based on the first.

"If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these shall it be unclean?"—Under the Law, a person was considered unclean if he touched a dead body (Num. 19:14-16), and this ceremonial uncleanness could be transmitted to others touching the person so defiled (cp. Lev. 22:4). This law revealed how easy it was for one to be defiled, or to defile, particularly when contrasted with the law of sanctification. It is far easier to defile than to make holy, and this the Law stressed!

The words "dead body" in this place are a translation of the Hebrew word *nepesh*, usually translated "soul," so that the word here signifies "dead soul." The word is used similarly in Lev. 19:28; 21:1; 22:4; Num. 5:2; 6:11 ("the dead") Num. 9:6, 7, 10 ("dead body"); Lev. 21:11; Num. 6:6; 19:11, 13; Hag. 2:13 ("body").

"It shall be unclean"—This answer of the priests showed how easy it is to be defiled, and emphasised the need for separateness (holiness) and care,

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VERSE 14

"So is this people"—By this statement, Haggai described the state of the people before they had commenced to do the work that God set them. They were defiled and defiling like the "dead body," to which he had made reference, and though claiming to be the holy nation they did not transmit holiness like the "holy flesh." Their previous attitude towards the work of the Temple was indicative of their general apathy towards the things of God, and showed them to be spiritually dead (Mal. 2:6-8).

"So is every work of their hands"—Their labor had not been productive previously, for though "they looked for much, it came to little" (Ch. 1:9). The prophet had already explained that it was because God had cursed it (Ch. 1:11).

"And that which they offer there is unclean"—The very sacrifices that they offered on the altar that had been set up 15 years earlier (Ezra 3:4-5) were unacceptable, because they were not accompanied by acts of faith that demonstrated that the offerers understood and applied the lessons of sacrifice.

Present Blessings For The Faithful — Vv. 15-19

Those who work faithfully in the service of Yahweh will find that such labor "has promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:8). That does not necessarily mean that they will receive material blessings (Paul never experienced such), though in some cases they do. When material increase does come, it is our duty to use it faithfully in the service of God.

VERSE 15

"Consider from this day and upward"—He bids them to go back in thought some fifteen years (from this day and upwards—or backwards) when they first intermitted the building of the Temple.

"From before a stone was laid upon a stone"—Rotherham renders: "So long as there had not been laid one stone upon another." Before they had begun to build upon the foundation which they had already laid (Ezra 3:10). Haggai thus asked them to consider their state from the day that the work had ceased some fourteen or fifteen years before, until it had been resumed some few weeks back.

VERSE 16

"Since those days were"—The Revised Version renders: "Through all that time." Compare also Zech. 8:10.

"When one came"—They had given all their efforts to building their personal resources during the period that the work on the Temple had lapsed, but their returns had been poor (Ch. 1:6), for the Divine blessing on their activities had been withdrawn (ct. Ch. 2:19).

"An heap of twenty measures"—Add the ellipsis required by the context: "When one came to *where was expected* an heap of twenty measures."

VERSE 17

"I smote you . . ."—It was Yahweh Who inflicted the calamities upon them, and He did so for their benefit, to bring home to them a realisation of their state of apathy. It was really an act of mercy on His part, for it kept them from becoming self-confident, self-sufficient and hardened in their attitude. He inflicted these punishments upon them judicially as He had warned He would (Deut. 28:22), and this had come to pass "in His holiness" (Amos 4:2), for He will not tolerate sin.

"Yet ye turned not to Me"—They did not give due consideration to the real cause of their sufferings and reverses, nor consider that Yahweh was punishing them for their good. They had attributed all their difficulties to unfortunate

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reverses, not realising that the poverty of their service to God was the cause of their poverty in the field (see Jer. 5:3-4).

VERSE 18

“Consider now from this day and upward”—In view of Haggai’s explanation of the cause of their past failures, the people were again asked to consider in thought the events of the past fifteen years.

“From the four and twentieth day of the ninth month”—The day the message was delivered to the people (v. 10).

“From the day that the foundation of Yahweh’s temple was laid”—Nearly fifteen years had elapsed since the foundation of the Temple had been laid (see note on v. 15), and the Jews were asked to carefully review that period in mind. Certain incidents would be outstanding as they considered it. They would recall the great joy that was theirs when the foundation was laid (Ezra 3:10-11), then the disappointment and frustration that followed as the work ceased (Ezra 4:23-24), finally the revival that had recently taken place (Ezra 5:1-2) since when the site had been cleared, and “stone had been laid upon stone in the Temple of Yahweh” (Hag. 2:15). They had experienced times of personal de-

pression and difficulties. when crops had failed and the bitterness of defeat had penetrated their very homes. Nor had there been much improvement since they had again taken in hand the work of building the Temple, even though Haggai had promised blessings to them. Nevertheless they labored on in faith.

VERSE 19

“Is the seed yet in the barn?”—Haggai’s message was delivered in the 9th month (v. 10) which approximates to November/December, or the beginning of winter. Obviously the seed was not yet in the barn, nor was there any indication then as to whether a good crop could be expected. But without waiting for the obvious answer to his question, Haggai added the promise of Yahweh: “From this day will I bless you.” The Law promised abundant crops if the people proved obedient (Lev. 26:3; Deut. 28:20), and the prophet called upon them to look for immediate signs of this, in the assurance that they would receive an ample harvest. The exhortation, therefore, was to labor on in the work of the Truth, for Yahweh would supply that which was needful. Such an attitude is always in season (Prov. 3:9-10; Matt. 6:30-34).

It is worthy of note that Haggai’s prophecy indicates an era of universal peace, following widespread tribulation, contemporaneous with the future glory of the house of God. The era of universal trouble is nearly upon us. Peace is sure to come after the passing storms of the latter days, although now universal peace is shrouded in the womb of the future.

A Message to Assure

Chapter 2:20-23

This final message was delivered on the same day as the last one. It showed that in addition to the immediate benefits that would accrue from service to God, there were also future ones of far greater value and significance to consider. Not all of the faithful are assured of present material blessings, but all are assured of the future blessings of the Kingdom if they "endure patiently unto the end." And this realisation is the greatest incentive to labor, bringing clearly to view "the joy set before them" (Heb. 12:2). It is important that God's servants should always look to that end, for there are no unmixed blessings now. Moses declared of Israel: "O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" (Deut. 32:29). When a son of God does that, he is more likely to "acknowledge God" in "all his ways," so that God will "direct his paths" (Prov. 3:6). In Haggai's final message, there was particular encouragement for those who had led the way to the spiritual revival of Israel, and had labored hard among the dust and debris of the ruins that they might perform the will of God, and build to the glory of His name. They are yet to reap the full fruits of their labor.

Future Judgments on Israel's Enemies — Vv. 20-22

The nations surrounding the Jews had vigorously opposed them in their work of rebuilding, and as they were representative of Gentiles in every age, their posterity will come in for special judgment.

VERSE 20

"The four and twentieth day of the month"—This was the same day as the previous message (cp. v. 10).

VERSE 21

"Speak to Zerubbabel"—He was the governor of Jerusalem, and a type of Christ (Ch. 1:1, note). He had led the way in the work of rebuilding and would see the successful completion of his labors. In that, he typed the work of the Lord Jesus (Zech. 4:9-10). His work was accomplished, not by might of man, nor by fleshly power, but through the Spirit of Yahweh of Armies (Zech. 4:6). By that means all difficulties were levelled

and the bitterness of trial was replaced by the joy of triumph (Zech. 4:7). In like manner it is said of the work of the Lord Jesus: "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isa. 53:11). See notes on Zechariah Chapter 4.

"I will shake the heavens and the earth"—This is a repetition of the prediction of v. 6, and in the light of the subsequent verses contrasts the change to be wrought in the Jewish heavens with the destruction to be poured out on Gentile Governments.

VERSE 22

"I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms"—No events in Zerubbabel's time satisfied this prediction, which shall find its fulfilment at the coming of Christ (Luke 1:52) in glory. For similar predictions of that time see Zeph. 3:8; Dan 2:44; Zech. 12:8. The "throne" of kingdoms relates to their rule; the "strength of the kingdoms of the heathen" points to the power

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in opposition to that of Israel and Yahweh.

"I will overthrow the chariots"—Yaweh will destroy all fleshly weapons of war and subdue all war-mongers (Rev. 11:18; Isa. 2:4; Psalm 46:9).

"Those that ride in them"—Those who delight in war (Ps. 68:30; Rev. 11:18).

"The horses and their riders"—In ancient times horses were used exclusively for war, and were obtained from Egypt. They are therefore representative of Gentile military might. The kings of Israel were warned against multiplying horses (Deut. 17:16), and in conformity therewith, Joshua houghed, or destroyed, all the horses taken in battle, and burnt all the chariots of war (Josh. 11:6-9). He therefore accomplished in Canaan what the Lord Jesus will do on a world-wide scale. The "riders on horses" (see also Zech. 10:5) represent those statesmen who seek to guide the destinies of nations. The Apocalypse (Ch. 14:20) represents the blood of those slain in the national judgments as reaching "unto the horse bridles" or to the very leaders who will be guiding the horses: a symbol expressing the overthrow of present world rulers.

"Every one by the sword of his brother"—Mutual slaughter will bring about the annihilation of the forces gathered together for battle at Jerusalem in the Age to come (Zech. 14:13; Ezek. 38:19-23; Hab. 3:14).

Future Blessings For Israel's Sons — V. 23

The "goodness and severity of God" (Rom. 11:22) will be manifested at Armageddon in that whilst destruction will be poured out upon the nations gathered for war the faithful will at last receive their promised inheritance.

VERSE 23

"Zerubbabel My servant"—As

governor of Jerusalem, son of David, and builder of the Temple, he was a man of sign (Zech. 3:8 mg), and typified Christ, the builder of both the spiritual (Eph. 2:20; 1 Cor. 3:11) and literal (Zech. 6:12-13) Temples. The Lord will fulfil this future work as the "servant of Yahweh" (Isa. 42:1, 6; 49:1-7). As His servant, he gave himself completely to perform the will of His father (Ps. 40:6-9), and became His medium in bringing salvation to humanity (Acts 5:31). Note Paul's comments in Phil. 2:5-10.

"As a signet"—A signet is a seal of office or status used by those in authority to authenticate any written document. The allusion to Zerubbabel is particularly appropriate because he was set at the head of the nation in the place of his predecessor, Jeconiah, who was so completely rejected from the monarchy, that Jeremiah was sent with the message from Yahweh: "As I live, saith Yahweh, though Coniah the son of Jehoia-kim King of Judah were the signet upon My right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence" (Jer. 22:24). In his place Zerubbabel was made as Yahweh's signet or authority in the land (see Gen. 41:42; Esth. 3:10; 8:8-10), and became the type of the Lord Jesus, who declared: "All things are delivered unto me of my Father" (Matt. 11:27). In the days of his flesh, the Lord's words and deeds constituted the Divine seal that he was of God (John 6:27); his subsequent death and resurrection were as a Divine seal authenticating the covenants of Promise (Rom. 1:3; 15:8). When Christ returns to the earth, he will exercise such power and authority as to clearly demonstrate that God is with him. Thus he will be as Yahweh's seal or signet, for everything that he will do will be by the authority and power that he has received of the Father (Matt. 28:18).

"I have chosen thee"—This applies not only to Zerubbabel and

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his antitype, the Lord Jesus, but to all the members of the royal house of David. All are in this category with whom He has made "an everlasting covenant," even "the sure mercies of David" (Isa. 55:4). In connection with the building up again of the tabernacle of David, Simeon declared that "God is taking out of the Gentiles a people for His name." The principles of the "call" are clearly shown in that statement. They involve Invitation (God is taking), Separation (out of), and Dedication (for His Name). It is to that end that the call goes forth. The Lord declared: "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44). Men are drawn or called by the power of the Word.

"Saith Yahweh of Hosts" —
Amid all the trials, frustrations and difficulties of life, help and strength

can be obtained from Yahweh. Upon Him we must learn to lean. Judah was taught that lesson through the problems that faced the nation in the days of Haggai. We must learn it today. Soon the storm of which Haggai spoke will burst on the kingdoms of the world, and the nations will be plunged into a catastrophic struggle for survival. But out of the maelstrom of evil will emerge a glorious future: even the Kingdom of God. So it is with the personal storms of life. Let us learn the lesson that they provide opportunities to demonstrate our unswerving loyalty to Yahweh, our recognition that His strength is more than adequate for all our needs, and so seek Him that we may find Him. Then we will learn the meaning of Paul's exhortation: "So we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:6).

Impossibilities become possibilities when God is helping. Thus Paul could say — "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me." But mark! Those only are assisted who recognise the necessity for obedience, and who set to work with a determination to render it. "Yahweh is with you, while ye be with him." Divine help enabled Noah to perform the superhuman work of maintaining his integrity in the midst of a whole godless world; it enabled Jeremiah and Ezekiel to testify during a long course of years in the teeth of a rebellious and blood-thirsty nation; it miraculously brought Israel a three-fold increase of the earth's products on every sixth year, so that God's command concerning the seventh might be observed. Divine help will in like manner enable God's children in this generation to fulfil the precepts given for their rule of conduct. In giving commands, God has taken into consideration the aid He has purposed to afford. He does not mock; that which He has enjoined He will most surely help us to carry through. There is nothing too hard for God. Therefore, in obeying His injunctions, natural consequences must not be taken into account. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong on the behalf of those whose heart is perfect towards him."

— A.T.J.