

THE MINOR PROPHETS

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Chapter 1

Gracious Invitations

The call: "O Israel, return unto the Lord your God; for you have fallen by your iniquity." (Hosea 14:1)

See how different the Lord's ways are from man's! With man, a great offense, a fall, is considered ground for casting one off. How often do we hear of a man who is called a father, that has turned a son or daughter away from home because the child has fallen into sin. Because of this human characteristic, to make a fall into sin a reason for berating a man, people who think that God is like a man, fear to come to Him when they have sinned.

"I am so sinful, I don't believe the Lord can ever receive and forgive me," says the wandering one. Why, that is the very ground on which God bases His call for you to come. Why does He call us to come? Because we have sinned, and not merely sinned, but have fallen by our iniquity.

"Oh well, perhaps Israel had not sinned so much as I have; in fact, I do not believe there was ever so great a sinner in the world as I am."

It is well for each one to think himself the chief of sinners; for when anyone, no matter, who has a just sense of what he really is, he can see more sin in himself than he can ever see in any other

man. The best man must therefore necessarily with all sincerity regard himself as worse than the worst man of whom he has any knowledge. That, however does not make any difference with God's reckoning. But let us see what we can find as to Israel's actual condition when this gracious invitation was uttered.

By comparing Hosea 1:1 and Isaiah 1:1, we find that the two prophets, Isaiah and Hosea, lived and prophesied at the same time. Isaiah's inspired utterance, at the beginning of his ministry was that the people were "laden with iniquity," (Isaiah 1:4) that they were corrupters, and that they were altogether corrupt--as bad as they could be. Of all the kings of Israel, after the division at the death of Solomon, not one was good. "Jeroboam...sinned, and...made Israel sin," (1 Kings 15:30) and the story of each succeeding king is that he was worse than all that were before him. Read the record in the books of Kings. Coming to Ahaz, king of Judah, during whose reign the prophets Isaiah and Hosea prophesied, we find that: "He burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel." (2 Chronicles 28:3)

Then he was greatly troubled, "And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord: this is that king Ahaz. For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him: and he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel." (2 Chronicles 28:22-23)

Moreover he shut up the house of the Lord, and cut in pieces the sacred vessels, and in all the cities of Judah he made high places, to burn incense to other gods. (2 Chronicles 28:24-25) Really, things could not have been worse than they were when God said: "O Israel, return unto the Lord your God; for you have fallen by your iniquity." (Hosea 14:1)

This invitation is the same as, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." (Revelation 22:17)

There is no limitation, no exclusion. No sinner can be too vile, no backslider can have fallen too low, for the Lord to receive and pardon him. "You have fallen by your iniquity." (Hosea 14:1)

That is unqualified. God does not say, "Return, because you haven't fallen very low yet," but simply, "Return, because you have fallen;" and that takes in the fall to the very lowest depths. "This Man receives sinners." (Luke 15:2)

Then give heed to the gracious invitation. The Lord is very gracious, for He tells us just how to come to Him. He says, "Take with you words, and turn to the Lord." (Hosea 14:2)

"But what shall I say? I haven't a word to say for myself." "My iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up." (Psalm 40:12)

Yea, words would fail you, if you had to find them yourself; but the Lord tells you just what to say, so that you can come with boldness to the throne of grace, knowing that your heaven-inspired plea cannot fail. Here are the words that you are to take with you, when you return to the Lord: "Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously." (Hosea 14:2)

That is sufficient; when you have uttered those words from the heart, you may be sure that the prayer is instantly answered. God does not trifle with men, and when He tells us to come to Him with a certain request, and tells us just what to say in order to gain it, we can have no doubt as to the result.

Of course this means confession of sin. The request, "Take away all iniquity," indicates this. We acknowledge that we have sinned, and that everything that God calls sin, is sin. In short, we accept God's estimate of us. This is necessary, in order that we may be made into what He estimates we ought to be. "Return, you backsliding Israel, says the Lord; and I will not cause my anger to fall upon you; for I am merciful, says the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever. Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the Lord your God." (Jeremiah 3:12-13)

See how large a request He tells us to make. "Take away all iniquity." It is just as easy for God to do a great thing, a complete work, as a little thing. In fact the work is already done: "[Christ] gave himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity." (Titus 2:14)

When God does a work, He does it thoroughly. Christ is given for our sins. "Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father." (Galatians 1:3-4)

When we accept that gift, we get the whole of His sinless life in exchange for our sinful life. So God receives us graciously, and takes away all our iniquities at once.

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me;
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.
Just as I am, Thou wilt receive;
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe;
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.
--Charlotte Elliott, Hymn: Just as I Am, 1835.

"Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, You are our gods; for in You the fatherless finds mercy." (Hosea 14:3)

This is simply a recognition of God as the only God, in whom alone there is deliverance. "A horse is a vain thing for safety." (Psalm 33:17)

The nations of earth depend very much upon horses for safety. The Governments of earth send agents abroad to buy up horses for the army. Without horses, an army would be very much crippled, if not useless, and without an army a nation would be helpless; but while "Some will trust in hoes and some in chariots; But we will trust in the name of the Lord our God." (Psalm 20:7, RV)

The Lord often reproved Israel for their dependence on horses, from which we are to learn that in returning to the Lord we are absolutely to depend on Him. For a church or an individual to make any sort of alliance with the world, or to look to earthly Governments for help and support, is virtually to say that God is not sufficient; it is having other gods beside Him.

But would it not be a mere matter of form, without any reason, for us who have been brought up amid Christian surroundings to say, "Neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, You are our gods?" (Hosea 14:3)

We have never fashioned graven images for ourselves to worship. This is true, yet there is great need of our making just the prayer that the Lord here gives us. How often we have made gods of the work of our hands. Many, many times have we regarded with complacent self-satisfaction what we were pleased to call our good works. Who has not at some time in his life imagined that he would get credit for something that he has done? Have we never, after escaping from some danger, congratulated ourselves upon our own

dexterity or shrewdness, and forgotten to give thanks to God? What was that but saying to the work of our hands, "You are our gods"?

The man who has no other gods besides Jehovah, and who never trusts himself, will certainly be saved. It is good to trust in Jehovah, for in Him the fatherless find mercy, whereas mercy is not found in any gods of human devising.

Not what these hands have done
Can save this guilty soul;
Not what this toiling flesh has borne
Can make my spirit whole.
Your work alone, O Christ,
Can ease this weight of sin;
Your blood alone, O Lamb of God,
Can give me peace within.

--Horatius Bonar, Hymn: Not What These Hands Have Done,
1864.

There is a very significant statement at the close of verse 2: "so will we render the calves of our lips." (Hosea 14:2)

The Revised Version, and some others, have it, "So will we render as bullocks the offering of our lips."

The French of Segond has it: "We offer You, instead of bullocks, the homage of our lips."

The idea clearly is, that praise and thanksgiving, that is spoken out of the abundance of the heart, is more acceptable to God than offering of animals, and, moreover, that it was so in the days of Hosea. Remember that this is the Lord's own statement. It was not sacrifice that He ever desired, but faith and love. The verse is very similar to: "By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name." (Hebrews 13:15) "I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the Lord better than an ox or bullock that has horns or hoofs." (Psalm 69:30-31)

We have read the gracious invitation, now listen to the gracious promises: "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for my anger is turned away from them." (Hosea 14:4)

Through the prophet Joel the Lord said, "I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten." (Joel 2:24)

Restoration is the Lord's order. "The Son of man is come to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10)

One saves the lost only by bringing it back again; so the Lord promises to make good all that His people have lost by the fall. He will heal all their backsliding, so that no trace of sin or the curse will remain. The Lord loves His people freely, fallen though they be; and the result of His love for the church is to "present it to himself a

glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (Ephesians 5:27)

Another promise: "I will be as the dew unto Israel: He shall grow [or blossom] as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon." (Hosea 14:5)

A whole lesson is in this promise. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow." (Matthew 6:28)

How do they grow? By the life of God that is in them. The life within makes the external beauty. Their life is their beauty, their clothing. See how the grass lifts up its head, and laughs for very joy of life, as the dew refreshes it. Now the dew is only one way in which God manifests His grace. What the visible dew is to the grass, that God is to His people. He can make them grow "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," (Ephesians 4:13) as easily as He can bring the lily to perfection. Not only will God bless His backslidden, fallen people, but He will make them a blessing to others. He will make the branches of Israel to spread, and: "They that dwell under His shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine." (Hosea 14:7) "The trees of the Lord are full of sap." (Psalm 104:16)

Planted by the river of the water of life, they bring forth their fruit in its season, their leaves do not fade, and whatsoever they do prospers. Their fruit is of God.

Consider these things, and be wise. Remember that great as are the promises of God, so great is the loss of those who reject them. "The ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein." (Hosea 14:9)

The very thing that enables some people to walk, causes others to stumble. It all depends on whether they are willing to stand in it, or are determined to ignore it. Whatever happens, the Lord's way is right. There can be no charge sustained against the One who makes such gracious invitations, and such glorious promises, which He is able also to perform. "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." (Psalm 2:12)--Present Truth, June 22, 1899--Notes on the International Sunday-School Lessons--Hosea 14:1-9

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 2

Sinful Indulgence

The message of Amos the prophet was given in a time of great seeming prosperity. Both the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were victorious in war, winning back from their enemies much of the territory that had been taken away. Jeroboam the second was king over Israel and "He restored the coast of Israel. ... For the Lord saw the affliction of Israel that it was very bitter: for there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel. And the Lord said not that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven: but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash." (2 Kings 14:25-27)

Uzziah reigned over the kingdom of Judah, "and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper. ... And God helped him against the Philistines, and against the Arabians. ... And the Ammonites gave gifts to Uzziah: and his name spread abroad even to the entering in of Egypt; for he strengthened himself exceedingly. ... And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong." (2 Chronicles 26:5,7-8,15)

Neither Were Thankful

But it was the same old, sad story over again. Israel and Judah forgot that it was God who made them rich and strong, and began once more to trust in themselves and their uncertain riches. "For she

did not know that I gave her the corn, and the wine, and the oil, and multiplied unto her silver and gold, which they used for Baal. Therefore will I take back my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will pluck away my wool and my flax which should have covered her nakedness." (Hosea 2:8-9,RV)

Thus spoke Hosea, who prophesied at the same time as Amos.

Lessons Unlearned

In despising the long-suffering of God and forgetting all His benefits, Israel was surely preparing the way for another experience of suffering and oppression, such as that from which they had been lately delivered. The Lord was not willing that the lessons of the past should thus be wasted, and sent His servants the prophets with messages of warning and instruction. These called attention to the patience and mercy of the Lord, as revealed in their past history, denounced the sins into which the people had fallen, and pointed out the inevitable results of continuance in their evil way. "Seek good, and not evil, that you may live: and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you as you say." (Amos 5:14)

An Inspired Herdman

Amos had not been educated as a prophet. He was not declaring God's Word because that was the kind of work he had been brought up to do. When the priest of Bethel told him to get out of Israel and go to Judah if he wanted to prophesy, because Bethel was very well

contented with things as they were, and could not consent to hear anything against the king who supported its false worship, Amos replied that he was not engaged in the work by his own choice, but that God who gave him the message told him where to speak it. Said he, "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a dresser of sycamore trees: And the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel." (Amos 7:14-15,RV)

We Cannot but Speak

The time needed such a man, one who was filled with a solemn sense of the fact that God had given him a message for the people, and that they must hear it. It was no light thing to Amos that the Lord had spoken, and he could not withhold the message from those for whom it was intended. He says, "Will a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey? will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing? Can a bird fall in a snare on the earth, where no gin is set for him? shall a snare spring up from the ground, and have taken nothing at all? Shall the trumpet be blown in a city, and the people not be afraid? shall evil befall a city, and the Lord has not done it? Surely the Lord; God will do nothing, but He reveals His secret unto His servants the prophets. The lion has roared, who will not fear? The Lord God Has Spoken, Who Can But Prophecy?" (Amos 3:4-8)

At Ease in Zion

"Woe to them that are at ease in Zion." (Amos 6:1)

Zion has never been a place for the idle and self-indulgent. It is true that there is rest in the presence of the Lord, but because this is true, no one who truly believes and enters into the rest, can be contented without bringing others to the same knowledge of God's nearness to them, "That they too should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one." (Acts 17:27)

Christ had not held to the riches and glory of heaven, but for our sakes became poor that we might be rich. Israel had been exalted once more among the nations that these might learn how blessed a thing it was to have "God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon Him for;" (Deuteronomy 4:7) and that in the spread of this knowledge, the promise to Abraham should be fulfilled that his seed should be a blessing to all the families of the earth.

Debtors to All Men

Instead, however, of recognizing God in His gifts, and exalting His name among the heathen, Israel resigned itself to the sinful enjoyment of its temporal blessings, unmindful of the crying need of a world that lay in darkness, without God and without hope. (Ephesians 2:12)

Had they carried the knowledge of God to other nations, these would have been subdued by the influence of the Gospel, but they were not, and Israel had only themselves to thank when, in after days, brought into bondage to those heathen nations, they learned how cruel a people could become when unenlightened by the Word of God. Then the work which might have been done in comparative ease, had to be done under a terrible pressure of discouragement and difficulty. It would have been better for them had they gone to the heathen than waited for the heathen to come to them.

Carnal Security

At present they felt secure in the mountain of Samaria. They put far away the evil day, and rejoiced in deeds of violence and shame. Lying on beds of ivory, and stretched on luxurious couches, they feasted on dainties, and sang idle songs to the sound of the viol. They devoted much time to the fine arts, inventing instruments of music. Wine flowed freely at their banquets, and fragrant ointments perfumed their persons.

But the anger of the Lord was against them because their one thought was to use all His gifts for their own gratification, and in their self-centered pleasures they were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Like Elijah's disturbing message, there came to them the stern reproof of the herd-man Amos, that for these things, "shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the revelry of them that stretched themselves shall pass away. The Lord God has sworn

by himself, says the Lord, the God of hosts: I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein." (Amos 6:7-8,RV)

Unacceptable Worship

The services of the temple had taken on new magnificence in those days of prosperity. The newly invented instruments of music were introduced into the public worship, but the Lord was not pleased with them. "I hate, I despise your feasts. ... Take away from me the noise of your songs; for I will not hear the melody of your viols." (Amos 5:21,23,RV)

What God desired was that they should receive from Him the righteousness that was bestowed as freely as the corn and wine. "Let judgment roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." (Amos 5:24,RV)

But Israel did not appreciate the best gifts of all, and failing to receive these, they also lost the lesser gifts. The promise is given to us that if we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, all necessary things shall certainly be added. "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:31-33)

The Present Situation

The situation now is the same as it was in the days of Amos. There are judgments waiting to be poured out, not upon one nation only, but upon all nations. Men put far away the evil day, and there are many at ease in Zion. "When they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction comes upon them...and they shall not escape." (1 Thessalonians 5:3)

Some are scoffing at the promise of His coming, and "As in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." (Matthew 24:38-39)

God's servants should now be proclaiming His Word, calling on men to "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment is come;" (Revelation 14:7) to recognize God in His works and receive life and righteousness at His hands, that the prophecy of Amos may be fulfilled to them, "I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be plucked up out of their land which I have given them, says the Lord your God." (Amos 9:15)--
Present Truth, September 1, 1898--Amos 6:1-8

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Chapter 3

The Story of Jonah

Jonah lived during the reign of Jeroboam II, for we read in the account of what Jeroboam did that: "He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He spoke by the hand of His servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gath-Hepher." (2 Kings 14:25)

As was related in our last lesson, "Hazael, king of Syria, oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz;" (2 Kings 13:22) and Elisha, just before his death, had prophesied to Joash, Israel's deliverance from Syria. But as Joash, in obeying the prophet's word to smite with the arrows upon the ground, had shown his lack of persistence in smiting only three times, whereas he should have smitten till directed to hold, the prophet said to him, "You should have smitten five or six times; then had you smitten Syria till you had consumed it: whereas now you shall smite Syria but thrice." (2 Kings 13:19)

Accordingly Joash smote Syria three times, and no more; and then it fell to Jeroboam II to complete the deliverance of Israel from the oppressions of Syria. "For the Lord saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter: for there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel. And the Lord said not that He would blot

out the name of Israel from under heaven; but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash." (2 Kings 14:26-27)

And it was the prophet Jonah that directed, encouraged, and strengthened Jeroboam in his appointed work, because the Lord was gracious to Israel and had compassion on them, "because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." (2 Kings 13:23)

Jeroboam, the son of Joash, reigned from 827 BC to 786, and it was in the former part of his reign that Jonah prophesied.

1. Because, as we have seen, it was at the word of Jonah that victory was given to Jeroboam, and that Israel recovered his possessions; and

2. Because of these successes Israel became exalted, and then Amos prophesied Israel's captivity and destruction. (See Amos 7:7-17)

And Amos says he prophesied "in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake." (Amos 1:1)

Uzziah began to reign in the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam, which would be in the year 800 BC; and this would leave only fourteen years of the reign of Jeroboam, so that Amos prophesied between the years 800 and 786 BC. Therefore Jonah's prophesying

in the early years of Jeroboam's reign, must have been from 827 BC down to about 810 BC.

Nineveh, to which Jonah was commanded to go, was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. It was situated on the River Tigris, 36° 20' north latitude, 43° 10' east longitude, and was 600 miles from Jonah's home. Vul-lush III was king of the city of Nineveh and the empire of Assyria from 810 to 781 BC, and it is most likely that it was in his reign that Jonah was sent on this mission to Nineveh. It may have been in the reign of Vul-lush's predecessor, Shamas-Vul, who reigned from 823-810. We cannot tell yet exactly in which it was; but we may be almost certain that it was in the reign of one of these two kings that Jonah was sent to Nineveh. Vul-lush had great success in all his expeditions; he extended his dominions in almost every direction, and it is most likely that the wealth acquired from the tribute of all the nations round about had induced that state of luxury and dissipation which called for destruction unless immediate repentance was shown.

Therefore the Lord said to Jonah, "Arise go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me." (Jonah 1:2)

The Lord has left no nation to itself without full opportunity to know and serve Him. Here His prophet is sent to the capital of Assyria, whose empire then ruled from Egypt and the Great Sea to Central Asia, and from the Persian Gulf to the mountains of Armenia. Before this, His prophets had spoken directly to, and had

even anointed, a king of Syria. Afterward He spoke in a dream, and then by His prophet, to the great Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon; and Nebuchadnezzar published a letter to all people, nations, and languages that he "thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the high God has wrought toward [him]." (Daniel 4:2)

From Jeremiah the Lord sent messages to Edom, and Moab, and Ammon, and Tyre, and Sidon. (Jeremiah 27:3-7) He spoke to Cyrus and to Alexander the Great. We repeat, God has left no nation without a knowledge of himself, and no nation has ever been left to itself without warning.

But Jonah was not willing to carry the Lord's message to this perishing city. "Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord." (Jonah 1:3)

Nineveh lay about six hundred miles to the east, and Jonah started to go about three thousand miles to the westward; for Tarshish was on the southwest coast of Spain. But Jonah was open-hearted about it; he did not pretend, as many people now do, to be obeying the Lord by going directly opposite to what the Lord told him. He was disobedient, and he intended it to be considered so.

But now, thousands of people, in effect, do just as Jonah did, and then try to convince themselves that they are obeying the Lord. The Lord says to all people, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work." (Exodus 20:10)

Thousands of people will work all day the seventh day, and then do no work on the first day, and pretend that in this they are obeying the commandment of God. But to rest on the first day of the week is no more obedience to the commandment of God to keep the Sabbath than it was obedience for Jonah to go to Tarshish when the Lord told him to go to Nineveh. If you are going to obey the Lord, do it; and if you are determined to disobey, do that; but don't try to pass off disobedience for obedience, and so deceive yourself. "And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us." (Deuteronomy 6:25) "[Jonah] ... went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. But the Lord sent out a great wind." (Jonah 1:3-4)

This was a euroclydon, such as struck the ship on which Paul was being taken a prisoner to Rome. "And there was a mighty tempest in the sea. ... Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep." (Jonah 1:4-5)

Jonah seems to have felt perfectly safe, although he knew he was disobeying God. So do many people. And, as then, innocent persons are thrown into trial and distress because of their careless disobedience. "So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, what do you mean, O sleeper? arise, call upon your God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not." (Jonah 1:6)

Then they cast lots to find whose was the fault that the storm was upon them, and the lot fell upon Jonah. "Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray you, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is your occupation? and whence come you? what is your country? and of what people are you? And he said unto them, I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which has made the sea and the dry land. Then were the men exceedingly afraid." (Jonah 1:8-10)

They knew that the God who made the sea and the dry land must be above all gods, and so when they heard of Him, they were "exceedingly afraid."

Then, knowing that Jonah was the cause of all their trouble, "They said unto him, What shall we do unto you, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea grew more and more tempestuous [margin]. And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea...for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you. Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not." (Jonah 1:11-13)

Even against the evidence of the lot, and the convincing word of Jonah, the men labored hard to deliver themselves rather than pitch him into the sea; but it was all no use; overboard he had to go. So the men "cried unto the Lord, and said, We beseech You, O Lord, we beseech You, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for You, O Lord, have done as it pleased

You. So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea; and the sea ceased from her raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows." (Jonah 1:14-15)

So the Lord turned Jonah's rebellion into good for those who knew not the Lord, and taught them of himself. "Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." (Jonah 1:17)

This part of the story is just as true as is any other. Jesus makes mention of this very verse of Jonah, in His preaching. And, having the endorsement of Christ, we know that it is as true as any other of His words, and they are all absolutely true; although the translation in the New Testament, which gives the word "whale," is not justifiable. The original says, "The Lord had prepared a great fish." (Jonah 1:17)

And a great fish was what it was. But because a whale is a great fish, it does not follow at all that this was a whale. There are great fish in the Mediterranean that can swallow not only a man, but a horse or a buffalo. In one such was found the whole body of a man in complete armor. In one was found a whole horse. In one was found the skin of a whole buffalo, which had been thrown overboard from the very ship which caught the fish. (See Smith's Dictionary, Art. "Whale.")

It was nothing strange or wonderful at all that such a great fish should swallow Jonah; and that the Lord should preserve him unhurt, and was no more wonderful than to preserve the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace, or Daniel in the den of hungry lions.--Signs of the Times, October 29, 1885--Notes on the International Lesson, November 8--Jonah 1:1-17

A.T. Jones

Chapter 4

Nineveh's Repentance

Last week's lesson ended with Jonah in the fish's belly. Then he began to pray. In fact, he began to pray as soon as he was cast into the sea; for he says: "For You had cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all your billows and your waves passed over me. Then I said, I am cast out of your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple. ... When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto You, into your holy temple." (Jonah 2:3-4,7)

It often happens that some such upsetting as this is necessary to bring men to see themselves. David said, "Before I was afflict I went astray: but now have I kept your word." (Psalm 119:67)

Then he says: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn your statutes." (Psalm 119:71)

The whole of Psalm 107 is made up of instances of men being brought by dangers, afflictions, etc., to acknowledge God, and of calls upon men to "praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men." (Psalm 107:8,14,21,31)

Yet it is to be feared that, in most cases, after the Lord at such times has heard their cries and delivered them, they remember Him, at best, for only a little while, and turn again to folly. But Jonah well

says: "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy." (Jonah 2:8) "Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." (Hebrews 12:11)

Jonah's repentance was genuine. He was ready to obey God, and he said, "I will sacrifice unto You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord. And the Lord spoke unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land." (Jonah 2:9-10) "And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid you." (Jonah 3:1)

"Preach the preaching that I bid you," is the Lord's command to every preacher. "Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto you receive in your heart, and hear with your ears. ... and tell them, Thus says the Lord God; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear." (Ezekiel 3:10-11) "I charge you therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom; Preach the word." (2 Timothy 4:1-2)

That which the Lord says is the only thing that is right. It may not always be the most pleasant thing to speak, nor the most pleasant thing for men to hear, but it is the best thing to speak, and it is the best thing for men to hear. "Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey." (Jonah 3:3)

Nineveh was built by Asshur, a grandson of Noah, (Genesis 10:11) and at this time was the greatest city in the world, containing about 600,000 people. It was the capital of the Assyrian Empire, which had spread its rule from the Tigris to the Mediterranean Sea, and from the Black Sea to the Persian Gulf. "And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them." (Jonah 3:4-5)

The message reached the king, and he too joined the general fear. He not only joined in it, but issued a decree that the good work should go on. "For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands." (Jonah 3:6-8)

This was genuine repentance. The Saviour declared it to be so, and that these men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment and condemn the generation to whom He preached. "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because

they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here." (Matthew 12:41)

We have, therefore, the testimony of Jesus that the men of Nineveh repented. The word which John the Baptist, and Jesus, and Peter, and all the apostles preached, was, "Repent." (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; Acts 2:38; 17:30; 26:20) And by the action of the Ninevites, it is shown that repentance is not only in word, not only in fasting and prayer, but this with turning every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in his hands. "Put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well." (Isaiah 1:16-17)

Anything short of turning from evil and of wanting to do better, it is of no avail until they really do better. And all who do so God will receive and forgive as really as He did the men of Nineveh. "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that He had said that He would do unto them; and He did it not." (Jonah 3:10) "But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry." (Jonah 4:1)

Jonah thought all his credit as a prophet, or even as a man, was forfeited. He had told the people that the city should be destroyed, and now the Lord was not going to do it, and he was therefore "very angry." It seems that he had told the Lord as much before he left his own country; for now he says: "O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish." (Jonah 4:2)

From this it appears that when the Lord first told Jonah to arise and go to Nineveh and cry against it, Jonah had said to Him, in substance,

"If I go up Nineveh and tell them the city shall be overthrown, they will stop sinning and turn to the Lord, and then You will not overthrow it; and so if the city is not to be overthrown anyhow, I might as well stay in my own country, or anywhere else; therefore I will flee to Tarshish."

He did not think that if the city was to be destroyed anyway it was indeed useless for him to go. Jonah apparently cared more for his reputation than he did for all the souls in Nineveh, and thought that the Lord should turn a deaf ear to all the cries of the people, so that Jonah's word might be performed in spite of all. "So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city." (Jonah 4:5)

Then, "the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head." (Jonah 4:6) from the heat; and the next day the gourd withered, and a vehement east wind "and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted," (Jonah 4:8) and he wished that he might die, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live. ... Then said the Lord, You have had pity on the gourd, for which you have not labored, neither made it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night; And should not I

spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six-score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" (Jonah 4:8,10-11)

There the record closes. Jonah made no further answer. It is queer that he could not see and rejoice in the mercy of God, in the first place; that the wicked people would not turn without warning; that unless they did turn they must perish; and that the warning alone could save them. But the Lord was patient and gentle with him, and kindly taught him the lesson which he was slow to discern. "Who is a God like unto You, that pardons iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retains not His anger for ever, because He delights in mercy." (Micah 7:18)--Signs of the Times, November 5, 1885--Notes on the International Lesson, November 15--Jonah 3:1-10

A.T. Jones

Chapter 5

The Bounds of Heathenism

These bounds are set by the word of God; that word alone defines what is heathenism and what is not. Only by that word can be determined whether the principles by which our lives are governed are heathen, or whether they are Christian. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (Micah 6:6-7)

Doubtless we would not think of presuming to worship God by such acts as are herein enumerated; yet what we do offer Him as worship may fall quite as far short of that worship which is in spirit and in truth.

The worship referred to by the prophet is heathenism. Heathen worship is not inconsistent with the retention of forms and ceremonies instituted by God, or of those which are approximate to them. God instituted sacrifices as an essential feature of His worship, and it was doubtless from these that all other sacrificial ceremonies were borrowed.

The heathen looked no further in their worship than the sacrifice itself, and attributed to it all the virtue of obedience to the Divine instructions. It was this that made them heathen. They lost faith, which looked beyond the form and ceremony to the Lamb of God, in whom alone there was virtue for mankind. Heathenism is simply worship not of faith.

This being gone, and human reasoning and speculation having taken its place, perversion of the forms of worship followed as a matter of course, in proportion as the human intellect endeavoured to give them a meaning. God came to be regarded as a being to be appeased by the shedding of blood, or--by what was held as its equivalent--the taking of life. Men thought to purchase His favor, and measured the probability of success by the value of the sacrifice which they offered. And thus it came to pass that they offered the fruit of their bodies--their own children--for the sin of their souls. They made their sons and their daughters to "pass through the fire," (2 Kings 17:17) or sacrificed them upon the burning altar. (2 Kings 3:27) It was the most valuable offering they knew how to make, and as such, in their view, the most acceptable. And that view was but the logical outgrowth of the human mind, working upon a system of worship without faith. And thus the very sacrifices by which they thought to atone for sin only added tenfold to it. The word of God declares, "whatsoever is not of faith is sin." (Romans 14:23)

Without faith there is no real sight of the Lamb of God, and without the sight of Him all forms of worship lose their meaning. Then come in human reasoning, philosophy, and tradition, by which

the spiritual sight is utterly darkened, and the commandments of God made of none effect. It was thus that the Jews had become actual heathen in the days of Christ; it is thus that many have become heathen in our own day who imagine themselves Christians. Every individual can determine his own position and the character of his religion by an examination of God's word. That word is the rule of faith, and "whatsoever is not of faith is sin." (Romans 14:23)

It is faith alone that sets the bounds to heathenism.--Present Truth, March 7, 1895--Micah 6:6-7

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 6

The Desire of All Nations

Two kings have reigned in Persia since the period of our last lesson,--See Article 3, "Rebuilding the Temple," Present Truth, August 24, 1899, in the section, "Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther." and one of them, Artaxerxes in response to complaints to assist those who were not allowed to assist in rebuilding the temple, has given orders that the work of restoration is stopped, "So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius, king of Persia." (Ezra 4:24)

In that year, Haggai and Zechariah began to prophesy unto Judah and engaged them to go on with the work of rebuilding the temple.

It is evident from the 1st chapter of Haggai that the people had become discouraged. They were saying that the time had not come for the Lord's house to be built. Yet they were building goodly houses for themselves. It was just as true then as it is now that those who seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness will find all other necessary things added to them. The prophet called the people to consider their ways. He reminded them. "You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but you have not enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink, you clothe yourself, but there is none warm; and he that earns wages earns wages to put it into a bag with holes. ... Why? says the Lord of hosts. Because of

my house that is waste, and you run every man unto his own house."
(Haggai 1:6,9)

We may find in this lesson an explanation of much of the misfortune that attends the plans of men in these days. A lack of liberality toward the cause of God is no economy. "There is that withholds more than is meet but it tends to poverty. ... He that waters shall be watered also himself." (Proverbs 11:24-25)

It is true that there were a great many very serious obstacles in the way of building the temple, but because of this the people were not justified in concluding that it was not yet time to build the Lord's house. Faith is that which connects us with God. No one can come to Him who does not believe Him. Hence it is important that faith shall be able to endure testing and trial.

Men would like to escape this experience and go right into heaven without a trial, but if they did, it would not be heaven very long. Israel desired to go straight from Egypt into the Promised Land, but till the influences of Egypt and the love for the ways were taken out of their hearts they would have turned Canaan itself into a copy of Egypt.

In the building of the second temple, God was not so anxious to see the completion of an erection of wood and stone, as to see in the hearts of His people that preparation for a pure and spiritual worship which would make it possible for Him to bless them. The people had not arrived at this state, and it was necessary that they should be

schooled and disciplined by the trying of their faith, that this being much more precious than gold that perishes, or even the structure of a magnificent temple, might be found unto praise and honor and glory.

For this reason, they were tried, to see whether, in the face of difficulty and temptation, they would still seek first the kingdom of God, or make the food and raiment of chief account. That they did the latter, showed them lacking in the first principles of the service of God, but they were not for this rejected. They needed instruction, and prophets were sent to teach them the right way.

The words spoken by these prophets are for us also, that we may not make the mistake of letting the service of God become secondary to anything else. Nothing is more foolish than for a man to weigh his chances of getting a living against the call to obey God. It is true now, as it was in Haggai's day, that faith must be tested, but there is no question about the Word of God being sure. The only uncertain element is our confidence in that Word. When we believe it and obey it with all our heart, our welfare is assured, for it rests upon the security of promises which cannot be broken. We must learn now to trust God's Word, even in the face of adverse circumstances, for the unbelieving and fearful never enter the city of God.

Even after the Jews had set to work on the temple, their hearts were discouraged when they remembered how far short it fell of approaching the splendor of Solomon's temple. Some of the people

had seen this before the captivity, and they despondingly compared these two.

But this was a small matter. The Lord sent a message by Haggai to all the people of the land bidding them work and be of good courage. The most splendid temple that men could have built would have fallen far short of God's grand purpose. This was that men themselves should be His temple. "Thus says the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that you build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?" (Isaiah 66:1)

Solomon had recognized how impossible it was to build a habitation meet for the God who had created all things. In his prayer of dedication he had said, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You; how much less this house that I have built?" (1 Kings 8:27)

God's chosen dwelling place is not in temples made with hands. He himself has constructed a temple, a living one, in which He may reveal His glory. "Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you. The temple of God is holy, which temple you are." (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

We cannot make ourselves holy; God has done that already; but we can defile the temple of God by enthroning idols in the holy place where God has chosen to dwell. The sacredness of the human body can only be measured by the holiness of Him who dwells

there. "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a humble and contrite spirit." (Isaiah 57:15)

But in this same verse, we read, "Thus says the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity." (Isaiah 57:15)

Think how much is brought into God's temple. There is the loftiness and height of God, as well as His eternity. So we read that we are to comprehend the length and depth and breadth and height of the love of Christ, that we might be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:18-19) God will infinitely enlarge the life that is submitted to Him, so that it shall be a fit temple for himself in every respect.

This was the truth which God desired to teach Israel. So long as they got no farther than to build Him a temple of wood and stone, it was evidence that they could not see His purpose or enter into it. "The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing." (Hebrews 9:8)

The lesson will be learned when God's people enter the New Jerusalem, for John says, "And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." (Revelation 21:22)

There is no shadow needed there of the good things to come, for the good things have come. Then we know even as also we are

known. (1 Corinthians 13:12) "The tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them." (Revelation 21:3)

The relation between God and His people, in their perfect union, is typified by the relation of the bridegroom and the bride. These are one flesh, yet each can see the other as a separate person. In a perfect marriage there is perfect union so that both lives are merged in one, yet the happiness is wonderfully increased by reason of the separate existence of the loved one. Thus not only do the heart and will and judgment find enjoyment, but also the senses that convey impressions from the inner life. So, "as in a glass, darkly," (1 Corinthians 13:12) does the Lord instruct us how we may be temples for His indwelling, and yet see His face, and find in Him our temple, wherein we may dwell always, and go no more out. "At that day you shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." (John 14:20)

This was the truth which God spoke to the Jews through Haggai, if they had had ears for it. "I am with you, says the Lord of hosts: According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so my Spirit remains among you." (Haggai 2:4-5)

God does not withdraw His Spirit from men, though they grieve it more, and resist its working. (Psalm 139:7-10) He dwelt in Israel, and that fact made them a holy people unto the Lord their God. (Deuteronomy 7:6) Now the Lord assures Judah that His Spirit remains among them still; therefore they are holy, if they will but acknowledge it.

The same thing is true today. Men have lost the knowledge of God and think that to be saved, they must purify themselves. But, "in returning and rest shall you be saved." (Isaiah 30:15)

It is true that God requires holiness, but how shall it be gained? God sanctifies every place where He dwells, and what men need to learn is that God does not cast off, but that He dwells in them still, and therefore they are holy. The holy place may be defiled, the sanctuary trodden underfoot, but He who dwells there can cleanse it, and He alone.

We are called to rest in a work which has been completed from the foundation of the world; (Hebrews 4:3) and to show our faith in God's finished work, by resting on the seventh day, whereon God rested from all His works. The Sabbath is a sign between God and His people, "that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctifies them." (Ezekiel 20:12)

Because God has formed every man for His own dwelling place, and implanted in every soul desires that can only be satisfied by the fullness of God dwelling within, Christ is truly "the Desire of all nations." (Haggai 2:7)

Men are ever in a state of unrest, seeking variety for satisfaction in the things of this world, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." (1 John 2:16)

But, as we have seen, man was made for "the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity;" (Isaiah 57:15) consequently nothing short of this gives lasting satisfaction. The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest; there is no peace for them; (Isaiah 57:20-21) because they do not receive the one thing that brings peace and rest,-the fullness of God.

Do we hunger and thirst after something we have never yet attained? It is the crying out of our heart and our flesh after God, like a thirsty land. (Psalm 63:1) Perhaps we have some ambition or longing, which, if we can only get it satisfied, will, we think, be all we desire. It is not so. Let none grasp longer after fleeting shadows, but take the substance that is freely offered, and which makes the receiver "satisfied with favor, and full with the blessing of the Lord." (Deuteronomy 33:23)

The highest stage of Christian life is to be "filled," and by the infinite greatness of that which fills, we may learn the insatiable character of the desire which God has placed in men. It is folly to think of finding satisfaction in the broken cisterns of this world. "I will fill this house with glory." (Haggai 2:7)

It was to this building, though much enlarged by Herod, that Christ came so many times in His earthly life. The Son of God, whose glory could not be contained by the heavens and the earth, filled the temple with His sacred presence. The mere adorning with silver and gold was nothing compared with this. "In this place will I give peace, says the Lord of hosts." (Haggai 2:9)

Christ, came to give peace to every restless, unsatisfied, longing heart. Malachi foretold that the Messiah, whom Israel desired, should suddenly come to His temple, but: "Who shall stand when He appears?" (Malachi 3:2)

Jesus Christ has come to the temple which was built in Haggai's time, but that does not fulfill the prophecy in its completeness. "Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations." (Haggai 2:6)

The Lord will come to His temple, the men and women who are His dwelling-place, and fill them with glory. But how will it affect them? "Who may abide the day of His coming? for He is like a refiner's fire." (Malachi 3:2)

Those who have defiled His sanctuary with their detestable things, will desire to be hidden from the wrath of the Lamb. His glory is to them a consuming fire; and they are "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power." (2 Thessalonians 1:9)

It is not that they did not obey His law. They "obey not the Gospel." (2 Thessalonians 1:8)

The Gospel declared that they were the holy temple of God, and made known to them His sanctifying rest in the Sabbath, but they

would have none of it. God is no respecter of persons, and it is His life that has been revealed in all mankind. Those who have confessed that Christ has come in their flesh (1 John 4:2) and have acknowledged Him in all their ways, (Proverbs 3:6) when He appears in His glory, (Matthew 25:31) are made like Him, for they see Him as He is. (1 John 3:2) "He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe," (2 Thessalonians 1:10) but the disobedient are unable to bear the revealing of His glory. Christ must fill all things, and it is for those whom He has chosen for His dwelling-place to decide whether He shall purify them from sin now, that they may be without spot or wrinkle or any such thing; (Ephesians 5:26-27) or whether they will forget that they are not their own, (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) defile His temple, (1 Corinthians 3:17) and be consumed when He gathers "out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity." (Matthew 13:41)--Present Truth, August 31, 1899--Notes on the International Sunday-School Lessons--Haggai 2:1-9

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 7

The Source of Power

In the visions granted to Zechariah, one of which is the subject of the lesson, he was taken behind the scenes and shown the powerful agencies which were at work on behalf of Israel. In the 3rd chapter is the history in brief of the struggle between God's people and their enemies, with its outcome. Satan appears as the real adversary, but in spite of his efforts, the high priest who represents Israel, is cleansed from defilement and clothed with change of raiment.

Israel was unconscious of much that was taking place in connection with their experience. They saw the attacks of their enemies and walked in fear of the machinations of their hostile neighbors, but these things did not by any means complete the picture. The powers of heaven were leagued with them, and while Satan seemed often to triumph to outward appearance, in reality the adversary was compelled to stand by, powerless under the Divine rebuke, while God wrought for His people in causing their iniquity to pass from them.

There is a lesson for us in this experience. We are not to fix our attention upon earthly difficulties. It is true that Satan will find numerous instruments through whom he can work to tempt and harass us, but we may always rejoice in the confidence that his seeming triumph is but a hollow one. Christ is the Captain of our

salvation, and He never stands aside from our spiritual conflicts, His strength is available to make us more than conquerors, (Romans 8:37) and "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen." (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)

As the angels of God, although invisible to human eyes, were yet all the while encamped about Elisha, (2 Kings 6:17; Psalm 34:7) so in times of apparently overwhelming attack, we may remember that Christ has promised never to leave or forsake us, (Hebrews 13:5) and that: "[God] always causes us to triumph in Christ." (2 Corinthians 2:14)

Again, in the 4th chapter Zechariah is shown that, while success depends entirely upon the Spirit of God, abundant provision is made for every one to receive this in its fullness. The prophet was shown a candlestick with seven lamps. There was no need for any of the lamps to become extinguished, because a pipe connected each with olive trees, which poured the oil out of themselves through the pipes into the lamps.

The candlestick with seven lamps stood for God's people. In the earthly sanctuary, the lights were to be kept always burning before the veil, showing that Israel was always in the presence and thought of God. "It shall be a statute for ever unto their generations on the behalf of the children of Israel." (Exodus 27:21)

When John was shown the sanctuary in heaven, and saw the Saviour in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, it was explained to him that the seven candlesticks were the seven churches. "The seven candlesticks which you saw are the seven churches." (Revelation 1:20)

God's people are the light of the world: ""You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid." (Matthew 5:14) "That you may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom you shine as lights in the world." (Philippians 2:15)

And it was solely that the light might shine that the temple was now to be rebuilt. God's ambition for His people is expressed in the words, "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burns." (Isaiah 62:1)

The two olive trees it was told Zechariah by the angel, were "the two anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth." (Zechariah 4:14)

They are referred to again in the 11th chapter of Revelation as God's two witnesses, also as two candlesticks. "And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of

the earth. (Revelation 11:3-4) "There are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit and the water and the blood: and these three agree in one." (1 John 5:8)

As these three agree in one, we may conclude that the two witnesses certainly refer to the life of Christ, as revealed in:

- the Spirit, which testifies of Him; (John 16:14)
- the Word or Water, which is himself, the Water of Life; (John 1:1) and
- the Blood, which is the life of Christ. "He that believes on the Son of God has the witness in himself." (1 John 5:10)

And so also, whatever the two olive trees represented, they poured out of themselves into the lamps. We see, therefore, that there were infinite possibilities before the children of Israel at this time, and the vision was given that they might know something of the riches of the glory that was bestowed so freely upon them. A great work could be done if they would only learn what was the true nature of God's work, and not get the false idea that spiritual receptivity and success meant much outward display.

It is evident that many were as yet laboring under this mistake, for they were despising the day of small things. Their thoughts were altogether upon externals. Had a vast army of workmen been at their command, and a splendid structure in course of rapid erection, they

would have felt that things were going prosperously, but because these outward indications were lacking, they set down the whole thing as a comparative failure. They did not know how they might work the works of God, and so the instruction was given: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts." (Zechariah 4:6)

With sufficient gold they might have erected a building which would be unsurpassable in architectural splendor, but all the gold in the world could not buy one living stone for the temple which God was building. Every other agency but the Spirit was valueless and powerless for the work.

Christian workers need to keep this truth in mind. When God has given success to some effort, it is often felt that if only so many more men could be engaged in the work, so much more good could be accomplished. But this is a fallacy which is based on a mistake. It is "not by might" (margin: "an army"). It is not by one man or a multitude that God effects anything.

Therefore when we would attain greater success in God's work, we should not seek for more men, but for more of God's Spirit. If we get this, the question of more workers will take care of itself. When the first thought is to get more men with a view to success, the real thing to be desired is partly obscured, and when the increase in men is obtained, it is often discovered that there has been no increase in real efficiency. On the other hand, the obtaining of more of God's Spirit will always ensure greater success.

The same principle applies with respect to every other means by which men think to advance the kingdom of God. The power of numbers, the influence of the press, the lever of wealth and worldly patronage are much sought after, but it is not by these that success comes. Even when the desire for them is satisfied, they bring leanness into the soul.

God's Spirit, His own character and power, are the one means by which His work of saving men can be carried forward. And the Spirit is given freely, without measure. Zechariah saw this in the vision of the two olive trees. No promise is more clear or more emphasized than the promise of the Spirit. Christ declared that if earthly fathers knew how to give good gifts to their children, much more would our Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. (Luke 11:13)

Notice the expression, "This is the Word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel." (Zechariah 4:6)

What was the word? Why the very thing it spoke of. God did not say to them, "You can do nothing without my Spirit," and then leave them to hunt for it. The pouring out of the Spirit was the word to Israel that it was the thing they needed. We may know whenever God tells us that we need anything, that we have that very thing in the Word which declares our need. No word of God is given to discourage. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were

written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." (Romans 15:4)

Without God's Spirit, as we have seen, numbers and wealth would have availed Israel nothing, for their enemies were stronger than they in both respects. But with God's Spirit working for them, the more opposition they met, the better they would get on. Everything would work together for their good. The difficulties in their way were compared by God himself to a "great mountain," (Zechariah 4:7) but that great mountain, by the working of God's Spirit would become a plain before Zerubbabel, and all that would be left of it would simply serve for a headstone for the temple, to be brought forth "with shoutings [of] Grace, grace." (Zechariah 4:7)

Never be afraid of the mountains of difficulty that stand in your path, or sigh for might or power to remove them. God's Spirit is poured into you with an unceasing flow from the Divine reservoir, and by its working the mountain will be brought low. Out of it shall come that which is needed to crown the completed structure of your life. Where the mountain stood will be a plain, and the massive strength and solidity which blocked your path is transferred into your own life, making you an enduring monument of grace.--Present Truth, September 7, 1899--Notes on the International Sunday-School Lessons--Zechariah 4:1-14

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 8

The Day of Small Things

"Who has despised the day of small things?" (Zechariah 4:10)

Not the Lord, for He makes use of small things to accomplish His purposes. "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are." (1 Corinthians 1:27-28)

In harmony with this, the Lord says: "Fear not, you worm Jacob, and you few men of Israel ... Behold I will make you a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: you shall thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shall make the hills as chaff." (Isaiah 41:14-15,margin) "A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the Lord will hasten it in his time." (Isaiah 60:22)

Nothing is too small for the Lord to pay attention to it. If God did not care for small things He would neglect the principal part of the world, because there are far more small things than large ones. Indeed, even the large things are composed of small particles.

God's infinite greatness manifests itself in this, that He can personally superintend an infinite number of details, without being worried or flurried. Where there is the greatest weakness, there does He exhibit His greatest power. Therefore, "Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, my way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Have you not known? have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary? there is no searching of His understanding. He gives power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increases strength." (Isaiah 40:27-29) "I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinks upon me: You are my help and my deliverer." (Psalm 40:17)--Present Truth, February 24, 1898--Original title: Back Page--Zechariah 4:10

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 9

Unacceptable Service / Lessons in Giving

The title of this lesson is simply, "Lessons in Giving," but the first portion of Scripture has no reference to giving, but to the service of the sanctuary, so that the lesson properly comes under two heads. Both portions of Scripture are so pertinent that they need to be reprinted, that everybody may read them. "A son honors his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a Father, where is my honor? and if I be a Master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And you say, Wherein have we despised your name? You offer polluted bread upon my altar; and you say, Wherein have we polluted You? In that you say, The table of the Lord is contemptible. And if you offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto your governor; will he be pleased with you, or accept your person? says the Lord of hosts. And now, I pray you, beseech God that He will be gracious unto us; this has been by your means; will he regard your persons? says the Lord of hosts. Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do you kindle fire on my altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand. For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering; for my name shall be great among the heathen, says the Lord of hosts." (Malachi 1:6-11)

Whoever reads the book of Malachi entirely through will see that while it is addressed to all Israel, the priests are especially singled out. The people had departed from the Lord, but it was the priests that had led the way. "The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But you are departed out of the way; you have caused many to stumble at the law; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts." (Malachi 2:7-8)

A great responsibility rests upon religious teachers and leaders. Apostasy begins at the head, rather than at the foot. It is the elders that draw away disciples after them. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." (Acts 20:28-30)

If the people are going astray, be sure that the priests are still farther astray. Christ said that He sanctified himself, in order that His followers might be truly sanctified. "And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." (John 17:19)

That is the true way, but it is seldom done. All reforms among the people have to be carried out in spite of the leaders of the

people. The people are ready to follow the light, but they are hindered by the teachers of the law, who take away the key of knowledge, and will not enter in themselves, nor allow others to do so. (Luke 11:52) If a religious teacher or one in authority in the church is not far ahead of the people, leading them along, then he is far behind them, dragging them back. "You offer polluted bread upon my altar," (Malachi 1:7) says the Lord. How did they do this? How did it become polluted? By being in the unclean hands of the priests. "Thus says the Lord of hosts: Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying, If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, says the Lord; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean." (Haggai 2:11-14)

A clean person cannot make a thing clean by touching it; but an unclean person defiles everything that he touches. So the priests, who had unclean hands, made every offering polluted, even though it was clean when it came into their hands. "Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do you kindle fire on my altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand." (Malachi 1:10)

This scripture has often been quoted as showing how unwilling people were to do any service unless they were paid for it; but such use of the text is based upon a misunderstanding of it. Rightly read, it contains nothing about working with or without pay. Notice that the first words, "for nought," are in italics, indicating that they are not in the Hebrew. The Revised Version has a fairly correct rendering of the text, thus: "Oh that there were some one among you that would shut the doors, that you might not kindle a fire upon my altar in vain!" (Malachi 1:10,RV)

The Lord is not complaining because the priests and people would not work for nothing, but because they did any service at all. What He desired was that they should leave off all form of service in the sanctuary. For while people often think that Divine service consists mostly in form, and that things cannot be wholly bad if there is at least a form of godliness, the Lord tells us that under such circumstances it would be a relief to Him if there were no form of service, no going to meeting, no preaching nor praying. Compare with: "Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? says the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When you come to appear before me, who has required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates:

they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear you. And when you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you: yea, when you make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood." (Isaiah 1:10-15)

Surely this is enough for one lesson. If we learn it, we have learned all that we need to know. Service that is rendered to the Lord from an impure heart and with unclean hands, is an abomination. He would much rather that one did not profess to serve Him. "Divine service" does not consist in going to church, in saying or hearing prayers or sermons, and in singing, nor in keeping fast and feast days. In what does it consist? Hear the Word of the Lord: "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." (Isaiah 1:16-17)

Service to God means the same kind of service that Jesus rendered, when He went about doing good.

- When He washed the feet of the disciples,
- When He fed the hungry,
- When He blessed the little children,
- When He cleansed the lepers,

- When He cheered the heart of the widow, and

- When He spoke words of compassion and courage to the repentant sinner, He was doing Divine service. The only kind of Divine service there can possibly be, is the service that the Divine Son of God does. If we allow God to work in us, both to will and to do of His good pleasure, (Philippians 2:13) we shall render Divine and acceptable service.

Cannot a sinner then serve the Lord? Oh, yes. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." (Psalm 51:17)

The ointment that was poured upon the feet of Jesus by a sinful woman was far more pleasing than the grand feast of the self-righteous Pharisee. (Luke 7:36-50) God is pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, and He counts every sacrifice a sacrifice of righteousness, no matter how vile the sinner who brings it, when it is brought in contrite love.

There is a promise in this lesson, an assurance of a time when the Lord will be served acceptably by all. "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering." (Malachi 1:11)

Righteousness will prevail at the last, even though wickedness seem now to have the supremacy. Christ was never more powerful

than when He hung up on the cross, the butt of all the ridicule that an unfeeling mob could heap upon Him. That despised cross was the power of God. By the power of the cross a new creation is to be effected. "If any man be in Christ, there is a new creation." (2 Corinthians 5:17,RV)

The power of the cross is the power that creates and upholds. The power that created the heavens and the earth in the beginning still acts. "Whatsoever God does, it shall be for ever;" (Ecclesiastes 3:14) therefore the new heavens and the new earth shall again spring forth from the cross which men despise. Then all shall know the Lord, from the least unto the greatest, (Jeremiah 31:34; Hebrews 8:11) and every service will be acceptable. Every offering will be pure, for it will be brought by pure hands, the gift of a pure heart,--a heart in which God rules.

But that new heavens and new earth will not be created until it is seen that there is need for them, that is, until there are new creatures, who need a suitable dwelling-place. So even before the creation of the new heavens and the new earth, there will be a pure offering, an offering in righteousness. "And He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years." (Malachi 3:3-4)

Who will accept the transforming grace of God, so that every work of their hands will be acceptable (1 Peter 2:5) and will be established, (Psalm 90:17) because prompted by the Christ who dwells within?--Present Truth, November 30, 1899--Malachi 1:6-11; 3:8-12

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 10

Fruits of Right and Wrong Doing

We make no apology for printing the whole of these passages of Scripture, for nothing that any man can write is comparable to the word inspired by God; moreover we are persuaded that but few would take the trouble to turn to the passage in their Bibles, and read it while reading the article, and without the text before the eyes, or in the mind, the talk upon it is of little profit. "Your words have been stout against me, says the Lord. Yet you say, What have we spoken so much against You? You have said, It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered. Then they that feared the Lord spoke with one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spares his own son that serves him. Then shall you return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serves God and him that serves Him not." (Malachi 3:13-18) "For, behold, the day comes, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing

in His wings; and you shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, says the Lord of hosts. Remember the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse [or, "with utter destruction"]." (Malachi 4:1-6)

A few general notes, to enable the student to read the passage understandably, are all that space will allow, and all that are necessary. If everybody knew how to read the Bible, and would read it, there would be no need of any such paper as this. Indeed, there would be little need of religious books of any kind; for to know how to read the Bible is to know the Lord; and to know the Lord well is to be in a position where one needs no other instructor. The promise to God's children is, "they shall all be taught of God;" (John 6:45) and when the time comes that all know Him, from the least to the greatest, "They shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord." (Jeremiah 31:34)

One should read the entire book of Malachi, in order to get a good understanding of the portion contained in this lesson. It is short, and will not take much time. From the reading it will appear that the service of God had degenerated into a mere form among priests and people, and that the people were weary even of the form.

Not only were "the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith," (Matthew 23:23) neglected, but, offerings, tithes and sacrifices were omitted or slighted.

False Witness Against God

Yet they could not see that they had said anything against the Lord. They had evidently not been guilty of open blasphemy, and so they boldly asked, when reproved, "What have we spoken against You?" (Malachi 3:13)

They had said that it was vain to serve God, and that there was no profit in keeping His commandments. The Lord regarded these as very "stout" words against Him, and they certainly were. To say that the service of God is vain, and that there is no profit in keeping His commandments, is the same as saying that He is a liar; for He says that His commandments are sweeter than honey and the honeycomb, (Psalm 19:10) and that: "in keeping of them there is great reward." (Psalm 19:11)

It is the same as saying that God himself is nothing. What more terrible charge could be brought against God than to say that His service is vain?

Are you sure that you have never been guilty of speaking such stolid words against God? Have you never become discouraged, and said,

"I can't see any use in trying to do right"?

Have you never envied the wicked, and called the proud happy, and said, "They that work wickedness are built up," (Malachi 3:15)

-and that people who look out for themselves, and do as they please, are better off than those who serve God? Have you never said, or thought, that the Lord did not care for you, and that He had neglected you, although you have given diligence to be faithful to Him? Have you never felt like "giving up" the Christian life, or at least that which you supposed was a Christian life, because you could not see that there was any profit in it,--no worldly profit, certainly, and no prospect of any spiritual gain?

If so,--and who cannot plead guilty to some such thoughts and speeches at some time in his life?--then your words have been exceedingly "stout" against God. You have been echoing the devil's false witness against the Most High. Surely it is time to repent.

Speaking God's Praise "Then they that feared the Lord spoke with one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name." (Malachi 3:16)

This verse is often quoted in meetings for prayer and testimony, as an incentive for people to bear testimony for the Lord. No doubt the speaking one to another includes such occasions, but it is most certain that it is not limited to them. They that fear the Lord have conversations with one another about His goodness, and they do not

need to be exhorted and urged to do so. Love that is forced, and must be prompted, is not of much value. "All your work shall praise You, O Lord; and your saints shall bless You. They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and talk of your power; To make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of His kingdom." (Psalm 145:10-12)

And this they will do spontaneously from the fullness of their hearts. The saints of the Lord will praise and bless Him in the same way that His other works do, only to as much greater a degree as they are greater than all things else. The heavens declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1) without any urging them to "do their duty." Get acquainted with the Lord, and you will know that His service is not vain, but that it is so blessed and joyous that you must tell of it to others. "Come and hear, all you that fear God, and I will declare what He has done for my soul!" (Psalm 66:16) "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:20)

The Lord's Property

"And they shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spares his own son that serves him. Then shall you return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serves God and him that serves Him not." (Malachi 3:17-18)

The Lord has an interest in this earth. He made it, and He has a desire to the work of His hands. Those to whom He let out His

property have sadly neglected it, and have let it run down, and have failed to give Him what fruit it did raise; yet He has not parted with it, and proposes to take the property over at no distant day.

When He makes up His property, those who have spoken to one another of His goodness, and have made known to the sons of men the glorious majesty of His kingdom will be acknowledged as His. They are not only His servants, but they are called sons. They serve the Lord, not as slaves, but as sons.

At that time there will be no difficulty in distinguishing between the righteous and the wicked, between Him that serves God, and him that serves Him not, for the day that burns as a furnace will burn them up. They will be nothing but stubble in the flame. But to those who fear the Lord the Sun of righteousness will arise, and they will be able to dwell with everlasting earnings. (Isaiah 33:14-15)

The Fate of the Wicked

"For, behold, the day comes, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." (Malachi 4:1)

This scripture shows sufficiently, if there were no other in the Bible to the same effect, that there will come a time when there will not be a sinner in the Lord's dominions. Not because all will be converted, for the Lord tells us that the majority will go in the broad

road to destruction, (Matthew 7:13-14) but because at the last day those who have utterly refused the Lord, will be utterly destroyed.

The Lord is coming, and His fan is in His hand, "and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into His garner; but the chaff will be burned with unquenchable fire." (Matthew 3:12)

Then will the wicked "be as though they had not been." (Obadiah 16) "The wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of the lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away. ... For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, you shall diligently consider his place, and it shall not be." (Psalm 37:20,10)

These truths concerning the final fate of the incorrigibly wicked are not arbitrary. They are a necessary consequence of the truth that Christ Jesus came into the world that "whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

The utter extinction of those who reject the Lord is not an arbitrary act of vengeance on the part of God, but is the inevitable result of their rejection of Christ, who is "the way, and the truth, and the life." (John 14:6)

Since they reject "the Author of life," (Acts 3:15,margin) who is the only life, the One in whom alone men can live, and move, and have any being, (Acts 17:28) it inevitably follows that they must

cease to be. "Whither shall I go from your Spirit? or whither shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend up into heaven, You are there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall your hand lead me, and your right hand shall hold me." (Psalm 139:7-10)

And wherever God is, He must reign. Therefore when men say that they will not have Him to reign over them, that they will not be led by Him, and that they will not have His right hand hold them, because they wish to be "free from restraint," and declare that they will not live in His presence, it is plain that there is no place for them in the universe.

The only place where they can flee from His presence is to get out of existence. And God, who gives to every man the desire of his heart, will graciously send them there. It is not necessary that He perform any arbitrary act in order to do this, but simply to let them be; when His life is withdrawn from them, according to their wish, they at once sink into nothingness. Outside of God there is nothing.

New Life and Perfect Health in Christ

"But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." (Malachi 4:2)

When the Sun of righteousness arises it is "with healing in His wings." He is our life. (Deuteronomy 30:20) "[He] who forgives all our iniquities [also] heals all our diseases. [He] redeems our life from destruction." (Psalm 103:3-4)

This He does by giving us His own life, which is eternal life. Now the characteristics of eternal life is that it is ever new, ever fresh. Who ever drinks of the water of life that Christ gives, has in him a well of water, ever springing up. (John 4:14) The vigor of this life will be seen to be full when all things have been created new and sin and sinners have been cleared from the earth by the fires of the last, great day. Then the righteous will go forth, and from very exuberance of life, from the bare joy of being alive, shall leap and gambol as calves let loose from the stall. (Malachi 4:2) "Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert." (Isaiah 35:6)

But all this freshness is not to be reserved till the last day. Even now does the Sun of righteousness shine, and we may, if we will, rejoice in His healing beams. When the lame man at the gate of the temple was made strong in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, he went with the apostles into the temple, "walking, and leaping, and praising God." (Acts 3:8) "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." (Isaiah 40:31)

The life is manifested, in order that we may have fullness of joy, and joy of the most real kind. The life is life indeed. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning." (Lamentations 3:22-23)

It is possible,--and whatever is possible with the Lord is our privilege and duty,--for men to live so fully by the life of the Lord, that His new mercies will make them feel new life every morning, so that they will be glad with the joy of life. This is not sentiment,--it is not a matter of theorizing, but comes by consciously taking the life of the Lord as it is manifested in His gifts to us, and of receiving it fresh from the Fountain head, in the purest form possible. "Then shall your ... health spring forth speedily." (Isaiah 58:8)

The words of God are health to the flesh of all who will live by them. "My son, attend to my words; incline your ear unto my sayings. Let them not depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh." (Proverbs 4:20-22)

We must not try it for the mere selfish purpose of desire and to feel better physically, but because we wish to live wholly to the glory of God, who gives us life; doing this, we shall find even with the progress of years the freshness and buoyancy of youth.

The Law of Moses a Defense

"Remember the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse [or, "with utter destruction"]." (Malachi 4:4-6)

The law of Moses is not obsolete. Even down to the very last days, just before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord, (Joel 2:31) it is to be remembered. The Spirit and power of Elijah the prophet are given in connection with this law, to work a reformation among men, so that the Lord will not be obliged to smite the earth with utter destruction. "Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it." (Isaiah 13:9) "The earth mourns and fades away, the world languishes and fades away, the haughty people of the earth do languish. The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore has the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left." (Isaiah 24:4-6)

But because some will remember the law of Moses, which God commanded him in Horeb, with all the statutes and judgments, and

will not say that there is no profit in keeping His charge, there will be a few men left. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32)

Moved by the Holy Spirit, the Psalmist David prayed: "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to your mercy remember me for your goodness' sake, O Lord." (Psalm 25:7)

That, therefore, is a promise that the Lord will do as requested. What a comfort to know that all the sins and follies of our youth are forgiven, and that we need not be handicapped by them, but can run the race set before us as freely as though we had never sinned.

Why bow you down, O soul of mine,
Crushed by ancestral sin?
You have a noble heritage
That bids you victory win.

The tainted past may bring forth flowers,
As blossomed Aaron's rod;
No legacy of sin annuls
Heredity from God.

--Lydia Avery Coonley-Ward, Poem: Heredity.

--Present Truth, December 7, 1899--Notes on the International
Sunday-School Lessons--Malachi 3:13-18; 4:1-6

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 11

Messiah's Messenger

From the day that man sinned to the days of Malachi, there had been promises of the coming of the Deliverer. And now as the last prophetic voice of the Old Testament is heard, it announces the coming of the messenger to prepare the way of the promised One, and to make ready a people prepared to meet Him.

This messenger came accordingly, calling the people to repentance, and to belief on Him that was to come. Those who received the message of the messenger, were by that prepared to receive Him whom the messenger announced. Those who rejected the words and testimony of the messenger, likewise rejected the Messiah when He came.

He knew that he was that messenger. He knew the message that he had to bear to the people, and he delivered his message faithfully and fearlessly. He, like the prophet Haggai before him, was "the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message unto the people." (Haggai 1:13)

John the Baptist came "preaching in the wilderness of Judea, And saying, Repent; for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand. ... And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but He

that comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Matthew 3:1-2,10-12)

And when they sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was, "He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaiah." (John 1:23)

He knew the work that he had to do. He knew that the time was come for the fulfillment of these prophecies. And he knew that his work was the fulfillment of them. He was the one of whom Malachi had spoken in the lesson for today; he was the one of whom Isaiah had spoken; and he and his message were the living evidence that God gave to the people that the Messiah was at hand. And while he was preaching, Messiah came and was baptized of him.

But it was not alone the first coming of Christ that was announced by John the Baptist, nor by Malachi, nor by any of the prophets. John the Baptist announced the gathering of the wheat into the garner--the harvest--and the burning up of the chaff. This is what Malachi had prophesied in the verses chosen for the present lesson.

He not only spoke of the coming of the Lord to His temple as at His first advent, but he also spoke of the coming of the same Lord "to judgment," (Malachi 3:5) which will be at His second advent; as says Paul, "I charge you therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus

Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom; Preach the word." (2 Timothy 4:1-2)

This is the coming which is referred to in the questions, "Who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appears?" (Malachi 3:2)

See also: "And the Lord shall utter His voice before His army: for His camp is very great: for He is strong that executes His word: for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?" (Joel 2:11)

It is then especially that He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver, and whosoever reflects His image will be accepted with Him. And this is especially so of those who shall be alive on the earth to behold Him when He appears. They are to endure a "fiery trial"; (1 Peter 4:12-13) they are to be "baptized with the baptism;" (Matthew 20:22) they are to have every vestige of this world's dross purged out of them. The test will be severe so that none is like it; (Jeremiah 30:7) but those who endure it shall come forth as gold, and "be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:7)

Then after that comes the burning up of the chaff, "For, behold, the day comes, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." (Malachi 4:1)

Here is the declaration of the word of God, as plain as language can make it, that all that do wickedly shall be burned up, root and branch. And the force of these words cannot be evaded except by making the language figurative, and then it may be made to mean just what any one pleases. But as long as plain language conveys any real meaning, so long will it be the truth that these words mean that the wicked shall be burned up as chaff is burned in the fire. This is made even stronger, if such a thing were possible, by the third verse, which says to the righteous, "And you shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, says the Lord of hosts." (Malachi 4:3)

The wicked are to be punished upon this earth; (Proverbs 11:31; Isaiah 24:21; Revelation 20:8-9) they are to be punished by fire, and that fire is to be the fire that is to melt the earth. (2 Peter 3:7,10) The earth will in that day burn as an oven, and all the wicked being upon it, will be, according to the words of the prophet, burned up upon the earth. Then the earth is to be made over new, and the righteous shall dwell therein forever, (Revelation 21:5,7) according to the word of Christ, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth;" (Matthew 5:5) and according to the words of Malachi in the lesson. After saying that the wicked shall be burned up, then he says: "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go forth and grow up as calves of the stall." (Malachi 4:2)

And the wicked, having been consumed on the earth, and returned to dust and ashes, shall be ashes under the soles of the feet of those who inherit and inhabit the earth. The doctrine of eternal torment is contrary to the word of God. More than a hundred times the Lord speaks of the fate of the wicked in terms that denote nothing but utter destruction and cessation of existence.

As there was a message of His coming carried to the people to whom Christ was to appear in His first advent; likewise there will be a message announcing His coming to the people who will see Him in His second advent. It will be a message such as was that of Elijah to the people of His day. "You have forsaken the commandments of the Lord...How long halt you between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal [the sun] then follow him." (1 Kings 18:21)

The world in these last days have forsake the commandments of the Lord and have followed Rome, and now God sends a message of warning and of duty to this, the generation of those who shall see the appearing of the Lord in glory. He says: "If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation. ... Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." (Revelation 14:9-10,12)

Then the next thing that is seen is "a white cloud, and upon the cloud one...like the Son of man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle," (Revelation 14:14) and coming to reap the harvest of the earth; to gather the wheat into His garner, and to gather the chaff to burn it. As those who accepted the message of God by John the Baptist were thereby prepared to accept the Messiah which he announced, so those now who accept this message of God will be thereby prepared to meet the Messiah in His second advent to this world.

God's message and His messengers are now in the world announcing the second coming of Christ, as really as was His message in the world proclaiming His first coming. Will you accept the message and meet Him in peace, bear His image, and be gathered as the precious wheat into His garner? or will you reject His warning and be found among the chaff?--Signs of the Times, March 11, 1886--Notes on the International Lesson, March 21--Malachi 3:1-6; 4:4-6

A.T. Jones

Chapter 12

The Light of Life

Christ--who is one with His Father--is the "Sun of Righteousness." (Malachi 4:2)

What the visible sign is to the physical world, Christ is to the spiritual world. The sun gives light to the physical world, and the Sun of Righteousness gives righteousness to the spiritual world.

As we cannot see the sun without having its light upon us, so we cannot see Christ without having His light upon us, which is righteousness. Looking unto Him, we are covered with His righteousness which shines upon us, and thus are made righteous.

As the sun is a powerful disinfectant and destroyer of disease-giving germs, so the Sun of Righteousness destroys with His beams all that which brings disease to the soul. "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings." (Malachi 4:2)

Sin cannot live in the sight of God, as mold cannot live in the bright sunshine. In the light of God's countenance is life, (Proverbs 16:15; In the light of the king's countenance is life; and his favor is as a cloud of the latter rain) and that light comes to us through Jesus, the propitiation for our sins. Thus we can look upon it and live, which no man could do were he to behold God's face. That light

destroys sin, but not the sinful flesh in which it works. So then we are to "run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith." (Hebrews 12:1-2)

And how can we see Him, and thus stand in the light of the Sun of Righteousness? Simply by faith, believing His word. Faith exercised to its full extent always brings Jesus into view. By faith we may ever "look and live." (Numbers 21:9)--Present Truth, June 27, 1895--Malachi 4:2

E.J. Waggoner