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# HOMILETICAL COMMENTARY

ON THE BOOK OF

## E Z R A .

*WITH CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES,  
ILLUSTRATIONS, AND INDEXES.*

BY

WILLIAM JONES.

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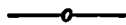
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ON THE

## BOOK OF EZRA.



### INTRODUCTION.

**I. The Nature of the Book.** The Book of Ezra was correctly characterised by Bishop Hilary as “a continuation of the Books of Chronicles.” The Second Book of Chronicles brings the history of the people of Israel down to the destruction of the Temple of Jehovah and of the city of Jerusalem, and the carrying captive into Babylon such of the people that remained in the land. The Book of Ezra takes up the history of the nation at the close of the seventy years of captivity, and tells of the return of some of the exiles to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel prince of Judah, and by permission of Cyrus king of Persia, of the restoration of the worship of Jehovah and the rebuilding of His Temple by them, of the return of a second company of exiles many years afterwards under Ezra, the celebrated priest and scribe, and by permission of Artaxerxes king of Persia, and of the social and religious reformation which was accomplished under Ezra. And some portion of this history is given in contemporary historical documents, which seem to have been written “from time to time by the prophets, or other authorised persons, who were eyewitnesses for the most part of what they record,” and were collected by the author and incorporated by him into his work.

**II. The Design of the Book.** From a survey of the contents of this book, Keil concludes “that the *object* and *plan* of its author must have been to collect only such facts and documents as might show the manner in which the Lord God, after the lapse of the seventy years of exile, fulfilled His promise announced by the prophets, by the deliverance of His people from Babylon, the building of the Temple at Jerusalem, and the restoration of the Temple worship according to the law, and preserved the reassembled community from fresh relapses into heathen customs and idolatrous worship by the dissolution of the marriages with Gentile women. Moreover, the restoration of the Temple and of the legal Temple worship, and the separation of the heathen from the newly-settled community, were necessary and indispensable conditions for the gathering out of the people of God from among the heathen, and for the maintenance and continued existence of the nation of Israel, to which and through which God might at His own time fulfil and realise His promises to their forefathers, to make their seed a blessing to all the families of the earth, in a manner consistent both with His dealings with this people hitherto, and with the further development of His promises made through the prophets. The significance of the Book of Ezra in sacred history lies in the fact that it enables us to perceive how the Lord, on the one hand, so disposed the hearts of the kings of Persia, the then rulers of the world, that in spite of all the

machinations of the enemies of God's people, they promoted the building of His Temple in Jerusalem, and the maintenance of His worship therein; and on the other, raised up for His people, when delivered from Babylon, men like Zerubbabel their governor, Joshua the high priest, and Ezra the scribe, who, supported by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, undertook the work to which they were called, with hearty resolution, and carried it out with a powerful hand."

**III. The Authorship of the Book.** The statement of Keil on this point seems to us to rest on trustworthy bases: "There can be no reasonable doubt that that author was Ezra, the priest and scribe, who in chaps. vii.-x. narrates his return from Babylon to Jerusalem, and the circumstances of his ministry there, neither its language nor contents exhibiting any traces of a later date." It is not meant by this that the whole book is the original work of Ezra, but that it was put together by him, and that the last four chapters, and probably some portions of the other chapters, were his original work. As illustrations of historical documents which were collected by Ezra and embodied in his work, we may mention the list of names in chap. ii., which is also inserted in Neh. vii. 6-73, and "which must have been composed in the earliest times of the re-establishment of the congregation" (see Neh. vii. 5), and the letters and decrees which are given in chaps. iv.-vi.

All that we know as certainly true concerning Ezra is recorded in this book (chaps. vii.-x.), and in the Book of Nehemiah (chaps. viii. and xii. 26). He was eminent for his learning, piety, patriotism, love of the Sacred Writings, and zeal for the honour of God; and was held in the highest esteem by his countrymen in ancient times, as he is also by those of modern days.

**IV. The Canonicity of the Book.** On this point Bishop Hervey says: "There has never been any doubt about Ezra being canonical, although there is no quotation from it in the New Testament. Augustine says of Ezra, 'magis rerum gestarum scriptor est habitus quam propheta' (*De Civ. Dei*, xviii. 36)."—*Bibl. Dict.*

**V. Date of the Book.** The first event recorded in this book took place in the first year of the rule of Cyrus over Babylon (chap. i. 1), which was in the year 536 B.C.; and the work of Ezra, so far as it is recorded in this book, was completed in the spring of 457 B.C. (chap. x. 17), which was the first spring after Ezra's arrival at Jerusalem, which took place in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (chap. vii. 7, 9) or 458 B.C. So that this book deals with a period of about eighty years. But of fifty-seven of these years, which intervene between the conclusion of chap. vi. and the commencement of chap. vii., nothing is recorded. From the fact that the history is carried on in this book so far as the spring of 457 B.C., we conclude that Ezra could not have compiled it before that year. And from the fact that no mention is made in it of the mission of Nehemiah to Jerusalem, which took place in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes (Neh. ii. 1) or about 445 B.C., we infer that it was written before that date. The probability, therefore, is that the work of Ezra the scribe must be assigned to some time between the years 457 and 445 B.C.

## **VI. Analysis of the Contents of the Book.**

**I. THE RETURN OF THE JEWS FROM BABYLON TO JERUSALEM UNDER ZERUBBABEL, AND THE REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE (chaps. i.-vi.).**

- i. The return of the Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel (chaps. i. and ii.).**
  - 1. The edict of Cyrus granting permission to the Jews to return and rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem (chap. i. 1-4).**
  - 2. The preparations of the Jews for returning (vers. 5 and 6).**
  - 3. The restoration of the sacred vessels of the Temple to Zerubbabel prince of Judah (vers. 7-11).**

4. The list of the names and the number of the people who returned (chap. ii. 1-64).
  5. The possessions of those who returned and their offerings for building the Temple (vers. 65-70).
  - ii. *The erection of the altar, the restoration of worship, and the commencement of the rebuilding of the Temple* (chap. iii.).
  - iii. *The hindrance of the work by the Samaritans* (chap. iv.).
    1. The request of the Samaritans to co-operate in the rebuilding of the Temple, and its refusal by the Jewish authorities (chap. iv. 1-3).
    2. The opposition of the Samaritans in consequence of this refusal (vers. 4-6).
    3. The letter of the hostile Samaritans to Artaxerxes the king (vers. 7-16).
    4. The reply of the king to this letter, in consequence of which the work was arrested (vers. 17-24).
  - iv. *The renewal and the completion of the rebuilding of the Temple* (chaps. v. and vi.).
    1. The renewal of the work in consequence of the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah (chap. v. 1, 2).
    2. The inquiries of the Persian officers concerning the work, and their report to Darius the king, which includes the reply of the Jews to their inquiries (vers. 3-17).
    3. The reply of Darius to the letter of his officers, including the discovery of the edict of Cyrus, and the commands of Darius to his officers to allow and to promote the rebuilding of the Temple (chap. vi. 1-12).
    4. The completion of the Temple (vers. 13-15).
    5. The dedication of the Temple (vers. 16-18).
    6. The celebration of the feast of the Passover (vers. 19-22).
- II. THE RETURN OF THE JEWS FROM BABYLON TO JERUSALEM UNDER EZRA, AND THE REFORMATION WHICH HE ACCOMPLISHED AMONGST THE PEOPLE (chaps. vii.-x.).
- i. *The return of Ezra and his company from Babylon to Jerusalem* (chaps. vii. and viii.).
    1. The genealogy of Ezra, and a statement concerning his going with others to Jerusalem (chap. vii. 1-10).
    2. The letter of Artaxerxes the king, authorising Ezra to do certain things (vers. 11-26).
    3. Ezra's praise to God for the kindness of the king (vers. 27 and 28).
    4. The list of the names and the number of those who accompanied Ezra (chap. viii. 1-14).
    5. Their encampment by "the river that runneth to Ahava," from whence Ezra sent for ministers for the Temple, and prepared for the journey by fasting and prayer, and by the delivery of the precious things of the Temple into the hands of twelve priests and an equal number of Levites (vers. 15-30).
    6. The journey "from the river Ahava" to Jerusalem (vers. 31 and 32).
    7. The giving up of the precious things to certain priests and Levites in the Temple, and the presentation of offerings unto the Lord (vers. 33-35).
    8. The deliverance of the king's decree to the Persian satraps and governors west of the Euphrates (ver. 36).
  - ii. *The social and religious reformation effected by Ezra* (chaps. ix. and x.).
    1. The evil to be remedied, viz., the marriages of the Jews with heathen women (chap. ix. 1, 2).
    2. The sorrow and prayer of Ezra in consequence of this evil (vers. 3-15).

3. The proposal of Shechaniah for the removal of the evil, and its acceptance by Ezra (chap. x. 1-5).
4. The accomplishment of the reformation (vers. 6-17).
5. The names of those who had married heathen wives and put them away (vers. 18-44).

Respecting our own work, we have very little to add to what we stated in the introduction to *The Homiletic Commentary on Numbers*, as the method of that work is followed in this also.

A considerable number of selected sermon outlines by various authors will be found in the following pages. By their introduction we have sought to secure variety in relation both to the mental view and the homiletic treatment of the texts.

We wish to acknowledge our obligations to the expositions of Professor Fr. W. Schultz (in the great work of Dr. Lange), C. F. Keil, D.D., Matthew Henry, and Thomas Scott.

## CHAPTER I.

**CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.]** In this chapter we have (i.) the proclamation of Cyrus (vers. 1-4); (ii.) the preparation of the Jews for availing themselves of it (vers. 5, 6) and (iii.) the restoration of the sacred vessels (vers. 7-11).

**Ver. 1. Now, Heb. וְעַתָּה, and]** The conjunction connects the history of the restoration of the Jews with the history of the destruction of their capital and kingdom, as in 2 Chron. xxxvi. 22. In the first year of Cyrus] *i.e.* the first year of his rule over Babylon, which was 536 B.C. Cyrus, שֶׁרָשָׁן is the Hebrew for the ancient Persian *Kurus*, Greek *Kūros*. "As to the meaning of the name," says Fuerst, "the ancients have already observed that it is an expression for the sun. The sun was called in old Persian *Khor*, *Khur*. שֶׁרָשָׁן is the sign of the Persian nominative *s* or *ush*. In cuneiform inscriptions the name is *Khurush*." Persia] "שֶׁרָשָׁן signifies in Biblical phraseology the Persian Empire (comp. Dan. v. 28; vi. 8, &c.)"—Keil. That the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah] &c. The prophecy referred to is in Jer. xxv. 11, 12; xxix. 10. The seventy years began in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, when Nebuchadnezzar first took Jerusalem and carried Daniel and others, with part of the vessels of the house of God, to Babylon (2 Kings xxiii. 36-xxiv. 4; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 5-8; Jer. xlvi. 2; Dan. i. 1, 2). This was the year 606 B.C. And, as we have seen, the first year of the rule of Cyrus over Babylon was 536 B.C., which completes the seventy years. The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus] *i.e.* God inspired within him the desire and the determination (comp. 1 Chron. v. 26; 2 Chron. xxi. 16; Hag. i. 14). Made a proclamation] Margin: "Caused a voice to pass." The expression signifies to make known by heralds (comp. Exod. xxxvi. 6; 2 Chron. xxx. 5; chap. x. 7; Neh. viii. 15). And put it also in writing] Schultz: "And also (made known) by writing." In addition to the proclamation by heralds, Cyrus issued written edicts.

**Ver. 2. All the kingdoms of the earth]** These words, which are not to be taken literally, "are explained, from the wide extent of the Persian Empire. When Cyrus conquered Babylon, he had already subjugated to himself almost the entire eastern Asia, even to the Indian Ocean (according to Berosus in Josephus, c. 4p.). Afterwards he pressed southward also, and entered even into Egypt and Ethiopia."—Schultz. He hath charged me] &c. "It is a reasonable conjecture," says Rawlinson, "that, on the capture of Babylon, Cyrus was brought into personal contact with Daniel, and that his attention was drawn by that prophet to the prophecy of Isaiah (Isa. xliv. 24-28; xlv. 1 *seq.*) Cyrus probably accepted this prophecy as a 'charge' to rebuild the Temple."

**Ver. 3. All His people]** Not Judah only, but also the descendants of the ten tribes. He is the God which is in Jerusalem] does not mean that His presence was confined to that place, but that He had chosen it as the chief seat of His worship (comp. Neh. i. 9, last clause; Ps. xlviii. 1, 2; cxxxii. 13, 14).

**Ver. 4. And whosoever remaineth]** &c. Schultz: "And as for every one of the survivors" (comp. Neh. i. 2; Hag. ii. 3). The men of his place] signifies those who were not Israelites. Help him] Margin: "Heb. lift him up." Both Keil and Schultz give the meaning "to assist." Goods] Fuerst: "Movable property." Schultz: "Here perhaps clothing or tents." Beside the freewill offering] &c. *i.e.* in addition to the gifts intended for the rebuilding of the Temple.

**Ver. 5. With all]** &c. Keil would render this, "in short," or, "namely, all whose spirit,"

&c. He says, "the  $\text{ל}$  in  $\text{ללל}$  serves to comprise the remaining persons, and may therefore be rendered by, in short, or namely." Many elected to remain in Babylon.

Ver. 6. All they that were about them] both their heathen neighbours and the Jews who preferred to remain in Babylon. Strengthened their hands] The idea is correctly expressed in the margin: "that is, helped them."

Ver. 7. The vessels of the house of the Lord] &c. Most probably those mentioned in 2 Chron. xxxvi. 7, and Dan. i. 2.

Ver. 8. Mithredath] According to Rawlinson, the Persian is *Mithradata*, and is made up of *Mithra*, "the sun-god," and *data* past part. of *da*, "to give," and signifies "given by Mithra." Sheshbazzar] is the Chaldee name of Zerubbabel. The etymology and meaning of the name are uncertain. The prince of Judah] He was of the royal family of Judah (1 Chron. iii. 19; Matt. i. 12), and was the recognised head of that tribe at this time.

Vers. 9, 10] The usual names for the sacred vessels are not used here, and consequently there is much uncertainty as to their meaning.

Ver. 11. Five thousand and four hundred] This total is more than double the numbers which are given in detail in vers. 9, 10. The statement of Keil may be correct: "The difference between the two statements has certainly arisen from errors in the numbers, for the correction of which the means are indeed wanting." But we prefer the suggestion of J. H. Michaelis, "that the author passed over many subordinate vessels in the detail, but in the sum total has taken them all into consideration."

## THE FULFILMENT OF THE WORD OF THE LORD.

(Verse 1.)

Here are four things which claim our attention:—

**I. The regard of God for His word.** "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled," &c. The word referred to is in Jer. xxix. 10: "Thus saith the Lord, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform My good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place." The seventy years were now accomplished, and God proceeds to perform His word to His people. He is punctual in the fulfilment of His promises. "God is not a man, that He should lie" &c. (Num. xxiii. 19). "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." "The word of the Lord endureth for ever." "He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself." We have in this—

1. *An assurance that the prophecies and promises of His word will be fulfilled.* "As the architect progressively executes every part of the plan which he had delineated, till the whole design is completed, so God in His providence performs in due order all the prophecies of His word: a great proportion of His great scheme has already been accomplished, and revolving ages will hasten the performance of all the rest in the appointed periods."—*Scott.* (a)

2. *An encouragement to trust in Him.* "Whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be set on high." "Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust." See Ps. xxii. 4, 5; xviii. 2. (b)

**II. The mercy of God to His people.** This mercy is seen—

1. *In the design and effect of the captivity.* The captivity was the punishment of their many sins, and especially their idolatry; and was designed to eradicate their apparently inveterate tendency to idolatry. And in this it was thoroughly successful. "Prone before on every occasion to adopt the idolatrous practices of the adjacent nations, the Jews now secluded themselves from the rest of the world, in proud assurance of their own religious superiority. The law, which of old was perpetually violated or almost forgotten, was now enforced by general consent to its extreme point, or even beyond it. Adversity endeared that of which in prosperity they had not perceived the value. Prone, the mass of them, all but the wiser and more enlightened, who worshipped Jehovah, to worship Him but as a national God, greater and mightier than the gods of other nations (a conception in itself polytheistic), they threw aside this lower kind of pride to assume that of the sole people of the One True God." In this way the pun-

ishment of their sins was an expression of the Divine mercy to them. "He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." "Thus the Divine word of chastisement," says Schultz, "ever goes hand in hand with His word of salvation. His chastening is in truth ever a helping; yea, His killing is a making alive. He puts to death only the dead."

2. *In the release from captivity.* (1.) As to its *time*. The emancipation was not delayed one moment longer than was necessary. As soon as the exile had accomplished its purpose, the Lord brought it to a conclusion. "Though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion, according to the multitude of His mercies." (2.) As to its *meaning*. It was an assurance of the Divine forgiveness of their sins. Isaiah clearly expresses this: "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God," &c. (Isa. xl. 1, 2). Their release was also the commencement of many and great blessings. "This chapter contains," says Schultz, "nothing less than the beginning of the fulfilment of all the great and glorious prophecies with which the prophets before the exile brightened the gloomy night of the severe judgments of God—the dawning light of the grace of God in all its greatness, that would reawaken the people of God from death and the grave, and enable them to live a new and glorious life—the glorious liberty of the children of God in the fullest and highest sense. What a great revolution of affairs was now to be expected! What a fulness of salvation after the night of misfortune—the entire extent of Messianic redemption!"

III. **The influence of God upon the spirit of man.** "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia."

1. *The nature of this influence.* "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus." "This does not mean," says Schultz, "that Cyrus was influenced in the same way as were the prophets, upon whom, with their greater susceptibility, the Spirit of the Lord came; but yet an influence in consequence of which Cyrus made the will of God his own will, and executed it in the things under con-

sideration. God gave him the resolution and the desire to execute His intention." All the pure desires and noble resolutions of men's hearts are Divine inspirations. All the good in human life is the result of Divine influence. (c)

2. *The subject of this influence.* "Cyrus king of Persia." Cyrus was the greatest king of the mightiest empire of the world; he was a heathen, but, in common with his countrymen at this period, was probably a pure Theist, believing in One Supreme Being. As a prince, he was distinguished for his justice, and for the mildness and kindness of his administration. His relations to the people of God, and the terms by which they are described in the Scriptures, are very remarkable. He is spoken of as "the righteous man" (Isa. xli. 2); "My shepherd" (Isa. xlv. 28), and "The Lord's anointed" (Isa. xlv. 1). God employed this celebrated heathen monarch in the accomplishment of His purposes, in the emancipation of His people, and the rebuilding of His Temple. (d) "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water" He turneth it whithersoever He will: He is now using the powers of the world to promote the interests of His cause. We have in this an earnest of His final victory over all heathen powers. "The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents," &c. (Ps. lxxii. 10, 11).

3. *The design of this influence.* "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, that he made a proclamation," &c. Divine influence was exerted upon Cyrus to cause him to do an act of great generosity and nobility. The intention of the action of God upon the spirit of man is always gracious. In all the inspirations and impressions which He imparts to man, His aim is to save and bless him, and to make him an agent in blessing others.

IV. **The suitable response of man to the influence of God.** "Cyrus made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom," &c. God's influence upon the spirit of man is not irresistible. He impresses man, but He does not coerce him. He inspires man, but He does

not compel him. Divine influence does not invade human freedom. Man may harden himself against it, may resist it to his own injury. "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost," was a charge brought by Stephen against the Jews. Or, like Cyrus, man may yield to this influence, and suitably and heartily respond to it. When this is the case the Divine influence results in rich blessings. "Quench not the Spirit." "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God." (e)

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Is God all-mighty? Then be assured that the throne of right shall stand upon the ruins of all wrong; but here God is apparently at a disadvantage, because you cannot kill evil with the sword. The abolition of evil is a work of time, requiring the combination, the conspiring of innumerable moral influences and educational forces; but that conspiring is going on. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promises, as some men count slackness."—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

(b) "I will go before thee." This was a Divine promise made to Cyrus; and God has made the same promise to all who put their trust in Him. It is surely something to have a Father's promise singing in the heart. Many of us know the inspiration even of a human promise; many of us know that we never could have endured this bitter trial, or surmounted that overshadowing difficulty, had we not enjoyed the presence and hopefulness of some friendly promise in the heart. What we want to feel is the triumphant faith that says definitely to God, "Thou didst promise this, and we will wait for its fulfilment."—*Ibid.*

(c) It is taught that, besides the general moral influences, unconscious and diffused—as it were distilled, like dew, in silence and darkness—there is an active energy, arousing, filling, impelling the souls of men. It is said that the Spirit of the Lord came upon judges, that it came upon kings, upon prophets, upon apostles—came mightily and stirred them up. As sudden and mighty winds make trees rock, and wrench them, and even overturn them, so, as by a mighty rushing wind, the Spirit of God has descended on men—on Samuel, on David, on Isaiah, on Paul. It is taught, likewise, that, while this energy of the Divine mind prepared certain men for emergencies, and prepared them to act official parts, all true Christians, all godly souls, are opening to a quickening influence, if not so mighty yet of the same general kind—an influence which stimulates, assists, ripens, and so finally sanctifies.

The Divine Spirit works along the line of a man's own thinking power, along the channel of a man's own motive power, and wakes up in the man that which was in him. It is not said that God's thought rolls along and becomes a part—a material part—of the current of our thought; on the contrary, it is said that God makes us think, makes us will, makes us feel. What is the formula? "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." That is, work, *work in earnest*, as men do about a thing which they are afraid they shall not accomplish. Why? Because "it is God that worketh in you"—what? putting His own will there and His own thought?—because "it is God that worketh in you *to will and to do.*" There is the point in which the Divine influence expends itself, according to the explicit testimony of Scripture, for the development in man of that which he had in him of dormant power.—*H. W. Beecher.*

(d) One of the designations of Cyrus, "the man that executeth My counsel," furnishes the key to the prophetic view of his character and position—a view which pervades all that is said of him, and promised to him. This forms the most striking and the most sustained of the instances in which the Lord not only asserts His supremacy in the government of the world, but reveals to us the mode in which that government operates, and the form in which it is most usually conducted. The marked manner in which Cyrus and his Persians are represented as set apart to execute the purposes of the Lord, while they considered themselves pursuing their own objects, cannot fail to suggest many interesting reflections respecting the manner in which the Lord acts in executing the high purposes of His will—often by agents who little think whom they are serving, and who are, it may be, as in this case, ignorant even of His name.

The greatest difficulty is supposed to be found in the designation of Cyrus, a heathen, as a "righteous man." But this title, which indicates one who acts with habitual rectitude, who would not consciously inflict wrong—a just man, is not in Scripture confined to Israelites; and, what is more, it correctly describes the character of Cyrus, which, not less than his military exploits, caused his name to be long held in honour by his countrymen. . . . In fact, as Dr. Henderson remarks: "It is not a little remarkable, that of all the virtuous princes of antiquity, he alone was thought worthy of being exhibited as a model of just government. Not only was he exemplary in private life, but his victories and conquests had for their object the vindication of law and justice. He is even said to have been an object of the Divine love (Isa. xlviii. 14). His destruction of the Babylonian Empire and liberation of the Jews were special acts of righteousness; and the abolition of idolatry, which in a great measure followed the success

of the Persian arms, comes also under the same head." . . .

. . . But the Lord had not only called Cyrus by his name—He had "surnamed" him, as our translation somewhat vaguely renders it. What is meant is, not that He had given him any surname—for the name already mentioned was his own proper name—but that He had made honourable mention of him, and bestowed upon him titles of high honour, such as no heathen prince had ever received. What were these titles and honourable distinctions? One of them, "The righteous man," has already engaged our attention. Two more occur in the passage last extracted (Isa. xlv. 28, xlv. 1-4): "My shepherd" and "Mine anointed."

As to the first of these titles, that of "shepherd," we know that good kings and rulers are called shepherds in Scripture, as they are in the ancient classics. It is a fact, however, that David, Cyrus, and Christ in His Messianic character, are the only sovereigns to whom the title is personally given. In other instances it is applied to the office of sovereign rather than to the person of any particular king. What is more remarkable is, that this very title was one to which Cyrus was partial, and the purport of which he fully appreciated. Xenophon describes him as saying, "The business of a good king and a good shepherd are much alike. The shepherd ought, before all things, to provide for the welfare and safety of his flock, and to make use of these creatures consistently with their happiness; and a king ought, in the same manner, to make men and cities happy, and in the same manner to make use of them."

Cyrus, again, is called "the Lord's anointed," in reference to the ancient custom of anointing kings with oil at their inauguration. To be merely the "anointed," was, therefore, no peculiar distinction to Cyrus, but to be "the Lord's anointed" was a very high distinction; and it is given to him obviously because

the Lord had, in His providence, appointed him to be the prince under whose rule the Jews were to be restored, and the other purposes of His will accomplished.—*John Kitto, D.D.*

(e) When we see a casket wrenched open, the hinges torn away, or the clasp destroyed, we mark at once the hand of the *spoiler*; but when we observe another casket deftly opened with a master key, and the sparkling contents revealed, we note the hand of the *owner*. Conversion is not, as some suppose, a violent opening of the heart by grace, in which will, reason, and judgment are all ignored or crushed. This is too barbarous a method for Him who comes not as a plunderer to his prey, but as a possessor to His treasure. In conversion, the Lord who made the human heart deals with it according to its nature and constitution. His key insinuates itself into the wards; the will is not enslaved but enfranchised; the reason is not blinded but enlightened; and the whole man is made to act with a glorious liberty which it never knew till it fell under the restraints of grace.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

We are not forced to have God; we can deliberately take up our pen and strike His name out of the page on which we intend to record our life; or, on the other hand, we can say, "We are of yesterday, and know nothing; we are so wise as not to be able to tell what will occur to-morrow; we are so empty and barren as to carry our little earthly immortality in our nostrils. Lord, lead, and we shall follow; we accept Thy mercy; we will go where Thou goest." So, then, religion is no tyranny; it is no pitiless compulsion of understanding and heart which we resent, but a blessing which first makes us poor, that it may afterwards enrich us with unwasting riches of purity, and strength, and love.—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

## RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN THE PROCLAMATION OF CYRUS AND THE GOSPEL.

(Verse 1.)

**I. In the disposition from which it originated.** The motive which actuated the Persian emperor was benevolence. The love of Christ.

**II. In the deliverance which it announced.** From Babylon to Canaan. From the captivity of Satan and sin to a state of salvation here and hereafter.

**III. In the terms which it specified.**

No pecuniary compensation for liberty. Salvation by grace.

**IV. In the universality of its offers.** Every Hebrew captive. Every sinner is invited.

**V. In the aids it promised.** Provision of help for the journey. Providential and spiritual aid for Christians. There were some who did not welcome the proclamation of Cyrus.—*George Brooks.*

## THE EDIOT OF CYRUS.

(Verses 2-4.)

Notice:

**I. The devout acknowledgment of God's sovereignty.**

1. *In the bestowment of His favours.* "Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth." The Persian Empire at this time was very vast in its extent. In Isaiah xli. 2, the Lord is represented as giving the nations to the righteous man from the East, and making him ruler over kings. The prophecy was remarkably fulfilled in Cyrus. (a). His attention was probably called to it by Daniel; and, perceiving its striking applicability to himself, he speaks of his wide dominions as given to him by Jehovah the God of heaven. (b). "The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will." "His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation; and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven," &c. (Dan. iv. 32, 34, 35). "Promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south: but God is the Judge; He putteth down one, and setteth up another." God bestows His gifts according to His own wise and righteous will. (c).

2. *In the authority of His commands.* "And He hath charged me to build Him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah." In Isaiah xlv. 28, it is predicted that Cyrus would say "to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the Temple, Thy foundation shall be laid." Josephus (*Ant.* xi. i. 1, 2) states that Cyrus having read the prophecies by Isaiah on this matter, "an earnest desire and ambition seized upon him to fulfil what was so written." He accepted it as a charge from God. Moreover, it is probable that God charged him by His own immediate action upon his spirit. As He stirred up his spirit to make the proclamation, He also probably charged his spirit to rebuild the Temple. And the king acknowledged

His authority, accepted the charge, and proceeded to execute it. (d). All the commandments of the Lord are righteous, and are ever binding. He is infinitely holy, and His will is ever authoritative on all moral beings everywhere. (e).

**II. The magnanimous emancipation of God's people.** "Who is there among you of all His people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, He is the God which is in Jerusalem." The edict of Cyrus does not grant political freedom to the Jews, but full religious liberty, with permission to go up to Jerusalem to rebuild the national Temple and restore the celebration of its worship.

Notice:

1. *The spirit in which the emancipation was made.* (1.) It was *generous*. "Who among you of all His people?" He does not attempt to keep back any. All are quite at liberty to depart if they are so minded. (2.) It was *pious*. "His God be with him." Thus he wishes them the presence and blessing of God; and having these, they would be sure to succeed.

2. *The purpose for which the emancipation was made.* "Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, He is the God which is in Jerusalem." He sets them free, not for purposes of war, but of worship; not for his own aggrandisement, but for the honour of God; that they might build a temple, not to Ormuzd the god of the Persians, but to Jehovah the God of Israel.

**III. The generous exhortation to assist God's people.** "And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him," &c. (ver. 4).

Notice:

1. *The purport of this exhortation.* That the subjects of Cyrus should assist the returning Jews with gifts. These gifts were of two classes:—(1.) Some were for their personal use. "Help him with

silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts." (2.) The others were for the great work which they were about to undertake. "The freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem."

2. *The persons to whom it was addressed.* "The men of his place" are those who belonged not to the Israelites—the heathen amongst whom they had sojourned, and whose goodwill they seem to have won. We may view it as an example of the world helping the Church in its enterprises. In spiritual things the world is unable to do this, but by material gifts it may aid the Church in the prosecution of its holy mission.

3. *The pattern by which it was enforced.* It is probable that Cyrus enforced his exhortation by his example, in bestowing liberal gifts upon the returning exiles. Rawlinson regards "the freewill offering for the house of God" as the gift of Cyrus himself. This is doubtful; but there is very little reason to doubt that he did render them personal help of this kind. He not only wished them well, but helped them to realise his wishes.

LESSONS:

1. *Be prepared to acknowledge and appreciate moral excellence outside of the visible Church of God.* Cyrus, the centurion of Capernaum (Luke vii. 1–10), and Cornelius the centurion (Acts x. 22) are examples.

2. *Imitate Cyrus in his practical acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God.*

3. *When we cannot offer our labours in good enterprises, let us cheerfully offer our gifts.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) In the forty-first chapter of Isaiah, the Almighty is sublimely introduced as demanding who it was that had raised up this great conqueror, this Cyrus, characterised as "the righteous man from the East;" who had called him to His foot—that is, had made him the instrument of the high purposes of His will. "Who," the interrogation proceeds,

"Gave the nations before him,  
And made him ruler over kings?  
He gave them as the dust to his sword,  
And as driven stubble to his bow.

He pursued them, and passed safely;  
Even by the way that he had not gone with  
his feet.

Who hath wrought and done it,  
Calling the generations from the beginning?  
I the Lord, the First,  
And with the last; I am He."

This assertion of the instrumentality of Cyrus—of his being in a peculiar manner the child of the Lord's providence, is always thus emphatically produced, and gives the clue to his history.

The fact that the Persians had not before taken part in the affairs of the West, and, in particular, that Cyrus had not, is clearly pointed out in the lines which describe his westward march as one not previously known to his feet. In fact, he had to march so far west as to the neighbourhood of Sardis, before he was enabled to meet the enemy in full force and give him battle. This Sardis was the capital of the Lydian Empire; and it seems to have been the policy of Croesus to draw the Persian far away from his own resources, and into the district where his own means were most available, before he gave him the opportunity of coming to a decisive action.

The extent of this victory and its important consequences are indicated by the largeness of the terms employed; not one nation, but many nations, not one king, but many kings, are given "as the dust to his sword, and as the driven stubble to his bow." Accordingly, the nations who had leagued against him on this occasion, and whom he subdued, were Lydians, Greeks, Egyptians, Babylonians, and all the nations of Asia Minor, and, taken in a large sense, with reference to the final extension of his power, it embraced the Medes, Hyrcanians, Assyrians, Arabians, Cappadocians, Phrygians, Lydians, Carians, Phoenicians, and Babylonians. "He ruled also," says Xenophon, "over the Bactrians, Indians, and Cilicians, as well as the Sacians, Paphlagonians, and Megadonians, and many other nations, whose names even one cannot enumerate. He ruled the Greeks that were settled in Asia; and, descending to the sea, the Cyprians and the Egyptians. These nations he ruled, though their languages differed from his own, and from each other; and yet was he enabled to extend the fear of himself over so great a part of the world, as to astonish all, so that no one dared to attempt anything against him."—*John Kitto, D.D.*

(b) Cyrus saw and acknowledged the Hand by which his path had been marked out, and his steps guided; and he hastened to testify his convictions and his obedience by executing with earnestness the remaining task to which he had been called—that of restoring the Jews to their own land. These are the memorable words of the edict which was promulgated in writing through all his empire: "Jehovah, the God of heaven, hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and He hath charged me to build Him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah." There is nothing indefinite or uncertain in

this. If he had said simply, "the God of heaven," we might have been doubtful as to his meaning. It might have been understood of the god he had been used to worship. But here he gives Him the name by which the Lord was peculiarly known among the Hebrews—the great name of Jehovah; and declares unreservedly his conviction that HE was "the God of heaven." Surely this is a great declaration. It shows not only that Cyrus recognised the truth and inspiration of these prophecies, but that they wrought the conviction in his mind that the Jehovah, in whose name they were uttered, was, and could be, no other than "the God of heaven."

That this "Jehovah, the God of heaven," and not his own Ormuzd, "had given him all the kingdoms of the earth," he could only have known from Isaiah's prophecy, which declared the intention to give them to him, so long before he saw the light. Indeed, if he believed anything at all of the prophecy, he could not but believe this—that he owed all his glory and his greatness to his being the predestinated and pre-nominated agent of Jehovah; and that it was He, and no other, who had made the nations "as dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow."—*Ibid.*

(c) The whole world is in the hand of God, let us be thankful. The whole past is under His review, let us leave it with the assurance that His judgment is righteous. The whole future is under His control, let us pass into it with the steadiness, the quietness, and the majesty of those who know that all the resources of God are placed at the disposal of all who put their whole trust in His wisdom and love.—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

(d) It was only through Isaiah's prophecy that Cyrus could have realised the conviction that "Jehovah, God of Israel," had, as he says, "charged me to build Him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah." For nowhere else is this command given; and nothing but the convincing evidence of this command being contained in an old prophecy, which in so many other circumstances unmistakably indicates him and no other, could have invested this command, to his thoughtful and sagacious mind, with an authority and power not to be

gainsaid. The intensity of his conviction is, however, manifested by the alacrity and fulness with which he discharged the high duty imposed upon him. This gives a marked intensity to the "me." "He hath charged ME:" "Me," and no other. It was not a duty imperative on any king of Persia, but on him personally and individually.—*John Kitto, D.D.*

(e) The first act of sovereignty is the making laws. This is essential to God; no creature's will can be the first rule to the creature, but only the will of God: He only can prescribe man his duty, and establish the rule of it; hence the law is called "the royal law" (Jas. ii. 8); it being the first and clearest manifestation of sovereignty, as the power of legislation is of the authority of a prince. Both are joined together in Isa. xxxiii. 22: "The Lord is our Lawgiver; the Lord is our King,"—legislative power being the great mark of royalty. God, as a King, enacts laws by His own proper authority, and His law is a declaration of His own sovereignty, and of men's moral subjection to Him and dependence on Him. His sovereignty doth not appear so much in His promises as in His precepts: a man's power over another is not discovered by promising; for a promise doth not suppose the promiser either superior or inferior to the person to whom the promise is made. It is not an exercising authority over another, but over a man's self; no man forceth another to the acceptance of his promise, but only proposeth and encourageth to an embracing of it. But commanding supposeth always an authority in the person giving the precept; it obligeth the person to whom the command is directed; a promise obligeth the person by whom the promise is made. God, by His command, binds the creature; by His promise He binds Himself; He stoops below his sovereignty to lay obligations on His own majesty; by a precept He binds the creature, by a promise He encourageth the creature, to an observance of His precept. What laws God makes, man is bound, by virtue of His creation, to observe; that respects the sovereignty of God. What promises God makes, man is bound to believe; but that respects the faithfulness of God.—*Stephen Charnocke, B.D.*

## THE PROCLAMATION OF CYRUS.

(Verses 1-5.)

This proclamation, interesting in itself, is adapted to convey instruction of a very edifying nature if properly considered. We may view it—

### I. In a way of literal interpretation.

1. *And here that which first calls for our notice is the person by whom this proclamation was issued.* It was Cyrus king of Persia; who, though by educa-

tion ignorant of God, and how He was to be served, was yet employed as an instrument in effecting His gracious purposes—which shows the power He exercises over the spirits of men, a power far exceeding that merely human, which extends only to their bodies.

2. *But the proclamation itself is that which more particularly demands our at-*

tion. In this we see that a great event was to be effected, namely, the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon, after a long and trying captivity; which event opened to them the pleasing prospect of again worshipping Jehovah in their native land. This God had foretold by the mouth of His servant Jeremiah (chap. xxix. 10); and as He did not forget His promise, so neither did He delay the fulfilment of it beyond the proper time (Isa. xli. 26-28).

II. In a way of spiritual improvement. In the proclamation of Cyrus we may see—

1. *What a sad state the men of the world at large are in.* They are slaves and captives, being in bondage to their lusts, to the world, to Satan, and to the grave (Rom. vi. 12, viii. 21; Eph. ii. 2; 2 Tim. ii. 26; 2 Pet. ii. 19; 1 John v. 19). This is a humiliating, but just, view of them.

2. *What an invaluable blessing the Gospel is.* No one needs be told what a blessing the proclamation of Cyrus was to the captive Jews; and precisely such is the Gospel, as announcing deliverance to us (Isa. xxvii. 13).

3. *What will be necessary to obtain what it offers?* However deeply all are interested in doing this, too many, alas! are well contented with their bondage, displaying thus most inconceivable madness; whereas, by repentance and faith, they should go up out of it; and by returning to God enjoy the glorious liberty of His children.

4. *What is our bounden duty when it has become effectual for our good?* God is said to "raise the spirits" of such as were ambitious for liberty; and it need not be said to whom we are indebted, if we differ from others (1 Cor. iv. 7, xv. 10; Jas. i. 17).—*William Sleight.*

## GOD WITH US.

(Verse 3: "His God be with him.")

Notice:

I. **The devout wish expressed.** "His God be with him." It is equivalent to our "Good-bye," which is an abbreviation of "God be with you." This wish comprises two things—

1. *Personal relation to God.* "His God." The expression may be viewed in two aspects—(1.) "His God," as opposed to the gods of the heathen. "Jehovah the God of heaven" be with him. He is the only living and true God. (2.) "His God," as engaged to him in covenant relation. God had condescended to enter into covenant with the Israelites (Gen. xvii. 1-14; Exod. xix. 3-8; Jer. xxxii. 38-41; Ezek. xvi. 8). And in the Gospel He engages, or covenants, to forgive and save all who accept Christ by faith, to receive them as His people, and to be their God. Thus our Lord speaks: "My Father and your Father; My God and your God" (John xx. 17). All that He has, and all that He is, He gives to them as their portion, to be employed for their good. Without any presumption the true be-

liever in Jesus Christ may say unto the great God, "My God and my Father." (a). Martin Luther said that the sweetness of the Gospel consisted chiefly in its pronouns—such as *me, my, thy, &c.* "Who loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*" (Gal. ii. 20). "Christ Jesus, *my* Lord" (Phil. iii. 8). "*My* Lord and *my* God" (John xx. 28). It is the assurance of our personal interest in God, through Christ Jesus our Lord, that makes Him so unspeakably precious unto us. (b).

2. *Realisation of the presence of God.* "His God be with him." He is everywhere present; but His presence is realised only by believing, loving, and reverent spirits. Such spirits feel Him near—they have communion with Him, &c. (c). His presence is a guarantee of all the help and blessing which we need. We have all things in Him. (d). But in uttering this wish in respect to the Jews, Cyrus probably had an eye to two things which the presence of God would secure to them—(1.) Guidance and guardianship on their long journey. In the pil-

grimage of life we have infallible direction and inviolable protection, if our God be with us. (2.) Success in their great undertaking. Having the Divine Presence, the returning exiles would be able to overcome the difficulties which lay before them, and to rebuild the Temple of the Lord their God. The presence of God is the pledge of the success and triumph of His people.

## II. The kind expression of this wish.

The expression of this wish indicates on the part of Cyrus—

1. *Reverence towards God.* He does not utter these words thoughtlessly, but seriously. His proclamation makes it quite clear that he entertained reverent and exalted views of the Divine Being. In our kind wishes let us never use the Divine Name except with consideration and veneration.

2. *Kindness towards the captives.* He wished them well, and proved the sincerity of his wishes by practically helping them in their best interests.

### CONCLUSION :

1. *Do we sustain this personal relation to God?*

2. *Do we realise the blessed presence of God?*

3. *Do we desire that others also may realise His gracious presence?*

## ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) This goodness appears in the choice gift of Himself which He hath made over in this covenant (Gen. xvii. 7). You know how it runs in Scripture: "I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jer. xxxii. 38); a propriety in the Deity is made over by it. As He gave the blood of His Son to seal the covenant, so He gave Himself as the blessing of the covenant; "He is not ashamed to be called their God" (Heb. xi. 16). Though He be environed with millions of angels, and presides over them in an inexpressible glory, He is not ashamed of His condescensions to man, and to pass over Himself as the propriety of His people, as well as to take them to be His. It is a diminution of the sense of the place, to understand it of God, as Creator. What reason was there for God to be ashamed of the expressions of His power, wisdom, goodness, in the works of His hands? But we might have reason to think there might be some ground in God to be ashamed of making Himself over in a deed of gift to a mean worm and a filthy rebel; this might seem a disparagement to His majesty; but God is not ashamed of a

title so mean as the God of His despised people; a title below those others, of the "Lord of hosts, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders, riding on the wings of the wind, walking in the circuits of heaven." He is no more ashamed of this title of being our God, than He is of those other that sound more glorious; He would rather have His greatness veil to His goodness, than His goodness be confined by His majesty. He is not only our God, but our God as He is the God of Christ; He is not ashamed to be our propriety, and Christ is not ashamed to own His people in a partnership with Him in this propriety (John xx. 17): "I ascend to My God and your God." This, of God's being our God, is the quintessence of the covenant, the soul of all the promises; in this He hath promised whatsoever is infinite in Him, whatsoever is the glory and ornament of His nature, for our use; not a part of Him, or one single perfection, but the whole vigour and strength of all. As He is not a God without infinite wisdom, and infinite power, and infinite goodness, and infinite blessedness, &c., so He passes over in this covenant all that which presents Him as the most adorable Being to His creatures. He will be to them as great, as wise, as powerful, as good as He is in Himself; and the assuring us in this covenant to be our God imports also that He will do as much for us as we would do for ourselves were we furnished with the same goodness, power, and wisdom. In being our God He testifies it is all one, as if we had the same perfections in our own power to employ for our use; for He being possessed with them, it is as much as if we ourselves were possessed with them, for our own advantage, according to the rules of wisdom and the several conditions we pass through for His glory.—*Stephen Charnocke, B. D.*

(b) Only to be permitted to contemplate such a Being as Jehovah; to see goodness, holiness, justice, mercy, long-suffering, and sovereignty personified and condensed; to see them united with eternity, infinite power, unerring wisdom, omnipresence, and all-sufficiency; to see these natural and moral perfections indissolubly united and blended in sweet harmony in a pure spiritual Being, and that Being placed on the throne of the universe; to see this would be happiness enough to fill the mind of any creature in existence. But in addition to this, to have this ineffable Being for *our God*, *our portion*, *our all*; to be permitted to say, "This God is our God for ever and ever;" to have His resplendent countenance smile upon us; to be encircled in His everlasting arms of power, and faithfulness, and love; to hear His voice saying to us, "I am yours, and you are Mine; nothing shall ever pluck you from My hands, or separate you from My love; but you shall be with Me where I am, behold My glory, and live to reign with Me for ever and ever." This is too much; it is honour, it is glory, it is happiness too overwhelming, too transporting for mortal minds to conceive, or for mortal

frames to support; and it is perhaps well for us that here we know but in part, and that it doth not yet appear what we shall be.—*Edward Payson, D.D.*

(c) My friend has gone away from me over the sea and beyond the mountain, but I have him in my heart; his thoughts, his views of life, his behaviour under given circumstances, his noble impatience, his magnanimous scorn of all that is low and mean, never leave me; they will mould my life, they will save me in many a temptation. He is with me always because of the realising power of love. And this that we know something about in friendship, in the family circle, in literature, reaches its highest consummation in Jesus Christ; for though He has gone away from us, He says, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Though we cannot see Him, yet He says, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Though we would gladly lay hold of His wounded hand, He says it is better not.

It is expedient for you that fleshly contact cease, and that you lay hold of Him by the tendrils of your love. For what if we did grasp hands, death would break up our union; but if we grasp hearts, we are one for ever.—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

(d) "I have read," says an old divine, "of a company of poor Christians who were banished into some remote part, and one standing by, seeing them pass along, said that it was a very sad condition those poor people were in, to be thus hurried from the society of men, and made companions with the beasts of the field. 'True,' said another, 'it were a sad condition indeed if they were carried to a place where they should not find their God; but let them be of good cheer, God goes along with them, and will exhibit the comforts of His presence whithersoever they go. God's presence with His people is a spring that never fails.'"—*The Sunday School Teacher.*

## THE RELEASE OF THE JEWS FROM BABYLON AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE REDEMPTION OF MAN FROM SIN.

(Verses 3 and 5.)

We discover an analogy in these two things as regards—

**I. The subjects.** The Jews were exiles and captives in Babylon. Apart from the redemptive power of God, man is the captive of Satan and the slave of sin. He is "taken captive by him at his will." He is the slave of sinful passions and habits. He is captive, imprisoned, and bound (Isa. lxi. 1; Luke iv. 18). "Whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin" (John viii. 34). "I see a law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Rom. vii. 23). In his sinful state, man is an exile from his true condition and place, and the bondsman of evil powers. (a).

**II. The agents.** Cyrus, and Jesus Christ. The analogy between them is at least twofold.

1. *Both were called of God to this work.* Ages before his birth Cyrus was pre-nominated for this work, and spoken of as the anointed of the Lord, and as strengthened by Him for the accomplishment of this work (Isa. xlv. 24–xlv. 6). And Jesus Christ is pre-eminently the Servant, the Anointed, the Sent of God (Isa. xlii. 1; lxi. 1–3; Luke iv. 18, 19;

John iii. 16, 17; Gal. iv. 4, 5; 1 John iv. 9).

2. *Both effected this work by battling with and overcoming the oppressors.* Cyrus had to conquer the Babylonian Empire before he could release the captive Jews. And our Lord and Saviour, as the Son of Man, encountered sin and mastered it; He resisted temptation and overcame it; He battled with the devil and vanquished him; He grappled with death and abolished it; and thus He offers freedom from sin and Satan to all men. (b).

**III. The source.** In both cases the blessing flowed from the free and unmerited grace of God. The Jews had no claim upon Him against whom they had so persistently and so grievously rebelled. He "stirred up the spirit of Cyrus" to grant them release, of His own spontaneous and gracious will. In like manner He gave His Son Jesus Christ for the salvation of men. "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us," &c. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us," &c. (Tit. iii.

5-7). He gave His Son, He bestowed the Holy Spirit, He instituted means and ministries of grace, all of His own sovereign favour. Human redemption in its origin, in its accomplishment, and in its conditions, is entirely of divine grace. "It is of faith that it might be by grace." (c).

#### IV. The extent.

1. *It is offered to all.* "Who is there among you of all His people?" &c. Every Jew was free to go to Jerusalem if he pleased. Salvation from sin is provided for all, and freely offered to all. Christ "died for all." "God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved," &c. "God so loved the world," &c. "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "Go ye into all the world," &c.

2. *It is accepted only by some.* "Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all whose spirit God had raised," &c. Great numbers preferred to remain in Babylon. (1.) Many did not feel any deprivation or degradation in their exile and subjection. They had been born in Babylon, had passed their lives there, &c. Many do not accept the offered "redemption that is in Christ Jesus" because they are not conscious of the slavery of sin. Like the Jews of a later age, they say, "We were never in bondage to any man." (d). (2.) Many had attachments and interests in Babylon which they could not or would not leave. And great numbers in this day will not comply with the conditions of spiritual redemption. Their love of the things of this world, and their devotion to temporal things, bind them to the Babylon of the world and sin. When summoned to "Arise, and depart," they are unwilling to obey.

V. *The object.* "Go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem." A striking illustration of the grand end of redemption, which may be expressed thus—

1. *The universal realisation of the presence of God.* So St. John describes it: "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them," &c. (Rev. **xxi** 3).

2. *The universal presentation of worship to God.* "And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth," &c. (Rev. v. 13, 14).

"And the Temple again shall be built  
And filled as it was of yore;  
And the burden be lift from the heart of  
the world,  
And the nations all adore.  
Prayers to the throne of Heaven  
Morning and eve shall rise;  
And unto and not of the Lamb  
Shall be the sacrifice."—*P. J. Bailey.*

### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Sin may be conceived of as *an object*, but also as *a power*—as something to which our actions are directed, but also as something from which our actions proceed. Sin is an internal principle, and he who "commits sin," who lives in it, obeys it in this sense—obeys it as a force. Occasional acts may not represent, but belie a man's real nature; but he can do as a habit only what he is, and if that is sinful, he is the slave of sin. The whole and constant tendency and bias of the soul is a despotic rule; it is more than any external authority or verbal law. It has a more rigorous and relentless rule. It is more besetting, has a more constant presence and constraining power; it acts directly on the will; it controls and stimulates volition. That is a great bondage which overbears the will, which brings it against itself into subjection, which ignores and defies its choice, but that is a greater far which corrupts and perverts it. There is no slavery like that in which the very seat and source of freedom is held captive. It is the salt itself losing its savour; it is the light leading astray; it is the king and leader falling in battle.—*A. J. Morris.*

Go to the intemperate man in the morning, when his head aches, his hand trembles, his throat burns, and his whole frame is relaxed and unstrung: he is ashamed, hates his sin, would not do it. Go to him at night, when the power of habit is on him like a spell, and he obeys the mastery of his craving. He can use the language of Rom. vii.: "That which he would, he does not; but the evil that he hates, that does he." Observe, he is not in possession of a true self. It is not he, but sin which dwelleth in him that does it. A power which is not himself, which is not he, commands him against himself.

This is a gross case, but in every more refined instance the slavery is just as real. Wherever a man would and cannot, there is servitude. He may be unable to control his expenditure, to rouse his indolence, to check his imagination. Well, he is not free. He may boast, as the Jews did, that he is Abraham's son, or any other great man's son; that he belongs to a free country; that he never

was in bondage to any man ; but free in the freedom of the Son he is not.—*F. W. Robertson, M. A.*

(b) Christ came to open the prison doors and preach deliverance to the captives. "If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." When Paul was describing the bitter bondage of the unregenerate state, he could not finish it without the parenthetical exclamation, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." "The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death," &c. (Rom. viii. 2-4).

Yes, Christ is a Redeemer, a Redeemer from the slavery of sin, by entering into the personal contest with evil, with sin, Satan, and the world lying in wickedness ; suffering, but not submitting ; falling, but yet a victor ; being "made sin for us, though He knew no sin," and thus becoming "the Author of eternal redemption to all them that obey Him." He became sin, "that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." "Through death He destroyed him that had the power of death." He "hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us."

This is our hope. There is no other can break our chains, or make us wish to have them broken. There is no other can rescue us from bondage, or beget in us the love and aspiration of spiritual freedom. It remains for us to lay hold of this hope. And this can be done only by believing His word. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." "But God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin ; but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered to you."—*A. J. Morris.*

(c) Every good thing that is in a Christian, not merely begins, but progresses, and is consummated by the fostering grace of God, through Jesus Christ. If my finger were on the golden latch of Paradise, and my foot were on its jasper threshold, I should not take the last step so as to enter heaven unless the grace which brought me so far should enable me fully and fairly to complete my pilgrimage. Salvation is God's work, not man's. This is the theology which Jonah learned in the great fish college, in the university of the great

deep, to which college it would be a good thing if many of our divines could be sent, for human learning often puffeth up with the idea of human sufficiency ; but he that is schooled and disciplined in the college of a deep experience, and made to know the vileness of his own heart, as he peers into its chambers of imagery, will confess that from first to last salvation is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

(d) Men may have a high notion of personal independence, and make a great boast of freedom, and yet be in the deepest and most degrading bondage. And we may extend this thought to other things. Moral and spiritual evil may be, and frequently is, allied to a keen sense and a tenacious hold of other kinds of good. We may live in sin, which is the worst *weakness*, and yet have reverence for many kinds of not the lowest power. We may live in sin, which is the deepest *degradation*, and yet have noble elevation of moral thought and sympathy. The thought of slavery may fire our blood with scorn and hate, and yet we may be slaves of sin.

The reason is obvious. Sin is voluntary. It must be. Compulsory sin is a contradiction in terms. Its root and fountain is in the will. It is its being willed that constitutes it sin. For, as Coleridge said, "Nothing is me but my will." In sinning men do what they wish, what gives them pleasure. They feel no constraint ; they are but acting out their wills.

And then, again, the practice of sin gradually destroys the power of seeing and feeling that it is slavery. We see things by means of their opposites. We estimate by contrast. And as we see we feel. It is what is good in man that resists evil, mourns over it, repents of it. One wholly evil could do none of these things, and when men are wholly evil they are lost. It is the memory, the feeling, the aspiration of freedom that makes men writhe under slavery. It is the reason not entirely blinded, the conscience not utterly seared, that sees and smarts under sin. And when the sense of liberty and the sense of holiness have died out, the man may hug his chains, and the sinner is no more able to deliver his soul or say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?" And this is the curse of both slavery and sin.—*A. J. Morris.*

## THE RETURN OF THE EXILES.

(Verses 5 and 6.)

In these verses two main points claim our attention —

I. The company who returned. "Then rose up the chief of the fathers," &c. (ver. 5).

1. *They were of various classes.* "The chief of the fathers of Judah and Benja-

min, and the priests, and the Levites, with all whose spirit God had raised." It was well that the chiefs, men of experience and rank and influence, and the priests and the Levites, men who were consecrated to the service of God, should take the lead in this worthy and diffi-

cult undertaking. They who are conspicuous in position should be solicitous to act becomingly; and they whose influence is great should see to it that it is also good.

2. *They were of noble character.* "All whose spirit God had raised." "Only those marched up," says Schultz, "whom the Spirit of God awakened, that is, only the zealous and the awakened, whose spirits allowed themselves to be filled from God with courage and joy to overcome all the difficulties that opposed them, and with a longing for the land of their fathers that outweighed every other consideration. This limitation was, moreover, entirely in accordance with the Divine purpose. They must bring with them a zeal for the service of the true God that could not be quenched, at least entirely, by the difficult and gloomy circumstances in Judea, that might be enkindled and fed in some of them by these very circumstances." They were men of—(1.) *Piety*, as we see from their zeal for the rebuilding of the Temple of God, and the restoration of their national worship. (2.) *Patriotism*, or they would not have left Babylon for their desolate fatherland. (3.) *Courage*, or they could not have confronted the perils of this enterprise. (a).

3. *They were exalted in purpose.* They went "up to build the house of the Lord, which is in Jerusalem." No personal or selfish aim was theirs; but the honour of their fatherland, and the glory of their God.

"What sought they thus afar?  
Bright jewels of the mine?  
The wealth of seas? the spoils of war?  
They sought a faith's pure shrine!"  
—*Hemans.*

4. *They were comparatively few in number.* (1.) Only three of the tribes are mentioned (Judah, Benjamin, Levi) as availing themselves of the opportunity offered by the proclamation of Cyrus. There may have been some of the other tribes with them; but if this were so, their numbers were so few that they are not noticed in this place. The ten tribes of Israel are conspicuous by reason of their absence from this record. (2.) And of the tribes mentioned only

a portion returned to their own country. There is considerable uncertainty as to the exact number; but certainly there were not fifty thousand persons in all. "The return home," says Schultz, "was not a matter that required no consideration. Their native land lay either desolate or occupied with heathen and barbarous nations. Great dangers threatened the little nation, that would put itself in opposition with the inhabitants; and, indeed, severe tasks awaited them. In Babylon, on the other hand, their circumstances had become such that they could very well endure them, yea, they were favourable, as we can see from Isaiah lvi. 11–lviii., hence 'many remained behind in Babylon, unwilling to relinquish their property' (Joseph. *Ant.* XI. i. 3)." (b). An illustration of those who are in love with this present evil world, and decline to enter upon the Christian life with its self-denials and difficulties.

II. *The assistance which they received.*

1. *This was general.* "And all they that were about them strengthened their hands," &c. The Jews who elected to remain in Babylon would be likely to aid them liberally, in order to a certain extent to make up for their apparent neglect in remaining behind. And the Babylonians, encouraged by the exhortation and example of Cyrus, would aid them also.

2. *This was spontaneous.* "They that were about them" were not compelled to aid them at all. It is indeed stated that the gifts for rebuilding of the Temple were "willingly offered;" and the same cheerful liberality doubtless characterised their other gifts. They gave "not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver." In the hearty contributions of these heathens towards building the Temple of the true God, have we not a hint and a foreshadowing of the gathering of the heathen world into the Church of Jesus Christ?

3. *This was honourable to both the givers and the receivers.* (1.) To the givers, who were not only willing that the exiles should return home, but generously aided them to do so. (2.) To

the receivers. These gifts are a proof that in the land of their captivity their conduct must have won the esteem of their conquerors.

#### CONCLUSION :

Apply the subject as illustrating the offers of deliverance from the bondage of sin which are made in the Gospel, and of the aids which are provided for those who accept those offers, and urge their immediate and hearty acceptance.

#### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) The dominion of God is manifested in raising up and ordering the spirits of men according to His pleasure. He doth, as the Father of spirits, communicate an influence to the spirits of men, as well as an existence; He puts what inclinations He pleaseth into the will, stores it with what habits He pleases, whether natural or supernatural, whereby it may be rendered more ready to act according to the Divine purpose. The will of man is a finite principle, and therefore subject to Him who hath an infinite sovereignty over all things; and God, having a sovereignty over the will, in the manner of its acting, causeth it to will what He wills, as to the outward act, and the outward manner of performing it. . . . Thus He appointed Cyrus to be His shepherd, and gave him a pastoral spirit for the restoration of the city and Temple of Jerusalem (Isa. xlv. 28); and Isaiah (chap. xlv. 5) tells them, in the prophecy, that He had girded him, though Cyrus had not known Him; *i.e.* God had given him a military spirit and strength for so great an attempt, though he did not know that he was acted by God for those Divine purposes. And when the time came for the house of the Lord to be rebuilt, the spirits of the people were raised up, not by themselves, but by God (Ezra i. 5), "Whose spirit God had raised to go up;" and not only the spirit of Zerubbabel, the magistrate, and of Jeshua, the priest, but the spirit of all the people, from the highest to the meanest that attended him, were acted by God to strengthen their hands, and promote the work (Hag. i. 14). The spirits of men, even in those works which are naturally desirable to them, as the restoration of the city and rebuilding of the Temple was to those Jews, are acted by God, as the Sovereign over them, much more when the wheels of men's spirits are lifted up above their ordinary temper and motion. It was this empire of God good Nehemiah regarded, as that whence he was to hope for success; he did not assure himself so much of it, from the favour he had with the king, nor the reasonableness of his intended petition, but the abso-

lute power God had over the heart of that great monarch; and, therefore, he supplicates the heavenly, before he petitioned the earthly, throne (Neh. ii. 4): "So I prayed to the God of heaven." The heathens had some glance of this; it is an expression that Cicero hath somewhere, "That the Roman commonwealth was rather governed by the assistance of the Supreme Divinity over the hearts of men, than by their own counsels and management." How often hath the feeble courage of men been heightened to such a pitch as to stare death in the face, which before were damped with the least thought or glance of it! This is a fruit of God's sovereign dominion.—*Charnock*. For further illustration of this topic, see p. 7.

(b) Some readers may perhaps wonder that, on this proclamation of Cyrus, the Jews did not assemble in one body, and directly go and take possession of their ancient inheritance; but a little reflection shows the matter in another light. The city and Temple lay a heap of ruins, and it would cost immense labour and expense to rebuild them. The land was either wholly desolate or occupied by encroaching neighbours; and in either case it would require some time and trouble to procure for themselves habitations and provisions. The journey was long, arduous, and perilous to those who were attended with families and substance; and many enemies would endeavour to plunder them by the way, as far as they could and dared (chap. viii. 21-23; Neh. ii. 7). None of the Jews had seen Jerusalem or the Temple, except such as were above fifty years of age; at which period of life the spirit of enterprise commonly begins to decline. Few were attached to the Temple by true piety; and most of them wanted even that attachment which men naturally feel for the land of their nativity, having been born in the places where they were then settled. Some persons of true and eminent piety were so situated that they did not think it their duty to remove; as Daniel in the court of Cyrus. Others would be hindered by the infirmities of old age, and the peculiar circumstances of their families and connections. In short, the difficulties, hardship, and peril were manifest; the success of the attempt would be doubtful to all but those that were "strong in faith;" its temporal advantages were remote and precarious, and not worth the venture, especially to such as had obtained comfortable settlements or occupations in the land of their captivity. Even the spiritual advantages would appear to the pious mind more intended for posterity than for that generation; and to engage in it, in this view, would require vigorous faith, lively hope, and an active zeal for the honour of God, and the benefit of His Church, and establishment of His worship, in ages to come.—*Thomas Scott*.

## THE RESULTS OF THE CAPTIVITY.

(Verses 5 and 6.)

It may be well to consider here what were the actual effects of the captivity upon the Jewish people. These are well stated in Dr. Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, art. *Cyrus*, from which we quote the following paragraphs:—

The edict of Cyrus for the rebuilding of the Temple was, in fact, the beginning of Judaism; and the great changes by which the nation was transformed into a Church are clearly marked.

**I. The lesson of the kingdom was completed by the captivity.** The sway of a temporal prince was at length felt to be at best only a faint image of that Messianic kingdom to which the prophets pointed. The royal power had led to apostasy in Israel, and to idolatry in Judah; and men looked for some outward form in which the law might be visibly realised. Dependence on Persia excluded the hope of absolute political freedom, and offered a sure guarantee for the liberty of religious organisation.

**II. The captivity which was the punishment of idolatry was also the limit of that sin.** Thenceforth the Jews apprehended fully the spiritual nature of their faith, and held it fast through persecution. At the same time

wider views were opened to them of the unseen world. The powers of good and evil were recognised in their action on the material world, and in this way some preparation was made for the crowning doctrine of Christianity.

**III. The organisation of the outward Church was connected with the purifying of doctrine, and served as the form in which the truth might be realised by the mass.** Prayer—public and private—assumed a new importance. The prophetic work came to an end. The Scriptures were collected. The “law was fenced” by an oral tradition. Synagogues were erected and schools formed. Scribes shared the respect of priests, if they did not supersede them in popular regard.

**IV. Above all, the bond by which “the people of God” was held together was at length felt to be religious and not local, nor even primarily national.** The Jews were incorporated in different nations, and still looked to Jerusalem as the centre of their faith. The boundaries of Canaan were passed, and the beginnings of a spiritual dispensation were already made when the “Dispersion” was established among the kingdoms of the earth.—*B. F. Westcott, M. A.*

## THE RESTORATION OF THE SACRED VESSELS.

(Verses 7–11.)

Notice :

**I. The preservation of the sacred vessels.** “Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods; even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer.” These are the vessels which are mentioned in 2 Chron. xxxvi. 7, and Dan. i. 2. They did not include all the consecrated things; for we read in 2 Kings xxiv. 13, of some that were afterwards “cut in pieces” by Nebuchadnezzar or some of his soldiers. But in the providence of God these vessels were remarkably preserved, to be in due time restored to their original place and uses. Nebuchadnezzar, regarding them as sacred things, did not appropriate them to purposes of his own, but placed them in the temple of his god Merodach, or Bel, as he was called by the Greeks, at Babylon; and in this way they were preserved.

Learn :

*Since God is so careful of the mere vessels consecrated to His service, may we not rest assured that He will much*

more preserve His consecrated people? His children are far more precious in His sight than the most costly furniture of His temples. (a).

II. The numeration of the sacred vessels. "Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah." This numbering indicates—

1. *The reverent care of Cyrus for these sacred vessels.*

2. *The grave responsibility of Sheshbazzar for these sacred vessels.* He would be held accountable for the number of them thus counted out to him.

Learn:

*That persons, places, and things which are devoted to religious uses should be reverently regarded by us.* Their associations should raise them far above the level of common things. (b).

III. The restoration of the sacred vessels. "All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem."

1. *This was a fulfilment of prophecy* (Jer. xxvii. 22). Prophecy is a "sure word." The predictions of the Holy Bible will become accomplished facts; its promises will all be fulfilled. The veracity and the power of God guarantee the fulfilment of the declarations and assurances of His Word.

2. *This is an illustration of the restoration of perverted things to their true uses.* Many of the gifts of God are sadly misused; e.g., wealth, when it is employed for purposes of self-indulgence or vain show, or when it is avariciously hoarded; eloquence, when it is employed to arouse and inspire men in unworthy enterprises; poetry, when it is made the vehicle of impure suggestions, or the quickener of corrupt imaginations; art, &c. All these things, like the sacred vessels of the Jews, shall be restored to their true uses. They shall be employed in harmony with the will of God, for His glory, and for the good of mankind. The Lord Jesus Christ is the great Restorer of the violated order, and the broken harmony of the universe of God. "In the dispensation of the

fulness of times God will gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him." (c).

#### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) "They shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels." God has jewels even amid the ruins of this shattered and degraded world. "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people." Terrible as has been the havoc created by sin, there are "jewels" still on the earth, and no hand can rifle them. Many times have Satan and his legions sought to purloin the treasure, but the Word of the Lord is faithful—"no man can pluck them out of My Father's hand."—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

Beneath the wings of the Almighty God, night with its pestilence cannot smite the saints, and day with its cares cannot destroy them; youth with its passions shall be safely passed; middle age with its whirl of business shall be navigated in safety; old age with its infirmities shall become the land of Beulah; death's gloomy vale shall be lit up with the coming splendour; the actual moment of departure, the last and solemn article shall be the passing over of a river dryshod. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee, saith the Lord." "They shall never perish."—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

(b) It is a dreadful thing to trifle with sacred matters. If at any time we open the Bible, or anything out of it be opened to us, and we have not the serious design before our eyes and upon our hearts, that we would know more of divine things, that we may be made more like God, and be more fitted for His service and communion both here and hereafter, we shall be found guilty of trifling with that which is sacred; and though in this world the punishment may not be so visibly severe, yet the guilt is undoubtedly greater than that which Uzzah lay under when he rashly laid hold on the ark; and the Bethshemites, when they opened and would be curiously prying into it. When a man meddleth with the great things of God, and can give no account for what he does, but only to satisfy his curiosity, and the idle fancy of a vain mind; this, sooner or later, must have a sad issue.—*John Howe.*

(c) The reconciliation which our Lord has effected has bearings as wide as creation. The whole creation will be restored, and inherit with man the peace and glory of Christ. Evil struggles, and will yet struggle, but it is doomed. Christ's death will be fulfilled in the death of evil throughout all nature. His ascension will be fulfilled in the universal diffusion of His Life, Love, and Glory. But

He will not make haste. By His long patience, He gives the utmost possibility to the endeavours of evil. In the end, evil powers will work their own confusion and downfall. The Son of God is sure of final victory. He foresees it. The whole field will come about to Him. He will wait for it. In His ascension, all the elements and powers of nature are already glorified. In Him, they have all come back to God, with increase. They are no longer divided and striving. They underwent their grand decisive and bloody sweat in Him. The worst is past. "The restitution of all things" is certain. All things are at peace in Christ, and the peace is wonderful.

"It is finished," proclaimed the end of the fallen order of nature. "He is risen," announced the beginning of the new order. Christ glorified is God's firstfruits of the whole harvest of His recovered creation. All things will be made after the pattern of Christ's

unity. The reconciliation of all things in Him is very Divine. And when the like reconciliation is fulfilled, both in man and nature, the work of the Mediator will be done, and "the mystery of God finished."

Observe once for all, that whoever speaks merely of the redemption of mankind, mutilates the redemption of God, and is unfaithful to the New Testament. The mystery of God's will and purpose, which Paul commends to us, is the knitting into unity, the gathering together in one, of "all things in Christ, both the things which are in heaven, and the things which are on earth; even in Him." The Headship of Christ is universal. Heaven and earth, and "all things" therein, are to be brought under One Head; and thus into the fellowship of a divinely balanced harmony. The whole course of sin and sorrow is His chastisement, which He will bear until it melts into His own Purity and Peace.—*John Pulsford.*

## CHAPTER II.

**CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.]** In this chapter we have *the list of those who returned from captivity with Zerubbabel, and their contributions for rebuilding the Temple.* The contents may be arranged thus—1. The description of the chapter (ver. 1), with the names of the leaders of the exodus (ver. 2). 2. The numbers of the people who returned, arranged—(1) according to families (vers. 3-19); (2) according to cities (vers. 20-35). 3. The numbers of the priests and Levites who returned, arranged according to families (vers. 36-42). 4. The numbers of the Nethinim and the descendants of Solomon's servants (vers. 43-58). 5. People and priests who could not produce their genealogy (vers. 59-63). 6. The sum total of the persons who returned, with their servants and beasts of burden (vers. 64-67). 7. The offerings of those who returned for the rebuilding of the Temple (vers. 68, 69), and a concluding statement (ver. 70). This catalogue appears also in the Book of Nehemiah (chap. vii. 6-73), he having "found" the document (ver. 5), and incorporated it in his work. It also appears in the apocryphal book, 1 Esdras v. 7-45. The three texts differ to some extent in the names, and yet more in the numbers. The differences, however, are unimportant, and arose probably from the mistakes of copyists, to which there is great liability in transcribing long lists of names and numbers.

**Ver. 1. The province]** "i.e. the province of Judea as a district of the Persian Empire; so chap. v. 8, Neh. i. 3."—*Keil.* **Every one unto his city]** All who returned did not settle in Jerusalem. Many were located in neighbouring cities and villages.

**Ver. 2. Zerubbabel]**="born in Babylon." His Chaldean name was Sheshbazzar (chap. i. 8). **Jeshua]** A later and abbreviated form of Jehoshua. He was the son of Jehozadak (1 Chron. vi. 14), or, as it is written in Hag. i. 1, Josedech; was probably born in Babylon; and was the first high priest of the restored community. "A man of earnest piety, patriotism, and courage." The names of nine other persons are given in this verse. Nehemiah (chap. vii. 7) gives the name of Nahamani, which is not mentioned here, and makes twelve in all. Of these ten persons we know nothing except their names, and that, with Zerubbabel and Jeshua, they were probably the twelve heads of twelve divisions into which the new community was arranged. **Nehemiah]** is not "Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah" (Neh. i. 1); **Seraiah]** is Azariah; **Reelaiah]** is Raamiah; **Mizpar]** is Mispereth; and **Rehum]** is Nehum, in Neh. vii. 7; **Mordecai]** not Mordecai the cousin and foster-parent of Esther (Esth. ii. 7). **The number of the men of the people of Israel]** is "the special title of the first division (vers. 3-35) of the following list, with which the titles in vers. 36, 40, 43, and 55 correspond. They are called 'the people of Israel,' not the people of Judah, because those who returned represented the entire covenant people."—*Keil.* Although, as we before stated, those who returned were almost all from the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi.

**Vers. 3-35]** It is not necessary for us to enter into a comparison of the names and numbers here given and those of the corresponding passage in Nehemiah.

**Vers. 36-39. The priests]** This brief catalogue corresponds exactly with Neh. vii. 39-42.

**Vers. 40-42. The Levites]** were of three classes—1. Those who assisted the priests in Divine worship. 2. The singers. 3. The porters. (Comp. 1 Chron. xxiv. 20-31, xxv., and xxvi. 1-19.)

**Vers. 43-54. The Nethinims]** Nethinim = "given or dedicated ones;" from נָתַן = "to give," "dedicate," &c. They were captives of war, who were given to the Levites to be employed in the rougher and more laborious duties of their offices (Num. xxxi. 47; Josh. ix. 27). "The Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed (Heb. *given*) for the service of the Levites" (chap. viii. 20). *Keil* briefly designates them "temple-bondsmen."

Vers 55-57. The children of Solomon's servants] were, according to Plumptre (*Bibl. Dict.*) and Rawlinson, the descendants of the remnant of the ancient Canaanites, upon whom Solomon "levied a tribute of bond-service" (1 Kings ix. 20, 21; 2 Chron. viii. 7, 8). But, according to Keil and Schultz, they were prisoners of war from some other nations, whom Solomon made to do services similar to those of the Gibeonites (Josh. ix. 27). In rebuilding the Temple their services would be of great importance.

Ver. 58. Three hundred ninety and two] So also Neh. vii. 60.

Vers. 59, 60. Could not show their father's house, and their seed] Margin: "pedigree." "Although they could not prove their Israelite origin, they were permitted to go up to Jerusalem with the rest, the rights of citizenship alone being for the present withheld."—*Keil*.

Vers. 61-63. Children of the priests] who could not prove that they belonged to the priesthood.

Ver. 61. Which took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai] &c. Keil and Schultz think that the daughters of Barzillai were heiresses, and that the priest who married one of them assumed her name in order to take possession of her inheritance. But this, to say the least, is very questionable, seeing that they had brothers (1 Kings ii. 7); and daughters, according to Jewish law, did not inherit any of their father's property except in those cases in which he had no son (Num. xxvii. 8). It is more probable that the name of the wife's family was preferred because of the honourable associations of that name; for *Barzillai the Gileadite* "was a very great man," and distinguished by reason of his relations to king David (2 Sam. xvii. 27-29, xix. 31-39; 1 Kings ii. 7). The change of name would not invalidate the claim of the descendants of the family to the priesthood; but in process of time it might have occasioned doubts as to their priestly origin.

Ver. 62. Therefore, were they, as polluted] &c. Margin: "Heb., they were polluted from the priesthood." They were pronounced unclean, and so excluded from the priesthood.

Ver. 63. Tirshatha] Margin: "Or, governor." It is the Persian title of the civil governor, and is here given to Zerubbabel. It was afterwards applied to Nehemiah (Neh. viii. 9, x. 1). Not eat of the most holy things] (comp. Lev. ii. 3; Num. xviii. 9). This prohibition involved their exclusion from the discharge of priestly functions. "A portion of the general fees which were offered to the priests was not denied them, since their right to the priesthood was not expressly denied, but left *in suspenso*."—*Schultz*. Till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim] Zerubbabel expected that when the altar and Temple were rebuilt, Jehovah would again grant them some special manifestation of His presence, and would restore the privilege of obtaining direct answers from Him by means of Urim and Thummim. His expectation, however, was never fulfilled.

Ver. 64] The number here given agrees exactly with that given both in Nehemiah and in 1 Esdras. "The sum total being alike in all three texts, we are obliged to assume its correctness."—*Keil*.

Ver. 65. Their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven] In Neh. vii. 67 the same number of servants is given. Two hundred singing men and singing women] These singers were employed to increase the delight of the festivities, and to chant dirges in times of mourning (2 Chron. xxxv. 25; Eccles. ii. 8); and as they were hired and paid, and were probably not of Israelite origin, they are here classed with the servants.

Vers. 66, 67] With these verses Neh. vii. 68, 69, exactly agree.

Ver. 68. When they came to the house of the Lord] *i.e.* to the site of the Temple. Probably considerable ruins of the Temple were yet remaining.

Ver. 69] The account of the offerings given in Neh. vii. 70-72 differs from that in this verse, and is held both by Keil and by Schultz to be more correct. Threescore and one thousand drams, or darics, of gold] According to Rawlinson, the daric was worth £1, 1s. 10½d. of our money. The 61,000 darics were therefore equal to £66,718, 15s. Five thousand pound, or mina, of silver] The Greek silver *mina* was worth a little over £4 of our money; and the value of the Hebrew silver *maneh*, according to Rawlinson, was probably not very different from the Greek. Thus the offering in silver would be worth over £20,000; and the entire offering in money worth nearly £90,000. Keil, however, reckons the 61,000 darics of gold to be worth £68,625, and the 5000 mina of silver, £30,000, and the entire offering nearly £99,000.

## GOING UP OUT OF CAPTIVITY.

### (Verse 1 and part of 2.)

We have here presented to our notice—

#### I. The deliverance from captivity.

"These are the children of the promise that went up out of the captivity, of those which had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away into Baby-

lon." The captivity from which they were escaping was (1.) *A degradation*. It was the loss of their power and independence. (2.) *A subjection*. It was the loss of their freedom. They were brought under the power of their conquerors. (3.) *A transportation*. "Nebuchadnezzar the king carried them away

unto Babylon." From their own land, with all its hallowed and inspiring memories and associations, they were forcibly removed unto the land of their heathen conquerors. (4.) *A retribution.* Their captivity was the punishment of their numerous, heinous, and long-continued sins against God, and especially their forsaking Him by the adoption of idolatrous customs. Nebuchadnezzar was the rod of God for their chastisement.

The most deplorable degradation and the most real and terrible subjection are those of sin.

But now many of the Jews are going "up out of the captivity." The offer of release has been made, and they who are mentioned in this chapter have accepted it.

Concerning this deliverance, notice :—

1. *It originated in the favour of God* (chap. i. 1).

2. *It was effected by an unlikely agent.* Cyrus.

3. *It was permissive, not compulsory.* The Jews were quite free to accept or to decline the offer of Cyrus.

Salvation from the bondage of sin is freely offered in the Gospel, but no one is compelled to accept the offer. All who accept it do so willingly, of their own accord.

**II. The journey home.** "And came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city." It is here suggested that this journey was :—

1. *A restoration.* "And came again." They were going unto the land which God had given to their fathers; to the scenes of the most sacred and stirring events in their national history.

2. *A restoration to their own home.* "Came again every one unto his city." It seems to us that where it was practicable the returning Jews would settle in the cities where their ancestors had resided, and take possession of the inheritances which they had held. They went back to the scenes amid which their forefathers lived and laboured, to the lands which they had cultivated, to the places where they had prayed and worked, rejoiced and wept, loved and suffered, lived and died. There must have been in this a very strong and tender attraction to many hearts. (a).

3. *A restoration to religious privileges.* "Came again unto Jerusalem." Jerusalem was not only the metropolis of the nation, but the holy city, the place where the Temple had been and was to be again. "This Mount Zion, wherein Thou hast dwelt" (Ps. lxxiv. 2). "Jerusalem . . . whither the tribes go up," &c. (Ps. cxxii. 4).

The salvation of Jesus Christ restores man to his true condition and to his forfeited inheritance. "When divine grace," said Leigh Richmond, "renews the heart of the fallen sinner, Paradise is regained, and much of its beauty restored to the soul."

But they were not returning with complete independence. They were still "the children of the province." Judea remained a "province" of the Persian Empire. Full religious freedom was granted unto them, but politically they remained subject to Persian rule. Sin, even when it is forgiven, blotted out, always leaves some detriment, or loss, or pain behind it. (b).

**III. The subordination to leaders.** "Which came with Zerubbabel : Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mizpar, Bigvai, Rehum, Baanah." Zerubbabel prince of Judah was head over all. Jeshua was the head of the party as regards its religious duties; and in addition to these there were ten recognised leaders. Society could not exist without rulers and leaders. They are necessary—

1. *For the maintenance of order.* The authority of law must be maintained; its sanctions must be enforced, or the bands of society would be utterly dissolved, &c. And for this purpose rulers or magistrates are necessary.

2. *For insuring progress.* The growth and improvement of a community are impossible apart from the exercise of wise leadership.

3. *Because of the differences in the characters and abilities of men.* By their native faculties, their character, and their training, some men almost inevitably become the rulers and leaders of others. (c).\*

\* These points are treated in a less fragmentary manner in the *Hom. Com. on Numbers*, p. 12.

## ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) There is a sanctity in a good man's house which cannot be renewed in every tenement that rises on its ruins; and I believe that good men would generally feel this; and that having spent their lives happily and honourably, they would be grieved at the close of them to think that the place of their earthly abode, which had seen, and seemed almost to sympathise in, all their honour, their gladness, or their suffering—that this, with all the record it bore of them, and all of material things that they had loved and ruled over, and set the stamp of themselves upon—was to be swept away, as soon as there was room made for them in the grave; that no respect was to be shown to it, no affection felt for it, no good to be drawn from it by their children; that though there was a monument in the church, there was no warm monument in the hearth and house to them; that all that they ever treasured was despised, and the places that had sheltered and comforted them were dragged down to the dust. I say that a good man would fear this; and that, far more, a good son, a noble descendant, would fear doing it to his father's house. I say that if men lived like men indeed, their houses would be temples—temples which we should hardly dare to injure, and in which it would make us holy to be permitted to live; and there must be a strange dissolution of natural affection, a strange unthankfulness for all that homes have given and parents taught, a strange consciousness that we have been unfaithful to our father's honour, or that our own lives are not such as would make our dwellings sacred to our children, when each man would fain build to himself, and build for the little revolution of his own life only. . . .

When men do not love their hearths, nor reverence their thresholds, it is a sign that they have dishonoured both, and that they have never acknowledged the true universality of that Christian worship which was indeed to supersede the idolatry, but not the piety, of the pagan. Our God is a household God, as well as a heavenly One; He has an altar in every man's dwelling; let men look to it when they rend it lightly and pour out its ashes . . . It is one of those moral duties, not with more impunity to be neglected because the perception of them depends on a finely toned and balanced conscientiousness, to build our dwellings with care, and patience, and fondness, and diligent completion, and with a view to their duration at least for such a period as, in the ordinary course of national revolutions, might be supposed likely to extend to the entire alteration of the direction of local interests.—*John Ruskin, M.A.*

Home! angels encamp about it. Ladders are let down from heaven to every pillow in that house. Over the child's rough crib there are chantings as sweet as those that broke above Bethlehem. It is home! home! The children of the family will grow up, and

though they may get splendid residences of their own, they will never forget that homely place, the place where their father rested, and their mother sang, and their sisters played. If you wanted to gather up all tender memories, all lights and shadows of the heart, all banquetings and reunions, all filial, fraternal, paternal, conjugal affections, and had only just four letters with which to spell out that height, and depth, and length, and breadth, and magnitude, and eternity of meaning, you would write it out with these four capital letters: H-O-M-E.—*T. de Witt Talmage, D.D.*

(b) Even pardoned sins must leave a trace in heavy self-reproach. You have heard of the child whose father told him that whenever he did anything wrong a nail should be driven into a post, and when he did what was good he might pull one out. There were a great many nails driven into the post, but the child tried very hard to get the post cleared of the nails by striving to do right. At length he was so successful in his struggles with himself that the last nail was drawn out of the post. The father was just about to praise the child, when stooping down to kiss him, he was startled to see tears fast rolling down his face. "Why, my boy, why do you cry? Are not all the nails gone from the post?" "Oh yes! the nails are all gone, but the marks are left." That is a familiar illustration, but don't despise it because of that. It illustrates the experience of many a grey old sire, who, looking upon the traces of his old sins as they yet rankle in his conscience, would give a hundred worlds to live himself back into young manhood, that he might obliterate the searing imprint of his follies. Have you never heard of fossil-rain? In the stratum of the old red sandstone there are to be seen the marks of showers of rain which fell centuries and centuries ago, and they are so plain and perfect that they clearly indicate the way the wind was drifting, and in what direction the tempest slanted from the sky. So may the tracks of youthful sins be traced upon the tablet of the life when it has merged into old age—tracks which it is bitter and sad remorse to look upon, and which call forth many a bootless longing for the days and months which are past.—*A. Mursell.*

(c) In the long run leadership resolves itself into a question of personal qualification. For a time men may arise who claim commanding positions who are unable to discharge the duties which their ambition has coveted. In such instances there would seem to be a miscarriage of the natural law and order of things; yet it is only temporary; sooner or later unqualified men have to resign positions which they ought never to have assumed.—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

In a great leader many elements of qualification are combined. Other men may excel him in detached points, but taken as a whole he rules not perhaps by one dominant faculty,

but by a noble proportion of natural and acquired gifts. The position of a leader is not so easy as it may appear to be to unreflecting observers. Men see the elevation, not the strain and responsibility which that elevation

involves. The only sound rule for promotion to influential positions in the Church is, that *wisdom*, wheresoever found, in the rich or the poor, the old or the young, should be recognised and honoured.—*Ibid.*

### A SUGGESTIVE RECORD.

(Verses 2 (last clause)—64: "The number of the men of the people of Israel: The children of Parosh," &c.)

Consider:

**I. The significance of the fact of the record.**

1. *It was an honour to the pious and patriotic ones who returned.* In going back to their own land at this time, and for the purpose of rebuilding the Temple, they acted very religiously and courageously; and to their praise their names were recorded, and in the providence of God the record has been preserved to this day. "Them that honour Me I will honour."

2. *It is an illustration of the Divine record of God's spiritual Israel.* The name of every true believer in Jesus Christ is "written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. xxi. 27). "Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Luke x. 20; comp. Exod. xxxii. 32; Ps. lxxix. 28; Phil. iv. 3; Heb. xii. 23; Rev. xiii. 8). "The Lord knoweth them that are His." (a).

3. *It suggests that every one of His people is precious in the sight of God.* "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, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels." He knows the number of His people, and the name of every one of them. "He calleth His own sheep by name." He will not lose any one of them. He has not only written their names in His book of life, but has graven them upon the palms of His hands (Isa. xlix. 16). (b).

**II. The significance of the contents of the record.** We have in this list—

1. *Significant persons.* (1.) Zerubbabel, "the prince of Judah," an ancestor of the Messiah (Matt. i. 12; Luke iii. 27). It was important that his name should be recorded, that no link might

be absent from the chain of evidence which shows that our Lord was of the family of king David (comp. Isa. xi. 1; Jer. xxiii. 5; Matt. i. 1-17; xxii. 42). (2.) Jeshua, who was a distinguished type of Jesus Christ (Zech. iii., vi. 11-13).

2. *A significant place.* Bethlehem (ver. 21). This place must be rebuilt, and reinhabited by Jews; for in the Divine purposes a great destiny awaited it (Mic. v. 2; Matt. ii. 1). Here, then, in this record we have two persons and one place which sustained close relations to the Messiah.

3. *Significant numbers.* (1.) The number of those who settled in Bethlehem was small—"an hundred twenty and three." Bethlehem was "little among the thousands of Judah." Yet how illustrious and universal is its renown! Size and populousness are utterly unsatisfactory tests of worth and greatness. (c). (2.) The number of those who settled in Anathoth was also small—"an hundred twenty and eight" (ver. 23). In this we have an illustration of the fulfilment of the Divine threatenings (Jer. xi. 21-23). The word of the Lord, whether it be a promise or a menace, shall surely be accomplished in due season. (3.) The number of the whole was comparatively small. "The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand, three hundred and threescore" (ver. 64). What a small number as compared with the 603,550 men "that were able to go forth to war in Israel," who were numbered in the desert of Sinai! How small, too, as compared with the 601,730 men "able to go to war in Israel," who were numbered in the plains of Moab, before the entrance into the Promised Land! The smallness of the number of those who returned to

their own land may be viewed—(i.) As a discredit to those who remained in Babylon. In them the love of material prosperity was stronger than the love of country. They had neither piety nor patriotism enough to inspire them to make the sacrifices and encounter the perils which the return to their own land involved. (ii.) The greater honour to those who returned. They acted with a noble faithfulness and independence in doing what they deemed to be their duty and privilege, though they were in a minority, and though the course they followed involved loss and danger. They had the courage of their convictions; they were heroes in their fidelity to their country and to their God. (iii.) An element which contributed to the success of their undertaking. To settle down again in the deserted land, and to rebuild the ruined Temple in the face of difficulty and opposition, demanded men of the right quality rather than men in great multitude. It was force of character, and not force of numbers, that was needed for the success of the returning exiles—men of sincere piety and fervent patriotism. As the victory of Gideon over the Midianites was achieved not by the 32,000, some of whom were fearful and others lacking zeal, but by the 300 eager and heroic ones; so with this company under Zerubbabel, success was to be achieved by their faith and courage, not by their multitudinousness. (d).

### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) God knows the persons of all His own. He hath in His infinite understanding the exact number of all the individual persons that belong to Him (2 Tim. ii. 19): "The Lord knows them that are His." He knows all things, because He hath created them; and He knows His people because He hath not only made them, but also chose them. He could no more choose He knew not what, than He could create He knew not what. He knows them under a double title; of creation as creatures in the common mass of creation, as new creatures by a particular act of separation. He cannot be ignorant of them in time whom He foreknew from eternity. His knowledge in time is the same as He had from eternity; He foreknew them that He intended to give the grace of faith unto; and He knows them after they believe, because He knows His own act in bestowing grace upon them, and His

own mark and seal wherewith He has stamped them. No doubt but He that "calls the stars of heaven by their names" (Ps. cxlvii. 4), knows the number of those living stars that sparkle in the firmament of His Church. He cannot be ignorant of their persons when He numbers the hairs of their heads, and hath registered their names in the book of life. As He only had an infinite mercy to make the choice, so He only hath an infinite understanding to comprehend their persons. We only know the elect of God by a moral assurance in the judgment of charity, when the conversation of men is according to the doctrine of God. We have not an infallible knowledge of them, we may be often mistaken; Judas, a devil, may be judged by man for a saint till he be stripped of his disguise. God only hath an infallible knowledge of them; He knows His own records, and the counterparts in the hearts of His people; none can counterfeit His seal, nor can any raze it out. When the Church is either scattered like dust by persecution, or overgrown with superstition and idolatry, that there is scarce any grain of true religion appearing, as in the time of Elijah, who complained that he was left alone, as if the Church had been rooted out of that corner of the world (1 Kings xix. 14, 18); yet God knew that He had a number fed in a cave, and had reserved seven thousand men that had preserved the purity of His worship, and not bowed the knee to Baal. Christ knew His sheep, as well as He is known of them; yea, better than they can know Him (John x. 14). History acquaints us that Cyrus had so vast a memory that he knew the name of every particular soldier in his army, which consisted of divers nations; shall it be too hard for an infinite understanding to know every one of that host that march under His banner? May He not as well know them as know the number, qualities, influences, of those stars which lie concealed from our eye as well as those that are visible to our sense? Yes, He knows them, as a general to employ them, as a shepherd to preserve them. He knows them in the world to guard them, and He knows when they are out of the world to gather them, and call out their bodies though wrapped up in a cloud of the putrefied carcasses of the wicked. As He knew them from all eternity to elect them, so He knows them in time to clothe their persons with righteousness, to protect their persons in calamity, according to His good pleasure, and at last to raise and reward them according to His promise.—*Stephen Charnocke, B.D.*

(b) Our God has a particular notice of us, and a particular interest in our personal history. And this was one of the great uses of the incarnation; it was to humanise God, reducing Him to a human personality, that we might believe in that particular and personal love in which He reigns from eternity. For Christ was visibly one of us, and we see in all His demonstrations that He is attentive to

every personal want, woe, cry of the world. When a lone woman came up in a crowd to steal, as it were, some healing power out of His person, or out of the hem of His garment, He would not let her off in that impersonal, unrecognising way; He compelled her to show herself and to confess her name, and sent her away with His personal blessing. He pours out everywhere a particular sympathy on every particular child of sorrow; He even hunts up the youth He has before healed of his blindness, and opens to him, persecuted as he is for being healed, the secrets of His glorious Messiahship. The result, accordingly, of this incarnate history is that we are drawn to a different opinion of God; we have seen that He can love as a man loves another, and that such is the way of His love. He has tasted death, we say, not for all men only, but for every man. We even dare to say, for me—who loved me and gave Himself for me. Nay, He goes even further than this Himself, calling us friends, and claiming that dear relationship with us,—friends because He is on the private footing of friendship and personal confidence: “The servant knoweth not what his lord doeth, but I have called you friends.” He even goes beyond this, promising a friendship so particular and personal, that it shall be a kind of secret, or cipher of mutual understanding open to no other—a new white stone given by his King, “and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”

His Saviour and Lord is over him and with him, as the Good Shepherd calling him by name; so that he is finally saved, not as a man, or some one of mankind led forth by his Lord in the general flock, but as the Master's dear Simon, or James, or Alpheus, or Martha, whose name is so recorded in the Lamb's book of life.—*Horace Bushnell, D.D.*

(c) The moral magnitude of things has no relationship to the physical. What if a man should say that Washington was not a great man because he was not a ten-thousandth part as great as the Alleghany Mountains, comparing moral magnitude with physical? What has the size of a man, or the duration on earth of a man, or his physical powers, to do with the moral measurement that belongs to the understanding, the reason, or the moral sentiments? Is a battle great by the size of the nation that fought it, or the field that it was fought in? Or is it great by the skill and the bravery enacted, and by the long-reaching sequences that flow from it? The part which this world is to play in the far future, the experiment of human life, the story of Divine sacrifice and love, the part which redeemed men are to enact in their translation into the heavenly sphere—these all give a moral grandeur to this world, and utterly overcome the objection that God would not be likely to give minute personal thought to the evolutions of individual life.—*H. W. Beecher.*

(d) Gideon's army, we see, must be lessened. And who so fit to be cashiered as the fearful? God bids him, therefore, proclaim licence for all faint hearts to leave the field. God will not glorify Himself by cowards. As the timorous shall be without the gates of heaven, so shall they be without the lists of God's field. Reader! does but a foul word, or a frown, scare thee from Christ? Doth the loss of a little land or silver disquiet thee? Doth but the sight of the Midianites in the valley strike thee with terror? Home then, home to the world; thou art not for the conquering band of Christ. If thou canst not resolve to follow Him through infamy, prisons, racks, gibbets, flames, depart to thy house, and save thyself to thy loss.—*Bishop Hall.*

## RELIGIOUS SERVICE.

(Verses 36-58.)

This section of the record suggests the following observations concerning service in the Church of God:—

**I** There are various spheres of service in the Church of God. In the verses before us there are several classes of persons, and each of these classes had its own proper duties to discharge. The priests (vers. 36-39), the Levites who assisted the priests (ver. 40), the Levitical choir or choirs (ver. 41), the Levitical porters or gate-keepers (ver. 42), the Nethinim, who performed the more menial and laborious duties (vers. 43-54), and “the children of Solomon's servants,” who were a grade lower even

than the Nethinim, and did the humblest work of all. In these we have an illustration of the various spheres of religious work in this Christian dispensation. “He gave gifts unto men. And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;” &c. (Eph. iv. 11, 12). In our own day we have pastors, preachers, evangelists, conductors of prayer-meetings, Sunday-school teachers, tract distributors, visitors of the sick and sorrowful, leaders of the psalmody of the church, and managers of its financial and other business arrangements. In the work of the Lord Jesus amongst

men there is scope for every kind and degree of faculty. The feeblest power may be beneficially employed; and the greatest gifts may find spheres of service which demand their utmost exercise. This fact deprives the idlers in the Church of God of any legitimate excuse for their indolence. There is work for every one, and suited to every capacity; and the obligation of service rests upon every one. Let every one, then, be up and doing, &c. (a).

**II. The humblest sphere of service in the Church of God is a place of privilege and honour.** This seems to us to be fairly deducible from the fact that the Nethinim and "the children of Solomon's servants" are here recorded and numbered. Even the bondsmen taken from alien and conquered peoples, being employed in the most menial services in connection with the Temple, find a place in this sacred record of the returning people of God. That we are permitted to do anything for Jesus our Lord, if it be the very lowest and humblest service, should be regarded as a precious privilege and a high honour. Is it not an honour that we may aid in any way, and in any degree, in the conversion, education, or progress of a soul immortal and redeemed by the precious blood of Christ? Is it not an honour that we are permitted, nay, called to be co-workers with our Lord and Saviour in His great redemptive undertaking? (b).

**III. The privilege of service in the Church of God is not limited to any particular races or classes of men.** Neither the Nethinim nor "the children of Solomon's servants" were Israelites; but they were not excluded from the privilege of employment in connection with the Temple and its services. In this Christian age no races or classes are privileged to share in this service to the exclusion of others. All men may participate in the blessings of Christ's salvation; and every true Christian may serve in some sphere of holy work, and ought so to serve. "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him." In

the Christian life "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all, and in all." Neither is there any exclusive sacerdotal class with special privileges and powers. Every sphere of Christian service is open to every Christian who possesses the qualifications for efficiently discharging the duties of such sphere. (c).

Let every Christian, then, promptly undertake and faithfully discharge some service in the cause of our Lord and Saviour. "Son, go work to-day in My vineyard." "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Every Christian who wants to have a blessing for himself or for others, must set to work by active exertion. Some of you young men might preach—you have the ability, you have the time for study; I want you to lay out your talents in that holiest of enterprises: in the street corners, anywhere, proclaim Christ. Some of you ought to be teaching in Sabbath-schools, but you are putting that talent by; it is rusting, it is spoiling, and you will have no interest to bring to your Master for it. I want that Sabbath-school talent to be used. Many of you might do good service by teaching senior classes at your own houses. This work might be most profitably extended. If our intelligent Christian brethren and matrons would try to raise little classes, of six, eight, ten, or twelve, at home, I know not what good might come of it. You would not be interfering with any one else; for in such a city as this, we may all work as hard as we will, and there is no chance of interfering with each other's labours. This sea is too large here for us to be afraid of other folks running away with our fish. Some of you, perhaps, will do best in tract distribution: well, do it—keep it up; but mind there is something in the tract—and that is not always the case—mind there is something worth reading, which will be of use when read. Do not give away somnolent tracts, which are more likely to send the readers to sleep than to prayer. Some of them might be useful to physicians, when they cannot get their patients to sleep by any other means. Get something useful, interesting, telling, scriptural, and give it away largely out of love to Jesus. And if these labours do not suit your taste, talk personally to individuals. Christ at the well! What a schoolmaster for us! Talk to the one woman, the one child, the one carter, the one labourer, whoever he may be. He who makes one blade of grass grow that would not otherwise have grown, is a benefactor to his race; and he who scatters one good thought which would not else have been disseminated, has

done something for the kingdom of Christ. I cannot tell you what is most fit for everybody to do; but if your heart is right, there is something for each one. There are so many niches in the temple, and so many statues of living stone to fill those niches, to make it a complete temple of heavenly architecture. You and I must each find our own niche. Remember, Christian, your time is going. Do not be considering always what you ought to do, but get to work; shut your eyes and put your hand out, and "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." The very first Christian effort will do, only do it with your might; do it in the name and strength of God.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

(b) I know of no service that can be more distinguished than the doing of good, the scattering of blessings among the sons of men. Methinks the very angels before the throne might envy us poor men who are permitted to talk of Christ, even though it be but to little children. I reckon the humblest ragged-school teacher to be more honoured than even Gabriel himself, in being commissioned to tell out the story of the Cross, and to win youthful hearts to the Saviour's service. You are not employed as scullions in your Master's kitchen, though you might be content with such a service; you are not made as His hired servants, to toil in meanest drudgery, you are not sent to be hewers of wood and drawers of water; but you are His friends, the friends of Jesus, to do such work as He did; and even greater works than He did are you enabled to do, because He hath gone to His Father. "This honour have all the saints," the honour of being gentlemen-at-arms under Jesus, the Captain of their salvation.—*Ibid.*

(c) The work of conversion is not to be the exclusive prerogative of the pulpit. There is no sacerdotalism in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We have a great High Priest, but it is Jesus. There is a holy priesthood, but it is no privileged caste, it is no modern tribe of Levi; it is the whole community of the faithful, the Church of God which He has purchased with His own blood. That figment of old Popery, which restricts all endeavour to spread the Gospel of Christ to the clergy merely, is alien from Apostolic teaching, and would leave the harvest to rot, neglected in the field, because of the miserable fewness of the reapers to gather it in. Though I yield to no man under heaven in respect for the office of the Christian ministry; though I would rather, far rather if I know myself, have the seal of its baptism upon my brow than the coronet of any earthly-patented nobility, I do feel that I am but fulfilling one of its most solemn vocations, when I summon every member of the sacramental host to participate in the glorious war. God forbid that I should trespass upon the crown rights of any of the blood royal of heaven. I should feel as if that were for a guardian to squander his ward's inheritance, or for a father to paralyse the growing manhood of his children, to deprive you, the very poorest of you, the luxury of doing good. The highest honour in this world, the honour of bringing souls to Christ, may be the common privilege of you all. The child with the linen coat, who listens, as did little Samuel, when the Master speaks; the love-watchers of the paralytic, who, if they can do nothing else, can take him and let him down through the roof to the room where Jesus is; the little servant-maid that waits upon Naaman's wife—all, all may have an apostolical commission, and may share in the glories of an apostolical reward. There is not a single member of a single church in the world that is exempt from this service. All are summoned to the labour, and all, oh! infinite condescension! may be workers together with God.—*W. M. Punshon, LL.D.*

## THE IMPORTANCE OF A CLEAR SPIRITUAL PEDIGREE.

(Verses 59–63.)

Consider:

**I. The doubtful pedigree amongst the people as an illustration of uncertainty as to our spiritual state.** Verses 59 and 60 suggest concerning such uncertainty—

1. *That it may consist with association with the people of God.* Those who "could not show their father's house, and their seed, whether they were of Israel," were permitted to go up to Jerusalem with those whose Israelitish descent was beyond question. And they whose evidences as to their spiritual lineage are not clear and conclusive, may

have a name and a place amongst God's spiritual Israel. And more than this, they may really be true members of that Israel. Sincere believers in the Lord Jesus Christ do not always realise the blessedness of Christian assurance. Sometimes even he "that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, walketh in darkness, and hath no light." (a).

2. *That it must involve spiritual loss.* Those persons of doubtful pedigree who journeyed with the Jews to Jerusalem, could not enjoy the full rights of citizenship until they proved their Israeli-

tish descent. And doubt as to our spiritual lineage must involve loss—(1.) *Of spiritual joy.* Such doubters are strangers to the strong consolation which they enjoy who can say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day;" and who can utter the triumphant challenge, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation," &c. (Rom. viii. 35-39). (b). (2.) *Of spiritual usefulness.* Lacking Christian assurance, our testimony for Christ would be likely to be deficient in clearness and attractiveness, in fervour and force; it would especially fail to set forth the joyful character of true religion. And thus our religious usefulness would be diminished. (c).

**II. The doubtful pedigree amongst the priests as an illustration of uncertainty as to our ministerial calling and condition.** A man's ministerial pedigree in the Church of Christ may be said to be unquestionable when he possesses—  
1. The Divine vocation. The true minister is assured that he is called of God to his work. He can enter into the feeling of the Apostle, who said, "Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel!"  
2. The Divine qualification. If a man is unfitted for the sacred duties of the ministry, his ministerial pedigree is ruinously defective.  
3. The Divine sanction. That a ministry is blessed to the conversion of sinners and the edification of Christian believers is an evidence that it is approved by God.

The verses under consideration (61-63) suggest—

1. *That a ministerial pedigree may be lost by reason of worldliness.* The children of the priests who could not find "their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy," were descendants of one who "took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name." Now Barzillai was a great man in his day, and the priest who married his daughter seems to have esteemed his alliance with that distinguished family more highly than the dignity of his priesthood, and

so he adopted the name of Barzillai for his family, and his family register was with the house of Barzillai, and not with the house of Aaron, and in this way it seems to have been lost. His preference for worldly distinction issued in the suspension, if not the total loss, of the sacerdotal heritage of his descendants. We regard this as an illustration of the effect of worldliness on the character and influence of a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The eager pursuit of either the possessions or the distinctions of this present world tends to despoil the Christian minister of spiritual power—to render his perceptions of truth less quick and clear, his spiritual sympathies and susceptibilities less true and active, his spiritual zeal less fervent, his spiritual aspirations less intense and constant, &c. (d).

2. *The loss of ministerial pedigree involves a corresponding loss of ministerial power and reward.* The priests whose pedigree could not be found were prohibited from discharging certain priestly functions, and from receiving certain emoluments of that office. "They were polluted from the priesthood; and the Tirshatha said unto them that they should not eat of the most holy things," &c. If a minister of the Gospel, from worldliness or any other cause, suffer personal spiritual deterioration or loss, it will tell sadly upon his influence for good, and upon the joy and spiritual reward which he finds in his work. (e).

3. *The final decision as to the standing of a minister of uncertain pedigree must be given by God Himself.* "And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim." The high priest in former times sought to know the will of God by means of Urim and Thummim, and the decisions which were given by this medium were regarded as those of God Himself. So the case of the priests of uncertain pedigree was left for the decision of God. Doubtless there are certain questions of ministerial character and qualification with which Church courts and councils are competent to deal. But when a man's minis-

terial pedigree is merely doubtful or uncertain, the final decision must be left to the great Searcher of hearts. "To his own Master he standeth or falleth."

"All to the great tribunal haste,  
The account to render there ;  
And shouldst Thou strictly mark our faults,  
Lord, how should we appear !"

—*Doddridge.*

### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Faith, let us remember, is the root, and assurance is the flower. Doubtless you can never have the flower without the root ; but it is no less certain you may have the root and not the flower. Faith is that poor trembling woman who came behind Jesus in the press, and touched the hem of His garment (Mark v. 25) ; assurance is Stephen standing calmly in the midst of his murderers, and saying, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God (Acts vii. 56). Faith is the penitent thief, crying, "Lord, remember me" (Luke xxiii. 42) ; assurance is Job sitting in the dust, covered with sores, and saying, "I know that my Redeemer liveth" (Job xix. 25). "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job xiii. 15). Faith is Peter's drowning cry, as he began to sink, "Lord, save me !" (Matt. xiv. 30) ; assurance is that same Peter declaring before the council, in aftertimes, "This is the Stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other ; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts iv. 11, 12). Faith is the anxious, trembling voice, "Lord, I believe ; help Thou mine unbelief" (Mark ix. 24) ; assurance is the confident challenge, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect ? Who is he that condemneth ?" (Rom. viii. 33, 34). Faith is Saul praying in the house of Judas at Damascus, sorrowful, blind, and alone (Acts ix. 11) ; assurance is Paul the aged prisoner, looking calmly into the grave, and saying, "I know Whom I have believed. There is a crown laid up for me" (2 Tim. i. 12, iv. 8). Faith is life. How great the blessing ! Who can tell the gulf between life and death ? And yet life may be weak, sickly, unhealthy, painful, trying, anxious, worn, burdensome, joyless, smileless to the very end. Assurance is more than life. It is health, strength, power, vigour, activity, energy, manliness, beauty.—*Bishop Ryle.*

Suppose thou hast not yet attained so much as to this inward peace, yet know thou hast no reason to question the truth of thy faith for want of this. We have peace with God as soon as we believe, but not always with ourselves. The pardon may be past the prince's hand and seal, and yet not put into the prisoner's hand. Thou thinkest them too rash (dost not ?) who judged Paul a murderer by

the viper that fastened on his hand. And who art thou, who condemnest thyself for an unbeliever, because of those troubles and inward agonies which may fasten for a time on the spirit of the most gracious child God hath on earth ?—*W. Gurnall.*

(b) A man may praise God for the redemption of the world, &c., who has no consciousness of having secured an interest in it, but not like him who feels he has a property in it. How different will be their feelings ! Just as great will be the difference of interest which will be felt by a stranger passing through a beautiful estate, and by the owner of it. One may admire the richness of the soil, the beauty of its crops, and the stateliness of its trees ; but his interest in it will fall very far short of his who has the title and property in it.—*H. G. Salter.*

(c) Christianity did not in its beginning succeed by the force of its doctrines, but by the *lives* of its disciples. It succeeded first as a light, in accordance with the Master's command, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Make religion attractive by the goodness that men see in you ; so sweet, so sparkling, so buoyant, so cheerful, hopeful, courageous, conscientious and yet not stubborn, so perfectly benevolent, and yet not mawkish or sentimental, blossoming in everything that is good, a rebuke to everything that is mean or little ; make such men of yourselves that everybody that looks upon you may say, "That is a royal good fellow ; he has the spirit that I should like to lean upon in time of trouble, or to be a companion with at all times." Build up such a manhood that it shall be winning to men. That is what the early Church did.—*H. W. Beecher.*

(d) What the astronomers say of the eclipse of the sun, that it is occasioned by the intervening of the moon between the sun and our sight, is true in this case : if the world get between Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, and our sight, it will darken our sight of Jesus Christ, and bring eclipses upon our comforts and graces. Again, those men that dig deep into the bowels of the earth, they are oftentimes choked and stifled by damps that come from the earth. So is it with Christians, those that will be ever poring and digging about the things of this world, it is a thousand to one that if from worldly things a damp doth not arise to smother their comforts and quench their graces. Lastly, a candle, though it may shine to the view of all, yet put it under ground, and, though there be not the least puff of wind, the very damp will stifle the light of the flame ; and so it is that men may shine like candles in their comforts, yet bring them but under the earth, and a clod of that will stifle their candle, will damp their spiritual comforts, and bereave them of those joys that are in themselves unspeakable.—*John Magirus.*

(c) A true minister is a man whose manhood itself is a strong and influential argument with his people. He lives in such relations with God, and in such a genuine sympathy with man, that it is a pleasure to be under the influence of such a mind. Just as, lying on a couch on a summer's evening, you hear from a neighbouring house the low breathing of an instrument of music, so far away that you can only hear its palpitation, but cannot discern the exact tune that is played, and are soothed by it, and drawn nearer to hear more; so the true man, the true Christian minister, is himself so inspiring, so musical, there is so much of the Divine element in him, rendered home-

like by incarnation with his disposition, brought down to the level of man's understanding, that wherever he goes, little children want to see him, plain people want to be with him; everybody says when he comes, "Good;" and everybody says when he goes away, "I wish he had stayed longer;" all who come in contact with him are inclined to live a better life. Manhood is the best sermon. It is good to fill the mind with the goodness and sweetness of the thing itself to which you would fain draw them. "Go, preach," was no more authoritative than "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."—*H. W. Beecher.*

## POSSESSIONS AND OFFERINGS.

(Verses 65-70.)

These verses present the following homiletical topics, which may be considered with advantage:—

**I. The completion of their journey.** "They came to the house of the Lord which is at Jerusalem." No account of the journey is given by the historian. It is, however, certain that the journey was—(1) *long*, the distance was more than one thousand miles, and Ezra and his company (who went up many years afterward) were four months on the way (chap. vii. 9); (2) *difficult*, by reason of their uncertainty as to the best way, and the comparatively small number of beasts of burden; (3) *perilous*, as we see from chap. viii. 22. The country through which their course lay was infested by Bedouin Arabs, who frequently plundered and assaulted travellers. But the returning Jews were sustained, guided, and guarded by the Lord their God. It was by His blessing that they reached their destination in safety. So will He lead and keep all those who forsake sin, seek to do His will, and set their faces Zion-ward. "An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called, The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but He Himself shall be with them, walking in the way; and the foolish shall not err therein. No lion shall be there," &c. (Isa. xxxv. 8-10).

**II. The extent of their possessions.** "Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven," &c. (vers. 65-67). There might have been

some wealthy men amongst them; but viewed as a whole this company was certainly poor. Their reduced and impoverished condition is indicated by the number of servants and beasts of burden in relation to the number of persons. They had only one slave to every six persons, one horse to every fifty-eight persons, one mule to every one hundred and seventy-three persons, one camel to every ninety-eight persons, and one ass to every seven persons. Sin always impoverishes and degrades the sinner. Some forms of it lead to temporal poverty, *e.g.*, drunkenness, indolence, wastefulness. "For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty; and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags" (Prov. xxiii. 21). "I went by the field of the slothful," &c. (Prov. xxiv. 30). But the worst poverty to which sin leads is that of the spirit. It despoils man of high and holy thoughts, of pure and pious aspirations, of generous and noble purposes; it tends to make him "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;" and to render him unconscious of his destitution and degradation.

**III. The presentation of their offerings.** "And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the Lord," &c. (vers. 68, 69). Notice:

**1. The object of their offerings.** "They offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place." Their contributions were for the rebuilding of the Temple. In this way they sought to promote the honour of God; and they

were faithful to the purpose for which they were permitted to leave Babylon. Offerings for the building of temples for the worship of the Most High are both prudent and pious; they are encouraged both by philanthropy and by religion; they promote the good of humanity and the glory of God.

2. *The spirit of their offerings.* (1.) They offered *promptly*, without delay; soon as "they came to the house of the Lord, which is at Jerusalem." If they could not begin to rebuild the Temple at once, they could contribute towards the expenses of rebuilding, and they did so. (2.) They offered *spontaneously*, without constraint. "They offered freely for the house of God." "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver." It is probable that gratitude for the mercies received during the journey, and for their safe arrival at their destination, would prompt them to present hearty offerings. (a).

3. *The measure of their offerings.* "They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work," &c. This seems to imply—(1.) *Proportion*; that they gave according to their means, the rich according to his riches, and the poor according to his poverty. "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, not according to that he hath not." (b). (2.) *Liberality*; that each one who gave, gave as much as he could. The total amount contributed was, at least, about £90,000; which gives an average of about £2 per person, including servants. An example worthy of imitation by many congregations in our day which are far more favourably circumstanced. (c).

IV. *The settlement in their cities.* "So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities." Two ideas are suggested—

1. *Home after exile.* "Dwelt in their cities." Their cities; not the cities of their conquerors. The cities were to a great extent ruined and desolate; but they were their own. It was the land of their fathers, and their own land. (d).

2. *Rest after a long and tedious journey.* The toils and perils of their pilgrimage were over. Rest in their own cities would be sweet to their weary feet, but sweeter still to their spirits.

"But rest more sweet and still,  
Than ever nightfall gave;  
Our yearning hearts shall fill,  
In the land beyond the grave.

There shall no tempests blow,  
No scorching noontide beat;  
There shall be no more snow,  
No weary, wandering feet.

So we lift our trusting eyes  
From the hills our fathers trod,  
To the quiet of the skies,  
To the Sabbath of our God."

—Mrs. Hemans.

## ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) "She hath done what she could." The costliness of her gift in proportion to her means, while it was nothing to Him she would honour, was a guarantee that she was not trifling. Had it been far less than it was, and had it been all she could bring, His blessing would have been the same. For mind, He does not say, "Stop, consider, this alabaster box really cost a good deal of money; it could not have been bought for less than three hundred denarii." No; but He says, "She hath done what she could;" that is, she hath demonstrated the deep and tender attachment of her soul. She believes on her Lord. She loves the Saviour for His holiness, His mercy, His Divine benignity. One penny's worth, if it is only the utmost that self-denial can do, is as good for that as ten thousand shekels. Did He not declare as much, in what He said of the two mites that the poor widow cast into the Temple treasury? Nay, did He not equally accept, and bless with the same favour, another woman, poorer and frailer still, who had nothing to give Him but tears and kisses for His feet? The whole spiritual meaning of gifts consists in the disposition of the giver. Distinctions of weight and measure, standards of currency, tables of value, rates of exchange, calculations of outlay, colour, material, and shape, vanish before that simple and royal touchstone in the breast. It is felt to be so, even in the presents of human friendship; and spiritual sincerity does not pass for less in the eyes of Him who searches and sees the heart.—F. D. Huntington, D.D.

(b) Hohannes, the blind missionary of Harpoot, tells of a place where the Board had spent much money with little result, where he was sent. It was a poor place. The people were to raise six hundred piastres; and the Board was to pay the balance of his salary. The people said they could not raise that sum; a neighbouring pastor said it was impossible, they were so poor. After much anxiety, the

missionary laid the case before God in prayer, when it was impressed upon him that each should give his tenth. He proposed it to the people, and they agreed to it. The money was easily raised, and amounted to more than the entire salary. That people never prospered so much before; their crops were abundant, and their satisfaction great. They not only supported their preacher and school-teacher, but gave two thousand piastres to other purposes.—*Dict. of Illust.*

(c) If there be any principle in our religion; if our obligation to worship be anything more than a seemly form, or an irksome impost upon time and thought; if the idea of God within us be not a remote and impersonal divinity, but a Being warm, near, watchful, provident, the living God of our clinging heart and of our crying soul, then surely it were mockery to render any homage but the truest at His footstool, and to offer any gifts but the chiefest on His altar. The old heathen understood this matter better. Their eyes were blinded and their rites were cruel, but they never erred in this. The goodliest spoil, the most fragrant libation, the fairest in the stall, the nearest to the heart, were reserved to be devoted to their gods; and shall we, heirs of all the ages and of all the economies, we on whom God has caused to shine a sun in His meridian of privilege—shall we anger our God against us by our selfish indifference to His claims, or by our unfilial withholding of His honour? We to whom He has given every faculty which makes us capable of God, shall we withhold from Him the hearts which He asks only to brighten and redeem? We to whom He has allotted a day so clear and so brilliant, shall we insult Him by the offer of the refuse of our time? We who are gifted by Him alike with our wealth and with our power to amass it, shall we deal out our niggard pittance in His cause like the coarse miser churl who parts with coin like blood? Brethren, I summon you, with all possible solemnity, to answer this invocation. If there has been indifference in the past, let our penitence mourn it, and let our consecration atone it, to-day. It is but little at the best that we can offer; our collective wealth would be absorbed by one single city's needs. Our influence, even at its widest, is contracted within a narrow span. The shadows gather swiftly upon the noon of our very longest day.

We are feeble, and half our time must be spent in sleep that we may recruit our strength. We are frail, and Death standing by laughs at our arithmetic when we calculate on future years. We receive unfinished labours from our fathers, and we transmit them unfinished to our children. Watchmen in the night, it is not given to us to tarry until the morning. Guardians of the battle-flag, we can but wave it gallantly for awhile; but we know full well that our hands will stiffen, and that our comrades will bury us before the work is done. But the present is ours. We have room to work; we have light to work in. There are ample opportunities, and there are passionate needs, and there are strong encouragements, and there are facilities such as no age ever possessed, for honest work for God. Now who, then, is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord? Give Him your hearts, dear brethren—your costliest and most acceptable offering. The sordid and the worldly may despise your choice, but there awaits you on earth God's palpable smile, and the blessing of those that are ready to perish; and in heaven the angel's welcome, and the conqueror's palm, and the King's palace as the soul's home, and the King Himself in His beauty as your exceeding great reward—*W. M. Punshon, LL.D.*

(d) No bricks and mortar and timber can make a home. No marble, however fine and polished, can make a home. No gold, or silver, or tapestry, or painting, can make a home. It is that which makes heaven which makes a home even on this earth. It is love that makes a home. To love, and to be loved, though it be in the peasant's cot, though it be in the rudest barn through the fissures of which the wind makes music, is to be at home; and often you find homes in the rudest dwellings, and none in the most splendid palaces. But where love is likely to be disturbed—where some rude hand can take the threads that love is ever spinning and tying and fastening, and cut them and sever them, the home feeling must of course be partial. And we long for a place and a state where those whom we love will never be taken from us, and where we shall know that we shall abide eternally in the presence of those who love us. "We seek one to come." A higher and a settled dwelling-place, a final home, a permanent state of being.—*Samuel Martin.*

### CHAPTER III.

**CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.]** This chapter contains—1. The rebuilding of the altar (vers. 1-3a). 2. The renewal of the sacrificial worship and of the observance of the religious festivals (vers. 3b-6a). 3. The preparations for rebuilding the Temple (vers. 6b, 7). 4. The laying of the foundation-stone of the new Temple, the religious celebration of the occasion, and the mingled feelings of the people (vers. 8-13).

Ver. 1. The seventh month] *i.e.* of the year in which they arrived at Jerusalem. The

seventh month was Tisri, "the month of the full streams," or "floods," which corresponded with the latter part of our September and the greater part of October. (For further notes of time, see notes on ver. 8). As one man] The expression does not signify every man; but, with great unanimity, "as if inspired by one will."

Ver. 2. As it is written in the law of Moses] (See Lev. xvii. 2-6; Deut. xii. 5-11).

Ver. 3. They set the altar upon his bases] *i.e.* they built it in its former position and on the old foundations. For fear was upon them] &c. They were afraid of the hostility of the neighbouring nations. The people of those countries] are the surrounding peoples, which are mentioned in chap. ix. 1. Burnt offerings morning and evening] as commanded in Exod. xxix. 38-42; Num. xxviii. 3-8.

Ver. 4. The feast of Tabernacles, as it is written] (See Lev. xxiii. 33-43). And offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required] The last clause is in the margin: "The matter of the day in his day." Vulg.: "*Opus dies in die suo.*" The offerings for each day of the feast of Tabernacles are carefully prescribed in detail in Num. xxix. 12-38. "The offerings required at this feast were the largest of all. They amounted to fourteen rams, ninety-eight lambs, and no less than seventy bullocks, being twice as many lambs and four times as many bullocks as were enjoined for the Passover. The feast of Tabernacles was especially one of thankfulness to God for the gifts of the fruit of the earth, and the quantity and nature of the offerings were determined accordingly."—*Speaker's Com.*

Ver. 5. After the feast of tabernacles the prescribed order of sacrifices was regularly observed, viz. The continual burnt offering] *i.e.* the daily morning and evening sacrifice (Num. xxviii. 3-8). Both of the new moons] Rather, "And (the offerings) of the new moons" (Num. xxviii. 11-15). And of every one that willingly offered] &c. (Lev. vii. 11-17; Num. xxix. 39; Deut. xvi. 10, 16, 17).

Ver. 6. From the first day of the seventh month] &c. "The altar service, with the daily morning and evening sacrifice, began on the first day of the seventh month; this daily sacrifice was regularly offered, according to the law, from then till the fifteenth day of the seventh month, *i.e.* till the beginning of the feast of Tabernacles. All the offerings commanded in the law for the separate days of this feast were then offered according to the numbers prescribed; and after this festival the sacrifices ordered at the new moon and other holydays of the year were offered, as well as the daily burnt offerings,—none but these, neither the sacrifice on the new moon (the first day of the seventh month), nor the sin-offering on the tenth day of the same month, *i.e.* the day of atonement, having been offered before this feast of Tabernacles."—*Keil.* This interpretation is, however, opposed by Schultz, who says: "It is merely said (ver. 5) that after the sacrifices of the feast of Tabernacles the usual order of offerings was again continued, which included the daily offerings, and then also those of the new moon and other feasts."

Ver. 7. Meat and drink] *i.e.* corn and wine. Unto them of Zidon] &c. (Comp. 1 Chron. xxii. 4; 1 Kings v. 6-18; 2 Chron. ii. 3-18.) According to the grant] &c. This probably refers to the permission to rebuild the Temple, which would involve permission to negotiate with the Phœnicians for such assistance as they needed; for we do not read anywhere that Cyrus made them a grant of Phœnician timber.

Ver. 8. Now in the second year of their coming] &c. "Whether this second year of the return coincides with the second year of the rule of Cyrus" (over Babylon), "so that the foundations of the Temple were laid, as *Theophil. Antioch. ad Antolic.*, lib. 3, according to Berosus, relates, in the second year of Cyrus, cannot be determined; for nothing more is said in this book than that Cyrus, in the first year of his reign, issued the decree concerning the return of the Jews from Babylon, whereupon those named in the list (chap. ii.) set out and returned, without any further notice as to whether this also took place in the first year of Cyrus, or whether the many necessary preparations delayed the departure of the first band till the following year. The former view is certainly a possible though not a probable one, since it is obvious from iii. 1, that they arrived at Jerusalem and betook themselves to their cities as early as the seventh month of the year. Now the period between the beginning of the year and the seventh month, *i.e.* at most six months, seems too short for the publication of the edict, the departure, and the arrival at Jerusalem, even supposing that the first year of Cyrus entirely coincided with a year of the Jewish calendar. The second view, however, would not make the difference between the year of the rule of Cyrus and the year of the return to Jerusalem a great one, since it would scarcely amount to half a year."—*Keil.* In the second month] *i.e.* Zif (1 Kings vi. 1), "the month of 'blossom;' or, more fully, 'the bloom of flowers,'" corresponding to our May. Appointed the Levites . . . to set forward the work] *i.e.* to preside over or superintend the rebuilding of the Temple.

Ver. 9. Jeshua] not the high priest, but the head of an order of Levites (chap. ii. 40). Judah] is an error of a copyist. It should be Hodaviah, as in the margin, and chap. ii. 40. In Neh. vii. 43, it is written Hodevah. Together] Margin: "Heb. as one," *i.e.* "all, without exception." The sons of Henadad] &c. Keil suggests, as an explanation of the striking position of the record of "the sons of Henadad," "that the two classes Jeshua with his sons and brethren, and Kadmiel with his sons, were more closely connected with each other than with

the sons of Henadad, who formed a third class." The authority of the clause, however, is doubtful.

Ver. 10. They (Zerubbabel and Jeshua) set the priests in their apparel] *i.e.* in their robes of office (Exod. xxviii. 40, xxxix. 27-29, 41, and chap. ii. 69). With trumpets] (Num. x. 8, xxxi. 6; 1 Chron. xv. 24, xvi. 6; 2 Chron. v. 12). After the ordinance] &c. (1 Chron. xv. 16; xxv. 1).

Ver. 11. And they sang together by course] Or, "And they sang antiphonally." Fuerst gives the meaning: "to sing an alternate song, or in alternate choir (1 Sam. xviii. 7; Ezra iii. 11), . . . but always to sing in reply, not to sing merely." The singing was responsive. One choir sang, "Give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good;" and the other responded, "For His mercy endureth for ever." Shouted with a great shout] for joy that the foundation of the Temple was laid.

Ver. 12. But many of the priests and Levites] &c. "Solomon's Temple was destroyed B.C. 588, and the foundation of the subsequent Temple laid B.C. 535 or 534; hence the older men among those present at the latter event might possibly have seen the former house; indeed, some (according to Hag. ii. 3) were still living in the second year of Darius Hystaspes, who had beheld the glory of the earlier building. Upon these aged men, the miserable circumstances under which the foundations of the new Temple were laid produced so overwhelming an impression, that they broke into loud weeping."—*Keil*.

## THE REBUILDING OF THE ALTAR: EXEMPLARY FEATURES OF DIVINE WORSHIP.

(Verses 1-3.)

We discover here—

### I. Unanimity and zeal in Divine worship.

Notice:

1. *The evidences of unanimity in worship.* "The people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. Then stood up Jeshua," &c. The movement seems to have been a spontaneous one on the part of the people. They were not summoned to Jerusalem either by Zerubbabel the prince or by Jeshua the high priest, but went there of their own accord, urged by the religious impulses of their own souls. And they assembled "as one man," *i.e.* as with one heart and will. And the authorities were not tardy in taking up the matter and leading it onward. "Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak," &c. Jeshua with the priests, and Zerubbabel with the princes, entered heartily into the movement. Priests and Levites, prince and people, high and low, cordially united in the preparation for the restoration of their national worship.

2. *The evidences of zeal in worship.* This great gathering at Jerusalem took place "when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities." They had only recently returned from Babylon; their country was to a great extent desolate, and would

ad much cleansing and cultivation;

their houses would need renovation, or new ones would have to be built by them; many private interests urgently claimed their attention; but all these were freely and resolutely set aside until they had rebuilt the altar of Jehovah, and restored His worship, and made ready to celebrate the sacred festivals of this seventh month. Such unanimity and zeal for the worship of God are worthy of imitation by both individuals and communities in this age.

II. *Sacrifice in Divine worship.* "And builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon." The altar and the burnt offerings suggest—

1. *Man's need of atonement with God.* The consciousness of guilt, and the desire to propitiate God, or the craving of the heart for fellowship with Him, are the experiences which give rise to sacrificial offerings. The altar is an answer to the deep cry of man, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?" Burnt offerings were intended, in some cases at least, to express the idea of expiation, as well as that of self-consecration; hence they are said "to make atonement for him" who offered them (Lev. i. 4; xiv. 20, 31). The tendency of sin is to estrange man from God; the tendency of the love of God in the sacrifice of

Jesus Christ is to destroy the power of sin in man, and to bind him to God in loving loyalty. We do not now need the altar and the expiatory victim; but we do need the Cross and the influence of the great Sacrifice, which once for all was offered thereon to put away sin. (a).

2. *Man's duty of self-consecration to God.* The chief significance of the burnt offering was that it expressed the self-consecration of the offerer to God. Without this, such offerings were worthless in the sight of Heaven. The moral or spiritual element was the essential thing in all the sacrifices. Without penitence the sin offering was offensive to God. Without gratitude the peace or thank offerings were rejected by Him. And without the self-dedication of the worshipper the burnt offerings were an abomination unto Him (comp. Ps. 1. 8-15; Isa. i. 11-15). Our richest gifts are accepted by God only as they express our self-devotion to Him. "And He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again." (b).

III. **Respect for precedent in Divine worship.** This was manifested by the Jews at this time in two particulars—(1.) In assembling at the old place. "The people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem." They congregated at the place where the Temple had once stood, and where their fathers were wont to worship. (2.) In erecting the altar upon the old foundation, and thus, as it were, associating it with its distinguished predecessor. There is much that is commendable in the feelings which led them to act thus. It is well to be willing to adopt changes in our modes and accessories of worship, when really enlightened judgment, and cultured taste, and sincere religious feeling unite in recommending them. It is also well to cling tenaciously to what is suitable and seemly in existing methods and arrangements of religious worship. The site of the former Temple and the bases of the ancient altar possessed for the Jews a sanctity and an inspiration to which no other spots in this wide world could lay claim. There are memories

and associations clinging around certain ancient forms and places hallowed by holy uses which greatly stimulate and enrich the worship of the devout heart.

IV. **Conformity to Scripture in Divine worship.** In building the altar and in offering their sacrifices, the Jews did "as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God." We must take heed that in our worship, whether clinging to precedent, or accepting suggestions of change, we do not depart from the principles and spirit of worship, as revealed in or fairly deduced from the holy Book. There are certain directions which are unmistakable and imperative: e.g., "God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit," &c.

V. **Fear of enemies in Divine worship.** "Fear was upon them because of the people of those countries."

1. *The fear of enemies should not intimidate us from the worship of God.* The Jews built the altar notwithstanding their dread of their enemies. The history of religious persecutions supplies many splendid examples of perseverance in worship despite the threats and cruelties of foes. (c).

2. *The fear of enemies should impel us to worship God.* The Jews were the more eager to build the altar because of the hostility of neighbouring peoples. The opposition of man led them the more earnestly to seek the protection of God. They were not in a position to join battle with their enemies, if they had been attacked by them; but in placing themselves under the guardianship of the Lord God they did that which was far wiser and better. The persecutions of men should cause us to be more earnest in prayer to God.

VI. **Regularity in Divine worship.** "And they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the Lord, even burnt offerings morning and evening." The offering of the daily sacrifice suggests—

1. *Our daily need of atonement with God.* There are daily temptations, omissions, and transgressions, which tend to alienate the heart from God; hence we

need daily to realise the reconciling influences of the Cross of Christ. (*d*).

2. *Our daily need of renewed consecration.* Every morning we require a renewal of our purpose and endeavour to live to God. The reception of new mercies also summons us to fresh dedication of ourselves to the bounteous Giver of all our mercies.

3. *Our daily need of renewed blessings.* Forgiveness and grace, guidance and guardianship, are blessings which we need every day, therefore we should seek them in prayer; they are, moreover, blessings which we receive every day, therefore we should acknowledge them in praise to God.

### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(*a*) I do not think any one ever knows the preciousness of the blood of Christ till he has had a full sight and sense of his sin, his uncleanness, and his ill-desert. Is there any such thing as really and truly coming to the cross of Christ until you first of all have seen what your sin really deserves? A little light into that dark cellar, sir; a little light into that hole within the soul; a little light cast into that infernal den of your humanity, and you would soon discern what sin is, and, seeing it, you would discover that there was no hope of being washed from it, except by a sacrifice far greater than you could ever render. Then the atonement of Christ would become fair and lustrous in your eyes, and you would rejoice with joy unspeakable in that boundless love which led the Saviour to give Himself a ransom, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. May the Lord teach us, thundering at us, if need be, what sin means. May He teach it to us so that the lesson shall be burned into our souls, and we shall never forget it. I could fain wish that you were all burden-carriers till you grew weary. I could fain wish that you all laboured after eternal life until your strength failed, and that you might then rejoice in Him who has finished the work, and who promises to be to you all in all when you believe in Him and trust in Him with your whole heart.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

(*b*) It is not the greatness of Christ's sufferings on the cross which is to move our whole souls, but the greatness of the spirit with which He suffered. There, in death, He proved His entire consecration of Himself to the cause of God and mankind. There, His love flowed forth towards His friends, His enemies, and the human race. It is moral greatness, it is victorious love, it is the energy of principle, which gives such interest to the cross of Christ. We are to look through the darkness which

hung over Him, through His wounds and pains, to His unbroken, disinterested, confiding spirit. To approach the cross for the purpose of weeping over a bleeding, dying Friend, is to lose the chief influence of the crucifixion. We are to visit the cross, not to indulge a natural softness, but to acquire firmness of spirit, to fortify our minds for hardship and suffering in the cause of duty and of human happiness. To live as Christ lived, to die as Christ died, to give up ourselves as sacrifices to God, to conscience, to whatever good interest we can advance—these are the lessons written with the blood of Jesus. His cross is to inspire us with a calm courage, resolution, and superiority to all temptation.—*W. E. Channing, D.D.*

Mercy, love, is more acceptable worship to God, than all sacrifices or outward offerings. The most celestial worship ever paid on earth was rendered by Christ, when He approached man, and the most sinful man, as a child of God, when He toiled and bled to awaken what was Divine in the human soul, to regenerate a fallen world. Be such the worship which you shall carry from this place. Go forth to do good with every power which God bestows, to make every place you enter happier by your presence, to espouse all human interests, to throw your whole weight into the scale of human freedom and improvement, to withstand all wrong, to uphold all right, and especially to give light, life, strength to the immortal soul. He who rears up one child in Christian virtue, or recovers one fellow-creature to God, builds a temple more precious than Solomon's or St. Peter's, more enduring than earth or heaven.—*Ibid.*

(*c*) Lord Macaulay, writing of the persecutions of the Protestant dissenters in the reign of James II., says:—The number of the rebels whom Jeffreys hanged on this (the Western) circuit was three hundred and twenty. Such havoc must have excited disgust even if the sufferers had been generally odious. But they were, for the most part, men of blameless life, and of high religious profession. They were regarded by themselves, and by a large proportion of their neighbours, not as wrong-doers, but as martyrs who sealed with blood the truth of the Protestant religion. Very few of the convicts professed any repentance for what they had done. Many, animated by the old Puritan spirit, met death, not merely with fortitude, but with exultation. It was in vain that the ministers of the Established Church lectured them on the guilt of rebellion and on the importance of priestly absolution. The claim of the king to unbounded authority in things temporal, and the claim of the clergy to the spiritual power of binding and loosing, moved the bitter scorn of the intrepid sectaries. Some of them composed hymns in the dungeon, and chanted them on the fatal sledge. Christ, they sang while they were undressing for the butchery, would soon come to rescue Zion and to make

war on Babylon, would set up His standard, would blow His trumpet, and would requite His foes tenfold for all the evil which had been inflicted on His servants. The dying words of these men were noted down; their farewell letters were kept as treasures; and in this way, with the help of some invention and exaggeration, was formed a copious supplement to the Marian Martyrology.

Never, not even under the tyranny of Laud, had the condition of the Puritans been so deplorable as at that time (autumn 1685). Never had spies been so actively employed in detecting congregations. Never had magistrates, grand jurors, rectors, and churchwardens been so much on the alert. Many dissenters were cited before the ecclesiastical courts. Others found it necessary to purchase the connivance of the agents of the government by presents of hogsheads of wine and of gloves stuffed with guineas. It was impossible for the separatists to pray together without precautions, such as are employed by coiners and receivers of stolen goods. The places of meeting were frequently changed. Worship was performed sometimes just before break of day and sometimes at dead of night. Round the building where the little flock was gathered sentinels were posted to give the alarm if a stranger drew near. The minister in disguise was introduced through the garden and the back yard. In some houses there were trap doors through which, in case of danger, he might descend. Where Nonconformists lived next door to each other, the walls were often broken open, and secret passages were made from dwelling to dwelling. No psalm was sung; and many contrivances were used to prevent the voice of the preacher, in his moments of fervour, from being heard beyond

the walls. . . . Dissenting ministers, however blameless in life, however eminent for learning and abilities, could not venture to walk the streets for fear of outrages, which were not only not repressed, but encouraged, by those whose duty it was to preserve the peace. Some divines of great fame were in prison. Among these was Richard Baxter. Others, who had, during a quarter of a century, borne up against oppression, now lost heart, and quitted the kingdom. Among these was John Howe.—*History of England*, chap. v.

(d) Is it not said in Scripture, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate"? Why is Christ an advocate to-day? Only because we want an advocate every day. Does He not constantly intercede yonder before the eternal throne? Why does He do that? Because we want daily intercession. And it is because we are constantly sinning that He is constantly an advocate—constantly an intercessor. He Himself has beautifully set forth this in the case of Peter: after supper the Lord took a towel and girded Himself, and then, taking His basin and His ewer, He went to Peter, and Peter said, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." But Jesus told him, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part in Me." He had been washed once; Peter was free from sin in the high sense of justification, but he needs the washing of purification. When Peter said, "Lord, wash not my feet only, but also my head and my hands," then Jesus replied, "He that is washed"—that is, he who is pardoned—"needeth not save to wash his feet, for he is clean every whit." The feet want constant washing. The daily defilement of our daily walk through an ungodly world brings upon us the daily necessity of being cleansed from fresh sin, and that the mighty Master supplies to us.—*C. H. Spurgeon*.

## THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRED FESTIVALS RESUMED.

(Verses 4–6 a.)

In these verses we have the record of the observance of the religious feasts of the nation. "The continual burnt offering," which we noticed in our exposition of the preceding section, is again mentioned. The feast of Tabernacles, the observance of the new moons, and the presentation of freewill offerings, are also distinctly mentioned. To these, therefore, let us direct our attention. They present to us the following homiletic topics:—

I. The commemoration in Divine worship of national experiences and blessings. Such was the feast of Tabernacles.

1. *It was a memorial of the emanci-*

*pation of Israel from Egypt, teaching us that we should cherish the memory of former mercies.* (See Lev. xxiii. 43.)

2. *It was a memorial of their life in the wilderness, reminding us that our present condition is that of strangers and pilgrims.* (See Lev. xxiii. 40–43; Heb. xiii. 14.)

3. *It was a thanksgiving for rest and a settled abode in the promised land, suggesting the certainty and blessedness of the rest which remains for the people of God.* (Comp. Lev. xxiii. 40 with Rev. vii. 9.)

4. *It was a thanksgiving for the completed harvest, teaching us to receive the precious fruits of the earth as the kind*

*gifts of a bountiful Providence.* (See Exod. xxiii. 16b; Lev. xxiii. 39; Deut. xvi. 13-15.)\* But this festival was specially appropriate and significant at this time. "It was," as Schultz remarks, "because of the season of the year in which the congregation had arrived in Canaan that the first feast which they could again celebrate in accordance with the law was the feast of Tabernacles. At the same time, however, we may see therein a special providence of God, which was at once lovely and significant to the congregation. The booths adorned with foliage and fruits had previously represented as well the gracious help in the times of the wilderness, as also the gracious blessings of harvest in the present; corresponding with this, the booths now gained of themselves a reference, on the one side, to the exhibition of grace during the new prolonged wilderness-time of the exile which had entered with so much gloom into the midst of the history of Israel; so to speak to the booths of protection and defiance which had arisen for the people, by the grace of the Lord, even in the heathen world; and, on the other side, to the new regaining of Canaan, which, to a certain extent, was a security and a pledge of all the further blessings in store for them in this land. They expressed the thanks which they owed to the Lord for both of these blessings in an especially lively and internal manner. This feast of tabernacles was a festal and joyous conclusion of all the preservations, consolations, and blessings that were behind them, connected with a joyous glance into the future; it was an evidence that a height had been reached upon which finally even the last height might be attained, an indication that some day, after all their struggles and all their labours, a still more glorious feast of Tabernacles, the Messianic, the eternal and truly blessed one, would come. (Comp. Zech. xiv.)" The text distinctly mentions one feature of this celebration of the feast, viz., the fidelity with which the original direc-

tions for its observance were carried out: "They kept also the feast of Tabernacles as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number," &c. The directions are given in Num. xxix. 13-39. (See *The Preacher's Commentary on Numbers*, p. 528.) For a people in their straitened circumstances the offerings required were very numerous; but they were fully and cheerfully provided by them. If their means were small, their zeal was great. (a).

II. **The celebration in religious worship of the natural divisions of time.** "And of the new moons." They presented the offerings appropriate to those occasions. "The first day of the lunar month was observed as a holyday. In addition to the daily sacrifice there were offered two young bullocks, a ram, and seven lambs of the first year as a burnt offering, with the proper meat offerings and drink offerings, and a kid as a sin offering (Num. xxviii. 11-15). It was not a day of holy convocation, and was not therefore of the same dignity as the Sabbath. But, as on the Sabbath, trade and handicraft work were stopped (Amos viii. 5), the Temple was opened for public worship (Ezek. xlvi. 3; Isa. lxvi. 23), and, in the kingdom of Israel at least, the people seem to have resorted to the prophets for religious instruction (2 Kings iv. 23). The trumpets were blown at the offering of the special sacrifices for the day, as on the solemn festivals (Num. x. 10; Ps. lxxxii. 3). . . . The seventh new moon of the religious year, being that of Tisri, commenced the civil year, and had a significance and rites of its own. It was a day of holy convocation" (Num. xxix. 1-6). What was the design of this religious celebration of "the beginnings of their months"?

We suggest :

1. *To impress them with the value of time.* Its irrevocableness should suggest its invaluable nature. The religious observance of the new moons was calculated to emphasise the facts that one month more had passed away for ever, with all its possibilities and opportunities, and that another had commenced its course, and its opportunities must be

\* For remarks and illustrations on these points see *The Preacher's Commentary on Numbers*, pp. 529, 530.

promptly seized and diligently employed ere they also departed. (b).

2. *To assist them to form a correct estimate of their life upon earth.* "All men think all men mortal but themselves." Man needs frequent and forcible reminders of the swift flight of time, and of the brevity of his life upon earth. "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." The religious observance of the natural divisions of time may be regarded as an answer to this request, inasmuch as it helps to impart and to impress the lesson desired. (c).

3. *To arouse them to make a wise use of the time which remained to them.* As we realise the fact that one month of our allotted time upon earth quickly follows another into the everlasting past, we should also realise with imperial force the solemn conviction, "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day, the night cometh when no man can work." "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might," &c.

III. *The presentation in Divine worship of personal voluntary offerings.* "And of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the Lord." These offerings were in addition to those required by the law, and were purely spontaneous on the part of the worshipper. The law required much, but in their zeal the returned exiles gave more. And in Christianity there is ample room for the expression of the grateful and reverent emotions of the soul. "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver." "In all thy gifts," says the Son of Sirach, "show a cheerful countenance, and dedicate thy tithes with gladness. Give unto the Most High according as He hath enriched thee; and as thou hast gotten give with a cheerful eye. For the Lord recompenseth, and will give thee seven times as much." (d)

### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) The end of the festival days among the Jews was to revive the memory of those signal acts wherein His power for them, and His goodness to them, had been extraordinarily

evident; it is no more but our mouths to praise Him, and our hand to obey Him, that He exacts at our hands. He commands us not to expend what He allows us in the erecting stately temples to His honour; all the coin He requires to be paid with for His expense is the "offering of thanksgiving" (Ps. l. 14); and this we ought to do as much as we can, since we cannot do it as much as He merits, for "who can show forth all His praise?" (Ps. cvi. 2). If we have the fruit of His goodness, it is fit He should have "the fruit of our lips" (Heb. xiii. 15); the least kindness should inflame our souls with a kindly resentment. Though some of His benefits have a brighter, some a darker, aspect towards us, yet they all come from this common spring; His goodness shines in all; there are the footsteps of goodness in the least, as well as the smiles of goodness in the greatest; the meanest therefore is not to pass without a regard of the Author. As the glory of God is more illustrious in some creatures than in others, yet it glitters in all, and the lowest as well as the highest administers matter of praise; but they are not only little things, but the choicer favours He hath bestowed upon us. How much doth it deserve our acknowledgment, that He should contrive our recovery, when we had plotted our ruin! that when He did from eternity behold the crimes wherewith we would incense Him, He should not, according to the rights of justice, cast us into hell, but prize us at the rate of the blood and life of His only Son, in value above the blood of men and lives of angels! How should we bless that God, that we have yet a Gospel among us, that we are not driven into the utmost regions, that we can attend upon Him in the face of the sun, and not forced to the secret obscurities of the night! Whatsoever we enjoy, whatsoever we receive, we must own Him as the Donor, and read His hand in it.—*S. Charnocke, B. D.*

(b) Suppose that God had so cast the arrangements of our system as never to give notice, at all, of the passage of time, by the distinction of days, seasons, and years. In that case, we should all be living on together, but how fast or how slow we could scarcely guess. One year of men's childhood seems as long to them, they say, as two, or perhaps even ten years, later in life. This shows you how they would mistake if there were no measure of time save that of their inward judgment. They would never realise how fast they are living. They would take the period equal to ten years, in the later portion of life, to be the same period which constituted only its tenth part in their childhood; and so, when drawing on towards the close of their days,—the very time when they ought most of all to be awake to the shortness of their stay,—then would they be, most of all, insensible to the flight of time, and the swift approach of eternity.

Observe, then, the faithfulness of God. He has made the very universe to be the clock of the universe, and admonish every mortal heart

of the sure and constant passage of time. We are not left to our inward judgments. Time has its measures without, in the most palpable and impressive visitations of the senses. Every twilight tells us that a day is gone, and that by a sign as impressive as the blotting out of the sun ! It is as if we had a clock, so adjusted as to give notice of the hour, by displacing, at a stroke, the light of heaven, suspending the labours of the world, quenching the fevers of its earthly schemes and passions, and diffusing an opiate spell of oblivion over all human consciousness. The impalpable odours of spring penetrate our secret sense as monitors of time. The summer heat is the heat of time, the winter's cold is the cold of time—both forcing their way into our experience by a visitation that we cannot resist. One season tells us that another is gone ; and, when the whole circle of seasons is completed and returned into itself, the new year tells us that the old is gone. And a certain number of these years, we know, is the utmost bound of life. How sure is the reckoning ! It is even compulsory—none can escape it.—*H. Bushnell, D.D.*

(c) A thousand years is a long time, but how soon it flies ! One almost seems, in reading English history, to go back and shake hands with William the Conqueror ; a few lives bring us even to the flood. You who are getting on to be forty years old, and especially you who are sixty or seventy, must feel how fast time flies. I only seem to preach a sermon one Sunday in time to get ready for the next. Time flies with such a whirl that no express train can overtake it, and even the lightning flash seems to lag behind it. We shall soon be at the great white throne ; we shall soon be at the judgment bar of God. Oh ! let us make ready for it. Let us not live so much in this present, which is but a dream, an empty show, but let us live in the real, substantial future.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

(d) Who, with the Word of God in his hand,

## THE WORK OF THE DAY DONE IN THE DAY.

(Verse 4 : “*As the duty of every day required.*”)

The pious Jews returned from Babylon having erected an altar, kept also the feast of Tabernacles as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, “as the duty of every day required.” It is in the margin, “the matter of the day in his day.” This has grown into a proverbial saying among those who love Scripture phraseology, and teaches us that we should do the work of the day in the day.

I We may apply this to life in

but must feel that an era of enlarged Christian liberality is hastening on ! . . .

Now, the Christian professor too commonly allows his *regular contribution* to check his liberality, to prevent his giving more than the stipulated sum, though there are times when his benevolent impulses would prompt him to exceed that sum ; then, he will regard his subscription only as a pledge that he will *not give less*, but as leaving his liberality open to all the impulses of an unrestricted benevolence. Now, he is too often disposed to shun the applications for charity, and if he is overlooked and passed by, to view it as a fortunate escape ; but then he will do good *as he hath opportunity*—creating the opportunity which he cannot find already made to his hands. Now, his ability exceeds his inclination ; but then his inclination will be greater than his ability ; like the Macedonian Christians of whom the Apostle testifies, “I hear them record that to their power, yea, and beyond their power, they were willing of themselves.” Instead of being charitable only on comparative *dstraint*, he will often anticipate application, and surprise the agents of beneficence by unexpected gifts ; thus strengthening their faith in God, and inciting them to enlarge their designs for the kingdom of Christ : like the same believers of whom the Apostle records, that, instead of needing to be solicited, they entreated him to accept their contributions—“praying us with much entreaty to accept the gift.” Like the happy parent of a happy family, he will hail every new-born claim on his resources, and cheerfully deny himself in order to support it. And, instead of giving as he now does, as scantily as if he only aimed to keep the Christian cause from famishing, he will then act on the persuasion that his own enjoyment is identified with its growth and prosperity.—*John Harris, D.D.*

Works of piety and charity should, like water from a fountain, flow spontaneously from the gratitude and benevolence of a believing heart, and not require to be extorted with importunity, like the toil and trouble of drawing water from a deep well.—*Anon.*

general This is called a “day,” and it is a single day, a short day, a day which it is impossible to lengthen. And what is the language of reason, of Scripture ? “To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart.” “Behold now . . . is the day of salvation.” And what will be your language if the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus ? “I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day ; the night cometh, wherein no man can work.”

II. It will apply to prosperity. This

is called a "day;" and Solomon tells us what is the duty of it. "In the day of prosperity be joyful." He cannot intend to encourage extravagance and excess. We are to "use this world as not abusing it." The wise man would teach us to enjoy the comforts our circumstances afford, in opposition to that self-denial that arises not from religious motive, but from anxiety; from a disposition to live comparatively poor and destitute at present in order to hoard up for the future; whereas the Apostle tells us that "God gives us all things richly to enjoy." God, like a generous friend, is pleased to see His presents enjoyed—"to enjoy is to obey." But let us be always joyful *in Him*; let us enjoy all *in God*, and *God in all*. Behold another thing that the duty of this day requires. It is *gratitude*. Compare your circumstances with those of others, whose plans are equally wise, and whose dependencies seemed equally sure. Compare your present with your former condition; the "two bands" with the "staff." Compare your indulgences with your deserts, and how can you be unthankful? And surely the duty of this day requires *liberality*. He has made you stewards, and not proprietors; and He will soon call you to give up your account. "Charge them that are rich in this world that they do good," &c.

**III. It will apply to adversity.** This is also called a "day;" and it is said, "In the day of adversity, consider." This is the grand duty of the season. Whatever be your affliction, it is a solemn call to consider your ways, to examine your hearts and lives, to inquire wherefore He contends with you, and what He would have you to do. You are also to consider the alleviations of your suffering; how much worse it might have been; and to compare your resources with your difficulties. Another part of the duty this "day" requires is *submission*. "Submit yourselves under the mighty hand of God," &c. This subjection does not exclude feeling, but regulates it; keeping us, while sensible of the affliction, from quarrelling with Providence, from charging Him foolishly or unkindly, and leading us to say, "It

is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good." The duty of this day also requires *prayer*. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble," &c. "Is any afflicted? Let him pray." The very exercise of it will soothe him, while the answer of it will deliver him.

**IV. We may apply it to the Sabbath.** This is called "the Lord's-day" because it is consecrated to the memory of His resurrection, and is employed in His service. But as to advantage, it is *our* day. It "was made for man." We are commanded to "sanctify it, calling the Sabbath a delight," &c. A Christian will say, "How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!" &c. He will take heed *what* he hears, and *how* he hears. But this is not all. He will retire. He will indulge in private reflection.

**V. It will apply to every day.** No day comes without its appropriate duty. We are to do everything in its season; to do the work *of* the day *in* the day; and not leave it till to-morrow.

1. *Because we may not live till to-morrow.* "We know not what a day may bring forth."

2. *Each day will have its own engagements, and it is wrong to surcharge one period with the additional work of another.* "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." It is unlawful to encumber to-day with the *care* of to-morrow; and to encumber to-morrow with the *work* of to-day.

3. *Because by this temporary negligence, we have nothing to do, or too much; whereas by doing the work of the day in the day, we are never unoccupied, never oppressed.*

4. *Because by this means the mind is kept cool, and tranquil, and cheerful; and we shall know nothing of the perplexities and ill-temper of those who are always in confusion and haste.*

To verify this important maxim, let me lay down three rules—

(1.) Rise early.

(2.) Grasp not so much business as to "entangle yourselves in the affairs of this life."

(3.) Arrange a plan of life, and firmly adhere to it.—*William Jay.*

## THE PREPARATIONS FOR REBUILDING THE TEMPLE.

(Verses 6b, 7: "But the foundation of the Temple of the Lord was not yet laid. They gave money also," &c.)

Two chief points are here presented to our notice—

I. **The great work yet to be accomplished.** Mingled with the joy of the Jews in their restored worship was the recollection of the great work which as yet was not even commenced. "The foundation of the Temple of the Lord was not yet laid." We regard this as an illustration of—

1. *The incompleteness of human joys.* The gladness of the returned exiles in celebrating the feast of Tabernacles was tempered by the fact that they had only an altar; they had no temple. The brightest day of our life here has its cloud and its shadow. Our most serene seasons are not entirely free from disturbance. Our joys are incomplete. Our gladness is often checked by sadness. "There is a cross in every lot." The victorious and calm eventide of the life of king David was darkened by trials in his family. "Although my house be not so with God" (2 Sam. xxiii. 5). St. Paul "was caught up into Paradise" and there received "abundance of revelations;" but there was given to him "a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet" him. This incompleteness of our joys here is a wise and kind arrangement. We need the shadow as well as the sunshine. We are reminded by vicissitude that this is not our rest, and urged to set our affections on spiritual and eternal things. (a).

2. *The incompleteness of human works.* The altar was built, but the Temple was not begun. The work of these patriotic and pious Jews was only just commenced. It would be long before it was completed. The work of the earnest man is never accomplished. Ere one task is completed another summons him to effort. If he were tempted to settle down to repose, his rest would soon be broken by the demands of unfinished enterprises, or by challenges to new endeavours.

"Labour with what zeal we will,  
Something still remains undone,  
Something uncompleted still  
Waits the rising of the sun."

—*Longfellow.*

Even when death approaches, most men have much which they desire to accomplish. The statesman is summoned hence devising new measures for his country's good, which he will not assist in passing into laws. The author dies leaving his book unfinished. The Christian minister lays down his charge, leaving many plans for the welfare of his people not yet carried out; and the parent, while he longs still to do much for the welfare of his children. Doubtless the good man is not called to leave this world until his work here is finished; but to us it often seems that life closes here in incompleteness. This incompleteness of our human works is also ordered wisely and well. It tends to prevent stagnation; to rouse to earnest activities, &c. (b).

3. *The obligation of the Church of God.* The Jews at Jerusalem felt themselves bound not to rest content with the joys and blessings of the altar, but to proceed to the more arduous task of rebuilding the Temple. In seasons of religious worship the Church must not forget the work which it is called to accomplish. Our holiest delights should not detain us from our arduous duties. The Church should not entertain the idea of any pause or decrease in its labours until the spiritual temple of our God is raised into utmost and beautiful completeness out of the ruins of our fallen humanity. Let Christians labour on until the head stone of this temple shall be brought forth "with shoutings of, Grace, grace unto it." (c).

II. **The prompt preparations for the accomplishment of this work.** "They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters," &c. (ver. 7). Two points claim attention—

1. *The variety of service and the unity*

*of design.* See the various ways in which different persons contributed to the preparations for rebuilding the sacred edifice. (1.) Certain Jews gave of their possessions to pay the workmen. "They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre." (2.) Other Jews laboured in the work of preparation. "The masons and the carpenters." (3.) Zidonian and Tyrian workmen also laboured in this work. "Them of Zidon and them of Tyre brought cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa." And (4) Cyrus assisted by his patronage and by his gifts. "According to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia." And others might be mentioned who otherwise promoted the great object; such as the Levites who acted as overseers of the work. All these, each in his own way and in his own sphere, helped to accomplish the end which was so eagerly desired by most of them. And in building the spiritual temple, there should be the individual effort of every Christian for the attainment of the great object which they all have in common: each one, in some form or other, should contribute his share in the glorious work, and all should keep in view the one grand end. (d).

2. *The co-operation of Jews and Gentiles.* "It was significant also," says Schultz, "that at this building of the Temple again it was not Canaan proper, but the Phœnician Lebanon, that provided the building material, and that corresponding with this, heathen workmen and artists also took part in erecting the house of God. It indicates that the rest of the earth also, and corresponding thereto, the rest of mankind, are to render their gifts and capacities, which are more and more to take part in the complete and true worship of the Lord, that the Lord by no means regards them as profane. The rest of the earth and mankind become thereby, to a certain extent, consecrated in advance and designated as one who, if now already in the Old Testament economy, yet still more some day in the fulness of time, would take part in the highest destiny

of Israel." (e). In the Church of Christ "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all and in all."

#### CONCLUSION:

1. *Are we "as living stones built up" in the spiritual temple of God?* (Comp. 1 Pet. ii. 4-6.)

2. *Are we also assisting to build this glorious temple?* (Comp. 1 Cor. iii. 10-15.) It is paradoxical yet true, that we should be both stones in the edifice and toilers for its completion. But are we?

#### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Mark the same people that usually have the highest joys, and see whether at other times they have not the greatest troubles. This week they are as at the gates of heaven, and the next as at the doors of hell: I am sure with many it is so. Yet it need not be so, if Christians would but look at these high joys as duties to be endeavoured, and mercies to be valued; but when they will needs judge of their state by them, and think that God is gone from or forsaken them when they have not such joys, then it leaves them in terror and amazement. Like men after a flash of lightning, they are left more sensible of the darkness. For no wise man can expect that such joys should be a Christian's ordinary state; or God should so diet us with a continual feast. It would neither suit with our health nor the condition of this pilgrimage. Live, therefore, on your peace of conscience as your ordinary diet; when this is wanting know that God appointeth you a fast for your health; and when you have a feast of high joys, feed on it and be thankful; but when they are taken from you, gape not after them as the disciples did after Christ at His ascension, but return thankfully to your ordinary diet of peace. And remember that these joys which are now taken from you may so return again. However, there is a place preparing for you, where your joys may be full. —Richard Baxter.

(b) Human life is short; God's work is complex and prolonged, and steadily flowing on. Hence we are continually beginning, and passing away, and leaving what we begin for others to finish. Every generation is beginning, and every generation is passing away without having finished what it has begun. But that which we begin is not going to stop because we cease to go forward with it. One worker dies; the loom goes on, and another worker takes up the thread that he has laid down. We pass away, and another man, somewhere, is prepared to step into our place. We commence a work, and perform a part of

it ; when we are gone, others perform another part ; when they are gone, still others perform another part ; and so that which we undertake is by others carried along to its bright consummation.—*H. W. Beecher.*

(c) I ask you to remember that every child whose heart is touched by the love of Christ, every worker for God who is ready to sacrifice his time, his comfort, his luxury, his life, for Christ, whose sympathy with the advance of God's kingdom is produced by an intelligent understanding of the magnitude of the interests that are at stake ; every bedridden, poverty-stricken Christian, who is daily wrestling with God in prayer ; every Sunday-school teacher who identifies himself with this great enterprise, not simply by giving money (that is sometimes an easy way of putting aside a pressing claim), but by earnest thought, honest speech, and loyal feeling ; every one of us who, appreciating the magnitude, sublimity, and consecration of Christian missions, does devote himself to this work, rises up for God against the evil-doers, enlists in the great battle which can only terminate when death and hell, the beast and the false prophet, are cast into the lake of fire.—*H. R. Reynolds, D. D.*

(d) I would stir you all up to help in this work—old men, young men, and you, my sisters, and all of you, according to your gifts and experience, help. I want to make you feel, "I cannot do much, but I can help ; I cannot preach, but I can help ; I cannot pray in public, but I can help ; I cannot give much away, but I can help ; I cannot officiate as an elder or a deacon, but I can help ; I cannot shine as 'a bright particular star,' but I can help ; I cannot stand alone to serve my Master, but I can help." There is a text from which an old Puritan once preached a very singular sermon. There were only two words in the text, and they were, "And Bartholomew." The reason he took the text was, that Bartholomew's name is never mentioned alone, but he is always spoken of as doing some good thing with somebody else. He is never the principal actor, but always second. Well, let this be your feeling, that if you cannot do all yourself, you will help to do what you can.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

(e) There are those in the Church who believe that God's express aim in Judaism was

to keep the Jewish people as separate from the world as possible ; to keep them, like Noah, in an ark, while He plagued and punished the world at His will. But I maintain, on the contrary, that Judaism was always genial and benignant to the stranger who would adopt its belief and accept its blessings. From the evil which was in the world God was minded to keep the Jewish people free at any cost. From idolatry and its attendant pollutions He sought to deliver them, inasmuch as idolatry in the long run inevitably leads to national decline and death. To the stranger, the foreign person or nation, who would dishonour its beliefs and trample on its blessings, Judaism was stern as fate and pitiless as death. The nations which had filled up the measure of their iniquity, whose influence must be corrupting, were ruthlessly exterminated. . . . The Jews were simply God's executioners here, and the same doom, they are plainly warned, awaited them if they suffered themselves to be tempted into the same sins. The nations, of whose pollutions the very land was weary, were swept off as the stubble before the flame. But this was the accident and not the essential character of the dispensation. The law here in England is merciful, though it has often to deal out terrible judgments on flagrant sins. And I am persuaded that the more carefully the spirit of the dispensation is studied, the more plainly will it appear that . . . from Moses to Zechariah, it is a cry to the nations not to rot in their own corruption, "Come with us and we will do you good." How benignantly, in the closing verses of the eighth chapter of the book of Joshua, the "strangers which were conversant among them" are included in the benediction ! How earnestly Daniel and his coadjutors sought to diffuse the blessings of Judaism among the nations which had enslaved them, and to make the Oriental despots sharers in the knowledge of the living God, which by revelation they had gained ! How emphatically the prophets take up and echo the invitation with growing clearness and earnestness through the ages, until it breaks out into full utterance in the great Successor of Moses, the great Fulfiller of the Law, the Son of David, the King of Zion, "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." Judaism in all ages was a witness for God to the nations, and a means of drawing all that would be drawn unto Himself.—*J. B. Brown, B.A.*

## LAYING THE FOUNDATION OF THE TEMPLE.

(Verses 8–13.)

Notice :

**I. The work already done.**

1. *Something was already accomplished.* Several months had passed away since the arrangements mentioned in verse 7 were made ; and during those

months the masons and carpenters, and the Tyrian and the Sidonian workmen, had not been idle. Considerable labour must have been expended on the site of the Temple before it was ready for laying the foundation thereof.

2. *Arrangements were made for carrying on the work.* "Now in the second year of their coming into the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel," &c. (vers. 8, 9). And in these arrangements there was a *unanimity* which augured well for the success of the enterprise. "Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of the brethren, the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem," were united in their arrangements and efforts for prosecuting the work to a successful issue.

II. *The worship offered.* "And when the builders laid the foundation of the Temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets," &c. (vers. 10, 11). Notice:

1. *The manner of their worship.* "They set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord." Their worship was orderly and seemly in manner. It was conducted by those who were qualified for the work and called to it by the command of God, and in accordance with the arrangements made by king David (1 Chron. vi. 31, xvi. 4-6, 42, xxv. 1; Neh. xii. 24).

2. *The character of their worship.* "Praising and giving thanks unto the Lord," &c. Their worship consisted of grateful and joyful praise; because of—(1.) The goodness of God. "Praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because He is good." (2.) The perpetuity of His goodness. "For His mercy endureth for ever." (3.) Their perpetual interest in His goodness. "His mercy endureth for ever toward Israel." Reverent and grateful praise is the highest form of worship which we present to the Father of spirits. (a).

3. *The occasion of their worship.* "When the builders laid the foundation of the Temple of the Lord." We call attention to the occasion in this place, because it illustrated and stimulated

their thankful praise. God had vouchsafed to them unmistakable manifestations of His goodness and mercy, in preserving and blessing them in Babylon, in granting them so favourable a return to their own land, and in helping them thus far with their work of restoration and renewal. Their own experiences would give force and fervour to their worship-song.

4. *The spirit of their worship.* This was hearty and enthusiastic. "And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid." Worship which is not hearty, or which is cold or lukewarm, does not meet with Divine acceptance.

III. *The emotions excited.* "And all the people shouted with a great shout," &c.

1. *Great joy.* "And many shouted aloud for joy." This joy probably arose from—(1.) The consideration of what was accomplished. "Those that only knew the misery of having no temple at all," says M. Henry, "praised the Lord with shouts of joy when they saw but the foundation of one laid. To them even this foundation seemed great, and was as life from the dead; to their hungry souls even this was sweet. They shouted so that 'the noise was heard afar off.' Note.—We ought to be thankful for the beginnings of mercy, though we have not yet come to the perfection of it; and the foundations of a temple, after long desolations, cannot but be fountains of joy to every faithful Israelite." Every step in the progress of our communion with God should be a matter of great joy to us. (2.) The anticipation of what would yet be accomplished. They looked forward with confident and exultant hope to the completion of the sacred edifice.

2. *Great sorrow.* "But many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers, ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice." Their grief arose chiefly from memories of the past, with which the present contrasted unfavourably. (1.) Recollections of the former

Temple. They "had seen the first house," and they knew well that they could not hope to build one which would be at all comparable with it in magnificence and splendour. "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?" (Hag. ii. 3). Moreover, they might have wept because of the sins which had led to the destruction of the former Temple, and the manifold miseries which had resulted from those sins. (2.) Recollections of their own lives. The joyful acclamations of the young generation probably recalled to these "ancient men" the brightness and hopefulness and enthusiasm of their own youth, and the recollection awakened sad thoughts. The contrast between the purpose of early life and the performance of after days, and the sad disparity between the hopes of youth and the attainments of manhood, are generally sufficient to subdue and sadden the hearts of the aged. The difference between the ideal entertained at twenty years of age and the actual realised at fifty or sixty is often a mournful thing. And even if a man is able to carry out his purposes, and achieves what is commonly called "success in life," how different the objects gained appear in possession from what they appeared in anticipation, and how disappointing! Much, very much, after which men aspire and for which they labour, cannot satisfy them; and having obtained their chief aims, they may cry mournfully—

"Years have gone by! and life's lowlands are  
 past,  
 And I stand on the hill which I sighed for,  
 at last:  
 But I turn from the summit that once was  
 my star,  
 To the vale of my childhood, seen dimly and  
 far;—  
 Each blight on its beauty seems softened and  
 gone,  
 Like a land that we love, in the light of the  
 morn."—*T. K. Hervey. (b).*

3. *Great joy and great sorrow mingled.*  
 "The people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people." We may regard this scene as—(1.) An illustration of our

personal experiences in this world. All our joys are tinged with sadness; all our sorrows have their mitigations, and if they do not yield rich compensations the blame will be our own. (c). (2.) An illustration of the experiences of mankind in this world. The shouts of those who rejoice and the cries of those who mourn are ever mingled in this world. The exultations of the victors and the lamentations of the vanquished rise together from earth to heaven. (3.) A feature which distinguishes the present from the future state. These mingled experiences belong only to this present life and world. In hell no one "shouts aloud for joy." And in heaven "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." (d).

#### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Praise is the very highest mood and exercise of the religious soul; it is the expression towards God of the holiest emotions of which we are capable—reverence, obligation, gratitude, love, adoration. Whenever these are uplifted to God in admiration and homage, there is the worship of praise—the highest and most perfect expression of all that is purest and noblest in our religious nature. As contrasted with the worship of prayer, the worship of praise is manifestly transcendent. Prayer is the pleading of our human indigence and helplessness; praise is the laudation of Divine excellency and sufficiency. Prayer supplicates the good that God may have to bestow; praise is the adoration of the good that there is in God Himself. When we pray we are urged by necessities, fears, and sorrows,—it is the cry of our troubled helplessness, often of our pain or our terror; we are impelled by feelings of unworthiness, memories of sin, yearnings for forgiveness and renewal. Praise brings, not a cry, but a song,—it does not ask, it proffers,—it lifts, not its hands, but its heart,—it is the voice, not of our woe, but of our love, not of beseeching, but of blessing. It comes before God not clothed in sackcloth, but with its "singing robes" about it, not wailing litanies, but shouting hosannas. Prayer expresses only our lower religious moods of necessity and sorrow; praise expresses our higher religious moods of satisfaction and joy. Prayer asks God to come down to us; praise assays to go up to God. The soul that prays falls prostrate with its face to the ground, often being in an agony; the soul that praises stands with uplifted brow and transfigured countenance ready to soar away to heaven. Moreover, the instinct

of praise is deeper in the religious heart than that of prayer; song in the human soul is earlier, and will be later, than supplication. Prayer is the accident of our present sinful necessity; praise is the essence of all religious life and joy. The birthplace and home of prayer is on earth. The birthplace and home of praise is in heaven."—*H. Allon, D.D.*

(b) I used to think a slight illness was a luxurious thing; . . . it is different in the latter stages; the old postchaise gets more shattered at every turn, windows will not pull up, doors refuse to open, or, being open, will not shut again. There is some new subject of complaint every moment; your sickness comes thicker and thicker, your sympathising friends fewer and fewer. The recollection of youth, health, and uninterrupted powers of activity, neither improved nor enjoyed, is a poor strain of comfort. . . . Death has closed the long dark avenue upon loves and friendships; and I look at them as through the grated doors of a burial place filled with monuments of those who were once dear to me, with no insincere wish that it may open for me at no distant period, provided such be the will of God. I shall never see the threescore and ten, and shall be summed up at a discount; no help for it, and no matter either.—*Sir Walter Scott.*

(c)  
There is no joy unmixed with grief—  
Each garden has more weeds than flowers—  
Care rides upon the winged hours,  
And doubt for ever haunts belief.

We stop to pluck some beauteous flower,  
And cold precaution idly scorn,  
To find some sharp and hidden thorn  
Exacts a forfeit for the dower.

There have been tears of wormwood shed,  
For every pleasure life can bring;  
The joys of earth are flowers that spring  
From out the ashes of the dead—*E. H. Dewart.*

In the bitterest grief, in the sharpest period of agony, in the dullest, most hopeless prospect, there is a source of joy which none but the spirit of Jesus can find or use. St. Paul calls it rejoicing in the Lord. Then we go

out of ourselves, as it were, and leave the last trial like a cloak that is thrown off. We pass from the sharpest and most disappointing trouble into the presence of the Spirit of the Lord. We move in by a mental flash, as it were, and there see the source of life unshaken, undimmed, steady, like the shining of the moon above a battlefield; calm and quiet, as the sunlight amid the shrieks and tumult of a pillaged town.—*Harry Jones, M.A.*

There is great joy of prosperity, of love, of victory, but there is a joy that belongs to the experience of suffering and sorrow which is more divine and exquisite than any joy the heart ever knows outside of trouble. When a soul is afflicted till it is driven into the very pavilion of God, till Christ, as it were, wraps His arms about it and says, "Rest here till the storm be overpast," that soul experiences an exquisiteness of joy which only those who have felt it can understand.—*H. W. Beecher.*

Then happy those, since each must drain  
His share of pleasure, share of pain;  
Then happy those, beloved of Heaven,  
To whom the mingled cup is given,  
Whose lenient sorrows find relief,  
Whose joys are chastened by their grief.  
—*Sir W. Scott.*

(d) This is a world of weeping—a vale of tears. Who is there that has not wept over the grave of a friend; over his own losses and cares; over his disappointments, over the treatment he has received from others; over his sins; over the follies, vices, and woes of his fellow-men? And what a change would it make in our world if it could be said that henceforward not another tear would be shed; not a head would ever be bowed again in grief! Yet this is to be the condition of heaven. In that world there is to be no pain, no disappointment, no bereavement. No friend is to lie in dreadful agony on a sick-bed, no grave is to be opened to receive a parent, a wife, a child; no gloomy prospect of death is to draw tears of sorrow from the eyes. To that blessed world, when our eyes run down with tears, are we permitted to look forward; and the prospect of such a world should contribute to wipe away our tears here—for all our sorrows will soon be over.—*A. Barnes, D.D.*

## THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE.

(Verses 11-13.)

That an exuberance of joy and of sorrow should be excited at once by the same event, is undoubtedly a curious fact; and it will be profitable to show you—

I. What there was at that time to call forth such strong and widely-different emotions. The Jews, after their return from Babylon, had just laid the

foundation of the second Temple, and this was—

1. *To some an occasion of exalted joy.* It was not the mere circumstance that a magnificent building was about to be raised, but the thought of the use to which that building was to be appropriated, that proved to them a source of joy. The erection of it was

justly regarded by them as *a restoration of God's favour to them* after the heavy judgments which He had inflicted on them during their captivity in Babylon. This event opened to them *a prospect of again worshipping Jehovah according to all the forms prescribed to them by the Mosaic ritual*. Nor could they fail to view it *as tending to advance the honour of their God*; in which view pre-eminently it must of necessity fill them with most exalted joy. With such views of the event before them the people could not but shout for joy; and "if they had been silent, the very stones would have cried out against them."

2. *To others an occasion of the deepest sorrow*. The persons who manifested such pungent grief were "the priests, and Levites, and the chief of the fathers who were ancient men, that had seen the former Temple." They wept because they well knew how infinitely this structure must fall below the former in point of magnificence. Of necessity it must want many things which constituted the glory of that edifice, and could never be replaced. The Shechinah, the bright cloud, the emblem of the Deity Himself, was for ever removed. The ark was lost, and the copy of the law which had been preserved in it. The Urim and Thummim too, by which God had been wont to communicate to His people the knowledge of His will, was irrecoverably gone; and the fire which had descended from heaven was extinct, so that they must henceforth use in all their sacrifices nothing but common fire. And what but their sins had brought upon them all these calamities? Would it have been right, then, in these persons to lose all recollection of their former mercies, and of the sins through which they had been bereaved of them; and to be so transported with their present blessings as not to bewail their former iniquities? No! I think that the mixture of feeling was precisely such as the occasion called for.

**II. How far similar emotions become us at the present day.**

1. *There is at this time great occasion for joy*. We are not, indeed, constructing a material temple for the Lord; but

the whole nation is engaged in endeavours to erect a spiritual temple to Him throughout the world. Never was there a period since the apostolic age, when the exertions were so general, so diversified, so diffusive. And is this no ground of joy? Is there no reason to rejoice in what, we trust, is going on amongst us? If the Gospel be "glad tidings of great joy unto all people," is it no cause for joy that it is brought to our ears; and that it is effectual amongst us to convert men to God? Are there not amongst you some at least who have been "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God"? Surely we have reason to rejoice.

2. *Yet is there amongst us abundant occasion for grief also*. If we suppose the Apostle Paul, who witnessed the state of God's Church in its primitive and purest age, to come down in the midst of us, what would be his feelings at the present hour? Would his joy be unmixed with sorrow? Would he be satisfied with what he saw? It was with "weeping" that St. Paul contemplated many of the Philippian converts; and for many of the Galatian Church he "agonised as in the pangs of childbirth till Christ should be more perfectly formed in them." And was this from a want of charity, or from a contempt of piety in its lower stages of existence? No; but from *love*, and from a desire that God should be honoured to the uttermost wherever His Gospel came, and wherever its blessings were experienced in the soul.

See, then—

(1.) *What, above all things, should interest our souls*. Nothing under heaven should transport us with joy like the establishment of Christ's kingdom in the world and in the soul. Nothing should produce in us such acute sensations of grief as a consciousness that God is not glorified in the midst of us as He ought to be.

(2.) *What use we should make of our knowledge and experience*. It is not so much an unqualified effusion of joy that is pleasing to the Most High, as that which is moderated with shame, and tempered with contrition.—*Charles Simeon, M.A.*

## THE ALTAR AND THE FOUNDATION OF THE TEMPLE.

*Notes for Scripture Lesson (Whole Chapter).*

Our lesson contains the account of the *beginning* of the great work of rebuilding the Temple. It is sad to find that through delays and indifference twenty years passed before it was finished, and then only on the arousing preaching of Haggai and Zechariah. They, however, began well, collecting material and laying the foundations by the fourteenth month after their return. Of this great and rejoicing day our lesson contains the brief account.

Looking carefully at the chapter, it will be seen that it contains two things, which, though related, are quite distinct—

1. *The beginning of Worship.*

2. *The beginning of the Temple for Worship.*

It will also be observed that the people very properly thought more of the spiritual worship than of the material building, and found that they could have the worship *at once*, though the Temple to worship in might be long unbuilt. The *things* we give to God, buildings, &c., must always come second, and have no value before Him until we have given Him *ourselves*. The true worshippers worship "in spirit and in truth;" but they properly accept all the helps of buildings and services. The key to the lesson may therefore be the sentence of praise spoken by Paul concerning the Macedonians (2 Cor. viii. 5). They "first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God."

We have then this to set forth and illustrate, and we call it—

**I. The true order.** First the burnt offering, then the Temple. First the self-surrender, then the doing of duty. First the worship of the soul, then the work of the hands. The burnt offering was designed to represent the *entire yielding of the worshipper to God*. How suitable such an act was for the newly-restored people, just beginning their national life! They properly began with a very solemn consecration of the

whole nation to God by burnt offering. Though we do not bring representative sacrifices now, we follow the example of these earnest-hearted men. Tell of the youth, going out into life from a country town, not knowing what temptations might befall him, and solemnly consecrating himself to God, and using David's resolve, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God, I will make mention of Thy righteousness, even of Thine only." That was his offering of himself on the altar of burnt offering, and the right and noble beginning for his life. That youth lived to work at building in the world the great Temple of God. But in the second part of the lesson we have another event introduced—laying the foundations of the second Temple, and this brings before us—

**II. The mingled feelings.** In the worship all feelings were absorbed in solemn joy; but when the foundations were laid, such *memories* blended with hope, that tears fell plentifully, and the wail of sorrow almost drowned the shout of triumph. Laying foundations of a new temple or church is the occasion for joy; show how we decorate with flags, &c., and have music and song. And yet *now-a-days*, when a new church replaces an old one, we cannot wonder that very touching memories should crowd round the elder people, making them sorrow in the very midst of other joys. So it is through our life, songs and tears are blended. Joys and sorrows go hand in hand continually. And so it must be in a sin-stricken world until "God Himself shall wipe all tears from our eyes." Impress the duty which surely comes to all who give themselves to the Lord "a living sacrifice." They have *work to do for God in the world*, and whatever forms that work may take, it is really a part of the work of building a great temple in the earth for the glory of God; a great spiritual temple that needs all sorts of workers and work; and, when one day complete, will win from the universe

triumphant songs, with which shall blend no sorrow and no tears. "The Temple of God shall be with men, and He shall dwell among them." God's temple among men *we* must help to build.—*R. Tuck, B.A.*

## CHAPTER IV.

**CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.]** In this chapter we have—(i.) The proposal of the Samaritans to unite with the Jews in building the Temple, and its rejection (vers. 1–3). (ii.) The opposition of the Samaritans because of the rejection of their proposal (vers. 4, 5). (iii.) The letters of the Samaritans to King Artaxerxes against the Jews, one of which is here given (vers. 6–16). (iv.) The reply of Artaxerxes to their letter (vers. 17–22). (v.) The stoppage of the building of the Temple (vers. 23, 24).

Ver. 1. The adversaries of Judah and Benjamin] These "adversaries" speak of themselves in the second verse as having been brought up hither by Esarhaddon king of Assur. They are the peoples spoken of in 2 Kings xvii. 24: "And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof." They described themselves in vers. 9, 10, as "the Dimaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Babylonians, the Susanchites, the Dehavites, the Elamites, and the rest of the nations," &c. They "were called Samaritans after the central point of their settlement." They were a very mixed people, including some Israelites, but chiefly composed of heathens.

Ver. 2. For we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto Him] They did worship Jehovah, but not as the faithful Jews did. They worshipped Him not as the only living and true God, but as one amongst others, according to the statement in 2 Kings xvii. 29–33.

Ver. 3. Ye have nothing to do with us to build] &c. "The question was not," as Keil observes, "whether they would permit Israelites who earnestly sought Jahve to participate in His worship at Jerusalem—a permission which they certainly would have refused to none who sincerely desired to turn to the Lord God—but whether they would acknowledge a mixed population of Gentiles and Israelites, whose worship was more heathen than Israelite, and who nevertheless claimed on its account to belong to the people of God. To such, the rulers of Judah could not, without unfaithfulness to the Lord their God, permit a participation in the building of the Lord's house." But we ourselves together] = "we as a compact unity, excluding others."—*Schultz*.

Ver. 4. The people of the land] *i.e.* "the adversaries," of ver. 1. Weakened the hands] &c. Hindered them by diminishing their courage and strength for the work.

Ver. 5. And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose] Whether by "hired counsellors" we are to understand ministers of state whom the Samaritans bribed, or legal agents whom they employed to bring about a stoppage of the work, is uncertain. All the days of Cyrus king of Persia] &c. "The machinations against the building, begun immediately after the laying of its foundations, in the second year of the return, had the effect, in the beginning of the third year of Cyrus (judging from Dan. x. 2), of putting a stop to the work till the reign of Darius,—in all, fourteen years, *viz.*, five years of Cyrus, seven and a half of Cambyses, seven months of the Pseudo-Smerdis, and one year of Darius (till the second years of his reign)."—*Keil*.

Vers. 6 and 7. Ahasuerus. . . Artaxerxes. Heb. *Ahashverosh*. . . *Artachshashta*] Dr. Cotton, Bishop of Calcutta, says that Ahasuerus "must be Cambyses," the successor of Cyrus, and Artaxerxes "must be the Pseudo-Smerdis" (*Bibl. Dict.*). So also Rawlinson, *et al.* But Keil, Schultz, *et al.*, hold that by Ahasuerus we must understand Xerxes, and by Artaxerxes "really Artaxerxes" Longimanus. The question is argued by them at considerable length in their observations *in loco*. Bishop Hervey takes the same view, and states it thus: "Ezra. iv. 6–23 is a parenthetic addition by a much later hand, and, as the passage most clearly shows, made in the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus. The compiler who inserted chap. ii., a document drawn up in the reign of Artaxerxes, to illustrate the return of the captives under Zerubbabel, here inserts a notice of two historical facts—of which one occurred in the reign of Xerxes, and the other in the reign of Artaxerxes—to illustrate the opposition offered by the heathen to the rebuilding of the Temple in the reign of Cyrus and Cambyses. He tells us that in the beginning of the reign of Xerxes, *i.e.* before Esther was in favour, they had written to the king to prejudice him against the Jews—a circumstance, by the way, which may rather have inclined him to listen to Haman's proposition; and he gives the text of letters sent to Artaxerxes, and of Artaxerxes' answer, on the strength of which Rehum and Shimshai forcibly hindered the Jews from rebuilding the city. These letters doubtless came into Ezra's hands at Babylon, and may have led to those endeavours on his part to make the king favourable to Jerusalem which issued in his own commission in the seventh year of his reign. At ver. 24

Haggai's narrative proceeds in connection with ver. 5." Fuerst also holds that Ahasuerus was Xerxes, but on Artaxerxes he says that the name was "borne by Pseudo-Smerdis and Artaxerxes Longimanus." But if Ahasuerus was Xerxes, the Artaxerxes of the text must have been Artaxerxes Longimanus. Matthew Henry propounds another view, viz., that Ahasuerus (ver. 6) was also called Artaxerxes (ver. 7), and is identical with Cambyses. The view of Rawlinson is perhaps correct, that the theory that Ahasuerus is Cambyses and Artaxerxes the Pseudo-Smerdis "presents fewer difficulties than any other." But, notwithstanding difficulties, the other theory seems to us to be the true one. It is beyond our province to enter further into the question.

Ver. 7. Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel] "These names certainly indicate Samaritans who, without being Persian officials, enjoyed, just as Sanballat subsequently, a certain degree of consequence."—Schultz. And the rest of their companions] Margin: "Heb. societies." Fuerst: "Associates, colleagues." The writing of the letter was written in the Syrian tongue] It was written in Syriac or Aramaic characters. And interpreted in the Syrian tongue] It was in the Syriac or Aramaic language. Both the characters and the language were Aramaic. The Samaritans "spoke a language more nearly akin to Hebrew than to" Aramaic; and what they had thought in their own language they translated into Aramaic, and wrote in Aramaic characters.

Ver. 8. Rehum the chancellor] Heb. בַּעַל-טֶעֶם. Fuerst: "Properly, lord of the (royal) decree, i.e. either *stadtholder*, and so the parallel is פֶּהָה, (comp. Ezra v. 3, vi. 6, or, according to *Ezra Apocr.* ii. 25; *Jos.* (Arch. xi. 2), and *Kimchi*, &c.) = כָּפֵר מְזַבֵּר, *chancellor*; but the former is more probable." It is probably the title of the Persian governor of the Samaritan province. Shimshai the scribe] Margin: "Or, *secretary*." Fuerst: "Royal scribe."

Ver. 9. The Dinaites] were probably, as suggested by Ewald, people from the Median city Deinaver. Rawlinson suggests that they were the people of Dayan, a country bordering on Cilicia. The Apharsathchites] were probably the same as the Apharsachites" (chap. v. 6), and were perhaps identical with the Parætacæ, or Parætaceni, a tribe of mountaineers living on the borders of Media and Persia. The Tarpelites]: "The territory Tarpel has been supposed to be found in (Τάρπουσι) of Ptolemy, east of Elam, with which it is mentioned; more correctly, perhaps, the territory Tarpel is at the Mæotic swamp, whose inhabitants Ταρπητες are mentioned in Strabo (i. p. 757). In no case can it be the Phœnician Tripolis."—Fuerst. The Apharsites] are by some regarded as Persians, by others as the Parhasi, in eastern Media. The Archevites] were people from the city Erech, now Warka. The Susanchites], or Susanites, were from the city of Susa. The Dehavites] were the Dai or Dahi, mentioned by Herodotus (i. 125) among the nomadic tribes of Persia. The Elamites] were the original inhabitants of the country called Elam.

Ver. 10. The great and noble Asnapper] seems to have been a distinguished officer in the service of Esarhaddon (ver. 2), and employed by him to conduct the colonists to Samaria and arrange their settlement there. And at such a time.] Chaldee וּבְכַעֲנָת = "and so now, Ezra iv. 10, vii. 12, i.e. and so forth, *et cetera*."—Fuerst.

Ver. 12. And have set up the walls] &c. Keil would translate: "And are setting up its walls and digging its foundations." "Repairing" (Fuerst) "its foundations" would perhaps be better.

Ver. 13. Toll] Rather tax or tribute; the money payment required from every one. Tribute] "A tax on articles consumed, excise.—Fuerst. Custom] "A road tax, a toll." *Ibid.* Thou shalt endamage the revenue] The meaning of the word rendered "revenue" in the text, and "strength" in the margin, is entirely uncertain. Keil, Rawlinson, and others say that אַחֲרָיִם depends upon the Pehlevi word אַחֲרָיִם, and signifies "at last." "And so at last thou shalt endamage the kings." Fuerst, however, says that this "gives no suitable sense." But it seems to us, as Schultz observes, that "the meaning of 'finally,' 'at last,' is entirely appropriate."

Ver. 14. We have maintenance from the king's palace] Margin: "We are salted with the salt of the palace." The Heb. is, "We salt the salt of the palace;" i.e. we eat the salt of the palace; a figurative expression, signifying to be in the king's service and to obtain subsistence from him, and implying the obligation to look after his interests. The king's dishonour] Keil: "The damage of the king" עֲרִוּהָ, deprivation, emptying, here injury to the royal power or revenue."

Ver. 15. The book of the records of thy fathers.] It is called in Esth. vi. 1, "the book of the records of the chronicles." Thy fathers] are the predecessors of the king on the throne, and the term applies not only to the Medo-Persian but also to the Chaldean sovereigns. Of old time] Heb.: "From the days of eternity," i.e. from time immemorial. For which cause was this city destroyed]—by Nebuchadnezzar.

Ver. 16. No portion on this side the river] The statement amounts to this, that the returned Jews, if allowed to rebuild and fortify Jerusalem, would seize all the country west of the Euphrates, and so the king would lose that part of his dominions. A very absurd exaggeration.

Ver. 17. And at such a time] Rather, "And so forth." (See on ver. 10.)

Ver. 18. Read before me] Persian monarchs were not accustomed to read letters or records themselves, but to have them read to them by others (comp. Esth. vi. 1).

Ver. 20. There have been mighty kings] &c. This is most applicable to David and Solomon, and in a smaller degree to Uzziah, Jotham, and Josiah. Ruled over all beyond the river] *i.e.* over all the region west of the Euphrates.

Ver. 23. By force and power] Or, as in the margin, "By arm and power." They compelled the Jews to desist from building.

Ver. 24. According to Keil, Schultz, *et al.*, the historian in this verse takes up the thread of the narrative which he dropped at the close of verse 5, in order that, by inserting the episodic section (vers. 6-23), he might give in this place "a short and comprehensive view of all the hostile acts against the Jewish community on the part of the Samaritans and surrounding nations." In their view this verse refers to the opposition which was commenced in the reign of Cyrus, while verses 6-23 narrate subsequent hostilities. But according to the view of Bishop Cotton, that Ahasuerus (ver. 6) must be Cambyses and Artaxerxes (ver. 7) the Pseudo-Smerdis, and that this chapter is one continuous narrative, the enforced suspension of the work lasted for about two years.

## THE PROPOSAL OF THE SAMARITANS TO THE JEWS.

(Verses 1-3.)

Notice :

**I. The proposal made by the Samaritans.** "Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the Temple unto the Lord God of Israel; then they came to Zerubbabel," &c. (vers. 1, 2). This proposal was—

1. *Plausible in its form.* They proposed—(1) *To render help in a great and good work.* "They said, Let us build with you." They do not ask for anything for themselves, except permission to co-operate in building "the Temple unto the Lord God of Israel;" but they offer something to the Jews, even their assistance in their great undertaking. (2.) *To render help in this work for an excellent reason.* "For we seek your God as ye do, and we do sacrifice unto Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither." They urge that they were worshippers of Jehovah even as the Jews were; that they were interested in the promotion of His honour; and that it would therefore be appropriate for them to unite in building a temple unto Him. Moreover, the returned Jews being neither a strong nor a wealthy people, and having much to occupy their time and energies, would naturally be prepared to welcome any suitable offers of assistance. Temptation is always plausible in its presentation to the tempted. (a). But this proposal was—

2. *Evil in itself.* Fair and plausible in appearance, it was false and perilous in reality. The evil of their proposal will appear if we consider that—(1.) They were not Israelites. They were brought into Samaria by Esarhaddon king of Assur. "And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim," &c. (2 Kings xvii. 24). They were "Dinaites, Apharsathchites, Tarpelites, Apharsites, Archevites, Babylonians, Susanchites, Dehavites, and Elamites" (ver. 9). If it be allowed that these peoples had become mixed by marriage with the remnant of the Israelites who remained in the land at the captivity, still the heathen elements and usages and influences were predominant amongst them. They were not Israelites either by descent or by sympathy. (2.) They did not worship Jehovah as the true God. When they were first planted in Samaria they were ignorant of the worship of Jehovah; and after they had been instructed in it, they adopted it not as exclusive of the worship of other gods but in common with such worship. "They feared the Lord, and served their own gods," &c. "These nations feared the Lord, and served their graven images," &c. (2 Kings xviii. 24-41). To have received such a people into community and co-operation with the true people of God would have been an act of utter unfaithfulness and dis-

loyalty to Him. (3.) Their design in making this proposal was an unworthy one. "The occasion of this request of the Samaritans," says Schultz, "was the correct recognition of the fact that those who should have the Temple at Jerusalem would be regarded as the leading nation, whilst those who should be excluded from this central point of the worship of the land would appear as less authorised, as intrusive; they likewise no doubt expected, if they were admitted to participation in the building of the Temple, as well as to consultation with reference to it, to gain thereby influence in shaping the affairs of the congregation in general. If in addition to this they had also a religious interest in the matter, it was only in order to secure for themselves the favour of the God of the land, whom they recognised as Jehovah, and then therewith also the same possessions and blessings in their new home as the Jews designed for themselves. We cannot regard them as actuated by any higher and purer motive; for their entire subsequent behaviour, which makes them appear as quite indifferent to religious affairs, and also that which we elsewhere learn of their religion (2 Kings xvii. 24-41), is opposed to that view." (4.) The acceptance of their proposal would have been perilous to the Jews. Proneness to associate with their heathen neighbours and to adopt their idolatrous customs had been painfully prevalent in the Israelites previous to their captivity, and had been the chief cause of their miseries. To have acceded to the proposal of the Samaritans would have been to have placed themselves in the utmost danger of falling again into their former sins with all their train of bitter consequences. They were not strong enough to overcome the heathen elements and influences which they must have encountered in association with the idolatrous Samaritans. In such association there was grave peril to their best interests. Separation from the Samaritans was essential to the spiritual safety of the Jews. (b).

II. The proposal rejected by the Jews. "But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua,

and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them," &c. (ver. 3). In this rejection there are several noteworthy points—

1. *An exclusive obligation in relation to the work is asserted.* "Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel." In such an undertaking the Jews and the Samaritans had nothing in common. The obligation to build the Temple devolved upon the Jews, and they alone would fulfil that obligation.

2. *The alleged similarity of worship is indirectly denied.* The rulers of the Jews in their reply to the Samaritans speak of "our God" and of "the Lord God of Israel," implying that He was not the God of the Samaritans. The returned exiles worshipped Jehovah as the only living and true God, while the Samaritans worshipped Him simply as a local deity, as one god amongst others. In this sense, then, He was "the Lord God of Israel," but not of the Samaritans. (c).

3. *The command of King Cyrus is adduced in support of this rejection.* "As King Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us." The authority of Cyrus was binding upon both the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews had his commission to come to Jerusalem and build the Temple; but if it was a work which the Samaritans could appropriately undertake, he need not have encouraged or even allowed the Jews to leave Babylon to do it. Again, if it was a work which might be done by others than Jews, why, seeing that he was so much interested in it, did he not undertake it himself? The mentioning of the authority of King Cyrus by the Jewish leaders was certainly a prudent thing. "Be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

4. *The rejection of the proposal was unanimous.* "Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel," i.e., all the heads of the people, concurred in declining the co-operation of the Samaritans. This unanimity is further indicated in the expression, "We ourselves together will build," which Schultz correctly explains.

“we, as a compact unity, excluding others.” If the Church of Christ would stand against and conquer its enemies, it must present to them a compact opposition. (*d*).

5. *The rejection of the proposal was prompt and decided.* There is neither hesitation nor uncertainty in the reply of the heads of the Jewish people to the Samaritans. It is perilous to parley with evil proposals. They should be immediately and firmly repudiated. (*e*).

### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(*a*) It was but a shallow device, and showed a very inadequate conception of devilish art, to represent Satan a hideous and repulsive figure, with frightful marks to be recognised by, with a beastly foot to certify his track, and all concentrated malignities on his distorted features. Why, men would run from such ugliness by instinct; and if this were the type of evil, it could never come near enough to tempt us. Our virtue would be safe against a seducer that inspired nothing but disgust. In the real Satan we must look for a shrewder cunning, a more subtle diplomacy, a more politic disguise. Whatever he may have been to the superstitious fears of ruder ages, to try the temper of the nineteenth century he takes on the address of a courtier, the self-possession of a man of the world, the royal dignity of a prince, the beauty of a seraph, and the manners of a gentleman. If you meet him now—and meet him you certainly will to-morrow and to-day—he will be transformed into an angel of light.—*F. D. Huntington, D.D.*

(*b*) Let not any so much presume upon their own strength as to imagine that they can retain their sincerity, though they keep wicked company, and rather convert them to good than be perverted by them to evil, seeing this is a matter of great difficulty. “To be good among the good,” says Bernard, “has in it health and safety; among the wicked to be so, is also commendable and praiseworthy: in that, happiness is joined with much security; in this, much virtue with difficulty.” For as he who is running down the hill can sooner pull with him one that is ascending, than he who is going up can cause him to ascend that is running down; so he who holds a headlong course in wickedness can more easily carry with him one that is ascending the hill of virtue, being a motion contrary to natural disposition, than he can cause him to ascend with him. For in common experience we see that the worse state prevails more in altering the better to its condition, than the better to make the worse like itself. The infected are not so soon cured by the sound, as they are tainted with their contagion. Rotten apples lying with the sound are not restored

to soundness, but the sound are corrupted with their rottenness. Dead carcasses united to living bodies are not thereby revived, unless it be by miracle, as we see in Elijah and Peter; but the living, if they continue any time united to the dead, partake with them in their mortality and corruption. And thus it is in our spiritual state, wherein the worse more prevails to corrupt the better, than the better to reform the worse.—*Downname.*

(*c*) Prone before, on every occasion, to adopt the idolatrous practices of the adjacent nations, the Jews now secluded themselves from the rest of the world in proud assurance of their own religious superiority. The law, which of old was perpetually violated, or almost forgotten, was now enforced, by general consent to its extreme point, or even beyond it. Adversity endeared that, of which in prosperity, they had not perceived the value. Prone, the mass of them, all but the wiser and more enlightened who worshipped Jehovah, to worship Him but as a national God, greater and mightier than the gods of other nations (a conception in itself polytheistic), they threw aside this lower kind of pride, to assume that of the sole people of the one true God. Their city, their native soil, their religion, became the objects of the most passionate attachment. Intermarriages with foreigners, neither forbidden by statute nor by former practice, were strictly inhibited. The observance of the Sabbath, and even of the sabbatical year, was enforced with rigour of which we have no precedent in the earlier annals, even to the neglect of defence in time of war. In short, from this period commences that un-social spirit, that hatred towards mankind and want of humanity to all but their own kindred, with which, notwithstanding the extent to which they carried proselytism to their religion, the Jews are branded by all the Roman writers. The best of these writers could not but be unconsciously or involuntarily impressed by the majesty of this sublime monotheism, but their pride resented the assumption of religious superiority by this small people; and the stern self-isolation of the Jews from all religious communion with the rest of mankind was beheld only in its seemingly proud and lonely obstinacy—in its refusal to contaminate itself with what it openly declared to be the unholy and unrighteous and foolish usages of the world.—*H. H. Milman, D.D.*

(*d*) Union is power. The most attenuated thread, when sufficiently multiplied, will form the strongest cable. A single drop of water is a weak and powerless thing; but an infinite number of drops, united by the force of attraction, will form a stream; and many streams combined will form a river; till rivers pour their waters into the mighty ocean, whose proud waves, defying the power of man, none can stay but He who formed them. And thus forces which, acting singly,

are utterly impotent, are, when acting in combination, resistless in their energies, mighty in power. And when this great union of the several powers of the Church shall be brought to bear unitedly on one point, its triumph will be the subjection of a world to Christ which now defies the solitary efforts of single forces.—*H. G. Salter.*

(e) Decision of character and promptitude of action, qualities so important on board ship in a storm, in the manœuvring of troops in battle, are indispensable to the Christian

life, both to our getting through the "strait gate," and our getting on in the "narrow way." How often, for example, does it happen that to hesitate even for one moment between resisting and yielding to temptation is to fall! The battle is lost in that moment of vacillation. In such cases, our safety lies in coming to an immediate decision; in promptly resolving to dally with the tempter not an instant, to flee if we can, and if we cannot flee to fight—so resisting the devil that if we cannot flee from him, he shall flee from us, and leave us.—*Thomas Guthrie, D.D.*

## THE PROPOSALS OF THE WICKED AND HOW TO TREAT THEM.

(Verses 1-3.)

"The children of the captivity" who had returned to their own land were true Israelites, both in their origin and in their sympathies; the Samaritans were heathens of various races, or at best only heathens mingled with Israelites. The Jews were decided monotheists; the Samaritans were confirmed polytheists, and are here correctly described as "the adversaries of" the Jews. For these reasons we may fairly regard the Jews as representing the true and good, and the Samaritans the false and evil. Viewed in this respect, the text suggests—

**I. That the wicked often propose to enter into alliance with the good.** "Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the Temple unto the Lord God of Israel; then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you." For selfish reasons these idolaters propose to co-operate with the Jews in building the Temple of the true and only God. In like manner worldly and wicked men often seek to form alliances with the religious and the godly. These alliances are of different kinds, *e.g.*—

1. *Commercial.* Partnerships in business, &c.

2. *Social.* Reception into their society, or personal friendship.

3. *Matrimonial.* From various selfish motives the non-religious man may seek a religious woman for his wife; or the worldly woman a godly man.

4. And even, as in this case, *Religious.*

Persons who have no real godliness, actuated by unworthy motives, sometimes seek to co-operate in religious enterprises.

**II. That the proposals of the wicked for alliance with the good are often supported by plausible reasons.** "For we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto Him," &c. How plausible! And men argue with equal plausibility for the formation of alliances between the worldly and the godly in our own day. Take the alliances mentioned above, and see how men argue for them.

1. *Commercial.* It is argued that religious principles have nothing to do with business transactions.

2. *Social.* That the advantage and enjoyment of social intercourse is independent of the question of personal piety.

3. *Matrimonial.* That the ungodly partner will soon be won over to the beliefs and practices of the godly one; or, at the very least, will derive much moral benefit.

4. *Religious.* That there is very little difference between the two parties; as, in the argument of the Samaritans. Such proposals must needs be plausibly supported, or they would not have even the remotest chance of acceptance. (a).

**III. That the alliances proposed by the wicked are always perilous to the good.** The Samaritans were "the adversaries of the" Jews, and their proposal was a dangerous one to the Jews. And the alliances we have spoken of place the best interests of the godly in

jeopardy. In such business partnerships the good man's high standard of morality and business principle is in sore danger of a sad reduction. In social and matrimonial relationships of this mixed moral character there is great danger that the delicate bloom of piety will be soon swept away, that zeal for truth and for God will grow cold, that habits of devotion will gradually fail, and thus the very life of the soul will be gravely imperilled. And if the wicked be admitted into religious alliances and enterprises, such enterprises will run imminent risk of being first degraded and then defeated. (b).

IV. That the proposals of the wicked for alliance with the good should always be firmly rejected. The leaders of the Jews are an example to us in this respect. "Zerubbabel and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God," &c. When the difference of character is essential and radical, there should be no hesitation as to the treatment of such proposals. Occasional association between the unmistakably good and the unmistakably wicked is sometimes justifiable and necessary; as in business transactions and in the efforts of the good to benefit the wicked. "I pray not," said Christ, "that Thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldst keep them from the evil." (c). But the first suggestion of intimate association or close alliance between them, however plausibly presented and enforced, should be at once and decisively checked by the good. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?" &c. (2 Cor. vi. 14-18). Resist temptation promptly and firmly. (d).

#### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Satan never plays a bold game. He wins by not showing his worst at first, by concealing his tricks, transformed into an angel of light. It takes a great deal of effort to put us thoroughly on our guard against his wiles; but when it is done, it is worth the pains.

Tempting men imitate their great leader and prototype. They never go directly and openly to their object. If they would bend you from your integrity, they will flatter your self-respect by holding out to you a moral inducement. If they would corrupt your purity, they insinuate the poison through some appeal to your better affections. If they would weaken the holy restraints that gird in, with their blessed zone, the innocence of childhood, they will urge some sly argument to an honourable pride, or else to a friendly sympathy, or else to a praiseworthy love of independence; and the first battery that has been plied against many a boy's virtue has been the cunning caution that bade him not be afraid of his elders. They may say, as Milton makes the Archfiend say, sitting like a cormorant on a tree that overlooked the sinless Eden and the yet innocent inmates, deceiving even his own black heart—

"Should I at your harmless innocence  
Melt, as I do, yet public reason just,  
Honour and empire, with revenge enlarged  
By conquering this new world, compels me  
now  
To do what else, though damned, I should  
abhor."

Theologians can cover their sectarian misrepresentations with the plea of "zeal for the cause," and controversialists baptize their bigotry with language of Holy Writ wrested from its meaning.

"The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose . . .

Oh what a goodly outside falsehood hath!"

Says the Apostle Paul, "If Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light, it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works."—*F. D. Huntington, D. D.*

(b) Man, being a sociable creature, is mightily encouraged to do as others do, especially in an evil example; for we are more susceptible of evil than we are of good. Sickness is sooner communicated than health; we easily catch a disease of one another, but those that are sound do not communicate health to the diseased. Or rather, to take God's own expression that sets it forth thus,—by touching the unclean the man became unclean under the law, but by touching the clean the man was not purified. The conversation of the wicked has more power to corrupt the good, than the conversation of the virtuous and holy to correct the lewd.—*Manton.*

(c) All company with unbelievers or misbelievers is not condemned. We find a Lot in Sodom, Israel with the Egyptians, Abraham and Isaac with their Abimelechs; roses among thorns, and pearls in mud; and Jesus Christ among publicans and sinners. So neither we be infected, nor the name of the Lord wronged, to converse with them that we

may convert them is a holy course. But still we must be among them as strangers: to pass through an infected place is one thing, to dwell in it another. The earth is the Lord's, and men are His; wheresoever God shall find the merchant, let him be sure to find God in every place.—*Thomas Adams.*

(d) Keep the devil at arm's length, and fight him at a distance. Suffer him, in easy security, to draw near, and resistance is over; the citadel of your soul is won. Nine-tenths of the gross, degrading, damning sins into which people are betrayed, are committed without premeditation, nay, with a clear purpose against them; but a man or a woman has toyed with temptation—just thus far I can venture, and stop short of foul and fatal sin.

And then, as the poor bird when he sees the bait in the trap, Satan knows he has you fast; he knows that those encroachments are never staid. The art of godly living in its earlier stages is an art of wise defences, a constant, earnest vigilance at the outworks of the spirit, that they may never be stormed or sapped by the foe. Gradually, as a man grows in grace and godliness, the outer defence may be abandoned. Paul, the aged, could look steadily in the face many a peril which Paul the neophyte would have wisely shunned. But let the young pilgrim of life beware, and if he feels himself in an atmosphere of temptation, let him raise bulwarks of habits and self-denials by which the pestilent foe may be kept as far as may be from the near neighbourhood of the soul.—*J. B. Brown, B.A.*

## THE TRUE BUILDERS OF THE SPIRITUAL TEMPLE OF GOD.

(Verse 3.)

The chiefs of the Jewish community here affirm that the building of the Temple at Jerusalem was their work, that the Samaritans had no proper part in it; and that, therefore, they would do the work themselves, without the proffered aid of the Samaritans. This position, which they took up and maintained, suggests that *the true spiritual Israelites are the only authorised and legitimate builders of the spiritual Temple of God, or that Christian work should be done only by Christians.* This position may be supported by the following reasons:—

**I. They alone will build on the true foundation.** “Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.” “Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” He is the only foundation of a true character; the only corner-stone of a true church. Neither theological creeds or systems, nor ecclesiastical politics, nor even divinely instituted sacraments, nor schemes of social improvement, nor the unreliable excellences and fancied merits of individuals—none of these, nor all of them combined, can be the true foundation of the spiritual Temple of God. Christ is the only true and sure foundation. And the true Christian, who is both a stone in the edifice and also a builder of the

edifice, is himself built upon Christ and builds others upon Him. He who is not himself a true Christian will suggest some other foundation, &c. (a).

**II. They alone will build with the true materials.** The spiritual temple is to be built of living and Christly souls. “Ye also as living stones are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood.” The Christian Church should be composed of Christian persons, and only of them. The great spiritual dwelling-place of God must be constructed of spiritual persons. The carnally-minded, the worldly-minded, the ungodly, have no true place in it. The Christian builder will seek to build the edifice of true materials; he will “build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones.” Those who are not themselves true Christians would build of “wood, hay, stubble;” they would put into the edifice unsuitable materials, &c. (b).

**III. They alone will build in accordance with the true plan.** The design of the Church is Divine. They who labour in the erection of the spiritual temple are not to carry out their own ideas, but to fulfil the plan of God. The Lord Jesus is the great Master Builder: He also superintends the work. The business of the workmen is to carry out His directions. Here are some glimpses of the Divine design for this temple. “In whom all the build

ing fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." "A glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Only the members of the true spiritual Israel will keep the Divine plan in view, and faithfully build in accordance with it.

**IV. They alone will build with the true aim.** What is the great end of the spiritual temple which is being built amongst men? The glory of God. For this end the Jews rebuilt their Temple. This is the end of the great redemptive work of our Lord and Saviour, and of the Holy Spirit, and of all Christian agencies. "Ye are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." "Ye are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God." The final cause of this spiritual temple is that God shall be manifest in it everywhere, realised everywhere, obeyed everywhere, adored everywhere. Only the godly will faithfully labour for this end. The ungodly, like the Samaritans, will be moved by political or other inferior considerations, and will aim at some selfish end.

**V. They alone will build in the true spirit.** The true spirit for Christian work is that of—

1. *Obedience*, as opposed to self-will.
2. *Humility*, as opposed to haughtiness and self-conceit.
3. *Patience* in dealing with difficulties and disappointments, as opposed to petulance.
4. *Trust in God*, as opposed to self-confidence.
5. *Self-consecration*, as opposed to self-seeking. This is the true spirit for the builders of the spiritual Temple of our God; and this spirit belongs only to the true people of God. The first and chief condition of doing good to others is being good ourselves. To accomplish successful Christian work we must live sincere Christian lives. And so our

subject brings us to the cross and to the Saviour, to the atonement and the example of the Lord Jesus. Fitness for holy work begins by trusting in Him, and is maintained by imitating Him. (c).

### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Christ is often called the foundation; the stone; the corner-stone on which the Church is reared (Isa. xxviii. 16; Matt. xxi. 42; Acts iv. 11; Eph. ii. 20; 2 Tim. ii. 19; 1 Pet. ii. 6). The meaning is, that no true church can be reared which does not embrace and hold the true doctrines respecting Him—those which pertain to His incarnation, His Divine nature, His instructions, His example, His atonement, His resurrection, and His ascension. The reason why no true church can be established without embracing the truth as it is in Christ, is, that it is by Him only that men can be saved; and where *this* doctrine is wanting, all is wanting that enters into the essential idea of a church. The fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion must be embraced, or a church cannot exist; and where those doctrines are denied, no association of men can be recognised as a Church of God. Nor can the foundation be modified or shaped so as to suit the wishes of men. It must be laid as it is in the Scriptures; and the superstructure must be reared on that alone.—*Albert Barnes, D.D.*

(b) By going to the lowest stratum of human nature, Christ gave a new idea of the value of man. He built a kingdom out of the refuse of society. To compare small things with great, it has been pointed out by Lord Macaulay that in an English cathedral there is an exquisite stained window which was made by an apprentice out of the pieces of glass which had been rejected by his master, and it was so far superior to every other in the church, that, according to tradition, the envious artist killed himself with vexation. All the builders of society had rejected the "sinners," and made the painted window of the "righteous." A new Builder came; His plan was original, startling, revolutionary; His eye was upon the contemned material; He made the first last, and the last first; and the stone which the builders rejected He made the head stone of the corner.—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

(c) The true philosophy or method of doing good is, first of all and principally, to be good—to have a character that will of itself communicate good. There must and will be active effort where there is goodness of principle; but the latter we should hold to be the principal thing, the root and life of all. Whether it is a mistake more sad or more ridiculous, to make mere stir synonymous with doing good, we need not inquire; enough, to be sure that one who has taken up such a notion of doing good is for that reason a nuisance to the church. The Christian is called a light, not lightning.

In order to act with effect on others, he must walk in the Spirit, and thus become the image of goodness; he must be so akin to God, and so filled with His dispositions, that he shall seem to surround himself with a hallowed atmosphere. It is folly to endeavour to make ourselves shine before we are luminous. If the sun without his beams should talk to the planets, and argue with them till the final day, it would not make them shine; there must be light in the sun itself, and then they will shine, of course. And this, my brethren, is what God intends for you all. It is the great idea

of His Gospel, and the work of His Spirit, to make you lights in the world. His greatest joy is to give you character, to beautify your example, to exalt your principles, and make you each the depository of His own Almighty grace. But in order to this, something is necessary on your part—a full surrender of your mind to duty and to God, and a perpetual desire of His spiritual intimacy; having this, having a participation thus of the goodness of God, you will as naturally communicate good as the sun communicates his beams.—*H. Bushnell, D. D.*

## THE HOSTILITY OF THE SAMARITANS TO THE JEWS.

(Verses 4, 5, and 24.)

The advances of the Samaritans having been firmly declined by the Jews, they resorted to opposition, and endeavoured to thwart them in their great work. Notice:

**I. The tactics of the wicked.** Having failed to accomplish their selfish purposes by the proposal to co-operate in the work, “the people of the land” at once proceeded to hinder the work. If the Jews would not accept their proffered assistance, they were resolved that they should experience their hostility. The Jews had said that they would do the work alone, whereupon the Samaritans determined that they should not do it at all. They “weakened the hands of the people of Judah,” “i.e., they discouraged and intimidated them as regards their great work. The wicked are, alas! fertile in resources for the accomplishment of their evil designs. Their methods are often manifold and crafty. If they cannot bend the good to their wishes and aims by plausible pretences, they alter their tactics and betake themselves to unscrupulous opposition in various forms.

**II. The venality of the wicked.** The Samaritans “hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose.” M. Henry suggests that these counsellors, “pretending to advise them for the best, should dissuade them from proceeding, and so ‘frustrate their purpose,’ or dissuade the men of Tyre and Sidon from furnishing them with the timber they had bargained for (chap. iii. 7); or whatever business they had at the Persian court, to solicit for any particular grants

or favours, pursuant to the general edict for their liberty, there were those that were hired and lay ready to appear of counsel against them.” Or, as Schultz suggests, they were hired to get the edict of Cyrus cancelled by influencing “the ministers to whom chap. vii. 28 and viii. 25 refer, or other influential persons, to give advice to Cyrus unfavourable to the Jews. At court they naturally did not understand how it could be that those who were as much the inhabitants of the land as the returned exiles, and therefore seemed entitled to the God of the land, should be excluded. If Cyrus had seen in Jehovah his own supreme God, it must have been all the more annoying to him that those who apparently had the best intentions of worshipping Him should be rejected. It would seem as if the reason why the Jews opposed the union could only be a national and political one, and the suspicion was quite natural, that they already designed to form not merely a religious community, but also had national and political designs, that they thus gave an entirely false interpretation to the decree of Cyrus.” But, however these counsellors proceeded in their work, it is reasonable to infer that they were men of some skill and resource and power of persuasion, and they deliberately exercised their abilities in an evil cause for gain. In them the voice of conscience was overwhelmed by the cravings of cupidity. In the twenty-fourth chapter of Acts we have two illustrations of this venality. The learning and eloquence of Tertullus, a Roman

barrister, were employed to promote the cause of tyranny, injustice, and falsehood, and to persecute a true and holy man. And Felix the governor refrains, for the space of two years, from doing what he is convinced is his duty in releasing St. Paul from his imprisonment, in the hope of receiving bribes to do so. It is inexpressibly mournful to see men prostituting their genius, or learning, or wisdom, or eloquence, or power for money. Yet how numerous are the forms and instances of it in our own day, *e.g.*, men write fictions and songs which minister to men's lower nature at the expense of their higher nature, &c. (a).

III. **The temporary triumph of the wicked.** The Samaritans succeeded in discouraging the Jews, harassing them in their work, and finally putting a stop to their work. They frustrated "their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia. . . . Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of Darius king of Persia." For the space of fourteen years the building of the Temple was arrested, *viz.*, for five years of the reign of Cyrus, seven and a half of Cambyses, seven months of the Pseudo-Smerdis, and one year of Darius. The wicked have often succeeded in hindering the progress of the cause of God. St. Paul was hindered by Satan, once and again, from the execution of his purposes (1 Thess. ii. 18). Persecution too has frequently obstructed sadly the work of God, and inflicted grievous trials and sufferings upon His people.

IV. **The freedom allowed by God to the wicked.** He allowed the Samaritans to resist His purposes, to persecute His people, to arrest the building of His Temple for fourteen years. And still He allows the atheist to deny His existence, the blasphemer to blaspheme His name, and the wicked to "do evil with both hands earnestly." He will not invade the moral freedom with which He Himself has dowered us. And "sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed." His forbearance, even with

the most pernicious and provoking sinners, is very great. "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy." But let no one presume upon the Divine patience. "Thinkest thou, O man, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long-suffering?" &c. (Rom. ii. 4-11). (b). And in the end the Temple of God shall be built, and His purposes fully and splendidly accomplished. The triumph of the wicked is only temporary. God will frustrate their deepest designs, and overrule them for the fulfilment of His own. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee: the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain." Let us learn, before leaving this section of the narrative, that the most dangerous enemies of the Church of God are hypocritical adherents to it. Half-hearted, inconsistent, ungodly professors of religion are, in their influence, the worst obstructions to the progress of the kingdom of God.

### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Gold is the only power which receives universal homage. It is worshipped in all lands without a single temple, and by all classes without a single hypocrite; and often has it been able to boast of having armies for its priesthood, and hecatombs of human victims for its sacrifices. Where war has slain its thousands, gain has slaughtered its millions; for while the former operates only with the local and fitful terrors of an earthquake, the destructive influence of the latter is universal and unceasing. Indeed war itself—what has it often been but the art of gain practised on the largest scale? the covetousness of a nation resolved on gain, impatient of delay, and leading on its subjects to deeds of rapine and blood? Its history is the history of slavery and oppression in all ages. For centuries, Africa—one quarter of the globe—has been set apart to supply the monster with victims—thousands at a meal. And, at this moment, what a populous and gigantic empire can it boast! the mine, with its unnatural drudgery; the manufactory, with its swarms of squalid misery; the plantation, with its inbruted gangs; and the market and the exchange, with their furrowed and careworn countenances,—these are only specimens of its more menial offices and subjects. Titles and honours are among its rewards, and thrones are at its disposal. Among its counsellors are kings, and many of the great and mighty of the earth

are enrolled among its subjects. Where are the waters not ploughed by its navies? What imperial element is not yoked to its car? Philosophy itself has become a mercenary in its pay; and science, a votary at its shrine, brings all its noblest discoveries, as offerings, to its feet. What part of the globe's surface is not rapidly yielding up its last stores of hidden treasure to the spirit of gain? or retains more than a few miles of unexplored and unvanquished territory? Scorning the childish dream of the philosopher's stone, it aspires to turn the globe itself into gold.—*John Harris, D. D.*

(b) The patience of God informs us of the reason why He lets the enemies of His Church oppress it, and defers His promise of the deliverance of it. If He did punish them presently, His holiness and justice would be glorified, but His power over Himself in His patience would be obscured. Well may the Church be content to have a perfection of God glorified, that is not like to receive any honour in another world by any exercise of itself. If it were not for His patience, He were incapable to be the Governor of a sinful world; He might, without it, be the Governor of an innocent world, but not of a criminal one; He would be the destroyer of the world, but not the orderer and disposer of the extravagancies and sinfulness of the world. The interest of His wisdom, in drawing good out of evil, would not be served if He were not clothed with this perfection as well as with others. If He did presently destroy the enemies of His Church upon the first oppression, His wisdom in contriving, and His power in accomplishing deliverance against the united powers of hell and

earth, would not be visible, no, nor that power in preserving His people unconsumed in the furnace of affliction. He had not got so great a name in the rescue of His Israel from Pharaoh, had He thundered the tyrant into destruction upon His first edict against the innocent. If He were not patient to the most violent of men, He might seem to be cruel. But when He offers peace to them under their rebellions, waits that they may be members of His Church, rather than enemies to it, He frees Himself from any such imputation, even in the judgment of those that shall feel most of His wrath; it is this renders the equity of His justice unquestionable, and the deliverance of His people righteous in the judgment of those from whose fetters they are delivered. Christ reigns in the midst of His enemies, to show His power over Himself as well as over the heads of His enemies, to show His power over His rebels. And though He retards His promise, and suffers a great interval of time between the publication and performance, sometimes years, sometimes ages to pass away, and little appearance of any preparation to show Himself a God of truth; it is not that He hath forgotten His word, or repents that ever He passed it, or sleeps in a supine neglect of it: but that men might not perish, but bethink themselves, and come as friends into His bosom, rather than be crushed as enemies under His feet (2 Pet. iii. 9): "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, but is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Hereby He shows that He would be rather pleased with the conversion than the destruction of men.—*S. Charnocke, B. D.*

## THE ANTAGONISM OF THE WORLD TO THE CHURCH.

(Verses 6–16.)

In these verses we have a further account of the hostility of the Samaritans to the Jews in their great work. Homiletically we may view it as an illustration of *The antagonism of the world to the Church*. This antagonism as it is here illustrated is—

**I. Persistent.** The opposition to the Jews was carried on during a considerable portion of the reign of Cyrus, the whole of the reigns of Cambyses and of the Pseudo-Smerdis; and it was continued by means of letters of accusation in the reigns of Ahasuerus (ver. 6) and of Artaxerxes (ver. 7). Terrible is the persistence of the world in its hostility to the Church of God. In different forms it is continued age after age; and at present we can discover no signs of its cessation. The spirit of worldliness

is as hostile now to the spirit of decided piety as ever it was. "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you." "If the world hate you," said our Lord, "ye know that it hated Me before it hated you," &c. (John xv. 18–21). (a).

**II. Authoritative.** This letter was written and sent to Artaxerxes by two high officers of the Persian monarch. It seems to have been devised by Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and their associates, and to have been written by Rehum the Persian governor in Samaria, and Shimshai the royal scribe in the same province. The letter of accusation had all the weight which the authority of these distinguished officers could impart to it. The spirit of secular governments has often been inimical to the spirit of true godliness,

and their action hostile to the principles of truth and righteousness. "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His" Church.

**III. Combined.** All the colonies of the Samaritans concurred in the statements and in the sending of this letter. "Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions: the Dinaites," &c. (vers. 9, 10). "They followed the cry, though ignorant of the merits of the cause." The popularity of a movement is no proof of its truth or righteousness. Numbers are not a reliable guarantee of the wisdom and worthiness of a cause. Majorities have very frequently been on the side of falsehood, injustice, and folly. Mark what a combination there was against the Lord and Saviour. "Against Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together." There is combination in hell.

"Devil with devil damned firm concord holds."

**IV. Unscrupulous.** This is very manifest in the gross exaggerations of this letter. Notice two or three of them. "Jerusalem . . . the rebellious and the bad city." A most unjust description of its character. "If this city be builded and the walls set up, they will not pay toll," &c. (ver. 13). An unwarranted and slanderous assertion, for these Jews had never given any cause why their loyalty to the Persian monarchs should be suspected. "If this city be builded, and the walls thereof set up, by this means thou shalt have no portion on this side the river." An extremely absurd exaggeration. One would suppose that the authors of it must have known it to be a gross misrepresentation. The chief assertions of the letter were unscrupulous and base calumnies. The enemies of the Church of God have never been particular as to the weapons they should use against it. Falsehood and cruelty, fines and imprisonment, bonds and banishment, fire and sword, have all been employed against it.

**V. Plausible.** This letter to Artaxerxes reveals the craft and plausibility of the Samaritans—

1. *In their profession of loyalty to the king.* "Thy servants" (ver. 11) . . . "Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour," &c. (ver. 14).

2. *In their presentation of proof of their assertions.* They suggest "that search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers," &c. (ver. 15). The remarks of M. Henry on this verse are admirable: "It cannot be denied but that there was some colour given for this suggestion by the attempts of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah to shake off the yoke of the King of Babylon, which, if they had kept close to their religion and the Temple they were now rebuilding, they would never have come under. But it must be remembered—(1.) That they were themselves, and their ancestors, sovereign princes, and their efforts to recover their rights, if there had not been in them the violation of an oath, for aught I know, would have been justifiable, and successful too, had they taken the right method and made their peace with God first. (2.) Though these Jews, and their princes, had been guilty of rebellion, yet it was unjust therefore to fasten this as an indelible brand upon this city, as if that must for ever after go under the name of 'the rebellious and bad city.' The Jews, in their captivity, had given such specimens of good behaviour as were sufficient, with any reasonable men, to roll away that one reproach; for they were instructed (and we have reason to hope that they observed their instructions), to 'seek the peace of the city where they were captives, and pray to the Lord for it' (Jer. xxix. 7). It was, therefore, very unfair, though not uncommon, thus to impute the iniquity of the fathers to the children." But it was craftily conceived and executed; and, for a time, it answered the purpose of its authors. The Church now has to contend against, not only the strength but also the subtlety of its foes; not only against the "roaring lion," but also against the "old

serpent." "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." And the blandishments of the world are more perilous to the Church than its threats. Christians need to be "wise as serpents," watchful as trusty sentinels, and prayerful as devoutest saints.

Yet greater is He that is in us and for us, than all our foes, with all their might, and malice, and cunning. "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" (b).

### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) From the fiery days of the stakes of Smithfield even until now, the world's black heart has hated the Church; and the world's cruel hand and laughing lip have been for ever against us. The host of the mighty are pursuing us, and are thirsty for our blood, and anxious to cut us off from the earth. Such is our position unto this hour, and such must it be, until we are landed on the other side of

Jordan, and until our Maker comes to reign on the earth.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

(b) As for the trouble thou puttest thyself to concerning the cause and Church of Christ, which thou mayest see at any time distressed by the enemy, though God takes thy goodwill to them (from which those thy fears arise) very kindly, yet there is no need of tormenting thyself with that which is sure never to come to pass. The ark may shake, but it cannot fall. The ship of the Church may be tossed, but it cannot sink, for Christ is in it, and will awake time enough to prevent its wreck. There is, therefore, no cause for us, when the storm beateth hardest upon it, to disturb Him, as once the disciples did, with the shrieks and outcries of our unbelief, as if all were lost. Our faith is more in danger of sinking at such a time than the cause and Church of Christ are. They are both by the promise set out of the reach of men and devils. The Gospel is an "everlasting Gospel." "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one iota of this shall perish." "The Word of the Lord endureth for ever," and shall be alive to walk over all its enemies' graves, yea to see the funeral of the whole world.—*W. Gurnall.*

### GOOD CAUSE FOR GREAT ZEAL.

(Verse 14.)

The facts of the case were these. . . . Now let me take these words right out of those black mouths, and put them into my own and into yours. They will suit us well if we turn them to the great King of kings. We may truly say, "Now because we have maintenance from the King's palace," &c. The text will enable me to speak on three points.

I. We acknowledge a very gracious fact. "We have maintenance from the king's palace." Both the upper and the nether springs from which we drink are fed by the eternal bounty of the great King. Hitherto we have been supplied with food and raiment. Although we do not drink of the water from the rock, or find the manna lying at our tent door every morning, yet the providence of God produces for us quite the same results, and we have been fed and satisfied; and, at any rate, many of us, in looking back, can say, "My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life." Hence, we have thus, even in things temporal, been made to feel that we have been maintained from the King's

palace. But it has been in spiritual things that our continual experience of the King's bounty has been most notable. We have a new life, and therefore we have new wants, and new hunger, and a new thirst; and God has maintained us out of His own palace as to this new life of ours. We have had great hunger at times after heavenly things, but He has "satisfied our mouth with good things," and our youth has been "renewed like the eagle's." Sometimes we have been drawn aside from our steadfastness, and we have wanted mighty grace to set us on our feet again, and to make us once more "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might;" and we have had it, have we not? In looking back upon all the way wherein the Lord our God has led us, we can sing of the beginning of it, we can sing of the middle of it, and we believe we shall sing of the end of it; for all through we have been maintained out of the King's palace. This is matter of fact both as to things temporal and things spiritual. Beloved, it is a great mercy that you

and I have been maintained out of the King's palace as believers; because, where else could we have been maintained? As to spiritual things, to whom could we go but unto Him who has been so good to us? What empty wells ministers are if we look to them! If we look to their Master, then "the rain also filleth the pools," and we find that there is supply in the preached word for our consolation. And the books you once read with so much comfort appear to have lost their flavour, their aroma, and their sweet savour, and, I may add, even the Word of God itself, though it is unchanged, appears to be changed sometimes to you. But God, your God, oh, how graciously has He still supplied you! "All my springs are in Thee," my God; and had they been elsewhere they long ago had failed.

We may remember that our maintenance from the King's palace has cost His Majesty dear. He has not fed us for nothing. It cost Him His own dear Son at the very first. We should not have begun to live if He had spared His Son and kept Him back from us; but the choicest treasure in heaven He was pleased to spend for our sakes that we might live; and ever since then we have been fed upon Jesus Christ Himself. Let us bless and magnify our bounteous God, whose infinite favour has thus supplied our wants. Think over the kind of maintenance you have had from the King's palace. We have had a *bountiful supply*. As the sun throws out his wealth of heat and light, and does not measure it by the consumption of men, but throws it broadcast over all worlds, even so does God flood the world with the sunlight of His goodness, and His saints are made to receive it in abundance. Our receptive faculty may be small, but His giving disposition is abundant. We have had an *unfailing portion*. As there has been much of it, so it has always come to us in due season. Times of need have come, but the needed supply has come too. The supply *has ennobled us*. For, consider how great a thing it is to be supported from a king's palace; but it is the greatest of all privileges

to be living upon the bounty of the King of kings. "Such honour have all the saints." Even those that are weakest and meanest have this high honour—to be supplied by Royalty itself with all that they need. And there is *reason for good cheer in this*, that we have such a soul-satisfying portion in God. A soul that gets what God gives him has quite as much as he can hold and as much as he can want. He has got a portion that might well excite envy. . . . Let us rejoice, &c.

II. *Here is a duty recognised.* "It was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour." The reasoning comes home to us. If we are so favoured—we, who are believers—with such a choice portion, it is not meet for us to sit down and see our God dishonoured. By every sense of propriety we are bound not to see God *dishonoured by ourselves*. It is well to begin at home. Art thou doing anything that dishonours thy God, professor—anything at home, anything in thy daily avocation, anything in the way of conducting thy business? Is there anything in thy conversation, anything in thy actions, anything in thy reading, anything in thy writing, anything in thy speaking, that dishonours God? Seeing that thou art fed from the King's table, I beseech thee let it not be said that the King got damage from thee. Perhaps that dishonour may come from *those who dwell under our roof*, and live in our own house. I charge you that are parents and masters to see to this. Do not tolerate anything in those over whom you have control that would bring dishonour to God. We cannot impart to our children new hearts, but we can see to it that there shall be nothing within our gates that is derogatory to the religion of Jesus Christ.

Let the same holy jealousy animate us among *those with whom we have influence*—as, for instance, amongst those who wish to be united with us in Church fellowship. It is the duty of every Church to try, as far as it can, to guard the honour and dignity of King Jesus against unworthy persons, who would intrude themselves into the congregation of the saints, of those who are called,

and chosen, and faithful. To receive into our membership persons of unhal-  
lowed life, unchaste, unrighteous—of  
licentious life and lax doctrine, such as  
know not the truth as it is in Jesus—  
would be to betray the trust with which  
Christ has invested us.

Under what sacred obligations do we  
stand to *maintain the statutes and testi-  
monies of the Lord!* And, oh, how the  
King is dishonoured by the mutilation  
and misrepresentation of His Word!  
Therefore we are always bound to bear  
our protest against false doctrine. Those  
who have their maintenance from the  
King's palace ought not to allow the  
Lord to be dishonoured by a *neglect of  
His ordinances*. The Lord Jesus has  
given you only two symbolic ordinances.  
Take care that you use them well.  
Again, let us take care that He be not  
dishonoured by a *general decline of His  
Church*. When churches go to sleep—  
when the work of God is done deceit-  
fully—for to do it formally is to do it  
deceitfully; when there is no life in the  
prayer-meeting, when there are no holy  
enterprises afloat for the spread of the  
Redeemer's kingdom, then the world  
says, "That is your Church! What a  
sleepy set these saints are!" Oh! let  
not the King be thus dishonoured.  
And, oh, how can we tolerate it that so  
many should dishonour Christ *by reject-  
ing His Gospel!* We cannot prevent  
their doing so, but we can weep for  
them; we can pray for them, we can  
plead for them, we can make it uncom-  
fortable for them to reflect that believers  
are loving them, and yet they are not  
loving the Saviour. Privileged as you  
are, you ought to love your Master, so  
that the slightest word against Him  
should provoke your spirit to holy  
jealousy.

**III. A course of action pursued.**  
"Therefore have we sent and certified  
the king." How shall we do that?

Doubtless we act as it well becomes us,  
when we go and tell the Lord all about  
it? "Certified the King!"—but does  
He not know? Are not all things open  
to Him from whom no secrets are hid?  
Ah, yes; but when Hezekiah received  
Rabshakeh's blasphemous letter he took  
it and spread it before the Lord. It is  
a holy exercise of the saints to report  
to the Lord the sins and the sorrows  
they observe among the people—the  
griefs they feel, and the grievances they  
complain of—to spread before Him the  
blasphemies they have heard, and appeal  
to Him concerning the menaces with  
which they are threatened. After those  
people had certified the king, they took  
care to plead with him. Plead with  
God! That praying is poor shift that is  
not made up of pleading. And when  
you have done it, do not go away and  
make your prayers into a lie by contrary  
actions, or by refraining from any action  
at all. He that prays hard must work  
hard; for no man prays sincerely who is  
not prepared to use every effort to ob-  
tain that which he asks of God. We  
must put our shoulder to the wheel  
while we pray for strength to put it in  
motion. All success depends upon God;  
yet He uses instruments, and He will  
not use instruments that are useless and  
unfitted to the work. Therefore let us  
be up and be stirring, for if we are  
maintained from the King's palace, it is  
not meet that we see the King's dis-  
honour, but it is due to Him that we  
should seek His glory. Alas! there are  
some here that have never eaten the  
King's bread, and will be banished from  
the King's presence if they die as they are.  
But, oh remember, the King is always  
ready to receive His rebel subjects, and  
He is a God ready to pardon. "Kiss the  
Son lest He be angry, and ye perish  
from the way when His wrath is kindled  
but a little." "Blessed are all they that  
put their trust in Him."—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

THE SUCCESS OF THE SUBTLE SCHEME OF THE SAMARITANS, OR THE  
TEMPORARY TRIUMPH OF THE WICKED.

(Verses 17-23.)

**I. Examine the letter of the king.** "Then sent the king an answer unto Rehum," &c. (vers. 17-22). This letter suggests—

1. *That the subtlety of the wicked frequently obtains a temporary triumph over the good.* We have already noticed that the letter of the Samaritans to the king was very plausible. And that it completely succeeded is clear from the reply of the king to it. (1.) The search in the archives of the nation which they recommended (ver. 15) was made. "I commanded, and search hath been made" (ver. 19). (2.) The result which they predicted (ver. 15) followed the search. "And it is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made therein." The Jews had formerly rebelled against foreign powers by whom they had been subjected. Hezekiah "rebelled against the king of Assyria" (2 Kings xviii. 7). Jehoiakim rebelled against the king of Babylon (2 Kings xxiv. 1). Zedekiah also "rebelled against the king of Babylon" (2 Kings xxiv. 20). (3.) The warnings which they gave (vers. 13, 16) were heeded. As a result of the examination of the records of the kingdom, the king discovered that "there had been mighty kings over Jerusalem, which had ruled over all countries beyond the river; and toll, tribute, and custom had been paid unto them;" and so the warnings of the Samaritans seemed to him reasonable and timely, and he acted upon them, inquiring, "Why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?" (4.) The end which they aimed at was attained. Their object was to obtain authority to put a stop to the rebuilding of Jerusalem. And the king writes, "Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment be given from me. Take heed now that ye fail not to do this." The misrepresentations of the

Samaritans had sufficient truth in them to completely mislead Artaxerxes the king and to accomplish their evil design. "Falsehood," says Colton, "is never so successful as when she baits her hook with truth; and no opinions so fatally mislead us as those that are not wholly wrong, as no watches so effectually deceive the wearers as those that are sometimes right."

"A lie which is half a truth  
Is ever the worst of lies."

2. *That one generation frequently suffers through the sins of another and an earlier one.* The Jews of this time were suspected of disloyalty, and were prevented from carrying on their great work because some of their ancestors had rebelled against the domination of foreign powers. They smarted for the sins of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. The children of the spendthrift, the drunkard, and the impure man generally have to bear the iniquities of their fathers. (Comp. Exod. xx. 5.) This stern fact should prove a restraint from sin. (a).

2. *That the cause of God is frequently reproached and hindered by the evil conduct of some of its adherents.* The rebellions of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah were now made use of to asperse the Jews and to stop the work of God. "A few instances of this kind," as Scott observes, "standing on record, whilst the blameless lives and patient sufferings of thousands are unnoticed and forgotten, serve through revolving ages as a pretext, by which malignant enmity misleads worldly policy. All who love the Gospel should therefore walk circumspectly, avoiding all appearance of evil, especially in this particular, lest the Church of God and posterity should suffer through their misconduct; for the whole body will be condemned without hearing, if a few individuals act improperly." (b).

**II. Notice the action of the Samaritans.** "Now when the copy of king

Artaxerxes' letter was read," &c. Their action was—

1. *Prompt.* They allowed no delay whatever, but eagerly carried out the royal mandate. "They went up in haste to Jerusalem," &c.

2. *Personal.* They did not depute others to put a stop to the work of the Jews: their interest was too deep and zealous for that. They themselves "went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews."

3. *Powerful.* They "made them to cease by force and power." They compelled the Jews by a display of force, which they probably took with them, to desist from building the city. Thus the plotters prevailed; the enemies were triumphant, and the progress of the good work was arrested. The tact and energy and zeal of the Samaritans were worthy of a good cause, and they were rewarded with success.

LEARN :

1. *That the temporary triumph of a cause or a party is not a proof of its righteousness.* When Jesus Christ was crucified, dead and buried, the enemies of truth and light and God appeared to be completely victorious. (c).

2. *That we are not competent to judge the relation of present events to the purposes and providence of the great God.* These require time for their development, &c. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) This is a truth evident by universal experience. It is seen every day, in every part of the world. If Mr. Paine indulge in intemperance, and leave children behind him, they may feel the consequences of his misconduct when he is in the grave. The sins of the fathers may thus be visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation. It would, however, be their affliction only, and not their punishment. Yet such visitations are wisely ordered as a motive to sobriety.—*Andrew Fuller.*

The child generally inherits the natural constitution, the mental peculiarities, and sometimes even the moral character of his parent.

His secular condition, too, rich or poor, is frequently determined by his parents. Some inherit a princely fortune, and some a crushing penury, from their ancestors. And their social status, too, is often ruled by the position and conduct of those of whom they were born. Children participate in the shame or the glory connected with the memory of their parents. The brilliant reflection of an illustrious sire seems to lead his offspring to social honour, and to shed a radiance on his name. On the other hand, the infamy which parents by theft, treason, or murder, have gained for themselves, transmits its odious influence down to their children, depreciating their own personal worth, and degrading them in the estimation of their contemporaries.—*David Thomas, D.D.*

(b) Was there ever a club in all the world without disreputable persons in it? Was there ever any association of men that might not be condemned, if the fool's rule was followed of condemning the wheat because of the chaff? When with all our might and power we purge ourselves of deceivers as soon as we detect them, what more can we do? If our rule and practice is to separate them wholly as soon as we unmask them, what more can virtue itself desire? I ask any man, however much he may hate Christianity, what more can the Church do than watch her members with all diligence, and excommunicate the wicked when discovered? It is a foul piece of meanness on the part of the world that they should allege the faults of a few false professors against the whole Church: it is a piece of miserable meanness of which the world ought to be ashamed. Nevertheless, so it is. "Ha! ha!" they say, "So would we have it! so would we have it!" The daughter of Philistia rejoices, and the uncircumcised triumphs when Jesus is betrayed by His friend, and sold by His traitorous disciple. O deceitful professor, will not the Lord be avenged upon you for this? Is it nothing to make Jesus' name the drunkard's song? Nothing to make the enemy blaspheme? O hardened man, tremble, for this shall not go unpunished.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

(c) If ever failure seemed to rest on a noble life, it was when the Son of Man, deserted by His friends, heard the cry which proclaimed that the Pharisees had successfully drawn the net round their Divine Victim. Yet from that very hour of defeat and death there went forth the world's life—from that very moment of apparent failure there proceeded forth into the ages the spirit of the conquering Cross. Surely if the Cross says anything, it says that apparent defeat is real victory, and that there is a heaven for those who have *nobly and truly* failed on earth.—*P. W. Robertson, M.A.*

## CHAPTER V.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.] i. The work resumed through the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah, the prophets (vers. 1, 2). ii. The workers interrogated by the Persian authorities west of the Euphrates (vers. 3-5). iii. The letter of the Persian authorities to Darius the king concerning the work (vers. 6-17).

Ver. 1. Then] shows the close connection of this with the last verse of the previous chapter. Zechariah, the son of Iddo] He was really the son of Berechiah, and the grandson of Iddo (Zech. i. 1). It is probable, as Dean Perowne suggests, "that Berechiah had died early, and that there was now no intervening link between the grandfather and the grandson. The son, in giving his pedigree, does not omit his father's name; the historian passes it over, as of one who was but little known, or already forgotten." In the name of the God of Israel, even unto them] Rather, "which was upon them," i.e. the name of God was called upon them, indicating that they belonged to Him (comp. Isa. iv. 1; Jer. xv. 16).

Ver. 2. Then rose up Zerubbabel . . . and Jeshua] &c. The exhortations of Haggai were addressed chiefly to these two leaders (Hag. i. 1, ii. 2, 4), and speedily they responded to them. "In the sixth month, in the first day of the month," the prophet delivered his first message to them; and "in the four and twentieth day of the sixth month," the "work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God," was resumed by them and the people (Hag. i. 1, 14, 15). Zechariah did not enter upon his mission until the eighth month, which was two months later than Haggai. And with them the prophets of God] Haggai and Zechariah. Helping them] by exhortation, encouragement, &c.

Ver. 3. Tatnai, governor on this side the river] Tatnai was governor (*pechah*) of the entire country west of the Euphrates, while Zerubbabel was governor (*pechah*) of Judah only, and was therefore subordinate to Tatnai. Shethar-boznai] was probably the royal scribe or secretary. Who hath commanded] &c. In investigating this matter the Persian magistrates only did their duty.

Ver. 4. Then said we unto them] &c. It is almost certain that the text here has been corrupted in some way, and that the genuine reading is, "Then said they unto them," &c. The question was put by the Persian officers to the Jews, as appears from vers. 9, 10.

Ver. 5. And then they returned answer by letter] &c. Schultz: "'And they then brought back a letter,' &c. The letter to be brought back was certainly to come from Darius." Keil: "'And they should then receive a letter,' &c. They (the royal officials) then receive a letter, i.e. obtain a decision."

Ver. 6. The Apharsachites] are probably the same as "the Apharsathchites" (chap. iv. 9). See notes on that verse.

Ver. 7. They sent a letter] or a report, a message. All peace] i.e. "peace in all things, in every respect."

Ver. 8. With great stones] Margin: "Chald., 'stones of rolling.'" So also Fuerst, who explains it as denoting "heaviness, weight. Ezra v. 8, vi. 4, *stone of heaviness*, i.e. a heavy, large stone, hewn." And timber is laid in the walls] Rawlinson interprets this as the employment of timber as the material of the party walls. Schultz, as indicating "the inlaying of the walls with woodwork artistically finished." Keil: "The placing of wood in the walls refers to building beams into the wall for flooring; for the building was not so far advanced as to make it possible that this should be said of covering the walls with wainscoting."

Ver. 11. We are the servants] &c. The elders of the Jews when asked for their names replied by stating their relationship to "the God of heaven and earth," which implied their obligation to obey Him. Which a great king of Israel builded and set up] Or, "and a great king of Israel built and completed it."

Ver. 12. But after that our fathers] &c. Keil: "For this reason, because our fathers," &c. Similarly Schultz: "On this account, because our fathers," &c. The significance of this verse he expresses thus: "It is true the Temple has been destroyed, but this does not show any weakness in their God, but rather His holiness." Nebuchadnezzar could not have destroyed their Temple, and carried them away into captivity, if God had not first withdrawn His protection from them because of their sins.

Ver. 15. Take these vessels] &c. "The three unconnected imperatives, 'take, go forth, lay down,' comprehend the three acts, to a certain extent, in *one*, thus expressing likewise the zeal of Cyrus, and the zeal that Sheshbazzar was expected to exhibit."—Schultz. Let the house of God be builded in his place] i.e. in its former sacred place.

Ver. 16. And since that time even until now hath it been in building] These words were probably not a part of the answer of the elders of the Jews to Tatnai, but simply his own statement to the king, which he thought was correct. "It was entirely in the interest of the Jews to be silent respecting the fact that Cyrus had allowed an interruption to take place;" and Tatnai and his associates were probably quite ignorant of the fact that the work had been suspended.

Ver. 17. The king's treasure house] This is called, in chap. vi. 1, "the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon." Important documents were preserved in the treasure house attached to the royal residence.

## THE GREAT WORK RESUMED.

(Verses 1 and 2.)

The best commentary on these verses is the first chapter of Haggai. In the light of that chapter we propose to interpret them. For fourteen years the rebuilding of the Temple was stayed. We have now to consider the resumption of the work.

Notice :

**I. The inciters to the work.** "Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews," &c.

1. *Want of interest in the work is implied.* The Jews were backward at making a new effort to erect the sacred edifice, and needed stirring up to their duty in the matter. They had been building their own houses, attending to their own affairs, and had become indifferent as to the rebuilding of the house of God. They said, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built" (Hag. i. 2). Had they been zealous in this affair, they would have renewed their efforts when Darius came to the throne. But the spirit of worldliness possessed them, and they deferred this sacred duty until they were sharply summoned to it.

2. *Obligation to perform the work is implied.* The prophets summoned them to the work "in the name of the God of Israel which was upon them." This implies His authority over them, and their obligation to render loyal obedience to Him. In His name Haggai commanded them to resume this work. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; . . . Go up to the mountain and bring wood, and build the house," &c. (Hag. i. 7, 8). The Jews did not deny the obligation. Fourteen years previous they had claimed it as their exclusive privilege. At that time they were forcibly prevented from fulfilling it; and afterwards, in process of time, they grew indifferent as to its fulfilment, and while acknowledging the obligation, they postponed its discharge. By neglecting the performance of duty our sense of its sacredness and im-

perativeness will almost certainly be diminished.

3. *Exhortations to resume the work were given.* "The prophets Haggai and Zechariah prophesied unto the Jews," &c. The nature of their prophesying we can ascertain by reference to the books which bear their names. In the address of Haggai (Hag. i. 1-11, 13), which led to the resumption of the work, we find—(1.) Earnest remonstrance because of their neglect (ver. 4). (2.) Solemn and repeated summons to reflection, "Consider your ways" (vers. 5, 7). (3.) Interpretation of the Divine dealings with them, showing that God had withheld His blessing because of their neglect (vers. 6, 9-11). (4.) Command to build the Temple (ver. 8). (5.) Encouragement to them to enter upon the work (vers. 8b, 13). Thus the prophet, under the direction of the Most High, endeavoured to arouse them from their sloth, and incite them to interest and effort in the good and great work.

**II. The leaders in the work.** "Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build," &c.

1. *They resumed the work readily.* In less than a month after the summons of Haggai they began the work. On the first day of the sixth month the first prophetic message was delivered to them, and on the twenty-fourth day of the same month actual operations were resumed at the Temple. The readiness of their response is commendable. Delay in the performance of duty is perilous. Promptitude in its discharge is both binding and blessed. (a).

2. *They led the work appropriately.* It was becoming that Zerubbabel the chief prince, the first man in the state, and Jozadak the chief priest, the first man in the Church, should take the lead in such a work. "Those that are in places of dignity and power," as M. Henry observes, "ought with their dignity to put honour upon, and with their power to put life into every good work ;

thus it becomes those that precede, and those that preside, with an exemplary care and zeal to fulfil all righteousness and to go before in a good work."

3. *They led the work influentially.* "All the remnant of the people" followed their example, "and came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God." The force of example is proverbially great; but it is especially influential in the case of those who hold the position of leaders amongst men. The example of those who occupy high stations is—(1.) *Most conspicuous.* It is visible with great clearness and to great numbers. (2.) *Most attractive.* To the majority of mankind the example of persons in eminent positions, from the mere fact that they occupy such positions, has an influence which is denied to others however wise and worthy they may be. (b). Great is the responsibility of those who are called to the high places of society. "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required," &c. (Luke xii. 48).

III. *The helpers in the work.* "And with them were the prophets of God helping them." The nature of the assistance which the prophets rendered in the work may be gathered from the prophecies of Haggai which were delivered after the work was resumed (Hag. ii). They assisted by their—

1. *Exhortations to vigorous prosecution of the work.* "Be strong, O Zerubabel, saith the Lord," &c. (ver. 4).

2. *Assurances of the presence of God with them.* "For I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts: according to the word that I covenanted with you," &c. (vers. 4, 5). This means more than His mere presence; for He is everywhere present. "Whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there," &c. (Ps. cxxxix. 7-10). It is an assurance of His gracious and helpful presence—His presence as their covenant God. With the obedient God is ever present for their protection, encouragement, assistance, &c.

3. *Promises of future blessings from God to them.* "The desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this

house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts," &c. (vers. 7-9). What a mighty inspiration there must have been in promises of such blessings as these, uttered by the prophet of God! He who thus encourages the hearts of workers renders them most valuable help in their work. Thus the earnest thinker, and the firm believer in God, may help those who are engaged in more active labours in building the spiritual temple of our Lord.

IV. *The great First Cause of the work.* It was God who inspired and sent forth the prophets, and who excited the spirit of the Jewish leaders and people to resume the work. "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God." "All holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed" from Him. He is the great Master-Builder of His own Church. "I will build My Church," said our Lord to Peter. All the inspiration and wisdom, the patience and power of the under-builders, come from Him. And to Him be all the praise. (c).

LEARN :—

1. *The insidious nature of the sin of worldliness.* See how gradually and stealthily it came upon the Jews. (d).

2. *The value of faithful ministers.* They both arouse men to duty, and assist them to perform it.

3. *The solemn obligation of men in eminent stations.* Let them, like Zerubabel and Jeshua, be forward in every good work.

#### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Pleasant is it to entertain the picture of ourselves in some future scene, planning wisely, feeling nobly, and executing with the holy triumph of the will; but 'tis a different thing — not in the green avenues of the future, but in the hot dust of the present moment—not in the dramatic positions of the fancy, but in the plain prosaic now—to do the duty that waits and wants us, and put forth an instant and reverential hand to the noonday or evening task.—*James Martineau.*

(b) As we give them (kings) all advantages of honour, so do we soothe and authorise all their vices and defects, not only by approbation, but by imitation also. Every one of Alexander's followers carried their heads on one side, as he did, and the flatterers of Dionysius ran against one another in his presence, stumbled at, and overturned whatever was under foot, to show that they were as purblind as he. Natural imperfection has sometimes also served to recommend a man to favour. I have seen deafness affected; and because the master hated his wife, Plutarch has seen his courtiers repudiate theirs, whom they loved; and, which is yet more, uncleanness and all manner of dissoluteness has been in fashion; as also disloyalty, blasphemies, cruelty, heresy, superstition, irreligion, effeminacy, and worse, if worse there be. And by an example yet more dangerous than that of Mithridates' flatterers, who, by how much their master pretended to the honour of a good physician, came to him to have incision and cauteries made in their limbs; for these others suffered the soul, a more delicate and noble part, to be cauterised. But to end where I began: the Emperor Adrian, disputing with the philosopher Favorinus about the interpretation of some word, Favorinus soon yielded him the victory; for which his friends rebuking him, "You talk simply," said he, "would you not have him wiser than I, who commands thirty legions?"—*Montaigne*.

(c) The scribe is more properly said to write than the pen, and he that maketh and keepeth the clock is more properly said to make it go and strike than the wheels and poises that hang upon it, and every workman to effect his work rather than the tools which he uses as his instruments. So the Lord, who is the chief Agent and Mover in all actions, may more fitly be said to bring to pass all things which are done in the earth than any subordinate causes, as meat to nourish us, clothes to keep us warm, the sun to lighten us, friends to provide for us, &c., seeing they are but His instruments.—*Downame*.

Day and night the tides are rising along our shores, filling bay and estuary, silently for the most part, yet surely. The power that draws them resides afar off in the heavenly bodies, and is not seen or noticed, but only inferred. All the goodness of men, their generous impulses, their loves and faiths and inspirations of purity, their zeal and enthusiasm in self-denial and devotion—that great moving tide of goodness which is moving in upon the human heart—is derived from God, who, afar off, silent as the moon in summer nights, is drawing all men unto Him.—*H. W. Beecher*.

(d) Nearly all can recall that favourite fiction of their childhood—the voyage of Sinbad the Sailor into the Indian Sea. They will remember that magnetic rock that rose from the surface of the placid waters. Silently Sinbad's vessel was attracted towards it; silently the bolts were drawn out of the ship's side, one by one, through the subtle attraction of that magnetic rock. And when the fated vessel drew so near that every bolt and clamp were unloosed, the whole structure of bulwark, masts, and spars tumbled into ruin on the sea, and the sleeping sailors awoke to their drowning agonies. So stands the magnetic rock of *worldliness* athwart the Christian's path. Its attraction is subtle, silent, slow; but fearfully powerful on every soul that floats within its range. Under its enchanting spell, bolt after bolt of good resolution, clamp after clamp of Christian obligation, are steadily drawn out. What matters it how long, or how fair has been the man's profession of religion, or how flauntingly the flag of his orthodoxy floats from the mast head? Let sudden temptation smite the un-bolted professor, and in an hour he is a wreck. He cannot hold together in a tempest of trial, he cannot go out on any cruise of Christian service, because he is no longer held together by a Divine *principle* within. It has been silently drawn out of him by that mighty loadstone of attraction—a sinful, godless, self-pampering, Christ-rejecting *world*.—*T. L. Cuyler, D.D.*

## THE GREAT WORK INVESTIGATED AND CONTINUED.

(Verses 3-5.)

**I. The sacred work investigated by the secular authorities.** "At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them," &c. (vers. 3, 4).

Notice:

1. *The nature of the investigation.* Two points are inquired into:—(1.) The authority of the builders. "Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall?" (2.) The

names of the builders. "Then said they unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make this building?"

2. *The spirit of the investigation.* It is probable that some of the Samaritan enemies of the Jews, prompted by bitter and hostile feelings, communicated with Tatnai and instigated this inquisition. But as regards the inquisition itself there is nothing to complain of; for—(1.) Tatnai had the authority to make the

investigation. He was "governor on this side the river;" all the country west of the Euphrates was subject unto him. The governorship of Zerubbabel, being of Judea only, was subordinate to that of Tatnai, who therefore acted within the limits of his power in making this inquisition. (2.) Tatnai exercised his authority in a commendable manner. He made no vexatious or impertinent inquiries. And he presented an impartial and honest report to Darius the king. Very different was the course which he and his associates pursued from that of Rehum and his associates (chap. iv.). There is nothing in the conduct of the present Persian officials which bears any resemblance to the unscrupulous and bitter hostility which their predecessors displayed to the Jews. The eye of the world is upon the work of the Church to-day. And while there are some who would wilfully misrepresent and maliciously oppose that work, there are others who regard it fairly, and speak of it with candour and truthfulness. Let the members of the Church see to it that it shall be apparent to all unprejudiced persons that their work tends to promote truth and righteousness, purity and peace, piety and patriotism. (a).

II. The sacred work carried on through the Divine blessing. "But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease," &c. These words suggest—

1. *The Divine interest in the work.* "The eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews" is an expression denoting His deep concern in the progress of their undertaking. As we attentively observe that in which we are greatly interested, so God regards His Church and the enterprises in which it is engaged.

2. *The Divine oversight of the work.* His eye ever upon the Jewish leaders suggests the accuracy and thoroughness of His knowledge of them and of their great business. In His providence the great God watches over the interests and efforts of His people. (b).

3. *The Divine inspiration of the workers.*

The consciousness that "the eye of their God was upon" them encouraged the Jews, made even coward spirits brave, and nerved even the feeblest arm for vigorous toil, and so raised them above fear, and enabled them to carry on the work. And to-day to godly souls there is unlimited inspiration in the consciousness that the Divine Eye is upon them. (c).

4. *The Divine protection of the workers.* "The eye of their God upon" them clearly involved this. The figure implies not only interest and knowledge and oversight, but also defence. His eye was upon them not only to inspire but also to shield them; not only to mark their perils, but also to preserve them from injury. And in this way the work was carried on. It suffered no interruption by reason of the inquisition of the Persian officials, and the reference of the case to Darius. (d).

If we are engaged in the work of the Lord, we may confidently look to Him for protection. The path of duty is the path of safety. And the consciousness of the eye of our God upon us should make us patient in suffering, calm in peril, earnest in work, and courageous in conflict.

## ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) If the Church will go forth to win new victories, she needs only to take fearlessly up the supremacy with which her God has dowered her, namely, the reconciling life of her indwelling Lord. Shutting up all internal questions that make her militant against herself, she is to move on in her own absolute, sublime majesty, militant only against every form of sin, to enthrone the kingdom of God. She must cease to beg favours of worldly policy. She must stop her infamous coquetry with Mammon. She must not be bowing on Sundays to sectarian prejudice, nor on week-days to social respectability, nor ever whisper guilty flatteries to popular sins, nor wait till great public vices are manifestly dying out of themselves, and feeble with approaching dissolution, before she dares strike at them. The staunch, uncompromising sincerity of old Puritans and confessors must be in her muscles. An awful zeal must gird up her loins. Purity, freedom, equity, are to be more to her than costly churches; the prayers of saintly men, and women and children too, her patronage; and her daily speech, the benediction of charity.—*F. D. Huntington, D. D.*

(b) The infinite knowledge of God fits Him

to be a special object of trust. How could we depend upon Him, if He were ignorant of our state? His compassions to pity us, His readiness to relieve us, His power to protect and assist us, would be insignificant, without His omniscience to inform His goodness and direct the arm of His power. This perfection is, as it were, God's office of intelligence: as you go to your memorandum-book to know what you are to do, so doth God to His omniscience. This perfection is God's eye, to acquaint Him with the necessities of His Church, and directs all His other attributes in their exercise for and about His people. You may depend upon His mercy that hath promised, and upon His truth to perform; upon His sufficiency to supply you, and His goodness to relieve you, and His righteousness to reward you; because He hath an infinite understanding to know you and your wants, you and your services. And without this knowledge of His, no comfort could be drawn from any other perfection; none of them could be a sure nail to hang our hopes and confidence upon. This is that the Church always celebrated (Ps. cv. 8): "He hath remembered His covenant for ever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations;" and (ver. 42), "He remembered His holy promise;" "And He remembered for them His covenant" (Ps. cvi. 45). He remembers and understands His covenant, therefore His promise to perform it, and therefore our wants to supply them.—*S. Charnocke, B.D.*

(c) Were the Olympian Agonistæ inspired by the admiring gaze of applauding thousands? Did the thunders of acclamation which awoke the echoes of Olympus excite the Athletæ to higher energies? How, then, shall we be affected who believe that we are ever under the watchful eye of the dread Supreme? The

KING looks on those who are running the heavenly race—who are wrestling with spiritual antagonists—and who are handing "a cup of cold water" to some drooping and thirsty disciple! As the King's eye brightens with approbation, let us resolve to climb the highest steepes of duty and to walk on the loftiest mountains of holy enterprise!—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

(d) The tribulation and poverty of His Church is not unknown to Him (Rev. ii. 8, 9): "I know thy works and tribulation," &c. He knows their works, and what tribulation they meet with for Him; He sees their extremities when they are toiling against the wind and tide of the world (Mark vi. 48); yea, the natural exigencies of the multitude are not neglected by Him; He discerns to take care of them. Our Saviour considered the three days' fasting of His followers, and miraculously provides a dish for them in the wilderness. No good man is ever out of God's mind, and therefore never out of His compassionate care: His eye pierceth into their dungeons, and pities their miseries. Joseph may forget his brethren, and the disciples not know Christ when He walks upon the midnight waves and turbulent sea; but a lions' den cannot obscure a Daniel from His sight, nor the depths of the whale's belly bury Jonah from the Divine understanding: He discerns Peter in his chains, and Stephen under the stones of martyrdom; He knows Lazarus under his tattered rags, and Abel wallowing in his blood; His eye and knowledge goes along with His people, when they are translated into foreign countries, and sold for slaves into the islands of the Grecians, for He "will raise them out of the place" (Joel iii. 6, 7). He would defeat the hopes of the persecutors, and applaud the patience of His people.—*S. Charnocke, B.D.*

## THE LETTER TO THE KING CONCERNING THE WORK.

(Verses 6–17.)

This letter has three chief divisions, each of which requires brief notice.

**I. The inquisition of the Persian authorities.** "The copy of the letter that Tatnai, governor on this side the river," &c. (vers. 6–10). Here is a report of—

1. *The observations which they made.* (1.) That the work was being *well* done. "Be it known unto the king, that we went into the province of Judea, to the house of the great God, which is builded with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls." This seems to show that the work was being done in a substantial and excellent manner. (2.) That the work was being *rapidly* done. "And

this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands." Inspired by the exhortations of Haggai the prophet, and encouraged by the example of Zerubbabel the prince, and Jeshua the chief priest, the people worked zealously and the edifice was progressing quickly.

2. *The inquiries which they proposed.* (1.) As to the *authority* of the builders. "Then asked we those elders, and said unto them thus, Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls?" (comp. ver. 3). (2.) As to the *names* of the builders. "We asked their names also, to certify thee, that we might write the names of the men that were the chief of them" (comp. ver. 4).

**II. The reply of the Jewish leaders.**

“And thus they returned us answer, saying,” &c. (vers. 11–16). This answer is remarkable both for its prudence and for its piety. It seems to us to present the following aspects of the work. That it was—

1. *Not a mere human enterprise, but a Divine commission.* When asked to give their own names, the Jewish elders replied, “saying, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth,” &c. Of their personal names and distinctions they say nothing; but assert that in rebuilding the Temple of Jehovah they were acting as servants of the Supreme Being, whom they were bound to obey. The work was to them not optional, but obligatory.

2. *Not an innovation, but a restoration.* “We build the house that was builded these many years ago, which a great king of Israel builded and set up.” Nearly five hundred years had passed since Solomon built the first Temple. The building they were raising was not a novel invention of their own, but was supported by the venerable antiquity of its predecessor, and by the fame of the great king which built that predecessor.

3. *Not in a spirit of presumption and pride, but of obedience and humility.* “But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon.” At least three portions of this statement have a bearing of more or less importance in the present position of affairs. (1.) That the destruction of the former Temple was not owing to any imperfection on the part of their God. Nebuchadnezzar did not prevail against Him. This testimony vindicates Him against any imputation of inability to defend His people and His Temple. (2.) That the destruction of their former Temple was owing to their God having forsaken them. “He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar.” He withdrew His protection from them, and they speedily fell before the Chaldeans. (3.)

That their God forsook them because of their numerous and heinous sins. Their fathers provoked Him unto wrath by abominable idolatries, and He retired, leaving them to themselves and to the gods whom they had chosen. They forsook God, then God forsook them. This testimony reveals the fact that it was in a spirit of penitence rather than of presumption that they were working. It also shows the obligatoriness of the work: having seen the evil of their ways and returned unto Jehovah their God, it behoved them to rebuild the Temple for His worship.

4. *Not in opposition to, but in conformity with, royal authority.* “But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon,” &c. (vers. 13–16). Three things (which we have already noticed) are here laid down. (1.) That the work was commanded by King Cyrus. “King Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God. . . . Let the house of God be builded in his place” (comp. chap. i. 1–3). (2.) That the work was assisted by King Cyrus. “And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of God,” &c. (vers. 14, 15, and comp. chap. i. 4–11). (3.) That the work was carried on by the officer appointed by king Cyrus. “Then came the same Sheshbazzar, and laid the foundation of the house of God which is in Jerusalem,” &c. (ver. 16, and comp. ver. 2, and chap. i. 8). Thus they show that in this work they were obedient and loyal subjects of the Persian monarch.

5. *Not political, but religious in its character.* They were building an edifice which was designed not for plotting but for piety, not for political schemes but for religious services—“the house of God.” Moreover, they were not building this Temple to any merely local or national deity, but to the One Supreme Being—“the God of heaven and earth.” Thus the reply of the Jewish elders was fitted to honour Jehovah their God, and to disarm the opposition of men; it was both pious and prudent. (a).

**III. The appeal of the Persian authorities to the king.** “Now, therefore, if it seem good to the king,” &c. They ask Darius—

1. *To ascertain whether Cyrus did authorise and encourage this work.* "Let there be search made in the king's treasure house, which is there at Babylon, whether it be that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem."

2. *To issue instructions for their guidance in relation to this work.* "And let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter."

#### CONCLUSION:

Two things we may well admire and imitate—

1. *The fairness of the Persian officials.* Let us deal justly with those who differ from us in faith or opinion; let us be careful to represent their views and beliefs fairly and accurately, &c. (b).

2. *The faithfulness of the Jewish leaders.* They "witnessed a good confession." Let us imitate them in this. By the testimony both of the lip and of the life, let us honour "the God of heaven and earth." (c).

#### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) As the hermits were communing together, there arose a question as to which of all the virtues was most necessary to perfection. One said chastity; another, humility; a third, justice. St. Anthony remained silent till all had given their opinion; and then he spoke, "Ye have all said well, but none of you have said aright. The virtue most necessary to perfection is prudence; for the most virtuous actions of men, unless governed and directed by prudence, are neither pleasing to God, nor serviceable to others, nor profitable to ourselves."—*Dict. of Illus.*

(b) There are a great many who cannot accept religion as a mere fact. There are a great many on whose minds are thronging thousands of thoughts. There are those who come to religion from the side of their household, and from the side of their affections. And they cannot doubt. Blessed be that man who had such a father and mother, that as long as the memory of father and mother lives he cannot doubt. Under such circumstances, whatever the intellect may do, the heart rectifies it. The intellect may write "Scepticism," but the heart rubs it out, and writes "Love." But many have no such childhood, no such teaching, and no such association. My memory goes back to the Sabbaths of my childhood—to the bright hill top, to the church-bell, and so long as I remember these things, and have a vision of my mother, and a recollection of my father, I cannot doubt religion. But there

are many who had no such parents, or none within their remembrance. Many have had their whole life's training in the most material elements, some in artistic relations, some in realms of doubt, some in intellectual gladiation. Men come to the subject of religion from entirely different points. And when men come to religion in such ways that they have in themselves no moral witness to the truth, and have suggestions and doubts that they do not seek, but that are forced upon them, there is a certain respect to be paid to them, and a certain sympathy to be experienced for them.—*H. W. Beecher.*

(c) We all have our creeds, and, in spite of ourselves, we profess them;—the creed of fashion; the creed of appetite; the creed of a selfish expediency; the creed of a sect; the creed of indifference, which is as irreligious and as bigoted in its way as any other; or the creed of eternal right and Gospel faith. Conduct is the great profession. Behaviour is the perpetual revealing of us. A man's doctrines flow from his fingers' ends, and stand out in his doings. What he may say is not his chief profession, but how he acts. Character lets out the secret of his belief; what he *does* tells what he is. He has "put on the Lord Jesus Christ," when he has "Christ formed within him." His profession is as natural as the pulse in his veins. The good man makes profession of his goodness by simply being good; but the Christian man will not forget that he is not wholly good till he has joined himself to Christ's body. He publishes his adhesion as spontaneously as nature publishes her laws,—as the sun its light,—as the rose its sweetness; by being steadfast; by shining; by fragrant charities. It costs a graceful elm no spasm to paint a graceful image on our eye, and the sea spreads its mysterious arms around the hemispheres without vanity. They make their nature known by silently keeping its laws. And because the Christian soul is made to be a conscious member in a living organism or church, it keeps its own high law only by being there. Religion belongs in the heartbeat of a man's affections, and the breath of his daily desire; till it has so possessed him, it is a small matter that he keeps its effigy as a connoisseur keeps his marble Apollo,—on the outskirts of his practical fortunes. The true hospitality takes it to the heart. But when the heart has taken it in, it will not lock it there, and make it a prisoner. It must go abroad again, for the blessing of man and the praise of God. It will put its owner into the Church, not to show himself, but that he may the better become one with his brethren, and their common Head. So does the religion that is natural unite the public confession of it with the hiding of its inward power.—*F. D. Huntington, D.D.*

The matter of professing Christ appears to be regarded by many as a kind of optional duty, just as optional as it is for light to shine, or goodness to be good, or joy to sing, or gratitude to give thanks, or love to labour and

sacrifice for its ends. No, my friends, there is no option here, save as all duties are optional, and eternity hangs on the option we make. Let no one of you receive or allow a different thought. Expect to be open, out-

standing witnesses for God, and rejoice to be. In ready and glorious option, take your part with such, and stife indignantly any lurking thought of being a secret follower.—*H. Bushnell, D.D.*

## THE SUPREMACY OF GOD.

(Verse 11.)

*“We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth.”*

These words lead us to consider—

### I. The universal supremacy of God.

“The God of heaven and earth.” The idea of sovereignty is involved in the idea of God. “The very name of a God includes in it a supremacy and an actual rule. He cannot be conceived as God, but He must be conceived as the highest authority in the world. It is as possible for Him not to be God as not to be supreme.” Our text brings to our notice the extent of the Divine supremacy, but we shall do well briefly to notice—

1. *The ground of the Divine supremacy.* God is the universal Sovereign because of—(1.) The perfections of His being. He is infinitely wise, righteous, and kind. He is supreme in authority because He is supreme in ability and excellence. “God therefore being an incomprehensible ocean of all perfection, and possessing infinitely all those virtues that may lay a claim to dominion, hath the first foundation of it in His own nature.” (a). (2.) Because all things were created by Him. The maker of anything has an undoubted right over the thing which he has made. The invention is the property of the inventor; the picture, of the painter; the book, of the author. God’s creatorship is most complete; all things, in respect both of matter and of form, were made by Him; therefore His sovereignty is absolute. (3.) *Because all things are sustained by Him.* “By Him all things consist.” He “upholds all things by the word of His power.” “In Him we live, and move, and have our being.” He is the Force of all forces; the Superintendent of all laws and processes of nature, &c. “As the right to govern resulted from creation, so it is perpetu-

ated by the preservation of things.” (4.) And this supremacy should be the more heartily recognised and responded to by us because of the benefits which He bestows upon us, and especially because of our redemption from sin by Jesus Christ. “Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God,” &c. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present,” &c. (b).

### 2. *The extent of the Divine supremacy.*

(1.) It extends throughout heaven. He is “the God of heaven.” He is supreme over heavenly beings. “Angels that excel in strength, do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word.” They are “His hosts, ministers of His, that do His pleasure.” The music and joy of their being is in doing His will. He is supreme over heavenly bodies. “Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these, that bringeth out their host by number: He calleth them all by names by the greatness of His might, for that He is strong in power; not one faileth.” “He telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by name.” (2.) It extends throughout earth. He is “the God of heaven and earth.”

“By knowledge supreme, by wisdom Divine,  
God governs the earth with gracious design.  
O’er beast, bird, and insect His providence  
reigns,  
Whose will first created, whose love still  
sustains.”

He rules over all men. The highest potentate and the humblest peasant are alike under His authority. He “bringeth the princes to nothing; He maketh the judges of the earth as vanity,” &c. (Isa. xl. 23, 24). He rules over men in every respect. Nothing pertaining to their life is too great or too small for His oversight and control. Even “the bounds

of their habitation" are determined by Him. (3.) It extends throughout hell. "The devil and his angels" are rebels against God's authority, but they cannot annul that authority, or free themselves from the restraints of His arm. Satan could not afflict Job beyond a certain limit, which was determined by God (Job i. 12; ii. 6). "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell," &c. (2 Pet. ii. 4). "The angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation," &c. (Jude 6). Thus the Divine supremacy is universal in its extent. (c).

**II. The great obligation of man.** "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth;" and are therefore under solemn obligations to obey Him. His will we should accept as our law. And our obedience to Him should be—

1. *Complete.* We should conform to His will in all things. No department of our life is beyond His control. We may not select certain commandments for our obedience, and reject or ignore others. We must "have respect unto all His commandments." (d).

2. *Perpetual.* His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. Our obedience must be continued as long as our being. The redeemed will "serve Him day and night in His Temple" through all eternity.

3. *Heartly.* Mere mechanical obedience is not acceptable to Him. The service of the hireling is an abomination in His sight; but that which is spontaneous and sincere He delights in. (e).

4. *Joyous.* Obedience to Him should be a pleasure to us. Joyous service is frequently commended in the Scriptures. "I will run in the way of Thy commandments." "Thy statutes have been my songs." "Serve the Lord with gladness." "I delight to do Thy will, O my God." (f).

**III. The exalted privilege of man.** It is deemed an honour to serve human sovereigns and princes. How much greater—how immeasurably greater—is the honour of serving the God of heaven and earth! When the service of God is rightly estimated, it is regarded as a glory, and rejoiced in as a privilege.

#### CONCLUSION :

What is our attitude towards the sovereignty of God? Do we bow to it only when we are forced to do so, and because we are forced to do so? Or do we rejoice in being "the servants of the God of heaven and earth"?

#### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) This is the natural order God hath placed in His creatures, that the more excellent should rule the inferior. He committed not the government of lower creatures to lions and tigers, that have a delight in blood, but no knowledge of virtue; but to man, who had an eminence in his nature above other creatures, and was formed with a perfect rectitude, and a height of reason to guide the reins over them. In man, the soul being of a more sublime nature, is set of right to rule over the body; the mind, the most excellent faculty of the soul, to rule over the other powers of it; and wisdom, the most excellent habit of the mind, to guide and regulate that in its determinations; and when the body and sensitive appetite control the soul and mind, it is a usurpation against nature, not a rule according to nature. The excellency, therefore, of the Divine nature is the natural foundation for His dominion. He hath wisdom to know what is fit for Him to do, and an immutable righteousness whereby He cannot do anything base and unworthy; He hath a foreknowledge whereby He is able to order all things to answer His own glorious designs and the end of His government, that nothing can go awry, nothing put Him to a stand, and constrain Him to meditate new counsels. So that if it could be supposed that the world had not been created by Him, that the parts of it had met together by chance, and been compacted into such a body, none but God, the supreme and most excellent Being in the world, could have merited, and deservedly challenged the government of it; because nothing had an excellency of nature to capacitate it for it, as He hath, or to enter into a contest with Him for a sufficiency to govern.—*S. Charnocke, B.D.*

(b) That benefit of redemption doth add a stronger right of dominion to God; since He hath not only as a Creator given them being and life as His creatures, but paid a price, the price of His Son's blood, for their rescue from captivity; so that He hath a sovereignty of grace as well as nature, and the ransomed ones belong to Him as Redeemer as well as Creator (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20): "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price;" therefore your body and your spirit are God's. By this He acquired a right of another kind, and bought us from that uncontrollable lordship we affected over ourselves by the sin of Adam, that He might use us as His own peculiar for His own glory and service. By this redemption there results to God a right over our

bodies, over our spirits, over our services, as well as by creation; and to show the strength of this right, the Apostle repeats it, "you are bought," a purchase cannot be without a price paid; but he adds price also, "bought with a price." To strengthen the title, purchase gave Him a new right, and the greatness of the price established that right. The more a man pays for a thing, the more usually, we say, he deserves to have it; He hath paid enough for it; it was, indeed, price enough, and too much for such vile creatures as we are.—*Ibid.*

(c) The sapphire throne of God, at this moment, is revealed in heaven, where adoring angels cast their crowns before it; and its power is felt on earth, where the works of creation praise the Lord. Even those who acknowledge not the Divine government are compelled to feel it; for He doeth as He wills, not only among the angels in heaven, but among the inhabitants of this lower world. Hell feels the terror of that throne. Those chains of fire, those pangs unutterable, are the awful shadow of the throne of Deity; as God looks down upon the lost, the torment that flashes through their souls darts from His holiness, which cannot endure their sins. The influence of that throne, then, is found in every world where spirits dwell; and in the realms of inanimate nature it bears rule. Every leaf that fades in the trackless forest trembles at the Almighty's bidding, and every coral insect that dwelleth in the unfathomable depths of the sea feels and acknowledges the presence of the all-present King.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

(d) All the commandments have the same Author, and the same sanction. He who thinks to atone for the breach of one by the observation of another; he who reserveth to himself a license of indulging in any favourite, darling lust, while, in general, he preserveth the appearance of an exemplary conduct, is a

hypocrite, and, unless he repent, will be brought to shame, if not before men here, yet before men and angels hereafter.—*Bishop Horne.*

The hypocrite is in with one duty, and out with another: like a globous body, he toucheth the law of God in one point—some particular command he seems zealous for; but meets not in the rest; whereas, the sincere heart lies close to the whole law of God in his desire and endeavour.—*W. Gurnall.*

(e) As fruits artificially raised or forced in the hot-house have not the exquisite flavour of those fruits which are grown naturally, and in their due season; so that obedience which is forced by the terrors of the law, wants the genuine flavour and sweetness of that obedience which springs from a heart warmed and meliorated with the love of God in Christ Jesus.—*H. G. Salter.*

(f) Men are commonly more cheerful in their obedience to a great prince than to a mean peasant, because the quality of the master renders the service more honourable. It is a discredit to a prince's government, when his subjects obey him with discontent and dejectedness, as though he were a hard master, and his laws tyrannical and unrighteous. When we pay obedience but with a dull and feeble pace, and a sour and sad temper, we blemish our great Sovereign, imply His commands to be grievous, void of that peace and pleasure He proclaims to be in them; that He deserves no respect from us, if we obey Him because we must, and not because we will. Involuntary obedience deserves not the title: it is rather submission than obedience, an act of the body, not of the mind: a mite of obedience with cheerfulness, is better than a talent without it. The testimonies of God were David's delight (Ps. cxix. 24). Our understandings must take pleasure in knowing Him, our wills delightfully embrace Him, and our actions be cheerfully squared to Him.—*S. Charnocke, B.D.*

## ARGUMENTS AGAINST SINNING.

### (Verse 12.)

In this verse we have three weighty reasons for abstaining from sin.

I. It provokes God. "Our fathers provoked the God of heaven unto wrath." By many sins, and especially by the practice of idolatry with its accompanying vices, the people of both Israel and Judah had long provoked Jehovah before He suffered them to be carried into exile. The evil of sin, as a provocation of the Most High, will be more impressively realised if we reflect that He is a Being of—

1. *Infinite purity.* He is "glorious

in holiness;" . . . 'of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity.' Sin is the very opposite of holiness; therefore it grieves Him, and if persisted in, it provokes Him. It is the "abominable thing, which He hates." Have we not in this a reason for shunning it? (a).

2. *Infinite patience.* He is "not easily provoked;" "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy." He "is longsuffering to us ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come

to repentance." How wonderful was His forbearance with His ancient people! How long He suffered them, notwithstanding their heinous, widespread, and long-continued sin! Yet at length they provoked Him unto wrath. How wicked and how persistent must the sin be which provokes so patient a Being to anger! Therefore let us flee from sin. (b).

**II. It deprives the sinner of His protection.** "He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean." By their sin the Israelites deprived themselves of the sure defence which His presence afforded to them, and frustrated His gracious purposes in relation to them. This truth is pathetically and beautifully expressed in Ps. lxxxii. 11-16: "My people would not hearken to My voice; and Israel would none of Me," &c. By his sin the sinner places himself beyond the protection of the Divine Providence; he takes up the position of a rebel against the Divine government, and so forfeits the rights and privileges which that government confers upon its loyal subjects.

**III. It strips the sinner of power to battle with his foes.** "Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon." Bereft of the Divine presence and protection, the men of Israel and of Judah could not stand before their enemies. Guilt robs a man of courage. The consciousness of righteous action in a righteous cause is the mightiest inspiration in conflict and the surest defence in peril. Sin deprives a man of this. Guilt brings faintness into men's "hearts; and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them; and they shall flee, as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth," &c. (Lev. xxvi. 36, 37). "The wicked flee when no man pursueth; but the righteous are bold as a lion." Or, as Shakespeare expresses it—

"Suspicion always haunts the guilty mind;  
The thief doth fear each bush an officer."

A guilty "conscience does make cowards of us all."

And Wordsworth:

"From the body of one guilty deed

A thousand ghostly fears and haunting thoughts proceed." (4).

By all these reasons let us beware of sin, shun it, hate it; and "follow after holiness." For in respect of holiness we may reverse the argument of our subject, and affirm that (1) it is well pleasing to God; (2) it secures to its possessor the Divine protection; and (3) it invests its possessor with moral strength and courage.

### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Is it (if the supposition may be allowed) anything merely *personal* which God condemns in the action of the sinner against Himself? Can the sinner do *God* any harm? Can the mightiest chief in all the armies of hell pluck one star from the sky, or keep back the light of the sun, or bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? God is not, so to speak, alarmed for His *personal* government. The offences against His *power* cost Him no concern, but the offences against His *holiness* afflict Him with great sorrow. The parent cares nothing for the mere blow of the child's tiny fist, but the passion which prompted it breaks his heart. God has to maintain the public virtue and order of the universe. He fears no stroke of power; but if, for mere convenience of expression, we may distinguish between His personality and His attributes, we may say that offences against His person are forgiven, but offences against His attributes cannot be forgiven apart from confession and repentance on the side of the criminal.—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

(b) The more His patience is abused, the sharper will be the wrath He inflicts. As His wrath restrained makes His patience long, so His compassions restrained will make His wrath severe; as He doth transcend all creatures in the measures of the one, so He transcends all creatures in the sharpness of the other. Christ is described with "feet of brass, as if they burned in a furnace" (Rev. i. 15), slow to move, but heavy to crush, and hot to burn. His wrath loseth nothing by delay; it grows the fresher by sleeping, and strikes with greater strength when it awakes: all the time men are abusing His patience, God is whetting His sword, and the longer it is whetting the sharper will be the edge; the longer He is fetching His blow, the smarter it will be. The heavier the cannons are, the more difficultly are they drawn to the besieged town; but, when arrived, they recompense the slowness of their march by the fierceness of their battery. "Because I have purged thee," i.e., used means for thy reformation, and waited for it, "and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused My fury to rest upon thee. I will not go back, neither will I spare; according to thy doings, shall they judge thee" (Ezek. xxiv. 13, 14). God will spare as little then as He spared much before: His wrath

will be as raging upon them as the sea of their wickedness was within them. When there is a bank to forbid the irruption of the stream, the waters swell; but when the bank is broke, or the lock taken away, they rush with the greater violence, and ravage more than they would have done had they not met with a stop: the longer a stone is in falling, the more it bruises and grinds to powder. There is a greater treasure of wrath laid up by the abuses of patience: every sin must have a just recompense of reward; and therefore every sin, in regard of its aggravations, must be more punished than a sin in the singleness and simplicity of its own nature. As treasures of mercy are kept by God for us, "He keeps mercy for thousands;" so are treasures of wrath kept by Him to be expended, and a time of expense there must be. Patience will account to Justice all the good offices it hath done the sinner,

and demand to be righted by Justice; Justice will take the account from the hands of Patience, and exact a recompense for every disingenuous injury offered to it. When Justice comes to arrest men for their debts, Patience, Mercy, and Goodness will step in as creditors and clap their actions upon them, which will make the condition so much more deplorable.—*S. Char- nocke, B.D.*

(c) They say sheep are scared with the clatter of their own feet as they run; so is the sinner with the din of his guilt. No sooner Adam saw his plate off, and himself to be naked, but he is afraid of God's voice, as if he had never been acquainted with Him. Never can we truly recover our courage till we recover our holiness. "If our heart condemn us not, then have we boldness before God" (1 John iii. 21). —*W. Gurnall.*

## CHAPTER VI.

**CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.]** This chapter contains—(i.) The search for and discovery of the decree of Cyrus (vers. 1–5). (ii.) The decree of Darius for the furtherance of the building of the Temple (vers. 6–12). (iii.) The carrying on and completion of the building of the Temple (vers. 13–15). (iv.) The dedication of the Temple (vers. 16–18). (v.) The celebration of the feasts of the Passover and of Unleavened Bread (vers. 19–22).

Ver. 1. Then Darius the king made a decree] "These words seem to refer only to the command to make an investigation; but in reality they serve as an introduction to the decree which was promulgated to Tatnai, &c. (comp. v. 6). It is as if the subsequent narrative: and search was made] were taken up merely as an explanation of the decree following in ver. 6 sq."—*Schultz.* The house of the rolls] Margin: "Chald. books." Schultz: "writings." (Comp. chap. v. 17.) Laid up] Margin: "Chald. made to descend." The apartment was probably underground.

Ver. 2. Achmetha] i.e., Ecbatana. "The name 'Achmetha, which at first sight seems somewhat remote from Ecbatana, wants but one letter of Hagmatana, which was the native appellation. . . . Two cities of the name of Ecbatana seem to have existed in ancient times, one the capital of Northern Media; the other the metropolis of the larger and more important province known as Media Magna. The site of the former appears to be marked by the very curious ruins at *Takht-i-Suleiman*; while that of the latter is occupied by *Hamadan*, which is one of the most important cities of modern Persia. There is generally some difficulty in determining, when Ecbatana is mentioned, whether the northern or the southern metropolis is intended. Few writers are aware of the existence of the two cities, and they lie sufficiently near to one another for geographical notices in most cases to suit either site. The northern city was the 'seven-walled town' described by Herodotus, and declared by him to have been the capital of Cyrus (Herod. i. 98, 99, 153; comp. Mos. Choren. ii. 84); and it was thus most probably there that the roll was found which proved to Darius that Cyrus had really made a decree allowing the Jews to rebuild their Temple."—*Bibl. Dict.* A roll] "The ancient Persians used parchment for their records, as appears from Ctesias (cap. Diod. Sic. ii. 32)"—*Rawlinson.*

Ver. 3. In the first year of Cyrus the king] (Comp. chaps. i. 1; v. 13.) Omit "concerning" as supplied by the translators of the A. V. The house of God at Jerusalem] These words "stand alone by themselves, and constitute to a certain extent a title." The place where they offered sacrifices] Keil: "As a place where sacrifices are offered." Schultz: "As a place where offerings are brought." And let the foundations thereof be strongly laid] Schultz: "'And whose foundations are capable of supporting' (namely, the structure)." The height thereof threescore cubits] &c. In these dimensions the length is not specified; probably because in this respect the new Temple was to correspond with the former one.

Ver. 4. With three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber] The meaning of this is uncertain. One interpretation is that the word translated *row* (רֶבֶד) should be rendered "storey;" and that it applies "to the three storeys of chambers that surrounded Solomon's, and afterwards Herod's Temple, and with this again we come to the wooden Talar which surmounted the Temple and formed a fourth storey."—*Bibl. Dict.* But it is questionable whether רֶבֶד ever signifies "storey." Fuerst gives, as the meaning of the word, "a layer, a row," as of stones or bricks in a wall. So also Keil. Schultz says it means "that three of the Temple walls were of hewn stone, the other, namely, the front, which must for the most part be com-

posed of a large entrance, was to be made of wood." In support of this view he argues from 1 Kings vi. 36, "that Solomon provided the inner court (of his Temple) on three sides with walls of quarried stone, on the one other side, without doubt the front side, where the chief entrance was, where then there was probably a larger door, with an enclosure of hewn cedar. . . . In the Temple of Herod also, the entrance side of the holy place was still composed of one great folding door, sixteen cubits broad." Another interpretation is that the walls were three rows or courses of stone in thickness with an inner wainscoting of wood. And another, taking **רָבָרָבָ** as signifying row, or layer, is that the walls were built of three layers of large stones and then a layer of timber, repeated from the base to the summit. But there is a complete absence of evidence of the existence of buildings of this kind in the East in olden times. And let the expenses be given out of the king's house] or from the royal revenues (Comp. ver. 8.) This must either refer to the cost of only the materials of the building, or it was never carried into effect; for the Jews themselves contributed largely to the cost of the building (chaps. ii. 68, 69; iii. 7).

Ver. 5. And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God] &c. (Comp. chaps. i. 7, 8; v. 14, 15.)

Ver. 6. Now therefore Tatnai] &c. This is the decree made by Darius the king (ver. 1). Your companions the Apharsachites] (See on chap. v. 6.) Be ye far from thence] *i.e.* do not trouble or interfere with the Jews in this matter.

Ver. 10. That they may offer sacrifices] &c. This was the object aimed at by Darius the king in the preceding orders of his decree. "We find," says Keil, "that in after times sacrifices were regularly offered for the king on appointed days: comp. 1 Macc. vii. 33, xii. 11; 2 Macc. iii. 35, xiii. 23; Joseph. *Antiq.* XII. ii. 5, and elsewhere."

Ver. 11. Alter this word] either by transgressing or by abolishing it. Let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon] Keil: "Let a beam be torn from his house, and let him be fastened hanging thereon." Schultz: "Let him be fastened thereon and crucified." It is almost beyond doubt that crucifixion is the punishment signified here. And let his house be made a dunghill for this] "that is, let it be torn down and changed into a common sewer, comp. 2 Kings x. 27; Dan. ii. 5."—*Schultz*.

Ver. 14. And Artaxerxes king of Persia] "This king did not reign till long after the completion of the Temple, and the insertion of his name here can only be accounted for by supposing that the compiler or editor of this record inscribed his name as one who, in later times, contributed to the maintenance of the Temple, and so kept up the work his predecessors had begun."—*Clemance*. And Schultz points out that, instead of giving a simple narrative of the completion of the building, "the author would rather express recognition and thanks, and hence could forget none who were deserving of mention. Artaxerxes came into consideration only on account of the gifts which he caused to be brought to Jerusalem by Ezra" (chap. vii. 15-20).

Ver. 15. The month Adar] which is the twelfth month, and corresponds with our March. The building was completed about twenty years after the laying of the foundation by Zerubbabel, and four years five months and a few days after the resumption of the work by reason of the prophesying of Haggai (Hag. i. 15).

Ver. 17. An hundred bullocks, two hundred rams] &c. These numbers, though small as compared with those offered at the dedication of the former Temple (1 Kings viii. 5, 63), considering the number and the circumstances of the people, constitute a hearty and joyful offering. A sin offering for all Israel, twelve he-goats] &c. While the great majority of those who returned with Zerubbabel were of Judah, it is probable that some families of the other tribes returned with them, and that for that reason a sin offering was presented for every tribe. Moreover, as Keil observes, a sin offering was brought for *all* Israel, "because the Temple was intended for the entire covenant people, whose return to the Lord and to the land of their fathers, according to the predictions of the prophets, was hoped for. (Comp. *e.g.* Ezek. xxxvii. 15, *sq.* Jer. xxxi. 27, *sq.*)"

Ver. 18. They set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses] &c. (Comp. 1 Chron. xxiii. 6-23; xxiv. 1-19; 2 Chron. xxxv. 5, 12.) As it is written in the book of Moses] (Comp. Num. iii. 6-10; viii. 5-26.) With this verse the Chaldee section closes.

Ver. 19. Kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month. (Comp. Exod. xii. 6.)

Ver. 20. For the priests and the Levites were purified] &c. Rawlinson says that this is a mistranslation, and that it should be, "For the priests had purified themselves, and the Levites were all pure as one man, and killed," &c. He further suggests that this was the reason why the Levites killed the paschal lambs not only for themselves and for the people, but also for their brethren the priests (Comp. 2 Chron. xxix. 34.) But, as Keil remarks, from the days of Josiah it seems to have been customary for the Levites to slaughter the passover lambs for the whole community, both priesthood and laity. (2 Chron. xxxv. 11, 14, 15.) Schultz translates, "For the priests and Levites had purified themselves as one man, they were all clean, and killed," &c. He suggests that the latter slaughtered the lambs "for the priests, because they were so busy elsewhere."

Ver. 21. And all such as had separated themselves] &c. "Those who separated themselves

from these heathen are not proselytes from heathenism, but descendants of the Jews and Israelites who had remained in the land when the rest of the nation had been carried captive, as all the parallel passages show, comp. ix. 1, 10, x. 2, 10, 11; Neh. ix. 2, x. 28. "They had without doubt intermarried with the heathen, and the more they had entered into communion with them, the less were they in a position to observe the Mosaic laws respecting food and purification. To separate themselves from the impurities of the heathen meant for them to forsake altogether communion with the heathen, and seek communion with the Jewish congregation."—*Schultz*.

Ver. 22. Kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days] (Comp. Exod. xii. 15, xiii. 7, &c.) The king of Assyria] "Darius, the king of Persia, is here called king of Assyria, not only as ruler of the territory of the previous Persian empire (Keil), or because Assyria from ancient time had been the usual name for all that region (Clericus), which cannot be proved from Judith ii. 1; but, above all, likewise, because Darius, as head of the great empire of the world, properly took the same relative position over against the people of God as the Assyrian and Chaldean kings had once had, because it was properly only a continuation or renewal of the same, and because the thought was now to be expressed, that finally that very enemy who had once so fearfully and destructively oppressed the people of God, had been changed by the grace of God into a friend, so that he had even himself strengthened the hands of the congregation in re-establishing the destroyed Temple."—*Ibid.*

## A THOROUGH SEARCH AND AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

(Verses 1-5.)

### I. The search for the decree of Cyrus.

1. *Was thorough.* "Search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon," as being the most likely place in which to find a copy of the alleged decree of Cyrus. The document, however, was not found there. But the search was not abandoned when it failed there, but was continued at Achmetha, or Ecbatana, as being the place where, next to Babylon, it would most probably be discovered. The thoroughness of this search seems to us an evidence of the desire of Darius the king to deal fairly and honourably with his Jewish subjects.

2. *Was successful.* "And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll," &c. Thus the honest and earnest search was rewarded, the veracity of the statement of the elders of the Jews (chap. v. 13-15) was clearly proved, and the lawfulness of the authority by which they acted firmly established.

Learn:

*Honest and thorough investigation promotes the interests of religion and of the Church of God.* Partial examination, and yet more, examination by persons whose opinions or feelings are prejudiced, often leads to conclusions which are inimical to the cause of God

and of religious truth. But sincere, patient, thorough investigation into the credentials of Christianity is eminently desirable, and conduces to its progress. Merely human systems of religion may well shun the light; some of the doctrines of men concerning Christianity, upon examination, may prove untenable; and error may naturally seek to evade every real test; but truth, righteousness, and the religion of our Lord Jesus Christ court inquiry, and by inquiry they spread and prevail. (a).

II. The discovery of the decree of Cyrus. "And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written: In the first year of Cyrus," &c. (vers. 2-5). The edict thus brought to light contained three commands of the utmost importance to the Jews.

1. *That their Temple should be rebuilt.* "In the first year of Cyrus the king, Cyrus the king made a decree:—The house of God at Jerusalem:—Let the house be built," &c. It was to be built (1) at the old place; "at Jerusalem." This was important, because of the old and precious associations and memories which clustered thickly around it. (2.) For the old purposes. "The house of God . . . a place where they may offer sacrifices." It was for the worship of the same holy Being, and in

the same manner, as their fathers had worshipped. (3.) In solid and durable manner. "And let the foundations thereof be strongly laid," so as to be thoroughly capable of supporting the superstructure, that the edifice may endure the longer.

2. *That the expenses of building be granted them from the royal revenues.* "And let the expenses be given out of the king's house." Either this command was intended to apply only to the materials of the building, or it was never fully carried out. It may be that they did not receive what was here ordered them, as Matthew Henry suggests, because the face of things at court was soon changed. But we know that, out of their own resources, the Jews contributed largely to the expenses of the building (chaps. ii. 68, 69; iii. 7).

3. *That the costly and sacred vessels of the former Temple should be restored.* "And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God," &c. (ver. 5). (1.) These vessels had been degraded to base uses by heathen kings. "Which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the Temple which was at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon." "And he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god" (Dan. i. 2). Belshazzar, at his great and impious feast, "whiles he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels," &c. (Dan. v. 2-4). (2.) They had been preserved from destruction or loss in the Providence of God. God had so ordered events that these vessels were regarded by the heathen Nebuchadnezzar as sacred, and were by him deposited in a secure place. (3.) They were restored to their original place and use by a heathen king, who was moved thereto by the Spirit of God. Let them "be restored, and brought again unto the Temple which is at Jerusalem, to their place, and (thou) shalt place them in the house of God." Seeing that God thus preserves even consecrated utensils, how much more will He keep His consecrated people! "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed," &c. (Isa. xli. 10, 13). "Fear not; for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by

thy name; thou art Mine. When thou passest through the waters," &c. (Isa. xliii. 1, 2).

Learn:

*The advantages of written history.* The testimony of the Jewish elders concerning the edict of Cyrus might have been denied by some, and by others suspected of exaggeration in their own favour, and in this way the great work might have been again arrested; but this state-document, found in one of the royal offices or chambers, was unimpeachable. Tradition is variable and uncertain; but the record written at the time of the events is fixed and trustworthy. (b). How great should be our gratitude for the sacred writings—"the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever"! (c).

#### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) The religion of Christ might be shown to abound in circumstances which contradict and repel the idea of a human origin. For example, its representations of the paternal character of God; its inculcation of a universal charity; the stress which it lays on inward purity; its substitution of a spiritual worship for the forms and ceremonies, which everywhere had usurped the name and extinguished the life of religion; its preference of humility, and the mild, unostentatious, passive virtues, to the dazzling qualities which had monopolised men's admiration; its consistent and bright discoveries of immortality; its adaptation to the wants of man as a sinner; its adaptation to all the conditions, capacities, and sufferings of human nature; its pure, sublime, yet practical morality; its high and generous motives; and its fitness to form a character, which plainly prepares for a higher life than the present;—these are peculiarities of Christianity, which will strike us more and more in proportion as we understand distinctly the circumstances of the age and country in which this religion appeared, and for which no adequate human cause has been or can be assigned.

Passing over these topics, each of which might be enlarged into a discourse, I will make but one remark on this religion, which strikes my own mind very forcibly. Since its introduction, human nature has made great progress, and society experienced great changes; and in this advanced condition of the world, Christianity, instead of losing its application and importance, is found to be more and more congenial and adapted to man's nature and wants. Men have outgrown the other institutions of that period when Christianity appeared, its philosophy, its modes of

warfare, its policy, its public and private economy; but Christianity has never shrunk as intellect has opened, but has always kept in advance of men's faculties, and unfolded nobler views in proportion as they have ascended. The highest powers and affections which our nature has developed find more than adequate objects in this religion. Christianity is indeed peculiarly fitted to the more improved stages of society, to the more delicate sensibilities of refined minds, and especially to that dissatisfaction with the present state, which always grows with the growth of our moral powers and affections. As men advance in civilisation, they become susceptible of mental sufferings, to which ruder ages are strangers; and these Christianity is fitted to assuage. Imagination and intellect become more restless; and Christianity brings them tranquillity, by the eternal and magnificent truths, the solemn and unbounded prospects, which it unfolds. This fitness of our religion to more advanced stages of society than that in which it was introduced, to wants of human nature not then developed, seems to me very striking. The religion bears the marks of having come from a Being who perfectly understood the human mind, and had power to provide for its progress. This feature of Christianity is of the nature of prophecy. It was an anticipation of future and distant ages; and when we consider among whom our religion sprung, where, but in God, can we find an explanation of this peculiarity?—*W. E. Channing, D.D.*

(b) In Books lies the *soul* of the whole Past Time; the articulate audible voice of the Past, when the body and material substance of it has altogether vanished like a dream. Mighty fleets and armies, harbours and arsenals, vast cities, high domed, many engined,—they are precious, great: but what do they become? Agamemnon, the many Agamemnons, Peri-

cleses, and their Greece; all is gone now to some ruined fragments, dumb mournful wrecks and blocks: but the Books of Greece! There Greece, to every thinker, still very literally lives; can be called up again into life. No magic *Rune* is stranger than a Book. All that mankind has done, thought, gained, or been: it is lying as in magic preservation in the pages of Books. They are the chosen possession of men.—*Thomas Carlyle.*

(c) It is a blessed thought that the words of the Bible were written for us—that the Spirit of God looked along the ages, and saw that in such an event or circumstance of life we should need just such counsel and help. And then He inspired a pen to write it down. Not for our good only, but for thousands who have gone before and who will come after. No promise is there that has not been proved thousands of times—no warning, but many have taken it home. It is like a good chart which has everything on it that a mariner in any seas may need. Its truths never wear out. Says one, who has been a deep student of it: “The Bible will bear a thousand readings, and the man who has gone over it the most frequently and carefully is the surest of finding new wonders there.”—*The Study.*

What a wonderful Book is the Bible! Just let us look at it. There it lies—a Book several thousand years old—a Book at war with all the evil passions of a wicked world—a Book dwelling in an enemy's country—a Book exposed to every species of assault—a Book that has been shot at by innumerable archers, and yet there it lies, unhurt, invulnerable, not a crevice to be found in its coat of mail, not the shadow of a genuine doubt upon its Divinity, not a speck upon its glorious robes! Well may we say as we gaze upon it, “Surely God is in this Book! how dreadful is this Book! it is none else than the Book of God; it is the gate of heaven!”—*Anon.*

## THE DECREE OF DARIUS.

(Verses 6–12.)

In this royal edict we have:

**I. A prohibition.** “Now Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shethar-boznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence: let the work of this house of God alone.” All interference with the builders and the building of the Temple is here forbidden by the king. Tatnai and Shethar-boznai seem to have acted with conspicuous fairness toward the Jews; but it is probable that some of their former Samaritan enemies would have hindered them in their great work

if they could have done so. Such hindrance this edict imperatively prohibits.

**II. An injunction.** The royal decree goes on to command Tatnai and his companions in office to help onward the work of the Jewish builders.

1. *They were to allow the building of the Temple.* “Let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place.”

2. *They were to assist the building of the Temple.* “Moreover, I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of

God: that of the king's goods, of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered."

3. *They were to assist the worship of the God of the Temple.* "And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail."

Notice:

1. The *sufficiency* of this assistance. It provides for the daily and other burnt offerings, for the meat offerings, and for other things according to the expressed requirements of the Jewish priests.

2. The *continuity* of this assistance. "Let it be given them day by day."

3. The *urgency* of the command of this assistance. "Let it be given them without fail; . . . let it be done with speed." In this way unusual importance is given to this edict for helping forward the Temple and the worship of Jehovah. *The object of the king in thus aiding their worship* is noteworthy: "That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons." This is a remarkable utterance from a heathen monarch. It reveals—(1.) His reverence towards God. Twice in this decree he speaks of Him as "the God of heaven;" and from his wish that sacrifices and prayers should be presented to Him, it is evident that he believed in His power to aid and bless men. (2.) His faith in the efficacy of prayer to God. Darius knew that the Jews "were a praying people," says Matthew Henry, "and had heard that God was nigh to them in all that which they called upon Him for. He was sensible he needed their prayers and might receive benefit by them, and was kind to them in order that he might have an interest in their prayers. It is the duty of God's people to pray for those that are in authority over them, not only for the good and gentle, but also for the froward; but they are particularly bound in gratitude to pray for

their protectors and benefactors; and it is the wisdom of princes to desire their prayers. Let not the greatest princes despise the prayers of the meanest saints; it is desirable to have them for us, and dreadful to have them against us." (a).

III. **A malediction.** "Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word," &c. (vers. 11, 12).

1. *Severe penalties are denounced against any who should violate the decree.* (1.) The crucifixion of the offender. "Whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, let him be fastened thereon and crucified." (2.) The consignment of the memory of the offender to shame and loathing. "And let his house be made a dunghill for this." Language such as this is not unfrequently employed by Orientals (2 Kings x. 27; Dan. ii. 5; iii. 29). "They imprecate all sorts of indignities and abominations on the objects of their dislike, and it is not uncommon for them to smear over with filth what is the object of their contempt and abhorrence. Thus when the Caliph Omar took Jerusalem, at the head of the Saracen army, after ravaging the greater part of the city, he caused dung to be spread over the site of the sanctuary, in token of the abhorrence of all Mussulmans, and of its being henceforth regarded as the refuse and offscouring of all things."

2. *A stern imprecation is uttered against any who should attempt to injure the Temple.* "And the God that hath caused His name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter, to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem." Where his own power was inadequate to protect the Jews and their Temple, he invokes the hand of God against those who would injure the sacred place.

CONCLUSION:

1. *See the force of example.* Darius was moved by the example of Cyrus in thus showing favour to the Jews. In this case we have—(1.) An example of excellent character. The conduct of Cyrus towards the Jews was good and noble. (b). (2.) An example of pos-

thumous power. Cyrus had been dead for several years, but the decree which he had made determined the conduct of Darius towards the Jews. Our influence for good or for evil does not cease with our life upon earth. (c). (3.) An example nobly followed. The decree of Darius was even more noble and generous than that of Cyrus.

2. *See the workings of Divine Providence.* In this decree we see that—(1.) God sometimes uses unlikely agents in accomplishing His purposes. Darius, king of Persia, was one of the most important agents in rebuilding the Temple at Jerusalem, &c. (2.) God overrules the opposition of enemies for the accomplishment of His purposes. We are far from saying that Tatnai and Shetharboznai were enemies to the Jews; but we know that the Samaritans were bitterly hostile to them; and now, as the result of the appeal to Darius, all his subjects west of the Euphrates are commanded to contribute to the Temple and to the worship of Jehovah. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee; the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain." (d).

### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) A man who lives habitually near to God is like a great cloud for ever dropping with fertilising showers. This is the man who can say, "The earth is dissolved; I bear up the pillars thereof." France had never seen so bloody a revolution had there been men of prayer to preserve her. England, amidst the commotions which make her rock to and fro, is held fast because prayer is put up incessantly by the faithful. The flag of old England is nailed to her mast, not by the hands of her sailors, but by the prayers of the people of God. These, as they intercede day and night, and as they go about their spiritual ministry, these are they for whom God spareth nations, for whom He permitteth the earth still to exist; and when their time is over, and they are taken away, the salt being taken from the earth, then shall the elements dissolve with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up; but not until He hath caught away the saints with Christ into the air, shall this world pass away.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

(b) If the present lecturer has a right to consider himself a real Christian,—if he has been of any service to his fellow-creatures, and has attained to any usefulness in the Church

of Christ, he owes it, in the way of means and instrumentality, to the sight of a companion, who slept in the same room with him, bending his knees in prayer on retiring to rest. That scene, so unostentatious, and yet so unconcealed, roused my slumbering conscience, and sent an arrow to my heart; for, though I had been religiously educated, I had restrained prayer, and cast off the fear of God. My conversion to God followed, and soon after my entrance upon college studies for the work of the ministry. Nearly half a century has rolled away since then, with all its multitudinous events; but that little chamber, that humble couch, that praying youth, are still present to my imagination, and will never be forgotten, even amidst the splendours of heaven, and through the ages of eternity.—*J. A. James.*

(c) The truth is, that no man or woman, however poor their circumstances or mean their lot, are without their influence; like an electric spark, passing from link to link, that runs flashing down the chain of successive generations. Indeed, a man's life is as immortal as his soul; and by its influence, though dead, he yet speaketh and worketh. . . . Men live after they are dead. Outliving our memory, and more enduring than any monument of brass or marble, our example may prove like the circle that rises round the sinking stone, and growing wider and wider, embraces a larger and larger sphere, till it dies in gentle wavelets on the distant beach. It reaches a distant shore; your example a distant time. Take care, then, how you live.—*Thomas Guthrie, D.D.*

(d) All things are for the best, by virtue of no inherent power in evil to develop good, for evil must ever gravitate towards an increase of itself; but by virtue of an overruling Wisdom bringing good out of evil, and converting the evil itself into the instrument of good. This is true of natural laws. The storm destructive of life and property fills the atmosphere with the seeds of larger and freer life. Pestilence is the providential stimulus of sanitary progress. Difficulties and conflicts are the school of all the heroic virtues. Fortitude, self-control, heroic force of will, unselfish generosity, a rational love of liberty, and liberality tolerant of other men's opinions, all grow out of this soil. They are not hot-house exotics, needing to be stimulated into artificial life, but vigorous evergreens, flourishing only in the free air of heaven, and striking their roots deep only in their native soil. The exercise of a Divine wisdom and power over-ordering evil for good is but the application of the same principle to the higher sphere of God's moral government, but another and a louder strain of the same harmonious music. The past history of the world is one long illustration of this truth. The experience of the past becomes prophetic, and catching its language from the glowing pages of the inspired Scripture, sings its songs of triumphant hope

for the future. Looking back to the past and forward to the future, faith recognises that all is best. From the height of the revealed

promise peeping on tiptoe into the future, it catches a glimpse of a more glorious hereafter. —Canon Garbett.

## A BELIEVER'S EXPENSES.

(Verse 4.)

*“Let the expenses be given out of the king's house.”*

The times are hard. Expenses are very well when one is able to meet them easily, but they involve a thousand perplexities if the income is insufficient. The most expensive living possible is that of the believer. It is not difficult to satisfy the bare requirements of the body. There is more swallowed up by the requirements of a man's position. But the human soul has the greatest needs. If we speak of its simple necessities, what a costly matter is the sustaining of its life! Think, however, of its expensive enjoyments, its superabounding luxuries! From whence do they all come? We are spiritually penniless. Are we not living far beyond our income? No. Heaven's exchequer supplies bountifully all our requirements and enjoyments.

**I. What are our expenses?** The expenses referred to in the text are those connected with the return of the Jews to their own land, the rebuilding of the Temple, and its continual sacrifices.

1. *Their release from captivity* was doubtless an expensive blessing. Our release from the thralldom of sin involved enormous expenditure. Was paid “out of the King's house.” Did not God give His Son? Did not the Son pay down His blood and His life? “Ye are not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.” What a price!

2. *Their return to Jerusalem.* The liberated Jews in Babylon were probably impoverished by their captivity. Cyrus says, “Return to your own land, I will pay your expenses.” The important step of public profession of faith in Christ, and of union with His Church, need peculiar supplies of grace.

It is promised to you “out of the King's house.”

3. *The material for a new Temple* was provided by king Cyrus. There is much new material to be built up in our habits and life. Extensive alterations must be made. We require a new building, the material of which shall be faith, hope, love, humility, chastity, self-denial, &c. Can we obtain these from our own slender purse?

4. *Wages for the workmen* are part of these expenses. It was a long job—the Temple-building—and the workmen must not stand still. The Christian who makes no progress in the Divine life may account for it—his source of supplies has been neglected—“the King's house.”

5. *The restoration of the sacred vessels from Babylon* (ver. 5) meant expense. Our bodies being temples of the Holy Ghost, every physical power and every mental faculty should be “a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use.” But these, also, have been profaned and defiled in our captivity to sin. They must now be restored to their proper use, and purified.

6. *The daily sacrifices* were a further item in the expenditure (ver. 9). (1.) Our hearts are altars whereon should be offered the sacrifices of worship and praise. (2.) Our life is an altar whereon should be offered our whole conduct, and our special effort for Christ.

**II. Where shall we find means to meet these expenses?** There is one great treasury of light—the sun—inexhaustible. “The King's house” is an inexhaustible treasury of grace.

1. *The word of His truth.* Hidden mines of wealth. Rich doctrines, rich examples, rich promises, rich pledges. Our needs appeared big until we saw the supply here.

2. *The throne of His grace.* “Let

us come boldly," &c. (Heb. iv. 16). "Ask what ye will," &c. "Whatsoever ye shall ask," &c.

"Thou art coming to a King,  
Large petitions with thee bring;  
For His grace and power are such,  
None can ever ask too much."

3. *The fellowship of His people.* Experience tells us of the supplies to be found here.

4. *The dispensation of His providence.* God's abundant, unasked mercies every day. Everything in nature is a storehouse of food; the clouds over our heads, the clods under our feet, the atmosphere which we breathe. Everything in Providence supplies food for the believer. "We know that all things work together for good," &c.

5. *The opposition of his foes.* The Persian monarch was naturally Israel's enemy, yet God arranges that He shall pay Israel's expenses. Even the lions we may meet shall supply sweet honey for our nourishment and refreshment.

6. *The work of His Son.* This includes all others. "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." What is there wanted that is not to be found here? "In Him dwelleth all the fulness

of the Godhead." "Full of grace and truth; and of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace."

III. How shall we act in the presence of such abundance?

1. *We need not be afraid of exhausting Heaven's treasures.* Here is grace abounding! We may be prodigals, for our Father has plenty.

2. *We dare not be slow in availing ourselves of these supplies.* Live up to your privileges, or you will suffer, and the bountiful King will be insulted.

3. *We cannot help wondering at the goodness of the King.* Was it not enough that He should liberate us from sin? He "crowns us with loving-kindness and tender mercies."

4. *We will not forget to express our gratitude to the King.* As He is at all the expense, He shall have all the praise. Here I will begin the song, and when I arrive at the "King's house" I shall in richer language

"The gratitude declare  
That glows within my ravished heart."

5. *We must not be so selfish as to hide these glad tidings.* "This day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace."  
—R. S. Latimer.

## THE DESIRE OF A SOVEREIGN AND THE DUTY OF SUBJECTS.

(Verse 10.)

I propose to consider the words before us in a twofold point of view—

**I As the desire of a heathen prince.**

1. *It was a just and reasonable desire,* as the history will clearly show. The Jews, by the permission of Cyrus, had begun to rebuild their Temple, &c.

Now, consider the obligations which this benevolent monarch was conferring on the Jews, and then say whether the desire which he expressed was not *just and reasonable*. He had ordered that "whatever they had need of, young bullocks and rams and lambs," &c. (ver. 9). Was it not reasonable that he should expect these things to be applied to their distinct use, and that, when he was showing such a paternal regard for

the welfare of their nation, he should be remembered by them in their devotions, and have an interest in their prayers? Surely this was the least return which they could render to him for his extreme kindness.

2. *It was also a wise and politic desire.* Religion and loyalty are inseparable. It cannot be that a man who truly fears God should fail essentially in honouring the king. On the other hand, a man who has no fear of God before his eyes, has no principle sufficiently strong to keep him faithful to his king, if he be drawn either by interest or inclination to oppose him. Hence, then, it was wise in Darius, though a heathen prince, to encourage piety amongst the Jews.

Nor was he less politic in desiring a

remembrance in their prayers. Intercession will induce a habit of mind friendly to the person for whom it is offered, and, if offered in sincerity by a whole nation, would prove a bulwark around the throne, stronger than all the fleets and armies that could be raised for its defence.

**II. As the duty of a Christian people.**

1. In the service of *our heavenly King*, the "offering of sacrifices to Him of a sweet savour" may well be considered as comprehending our duty to Him; whether *as sinners*, who stand in need of His mercy, or *as saints*, who desire to glorify His name. The Jewish sacrifices were presented as an atonement for the sins of the people; and they prefigured that "Lamb of God, which in His eternal purpose was slain from the foundation of the world." These *we* are not required to bring; because that adorable Saviour, in whom all the types and shadows of the Mosaic law were to be fulfilled, has come. "He loved us, and gave Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." This sacrifice we must ever bring before the God of heaven and earth. Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life." "His is the only name whereby any man can be saved."

But there are other sacrifices also, which, *as saints*, we are to offer, and which have a sweet savour before God. Our whole person, body, soul, and spirit, is to be presented to the Lord, as the Apostle tells us: "I beseech you, by the

mercies of God, that ye present your bodies," &c. (Rom. xii. 1). And if only we come to God through Christ, there is not a service which we can render to Him which shall not come up with acceptance before Him, as a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour. Such are our alms (Heb. xiii. 16); such our prayers (Ps. cvii. 22); such our very sighs (Ps. li. 17); such is our every service, of whatever kind (1 Pet. ii. 5).

And do not imagine that your attention to this duty is unimportant as it respects the welfare of the state. There is a far closer connection between national piety and national prosperity than men generally imagine. (Comp. chap. vii. 23.)

To this must be added your duty to your earthly prince, to be instant in prayer to God on his behalf. *This is your duty*; for the Apostle says, "I exhort that, first of all, supplications, prayers," &c. (1 Tim. ii. 1-3).

*It is your interest also*; for the welfare of every individual in the nation is bound up in the welfare of the king.

Let us, from the example of this heathen prince, learn *how to employ our influence*. Let us use it for "the God of heaven;" let us employ it to protect the oppressed, to encourage piety, and to maintain the honour of God in the world.

Let us learn also *how to improve the privileges we enjoy*. Let us abound in praises to our heavenly Benefactor, in affectionate loyalty to our earthly king, and in every work, whereby God may be glorified, and the welfare of our fellow-creatures may be advanced.—*C. Simeon, M.A.*

**THE COMPLETION OF THE TEMPLE.**

(Verses 13-15.)

Let us consider—

**I. The ready compliance of the Persian officers with the royal commands.**

1. *They carried out their commands faithfully.* "Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river, Shethar-boznai, and their companions, according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did."

2. *They carried out their commands*

*readily.* "So they did speedily." They exhibited neither reluctance nor delay in carrying out the directions which they had received from king Darius. We have in this another evidence of the freedom from prejudice, the impartiality, and the fairness which marked the conduct of Tatnai and Shethar-boznai towards the Jews.

**II. The satisfactory progress and**

ultimate completion of the building of the Temple. "And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered," &c. (vers. 14, 15). This successful issue of their important undertaking was accomplished by the co-operation in various ways of many persons and powers, through the good Providence of God. Let us glance at such of these as are here mentioned.

1. *The grand Authority for the great work.* "They builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel." The builders prosecuted their work as "the servants of the God of heaven and earth" (chap. v. 11). They were summoned to their work and encouraged in it by the prophets of Jehovah, "in the name of the God of Israel" (chap. v. 1). They were working in obedience to His express command. And "there would have been no command of Cyrus and Darius without God's command."

2. *The royal promoters of the great work.* "And according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia." Although Artaxerxes had nothing to do with the erection of the sacred edifice, he is mentioned by the historian because of the great favour he showed to the good cause many years afterwards. Each of these monarchs had rendered valuable assistance to the Jews in restoring and carrying on the worship of Jehovah. (1.) They gave permission for the return of the exiles and for the rebuilding of the Temple (chaps. i. 1-4; vi. 1-12; vii. 11-13). (2.) They granted them protection in rebuilding the Temple (ver. 7). (3.) They bestowed upon them liberal assistance both for their work and for their worship (chaps. i. 4-11; vi. 8-10; vii. 14-23).

3. *The worthy leaders of the great work.* "And the elders of the Jews builded." They were forward in taking up the work when summoned thereto by the prophet Haggai (chap. v. 2), and they continued steadfast and diligent in the prosecution thereof. By their example they encouraged the people in their duty.

4. *The inspired inciters in the great*

*work.* "And they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo." When the people were disheartened and wearied through difficulties and hindrances, these holy messengers of Heaven encouraged and strengthened them "through the Divine word and in the power of the Divine Spirit." With the assurances of success in their great work, and of the rich blessing of their God, they stimulated and invigorated the people in the prosecution of that work. (Comp. Hag. ii.; Zech. iv. 6-10.)

5. *The ultimate completion of the great work.* "And they builded and finished it," &c. It was completed at last. There had been difficulties in the way of the work, and opposition to it, and for some time lack of interest in it on the part of the Jews themselves; but by the several concurrent favourable influences, and especially by the blessing of God, the undertaking was at length brought to a successful issue. And *the time of its completion is significant.* "And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king." Says Schultz: "For a work of such importance the date is properly given. . . . It was now for the first the exactly right time. The Temple was ready just seventy years after its destruction, so that the prophecy of the seventy years was now fulfilled exactly thereby."

CONCLUSION :

The building of this Temple may be regarded as a figure of—

1. *The building of the temple of God in individual Christians.* "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" &c. (1 Cor. iii. 16, 17). "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith," &c. (Jude 20, 21). "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue," &c. (2 Pet. i. 5-7). And building thus, by the blessing of God, this edifice also shall be completed. "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until" (Alford: "will perfect it up to") "the day of Jesus Christ." (a).

2. *The building of the temple of God in the world.* A great and glorious spiritual temple is being erected out of the ruins of fallen humanity. The work is frequently and sadly obstructed; the adversaries to it are many; the builders at times seem only half-hearted in their work; and the progress appears to be irregular and slow; but the edifice shall surely be brought to splendid completion. Opposition, however crafty and organised and powerful, can neither frustrate the purposes nor hinder the fulfilment of the promises of God. Here is the grand issue of the work of the builders of the spiritual temple: "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them," &c. (Rev. xxi. 3, 4). (b).

### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) The work of sanctification must go on until the saint can say, "I and my Father are one." That is the sublime end of Christianity. It is not to multiply theological technicalities; it is not to build one church spire higher than another; it is not to furnish a grindstone on which pugnacious bigots may whet their little swords; it is to gather up a shattered and overthrown humanity, to re-burnish the living stones on which the fire of an enemy has left traces of fury, to rebuild the fallen empire of manhood, until it shall be beautiful and holy as a palace built for God.—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

It is the part of a good workman not to leave his work imperfect; a good physician will not forsake his patient when he has done but half his cure; the husbandman gives not over when he has sown but part of his ground; and he that does but half build a house is but half a carpenter. So he that enters into the way of Christianity, and stands still, is but half a Christian—the greatest part of his work is yet behind. It is not enough to begin well, but to continue in well-doing; it is not so much the entrance into, as the perseverance in goodness that is required. God left not the great work of the creation in the first or second day thereof, but in six days finished it to the glory of His name; not as then in the generation of His creatures, but now also in their regeneration; whom He loves, He loves to the end; and the good work He has begun in any, shall be perfected. Having, then, so fair a copy to write by, so good an example to live by, let us so run that we may obtain; so sail in the sea of this world that we may never give over till we arrive in the

desired haven; so to begin as to be sure to make an end; that it may never be said to our great and just reproach, "This man began to build, but was not able to finish" (Luke xiv. 30).—*Whittaker.*

(b) Inasmuch as "all the building is growing in the Lord" (Eph. ii. 21), and according to His order, it will, in the end, not only be a glorious temple of humanity, but marvelously adapted for the indwelling and manifestation of God. "I will dwell in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." I will fill them, and they shall represent My fulness. "The whole building," the redeemed of every generation, growing more and more into unity with each other, and with Christ, and through Him, with all the hidden powers of the Godhead, is a work which is every way worthy of an Almighty Father. To what glory, to what beauty, will the kingdom grow? to what wisdom will its members attain? what will be their powers? what their fellowships? what their individual freedom of action? what their service and end, as one empire in the Son, and in the Father!—*John Pulsford.*

Did you ever win a soul to Christ? Did you ever get a grip of the hand of spiritual gratitude? Did you ever see the tear starting from the eye when the convert said, "Bless you! I shall remember you in heaven, for you have brought me to Christ?" Ah, my dear friend, you will not be satisfied merely with this. This is a kind of food that makes men hungry. Oh, that you had a rich banquet of it, and yet wanted more still. The Church will be built. If you and I sit still, it will be built. This is a truth, though it is often turned to a mischievous end—the Church will be built, even without us. But, oh, we shall miss the satisfaction of helping in its building. Yes, it will grow; every stone will be put in its place, and the pinnacle will soar into its predestined place, but every stone from foundation to pinnacle, will seem to say to you, "Thou hadst nothing to do with this! Thou hadst no hand in this!" When Cyrus took one of his guests round his garden, the guest admired it greatly, and said he had much pleasure in it. "Ah," said Cyrus, "but you have not so much pleasure in this garden as I have, for I planted every tree in it myself." One reason why Christ has so much pleasure in His Church is because He did so much for it; and one reason why some saints will have a greater fulness of heaven than others to rejoice in will be because they did more for heaven than others. By God's grace they were enabled to bring more souls there; and as they look upon the Church they may, without self-reliance, and ascribing it all to grace, remember what they were enabled to do in its building up.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

THE SUBSERVIENCY OF A FAITHFUL MINISTRY TO THE ERECTION OF GOD'S  
SPIRITUAL TEMPLE.

(Verse 14.)

**I. The building of the Temple through the instrumentality of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.**

1. *Many difficulties obstructed the progress of the work.* Scarcely was the foundation laid, before an attempt was made to impede the work through the *hypocrisy of pretended friends.* The Samaritans offered to co-operate with the Jews in raising the intended fabric; but their design was to frustrate, rather than promote, the completion of it. Many will profess to desire the same objects, and will offer to concur in prosecuting them to a certain point, who, if their offers were accepted, would only defeat the ends proposed. The Jews, however, determined to prosecute their work alone (chap. iv. 1-3). That device having failed, they were assaulted by the *hostility of open enemies.* Complaints were made against them, and they were represented as plotting to gain their liberty and independence, &c. In this way the servants of God have been assailed in all ages: our Lord was calumniated as an enemy to Cæsar; and His apostles as "movers of sedition," &c. This plan succeeded, the Jews yielded to despondency, and for the space of fifteen years suspended the work (chap. iv. 23, 24). *A spirit of indolence and supineness* soon prevailed among them, and would have operated to a total dereliction of the work, if God had not sent His prophets to rouse them from their lethargy.

2. *Through the preaching of the prophets, however, these difficulties were overcome.* The prophet Haggai justly reproved them for attending so carefully to their own accommodation, &c. (Hag. i. 2-5, 7). The prophet Zechariah also urged them to bear in mind how awfully their fathers had suffered for the neglect of God (Zech. i. 1-6); and then, by a variety of images which he had seen in visions, encouraged them with assurances of success in their labours (Zech.

i.-iv.). Thus were the people stimulated to exertion. But no sooner did they resume their work, than their enemies renewed their application to the government to issue again their mandate to discontinue it (chap. v. 1-10). This effort, however, was overruled, as similar efforts have often been, for the furtherance of the work it was intended to destroy (comp. chap. vi. 1-10 with Phil. i. 12); and in the short space of four years the edifice was completed (ver. 15).

**II. The subserviency of a faithful ministry to the erection of God's spiritual temple.** The Temple of old was a shadow of that spiritual temple which is erected for God in the hearts of men; "being built on the foundation of the apostles," &c. (Eph. ii. 20-22). The erection of this—

1. *Is connected with the same difficulties.* Who that begins truly to surrender up his soul to God, does not find many impediments from *pretended friends?* They will profess to approve of religion, and will propose to go with us to a certain length, that so they may have the greater influence to keep us from "following the Lord fully," and from serving Him with our *whole* hearts. If we are enabled to withstand their efforts, then we shall be assailed by *open enemies.* Not unfrequently will they become our greatest foes, who by their relation to us ought rather to become our firmest protectors. And too often do *timidity and sloth* induce us to relax our efforts, till, if God do not by some special act of providence or grace awaken us, we lose the time for working, and, like the foolish virgins, experience for ever the fatal effects of our remissness.

2. *Is carried on and perfected by the same means.* God has established an order of men *on purpose to carry on this spiritual building* in the world (Eph. iv. 11-13). The apostles may be called "master builders;" but every pastor and teacher is engaged in the same

work, according to the office that has been assigned him. We call you, then, to "consider your ways;" consider what has hindered you hitherto, &c. Consider too the promises of God. What assurances of success are given, &c. "Up

then, and be doing," every one of you; and "your God will be with you." Yield not to discouragements of any kind, &c. Seek "as living stones to be built up a spiritual house," &c. (1 Pet. ii. 4, 5).—*C. Simeon, M.A.*

## THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE.

(Verses 16–18.)

The dedication of the Temple was characterised by—

**I. Religious rejoicing.** "And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy." It would not have been very surprising if they had mourned because it was so inferior in magnificence and splendour to the Temple of Solomon. It is probable "that the carving and the gold, and other ornaments of Solomon's Temple far surpassed this, and the pillars of the portico and the veils may all have been far more splendid, so also probably were the vessels; and all this is what a Jew would mourn over far more than mere architectural splendour." Moreover, some of the most sacred and glorious things of the first Temple were altogether absent from this one, *e.g.*, the Ark of the covenant, the cherubim, the Shechinah, and the Urim and Thummim. Sometimes when we have reached the end of long cherished hopes and efforts, we are disappointed and depressed because the result does not come up to our ideal and desire. And we should not, therefore, have been surprised if the Jews had looked upon their finished work with sadness. But it was not so. They "kept the dedication of this house of God with joy." And they had good reasons for devout gladness; *e.g.*—

1. *Protracted labours brought to a successful termination.*

2. *The honour offered to Jehovah their God.*

3. *The benefits which were likely to accrue to men through their sacred edifice and its worship.* Joyousness in the service of God is a conspicuous feature of the religious life in post-exile times. This is especially manifest in

the Psalms of this period. Comp. Ps. cxxxv., cxxxvi., cxlvi.—cl., and cxviii., which, says Schultz, "without doubt the congregation then sung, although it was really composed somewhat earlier; and especially did they appropriate with greatly agitated hearts the shout of triumph: 'The right hand of the Lord is exalted, the right hand of the Lord doth valiantly. . . . Open to me the gates of righteousness,' &c. And we also should "serve the Lord with gladness, come before His presence with singing, enter into His gates with thanksgiving," &c. (a).

**II. Devout gratitude.** "And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs." In these offerings we discover—

1. *An expression of gratitude.* They presented both burnt offerings and peace offerings; and while both were expressive of gratitude, the latter were especially so. The peace offerings were eucharistic. The Psalmist refers to them when he says, "I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving." They had great and strong reasons for gratitude. "The Lord had done great things for them." And they sang, "The Lord hath done great things for us; we are glad." (b).

2. *An expression of their complete self-dedication to God.* The burnt offerings were laid whole upon the altar, and there consumed by fire, thus setting forth the entire consecration of the offerer to God. This was the chief meaning of the burnt offerings. The dedication of churches is acceptable to God only as the worshippers dedicate themselves to Him. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." "I be-

sech you, therefore, brethren, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice," &c. (c).

The number of these offerings is small as compared with the very large number offered by Solomon at the dedication of the former Temple. "Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered unto the Lord, two and twenty thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep." But Zerubabel offered only "an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he-goats." The total number of animals sacrificed then was 142,000; the total now is only 712. Yet Zerubabel and the people with him offered—(1.) Freely. (2.) Liberally, when we take into account their small numbers and reduced circumstances, as compared with those of the time of Solomon. (3.) Cheerfully. And "if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, not according to that he hath not."

**III. Deep humility.** "And for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he-goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel." Consider—

1. *The nature of this offering.* "A sin offering." This was an acknowledgment of sin on the part of those for whom it was offered, and that the sinner deserved death by reason of his sin, but that God in His mercy accepted the death of the victim as an atonement for the sinner. And in this way the people humbly confess their sin before God. Sin had brought their miseries upon them, had stripped them of their national power and protection, had been the real cause of their captivity. Hence this sin offering was appropriate in its relation to past sins, and a hopeful indication as to their future conduct. (d).

2. *The number of the victims composing this offering.* "A sin offering for all Israel, twelve he-goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel." The confession of sin was intended for the whole nation, and the atonement was designed "for all Israel." This was a recognition on the part of the offerers

of the unity of all the tribes, an evidence that "the Temple was intended for the entire covenant people," and an expression of the hope that all would return to the land of their fathers, and to the enjoyment of the full privileges of the people of God.

**IV. Appropriate arrangements for its future use.** "And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses." Thus arrangements were made for—

1. *Regular and orderly services.* They aimed at—(1.) *Completeness* in their worship. Both priests and Levites were set in their respective spheres of work. No duties were to be neglected. (2.) *Continuity* in their worship. They were set in classes and divisions, so that when one had fulfilled its appointed term of service another would take its place. (Comp. 1 Chron. xxiii.—xxvi.)

2. *Scriptural services.* "As it is written in the book of Moses." They were careful that their worship should be in accordance with the expressed will of God. It is well said by Matthew Henry: "Though the Temple service could not now be performed with so much pomp and plenty as formerly, because of their poverty, yet perhaps it was performed with as much purity and close adherence to the Divine institution as ever, which was the true glory of it. No beauty like the beauty of holiness."

It is perhaps unnecessary to add that the principal points of this exposition are applicable to the dedication of churches in our own day.

## ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) The priests of old were not to sully themselves with sorrow when they performed their functions, and saints who are of a higher priesthood should show forth delight in their approaches to their God. Angels sing, and why not God's other servants, who are a little lower, and yet far higher? David danced before the ark, which was but a symbol of Divinity; what ails us that our heart so seldom dances before the Lord Himself? The old creation has its sunshine and flowers; its lowing herds and bleating flocks; its heaven-mourning larks and warbling nightingales; its rivers laughing, and its seas clapping

hands; is the new creation of grace to render less happy worship to God our exceeding joy? Nay, rather let us come into His presence with thanksgiving, and show ourselves glad in Him with psalms. Most of the English versions alter the old hundredth Psalm into, "Him serve with fear;" but for my part, by God's grace I mean to sing it as it used to be and still is sung in Scotland—

"All people that on earth do dwell,  
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice;  
Him serve with MIRTH, His praise forth tell,  
Come ye before Him and rejoice."  
—C. H. Spurgeon.

(b) It is an excellent thing when Christian men know how to sing as well as to work, and mingle holy music with holy service. The best music of a Christian consists in thankfulness to God. Thanks should be rendered by the believer with all the acts common to men. Our eating, our drinking, our social meetings, our quiet conversings one with another, in all we should give thanks unto God and the Father. This we should do in the labours peculiar to our vocation. Whatever your trade and calling may be, if you cannot sing aloud, you can sing in your hearts while your hands are busy; you can ring out the praises of God as well to the sound of the hammer on the anvil as to the peal of the organ; your feet at the sewing machine may beat time to a sacred tune; you can as well praise God while you crack your whip as when you sing to a Psalm tune. Why not? If the heart be right you can mount up to the heavens from any place of labour.—*Ibid.*

(c) It is the end and essence of all religion to turn the mind from self to God; to give it absorbing views of the Divine beauty and glory; to fill it with Divine love and zeal; to make it feel honoured in honouring God, blessed in blessing Him; to make it feel that nothing is good enough or great enough for Him. . . . A man thus inspired will no more think of inquiring the advantages, the probable gain of his deeds and his adoration, than he would think of the profitableness of gazing with admiration on a lovely landscape, or regaling his soul with the noble qualities of a hero or a martyr. Such a man has offered himself to

God; he has given his own soul, with all its powers. His other gifts are but results and forms of this first and greatest gift; all other offerings are virtually included in this. And, in truth, this consecration of self is the grand and essential condition, the seminal principle of all consecration. We have no just thought of God, no oneness of spirit with His Spirit, if we look on ourselves simply as sacrificers; we are sacrifices as well; both sacrificers and sacrifices; we have to present ourselves as sacrifices to God. And if there be this first and best offering, the offering of ourselves, it will infuse a spirit of life and fulness into all our service, animating the form, quickening the body of all service; a spirit of delight and strength and earnestness; a large and enlarging, a noble and an ennobling spirit. The prudent, commercial temper, in religion, is one of narrowness and pain and bondage; we never possess ourselves thoroughly till we forget ourselves, never realise our power and inherit our portion till all spiritual engagements and acts cease to be the mere meeting of a demand, the mere performance of a condition, and become the home and rest and reward of the soul.—A. J. Morris.

(d) The effect of these views and recollections (*viz.*, those of true Christians) are penitence, contrition, and deep humiliation of soul, and by them all their religious feelings are pervaded and characterised. When they love their God and Redeemer, it is with a penitent love; when they rejoice in Him, it is with a penitent joy; when they believe in Him, it is with a penitent faith; when they obey Him, it is with a penitent obedience; when they offer Him thanksgivings and praises, penitence mingles with them her humble confessions and contrite sighs; and the place on earth which they most covet, in which they most delight, is that of the woman who stood weeping at the feet of Christ, washing them with her tears, and wiping them with the hairs of her head. Even while observing a joyful festival, tears, the fountain of which is supplied by godly sorrow for sin, and gratitude to the Redeemer; tears, which it is delightful to shed, are seen on the same countenances which glow with love and hope, and beam with holy humble joy in God.—E. Payson, D.D.

## THE CELEBRATION OF THE PASSOVER.

(Verses 19–22.)

A few weeks after the dedication of the Temple the feasts of the Passover and of unleavened bread were celebrated; and this marked the beginning of the new period in which the worship of God, with its festivals and observances, was regularly and fully carried on.

Notice :

**I. The personal preparation for these sacred festivals.** This comprised—

1. *The purification of the priests and Levites from ceremonial uncleanness.* "For the priests and Levites had purified themselves as one man, they were

all clean, and killed the Passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves." "The purity of ministers adds much to the beauty of their ministrations." They who "bear the vessels of the Lord" should be clean (Isa. lii. 7).

2. *The separation of the people from heathen associations and immoralities.*

"And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the Lord God of Israel, did eat." And separation from sinners and their corrupt practices is still indispensable to union and communion with God. "Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate," &c. (2 Cor. vi. 16-18). We cannot meet with God in holy fellowship unless we are in a suitable spiritual condition. And as a rule, men require preparation of heart (Job xi. 13), in order to meet Him thus. To enjoy intimate communion with God, we must turn aside from the ways of darkness, and "walk in the light as He is in the light" (1 John i. 5-7). (a).

**II. The principal significance of these sacred festivals.** It would be out of place here to enter at any length into a consideration of the meaning of these feasts. But inasmuch as their chief significance was emphasised upon this special occasion, it behoves us to notice that significance.

1. *The Passover was a memorial of their covenant relation with God.* "The Exodus," as Dr. Howson observes, "was looked upon as the birth of the nation; the Passover was its annual birthday feast. Nearly all the rites of the festival, if explained in the most natural manner, appear to point to this as to its primary meaning. It was the yearly memorial of the dedication of the people to Him who had saved their first-born from the destroyer, in order that they might be made holy to Himself. This was the lesson which they were to teach to their children throughout all genera-

tions. When the young Hebrew asked his father regarding the paschal lamb, 'What is this?' the answer prescribed was, 'By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt,' &c. (Exod. xiii. 14, 15). Hence, in the periods of great national restoration in the times of Joshua, Hezekiah, Josiah, and Ezra, the Passover was observed in a special manner, to remind the people of their true position, and to mark their renewal of the covenant which their fathers had made." This covenant relation was originally based upon what God had done for them in bringing them out of their bondage in Egypt, and in preserving their first-born from the destroying angel; and now the grounds of that relation were strengthened by the deliverance from Babylon, which He had effected for them, and by the fact that He had raised up for them such powerful and liberal friends as Cyrus and Darius. Thus they had special reasons for celebrating this Passover with extraordinary heartiness and devotion. How many and mighty are the reasons which constrain us to devote ourselves to God! (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20; 1 Pet. i. 18, 19). (b).

2. *The feast of unleavened bread was a solemn recognition of their obligation to live holily unto God.* "The unleavened bread signified the abiding state of consecrated holiness." "Through the feast of unleavened bread," says Schultz, "they vowed, in that the strict abstinence from leaven was connected therewith, to walk not in the old leaven of wickedness and wantonness, but in the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (Comp. 1 Cor. v. 7, 8.) "We have far more cogent motives to rise into the new and pure life of sincerity and truth." (c).

**III. The special joy in these sacred festivals.** "And they kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy."

1. *All the ordinary reasons for joy were applicable upon this occasion.* The great facts commemorated were joy-inspiring. So also was the covenant relation which arose from these facts, with its privileges, &c.

2. *There were also special reasons*

for joy on this occasion. "For the Lord had made them joyful, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel."

Notice :

(1.) The *Author* of their joy. "The Lord had made them joyful." They regarded Him as the great fountain of all their blessings. "All my springs are in Thee." (2.) The *occasion* of their joy. That by the favour and assistance of Cyrus and Darius they had completed the Temple of God, and were able to celebrate all the sacred ordinances of their religion in a becoming manner. (3.) The *character* of their joy. It was religious in its source, occasion, character, and expression. It expressed itself in the reverent worship of the holy God. Let our joy be of the same character. "Rejoice in the Lord alway : again I say, Rejoice." (d).

### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Sequester yourselves from all earthly employments, and set apart some time for solemn preparation to meet God in duty. You cannot come hot, reeking out of the world into God's presence, but you will find the influence of it in your duties. It is with the heart a few minutes since plunged into the world, now at the feet of God, just as with the sea after a storm, which still continues working muddy and disquiet ; though the wind be laid and storm over, thy heart must have some time to settle. There are few musicians that can take down a lute or viol, and play presently upon it, without some time to tune it. When thou goest to God in any duty, take thy heart aside, and say, "O my soul, I am now addressing myself to the greatest work that ever a creature was employed about. I am going into the awful presence of God, about business of everlasting moment."—*H. G. Salter.*

(b) Dr. Doddridge, on one occasion, interested himself on behalf of a condemned criminal, and at length succeeded in obtaining his pardon. On announcing to him the joyful intelligence, he prostrated himself at the Doctor's feet, and exclaimed, "Oh, sir, every drop of my blood thanks you, for you have had mercy on every drop of it ! Wherever you go, I will be yours." With how much greater propriety may the Christian prostrate himself at the feet of Christ, and make use of similar language.—*Bible Illustrations.*

(c) "Holiness to the Lord !" where is that

inscription to be stamped now ! Not on the vestments of any Levitical order ; not on plates of sacerdotal gold, worn upon the forehead. Priest and Levite have passed by. The Jewish tabernacle has expanded into that world-wide brotherhood where whosoever doeth righteousness is accepted. Morning has risen into day. Are we children of that day ? For form, we have spirit ; for Gerizim and Zion, our common scenery. The ministry of Aaron is ended. His ephod, with its gold, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, and cunning work, has faded and dropped. The curious girdle and its chains of wreathen gold are broken. The breastplate of judgment that lay against his heart, and its fourfold row of triple jewels—of sardines, topaz, and carbuncle—of emerald, sapphire, and diamond—of ligure, agate, and amethyst—of beryl, onyx, and jasper—has been crushed and lost. The pomegranates are cast aside like untimely fruit. The golden bells are silent. Even the mitre, with its sacred signet, and the grace of the fashion of it, has perished. All the outward beauty and glory of that Hebrew worship which the Lord commanded Moses has vanished into the eternal splendours of the Gospel, and been fulfilled in Christ. What teaching has it left ? what other than this ?—that we are to engrave *our* "Holiness to the Lord," first on the heart, and then on all that the heart goes out into, through the brain and the hand : on the plates of gold our age of enterprise is drawing up from mines, and beating into currency ; on bales of merchandise and books of account ; on the tools and bench of every handicraft ; on your weights and measures ; on pen and plough and pulpit ; on the doorposts of your houses, and the utensils of your table, and the walls of your chambers ; on cradle and playthings and school-books ; on the locomotives of enterprise, and the bells of the horses, and the ships of navigation ; on music-halls and libraries ; on galleries of art, and the lyceum desk ; on all of man's inventing and building, all of his using and enjoying ; for all these are trusts in a stewardship, for which the Lord of the servants reckoneth.—*F. D. Huntington, D.D.*

(d) Christianity is not a sepulchral thing, a gloomy life, a depressed condition of social existence. It is impossible that it can be so as the world brands it, with such a prescription as this from an apostle's lips, "Rejoice evermore." True, the Christian has his sorrows ; but these are not unsweetened. True, the Christian life has its shadows and its showers ; but these are not unmingled with bright beams of heavenly light ; and the saddest aspects of a Christian's daily life are but the April showers of spring that usher in the approaching bright and beautiful summer—the everlasting and the heavenly sunshine. Christian life is not a penance, as the Romanist thinks it ; but a privilege, as God describes it. It is not a reluctant sacrifice wrung from us, but a joyous and freewill offering gladly and gratefully rendered by us. And, therefore, the

light of our life is not a dim, but a bright religious life. The injunction of our Apostle is, "Rejoice always;" and the prayer of the Apostle's Lord, "That My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." And Peter, catching up the thought of his Lord still shining with undiminished lustre on the leaves of memory, answers in his epistle, "Whom, having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing we rejoice

with joy unspeakable and full of glory." And the Apostle Paul, echoing the same grand sentiment, says, "We joy in God." "Rejoice; again I say, Rejoice." This shows us, that of all happy men upon earth the Christian should be happiest. His sorrows come from sin, his griefs spring from evil; his sunshine, his gladness, and his joy are the spontaneous and moral elements of his true Christian and holy life.—*John Cumming, D.D.*

## THE DEDICATION OF THE SECOND TEMPLE.

*Notes for Scripture Lesson. (Verses 16-22.)*

The new house at length was ready. It was larger than the Temple of Solomon (see article on Second Temple in any good Bible dictionary), though very far less gorgeous. Its size, however, was "not larger than an average parish church of the last century. Solomon's was smaller." (Article, "Temple of Zerubbabel," *Smith's Bibl. Dict.*) There is, too, a very great contrast between the number of sacrifices at the dedication of the two Temples (comp. Ezra vi. 17, with 2 Chron. vii. 5), as there is also between the gorgeousness of the ritual in one case, and its comparative plainness in the other. Each feature noted by Ezra is of interest and importance.

**I. The occasion was one of joy—the worship of God should be joyful.** Hebrew and Christian worship are joyful, because believers worship a revealed God of salvation. Heathen worship is a straining or groping of man after God (1 Kings xviii. 26-29). It cannot be joyful. But we worship a God of Love, who revealed Himself to the Hebrews in sacrifices and prophecy, and who reveals Himself to us in Jesus Christ, "full of beauty, truth, and grace." If we would see the gladness of the worship in the second Temple, let us turn to the 146th, 147th, and 148th Psalms, which were composed by, or under the direction of, Haggai and Zechariah, for the service of this house of God. The burden of Hebrew song is "Rejoice in the Lord!"

**II. The service was one for which all who had to take part in it had previously purified themselves** (ver. 20). All who have to take any part in the work of teaching, or worship of

God's house, should prepare themselves for it by communion with God, and a renewal of the covenant with Him to put away all iniquity.

**III. There were burnt offerings as a token of the consecration of the people** (see the title of these Psalms in the LXX.), heart and soul afresh to God (ver. 17, 1st part). Let us (1) glory in what God is to us, and (2) give our whole selves to God.

**IV. There were sin offerings**—"A sin offering for all Israel" (ver. 17). Every tribe was represented. These sin offerings were "but shadows of good things to come" (see Heb. x. 1-12; John i. 29). In Divine worship there should *always* be a recognition of sin, and of Christ's having "put away sin" by the sacrifice of Himself.

**V. There was the observance of the Passover** (Exod. xii.). Doubtless an effort was made to finish the Temple at the close of the year, that the feast, which celebrated the great national deliverance of the people, might naturally fall in place during the dedication ceremonies. Their national life was based on redemption. They loved God, *because* God loved them; this is the order now, and we cannot reverse it (1 John iv. 19).

**VI. The feast of unleavened bread was kept joyfully for seven days.** (1) A feast in token of national unity and fellowship; (2) of unleavened bread, in token of their desire to cultivate purity; (3) a feast in which, as of old, "the stranger" joined, if ready to separate himself to Israel's God (ver. 21; Exod. xii. 48, 49).

**VII. The new national life thus inaugurated had far less of pomp and**

show about it than were seen in the days of Solomon. But there was more of spiritual power (Hag. ii. 9). The people had been purified in the furnace

of affliction, and from this time idolatry was unknown among them. — *C. Clemance, D.D.*

## THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE.

### *Outline of Scripture Lesson. (Whole Chapter.)*

**I. The Jews had a truth to learn which God knew only captivity in a strange land would teach them.** That truth was, that national and individual prosperity depend on the maintenance of religious worship. The captivity had the desired effect; the people traced their fall to its real source (Ps. cxxxvii. 1, 2). Ages before, they, on looking back, had remembered other things (Num. xi. 4, 5), and would willingly return to the house of bondage for the sake of creature comforts. Long ages of national discipline and Divine teaching had taught them that men do not live by bread alone. (Comp. Deut. viii. 3 with Matt. iv. 4.) Now they remembered and sighed for the nourishment of their higher life. Instead of recalling, with tears, the land flowing with milk and honey, and their former political greatness, and the glory of their kings (as David and Solomon), they “wept when they remembered Zion.”

Bring out the province of memory, and how the character is indicated by that which memory recalls with most of joy or of sorrow. The day will come when the memory of each one will be most active, when the Lord will say to many an one, “Son, remember” (Luke xvi. 25).

**II. They showed how well they had learned this truth by at once, on their return, commencing the rebuilding of the Temple, and persevering with the work, in the midst of many difficulties and interruptions, for twenty-one years.** Let the teacher bring out the difference between the work of the people on coming out of the Egyptian house of bondage; and now, on returning from the Babylonian captivity, show how the different work is indicative of great progress in national sentiment and religious life. The old work showed that freedom

was then won by the sword; this, that the greatest freedom and happiness of a people are secured by the truth (John viii. 32), the central, liberty-winning truth being, There is one true and ever-living God, and that happy is the people whose God is the Lord (Ps. cxliv. 15).

So far, what has been said may be regarded as recapitulatory exercise.

**III. Their persevering, self-denying work was crowned with success—the Temple was at length finished.** The completion of great undertakings is a time of great interest. Take, as examples, some celebrated buildings, palaces, fortresses, exhibition buildings, &c. Will they answer the purpose for which they have been erected? Is the purpose one that warrants the expectation of the Divine blessing? If not (as the Tower of Babel), the building will presently become a monument of human folly (Ps. cxxvii. 1).

Bring out the purpose of this building, and show its importance, relatively, to other erections. The Temple was built before the walls of the city were repaired. It was the true rock of strength, the fortress, the spiritual Gibraltar, the key to the possession of the Promised Land. Why? (See Ps. xlvi.; xviii. 2, 3; lxxi. 3.)

**IV. It was meet that the opening services should be marked by the liveliest demonstrations of religious joy.**

1. For here was a vast work, pursued by a small number of people through many interruptions, and continued for many years—(during which those who assisted at the foundation, above twenty years before, were daily dying off)—brought to a successful close; while enemies and difficulties increased, the stimulating influence of the presence of the elders of the people diminished.

2. Not only was there the joy caused

by the ending of the work, joy caused by retrospective glances, but joy inflamed by the hope of the future. We are accustomed, in the opening of places of worship, to rejoice in the prospect of the truth that may be there proclaimed to future generations.

3. It was joy marked by feasting and song. Probably they sang Psalms cxlvi., cxlvii., cxlviii., which, in the Septuagint, are called Psalms of Haggai and Zechariah. Reference to these Psalms will show that joy was deep and religious; that they praised God as the Creator of the world, as the God of providence, and as the God of Israel, and (see Ps. cxlviii. 11, 12) that all classes and ages were to share in the joy and the song.

4. It was joy marked by the control of law and order. It was no wild bacchanalian revelry, but devout and reverential thanksgiving. There was in it the remembrance of former mercies (see vers. 20-22). Hence the acknowledgment of the God of the past as the God of the present, and the belief that He would be the God of the future.

V. In spirit and principle, this dedication of the Temple may be applied in the case of the opening of any build-

ing devoted to religious purposes. Such an event is an occasion for joy of the deepest and most holy kind. There is in it the grateful memory of the past, and believing hopefulness for the future. All places of prayer, and religious work in the world, are the true successors of this Temple, whose dedication we have been considering. They are designed to conserve and to promulgate that salvation which is of the Jews, and which, by type and ceremony, was first manifested by shadows in the past, but which now with clearer light has appeared unto all men.

VI We are engaged in rearing a Temple. It is not built of bricks and stones, but of living souls. In it are our sons and our daughters, polished after the similitude of a palace. (1.) Have we a place therein? (2.) Are we doing our utmost to bring others in? (3.) Let us not be content till every one in our class is built up into this spiritual temple. (4.) Let us also labour for the whole school, and for the world at large; till, as the glory of God filled the Temple of old, the "whole earth may be filled with His glory" in the reign of love, and truth, and salvation.—*J. Cowper Gray.*

## CHAPTER VII.

**CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.]** We now enter upon the second and concluding part of this book, which treats of the return of certain Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem under Ezra, and the reformation which he accomplished amongst the people (chap. vii. 10). The first section of this part gives the history of the return of Ezra and his company from Babylon to Jerusalem, with the names of "the chief of their fathers" and the numbers of the respective families (chaps. vii. and viii.). The present chapter contains—(i.) The genealogy of Ezra and a brief statement of his journey with others to Jerusalem (vers. 1-10). (ii.) The commission given by Artaxerxes the king to Ezra (vers. 11-26). (iii.) Ezra's praise to God for the favours received from the king (vers. 27, 28).

Ver. 1. Now after these things] Fifty-seven years had elapsed since the events recorded in the close of the preceding chapter. "Such gaps," as Schultz observes, "the ancient sacred history has again and again; it is silent respecting the times between Joseph and Moses, respecting the time passed by the generation rejected of God in the wilderness, respecting the time of the exile. There was lacking in these times useful material calculated for the edification of the congregation." Artaxerxes king of Persia] Heb. *Artachshasta*. Artaxerxes Longimanus, son of Xerxes and grandson of Darius, is meant. Ezra the son of Seraiah] "Ezra was probably the great-great-grandson of Seraiah; for the high priest Jeshua, who had gone to Jerusalem seventy-eight years before with Zerubbabel, was a grandson of Seraiah. One hundred and thirty years had already passed since the execution of the latter (2 Kings xxv. 18-21) in the year 588."—*Schultz*. According to the usage of the writers of Scripture, every descendant is designated a "son," and every progenitor, a "father."

Vers. 1-5] A number of generations are not mentioned between Ezra and Aaron. Three names are omitted between Ezra and Seraiah (ver. 1), and "in verse 3 six members of the line are passed over between Azariah and Meraioth (according to 1 Chron. vi. 7-10), without doubt only for the sake of brevity, as is frequently the case in the longer genealogies."

Ver. 6. A ready scribe in the law of Moses] "The word סֹפֵר means in older works

writer or secretary; but even as early as Jer. viii. 8, the lying pen of the סֹפֵר is spoken of, and here therefore סֹפֵר has already attained the meaning of one learned in the Scripture, one who has made the written law a subject of investigation. Ezra is, however, the first of whom the predicate הַסֹּפֵר, ὁ γραμματεὺς, is used as a title."—Keil. Which the Lord God of Israel had given] It thoroughly accords with the piety of Ezra to regard and speak of the law as the gift of God. And the king granted him all his request] "The question how this favouring of Ezra is related to the writing of Artaxerxes given in chap. iv., is best answered by the fact that Ezra's journey occurred somewhat later, that Artaxerxes, since he had been moved to that writing by his officials, had paid more attention to the Jews, and that he furthered Ezra's journey in order to strengthen the Jewish congregation; perhaps also in order to show thereby that he actually was ready to be as just as possible, notwithstanding the prohibition issued respecting the walls of the city. It is shown then by this approval that he would perhaps recall at a suitable time even that prohibition which indeed had been issued at first only provisionally."—Schultz. According to the hand of the Lord his God upon him] This expression is found only here and in vers. 9, 28; viii. 18; Neh. ii. 8, 18; and with slight variations in chap. viii. 22, 31; and it signifies, according to the favour and furtherance which God had granted to him.

Ver. 7. And there went up some of the children of Israel] &c. (Comp. chap. ii. 70.)

Ver. 9. For upon the first day of the first month] &c. The journey occupied exactly four months, which seems an unnecessarily long time. "The direct distance of Babylon from Jerusalem," says Rawlinson, "is no more than about five hundred and twenty miles; and it may therefore seem surprising that the journey should have occupied four months. But no doubt the route followed was that circuitous one by Carchemish and the Orontes valley, which was ordinarily taken by armies or large bodies of men, and which increased the distance to about nine hundred miles. Still the time occupied is long, and must be accounted for by the dangers alluded to in chap. viii. 22, 31, which may have necessitated delays and detours to avoid conflicts." Moreover, we read of one rest of three days by the river of Ahava (chap. viii. 15), and there might have been other rests during the journey.

Ver. 12. Artaxerxes, king of kings] One of the recognised titles of the Persian monarchs, to whom were subject a number of tributary sovereigns. Perfect peace] "Peace" has been supplied by the translators of the A.V., and that improperly, in the opinion of some Hebraists. The explanation of נָמִיר (from נָמַר = to complete) is difficult. Fuerst says it is the passive participle. Keil is inclined "to regard it as an adverb used adjectively: To the scribe in the law of God perfectly, for the perfect scribe, &c., corresponding with the translation of the Vulgate, *doctissimo*." The correct meaning is probably that which is given in the margin of the A.V., "Unto Ezra the priest, a perfect scribe of the law of the God of heaven." And at such a time] Rather: *et cetera*, and so forth. (Comp. chap. iv. 11.) The letter of the king is given in the Chaldee original.

Ver. 14. His seven counsellors] constituted the supreme court of the kingdom. (Comp. Esth. i. 14.) To inquire concerning Judah] &c. "Probably the commission was general to inquire into the state of the province. According to Xenophon (*Cyrop.* VIII., vi. 16), it was a part of the Persian system for the king to send an officer once a year into each province to inspect and report upon it."—Rawlinson. According to the law of thy God] &c. *i.e.* "righteously and justly, according to the principle of thy religion."

Vers. 15, 16. And to carry the silver and gold] &c. "Three kinds of offerings for the Temple are here spoken of: 1st, the gifts of the king and his counsellors for the service of the God of Israel; 2d, the gold and the silver that Ezra should obtain in the province of Babylon, *i.e.* by the collection which he was consequently empowered to make among the non-Israelite population of Babylon; 3d, the freewill offerings of his fellow-countrymen."—Keil.

Ver. 20. Out of the king's treasure house] *i.e.* the royal treasury. "The Persian system of taxing the provinces through the satraps involved the establishment in each province of at least one local treasury. Such treasuries are mentioned occasionally in Greek history (see *Arrian, Exp. Alex.* I. 17; III. 18, 19, &c.)."—Rawlinson.

Ver. 22. Here the limit is stated which the treasurers were not to exceed in their grants to Ezra. An hundred talents of silver] According to Bishop Cumberland's computation of the Hebrew silver talent, this would amount to about £35,350. According to Dr. Arbuthnot's tables it would amount to £34,218, 15s. But according to Mr. R. S. Poole ("Dict. of the Bible," articles, *Money*, and *Weights and Measures*), it would be as much as £40,000. But it is not certain that the Hebrew talent was meant. An hundred measures of wheat] Margin: Chald. *cors*. Cor is the later word for homer. It was equal to ten ephas or baths, almost two bushels (1 Kings v. 11; Ezek. xlv. 14). The bath was equal to seven and a half gallons, according to Dr. Arbuthnot; but, according to the Rabbinites, to between four and five gallons, while, according to Josephus, it was between eight and nine gallons. Wheat, wine, oil, and salt] were required by the Jews for their meat offerings; and "as the Persian tribute was paid partly in money and partly in kind, the treasuries would be able to supply them as readily as they could furnish money."

Ver. 23. Let it be diligently done] Keil translates, "completely done." So does Schultz also. Why should there be wrath] &c. (Comp. vi. 10.)

Ver. 24. We also certify you] or, "and to you it is made known." "The treasurers which are beyond the river" are still addressed. Or ministers] Rather, "and ministers." "The expression comprises any servants of the Temple who might have been omitted in the classes enumerated."—*Keil*. It shall not be lawful to impose] &c. In this respect "the decree of Artaxerxes was more favourable to the Jews than those of all previous Persian monarchs." Toll, tribute, or custom] (See notes on chap. iv. 13.)

Ver. 25. That is in thine hand] *i.e.* "which thou possessest." All the people that are beyond the river] is limited to Israelites or Jews by the following clause, all such as know the laws of thy God. And teach ye them that know them not] These words do "not refer to the heathen, but to born Israelites or Jews, who, living among the heathen, had not hitherto made the Mosaic law the rule of their lives. Such were the judges to constrain to the observance and obedience of the law.

"By granting these privileges, Artaxerxes was not only treading in the footsteps of Cyrus and Darius Hystaspes, but even going beyond these princes in granting to the Jews a jurisdiction of their own."—*Keil*.

Vers. 27, 28. Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers] &c. "This abrupt transition from the words of Artaxerxes to those of Ezra may be compared with the almost equally abrupt change in vi. 6. The language alters at the same time from Chaldee to Hebrew, continuing henceforth to be Hebrew till the close of the book."—*Rawlinson*.

Ver. 28. And hath extended mercy unto me before the king] *i.e.* hath awakened in him such a kind disposition towards me. And I gathered together] &c. Ezra regards this as a result of his being "strengthened." Chief men to go up with me] These chief men being heads of households, their families would accompany them to the land of their fathers.

## EZRA THE DISTINGUISHED.

(Verses 1-10.)

In this paragraph Ezra appears before us as—

**I. A man of distinguished ancestry.** "Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, &c." (vers. 1-5). He was able to trace his pedigree up to Aaron the high priest; and he was "descended from the heads of that line." To have descended from godly progenitors is a blessing of incalculable worth. This blessing comprises—

1. *The inspiration of noble examples.*
2. *The inheritance of excellent constitutional moral tendencies.* (a).
3. *The rich results of parental prayers.* (b).

"My boast is not that I deduce my birth  
From loins enthroned, and rulers of the  
earth;

But higher far my proud pretensions rise—  
The son of parents passed into the skies."

—*Cowper*.

**II. A man of distinguished attainments.**

1. Here are *distinguished attainments*. "This Ezra was a ready scribe." This does not mean merely a ready writer; but, as Bishop Patrick observes, "he calls himself a scribe, from his declaring and explaining the things contained in

the Scriptures. The word in the original signifies one skilled and learned in that which was the Book by way of eminence, a teacher and expounder of it; and he was a 'ready scribe,' because he was peculiarly expert and understanding in the law, both in matters which related to the priesthood, and to the civil authority."

2. Distinguished attainments *in a great subject*. "He was a ready scribe in the law of Moses." Ezra was famous for his learning and skill, not in any trivial matters, or in things of inferior importance, but in themes and things of the most vital and enduring interest. He was "mighty in the Scriptures." And, passing over the Jewish traditions concerning him in this respect, we may observe, quoting the words of Bishop Hervey, "that the pointed description of Ezra (vii. 6) as 'a ready scribe in the law of Moses,' repeated in 11, 12, 21, added to the information concerning him that 'he had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments' (vii. 10), and his commission to teach the laws of his God to such as knew them not (25), and his great diligence in reading the Scriptures to the people, all give the

utmost probability to the account which attributes to him a corrected edition of the Scriptures, and the circulation of many such copies. The books of Nehemiah and Malachi must indeed have been added later, possibly by Malachi's authority." (c).

3. Distinguished attainments in a great subject *by a great Author*. "He was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given." In the estimate of Ezra, the law was not a human code which originated with Moses; the Scriptures were not merely the richest treasures of their national literature, which had required many ages for their accumulation. They had God for their author; they were His special gift to His chosen people; they were sacred things to this earnest and reverent student of them.

**III. A man in the enjoyment of distinguished favour.** "This Ezra went up from Babylon, . . . and the king granted him all his request." It is probable that the officers of the Persian government in Syria were not faithfully and fully carrying out the decree of Darius as regards the grant of supplies for the Jewish worship at Jerusalem (chap. vi. 9, 10), and that Ezra, representing the elders of the Jews, requested the king to issue new commands concerning them; for the commission of Ezra from the king provides fully for these things (vers. 15-23). His request seems also to have been for permission for himself to go up to Jerusalem, and for all such as were disposed to accompany him, that they might be allowed to do so. And this pious and patriotic scribe stood so high in the estimation of Artaxerxes that "the king granted him all his request." That he should enjoy so much of the confidence and favour of such a monarch as Artaxerxes is a valuable testimony to the worth of Ezra. "The king's favour is toward a wise servant."

**IV. A man of distinguished influence.** "And there went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests," &c. (ver. 7). Ezra was trusted not only by the king and his counsellors, but by his own countrymen also, with

whom he had great influence. **This influence was over—**

1. *Various classes of men.* Priests, Levites, people of the other tribes, not set apart for religious services, and Nithinim, accompanied him to Jerusalem from Babylon.

2. *Large numbers of men.* Of all classes there were upwards of 1770 adult males in the party which went up to Jerusalem with Ezra; so that the total, including wives, children, and servants, would probably be from 8000 to 9000 souls. (d).

**V. A man of distinguished success.** We have an example of this in his journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. "He came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. For upon the first," &c. (vers. 8, 9). This journey was—

1. *Long.* About nine hundred miles by the route which they probably pursued.

2. *Difficult.* It was by no means an easy matter to conduct so large a number of persons, including many women and "little ones," through so long a journey in those times and countries. (Comp. chap. viii. 21.)

3. *Perilous.* They were in danger of being attacked by Arabian freebooters, by whom the country through which they had to travel was infested. (Comp. chap. viii. 22, 31.)

4. *Successful.* "On the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him."

**VI. A man of distinguished aim.** "Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord," &c. (ver. 10). We see that he aimed at—

1. *The acquisition of the highest knowledge.* "He had prepared"—set or fixed—"his heart to seek the law of the Lord." He resolutely sought thoroughly to know the Scriptures.

2. *The practice of the highest knowledge.* "And to do it." He endeavoured to conform his life to the law of Jehovah. (e).

3. *The impartation of the highest knowledge.* "And to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." By both pre-

cept and example he strove to bring the people to know and obey the Divine law. We must know ourselves what we would teach others; and if we would teach with practical effect, we must ourselves practise what we teach.

VII. A man of distinguished blessing. "The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him. . . . Came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him."

1. *The blessing of God rested upon him.* By reason of it he was protected in journeyings, and prospered in his undertakings.

2. *The blessing of God was acknowledged by him.* He traced his successes to their First Cause; and gratefully acknowledged the gracious providence of God in his life. (*f*).

We are all recipients of the manifold blessings of God; let us also heartily recognise them as such, and gratefully bless the Giver.

#### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) If you plant seeds for apple-stalks, you are obliged to graft every one of them; but if you take from a good apple-tree a cutting, it will grow up and bear the same kind of fruit which that tree bears. Now, I do not say that literally there is a transfer of qualities from parents to children, as there is a literal transfer of fruit from the original tree to the tree which is produced from a cutting, so that the apples are greenings or pippins according to the stock from which they sprung; but I believe it is substantially like that. I believe it is in the power of father and mother to rear the child so that from its earliest periods it shall be drawn by the Spirit of God.—*H. W. Beecher.*

Your father was a holy man, — will you undertake to *break the line of a holy succession*? Ought not the fame of his holiness to awaken your own religious concern? Are you prepared to make yourself the turning-point in the line of a pious ancestry? Beware lest you say in effect, "For generations my fathers have trusted in God and looked to Him for the light of their lives, but now I deliberately disown their worship and turn away from the God they loved." This you can say if you be so minded. God does not force Himself upon you. You may start a pagan posterity if you please.—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

(b) Though God has not bound Himself to hear the prayers of any one for the salvation of the soul of another, yet He frequently does so; and hence perhaps, though grace does not

run in the *blood*, yet we frequently see it runs in the *line*. Many more of the children of God's children prove gracious than those of others.—*Dr. Ryland.*

(c) That is a good day in which you learn something new of the Bible. Do not keep treading around in just the same place, reading the same Psalms of David over and over again because they are short, while you neglect other portions of the Gospel. If your friend writes you a letter written on four sides of a letter-sheet, you do not stop after you have read the first page. You do not treat him well unless you read the second page, the third page, and the fourth page, as well as the first. God our Father has written us a very long letter, all full of affection and counsel; and what a mean thing it is if we only read one or two of the pages when all of them demand our attention. How many verses could you quote to me from Obadiah, or Habakkuk, or Nahum, or Leviticus? Not one. Find out what part of the Bible you know the least about, and study it. Do not spend your entire time under one tree when there is around about you a great orchard.—*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*

(d) The greatest works that have been done, have been done by the ones. The hundreds do not often do much, the companies never do; it is the units, just the single individuals that, after all, are the power and the might. Take any Church—there are multitudes in it; but it is some two or three that do the work. Look on the Reformation!—there might be many reformers, but there was but one Luther: there might be many teachers, but there was but one Calvin. Look ye upon the preachers of the last age, the mighty preachers who stirred up the churches!—there were many coadjutors with them; but, after all, it was not Whitefield's friends, nor Wesley's friends, but the men themselves, that did it. Individual effort is, after all, the grand thing. A man alone can do more than a man with fifty men at his heels to fetter him. Look back through all history. Who delivered Israel from the Philistines?—it was solitary Samson. Who was it gathered the people together, to rout the Midianites?—it was one Gideon, who cried, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" Who was he that smote the enemy?—It was Shamgar, with his ox-goad; or it was an Ehud, who, with his dagger, put an end to his country's tyrant. Separate men—Davids with their slings and stones—have done more than armies could accomplish.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

(e) I ask you to remember, at home, in the shop, and in the counting-house, that you are epistles of Christ; and that in your spirit, habits, and character, His very thoughts are to be translated into forms which common men can read and understand. You would condemn with heaviest censure the presumptuous hand which wilfully corrupted the text

of the printed book in which the acts and thoughts of God are preserved for the instruction of the world; you would condemn with censure hardly less severe the carelessness which should omit chapter after chapter, and give false readings instead of true. But *you* are the living revelation of God to mankind. Through you it is meant that the Holy Ghost should speak, not in mere words, but in acts, which are more intelligible and emphatic than words. The very life of the Spirit of God is intended to be manifest in your conduct, as the life of a plant is manifested in the flower, and the life of a tree in the fruit. Are you giving a true revelation to mankind, or are you perverting, corrupting, falsifying it?

Your religious emotions irreligious men can know nothing of, but your virtues and vices are a language plain and familiar to them as their mother tongue. They can read these without note or comment. They can judge of the Divine inspiration of these without any argument from miracles. As the style of a great artist is re-

cognised in the drawing and colouring of his pictures; as the genius of Mozart or Beethoven may be known at once by the movement of the melody and the flowing sweetness or mysterious complexity of the chorus, so—if you are really God's workmanship—there ought to be the manifested impress of the Divine hand in your character, and to those who know you well, your life ought to be plainly the revelation of a Divine idea.—*R. W. Dale, M.A., D.D.*

(*f*) When men have had a successful season in merchandise, they are apt to attribute it to their own acumen or their partners in business. When men have had a successful season in husbandry, they attribute it to the phosphates used, or to the agricultural journal that gave them the right kind of information. How seldom it is that men first of all go to the Lord, who is the owner of the field, and who presides over all merchandise, and who gives us all our worldly as well as our spiritual success!—*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*

## STUDYING, PRACTISING, AND TEACHING THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.

(Verse 10.)

The conduct of Ezra as described here is eminently worthy of imitation. Let us contemplate its chief features—

**I. The acquisition of Divine truth for himself.** “For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord.” In aiming at the attainment of a knowledge of the Divine law, Ezra adopted—

1. *The right method.* He sought for the knowledge which he desired; he put forth efforts to acquire it. Would any one attain a competent knowledge of any science? He must seek it, he must read, think, experiment, &c. Would any one “know the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make him wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”? He must “search the Scriptures,” &c. Personal effort is indispensable.

2. *The right manner.* Ezra sought for this knowledge resolutely and earnestly. “He had prepared”—*i.e.*, fixed or set—“his heart to seek the law of the Lord.” He who would seek successfully must seek resolutely. It is the earnest student who overcomes obstinate difficulties, disentangles bewildering perplexities, and makes glorious discoveries. Moreover, though it is not mentioned in this verse, we have abundant evidence of the fact that Ezra was a *devout* stu-

dent of the Scriptures. In this province of investigation, reverence is as important as earnestness. “The meek will He guide in judgment,” &c. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him,” &c.

3. *The right place.* Ezra sought “the law of the Lord” in the Holy Scriptures. Divine truth may be discovered in the material creations of God, in the revolutions of human history, &c. But he who would acquaint himself with moral law, let him “search the Scriptures;” he who would know the redemptive truth of God, let him study the Bible.

**II. The embodiment of Divine truth in his life.** Ezra had set his heart not only to seek the law of the Lord, but also “to *do* it.” He translated his discoveries into deeds. The truth which he acquired by his heart and mind, he practised in his life. In this also he is an example to us. And the importance of imitating him in this respect will appear if we consider that *knowledge misapplied is—*

1. *Useless.* Knowledge of the laws of nature benefits us only as it leads us to act in harmony with those laws. And knowledge of Gospel truth becomes a blessing to us only as we receive it into

our heart by faith, and give practical expression to it in our lives. "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven," &c. (Matt. vii. 21-27). It is the "doer of the work" that is "blessed in his deed" (Jas. i. 25). (a).

2. *An occasion of condemnation.* "That servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes," &c. (Luke xii. 47, 48). (b).

III. The communication of Divine truth to others. Ezra had set his heart also "to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." A solemn obligation rests upon man not only to acquire truth, but also to impart it. He who has learned of others must himself in his turn become a teacher of others. Here is the Divine law on the question: "Freely ye have received, freely give."

"Thyself and thy belongings  
Are not thine own so proper, as to waste  
Thyself upon thy virtues, them on thee.  
Heaven doth with us, as we with torches do:  
Not light them for themselves; for if our  
virtues

Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike  
As if we had them not. Spirits are not finely  
touched,

But to fine issues; nor nature never lends  
The smallest scruple of her excellence,  
But, like a thrifty goddess, she determines  
Herself the glory of a creditor,  
Both thanks and use."—*Shakespeare.*

"Measure for Measure," i. 1.

Ezra first learned the truth for himself, then practised it in his own life, and then taught it to others. He taught others both by his speech and by his action. Merely verbal teaching will not bear comparison with that which is also of the character and conduct. The latter is—

1. *More intelligible.* Minds which would utterly fail to follow our arguments can understand our actions.

2. *More continuous.* Instruction by means of sermons or lessons is necessarily occasional, but the teaching of the life is constant. (c).

3. *More influential.* "How forcible are right words!" But how much more forcible are right works! Ezra's power as an expository preacher was great, as we see from Neh. viii.; but his power

as a holy and zealous man was greater. And it seems to us that much of his power as a preacher arose from the saintliness and strength of his character. (d).

Let all Christians, but especially Christian preachers and teachers, copy the example of Ezra, and first study the Scriptures for themselves, then live the Scriptures for themselves, and then teach the Scriptures to others.

### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) As compared with professions, good deeds are put into ever-lustrous eminence, both by their solid quality, and by that grand refutation of all talking hypocrisy and ceremonial cant, from the mouth of the Judge Himself, "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father." We cannot be wrong—if there is such a thing as truth in God's universe, we must be right—in esteeming one palpable and ponderable action in Christ's name before a library of dogmatic *credos*, subscription to the straitest ecclesiastical vows, or the handsomest adjustment of the mantle of public conformity. If we must have one without the other, an acre of statements must be let go rather than an ounce of life.—*F. D. Huntington, D.D.*

I beseech you more earnestly endeavour to reduce the things you know to practice. Nothing can be more absurd than to content ourselves with only a notional knowledge of practical matters. We should think so in other cases; as if any man should satisfy himself to know the use of food, but furnish himself by never eating any, when he hath it at hand! Oh, what holy and pleasant lives should we lead in this world, if the temper and complexion of our souls did but correspond to the things we know. The *digesting our food* is what God eminently calls for.—*John Howe.*

(b) The more any one doth only *notionally* know in the matters of religion, so as that the temper of his spirit remains altogether unsuitable to the design and tendency of the things known, the more he hath lying ready to come in judgment against him; and if, therefore, he count the things excellent which he knows, and only please himself with his own knowledge of them, it is but a like case as if a man should be much delighted to behold his own condemnation written in a fair and beautiful hand; or as if one should be pleased with the glittering of that sword which is directed against his own heart; and so little pleasant is the case of him who thus satisfies his own curiosity with the concerns of eternal life and death, that any serious person would tremble on his behalf, at that wherein he takes pleasure, and apprehend

just horror in that state of the case whence he draws matter of delight.—*Ibid.*

(c) If we distinguish man as a creature of language, and thus qualified to communicate himself to others, there are in him two sets or kinds of language,—one which is voluntary in the use, and one that is involuntary; that of speech in the literal sense, and that expression of the eye, the face, the look, the gait, the motion, the tone or cadence, which is sometimes called the natural language of the sentiments. This natural language, too, is greatly enlarged by the conduct of life, that which, in business and society, reveals the principles and spirits of men. Speech, or voluntary language, is a door to the soul, that we may open or shut at will; the other is a door that stands open evermore, and reveals to others constantly, and often more clearly, the tempers, tastes, and motives of their hearts. Within, as we may represent, is character, charging the common reservoir of influence, and through these twofold gates of the soul, pouring itself out on the world. Out of one it flows at choice, and whensoever we purpose to do good or evil to men. Out of the other it flows each moment, as light from the sun, and propagates itself in all beholders.

The door of involuntary communication, I have said, is always open. Of course we are communicating ourselves in this way to others at every moment of our intercourse or presence with them. But how very seldom, in comparison, do we undertake by means of speech to influence others! Even the best Christian, one who most improves his opportunities to do good, attempts but seldom to sway another by voluntary influence, whereas he is all the while shining as a luminous object unawares, and communicating of his heart to the world.—*H. Bushnell, D.D.*

(d) If every disciple is to be an "epistle known and read of all men," what shall we expect but that all men will be somehow affected by the reading? Or, if he is to be a light in the world, what shall we look for, but that others, seeing his good works, shall glorify God on his account? How often is it seen, too, as a fact of observation, that one, or a few good men, kindle at length a holy fire in the community in which they live, and become the leaven of a general reformation! Such men give a more vivid proof in their persons of the reality of religious faith, than any words or arguments could yield. They are active; they endeavour, of course, to exert a good voluntary influence; but still their chief power lies in their holiness, and the sense they produce in others of their close relation to God.

. . . Where the direct or active influence of men is supposed to be great, even this is due, in a principal degree, to that insensible influence by which their arguments, reproofs, and persuasions are secretly invigorated. It is not mere words which turn men; it is the heart mounting uncalled into the expression of the features: it is the eye illuminated by reason—the look beaming with goodness; it is the tone of the voice, that instrument of the soul, which changes quality with such amazing facility, and gives out in the soft, the tender, the tremulous, the firm, every shade of emotion and character. And so much is there in this, that the moral stature and character of the man that speaks are likely to be well represented in his manner. If he is a stranger, his way will inspire confidence and attract good will. His virtues will be seen, as it were, gathering round him to minister words and forms of thought, and their voices will be heard in the fall of his cadences.—*Ibid.*

## THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

(Verse 10.)

This learned and pious priest is an eminent model for the study of those who are engaged in the public service of God. Born in Babylon, he nevertheless became an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile. His zeal for the pure worship of God—for the reformation of social manners and faithful administration of the law; his personal consecration, his profound study of the sacred writings, his deep views of the evil of sin, his power with God in prayer, his personal humility and true nobleness of character, entitle him to rank among the most illustrious of God's worthies in the ancient Church.

The text points out some indispensable qualifications for an able minister of the New Testament.

### I. Devotedness to God's Word.

1. The minister is called to this; it is the indispensable requirement of his office.

2. Its inexhaustible riches require profound and constant research.

3. Prayer is absolutely necessary for the right understanding of the Scriptures.

### II. Personal religion.

1. Without this all other qualifications will prove unavailing.

2. Its influence upon the minister's

own heart and life is necessary to his success.

3. Its power over others.

### III. Public instruction.

1. Its subjects. Scripture :—God in Christ, sin, salvation.

2. Its spirit. Dependent on Divine aid, faithful, bold.

3. Its manner. Simple, unaffected, earnest, practical, affectionate. — *The Preacher's Portfolio*.

## DIVINE SEQUENCE.

(Verse 10.)

In most operations due sequence is of as great importance, in order to success, as correct action or proper quality. To transpose the order in a succession of processes is certain failure. How manifestly fatal as to the result, for a farmer to sow before ploughing, or to harrow before sowing! How vain the blacksmith's labour if he smite the iron first, and then make it hot! Everything in its due order is a universal law. It applies to Sabbath school teaching as inexorably as to other matters, and to ignore it is culpable folly. The law of true sequence in this case is plainly taught in the Word of God, and is forcibly illustrated in the conduct of Ezra.

**I. There must be diligent searching for the law of God.** "Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord." Teachers must know before they can teach, and there is need for searching in order to knowledge. "Search the Scriptures" is the first step in the Divine sequence. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." And for effective teaching, to head-knowledge there must be heart-sympathy.

**II. There must be a hearty doing of the discovered will.** Ezra prepared his heart not only to seek, but "to do" the law of the Lord, and this is the second process in the Divine order. Alas! for him who seeks to teach others laws which he does not himself obey, and to enforce commands which he himself defies! Doing, moreover, stands in

double relation to knowing and teaching. "If any man will *do* His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God" (John vii. 17). Hence its importance in relation to knowledge. It is also indispensable to true teaching; for by our lives we must teach, even though we be very unskilful with our tongues. "Whosoever shall do and teach, shall be called **great** in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. v. 19).

**III. Then may we teach the law of the Lord.** This is the last step in the Divine sequence; and how firm a foundation will the teaching rest upon if the sequence has been duly observed! Knowledge treasured in the heart and acted in the life will give power and energy to the teachings, such as can in no other way be gained. How forcible will such teaching be—how irresistible! What efficacy the observance of this Divine sequence gave to Ezra's teaching may be learned from his subsequent history, for all the congregation were by his words convinced of their sin, and truly repenting, they cried, "As thou hast said, so must we do" (chap. x. 12), and they did it. So will our scholars act, if we faithfully fulfil the Divine conditions. Let us give heed to this sequence. It is taught in many parts of Scripture; but let Ezra's embodiment of it make it plain. Let his example stir our emulation, and his success whet our desire for a like result.—*B. P. P., in The Sunday School Teacher*.

## THE COMMISSION OF ARTAXERXES TO EZRA.

(Verses 11–26.)

**I. The granting of this commission.** This letter, conveying such large powers, was given—

1. *In answer to the request of Ezra.* We see this from ver. 6: "the king granted him all his request;" and from

ver. 28: God "hath extended mercy unto me before the king and his counsellors," &c. It was a courageous thing for Ezra to make such a request before such an assembly (comp. Neh. ii. 2; Esth. iv. 11); and the fact that it was granted is a forcible testimony to the very high esteem in which he was held.

2. *By the supreme authority of the empire.* "Thou art sent of the king and of his seven counsellors" (ver. 14). "God hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes" (ver. 28). Thus the commission carried the greatest weight and importance.

**II. The articles of this commission.**

1. *Those which are addressed to Ezra.*  
 (1.) *Permission for him to go up to Jerusalem with as many of his fellow-countrymen as wished to do so.* "I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel," &c. (ver. 13). This permission was necessary to enable them to go forth, because they were captives. And it was simply a cordial permission; it was not a sentence of banishment from Babylon. The Jews were not sent away, but freely allowed to go if they desired to do so. (2.) *Authority to investigate the affairs of those Jews who were already settled in their own land.* "Thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to inquire," &c. (ver. 14). The subject of the inquiry is not stated; and it cannot be determined whether it referred to their general condition and progress, or more particularly to their religious condition. But the rule by which the inquiry was to be conducted is clearly laid down: "according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand." Thus the Divine law was honoured by the Persian monarch and his supreme council. (3.) *Authority to receive, convey, and distribute money and other valuables for the worship of Jehovah at Jerusalem* (vers. 15-19). Notice—(i.) The treasures committed to him. "The silver and gold which the king and his counsellors freely offered," &c. (ver. 15). The contributions of money which the non-Israelite population in all the province of Babylon, and such Jews as elected still to remain in Babylon, were

disposed freely to contribute for the worship of the God of Israel. "And all the silver and gold that thou canst find," &c. (ver. 16). And certain vessels which had been given for use in the Temple-service at Jerusalem. "The vessels also that are given thee," &c. (ver. 19). It is probable that the sacred vessels which Zerubbabel had taken to Jerusalem were inadequate to their requirements at the great religious festivals. (ii.) The use to be made of these treasures. The vessels were to be delivered up in the Temple to the proper persons for use in its services. "The vessels . . . deliver thou before the God of Jerusalem." The money was to be employed in the purchase of animals and other things for religious sacrifices. "That thou mayest buy speedily with this money bullocks," &c. (ver. 17). And the residue of the money was to be appropriated to such religious uses as seemed good to Ezra and to his brethren. "And whatsoever shall seem good to thee and to thy brethren," &c. (ver. 18). (4.) *Authority to obtain further needful supplies from the royal treasury in Syria.* "And whatever more shall be needful for the house of thy God," &c. (ver. 20). The requirements at Jerusalem could not be fully known by Ezra until he had looked into the state of affairs there; hence this warrant concerning further supplies was both thoughtfully and generously given. And such a use of royal revenues was both wise and worthy in the highest degree. (5.) *Authority to appoint magistrates and judges with full judicial powers.* "And thou Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges," &c. (vers. 25, 26). Observe: (i.) Their jurisdiction was over the Jews and the proselytes to the Jewish religion. They were to "judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God," &c. (ii.) Full power was granted to them for maintaining their authority and enforcing their decisions. They were authorised to inflict the severest penalties which the law prescribed. "Whosoever will not do the law of thy God," &c. (ver. 26). They were "re-

sponsible to the king alone for the exercise of their authority."

2. *Those which are addressed to the Persian treasurers in Syria.* "And I, even I Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers which are beyond the river," &c. (vers. 21-24). These commands refer to two things—

1. *To contributions which they were to make to Ezra.* They were to furnish him with certain supplies for the service of the Temple of the God of heaven, according to his request. (1.) These supplies were liberal. "Unto an hundred talents of silver," &c. (ver. 22, and see explanatory note). (2.) These supplies were to be quickly and fully furnished. "Whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done speedily. . . . Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be completely done," &c. (3.) The reason assigned for furnishing these supplies is significant. "For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?" This inquiry implies a conviction of several things:—*e.g.*, that the God of heaven is almighty; that the neglect of His worship was likely to awaken His anger; that His anger should be earnestly dreaded and deprecated; and that a liberal regard for His worship was likely to secure His favour. 2. *To exemptions from taxation which they were to make.* Every minister of the Temple, from the high priest to the humblest of the Nethinim, was to be entirely relieved of government taxation. "Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites," &c. (ver. 24). This was at once a liberal favour and an honourable distinction for all those whom it concerned.

This official letter reflects very great credit upon Artaxerxes. It is, as M. Henry observes, "to the praise of this heathen king, that he honoured the God of Israel though His worshippers were a despicable handful of poor men, who were not able to bear the charges of their own religion, and were now his vassals, and that, though he was not wrought upon to quit his own superstitions, yet he protected and encouraged the Jews in

their religion, and did not only say, 'Be you warmed, and be you filled,' but gave them such things as they needed."

### III. The spirit of this commission.

The letter indicates clearly a spirit of—

1. *Great reverence for God.* Thrice it speaks of Him as "the God of heaven," thus showing that Jehovah was regarded by the king not as a mere local deity, but as the Supreme Being. And the inquiry, "Why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?" implies (as we have mentioned above) certain important convictions concerning Jehovah, God of Israel. (a).

2. *Profound respect for the law of God.* "According to the law of thy God which is in thine hand" (ver. 14). "Do after the will of your God" (ver. 18). "Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be completely done," &c. (ver. 23). Ezra is commissioned to teach those persons the laws of God who did not know them (ver. 25). And, according to ver. 26, the law of Jehovah was made the law of Artaxerxes so far as the Jews were concerned. "The law of thy God, and the law of the king." (b).

3. *Sincere regard for the worship of God* (vers. 15-24). The munificence of the royal grant for this worship indicates the depth and sincerity of his regard for it.

4. *Hearty appreciation of the character of a good man.* That this large and liberal commission was granted to Ezra in answer to his request is an evidence—(1.) That the life of Ezra must have been distinguished by wisdom, uprightness, and piety. (2.) That Artaxerxes sincerely appreciated the wisdom and worth of Ezra, for in honouring him the king seems to have taken pleasure. This letter is greatly to the praise of both the monarch of Persia and the scribe of the law of Jehovah. (c).

### CONCLUSION :

The liberal gifts of Artaxerxes for the support of the worship of God may be exhibited as—

1. *A rebuke to the parsimony of many Christians in this respect.*

2. *An example to all Christians. (d).*

## ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) How should we reverence that God that hath a throne encompassed with such glorious creatures as angels, whose faces we are not able to behold though shadowed in assumed bodies! How should we fear the Lord of Hosts, that hath so many armies at His command in the heavens above, and in the earth below, whom He can dispose to the exact obedience of His will! How should men be afraid to censure any of His actions, to sit judge of their Judge, and call Him to an account at their bar! How should such an earthworm, a mean animal as man, be afraid to speak irreverently of so great a King! Not to fear Him, not to reverence Him, is to pull His throne from under Him, and make Him of a lower authority than ourselves, or any creature that we reverence more.—*S. Charnocke, B.D.*

(b) We cannot be too strongly impressed with the goodness or benevolence of the Divine law. Right and good are correlative ideas, but we are not equally affected by them. More spontaneously can we conclude that all good is right, than that all right is good. And we more slowly confess the good of law, because we commonly regard law itself as restraint rather than as protection. We forget that it is far more restraint upon others than upon ourselves, and that our protection is in that restraint. Every interdict is on all, and each one obtains the benefit. Every obligation binds the whole race to the security and welfare of the individual. The best definition of liberty is, protection from wrong. And if we inspect the great social law, what is it but a fence and safeguard thrown around our dearest, most precious, interests? Its heed holds back that which receives every denouncement, when we call it lawless. Its observance defends the allegiance of our household, the sanctity of our life, the legitimacy of our offspring, the possession of our store, the reputation of our character, even to the proscription and to the driving from the heart of any secret wish that might seek to injure us. It sets a seal upon all. Our forbearance to aggrieve others, which must be harmful to ourself, is repaid by forbidding any grievance against our welfare from the millions upon millions who might otherwise inflict it. The duty which every man owes to love us as himself, is a blessed and rich return of our duty thus ourselves to love every man. The rule commands and obliges every man to love me, to uphold me,—invests him as my brother, authorises him as my keeper, arms him as my defender, pledges him as my surety, adorns him as my example, couples him as my co-heir. It is the law of love. It is the perfect commutative justice. How benign must be the universal regulation, all whose requirements, bearings, consequences, motives, aims, are fulfilled by love! The same

reflections are appropriate with respect to the claims of the Deity. . . . Let us honour law as the crowning blessing of blessings. Let us remember that intellectual creatureship without it is as inconceivable as it would be insupportable. Let us acknowledge it as the most sublime of ideas, the true exponent of happiness, the proper basis of dignity, the exclusive shield of freedom, the pure fountain of goodwill,—inaugurating truth in its state, decking benevolence in its majesty, lifting right to its throne, and then proclaiming with imperial authority that all this is but God, and that, therefore, there is none good but One, that is God!—*R. W. Hamilton, LL.D., D.D.*

(c) There is something in a holy life which wonderfully conciliates the minds of men. At first, indeed, like a strong influx of light, it offends their eyes; and the beholders, unable to bear the effulgence of its beams, turn away from it, or perhaps desire its utter extinction. But when it has shone for a long time before them, and they have had sufficient opportunity to contemplate its worth, they are constrained to acknowledge that “the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour;” and they begin to venerate the character, whose virtues at first were occasions of offence.—*C. Simeon, M.A.*

(d) In collecting money for the repairs of the Temple, which Athaliah and her sons had dilapidated, the good priest did a thing worth noticing. He had a chest placed right alongside the brazen altar in front of the Temple, and in the lid of the chest was a hole bored, and into the hole the priests, selected for the purpose, dropped the coins which the people brought, either as their half-shekel tax, or as the offering for vows, or as a freewill offering to the Temple of Jehovah. When I read this story and then read from Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians, “Upon the first day of the week” (the Lord’s-day, mind you!) “let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him,” I cannot help thinking that *giving is a part of worship!* Close alongside of the altar, where the type of the Lamb of God was offered up, was the money chest. How exalted giving to the Lord’s cause is in this light! And Paul calls it Sunday work, puts it with prayer, and praise, and Bible instruction, and all that is improving to the soul. I take it that if all Christians in our land would entertain the notion of Jehoiada and Paul about giving to the Lord (and it is not their notion, but the Holy Ghost’s), our spiritual temple would not be so dilapidated—thousands would flow forth from willing hearts where now hundreds are squeezed out. Take the idea, my brother with the long purse; yes, and my brother with the short purse, too. Make your giving a part of your worship, and then thank Jehoiada and Paul, but above all the Lord, for making your Christian life the happier.—*Dr. Crosby.*

## REASONS FOR ACTIVE DEVOTEDNESS TO THE CAUSE OF GOD.

(Verse 23.)

Here Artaxerxes issues a decree, gives wealth, displays great zeal for God, and as though ambitious to sink the monarch in the preacher, exhorts to diligence and fervour in the work. "Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven," &c. We may well sit at the feet of this lord of one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, and learn from heathen lips the extent of our duty and the nature of our obligations. We plead for missions.

I. To assign some reasons for active devotedness to the cause of God and truth in the world.

1. *From the Divine authority by which it is enjoined.* It "is commanded by the God of heaven." We love to see the estimate of Christian duties from the men of the world, who, while they are blind as bats in discerning their own defects, are clear-sighted as eagles to mark the inconsistencies of the professed followers of Christ. They often take a just measure of our obligations, and reason with wonderful exactness and form just conclusions, from the principles which we lay down, as to the course which we ought to follow,—just as Artaxerxes did here. The text is remarkable from the quarter whence it comes; not from the hovel of poverty, but from the throne of power; not from one who prophesied in sackcloth, but from one clothed in the purple and fine linen of royal houses.

The law of love to the perishing heathen is clearly laid down. We labour under no uncertainty upon the subject. We are not left to the trembling ifs and conjectures of mere circuitous and inductive reasoning, but the rule is express and final: "Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother." The same law which says, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart," says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." We should like to see inscribed over all our missionary institutions the law, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." The same God who bids

us "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ" that we may be saved, bids us "Go into all the world," &c. God makes man the medium of His blessings to man. He blesses us by making us blessings. The harvest of immortal souls is to be gathered in, but human hands are to be employed in the work. The scattered flock of Christ, wandering upon the dark mountains of the Eastern and Western world, claim your ready aid, and Jesus commissions you to bring them into the fold.

2. *From the urgent necessity which exists for your exertions.* "In Judah was God known; His name was great in Israel;" but His spiritual claims were unknown and disregarded everywhere else. And the Gospel cannot be proclaimed in the heathen world except Christians proclaim it; for "how shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?" &c. (Rom. x. 14, 15). We cannot plead ignorance of the state of the heathen world, or of the religious destitution of the heathen without the Gospel. It was never safe to use this plea as an excuse for indifference, but it is wholly impossible to urge it now. "We know that the whole world lieth in wickedness." "We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain," &c. The islands and continents of the kingdoms under darkness have been completely explored. The reports of travellers, merchants, missionaries, and scientific men only confirm the testimony of Scripture as to the moral misery and degradation of mankind without the Gospel. Where Christianity is not, the race is stationary, if not retrograde; social life loses its security and charm, &c.

3. *From the fearful consequences of the neglect of this duty.* "For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?" The king feared God's anger, and apprehended that the neglect of Zion's interests would be fatal. He could not be ignorant of the ruin that had overtaken the Pharaohs

of Egypt, Sennacherib of Assyria, and the monarchs of Babylon; and he trembled for himself, for his sons, and for the future stability of the Persian throne.

It is not safe for *individuals* to oppose the kingdom of Christ. They who "break His bands asunder," do it at their own peril. And there is no neutrality; not to assist is to oppose; not to seek Christ is to neglect Him. Every one of us is taking a side—for Christ against Satan, or for Satan against Christ. It is not safe for *churches* to do so. What has become of the Jewish church? of the seven churches of Asia? &c. Their golden lamps have been extinguished. It is not safe for *nations* to neglect the interests of religion. "The nation and kingdom that will not serve Thee shall perish," whether that nation be Persia or Judea, Carthage or Rome, Spain or England. I should tremble for Britain's safety, if she forgot her obligations to the God of the Bible, and failed to pay some small fraction of the mighty debt she owes to the Providence that has exalted her, by extending the Gospel. God has not raised her so high for any mean and ignoble purpose. He has not given her the empire of the seas, and a

voice among the nations at which the mightiest tremble, and an extent of colonial territory heretofore unknown, merely for purposes of national aggrandisement or personal pride; but to render us, as we hope, the world's benefactors, the heralds of the Cross, the willing harbingers of the onward triumphs of the Prince of Peace. Fulfilling this duty, Britain stands: failing to fulfil it, Britain falls; for God's wrath will be against the realm of the Queen and her sons.

4. *From the success which has attended the fulfilment of this duty.*

II. To offer some suggestions as to the spirit and mode in which this work should be carried on.

1. *Earnestly, without remissness.* "Let it be diligently done." Learn a lesson from the activity of the opposite party. The infidel and socialist come into your workshops and manufactories. The emissaries of the Papacy are not idle. Popery is fighting, not for existence, but for dominion.

2. *Prayerfully, without pride.*

3. *Speedily, without delay.*

• • • • •

—Samuel Thodey.

## THE DECREE OF ARTAXERXES.

(Verse 23.)

The words before us breathe a spirit which we should scarcely have expected to find in a heathen prince; but it is remarkable that some of the richest effusions of piety in the whole Scriptures proceeded from heathen monarchs, *e.g.*, Darius and Nebuchadnezzar. To make a due improvement of the words before us we shall consider them—

I. In reference to the Jewish Church.

1. *The state of the Jewish Church at this time is not unlike to that in which it was in the days of Ezra.* Though the Temple worship was restored, it was carried on by the Jews without any zeal for God's honour, or any of that spirituality of mind which is the very essence of all acceptable worship. Nor was the

law of God regarded amongst them with any just measure of submission; for, in direct opposition to its most authoritative dictates, they formed connections with the heathen round about them, &c. (chap. ix. 1-9). So at this time the Jewish people are at a very low ebb, both in respect of morals and religion. . . . It is impossible to behold them in their religious services, and not see how thick a veil is yet upon their hearts. Nor do they manifest any respect for their own law in its sublimer precepts. Of real holiness of heart and life they are ignorant in the extreme.

2. *But to us is given, no less than to Ezra, a command to advance their welfare.* Ezra received a commission from Artaxerxes to go and rectify the abuses

which obtained at Jerusalem, &c. And have we no command to seek the welfare of that degraded people? Are we not told what God's purpose is respecting them; namely, to "raise up the tabernacle of David," &c.? (Amos. ix. 11). This is God's express command to us strangers of the Gentiles: "The sons of strangers shall build up thy walls," &c. (Isa. lx. 10-12). With their *material* temple we have nothing to do; but for the erection of God's spiritual temple amongst them we are bound to labour, proclaiming to them the advent of their Messiah, saying, "Behold your salvation," &c. (Isa. lxii. 11; xl. 9).

3. *In this work we should engage with all diligence.* It is not to be effected by good wishes merely, but by great exertions. It was not without great exertions on the part of men that the Gentiles were converted to the faith of Christ; and the same kind of efforts which the apostles made for the conversion of the Gentiles we are to make for the restoration of the Jews to the favour of their God. This is our duty. God has told us that He has made us the depositaries of His Gospel, not for our benefit merely, but for the benefit of His outcast people: "As ye in times past," &c. (Rom. xi. 30, 31).

**II. In reference to the Church which is amongst us.**

1. *Ye, brethren, need to have God's work advanced in the midst of you.* Ye are God's house (Heb. iii. 6); ye also are called the temples of God, in which He lives and dwells (2 Cor. vi. 16). But in whom is God honoured as He ought to be? In whom are found sacrifices so pure, so spiritual, so abundant, as God calls for at our hands? Truly there is much amiss in all of us; much evil to be rectified, and much defective to be supplied.

2. *I call upon you, then, to engage in the Lord's work with your whole hearts.* We will suppose that you are built upon the Lord Jesus Christ, as the foundation which God has laid in Zion (Isa. xxviii. 16). But no man is contented with having laid a foundation; he proceeds to build upon it, and never considers his work as finished till he has brought

forth the top-stone. So it must be in this spiritual building which is begun within us. We must come to Christ daily "as lively stones, that we may be built up," &c. (1 Pet. ii. 4-6). To this, then, would I call you, &c. Oh! learn of a heathen to venerate the Divine authority, and to exert yourselves to the uttermost to promote the Divine glory.

Let me call you to obey this imperial mandate—

1. *In a way of personal reformation.* At the time of the Passover, the Jews swept every corner of their houses, in order to purge from them every particle of leaven which might have escaped their more general and superficial search. And this is what we are called to do. Alas! there are many evil dispositions which lurk within us, and which a superficial survey will not enable us to detect. Pride, envy, discontent, &c. Oh, be diligent in "purging out this old leaven, that ye may be a new lump" (1 Cor. v. 7, 8).

2. *In a way of ministerial exertion.* In this, persons of rank and influence ought to take the lead. Who can see a heathen monarch thus interesting himself for his Jewish subjects, and not wish that all monarchs with "their counsellors" were embarked in this holy cause? In this the clergy, also, should be most distinguished. Gladly did Ezra avail himself of the liberty accorded to him of going to Jerusalem for the purpose of remedying the evils which obtained there, &c. It was an office of great labour, yet he willingly undertook it. And does not this show, how those who are distinguished for rank and learning amongst the clergy should employ their talents and influence for the Lord?

The readiness with which the people of Babylon concurred in this good work shows how all classes of the community amongst ourselves should unite in the work. They contributed no less than eighty thousand pounds in silver, and one hundred and fifty thousand pounds in gold, besides a vast abundance of wheat, &c. This was done by heathens to honour the God of the Jews. What,

then, should not be done by us Christians, who profess to serve the God of the Jews, and to feel our obligations to

Him for all the wonders of redeeming love?—*C. Simeon, M.A.*

EXEMPLARY PRAISE.

(Verses 27, 28.)

**I. The true offerers of praise.** We regard Ezra as an example of the true and acceptable worshipper. He exhibits in these verses—

1. *Unaffected humility.* There is not here the least indication of self-laudation or self-commendation. All thought of his own character and influence and work seems lost in his admiration and thankfulness for the doings of God. Humility is always becoming in man; but in drawing near to the great and mighty, the holy and blessed God, humility is especially incumbent upon us. (a).

2. *Sincere piety.* Of this here are two evidences—(1.) Ezra traces all good to God. He looks above secondary causes to the great First Cause. The godly soul sees the hand of God in all the worthy purposes and kind actions of men, and in all that is true and good in life. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above,” &c. (b). (2.) Ezra delights in the worship of God. It was matter of joy to him that the king designed “to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.” “We read not of any orders given to paint or gild it, or to garnish it with precious stones, but to be sure that the ordinances of God were administered there constantly, and carefully, and exactly, according to the institution; and that was indeed the beautifying of the Temple.” When God is honoured by the erection of beautiful temples, and more, by the presentation of spiritual and reverent worship, the good man realises great joy of spirit.

3. *Practical religiousness.* Ezra’s pious feelings were expressed in consistent actions. He blessed God in words, and sought to bless Him in works also. “And I was strengthened as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me, and I

gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.” The noblest praise that we can present to God is that of hearty conformity to His will. “Thanksgiving is a good thing; thanksgiving is better. (c).

**II. The grand Object of praise.** “Blessed be Jehovah God of our fathers.”

1. *The Supreme Being.* “Jehovah God.” “Jehovah,” i.e. the Self-Existent, the Eternal, the Unchangeable One. “God,”—the primary idea of the word is the Strong One, the Almighty. The true object of worship for man is the Omnipotent and Eternal, the Supremely Great and Good.

2. *The Supreme Being in covenant relation with His worshippers.* “Jehovah my God” (ver. 28). The Israelites had entered into solemn covenant relations with God (Exod. xxiv. 3–8). God by the Psalmist speaks of them thus: “My saints; those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice.” Again He says: “I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be My people” (Lev. xxvi. 3–13). And the true worshippers to-day are in covenant relation with God; they have embraced Him as their Supreme Good, and have fully given themselves to Him.

3. *The Supreme Being whom our fathers worshipped.* There is pathos in the expression “Jehovah God of our fathers.” That they worshipped Him binds us tenderly yet tenaciously to His service. There is inspiration also here. He who proved Himself the unfailing Friend and Helper of our fathers is worthy of our trust: He will not fail us, &c.

“In Thee our fathers put their trust;  
Thy ways they humbly trod:  
Honoured and sacred is their dust,  
And still they live to God.

Heirs to their faith, their hope, their prayers  
 We the same path pursue :  
 Entail the blessing to our heirs ;  
 Lord, show Thy promise true."

—Conder. (d).

**III. Good reasons for praise.** "Blessed be Jehovah God of our fathers, which hath put," &c.

1. *He inspires the worthy purposes of men.* He put it into "the king's heart to beautify the house of Jehovah which is in Jerusalem." "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water; He turneth it whithersoever He will." "All holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed" from Him.

2. *He beneficently influences the moral judgments of men.* "And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and all his mighty princes." The influence of Ezra over the sovereign and these mighty princes was very great; and to his mind the secret of it was that God had inclined them to regard him with esteem, and to give their judgment in his favour.

3. *He invigorates the heart and life of His servants.* "And I was strengthened as the hand of Jehovah my God was upon me," &c. God encouraged His servant in order that he might carry out his sacred mission, and he at once proceeded to do so. The strength which God gives must be used in accordance with His will, and for His glory. "If God gives us His hand, we are bold and cheerful; if He withdraws it, we are weak as water. Whatever service we are enabled to do for God and our generation, God must have all the glory of it. Strength for it is derived from Him, and therefore the praise of it must be given to Him." (e).

### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Two men went up into the Temple to pray, the one a very righteous man, as he seemed to himself and to others; but God, who seeth not as man seeth, accounted the unrighteous man the more righteous of the two. So have I seen two flowers, side by side, the one erect, and without a misgiving, looking up to heaven; the other, with its head all adown upon its breast, looking only to the earth. But the flower that looked

earthward, as though not worthy to look heavenward, was the more heavenly of the two. Then said I, Pride and self-sufficiency are a miserable insufficiency; but meekness and self-distrust are allied to All-sufficiency. Question: Does God always give least to those who think themselves greatest, and most to those who think least of themselves? Answer: Humility hath the palm.—*John Pulsford.*

(b) As rivers empty their streams again into the bosom of the sea, whence they at first received them; so men give the praise of what they do unto that by which they do it. If they attempt any enterprise with their own wit, you shall have them bring the sacrifice to their own wit or net. But faith teaches the creature to blot out his own name, and write the name of God in its room upon all he hath and doth.—*W. Gurnall.*

What I have done is worthy of nothing but silence and forgetfulness; but what God has done for me is worthy of everlasting and thankful remembrance.—*Bishop Hall.*

(c) Holiness was meant, our New Testament tells us, for everyday use. It is home-made and home-worn. Its exercise hardens the bone, and strengthens the muscle in the body of character. Holiness is religion shining. It is the candle lighted, and not hid under a bushel, but lighting the house. It is religious principle put into motion. It is the love of God sent forth into circulation, on the feet, and with the hands, of love to man. It is faith gone to work. It is charity coined into actions, and devotion breathing benedictions on human suffering, while it goes up in intercessions to the Father of all pity. Prayers that show no answers in better lives are not true prayers. Of religion without holiness—or the spurious pretence current under that name—the world has seen enough; it has more than once made society, with all its reforms, go backward; it has sharpened the spear of the scorner, and sealed the sceptic's unbelief. It has hidden the Church from the market. It has gone to the conference and communion-table, as to a sacred wardrobe, where badges are borrowed to cloak the iniquities of trade. It has said to many an out-cast and oppressed class, "Stand by thyself; the Master's feast is for me, and not for you." It has thinned the ranks of open disciples, and treacherously offered to objectors the vantage-ground of honesty. My friends, get faith, and then use it. Gain holiness, and wear it. Pray, and watch while you pray. Keep the Sabbath; keep it so carefully that it shall keep you all the week,—a mutual friendship. Come to the church; come to carry the church back with you, not in its professions nor its external credit, but its interior substance, into a consistent holiness.—*F. D. Huntington, D.D.*

(d) The covenant made with the Patriarch was made with Abraham and his seed after

him. Throughout the Mosaic period, children were included with their fathers in all the blessings of the elder Testament. "The promise is unto you and your children," is the constant doctrine through all God's messages to the Israelites. We are expressly told, that under Christ, in the New Testament, the same covenant is renewed, only expanded and deepened. Throughout, the law of descent is carefully respected. The hereditary tie is recognised. Offspring, at birth, are supposed to be bound up in the same bond of Christian privileges and helps which encircles their believing progenitors.—*Ibid.*

(e) What reward shall we give unto the Lord for all the benefits He hath bestowed?

From the cheerless gloom of non-existence He waked us into being; He ennobled us with understanding; He taught us arts to promote the means of life; He commanded the prolific earth to yield its nurture; He bade the animals to own us as their lords. For us the rains descend; for us the sun sheddeth abroad its creative beams; the mountains rise, the valleys bloom, offering us grateful habitation and a sheltering retreat. For us the rivers flow; for us the fountains murmur; the sea opens its bosom to admit our commerce; the earth exhausts its stores; each new object presents a new enjoyment; all nature pouring her treasures at our feet, through the bounteous grace of Him who wills that all be ours.—*Basil.*

## CHAPTER VIII.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.] This chapter contains—(i.) A list of the heads of houses, with the number of adult males accompanying each of them, who went with Ezra from Babylon to Jerusalem (vers. 1-14). (ii.) An account of the encampment for three days at the river Ahava, and the doings there; viz., obtaining ministers for the Temple service (vers. 15-20); proclaiming and observing a religious fast (vers. 21-23); arranging for the safe keeping during the journey of the offerings and the precious vessels for the Temple (vers. 24-30). (iii.) A brief record of their departure from Ahava and arrival at Jerusalem (vers. 31, 32); and (iv.) Of the careful delivery of the treasures in the Temple (vers. 33, 34), the offering of sacrifices to God (ver. 35), and delivering their commissions unto the king's lieutenants (ver. 36).

Ver. 1. The chief of their fathers] or, "the heads of their families." Keil: "The heads of the houses."

Vers. 2-14] This list is parallel with that of chap. ii. 3-19. Many of the family names (or, as Keil calls them, "designations of races," e.g. Pharosh, Pahath-moab, &c.) are common to both; while some are found in each which are absent from the other. The presence of the same family names "in both lists is to be explained by the circumstance that portions of" such families or races "returned with Zerubbabel, and that the rest did not follow till Ezra's departure." The number of families in Ezra's list is smaller than in that of Zerubbabel, and the members of each family less numerous. The total number of adult males, including Levites and Nethinim (vers. 18-20), who returned with Ezra was 1775, according to this list.

Vers. 2, 3] The first member of ver. 3 should probably be joined to ver. 2: Of the sons of David; Hattush, of the sons of Shecaniah] It is almost certain that this is the Hattush of 1 Chron. iii. 22, the son of Shemaiah and grandson of Shecaniah.

Ver. 5] The Hebrew text seems to be imperfect here by reason of the falling out of a name. Keil suggests that the reading, as in the LXX., should be, "Of the sons of Zattu, Shecaniah, the son of Jahaziel." (Comp. chap. ii. 8.)

Ver. 10] A similar defect seems to exist in the text of this verse. The deficiency is thus supplied in the LXX., "And of the sons of Bani, Shelomith, the son of Josiphiah." (Comp. chap. ii. 10.) This emendation is also accepted by Keil.

Ver. 13. And of the last sons of Adonikam] &c. "Here, instead of the name of the head of the house, we read the words, 'last, and these their names;' whereupon three names are given, and not till then, 'and with them sixty males.' Here, then, it is not the head of the house who is named, but in his place three heads of families, amounting together to sixty males. Now, as these three families did not form a house, these sixty sons of Adonikam who returned with Ezra are, with regard to the six hundred and sixty-six sons of Adonikam who returned with Zerubbabel (chap. ii. 13), designated the last, or last arrived, and thus comprised with them as one house."—*Keil.*

Ver. 15. The river that runneth to Ahava] In vers. 21 and 31: "the river of Ahava." The name both of a place and of a river. "The latest researches," according to Mr. Grove (*Bibl. Dict.*), "are in favour of its being the modern *Hit*, on the Euphrates, due east of Damascus," and north-west of Babylon, from which it was about eighty miles distant. The place is famous for its bitumen springs. "The river of Ahava" is a small stream which here flows into the Euphrates. And there abode we in tents three days] From this statement, and that of ver. 31, "We departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month," we learn that they arrived at Ahava on the ninth day of the first month; the journey from Babylon having been commenced on the first day of that month (chap. vii. 9).

Ver. 17. Casiphia] "a place of uncertain site on the road between Babylon and Jerusalem."—*Bibl. Dict.* "The place Casiphia is entirely unknown, but cannot have been far from the river Ahava."—*Keil.* It seems that both Levites and Nethinim, the upper and lower orders of Temple ministers, had settled in Casiphia; and that Iddo was the chief man of the place, and possessed considerable influence amongst these orders.

Ver. 18. By the good hand of our God upon us] (Comp. chap. vii. 6, 9, 28.) A man of understanding] Heb.: *Ish sechel.* Keil regards this as a proper name. But it seems to us better to take it as in the A. V.; or as Fuerst renders it, "A man of knowledge." The man of understanding was named *Sherebiah*. The ך copulative (*and*) was probably "inserted by a careless copyist," or, if it be retained, it should be translated *even*. "A man of understanding, . . . even Sherebiah." He is again mentioned in ver. 24; Neh. viii. 7; ix. 4, 5; x. 12; xii. 24.

Ver. 19. Hashabiah] is again mentioned in ver. 24; Neh. x. 11; xii. 24.

Ver. 20. The Nethinims] (See on chap. ii. 43.) All of them were expressed by name] *i.e.* Iddo sent a list of them to Ezra.

Ver. 21. A right way] Fuerst: An "even" or "plain way;" *i.e.* a prosperous journey (Comp. Jer. xxxi. 9: "A straight way, wherein they shall not stumble.")

Ver. 24. Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah] &c. It seems from the rendering of the A. V. that Sherebiah and Hashabiah were priests; but they have been already described as Levites (vers. 18, 19). The Heb. is לְשֵׁרֵבְיָהּ; but in the A. V., as in the Vulgate, ש is not translated. Keil suggests that for ש, we should read ך, and translate, "and Sherebiah;" for this reason that if we retain ש, and translate "for Sherebiah," we "place the priests in a servile relation to the Levites, contrary to their true position." We prefer to retain the ש, and to translate, "Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests to Sherebiah," &c. This would not involve the subordination of the priests to the Levites; but would mean that Ezra appointed twelve chiefs of the priests to act with twelve chief Levites, of whom Sherebiah and Hashabiah were two, in keeping the offerings for the Temple during the journey.

Ver. 26. Six hundred and fifty talents of silver] According to Dr. Arbuthnot's tables this would be equivalent to £222,421, 17s. 6d. of our money; and according to Mr. R. S. Poole's estimate (*Bibl. Dict.*), to about £260,000. Of gold an hundred talents] or £547,500 of our money, according to Dr. Arbuthnot, and a little over £1,000,000, according to Mr. Poole.

Ver. 27. Two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold] Margin: "Heb., 'yellow, or shining brass, desirable as gold.'" "They may have been," says Canon Farrar, "of orichalcum, like the Persian or Indian vases found among the treasures of Darius (Aristot. de Mirab. Auscult.)."—*Bibl. Dict.* Keil speaks of them thus: "Two brazen vessels of fine golden brilliancy, precious as gold."

Ver. 29. The chambers of the house of the Lord] (Comp. 1 Kings vi. 5; Neh. xiii. 5.)

Ver. 31. The river of Ahava] (See notes on ver. 15.) He delivered us from] &c. (Comp. ver. 22.)

Ver. 32. Abode there three days] for rest after the fatigues and trials of their long journey. (Comp. Neh. ii. 11.)

Ver. 33. Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest] He is mentioned again in Neh. iii. 4, 21; x. 5; xii. 3. Eleazar the son of Phinehas] is probably the person who is named in Neh. xii. 42. Meremoth and Eleazar were priests. Jozabad the son of Jeshua] is mentioned in chap. x. 23; Neh. viii. 7. Noadiah the son of Binnui] is not named in the subsequent history. Jozabad and Noadiah were distinguished Levites.

Ver. 34. By number and by weight] &c. The vessels were both weighed and counted; the gold and silver were probably only weighed. And all the weight was written at that time] *i.e.* an authentic list was made at the delivery which then took place.—*Keil.*

Ver. 35. The children of those that had been carried away, which were come out of the captivity] *i.e.* those who had returned with Ezra. Offered burnt offerings] &c. (Comp. chap. vi. 17; and see notes on that verse.)

Ver. 36. The king's lieutenants] Keil: "The satraps of the king." He says they "were the military chiefs of the province." Rawlinson says they "were the highest class of the Persian provincial governors." The governors] were, according to Keil, "the heads of the civil government." Rawlinson: "It denotes a lower grade of official." They furthered the people] &c., or, "they supported the people," &c.

## THE ASSEMBLY AT AHAVA.

(Verses 1-20.)

I The long journey commenced. went up with me from Babylon," &c.  
 "These are now the chief of their fathers, "Upon the first day of the first month"  
 and this is the genealogy of them that (chap. vii. 9) they set out from Babylon,

and continued their journey for several days without any lengthened encampment. They entered upon their journey, we conceive, with mingled feelings of hope and fear. They were encouraged by hopes of reaching their famous fatherland, and of there enjoying the precious privileges of their religion; but the pleasure of these anticipations was moderated by the thought of the difficulties and dangers of the long journey that lay before them. Moreover, it is almost certain that, in leaving Babylon, most of them were sacrificing temporal advantages, and breaking up treasured associations, and severing themselves from dear friends, and these things could not have been done without much mental suffering; but at the summons of duty and the invitations of sacred privileges, they deliberately encountered these trials, and went up from Babylon. Their departure may be looked at as an illustration of the exodus of the soul from the captivity of a life of sin and its setting out on its upward pilgrimage.

**II. An important inspection made.** "And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days; and I viewed the people and the priests." On the ninth day of the first month they encamped at Ahava, they remained there "in tents three days" (ver. 15), and then, "on the twelfth day of the first month," they departed from the river of Ahava to go unto Jerusalem (ver. 31). This halt illustrates—

1. *The need of seasons of rest.* The company with Ezra needed rest after the excitement and trials of their departure, and the toils of the first stage of their long journey. The Almighty recognised and provided for man's need of rest when He ordained the night to succeed the day, and in the institution of the Sabbath. Jesus Christ recognised it, and said unto His disciples, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile." In our life-pilgrimage there are times when we need to rest from our labours for awhile, and, if possible, to lay aside our cares. (a).

2. *The use of seasons of rest.* Ezra employed the three days which were

spent at Ahava in such a manner that great advantages to his company resulted from them. He reviewed the assembled people, &c. Rest time should not be waste time. As individuals we should use our seasons of rest in reviewing the way in which the Lord hath led us, in considering our present condition and circumstances, and in preparing ourselves for future work. And if a church has comparative rest for a brief season, such rest should be employed in equipping its members for more vigorous service.

**III. A grave deficiency discovered.** "I viewed the people, and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi." There were no Levites in the company, except such as were priests, and they had their own proper duties. All the priests were "of the sons of Levi," but all "the sons of Levi" were not priests, but those only who were of the family of Aaron. Of the Levites proper, members of the other families of the tribe of Levi, who ministered in subordination to the priests, Ezra could not find any in his company. None of them was present. This was to their discredit. They should have been most eager to embrace the opportunity of going to Jerusalem, and there entering upon the duties of their sacred calling. They who are in possession of sacred privileges and engaged in the performance of sacred duties, are not always characterised by personal zeal and devotedness in the cause of God. Ministers of religion are sometimes slow in making personal sacrifices and rendering personal assistance even in a good enterprise. (b). They should be leaders, &c.

**IV. The supply of the deficiency sought.** "Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan," &c. (vers. 16, 17). Ezra was unwilling to proceed until he had secured a band of Levites to go with them. The means which he employed to obtain them are worthy of notice. He sought them—

1. *By means of influential men.* He called for eleven leading men of his company; nine of them are characterised as "chief men," and the other two as "men of understanding" or wisdom (ver. 16), and sent them to seek for "ministers for

the house of God." Such men were likely to succeed where men of an inferior type would have failed. Important affairs should be entrusted only to competent men.

2. *By sending them to the right place.* He "sent them unto the place Casiphia." It has been conjectured that there was at Casiphia a college "for the education of priests, Levites, and Nethinim, over which Iddo presided; where they had the free exercise of their religion, and had so comfortable a support that they were not inclined to remove. 'It is very probable they had their synagogues or other places where they met for religious worship; for we find the people resorting to Ezekiel in their captivity, and him preaching to them the Word of God, in many places of his book (Ezek. xxxiii. 31), &c. And Ezra in all likelihood was an instructor among them.'"—*Bishop Patrick*. But, apart from conjectures, it is clear that a considerable number of Levites and Nethinim dwelt at Casiphia, and that Ezra was cognisant of the fact; therefore to that place he despatched his messengers.

3. *By sending them to the right man.* Ezra "sent them with commandment unto Iddo the chief," &c. Iddo was probably a Levite; for the Nethinim being a lower order of Temple servants, it is not at all probable that one of their number would be "chief" over Levites. Iddo was "the chief at the place Casiphia," was evidently disposed to further the movement under Ezra, and, from his sending a list of the names of those who went from Casiphia (ver. 20), seems to have been a man of methodical and business-like habits.

4. *By sending them with precise instructions.* Ezra "told them what they should say unto Iddo," &c. Margin: "Heb., 'I put words in their mouth.'" Thus this mission was admirably selected and sent forth, and it deserved success. (c).

V. **The supply of the deficiency obtained.** "And by the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of understanding," &c. (vers. 18-20). Notice—

1. *The supply was sufficient.* About

forty Levites and two hundred and twenty Nethinim went from Casiphia and joined the returning exiles under Ezra.

2. *The supply was various.* There were Levites, and Nethinim "for the service of the Levites." Different grades of ministry are necessary for the various spheres of service in the Church of God.

3. *The supply was remarkable for the presence of at least one man of distinguished ability.* "They brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel, even Sherebiah." This man afterwards rendered important service in the history of the people, as we see from ver. 24; Neh. viii. 7; ix. 4, 5; x. 12; xii. 24.

4. *The supply was obtained by the blessing of God.* "By the good hand of our God upon us they brought us," &c. Thus Ezra traces the success of this mission to the gracious assistance of God.

"Except the Lord conduct the plan,  
The best concerted schemes are vain,  
And never can succeed;  
We spend our wretched strength for nought!  
But if our works in Thee be wrought  
They shall be blest indeed."

—C. Wesley.

"If," says M. Henry, "where ministers have been wanting, the vacancies are well supplied, let God have the glory, and His good hand be acknowledged as qualifying them for the service, inclining them to it, and then opening a door of opportunity for them."

## ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) It will be confessed by all men, even by the veriest slaves to their ever-driving ambition, that physical rest is sometimes needed. The aching limb asks for it; the hand that is so weary that it cannot any longer hold pen, or tool, or weapon of war, says, in its trembling weakness, "Let me rest awhile;" and the fevered brain, over-driven, excited almost to madness, says, in its sleeplessness and throbbing and heat, "Let me rest awhile." Well, then, here is so much gained. We shall be able to make our way from this low point to a much higher phase of rest, and find our way upward, from the cry of the feeble and exhausted flesh, to the greater, more solemn, and urgent wants of our over-excited spiritual nature; we shall understand, in some degree, that our highest, divinest faculties must occasionally pause, rest, and recover themselves, if

they would fully, with completeness and perfectness, discharge all the duties and obligations which Almighty God has imposed upon them. Rest is as necessary as labour. He is not a philosopher, but a madman, who lights the candle of his life at both ends.—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

(b) There is an old proverb, "The temple mouse fears not the temple idol." It is a painful experience, present to the hearts of most of us, how different is the awe of the first service in which we ministered, and of the fiftieth or hundredth. At first, the putting on of the surplice was a dedication—the entering of the vestry was a solemnity—the opening Sentences, the Exhortation, the Confession, read by our lips, seemed as though they consecrated those lips themselves to a new use and a new religion. So was it with each function of the holy office. The first reading of the Commandments—the first Sermon—the first Communion in which we followed with the Cup—the first baptism, the first wedding—the first visit to a sick-room, the first commendatory prayer beside the dying, the first saying of the words, "Dust to dust," by the open grave—each was an event, each was an epoch, of the life within—it had an effect, a spiritual effect, upon the conscious immortal man. It may be that we relied upon this—thought it needless to impress the feeling, to turn emotion into principle, by prayer and watching—felt confident that the repetition of the occasion would revive the effect—trusted to this, and left it there. A year afterwards we could stand unmoved by the grave, talk and laugh in the vestry, fall half asleep as we read the Prayers. Even with the best efforts made and persisted in, we could never reawaken the solemnity of the beginning. Duty becomes habit, habit becomes familiarity, and familiarity, if it breeds not contempt, at least forbids that kind of awe which is more nature than grace.

And some of us make the fatal mistake of expecting our Profession to make or to keep us spiritual. Living always in holy things, what can we be but holy? We learn a new lesson as years advance—and although we can give thanks still for the blessing of having the inward and the outward life of one piece and of one colour, occupied in the same thoughts and the same studies, mutually helpful and sympathetic with each other—yet we feel more and more that there is no security, in this harmony, for holy living; that there is no royal road, but

that which is open for all wayfarers, to the saint's life and the saint's rest; nay, that there is even an added risk, for the priest of God's temple, lest he find that "common" to him which is "holy" for all besides, just because he must daily touch and daily handle, daily prepare and daily dispense, that bread of life which souls only can digest, and which his soul may, by the very having, have not. There is nothing for it but to say to ourselves, and act upon it, "Like people, like priest." Just what they want, I want—just what I bid them do, I will do. I will prepare for my work, I will do my work, not as though it could sanctify, not as though it were (of itself) either hither or thither as to my soul's state, but as needing, like any commonest trade or handicraft, a soul at peace with God beforehand, a soul in full communion with God beforehand, a soul preoccupied by the Holy Spirit sought and cherished, a soul setting God always before it, by Him first quickened, then to Him afterwards ministering.—*C. J. Vaughan, D.D.*

(c) Ministers will not be found ready made, and ministers cannot be made to order. There is no royal road to the supply of the ministry. There is no climate in which ministers are indigenous. There is no patent by which ministers can be manufactured. Ministry is a gift, ministry is a growth, ministry is an inspiration. It is not every educated man—still less is it every uneducated man—who is even capable of it. The minister is the ultimate product of a long operation of Providence and of grace, working individually, working secretly, and giving no account of itself. When our Lord looked upon the vast shepherdless multitudes, He had but one suggestion to make for the ministerial supply: "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest"—and He was there Himself—"that He will send forth"—and the word is a very strong one—"labourers into His harvest." This is the one hope now. In comparison with this, any other suggestion must be timid and tentative. Yet something perhaps might be done by a keen and practised eye directed towards our schools and homes. Young intelligence, young diligence, young devotion, sought out by the loving watchfulness of master or minister, might be fashioned, here and there, even from a humble stock, by a wise influence and sometimes a generous bounty, into an eventual aptitude for the ministry. To foster this promise, but in one or two cases, into performance, is a noble ambition for any one who cares for his Church's future.—*Ibid.*

## THE COMPANIONS OF EZRA ON HIS JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM.

(Verses 1–20.)

The following observations are suggested by these verses:—

1. Whilst love of the world and fear of the cross induce most men to neglect

the salvation of the Gospel, they who obey the gracious call stand recorded in the Book of Life, and will be honoured by God Himself (vers. 1–14).

2. When some of a family embrace the Gospel, they who linger behind may probably follow; till sometimes, in answer to fervent prayers, the very last are brought in (ver. 13).

3. Alas! that professed ministers, who ought to take the lead in every good work, are generally so backward to labour, or venture, or suffer in the cause of God, and need to be stirred up by the example and exhortations even of their lay brethren! (ver. 15, last part).

4. But such as address them on these occasions should be "chief men," or "men of understanding;" lest they should be irritated, instead of being persuaded (vers. 16, 17). They must not,

however, be left to their negligence: and their superior brethren, having given them a good example, may send or speak to them, with more authority and effect than others can; and often those who were before inattentive will profit by meek and faithful admonitions.

5. When ministers for the work of the house of our God are raised up, who are men of piety and understanding, we should acknowledge "the good hand of our God upon us," and give Him the praise; as we ought at all times to lift up our prayers to Him for this blessing to His Church (vers. 18-20).—*Arranged from Scott's Comm.*

## MEN OF UNDERSTANDING.

(Verse 18.)

*"By the good hand of our God upon us, they brought us a man of understanding . . . Sherebiah."*

Sherebiah was not merely a man of knowledge and intelligence, but of wisdom and prudence. *Sechel*, here rendered "understanding," signifies moral excellences as well as mental abilities, as may be seen from its use elsewhere. The word rendered "them of understanding" in Dan. xi. 35, and "they that be wise" in Dan. xii. 3, comes from the same verb as *sechel*, viz., *sachal*. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding (*sechel*) have all they that do," &c. (Ps. cxi. 10). "There is no solid wisdom but in real piety." (a).

The text teaches that—

**I. Men of understanding are the gifts of God.** Ezra traces the presence of Sherebiah amongst them to "the good hand of their God upon them." Wise men are God's gifts, inasmuch as—

1. *They derive their abilities from Him.* He bestowed upon them the faculties and capacities of their mental and moral nature.

2. *They rightly develop their abilities by His blessing.* He inspires them to every worthy purpose, and aids them in its prosecution.

3. *They attain their moral excellences*

*by His blessing.* They "are His workmanship," &c. (Eph. ii. 10). "By the grace of God they are what they are" (1 Cor. xv. 10).

**II. Men of understanding are of great worth amongst men.** Ezra perceived the value of Sherebiah to his company, acknowledged the goodness of God in his arrival amongst them, recorded his quality and his coming, and found him very useful subsequently. Men of understanding are of great worth in society because—

1. *Understanding is essential to the beneficent employment of other gifts and powers.* For example—(1.) Zeal without understanding is a very perilous thing. "Zeal without knowledge is like expedition to a man in the dark." (2.) Strength without understanding often acts injuriously. "Wisdom is better than strength. . . . Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroyeth much good."

"It is excellent  
To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous  
To use it like a giant."—*Shakespeare.*

(3.) Great gifts of any kind without moral excellences are productive of great evils. Without grace, great powers are great engines of mischief and ruin, a curse and not a blessing to society. "Good

understanding" is needful to ensure the usefulness of great abilities.

2. *The employment of understanding itself confers great benefits upon society.* (1.) In restraining from unwise and sinful projects. We have an example in Acts v. 34-40. (2.) In originating and inciting to wise and good projects. (3.) In devising appropriate methods for the attainment of such projects. (4.) And for direction in life and work generally. "Wisdom is profitable to direct." See how useful Sherebiah was to the Jews (ver. 24; Neh. viii. 7; ix. 4, 5; x. 12; xii. 24). (b).

CONCLUSION: It behoves us—

1. *To praise God for men of understanding.*

2. *To prize such men.* Too often they have been neglected, and frequently cruelly persecuted while living, and honoured after death. Let us value them highly while they are yet with us. (c).

3. *To endeavour to become men of understanding.* "Wisdom is the principal thing: get wisdom; and with all thy getting get understanding." "In understanding be men." (d).

### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) The greatest man is he who chooses right with the most invincible resolution; who resists the sorest temptation within and without; who bears the heaviest burdens cheerfully; who is calmest in storms, and most fearless under menaces and frowns; whose reliance on truth, on virtue, and on God is most unflinching.—*Seneca.*

Remember that he is indeed the wisest and the happiest man who, by constant attention of thought, discovers the greatest opportunity of doing good, and, with ardent and animated resolution, breaks through every opposition that he may improve these opportunities.—*P. Doddridge, D.D.*

(b) We cannot look, however imperfectly, upon a great man without gaining something by him. He is the living light-fountain, which it is good and pleasant to be near; the light which enlightens, which has enlightened, the darkness of the world; and this, not as a kindled lamp only, but rather as a natural luminary, shining by the gift of Heaven; a flowing light-fountain, as I say, of native original insight, of manhood and heroic noble-

ness, in whose radiance all souls feel that it is well with them.—*Thomas Carlyle.*

(c) Let us not forget that if honour be for the dead, gratitude can only be for the living. He who has once stood beside the grave, to look back upon the companionship which has been for ever closed, feeling how impotent, *there*, are the wild love and the keen sorrow, to give one instant's pleasure to the pulseless heart, or atone in the lowest measure to the departed spirit for the hour of unkindness, will scarcely for the future incur that debt to the heart, which can only be discharged to the dust. But the lesson which men receive as individuals, they do not learn as nations. Again and again they have seen their noblest descend into the grave, and have thought it enough to garland the tombstone when they had not crowned the brow, and to pay the honour to the ashes which they had denied to the spirit. Let it not displease them that they are bidden, amidst the tumult and the dazzle of their busy life, to listen for the few voices, and watch for the few lamps, which God has toned and lighted to charm and to guide them, that they may not learn their sweetness by their silence, nor their light by their decay.—*John Ruskin, M.A.*

(d) If you look at what keeps the world astir, you will at once conclude that most men around you are under the actuating influence of a very different maxim from that presented in Prov. iv. 7: "Wisdom is the principal thing: get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get understanding." You might, without being at all chargeable with a libel, read, "*Money* is the principal thing; therefore get money; and with all thy getting, get a *fortune*." This, alas! is the world's "one thing needful." All else is postponed to this. The world's advice to the young is, "Get money first. Secure a *competency*," a word of which the limit is never defined; "and when that has been done, you will have leisure to think about what good folks call 'better things.' Mind you the main chance. This world is the one with which we have first to do, as we are placed first in it. *This world*, then, *first*, and *then the next*." Ah! what a delusion!—*Ralph Wardlaw, D.D.*

Labour to be men of knowledge and sound understanding. A sound judgment is a most precious mercy, and conduces much to soundness of heart and life. A weak judgment is easily corrupted; and if it be once corrupt, the will and conversation will quickly follow. Your understandings are the inlet or entrance to the whole soul; and, if you be weak there, your souls are like a garrison that hath open or ill-guarded gates; and if the enemy be once let in there, the whole city will be quickly his own. Ignorance is virtually every error; therefore, let the Bible be much in your hands and hearts.—*R. Baxter.*

## EZRA'S CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

(Verses 21-23.)

**I. Confidence in God avowed.** "We had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God," &c. (ver. 22). Here is a declaration of faith—

1. *In His providence.* Ezra believed that God was interested in human affairs; that "His eyes are upon the ways of man, and He seeth all his goings;" and that His hand was working amongst men, directing and controlling, rewarding and punishing them. (a).

2. *In His providence as efficiently promoting the interests of His people.* "The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him." He regards His people with approval, guides their footsteps, guards them and their interests, and makes "all things work together for good to them."

3. *In His providence as opposed to those who forsake Him.* "His power and His wrath are against all them that forsake Him." The power which works for righteousness must be hostile to the workers of iniquity. The government of a holy God must set itself against impiety and wickedness.

**II. Confidence in God tested.** A long journey, which would involve many difficulties and dangers, was before Ezra and his great company; and he was the responsible leader in that journey. Can he trust in God and in His providence now? His confidence was tested—

1. *By their need of guidance.* The journey they were entering upon was a long one; they required some one to lead them in "a right way." They had no visible symbol of the presence of God with them and guiding them, as their fathers had in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Can Ezra and his companions trust the invisible "hand of their God" in this matter?

2. *By their need of protection.* The journey that lay before them was a perilous one. (1.) There was danger from "the enemy in the way." The

country through which they had to travel was infested with Arabian freebooters. And it seems probable, from vers. 22 and 31, that a plan had been arranged by some of them for attacking and plundering this company. (2.) This danger was increased by the treasures which they carried with them. There was their own "substance," and the gold and silver and precious vessels for the Temple service; the gold and silver alone, according to one computation, being worth upwards of three quarters of a million of our money, and according to another, upwards of a million and a quarter. What a temptation this would be to "the enemy in the way." (3.) Their danger was also increased by the character and composition of their company. Amongst them were many women and "little ones," who in case of an attack would not be able to assist in repelling it, but would themselves require defence. Thus, if they were assaulted, they would be able to offer only a feeble resistance. Can Ezra trust their defence to the hand of their God upon them for good? Can he go forward towards "the enemy in the way," relying upon that power which is against the wicked? Or, will he seek for help elsewhere?

**III. Confidence in God maintained.** Ezra considered their position and prospects, their difficulties and dangers, and their consequent needs, and he decided to trust in God for all, and to give practical proof of their confidence:

1. *In not seeking guidance and defence from the king.* "I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way." The terms of the king's commission to Ezra leave no room for doubt that if he had requested of him a military escort, the request would have been readily granted; but he determined not to do so. He and his companions might have adopted the words of David, "The Lord will hear from His holy heaven with the saving strength

of His right hand. Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the Name of the Lord our God" (Ps. xx. 6, 7).

2. *In seeking guidance and defence from God.* "Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava," &c. (ver. 21). See how they sought unto God for what they needed—(1.) Humbly. They fasted and afflicted themselves before their God, in deep self-abasement and penitence on account of sin, and with a view to its forgiveness. (2.) Believingly. They not only fasted before God, but they prayed unto Him for a prosperous journey. Their confidence in Him did not lead them to neglect prayer to Him. True faith in God and in His gracious providence is not a substitute for prayer to Him, but an incentive thereto. (b). (3.) Earnestly; as is indicated by their fasting and prayer, to which for a time they seem to have entirely given themselves. "So we fasted and besought our God for this."

Thus Ezra's confidence in God, being tested, did not fail, but was nobly maintained and manifested. (c).

**IV. Confidence in God vindicated.** "And He was intreated of us." Their faith was vindicated—

1. *In their inward assurance.* They had a firm conviction that their prayers were heard and accepted, and that God would secure to them a prosperous journey.

2. *In the outward result.* They were led by a right way; they were delivered from the enemy that lay in wait for them; they had a prosperous journey, and arrived safely in Jerusalem. The confidence in God which they had avowed and maintained was splendidly vindicated by His hand upon them for good in their journey. They who honour Him with their hearty trust, He will honour with His great salvation. (d).

### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) But what is to be the justification of this implicit confidence? It can only be justified upon the supposition that God is a being having particular powers, and of a particular character. Confidence in God, for instance,

would be entirely irrational if He were conceived of as a destiny, as a force, as a soul of the universe,—if He were not believed to be a person distinct from the universe, its ruler, and its sustainer, as well as its creator, acting upon it in the perfection of His freedom, and without any sort of limit to His power, except such limits as His own moral nature may impose. Again, confidence in God would be misplaced if it were believed that He is the personal, the free, the omnipotent creator; and yet if He were imagined to act, as we should say in human words, capriciously, that is, without reference to those eternal laws of righteousness and truth, the traces, the echoes of which we find within ourselves, and which are in their essence, and demonstrably, not fruits of His arbitrary enactment, but constitutive parts of His eternal nature. Our Lord, therefore, reveals God as a Father, a revelation which assures us at once of His power and His love. It is the combination of these two facts, God's almightiness and God's love, which taken together constitute or warrant what we term His providence, His power, that is, under the guidance of his love making provision for the good of His creatures generally, but supremely and in particular of man, and, among men, in a yet more eminent degree of His servants.—*Canon Liddon.*

(b) "God's promises, by reason of His unchangeableness, may be relied on; what occasion, then, of prayer, seeing the thing promised will come round of its own steady accord, whether you open your lips or no?" The answer is short and simple. These promises are made only to those who expect, and desire, and ask for them. They are not promised indifferently, and come out of their own accord at all, but to such only who have meditated them, and who value them, and desire them, and earnestly seek them; being, in truth, too valuable to be thrown about to a scrambling mob; being the high and holy attractions by which God intended to work upon the nature of man, and lead it out of its present low and sunken estate into glorious liberty and unwearied ambition of every noble excellence. They are prizes in the hand of God to stimulate the soul's activities,—more glorious prizes than laurel wreaths, or the trumpeting of fame, or principalities and thrones,—and they are yielded only to an application of faculties, at the least, as intense and ardent as is put forth in pursuit of human ambition. God does not cheapen His promises down to a glance at them with the eye, or a mouthing of them with the tongue, but He requireth of those that would have them an admiration equal to that of lovers, an estimate equal to that of royal diadems, and a pursuit equal to that of Olympic prizes.—*Ed. Irving.*

(c) Suppose I were to set out on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and before I started were to go to Brown Brothers & Co., and obtain letters of credit for the cities of London,

Jericho, &c. Then, with these papers, which a child might destroy, which would be but ashes in the teeth of flame, which a thousand chances might take from me, I should go on with confidence and cheer, saying to myself, "As soon as I come to London I shall be in funds. I have a letter in my pocket from Brown Brothers & Co. which will give me five hundred dollars there; and in the other cities to which I am bound I shall find similar supplies, all at my command, through the agency of these magic papers and pen strokes of these enterprising men." But suppose that, instead of this confidence, I were to sit down on ship-board, and go to tormenting myself in this fashion—"Now, what *am* I to do when I get to London? I have no money, and how do I know that these bits of paper which I have with me mean anything, or will amount to anything? What shall I do? I am afraid I shall starve in the strange city to which I am going." I should be a fool, you say; but should I be half the fool that man is who, bearing the letters of credit of the Eternal God, yet goes fearing all his way, cast down and doubting whether he shall ever get save through his journey? No fire, no violence, nor any chance can destroy the

cheques of the Lord. When He says, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," and "My grace shall be sufficient for thee," believe it; and no longer dishonour your God by withholding from Him the confidence which you freely accord to Brown Brothers & Co.—*H. W. Beecher.*

(*d*) A heathen could say, when a bird scared by a hawk flew into his bosom, "I will not betray thee into the enemy, seeing thou fliest to me for refuge;" how much less will God yield up a soul to its enemy when it takes sanctuary in his Name, saying, "Lord, I am hunted with such a temptation, dodged with such a lust; either Thou must pardon it, or I am damned; mortify it, or I shall be a slave to it; take me into the bosom of Thy love, for Christ's sake; castle me in the arms of Thy everlasting strength; it is in Thy power to save me from or give me up into the hands of my enemy; I have no confidence in myself or any other; into Thy hands I commit my cause, myself, and rely on Thee." This dependence of a soul will undoubtedly awaken the almighty power of God for his defence.—*W. Gurnall.*

## FAITH AND PRUDENCE.

(Verses 21-23.)

In the text we find Ezra about to return to Jerusalem, and ashamed to ask the king for any military protection. He had made certain statements to Artaxerxes, and he was reluctant to act in a manner which might bring those statements into question. He felt, what Christian people often feel, the conflict between prudence and faith. Prudence dictates one line of conduct, Christian consistency seems to dictate another, and the perplexity is sometimes painful.

We observe—

**I. That, as a grand rule in the Christian life, faith and prudence must go together.** The Scriptures often relate the marvellous helps which good men have found in the days of peril, but they give no countenance to presumptuous reliance on supernatural intervention. As the rule of life, the Scriptures bind us to take all human precautions against the various forms of mischief we have reason to apprehend. In this unbelieving generation there is not much reason to speak against excessive faith, but there is some reason thus to speak. The

workman gave as his reason for not going to church, "That religious people were hypocrites, because they called the temple God's house, and yet put upon it a lightning rod." This worldly workman could not see that God's Church ought to recognise God's law, and act agreeably thereto; but he thought he saw a glaring contradiction in this union of prudence and piety. And some noble men in the Church sympathise with this workman, and reject the securities which prudence would counsel. They will leave their property uninsured; in times of disturbance they will not claim the protection of the magistrate; and in time of sickness they will not call the physician. This is, to a large extent, a serious mistake. As a rule, we are to accept the band of soldiers which Ezra, in peculiar circumstances, rejected. We must not rashly cast ourselves into peril on the idea that "angels have charge concerning us." We must "not tempt the Lord our God." We must not, without imperative reason, leave the ship and step upon the sea, otherwise, with Peter,

we must suffer disaster. If devout men do not attend to the dictates of prudence, they must suffer for it; and not only so, but they injure Christianity likewise. The truth of religion is based on false issues, and thus brought into suspicion or contempt. "The good man guideth his affairs with discretion." Yet there are times—

**II. When faith in God must supersede the provisions of ordinary prudence.** When faith and prudence gave different counsel, Ezra chose to "walk by faith, and not by sight," and we must all feel that he did right. The question is: When are we to go beyond merely prudential considerations, and venture all on the unseen power of God? An attentive consideration of Ezra's situation and conduct may throw some light on this delicate question. We are "shut up to faith" when—

1. *Prudential action would most probably be construed as a denial of the Divine government.* Ezra had told the king that "the hand of God was upon all them for good who seek Him." And now Ezra considered that to reveal any anxiety for a guard of soldiers would appear to the heathen king like a practical denial of the overshadowing providence of Jehovah. A band of soldiers would have hidden the Shepherd of Israel; Artaxerxes alone would have been seen; and so Ezra, with a fine spiritual instinct, saw the hour for simple trust had come, and by declining the soldiers left open the full view of God, and His gracious and glorious government. A line of action is here marked out for ourselves. To remove the scruples of the few we are not to take the lightning conductors from our temples, and essay similar reformatations; but we must seek so to act that we satisfy the world generally that we *do believe* in the Divine superintendence and care. A worldly man believes *only* in the band of soldiers; and, to let him know that we believe in something beyond, we must sometimes be willing to act without the band of soldiers altogether. Are we not *too anxious* about material helps and visible securities? We have boasted of the power of the Lord's good hand, and are

we then to resort to sorry shifts for our safety and success? Has not the Church, by clinging so feverishly to visible resources, and helps, and defenders, given some sanction to the world's unbelief? When—

2. *Prudential action would cause us to lean on worldly associations and resources.* Artaxerxes was an idolater, and Ezra was anxious not to ask too much at his hands. It seemed inconsistent to Ezra that he should be soliciting a band of pagan soldiers to protect God's people and the treasures of God's Temple. Here, again, we have a line of action marked out for us. We are the confessed servants of the Holy One of Israel, and prudence must not lead us to worldly alliances and dependence upon sinful circles. In our *personal* life we must observe this. We must beware of compromises with the world for the sake of our personal safety and aggrandisement. And in regard to *God's Church*, we must observe this. Policy would often direct us to expect great things from the greatness, wealth, or wisdom of unregenerate men for the Church's sake. So far from seeking their assistance, we ought to be shy of their gold and patronage. Thus did Ezra. And thus acted Paul and Silas (Acts xvi. 16–19). When prudence would lead us to seek for much, either for ourselves or for the Church, at the hands of unbelieving men, we must pause and follow the path faith indicates. Let us dare anything, suffer anything, rather than compromise our own character and the character of God, in the eyes of the world, by linking our fortunes and the fortune of the Church with those who are joined to idols. When—

3. *Prudential action might embarrass the progress of God's kingdom.* If Artaxerxes had detected any inconsistency in Ezra, he might have ceased to be favourable to his cause, and have prevented or delayed the return to Jerusalem. Rather than endanger the popularity and progress of the cause of God, Ezra was prepared to run great risks. Here another line of action is marked out for us. If prudence would circumscribe, fetter, or destroy the work of

God, the time has come to appeal to loftier considerations. Calculating, cautious piety would condemn the act of Ezra as imprudent, and no doubt, speaking after the manner of men, it was imprudent; but many imprudent things have been done, or there would not have been so much Christianity in the world as there is; and many more imprudent things will have to be done before Christianity fills the world. The practical, calculating spirit of our age invades the Church, and in the administration of its affairs we frequently ask too anxiously about "ways and means," and are afraid to venture to victories beyond unless we can "see our way." Let us remember that God's kingdom is a supernatural one, and in its promotion we must often act with a boldness which could not be justified in the court of prudence. There is a holy venturesomeness in evangelisation which carries with it a far higher guarantee of success than do the pondered schemes of a rationalising statesmanship. Thus, then, there are times—times which a true, delicate, noble spirit will not fail to recognise—when we must renounce the counsellings of worldly wisdom, and, stepping boldly into the darkness, cry, with Ezra, "Help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on Thee!"

**III. The separation of faith from prudence must be effected only in the spirit of sincere and earnest dependence upon Heaven (ver. 23).** No precipitancy, no levity, no presumption. By fasting and prayer they obtained the sweet assurance that God would honour their faith and preserve them. "He was entreated of us." Not lightly must we discard ordinary defences and helps. When we can do no other, we must humbly, solemnly rest ourselves in the hand of God. The times come to us all when faith and policy give contradictory counsel. When such times come, let us not be found wanting to our profession and our God. In many circumstances simple trust in God will prove the truest policy. . . . And, on the contrary, policy, leading God's people to rest on worldly men, and means, and measures, finally demoralises and betrays them. Hear how God reproaches Israel for their lack of faith in the Unseen Powers: "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord. . . . Now the Egyptians are men, and not God," &c. (Isa. xxxi. 1, 3).—*W. L. Watkinson.*

### EZRA AND HIS TIMES.

(Verses 21–23.)

Let us see how much is included in these words of Ezra, and endeavour to ascertain their bearing on our position and circumstances.

**I. Ezra's language was in striking contrast with the general state of opinion around him.** He says, not egotistically,—great men have no egotism,—but he says, because he cannot help living when there was a time to speak, "I was ashamed; *others* can take their own course, but I could not ask our heathen but noble king for a band of horsemen and soldiers to help us in the way." Others might, and probably did, feel that it would only be courteous to accept the king's offer; others, that

it would look more respectable; others, that it would be safer; others, that they would get through their journey quicker; and others, that Ezra was carrying things rather too far, he might have a little thought for timid women and children. Such thoughts as these were very current, depend upon it, amid that motley crowd. He knows he is right, and can afford to be singular; and, as he can bide his time, he knows the people will one day thank him for what they may now condemn. And here we see a guiding principle for us. At particular crises of public opinion, it devolves upon some men to go into the land of the enemy, that they may bring truth out of cap-

tivity. It is a perilous and generally a thankless task; but it must be done, that it may be brought out into a glorious enlargement, before men shall see its form or feel its power. Such men have no ultimate fear for truth; they know its vitality depends upon no accidental prosperity, and can be destroyed by no accidental adversity; such men never change sides; they have sometimes sailed with truth under sunny skies into a secure haven; they have also sailed with her through many a "stormy wind and tempest," and they have always come right at last. The world wonders at their eccentricity, and recommends them to beg or borrow a band of soldiers and horsemen, to assist them in their progress; but they are "ashamed" to think of such a thing; it hurts their consciences, and wounds there are long in healing, and when healed they leave ugly scars. If they could make truth successful to-morrow, they must do it with truth's weapons, and her weapons only; but they cannot advance the liberation of truth by any unworthy means, or by any unnatural alliance. "Christ for ever, and His word," cried Luther, as he left Wittenberg with a penny in his pocket, and a threadbare gown upon his back. "Christ for ever, and His word," let every modern Ezra and Luther say, until that word shall enlighten every mind and emancipate every heart; and this it will do, if we will let truth do its work, without "soldiers and horsemen."

**II. Ezra's situation afforded him an opportunity for asserting this great principle under very trying circumstances.** In reading the Old Testament, it is needful to call to mind the peculiar political constitution of the Jews. It was a pure theocracy. The only one the world has ever seen, or is likely to see. God was their King, and their King was their God. God would defend them; He would be a wall of fire round about them; He would lead them forth to battle; He would be their national safeguard. This the Jews continually forgot. Their crying sin was departure from the true theocratic idea. They trusted in every-

thing but truth; in every one but God. Egypt and Assyria were, by turns, their strongholds of confidence. Hence the prophet's cry, "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help," &c. (Isa. xxxi. 1, &c.).

But Ezra fell back upon the old principle of the theocracy. What was true in Judea, he took to be true in Babylon. That which was true to Isaiah was true to him now. He could not see any clear path of safety, except in the path of duty; and he would rather be there than in the way of mere expediency. Others might suggest that, under present circumstances, they need not be so very precise; they had permission to return to Jerusalem, was not that enough? If the king, of his own goodness, chose to help them with horsemen, they could accept his offer up to the gates of Jerusalem; they were not now in the land of the theocracy, and allowance must be made for their peculiar circumstances; and to be so strict about an abstract principle was being righteous overmuch. All that was perfectly incomprehensible to Ezra; he knew of no guiding star but principle, and that alone he resolved to follow.

And Christ's whole life illustrates this principle of confidence in God and in truth, once exhibited by Ezra under circumstances of great temptation; a principle we seek to uphold, as constituting a very essential part of a free, a spiritual Church state. "How often was Christ urged by the impatient longings, and the worldly spirit of the Jews, to gratify their intense and long-cherished hopes, and to establish His kingdom in a worldly form, before the last demand was made upon Him, as He entered, in the midst of an enthusiastic host, the capital city of God's earthly dominion, before His last refusal, expressed in His submission to those sufferings which resulted in the triumph of God's pure spiritual kingdom!"

Thus, oftentimes, the good man will have to strive against the spirit of his age; but obeying Christ, and confiding in Christ, whilst doing so, his conflict will lead to certain victory: he will not

conquer by "a band of horsemen and soldiers," but by the exhibition and enforcement of truth, by the use of weapons that are not carnal, but spiritual; weapons mighty, nevertheless, to the pulling

down of strongholds, in the use of which the Christian warrior says, "Now thanks be unto God, who causeth us to triumph in every place, by Jesus Christ."—*W. G. Barrett.*

### EZRA AN EXAMPLE IN BUSINESS.

(Verses 21–23.)

The circumstances in which Ezra was placed were as difficult as can be conceived. He had to contend with the scorn and opposition of pagans, and with the corruptions of Jews. He bears up under his difficulties: he labours through them; he endures as seeing Him who is invisible.

- I. His humiliation.
- II. His faith.
- III. His prayer.
- IV. His holy jealousy.
- V. His success.

—*R. Cecil.*

### CONTRASTS.

(Verse 22.)

"*The hand of our God is upon all them for good,*" &c.

#### I. A contrast of human character.

1. *Those that seek God.* To seek God implies—(1.) Faith in Him. Seekers after God believe in the existence of truth, righteousness, love; in the existence of a Supreme and Perfect Being; they believe that *God is*. (2.) Desire after Him. Seekers after God believe in Him as the Supremely Good and Beautiful—not only the Almighty, but the All-attractive. They do not simply seek His blessing or His favour, but Himself. The former may be mean; the latter must be noble. To seek Him is to desire the highest truth and righteousness, goodness and beauty, &c. (3.) Prayer to Him. They who come to God believe not only that He is, but that "He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Out of the faith and longing of their heart they petition Him for His favour and His presence. Their attitude and inclination is towards God.

2. *Those that forsake God.* Sin is frequently represented as forsaking God, departure from Him, distance from Him (Isa. lix. 2; Jer. i. 16, ii. 13; Luke xv. 13; Eph. ii. 13; Col. i. 21, 22). Forsaking God begins in the heart. Some sinful thought or purpose has been che-

rished, and so God has been shut out of the heart. Guilt has been contracted, and the sinner has become afraid of God, and tried to escape from Him. (Comp. Gen. iii. 8–10.) This forsaking God proceeds from the heart to the conduct. God's commands may be outwardly obeyed for a time by one who has forsaken God Himself; but ere long the commands also will be set at naught. When the affections are estranged from God, the actions will soon follow, &c.

Here then is the contrast of character: The one seeks God, draws ever nearer to Him, &c.; the other forsakes God, departs ever farther from Him, &c. Ask yourself—Which is my character? Am I a seeker or a forsaker of God?

#### II. A contrast of Divine treatment.

1. "*The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him.*" His power is exercised on their behalf; His providence watches over and secures their true interests. But is this really the case? Do we not sometimes find those that seek God in poverty, privation, and pain? Do they not sometimes cry, "Thy hand is heavy upon me"? not, Thy hand is upon me "for good"? Earthly parents see many things to be for the good of their children, which appear unmixed evils to the children themselves. Does the sick infant see

that the nauseous medicine which heals him is for his good? Does the young schoolboy see that it is for his good to master the declensions and conjugations of grammar? And

"What am I?  
An infant crying in the night:  
An infant crying for the light:  
And with no language but a cry."

—Tennyson.

Not by any hasty conclusions on the results of human character and conduct; not by an induction formed from a brief and narrow observation of human experiences, must our judgment of the Divine procedure be determined; but by His own revelations of His character and government, and by the testimonies of the wise and good amongst men. These unite in assuring us that "the hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him." (1.) For their good temporally. Being perfectly acquainted with the circumstances, temperament, and tendencies of every man, He gives to each one who seeks Him what will really be for his good. "No good will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." (2.) For their good spiritually. Many and precious are the spiritual benefits which He bestows upon His people, *e.g.*, pardon and peace, purity and power, grateful recollections and inspiring anticipations, &c. (3.) For their good eternally. He is preparing them for a glorious destiny, and endless. Our Lord has gone to prepare a place for us in His Father's house. And as He was both guide and guardian to Ezra and his company from Babylon to Jerusalem, so is He the guide and guardian of all His people to their blessed and abiding home. They enter heaven through Him.

2. "*His power and His wrath are against all them that forsake Him.*" A sentimental theory which ignores the stern aspects of the character of God is very popular with some people. There is a growing tendency to magnify the love of God, and then deny His wrath, &c. We rejoice in knowing that "He will have all men to be saved;" that He has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from

his way and live;" but we cannot question His wrath. God is tender, without weakness; angry, without sin. He is just, as well as merciful. Sin has been punished by Him, is punished by Him, and will be punished by Him. (Comp. Prov. xi. 21; 2 Pet. ii. 4-9; Rev. vi. 16, 17). (a). "His power;" who can estimate it? It is "against all them that forsake Him." (b). Who can conceive "His wrath"? It is infinite as His love. It is His love flaming forth against the incorrigibly wicked. (c). "He is mighty in strength; who hath hardened himself against Him, and hath prospered?"

#### CONCLUSION:

1. *How solemnly man's destiny is in his own hands, or, more correctly, in his own choice!* "Deeds are destiny; character is fate." For our character we are each responsible. Heaven or hell is the result of man's own choice and character.

2. *In this world character may be changed.* Those who have forsaken God may return to Him, assured of a joyous welcome. By the grace of God sinners may here and now be converted into saints. "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found," &c. (Isa. lv. 6, 7). "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God," &c. (Hos. xiv. 1, 2, 4).

#### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) It is very common to separate the question of punishment from its strict relationship to justice, and to argue it on infinite goodness. What is this proper view of God? "Good is the Lord." But is He good to restrain any administration of government, or to impede any exercise of law? Does His goodness look more indifferently on moral evil than His justice? Is it not its peculiar province to check the consequences of sin? We know not of the goodness which exists only to pity and to spare,—which is a misprison of right and holy principle, which is a connivance at every moral perturbation of the universe. It is easy to reduce this "awful goodness" to our depraved wish and idea. . . . "Our God is a consuming fire." "He is terrible out of His holy place." "God shall destroy for ever." "The enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs." Those passages which speak of His ire and wrath are many, reiterated, and vehement. Do they tell of goodness, partial and fond, as it is now presumed? A mere indulgence? A figure, most beautiful and

frequent, does Holy Scripture present. God is our Parent. "Have we not one Father?" It is a figure,—“like as a father.” It is argued that all punishment, except for the improvement of the child, would be inconsistent with that relation. But may not the case of the son's disobedience be so heinous, that all, under the influence of the most natural feeling, would justify a treatment the most extreme? disownment? disinheritance? final separation? The paternal relationship, though not as to its fact, yet, as to its exercise, may be altered by the conduct of the offspring: moral government cannot be altered. The one might be renounced: the other is necessary and insubvertible. May we not fear that, in consequence of sin, the paternal favour is withdrawn, and the filial privilege forfeited? Let that father be the magistrate. The child is now under his jurisdiction as well as discipline. That child may be the transgressor of social law. It is conceivable that his father may be called to pass sentence upon him. Will not all, if it be his inevitable duty, see in its discharge a title to their admiration? Without any impeachment of his tenderness, is not such bearing truly great? Does not history hallow it? Has it not saved commonwealths? Why should not the same suffrage be accorded to God? He is the “righteous Father.” He sitteth King for ever. He reigns not for a part, but for the whole. His goodness must agree with universal justice, or with that which is the same thing, the protection of universal claim and interest. . . . And if this notion of goodness is to be entertained, how frequently would it have been disappointed! Had earlier creatures than ourselves been forewarned that our earth was soon to be formed, and our race to be created, it would have seemed improbable to them that aught but good could be admitted. The entire scheme would have demanded this expectation. What evils do exist, moral and physical! Then their idea of that which goodness can allow would have been disappointed. It would have been false. When men have been threatened with Divine judgments, they have imagined a presumption against them in the Divine goodness. To the antediluvian the impending fate appeared most unreasonable; the men of Sodom derided the fear of overthrow. If they thought of God at all, arguments like those which we have considered were ready. Goodness forbids it. A parent cannot do it, &c. Then their idea of that which

goodness can allow was disappointed. It was false. So we may speculate concerning the future state. Its punishment may affect our views as exaggerated beyond all showing of truth, of reason, of analogy. We may interpose the Divine goodness. We may pronounce that this state of things cannot be. But we are not placed more favourably to give judgment than they who have palpably erred. Our idea may be disappointed. It may be false.—*R. W. Hamilton, LL.D., D.D.*

(b) How miserable will all wicked rebels be under this power of God! Men may break His laws, but not impair His arm; they may slight His sword, but cannot resist His power. If He swear that He will sweep a place with the besom of destruction, “as He hath thought, so shall it come to pass; and as He hath purposed, so shall it stand” (Isa. xiv. 23, 24). Rebels against an earthly prince may exceed him in strength, and be more powerful than their sovereign; none can equal God, much less exceed Him. As none can exercise an act of hostility against Him without His permissive will, so none can struggle from under His hand without His positive will. He hath an arm not to be moved, a hand not to be wrung aside. God is represented on His throne “like a jasper stone” (Rev. iv. 3), as One of invincible power when He comes to judge; the jasper is a stone which withstands the greatest force. Though men resist the order of His laws, they cannot resist the sentence of their punishment, nor the execution of it. None can any more exempt themselves from the arm of His strength than they can from the authority of His dominion. As they must bow to His sovereignty, so they must sink under His force. A prisoner in this world may make his escape, but a prisoner in the world to come cannot (Job x. 7): “There is none that can deliver out of Thine hand.” There is none to deliver when He tears in pieces (Ps. l. 22).—*S. Charnocke, B.D.*

(c) Wicked men hereafter will feel the full weight of God's wrath. In this world they have the wrath of God abiding on them, but then it will be executed upon them; now they are the *objects* of it, but then they will be the *subjects* of it. Now it hangs over them, but then it shall fall upon them in its full weight, without any alleviation, or any moderation or restraint.—*President Edwards.*

## SEEKING THE LORD, AND ITS ADVANTAGES.

(Verse 22.)

“*The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him,*” &c. Our text contains a great scriptural truth, applicable to all ages, countries, and persons. It is a truth which is cor-

roborated by many parallel passages, and therefore expresses a subject of more than ordinary importance. There are two things clearly expressed in the text,—man's responsibility, and the

different results of piety and sin. God's hand shall be upon all those who seek Him, and that for good, and His wrath is against those who forsake Him. Observe, we are directed—

**I. To seeking God, and its advantages.** Seeking God denotes—

1. *A consciousness of our need of Him.* Men in general do not regard God, He is not in all their thoughts. Many feel as Pharaoh did when he exclaimed, "Who is the Lord?" &c. But the enlightened, convicted sinner, and the true Christian, feel that God is the fountain of their existence, and the only source of their peace and happiness. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee," &c. God is all and in all to the pious mind; and their need of Him is every moment's experience.

2. *Earnest and fervent prayer to God* (ver. 23.) Seeking and praying are synonymous. Thus Christ taught His disciples. "Ask, . . . seek, . . . knock," &c. Thus, too, Job says (xxiii. 3), "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" &c. We cannot find God but by earnest prayer and supplication, and He is ever near to all who call upon Him. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord," &c.

3. *To seek the Lord is to come to Him in the way of His appointment.* We may seek anxiously and fervently, but what will it avail if we seek in the wrong way? Thus heathen philosophers laboured to know the true God. Thus, too, many anxious pagans. Many are like the devotional eunuch, they read, &c., but understand not. The Word of God is, however, explicit and full on this subject. Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life." "One God, and one Mediator," &c. "No man cometh to the Father but by" Christ.

4. *To labour in all things to have His approbation.* To commit all to Him; to refer all to Him; to acknowledge Him in all; and seek His blessing upon all our steps. To set the Lord always before us, and to labour to walk well-pleasing in His sight.

Notice the advantages arising to those who thus seek Him, "The hand of our God is upon all," &c.

(1.) *The hand of His pardoning mercy.* To those who thus seek Him, He says, "I, even I, am He who blotteth out your iniquities." "Seek ye the Lord," &c. Then it follows, "Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts," &c.

(2.) *The hand of His delivering power.* He delivers the souls of His people, raises them from the horrible pit, &c. Translates them from the kingdom of darkness, brings their spirits out of the prison of sin, and from the dominion of Satan. Rescues from "the gall of bitterness, and the bond," &c.

(3.) *The hand of His providing goodness.* They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing. He is their Shepherd, and they shall not want. He leads them into green pastures, &c. "My God shall supply all your need," &c.

(4.) *The hand of His heavenly guidance.* The Lord leads and guides His people. "He led them by the right way," &c. "The Lord shall lead thee continually," &c. "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."

(5.) *The hand of His sustaining grace.* The Christian is weak and feeble; of himself, insufficient: exposed to many enemies and perils. The saints of the Lord are therefore only absolutely secure in His hand. He keeps them by His mighty power; He preserves them for His kingdom and glory. There is often—

(6.) *The hand of His manifest providence.* How clearly do we see this in the history of His Church and people! It is said of one, "So long as he sought the Lord, the Lord made him to prosper." How many thousands have experienced that "godliness is profitable to all things," &c.

**II. Forsaking God, and its attendant evils.** To forsake God is the opposite course to that we have described in seeking the Lord. It is refusing Him homage and veneration. It is to disobey Him; to live without His fear; to turn from the way of righteousness; to withdraw our hand from the Gospel plough; to draw back; to make shipwreck, &c. Now, against these, His power and

wrath are declared. Power to punish, wrath to inflict a fearful and eternal doom. Power and wrath of God to cast both body and soul into hell fire. (See Heb. x. 22, &c.) "A certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."

APPLICATION. We learn:

1. The value of true religion. The good hand of the Lord upon us.

2. The awfulness of apostasy from the Lord.

3. The necessity of both vigilance and perseverance. (See Heb. iii. 12; iv. 10-13.)

4. Urge the unconverted to seek the Lord, and live.—*Jabez Burns, D.D.*

## THE GUARDIANSHIP OF THE SACRED TREASURES.

(Verses 24-30.)

Having sought the Divine guidance and protection in their journey, Ezra proceeds to make wise arrangements for the safe conveyance of the offerings for the service of the Lord at Jerusalem. True prayer will always be followed by earnest effort in the same direction.

Notice:

### I. The treasures to be guarded.

"The silver, and the gold, and the vessels, the offering of the house of our God," &c. (vers. 25-27). These treasures were—

1. *Valuable in themselves.* "Six hundred and fifty talents of silver," &c. (vers. 26, 27). (We have already stated the estimated value of these things: see *Explanatory Notes* on ver. 26, and homily on "Ezra's confidence in God," vers. 21-23.)

2. *Valuable as being consecrated to God.* Mark how Ezra speaks of them: "The offering of the house of our God: . . . the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold a freewill offering unto the Lord God of your fathers." To every pious mind the fact that they were designed for sacred uses would greatly enhance their worth.

3. *Valuable as being the spontaneous gifts of friends and well-wishers.* "The king, and his counsellors, and his lords, and all Israel there present, had offered . . . a freewill offering unto the Lord God of your fathers." As expressions of the good will and kind feeling of the donors to the returning exiles and to their religion, these treasures were very precious. They were well worthy of the most watchful care.

### II. The guardians of the treasures.

"Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests," &c. (ver. 24). These guardians were—

1. *Adequate in number.* There were twenty-four of them in all; twelve priests and twelve Levites. It was well to have a goodly number for the weighty responsibility.

2. *Appropriate in official character.* They were priests and Levites. Ezra "said unto them, Ye are holy unto the Lord; the vessels are holy also." The consecrated things were intrusted to consecrated persons. This was in harmony with Divinely-appointed usage amongst them (see Num. iii. 5-10). It was also in accordance with the charge of God by Isaiah the prophet: "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord" (Isa. lii. 11). The principle is of universal application, that holy things should be committed to the charge of holy persons.

3. *Distinguished amongst their brethren.* Ezra selected "twelve of the chief priests;" and Sherebiah and Hashabiah were eminent amongst the Levites (see on vers. 18, 19). By selecting eminent men for this trust Ezra acted prudently; for they would be the more likely to keep it with fidelity than untried men. He also acted religiously; for he thus honoured in the eyes of the people the Lord God, to whom these treasures had been offered.

### III. The charge to the guardians of the treasures—

1. *Points out the value of the things committed to them.* In three ways Ezra does this—(1.) By weighing them so carefully before delivering them into

their hands. He "weighed unto them the silver," &c. (vers. 25-27). (2.) By reminding them of their source. They were the voluntary offerings of "the king, and his counsellors, and his lords, and all Israel there present." (3.) By reminding them of their destination. They were designed for the service of the Lord God of their fathers.

2. *Enjoins watchful care of these things.* "Watch ye, and keep them." They were to see to it that they were neither lost, nor stolen, nor intermingled with the other possessions of this great company during their long journey.

3. *Indicates their responsibility for them.* "Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites," &c. (ver. 29). Thus Ezra gave them to understand that they would be required to deliver them up at the end of the journey safely and accurately. They would have to account for them—(1.) Exactly: "until ye weigh them." The same weight which had been given to them they must deliver up at the end of the journey. (2.) Unto the chief men of the nation: "the chief of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel." (3.) In the chief place of the nation: "at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the Lord." Thus Ezra impressed upon them the importance and sacredness of the trust committed to them, and the greatness of their responsibility.

**IV. The acceptance of the guardianship of the treasures.** The selected priests and Levites did not seek to excuse themselves from this trust and its onerous obligations; they do not seem to have offered any demur in relation to it, but accepted it at once. "So took the priests and the Levites the weight of the silver," &c. (ver. 30).

#### CONCLUSION:

1. *Our subject speaks to ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.* How precious and sacred is the trust committed to them! How solemn their responsibility! (1 Cor. iv. 1, 2; Tit. i. 7, 9.) By the Holy Ghost let them seek to be faithful to their glorious, awful trust (1 Tim. vi. 20; 2 Tim. i. 14). (a.)

2. *To all who have charge of public funds or the property of others.* Let them copy the scrupulous care and fidelity of Ezra, that they may be able, when called upon, to give a punctual and exact account of the things committed unto them.

3. *To all men.* God has committed some gift to every man to be used in accordance with His holy will; and He will call every man to account for such gift. Blessed are they who will be able to render such an account as shall call forth from Him the "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Comp. Matt. xxv. 14-30.) (b.)

#### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Brethren, have we at all understood what was done to us when we were ordained—that it was an act of exchange and of interchange—we giving ourselves to Jesus Christ; He giving to us a trust of ministry, on the definite basis of a Divine communication of truth?

How little have they realised the good deposit, who have regarded it as nothing more than the reading of services or the preaching of sermons, out of the resources of natural or acquired knowledge, and as only a part of the life, of which all other parts might be just as earthly, just as self-indulgent, just as frivolous, as if no transaction at all had passed between us and Jesus Christ! How many must confess, sorrowfully and with tears, that they were not conscious then, if they have ever awakened to the consciousness afterwards, of anything whatsoever having been put into their hands when they became ordained men! Oh, we do not blame them—still less would we let them despair. But surely it is something to be grieved for, that we thus undertook a sacred office in utter ignorance of its sacredness; that we thus took it upon us to tell men the way of salvation, when we scarcely so much as knew what they needed to be saved from, or what it was to be saved.

The good deposit. Let us first of all feel it to be *something*. Let us try to touch and to handle just one substantial ingredient of it. Let us resolve, let us struggle, let us pray, that this revelation, this self-manifestation of God, which is enshrined in this volume called holy, shall shine out of it upon us. It shall not be a name, it shall not be a formula, it shall not be a mere buzzing sound—it shall be a voice. If we could make one verse speak, if we could make one little sentence of the Testament call us by our name, and tell us to do something because of it, it might be "the beginning of months" to us. It might be the dawning of the day—it might be the very sunrising of an altered life; for then, certainly, we never could rest till it had spoken

again to us, and again, and again. Then we should begin to turn to it as our adviser, as our counsellor, as our friend. Then we should never attempt to write or to preach till the revelation had put a word in our mouth; we should listen for it in the night watches; we should kneel to it as we rose from our sleep, God-sustained and God-commissioned.

How serious should we then be—how evidently taken knowledge of as men that had a trust, and were set and bent upon faithfulness to it! Men would come then to listen to us, as to men who were in communication with the world out of sight—as men who were charged, each separate time of ministering, with something special to say, and with the true way of saying it.—*C. J. Vaughan, D.D.*

(b) Obligation and capacity are commensurate. God does not desire to “reap where He has not sown, nor to gather where He has not straved,” but where He has “given much, of them He will expect the more.” He ex-

pects not from a brute the service of a man, nor from a man the obedience of an angel; He expects not from him that has one talent the results of five, nor from him that has five the results of ten; but He does expect everywhere, and from all beings, that each shall serve according to his actual and “several ability.”

With respect to the power to do something for Christ, this differs in different men, and in the same man at different times. There are differences of talent, wealth, influence, station, opportunity; and there are very frequently growth and accession in all these things as Christians advance and succeed in life. It will often be found, however, that the most able and endowed classes do the least; and of certain individuals it is sometimes true, that as their means increase their doings diminish; for it is diminution, if, while Providence enlarges power, the service rendered is only what it was.—*T. Binney, LL.D.*

## FROM AHAVA TO JERUSALEM; AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE PILGRIMAGE OF THE CHRISTIAN.

(Verses 31, 32.)

Notice—

### I. The setting out from Ahava.

“Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem.” They went forth—

1. *From captivity to liberty.* In Babylon they were not in cruel bondage, as their fathers had been in Egypt; and in departing from Babylon they did not go forth to civil or political freedom, as their fathers did when they left Egypt. But in Babylon they were captives. They could not leave the places in which they were settled without permission. Their departure is repeatedly spoken of as a going “up out of the captivity.” And while they who departed were still subject to the Persian civil government, they were allowed full religious freedom. The Christian pilgrim is emancipated from the captivity of sin. “Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.” But the believer in Christ Jesus is “made free from sin;” he is delivered from “the bond of iniquity,” from the thralldom of evil habits, &c. “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. . . . If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” (a.)

### 2. From exile to their ancestral home.

They were going forth to the land of their fathers, which was sacred and dear to them by many precious and glorious memories and associations. They were going home. Christians are “strangers and pilgrims on the earth. They desire a better country, that is, an heavenly,” &c. “Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.” “Our conversation” (rather, country or citizenship) “is in heaven.” We, too, are going home.

3. *From the land of idolatry to the scene of true worship.* The priesthood, the altar, and the temple of the true and living God were at Jerusalem. The chief reason of their return to their own land was that there they could more fully and perfectly worship Jehovah, the God of Israel. We are travelling to the scene of pure and perfect and perpetual worship. Our journey will end in heaven, and there every thought and affection, every word and action will be sacred. (Comp. Rev. vii. 15, xxi. 2, 3.) (b.)

“There God in Christ revealed  
In fulness of His grace  
Shall we behold for ever,  
And worship face to face.”

### II. The progress on the journey.

“And the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way.” They progressed—

1. *Notwithstanding enemies.* The path of the Christian pilgrim is beset with foes. His progress is opposed by—(1.) Invisible, spiritual enemies. He has to contend against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not “against flesh and blood, but against principalities,” &c. (Eph. vi. 10–17). “Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about,” &c. (1 Pet. v. 8, 9). (2.) Enemies in human society. The allurements of the world; “the deceitfulness of riches;” the temptation to substitute policy for principle, and to sacrifice the spiritual and eternal for the material and temporal, &c. (3.) Enemies in our own nature. “The flesh lusteth against the spirit,” &c. (Gal. v. 17). Carnal appetites contend against spiritual aspirations, &c.

2. *By reason of the Divine blessing.* “The hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered,” &c. He was both guide and guardian to Ezra and his company. And He leads and protects His people in their heavenward journey. “We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.” “Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ.” “He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper,” &c. (Heb. xiii. 5, 6).

III. *The arrival at Jerusalem.* “And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days.” Their arrival was characterised by—

1. *Grateful rest.* For three days they rested after their long and toilsome journey. The rest would be very welcome, &c. “There remaineth a rest to the people of God.” In heaven the Christian pilgrims “rest from their labours.” (c.)

“Rest more sweet and still  
Than ever nightfall gave,  
Our weary hearts shall fill  
In the land beyond the grave.”

2. *Joyful welcome.* Many of the pilgrims in Ezra’s company had relatives in Jerusalem, persons who had gone up there

with Zerubbabel, or the children of such persons, and heartily would they welcome their newly-arrived kinsfolk. Have we not kinsfolk in the “better country” who wait to greet us on our arrival there? We are not journeying to a strange land, but to our “Father’s house.” Many of our loving and beloved ones are already there, and wait to welcome us into their shining ranks, and sacred services, and delightful society. And when once we are united there, we shall part no more. (d.)

“O happy world! O glorious place!  
Where all who are forgiven  
Shall find their loved and lost below,  
And hearts, like meeting streams, shall flow,  
For ever one, in heaven.”

### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) The work of grace shall conquer the work of depravity; the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus shall set free the soul from the law of sin and death. Nothing else could do it, nothing external to the soul; no outward law of excellence could do it, nothing that did not work within the soul as a living principle of life and action. By this new principle introduced, this new determination of the will in accordance with Divine grace, the man is set free from the evil dispositions of the unregenerate heart, from its inbred, habitual, long-cherished, long-growing, and powerful corruptions; he is set at liberty to serve God out of love, no longer bound in slavery to the law of sin and death in an evil nature. This is the great deliverance; this is freedom indeed; instead of the death of sin, a death to sin, a redemption from its indwelling power by the working of an opposite power of holiness and life, which, as Christ’s own life, imparted to the soul, becomes the *habit* of the soul. But it is too low an expression when we say *imparted to the soul*, for in order to work this freedom, this regeneration, this new creatureship in Christ, Christ Himself takes up His abode within the soul, and works in it. So the man says, this freeman of Christ, “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” This new life in the soul is not only a life *in* Christ, but the life *of* Christ. “Now the Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,”—liberty from the bondage of corruption, from the law of sin and death, liberty of life, liberty of holiness, liberty to serve God, not as a slave but as a child, not with the spirit of bondage to fear, but with “the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.”—G. B. Cheever, D. D.

(b) All earthly shrines shall pass away. The beautiful temples shall fade into oblivion; the fanes which utter their silver melody as each Sabbath dawns, awakening the sweetest

associations of the soul and calling man from cares and sorrow to God and peace,—all, all shall depart. The music, so subtle and deep and elevating, shall sink into silence; the prayers, so eloquent and importunate and fervid, shall cease; the call to dying sinners, and neglecters and despisers of Jesus, shall no longer be heard. Altars and priests shall be no more. And instead shall come the holiest worship and the purest homage, and the cleansed heart and the immortal body, and man shall walk in that region which sin cannot enter, and death cannot shadow, and pain cannot touch, amid scenes of beauty and undecaying sweetness, and in that realm whose King is the Lord of hosts, and whose subjects are the obedient servants of their lawful Monarch, and the willing children of their Royal Parent. And instead of temples for the hymn of homage, and the prayer of faith, and the voice of persuasion, there shall be the spiritual worship of redeemed souls, and angelic beings uttering a deeper language than ever was heard on earth, and breathing a more liquid hymn of tenderness than ever rose from an earthly pile, and the soft and exquisite expression shall be fully realised: “I saw no temple therein.”—*J. W. Lester, D. D.*

Sublime beyond the reach of words to express is the choral service of the heavenly Temple. Inspiring and thrilling are the strains that rise from that mysterious mount on which stands the collective Church of the First-born, and whose praise swells and flows triumphantly away, till the universe is filled with the harmony which comes “rolling back full on the throne of God.”—*R. Ferguson, LL.D.*

(c) Peace is the very highest mode of joy. It is the joy of rest; and this rest partakes the repose of the Divine nature. It is on God that the soul is fixed, and hence she cannot but enjoy the calm and the quiet of Infinite Perfection.

“As the wave a ray of light receives,  
And rests unbroken;”

so it is the fact of each nature being in im-

mediate union with God and of His fullness flowing into it, which insures its everlasting rest. In such a case, unrest is impossible. Here we may see a ripple on the bosom of the most placid lake, but there every breast is soothed into unruffled peace. The gentle words of the Saviour—**FEAR NOT**—addressed to the spirit as she was passing through the waters of death, have there deepened into the tranquillity of a sinless nature, and on the bosom of her God she will recline for ever.

This deep repose of soul in the world of glory is not incompatible with the loftiest and the most unwearied activity. Rest is often confounded with sloth, and repose with indolence. But neither indolence nor sloth can exist in heaven, where the purity of each individual nature involves a corresponding vitality, and the vitality a corresponding activity. It is true that the motion of the soul there is ever towards rest; but it is no less true that the rest is ever towards motion. In seeking the one only centre of her life, it is that the soul may come back replenished and filled unto the fullness of God, and thus be prepared to enter on new and still higher spheres of service. In her moments of most profound quiet, her every power is on the utmost stretch and reach of effort.—*Ibid.*

(d) Thy dead men shall live; that decaying dust shall rise again. Weep not as though thou hadst cast thy treasure into the sea, where thou couldst never find it; thou hast only laid it by in a casket, whence thou shalt receive it again brighter than before. Thou shalt look again with thine own eyes into those eyes which have spoken love to thee so often, but which are now closed in sepulchral darkness. Thy child shall see thee yet again; thou shalt know thy child; the selfsame form shall rise. Thy departed friend shall come back to thee, and having loved his Lord as thou dost, thou shalt rejoice with him in the land where they die no more. It is but a short parting; it will be an eternal meeting. For ever with the Lord, we shall also be for ever with each other. Let us comfort one another, then, with these words.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

## AT JERUSALEM: THE FAITHFUL SURRENDER OF IMPORTANT TRUSTS.

(Verses 33–36.)

We have here—

I. A sacred trust faithfully discharged. “Now on the fourth day was the silver and the gold and the vessels weighed in the house of our God,” &c. (vers. 33, 34). This trust was discharged—

1. *With minute accuracy and reverent care.* Notice—1. The particular accuracy with which everything was accounted for. Everything was—(1)

weighed. “The silver and the gold and the vessels were weighed,” &c. “By weight of every one.” (2.) Numbered. “By number and by weight of every one.” (3.) Inventoried. “And all the weight was written at that time.” 2. The reverent care with which these treasures were delivered up. This is indicated—(1.) In the sacred place in which they were delivered. “In the house of our God.” (2.) By the conse-

crated persons to whom they were delivered. "By the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest," &c. It appears from ver. 29 that "the chief of the priests and Levites and the chief of the fathers of Israel" were also present at the time. (a.)

2. *With a grateful sense of relief.* It seems to us that the twelve priests and the twelve Levites, who had charge of these treasures during the long and perilous journey, must have felt relieved and thankful when the journey was concluded in safety, and the treasures were surrendered entire and inviolate. Blessed is he who, in relation to the trusts of life, will be able to render as satisfactory an account as this! Blessed who at the end of life's journey will be able to say, "Lord, Thou deliverdst unto me five talents," &c. (Matt. xxv. 20, 21). Or, with St. Paul, "I have fought a good fight," &c. (2 Tim. iv. 7, 8). (b.)

**II. Divine worship devoutly offered.** "The children of those that had been carried away, which were come out of the captivity, offered burnt offerings unto the God of Israel," &c. In these sacrifices there was—

1. *An acknowledgment of sin and of the need of atonement with God.* They "offered twelve he-goats for a sin offering."

2. *An expression of thankfulness and self-consecration.* They "offered twelve bullocks for all Israel, ninety and six rams, seventy and seven lambs; all this was a burnt offering unto the Lord."

3. *An indication of the unity of the twelve tribes of Israel.* A sin offering and a burnt offering was offered for each of the twelve tribes. "Offered burnt offerings unto the God of Israel, twelve bullocks for all Israel, ninety and six (8 × 12) rams, twelve he-goats for a sin offering." (For further notes on the significance of these sacrifices, see homilies on chaps. iii. 1-3, vi. 16-18; and for illustrations, see those accompanying the above-mentioned homilies.)

**III. The royal letters duly delivered.** "And they delivered the king's commissions unto the king's lieutenants," &c.

1. *The delivery of these letters was an evidence of loyalty to the Persian govern-*

*ment.* It was an acknowledgment of the authority of Artaxerxes the king, and of his officers west of the Euphrates. The same Word which commands us to "fear God" commands us also to "honour the king" (1 Pet. ii. 13-17). "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates." "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers," &c. (Rom. xiii. 1-7).

2. *The time of their delivery was an evidence of their supreme regard for Jehovah their God.* First, they gave up the sacred vessels and treasures for the worship of Jehovah; then they presented to Him their humble and grateful sacrifices, and then they delivered the king's commissions unto the king's officers. Our loyalty to the earthly sovereign must be subordinate to our reverence for God. To Him must be given our highest, holiest affections, and our constant and complete obedience.

**IV. Valuable help promptly rendered.** "The king's lieutenants and governors on this side the river furthered the people, and the house of God." They carried out the behests of the king expressed in the letters which Ezra delivered to them. Thus the journey of Ezra came to a very satisfactory and successful issue.

## ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Many fill their life with regrets for being confined to such a narrow sphere of usefulness. If they only were in the ministerial office, or had millions of money, they would do so and so; but what can an ordinary labourer, a poor Sunday-school teacher, accomplish? Friend, be content to serve God where He has placed you; for there precisely you can accomplish the most. It is better to make the best of what you have than to fret and pout for what you have not. The man with one talent is never accountable for five; but for his one he must give as strict an account as the other for his five. It may require more humility to husband one talent than five; and, so far as the improvement or misimprovement of either is concerned, they are both equally important in the sight of God. The king's million and the widow's mite are worth the same with the Eternal.—*Dict. of Illust.*

(b) "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Oh blissful sentence! Words of unutterable, inconceivable import! Language of condescend-

ing grace, not now to be comprehended! To be acknowledged before the assembled universe, not only as His servants, but His *good* and *faithful* servants. To be told that we have served Him faithfully, and told it from the throne of His glory! To hear *Him* say "Well done!" and have the plaudit reverberated in ten thousand times ten thousand echoes from the lips of admiring and adoring angels, till heaven rings with the sound, "Well done, well done, thou faithful servant of the Lamb!" Nor is this all. "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." "Come into the same place, yea, into the same joy. Come and dwell with Me, and have one felicity common to both."

This reward will be bestowed on *all* His faithful servants without exception. It belongs not to apostles merely, nor to martyrs, reformers, missionaries, and ministers; but to

the most obscure, and illiterate, and humble Christians on earth. It is not the service of official station merely that is alluded to, but the service of personal religion. Christ is as truly served by the most retired believer, though not as publicly, nor as extensively, as by the most popular and successful preacher. It is the service of faith, patience, self-denial, suffering, mortification, that is to be rewarded; the service of a devoted heart and a holy life that is to be thus honoured and blessed, whether the man who performs it follows Christ in the retirement of a private or the activities of a public station. It is true the reward will be in proportion to the service, and the degrees of glory according to the degrees of grace; but all faithful servants will be rewarded by admission to the presence and service and enjoyment of Christ in heaven.—*J. A. James.*

## CHAPTER IX.

**CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.]** We now come to the social and religious reformation effected by Ezra amongst the Jews who had previously returned to their own land (chaps. ix. and x.). And in this chapter we have—(i.) The complaint of the princes to Ezra concerning the mingling of the people of Israel with the idolatrous people of the lands (vers. 1 and 2). (ii.) The great amazement and grief of Ezra because of this (vers. 3 and 4). (iii.) The confession and prayer of Ezra for the people of Israel (vers. 5–15).

**Ver. 1. Now when these things were done]** Some time seems to have elapsed between the events recorded in chap. viii. and those narrated in chap. ix. Ezra and his company arrived in Jerusalem "on the first day of the fifth month" (chap. vii. 9), and on the fourth day of that month they delivered up the treasures in the Temple, and offered burnt offerings and sin offerings unto the Lord God (chap. viii. 32–35). The next note of time is in chap. x. 9: "It was the ninth month and the twentieth day of the month" when the great assembly took place at Jerusalem. This assembly had been summoned three days previously. So that there seems to have been an interval of more than four months between the arrival at Jerusalem and the events related in chaps. ix. and x. Probably some portion of this time was occupied in making arrangements with the king's satraps and governors (chap. viii. 36). **The people of the lands]** are the dwellers in the adjacent districts, who are afterwards mentioned. **Doing according to their abominations]** It is better to omit "doing," which has been unnecessarily supplied by the translators of the A. V. "Have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, according to their abominations, (even) of the Canaanites," &c. Or, "in respect of their abominations, (even) of," &c. **The Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites]** were descendants of the ancient Canaanites, whom Israel failed to exterminate, and who were not carried into captivity with the Israelites, but remained in some parts of Palestine. **The Ammonites, the Moabites]** dwelt on the east. **The Egyptians and the Amorites]** on the south.

**Ver. 2. The holy seed]** The expression is probably taken from Isa. vi. 13. By calling, by covenant, and by profession the Israelites were a separate people, a holy people (see Exod. xix. 5–8; xxxiii. 16; chap. vi. 20, 21). **Have mingled themselves with the people of the lands]** thus violating an express command of the Lord their God (Deut. vii. 1–4). **Yea, the hand of the princes and rulers have been chief]** &c., *i.e.* the upper classes were the first to transgress in this respect.

**Ver. 3. I rent my garment and my mantle]** As an indication of his great grief and horror, he rent both his outer and inner garments. The custom was a very ancient and a very common one for expressing sorrow, and is frequently mentioned in the Bible (see Gen. xxxvii. 29, 34; Josh. vii. 6; 1 Sam. iv. 12; 2 Sam. i. 11; 2 Kings ii. 12; Job i. 20, *et al.*) **And plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard]** This also was expressive of grief, horror, and moral indignation. To shave the head in great sorrow was not unfrequent amongst the Jews (Job i. 20); but this is the only example in the canonical Scriptures of a person plucking out his own hair by the roots in grief and indignation. **And sat down astonished]** or "benumbed, stunned."—*Fuerst.*

**Ver. 4. Every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel]** &c. They trembled in their alarm because of the punishments threatened in the law of God for such transgressions as had been committed. **I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice]** Inasmuch as business

is generally transacted in the morning in the East, the princes in all probability made their complaint to Ezra in the forenoon, in which case he sat stunned and silent for several hours.

Ver. 5. **I arose up from my heaviness]** Rather, as in margin: "affliction." Fuerst: "self-affliction." Keil: "mortification, or humiliation." **And having rent my garment and my mantle]** This does not refer to the former rending (ver. 3). For the second time he expresses his grief and horror in this manner.

Ver. 6. **I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face]** &c. Keil: "I am ashamed, and am covered with shame, to lift up," &c. The same words are used together in Isa. xlv. 16; Jer. xxxi. 19; and other places. **Our trespass is grown up unto the heavens]** Margin: "our guiltiness." Keil: "our guiltiness is great, (reaching) unto the heavens." (Comp. 2 Chron. xxviii. 9.)

Ver. 7. **Since the days of our fathers]** This expression may be taken as reaching back to the time when their fathers came out of Egypt; but it seems probable that Ezra meant by it, since the time when under their kings idolatry and idolatrous customs were practised amongst them. **To confusion of face]** (comp. 2 Chron. xxii. 21; Dan. ix. 7, 8). **As it is this day]** They were then in subjection to Artaxerxes.

Ver. 8. **For a little space]** or, a "little moment." The eighty years that had elapsed since the emancipation by Cyrus he speaks of as "a little moment," as compared either "with the long period of suffering from the times of the Assyrians (comp. Neh. ix. 32) till the reign of Cyrus" (Keil), or with "the long enjoyment of Divine favour from Abraham to Zedekiah" (Rawlinson). **A remnant to escape]** Keil: "rescued remnant." Those who had returned to the land of their fathers were but "a remnant" as compared with the numerous population of former days. **And to give us a nail in His holy place]** Margin: "or, a pin: that is a constant and sure abode." Fuerst: "נִיב = a peg, nail, driven into the wall (Isa. xxii. 25; Ezek. xv. 3); a tent pin, to which a tent is fastened (Judg. iv. 21; Exod. xxvii. 19); the fastening being used as an image of being established (Isa. xxii. 23); of remaining (Ezra ix. 8). for which נִיב stands in ix. 9." Ezra seems to have regarded the Temple as a pledge of their permanence, and a means of increased life and vigour; for he goes on to say: **that our God may lighten our eyes]** &c.

Ver. 9. **For we were bondmen]** Rather, "we are bondmen." They were still subject to the Persian king. Only as regards the exercise of their religion were they granted independence. **And to give us a wall]** &c. This must be understood figuratively; for the walls of Jerusalem were not yet rebuilt (see Neh. i. 3; ii. 13). God had disposed the Persian kings, Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, to protect them in the possession of their country and capital. The wall is a figure of defence, safety, and continuance.

Vers. 11, 12. **Which Thou hast commanded by Thy servants the prophets, saying, The land]** &c. This is not a verbal quotation, but a statement which correctly represents many passages of Scripture (see Exod. xxiii. 32, 33, xxxiv. 12-16; Lev. xviii. 24-30; Deut. vii. 1-4, xxiii. 6, et al.)

Ver. 13. **Hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve]** The last word is supplied by the translators of the A.V. Margin: "Heb. 'hast withheld beneath our iniquities.'" Fuerst: "Thou hast delivered (us) below our iniquities, i.e. undervaluing our iniquity." Keil: "Thou hast spared us more than our iniquity deserved." Or, "Thou hast checked, hast stopped, beneath our iniquities." Though not a close rendering of the Hebrew, the A.V. gives the meaning of it. **And hast given us such deliverance as this]** Rather, "Thou hast given us (such) a remnant as this."

Ver. 15. **Thou art righteous]** "Ezra appeals to the righteousness of God, . . . to rouse the conscience of the community, to point out to them what, after this relapse into their old abominations, they had to expect from the justice of God."—Keil. Or, he acknowledges the justice of God in His dealings with them, by which they were reduced to a mere remnant. **For we cannot stand before Thee because of this]** (comp. Ps. lxxvi. 7; cxxx. 3).

## THE GOOD MAN'S SORROW OVER THE PEOPLE'S SIN.

(Verses 1-4.)

Notice :

I. **The painful communication made to Ezra.** "Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying," &c. (vers. 1, 2). Information is here given to Ezra—

1. *Of a great sin committed.* "The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated them-

selves from the people of the lands, according to their abominations," &c. The men of Israel had taken wives of the idolatrous Canaanites and other heathen peoples. (1.) This was a positive transgression of a plain and oft-repeated command (see Exod. xxiii. 31-33, xxxiv. 12-16; Deut. vii. 1-4; Josh. xxiii. 12, 13). (2.) It was a peri-

lous transgression. Every sin is perilous. But this one was especially so. The foreign and idolatrous wives were likely to lead their husbands into their sinful customs; and yet more likely to traffic up their children in them. This was expressly pointed out to them by Moses: "They will turn away thy son from following Me, that they may serve other gods," &c. (Deut. vii. 4). Their previous history contained evidence painfully abundant and conclusive of the danger of these prohibited marriages. Even Solomon, notwithstanding his great wisdom and that he was so richly blessed by God, erred greatly and sadly through the influence of heathen wives. "His wives turned away his heart after other gods" (1 Kings xi. 1-13). And this sin the Jews who had returned to their own land were guilty of.

2. *Of the prevalence of this sin.* No class of the community was free from it. "The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites" (ver. 1) were all guilty of it. The evil was general in the community.

3. *Of the aggravations of their sin.* (1.) "The priests and the Levites" (ver. 1), whose business it was to teach the law and promote obedience to it, were themselves guilty of violating it in this respect. The law for the regulation of the marriages of priests was particularly strict (Lev. xxi. 7, 13, 14); and by reason of this and of their sacred character and calling, their marriages with heathen wives were especially reprehensible. (2.) The princes and rulers were foremost in the offence. "Yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass." It was their duty to have maintained and enforced the observance of the law, yet they took the lead in violating it. Other and greater princes had done the same evil thing; e.g., Solomon, Ahab, *et al.* Again, the eminence of their position would impart great force to their example, and it was their duty to see that the excellence of the latter corresponded with the eminence of the former; but it was the opposite of this. In this matter, at least, their example was as pernicious as it was influential. (a.)

This distressing communication was made to Ezra by persons of unimpeachable credibility. They were in responsible positions—"princes;"—and in making this statement, if they did not impeach themselves, they certainly impeached their order. It is probable that they had been stirred up to do so by the influence of Ezra. During the four months which had passed since his arrival at Jerusalem, he had been inquiring into the condition of the people (comp. chap. vii. 14), and the administration of justice, and the measure of their acquaintance with the law (comp. chap. vii. 25, 26); he had also probably been expounding and applying the law; and the result was, that the minds of these princes were enlightened, their consciences were aroused to a sense of the sin which had been committed, and they went to Ezra and made known to him the sin which was so general in the community.

II. *The effect which this communication produced upon Ezra.* "And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle," &c. (ver. 3). The statement caused Ezra—

1. *Great amazement.* "I sat down astonished"—stunned. Domestic life in the East is characterised by great privacy; so that Ezra in making inquiries into the state of the people might well have been ignorant as to the occupants of the apartments of the women. The statement of the princes was quite a revelation to him, and filled him with bitter astonishment. The sins of religious people in our day might well utterly amaze a really godly man.

2. *Deep grief.* "I rent my garment and my mantle." The usual mode of expressing sorrow amongst Eastern peoples was by tearing the garment. The tearing both the outer and the inner garments may betoken the intensity of Ezra's distress. The prevalence of iniquity is ever a source of pain to the godly. It was so to the Psalmist: "I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not Thy word. Rivers of waters run down mine eyes," &c. (Ps. cxix. 158, 136). And to Jeremiah: "Oh that my head were waters," &c. (Jer. ix. 1; xiv.

17). Ill fares it with the soul when we can contemplate sin without sorrow.

3. *Intense moral indignation.* "I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished." Thus he expressed not only his surprise and grief, but also his utter abhorrence of the sin of which they were guilty. God has declared His hatred of sin (Jer. xlv. 4); and as His servants grow in likeness to Him, their hatred of sin will also grow. We may not hate the sinner; while we condemn we may also pity him; but it behoves us to regard sin with repugnance and anger.

III. **The effect of Ezra's grief upon others.** "Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel," &c. Thus the distress of Ezra—

1. *Excited their alarm.* They "trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away." They were filled with fear lest the judgments pronounced upon those who were guilty of this sin should be inflicted upon them. They could not do otherwise than regard with consternation that which afflicted Ezra with so much distress.

2. *Attracted them unto him.* Every one who thus trembled at the words of God assembled unto Ezra. Some might have been drawn to him by curiosity; but certainly they who were alarmed because of the threatened punishments were not of the number. They came to him moved by deep concern on account of the guilt contracted, and by sympathy with his sorrow because of it. And he and they remained apparently speechless for a considerable time—probably for three or four hours. Emotions are sometimes too deep to find expression in words. At such times silence is more expressive than even the most mighty and moving words (comp. Job ii. 13). Mark the power of one true and good man to influence others beneficially. The sorrow of such a man is deeply impressive; it awakens serious reflection, &c. And his moral indignation goes far to carry conviction of the sinfulness of that which enkindles it. (b).

#### CONCLUSION :

1. *Separation from the world is obligatory upon the true Christian.* We do not by this mean neglect of the secular duties of life. "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called." "Diligent in business." In business the Christian must associate with the worldly. Nor do we mean separation from political parties and pursuits. As citizens we have duties which we may not neglect without sin. Nor yet, retirement from the world into seclusion. "I pray not," said our Lord, "that thou shouldst take them out of the world," &c. We mean separation from the aims, principles, spirit, and society of the world. And this not from any Pharisaic conceit of our moral superiority, but for our own safety and usefulness, and for the honour of God. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate," &c. (2 Cor. vi. 14–18). (c).

2. *Sin in others should be regarded by the true Christian with unfeigned sorrow, and reprobation of the sin.* See how Ezra grieved! how our Lord wept over guilty Jerusalem! (d).

3. *Sin in the avowed people of God is especially heinous and mournful.* Their privileges are greater than those of the world, consequently their obligations also are greater, and their sin involves a darker guilt. It is a greater dishonour to God; it checks the progress of His cause and kingdom, &c.

4. *Therefore it behoves Christians to give all diligence to walk holily and unblamably before God and before men.* "Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord." Let us take heed that we be not found false witnesses. "Ye are the salt of the earth," &c. (Matt. v. 13–16). (e).

#### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) If a man could be wicked and a villain to himself alone, the mischief would be so much the more tolerable. But the case is much otherwise. The plague flies abroad and attacks the innocent neighbourhood. The guilt of the crime lights upon one, but the example of it sways a multitude, especially if the criminal be of any note or eminence in the world. For the fall of such an one by any temptation (be it never so plausible) is like that of a principal stone, or stately pillar, tumbling from a lofty edifice into the deep mire of the

street : it does not only plunge and sink into the black dirt itself, but it also dashes and bespatters all that are about or near it when it falls. Was it not thus with Samson, who, of a judge of Israel, and a terror to his enemies, a man all made up of miracle, rendered himself both the shame of the former and the contempt of the latter; a scoff and a byword to all the nations round about him (as every vicious and voluptuous prince must needs be); and all this by surrendering up his strength, his reason, and his royal trust to the charms of a brutish temptation, which quickly transformed and made him a more stupendous miracle of folly and weakness than ever he had been of strength; and a greater disgrace to his country than ever he had been a defence; or, in a word, from a judge of Israel, a woeful judgment upon it? And was it not thus also with David? This was the worst and most killing consequence of the temptation which he fell by (2 Sam. xii. 14), that he had by that enormous act "given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." And no doubt the religion he professed, as well as the sin he had committed, was thereupon made "the song of the drunkards;" and many a biting jeer was obliquely cast at one, as well as directly levelled at the other.—*R. South, D.D.*

(b) The Christian ought to clear a space for himself wherever he goes. Little children, humble hearts, mourning souls, reverent, noble, heavenly-minded persons ought to come round him and say, "Welcome in God's name. Don't leave us; abide with us a long while." But knaves and hypocrites, people who are rolling iniquity under their tongue as a sweet morsel—masked people—ought to feel terribly uncomfortable when a Christian man comes among them. They ought to know him from afar. There should be surrounding him a kind of atmosphere in which men that are evil cannot breathe and live—the knave should shrink away from his sight; the coward should hide himself in the lowest and vilest dust; and the man who was contemplating some keen, clever stroke, in which there should be dishonour and injustice, should feel himself paralysed, disabled, half-damned, in the presence of a man whose soul is afire with Divine truth.—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

(c) The Jewish law shadowed out an everlasting truth. God's people are an exclusive nation; God's Church is for ever separated from the world. This is her charter, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." God's people may break that charter, but they do it at their own peril. And we may be very sure of this, when a religious person begins to feel an inclination for intimate communion with the world, and begins to break down that

barrier which is the line of safety, the first step is made of a series of long, dark wanderings from God. We are to be separate, brethren, from the world. Mistake not the meaning of that word. The world changes its complexion in every age. Solomon's world was the nations of idolatry lying round Israel. *Our* world is not that. The world is that collection of men in every age who live only according to the maxims of their time. The world may be a profligate world, or it may be a moral world. All that is a matter of accident. *Our* world is a moral world. The sons of our world are not idolaters, they are not profligate, they are, it may be, among the most fascinating of mankind. Their society is more pleasing, more lively, more diversified in information than religious society. No marvel if a young and ardent heart feels the spell of the fascination. No wonder if it feels a relief in turning away from the dulness and the monotony of home life to the sparkling brilliancy of the world's society. . . . And yet now, pause. . . . The Christian must leave the world alone. His blessedness lies in quiet work with the Israel of God. His home is in that deep, unruffled tranquillity which belongs to those who are trying to know Christ.—*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*

(d) You must learn to be good haters—but not of *men*. You do not need anything to instruct you on that point. You are too good in that already. You are to abhor *evil*. Ah! there are hundreds of men that know how to hate men, where there is one that knows how to love a man and hate evil. Because evil is offensive to God, because it is repugnant to the innate delicacy of every moral sentiment, because it wastes you, because it wastes your neighbour, because it is hurtful to society, because every benevolent instinct requires that you should hate that which is the common foe of all mankind, therefore you should hate evil. We are to hate all qualities and actions which corrupt the individual, which injure manhood in man; all that creates sorrow or suffering, or tends to do it. In short, we are to take our beginning in the law of God; and being filled with goodwill toward every living creature, that spirit breathing itself like summer throughout, we are to hate, come from what quarter it may, everything that injures society, that injures men in the mass, or that injures men in their individual capacity. Whether it be in their bodies, their souls, or their estate, whatever works mischief to mankind, you are to be its enemy. The want of this moral rebound, and of this indignation, will be found to be ruinous. The presence of it is wholesome. The absence of it is effeminating. It destroys the individual to whom it is lacking, and it is mischievous to the community in which it is lacking.—*H. W. Beecher.*

(e) It is recorded of Alexander the Great, that a soldier was reported to him as having betrayed great cowardice on a particular occa-

sion, on which Alexander called him to him and asked his name. On hearing that his name was Alexander, he upbraided him with the dishonour that he brought on such a name, and entreated him either to change his manners or to change his name, asking him how he could dare, while known as Alexander, to act unworthily? And shall not the Christian remember the high and holy name by which he is called, and dread encountering

the guilt and meanness of dishonouring his Head, who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners"? That name, in its very signification, tells him that he is related to the *anointed One*, and that (as the name implies) all His members, in their measure and degree, are anointed ones. How shall they who take this sacred unction upon them dare to dishonour this name, and so sin against Christ!—*H. G. Salter.*

## THE GOOD MAN'S CONFESSION OF THE PEOPLE'S SIN.

(Verses 5–15.)

We have here—

**I. Deep personal shame and sorrow on account of the sins of the people.** These feelings Ezra expresses by—

1. *A symbolical action.* "And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness, and rent my garments and my mantle." Thus before the assembled people he proclaims the grief and moral indignation with which he regarded their sin.

2. *A suggestive attitude.* "I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God." The posture indicates deep humiliation before God and earnest supplication unto Him.

3. *An explicit avowal.* Ezra said, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Thee, my God." In this avowal notice—(1.) The shamefulness of sin. "Sin is a reproach to any people." It is an "abominable thing." (2.) The good man is ashamed because of the sin of others. He feels the dishonour which is offered by it to God, and the ingratitude, folly, and wickedness of those who commit it. He cannot be an unmoved spectator of the workers of iniquity. The knowledge of human wickedness affects him as it did Ezra, or leads him to cry with the Psalmist, "Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake Thy law." (3.) The good man is specially conscious of the shamefulness of sin when he draws near to God in worship. In the light of His presence the exceeding deformity and heinousness of sin are painfully clear; and the godly soul, burdened in feeling with the iniquities of others, is ashamed to lift up his face to God. (Comp. Isa. vi. 1–5.) (a).

**II. Humble confession of the sins of the people.** Ezra confesses—

1. *The great accumulation of their sins.* "Our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up into the heavens." The idea seems to be that their iniquities, like waves of the sea, rolled over them threatening to overwhelm them; and their guilt was piled up to the very heavens. The confession of the Psalmist is similar: "Mine iniquities are gone over mine head," &c. (Ps. xxxviii. 4). "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me," &c. (Ps. xl. 12).

2. *The long continuance of their sins.* "Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day." From generation to generation they had been a perverse and rebellious people. A sad continuity in sin characterised their history.

3. *The sore aggravations of their sins.* (1.) That they had been committed notwithstanding the Divine judgments. "For our iniquities have we, our kings and our priests, been delivered into the hands of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day." God had visited them with heavy judgments, but they had not turned from their iniquities. He had severely reformed them, but they were not reformed. As a people they had suffered long and sorely for their sins, and yet they were still guilty of those sins. (2.) That they had been committed notwithstanding the Divine mercies. Of these several are mentioned by Ezra. (i.) Mercy in the measure of the punishment inflicted upon them. "Thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve." God might justly have entirely forsaken them, or have

made an utter end of them; but in His wrath He had remembered mercy. (ii.) Mercy in disposing the Persian monarchs to treat them with so much generosity. "For we were bondmen, yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia," &c. "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia" (chap. i. 1) to grant them permission to return to their fatherland. He inclined the heart of Darius to treat them so favourably. And it was by His good hand upon Ezra that Artaxerxes "granted him all his request" (chap. vii. 6). (iii.) Mercy in bringing a rescued remnant to their own land again. "And now for a little space grace hath been showed from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape," &c. A considerable remnant of the people had been safely restored and comfortably settled in the country given by God to their fathers. (iv.) Mercy in enabling them to rebuild the Temple of their God. "To give us a nail in His holy place," &c. "To set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof." For a people in their circumstances this was a great achievement, and a great mercy from the Lord their God. To the pious amongst them it would be the crowning blessing that the Temple was restored, and that the ordinances of their holy religion were regularly and becomingly celebrated. (v.) Mercy in granting them security in their own land. Two expressions seem to suggest this: "To give us a nail in His holy place." Margin: "Or, 'a pin;' that is, a constant and sure abode." "And to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem;" not a literal wall, for as yet the walls of Jerusalem were not restored; but a shield and shelter, peace and protection. Their Samaritan enemies were restrained, and did not trouble them. And the officers of the Persian government favoured and supported them and the house of God. Yet despite all these mercies, they were now living in the regular practice of sin against their gracious God. How black the ingratitude of such conduct! And how foolish, for their sins might lead

Him to withdraw His favour from them. Neither judgments nor mercies had availed to restrain them from heinous transgression. (3.) That they had been committed against plain and positive commands. "And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken Thy commandments, which Thou hast commanded by Thy servants, the prophets," &c. (vers. 10-12, and see *Explanatory Notes* on them). They could not plead ignorance or uncertainty of the law as an excuse for their evil doings. (4.) That they had been committed against commands the reasons of which had been clearly set before them. It had been shown to them that obedience to these commands was necessary for—(i.) The maintenance of their power. "That ye may be strong." (Comp. Deut. xi. 8.) As they mingled with the heathen they lost strength and courage. (ii.) Their enjoyment of the produce of the land. "And eat the good of the land." (Comp. Isa. i. 19.) They should eat it, and not strangers. They should eat it in peace and happiness. (iii.) Their continued possession of the land. "And leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever." (Comp. Deut. xi. 9; Prov. xiii. 22; Ezek. xxxvii. 25.) Their separation from the heathen was necessary to their secure possession of their country. Thus, these commands were not arbitrary, but reasonable; and the reasons for them were stated. Obedience would have been both rational and advantageous; it was both their duty and their interest. Yet they transgressed these commands. No obligation seemed strong enough to bind them to their duty in this respect; no motive adequate to constrain them to obedience. Most persistent and most aggravated were their sins. (b).

III. A solemn anticipation of the consequence of the continuance of the sins of the people. "And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass," &c. (vers. 13-15).

1. *Continuance in sin would lead to their utter end as a community.* "And after all that is come upon us for our

evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that Thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this; should we again break Thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations, wouldest not Thou be angry with us till Thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?" This inquiry does not denote doubt, but certainty. Looking at God's commands to them, and His past dealings with them, Ezra was convinced that if they persisted in these sinful alliances God would bring them to an utter end.

2. *That such a consequence of continuance in sin would be just.* "O Lord God of Israel, Thou art righteous," &c. (ver. 15). In His past dealings with them God had been just and merciful. He would still be just towards them. They were guilty before Him; they had nothing to plead in extenuation of their sins, but must leave themselves in His hands.

3. *That such a consequence of continuance in sin was to be dreaded.* This is quite clear from the close of Ezra's humble appeal to God (vers. 13-15). If sin be not truly repented of its consequences will be found to be dreadful. "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." "He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness."

#### LEARN:

1. *The great evil of sin.* It is evil in itself; it is a great wrong against God; it is terrible in its consequences, &c. (c).

2. *The grand hope of the sinner.* God is merciful as well as just. The greatest sinner, being penitent, may approach unto Him, and, confessing his sin, may obtain full and free forgiveness. "There is forgiveness with Thee," &c. (Ps. cxxx. 3, 4, 7). "If we confess our sins," &c. (1 John i. 9). (d).

3. *The right relation of the good man to sin.* Like Ezra, he should hold it in abhorrence, should be burdened in feeling because of its prevalence in others, should exhibit to them its heinousness, and should humbly confess it before God.

When iniquity abounds, let God's faithful people "weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare Thy people, O Lord," &c. (Joel ii. 17). (e).

#### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Our whole lives present one unbroken series of duties neglected, of favours not acknowledged. And, oh! how do they appear, when we review them in the light of God's countenance! When we see before us our Creator, our Preserver, our Benefactor, our Sovereign, and our Heavenly Father; when we see in Him, to whom all these titles belong, infinite excellence, perfection, glory, and beauty; when we see with what profound veneration, with what raptures of holy, grateful affection He is regarded and served by all the bright armies of heaven;—and then turn and contemplate our past lives, and reflect how they must appear in His sight, can we refrain from exclaiming with Job, "We have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now our eyes see Thee: wherefore we abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes"! Must not each of us say with the Psalmist, "Innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head; therefore my heart faileth me"! Nay, more, when you see what God is, and how He is worshipped in heaven, and then look at the coldness, the formality, the want of reverence with which you have often approached Him in prayer, and listened to His word, must you not feel conscious that should He call you into judgment you could not answer for one in a thousand of the iniquities which have stained your holy things, your religious duties?—*E. Payson, D.D.*

(b) The criminality of any sin is in proportion to the motives and obligations which opposed its commission. To sin against many and powerful motives indicates greater depravity, and is, of course, more criminal than to sin against few and feeble motives. Suppose a person is informed that if he commits a certain crime he shall be imprisoned. If, notwithstanding the threatening, he perpetrates the crime, he shows that he loves the crime more than he loves liberty. Again, suppose him to be assured that if he commits the crime he shall be put to death. Should he after that commit the crime, it would indicate greater depravity than before, it would show that he loved the crime more than life. But the Word of God threatens sinners with everlasting misery if they persist in sin, and promises them everlasting happiness if they will renounce it. I need not tell you that what is everlasting is in one respect infinite, viz., in duration. Here, then, are two infinitely powerful motives presented to the sinner to deter him from sin—infinite happiness and infinite misery. Every one, then,

who persists in sin, notwithstanding these motives, shows that he loves sin more than everlasting happiness, that he hates holiness more than he dreads everlasting misery. His attachment to sin, and, of course, his depravity and criminality, are therefore boundless or infinite.—*Ibid.*

(c) Every sin is a violation of an infinitely perfect law. It will readily be allowed that to violate a good law is a greater evil than to violate a law the goodness of which is doubtful. It will also be allowed that if there were any law made by human governments, on obedience to which the honour, the welfare, and even the existence of a nation depended, —to violate that law would be the greatest crime which a subject could commit. Now the law of God is perfectly holy, just, and good. If it were universally obeyed, universal and endless happiness would be the consequence. But disobedience to this law tends to produce universal and endless misery. Take away the law and the authority of God, there would be no right but that of the strongest; violence, discord, and confusion would fill the universe; sin and misery would overspread the earth, would ascend to heaven, subvert the throne of Jehovah, and compel Him to live in the midst of a mad, infuriated mob, the members of which were continually insulting Him and injuring each other. Now every violation of God's law tends to produce this effect.—*Ibid.*

Others may throw garlands upon sin, picturing the overhanging fruits which drop in her pathway, and make every step graceful as the dance; but we cannot be honest without presenting it as a giant, black with the soot of the forges where eternal chains are made, and feet rotting with disease, and breath foul with plagues, and eyes glaring with woe, and locks flowing in serpent fangs, and voice from which shall rumble forth the blasphemies of the damned.—*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*

(d) Confession is a necessary basis of forgiveness. Confession is not a simple act. Confession is in reality a multitudinous act; it is many acts in one; it is a convergence of right judgment, right feeling, and right action. There are kinds of confession which are wholly unavailing. . . . This is not the confession in which David poured out his soul; his words are full of heart. His language seems to be baptized with tears. Every word is a groan from the soul; and consequently his confession comes within the assurance of

that world-enclosing and most blessed promise, that if we confess our sins, God will erase them from His book, and remember them no more for ever. Think of God *forgetting*. Think of the Infinite casting aught behind His back! Back of the Infinite! Where is *that*? He will put our sins away from Him, as far as the East is from the West. What geometrician can set forth in lines that distance, or tell in words the vastness of that immensity?—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

(e) Abhorrence of evil is indispensable to the purity of a man's own self who is in the midst of "a perverse and crooked generation." I do not believe any man can avoid the formation of feeling, and to a certain extent the expression of it, and maintain himself incorrupt. It is unnatural. What would you give for a man's humanity who could stand by and see a little boy deliberately tortured, and maintain a sweet and smiling face, and perfect equanimity, saying, "It is neither my child, nor the child of anybody that I know anything about;" and saying, "It is wrong; I suppose it is wrong; but there is no use of being excited about it"? What would you think of a man that could stand and look upon wickedness and not feel all his nature rebound at it? You cannot see a man steal (provided it is not yourself!) without the utmost horror. You never see a mean thing done (if it is only done by another) without some sensibility in regard to it.

Now, the expressions of these feelings are, by reaction, the modes in which moral sense, the repugnance to wickedness, to evil, is strengthened. And if you, for any reason, forbear to give expression to the feeling, it goes out for want of expression. It is like fire that is smothered. And the man who is so extremely prudent that he never does give utterance to his feelings of indignation against great wrongs, is a man that emasculates himself; and he becomes a moral eunuch. A man is not worthy of the name of man who has no power of indignation. A man is not worthy of being ranked in the roll of manhood who does not know how to issue soul-thunder.

The feeling, and suitable expression, of indignation, then, is not only salutary as a mode of penalty, and of restraint to the wickedness of society, but it is quite indispensable, also, to the moral purity of the individual, the spectator, himself. It is one of those exercises by which the very moral sense itself, the judge and test of all things right or wrong, is kept in tone.—*H. W. Beecher.*

## EZRA'S HUMILIATION FOR THE SINS OF HIS PEOPLE.

(Verses 5–6.)

**I** The reason of his sorrow. Many of the people had connected themselves in marriage both with the Canaanites and

other heathens around them. This he justly regarded as a most heinous evil.

1. *As being a violation of an express command.* Ezra himself speaks of it in this view (comp. vers. 10–12 with Deut. vii. 2, 3). It is possible that, whilst the generality sought only the gratification of their own corrupt appetites, “the princes and rulers, who were chief in this matter,” justified their conduct on the ground of policy. They might urge that, being few in number, it was desirable for their own preservation to make alliances with those whose hostility they feared. In this way many set their own reasonings in opposition to God’s revealed will. But reason is altogether out of place on such occasions. We are not at liberty to sit in judgment on God’s commands, and to determine how far it is expedient to obey them, &c.

2. *As having an evident tendency to bring the people back to idolatry.* It was for their idolatries that the nation had been sent into captivity; and a recurrence of the same evil was likely to result from so intimate a connection with idolaters. (Comp. Deut. vii. 4.) Their disregard of this danger showed how little they had profited by the judgments that had been inflicted on them, or the mercies that had been vouchsafed unto them. But thus it is with all who seek the friendship of the world: God has told them that “friendship with the world is enmity with God” (Jas. iv. 4); that it is impossible to maintain communion with both (Matt. vi. 24; 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15); and that therefore all who cultivate the friendship of the world will be regarded and treated as the enemies of God (1 John ii. 15–17); yet they will run the risk, and for the sake of gratifying their corrupt wishes, will endanger the everlasting salvation of their souls.

## II. The expressions of his sorrow.

1. *The expression of his grief the instant he was informed of their misconduct.* This was more violent than any of which we read in the Holy Scriptures. Often have men rent their mantle and their garments; but of him alone we are told that “he plucked off the hair of his head and of his beard.” He was almost distracted; he was so overwhelmed as to be incapable of speech or action; “he

sat down astonished,” &c. Shall we think all this extravagant? No truly, if we duly estimate the evil they had committed, and the danger to which the whole nation was reduced. We are told of David, that “horror took hold upon him,” and that “rivers of tears ran down his cheeks,” &c. St. Paul appeals to God, that he had “great sorrow and continual heaviness in his heart,” &c.

2. *His humiliation before God more particularly demands our attention.* “At the time of the evening sacrifice,” as if revived and encouraged by the consideration of the great atonement, “he arose from his heaviness, and fell upon his knees,” and confessed with shame and anguish of heart both his own sins and the sins of all the people. What a just view had he of national transgressions. Many would have thought that because he disapproved of the evils that had been committed, he had no share in the guilt, nor any occasion to humble himself before God on account of them; but the members of the body politic are, in their corporate capacity, like the members of the natural body, all to a certain degree responsible for those evils which generally, though not universally, prevail among them. At the day of judgment indeed, none will have to answer for anything but what they themselves were personally guilty of; but in this world, where alone nations can be dealt with as nations, we should consider ourselves as participating in whatever relates to the nation at large. Oh that we felt for our own sins as he felt for the sins of others! We are told plainly enough what is that repentance which godly sorrow will produce (2 Cor. vii. 10, 11); let us therefore look to it that we “approve ourselves to be clear in this matter.”

### APPLICATION:

And now the evening sacrifice is just offered; “now once in the end of the world, hath Christ appeared,” &c. (Heb. ix. 26.) Let us spread before Him both our national and personal transgressions; not doubting but that “if we confess our sins, God is faithful,” &c. (1 John i. 9).—*C. Simeon, M.A.*

EZRA'S ADDRESS.

(Verse 8.)

Israel had often suffered for their sins, especially for idolatry. Worst of all by enemies—latterly carried into captivity. Now, after seventy years, restored. Now Ezra relates his experience. Deep sorrow and shame for their sins (ver. 2, &c.). His distress, prayer, and confession, &c. In the midst of this comes our text, full of instruction, counsel, &c. The subject shows—

**I. The grace they had experienced.**

Observe—

1. *In bondage.* Not desert, but grace—undeserved favour.

2. *Grace from Jehovah,* their covenant God.

3. *Grace to preserve.* “A remnant.” Seventy years’ captivity. Not all extinguished. Some kept, sustained—and a remnant only.

4. *To be restored to their land—nation—city—worship—inheritances—and home.*

**II. The exalted position to which they had been raised.**

1. “*A nail,*” or *pin*—these were inserted in the building of the place. Designed—(1.) For ornament. (2.) For usefulness. (3.) For permanence. So Christ, the Messiah (Isa. xxii. 23). Levites were nails, pins. The priests—the high priest—an exalted place. The musicians.

2. *In the “holy place” of God.* Tabernacle—Church of the old covenant. Not in palaces—schools of learning—halls of science—academies of philosophy; but in the far higher, holier Church of the living God. Observe this is expressive—(1.) Of their honour—true dignity. (2.) Of their security. (3.) Of their privileges and favours.

**III. The blessings connected with these privileges.**

And here there is reference—

1. *To spiritual illumination.* “God may lighten,” &c. (Ps. xiii. 3; xxxiv. 5). (1.) Eyes to see their own unworthiness. (2.) Their own helplessness. (3.) The Lord’s goodness. (4.) The Lord’s will and ways.

2. *Spiritual reviving.* Rekindling of the fire—stirring up—re-inspiring—re-strengthening—reviving. Faith—hope—zeal—love—obedience.

3. *Gratefulness for deliverances.* In our bondage—that God should show grace. Deliverance from it, &c. And now gratefully reviewed, &c.

4. *The brevity of these signal mercies*—“a little space.” For working—fighting—building up ourselves. Also the Church—“a little space.” We are reminded of this—(1.) By those who have passed away. The fathers, &c. Those we have known—succeeded. (2.) By the advance we have made in life. Look back to childhood—youth, &c. How changed! (3.) By the uncertain, fragmentary remains, we can only possess. “Time is short,” &c. “We spend our years as a tale that is told.” The Judge at the door. “I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day,” &c. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do,” &c. Let the subject be—

1. *A test of character.* Are we of the remnant? Called—the chosen—the faithful.

2. *An appeal as to our position.* In the Church, “a nail” or pin—somewhere.

3. *A question as to our desires.* Are we seeking the reviving?

4. *An exhortation.* Appeal to those outside the Church to come with us, &c.—*Jabez Burns, D.D.*

FORBIDDEN MARRIAGES.

(Verse 12.)

“*Give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons.*” The Israelites were prohi-

bited from taking heathen women for their wives, and from giving their daughters in marriage to the heathen.

And true Christians are commanded not to marry those who are not Christians. What are the reasons why such marriages should not be contracted? Because—

**I. They are opposed to the express command of God.** “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers,” &c. (2 Cor. vi. 14). “There is,” says Barnes, “a difference between Christians and those who are not so great as to render such unions improper and injurious. The direction here refers, doubtless, to all kinds of improper connections with those who were unbelievers. It has been usually supposed by commentators to refer particularly to marriage. But there is no reason for confining it to marriage. It doubtless includes that.” And M. Henry: “Those relations that are our choice must be chosen by rule; and it is good for those who are themselves the children of God to join with those who are so likewise; for there is more danger that the bad will damage the good than hope that the good will benefit the bad.” Again, St. Paul writes that Christians are to marry “only in the Lord” (1 Cor. vii. 39); which Alford explains thus: “i.e., within the limits of *Christian* connection—in the element in which all Christians live and walk—‘let her marry a Christian.’ So Tertull., Cypr., Ambros., Jerome, Grot., Est., Bengel, Rosenm., Olsh., Meyer, De W.” Whitby: “She must marry a believer, one who is in Christ by faith and profession.” And Barnes: “That is, only to one who is a Christian, with a proper sense of her obligations to Christ, and so as to promote His glory.” (a).

**II. They are inconsistent with the most sacred aspects and ends of marriage.** Marriage was instituted by God (Gen. ii. 20–24; Matt. xix. 4–6); and it was intended by Him to be a union of persons not merely as regards their temporal interests, but in their spiritual sympathies. In its best aspect marriage is a union of souls. (b). They who are thus united have sympathy with each other in their deepest, highest, and holiest experiences. They are one in soul, one in Christ, and one for ever.

The marriage which is not a union of souls is defective, and it degrades the Divine institution. One of the ends contemplated in the institution of marriage was that they who are joined in this relation should be mutual helpers. Woman was created to be “an help meet for” man. And this must surely hold good in relation to the highest and most important concerns of life, viz., the salvation of their souls, or their life, health, and progress as spiritual beings. Husbands and wives should aid each other in their upward and heavenward path. But how can they do this if the genuine Christian is mated with one who is not a Christian? (c). The absence of this high and holy union is sometimes mournfully manifest in married life. How inexpressibly sad it is when in the sore troubles of life husband and wife look to different quarters for relief, and consolation, and help! The true Christian looks to the Heavenly Father, and obtains calmness and peace and hope, to which the unbelieving partner is a stranger. When their union should be most closely and preciousy realised, the gulf which separates them is most painfully felt. In like manner the unbeliever is utterly unable to enter into the tenderest, holiest, and most cherished experiences—those of the religious life—of the Christian partner.

**III. They imperil the salvation of the soul.** The believing husband or wife may be successful in leading the unbelieving partner to real trust in Christ and hearty consecration to Him. But in very many instances the actual result is the opposite of this. “Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin” (Neb. xiii. 26). “There is far greater ground of fear that they shall pervert you, than there is ground of hope that you shall convert them.” The risk of this kind which such marriages involve is one which no Christian is justified in deliberately encountering. (d).

“Maid, choosing man, remember this :  
You take his nature with his name ;  
Ask, too, what his religion is,  
For you will soon be of the same.”

**IV. They are inimical to wise and harmonious home government.** In such marriages there is a difference of opinion as to the ends to be sought and the methods to be employed in the government of the family ; and as to the spirit which should pervade the home ; and, further, as to the course of life to be pursued therein. Such differences must militate against the order and harmony which should characterise family life.

**V. They are detrimental to the best interests of the children of the marriage.** One of the objects contemplated in the institution of marriage was the production of “a godly seed” (Mal. ii. 15), and in the marriages which are Divinely forbidden this object is likely to be frustrated. The diversity of spirit, principles, aims, and methods, which exists where one parent is really a Christian and the other is not, must exert an injurious influence upon the children. (e). How many and forcible, then, are the reasons why Christians should marry “only in the Lord” !

### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) They that enter, or think of entering, into the married state, are required to do it in the Lord, as an *only thing*. Marry they may, “only in the Lord.” But when they neglect this, they leave out the only thing that can make a blessed marriage ; which certainly must argue a very profane mind, when men and women dare venture, and rush upon a matter of so great importance as that, and leave out the very only thing that concerns them in it.—*John Howe*.

(b) The relation of which we now treat, instituted by the benevolent Creator Himself, is the closest, the most intimate and tender, of all earthly connections. Its closeness and endearing intimacy were evidently meant to be indicated by two circumstances :—(1.) The manner of the formation of the first woman ; not, as the man himself had been, from “the dust of the ground,” but from a bone of his own body ; and that bone one of the safeguards of the most important and vital organs of his frame, being part of the protecting bulwarks of his heart—the fountain of life to his whole frame, and the seat of all his affections. I dare not for a moment doubt the emblematic significance of this remark-

able fact. It is as far as possible from being fanciful. Adam himself perceived, and felt, and expressed it, when, on the delicate and lovely counterpart of himself being brought to him by the Divine Maker, he exclaimed, with new, and delightful, and sinless emotion : “This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh ; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man.” In our language the sentiment is not, and cannot be, correctly transfused. In the original the name for woman is simply that for man, with a feminine termination, which, from the structure of our language, we cannot imitate. The nearest approximation to it would be she-man ; but, unfortunately, it sounds too ludicrously to be at all sufferable. To this original formation of woman Paul beautifully alludes, when he describes the very thing of which we have been representing it as significant of the tender care with which husbands should regard and cherish the chosen partners of their lives. “So ought men to love their wives,” &c. (Eph. v. 28-30). (2.) The second thing by which this was indicated was the pronouncing of this relation, by Jehovah Himself, superior in its imperative requisitions to every other. The relation of child to parent is specially tender and powerful ; yet it must give way before the obligation under which that child, when he becomes a husband, is laid to the “wife of his youth :” “For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife.” It is the only one of life’s relations that is represented as constituting a species of identity—a dual unit : “Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.”—*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*

(c) Husband and wife should be as the milch-kine, which were coupled together to carry the ark of God ; or as the two cherubim, that looked upon one another, and both upon the mercy-seat ; or as the two tables of stone, on each of which were engraven the laws of God. In some families married persons are like Jeremiah’s two baskets of figs, the one very good, the other very evil ; or like fire and water, whilst the one is flaming in devotion, the other is freezing in corruption. There is a twofold hindrance in holiness : first, on the right side ; secondly, on the left. On the right side : when the wife would run in God’s way, the husband will not let her go : when the fore-horse in a team will not draw, he wrongs all the rest ; when the general of an army forbids a march, all the soldiers stand still. Sometimes on the left : how did Solomon’s idolatrous wives draw away his heart from heaven ? A sinning wife was Satan’s first ladder, by which he scaled the walls of Paradise, and took away the fort-royal of Adam’s heart from him. Thus, she that should have been the *help of his flesh*, was the *hurt of his faith* : his *nature’s under propper* becomes his *grace’s under miner* ; and she that should be

a crown on the head, is a cross on the shoulders. The wife is often to the husband as the ivy is to the oak, which draws away his sap from him.—*W. Secker.*

(d) Such unlawful unions have been usually advocated thus :—The godly party pretends to make no doubt but that the other party may be converted ; “God can easily convert men when He will ; and if there be but love, persons are easily won over to the same mind with those they love.” *Answer*—(1.) Then it seems because you love an ungodly person, you will be easily turned to be ungodly. If so, you are not much better already. If love will not draw you to their mind to be ungodly, why should you think love will draw them to your mind to be godly ? Are you stronger in grace than they are in sin ? (2.) If you knew well what grace is, and what a sinful, unrenewed soul is, you would not think it so easy a matter to convert a soul. Why are there so few converted, if it be so easy a thing ? You cannot make yourselves better by adding higher degrees to the grace you have ; much less can you make others better by giving them the grace which they have not. (3.) It is true that God is able to convert them when He will ; and it is true that, for aught I know, it may be done. But what of that ? Will you in so weighty a case take up with a mere possibility ? God can make a beggar rich, and for aught you know to the contrary, He will do it ; and yet you will not therefore marry a beggar ; nor will you marry a leper, because God can heal him ; why then should you marry an ungodly person, because God can convert him ? See it done first, if you love your peace and safety.—*R. Baxter.*

A consistent Christian young man became attached to a pleasure-loving and gay young

lady, and married her against the advice of his brethren. Her influence silenced his prayers, estranged him from the house of God, and led him to her ways of pleasure. Sickness called his attention back to religion. Twice his wife had driven him from his duty. Now, in agony and remorse, with a fearful eternity before him, he gazed upon her and cried, “Rebecca, Rebecca, you are the cause of my eternal damnation !” and died.—*Dict. of Illust.*

(e) Hannah vows, if the Lord will give her a son, by bearing him, she will return that son to the Lord by serving Him (1 Sam. i. 11). A spouse should be more careful of her children’s breeding than she should be fearful of her children’s bearing. Take heed lest these flowers grow in the devil’s garden. Though you bring them out in corruption, yet do not bring them up to damnation. Those are not mothers, but monsters, that whilst they should be teaching their children the way to heaven with their lips, are leading them the way to hell with their lives. *Good education is the best livery you can give them living ; and it is the best legacy you can leave them dying.* You let out your cares to make them great. Oh lift up your prayers to make them good ; that before you die from them, you may see Christ live in them. Whilst these twigs are green and tender, they should be bowed towards God. Children and servants are in a family as passengers are in a boat ; husband and wife, they are as a pair of oars to row them to their desired haven. Let these small pieces of timber be hewed and squared for the celestial building. By putting a sceptre of grace into their hands, you will set a crown of glory upon their heads.—*W. Secker.*

## USE OF GOD’S DIVERSIFIED DISPENSATIONS.

(Verses 13, 14.)

**I** God’s diversified dispensations towards us. God visited His people of old with alternate mercies and judgments ; and thus He has dealt with us also.

1. *He has visited our sins with judgments.* And it is of the utmost importance that we should acknowledge the hand of God in them. They spring not out of the dust, &c. God uses men as instruments, just as He did the Assyrians and Chaldeans, to punish His people ; but still it is His hand alone that inflicts the stroke (Ps. xvii. 13 ; Isa. x. 5–7, 13–15, xxxvii. 24–26 ; Gen. xlv. 8). We must confess, however, that our sufferings have by no means equalled

our deserts (Ps. ciii. 10). **Take any one of our national sins, &c.** If God had proceeded against us according to the tremendous aggregate of our iniquities, we should have been made as Sodom and Gomorrah.

2. *He has also vouchsafed us a deliverance.* The “deliverance” granted to the Jews on their return from Babylon was not inferior to that which they had formerly experienced in their departure from Egypt. And has not ours also been exceeding great ? . . . In this too must we view the hand of God. Whoever were the means, God was the author of it. It is He who produces all the changes in the state of individuals (I

Sam. ii. 6-8), or of kingdoms (Jer. xviii. 6, 7, 9). And as the discerning of His agency in our afflictions is necessary to effect our humiliation, so the beholding of it in our mercies is necessary to excite our gratitude.

**II. The effect they should have upon us.** If the destruction of sin be the end which God proposes to Himself in all His conduct towards us, then we should endeavour to make everything subservient to that end. The pointed interrogation in the text strongly shows in what light we should view a renewed violation of God's commandments, after He has taken such pains to enforce the observance of them.

1. *How unreasonable would it be!* No man can read the account of Pharaoh's obstinacy in the midst of all his successive judgments and deliverances, and not stand amazed at his more than brutish stupidity. Yet it is thus that we shall act, if we do not now put away our sins, &c. And how irrational such conduct would be God Himself tells us: He even calls heaven and earth to express their astonishment at it, &c. (Isa. i. 2, 3). And if we be guilty of it, He will justly vent His indignation against us, as He did against His people of old: "They are a perverse and crooked generation," &c. (Deut. xxxii. 5, 6).

2. *How ungrateful!* Ingratitude is considered as one of the greatest aggravations that can be found in any offence of man against his fellow-man; and how much more must it enhance the guilt

we contract in our disobedience to God! See what a stress God Himself lays upon this in the transgressions of David (2 Sam. xii. 7-9), and Solomon (1 Kings xi. 9), and Hezekiah (2 Chron. xxxii. 25); and will it not stamp a tenfold malignity also on our offences? (Comp. Jer. vii. 9, 10.)

3. *How dangerous!* This is particularly noticed by Ezra, in the words following the text; and the state of the Jews at this moment is an awful comment upon it. God tells us that, as the impenitence of the Jews was the reason of His continuing to afflict them (Isa. ix. 12, 17, 21; x. 4), so He will "punish us seven times more for our sins" (Lev. xxvi. 18, 21, 24, 28) if we now continue in them. To what a state of misery we may in that case expect to be reduced, we may judge from what was actually experienced by the Jewish nation (Judg. x. 11-14).

ADDRESS:

Remember that God is not an indifferent spectator of our conduct. Sin is that "abominable thing which His soul hateth" (Jer. xlv. 4); and He will surely destroy either it or him that retains it. And if His judgments be not inflicted on the sinner in this life, there still is a future day of retribution, when every man shall give account of himself to God, and receive the just recompense of all his actions. Let every one of us shudder at the thought of ever again breaking the least of God's commandments.—*C. Simeon, M.A.*

## CHAPTER X.

**CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.]** In this chapter we have the account of—(i.) Shechaniah's proposal to put away the strange wives (vers. 1-5). (ii.) Ezra's fast because of the people's sin (ver. 6). (iii.) The proclamation calling upon all the Jews to assemble at Jerusalem within three days (vers. 7, 8). (iv.) The coming together of the people at Jerusalem, and their acceptance of the proposal to put away the strange wives (vers. 9-14). (v.) The opposition of Jonathan the son of Asahel and others (ver. 15). (vi.) The carrying out of the proposal (vers. 16, 17). (vii.) The names of the men who had taken strange wives (vers. 18-44).

**Ver. 1. Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed]** Rather, "Now whilst Ezra prayed and whilst he confessed." **Before the house of God]** *i.e.* in the court of the Temple.

**Ver. 2. Jehiel]** Perhaps the Jehiel whose name occurs in ver. 26, as having married a heathen wife. **Now there is hope in Israel]** Rather, "for Israel." He came to this conclusion because the people were sensible of their sin and sorrowing by reason of it.

**Ver. 3. According to the counsel of my lord]** Keil: "the Lord." Ezra had given no advice in the matter as yet. But Shechaniah might have inferred what Ezra would counsel from his words and actions (chap. ix. 3-15).

**Ver. 5. According to this word]** *i.e.* according to the proposal of Shechaniah.

**Ver. 6. Went into the chamber]** (Comp. 1 Kings vi. 5; chap. viii. 29; Neh. xiii. 4, 5.) **Of Johanan the son of Eliashib]** We cannot arrive at any certain conclusion as to who this Johanan was. According to Mr. Aldis Wright, he was one of the chief Levites (Neh. xii. 23). From a comparison of Neh. xii. 22, 23, with vers. 10 and 11 of the same chapter, Rawlinson concludes that he was the grandson of Eliashib the high priest. Keil says, "Johanan, the son of Eliashib, cannot actually be Johanan-ben-Eliashib (Neh. xii. 23) the high priest. . . . For the high priest Eliashib was a contemporary of Nehemiah, and the high priest Johanan was not the son, but, according to the definite statement (Neh. xii. 10), the grandson of Eliashib, and the son of Joiada (the correct reading of Neh. xii. 11 being, Joiada begat Johanan and Jonathan). Now a chamber of the Temple could not in Ezra's time have been as yet called after a grandson of Eliashib, the contemporary of Nehemiah; and both Johanan and Eliashib being names which frequently occur (comp. vers. 24, 27, 36), and one of the twenty-four orders of priests being called after the latter (1 Chron. xxiv. 12), we, with Ewald (*Gesch.*, iv. p. 228), regard the Johanan-ben-Eliashib here mentioned as an individual of whom nothing further is known,—perhaps a priest descended from the Eliashib of 1 Chron. xxiv. 12, and who possessed in the new Temple a chamber called by his name." **He did eat no bread nor drink water]** He fasted strictly. Fasts of this strictness were not common. A few cases are recorded (see Exod. xxxiv. 28; Deut. ix. 9, 18; Jon. iii. 7).

**Ver. 7. And they made proclamation]** &c. Lit., "And they caused a voice to pass throughout," &c., *i.e.* they proclaimed by heralds. (Comp. chap. i. 1.)

**Ver. 8. Forfeited]** Margin: "Heb., devoted," *i.e.* appropriated to the treasury of the Temple.

**Ver. 9. The ninth month]** was named Chisleu, and nearly corresponds with our December. **In the street]** רחוב = a wide space, a large, open place. Probably here it means the great court before the Temple. **For the great rain]** Chisleu was in the rainy season. "During the months of November and December the rains fall heavily, but at intervals."—*Bibl. Dict.*

**Ver. 10. Have taken strange wives]** Lit., "Have caused strange wives to dwell," *i.e.* have taken them to live with you.

**Ver. 14. Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand]** or, as Keil, "Let then our rulers stand for the whole congregation," *i.e.* for the good of the congregation, and transact its business. **With them the elders of every city and the judges]** as being acquainted with the several cases. **For this matter]** Margin: "Till this matter (be despatched)." Keil: "As long as this matter lasts." The rulers were to continue to judge the accused as long as the matter lasted. The latter part of the verse would run thus: "Until the fierce wrath of our God be turned from us, as long as this matter lasts." The last words define more exactly the leading idea of the verse.

**Ver. 15. Were employed about this matter]** Rather, "Stood up against this (matter)," as in 1 Chron. xxi. 1; 2 Chron. xx. 23; Dan. viii. 25, xi. 14. *Meshullam* is probably identical with the Meshullam of ver. 29, who had taken a heathen wife.

**Ver. 16. And the children of the captivity did so]** Notwithstanding the opposition of Jonathan and his companions, the people carried out the determination which they had expressed. **With certain chief of the fathers, after the house of their fathers]** Keil translates, "And men, heads of houses according to their houses." The meaning is, that each recognised house or family was represented on the commission by its head. **And all of them by their names]** or, "and they all by names." A list of their names was written (comp. chap. viii. 20). **Were separated]** or, selected for this business. **The tenth month]** *i.e.* Tebeth, which nearly answers to our January.

**Ver. 17. The first month]** *i.e.* Nisan, which nearly corresponded to our April. The commission sat for three months, and at the end of that time they had completed their business.

**Ver. 18. The sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak]** This is Jeshua the high priest who came up from Babylon with Zerubbabel.

**Ver. 19. They gave their hands]** *i.e.* "bound themselves by shaking hands, to put away their wives, *i.e.* to dismiss them, and to sever them from the congregation of Israel."—*Keil.* **And being guilty they offered a ram of the flock for their trespass]** The Heb. is simply, "And guilty, a ram of the flock for their trespass;" which is explained by Keil that they were condemned to bring a ram as a trespass offering (Lev. v. 14-16). Fuerst: "And the guilty (gave their hands to bring) a ram for their trespass."

**Vers. 20-22. Of the sons of Immer, Hanani]** &c. "By comparing chap. ii. 36-39, we perceive that not one of the orders of priests who returned with Zerubbabel was free from participation in this transgression."—*Keil.*

**Ver. 25. The singers and the porters]** (Comp. chap. ii. 41, 42.)

**Ver. 26. Moreover of Israel]** "As distinguished from priests and Levites, *i.e.* of the laity."—*Keil.*

**Ver. 44. And some of them had wives by whom they had children]** Rather, "And there were among them wives who had brought forth sons." This fact is mentioned probably to show how thoroughly this reformation was effected. It would be more difficult, for several reasons, to put away a wife who had given birth to children than to put away a childless wife; but the difficulties did not prevent the execution of the duty.

## THE REFORMATION PROPOSED.

(Verses 1--25.)

Three principal points require attention—

**I. The proposal of reformation prepared for.** “Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel,” &c. (ver. 1). Ezra’s great distress, and humble confession, and earnest appeal to God, had influenced the people in such a manner and to such an extent as to prepare them for such a proposal as that made by Shechaniah. The impression which Ezra’s condition and conduct by reason of their sin produced upon the people was—

1. *Sympathetic.* His horror and self-abasement on account of their sin aroused their consciences to a sense of their own guilt. His great sorrow awakened grief in them, and they “wept very sore.”

2. *Extensive.* It seems that the fact of his grievous distress was widely made known, and all the city was stirred by it. Very many were moved by his grief and penitence. “There assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children.” The fact that both men and women, and so many of them, were much affected is important as indicating preparedness for reformation.

3. *Deep.* The people in the great assembly before the house of God were very much moved. The impression was profound as well as extensive. “The people wept very sore;” or “wept a great weeping.” Ezra’s influence for good in this respect was very great. The distress which he manifested was contagious, and spread rapidly, widely, and powerfully amongst the Jews at Jerusalem. Now this was indispensable as a condition for the proposal of any real reformation with a reasonable prospect of success. Until the sinfulness of these marriages was realised, and genuine concern in relation to them was experienced by the people, it would have been vain to have suggested measures for their abolition. But now this “very great

congregation” was in a condition to consider such measures, and probably to adopt and enforce them.

**II. The proposal of reformation made.** “Then Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra,” &c. (vers. 2-4). In this wise and brave address Shechaniah—

1. *Frankly acknowledges the sin.* “We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land.” We do not find his name amongst those who had sinned in this thing; but, like Ezra (chap. ix. 5-15), he includes himself amongst the offenders. He does not attempt either to extenuate or palliate or excuse the sin, but ingenuously confesses it. This was important. The disease must be discovered before it can be remedied. The sin must be perceived and acknowledged before it can be forgiven and done away. There could be no true reformation without a clear perception and a humble confession of the sin. (a).

2. *Discovers reasons for hope.* “Yet now there is hope for Israel concerning this thing.” As M. Henry observes: “The case is sad, but it is not desperate; the disease is threatening, but not incurable. There is hope that the people may be reformed, the guilty reclaimed, a stop put to the spreading of the contagion; and so the judgments which the sin deserves may be prevented, and all will be well. ‘Now there is hope;’ now that the disease is discovered, it is half cured. Now that the alarm is taken, the people begin to be sensible of the mischief, and to lament it; a spirit of repentance seems to be poured out upon them, and they are all thus humbling themselves before God for it, ‘now there is hope’ that God will forgive and have mercy. ‘The valley of Achor’ (that is, of trouble) is the ‘door of hope’ (Hos. ii. 15); for the sin that truly troubles us shall not ruin us. There is hope now that Israel has such a prudent, pious, zealous governor as Ezra to manage this affair.”

3. *Proposes the abolition of the sin.* "Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God," &c. (ver. 3). His proposal was to the effect that they should enter into a solemn covenant with God to make an end of this sin, and to make an end of it—(1.) Completely. "To put away all the wives, and such as are born of them." Marriage with idolaters was prohibited as a preventive of idolatry and its associated abominations (Exod. xxxiv. 11–17; Deut. vii. 1–6; 1 Kings xi. 1–8; Neh. xiii. 23–28); and the presence of the idolatrous wives was a continual temptation to the sin. The Jews had done wrong in marrying such women; and Shechaniah would have them undo that wrong as far as possible by putting away such wives. The true penitent abandons the sin for which he grieves, even though its renunciation be very painful. "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out," &c. (Matt. v. 29, 30). It is better that the surgeon should amputate the diseased limb, than that we should retain it and by so doing imperil the life of the body. So must sin be renounced even at the cost of sharp sufferings. Moreover, the true penitent seeks to repair if possible, and as far as may be, the injury he has done. Repentance leads to restitution. "What has been unjustly got cannot be justly kept, but must be restored." It is one of the sorest sorrows of the penitent soul that complete restitution for sin cannot be made; that the evil done can never be undone; that the false or malignant speech may be afterwards contradicted by him who uttered it, but he can neither unsay it, nor totally annul its effects. Now, it was in this spirit, which seeks to repair the wrong done and to remove the temptation to do it again, that Shechaniah proposed "to put away all the wives and" their children. (b). (2.) In accordance with the counsel of the godly. "According to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God." It does not appear that Ezra and they who sympathised with him had as yet advised this or any other line of action; but from their distress Shechaniah inferred that his

proposal would commend itself to them. Their recommendation of his measure would contribute to its general acceptance. (3.) In accordance with the commands of God. "And let it be done according to the law." I am not aware of any express command to put away heathen wives, to which Shechaniah can refer; but the spirit of the law, which repeatedly and solemnly prohibited such marriages, seemed to require their divorcement. "Divorces were permitted to the Israelites, *by the judicial law*, to prevent worse consequences;" but there could be no consequences worse than the seduction of the husbands and the training of the children to idolatry. Moreover, the law which commanded the Israelite to put to death any one enticing him to idolatry, even if the enticer were his "brother, the son of his mother, or his son, or his daughter, or the wife of his bosom, or the friend, which was as his own soul" (Deut. xiii. 6–11), would surely sanction the putting completely away of heathen wives. If a Christian sin by marrying an unbeliever, he may not adopt the course recommended by Shechaniah. The rule for him, or for her, as the case may be, is laid down in 1 Cor. vii. 12–14.

4. *Summons Ezra to take the lead in abolishing it.* "Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee," &c. (ver. 4). In this appeal of Shechaniah to Ezra we have—(1.) An assertion that the work pertained to him. It was the business of Ezra to take this matter in hand, for two reasons: First, his commission authorised him to do it (see chap. vii. 26). He was sent by Artaxerxes to enforce obedience to the law of God. And, second, his character qualified him for doing it. His acquaintance with the law of God, his practical conformity to that law, his position as a teacher of it, and his great influence with the people, all combined to qualify him for taking the lead in effecting this reformation. (2.) A call to courage in respect to this work. "Be of good courage." Perhaps Ezra took too dark a view of the case, and was too despondent concerning it, and required this hopeful

and earnest call to courage. The despondent would never succeed in carrying out such a reformation; the business imperatively required a brave and resolute spirit. (3.) A summons to action. "Arise, . . . be of good courage, and act." It was of the utmost importance to seize the present favourable opportunity for beginning the reformation. In their present state of sore distress on account of the sin, the people of this great assembly would be ready to enter upon any possible course for making an end of that sin. Therefore it behoved Ezra to arise from his deep grief, and begin the reformation. Let his deep feelings now impel him into earnest action, and the deep feelings of the people will impel them to unite with him. The case demanded immediate and resolute action (comp. Josh. vii. 10-15).

5. *Promises co-operation in abolishing it.* "We also will be with thee." Shechaniah thus takes the place of spokesman for the "very great congregation" assembled before the house of God; and pledges them to stand by Ezra and to work with him in effecting the great reformation. The co-operation of such an assembly in this undertaking would go far to guarantee its success. (c).

III. **The proposal of reformation accepted.** "Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites," &c. (ver. 5).

1. *It was accepted influentially.* "The princes, the priests, the Levites," the men of the most eminent position and commanding influence, gave in their adhesion to the movement.

2. *It was accepted extensively.* "And all Israel." All that great multitude which had assembled unto Ezra out of Israel, pledged themselves to co-operate in carrying out the proposal of Shechaniah. The party of reformation was strong both in the number and in the power of its adherents.

3. *It was accepted solemnly.* Ezra made them "to swear that they should do according to this word; and they swear." When the keenness of their present distress had abated, if any of them had been tempted to draw back,

they would have been prevented from doing so by the solemnity with which they had pledged themselves to the undertaking.

#### CONCLUSION :

The lessons suggested by this subject are many and important. Let us attend to the principal ones.

1. *The manifestation of intense feeling is sometimes commendable, and very influential for good* (ver. 1).

2. *A deep feeling of the guilt of sin is a strong encouragement to hope for forgiveness, amendment, &c.* (ver. 2). (d).

3. *That repentance only is genuine which leads to restitution and reformation* (ver. 3). (e).

4. *It is of the utmost importance to translate religious feeling into corresponding action without delay* (vers. 3, 4). (f).

5. *Great leaders may receive valuable aid from even their humblest followers.* Shechaniah, apparently an able man, suggested the reformation and urged Ezra to attempt it at once; but even the obscurest person in that "very great congregation," by swelling the tide of penitent feeling, helped to set the project of reformation well afloat.

6. *It is sometimes wise to fortify good resolutions by a solemn covenant with God, or by a serious pledge to man* (vers. 3, 6).

#### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Let us strive after God's view of sin. To Him sin is infinitely hateful; He cannot tolerate it with the least degree of allowance; it troubles His otherwise perfect and happy universe; it despoils human nature; it overthrows all that is Divine in manhood; it calls into existence the worm that gnaws for ever; it is the cause of death and the source of hell. To under-estimate the heinousness of sin is to put ourselves out of the line of God's view; to understand sin is to understand redemption. Sin interprets the Cross; sin shows what is meant by God's love. We cannot be right in our relation to Jesus Christ, we cannot be just to His holy Cross, until we regard sin with unutterable repugnance, until we rise against it in fiery indignation, fighting it with all the energy of wounded love, and bringing upon it the damnation of concentrated and implacable anger. I am not speaking of what are called great sins; I am not thinking of murder, of commercial plunder, of adultery, drunkenness, or theft; I am speaking of sin as sin, sin

nestling secretly in the heart, sin rolled under the tongue as a sweet morsel, sin indulged in secret places, sin perverting the thought, sin poisoning the love, sin sucking out the life-blood of the soul; I am thinking of *sin*, not of *sins*—of the fact, not of the details; and I ask, with passionate yet well-considered pointedness, Have we not been led to under-estimate the guilt of sin?—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

(b) There is often, when men repent, the necessity of a reparation. A man that in his past life has been inflicting wrong may not be able to make all the reparation. A man whose distributive gains have been flowing in from a hundred sources, and varying every year, may not be able to carry back the tribute and re-bestow it where he fraudulently or wickedly obtained it. Yet while this is the case frequently in respect to gains, there are many things which a man may repair. A man may have wronged a fellow-man by his tongue, and it is necessary, if he is going to be a Christian, that that shall be all repaired. A man may have a quarrel on his hands, and if he is going to be a Christian, that quarrel must come to an end. A man may be high and obstinate, and that man, if he is going to be a Christian, must come down and confess, "I was wrong, and I give up the transgression wholly, absolutely." It may be that a man has been living on ill-gotten gains. It may be orphan's property. No matter if it makes a beggar of him, the man who is living on fraudulent gains, if he is going to be a Christian, must make reparation, and give them up. If, for proper and suitable reasons, he finds that he cannot give them up, he must at least confess; for although everybody knows his sin, everybody does not know that he knows it—at any rate they do not know that he knows it in such a way that he is willing to confess it. Confession is a testimony to the power of God, and to the power of the new-found virtue in his soul.—*H. W. Beecher.*

(c) The social element in religious movements—that which men often decry in revivals—is apt to infuse a generous enthusiasm, a largeness, into men's minds. There are times when men cannot alone do noble things; but if there be scores and hundreds of men that seem at the same time to be filled with the same influence, then they rise to heroic proportions, and are able to do easily things that would overtax their individual power.

This seems to have been one of those cases where men were seized, not simply with a conviction of sin and with a disposition to repent; but with a disposition to repent in a manner that should be heroic, and should stamp both their sense of iniquity and transgression, and their sense of the genuineness of their repentance and conversion.—*Ibid.*

(d) The essence of repentance is sorrow, sorrow for our sin. Sorrow is painful, and we shrink from pain; we avoid it. To those that

have not felt the evil that repentance cures, how dark and bitter a thing it is to be away from God, homeless, fatherless, an orphan, and made so by selfish ingratitude,—to those it will not seem a good. It is a good only to those who feel the evil it delivers them from, the nobler peace it brings them to. We know there is one thing worse than pain; the painless disease that kills; the slow, insidious, fatal malady that eats away the springs and energies of life, without giving the warnings of bodily distress. To stop that, to heal that, we gladly go in search of pain. We tell the surgeon to hurt us that we may live. Physical vitality is often undermined unconsciously. To avert that process by a pang, by a period of needful and saving agony, we account a blessing. After the first stages of suffocation, the drowning, on their own testimony, pass into a state of insensibility to suffering, or even, as many maintain, of positive and exquisite pleasure. Adam Clarke, who went through it, says, in his autobiography, it was like being borne gently through the most luxurious tropical verdure, the keenest enjoyment. And when this swift, easy passage to destruction is interrupted, and friendship applies restoratives, there are spasms, tortures; the sufferer begs to be let alone, to die. It is not otherwise with the spiritual sensibilities. It is their coming back from death to life that makes their distress. But no wise man, only the demented man, regrets that distress. Paul, with his singular exactness of expression, says that the sorrow that is *unto life*, the price of living for ever, needeth not to be repented of, not to be sorrowed for. The pain that rescues life is a good.—*F. D. Huntington, D.D.*

(e) Reformation is just as essential as repentance. That is, it is just as essential that you should, up to your power, do the deeds of a good man or woman, as that you should take the resolution to be a good man or woman. If you are heartily sorry for misspent years, you will make it your business to spend your future years wisely. If you are called to renounce an undevout heart, the same Lord calls you to work with holy hands. In whatever the past has been irreligious and mean, the future must be sanctified and noble. Despising your selfishness, you must go on to generosity. Renouncing a paltry ambition, you must serve humanity and truth for their own immortal sake. The invisible energy that makes the acorn vital is nothing, unless you give it soil and air for growth and expansion into the fair proportions of the oak.

Thus, in fact, reformation becomes the *test* of repentance, proving its sincerity and its worth. We infer that a miser is penitent, when we see him giving liberally to the poor, or to spreading the Gospel. A sensualist may profess to have repented; but we are not sure, till we see him forsaking dissipation, and living temperately and chastely. A vain, frivolous girl deserves small confidence as repenting, till her whole appearance reveals a constant life

hidden with Christ in God, and the dignity of a sober devotion to the welfare of others. It is not to be believed that a sullen or angry temper has been actually repented of, till the countenance loses its unhallowed fire, and the voice its asperity, and the words come gently, like His, who, when He was reviled, reviled not again.—*Ibid.*

(*f*) It is a perilous thing to separate feeling from acting; to have learnt to feel rightly without acting rightly. It is a danger to which, in a refined and polished age, we are peculiarly exposed. The romance, the poem, and the sermon teach us how to feel. Our feelings are delicately correct. But the danger is this:—feeling is given to lead to action; if feeling be suffered to awake without passing into duty, the character becomes untrue. When the emergency for real action comes,

the feeling is as usual produced: but accustomed as it is to rise in fictitious circumstances without action, neither will it lead on to action in the real ones. "We pity wretchedness and shun the wretched." We utter sentiments, just, honourable, refined, lofty; but somehow, when a truth presents itself in the shape of a duty, we are unable to perform it. And so such characters become by degrees like the artificial pleasure grounds of bad taste, in which the waterfall does not fall, and the grotto offers only the refreshment of an imaginary shade, and the green hill does not strike the skies, and the tree does not grow. Their lives are a sugared crust of sweetness trembling over black depths of hollowness; more truly still, "whited sepulchres"—fair without to look upon, "within full of all uncleanness."—*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*

## TRUE LOYALTY.

(Verse 4.)

The word "loyalty" is much used in these days. A picture here of the thing. The spirit which was animating many in Israel at this juncture finds utterance here from the lips of one. He speaks in the name of others. The issue shows he had warrant for so doing. We also see that he speaks well. By examining his language we shall find that true loyalty is marked—

**I. By genuine respect.** In the commonwealth of Israel at that time there was great need of reform. The people had not long returned from captivity. They were powerless and few. Yet the very evil which had previously occasioned their captivity had begun to reappear. Steps had been taken which, if not retraced, would certainly bring that evil about. Many in high places—some of the speaker's own relatives—were in fault (see ver. 26). The matter therefore was pressing. He felt it so. He desired reform very earnestly; he recommended it very strongly (see vers. 2, 3). Yet he would not take upon him to be the first to move in this matter. He would not set aside those whose office it was to do this. "Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee." You see exactly the state of his mind. Notwithstanding the depth of his zeal and convictions, he would sooner do nothing than be disrespectful to Ezra.

No change, in his judgment, would be proper reform that should set proper authority on one side.

**II. By sincere sympathy.** This is shown here in the words that come next: "We also will be with thee; be of good courage, and do it." It is possible to defer to authority in a very cold and unfriendly spirit, to leave too much on the hands of our rulers, and to fail in taking our proper share of *odium* and labour in supporting them and their measures. We do well, therefore, to note from this language that we owe much to them in both these respects. If we wish to be truly loyal, we are bound to encourage them openly in their righteous efforts. We are bound also to promise them our support and assistance. In fact, to do otherwise is covert rebellion. Not to encourage is to hinder in a taciturn way. Not to assist is, in an indolent fashion, to oppose. How could Ezra have moved at all in this matter, how could he have moved to good purpose, but for this language of Shechaniah?

We may apply these lessons—

**1. To the laws of our land.** Except where religious principle is in question, these should be the laws of our lives. It is the object of the "criminal classes" to try and evade them. It should be the object of God-fearing persons to try

and observe them. "Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's" (Matt. xxii. 21; see also Rom. xii. 1, 2, 7). All this should be regarded by us as part of our duty towards God. This also should be applied by us carefully to all the points it embraces; *e.g.*, our income-tax returns; our action towards contraband trade; our respect for the administrators of justice; our support of its officers, and so on. A bad citizen will never make a good Christian. A good Christian, in these matters, would rather exceed than fall short, after the example of Christ Himself (Matt. xvii. 24-27).

2. *To the laws and officers of our Church.* Ezra was acting here ecclesi-

astically as much as politically; of the two, perhaps rather more so. So of our Lord in paying the di-drachma, or Temple tribute, as above (see also Matt. xxiii. 2, 3). In all things, therefore, in regard to which a Church hath power to ordain, in all matters where its ministers have a right to be consulted, let us not only acquiesce, but encourage; not only encourage, but support. Yet let us do it without interference, and without taking their proper work from their hands. The English word "leader" signifies both a commander and a guide. Therefore never be many steps behind your leader; never be one step in front. —*W. S. Lewis, M.A. in The Clergyman's Magazine.*

## THE REFORMATION DECIDED UPON.

(Verses 6-12.)

Notice:

I. **The summons to the people to assemble at Jerusalem.** Proclamation was made throughout that part of the country in which the returned Jews had settled, requiring them to come to Jerusalem within a specified time, and announcing severe penalties in case any one failed to do so. Concerning this summons, notice—

1. *The circumstances in which it originated.* When the proposal of Shechaniah was adopted by the great congregation assembled before the house of God, "Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan, the son of Eliahshib; and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water; for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away." Here in this chamber Ezra seems to have consulted the chief men, the princes, the elders, and the priests, as to the best measures for carrying out the resolution which had been so solemnly made. And his consultations were in a spirit of profound penitence and earnest piety, which was manifested by his fasting and mourning.

2. *The persons to whom it was ad-*

*dressed.* "They made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity." The summons was issued to all the adult male population of the Jews, who out of exile had returned to their own land. It applied to the entire Jewish community in Palestine.

3. *The authority by which it was issued.* "They made proclamation . . . according to the counsel of the princes and the elders." Not by Ezra alone was the summons sent forth, but by him in connection with the recognised and rightful heads of the community. The authority of the mandate was unquestionable.

4. *The speedy obedience which it required.* "That they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem . . . within three days." "The limits of Judea at this time," says Rawlinson, "appear to have been Bethel on the north, Beersheba on the south, Jericho on the east, and the Mediterranean upon the west. As the frontier was nowhere much more than forty miles from Jerusalem, three days *from the day that they heard the proclamation* would be sufficient time to allow all the able-bodied men to reach the capital." No time

was granted for hesitation or delay. Resolute and quick obedience was demanded of all.

5. *The penalties by which it was enforced.* "And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders," &c. (ver. 8). Should any one prove a defaulter, he is here threatened with a twofold penalty — (1.) The forfeiture of his entire property to the Church. "All his substance should be forfeited;" or, as in the margin, "devoted" (comp. Lev. xxvii. 28). Ezra was authorised by the Persian monarch to inflict this penalty (comp. chap. vii. 26). (2.) Personal exclusion from the community. "And himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away." He would be deprived of all the rights and privileges which pertained to him as a member of that community.

**II. The assembly of the people at Jerusalem in obedience to this summons.** Notice:

1. *The universal attendance at the assembly.* "Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together within three days." There seems to have been no defaulters. If any were inclined to disregard the summons, the severe penalties proclaimed against absentees constrained them to obey it. And all were present within the appointed time.

2. *The felt importance of the assembly.* The historian seems to have regarded it as an epoch in the history of the community; for he carefully records the date of its occurrence. "It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month." The importance of the great and solemn meeting was doubtless felt by most, if not by all the people.

3. *The depressed spirit of the assembly.* "All the people sat in the street of the house of God," &c. (ver. 9). They were troubled and alarmed because of—(1.) The sin by reason of which they had been called together. "Trembling because of this matter." The consciousness of guilt distressed them, and made them fearful. (2.) The extraordinarily heavy rain which was falling at the time.

"And for the great rain." This great gathering took place in the rainy season; but the showers at this time were evidently of unusual severity, and were in the mind of the people associated with the fact of their grievous trespass. How impressive and melancholy a spectacle! The vast multitude seated before the Temple of God, tired, troubled, and trembling, beneath the dark canopy of heavy clouds, with the rain falling down upon them in torrents!

**III. The address of Ezra to the assembled people.** "And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them," &c. (vers. 10, 11). This address comprises—

1. *A declaration of their sin.* "Ye have transgressed and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel." A decided recognition of the sin was indispensable to reformation. By these marriages they had augmented greatly the guilt of the community.

2. *An exhortation to repentance.* He calls upon them to discharge two of the principal duties of repentance. (1.) Confession of sin. "Now therefore make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers, and do His pleasure." Confession of sin is a relief to the penitent soul. (a). It is also an essential condition of forgiveness. (b). "Whoso covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins," &c. "I acknowledged my sin unto Thee," &c. (Ps. xxxii. 5). (2.) Abandonment of sin. "And separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives." This is an essential element in true repentance. "Let the wicked forsake his way," &c. (Isa. lv. 7). "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall have mercy." "Repentance," says Shakespeare, "is heart's sorrow, and a clear life ensuing." (c).

**IV. The declaration of the assembled people.** "Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do." Thus they announced their determination to follow the counsel of Ezra.

Notice—

1. *The unanimity of their determination.* "All the congregation answered and said," &c. This augured well for the success of the movement.

2. *The earnestness of their determination.* "Answered with a loud voice." This was not a half-hearted or reluctant assent, but a free and whole-hearted resolution.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) As the frank and dutiful child, when he has committed a fault, does not wait till another goes and tells his father, or till the father discovers by his frowning countenance that it has come to his ear; but freely, and of his own accord, goes pleasantly to his father, and eases his aching heart by a free and full confession; and this with such plain-heartedness, giving his offence the weight of every aggravating circumstance, so that if the devil himself should come after him, to glean up what he hath left, he should hardly find wherewithal to make the case appear blacker;—thus does the sincere soul to God; adding to his simplicity in the confession of his sin such a flow of sorrow, that God, seeing His dear child in danger of being carried down towards despair, if good news from Him do not speedily stay him, cannot but tune His voice rather into a strain of comforting him in his mourning, than chiding him for his sin.—*W. Gurnall.*

(b) It is impossible for the Almighty Himself to forgive men unless men come to Him with contrition, with repentance towards Himself, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Believe me, there is no action so difficult as the action of forgiveness. There is no action so complicated as the action of pardon. It seems a very simple thing to say, "I forgive you; say no more about it; there is an end of the whole affair: away you go." He who could speak so, is immoral. He who could talk so, is not to be trusted. If a man could treat the moral relationships of life so, it would but prove that his conscience had been drugged, that his judgment had been hoodwinked, and that there was nothing morally permanent in the quality of his soul but corruptness.—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

(c) Convince a man that the only way to save his life is to part with his limb, and he does not hesitate an instant between living with one limb and being buried with two. Borne into the operating theatre, pale, yet resolute, he bares the diseased member to the

knife. And how well does that bleeding, fainting, groaning sufferer teach us to part with our sins rather than with our Saviour. If life is better than a limb, how much better is heaven than a sin!

Two years ago a man was called to decide between preserving his life, and parting with the gains of his lifetime. A gold-digger, he stood on the deck of a ship that, coming from Australian shores, had—as some all but reach heaven—all but reached her harbour in safety. The exiles had been coasting along their native shores; and to-morrow, husbands would embrace their wives, children their parents, and not a few realise the bright dream of returning to pass the evening of their days in happiness amid the loved scenes of their youth. But as the proverb runs, there is much between the cup and the lip. Night came lowering down; and with the night a storm that wrecked ship, and hopes, and fortunes all together. The dawning light but revealed a scene of horror—death staring them in the face. The sea, lashed into fury, ran mountains high; no boat could live in her. One chance still remained. Pale women, weeping children, feeble and timid men must die; but a stout, brave swimmer, with trust in God, and disencumbered of all impediments, might reach the shore, where hundreds stood ready to dash into the boiling surf, and, seizing, save him. One man was observed to go below. He bound round his waist a heavy belt, filled with gold, the hard gains of his life; and returned to the deck. One after another, he saw his fellow-passengers leap overboard. After a brief but terrible struggle, head after head went down—sunk by the gold they had fought hard to gain, and were loth to lose. Slowly he was seen to unbuckle his belt. His hopes had been bound up in it. It was to buy him land, and ease, and respect—the reward of long years of hard and weary exile. What hardships he had endured for it! The sweat of his brow, the hopes of day, and the dreams of night were there. If he parts with it, he is a beggar; but then if he keeps it, he dies. He poised it in his hand; balanced it for a while; took a long, sad look at it; and then with one strong, desperate effort, flung it far out into the roaring sea. Wise man! It sinks with a sullen plunge; and now he follows it—not to sink, but, disencumbered of its weight, to swim; to beat the billows manfully; and, riding on the foaming surge, to reach the shore. Well done, brave gold-digger! Ay, well done, and well chosen; but if "a man," as the devil said, who for once spoke God's truth, "will give all that he hath for his life," how much more should he give all he hath for his soul? Better to part with gold than with God; to bear the heaviest cross than miss a heavenly crown!—*Thomas Guthrie, D.D.*

## A GREAT AND TROUBLED ASSEMBLY.

(Verse 9.)

How much good one man may do who has the grace of God in his heart and the fear of God before his eyes! "One sinner destroyeth much good;" one saint may accomplish much. He may be a centre of gracious influences to the Church and the world, a terror to the bad, a tower of strength to the good. The world owes much to its great men, more to its good ones. Ezra was one of these. He was the means of bringing part of the Church out of captivity, and of renewing the faded splendours of holiness and devotion which it had lost. He stood in the line of illustrious reformers, and was considered in the Jewish Church a second Moses.

The Book of Ezra closes with an account of their national humiliation for the sin of taking foreign wives, and the measures taken for putting them away. Public proclamation had been made for this purpose. The text shows the result. It teaches—

**I. That it is the tendency of sin to produce sorrow and consternation of soul.** "All the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain." The matter spoken of was the sin of marrying strange or foreign wives. It was of great consequence that this evil should be corrected at this time, that their genealogies might be kept pure, that their estates might descend in the right direction, and, above all, that the line of the Messiah might be preserved in the chosen tribe. The deep grief of Ezra and the ready submission of the princes and people show its importance in a national point of view. They all partook of the feelings of shame and consternation. They sat trembling in the open street. "And for the great rain." They probably thought there was something ominous or judicial in this, designed to put an accent of terror upon God's displeasure at their sin.

Learn, then, that it is the tendency of sin to produce sorrow, and that the providences of God often give a voice

to conscience, and produce an inward agony which none but the sinner himself can know. There is a scorpion sting in remembered guilt, when outward troubles and inward fears meet together. Joseph's brethren: "We are verily guilty concerning our brother," &c. (Gen. xlii. 21). The sight of Elijah agonised the mourning mother: "Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" (1 Kings xvii. 18). Sin often begins with gladness and ends in terror. Grace begins with tears and ends with triumph.

"The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?" The spirit can bear temporal ills with much fortitude, and arm itself against outward or inward affliction; but a wounded spirit, pierced and wounded by those arrows of the Almighty's quiver, which find their way to the heart, is intolerable. By a wounded spirit—here described as a spirit of "trembling"—we apprehend a spirit convinced of sin under the terrors of the law, led to a full and just view of its own condition and condemnation. This is the disposition to which, under the efficacious influence of Divine grace, all "the vessels of mercy" are sooner or later led, in a greater or less degree, because the conviction of sin is the very beginning, lies at the foundation of genuine godliness. Sins overlooked and forgotten now appear in their true light. Conscience once asleep is now awakened. The thunders of the law are heard, and there are fearful apprehensions of deserved wrath. "The people wept very sore." They could not "wash their hands in innocency," and therefore they bathed their eyes with tears. A deluge of iniquity in the heart may well produce a deluge of grief in the conscience. Jeremiah wished "that his head were waters, and his eyes a fountain of tears," &c. (Jer. ix. 1). And Ezra himself, though not a partaker of the scandalous guilt of those who had taken foreign wives, exhibits much more earnestness and inten-

sity than many who had. The practice of sin hardened their consciences; the sight of sin softened his (chap. ix. 3-6).

**II. That God marks with peculiar interest the time in which repentance unto life begins in the soul.** "It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month." No breath of prayer, no exercise of faith, no sigh of repentance can ever escape Him. God is very attentive to times and dates. The dates of the commencement of carrying out the reformation and of its completion are preserved (vers. 16, 17). The day in which the three thousand were converted is distinctly recorded: "When the day of Pentecost was fully come" (Acts ii. 1). The day in which the foundation of the second Temple was laid was memorised: "Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's Temple was

laid, consider" (Hag. ii. 18). And is He less attentive to the building of the spiritual temple in the soul? The moment Saul of Tarsus began to pray was a memorable season in the calendar of Heaven (Acts ix. 11). And the prayer of faith and penitence does wonders.

**III. That repentance, where it is real, will be attended with its appropriate fruits.** The people put away the strange wives (vers. 11, 12, 16, 17). "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance," &c. (Luke iii. 8-14).

**IV. That the names and persons of genuine penitents are for ever precious to God and recorded in His book.** "And among the sons of the priests there were found that had taken strange wives: of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak," &c. (vers. 18-44). They were held up as patterns of sin repented, sin forsaken, and sin forgiven.—*Samuel Thodey.*

## THE REFORMATION EFFECTED.

(Verses 13-17.)

The great assembly having earnestly decided that the strange wives should be put away, the next consideration was as to the mode by which this decision might be carried out. It is frequently, and especially in a popular assembly, much easier to resolve that a thing shall be done, than to devise a prudent and practicable method of doing it. In the paragraph now before us we see how the great reformation was carried out. It was effected—

**I. Notwithstanding difficulties.** Two difficulties are suggested in the thirteenth verse:—

1. *The greatness of the undertaking.* "Neither is this a work of one day or two; for we are many that have transgressed in this thing." The cases being numerous, considerable time would be required to deal with them satisfactorily. Moreover, some of the cases would probably need very careful consideration. Amongst the foreign wives some perhaps had become proselytes to the Jewish religion; and amongst the

children of these marriages some of the sons had perhaps been circumcised, and these wives and sons could not be put away. It was necessary that an impartial and sufficient investigation of each case should be made, and the cases were many, so that the task to be performed was not by any means a light or easy one.

2. *The inclemency of the weather.* "But the people are many and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without." The reformation could not be carried out by a great popular assembly, such as that gathered before the Temple; and, even if it had been practicable in other respects, the drenching showers would have prevented it. The assembly could not have continued to sustain those showers; and there was no building in the country that could have sheltered so vast a multitude.

Learn: *To eradicate sin is a task of the greatest difficulty.* How hard it is to overcome a sinful habit in ourselves!

Only the most patient, persistent, prayerful, and believing effort has any chance of success in such an attempt. How difficult it is to eradicate an evil, whether of belief or of practice, from the Church of God! It is a task requiring the zeal of an enthusiastic reformer, the piety of a devoted saint, and the wisdom of a profound sage. Nothing is easier than the propagation of moral evil; but its eradication is supremely difficult. (a).

**II. Notwithstanding opposition.** "Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah stood up against this; and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them," that is, in their opposition to this measure of reform (see *Explanatory Notes* on ver. 15). It is not surprising that opposition should have been offered to this matter. The severance of these marriage ties must have been very painful to most of the persons concerned therein. And very plausible objections might have been urged against their severance. The examples of distinguished Israelites might have been pleaded as precedents in favour of such marriages. Joseph had married an Egyptian (Gen. xli. 45); Moses, a Midianite (Exod. ii. 16, 21), and afterwards a Cushite (Num. xii. 1); Boaz, Ruth, a Moabitess (Ruth iv. 9-13); David, Maacah a Geshurite (2 Sam. iii. 3); Solomon, an Egyptian princess (1 Kings iii. 1, vii. 8). These cases might have been adduced and urged as making against the rigorous measure proposed at the present time. It would have been passing strange if there had been no opposition to this unsparing reformation. It is surprising that the opposition was not more extensive.

Learn: *In effecting any great reformation opposition is to be expected.* Such reformations injure the secular interests of some persons, run counter to the prejudices of others, make war upon the practices of others, and so awaken resistance. Great reformations are generally carried out despite determined opposition. (b).

**III. With exemplary wisdom and fairness.** "Let now our rulers of all

the congregations stand, and let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times," &c. (vers. 14, 16). Thus this reformation was effected—

1. *By the proper authorities.* The "rulers of all the congregation," i.e., the princes and elders of the people, were proposed as a judicial commission to conduct this matter. "And Ezra the priest, with certain chief of the fathers, after the house of their fathers, and all of them by their names were separated, and sat down to examine the matter." The cases were investigated and determined by the rightful judicial authorities of the community, with Ezra as their president.

2. *With competent and reliable witnesses.* "And with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof." "With the accused were to come the elders and judges of every city, to furnish the necessary explanations and evidence." They would be likely to possess the requisite information as to the cases in their respective cities, and their character and position would give increased weight to their testimony.

3. *In the presence of the accused.* "Let all them which have taken strange wives come at appointed times" to Jerusalem for trial. No one was condemned in his absence, or without being allowed an opportunity of pleading his cause if he wished to do so.

4. *With due regard for the convenience of the people.* It was arranged that the cases from each city or locality should be taken by themselves "and at appointed times," and not be mixed with the cases from other localities. By this plan the Jews from the provinces would not be unnecessarily detained in Jerusalem; but having answered the summons to appear there, the cases from their locality would be taken consecutively until they were all adjudicated, and then they would be at liberty to return to their homes and duties.

5. *With careful inquiry.* The time during which the judicial commission sat, and the probable number of cases investigated, furnish evidence of patient examination into the cases. The in-

quiry lasted for three months. They "sat down in the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. And they made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives by the first day of the first month." It is probable that they sat for seventy-five or seventy-six days, and it seems to us that they may have investigated an average of three cases a day. One hundred and thirteen persons were found to have taken foreign wives; and, in accordance with the decision of the judges, they put them away. Evidently the examination was not hurried and superficial, but patient and thorough.

Learn :

*The importance of combining prudence of method with earnestness of purpose in carrying out great reformations.* Zeal in a good cause should be guided and regulated by sound judgment. A noble aim should be pursued by wise and worthy methods, or it may never be attained, or attained with needless loss and trouble. "Wisdom is profitable to direct." (c).

**IV. Thoroughly.** "And they made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives." They completely abolished the evil from the community. It was most desirable and important for the people themselves that the wrong should be courageously grappled with and utterly done away. If a surgeon has to remove diseased flesh from his patient, he must cut it completely away, or he is neither skilful in his practice nor kind to his patient. Sin is very tenacious in its hold, and though checked for a time, springs forth into new and active development. Checking is not enough, it must be killed. Notwithstanding the complete abolition of the foreign wives from the community at this time, the evil reappeared and had to be dealt with by Nehemiah (Neh. xiii. 23-28).

Learn :

*The importance of making an end of sin when we are battling with it.* Let us put it utterly away, cut off all occasions of it, and shun every temptation to it. (d). And a yet more effective safeguard and surety against it, is the

cultivation of the opposite virtues. Let the avaricious cultivate generosity, and the proud man seek after humility, &c. And let every one cry unto God, "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe."

## ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Sometimes this separation from familiar evil is a struggle as between life and death, shaking the whole soul, and tearing its shrinking quick in torture. It is like the sword that pierceth to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow. And yet, such is the power of the conviction of the Spirit of truth when humility has once begun its holy and honest work within us, how many even go out to meet that saving sorrow! Indeed, when the heart has slept too long in the lap of indulgence, there often creeps upon it, I believe, an undefined feeling that before long this rest must be ended; the foreshadow of some darker angel cast across the path. And if the ear of our sympathy were quicker and finer than it is, we should doubtless often overhear, in the tones that breathe around us, the sadness and the prayer of an unsatisfied spirit striving against the evil in it! Blessed is the mind that springs with alacrity and thanksgiving to its better ministry!

For all true souls really touched with the spirit, and consecrated to the fellowship, of Christian obedience will be ready for this sacrifice. Not all equally ready. The bonds of past practice and attachment hang unequal weights about our necks. But what awakened soul will not willingly be drifted away from the accustomed repose, if it is thereby brought nearer to the righteousness and charity of Christ? This, in fact, is the test of the sincerity of faith; the willingness to give up all that has been precious but not holy, and launch out upon the future, trusting only to the Unseen Hand—like the Patriarch, of whom that beautiful thing is written, that when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive, he obeyed, and went out, not knowing whither he went, dwelling in the land of "promise," and looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Great difficulties will threaten every such obedient foot—the wilderness before, the bondage to evil behind; but God is mightier than they—a pillar of fire for the night, and of bright cloud by day: "Greater He that is for us than they that are against us." Outside our private battle, society exposes gigantic wrongs to be redressed; but the right which is to redress them is sure, and the prophetic ear of hope hears the sound of its footsteps from afar. There are changed faces, disappointed companions, an angry class or denomination forsaken, sneers, imputations, false charges, and criticisms—such feeble weapons of the modern world's inquisitions as betray the cowardice of persecution, without its positive creed or its power. But these are

not a terror to him who hears the voice say, "Awake, arise, and Christ shall give thee light!"—*F. D. Huntington, D.D.*

(b) It is a remarkable, but awful, fact that liberty and religion both have arisen to prosperity in the world on successive stages of blood. Blood nurtured the tree of Grecian and of Roman freedom. With bloody swords our fathers in the puritanic and covenanting days gained our civil and religious victories. Through a shower of blood came down, in 1789 and the after years, the genius of liberty to the continental shores. Even while we write (1859), the blood of John Brown of Virginia is dropping into the dust, to rear a glorious and a terrible harvest of freedom to his black countrymen. And the religion of Jesus, need we say, arises from the root of a blood-sprinkled cross. This springs, doubtless, in part from the Divine plan and purpose, but it augurs also something dreadfully wrong in the present system of things. Through the dominion of the evil power men's minds, in every age, have been steeped in selfishness, besotted with lies; and when truth and good try to stir them, they succeed, but the stir they produce is that of rage and resistance. The darkness comprehends them not, but apprehends and destroys their votaries, and many of the followers of the prince of evil perish in the strife, too, and thus "blood toucheth blood." Nor can we conceive the final contest of the world decided without a "great slaughter" among the "multitudes—the multitudes in the valley of decision;" and even the gorgeous Flora of the millennial meadows shall derive its glory from transmuted and transfigured blood.—*G. Gilfillan, M.A.*

(c) The property of cords contracting their length by moisture became generally known, it is said, on the raising of the Egyptian obelisk in the square facing St. Peter's, at Rome, by order of Pope Sixtus V. The great

work was undertaken in the year 1586; and the day for raising the obelisk was marked with great solemnity. High mass was celebrated at St. Peter's; and the architect and workmen received the benediction of the Pope. The blast of a trumpet was the given signal, when engines were set in motion by an incredible number of horses; but not until after fifty-two unsuccessful attempts had been made, was the huge block lifted from the earth. As the ropes which held it had somewhat stretched, the base of the obelisk could not reach the summit of the pedestal; when a man in the crowd cried out, "*Wet the ropes!*" This advice was followed; and the column, as of itself, gradually rose to the required height, and was placed upright on the pedestal prepared for it.—*Biblical Treasury.*

(d) Clip the hairs short, yet they will grow again, because the roots are in the skull. A tree that is but pruned, shred, topped, or lopped, will sprout again; root it up, and it shall grow no more. What is it to clip the outward appearances, and to lop the superfluous boughs of our sins, when the root is cherished in the heart?—*Thomas Adams, D.D.*

How grand a thing to get a passion down and hold it by the throat, strangling it despite its struggles! It is fine work to hang up some old sin as an accursed thing before the Lord, just as they hung up the Canaanitish kings before the face of the sun; or if you cannot quite kill the lust, it is honourable work to roll a great stone at the cave's mouth, and shut in the wretches till the evening comes, when they shall meet their doom. It is a joyous thing when by God's grace under temptation you are kept from falling as you did on a former occasion, and so are made conquerors over a weakness which was your curse in past years. It is a noble thing to be made strong through the blood of the Lamb so as to overcome sin.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

## THE LIST OF OFFENDERS.

(Verses 18-44.)

For what purpose is this catalogue of names inserted here? The list is probably the final record or report of Ezra and his fellow-commissioners, and brought their duties in this matter to an end. But why is it preserved here in the sacred Book? Has it any moral significance? Is it of any permanent value? And if so, in what way is it valuable? We suggest, in reply—

I. As a warning against sin. This catalogue shows us—

1. *Sin extending to all classes.* Here are the names of seventeen priests (vers.

18-22) who had committed the sin of marrying foreign wives, and four of them belonged to the family of the high priest, "Jeshua the son of Jozadak." They had transgressed in this matter notwithstanding their sacred calling, and that they had received commands imposing special restrictions as to their marriages (Lev. xxi. 7). Again, we have the names of ten Levites of three different classes, viz., assistants of the priests, singers, and porters (vers. 23, 24). And besides these there are the names of eighty-six laymen. A sacred

calling, with its hallowed associations and solemn obligations, affords no exemption either from temptation to sin or from the liability to yield to temptation. Let Christian ministers and teachers heed well this fact. Sin is not confined to certain classes or callings. It is found amongst all classes—the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, &c. “All have sinned.” (a).

2. *Sin injuring the reputation.* The names of these offenders “are here recorded to their perpetual reproach.” “Sin is a reproach to any people.” Sin has covered with infamy many a name, which but for it would have been eminent and illustrious for great gifts and noble achievements.

3. *Sin corrupting the influence.* This must have been true of every one of these offenders. The example of each one would be morally pernicious, tending to extend the offence of marrying these foreign wives. But this was especially true in the case of the priests. Their participation in this sin would cause it to appear in the eyes of, at least, some of the people as no sin at all, but quite consistent with duty and piety. In this way their influence, which should have been morally purifying and invigorating, became corrupt and injurious. Thus this catalogue remains as a warning against sin.

**II. As an example of genuine repentance.** Three characteristics of true repentance marked the conduct of these offenders—

1. *They confessed their sin with sorrow.* “The people wept very sore. And Shechaniah answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land.” When Ezra said to the assembled people, “Now therefore make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers . . . all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do.” Sincere and sorrowful confession of sin is a mark of true repentance, and a condition of Divine forgiveness. “I acknowledged my sin unto Thee,” &c. (Ps. xxxii. 5). “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and

just to forgive us our sins,” &c. (1 John i. 9).

2. *They offered sacrifice on account of the sin.* “And being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their trespass.” This trespass offering, as Keil observes, “was imposed upon them according to the principle of the law (Lev. v. 14–19), because they had committed a *מַעַל* (trespass) against the Lord, which needed expiation.” The presentation of this offering was not limited to the four priests who “gave their hands” as a pledge that they would make it. “The same obligations, namely, the dismissal of their strange wives, and the bringing of a trespass offering, were imposed on” all the other guilty persons; but these obligations, having been once stated, it was not deemed necessary to repeat. Every offender was required to bring his sacrifice, and every one did so. And now forgiveness is offered freely to the penitent sinner through the blood of Jesus Christ. “We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” Repentance is the condition of forgiveness, and the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus is the medium through which it is attained. (b). Where there is true repentance the need of reconciliation with God will be deeply felt, and the sacrifice of the Cross will be accepted with thankful joy. (c).

3. *They forsook the sin.* All the offenders put away their strange wives. Even when children had been born of these marriages, rendering the removal of the wives and mothers much more difficult and painful, the difficulties were overcome, the pain was borne, and the wives were put away. True repentance involves practical reformation—change of conduct. (d). Thus the men whose names are here recorded are examples of genuine repentance.

**III. As an encouragement to genuine repentance.** Their repentance was accepted by God, and as a result—

1. *Their sin was forgiven.* If the sinner “turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right;” &c. (Ezek. xxxiii. 14–16).

2. *The Divine favour was vouchsafed.* The wrath of their God for this matter

was turned from them (ver. 14). He approved their penitence and blessed them in their obedience.

Let sinners take encouragement to seek true repentance. "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts," &c. (Isa. lv. 6, 7). "There is forgiveness with God. . . . With the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption." "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, He will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities; and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." (e).

#### ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) The world over, in its serious hours the heart longs, sighs, groans, and travails with sorrows that cannot be uttered, to be delivered from the bondage of sin and death. The Scripture has no other doctrine of the matter on any of its pages, and scarcely one page where this is not. Read the burning confessions of the fifty-first Psalm, and of many another before and after it, where the fire of remorse, which is only the lurid reflection of sin, almost visibly scorches the Psalmist's heart; read the terrible descriptions of that state of man without his Redeemer written by Paul to the Romans; or the tragic picture of Paul's own fearful struggles with the law of his members; or the awful prophecies of a society forgetting its Lord, given in Jude. Recall the narratives of depravity in Scripture history, and the denunciations upon it by prophets, and the thrilling exhortations against it by apostles. Remember that the Bible begins with the first inroad of sin, and finishes with warnings of its punishments. Above all, remember that the first word of the new dispensation was "Repent," and its consummation was the cross built on Calvary to assure forgiveness to "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ;" and you will hardly need to multiply these convincing tokens that all the ministrations of our religion to the human soul presuppose that we all have sinned,—are sinners still. If any of you are disposed to complain that there is too much preaching against sin, apply your criticism to the Bible. The Christ whom we preach came to be a Saviour from sin, did He not? How much better to think and feel thoroughly what sin is now, than when the "space for repentance" is exchanged for the

determination of the judgment!—*F. D. Huntington, D. D.*

(b) Repentance is necessary to forgiveness—a *sine qua non*—a condition, though not in any respect in the sense of desert, yet in the sense of indispensable existence or of being something without which the blessing cannot be enjoyed. This is a truth, a Bible truth. But it is not the ground of pardon, or in any way its meritorious cause. That is the atonement. And, according to the Bible, instead of repentance being the ground of forgiveness, that which is the ground of forgiveness is itself the motive, or inducement, or persuasive, to repentance. It is that consideration by which the Spirit of God in the Word is ever urging sinners to repent and turn unto God. . . . Moreover, that repentance is sufficient to obtain forgiveness, there is nothing in the analogy of Providence that warrants us to conclude. There is much to the contrary. Repentance and reformation do not, in point of fact, in the present experience of mankind, place transgressors, with regard to the temporal effects of their sins, in the same state as if they never had offended. The ruined health and fortune of the intemperate and profligate are not retrieved the instant they repent and reform. Nor is there anything in reason to sustain the position. It is very manifest, that present obedience can only fulfil present obligation. There is, as has often been observed, just as good ground for affirming that former obedience atones for present sins, as there is for affirming that present obedience atones for former sins. Repentance neither alters the nature nor obliterates the guilt of what is past; and present duty, even were it free from all mixture and imperfection, can do no more than answer for itself. It cannot possess, for our former selves any more than for others, aught of the nature or efficacy of works of supererogation. There will be no such works known at the bar of God.—*Ralph Wardlaw, D. D.*

(c) Our want is deliverance from our evil, including both forgiveness for the past and strength now; something to

"Be of sin the double cure,—  
Cleanse us from its guilt and power."

Manifestly this cannot come from ourselves. It must come from Him whom our ingratitude has offended; from the Ruler whom our selfish wickedness has wronged. It must come from God. Look closely at this want; for it is that vital spot in all humanity where sorrow is most keen, and where relief is most joyful. The sure result of evil is pain; of persistent sin is death. Hence the voluntary surrender to pain, pain even unto the body's death, is felt and has been ever felt, to be the natural expression of a penitent soul. It is propitiation; not because God takes pleasure in His children's suffering, but because that is the soul's fitting tribute to the just majesty of

goodness and the holy authority of Right. Government without penalty is gone, and all its blessed protections are dissolved. Hence the honest heart cries out in its shame and fear, "Let me suffer for my sin." Suffering for it there must be somewhere; transgression is a costly business; so it must always be and always look; right must stand at any rate; law must be sacred, or all is gone; and since nothing is so dear as life, and blood is the element of life, life itself must be surrendered, and "without the shedding of blood is no remission." Take the next step. Just because this life is so dear, He who loves us infinitely, and to whom it is dearer than to us, will be willing to lay down for us His own. He will not even wait for our consent; but in the abundance of that unspeakable compassion, in the irresistible freedom of that goodness, He will do it beforehand—only asking of us that we will believe He has done it, and, accepting our pardon, be drawn by that faith into the same self-sacrificing spirit. Herein is love indeed. Suffering for our peace! Sacrifice, not that our service may profit and pay Him, but that our transgression of a perfect law may be pardoned, and the noble life of disinterested goodness may be begotten in ourselves.—*P. D. Huntington, D.D.*

(d) Some confess their sins without so much as intending to forsake them. Marvellous delusion! As if it were possible to impose upon the Almighty Himself. As if the hollow confession of the lips availed anything against the stubborn impenitence of the heart! Very beautiful is that liturgy of the Established Church. Yet how many are there who have knelt in silks and satins to-day, and found a certain anodyne for conscience in the mere repetition of the cry, "O God, the Father of heaven, have mercy upon us miserable sinners"? Or, not to look abroad for examples which may be found at home, how many of

us within these walls have moved the lips and bent the knee, while locked up inviolate in a secure corner of the heart has lurked all the while that evil thing which the lips have professed to expel. That is not repentance. Rather, it resembles a contrivance for beginning the world upon a new score, because the old has grown inconveniently long. True repentance has always an eye to the future as well as to the past; and to confess those sins which you secretly intend to repeat, or which it is not your settled purpose to abandon, is to cheat conscience and to mock God.—*J. G. Pigg, B.A.*

(e) You cannot believe too much in God's mercy. You cannot expect too much at His hands. He is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." No sin is so great but that, coming straight from it, a repentant sinner may hope and believe that all God's love will be lavished upon him, and the richest of God's gifts granted to his desires. Even if our transgression be aggravated by a previous life of godliness, and have given the enemies great occasion to blaspheme, as David did, yet David's penitence may in our souls lead on to David's hope, and the answer will not fail us. Let no sin, however dark, however repeated, drive us to despair of ourselves, because it hides from us our loving Saviour. Though beaten back again and again by the surge of our passions and sins, like some poor shipwrecked sailors sucked back with every retracing wave and tossed about in the angry surf, yet keep your face towards the beach where there is safety, and you will struggle through it all, and though it were but on some floating boards and broken pieces of the ship, will come safe to land. He will uphold you with His Spirit, and take away the weight of sin that would sink you, by His forgiving mercy, and bring you out of all the weltering waste of waters to the solid shore.—*Alex. Maclaren, D.D.*

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