

Our Daily Homily

By

F.B. Meyer

VOLUME THIRTEEN (FINAL)

Preface

With the issue of this volume of "Our Daily Homily," the top stone is placed on a structure which has occupied many of my brightest hours for more than three years.

Amid the pressure of a busy life, and the inevitable demands of a considerable church-organization, it has been an untold refreshment to turn to the devout study of successive chapters of the Bible, with the view of obtaining a message for oneself, and to pass on to others.

We must all have our "Temple of Peace"; and if this August not be a spacious and well-stocked library, it August at least be that collection of sacred literature which contains the noblest thoughts of the holiest men, inbreathed and borne along by the Spirit of God. Here is the secret of serenity, the treasure of tranquillity, the clue to perennial comfort.

It has been impossible altogether to exclude the personal element from these pages, because the sheets have been printed from the types of my own daily experience, set up by the many altering circumstances of joy and grief, conflict and peace, which befall each of us. But the one refrain has been the reality of the unseen; the nearness of God; the vindication of the Christian, as the only true policy of life; the duty and blessedness of doing all God commands, and bearing all He permits; the uplifting and light-bringing power of simple trust in Him who liveth, and was dead, and who is alive forevermore.

None of my books is dearer to me than this, or seems to contain more of my innermost thought; but at best it is only a handful of meal in the barrel, which August God multiply till He send rain on the earth.

Note: This devotional can be accessed at: www.lifebpc.com/devotions
It is also available for downloading on to Palm handheld devices.

FREDERICK BROTHERTON MEYER (1847–1929)

*British preacher, author, and
spokesman for public righteousness*



Meyer's ministry was worldwide, but his base was London. He was born and educated there, held pastorates at some of London's largest free churches, and conducted his moral crusades from that city.

An ardent Baptist and premillennialist, Meyer applied Christian principles to social ills such as drunkenness, prostitution, unmarried mothers, and unwanted children. One of his best crusades occurred in 1911 when he

successfully stopped a prize fight that was to be held at Earl's Court between Jack Johnson of the United States and a British contender. Meyer endured scorn for his efforts: a London newspaper called him "Meddling, Maudlin Meyer."

Meyer was involved in the Blue Ribbon movement (prohibition); the Purity, Rescue, and Temperance work of the Central South London Free Church Council (which closed brothels and counseled prostitutes); and the Homeless Children's Aid and Adoption Society. He served as president of the National and World Sunday School Unions, president of the National Union of Christian Endeavor, and founder of South London Missionary Training College. He was also the author of more than seventy books. He preached around the world. Melbourne Hall (Leicester), a center of social and evangelistic activity, was built in 1881 under his leadership.

- *Who's Who In Christian History* - Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Ezekiel 35:10

“Because thou hast said, These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess it; whereas the LORD was there:”

LISTEN to the plottings of Mount Seir, waiting until Nebuchadnezzar has dispossessed Israel of their land, and with the fixed intention of entering upon its inheritance. These two nations, says the foe, and these two countries shall be mine. The children of Israel are in captivity in Habor and Gozan; the children of Judah at Babylon. What is there to prevent my entering upon their lands? But Jehovah Shammah, the Lord, was in possession; He was there.

What inspiration this is! How often do our foes plot against us, supposing that we shall fall an easy prey, and that they can divide the spoils without let. But God is there. God is in the heart, holding for Himself that which He redeemed. God is in that bed-chamber of mortal anguish and of long waiting. God is in that home which appears besieged by every kind of misfortune. O foot of the foe, thou shalt not intrude! O might of the foe, thou shalt not prevail! God is in possession! Though there seems nothing to prevent the complete over-running of the land, the mailed forces of the enemy shall break on the invisible bulwarks of the Divine presence.

Jehovah Shammah! That hallows every spot, consecrates every act, invests the meanest believer with transcendent worth, is our buttress against attack, and our glory in the midst. For God to be in the soul is the secret of its holiness, of its persistence in the heavenly way, and of its ultimate triumph over all the power of the adversary. Be sure that He is willing to become all this for you also, O weakest and most helpless man! When the Stronger than the strong is in possession, how safe his goods!

Ezekiel 36:8

“But ye, O mountains of Israel, ye shall shoot forth your branches, and yield your fruit to my people of Israel; for they are at hand to come.”

VERY magnificent is this address to the mountains of Israel. At the moment the prophet spoke they were lying waste, and the people of Idumea were plotting to possess them; but this chapter reiterates the assurance that they should be tilled, sown, and possessed.

It seems to me as though these words may be addressed to desolate hearts that are suffering from heartrending grief. Whereas they were once full of mirth, they are now desolate and lonely. The light of their eyes has departed; the voice that made music is still; the presence that filled the home is gone. Is such your case? Behold, God will do better unto you than at your beginnings, and the old estates shall be apportioned and inherited. Bind this promise to your heart; the desolate land shall be tilled, and they shall say, This land that was desolate has become like the Garden of Eden, and the wastes are inhabited (Ezekiel 36:34–35). Do you think that you will never be glad again; that shadow will always lie athwart your path; and that desolation shall hold undisputed empire? It shall not be so. O desolate mountains, ye shall shoot forth your branches, and yield fruit; and it is near to come.

But before these promises can be realized, you must let your sorrow work to its full result in the purification and sanctification of your heart. Great trouble has been allowed to come that you might know the vanity and evil of your own heart, and be led to claim the promises of Ezekiel 36:25–29. They are exceeding great and precious. Note specially the words, “Thus saith the Lord GOD; In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded. And the desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by.” (Ezekiel 36:33–34).

Ezekiel 37:4, 9

“Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ... Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.”

THIS is our double office, as servants of God. We are to prophesy to earth and heaven; to man and God. There are some who forget the second of these injunctions, and their work fails of its highest result. When they speak, bones “came together, bone to his bone” (37:7); there is a stir in the graves of death and corruption; a coming together of the people to hear the word; and in many cases all the appearance of a new life. The flesh comes up and skin covers them above; but (and how fatal is the admission which this *but* introduces) there is no breath in them. It is clear that no amount of human persuasiveness or oratory can secure the true regeneration of the soul. That which is born of the flesh may be galvanized by the energy of the flesh into the appearance of spiritual life, but it will always remain flesh.

When you have done your best, and have failed of the highest results, prophesy to the Spirit; cry to the *four* winds, because He may come in the icy north wind of tribulation, or the warm west wind of prosperity; but speak with the certain assurance of, “Thus saith the Lord God: Come!” (37:9) There is a sense in which the believer has the privilege of commanding the Spirit of God. “Concerning the works of my hands command ye Me.” (Isaiah 45:11) When you obey the law of a force, the force will obey you; and when you yield utterly and humbly to God, the power of God will answer the summons of your faith.

Even while you are speaking, let your heart be in the attitude of expectancy; and according to your faith, it shall be done unto you. If you cannot go forth to witness or prophesy, let your prayer arise to God like a fountain day and night, that His Spirit may breathe on the slain.

Ezekiel 38:3

“And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal:”

IT is startling to meet with these three names, which are found in modern maps as Russia, Moscow, and Tobolsk, and to feel that we may be reading words that are shortly coming to pass. So far as we can see, they have not as yet been fulfilled. Within the hearing of the present generation, Russia may resolve to go up to the land of unwallled villages, such as those that abound in Palestine, and may be challenged by the merchants of Tarshish in the far West. Some have even found an allusion to the English standard in the reference to the young lions of Ezekiel 38:13.

The shrewdest among us cannot guess what may await the world in the near future. Peer as we may into the dim mist, we cannot descry the events which are coming upon the earth. But we may be thankful that we have this word of prophecy, to which we “do well to take heed, as unto a light shining in a dark place.” It is like the illustrated railway-table, which contains a list of the stations through which we must pass ere we reach the terminus. And as the porters call out the names, and we find that they correspond to the route as detailed on the tables, we come to place more implicit trust in our guide-book, and to count with absolute certainty on our ultimate emergence at our destination. “So ye in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors.” (Mark 13:29) In the meanwhile let your loins be girt, and your lamps burning, and ye as those that wait for their Lord.

“Surely He cometh, and a thousand voices

Shout to the saints, and to the deaf and dumb!

Surely He cometh, and the earth rejoices,

Glad in His coming, who hath sworn, ‘I come.’”

Ezekiel 39:25

“Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and will be jealous for my holy name;”

WE must never overlook the literal significance of this promise. All Israel, insists the apostle of the Gentiles, who never lost his love for his own people, shall be saved. The blindness which has happened to them is only till the fullness of the Gentile contingent to the one Church has been brought in. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. The covenant made to their fathers cannot be annulled.

But all bringing again must originate in God. The sheep can only wander on, further and further from the fold, ever deeper into the dark mountains; it will never find its way back: if it shall see the fold again, it will be because the shepherd goes after it until he finds it.

Our natural bias is altogether away from God. The pole of our life is aslant from the pole-star. Our natural tendency is to vanity, corruption, and chaos. If God were to withdraw Himself, however slightly, from the natural world, it would revert to the darkness and confusion of its earliest stages; and whenever God is absent from our moral life, there is the natural and inevitable reversion to the original Adam-type. But God is rich in mercy, in neutralizing the effects of our evil nature. He calls us back to Himself; nay, He comes after us, and brings again our captivity for His name's sake. Are you in captivity to evil habits from which you cannot break loose; to evil associations from which you cannot free yourself; to circumstances that shut you in as iron bars? Have you come to an end of your efforts for liberty, finding the more you struggle the more deeply you involve yourself in the close-woven meshes? Then look away to the Lord God, plead His promises, ask Him to remember His holy name, and He will bring you again.

Ezekiel 40:4

“And the man said unto me, Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall shew thee; for to the intent that I might shew them unto thee art thou brought hither: declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel.”

WE are called to be God’s witnesses, beholding the visions of God, and bearing witness to our brethren of what we have seen, tasted, and handled, of the Word of Life. When the city is draped in mist and gloom, the artist takes his portfolio and climbs into the high mountain of vision. He beholds there the crystalline beauty of the unsullied snow; the roseate hues of sunrise and sunset; the heaped magnificence of the glaciers, with their blue depth. Transferring his visions to his canvas, he returns to this lower sphere, and exhibits his picture on the walls of some public gallery, from which it silently witnesses to one of shy Nature’s coyest moods. But the passers-by are apt to accuse him of extravagance. Ah, but they have not stood where he stood, or seen what he has beheld! It is thus in Divine things also.

God often leads His children into startling and unexpected experiences. They are troubled on every side; bereft of dear ones; deprived of health or property; compelled to pass through the scorching fires of slander, misunderstanding, and temptation. But these are the times when they should *set their hearts* on all that is being shown, to see the way by which God is leading them; the comfort with which He is comforting them; the help in which He is environing them. They have been brought to these experiences that they may know themselves, and God, and His ways of dealing with His people; and may be able to declare what they have been taught, to the intent that unto the principalities and powers in the heavenlies may be known through the Church the manifold wisdom of God. No vision is for private advantage and jubilation only; declare it all.

Ezekiel 41:1

“Afterward he brought me to the temple, and measured the posts, six cubits broad on the one side, and six cubits broad on the other side, which was the breadth of the tabernacle.”

THIS is the pattern of an ideal Temple, which was presented in thought to the prophet’s mind, as the pattern of the Tabernacle was shown to Moses on the Mount. It is interesting to notice the minute measurements and specifications — even to the ornaments of cherubim and palm trees. We cannot but remember that the plan of our life is also worked out before the face of God, and that we shall live to the best purpose when we make all things according to the pattern shown us on the Mount of Prayer and Vision.

Ever remember to look upward to God’s pattern, and do nothing except what He reveals as His will for you; whilst careful to omit nothing that has been prepared for you to say or do. Look up, child of God; look into the plan of your temple-building. The holy places of prayer; the altars of your sacrifice and consecration; the tables of your fellowship; the doors that lead out to work, and open into chambers of pain and suffering; the length and breadth of each; the ornamentation to be chased upon your soul — all, all are fixed. Let your one aim be that God’s will for you should be realized in you; and dare to believe that, if only you will yield to Him, He will work out in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, to whom shall be the glory for ever and ever.

Only remember three rules:—(1) Keep your eye directed outwards and upwards, to Christ exalted in the glory. (2) Be careful to maintain the silence of the Sabbath-rest within—rest from your own thoughts and ways. (3) Do not be always speaking of God as having said or shown this or that: let men form their own conclusions.

Ezekiel 42:13

“Then said he unto me, The north chambers and the south chambers, which are before the separate place, they be holy chambers, where the priests that approach unto the LORD shall eat the most holy things: there shall they lay the most holy things, and the meat offering, and the sin offering, and the trespass offering; for the place is holy.”

EVERY believer is a priest unto God. He may not exercise his priesthood; but when he was washed from his sins in the blood of the Lamb, he was constituted a priest unto God, even the Father. We are called, not to offer propitiatory sacrifices—there is no need for this, since Jesus when He died offered the one sufficient oblation for the sins of the world—but to present ourselves living sacrifices, to offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, and to do good and communicate of our substance to the help of others.

Are you near unto the Lord? Hath He chosen you to stand before Him, and know His will, and hear the word from His mouth? Then most certainly you will often enter into the inner chamber to eat of the most holy things. These are enumerated as the meat-offering, the sin-offering, and the guilt-offering. We must have fellowship with God in His joy over the spotless character and lovely human life of Jesus, which may be compared to fine flour. We must have fellowship in the atoning death of our Substitute; feeding on all the sacred meaning of the wondrous Cross. We must avail ourselves of Jesus as our guilt-offering; making propitiation for our mistakes, negligences, and infirmities (Leviticus 2; 4; 5).

If you would be near to God, feed on the work of Jesus; if you are near to God, you cannot live without it. To muse on the propitiatory aspects of the death of Jesus is as necessary for the strength of our inner life as food is to the body. Let us beware of imitating the mistake of Leviticus 10:16–20; and let us be very careful to eat of the wave-breast and the heave-shoulder, which stand for the love of Jesus for our affections, and the might of Jesus for our strength (Leviticus 10:14).

Ezekiel 43:2-7

“And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory. And it was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city: and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face. And the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east. So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house. And I heard him speaking unto me out of the house; and the man stood by me. And he said unto me, Son of man, the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever, and my holy name, shall the house of Israel no more defile, neither they, nor their kings, by their whoredom, nor by the carcasses of their kings in their high places.”

AT the beginning of this book (Ezekiel 9 and 10) we beheld the departure of the Shekinah cloud from the doomed temple. But now, to the new reconstructed temple it returns. So will God shed the sense of His presence through our hearts. We may have grieved Him, and lost it by defiling His holy name, and by the abominations which we have committed. But if we will resolutely put away our unfaithfulness, our coquetting with the world, our tampering with the flesh, He will return and dwell in our midst for ever. Behold, the glory of the Lord will fill the inner shrine of our spirit, and the earth will shine with His glory.

“Heaven above is softer blue;
Earth beneath in sweeter green;
Something shines in every hue
Christless eyes have never seen.”

There is a very precious promise connected with the Divine return and indwelling: "I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever, and my holy name, shall the house of Israel no more defile," (Ezekiel 43:7). Be willing to admit God, and He will come. "If any man open the door, I will come in." Whenever God comes He will make the old sin abhorrent and impossible; and His indwelling will not be transient and fitful, but permanent and efficient. "They shall *no more* defile."

This is what we need. We cannot have holiness apart from the Holy One. The attribute may not be divorced from its possessor. But to the soul that desires holiness, the holy God comes, and infills, and keeps; so that darkness cannot intrude on the domain of light, nor hate on love, nor death on life. Has the Shekinah left thee? Lo, it returns by the way it went, and thine earthly life shall shine again.

Ezekiel 44:28

“And it shall be unto them for an inheritance: I am their inheritance: and ye shall give them no possession in Israel: I am their possession.”

THESE injunctions for the priests, the Levites, that keep the charge of the sanctuary, are full of suggestion to those who have been made priests to God and the Father. It is for us to enter into the Holy Place, to come near His table to minister unto His Father, and to keep His charge (Ezekiel 44:16), always remembering that we need the sin-offering whenever we approach God (Ezekiel 44:27). However holy a man becomes, as the revelation of God’s perfect holiness breaks upon him, there is need to shelter beneath the blood that was shed.

But when these features of our ministry have been realized, we have a right to look on God as our inheritance and possession. How wonderful that in a deep sense we may obtain supplies of Divine help from our fellowship with God! To follow out the literal comparison of an inheritance would suggest that as the peasant proprietors of Palestine raised crops on their lands, so we may obtain, by prayer and faith, out of the very heart of God, all things that are needful for life and godliness.

We possess God as the flower the sunlight; as a babe the mother. All His resources are placed at our disposal. The seed cast into the ground immediately begins to take from earth and air the nutriment of its life, and we have the same power of deriving from the infinite fullness of God all that shall make us pure and strong and gentle. Ours are the unsearchable riches of Christ; we are made full through the fullness which God the Father has been pleased to make dwell in Him. All the resources which have been placed at His disposal in His ascension and eternal reign are gifts which He holds for men. Alas for us that we fail to possess our possessions!

Ezekiel 45:20

“And so thou shalt do the seventh day of the month for every one that erreth, and for him that is simple: so shall ye reconcile the house.”

A VERY touching provision is here. When the services of the newly constituted temple were in full operation, and the priests were performing the usual rites in all the pomp and splendor of their ceremonial on the behalf of all righteous and godly souls, there was to be special thought of the erring and simple; for these two characters a special offering was made. Perhaps the erring were too hardened and the simple too obtuse to bring an offering for themselves; but they were not forgotten. The blood of the sin-offering was to be placed on the posts of the house and on the posts of the gate of the inner court, each seventh day of the month, on their behalf.

Whenever we draw around the altar of God, whether in the home or church, we should remember the erring and simple. If a family misses from its ranks one erring member, its prayer and thought are more directed towards that one than to those that have not gone astray. Does not the child who is deficient in its intellect attract more loving care than those who are able to care for themselves? Should it be otherwise in God's home? Was it not for erring Peter that Jesus prayed? Was it not for Thomas that He made another special visit to the upper room? Does not the Great Shepherd gently lead those that are with young? And in so far as we enter into God's mind, we, too, shall care for the ignorant and those who are out of the way.

There is room for all such in the Father's House—a warm welcome and ample provision. Like Samuel's words about David, so God speaks of the most inconspicuous members of his family, “Send and fetch him; for we will not sit down till he come hither.” (1 Samuel 16:11)

Ezekiel 46:10

“And the prince in the midst of them, when they go in, shall go in; and when they go forth, shall go forth.”

THESSE are regulations for ingress and egress in the temple which Ezekiel describes; but we may be pardoned for finding a true and tender thought of the new relationship of Christ and His own.

We, too, go in, to find pasture within the precincts of the fold; to worship in the Holy Place, to get refreshment and strength; as when Jonathan and David met in the wood and strengthened each other's hands in God. On the Lord's Day especially we go in where the seraphim stand around the sapphire throne. But of what avail is it to go in, unless our Prince accompanies us? His presence makes the feast; His company is as sunlight to nature; to hear His voice, to feel the touch of His hand, to sit in His near proximity—this is the bread of life divine.

But there are times when we must go forth; we must leave the transfiguration mount for the valley. The bugle-note rings out in the starry dawn, and tells us that the foe is approaching. The look-out watch calls from the mast-head that the enemies' ships are in view. There is work to be done, suffering borne, difficulty encountered. But when we go forth, our Prince and we shall go forth together.

He never puts His sheep forth without going before them. He never thrusts us into the fight without preceding us. If we have to take the way of the Cross, we may always count on seeing Him go first, though we follow Him amazed.

No ascent so steep that we cannot see His form in advance; no stones so sharp that are not flecked with His blood; no fire so intense that One does not go beside us, whose form is like the Son of God; no waters so deep that Emmanuel does not go beside us.

Ezekiel 47:9

“And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh.”

THE great need of the world is life. Not more intelligence or activity, but life, and fuller life—life more abundant, life in full tide; the life which is life indeed, the eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested to the world. Of that life, this river is the emblem. It issues from the throne of God. It ever tends to become fuller and deeper. It becomes finally too mighty to be crossed. The course of the river of the prophet’s vision was due east, to the Arabah, a desert waste, and the Dead Sea, in whose dark, brackish waters no fish can live; but as even these are smitten by the crystal tide, a wonderful change takes place — they are healed, and begin to abound with fish, and fishers stand beside it from Engedi to Eneglaim.

This has been the course of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Ever since the river of the water of life issued from the Cross it has been deepening and extending, bringing life and beauty into the waste and barren wilderness of the world. The transforming effects of the Gospel on continents and islands, on vast multitudes of men, can be compared to nothing less than the fertilizing effect of a mighty river. Flow on, great sea of God, until all the Dead Sea of sin is swept away before thy beneficent waters!

But chiefly we want this more abundant life within us. Are there no Dead Seas, no marshes, no waste stretches of desert sands? Is there not urgent need that the lengthening out of our days should see a deepening of the river until it rise beyond our depths? We need the ankle-depths of walking to be exchanged for the knee-depths of praying; and these for the loin-depths of perfect purity; and these for the length, depth, breadth, and height of the love of Christ.

Ezekiel 48:35

“It was round about eighteen thousand measures: and the name of the city from that day shall be, The LORD is there.”

EZEKIEL has in view an ideal city; whether in any material form it is to be realized, we must wait to see. But this shall be its prominent characteristic, that God will be there. A great voice will be heard out of heaven, saying, “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.” (Revelation 21:3)

There is comfort in this for the sorrowful; because where God is, there cannot be sorrow, nor crying, nor pain. God shall wipe away all tears from off all faces. No cypress-trees line the streets of that city; no dirge intrudes upon the glad ascription of praise; no sob or groan is possible.

There is comfort for far-dissevered friends; for where God is, the center and goal and home, all His children meet. Back from distant lands and spheres they come; home from the school where they have been taught; back from the voyage; back from the military camp; back from the tour of exploration. The gates stand open to admit to His heart; and that heart is the rendezvous of those who have come out of every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people-never again to be parted.

There is comfort for the doubting and perplexed. Here, night often reigns over the heart of Thomas and the mind of Mary. Truly devoted souls grope by candle-light, and sometimes they walk in darkness and have no light, learning to walk by faith. But there all mysteries will be unraveled, all problems solved, every question answered; there will be no night, no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God shall lighten it, and the Lamb shall be the lamp thereof.

Daniel 1:21

“And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.”

IS that wonderful? It may seem so when you consider the uncertainty of Oriental politics, and the feverish haste with which favorites are raised to confidential positions and thrust back again to obscurity. In this very book we have glimpses of the virulence of hatred entertained in the court of Babylon towards Jews, and the mortification with which aspirants for the royal favor found it monopolized by Daniel and his friends. But we cease to wonder when we turn to Daniel 6:10, and discover Daniel's habit of kneeling upon his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks to his God. Prayer is the secret of continuance.

To all deep lives there come moments of serious questioning: Shall I be able to hold out? Shall I always be able to withstand the virulent hate of my foes, and overcome the corruption of my heart? Will it be always possible to meet the strong and imperious demands of duty, and the appeal of those who look to me for help? Amid the changes that the years may bring, will it be possible to maintain my ground? Men are so capricious; events so fluctuating; the sea of human life so unstable. To all such suggestions there is but one reply—prayer is the secret of continuance.

It is a dangerous temptation of the adversary, so writes one of God's hidden ones, when upright minds suffer themselves to be completely cast down by the unbelieving—I had almost said proud—view of their infirmities: in the performance of God's works such ought only to humble themselves, and go forward. He who loves and exercises prayer, will in due time be translated from self unto God: from being a pitcher, filled and emptied, to a river-bed.

Daniel 2:17-19

“Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions: That they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.”

THIS prayer-meeting, called hurriedly, must have been very intense. There was no knowing whether it might not be interrupted before it was completed by the guards of the palace summoning the supplicants to die. These two or three were gathered in the name of God, in rooms which never before had heard His name. But when their prayers had been offered, such serene peace resulted that Daniel was able to sleep with the utmost composure; and his mind, like a mirror, received upon its placid depths the impression of God’s thoughts.

It is a test of prayer having attained its object, when the praying soul feels there is no need to wrestle longer, and the sweet assurance is borne in that God has received our supplication, and that further words are needless. This serenity of heart shows itself in the unruffled calm of the commercial man in a time of panic; in the quietness of the soul under provocation; in the staidness of the heart on God, while storms sweep earth and sky.

It has been pointed out that there are three New Testament words for prayer to which we do well to take heed. *Be sober* unto prayer (1 Peter 4:7). Do not be drunk with worldly vanity, business, or gaiety; but bring a humble, penitent, clear, and sound mind. *Be at leisure* when you pray (1 Corinthians 7:5). The word means that prayer is not to be hurried; that nothing should interfere with its leisurely enjoyment. *Labor* at prayer (Colossians 1:29; or 4:12). As a man labors at his daily work, or strives on the battle-field, or agonizes to preserve a beloved friend from danger. It was thus that Jesus labored in the Garden of Gethsemane. And it was thus that these faithful souls must have prayed.

Daniel 3:25

“He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”

THERE was no doubt about their being bound. Their turbans, mantles, and other garments had bound their limbs so tightly, that when first they reached the furnace they fell down bound in its midst. Whatever else the fire could not do, it at least freed them, so that they walked loose; and the dewy glades of Paradise were not more fragrant and delightful than were those white-hot cinders.

This is what trial has often done for us. We had become conscious of the binding effect of our own habits which we had permitted as comparatively innocent; but gradually the conviction grew that they were amongst the weights that should be laid aside. Yet they clung to us until some fiery trial befell us, and from that hour, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, we were free. Do not fear the fire. It cannot hurt one hair of your head, or leave the smell of burning on you; but it will eat out the alloy, and gnaw away the iron bands that bound you.

“Beat on, true heart, for ever!

Shine bright, strong golden chain;

And bless the cleansing fire

And the furnace of living pain.”

But Jesus never allows His beloved to walk the fire alone. If it is heated seven times hotter than its wont, this is only the reason for His becoming more real, as our living and glorious Friend. There always goes beside the tried saint, though not always patent even to the eye of the spirit, another whose aspect is that of the Son of God. Reach out thy hands to Him, beloved—He is there. The Refiner not only watches the crucible, He is in it with thee. In all thy affliction He is afflicted.

Daniel 4:37

“Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.”

THIS is the confession of a heathen king; but how true it is, and how well for us, if we dare to affirm, amid all the appearances to the contrary, and all the shrinking of the natural man, that all God’s works are truth and His ways righteous, not only in the wide circumference of the heavens, but in the tiny circle of our little life.

The main lesson, let us note it, which this chapter is designed to teach, and which Nebuchadnezzar epitomizes in these words, is the abhorrence with which God regards pride. We are all tempted to walk on the terrace of our palace, and say, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” (4:30) But to speak thus is to incur the displeasure of the Most High, who giveth the kingdom to whomsoever He will.

If thou hast achieved a position of wealth and independence and success, do not be proud of it, as though it were all of thy own creating. God gave thee power to get wealth; raised thee to that responsible position as His agent and trustee; and made thy name as one of the great over the earth. Give Him the glory, and be sure to consider thyself only as His steward, entrusted with His property, and continued in thy position for so long a time as thou art faithful in thine administration.

May not that illness, that suspension from active work, that serious deprivation, have been sent to thee, as this madness was permitted to come to the King of Babylon, that thou shouldest know and acknowledge that the heavens do rule? Remember that the watchers and the holy ones still walk the world with viewless footprints, and give in their account.

Daniel 5:16

“And I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations, and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom.”

THE perplexed world often turns to the Christian in its hours of anguish and terror. While the foe seems powerless, and the hall of life is full of light and song; while the merry feet chase the flying hours, and mirth is unrestrained; whilst the wine flows freely, and the courtiers whisper flattery—the servant of God may be left in obscurity and neglect, as Daniel by Belshazzar. At such times God Himself is an object of ridicule and scorn. But let a hand come from out the Infinite, and write on the walls of life’s palace in words of mystery, then the panic-stricken worldlings cry out for one in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God, and who can decipher the mysterious hieroglyphics, which to conscience forebode only disaster.

At such hours the child of God is kept in perfect peace. How should it be otherwise? He recognizes his Father’s handwriting, and can decipher his Father’s meaning. Amid the crash of falling kingdoms he is sure of his Father’s care. Oblivious of his own interests, he is only anxious to interpret the ways of God, to recall the sinner, and save the State.

The world has more respect for our religion than it cares to admit in its gay moods, and it is noticing us more than we dream. Some day those who treat you with least courtesy will send for you. Only be at peace, and rest in your Father’s Spirit. It shall be given you in that same hour what ye should speak. In the meanwhile, do not be surprised if you are led through many mysterious and trying experiences. It is only so that you can get the key to God’s secrets, or the clue to His mysteries. Above all, seek for the Spirit of God, that light and understanding and excellent wisdom may be found in thee.

Daniel 6:23

“Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God.”

BY faith they shut the mouths of lions. The lions’ den is not an old-world experience merely. God’s saints still dwell among lions, and fight with wild beasts at Ephesus. Like David, God’s people have abundant cause to cry, “They have now compassed us in our steps: they have set their eyes bowing down to the earth; Like as a lion that is greedy of his prey, and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places.” (Psalm 17:11,12) But still God sends His angel to shut the lions’ mouths; still faith surrounds us with His unseen protection. Or, if the lion seems to triumph, it is only in appearance. Was not the martyr Ignatius more than a conqueror when he said:

“I bid all men know that of my own free will I die for God, unless ye should hinder me. I exhort you, be ye not an unseasonable kindness to me. Let me be given to the wild beasts, for through them I can attain unto God. I am God’s wheat, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts that I may be found pure bread of Christ. Rather entice the wild beasts that they may become my sepulchre, and may leave no part of my body behind; so that I may not, when I am fallen asleep, be burdensome to any one.... Now I am beginning to be a disciple. May naught of things visible and things invisible impede me, that I may attain unto Jesus Christ. Come fire, and iron, and grapplings with wild beasts, cuttings, and manglings, crashings of my whole body—only be it mine to attain unto Jesus Christ.”

Whether faith closes the mouth of the lion, or gives the soul such an entire deliverance from all fear, it is the same in essence and operation, and shows its heavenly temper with the ease with which it overcomes the world.

Daniel 7:14

“And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”

JESUS does rule. The kingdom of Christ is no fanciful phrase. The words He spoke, the deeds He did, have shaped the religious life and thought of the civilized world. But this is the lowest ground. He is supreme over all creation. In Him the ancient psalm is fulfilled, “Thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field;” (Psalm 8:6,7) The Father hath set Him at His own right hand, far above all principality and power; all angels do His bidding; all demon-powers are beneath His feet. Joseph, our Brother, is King.

But let us never forget that the foundation of His kingdom is His Cross. We want more than the truth, more than a guide to show the way; we need forgiveness, salvation, life: and these are only possible through the death of the Redeemer. Satan offered Him the kingdom when he met Him in the wilderness, and He would not have it on such terms. With face set for Calvary, He went down the mountain to the valley of the shadow of death; and having traversed it, He came to his disciples and said, “All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.” (Matthew 28:18) Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ; for Thou art the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.

That kingdom is an everlasting one. “All kingdoms will pass away before Christ’s as the chaff of the summer threshing-floor.” The shaking of the kings and kingdoms of this world has already begun, and is destined to shake to the ground the most stable edifices of human pride; but as we are to receive a kingdom that cannot be moved, let us not be troubled.

Daniel 8:27

“And I Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days; afterward I rose up, and did the king’s business; and I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it.”

FEW men have been favored with such visions and revelations as fell to the lot of Daniel. The future, in so many different aspects, was repeatedly unfolded before him, and he saw much that elated and that depressed him. But through it all he steadily did the king’s business; so far as he knew, nothing was allowed to suffer or get behind. He would have counted it a great slur on his religious life if it could have been said that his visions and exercises interfered with his service to the king. Probably he did better work because his life was hid with God.

In all this there is much of suggestion and warning. We too must have our secret mount of vision. We too must look across the valley for that blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. We too must have the vision of the evenings and mornings. But that is not enough. We must do our business in the world. Not star-gazing, but following the Star; not always standing at the window, but going to and fro in the King’s household, seeing that every one is at his post, and that the Royal household is properly fed; not always on the mount of transfiguration, but hastening whithersoever the uplifted hand of human need beckons us.

At the same time, it will quicken us to do our business better if we have had a vision. Nothing makes so good a workman as thorough comprehension of his master’s purposes. And when Jesus calls us not servants only, but friends, we serve Him with deep appreciation of His thoughts and plans. Our service is more refined, diligent, and intelligent. Get your plan in the mount, and then build.

Daniel 9:23

“At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to shew thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision.”

THIS is always so. Directly a God-given prayer is uttered, the commandment goes forth. There is a sense, indeed, in which true prayer is the anticipation in the human heart of the Divine intention: “Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” (Isaiah 65:24) Does it seem as though your prayer were like a ship lost at sea, which brings no cargo home? Dare to believe that the commandment did go forth, though as yet it has not reached you. It is operating; and before long you shall see the result. “What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye have received them.” (Mark 11:24) The answer may not have come to hand, but it has been granted. Even if you do not live to see the answer, dare to believe that it is assured.

What a tender address is this— “greatly beloved” which can be rendered *very precious*. Is it really so, that we are very precious to God? To those who believe, Christ is precious; but how wonderful that they should be amongst His jewels, who were born of the first Adam, and have cost so much pain and sorrow by their sins! There is no accounting for love. Directly love begins to enumerate the reasons for its attachment, it ceases to be true love. Love knows no law except the drawing of an inward affinity. So Jesus draws near to us. We are very precious to Him. To have our love well compensates Him for all His bitter sorrow. Let us be very careful not to hurt Him, or give Him needless grief. And when we pray, let it be with the assurance that He bends over us and says, “Thou art greatly beloved; ask what thou wilt.” As soon as the child of God says “Father,” the whole Godhead is quick to hear his request.

Daniel 10:19

“And said, O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong. And when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened, and said, Let my lord speak; for thou hast strengthened me.”

WHY should we fear? We are loved, *greatly beloved*; loved to God’s uttermost; loved to the gift of His Only-begotten; loved to tears; loved to blood-shedding and death. It is said that Jesus, having loved His own, which were in the world, loved them *unto the end*; not to the end of His human ministry, but to the uttermost of what love can be (John 13:1).

Why should we *fear*? Has God done so much, and will He not do all? Has He brought us out of Egypt to let us perish in the wilderness? Is He so careful of the soul, and so careless of all beside? There are mysteries—mysteries of life and death, of sin and sorrow, of this world and the next; but fear not: God is ours, and we are His by immutable and indissoluble ties.

Let us possess ourselves in *peace*. We cannot understand, but we can trust. We may not know the way we are going, but we can lean back on the heart of our Guide; standing in the cleft of the Rock we can look out in peace on dreaded evils as they pass away together, dismayed and amazed. If only we are acquainted with God, we shall be at peace, and thereby good will come to us. They fear who look at circumstances, and not into God’s face.

And we shall be *strong*—strong to endure; strong to achieve; strong to wait; strong to carry the battle to the gate; strong to set our face like a flint, when the hour strikes for us to go to the cross; strong to be glad when the crowds ebb away from us to follow the dear Master, Christ:—

“Be strong to hope, O heart! Though day is bright,

The stare can only shine in the dark night.

Be strong, O heart of mine and look towards the light”

Daniel 11:32

“And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.”

DANIEL probably refers to the great persecution under Antiochus, when the followers of Judas Maccabaeus, knowing their God, and keeping loyal to Him amidst the general defection, refused to bow before the idols of Syria. These were strong in God’s strength, and did exploits never surpassed in the annals of those who have suffered for the truth.

There are many ways of knowing God—through the Bible, in solitary meditation, and pre-eminently in the person of Jesus; but we also come to know Him by the daily experience and intercourse of life. Those who live with you in the same house know and read you in an intimacy of knowledge which no other method can rival. Learn to live with God! Summer and winter with Him! “Abide in Him!”

In the Epistle to the Ephesians there are three prayers, which the apostle was wont to offer for his converts. First, that they might know; next, that they might be strong; lastly, that they might watch unto prayer. All our knowledge of God should be turned to practical use. Few things injure us more than to seek knowledge for its own sake. Know, that you may do.

Then you will be strong to do exploits. When a man is sure of his base of operations; sure that those in the rear of his march will back him up; sure that a strong and wise friend behind him is pledged to his support—his heart is at peace, he can concentrate all his attention and energy on the work that is on hand. He has no care, the Greek word for which means *division*. When we really know God, and understand how utterly faithful He is to those who venture forth in faith, we can do what others dare not attempt.

Daniel 12:13

“But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.”

MAN becomes mystified with the great circle of God’s Providence. He tries to follow it, but his eyesight fails; his heart and head grow weary. And God says, It is enough—go thy way till the end be: learn thy lesson; do thy work; tread the predetermined path: it is enough that thou shouldst fulfill thy little day; evening will be here presently, and then thou shalt rest; leave the evolution of my vast schemes to Me; I will bring all right; and “thou shalt stand in thy lot at the end of the days.”

Thy way. — For every one that way is prepared; identical in the main outlines, but special for the footsteps that are destined to tread it. There are three elements, which are almost certainly present—Suffering, the strain of Toil, and Temptation. So long as the blight of the curse lingers on our earth, these will be the ingredients in our cup. But let us go on our way. It is graduated to our steps. God’s grace will be sufficient for us.

Our lot. — What will it be? As Canaan was allotted, so will heaven be. Where shall we stand? Among the overcomers, or the martyrs, or the virgin souls that follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, or those that get the victory over the Beast? Or shall our lot be amongst those who have buried their talents, forgotten their oil, and proved disobedient and self-indulgent? “Make us to be numbered with thy saints in glory everlasting.”

Thou shalt Rest. — Heaven will be to each soul what it most desires, and has missed on earth. To the lonely, Love: to those that hunger and thirst for righteousness, Holiness: to those who have dwelt amid perpetual warring and strife, Peace: to the weary, Rest—and to all the vision of God in Christ.

Hosea 1:3

“So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son.”

UNDER the glorious reign of Jeroboam, Israel had become very prosperous; but this period of wealth was one of shameless idolatry, self-indulgence, and oppression of the poor. The people were unfaithful to their marriage covenant with Jehovah; yet He loved them still. With the love that a husband may bear to the woman who is mother of his children, but who has shown herself worthless or abandoned, so God still loved, and wooed, and sought to reclaim. All this was set forth in Hosea’s sad personal history.

He married one who was probably well known at the court for her infidelities. Her children’s names were all significant. The first was called Jezreel, to indicate their prophetic import; the daughter, “Unpitied”; the third child, “Not My People”; and these children were accustomed, in after years, to go between the prophet and his wife and plead with her. “Plead with your mother, plead.”

What a living picture this is of God’s relations to ourselves! He has loved us, not because we were pure, and holy, and lovely; for, in fact, He knew that we were the very reverse. But with the clear prevision of our native sin and unfaithfulness, He took us into covenant relationship with Himself. Not because we were good, but to make us so; not because we were faithful, but to lead us to be so. He has given us all kinds of blessings. But, alas, how ill we have requited Him! We have departed from Him, and grossly betrayed His trust; till He has been reluctantly obliged to leave us to ourselves. But He waits to be gracious; and if we repent and turn to Him, He will say to us, Ammi, my people; and Ruhamah, thou hast obtained mercy.

Hosea 2:15

“And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.”

WE are familiar with the story of the valley of Achor, where Achan the troubler of Israel was stoned to death. We can almost fancy the long stony valley through which again the house of Israel was made to pass. The prophet foresaw the heavy judgments which were about to fall upon the land, as God took back his corn and wine and flax, and laid waste their vines and fig-trees. It seemed as though the nation were again in the valley of trouble; and as the people take their weary way, dropping with fatigue and privation, behold, a door suddenly opens in the stony wall of flint, through which they pass into a land of corn, and wine, and wifely loyalty to their true husband. Thus the traveller piercing the Alps will, within the space of an hour, leave the northern slopes of ice and snow, and emerge upon the fertile plains of Italy.

It is a beautiful similitude, and one that still has its counterpart in spiritual experience. You, too, are in the valley of Achor—brought there in consequence of your sins; your life is overcast; your heart desolate. Ah, how different it is with you now, compared with those fast glad days when you went out after God, in the kindness of your youth, and the love of your espousals! God cannot leave you. He comes and pleads, “Return unto Me; thou art mine.” Will you answer His tender pleading with repentance, faith, and prayer? Will you cry, “Oh that it were with me as in the first days!” Then, immediately, right before you, the door of hope will spring open; and you will pass from winter to summer; from ice to vernal heat. Dare to believe that in your Valley of Achor there is but a door between you and the Divine betrothal—only a step.

Hosea 3:5

“Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.”

THE unfaithful wife had left husband and children, and sunk into abject poverty and shameful disgrace; but Hosea is bidden to seek her again and bring her to his home. It was a wonderful act of condescending love on his part, to be willing to condone the past and take the poor stricken thing to his well-ordered dwelling. Nothing could have done it but the strong love which had followed her through all her wanderings, refusing to let her go. We cannot certainly affirm that Hosea’s love succeeded in making his Guinevere fair and lovely again; but we may cherish the hope that in this his compassionate love was recompensed.

Through the tragedy of the prophet’s domestic life, the people were called to see the mystery of the Divine faithful love. “Then said the LORD unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine.” (Hosea 3:1). The people in their wandering and rebellion had been unfaithful to the marriage vow plighted at Sinai. They had gone after many lovers; but God’s redeeming love would not let them go. That love still follows them; and though they have been for so many centuries without king, prince, sacrifice, or temple, they shall doubtless return to God. And is not this marvelous Zionist movement one further step towards the ultimate recognition and reunion?

You, too, have been without king or priest; without tears of penitence, or smiles of conscious acceptance. But the love of God has never ceased to follow you. And now, in your abject need, He seeks you out, and says, “Be for Me only.” Will you not come back to the goodness of God in these your latter days?

Hosea 4:1, 3

“Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. ... Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away.”

THROUGHOUT the Old Testament the sin of the people and the prosperity or otherwise of their country are closely conjoined. If the people please God, harvests are plentiful, and the seasons of the year pursue their round in unbroken bounty. If the people backslide, the land is smitten. There is probably a much deeper connection than we suppose between the moral condition of our nation and its prosperity. It is at least remarkable that ever since the Indian Government has legalized impurity in India, and has made money out of the vices of Chinamen, that empire has been smitten with drought and pestilence. So with Africa; the injustice with which the natives have been treated has been terribly avenged in the rinderpest which has swept over the land. And may there not be a close connection between the vice, Sabbath-breaking, and drunkenness of Great Britain, and the agricultural distress which has so long driven our people from the open country to life in the cities? It is an awful thing when God has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. Sin is then terribly avenged.

One noticeable feature with all the prophets is their intense devotion to God on the one hand, and their ardent patriotism on the other. They never scrupled to denounce the sins which were bringing their land to desolation, and to indicate the inevitable result. In the present instance, Hosea turned on the priests and showed how accountable they were for the desolation of the country.

On a wider scale still, we remember that creation groaneth and travaileth in pain because of sin; and its emancipation awaits the advent of the Lord, and the manifestation of His saints (Romans 8:21).

Hosea 5:15

“I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.”

THE withdrawal of God’s countenance and protection involved the exile of Israel from their own land. No weapon formed against them could prosper, so long as they walked with their Almighty Friend; but sin severed them from His care, and cut them adrift to be swept before the storm of the invader.

There is always a “till” in God’s withdrawals. He tears that He may heal; goes that He may come; leaves, that He may return so soon as the afflicted soul is led to seek His face. May not this be your lot? You seem deserted by man and God; life is going very hardly with you; thick darkness broods over your soul, and sore affliction devastates your life; yes, and worse is threatened. But is there not an offence somewhere that needs to be acknowledged; a sin that should be confessed?

Search yourself by the suggestions of this chapter. Have you in any way been a snare or a net to other souls, injuring them by your example or conversation (Hosea 5:1)? Have you been unfaithful to your immortal lover, Christ (Hosea 5:3)? Have you become proud of any of God’s gifts, or the position to which they have lifted you (Hosea 5:5)? Have you been grasping and fraudulent, like those who secretly remove the landmark to include a little more of their neighbor’s lands with their own (Hosea 5:10)? Have you willingly walked after the statutes of Omri (Hosea 5:11, and 1 Kings 16:25)? Have you gone for help away from God to some unhallowed alliance, such as is represented by King Jareb, the Assyrian, whose alliance Israel sought (Hosea 5:13)? Ask God what controversy He has with you, and put it away. You will be astonished to discover what evils you have been harboring. But the result will be salutary indeed.

Hosea 6:3

“Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.”

YOU may always count on God. If there is variation in His relations with us, it is on our side, not on His. Just as surely as we return to Him, we shall find Him running to meet and greet and receive us with a glad welcome.

The exquisite words of the text derive additional beauty when we consider them in the light of modern astronomy. The spot on which we live, when the day is done, slowly turns away from the face of the sun; and as each moment passes, plunges further and further from its wholesome, blessed light. At midnight we look out into the abyss of space in the opposite direction to the solar throne. But the moment when we have reached our furthest from the sun is followed by another, in which we begin to return to the light and glory of the perfect day. So when the soul has reached its furthest from God, it may immediately return to Him. Let us return. Let us know. Let us follow on to know the Lord.

Is there any doubt about our reception? No; there cannot be. Look again at the analogy of the physical night. During our absence the sun has not shifted from his place. We shall find him waiting for us; his going forth is prepared. We have but to pass into his blessed beams, which had not ceased to pour forth through the hours, which to us were so cold and dark. So our God is always waiting for us. He is just where we left Him. In Him can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning. As certainly as we count on the dayspring may we count on God. Move then God-wards, through the dark hours. On the third day—the day of Resurrection—He will burst on your view.

Hosea 7:9

“Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not.”

SIN in its worst forms was prevalent among the people, and secretly deteriorated their strength. Of this, however, they were unconscious; but imagined that they were as strong as at other times, anticipating long years of national prosperity. They little weaned that they had reached the old age of their history, with its attendant decrepitude and helplessness. What a striking illustration of the insidious process of decay, of unconscious deterioration, of the departure of the Samson-might while we wist it not.

But is not this always the case with the initial stages of backsliding, of which this is the most dangerous element, that we are so largely unaware of the change that has come over us? Gradually and almost insensibly we lose our watchfulness over our thoughts; our relish for the society of God’s people; our delight in God’s house; our interest in the salvation of others; our sensitiveness of conscience as to the conventionalities of trade or society. We do not realize it; we are not specially concerned; we have no idea that the white ant is eating out the substance of our furniture, and the dry-rot undermining the rafters of our house. Strangers are devouring our strength; grey hairs are indicating our decay—to all eyes but our own. We grow grey almost imperceptibly; the strength of our manhood is very slowly undermined; the degrees of spiritual declension are as the fall of the year through the last days of summer. But it need not be if we would regard ourselves in the mirror of God’s Word.

“It is strange: but life’s currents drift us

So surely and swiftly on,

That we scarcely notice the changes

And how many things are gone.”

Hosea 8:12

“I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing.”

GOD’S will is so all-sided and far-reaching in its scope, that it cannot be contained in one precept or a thousand. It needs ten thousand precepts to set forth its heights, and lengths, and breadths, and to cover all the circumstances of our lives. But how thoughtful God is in anticipating our ten thousand difficulties, perplexities, and questions; and in directing us how He would wish us to act. Anticipating all the steps of our life, God has written ten thousand precepts to guide us.

But what great things have been unfolded to us in the Law of God—using that term to cover the entire compass of revelation! Mysteries which pass the conception of angels have been placed within the reach of men. Our Father has beckoned us to share with Him the sublimest secrets of His government.

Let us not count them as strange things. We often say to one another: “Do not treat me as a stranger.” And is not this the sense in which we may get estranged from the word and thought of God—keeping them only for special times; giving them courtly entertainment; but refusing to admit them to the familiarity of daily intercourse? Nothing hurts God more than this! Never perform your daily duties as though God must be shut out from them. If you keep one day sacred, it is that all time may be sanctified: if you keep one place private for prayer and worship, it is that the light which shines there may irradiate all the places of your daily occupation; if you keep one meal for special meditation on the love of Jesus, it is that whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, all should be done for Him.

Hosea 9:8

“The watchman of Ephraim was with my God: but the prophet is a snare of a fowler in all his ways, and hatred in the house of his God.”

WATCH with God. — To watch with God is the privilege of comparatively few. Eight were left outside the garden; to three only did Jesus say, “Come and watch.” To watch for the morning star, for the first flowers of the coming spring, for the coming of the Bridegroom, for the setting up of the Kingdom—such is the privilege of those elect souls who are bidden to take their lamps, and go forth to meet the Bridegroom. It is a high honor to be appointed to watch with God the slow evolution of His purpose; to stand on the watch-tower and see what He will say; to be a watchman for the people, a spokesman of their danger when the sword approaches; to be allowed to enter into some of His tears, and yearnings, and prayers, as He beholds the city and weeps over it.

Watch against sin. — But we may be displaced from that position of privilege and responsibility as Israel was. We learn that at this time the chosen had *deeply corrupted* themselves, as in the darkest days of the Judges; and we may fall into similar corruption and rebellion, unless we watch ourselves, whilst we watch with God. Let us watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation. Corruption is always around us in this world of death. Its germs float on every breeze. We need, therefore, to steep ourselves in the antiseptic of the Holy Spirit’s grace. This is the true Eucalyptus in which the germs of disease perish.

Watch unto Prayer. — “Prayer,” said Phillips Brooks, “is not compelling God’s reluctance, but laying hold of God’s willingness.” It is as though we waited for God’s movements to bless us, and taking the stream at the flow, launched our heavy barge upon it, that His power might bear us forward.

Hosea 10:12

“Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.”

T*HE fallow ground.* — There is a great deal of fallow ground in our hearts and lives; it has borne no crops of righteousness. Weeds have covered the unfruitful acres with their rank growth, and have scattered their thistledown into other lots. The rain has fallen and the man has shone in vain. In some cases our daily business life—in other cases our social life—is a blank, so far as religious usefulness is concerned. God gets no revenue from these barren fallow tracts. But the prophet bids us ascertain what they are, and break up the hard, caked surface by ploughshare and spade.

Breaking up the clods. — In his great sermon on this text, Finney exhorts to break up the fallow ground by the payment of neglected debts; the putting aside of evil habits; the righting of old wrongs; the forgiveness of old injuries.

It is time to seek the Lord. — The days are passing over us so rapidly, and we shall be at the end before we are well aware. “It is high time to awake out of sleep: ... The night is far spent, the day is at hand:” (Romans 13:11,12) May not the time past suffice us to have been barren and unfruitful; and shall we not make the best of the time which remains?

He will come and rain. — What a glorious promise! He will come and rain down righteousness. It is parallel to the words of the psalm: “Righteousness shall look down from heaven.” (Psalm 85:11) It is certain that righteousness will never spring up in the furrows of our souls unless it has come down to us from the heart of God. In us are only the dark, bare, lifeless clods, lying open in their need: in Him all that is pure, and holy, and righteous—but God waits to rain it down in plentiful showers.

Hosea 11:3

“I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them.”

THIS is very touching. It is one of the sweetest, tenderest words in the Bible—a metaphor borrowed fresh from the nursery. What an epoch it is in the child’s life when it first gets upon its feet! The mother sets it there, or it manages to get up by itself. But it dare not walk; it must be taught to go. Sometimes the mother holds the clothes from behind, or reaches out her hands in front, or hovers around the little hesitating figure with outstretched arms to guard against the first sign of tumbling. The lesson is not learned all at once. Sometimes many a sad fall tutors the venturesome pupil; but the mother is not discouraged. With a kiss and a “never mind” she puts the little one on its feet again, and teaches it to go.

God is teaching us to go. He holds our hands in His; walks beside us with outstretched arms to see that we do not fall to our entire undoing; catches us when we are about to stumble, and picks us up when we have fallen to our hurt. God is never discouraged, any more than the mother is; and the more weak our ankle-bones and nervous our gait the more care does He expend.

There are stages beyond this. There is the *walk* that pleases God; the *running*, when He has enlarged our heart; the *mounting* up with the wings of eagles. But at the end of life we come back to the going: “Then will I *go* unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God.” (Psalm 43:4)

“I have no help but Thine, nor do I need

Another arm save Thine to lean upon!

It is enough, my Lord, enough indeed;

My strength is in thy might, thy might alone!

Hosea 12:3

“He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God:”

JACOB’S strength lay in his weakness. As long as he seemed strong, and was able to oppose force to force, he failed of the highest blessing; but when the sinew of his thigh shriveled beneath the angel’s touch, and was out of joint; when he was in imminent danger of falling helplessly to the ground—he prevailed, and received the name of Israel the Prince.

The eloquence of tears. — “He wept.” (Hosea 12:4) There is no record of these tears in Genesis, but we can well understand that they flowed freely. The entire results of Jacob’s life—wife, children, and fortune—were at stake. With one fell sweep, Esau on the morrow might reduce him to the loneliness with which he had passed over Jordan years before. God is touched by tears. He puts them in His bottle. He hears the voice of our weeping, and interprets it

The power of prayer. — “He made supplication.” (Hosea 12:4) “I will not let Thee go unless Thou bless me.” (Genesis 32:26) Remember how the Syrophenician mother cast herself at the Savior’s feet, and pleaded for help. The Lord kept her waiting till her prayer had reached a pitch which only delay could have induced, and then turned to her with the assurance that all she had claimed was hers. You may be kept in the attitude of prayer through the long night, but at daybreak you may receive what you sought.

The strength of weakness. — As long as we can stand and hold our own, we fail of our quest. When we are lamed and broken, and unable to do more than cling, we realize God’s hidden stores of blessed help. The sick child elicits most of the mother’s love. The last-born babe drags down to the level of its tiny mouth its strong and brawny father.

Hosea 13:14

“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.”

THESE words are made familiar to us in the magnificent apostrophe with which Paul’s great resurrection chapter closes. They have been recited for centuries over Christian graves.

In their first utterance they record Jehovah’s resolve to deliver His people, in spite of all their sins. The conflict in the Divine heart between hatred of the abominable idolatries by which they were cursed, and His ancient, unalterable love, gives this chapter, and indeed the whole book, its remarkably disjointed character. There is hardly a paragraph which is not marked by abrupt transitions, agitation of speech, appeals, enquiries, expressions of infinite regret. But notwithstanding all, God had given commandment to bless, and He neither could nor would reverse it. Let death and Hades do their worst against His chosen, He was stronger far.

In these intermediate ages these words may be quoted over every Christian’s death, whether it be a martyrdom or the quiet yielding up of life. In comparison with the great gain that death brings to those who pass to the “far better” of being with Christ, wherein are we losers by it? Nay, do we not greatly gain?

But the full realization of these words awaits the hour when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality, at the sudden appearance of the Savior in His advent glory. Then shall be brought to pass the saying which is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. There shall not a hoof be left behind. Not one of the redeemed shall remain in the prison-house; and even in their bodies, raised in the likeness of Christ, there will be no evidence of the triumph of death or the gave.

Hosea 14:8

“Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found.”

THIS chapter abounds with picturesque natural imagery. The dew distilling on the parched herbage, as the sign of the Holy Spirit. The blossoming lily, fragile but beautiful, an emblem of the retiring grace and purity of Christian character. The roots of Lebanon, descending far down into the valley, anchoring in its rugged strength, significant of the stability which in each Christian should mingle with grace. The silver beauty of the olive, the cool aromatic breath of the wind that has passed over the snows and slopes of Lebanon, commemorating the beauty and fragrance of the influence of the child of God. The covering shadow, the yellowing corn, the delicious scent of the vine, when it gives a good smell, to denote the gifts and graces of holy living. And finally, all of these summed up in the cry of Ephraim, “I am like a green fir-tree.” O child of God, canst thou appropriate this wealth of imagery for thyself? Are the facts which these symbols denote true of thy life? Be not content to be as the lily, seek also to be as the rooted strength of Lebanon; be not satisfied with the similitudes of beauty, seek also those of usefulness. And above all, be an evergreen, never showing signs of autumnal decay.

But, amid it all, remember the caution — “From Me is thy fruit found.” Count naught thine own but sin. Thou hast nothing thou didst not receive; thou couldst do nothing apart from Jesus. It is only as thou abidest in Him, and He in thee, that thou canst bring forth any fruit, or be fragrant, or serve any good purpose in the world.

“As some rare perfume in a vase of clay
Pervades it with a fragrance not its own,
So, when Thou dwellest in a mortal soul,
All heaven’s own sweetness seems around it thrown.”

Joel 1:14

“Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD,”

IT was a terrible invasion. The locusts had lighted down upon the land of Israel; so that the seeds rotted under the clods; garners were desolate; the barns were broken down. Despair took hold of the husbandman; and the herds and flocks panted out their anguish. At this juncture the prophet called for a national fast.

Whenever our life is visited by special trials and perplexities, we should withdraw ourselves from common pursuits, and lay bare our heart-secrets, so that we may learn the cause of God’s controversy with us. There is a reason and a needs-be; because He does not afflict willingly, or grieve the children of men.

From time to time a call for prayer has issued from the hearts of men closest in touch with heaven. In the middle of the eighteenth century Jonathan Edwards issued such an appeal; and this led to that union of prayer, which played so significant a part in the origination of the great missionary societies. It was notably the effect of that appeal on Sutcliffe, Rylands, Fuller, and Carey, that led to the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society at the close of the eighteenth century.

It may be that a wave of prayer is again about to break over the Church. There are many signs of it. We hear Christian people saying on all hands that they want to get back to God; and surely it would be one of the most significant signs of the unity of the Church and the power of the Holy Spirit, if such a prayer wave were to lift us all on to a new level of intercession for the Church of God and the world around us. We need not wait for the Church to appoint.

Joel 2:25

“And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.”

HOW many years of our life have been consumed by the locust! Self in one form or another has sorely robbed us of our golden sheaves, reducing them to dust. Self-indulgence, frivolity, wanton spend-thriftiness of time, and talent, and opportunity, sloth and lethargy, mixed and evil motives, secret sins—what a crew are there! They have played the part of the caterpillar, the cankerworm, and the palmerworm with the green promise and the yellow produce of our lives.

But God waits to forgive; to put away from his mind the memory of the wasted past; to place the crown of a new hope upon our brow—yea, more, to restore to us the years that the locust hath eaten. There shall be a revenue of glory to Him even from those wasted years. Either in the experience they shall have communicated to us for dealing with other men, or in the penitential and broken-hearted temper they shall have begotten in ourselves; those years shall yet yield crops of praise to God, and of fruitfulness to us. And, also, God is prepared so to add His blessing to us, in the present and future, as to give us in each year not only the years produce, but much more, so that each year will be laden and weighted with the blessing of three or four beside. Where sin abounded, grace shall much more abound. Where we have sown, we shall reap; not thirty-fold only, but a hundred-fold. God is so anxious to give us as large a result as possible to show for our life's work, though we may have sadly wrecked its earlier portions. Did He not restore to Peter at Pentecost what he wasted in the hall of judgment? Did not Paul win harvests for Christ out of the years which preceded his conversion?

Joel 3:17

“So shall ye know that I am the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more.”

THIS will be the lot of the chosen people in the millennial age. The Holy God will make the city in which He resides a Holy place. But it is true universally. Wherever the Holy God dwells, there you have holiness—for it is the attribute of his nature, as heat is of fire. Holiness is not *It*, but *He*. Do you want *it*? Then you must invite Him to come.

When God comes into a day, it becomes holy unto Him. When His presence is revealed in a bush, it is holy ground. When He descends on a mountain, the fences are erected, that unhallowed feet may not draw nigh. When He fills a building like Solomon’s Temple, the whole is consecrated, and may not be employed for sacrilegious purposes. Best of all, if He dwell in our hearts, they too are rendered holy to Himself.

When the apostle prays that the God of Peace should sanctify us wholly, he goes on to ask that spirit, soul, and body, should be as a temple filled with God. The holy man is he who is God-filled and God-possessed. It is not enough to possess God; we must be possessed by Him. He who has more of God is surely holier than other men; and he is the holiest who has most. Behold, Christ stands at the door and knocks: He longs to come in and abide, never again to depart; He brings with Him the holiness for which He has taught us to yearn.

“Is it true, Ignatius,” said the Roman emperor to the Christian martyr, “that you carry about your God within you?” “It is even so,” replied the bishop, “for it is written, I will dwell in thee, and walk in thee.” And for that answer they cast him to the wild beasts. But what they deemed blasphemy is literally true of the Holy Spirit.

Amos 1:1

“The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.”

GOD does not hesitate to employ a herdman, if only his heart is pure and devoted to his service. He calls such an one out of the midst of his fellows, designating him for His sacred ministry. And when the fire of God burns within, very common clay becomes luminous and transparent. An ox-goad, a ram’s-horn, a sling of stone, will serve His purpose. It is not what a man has, but what he is, that matters.

As we look through this strong book of ancient prophecy, and notice how it abounds with references and imagery peculiar to a herdsman’s life, we feel that a noble spirit of devotion to God may elevate the meanest employments and dignify the most ordinary subjects. The common incidents of the farm may convey the Divine meaning not less than the sacred scenery of the Temple, which was familiar to Ezekiel. There is nothing which is intrinsically common or unclean. We profane things by a profane spirit. But if we view all things from the Divine standpoint, we shall find that a sacred light will beat through them, like that which transfigured the coarse garments of Christ so as no fuller on earth could whiten them. The glory streamed through from his heart! It is comparatively seldom that God calls one of the upper classes of society to conspicuous usefulness. “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised,” (1 Corinthians 1:26-28) Here and there a noble of great authority, a Zinzendorf, a Shaftesbury: but most often fishermen and publicans; Luther, the miner’s son, Tersteegen the ribbon-weaver, Carey the cobbler.

Amos 2:13

“Behold, I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves.”

BEHOLD! This is like the hand which occurs in the margins of old books, to attract the reader’s attention. It is God’s special call to our heed.

Sin is very burdensome to God: especially the sins enumerated in this context. Look at the story of oppression in Amos 2:6; of licentiousness in Amos 2:7; of ingratitude in Amos 2:9; of drunkenness in Amos 2:12. These sins are aggravated when committed by His own people. Just as the groaning wain creaks and cries out under its load, so does the heart of God under our sins. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!” Should not we feel more as God does in this respect? Ought not we to bear the burden of sin, as Daniel did for his land and people?

What a fulfillment these words had in the life and death of our blessed Lord! The sheaves of our sins were laid on Him: for the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all. As He bore His cross through the streets of Jerusalem; as He lay crushed to the ground in Gethsemane; as He cried, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (Psalm 22:1) — surely He was like a laden wagon, groaning under an almost insupportable load.

A discovery is announced of a process of turning silver into gold by a pressure of eighty tons on a square inch, and in very low temperature. Yes, pressure and the chilling effects of persecution, difficulty, and disappointment are God’s methods of redeeming us from destruction, and turning our silver into gold. Oh, let us forsake our sins rather than compel Him to employ such an ordeal!

Amos 3:3

“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”

THIS is the first of seven searching questions, to each of which there is but one answer—*Certainly not.*

We are conducted, first, *to the forest*, to the lion’s lair, where the roaring indicates that he has certainly secured his prey. There is a cause for those low roars of satisfaction. Then *to the moorland*, where the bird is suddenly entrapped. But there must have been an intention to entrap it on the part of the fowler, else it had not fallen to his hand. Lastly, *to the city*, where the panic-stricken crowds cower before some giant evil, such as pestilence, and tremble at the bugle-note of alarm. Here also, whether in the sounding of the trumpet, or the presence of the plague, there is an evident reason. Thus sorrow, causeless, does not come; and whenever it presses on the individual or the State, inquiry should be made whether God has any controversy with those who suffer beneath the stroke.

Often, in answer to such inquiry, it will be discovered that the soul is not in agreement with God; but at some almost imperceptible angle its metals have diverged from the main track of God’s wise and holy procedure. And the trouble will remain until the nation or the individual have come back into agreement with God. It is worth our while to make any sacrifices, if only we may get back to God’s side.

Whether in marriage, or business, or journeying together, be very sure that you are in perfect accord with your companion before you start. What sorrow might have been saved in thousands of cases, if only there had been stricter comparison of temperaments and methods before starting forth!

Amos 4:12

“Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.”

THESSE words might have rung out in Paradise. When the heat of the day was over, the voice of the Lord might have been heard sounding down the leafy avenues: Prepare, O man, to meet thy God! And the summons must have filled him with ecstasy. As a child to its parent, so must those two innocent and happy beings have sped to their Creator.

We, too, hear the summons. Each morning, when we stand ready for the duties of the day, we hear the voice, Prepare to meet Me. Each Lord’s Day we wake with this same summons in our heart, and prepare ourselves to meet our God. Each illness, each fluttering of the canvas of our mortality, each premonition of our end, takes up the same appeal, Prepare to meet God. And as we hear the words, we have no dread, no fear. Clothed in Christ’s perfect righteousness, arrayed in his beauty, we know that we are accepted; that the love wherewith the Father loves the Son is waiting to greet us.

But there should be a preparedness of heart. We should not rush heedlessly into His presence. We should stimulate our hearts by thoughts like those suggested in the following verse. Stop and remember how great God is: He formed the mountains. How subtle His power: He made the viewless wind, and the Spirit of which it is the emblem. How omniscient His knowledge: He can declare unto man His inmost thought. How absolute His authority — the brightest morning will darken, or the darkest night brighten, as He bids. How vast the circuit of His providence, who steps from Alpine peak to peak. Let me not rush into His presence: He is my Father. But He is the Lord, the God of hosts: I must order my thoughts, and prepare to meet Him.

Amos 5:8

“Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night: that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: The LORD is his name:”

THIS chapter resounds with invitations to *seek* God. He makes the *Pleiades*, which usher in *the spring*: seek Him when life is full of radiant hope and promise, in days of love and joy. But He also makes *Orion*, the precursor of tempests; be sure, therefore, to seek Him when the sky is overcast and lowering, and when He presses you to enter the boat and face the storm.

He turns the shadow of death *into the morning*. Thank God for this. There is a turning of death-shadow into morning, when despair gives place to hope; when the dear one begins to revive from sore sickness; when circumstances begin to brighten; and when the perplexity and darkness of this mortal life, with its separations and misunderstandings, shall brighten with the eternal day. Weave thoughts of God into all these glad experiences; but not less so, when He makes the day dark with *night*. It may be that you will come closest to Him then; as the little child will sit on the far side of the railway carriage from her mother till they enter a tunnel, and then there will be a little startled cry and a rush to the mother’s knee.

Sometimes the waters of the sea pour in on the land, engulfing the works of men, and devastating their toils. But amid all such scenes of desolation, the righteous have a secure hiding-place, suggested by the reference to the name Jehovah, with which this verse closes. “The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.” (Proverbs 18:10)

“Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure;

What entered into thee,

That was, is, and shall be;

Time’s wheel runs back or stops—Potter and clay endure.”

Amos 6:1

“Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!”

A PICTURE is given in the following chapters of the luxury and self-indulgence of the people. Stretched on couches inlaid with ivory, choosing the rarest dainties, accompanying their voices on the lute, and drinking wine from flowing bowls, they were indifferent to the wounds from which the national life-blood was pouring. “But they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.” (Amos 6:6).

The same behavior is only too common amongst ourselves. Indeed, this temptation besets us all. If only we are well supplied with the comforts and luxuries of life, we are apt to become thoughtless of the miseries of poverty and misfortune. If our own heaven is secure, we are apt to enwrap ourselves with an atmosphere of satisfaction and composure, without taking sufficiently to heart the needs of the great world of sin and sorrow around.

“The affliction of Joseph” reminds us of the scene at the pit’s mouth: how Joseph’s brethren sat down to eat bread, whilst their brother was in the pit without water, and then sold him to the travelling merchantmen, to rid their sight of him. But human nature is prone to act thus in every age.

Are we at ease in Zion? Are we using for our own luxurious enjoyment gifts which God entrusted to our care for the world? Are we too indifferent to the fate of those who live in our homes, or pour in great streams of activity along our streets? Are we sleeping in the garden, whilst our Master sweats the bloody sweat? We have but one life to spend; let it be a life in earnest. Let us bethink ourselves of any whom we can help—any who are in affliction, the poor widow, the young wife with the sick husband, the student who is so eager to become a minister.

Amos 7:1

“Thus hath the Lord GOD shewed unto me; and, behold, he formed grasshoppers in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth; and, lo, it was the latter growth after the king’s mowings.”

OUR King has often to mow the grass of the inner life—the daisies and buttercups of experience of which we are so proud, the tall stalks, the flowering grasses. Were He to leave them, the entire growth would become altogether too coarse and rank for use. The lawn on which He loves to walk, with its velvet pile of grass, would become coarse and rough.

Mowing implies death. All the pretty flowers and myriads of blades lie in long swathes of death, presently to be carried away to the rubbish-heap. From myriads of dying flowers the last expiring sigh is being breathed out on the soft spring breeze. We must be prepared to die to our complacent self-content; to our blissful frames and feelings; to our complaints and consolations—if any of them come between us and our King.

But after the King’s mowings there is the *aftermath*. It is said that the tenderest, juiciest shoots appear on lawns which are repeatedly mown. This is what the young lambs love, if they may taste it. And surely there is no such piety as that which follows on the repeated application of God’s scythe. When repeated strokes have robbed us of health, friends, money, and favorable circumstances; then we put forth our tenderest shoots of love, and prayer, and consecration. Oh, do not be afraid of the scythe! The King loves thee too well to hurt thee. Be of good heart; thou shalt yet bear an aftermath!

“What do you think of your God now?” asked a well-known skeptic of Silwood of Keswick, who for twenty years suffered agonies. “Since He is able to keep me in perfect peace,” was the reply, “amid sufferings like mine, I think of Him more than ever.” Here was aftermath indeed!

Amos 8:11

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD:”

ISRAEL will not listen to God’s prophets, and their voices would be silenced. This was a just retribution. As they were not willing to have the word of God, so there should be a famine of that word. The word of God was precious in the days of Samuel, because there was no open vision; so should it be again. And perhaps this privation will one day be meted out to our beloved country. There is a much larger proportion of our population outside than inside our churches; and men proudly eschew God’s Word. It may be that the message of the Gospel will almost cease from among them, and be replaced—as in so many instances is now the case—by the dry husks of morality and ceremonialism. Then they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it.

We may question ourselves, whether we feed enough on God’s Word. If we would grow strong, we must feed, not on condiments and sweetmeats, not on tit-bits and scraps, not on versicles and pious sentences; but on the strong meat of the Word, on the doctrines, histories, types of Scripture. Oh for more hunger and thirst for these! Would you have it so? No child will enjoy its meals who is constantly being surfeited with sweets between times. Beware lest you cloy your appetite with the painted sweetmeats of the world.

It is worth notice, that if men have not God, they will find some substitute. They will swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, Thy God, O Dan; thy manner, O Beersheba. This is why palmistry, spiritualism, so-called Christian science, are just now so much in vogue. Man’s nature is made for God, and hungers for a substitute.

Amos 9:11–12

“In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this.”

THESSE verses were quoted by the grave, white-vestured James in that memorable gathering of the Church to consider the admission of the Gentiles on equal terms with Jews (Acts 15). It is well worth noticing the special turn which the Lord's brother gave to the closing words of the quotation. He reads into it the deeper meaning of the Holy Spirit. The quickening and blessing of the chosen people has always meant the blessing of the world.

It was so, as James says, at Pentecost. The blessing which descended on the hill of Zion passed to all lands. They went everywhere preaching the Gospel, until some began to utter it also to the men of Antioch, and great numbers streamed into the Church (Acts 11); and thence the widening circles broadened out, until Ephesus, Athens, Rome, and distant Spain and Britain were included.

So will it be when the end of the present age has been reached. We, the Church, shall sit with Christ in the heavenlies, occupying the place now held by the devil and his demons, who will no longer be the prince of the power of the air; but the Jews, using that term in its strict sense, having been brought to God, shall be the evangelists and apostles of the world. Then the residue of the Gentiles shall seek unto the Lord. Ponder, specially, the promises of Amos 9:13–15; and compare them with Romans 11:15, 24, 28.

May we not appropriate them in a spiritual sense, and ask that the days may hasten when the crops shall have no sooner fallen before the sickle, than the plowmen shall run their shares through the clods; and the vintage shall follow close on the harvest; and men shall be prepared and eager before we begin to speak!

Obadiah 17

“But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.”

AS long as Edom invaded and annoyed the house of Jacob, the people were unable to possess their possessions in peace. No sooner did the harvest or vintage appear, than their hereditary foes swooped down to carry off the fruits of their toils. But Edom’s dominion was to be ended; and then there would be no cloud in the sky, no barrier to their uninterrupted joy.

There are many instances of people not possessing their possessions. Such are those who put their plate and valuables into furniture depositories, and for years leave them to neglect; who have shelves of unread, uncut books; who do not realize that coal and iron mines lie under their estates; who never enjoy the wealth of love and tenderness in their friends’ hearts; who refuse to avail themselves of resources which are well within their reach.

But too many of God’s people are like this. The Father has caused all His fullness to reside in the nature of Jesus; He hath given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness in Him; He hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus; in our Savior are treasures of wisdom, of purity, of prevailing power, of love and patience. The Divine Merchantman has come to us to give us gold tried in the fire, white raiment, and eyesalve. But we go blundering on in our own selfish, sinful, faltering way. We do not possess our possessions. We do not call into practical use the boundless reinforcements awaiting us, at every hour, within the tiniest beckoning of our faith. We are like the manufacturer who refuses to use the steam-power, though it is laid on into the mill; or the householder who refuses to touch the button of the electric light.

Jonah 1:3

“But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.”

HE went down to Joppa. — Sin is always a going down. Down from the heights of fellowship with God; down from the life of high and noble purpose; down from self-restraint and high endeavor. Yes, and we know we are going down; that our self-discipline is relaxed; that our holy separation from the world is slacker.

He found a ship. — Opportunity does not necessarily indicate either expediency or duty. Because the ship happened at that moment to be weighing anchor and the sails to be filled with a favoring breeze, Jonah might have argued that his resolution was a right one. Whether he did or not, there are many times in our lives when we are disposed to argue that favoring circumstances indicate the right course. But it must be remembered that they never can belie God’s summons to the soul to do His will. The court of conscience is the supreme court of appeal; and to run away from known duty cannot be right, though circumstances seem at first to smile.

He paid the fare thereof. — Yea, if we go opposite to God’s will, we always have to pay for it. The loss of self-respect, the broken piece of conscience, the deprivation of God’s blessed presence, are part of the fare. And even when we have paid and lost it all, we fail to get what we purchased; we are dropped out of our chosen vessel in mid-ocean; and God brings us back to land at His own expense, and in a ship of His own construction. The morning may be fine, but it is soon overcast: the sky may be clear at starting, but God sends a great storm after the runaways to bring them back to Himself: the ship may seem to be opportunely leaving the wharf, but disaster will over-take it.

Jonah 2:4

“Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.”

THAT is well, O truant soul. *Look again from where thou art!* Thou art in the heart of the seas; the flood of sorrow enwraps thee; storms of trouble are sweeping over thee—but look again toward His holy temple. All that sorrow has been sent to bring thee back from thy wanderings, and cause thee to look again. Thou couldest not look so long as thy back was towards the will of God, and thy face towards Tarshish; but now thou art turned again, and art on thy way back, thou mayest look again in the direction of the altar and its sacrifice, the High Priest and his mediation. Look again. Look off unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of Faith. Do not wait till thou hast come into a better vantage-point for vision, but look again from thy position in the lowest depths.

Look again! God invites thee, too. Though thou hast turned thy back on Him these many years, He waits to be gracious; His face is wreathed in tenderest, yearning love. One look the least, the most abashed, from the greatest distance, will be eagerly noticed and instantly reciprocated. “They looked unto Him and were lightened” (Psalm 34:5) — so wilt thou be. And He will bring up thy life from the pit. Does thy soul faint within thee? — then remember the Lord. Let there be but one yearning desire for Him, and it will come in unto Him as a prayer to His holy temple.

Look again! in spite of remonstrances of thine heart. “I said.” The heart is always saying: I am too vile; I have sinned too deeply; I have gone too far; I have so often fallen and returned, I am ashamed to come again: besides, are there not texts about never forgiveness, and impossible to renew to repentance? *I said:* Yet, look again!

Jonah 3:1

“And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying,”

WE must not presume on this, but we may take it to our hearts for their very great comfort. God’s word may come to us “the second time.” Jonah evaded it the first time; but he was permitted to have a second opportunity of obeying it. Thus it was with Peter; he failed to realize the Lord’s ideal in the first great trial of his apostolic career, but the Lord met him on the shores of the lake, and his word came to him a second time.

God is not waiting to notice our first failure and thrust us from His service. He waits, with eager desire, to give us the joy and honor of being fellow-laborers with Himself. He waits to be gracious. Therefore, when in our madness we refuse to do His bidding, and rush off in another direction, He brings us back, amid bitter experiences, and says, “Go again to Nineveh with the message that I gave thee originally.”

How many times He will do this I do not dare to say. He forgives indefinitely, unto seventy times seven; but how often He will re-entrust the sacred message and mission, it is not for me to say. But there is, without doubt, a limit beyond which He cannot go, lest our own character suffer, and the interests of other souls, who may be dissuaded from obedience by our example, should be imperiled.

How wonderful it is that God should employ us at all! Yet it is like His work in nature. He is ever calling men to co-operate with Himself. He lays the coal up in mines, but man must excavate: He puts the flowers in the wilds, but man cultivates them: He gives the water, but man irrigates the fields. So He longs over Nineveh, but summons sinful men to carry His word.

Jonah 4:6–8

“And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.”

THIS book is full of this word *prepared*. We are told that the Lord prepared a great fish, a gourd, a worm, and a sultry east wind.

He prepares the fish (Jonah 1:17). — When we are at our wits’ end, apparently going to destruction, He interposes and arrests our progress, and brings us back again to Himself.

He prepares the gourd, that it may come up to be a shadow to our heads, and deliver us from our evil case. The gourd of friendship, of property, of some cherished and successful achievement. Ah, how glad we are for these gourds; though not always sufficiently quick to attribute them to the loving providence of our Heavenly Father.

He prepares the worm, and the east wind. — Jonah would have regarded Nineveh’s destruction with equanimity, whilst he mourned over his gourd; and there was no way of awakening him to the true state of the case than by letting worm and east wind do their work. He must be taught that what the gourd was to himself, Nineveh was to God. Yea, it was more; because God had labored for it, and made it to grow through long centuries (Jonah 4:11).

How often our gourds are allowed to perish, to teach us these deep lessons. In spite of all we can do to keep them green, their leaves turn more and more sere and yellow, until they droop and die. And when they lie prone in the dust, the east wind is let forth from the Almighty hand—the malign breath from which the gourd would have delivered us. O child of God, fainting in the east wind, do not ask to die; but get thee to the blue misty shadow of the great Rock in a weary land; to the Man who is a shadow from the heat.

Micah 1:4

“And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place.”

WE must stay to admire the sublimity of these words. Of course, it is a very human way of describing the movements of the Eternal: but how forcibly the prophet's words suggest the interest of God in human life. He comes out of His place to deliver His own, and to judge the ungodly: to remove obstacles to the fulfillment of His purposes.

Are you looking out today on a range of mountains that block your passage and screen off the rays of the sun? Do your difficulties seem to have accumulated till they act as insuperable obstacles to the fulfillment of your most cherished purposes? Perhaps, divided from your friends; hemmed and blocked in from the fair sunny lands of the vineyard and the goldening corn; despairing of tunneling or scaling the Himalaya and the Alps. It is a sad and drear prospect, enough to daunt the most courageous spirit, and break down the most heroic courage. But look again at this text.

“Behold, the Lord cometh forth out of his place.” He steps forth from His pavilion, intent on some great and glorious project. He treads on thy high mountains as on the furrows of a ploughed field. They are nothing to Him. Beneath His tread the mountains melt, and the valleys cleave. Wax melting before the fire is the simple but sublime image of the instant subsidence of whole ranges of difficulty. Wilt thou not walk with Him? Dare to believe that He can make His mountains a way. Who art thou, great mountain before Zerubbabel Thou shalt become a plain.

“For whom the heart of man shuts out,
sometimes the heart of God shuts in;
And fences them all round about
With silence 'mid the world's loud din.”

Micah 2:13

“The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their king shall pass before them, and the LORD on the head of them.”

THE mind of the prophet conceives of the people as captives in a foreign city, surrounded by lofty walls and frowning gates. Like impassable barriers, these lie between them and liberty. There seems no hope of their being able to break forth; but all suddenly a Breaker appears, who, summoning them to follow, breaks through the opposition of armed men and of mighty bulwarks. With resistless might, He breaks his way through; and they that follow Him are described as having broken forth, and passed on to the gate, and gone out thereat. First the Lord, then their king, and then hosts of men.

No finer description could be imagined of the resurrection, which we celebrate as the first day of every week recurs. Looking forth from heaven at the mystery of the resurrection, when the triumphant Lord stepped forth from the restraint of watch, and ward, and stone, and demon hate, and the grim fortress of the grave, the angels might fitly have appropriated these words, “The Breaker is gone up” before His redeemed ones. See! they too are breaking forth, and passing on through the gate—their King passing on before them.

This is also true of every new era of time and novelty of circumstance. Circumstances, like prison walls, may confine us; but our Breaker is always preceding us, breaking down opposition and strong ramparts of apparently impassable difficulty; breaking down the suspicion and hatred of men; breaking down the mailed force of hell. Keep close beside Him, as the armor-bearer behind Jonathan. Let there be no perceptible inter-space. The iron gate of the city will open of its own accord, through which you shall pass into perfect liberty.

Micah 3:8

“But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the LORD, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin.”

NOTHING needs more of the Spirit of God than the preaching which declares to men their sins. No one is so thoroughly hated as the candid friend. Just because conscience attests the truth of our utterances, the soul of the sinner resents our plain speaking. You may condemn sin generally as much as you like; but when your hand comes near the broken bone, or the diseased flesh, then there is at once a violent outcry. Nothing is more needed in the present day than particular preaching, the careful analysis of motive, the discrimination of shades of wrong-doing; but the ministry of John the Baptist is only possible to those who come in the spirit and power of Elijah.

We need *power* like that with which the apostles gave witness to Jesus Christ. And it is not difficult to discern when a man is dealing with sin in the power of the eternal God. We need *judgment* to detect graver and lighter offences, and trace the connection between sin and its consequence. We need *might* to withstand the opposition we shall inevitably meet.

But all these may be had with the filling of the Holy Ghost, which is the privilege and right of every child of God in this the age of the Holy Ghost. Our ascended Lord received of the Father the fullness of the Spirit, that He might communicate Him to all who believe; but we, in return, must receive. Do not be content with a few drops at the bottom of the bucket; ask to stand always beneath the flowing spring and be filled. The disciples were filled suddenly on the day of Pentecost; but they were being filled perpetually (Acts 13:52, Gr.). The fullness of God for you is only limited by your capacity to receive.

Micah 4:1

“But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it.”

THESSE words are repeated in Isaiah 2:2–4. The holy men that wrote the Bible lived upon the inspired words of their predecessors. Amid the dark night this promise of God shone like binary stars.

No doubt they have been fulfilled in the Gospel dispensation. In a deep and true sense it has come to pass that the Lord’s house has been established in the top of the mountains, and has been exalted above the hills. The Church is a conspicuous and influential object among the forces of the world; and peoples are flowing towards it. In very many cases whole nations have flung away the religion of their ancestors, and gathered within that Christian temple which has been built upon the foundations of Judaism. Out of Zion there has gone forth the law; and from Jerusalem the Word of the Lord. In Jesus, the Jew is still the center of the world’s vision.

But the full accomplishment of these words waits behind the curtain that is so soon to be rent at the coming of our Lord. Then holy influences will proceed from the chosen people who shall have been led to recognize Christ as their Messiah. From these the Gospel shall go forth unto all the world. Beneath the hallowing influences of that age swords shall be beaten into ploughshares, and spears into pruning hooks; the cannon shall be as obsolete as the tomahawk; the explosives of war shall be stored in museums; whilst schools for training the art of war shall be used as missionary seminaries.

There shall be no war, because there shall be no fear. “None shall make them afraid.” (Micah 4:4) And there shall be no fear, because universal love shall reign towards God and man.

Micah 5:4-5

“And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth. And this man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land: and when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against him seven shepherds, and eight principal men.”

HE that comes from Bethlehem Ephratah, leaving a trail of light that conducts the eyes of all generations back to the little village, “the least amongst the thousands of Judah,” is the Everlasting Jehovah, whose goings forth have been from of old.

What *majesty* is His! He shall stand amid the swirling waves of change, the shifting quicksands of time, and the drifting cloud-wrack of revolution; erect, unchangeable, unmovable. And not He alone, but His flock which has gathered around Him out of the windy storm and tempest. No common majesty mantles that gentle form; it is the majesty of the Name of Jehovah, the glory that He had with the Father before the worlds were.

What *tenderness* is His! He feeds His flock like a shepherd, and gathers the lambs in His arm. Though He is great to the ends of the earth, He is the Prince of Peace. He makes peace; does His work calmly and tenderly; lays the foundations of peace by yielding His life to the death of the Cross without resistance or complaint.

What *strength* is His! Strong with the original strength of Deity, with the acquired strength of perfect obedience, with the strength that accrues from the successful prevalence over His foes. His strength is ours, because He loves us perfectly; and it is the boast of the strong to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to seek its own.

And this Man is our Peace. — He came and preached peace to them that were far off, and peace to them that were nigh. He has made peace by the Blood of his Cross. He is the Prince of Peace to loyal and loving hearts. He sheds abroad in our hearts his own peace, which the world cannot take away.

Micah 6:8

“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

THE perfunctory sacrifices of lambs and rams, rivers of oil, and of tender children, were eagerly practised by the surrounding nations, such as the Moabites, but were abhorrent to God. What to Him is the outward rite without the holy purpose; the child's form of obeisance, apart from filial love! Grave questionings as to the utility of mere ritualism suggested themselves in the old-world religions. It appears that the questions of this chapter were put by Balaam; and the words before us were uttered by the Divine Spirit to his heart. But however that may be, it is matter for our adoring gratitude that God has stepped out of the infinite to show us what is good, and what He requires.

To do justly is to preserve the balance of strict equity: if an employer, treating work-people with perfect justice; if a manufacturer or salesman, making and selling what will thoroughly satisfy the just requirements of the purchaser; if an employee, giving an exact equivalent of time and diligence and conscientious labor for money received.

To love mercy is to take into consideration all those drawbacks which misfortunes, which enfeebled health, or crushing sorrow may impose on those who owe us service or money, or in some other way are dependent upon us.

To walk humbly with God implies constant prayer and watchfulness, familiar yet humble converse, conscientious solicitude, to allow nothing to divert us from His side or to break the holy chain of conversation. We must exchange our monologue, in which we talk with ourselves, for dialogue, in which we talk as we walk with God. Ask Him to make these good things the ordinary tenor of your life.

Micah 7:8

*“Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise;
when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me.”*

THOU art glad, O child of the darkness, that the child of God has fallen into the pit: thou laughest derisively and in scorn. But wait to see the end of the Lord, for He is very pitiful. Thy rock is not as our Rock, and of this thou shalt be the judge. Our God will chastise with many stripes those of His children who persist in wrong-doing. He will withdraw the light of His face. He will permit the backslider to bear His indignation. But He does not keep His anger for ever, or allow the enemy and avenger to wreak all His vengeance. He may use the stripes of the children of men to a certain point; but immediately they exceed it, and take unhallowed license, He steps in and delivers His beloved, enabling the returning and restored soul to use these words.

Wait, O soul; thy God will presently arise to plead thy cause, and execute judgment for thee; do not put forth thine hand to save thyself; wait on Him, He will deliver thee; He will bring thee forth to the light, and thou shalt behold His righteousness in the ordering of thy life. Only acknowledge thy sin; cast thyself on His mercy; and accept what He may appoint by way of chastening.

What an exquisite word is here for those who sit in darkness from any cause: from the waning of human love; the darkening of increasing physical weakness; the withdrawal of beloved faces, one by one, from the family circle. Look unto the Lord; wait for the God of your salvation; when you sit in darkness, He will be a light.

“In darkest shades, if He appear,
My dawning is begun;
He is my soul’s sweet morning star,
And He my rising sun.”

Nahum 1:3

“The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.”

GOD'S dealings are often terrible. — He rides on the whirlwind, and wraps Himself in the storm. But the child of God looks beneath the dress to the Father's heart, which beats with as much love when attired thus as when arrayed in the smiles of a summer eve. The whirlwind serves a useful purpose in cleaning the trees of rotten boughs, and searching the corners of fetid courts; the storm, in deluging the galleys and drains; the clouds, in forming the fertilizing showers on the thirsty land. God is in it all. God is behind the tempests that sweep over and desolate your life: this is His way; and the clouds that overcast your sky are the pavement of His feet; on our side they seem dark and lowering; but on the other side they are like burnished gold, as He steps across them. Whenever clouds are above, remember that God is at hand. They are the dust of his feet.

God's way is generally hidden. — The clouds as dust conceal Him; but we must not dwell with melancholy foreboding on the clouds, as if they were all. God is behind them, working for us, coming to our rescue, showing Himself strong on our behalf. Whenever the clouds gather over your life, say God cannot be far off—see, the dust He raises in His mighty progress betrays Him.

God counts our great things as very trifling. — A cloud is a great thing to us; it sometimes seems to equal the Alps in magnificence, in height, in girth; but to God it is only as a grain of dust to us. Our difficulties, perplexities, and anxieties, are very little things to Him. With one movement of His hand He could sweep them away, as you can move dust-motes from your table. Trust Him! Your tears are much to Him; your difficulties nothing.

Nahum 2:2

“For the LORD hath turned away the excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel: for the emptiers have emptied them out, and marred their vine branches.”

TOO long Nineveh had exerted her malign influence upon the fortunes of the chosen people; that, to use the expressive simile of Nahum 2:11, it had resembled a den of lions, whence ravenous beasts prowl forth to devour the villagers. The Assyrians, pouring forth from their mighty metropolis, had devastated the excellency of Jacob, the cry of the land had gone up to Jehovah; and He here declares His determination to quell the enemy and avenger, and to bring again the excellency of the people whom He loved.

It may be that you, too, have been carried into captivity, or devastated by strongly besetting sins; though you pray and yearn for emancipation, still you are kept low by the depredations of the power of evil. But be of good cheer; God is moving to your help. He is against those who are against you; He will bring again your excellency. He resembles the mother, whose child is smitten with small-pox. Does she love it less? Nay, but comes nearer, that they may fight the disease together.

You shall excel in *faith* when the hindrance is removed. The faith that once characterized you shall arouse with its former vigor, and make an open pathway down which heaven's best blessings may enter your life. At its summons the unseen will become more real than the seen, and God will be all in all. You shall excel also in *hope*. This is the realizing faculty, accepting the assurances of faith, following them as the beacon-lights that guide weary sailors; for hope is more than faith, as the artist is more than the preparer of colors. You shall also excel in *love*. When self-will looses its hold upon the soul, love springs spontaneously from its soil.

Nahum 3:19

“There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous: all that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee: for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?”

THIS is one of the greatest chapters in Old Testament prophecy. Nahum the Elkoshite was a man of uncommon power of imagination and force of eloquence. His denunciation of Nineveh is remarkably forcible and eloquent. You can almost hear the crack of the whip, the rattling of wheels, and see the heap of corpses that block the passages. Every traveller, from Layard downwards, has attested the literal fulfillment of these predictions. For Nineveh, from the time of her fall to the present, has been utterly waste. Her hurt has never been assuaged. A scar upon the earth's surface alone marks her site.

From such a spectacle we may well turn to our beloved country, and seriously question whether we are doing all that we can to stay a similar fate. There are many signs that she is being swept along in the same stream as has borne many mighty nations down to ruin. The growing luxury of the rich; the abject poverty of the poor (a child was burned in Whitechapel the other day through the mother having to sell the fire-guard to buy bread); the gross impurity and immorality of our streets; the increasing desecration of the Rest Day; and the overwhelming bill for drink—these things cannot be unpunished. May we not indeed fear that God will soon rise against us? Let us use our influence as citizens, and our prayer as saints, to avert a fate which if it comes will be irretrievable.

Ah, reader, is this thy case? Hast thou an inward hurt, of which no balm or medicine has brought assuagement? Hast thou a wound, so grievous that no art has sufficed to heal it? Take it to the Living Savior. Each of His miracles, in the days of His flesh, has a spiritual counterpart still.

Habakkuk 1:12

“Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction.”

NOTE the attributes of God, which are enumerated in these words. His eternity—He is from everlasting; He is the Holy One—of purer eyes than to behold evil; the Almighty—the Rock. Is it not wonderful that mortals should be permitted to put the possessive pronoun before these wonderful words, and claim this glorious God for themselves! *My God; mine Holy One.*

But the most remarkable is the reading suggested above by the words, “Thou diest not”; “He only hath immortality.” Time cannot lay its hand upon His nature, or death dissolve it. His hair is white, but not with the whiteness of decay, but of unutterable purity. He need not tremble at the summons of man’s great last foe. Unchangeable! The same yesterday, today, and for ever! The death of death! The destruction of the grave! He dies not.

All this is true; but it is true also that in the person of His Eternal Son He died. He laid down His life, though none took it from Him. He bowed His glorious nature beneath the yoke of death. Because the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He took part in the same, that through death He might destroy death. Though He ever liveth, yet He became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.

There are many mysteries like those at which the prophet hints. He holds His peace whilst the wicked swallows up the man that is more righteous than himself. It is the problem of all ages why God should permit it; but whatever be the explanation, it cannot be because He has vacated the throne of the universe, or that His arm is weakened by disease. From everlasting to everlasting He is God.

Habakkuk 2:1

“I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.”

THE prophet had made his complaint in the preceding chapter; and now he climbs the watch-tower, much as the watchman did who waited for tidings of the battle between Joab and Absalom. He looks forth for God’s answer. This, to say the least, is respectful in our dealings with the Almighty. Too often we ask questions, and do not wait for replies; shoot prayer-arrows into the air, without stopping to see where they alight, or what quarry they strike. We are in too great a hurry, to take time and trouble for climbing the watch-tower, and awaiting the Divine reply.

God still speaks to the waiting soul. Sometimes, there is a direct answer to its perplexity; at others, there is the assurance that the vision is yet for the appointed time, but that it is hastening towards the end. O long-waiting soul, dost thou hear those words? Thou hast been standing long upon the watch-tower. Hope has almost died; but the vision is panting in its haste to be fulfilled. If it tarry, wait for it; because it is already on the way. Every throb of the pendulum brings it nearer. The express train is hurrying towards thee, with its precious freight.

How often God’s answers come, and find us gone! We have waited for awhile, and, thinking there was no answer, we have gone our way; but as we have turned the first corner the post has come in. God’s ships touch at our wharves; but there is no one to unload them. His letters lie at the office; but no one calls for them. It is not enough to direct your prayer unto God; look up, and look out, until the blessing alights on your head. When we ask what is according to His will, we receive while we pray.

Habakkuk 3:2

“O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.”

WHEN we are oppressed with the state of the Church and the world, as Habakkuk was, there is no resource but to turn to God. It is of no use to say to our brother, “What shall *we* do?” Better at once get into the presence of the Almighty. All conferences with flesh and blood are wasted breath, unless there has been a previous one with God.

Note also the *unselfishness* of the prayer which precedes revival. We must not pray “Revive my work,” lest the insidious temptation come in of using the stream of God’s blessing to turn our own tiny water-wheels for our own profit. Let us get beyond the narrow limits of our church or section, and ask for a revival of *God’s* work everywhere.

We do not need a new Gospel, but a *revival*—a revivifying of the old Gospel. If any preach another Gospel than that which the apostles preached, let him be accursed; he is selling bran for wheat; he is filling cartridges with sand. We want nothing but the Gospel of the Cross of Jesus Christ, proclaimed from lips which have received a new baptism of heavenly power.

Note the *time*. Not at the *end* of years, but in the *midst*. This is a prayer for those in middle life. They are apt to think that their power for service has passed its prime, and that the successes of their early days cannot be paralleled. But let them remember that in the midst of the years God can revive His work, and ask for it.

What *an argument!* “Remember mercy.” We cannot appeal to *merit*, but can lay great stress on *mercy*. Lord, have mercy on thy Church—revive her; and ere the dispensation close, may she arise for one great work of soul-salvation!

Zephaniah 1:12

“And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil.”

THE state of things in the chosen city was scandalous. The people worshipped the host of heaven on the housetops; the temple-courts were filled with the priests of idolatry; the court affected foreign dress and manners. Nothing could prevent the invasion of the Chaldeans as ministers of the Divine vengeance. These were the terrible guests whom the Almighty had summoned to the feast; and the feast consisted of the spoils of the city (Zephaniah 1:7).

No sin of His people can escape the notice of God. He searches out the secret evils of our hearts with lighted candles, not for His vision alone, but for ours; that we may know, and abhor them, and put them from us. There is the *candle of conscience*. The spirit of man is as the candle of the Lord. In some men the candle is present, but not lit: in others it is lit by the power of the Divine Spirit; and there is something of the incandescent flame about it then.

There is the *candle of outward events*. How often does God allow some incident of which we hear in social conversation, or read in the newspaper, to cast a sudden and unexpected light upon some passages in our lives which we have carefully shrouded in darkness. Right into a hidden closet the searchlight falls, saying “thou art the man.”

Then there is that *candle of his Holy Word*. A text or sermon unkindled by the Spirit of God is like an unlighted candle. But when God’s Holy Spirit rests on it, interfusing it with fire, then how mighty is its effect! It searches the heart and tries the reins; it reveals to man his thought and the real object of his existence, that he may repent.

Zephaniah 2:3

“Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD’S anger.”

THE name of this prophet means, “Whom God hides or protects.” The hidden man invites others to his hiding-place; and shows how we may be hidden in the day of God’s anger. It is said that in the center of the wildest cyclone there is a point of absolute calm: so amid the wildest storms that have swept the face of the world there have always been some of God’s hidden ones:—

“The secret place, the refuge from the blast,
The glorious Temple, Lamb of God art Thou;
Our *feet* shall tread the golden courts at last,
Our *souls* have entered now.”

“I cannot deny,” writes Tersteegen, “the corruptions of the external Church; but I think my dear friend has more necessary things to attend to. Within! Within! With God alone!” There is truth here, though not all the truth. We must have Elijahs as well as Zephaniahs.

Only those may know the hidden life who fulfil the conditions here described. They must be *meek*; they must *work His judgment*; they must *seek righteousness and meekness*. It is the soul that bends before the blast of the terrible ones; that gives place to wrath, not because of pusillanimity (*cowardice*), but because of the fear of the Lord; that hands over its cause of alarm and fear to the Most High, which abides in His secret place, and hides under His shadow.

Let us seek these things, and then there will be no *may-be* in our being hidden. We shall certainly be hidden in the day of the Lord’s anger; hidden in the wounds of Jesus, hidden in His heart, hidden in God with Christ, hidden in the fiery glory of His intolerable holiness.

“Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee!”

Zephaniah 3:17

“The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.”

IF this announcement is compared with the foregoing verse, it becomes apparent that only those may take its blessed comfort who have made the Lord their King. It is when the Lord, the King of Israel, is in the midst that we cease to fear the incursion of evil. Entire surrender and consecration must precede that deliverance from the power of evil which we all desire in our holiest hours.

O tempted one, who fearest every hour because of the fury of the foe, that seems only waiting to destroy, look no longer upon him, but behold thy glorious Lord. *“He will save.”* Dare to repeat those words again and again, as a sweet refrain. Dare to believe that the battle is not yours, but His. Fear not; nor let thine hands be slack! Do thy work in the world, and let God keep thee.

But God will do more than save the yielded trusting one. *He will rejoice* over the soul that finds its all in Himself. Such exquisite satisfaction will fill His glorious nature, that it shall be as when the heart can no longer contain itself, and wells over with liquid music. It is much to hear a nightingale sing; more to hear an angel; more to hear some child of Adam redeemed from sin sing the new song: but most to hear the great God break out into song. So a mother sings over her babe. O my God, may my life give Thee joy; not grief, nor tears, but a song.

But He does not always express Himself thus. He is sometimes “silent in His love.” At such times He does not speak or sing, but broods over the soul that has dared to trust Him. *“He will rest in his love.”* There are times when the heart is too full of blessedness to speak—it has learned to abide in the secret place. An ocean too full to permit of waves!

Haggai 1:6

“Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.”

IN these words, spoken on their return from captivity, God remonstrates with His people for neglecting the rebuilding of His house, and indicates this as the reason for the failure of their crops, and the profitlessness of their labors. They seemed to put their hard-earned wages into a bag with holes.

How true a description of many in the present day! They work hard, but derive little comfort from their toils. Their homes are bare; their children unkempt; their circumstances meager. They are always in anxiety. Gambling, drinking, loose and evil company—are indeed bags with holes. But there are other analogies. We sometimes find our days slipping away without accomplishing anything worth mentioning. We have nothing to show for them—nothing accomplished, nothing done. Or we expend time and thought on plans that are apparently well and carefully devised, but they prove abortive and disappointing. All this is like a labourer putting his wages into a bag with holes, and when he reaches home he has nothing to show for his labour.

There is a reason for this loss and failure. What applied to the Jews on their return from captivity, applies still. We have not placed God first. We have run every man to his own house, while His house has lain waste. We have worked from the wrong base of operations. We have not made first things first. If we do not trust in the Lord with all our heart, but lean to our own understanding; if in all our ways we do not acknowledge Him; if our eyes are not single to His interests, we need not be surprised when He calls for a drought upon the land. Let us consider our ways, and amend them.

Haggai 2:8-9

“The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.”

THE new Temple was deficient in the splendid adornment which Solomon had lavished on the first. Neither gold, nor silver, nor precious stones garnished its bare walls. But Haggai says that this lack was not due to any failure in the resources of Israel's God. The silver and the gold were His; and if He had chosen He could have poured them without stint into the lap of His people. But He purposely withheld them, that their attention might not be distracted from the spiritual glory which was to make the second Temple more famous than the lavished gold of Parvaim. The latter glory of this house, or the glory of this latter house, shall be greater, saith the Lord of Hosts; and then, as though to indicate that the glory was to be moral and spiritual, the Divine voice adds, “And in this place will I give peace.”

Dear child of God, it has pleased thy Heavenly Father to withhold from thee both gold and silver. Thou hast just enough to live on, but that is all. With the apostle thou sayest, “Silver and gold have I none.” God could have done otherwise for thee; for the silver and gold are His. But He purposely abstained lest thy head should be lifted up; lest thy attention should be so absorbed by these things as to neglect the sure riches; lest the radiance of thy faith, which is more precious than gold tried in the fire, or the beauty of thy meek and quiet spirit, should be obscured by the tawdry sheen of earth's metals.

But peace, and righteousness, and meek humility, are of everlasting work. Cultivate these; let thy life be a Temple whose glory is the indwelling of God; expect that the Desire of all nations should make thee His home, and shine through thee to others.

Zechariah 1:8

“I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom; and behind him were there red horses, speckled, and white.”

THE myrtle in a lowland vale is a beautiful emblem of the people of God. They do not aspire to be forest trees, but are content to fill a little space if He be glorified. As the myrtle seeks its home in shady and moist lands, so the believer needs shadow and moisture. God's ideal for us is a lowly plant, fragrant in scent, and graceful in its appearance.

But, however lowly and humble the myrtle might be, the Angel of Jehovah, who could have been none other but the Lord Jesus Himself, was there. At dead of night the prophet beheld Him sitting on a red horse, and attended by a retinue of horsemen, who had come back to Him after walking to and fro in all the earth. The Lord has His throne in the midst of His people, and His servants post over sea and land to do His bidding on their behalf.

And thus the prophet overheard the colloquy. The Lord's inquiry and the Angel's answer were clearly distinguished. He also heard the appeal made by the Redeemer of Israel to the Eternal, as He pleaded that God would avenge His people's cause, and was answered with good and comforting words. The Angel Jehovah who pleaded for Israel (Zephaniah 1:12) still pleads for His Church: and is similarly answered.

Yes! we are the objects of divine solicitude. Jesus with His bright angels is on our side. Not more really was He with the disciples of old, who were but as myrtles, than He is with us. He is still displeased with those who invade our lives with their cruelties. He is jealous for His people with a great jealousy. He will yet comfort Zion, and choose Jerusalem. However dark your night, dare to believe that the Lord of the Angels has stooped to your myrtle-tree life to help and bless.

Zechariah 2:5

“For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.”

JERUSALEM was to be rebuilt; but it would soon outgrow the narrow boundaries of the walls which Nehemiah and Ezra had reared with so much care. The multitude of men and cattle would pour over the ramparts as villages spread themselves out over the open country. What then: would there be no wall to arrest the foe and preserve the inhabitants from attack? Yes; there would be one, because the presence of God would be as a wall of fire round about. Nor would this be all, because He would be the glory in the midst (Isaiah 4:5).

How busy some of us are in building walls to our lives—the walls of property; of family alliances; of preparation against all kinds of ill. But the utmost we can do is not enough to defend us against the inevitable perils and dangers of our mortal life. Better far is it to bide within the enfolding, encouraging presence of the Eternal God, which is as a rampart of fire. Can plague or pestilence pass through fire? Travellers light a cordon of fires to surround them with their protection from tigers and wolves; so the soul hides in God. Notice the exquisite similitude—we are safe as “the apple of His eye.” What a safe environment is furnished by the brows, lids, lashes, strong frontal bones, and lachrymal water to cleanse each defect. We raise the arm at once to protect the eye. So safe art thou, O weak believer!

But we need not defence only, but illumination; not the fire around alone, but within; not deliverance, but salvation. Where can this be obtained, save in the indwelling of the Son of God, making our hearts so full of His burning purity that sin might be abashed and no sacrilegious foot intrude?

Zechariah 3:2

“And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?”

SUCH the divine economy, that God makes much of brands, fragments, castaways. What others regard as unworthy of their heed is dear and priceless to the great Lover of souls. The smoking flax, the bruised reed, the woman that was a sinner, the dying thief, the brand plucked from the fire, charred and blackened and almost useless—those whom man rejects as worthless—the base things of the world, and the things that are despised; these are chosen to bring to naught the things that are, so that no flesh should glory in His presence.

Hear the enemy and the Son of Man speaking concerning that smoking brand. The enemy says: It is so worthless and useless, so nearly eaten through with fire, so black and charred—cast it back again into the flame, and take some other. But Jesus says: Because it is so nearly worthless, because no one else would find any use for it, because all others would fling it back to be consumed—there is the more reason why I should take it in hand: nothing less than Divine skill or patience will avail.

And see what He will do for that charred ember. He will take away the filthy garments, clothe with change of raiment, and set the fair miter of priesthood on his head. From the verge of the pit to the proximity of the throne!

“The fair miter” may fairly be taken to represent a fresh enduement of the Holy Spirit for service. We must receive a new anointing ere we can go into the temple of God, to perform the priestly offices of praying for the people, and of coming forth to bless them. Let us break in on the heavenly ceremonial, pleading for one another that none may be missed, but that on each the fresh miter may be bestowed.

Zechariah 4:12

“And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves?”

WHAT a sermon there is in a wick! Sit beside it, and ask how it dares hope to be able to supply light for hours and hours to come. “Will you not soon burn to an end, you wick of lamp?” “No; I do not fear it, since the light does not burn me, though it burns on me. I only bear to it the oil which saturates my texture. I am but the ladder up which it climbs. It is not I, but the oil that is in me, that furnishes the light.”

Yes, that is it, and when we anticipate the future, our hearts might well misgive us if we were counting on meeting its demands from our only slender resources. But this is not necessary; we do not give light to the world; we only receive the oil from the Holy Spirit and the spark of His fire; and if we burn steadily through the long, dark hours, it is because we have learned to translate into living beauty those supplies of grace which we receive in fellowship with Jesus.

But how necessary it is that nothing interrupt the flow of oil; that there be no uncleanness permitted to clog and obstruct the narrow bore of the golden spout of faith. Let us daily see to this; let us watch and pray, that there may be no hindrance or impediment; let us draw from our King-Priest more and more of His grace, to enable us to persevere. It cannot be too often repeated, that it is not what we do for Him, but what He does through us, which really blesses men. Be satisfied then to be only a wick, unseen amid the glory of the light that crowns it, and willing to be consumed by the daily removal of the charred fringe. Delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus may be manifest in your mortal flesh.

Zechariah 5:10

“Then said I to the angel that talked with me, Whither do these bear the ephah?”

THE first vision of this chapter denounces those who had sinned against the first and second tables of the law; the record of their sin would be written in unmistakable syllables, and would consume the houses of evil-doers with dry-rot (Zechariah 5:4). But the second vision is most consolatory. A woman who symbolizes the wickedness of the land is thrust into an immense ephah, and covered with a leaden weight, and then is borne away from the Holy Land by two women in whose wings are strength and speed. Its destination was Babylon; thence had come the principal forms of iniquity, with which the chosen people were cursed, and thither would they return. But what encouragement to every pious Jew to know that the wickedness which had brought God’s judgments on the land was removed beyond recall!

This choice is presented to every one of us:—If we refuse to confess our sin, it eats out our heart and life, as cancer and consumption do the fiber of life. If, on the other hand, we confess, and seek the grace of the Holy Spirit, our iniquity will be purged, and the power of sin broken. With swift and sure salvation will God come to our relief, and the chains that bind shall drop from off us like wreaths of hoarfrost before the sun. What though the tendency and possibility of sin remain yet within us; yet the thrall of wickedness is abolished. However many the dark transgressions of the past, when sought for, they cannot be found; and whatever the temptation without, and the frailty within, we are learning to abhor that which is evil, and cleave to that which is good. So our path mounts up on a stairway of light to the gates of everlasting day. “Awake to righteousness, and sin not.” (1 Corinthians 15:34)

Zechariah 6:12

“And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD:”

THREE men came from Babylon, where many Jews remained, even after the return under Ezra and Nehemiah; they brought presents to the new-found temple. Their names were Robust; the Goodness of God; God-knows. Of the gold and silver a double crown was made, and placed on Joshua's head: one circle, as emblem of the priest; the other, of the king—the two signifying the final gathering of Israel's outcasts to the Messiah, who would then be recognized as their true King and Priest. In the Jewish commonwealth it was without precedent for the same man to be both king and priest; but as the time drew nearer the advent of the Lord, revelation concerning His marvelous Person grew in clearness, and the majestic combination of glory in His character became apparent. In His Church, Christ is Priest and King, after the order of Melchisedec, and between the two offices is no dispute.

As *Branch*, He is a scion of David's ancient stock; and through His far-reaching boughs the sap of the eternal purpose breaks into flower and fruit. He sprouted out from His place, Bethlehem, as predicted, and as befitted one of David's line.

As *Builder*, He began to build the Temple of the Lord, laying its foundations in the blood of His cross. He quarries the stones from the hearts of His people, and superintends the plan of the growing structure, as its Architect. Through the ages tier after tier is being added, though the builders pass and He will place the top-stone at His second advent. The Temple grows towards completion. Let us ask whether we have been built into its fabric, or left as those huge boulders at Baalbec, shaped for the Temple but never carried beyond the quarry.

Zechariah 7:5

“Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?”

THE men at Bethel asked this question of the priests; it was answered by the prophet. The fast of the fifth month was in memory of the fall of Jerusalem; that of the seventh commemorated the murder of Gedaliah, when the last blow was struck at Jewish independence. The question was: Should the restored Jews continue these fasts now that the events they recalled were forgotten in the abounding joy of the new state? It was a question of rite and ceremony and outward observance; and the prophet answers in effect: “Ye take much trouble and thought about the observance of a man-constituted religious rite; would that you were equally solicitous to practise those virtues, and denounce the vices, which were the theme of so many expostulations and warnings of the older prophets.”

God invariably demands a religion which does not consist in outward rites and ceremonies, but is inward and spiritual; and demands true judgment, the showing of mercy and compassion, the forsaking of oppression and evil imaginings. This is unpalatable enough to the natural man, who pulls away his shoulder.

On the general question, one would advise that there is no need to observe the sad anniversaries of our sins and their accompanying punishment, if once we are assured of God’s free forgiveness. When He forgives and restores, the need for dwelling on the bitter past is over; and we should put off our sackcloth and array ourselves with festal garments. This is a most salutary and necessary lesson. Too many of us are always dwelling beside the graves of the dead past. Each month has an anniversary of something we have lost. “Not looking behind” should be the motto of our Christian life.

Zechariah 8:6

“Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the LORD of hosts.”

MARVELOUS! Marvelous! Probably there is no adjective more frequently on our lips than this, in these wonderful years when we are reaping the harvest of centuries of patient sowing, and when any morning the newspapers may announce a discovery which will revolutionize our methods of illumination, or locomotion, or military organization.

The other day we were told that the philosopher's stone was found at last; and that silver can be transformed into gold; tomorrow we may rub our eyes at the marvelous news that the North Pole has been reached. Men resemble the little child led into a toy-shop, or listening to a lecture at the Royal Institute, with open-eyed wonder and open-mouthed exclamation.

But none of these things are wonderful to God; they are but the unraveling of His thoughts, the discovery of His secrets! They are only marvelous to us because we are as yet in the baby stage, waking up to know a little of what a wonderful God He is. Like a little child in Wonderland, our God is leading man from room to room, telling him such wonderful stories of His nature and creative work, as make us continually exclaim, How wonderful!

But there are more wonderful things than these—that rebels should be forgiven, prodigals restored, the sons of darkness changed into children of light, Satan driven out before the Stronger than he, the unclean heart made the pure temple of the holy God. Talk they of marvels in the natural world! These pale before the star of Bethlehem, the sunset of Calvary, and the radiance of the Resurrection morning. And we shall see greater things than these, when we follow on to know through unending ages.

Zechariah 9:11

“As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.”

THE state of the Jews in Palestine is presented under the figure of prisoners, shut up, as Joseph of old, in disused water-pits, from which the water had been drawn off, leaving a miry swamp behind. Jeremiah sank in one of these, almost to suffocation. But all the while they might reasonably be prisoners of hope, not of despair; of hope, because the seventy years had expired; of hope, because the purpose of their captivity had been achieved; of hope, because God had entered into covenant with their fathers, and had ratified it with blood. And, because of this, they would go forth out of the pit.

These words will probably be read by many other prisoners: prisoners of circumstance; prisoners in the hands of strong oppressors; prisoners in the utmost extremity. They fear every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as though he were ready to destroy. Behold, I bring to such of these as are united with the Son of God, good tidings of great joy! God will ever be mindful of His covenant. You may forget, or be utterly unworthy of His continued favor; you may have involved yourself in difficulties of your own making, the consequences of your own sin; but you must never forget that you are bound to God by the blood of an everlasting covenant. In the depth of your despair you may appropriate the psalmist's words, “Remember the covenant!” And He who brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd, will raise you from the dark dungeon, and make you sit with princes. He will certainly chasten, but He will assuredly redeem. Be of good cheer, ye prisoners of hope! According to covenant, God comes down the long corridor to throw open the prison doors.

Zechariah 10:6

“And I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will bring them again to place them; for I have mercy upon them: and they shall be as though I had not cast them off: for I am the LORD their God, and will hear them.”

GOD distinguishes, in these words, between the civil rulers of the people, called shepherds, and the people, His flock. He was determined to interpose on the behalf of His people, and to redeem them from the troubles in which their rulers had involved them. The distinct mention of Judah and Israel foreshadows a more complete restoration than that which had brought them from Babylon; in which Judah alone, with a few other Israelites from the other tribes, participated. This restoration is yet future; but when it comes, it will be so complete that the long history of the centuries shall be obliterated; and both the house of Judah and the house of Joseph will be as though they had never been cast off.

Hast thou been cast away from the hand of God—not as far as thy salvation is concerned, but for His purposes of service? Be sure to put away your sin. Ask for rain in the time of the latter rain—the gracious rain of the Holy Spirit; put away the false ideals which you have followed, as Israel’s false gods; then He will bring you again.

Your sins shall be remembered no more—the deep gulf of separation shall be bridged; the years devoured by the locust shall be restored; the dead past shall bury its dead; the river of the water of life will flow again into the channels which it filled once with music, but have so long been dry; and you shall be as though you had never been cast away. If you take the precious from among the vile, you shall not remove. God not only forgives, but obliterates the memory of past failure and sin. He reposes as much confidence in us as though we had never deceived Him; He treats His prodigals as though they had never gone astray.

Zechariah 11:7

“And I will feed the flock of slaughter, even you, O poor of the flock. And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock.”

THE prophet exercised his office amongst the poor of the land. They gave heed unto him (Zechariah 11:11), and recognized that he spoke the word of the Lord. It always has been so; and such people make the best flock, for pastoral oversight.

One day, the prophet appeared amongst these humble folk with two staves: Beauty, to represent the possible excellence of the people whom God loved; Bands, to denote the unity by which the entire nation should have been bound in one. These twain he broke to show, first, that God would be compelled to choose another people to set forth His praise; and, secondly, that the unity of Israel would be annulled. When his hearers had received these announcements, wrung from his heart, their sole response was to make a collection amongst them in recognition of his pastoral care; and this amounted only to the price of a good bond-servant (Exodus 21:32). What a miserable return for all the prophet's team and words!

All this was symbolical of our Lord. He longs for the beauty and unity of His Church. But, alas! how bitterly He has been disappointed! How hopelessly He has snapped His staves! How ungraciously his reward has been meted out to Him! (Matthew 26:15). The historical counterpart of this scene was afforded in His closing discourses and final betrayal; and its spiritual counterpart is being enacted day by day. O my soul! hast thou missed the beauty and unity He chose for thee? Hast thou esteemed His service of small account! Art thou like the Pharisees, that use the price of blood for the Potter's Field? (Matthew 27:6-7, 10). Repent thee, lest the Good Shepherd be compelled to adopt severer methods, and pass thee also through the refining fires.

Zechariah 12:10

“And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.”

THE fulfillment of these words is evidently future. A time is undoubtedly coming when the Jews shall recognize that Jesus is their brother. That scene in Joseph’s palace, when he made himself known to his brethren, and they looked on him whom they had cast into the pit and mourned with bitter tears, shall be literally enacted before the eyes of the world. The prophet tells us that this great reconciliation will take place, when their foes will be in the siege against Jerusalem; from which we infer that they will be restored to their own land in unbelief, but will be led to recognize Jehovah-Jesus when He comes to their rescue (Revelation 1:7).

But the interesting point for us to notice is the precise place in which their morning breaks out with its exceeding great and bitter cry. It is *after* they have been saved (Zechariah 12:7); *after* they have been engirded with strength; *after* their foes have been destroyed. Then the sluice-gates of sorrow are opened, and the bitter tears gush forth. They look on Him whom they pierced, and mourn. This is the true place of penitential grief. It was when the woman had been already forgiven that she loved much, and covered the Lord’s feet with tears.

Do not chide yourself if your sorrow for sin is meager and belated. This is quite likely to be the case, until you have deeper experience of the love of your dear Lord. But the more you know Him; the more you gaze on the piercings of His heart, the more you will mourn, as one that is in bitterness for the first-born. Pour on me this grace, O Lord, and give me this brokenness of heart! It was the figure of Christ on the cross that broke down Count Zinzendorf’s proud heart.

Zechariah 13:7

“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.”

THERE is no uncertainty as to the application of these striking words. On the eve of His death our Lord appropriated them to Himself. To His troubled disciples was He not the Shepherd and they the little flock? (Matthew 26:31). How well every word suits His lips!

He was a Shepherd, true, stedfast to His Father’s charge. There is a special emphasis in the pronoun *my*: since the Father had given over to His care a number of souls who were His, but whom He committed to the Son with the charge that He should lose none, but raise all of them up at the last day.

But He was more than Shepherd. He was Jehovah’s Fellow. From eternity He had dwelt in the bosom of the Father. He counted not equality with God a prize to be grasped at, as though there were any uncertainty about it. It was His native right. To all the deep secrets and purposes of God He was privy in all the plans of creation, providence, and redemption, He had fellowship. My Shepherd, said the Almighty; and my Fellow. But, O my soul, stand still and wonder; He who was all this became also a man! What an astonishing combination: The man that is “my Fellow!” The mediator between God and man was Himself — man.

But listen to the appeal to the sword of Divine justice. It had slept. Even since the sin of Eden it had remained quiet and unavenging. The pledge of the Son to come in the fullness of time met all its demands. But when He came it awoke. He was made sin for us: He bore the penalty of our transgression: He was led as a lamb to the slaughter and slain. And now, O sword of Divine Justice, thou hast returned into thy sheath, never again to awake.

Zechariah 14:20

*“In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses,
HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the LORD’S
house shall be like the bowls before the altar.”*

IN the days which the prophet anticipated, the knowledge and love of God would be universally diffused. The method in which he expresses this is as significant as it is beautiful. Horses were forbidden under the Jewish law, because of the temptations they presented to pride and war; but they would become dedicated to God, and their furniture or trappings would be emblazoned with the same sacred words that shone of old from the high priest’s golden frontlet. So, the commonest utensils in the Lord’s house would become as sacred vessels.

Such a day ought to be our everyday experience. “Holiness to the Lord” should be written on our commonest and most ordinary actions. The holy emotions and intentions that thirst in our bosoms on the Lord’s day and in the Lord’s house should always characterize us. Whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do, we should do all for the glory of God.

Many bells ring in our lives hour by hour: for awaking from our sleep, for meals, for work in the school or factory, for our attendance on those who employ us. There is the bell of call for the surgeon, the clergyman, the man of business. Let us look on each summons, from whatever quarter, as being the call of God, as much so as the recurring duties of the priests in the temple of old; and let us regard each opportunity as a sacred bowl, from which we may pour out some holy libation to the glory of God. We can only live like this when we have consecrated ourselves absolutely to God, and regard our entire life as being marked out in all its details as a sacred plan. It is good also carefully to observe our priestly office, and to remember that we are a holy nation as well as a royal priesthood.

Malachi 1:8

“And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts.”

MALACHI'S special work was in stirring up the priesthood to their duty, to the proper maintenance of the Temple services. They were very careless of these, and treated their holy duties with great contempt. The special method adopted seems to have been in the presentation of the blind, the lame, and sick on the altar; while the healthy and whole were reserved for private use. “The table of the Lord was polluted, and his meat contemptible.” Such unconcealed irreverence and greed could not pass unrebuked. They are asked to compare their service to God with their service to man; their sacrifices in the Temple with their gifts before their governors and rulers. Would these be pleased, and accept the gift, if they were treated in the same way as God was?

Professing Christians might sometimes be addressed in the same terms. When they slip a copper coin into the collecting-bag, which they would not think of offering to the butler in a friend's house; when they give more to the revenue officer than to the Church or poor; when they give to the Lord's work whatever they can spare without loss, and, indeed, are glad to be rid of; whenever they spend more time and strength on public duties than on the calls of Christianity—at such times we might fairly bid them present it to their governor.

In Malachi 1:10 God is heard asking for someone to close the doors of the Temple. He would rather this than be mocked by such heartless rites. It was as though He would rather that no prayers were offered, no services maintained, no holy hymn sung—than that there should be such perfunctory and heartless worship. Let us be very careful against this spirit in our daily devotions!

Malachi 2:6

“The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.”

THESE inspiring words, especially the last clause, might well hang in the secret chamber of every servant of God. They were specially prized by the sainted R. M. McCheyne, whose life was a beautiful exemplar of their meaning. You will notice that covenant dates back to the righteous zeal of Phinehas for the honor of God (Numbers 25). How well God remembers such things, and writes them in ineffaceable characters on the tablets of His memory! But what a contrast between that noble ancestry and the degenerate successors of Malachi’s days!

Do you want to turn many away from iniquity? You must walk with God, hourly, constantly, in blessed and intimate fellowship, learning from Him who you are to approach, what line you are to follow in dealing with them, and the message you are to deliver. You must expect to come into collision with them: they are coming in one direction, whilst God and you are will be going in just the reverse. But go on walking with God; fear His fear; know the terror of losing His companionship, even for a moment; be perfectly transparent in speech and life; let your lips be weighted with His messages only. The result will more than compensate. Yours will be the abundant life, and yours the peace which is unspeakable; yours will be the uprightness of soul which carries the Divine radiance on its face, and yours the joy in arresting the way of transgressors and sinners.

Plead this promise: “Lord, let me be used to turn many away from iniquity,” and notice that this most blessed result will accrue much less from what you say than from what you are. It was Levi’s walk and converse with God; more even than his words, that produced this wholesale reformation.

Malachi 3:3

“And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.”

IF you are just now in the fire, dear soul, be of good cheer—it shows at least that you are silver, and that you are capable of performing more acceptable service in God’s holy Temple. If it were not so, God would not take so much pains. He chastens those whom He loves, and prunes the branches that are already bearing fruit. What a comfort it is that He surrenders this work to no other hands than His own. He may give His angels charge concerning us when we are in danger; but He keeps our purification beneath His special superintendence.

But notice that He *sits*. What patience is here! However many years thou mayest have to lie on that couch, He will sit beside thee. The nurses will go off duty, but He never. Love may faint and be weary, and nod into light slumbers; but He never slumbers nor sleeps. Those that were most frequent in attendances may drop off; but He will sit, night and day—when the soul is lonely, and when the room is filled with cheery voices; when the pain is almost unbearable—reach out the hand, you will touch His; breathe the softest sigh, He will answer, “I am here.”

And the process will be continued until the scum has passed away, with its rebellion and murmuring, and His dear face shines, sweetly mirrored in its every outline and lineament, Then the fires will die down, and He will bid thee arise to reap the full reward. God is set on reviving the better, holier past, to which some of us revert with tender interest. “It was better with me then than now,” we sometimes say. But the tender grace of those days that are dead will come again to the soul, who yields to God’s refining. “The offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old.” (Malachi 3:4)

Malachi 4:2

“But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.”

AT the end of the Old Testament it is meet that the sun should break out. The morning that broke on Paradise was clear enough. It was without clouds. But the sky soon became darkened, and at last veiled, with only here and there a chink of blue sky left. All through the dark succeeding centuries there have been gleams of sunshine to let men know that the sun was shining still. Every precious promise, every solemn type, every holy life, that was bathed in supernatural beauty, was like a shining forth of the sun through the bars of human darkness and sin. But evidently more was in store than Old Testament saints had dreamed; and the time was coming when the reign of type, symbol, and parable, would be succeeded by the clear vision of the face of God.

We live in the days of open vision. Let us go forth and exult. We are to rejoice in every good thing He gives us. As the young calves of the early spring manifest their exuberant life in their caperings and gambols in the pastures, so let us give expression to our joy. Exult because of the clear shining of God’s love: exult because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth: exult because He is coming again, as surely as He came once. Wake up, my soul, take psaltery and harp, and sing. The Bridegroom is at hand. Hark! are those His chariot wheels reverberating through the air? Even so! Lord Jesus, come quickly!

INFORMATION ON THE SCRIPTURE TEXTS USED IN THIS DEVOTIONAL

EZEKIEL: The Glory of God

Outline:

1. Ezekiel's Call (1-3)
2. Judah's Fall (4-24)
3. Judah's Foes (25-32)
4. Judah's Future (33-48)

DANIEL: The Sovereignty of God

Outline:

1. The Prophet (1)
2. The Prophetic Plan for the Gentiles (2-7)
3. The Prophetic Plan for Israel (8-12)

HOSEA: The Tragedy of Unfaithfulness

Outline:

1. Israel's Unfaithfulness to God (1-10)
2. God's Faithfulness to Israel (11-14)

JOEL: The Day of the Lord

Outline:

1. The Present Desolation (1)
2. The Coming Desolation (2)
3. The Future Deliverance (3)

AMOS: God's Judgments

Outline:

1. God's Judgments against the Gentile Nations (1-2)
2. God's Judgments against Israel (3-8)
3. God's Hope for Israel (9)

OBADIAH: The Punishment for Pride and Hatred

Outline:

1. The Doom of Edom (1-16)
2. The Deliverance of Israel (17-21)

JONAH: God's Concern for the Gentiles

Outline:

1. God Sends His Servant to the Gentiles (1-2)
2. God Shows His Mercy to the Gentiles (3-4)

MICAH: Doom and Hope Proclaimed

Outline:

1. 1st Proclamation: "Hear All Ye People" (1-2)
2. 2nd Proclamation: "Hear, O heads of Jacob" (3-5)
3. 3rd Proclamation: "Hear ye, O Mountains" (6-7)

NAHUM: The Punishment for Abusing God's Mercy

Outline:

1. God's Right to Punish Nineveh (1)
2. God's Power to Punish Nineveh (2-3)

HABAKKUK: Trusting in a Just God

Outline:

1. Habakkuk's Questions to God (1-2)
2. Habakkuk's Prayer to God (3)

ZEPHANIAH: Seek Ye the Lord

Outline:

1. The Reason for Seeking the Lord: Divine Wrath (1-2)
2. The Result of Seeking the Lord: Divine Blessing (3)

HAGGAI: Do Not Neglect God's Work

Outline:

1. Rebuke for Neglecting God's Work (1)
2. Encouragement for Doing God's Work (2)

ZECHARIAH: The Coming Kingdom of God

Outline:

1. Encouragement during the Building of the Temple (1-8)
2. Encouragement after the Building of the Temple (9-14)

MALACHI: Do Not Neglect God's Commandments

Outline:

1. Reproof for Neglecting God's Commandments (1-3)
2. Encouragement for Doing God's Commandments (4)