



RESTORATION FROM BABYLON

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1. Causes of the Captivity

Signs of the Times, March 12, 1902

THERE is hardly any portion of the Bible story that receives less attention than that relating to the period of the restoration of Israel to their own land, from the captivity to Babylon.

And yet there is hardly any portion of the Bible story that is more full of the very life and movement of God in human affairs; hardly any portion more full of valuable lessons. Indeed, there is no portion of the Bible story so full as is this of striking illustrations of how promptly and how triumphantly, God can interpose with kings and powers in behalf of His cause and His people in the earth.

For this reason, we want to look at that interesting and important part of the Bible story. The books of the Bible especially embraced in this are, *Daniel*, *Ezra*, *Nehemiah*, *Esther*, *Haggai*, *Zechariah*, and *Malachi*. The period of the world covered in the narrative is about from BC 536 to the crucifixion.

God had brought Israel out of Egypt, and, separated from all the nations, had placed them in the land of Canaan, “the glory of all lands,” to be the light of the world. The chief reason why He placed them in the land of Canaan—Palestine—is that then, and for ages afterward, that little country was the pivot of the world. Between Egypt and the eastern and northern nations there was then, and for ages afterward, constant intercourse, practically all of which necessarily passed through Palestine. Yet later, when the weight of empire passed to the west, still Palestine was the center around which swirled the grand sweep of the world’s affairs.

At that center of the world’s great currents God set His people to be His light to all the nations, whose people by thus

constantly passing and repassing through that land, should behold that blessed people and glorious land, and be led to say,

Deuteronomy 4

⁶ Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

And thus be led to inquire for the source of this wisdom and understanding, this prosperity and glory, and so find the true God, and turn from idolatry to the worship of Him. God intended that by His splendid presence abiding with them, His people should thus influence all the nations for good; and thus to carry on His fulfillment of His promise to Abraham,

Galatians 3

⁸ In you shall all nations of be blessed.

Therefore, of Israel God had said,

Numbers 23

⁹ Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.

But the people would not have it so. They exclaimed and insisted,

1 Samuel 8

⁵ ...make us a king...

²⁰ That we also may be like all the nations.

They had their way, they rejected God, and not only became “like all the nations,” but did “worse than the heathen” round them. And then, as they became like the nations that were in that land before them, likewise as with those nations the land could no longer endure them, and so must spew them out, as it had spewed out the nations before them.

They were carried captive to Babylon, and the land was left desolate that it might have rest from the sickening iniquities with which it had been afflicted.

The special sins that brought the captivity of Israel and the desolation of the land were:

A. Oppression and Injustice

Jeremiah 21

¹² O house of David, thus says the Lord, Execute judgment in the morning, and deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor, lest my fury go out like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

Jeremiah 22

³ Thus says the Lord, Execute judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor; and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.

Jeremiah 7

⁵ For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor;

⁶ If you oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt:

⁷ Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever.

B. Defrauding the Laborer

Oppressing and defrauding the laborer in his wages, while they in their wealth reveled in luxury.

Jeremiah 22

¹³ Woe unto him that builds his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that uses his neighbor's service without wages, and gives him not for his work;

¹⁴ That says, I will build me a wide house and large chambers, and cuts him out windows; and it is ceiled with cedar, and painted with vermillion.

C. Neglect of the Poor

Jeremiah 22

¹⁵ Shall you reign, because you closed yourself in cedar? did not your father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him?

¹⁶ He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? says the Lord.

¹⁷ But your eyes and your heart are not but for your covetousness.

D. Disregard of the Sabbath

Jeremiah 17

²¹ Thus says the Lord; Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem;

²² Neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the sabbath day, neither do any work, but hallow the sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers.

²³ But they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction.

²⁴ And it shall come to pass, if you diligently hearken unto me, says the Lord, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the sabbath day, but hallow the sabbath day, to do no work therein;

²⁵ Then shall there enter into the gates of this city kings and princes sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: and this city shall remain for ever.

²⁶ And they shall come from the cities of Judah, and from the places about Jerusalem, and from the land of Benjamin, and from the plain, and from the mountains, and from the south, bringing burnt offerings, and sacrifices, and meat offerings, and incense, and bringing sacrifices of praise, unto the house of the Lord.

²⁷ But if you will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates

of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.

E. Worship of the Sun

The worship of the sun, with all the abominations that go with it.

Ezekiel 8

³ And he put forth the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my head; and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looks toward the north; where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy.

⁴ And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, according to the vision that I saw in the plain.

⁵ Then said he unto me, Son of man, lift up your eyes now the way toward the north. So I lifted up my eyes the way toward the north, and behold northward at the gate of the altar this image of jealousy in the entry.

⁶ He said furthermore unto me, Son of man, do you see what they do? even the great abominations that the house of Israel commits here, that I should go far off from my sanctuary? but turn yet again, and you shall see greater abominations.

⁷ And he brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, behold a hole in the wall.

⁸ Then he said unto me, Son of man, dig now in the wall: and when I had dug in the wall, behold a door.

⁹ And he said unto me, Go in, and behold the wicked abominations that they do here.

¹⁰ So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about.

¹¹ And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up.

¹² Then he said unto me, Son of man, have you seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The Lord sees us not; the Lord has forsaken the earth.

¹³ He said also unto me, Turn yet again, and you shall see greater abominations that they do.

¹⁴ Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord's house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz.

¹⁵ Then he said unto me, Have you seen this, O son of man? turn yet again, and you shall see greater abominations than these.

¹⁶ And he brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshiped the sun toward the east.

¹⁷ Then he said unto me, Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose.

¹⁸ Therefore will I also deal in fury: my eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in my ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them.

F. Rejection of the Lord's Message

Rejection of the word and message of the Lord in reproof, counsel, and warning.

Jeremiah 26

¹ In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah came this word from the Lord, saying,

² Thus says the Lord; Stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the Lord's house, all the words that I command you to speak unto them; diminish not a word:

³ If so be they will hearken, and turn every man from his evil

way, that I may repent me of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them because of the evil of their doings.

⁴ And you shall say unto them, Thus says the Lord; If you will not hearken to me, to walk in my law, which I have set before you,

⁵ To hearken to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I sent unto you, both rising up early, and sending them, but you have not hearkened;

⁶ Then will I make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth.

⁷ So the priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the Lord.

⁸ Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, You shall surely die.

⁹ Why have you prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant? And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the Lord.

¹⁰ When the princes of Judah heard these things, then they came up from the king's house unto the house of the Lord, and sat down in the entry of the new gate of the Lord's house.

¹¹ Then spoke the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man is worthy to die; for he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your ears.

¹² Then spoke Jeremiah unto all the princes and to all the people, saying, The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that you have heard.

¹³ Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God; and the Lord will repent him of the evil that he has pronounced against you.

¹⁴ As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as seems good and meet unto you.

¹⁵ But know for certain, that if you put me to death, you shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this

city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the Lord has sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears.

¹⁶ Then said the princes and all the people unto the priests and to the prophets; This man is not worthy to die: for he has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God.

¹⁷ Then rose up certain of the elders of the land, and spoke to all the assembly of the people, saying,

¹⁸ Micah the Morasthite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and spoke to all the people of Judah, saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts; Zion shall be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest.

¹⁹ Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him at all to death? did he not fear the Lord, and besought the Lord, and the Lord repented Him of the evil which he had pronounced against them? Thus might we procure great evil against our souls.

²⁰ And there was also a man that prophesied in the name of the Lord, Urijah the son of Shemaiah of Kirjath-jearim, who prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah:

²¹ And when Jehoiakim the king, with all his mighty men, and all the princes, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death: but when Urijah heard it, he was afraid, and fled, and went into Egypt;

²² And Jehoiakim the king sent men into Egypt, namely, El-nathan the son of Achbor, and certain men with him into Egypt.

²³ And they fetched forth Urijah out of Egypt, and brought him unto Jehoiakim the king; who slew him with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people.

Jeremiah 36

²² Now the king sat in the winterhouse in the ninth month: and there was a fire on the hearth burning before him.

²³ And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed

in the fire that was on the hearth.

Jeremiah 37

¹ And king Zedekiah the son of Josiah reigned instead of Co-niah the son of Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon made king in the land of Judah.

² But neither he, nor his servants, nor the people of the land, did hearken unto the words of the Lord, which He spoke by the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 38

¹ Then Shephatiah the son of Mattan, and Gedaliah the son of Pashur, and Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashur the son of Malchiah, heard the words that Jeremiah had spoken unto all the people, saying,

² Thus says the Lord, He that remains in this city shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goes forth to the Chaldeans shall live; for he shall have his life for a prey, and shall live.

³ Thus says the Lord, This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which shall take it.

⁴ Therefore the princes said unto the king, We beseech you, let this man be put to death: for thus he weakens the hands of the men of war that remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, in speaking such words unto them: for this man seeks not the welfare of this people, but the hurt.

⁵ Then Zedekiah the king said, Behold, he is in your hand: for the king is not he that can do any thing against you.

⁶ Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that was in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire.

But the very crowning abomination of all was:

G. Putting Confidence in Ceremonies

Their making the temple of God, and the forms of worship of the Lord, their confidence of salvation, while practicing all

those other iniquities and abominations; their holding God to a strict accountability for His promises, while they ran perfect riot against every precept upon which those promises could possibly rest; their making capital of God's temple, and ordinances, and services designed to put away sin, as security in their corruptible abandon in the indulgence of sin:

Jeremiah 7

³ Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place.

⁴ Trust not to lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord. The temple of the Lord. The temple of the Lord, are these. [Luther's translation: "Here is the Lord's temple. Here is the Lord's temple. Here is the Lord's temple."]

Micah 3

⁹ Hear this, I pray, you heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel, that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity.

¹⁰ They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity.

¹¹ The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord among us? no evil can come upon us.

¹² Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest.

Jeremiah 7

⁸ Behold, you trust in lying words, that cannot profit.

⁹ Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom you know not;

¹⁰ And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? ["There is no danger to us, though, or as long as, we do such abominations."—Luther's Translation.]

¹¹ Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of

robbers [den of murderers, a resort of cut throats—German] in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, says the Lord.

Micah 3

¹² Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house [of the Lord] as the high places of the forest.

Jeremiah 7

¹² Go you now unto my place which [was] in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel.

¹³ And now, because you have done all these works, says the Lord, and I spoke unto you, rising up early and speaking, but you heard not; and I called you, but you answered not;

¹⁴ Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein you trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh.

¹⁵ And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim.

¹⁶ Therefore pray not for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear you.

Because of that deplorable, even desperate, condition of things in Jerusalem, the Lord of Jerusalem was compelled to liken her to Sodom, declaring that she and Sodom were sisters; and further:

Ezekiel 16

⁴⁸ As I live, says the Lord God, Sodom your sister has not done, she nor her daughters, as you have done, you and your daughters.

⁴⁹ Behold, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom, pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.

⁵⁰ And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good.

And consequently Ezekiel saw in a vision a man with a writer's ink horn by his side, passing throughout Jerusalem, setting a mark upon the foreheads of the men who were sighing and crying for all the abominations that were done therein. Following him were six other men, each with a slaughter-weapon in his hand, to "slay utterly" all to whom they should come, except that they were to "come not near any man upon whom is the mark." (*Ezekiel 9:1-7*).

Now this whole narrative has its parallel in the last days, even in our own time:

1. General wickedness prevails (*Matthew 24:12*; *2 Timothy 3:1-3*), oppression, injustice, defrauding the laborer in his wages to increase the overloaded coffers of the rich, who revel in luxury—all this is indulged (*James 5:1-8*);
2. In the midst of this abundance to boundless millions there is such neglect of the poor that God is obliged to turn His attention especially to them (*Luke 14:21-23*);
3. The Sabbath is disregarded (*Isaiah 56:1, 2*; *58:13, 14*);
4. The sun—in the Sunday—is honored (*Daniel 7:25*; *Revelation 14:9-12*);
5. The Word of God in counsel and warning, concerning all the evil and impending destruction, is rejected (*2 Peter 3:3-7, 10-14*; *Matthew 24:37-39*); and, also
6. There prevails the same chief abomination of all—the indulgence of a whole catalog of iniquities under the form and profession of godliness (*2 Timothy 3:1-5*).

So that, looking again upon it all, God is compelled to liken it also to Sodom, because the last days of the world are as the last days of Sodom.

Luke 17

²⁸ Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot...even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.

²⁹ The same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and

brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.

³⁰ Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

And while this destruction and desolation is impending, the heavenly messenger (*Revelation* 7:2, 3) passes through the world, setting the royal seal—the heavenly mark—upon the servants of God, who are sighing and crying for all the abominations that are done in the land. And after him pass the messengers of judgment, slaying utterly all upon whom is not found the mark (*Revelation* 14:9, 10; 15:1; 16:1-21).

Thus certainly and thus fully does the period which culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem and the desolation of that land, contain lessons of deep meaning to the people of God of all times, and especially of the last days.

2. The Release from Captivity

Signs of the Times, March 19, 1902

ISRAEL had frustrated God's purpose to enlighten all the nations by them in the land where He had planted them; yet He would fulfill His purpose and His promise to Abraham, and enlighten all the nations through them in the lands where He had scattered them.

By unbelief and iniquity Israel, when planted in their own land, had lost the power to arrest and command the attention of all the nations, that the nations might consider God and His wonderful works and ways with the children of man, for now, as they are scattered among the nations, God would use them to enlighten those who had acquired the power to arrest and command the attention of all the nations, and thus through them would still cause all nations to consider the wonderful works and ways of God with the children of men.

Through Daniel and his three brethren in captivity, God enlightened king Nebuchadnezzar who was ruler over all the nations, and by king Nebuchadnezzar twice distinctly proclaimed to all people, nations, and languages His kindness, His justice, His power, His glory, and His kingdom and dominion (*Daniel* 3:29; 4:1-3, 34-37).

Nebuchadnezzar and his empire, and even the last vestige of his kingdom, passed away. Another kingdom and empire took the dominion of the world.

Daniel 5

³¹ Darius the Median took the kingdom.

As the result of a conspiracy, Daniel was cast to the hungry lions in their den. But God shut the lions' mouths that they did him no hurt; because innocence was found in him, and because he believed in his God. This so fixed upon God as the

only true and living God, to the heart of king Darius the Mede, who was now king of all the nations, that he did the following:

Daniel 6

²⁵ Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you.

²⁶ I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for He is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall be even unto the end.

²⁷ He delivers and rescues, and He works signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.

Daniel 9

¹ In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans;

² In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

One thing that had caused Daniel to be most deeply interested in this subject was the word of *Palmoni*, the wonderful numberer (marginal reading of “that certain saint”, *Daniel* 8:13) in the vision of *Daniel* 8, given to him in the third year of Belshazzar, saying,

Daniel 8

¹⁴ Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.

This two thousand and three hundred days to the cleansing of the sanctuary caused Daniel great anxiety. He could not understand it. The temple at Jerusalem was a ruin, and had so lain for more than fifty years. Was it possible that it should so

lie for yet two thousand and three hundred years, before the ruins should be cleared away and the temple restored?

To this the book of *Jeremiah* answered, No:

Jeremiah 29

¹⁰ After seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.

Could it be possible, then, that they should return, and yet the temple be not restored for so long? To this the book of *Isaiah* answered, No:

Isaiah 44

²⁸ That says of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, You shall be built; and to the temple, Your foundation shall be laid.

Cyrus was now living and sixty years old. What, then, could mean that word, “Unto two thousand and three hundred days, then shall the sanctuary be cleansed?” Was there any connection between that and the return from captivity and the rebuilding of the city and temple? This problem was beyond solution by human thought. Therefore:

Daniel 9

³ I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting; and sackcloth, and ashes:

²¹ ...whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning [*Daniel* 8:16], being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation.

²² And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give you skill and understanding.

²³ At the beginning of your supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to show you; for you are greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision.

²⁴ Seventy weeks are determined upon your people and upon your holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.

²⁵ Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.

²⁶ And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.

²⁷ And He shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week He shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations He shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

Within two years, in 536, Darius the Mede died, and was immediately succeeded by Cyrus the Persian, of the same united and universal kingdom of the Medes and Persians.

Cyrus had been the commander of the Medo-Persian armies in the destruction of the empire and kingdom of Babylon. At that time he was an idolater. Yet long before that, even one hundred and fourteen years before he was born, the God of Israel had called him by name; and had recorded a message addressed to him personally. And this is the message:

Isaiah 45

¹ Thus says the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut;

² I will go before you, and make the crooked places straight: I

will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron:

³ And I will give you the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I, the Lord, which call you by your name, am the God of Israel.

⁴ For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel my elect, I have even called you by your name: I have surnamed you, though you have not known me.

Thus the Lord revealed Himself to Cyrus as the God of Israel. But since Cyrus was an idolater, God must further reveal Himself to him as the only true and living God. This He did in the further word,

Isaiah 45

⁵ I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded you, though you have not known me:

⁶ That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the Lord, and there is none else.

God thus revealed Himself to Cyrus as the God of Israel, and as the only true God; it remained to reveal to Cyrus that He, the God of Israel, and the only true God, was distinct from and above the gods that Cyrus had worshiped. Therefore the Lord revealed Himself yet further,

⁷ I form the light, and create darkness. I make peace, and create evil.

The point in this is:

1. The Persians, in their religious system, recognized two original principles—good and evil. Their conception of good and evil, however, did not rise to the height of moral and spiritual good and evil, or righteousness and sin, as is revealed by the Lord, rather as men naturally conceive of good and evil as manifested in prosperity and adversity, tranquility and disturbance. Therefore

when the Lord would show to Cyrus that He is over all, He said, “I make peace, and create evil.” That is, “I make tranquility and create disturbance; I give prosperity and send adversity.”

2. The Persians held that their principle of good was represented in light; and the principle of evil in darkness. Therefore when the Lord would reveal to Cyrus the Persian that He is alone above all, He said, “I form the light, and create darkness.”

The night that the city of Babylon was captured and Belshazzar slain, before the capture king Belshazzar had made Daniel the first man of the empire after the two kings, Belshazzar and his father. Then when the city was taken, Belshazzar slain, and his father a captive, this left Daniel the first man of the kingdom, Darius and Cyrus, the new rulers, found Daniel in his royal robe of scarlet with his insignia of office, the “chain of gold about his neck.” They found him so intelligent in all the affairs of the vanished kingdom that they immediately took him into their council, and gave to him the chief place in their organization of the kingdom.

And when Cyrus thus met Daniel, Daniel showed to him the word of the Lord, written to him by Isaiah one hundred and seventy-four years before. The message was so direct and so personal, and the revelation so plain and indisputable, that Cyrus accepted and acknowledged God as “the Lord God of heaven,” and declared, “He is the God.”

There was also read to Cyrus the further word of the Lord by Isaiah to him,

Isaiah 44

²⁸ That says of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure...

Isaiah 45

¹³ I have raised him in righteousness, and I will direct all his

ways; he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, says the Lord of hosts.

This message, too, Cyrus accepted from the Lord; and in 536, when Cyrus came to the throne of the empire, that very year expired the seventy years' captivity, and in that very year Cyrus issued the decree and proclamation throughout the whole empire, releasing from captivity all the people of Israel, and calling them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city, and especially the house of the Lord.

And here is a copy of that decree:

Ezra 1

² Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and He has charged me to build Him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

³ Who is there among you of all His people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, He is the God, which is in Jerusalem.

⁴ And whosoever remains in any place where he sojourns, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

Ezra 6

³ Let the house be built, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits;

⁴ With three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king's house:

⁵ And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored, and brought again unto the temple which is at Jerusalem, every one to his place, and place them in the house of God.

That decree was published by “proclamation throughout all his kingdom,” and was put “also in writings;” and was deposited among the archives of the kingdom in the palace at Ectutana, the Median capital of the empire.

Ezra 1

⁵ Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.

⁶ And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered.

⁷ Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods;

⁸ Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.

¹¹ All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

And of the people who returned to Jerusalem:

Ezra 2

⁶⁴ The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore,

⁶⁵ Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and there were among them two hundred singing men and singing women.

⁶⁸ And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the Lord which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place:

⁶⁹ They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pound of silver, and one hundred priests' garments.

⁷⁰ So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

The restoration of Israel had begun.

3. Troublous Times

Signs of the Times, March 26, 1902

IT SEEMS to have been about midsummer, or late in the summer of BC 536, when the returned of Israel arrived in their own country, and had taken up their abode and dwelt in their cities; for their first assembly at Jerusalem for worship was at the regular annual feast of the memorial of blowing of trumpets on the first day of the seventh month.

On that day, and under the direction of Joshua, the high priest, and Zerubbabel, and their brethren,

Ezra 3

¹ The people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.

² And built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God.

³ And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the Lord, even burnt offerings morning and evening.

They could not celebrate the Day of Atonement—the tenth day of the seventh month—in that order, because there was no temple or house yet built.

But they kept the Feast of Tabernacles (the fifteenth to the twenty-second of the seventh month), as it is written, and offered the daily burnt-offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required; and afterward offered the continual burnt-offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the Lord that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a free-will offering unto the Lord. From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord.

Ezra 3

⁶ ...But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid.

However, preparations were immediately begun for the building of the temple. Masons and carpenters were regularly employed, and set to work to prepare the stones and timber. They also established with Tyre and Zidon trade of provisions—food, drink, and oil—for cedar trees for the temple, to be brought from Lebanon by sea and delivered at Joppa,

⁷ ...according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia.

This work of preparation continued till “the second month” of the “second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem,” when they actually began work in building the temple.

Ezra 3

¹⁰ And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the Lord, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.

¹¹ And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because he is good, for His mercy endures for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

¹² But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:

¹³ So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

In Gabriel’s explanation of the two thousand and three hun-

dred days, he had said to Daniel of the rebuilding of Jerusalem, that “the street shall be built again and the wall, even in troublous times.” And now those troublous times began.

Satan was determined to hinder, in every way that he possibly could, the establishment of the work of God in Jerusalem. He found ready instruments, in the mixed people and religion of Samaria, that had resulted from the successive transportations by Sargon, Esar-haddon, and Asshur bani-pal, kings of Assyria, before 625 BC.

As soon as the Jews had begun to build, these mixed peoples of the land of Samaria devised a scheme so to turn to their own advantage the rebuilding of Jerusalem that, by alliance with the Jews, they could fix their power in Jerusalem and the land of Judah, as in Samaria, execute a successful revolt, set up an independent kingdom there, and dominate all the territory between the Euphrates and the Mediterranean Sea, as had been done in old time.

Accordingly when they had...

Ezra 4

¹ ...heard that the children of the captivity built the temple unto the Lord God of Israel;

² Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as you do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up here.

³ But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, You have nothing to do with us to build a house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us.

Then the Samaritans revealed their real spirit from the beginning, and showed that their interest in the God of Israel, and their “kind” offer to help in building the temple and city,

was a sheer pretense to hide their rebellious intent; they...

Ezra 4

⁴ ...weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building,

⁵ And hired counselors against them [at the court of the Persian kingdom], to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia,

—a period of fourteen years. The situation was this: The Jews had the decree of Cyrus to sustain them in all that they were doing. The Samaritans knew that it was vain to try to get that decree reversed while Cyrus lived.

But the funds for the building work must all pass through the imperial treasury. Those hired counselors were officials of the court and council of Cyrus, who accepted from the Samaritans bribes to be on the watch for the affairs concerning Jerusalem, and block every procedure possible. They could hold back the supply of funds; they could delay the official applications for funds; by empty technicalities they could force tedious correspondence and delay in reports; they could prevent correspondence and even messengers from reaching Cyrus, or even Daniel—in a thousand ways they could frustrate the purpose of the builders at Jerusalem.

Daniel was still prime minister at the court of Persia, and it was not a great while before he discovered that the work in Jerusalem was being hindered, and his own efforts hampered in the court of Cyrus, by influences and actions so subtle that it was impossible definitely to expose or successfully to check them. This caused him again great and anxious concern for the work of God. Yet he spent no time in attempting to arrange, or to carry on any counter-intrigue; he appealed direct to God.

By those hired counselors, the Samaritans had set their

schemes to work at the court of Cyrus in the latter part of the second year of Cyrus. On the third day of the first month of the third year of Cyrus, Daniel began his appeal to God in fasting and mourning and prayer. This he continued three full weeks, before he was positively informed that his appeal was heard. Yet his appeal was heard, the very first day, but the adverse influences at the Persian court were so strong that Gabriel dared not leave the presence of the king.

And those adverse influences were just then so determined and so persistent that every possible thing was done, every conceivable device was employed, and every moment of the time was occupied, during the whole of that three weeks, in the endeavor to turn Cyrus from his true course and to frustrate the purpose of God concerning Jerusalem.

To defeat the subtle devices and continued efforts of the enemy, Gabriel must be ever watchful. He continued thus three full weeks. Daniel continued his earnest praying. Still the angel could not leave the presence of the king. Yet Daniel's prayer must be answered by Gabriel in person. It was a crisis in the cause of God in the earth.

Then Michael, the first of the heavenly princes, came to help him. This secured victory, the enemy's siege was broken, and Gabriel went to Daniel by the river Tigris. His own words in explanation of the three weeks delay are these:

Daniel 10

¹² Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that you did set your heart to understand, and to chasten yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I am come for your words.

¹³ But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia.

¹⁴ Now I am come to make you understand what shall befall

your people in the latter days: for yet the vision is for many days.

²⁰ Do you know why I come unto you? and now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia...

²¹ But I will show you that which is noted in the Scripture of truth: and there is none that holds with me in these things, but Michael your prince.

Thus, through prayer and faithfulness to God, Daniel and his people were victorious against all the machinations of Satan and his instrumentalities. And so shall it ever be. The heavenly agencies are always ready to cooperate with the faithful ones of earth today, as in the days of Daniel, Joshua, Zerubbabel, and their companions.

Prayer to God, that obtains the cooperation of heavenly messengers, is even today worth infinitely more in securing the cooperation or restraint of the powers of earth, than could be all the political wire-pulling and lobbying that could ever be employed. The hearts of kings are in the hand of the Lord, and only He can move them right.

Daniel must have died shortly after this vision, for in the vision the last words of the angel are,

Daniel 12

¹³ You shall rest, and stand in your lot at the end of the days.

Cyrus lived five years longer. But though the Samaritans and their hired counselors continued all this time their work of weakening the hands of the Jews of hindering them and frustrating their purpose in building, they never succeeded in stopping the work. The “victory” of Daniel and the heavenly ones still “kept” with Cyrus the king of Persia, though the work went on still in “troublous times.”

4. The Success of the Samaritans

Signs of the Times, April 2, 1902

AT THE death of Cyrus king of Persia, Cambyses his son, the Ahasuerus of *Ezra* 4:6, immediately succeeded to the throne of the empire. The Samaritans who had so persistently carried on their work of obstruction by hired counselors and otherwise “all the days of Cyrus,” continued it all the days of Cambyses—about seven years.

At the very beginning of his reign, in addition to the work of their hired counselors, the Samaritans took the bold step of presenting to Cambyses, the son of Cyrus, a formal and written accusation against the Jews:

Ezra 4

⁶ In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote unto him an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

There is no known record that any notice at all was taken of their accusation. Even if any notice was taken of it, it is certain that their efforts were still in vain. The victory gained over them in the three weeks’ contest at the Persian court in the first month of the third year of Cyrus, still held all the days of his son Cambyses. This shows that there was real meaning in Gabriel’s words that at the end of the three weeks’ contest at the court of Persia he held the victory with not only the king, singular, but plural,—with the kings of Persia.

From this it is plain that Cambyses, the heir apparent to the throne, was in that council through that three weeks’ contest, and therefore when the contest was ended and the victory was kept, it was victory not only as respected Cyrus and the time being, but also respecting Cambyses and the years to

come. The victory was kept with the kings of Persia.

There was a second son of Cyrus, named Smerdis; but Cambyses caused him to be secretly murdered. Indeed, this was accomplished with so much secrecy that the great body of the people believed that he was still alive. This gave opportunity for conspiracy and the rise of a usurper, whose real name was Gomates, but who claimed before the people to be Smerdis, the son of Cyrus. This occurred at the capital of Persia while Cambyses was absent on his expedition in the conquest of Egypt. The original account runs thus:

Cambyses the son of Cyrus was king....This Cambyses had a brother, named Smerdis (Bardiga); they had the same mother and the same father. Afterward, this Cambyses killed Smerdis. When Cambyses killed Smerdis, the people did not know that Smerdis was killed. Then Cambyses went to Egypt. The people became bad; and many falsehoods grew up in the provinces, as well as in Persia, as in Media, as in the other lands. And then a man, a Magian, named Gomates, from Pasargade, near the mount named Arakadris, there he arose. On the 14th day of the month Vlyakhna, thus arose: To the people he told lies, and said, "I am Smerdis, the son of Cyrus, the brother of Cambyses." Then all the people revolted from Cambyses, went over to him, and the Persians, and the Medes, and the other nations. He seized the kingdom. On the ninth day of the month Garmapada he took the royalty from Cambyses....Gomates the Magian deprived Cambyses as well of the Persians, as of the Medians, as of the other nations; he did according to his own will, and seized the royalty over them.¹

Cambyses, returning with his army from Egypt, went as far as Syria, and was there met by one of the many heralds whom Gomates had sent into all the empire publishing the

"proclamation to the troops that henceforth they were to

¹ Darius, in *Records of the Past*, Old Series, vol. VII., pp. 89-90.

obey Smerdis, the son of Cyrus, and not Cambyses.”

Cambyses, believing now that his secret murderers of Smerdis had really played him false; and that thus Smerdis was really alive and reigning in the capital, immediately killed himself (*Darius*):

...having reigned, in all, seven years and five months, and left no issue behind him, male or female.²

This was the end of July, 522 BC. As before stated, Gomates, this false Smerdis, was a Magian. His usurpation was a part of the conspiracy of the Magian priests to make the Median element predominant in the mixed national religion of Media and Persia. And though Gomates the Magian reigned as Smerdis the Persian, yet he was but the tool of the Magians to swing back the predominant element in the imperial religion from the Persian to the original Median.

The difference was more sectarian and merely priestly, than fundamental and popular; but it furnished an opportunity that was instantly seized by the Samaritans and their hired counselors to make effective their determination to stop the work on the temple at Jerusalem.

Accordingly, no sooner was it known in Palestine that the new king reigned, than the Samaritans wrote to him a new and extended accusation against the Jews. For this Gomates, the false Smerdis, was the Artaxerxes of *Ezra* 4:

Ezra 4

⁷ In the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions, unto Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the writing of the letter was written in the Syrian tongue, and interpreted in the Syrian tongue.

⁸ Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this sort:

² Herodotus.

⁹ Then wrote Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions; the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Susanchites, the Dehavites, and the Elamites,

¹⁰ And the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Assnapper brought over, and set in the cities of Samaria, and the rest that are on this side the river, and at such a time.

¹¹ Your servants the men on this side the river, and at such a time.

¹² Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from you to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls thereof, and joined the foundations.

¹³ Be it known now unto the king, that, if this city be built, and the walls set up again, then will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and so you shall endamage the revenue of the kings.

¹⁴ Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonor, therefore have we sent and certified the king;

¹⁵ That search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers: so shall you find in the book of the records, and know that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time; for which cause was this city destroyed.

¹⁶ We certify the king that, if this city be built again, and the walls thereof set up, by this means you shall have no portion on this side the river.

That letter is a most subtle and deceptive mixture of truth and falsehood. It was true that the city of Jerusalem had in old time been rebellious and seditious to the eastern kings, and that because of that, the city was destroyed. It was true that the imperial records at Babylon would confirm all this.

But it was not in any sense true that such was the intention in now rebuilding the city, or that such would be the result of its rebuilding.

This attributed intention of the Jews, and this surmised result of the rebuilding of the city, was nothing else than the revealing of their own secret purpose, when at the very first they offered to join the Jews and help in the building of that very city; and which they would have carried out to the full as soon as the city should have been finished, as certainly as they had been allowed to join in the building of the city.

Such a subtle mixture of lies and truth would have been well calculated to deceive any new king; and when it came to the false Smerdis, the tool of the reactionary priests, it only the more readily had its intended effect.

Ezra 4

¹⁷ Then sent the king an answer unto Rehum the chancellor, and to Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their companions that dwell in Samaria, and unto the rest beyond the river: Peace, and at such a time.

¹⁸ The letter which you sent unto us has been plainly read before me.

¹⁹ And I commanded, and search has been made, and it is found that this city of old time has made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made therein.

²⁰ There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, which have ruled over all countries beyond the river; and toll, tribute, and custom, was paid unto them.

²¹ Give now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not built, until another commandment shall be given from me.

²² Take heed now that you fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?

This letter was of course exceedingly gratifying to the rebellious, seditious, and officious Samaritans. Accordingly,

²³ ...when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them

to cease by force and power.

²⁴ Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem.

Then the Samaritans laughed, and congratulated one another, and strutted, and rode around among the Jews, asserting their power. But even in the most exalted moments they never dreamed of what it really was over which they were so gleeful and so perfectly satisfied. They had no idea of what it was in reality into which they had so persistently, and at last so triumphantly, pushed themselves.

In about six months there was another turn in imperial affairs. In the eighth month of his reign the false Smerdis, Gomates the Magian, was slain by Darius the Persian and six companions, and Darius the Persian, of ancient kingly race and descent, reigned in the Medo-Persian Empire.

The Magian scheme was annihilated; the Persian element was once more predominant; the tide turned again in favor of the Jews, the rebuilding of the temple and the city went on, and by the power which they had invoked the Samaritans were compelled to help in the good work. This was exceedingly galling to them; but they had persistently pushed themselves into it, and there they must stay; they had been exceedingly glad when the power which they had invoked worked altogether their way; they could not fairly complain when that same power worked altogether the other way.

5. The Work of Haggai and Zechariah

Signs of the Times, April 9, 1902

EARLY in the year 521 BC Darius, the son of Hystaspes, of ancient Persian line, took the Medo-Persian throne by killing the false Smerdis and his chief adherents. Yet it was nearly a year and a half before work was resumed upon the temple of God in Jerusalem.

The people of God in Jerusalem and Judea had lost faith in God. They knew that the decree of the false Smerdis stopping the work, was secured by false representations; and they knew that the decree was illegal in itself, because of the fundamental principle of Medo-Persian law that no law of the Medes and Persians could be changed.

Yet though they knew that the usurper was dead, and though they had in their hands the original decree of Cyrus which could not be lawfully reversed by any other Medo-Persian decree, still they did not have the faith to take up the work again. In their lack of faith they had imbibed the notion that the work was really dependent upon kings and their decrees, instead of upon God; that the Lord's part in the work was really secondary to that of kings and powers; that the kings' motions and decrees must come first, and then the Lord cooperate; instead of the Lord and His work being first, and then the king's cooperate.

Also as a consequence of their lack of faith, and so their neglect of the cause and work of God, there had come hard times in the land; the seasons were unfavorable; there was drought in the land, the crops of all kinds were short; what money was received went such a little way that it seemed more as if it had been lost than as if it had really been spent; what was bought with the money seemed to do so little good, that, whether it were food or clothing, it seemed almost as

though they had not had it at all.

In view of all these things, which were only the consequences of their loss of faith in God, in His cause, and in His present work in the world; and in the face of all that God had done, not only before their very eyes, but by their very selves; they actually reached and expressed in words the astonishing conclusion that,

Haggai 1

² The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built.

To correct these utterly mistaken thoughts, reasonings, and conclusions, the Lord sent to them the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to revive their faith in God; thus to open their eyes, that they might see things in their true light.

Haggai spoke first: The first day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius—520 BC—the word of the Lord came to Zerubbabel the governor, and Joshua the high priest, saying,

Haggai 1

² Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built.

⁴ Is it time for you, O you, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?

⁵ Now therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways.

⁶ You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but you have not enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe yourself, but there is none warm; and he that earns wages earns wages to put it into a bag with holes.

⁷ Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways.

⁸ Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, says the Lord.

⁹ You looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? says the Lord of

hosts. Because of my house that is waste, and you run every man unto his own house.

¹⁰ Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit.

¹¹ And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground brings forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labor of the hands.

This message of the Lord by His prophet was promptly received by all to whom it came. Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest,

Haggai 1

¹² ...with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him; and the people did fear before the Lord.

¹³ Then spoke Haggai the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, says the Lord.

¹⁴ And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God,

¹⁵ In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.

In the following month, "in the seventh month," in the twenty-first day of the month, came again the word of the Lord by Haggai to Zerubbabel, and Joshua, and all the remnant of the people, saying:

Haggai 2

³ Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do you see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?

⁴ Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, says the Lord; and be

strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land, says the Lord, and work: for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts:

⁵ According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so my spirit remains among you: fear not.

⁶ For thus says the Lord of hosts: Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land;

⁷ And I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts.

⁸ The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the Lord of hosts.

⁹ The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, says the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, says the Lord of hosts.

In the next month, “the eighth month in the second year of Darius,” the message of the Lord came to them by the prophet Zechariah, saying:

Zechariah 1

² The Lord has been sore displeased with your fathers.

³ Therefore say unto them, Thus says the Lord of hosts; Turn unto me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, says the Lord of hosts.

⁴ Be not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts; Turn now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, says the Lord.

⁵ Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?

⁶ But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and they returned and said, Like as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so has He dealt with us.

In the next month, “the ninth month,” the twenty-fourth day of the month, the message of the Lord came again by the prophet Haggai in which He said:

Haggai 2

¹⁵ Consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord:

¹⁶ Since those days were, when one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the pressfat for to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were but twenty.

¹⁷ I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labors of your hands; yet you turned not to me, says the Lord.

¹⁸ Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord’s temple was laid, consider it.

¹⁹ Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, has not brought forth: from this day will I bless you.

In the eleventh month and the twenty-fourth day of the month of that same year, the word of the Lord came again to the prophet Zechariah. He saw in a vision a man riding a bay horse, followed by bay, speckled, and white horses. They stood among myrtle trees in a valley. Zechariah asked what were these. The angel answered,

Zechariah 1

¹⁰ ...These are they whom the Lord has sent to walk to and fro through the earth.

And they reported to the angel, in the hearing of the prophet,

¹¹ ...We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sits still, and is at rest.

Then the angel said,

¹² ...O Lord of hosts, how long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which You have had indignation, these threescore and ten years?

Then the angel spoke to Zechariah, saying:

Zechariah 1

¹⁴ ...Cry, saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy.

¹⁵ And I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction.

¹⁶ Therefore thus says the Lord; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, says the Lord of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem.

¹⁷ Cry yet, saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts; my cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.

Next in the vision the prophet saw the four horns—powers—that had scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem, and also four carpenters come to repair these desolations. And the angels said:

Zechariah 1

¹⁹ These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.

²⁰ And the Lord showed me four carpenters.

²¹ Then said I, What come these to do? And he spoke, saying, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head: but these are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it.

Next in the vision he saw a man with a measuring line in his hand “to measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof.” Then the angel who talked with the prophet went forth and was met by another angel who said to him:

Zechariah 2

⁴ Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein:

⁵ For I, says the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.

⁶ Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north, says the Lord: for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven, says the Lord.

⁷ Deliver yourself, O Zion, that dwells with the daughter of Babylon.

⁸ For thus says the Lord of hosts; After the glory has He sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that touches you touches the apple of His eye.

⁹ For, behold, I will shake my hand upon them, and they shall be a spoil to their servants: and you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me.

¹⁰ Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of you, says the Lord.

¹¹ And many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of you, and you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me unto you.

¹² And the Lord shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again.

¹³ Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord: for He is raised up out of His holy habitation.

Next Zechariah saw in the vision,

Zechariah 3

¹ Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him.

² And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke you, O Satan; even the Lord that has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"

³ Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel.

⁴ And he answered and spoke unto those that stood before

him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused your iniquity to pass from you, and I will clothe you with change of raiment.

And Zechariah said,

⁵ Let them set a fair miter upon his head.

So they set a fair miter on his head, and clothed him with the beautiful garments. Then said the angel to Joshua:

⁷ If you will walk in my ways, and if you will keep my charge, then you shall also judge my house, and shall also keep my courts, and I will give you places to walk among these that stand by.

⁸ Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you, and your fellows that sit before you: for they are men wondered at [a sign]: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH.

⁹ For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, says the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.

¹⁰ In that day, says the Lord of hosts, shall you call every man his neighbor under the vine and under the fig tree.

Next in the vision there was shown to the prophet a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and seven lamps upon it, and seven pipes to the seven lamps; and an olive tree on each side of the bowl; this signifying to Zerubbabel that the building of the house of the Lord was to be done...

Zechariah 4

⁶ Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.

⁷ Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.

And in the vision the word of the Lord was spoken:

⁹ The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me unto you.

¹⁰ For who has despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth.

Next in the vision the prophet saw a flying roll of the law of God; the length twenty cubits, and the breadth ten cubits; revealing the curse, because of the sins, that goes forth over the face of the whole earth.

After that the prophet saw go forth two women, having between them in an ephah, named “wickedness,”

Zechariah 5

¹¹ ...To build it a house in the land of Shinar; and it shall be established, and set there upon her own base.

Next in the vision the prophet saw going forth four chariots, each with horses; two toward the north, one toward the south, and the remaining one to and fro through the earth.

And last he was instructed to take certain men by name, and have them make crowns of silver and gold, and set them upon the head of Joshua the high priest, and say:

Zechariah 6

¹² Thus speaks 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:

¹³ Even He shall build the temple of the Lord; and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and He shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

Then the crowns were to be for a memorial in the temple of the Lord. And the vision closed with the words of confirming promise upon all:

¹⁵ ...And this shall come to pass, if you will diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God.

6. The Samaritans Compelled to Help

Signs of the Times, April 16, 1902

BY THE presence and the messages of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the Jews were encouraged to take up again the work of building the temple of God and the wall of Jerusalem.

Faith once more found her place in the hearts of the people; the land and people were blessed with prosperity and good cheer; and the work was begun and carried on with a spirit and an alacrity that meant success certainly and speedily. Yet it was not all peace.

News of this soon reached the Samaritans, and of course set them all astir again. However, among the changes that had come in the imperial government by the death of the false Smerdis and the accession of Darius, was the change of the governor and other officials of Samaria.

Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the secretary had been displaced by Tatnai as governor and Shethar-Boznai as secretary. These men, of themselves, were fair-minded men; but there was about them the same officious Samaritan party as "companions." These urged on Tatnai and Shethar-Boznai to go up to Jerusalem, and again call a halt upon the work there. They did so, but, being fair-minded men, they did it in a perfectly fair way. They asked,

"Who has commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall?"

and,

"What are the names of the men that make this building?"

The Jews told them that the temple had been built there many years before by a great king; that it had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar; and that Cyrus had issued a decree for

the rebuilding of it, and had sent back from Babylon the gold and silver vessels that belonged in the house. Yet the Samaritans tried to have them stop the work; but they would not stop. Besides,

Ezra 5

⁵ The eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius.

Since they could not stop the work, the Samaritans had Tatnai and Shethar-boznai, write to Darius. They did so, but not as did Rehum and Shimshai in their deceptive mixture of truth and falsehood; they stated the case with fairness; exactly as the Jews had stated it to them. They wrote as follows:

⁷ Unto Darius the king, all peace.

⁸ Be it known unto the king, that we went into the province of Judea, to the house of the great God, which is built with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goes fast on, and prospers in their hands.

⁹ Then asked we those elders, and said unto them thus, Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls?

¹⁰ We asked their names also, to certify you, that we might write the names of the men that were the chief of them.

¹¹ And thus they returned us answer, saying: We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was built these many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and set up.

¹² But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon.

¹³ But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon the same king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God.

¹⁴ And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that was in Jerusalem, and brought them into the temple of Babylon,

those did Cyrus the king take out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered unto one, whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor;

¹⁵ And said unto him, Take these vessels, go, carry them into the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be built in his place.

¹⁶ Then came the same Sheshbazzar, and laid the foundation of the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and since that time even until now has it been in building, and yet it is not finished.

¹⁷ Now therefore, if it seem good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure house, which is there at Babylon, whether it be so, that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter.

When this letter reached Darius, he went about the matter in the thoroughly business-like way that characterized his whole reign and administration; he “made a decree” that search should be made for the records mentioned. First,

Ezra 6

¹ Search was made in the house of the books, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon.

It was not found there, nor anywhere in Babylon. The search was continued in the other capitals;

² And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written:

³ In the first year of Cyrus the king the same Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the house be built, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits;

⁴ With three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king's house;

⁵ And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of

God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored, and brought again unto the temple which is at Jerusalem, every one to his place, and place them in the house of God.

This being found, Darius wrote to Tatnai and Shethar-boznai and the Samaritans as follows:

Ezra 6

⁶ Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shethar-boznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be you far from thence:

⁷ Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place.

⁸ Moreover I make a decree what you shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God; that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered.

⁹ And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail;

¹⁰ That they may offer sacrifices of sweet saviors unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons.

¹¹ Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this.

¹² And the God that has caused His name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed.

That settled the question for ever. Therefore Tatnai, and Shethar-boznai, and their companions,

¹³ According to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily.

¹⁴ And the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus and Darius, an Artaxerxes king of Persia.

¹⁵ And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar [the twelfth month], which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. [517 BC]

And as soon as the house was finished, it was dedicated:

¹⁶ And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy,

¹⁷ And offered at the dedication of this house of God a hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.

¹⁸ And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses.

And then they kept the Passover:

¹⁹ And the children of the captivity kept the Passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month.

²⁰ For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the Passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves.

²¹ And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the Lord God of Israel, did eat,

²² And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the Lord had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands

in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

The temple and worship of God was restored. Against all opposition the cause of God had triumphed so far. However, the battle was not yet over; the wall was not yet built; and this was yet to be built “even in troublous times.”

7. Satan's Master-Stroke

Signs of the Times, April 23, 1902

IN A previous chapter we read that in vision there was shown to the prophet Zechariah, Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. That is the key to the vicissitudes of this whole history.

The time was come when the cause of God must be restored, and His work done in the earth. In the nature of things, this must be done through human instrumentalities. Joshua, the high priest, was the chief of these human instrumentalities; and therefore stood in the vision as the representative of God and His work in the earth.

On the other hand, Satan is the great adversary of God and His work everywhere, whether in the earth or in heaven. And when the time came for the cause and work of God to be revived and restored in the earth, Satan, as the great adversary of all that is of God, was prompt to create every kind of opposition. Accordingly he was seen standing at the right hand of Joshua—in the very place of opportunity and helpfulness—to resist him.

Satan had been actively engaged in this from the very first day that the work was begun in Jerusalem. It was his spirit and energy that actuated the Samaritan meddlers and their hired counselors at the court of Cyrus, Cambyses, and the false Smerdis. It was the personal presence of Satan in that three weeks' contest at the court of Cyrus, that made the unbroken presence of the angel Gabriel essential there the three full weeks, and finally demanded even the presence and help of Michael to make victory certain.

But in spite of all Satan's resistance the temple of God was

finished and dedicated, and the full worship and service of God was there established. Yet he slacked not his plotting of resistance. He failed to accomplish anything of his purpose during the reign of Darius; but in the reign of the successor to Darius he played a master-stroke, and arranged a most stupendous plot—nothing less than the sweeping away, in one day, all the Jews in the empire; the complete blotting out at one stroke of the whole worship, and even the whole people of God.

Of course it was a plot worthy only of Satan; but that even he should think that he could make such a plot succeed, would be astonishing, were it not for the peculiar train of circumstances that had developed the special instrumentality that he could use for his enormous purpose.

Darius died in BC 485, having reigned thirty-six years, and was succeeded by his son Xerxes, who was the Ahasuerus of the book of *Esther*. For the Hebrew *Ahashuerosh* is the natural equivalent of the old Persian *Khshayarsa*, the true name of the monarch called by the Greeks *Xerxes*, as now read in his inscriptions.

The name of him whom the Greeks called Xerxes, as left by himself in his own inscriptions is Khshayarsa, which proves to be identical with the Ahasuerus of Holy Scriptures.³

And it is not strange that in the endeavor to pronounce such a name, the tongue of a Greek would reduce it to Xerxes. Thus Xerxes being truly the Ahasuerus of the book of *Esther*, this causes the book of *Esther* to stand chronologically in the Scriptures between the sixth and seventh chapters of the book of *Ezra*. Xerxes, the king of Persia, was the son of Darius of *Ezra* 6, and the father of Artaxerxes of *Ezra* 7.

Political conditions, as developed by Darius in his last years,

³ Oppert.

and left by his death, were such that, in order for Xerxes to complete the plans of Darius, he must “stir up all against the realm of Grecia;” as it had been stated by the angel to Daniel that Xerxes would do (*Daniel* 11:2). In furtherance of this enterprise:

Xerxes, being about to take in hand the expedition against Athens, called together an assembly of the noblest Persians, to learn their opinions, and to lay before them his own designs.⁴

This was in the third year of the reign of Xerxes; and this assembly was the one that is referred to in Esther:

Esther 1

² In those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace,

³ In the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces; being before him:

⁴ When he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honor of his excellent majesty many days, even a hundred and fourscore days.

That was the day of Persia’s greatest glory, and at the end of the six months’ council of preparation for the invasion of Greece, Xerxes made a grand feast for a whole week to the whole company of imperial officials:

⁵ ...the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small, seven days, in the court of the garden of the king’s palace;

⁶ Where were white, green, and blue, hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble: the beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black, marble.

⁷ And they gave them drink in vessels of gold, (the vessels being diverse one from another,) and royal wine in abundance,

⁴ Herodotus.

according to the state of the king.

⁸ And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel: for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure.

⁹ Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to King Ahasuerus.

And because Vashti declined to make a display of herself to the drunken crowd, she was deposed from the position of queen.

Xerxes led into Greece a force, land and naval, amounting to 5,283,220 men. But in the successive defeats of Thermopylae, Salamis, Plateu, and Mycale, BC 480-79, his whole force was annihilated, and he returned to Shushan with only a body-guard.

Shortly after his return, he issued his directions for the gathering together of the most beautiful maidens of the empire, that he might select a queen in the place of the deposed Vashti. Among these was Esther, the cousin and adopted daughter of Mordecai, a Benjamite who was an attendant in the king's palace in Shushan. Esther was chosen.

Esther 2

¹⁶ So Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus into his house royal in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

¹⁷ And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti.

About this same time two of the king's chamberlains laid a plot to kill him. The plot was discovered by Mordecai. He told it to Esther, Esther told it to Xerxes, investigation was made, the thing was proved, and the two men were hanged. Then a record of the whole affair was made in the official chronicles

of the kingdom, in which was included the name of Mordecai and the part that he had taken in exposing the plot, and so saving the life of the king.

Not long after that, a certain prince whose name was Haman was promoted by king Xerxes, who thus...

Esther 3

¹ ...advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him.

Thus Haman was not only prime minister of the empire, but also the special favorite of the king; so that the king commanded all the servants “that were in the king’s gate” to bow to Haman and reverence him.

Now Mordecai the Jew sat in the king’s gate; and he would not bow nor do reverence to Haman. His fellow-servants noticed this, and asked him,

Esther 3

³ Why do you transgress the king’s commandment?

When they had for several days in succession called Mordecai’s attention to this, and still he would not bow nor do reverence to Haman, they told it to Haman, and also told him that this Mordecai who had thus refused to do him reverence was a Jew.

And just there is where Satan found his grand opportunity to make his master-stroke against the whole nation of Israel at once. Therefore

⁵ When Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath.

⁶ And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had showed him the people of Mordecai; wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai.

But why was this? What was the secret spring that Satan could touch there, to urge on one man thus to plan the destruction of a whole people?

The answer is easy. Haman was “the Agagite.” That is, he was a direct descendant from king Agag, the king of the Amalekites whom Saul captured when he destroyed the Amalekites, and whom the prophet Samuel slew after Saul had brought him to Gilgal alive.

And Mordecai was a Benjamite; of the very tribe of that Saul, king of Israel, who had destroyed the nation of the Amalekites.

Here, then, was the chance for the remaining Amalekite and Agagite to visit vengeance upon this people, and destroy this whole nation, as this people had destroyed his nation so long before. Possibly someone will say,

“Well, was not that even justice, and fair enough?”

The answer is,

“No; it was but the continuation of the original treacherous and destructive purpose of the Amalekites who initiated the war shortly after Israel left Egypt, and before they came to Sinai.”

In Rephidim, between the wilderness of Sin and the wilderness of Sinai, the Amalekites laid an ambush for the children of Israel as they marched, and cruelly smote the hindmost; even all that were feeble, and when they were faint and weary (*1 Samuel* 15:2; *Deuteronomy* 25:17, 18).

And it was for this that Saul had destroyed the Amalekites. (*Exodus* 17:8-14; *Deuteronomy* 25:19; *1 Samuel* 15). And now it was in perpetuation of original and native Amalekite treachery and cruelty that Haman the Amalekite must scheme to blot out the whole people, simply because one of their num-

ber failed to bow and do him reverence.

And Haman proceeded to put into effect his Amalekitish scheme. First he cast lots in the selection of the month in which the massacre should be. It was in the first month that the lots were cast, and the lot fell on the twelfth month—in the twelfth year of Xerxes, BC 473—and the day fixed, was the thirteenth day of the twelfth month.

Having this preliminary arranged, Haman approached the king for the royal authority to execute his murderous plot.

Esther 3

⁸ [He] said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them.

⁹ If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents [about six millions of dollars] of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries.

Then Xerxes gave to Haman his imperial ring, and said,

¹¹ The silver is given to you, the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you.

Then Haman caused the imperial secretaries to issue his murderous commandment to:

¹² ...the king's lieutenants, and to the governors that were over every province, and to the rulers of every people of every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language; in the name of king Ahasuerus was it written, and sealed with the king's ring.

Then the letters were sent by the imperial post-riders...

¹³ ...into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children

and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey.

The letters also commanded all the people to be “ready against that day.” (vs. 14). So...

¹⁵ ...the posts went out, being hastened by the king’s commandment, and the decree was given in Shushan the palace. And the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed.

It may be thought strange that Xerxes should so readily fall in with Haman’s scheme, and apparently so thoughtlessly give over a whole people thus to sheer massacre. And yet when it is remembered that the very flower of the defensive strength of the empire had only lately been swept away in the campaign against Greece, it is not difficult to understand that, from the way in which the matter was presented to him by Haman, he might fear that this “lawless” people would take advantage of the weakness of the kingdom, and attempt a revolution. Thus he could easily convince himself that it was only for the safety of his kingdom that they should be forestalled.

The imperial decree had gone forth for the massacre of all the Jews in every province on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month. The king had commanded all the people to be ready against that day, to execute the decree. The time was fixed, and each passing day brought the devoted people only a step nearer to the fearful goal; and the law, being a law of the Persians and Medes, could not be changed.

8. The Hand Upon the Throne of the Lord

Signs of the Times, April 30, 1902

WITH every soul of them devoted to massacre on a day already fixed, and fixed by a law that could not be changed, the Jews throughout the whole empire of the Persians and Medes were in great distress.

Esther 4

³ And in every province, wherever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many had on sackcloth and ashes.

² [And]...Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry; and came even before the king's gate.

Yet these expressions of distress and grief were not merely such, as though they were hopeless lamentations. The living God was still their God. In their history there had been crises as desperate as was this; and when appealed to and trusted, He had never failed to work deliverance. They could surely trust that He would deliver them now.

And because the examples of God's wonderful deliverances in their history, which they had as encouragements to their faith, they had the direct word of the Lord with respect to any such occasion as this that might ever arise in which the Amalekites were to have a part.

When Amalek played his treacherous part, and attacked the weak, the feeble, the faint, and the weary, even the hindmost, in Rephidim, though he was defeated, when the battle was over the Lord commanded Moses:

Exodus 17

¹⁴ ...Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the

ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.

Yet that matter did not end with only writing it for a memorial in a book.

¹⁵ And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi. [The Lord my banner]

This was also a memorial of the affair of Amalek's, that the Lord Jehovah would ever be His people's banner against Amalek. For said Moses in the name of the Lord:

Exodus 17 [margin]

¹⁶ Because the hand of Amalek is against the throne of the Lord, therefore the hand upon the throne of the Lord has sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.

And now in this latest generation of Amalek, in this Haman the Agagite, the hand of Amalek was still against the throne of the Lord. And now also the oath of the hand upon the throne of the Lord, was still good, the Lord Jehovah was still the banner of His people in the war with Amalek.

And this is why it was that the distress, the mourning, the fasting, and the cry of His devoted people, was not hopeless. Indeed, it was not only not hopeless, but was full of faith; for the memorial and the oath of God, written in the Book, still stood as the door of faith, and therefore of victory. And this was their confidence.

Therefore they expected victory and deliverance by that blessed hand that is upon the throne of the Lord. It is certain that they expected only victory and deliverance, for when Mordecai got word to Esther of the true state of their affairs, urging her to go to the king and make supplication and request for her people, and she pleaded the danger of death when she went without being called, Mordecai assured her

that if she failed to do her part, then should...

Esther 4

¹⁴ ...relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place.

God would not fail them. Esther was in a position to be an instrumentality in God's working the deliverance that was certain to come. How could she know but that she was in that position for just such an occasion as this? And if, for any reason, even the certain risk of her own life, she should fail to rise to the occasion and do her part, still life and deliverance would certainly come, only it would come by other instrumentality; it would arise from another place. This was the faith of Mordecai and of his people.

It was true faith in the word of God; it rested upon the word of God, and the oath of Him whose hand is upon the throne of the Lord. All that remained for them to do was to prove themselves appreciative of that word by separating themselves from all sin, and everything that was unbecoming to their Banner, so that the certain victory of the Hand upon the throne of the Lord should include very individual; and that they might see that Hand moving victoriously in this final war with Amalek.

Esther did rise nobly to the occasion; she proved indeed to be the queen that her position implied that she was. She sent word to Mordecai to gather together all the Jews that were in Shushan, and fast for her "three days" night and day;

Esther 4

¹⁶ ...I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish.

And God began just then to work their glorious deliverance. On the third day Esther made her trembling venture into the

king's presence. The king graciously received her; and told her to ask anything she chose, even to the half of the kingdom, and it should be granted her. She simply asked that the king and Haman come that day to a banquet which she had prepared. The king caused Haman to be informed; and,

Esther 5

⁵ So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

At the banquet the king said again to Esther,

⁶ What is your petition? and it shall be granted to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed.

Esther most respectfully requested that the king and Haman come again on the morrow to a banquet which she would prepare; stating also that on the morrow she would present her petition and request that the king desired to know.

Thus twice in immediate succession had Haman been shown the high honor of an exclusive banquet with the king and queen; and this upon the special invitation of the queen herself. This was honor and distinction surpassing all. He was correspondingly elated, and "went forth that day joyful and with a glad heart."

Yet there was one element that detracted from the perfection of his happy state: as he went forth from the royal banquet, he saw Mordecai in the king's gate, who still "stood not up, nor moved for him." This, and at such a time, was an ignominy too great to be borne, and filled him "full of indignation against Mordecai." Nevertheless, in view of what he had prepared for Mordecai and all his people, "Haman refrained himself."

¹⁰ Haman refrained himself; and when he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and Zereh his wife.

¹¹ And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the

multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king.

¹² Haman said moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and tomorrow am I invited unto her also with the king.

¹³ Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.

To Haman's wife and his friends his affliction from the presence of Mordecai was exceedingly proper and reasonable, and a thing from which he ought to be speedily relieved. Therefore

¹⁴ Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends unto him, Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits [seventy-five feet] high, and tomorrow speak you unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon; then go you in merrily with the king unto the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman; and he caused the gallows to be made.

And he went to sleep perfectly satisfied with all his arrangements and fair prospects for the morrow. But He that keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. He whose hand is upon the throne of the Lord had other arrangements for both Mordecai and Haman on the morrow.

Therefore that night, for some reason, king Xerxes found it impossible to sleep. In order to occupy the sleepless hours, the king caused the book of the chronicles of the kingdom to be brought and read to him, and the place where the reader read in the book happened to be the very place of the record of the late plot to assassinate the king, and of Mordecai's exposure of the plot in time to save the king.

When this had been read, the king asked,

Esther 6

³ What honor and dignity has been done to Mordecai for this? Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him.

⁴ And the king said, Who is in the court?

It was now morning, and Haman had come early to get the king's order to hang Mordecai on that seventy-five-foot gallows that was waiting, so that Haman could go merrily to the coming banquet. Thus at so early an hour Haman was in the court, and was the only man in the court. So when the king's attendants looked into the court, they saw Haman, and in answer to the king's question said,

Esther 6

⁵ Behold, Haman stands in the court. And the king said, Let him come in.

The word was passed; and "so Haman came in." But before Haman had a chance to present his request for the hanging of Mordecai, the king asked him,

⁶ What shall be done unto the man whom the king delights to honor?

Haman, having flattered himself beyond all judgment or reason, instantly thought, That man is myself. For,

⁶ To whom would the king delight to do honor more than to myself?

The king designs some new honor for me, so that I can go to that banquet today in a style befitting my nobility and dignity: and he has even done me the honor of letting me name it myself. The only honor that remains, that could be really becoming to me, is that I should occupy the very place of the king. Therefore Haman answered:

⁷ For the man whom the king delights to honor.

⁸ Let the royal apparel be brought which the king uses to wear, and the horse that the king rides upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head:

⁹ And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delights to honor, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.

Then said Xerxes to Haman:

¹⁰ Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as you have said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sits at the king's gate; let nothing fail of all that you have spoken.

For Haman, this was a terrific come-down. Yet there was no escaping it; he had fixed the whole matter himself. Therefore,

¹¹ ...took Haman the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him: Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delights to honor.

¹² And Mordecai came again to the king's gate. But Haman hasted to his house mourning, and having his head covered.

¹³ And Haman told Zeresh his wife and all his friends every thing that had befallen him. Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom you have begun to fall, you shall not prevail against him, but shall surely fall before him.

All this had occurred early in the day, and before the time of the banquet of the queen. And just now, even while Zeresh and Haman's wise men were talking with him of what he should expect from this beginning,

¹⁴ ...came the king's chamberlains, and hasted to bring Haman unto the banquet that Esther had prepared.

Esther 7

¹ So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen.

But Haman did not go to the banquet as “merrily” as had been planned by himself, and wife, and friends the evening before. As they sat at the banquet, the king again said to Esther,

² What is your petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted you; and what is your request? and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom.

Esther now, to the king and in the very presence of Haman, presented her petition and her request:

³ If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request.

⁴ For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king’s damage.

In blank astonishment the king asked,

Esther 7

⁵ Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?

Esther answered, with Haman sitting there,

⁶ The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman.

This revelation was more than the king could bear, and sit still. Therefore “in his wrath” he arose from the banquet and stepped into the palace garden.

Haman, well knowing what the king’s wrathful astonishment must mean to him, arose from his seat to plead with Esther for his life. In his anxiety and fear in his pleading he fell

upon the divan where queen Esther was sitting. Just then the king returned to the banquet room, and discovered Haman in that attitude. Instantly there flashed across the mind of the king a suspicion that in that murderous scheme Haman had a design to seize the kingdom: and he exclaimed,

⁸ Will he force the queen also before me in the house?

As the word “went out of the king’s mouth,” the chamberlains ran in and...

⁸ ...covered Haman’s face.

⁹ And Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king, stands in the house of Haman. Then the king said, Hang him thereon.

¹⁰ So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king’s wrath pacified.

The same day Esther told king Xerxes what Mordecai was to her; and,

Esther 8

² The king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman;

For the king had given “the house of Haman the Jews’ enemy unto Esther the queen.” And again Esther put her life at stake in approaching the king without being called.

³ And Esther spoke yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews.

The king held out to Esther his golden scepter, and she arose and stood, and pleaded that letters be written and sent to every province, reversing the letters sent by Haman to de-

stroy the Jews. In response the king directed that Esther and Mordecai to:

⁸ Write also for the Jews, as you like, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring: for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse.

But already were the letters out in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, commanding that all the Jews should be destroyed. This could not be reversed by writing letters saying that the Jews should not be destroyed, or forbidding anybody to attack them.

Instead, letters were written to all the officials and all the people in all provinces of the empire, granting to the Jews full right and power to defend themselves against all who should attack them.

This being published everywhere, and the favor of the king thus known toward the Jews, plainly it could be only the most desperate and murderous characters that would attempt to execute the first decree; and if, in so doing, they should fall, it would be only a benefit to the empire and to mankind.

Esther 8

¹⁵ And Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple: and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad.

¹⁶ The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honor.

¹⁷ And in every province, and in every city, wherever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.

These letters were sent out on the twenty-third day of the third month. Thus there were yet nearly nine months before

the day fixed in Haman's decree for the massacre.

And when that day came, there were found in all parts of the empire the number of seventy-five thousand who were so set in their hatred of the Jews as to attack them under Haman's decree. But,

Esther 9

³ All the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them.

Among those who attacked the Jews were the ten sons of Haman the Agagite. These were all slain; the last remnant of the race of the Amalekites. And so ended the war of Amalek against the hand that is upon the throne of the Lord. And so also ended Satan's master-stroke against the cause, and work, and people of God in the earth.

9. The Second Return

Signs of the Times, May 7, 1902

FROM the time of Satan's master-stroke by Haman the Amalekite against the people and the work of God in the earth, unto the next recorded event in their history, was fifteen years—from the twelfth year of Xerxes to the seventh year of Artaxerxes Longimanus, (*Esther* 3:17; *Ezra* 7:1-7).

Yet it must not be supposed that in all these years Satan had been idle or had in any wise slacked his efforts; he only changed his tactics, and plied his efforts in another and more insidious way. He insinuated himself, his spirit, and his ways, into the individual life of the Jews in Palestine.

When the people of Israel came up first from the captivity, the Samaritans and other people of the land sought alliance with them. By the faithfulness of Zerubbabel and Joshua, that proposed alliance was rejected and prevented. By the faithfulness of these devoted men, and by their noble example, the people were held in faithfulness and devotion to God, and so to the rejection of all form of alliance with the mixed peoples around them.

But when these devoted men had passed away, they were not succeeded by men of equal devotion. As a consequence the people, not having before them a good example in the men in chief responsibility, drifted into looseness of life: faithfulness and integrity were forgotten; and the alliance which the mixed peoples sought with them was secured, and by that Satan accomplished his purpose of putting a stop to the work of God in the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

The alliance of the mixed peoples with Israel was accomplished by the new leaders in Israel forgetting their integrity and true responsibility, and intermarrying with the mixed

peoples around them.

Ezra 9

¹ The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

² For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass.

As a natural and very easy consequence the work of rebuilding the city, the streets, and the walls of Jerusalem was neglected, and finally was left off entirely, and even the temple that had been built and dedicated was neglected, and allowed to fall into decay.

But thank the Lord, in captivity down in Babylon there were yet some faithful ones whose hearts were seeking the law of the Lord to do it. Of these Ezra was the chief; for

Ezra 7

¹⁰ Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

This right spirit and true example drew others to the right way; and in the seventh year of Artaxerxes Longimanus, BC 457, a decree was issued by that king of Persia in favor of Ezra and whosoever was minded to go with him, for the building of the city and wall of Jerusalem, and the repair of the house of God; and commanding all the people beyond the Euphrates to pay toll, tribute, and custom for the work of the Lord in Jerusalem. This decree is recorded in *Ezra 7:12-26*.

In gratitude for this blessed favor, Ezra wrote:

Ezra 7

²⁷ Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, which has put such

a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem: and has extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty princes.

²⁸ And I was strengthened as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.

The number of those who went up from Babylon with Ezra was about six thousand, as enumerated in the Scriptures. On the first day of the first month in the year 457 BC, they started from Babylon.

When they had reached the river of Ahava, about a day's journey from Babylon, Ezra reviewed the people, and found that in all the company there was not a single Levite. As the Levites were essential to the ministry of the house of God when they should reach Jerusalem. Ezra was obliged to send messengers back to the Jewish colony at Babylon to find some Levites who would come with them to Jerusalem. In response to Ezra's call, there came two hundred and fifty-eight men. When those had arrived, "then," says Ezra,

Ezra 8

²¹ Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of Him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.

²² For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him; but His power and His wrath is against all them that forsake Him.

²³ So we fasted and besought our God for this: and He was entreated of us.

This reviewing of the people, the sending back to Babylon for the Levites, and the time of fasting and prayer, occupied

eleven days.

³¹ Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way.

And “on the first day of the fifth month” they arrived safely at Jerusalem, “according to the good hand of God” upon them. On the fourth day after their arrival at Jerusalem, the gold and silver and the vessels for the house of God which they had brought as offerings, were weighed into the house of God and entered in writing; they offered burnt-offerings according to the twelve tribes of Israel;

Ezra 8

³⁶ And they delivered the king’s commissions unto the king’s lieutenants, and to the governors on this side the river; and they furthered the people, and the house of God.

The temple was immediately repaired, and beautified, and caused once more to stand worthy of the divine purpose to which it was devoted, and to which it had been dedicated.

Ezra 6

¹⁴ ...And they built, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.

This work of repairing and building the temple occupied about eight months. When that work was all done, and Ezra turned his attention to restoring and organizing the full worship and service of God in the temple, there was made the discovery of the mixed marriages and other abominations into which had entered the Jews who had first returned from Babylon.

The princes who had come with Ezra, and who were his as-

sistants, discovered this deplorable condition, and came to Ezra, saying:

Ezra 9

¹ ...The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

² For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers has been chief in this trespass.

This was so fully true that no fewer than four of the very sons of Joshua the son of Jozadak “had taken strange wives.” When the full truth of the dismal situation burst upon the devoted Ezra, he was so overcome that he was utterly speechless all the remaining part of the day.

Ezra 9

³ When I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished [like stone, petrified].

⁴ Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.

⁵ And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God,

⁶ And said: O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to you, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.

⁷ Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day.

⁸ And now for a little space grace has been shown from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in His holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage.

⁹ For we were bondmen; yet our God has not forsaken us in our bondage, but has extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.

¹⁰ And now, Oh our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken your commandments,

¹¹ Which You have commanded by your servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which you go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness.

¹² Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever: that you may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever.

¹³ And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that you our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us such deliverance as this;

¹⁴ Should we again break your commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? Wouldn't You be angry with us till You had consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?

¹⁵ O Lord God of Israel, You are righteous: for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day: behold, we are before You in our trespasses: for we cannot stand before You because of this.

Ezra 10

¹ Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore.

Then spoke one for all,

² We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing.

³ Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.

⁴ Arise: for this matter belongs unto you: we also will be with you: be of good courage, and do it.

This proposal was accepted by all. Then Ezra arose up from before the house of God, and went into one of the chambers of the priests, but...

Ezra 10

⁶ He did eat no bread, nor drink water; for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away.

Then a call was sent throughout Jerusalem and all the land, that all should assemble at Jerusalem;

⁸ And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation.

Within the three days all were assembled in Jerusalem.

⁹ It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month; and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain.

Ezra addressed them:

¹⁰ You have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel.

¹¹ Now therefore make confession unto the Lord God of your

fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives.

The people answered,

¹² As you have said, so must we do.

But since the people were many, and it was a time of much rain, and they were not able to stand without, neither was this...

¹³ ...a work of one day or two; for we are many that have transgressed in this thing,

—they advised that portions of the people come respectively at appointed times, until all who were in the transgression had cleared themselves. This suggestion was adopted. And the time required to accomplish the work was two whole months—from the first day of the tenth month until the first day of the first month.

By this record there is made plain at least one very important lesson. Looseness in the individual life of the people of God gives to Satan advantage and victory over the people and cause of God, which it is impossible for him, by any possible power or machination, to gain, while they maintain integrity and true devotion to God.

In the day of the false Smerdis, all that Satan, in possession of imperial power, could do against the work and people of God was, in reality, to produce a condition which only the more helped it forward.

In the day of Haman the Amalekite, all that Satan, in possession of the very supremacy of worldly power, could do against the work and people of God, was only to demonstrate the absolute impotence of it all. And all this, simply because the people of God were walking in singleness of heart before Him, in true faith and integrity.

But when they neglected all this, and so gave place to Satan in the individual life, then Satan gained the victory for which he had so long striven, and which, with all the power of earth in his hands, he had utterly failed to gain.

Individual faithfulness is the victory of the people of God; individual unfaithfulness is the victory of Satan over the people of God.

10. The Third Return

Signs of the Times, May 14, 1902

FROM the time of the arrival of Ezra at Jerusalem and his reformatory work done there, as recorded in *Ezra* chapters 7-10, unto the next recorded event in the history—*Nehemiah* 1:1—was thirteen years; from the seventh year of Artaxerxes Longimanus to the twentieth year of the same king.

It seems that the efforts of Ezra were confined to moral and ecclesiastical reforms; and that in all these thirteen years nothing was done toward rebuilding the wall and city of Jerusalem; for it was the news that the place was still a ruin that stirred up Nehemiah with the determination to go himself to Jerusalem. As he wrote:

Nehemiah 1

¹ It came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace,

² That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.

³ And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

⁴ And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,

⁵ And said: I beseech you, O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keeps covenant and mercy for them that love Him and observe His commandments:

⁶ Let your ear now be attentive, and your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of your servant, which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have

sinned against You: both I and my father's house have sinned.

⁷ We have dealt very corruptly against you, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which You commanded your servant Moses.

⁸ Remember, I beseech You, the word that You commanded your servant Moses, saying, If you transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations:

⁹ But if you turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.

¹⁰ Now these are your servants and your people, whom You have redeemed by your great power, and by your strong hand.

¹¹ O Lord, I beseech You, let now your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants, who desire to fear your name: and prosper, I pray You, your servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.

Nehemiah Permitted to Go

Nehemiah was cupbearer to king Artaxerxes Longimanus; and at this time was with the king in the royal palace in Susa, the capital of the province of Elam.

He spent about four months—from the month Chisleu, the ninth month, till “in the month Nisan,” the first month—in praying, and fasting, and mourning, before he received open evidence of mercy and favor “in the sight of this man,” the king Artaxerxes Longimanus.

By this time his true sorrow for the desolations of Jerusalem and the consequent retarding of the work of God, so showed itself upon him that it could be noticed. And as he fulfilled his office of cupbearer to the king, and “took up the wine, and gave it unto the king,” his sadness was noticed by the king.

Then the king asked him,

Nehemiah 2

² Why is your countenance sad, seeing you are not sick? this is nothing but sorrow of heart.

Nehemiah answered,

³ Let the king live forever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchers, lies waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?

Then said the king,

⁴ For what do you make request?

And Nehemiah, standing in the presence of the king, and in the very act of bearing the cup to the king—even standing there,

⁴ ...prayed to the God of heaven.

And having darted up his prayer to God, he said to the king,

⁵ ...If it please the king, and if your servant have found favor in your sight, that you would send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchers, that I may build it.

⁶ And the king said (the queen also sitting by him), For how long shall your journey be? and when will you return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.

The Royal Grants

⁷ Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah;

⁸ And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.

Yet more than this, the king appointed Nehemiah governor of the province of Judah; and sent with him captains and troops of the imperial army to escort him to Jerusalem.

The Samaritans were still as envious, and as much opposed to the work of God in Jerusalem as at the first return from the captivity. The principal men of the Samaritans now were Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem or Gashmu the Arabian. When these men heard that Nehemiah the Jew had come, with the commission, the honor, and the support of the king of Persia, they were greatly perplexed;

Nehemiah 2

¹⁰ It grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.

When Nehemiah had come to Jerusalem, and had been there three days, he spent a night in viewing the condition of ruin in which the city still lay. Then he had the priests, and the nobles, and the rulers, and others, assemble; and to them he said,

¹⁷ You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and the gates are burned with fire; come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.

He also told them of the hand of God that was good upon him; and also of the words which Artaxerxes had spoken to him. And they answered heartily,

¹⁸ Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.

The Troubles Times

As soon as Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem heard that the Jews had begun again to build, they laughed them to scorn, and despised them, and said,

Nehemiah 2

¹⁹ What is this thing that you do? Will you rebel against the king?

And Nehemiah answered as did Zerubbabel and Joshua at the first restoration:

²⁰ ...The God of heaven, He will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build; but you have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.

The people were divided into forty-two companies. These companies were distributed round the city the whole length of the compass of the wall, each company to build a portion of the wall. The work was entered upon so heartily that even the women were engaged, though certain of the nobles of the Tekoites...

Nehemiah 3

⁵ ...put not their necks to the work of their Lord.

When Sanballat heard that the work of building the wall went busily on,

Nehemiah 4

¹ He was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews.

² And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?

Tobiah the Ammonite was standing by when Sanballat snapped forth these ironical inquiries, and Tobiah answered in kind:

³ Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.

But the work went on so prosperously that soon the whole wall was built and was joined together, to half the height unto which it was to be built. Sanballat and his Samaritans, finding that their prognostications were a mistake, and that a good solid wall was actually going up,

⁷ ...were very wroth,

⁸ And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it.

⁹ Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.

The courage of some began to wane, and they said,

Nehemiah 4

¹⁰ The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall.

And the adversaries, the Samaritans, said,

¹¹ They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease.

And even among the Jews in the country there were sympathizers with the Samaritans. These came ten times to Nehemiah and the workers on the wall, with the evil advice,

¹² From all places you must return to us, for they [the Samaritans] will be upon you.

Since a surprise by secret and sudden attack was thus planned by the Samaritans, Nehemiah armed all the people, men, women, and children, with swords, and spears, and bows, and stood constantly on such watchfulness that the enemies found that their plot was known, and they could not execute their planned surprise, and that

¹⁵ ...God had brought their counsel to naught...

Being thus delivered from the immediate danger, the people returned all of them

¹⁵ ...to the wall, every one unto his work.

And from that time forth, half of the governor's imperial guard wrought in the work, and the other half held the spears, shields, bows, and breast-plates of both. And of those who built on the wall, and carried the material,

¹⁷ ...every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon.

And the builders...

Nehemiah 4

¹⁸ ...every one had his sword girded by his side, and so built...

Nehemiah had the trumpeter stand constantly by his side, to sound the alarm; and he said to all the people:

¹⁹ The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another.

²⁰ In what place therefore you hear the sound of the trumpet, resort you thither unto us: our God shall fight for us.

²¹ So we labored in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared.

²² Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labor on the day.

²³ So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing.

Thus the work of building the city and the wall went steadily onward, though truly, as the angel had said to Daniel, "even in troublous times."

11. The Fear of God Against Unbrotherliness

Signs of the Times, May 21, 1902

THE time spent in the building of the wall of Jerusalem after the coming of Nehemiah, noted in the preceding study, was so far only about a month. Nehemiah's attention had been so engaged in the work of pushing forward the work on the wall, and in warding off the schemes of the enemies, that he had not had time or opportunity to look into the individual and social conduct and condition of the people.

And now there came to his knowledge that which was almost as surprising to him as was to Ezra the knowledge of the mixed marriages. In the thirteen years that had elapsed between the coming of Ezra and that of Nehemiah to Jerusalem, though the evil of the mixed marriages had been largely corrected, other wrong and weakening things had been indulged. And Nehemiah was surprised and greatly offended by...

Nehemiah 5

¹ ...a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews.

² For there were that said, We, our sons, and our daughters, are many; therefore we take up corn for them, that we may eat and live.

That is, they had put to pledge the honor of their children, for the grain which, in food, they and their children must eat.

³ Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth.

⁴ There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute [the State taxes], and that upon our lands and vineyards.

⁵ Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our chil-

dren as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and [some] of our daughters are brought unto bondage [already]: neither [is it] in our power [to redeem them]; for other men have our lands and vineyards.

Thus on the part of many there was the spirit and practice of speculating on the necessities of their brethren; for this money was not simply loaned, but loaned at interest and profit. This spirit, in the nature of things, only increased the natural selfishness of the heart, and cultivated hardness and oppressiveness of brother to brother.

It really destroyed all true brotherliness, and supplanted it with the spirit of sordid gain; the whole thought became not,

“How can I do most to help my brother?”

but,

“How can I make most off of him?”

Not,

“What can I do most to help him?”

but,

“What can I do most to help myself through his necessities?”

For these reasons, what they were doing was plainly forbidden by the Lord; and in it all they were going directly contrary to the Scriptures which they professed to obey. In the Word of the Lord it was plainly written to all:

Leviticus 25

³⁵ If your brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with you, then you shall relieve him; yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with you.

³⁶ Take you no money⁵ of him, for increase; but fear your God; that your brother may live with you.

³⁷ You shall not give him your money upon money, nor lend him your victuals for increase.

³⁸ I am the Lord your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God.

³⁹ And if your brother that dwells by you be waxen poor, and be sold unto you, you shall not compel him to serve as a bondservant;

⁴⁰ But as a hired servant, and as a sojourner, he shall be with you...

Deuteronomy 23

¹⁹ You shall not lend upon usury to your brother, usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of anything that is lent upon usury.

²⁰ Unto a stranger you may lend upon usury; but unto your brother you shall not lend upon usury; that the Lord your

⁵ USURY: From Latin *nias*—to use. A premium paid, or stipulated to be paid, for the use of money; interest—The practice of taking interest. (*Webster*)

USURY: Originally, any premium paid, or stipulated to be paid, for the use of money; interest. The practice of lending money at interest, or of taking interest for money lent. (*Century*)

USURY: A using; benefit interest. Now usually exorbitant interests, in the A. V. [the Bible] interest of money at any rate. (Smith, *Dictionary of the Bible*)

USURY: Is used in the Old-English sense of interest for money loaned, and not necessarily in the odious and later signification, an unlawful contract for the loan of money. (McClintock and Strong, *Biblical Cyclopedia*)

USURY: The practice of requiring, in repayment of money lent anything more than the amount lent, was formerly thought to be a great moral wrong; and the greater, the more was taken. (*American Cyclopedia*)

“You shall not lend upon usury to your brother, usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of anything that is lent upon usury. Unto a stranger you may lend upon usury; but unto your brother you shall not lend upon usury; that the Lord your God may bless you.” *Deuteronomy* 23:19-20. In this sentence we find interest of all kinds blended together, and the natural economic tendencies directly counteracted by the moral and religious law. (*Encyclopedia Britannica, Usury*)

God may bless you in all that you set your hand to in the land where you go to possess it.

Exodus 22

²⁵ If you lend money to any of my people that is poor by you, you shall not be to him as a usurer, neither shall you lay upon him usury.

Psalms 15

¹ Lord, who shall abide in your tabernacle? who shall dwell in your holy hill?

² He that walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart.

⁵ He that puts not out his money to usury, nor takes reward against the innocent.

Ezekiel 18

⁵ If a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right,

⁷ And has not oppressed any, but has restored to the debtor his pledge, has spoiled none by violence, has given his bread to the hungry, and has covered the naked with a garment;

⁸ He that has not given forth upon usury, neither has taken any increase, that has withdrawn his hand from iniquity, has executed true judgment between man and man,

⁹ Has walked in my statutes, and has kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, says the Lord.

And among the “abominations” that had destroyed “the bloody city,” Jerusalem, and taken the people captive to Babylon, was this:

Ezekiel 22

² ...in you have they taken gifts to shed blood;

¹² You have taken usury and increase, and you have greedily gained of your neighbors by extortion, and have forgotten me, says the Lord.

All this was written in the Scriptures which these very people professed to believe, and in which they even boasted; and yet they disregarded it all, and made the poverty and necessity of their brethren only opportunity for traffic in loaning

money and victuals for usury and increase! No wonder that the righteous Nehemiah declares,

Nehemiah 5

⁶ I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words.

⁷ Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, You exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them.

⁸ And I said unto them, We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will you even sell your brethren? or shall they be sold unto us? Then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer.

⁹ Also I said, It is not good that you do: ought you not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?

¹⁰ I likewise, and my brethren, and my servants, might exact of them money and corn: I pray you, let us leave off this usury.

¹¹ Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that you exact of them.

¹² Then said they, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as you say. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they should do according to this promise.

¹³ Also I shook my lap, and said, So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labor, that performs not this promise, even thus be he shaken out, and emptied. And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the Lord. And the people did according to this promise.

Nehemiah could safely and consistently appeal to all the people upon this issue; for, though he was an exceedingly rich man, and had the best of opportunities to lend money at big interest, and make gain of the people, he not only did nothing of the kind as a speculator, but he did not use nor even collect what was his due as governor.

For twelve years he supported himself and his whole household and retinue as governor, also a hundred and fifty Jews and rulers, besides others, at his own expense from his own personal funds. And he says:

Nehemiah 5

¹⁴ From the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor.

¹⁵ But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God.

¹⁶ Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall, neither bought we any land: and all my servants were gathered there unto the work.

¹⁷ Moreover there were at my table a hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers, beside those that came unto us from among the heathen that are about us.

¹⁸ Now that which was prepared for me daily was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine: yet for all this required not I the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people.

With such an example as this of mercy and brotherly kindness ever before them, those who had been trading upon the bondage and necessities of the people were enabled to keep their promise to quit it all, and to deal with their brethren as though they were brethren indeed. This reform was a success.

Nehemiah, because of the fear of God, had from the heart manifested the very spirit and essence of the divine principle.

Matthew 7

¹² All things whatsoever you would that men should do to

you, do you even so to them.

Also in the same fear of God he could pray,

Nehemiah 5

¹⁹ Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

And that prayer will certainly be answered, because it is also a divine principle that...

Matthew 7

² With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.

And now, as then, let all the people say, “Amen.”

12. The Wall Finished, the Temple Service Restored

Signs of the Times, May 28, 1902

AT LAST the wall of Jerusalem was finished. So diligently had the work been pursued, that the wall was finished in fifty-two days from the day that Nehemiah began the work. However, the gates were not yet set up. But even though the wall was finished, the “troublesome times” did not cease; for says Nehemiah:

Nehemiah 6

¹ When Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had built the wall, and that there was no breach left therein;...

² Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono.

This was a part of a plan of theirs and of the master adversary, to get Nehemiah into their power, and to slay him, and then cause to cease the work of building the city. But Nehemiah knew that the work in which he was engaged was one in which those men could have no part nor lot, nor any true interest, and to the extent of a parley; therefore he...

³ ...sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I can not come down; why should the work cease, while I leave it, and come down to you?

Yet they were so persistent that they sent to Nehemiah “four times after this sort,” and every time...

⁵ ...[he] answered them after the same manner

And even yet they did not cease. In encouragements to the people in the work of that restoration of the city and people of God, Nehemiah, with his faithful fellow laborers, con-

stantly cited the promises of God that the Messiah, the Son of David, the official King of Judah, would come. He assured them that the work which was then being done, and the time upon which they were engaged, would end only in the coming of the Messiah, the rightful King.

Rumors of this constantly reached the adversaries, the Samaritans. Their dull minds could frame only the conception of an earthly king; only Nehemiah himself could be such king; this could mean only rebellion as soon as the city should be finished, therefore Nehemiah could be working so diligently only for his own aggrandizement.

Nehemiah 6

⁵ Accordingly Sanballat sent his servant even the fifth time: [this time] with an open letter in his hand;

⁶ Wherein was written: It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu says it, that you and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause you built the wall, that you may be their king, according to these words.

⁷ And you have also appointed prophets to preach of you at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together.

The Worst Trouble of All

Nehemiah answered truly,

Nehemiah 6

⁸ There are no such things done as you say, but you feign them out of your own heart.

And of them he says,

⁹ For they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done...

And against all he appealed to God,

⁹ Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.

Yet the worst feature of the situation was not the scheming of Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem; it was the traitorous fellowship of Jews in Jerusalem who in heart were united with Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem, and constantly played into their hands and aided their schemes.

When the trick of Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem to get Nehemiah into their power outside the city had failed, these false brethren attempted to make that scheme effective inside the city. So as Nehemiah came one day to the house of Shemaiah, the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabeel, who was shut up, Shemaiah said to him,

Nehemiah 6

¹⁰ Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple; for they will come to slay you; yea, in the night will they come to slay you.

But, said noble Nehemiah,

¹¹ Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.

Yet more, and the worst, was to come. Here is the record:

¹² And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.

¹³ Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me.

¹⁴ My God, think you upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear.

¹⁷ Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came unto them.

¹⁸ For there were many in Judah sworn unto him, because he

[Tobiah] was the son in law of Shechaniah the son of Arah; and his son Johanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah.

¹⁹ Also they reported his good deeds before me, and uttered my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear.

Yet, for all this, there was no halt in the work. The gates were set up, and thus the wall was finished in all its parts completely round the city. And

Nehemiah 6

¹⁶ When all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God.

As the danger from the enemies was still great, Nehemiah commanded,

Nehemiah 7

³ Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun be hot; and while they stand by, let them shut the doors, and bar them: and appoint watches of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, every one in his watch, and every one to be over against his house.

⁴ Now the city was large and great: but the people were few therein, and the houses were not built.

Restoring the Worship

Being able thus to dwell in comparative safety, the restoration of the worship of God according to the Scriptures was systematically entered upon. On the first day of the seventh month,

Nehemiah 8

¹ All the people gathered themselves together as one man, into the street that was before the water gate, and they spoke unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord commanded to Israel.

² And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congrega-

tion both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month.*n1

³ And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.

⁴ And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose...

⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up:

⁶ And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

Certain chosen ones...

⁷ ...caused the people to understand the law; and the people stood in their place.

⁸ So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

This was so especially necessary, because,—owing to the scattered condition of the people in the captivity, and especially owing to the mixed marriages in which the people had indulged since their return—the language of the people had so changed that many of them could not well understand the pure Hebrew in which the Scriptures were written, and now read by Ezra.

And when they did understand the reading, as now distinctly presented to them in its plain sense, it presented before them a manner of life so distinct from that which they had been living, so much purer and more elevated and noble, that

⁹ All the people wept when they heard the words of the law.

But Nehemiah and Ezra and the interpreters comforted all

the people, saying,

⁹ This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep...

¹⁰ Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy unto our Lord. Neither be you sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

¹¹ Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be grieved.

¹² And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

The Feast of Tabernacles

On the second day, as they were all gathered to the reading, it was also the second day of the seventh month, in the portion that was read was what is now *Leviticus* 23. In this they found that it was commanded

Nehemiah 8

¹⁴ ...that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month;

¹⁵ And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth into the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written.

This had stood in the book all the ages since the children of Israel had been in the wilderness, after their coming out of Egypt; yet

¹⁷ ...since the days of Joshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so.

Nevertheless as soon as it was now read, the people received it as it is the word of God, and promptly went forth, and brought the branches,

¹⁶ And made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim.

¹⁷ And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths...And there was very great gladness.

When the booths were prepared, and the people dwelt in them, on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles the reading of the Scriptures was taken up again, and was continued day by day throughout the whole seven days of the feast. And on the eighth day, the twenty-third day of the seventh month,

¹⁸ ...was a solemn assembly according to the manner.

And on the twenty-fourth day of this same month the people

Nehemiah 9

¹ ...assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them.

² And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.

³ And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the Lord their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshiped the Lord their God.

One of these blessed and thorough confessions is recorded in full in *Nehemiah 9* as an example for God's people in all time. It is well worth a careful reading in detail by every one of God's people today.

There is not anywhere in it any suggestion that either they or their fathers had been infallibly right, and had done infallibly right all the time, so that it should be accounted akin to sacrilege for anybody to think, and akin to blasphemy for

anybody to say, that there was a better way.

Nehemiah 9

¹ Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sack-clothes, and earth upon them.

² And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.

³ And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the Lord their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshiped the Lord their God.

⁴ Then stood up upon the stairs, of the Levites, Jeshua, and Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani, and cried with a loud voice unto the Lord their God.

⁵ Then the Levites, Jeshua, and Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, Stand up and bless the Lord your God for ever and ever: and blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.

⁶ You, even you, are Lord alone; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and You preserve them all; and the host of heaven worship You.

⁷ You are the Lord the God, who did choose Abram, and brought him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gave him the name of Abraham;

⁸ And found his heart faithful before You, and made a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Jebusites, and the Girgashites, to give it, I say, to his seed, and have performed your words; for You are righteous:

⁹ And did see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heard their cry by the Red sea;

¹⁰ And showed signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land: for You knew that they dealt proudly against them. So did You get yourself

a name, as it is this day.

¹¹ And You did divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors You threw into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters.

¹² Moreover You led them in the day by a cloudy pillar; and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go.

¹³ You came down also upon mount Sinai, and spoke with them from heaven, and gave them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments:

¹⁴ And made known unto them your holy sabbath, and commanded them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses your servant:

¹⁵ And gave them bread from heaven for their hunger, and brought forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and promised them that they should go in to possess the land which You had sworn to give them.

¹⁶ But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to your commandments,

¹⁷ And refused to obey, neither were mindful of your wonders that You did among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but You are a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsook them not.

¹⁸ Yea, when they had made them a molten calf, and said, This is your God that brought you up out of Egypt, and had wrought great provocations;

¹⁹ Yet You in your manifold mercies forsook them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way wherein they should go.

²⁰ You gave also your good spirit to instruct them, and withheld not your manna from their mouth, and gave them water for their thirst.

²¹ Yea, forty years did You sustain them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old, and

their feet swelled not.

²² Moreover You gave them kingdoms and nations, and did divide them into corners: so they possessed the land of Sihon, and the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og king of Bashan.

²³ Their children also You multiplied as the stars of heaven, and brought them into the land, concerning which You had promised to their fathers, that they should go in to possess it.

²⁴ So the children went in and possessed the land, and You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hands, with their kings, and the people of the land, that they might do with them as they would.

²⁵ And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, wells dug, vineyards, and oliveyards, and fruit trees in abundance: so they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in your great goodness.

²⁶ Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against You, and cast your law behind their backs, and slew your prophets which testified against them to turn them to You, and they wrought great provocations.

²⁷ Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their enemies, who vexed them: and in the time of their trouble, when they cried unto You, You heard them from heaven; and according to your manifold mercies You gave them saviours, who saved them out of the hand of their enemies.

²⁸ But after they had rest, they did evil again before You: therefore You left them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had the dominion over them: yet when they returned, and cried unto You, You heard them from heaven; and many times did You deliver them according to your mercies;

²⁹ And testified against them, that You might bring them again unto your law: yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto your commandments, but sinned against your judgments, (which if a man do, he shall live in them;) and withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their neck, and would not hear.

³⁰ Yet many years did You forbear them, and testified against them by your spirit in your prophets: yet would they not give ear: therefore You gave them into the hand of the people of the lands.

³¹ Nevertheless for your great mercies' sake You did not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for You are a gracious and merciful God.

³² Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keeps covenant and mercy, let not all the trouble seem little before You, that has come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day.

³³ Howbeit You are just in all that is brought upon us; for You have done right, but we have done wickedly:

³⁴ Neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers, kept your law, nor hearkened unto your commandments and your testimonies, wherewith You did testify against them.

³⁵ For they have not served You in their kingdom, and in your great goodness that You gave them, and in the large and fat land which You gave before them, neither turned they from their wicked works.

³⁶ Behold, we are servants this day, and for the land that You gave unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof and the good thereof, behold, we are servants in it:

³⁷ And it yields much increase unto the kings whom You have set over us because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress.

³⁸ And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it.

This confession was written out, and Nehemiah and eighty-three others of the princes, priests, and Levites signed it in behalf of themselves and all the people, who...

Nehemiah 10

²⁹ ...clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a

curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, and His judgments and His statutes;

³⁰ And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons:

³¹ And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the Sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the Sabbath, or on the holy day: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt.

At the same time the ordinances, and the courses of the priests, Levites, porters, and singers, etc., were restored, in the service of God in the temple.

13. The Wall of Jerusalem Dedicated

Signs of the Times, June 4, 1902

SOME time after the events related in the preceding article, Nehemiah made a journey to the court of the king of Persia, where he stayed several months, and then returned to Jerusalem.

As soon as he returned, he began to arrange for a great celebration in the dedication of the wall that had at last, through such “troublous times,” been triumphantly finished.

He gathered from the cities, the villages, and the country of Judah, priests, Levites, and singers in great numbers to bear a leading part in the...

Nehemiah 12

²⁷ ...dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings, and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps.

²⁸ And the sons of the singers gathered themselves together, both out of the plain country round about Jerusalem, and from the villages of Netophathi;

²⁹ Also from the house of Gilgal, and out of the fields of Geba and Azmaveth: for the singers had built them villages round about Jerusalem.

³⁰ And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, and the gates, and the wall.

When all had thus been “purified,” and so prepared, the day of the dedication came. There were formed two great processions of princes, priests, singers, and people who ascended the wall at opposite points, and marched round upon the top of the wall till the two processions were joined at both ends of the lines, forming now one continuous procession round the whole city upon the top of the wall.

Then the whole united procession stood still and “gave thanks,” (vs. 40) and...

⁴² ...the singers sang loud, with Jezrahiah their overseer.

⁴³ Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off.

Enemies Cast Out

During Nehemiah's absence, the Samaritans, the enemies of the work of God, through their alliances among the princes and priests in Judah and Jerusalem, had secured a foothold in Jerusalem.

Eliashib the priest had allowed one of his daughters to marry that chief and persistent enemy, Tobiah the Ammonite! Not only this, but Eliashib had actually emptied of its property one of the great chambers of the temple, had fitted it up as a residence for his new son-in-law, Tobiah the Ammonite.

Now amid the services of the festival days of the dedication, in reading the Scriptures in the book of the law,

Nehemiah 13

¹ They read in the book of Moses to the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever.

² Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing.

³ Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude.

Thus there came to the attention of Nehemiah the crooked and brazen course of Eliashib the priest in his alliance with Tobiah the Ammonite, and...

⁷ ...in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God.

⁸ And, it grieved me sore; therefore I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber.

⁹ Then I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers; and there brought I again the vessels of the house of God, with the meat offering and the frankincense.

The Lord Robbed of Means and Time

Also during Nehemiah's absence there had been a falling away from faithfulness in bringing the tithes into the storehouse.

Nehemiah 13

¹⁰ I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them; for the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled everyone to his field.

¹¹ Then contended I with the rulers and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together, and set them in their place.

¹² Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn and the new wine and the oil into the treasuries.

There had been also a falling away from the proper observance of the Sabbath; indeed, with many, from any observance of the Sabbath at all; for:

¹⁵ In those days saw I in Judah some treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day; and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals.

¹⁶ There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the Sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.

¹⁷ Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that you do, and profane the Sabbath day?

¹⁸ Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet you bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath.

¹⁹ And it came to pass, that, when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the Sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the Sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the Sabbath day.

²⁰ So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice.

²¹ Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why do you lodge about the wall? if you do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the Sabbath.

Mixed Marriages

Encouraged by the example of the priests and others, many of the people had again fallen away to mixed marriage:

Nehemiah 13

²³ In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab;

²⁴ And their children spoke half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language; but according to the language of each people.

²⁵ And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, You shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves.

²⁶ Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin.

²⁷ Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives?

We have seen that a daughter of Eliashib had been given in marriage to one of the chief enemies of the cause of God—Tobiah the Ammonite. In addition to that, one of his grandsons had married the daughter of the very chief enemy himself—

Sanballat the Horonite. When it was demanded that he separate from this heathenish connection, he was so far gone in apostasy that he refused. And as the consequence, says Nehemiah,

²⁸ One of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite; therefore I chased him from me.

Samaritan Worship Established

The chasing away of this young man—his name was Manasseh—brought curious historical results. The mixture of Samaritans and Jews was now as follows:

- Sanballat's daughter was married to this young Jew, Manasseh.
- Tobiah was married to at least one, if not two of the Jewesses.
- Tobiah's son, Johanan, was also married to a Jewess.

And now this company, including young Manasseh, finding themselves permanently excluded from Jerusalem and the temple and worship there, conceived a design to have a temple and worship of their own.

However, so long as Artaxerxes Longimanus lived, they could do nothing, because of his fixed favor toward the temple and worship in Jerusalem. But in 425 BC Artaxerxes died. He was succeeded by Xerxes II., who, after forty-five days, was murdered and succeeded by his half half-brother, Sogilianus; and he in turn, after six months and fifteen days, was murdered and succeeded by his half-brother, Ochus, who reigned as Darius Nothus.

To Darius Nothus, Sanballat made personal application, and was successful in obtaining from him a grant to build on Mount Gerizim, near Samaria, a temple like that at Jerusalem,

and to make Manasseh, his son-in-law, high priest of it.

Sanballat having built this temple, and made Manasseh high priest of it, Samaria thenceforth became the common refuge and asylum of the refractory Jews; so that, if any among them were found guilty of violating the law, and in eating forbidden meats, the breach of the Sabbath, or the like, and were called to an account for it, they fled to the Samaritans, and there found reception.

By this means it came to pass that, after some time, the greatest part of that people were made up of apostate Jews and their descendants. The mixing of so many Jews among them soon made a change in their religion. For whereas they had hitherto worshiped the God of Israel only in conjunction with their other gods,—that is, the gods of those nations of the East from whence they came,—after a temple was built among them, in which the daily service was constantly performed in the same manner as at Jerusalem, and the book of the law of Moses was brought to Samaria, and there publicly read to them, they soon left off worshiping their false gods, and conformed themselves wholly to the worship of the true God, according to the rule which was in that book prescribed to them.

However, the Jews, looking on them as apostates, hated them above all the nations of the earth, so as to avoid all manner of converse and communication with them. This hatred first began from the opposition which the Samaritans made against them on their return from the Babylonish captivity, both in their rebuilding of the temple, and their repairing of the walls of Jerusalem, of which an account has been above given; and it was afterward much increased by this apostasy of Manasseh and those who joined with him in it, and by their erecting an altar and a temple in opposition to theirs at Jerusalem.

And all others who, at any time after fled from Jerusalem for the violation of the law, always finding reception among them, this continually further added to the rancor which the Jews had entertained against them, till it grew to that length that the Jews published a curse and an anathema against them, the bitterest that ever was denounced against any people.

For thereby they forbade all manner of communication with them, declared all the fruits and products of their land, and everything else of theirs which was either eaten or drunk among them, to be as swine's flesh; and prohibited all of their nation ever to taste thereof, and also excluded all of that people from ever being received as proselytes to their religion. (*Prideaux*)

This is why the woman of Samaria was so surprised when Jesus asked her to give him a drink of water; and she replied,

John 4

⁹ How is it that You, being a Jew, ask drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.

It also illustrates the force of that expression of the Jews to the Saviour:

John 8

⁴⁸ ...you are a Samaritan, and have a devil.

In their estimation, to be a Samaritan and to have a devil—be possessed—were the same thing.

14. Backsliding to Confirmed Apostasy

Signs of the Times, June 18, 1902

IN THE history of the restoration from the captivity to Babylon there is one notable thought that runs like a thread through the whole, that until now it could not be considered in its full strength of meaning.

That thought—that truth—is that after the first coming-out of Babylon, the real strength and hope of the cause of God lay in the other comings-out of Babylon, and not at all in any development or growth from within, of those who were not of Babylon and in the Lord's land, and possessed there of the full light of His Word, His prophets, and all the opportunities and blessings of His true worship.

The Course and Cause of Backsliding

The first coming-out of Babylon was a glorious deliverance; a wonderful manifestation of God's power and grace, both through the powers of the world and upon His people. The most perfect freedom in work and worship in the world, was theirs. Heaven and earth were united in their favor.

But instead of being absolutely swallowed up in pure devotion out of gratitude for all this wondrous favor of God, they soon began to drift into formality and worldliness. They neglected the cause and work of God and thought of worldly gain.

They so slighted the truth of God, so lost true love for it, that they neglected to instruct their own children. The children, therefore, easily swung into the ways of the heathen, into essential sympathy with the heathen, so that they could readily choose the heathen in marriage.

And the parents were themselves so in essential sympathy

with heathenism in principle, that they could readily assent to their children's marriage with the heathen, not seeing...

“...but that the children were about as well off as marrying the heathen as in marrying among their own people.”

And this was true, because by the general neglect of the parents among their own people, the young of their own people had grown up within the heathen, so that any vital difference was difficult to see. And yet in the presence of all the essential confusion, these people were willing to pride themselves on being “out of Babylon”:

“We have the truth. God speaks to us by prophets.”

And when down in Babylon devout souls, seeking the full truth, longing for light and freedom and for deliverance and redemption from the confusion and darkness around them, really found deliverance and came “out of Babylon” indeed, glad even to know that God was really speaking by living prophets to His people who were out of Babylon,—when these dear souls came, all expectant, up to Jerusalem to the people of God, as to the very gate of heaven, they were so disappointed and pained at the low and loose condition of the people in worship, in morals, and in mixing with the world, that they were made ashamed and to blush, and to lift up their faces to God in view of the iniquities that had increased over their heads, and trespasses that were grown up unto the heavens.

Spirituality Waning

Nevertheless by this second coming-out of Babylon—that under Ezra—there was a great revival sought, and the back-slidden people were again separated from corruptness and worldliness, and united once more to God.

But soon the power of the revival was allowed to wane; again the people drifted into the former condition of worldli-

ness, of money-getting, of neglect of the cause and work of God, and of marriage with the heathen.

The Final Coming-out and Apostasy

And still there were in Babylon devout souls, loving God, and longing to see His cause rise in its true dignity and power, and move prosperously in the world; souls longing for deliverance from the corruption of Babylon, into the light and freedom and place of God's own land, among God's people who were out of Babylon.

And again these were disappointed and groaned at the low and loose conditions of the people whom they thought to be out of Babylon; grieved at the neglect of the cause and work of God which those people professed, and grieved at the deplorable unity of heart and mixture of marriage between them and the open enemies of God and His cause and work in the world.

Nevertheless, again as the consequence of these comings-out of Babylon, there was a great revival, and a cleansing and a separating from the heathen, among the backslidden ones also professed to be "out of Babylon."

And still again, but now for the last time, the power and blessedness of the revival was allowed to wane, the people drifted into formalism, worldliness, love of money, neglect of the cause and work of God, and now—even worse than the confusion of marriages with the heathen—a confusion of relationships among themselves by the use and multiplying of divorce.

The backsliding was now so great that there was a total separation of their own interests from the cause and work of God, so much so that if they did for the cause so little a thing as the shutting of the doors of the house of God, or the kindling of a fire on His altar, they considered that they ought to

be paid for it; because that was “not their work,” but the work of those whose time was devoted to that and who consequently were paid for it.

When they made offerings to the Lord, instead of making them from the first and the best, it was from what was left after they had consumed upon themselves the first and the best—from the refuse, that would be unfit to offer to their human governor. Yes, and even when the first and best was still in their possession unconsumed—instead of making offerings from that, they would actually pick out that which was inferior, and make that their offering to the Lord.

And all this as a professed expression of their faith that God had given for their salvation and redemption of His First and Best! But in truth it was the expression of their unbelief in God’s having made, or that He would make, any true offering at all, but only the refuse, if any.

The Depth of Backsliding

The backsliding was now such that the priests, the ministers and teachers to the people, “departed out of the way,” and actually caused the people to stumble at the very law that they were set to teach.

They forgot the fear of God, and of course feared the people. Then they would not declare the clear and plain Word of God, for fear that the people would resent it and they would lose their place. For though the office of priest was of God, as a consequence of such example. the people, seeing that the priests had become political and were afraid of them, became themselves political and unruly, and would turn out of office even a priest who did not please them. Thus the priests did not keep the straight way of the truth, but practiced partiality in the law of the Lord, and so made the Lord “contemptible and base before all the people.”

The men dealt treacherously, committed abomination, and profaned the holiness of the Lord and the covenant of fatherhood, in dealing treacherously against the wife of their youth by divorcing her for another, and especially for a younger.

Malachi 2

¹⁶ For the Lord, the God of Israel, says that He hates putting away; for one covers violence with his garment, says the Lord of hosts; therefore take heed to your spirit, that you deal not treacherously.

They were so far backslidden from God that they would keep the tithe, paying it not at all; thus robbing God. They were so far in the dark that they actually drew comparisons between themselves and the wicked, to the advantage of the wicked. And when in their darkness and discontent with God, because of their own perverseness, they concluded that the wicked were having a better time than themselves, they declared (*Malachi 3:14-15*),

“It is vain to serve God, and there is no profit in trying to do right and walking mournfully before the Lord; for while we are doing this and having a hard and cheerless time of it, the proud are happy, the wicked are prospered, and they that actually go so far as to tempt God, are even delivered.”

Dead Formality

And with all this looseness of life, this darkness of spirit, this corruption of morals, they would go to meeting on the Sabbath, and go through the forms of worship, and pray, and weep; and they counted themselves very religious because of all this. But the Lord rebuked this with the rest of their iniquity, and declared that it was this formalism which was the cause of His rejecting their offerings.

Malachi 2

¹³ This have you done again, covering the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch

that He regards not the offering any more, nor receives it with good will of your hand.

But amidst this dark and dismal mass there were still a few, a little flock, who feared the Lord. These “spoke often one to another” (*Malachi* 3:16) of the goodness of the Lord, of the joy of serving Him, and the wealth of happiness found in the loving-kindness of the Lord.

Malachi 3

¹⁶ And the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name.

¹⁷ And they shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spares his own son that serves him.

Thus was it with the few; but as for the people themselves, the nation, they were gone. They had neglected the light and joy and blessing of the three messages of God calling out of Babylon; they had worn out the Lord’s good Spirit of reviving; they had confirmed themselves in backsliding.

All that is left for the Lord to do is by His prophet to testify to the real condition of things and the end thereof, close up His revelation, cease to speak, and let them reap what they had so persistently sown—the rejection of God when He came in the person of His Son to offer Himself finally for them; and then appeal directly to the heathen to whom they had persistently allied themselves, and whose salvation they had so long hindered by so allying themselves to them.

It was a wonderful thing to be delivered from Babylon, and brought to the freedom, and light, and joy, and blessing, of the Lord in His own chosen land. It was a wonderful thing to have God enlist in their favor all power of earth as well as of heaven. It was a wonderful thing that God should speak to them by living prophets.

And it was a most deplorable thing that they should allow the love of the world and fellowship of the heathen to frustrate and make utterly vain, so far as they were concerned, this whole tide of heaven which had been made to flow upon earth.

Luke 13

³⁴ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killed the prophets, and stoned them that were sent unto you; how often would I have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!

³⁵ Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

15. From Religious to Political

Signs of the Times, June 25, 1902

AFTER the time of *Malachi*, there is, strictly speaking, no such thing as a religious history of the Jews. God had closed His revelation, His voice was stilled. He spoke no more by prophets. The people had got entirely beyond the hearing of His voice.

They were already political in their religion; and it was not long before their religion itself became political, so that henceforth their history is simply political, tending steadily more and more to that dreadful hour in which they openly renounced every principle of religion, and openly proclaimed themselves political solely—in their savage exclamation, that awful night, to Pilate and to the universe,

John 19

¹⁵ ...We have no king but Caesar.

Nevertheless, God bore with them until that hour, and even beyond. He still abode with them, in spite of their sad misrepresentation of Him, in spite of their putting Him to an open shame.

For the sake of His promise to their fathers from ancient time, that from them the deliverer should come, He remained through all their unfaithfulness, the Faithful One.

Yet their history from *Malachi* onward is but a part, rather an incident, of the general history of empire in the East. And in this general history of empire, God continued to reveal Himself to fulfill His Word, and to shape all things to the accomplishment of His eternal purpose.

God had revealed Himself to Nebuchadnezzar, and had been accepted by him as the one true God and the everlasting King.

And Nebuchadnezzar proclaimed Him as such to all peoples, nations, and languages.

God revealed Himself to Darius the Mede, and was also accepted and proclaimed by him to all peoples, nations, and languages.

God next revealed Himself to Cyrus, and by him likewise God was accepted and proclaimed to all nations as “the God.” As we have seen, the influence of Cyrus for this God and for His worship in the earth, continued to shape the course of his successors, Cambyses, Darius, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes.

We have seen that in the days of Cyrus, the angel Gabriel abode at the Persian court; and he said that he would continue there till the time of the coming of the prince of Grecia, of which the angel had already spoken to Daniel.

Daniel 8

²¹ And the rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king.

Daniel 10

²⁰ Then said he, Do you know why I come unto you? and now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia: and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Grecia shall come.

And the Persian court was becoming worse and worse, and more and more unbearable. We have seen that Darius Nothus came to the throne by the murder of his predecessor, who had obtained the same throne by the murder of his predecessor.

This Darius was succeeded by his son Artaxerxes without murder on his part, but not without his brother’s attempting to murder him. Artaxerxes was succeeded by his son Ochus,

“the most cruel and wicked of all the princes of his race, as his actions soon evinced. In a very short time the palace and the whole empire were filled with his murders.”

He was poisoned by one of his ministers, Bagoas by name, who also slew all the king's sons but the youngest, whom he made king, but whom in two years he murdered. Bagoas then placed upon the throne Darius Colomannus. Him also he shortly attempted to poison; but was detected, and was required to drink his own prepared poisoned drink to prove his innocence.

In such a desperately corrupt place as the court of Persia had now become, the angel could no longer stay. Corruption had reached its height. Gabriel left the horrible place, lo! the prince of Grecia came, and the Persian empire sank.

Alexander, "the prince of Grecia," in his siege of Tyre, had demanded assistance from the Jews. The Jews pleaded that they were lawful subjects of the Persian king who was yet reigning; that all that they were, as a nation, they owed, under God, to the favor of the Persian kings; and that therefore they could not consent to oppose the Persian king.

This made Alexander very angry, and he declared against the Jews and Jerusalem vengeance in destruction and desolation. He started toward Jerusalem to execute his wrath. The people were greatly troubled. The high priest proclaimed a fast, and that supplications be made to God. God accepted their appeal, and instructed the high priest in a dream to go forth with his assistant priests, arrayed in their priestly garments, and all the other people clothed in white, to meet the coming king, as he should approach the city.

The procession extended a long distance outside the city. When Alexander

...saw the multitude at a distance, in white garments, while the priests stood clothed in fine linen, and the high priest in purple and scarlet clothing, with his miter on his head, having the golden plate whereon the name of God was engraved, he approached by himself and adored that name, and first

saluted the high priest. The Jews also did all together with one voice salute Alexander, and encompassed him about. Whereupon the king of Syria and the rest were surprised at what Alexander had done, and supposed him disordered in his mind.

However, Parmenio alone went up to him and asked him how it came to pass that when all others adored him, he should adore the high priest of the Jews? To whom he replied,

I did not adore him, but that God who has honored him with His high priesthood. I saw this very person in a dream, in this very habit, when I was at Dios in Macedonia; who, when I was considering with myself how I might obtain the dominion of Asia, exhorted me to make no delay, for that He would conduct my army, and would give me the dominion over the Persians; whence it is that having seen no other in that habit, and now seeing this person in it, and remembering that vision, and the exhortation which I had in my dream, I believe that I bring this army under the Divine conduct, and shall therewith conquer Darius, and destroy the power of the Persians, and that all things will succeed according to what is in my mind.⁶

Alexander then placed the high priest at his right hand, and walked at the head of the procession, that was now joined by his army, into the city, and up to the temple, where “he offered sacrifice to God according to the high priest’s direction.”

There also the high priest read to him, from the book of *Daniel*, the prophecy concerning him; and Alexander acknowledged that he was the one referred to in the prophecy. Oh that Alexander had yielded himself to this call from God, as did Cyrus!

When Alexander’s career had ended, and his dominion was broken up, the Jews submitted to whatever king happened to hold Palestine as part of his dominion, though it happened

⁶ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, Book II, Chapter 8.

that for the most part they fell under the power of the kings of Syria—the Seleucids.

One of them, Seleucus Philopater, sent his chief officer to ask the people at Jerusalem of its treasures. The priests and people of the whole city threw themselves down before God, imploring Him to defend His holy house. As the officer had entered the temple court, and was about to break open the treasury,

...the Spirit of the Almighty revealed Himself by the most sensible marks; insomuch that all those who had dared to obey Heliodorus were struck down by a divine power, and seized with a terror which bereaved them of all their faculties. For there appeared to them a horse richly caparisoned which, rushing at once upon Heliodorus, struck him several times with his forefeet. The one who sat on this horse had a terrible aspect, and his arms seemed of gold. At the same time there were seen two young men, whose beauty dazzled the eye, and who, standing on each side of Heliodorus, scourged him instantly, and in the most violent manner....By the same power he was cast to the ground speechless.⁷

That was the last time, however, that the temple was so protected and defended, though it was more than once entered and robbed by heathen.

A few years afterward, king Antiochus Epiphanes captured the city by storm, and gave it up to plunder and slaughter for three days, in which about eighty thousand were slain, forty thousand were made prisoners, and forty thousand were sold as slaves. The king himself entered the temple, and even into the most holy place, and robbed the temple of its golden furniture and all the treasure therein. But before all this, there had gone out of Israel...

...wicked men who persuaded many, saying, Let us go and

⁷ Rollin, *Ancient History*.

make a covenant with the heathen that are round about us; for since we departed from them we have had much sorrow. So this device pleased them well. Then certain of the people were so forward herein that they went to the king, who gave them licenses to do after the ordinances of the heathen; whereupon they built a place of exercise at Jerusalem according to the customs of the heathen.⁸

And the sack, slaughter, slavery, and the robbery of the temple were their reward.

Next Antiochus Epiphanes issued an edict, commanding that all the people of his dominion should be of one and the same heathen religion, and all recognize only heathen laws; and this under penalty of death. This, of course, was aimed directly at the Jews.

Many of them obeyed the edict of the king, and persecuted those of their own people who would not obey it. The king also filled Jerusalem with idol altars, upon which he sacrificed abominable things; he also put to death those who would circumcise their children, or who refused to eat swines flesh and other abominable things.

Driven to desperation by these horrible things practiced upon his people, a certain Mattathias, a ruler and a great and honorable man in the city of Modin, revolted, and with his five sons fled to the mountains. They were joined by all who rejected the king's throne.

Not long afterward Mattathias died; but before his death he solemnly enjoined upon his sons that they stand true to the laws of Israel and to fight against the king. He commanded them to let his son Judas be their captain. This Judas was surnamed Maccabeus. Thus came the Maccabean wars, and what is called "the Maccabean Revival." The origin of this Maccabean Revival was religious, but it shortly became political.

⁸ 1 Maccabees 1:11-14.

The Maccabees were wonderfully successful in their wars; but firmly to fix forever their power and standing, they sought an alliance with the Romans, BC 161. And that their motive in this was absolutely political is clear from their own record of it, which runs as follows:

Now Judas had heard of the fame of the Romans, that they were mighty and valiant men; and such as would lovingly accept all that joined themselves unto them, and make a league of amity with all that came unto them; and that they were men of great valor. It was told him also of their wars and noble acts which they had done among the Galatians [the Gauls], and how they had conquered them, and brought them under tribute; and what they had done in the country of Spain, for the winning of the mines of the silver and gold which is there; and that by their policy and patience they had conquered all the place, though it were very far from them; and the kings also that came against them from the uttermost part of the earth, till they had discomfited them, and given them a great overthrow, so that the rest did give them tribute every year.

Beside this, how they had discomfited in battle Philip, and Perseus, king of the Citims [Macedonians], with others that lifted up themselves against them, and had overcome them: how also Antiochus [Magnus] the great king of Asia, that came against them in battle, having a hundred and twenty elephants, with horsemen, and chariots, and a very great army, was discomfited by them; and how they took him alive, and covenanted that he and such as reigned after him should pay a great tribute, and give hostages, and that which was agreed upon, and the country of India, and Media and Lydia and of the goodliest countries, which they took of him, and gave to king Eumenes.

Moreover how the Grecians had determined to come and destroy them; and that they, having knowledge thereof sent against them a certain captain, and fighting with them slew many of them, and carried away captives their wives and their children, and spoiled them, and took possession of their

lands, and pulled down their strong holds, and brought them to be their servants unto this day.

It was told him besides, how they destroyed and brought under their dominion all other kingdoms and isles that at any time resisted them; but with their friends and such as relied upon them they kept amity: and that they had conquered kingdoms both far and nigh, insomuch as all that heard of their name were afraid of them: also that, whom they would help to a kingdom, those reign; and whom again they would, they displace: finally, that they were greatly exalted: yet for all this none of them wore a crown or was clothed in purple, to be magnified thereby.

Moreover how they had made for themselves a senate house, wherein three hundred and twenty men sat in council daily, consulting always for the people, to the end they might be well ordered: and that they committed their government to one man every year, who ruled over all their country, and that all were obedient to that one, and that there was neither envy nor emulation among them.

In consideration of these things, Judas chose Eupolemus the son of John, the son of Accos, and Jason the son of Eleazar, and sent them to Rome, to make a league of amity and confederacy with them, and to entreat them that they would take the yoke from them; for they saw that the kingdom of the Grecians did oppress Israel with servitude. They went therefore to Rome, which was a very great journey, and came into the senate, where they spoke and said:

Judas Maccabeus with his brethren, and the people of the Jews, have sent us unto you, to make a confederacy and peace with you, and that we might be registered your confederates and friends.

So that matter pleased the Romans well. And this is the copy of the epistle which the senate wrote back again in tables of brass, and sent to Jerusalem, that there they might have by them a memorial of peace and confederacy:

Good success be to the Romans, and to the people of the Jews, by sea and by land for ever: the sword also and enemy

be far from them, if there come first any war upon the Romans or any of their confederates throughout all their dominion, the people of the Jews shall help them, as the time shall be appointed, with all their heart; neither shall they give any thing unto them that make war upon them, or aid them with victuals, weapons, money, or ships, as it has seemed good unto the Romans; but they shall keep their covenants without taking any thing therefore.

In the same manner also, if war come first upon the nation of the Jews, the Romans shall help them with all their heart, according as the time shall be appointed them: neither shall victuals be given to them that take part against them, or weapons, or money, or ships, as it has seemed good to the Romans; but they shall keep their covenants, and that without deceit.

According to these articles did the Romans make a covenant with the people of the Jews. Howbeit if hereafter the one party or the other shall think to meet to add or diminish any thing, they may do it at their pleasures, and whatsoever they shall add or take away shall be ratified. And as touching the evils that Demetrius does to the Jews, we have written unto him, saying, Wherefore you made your yoke heavy upon our friends and confederates the Jews? If therefore they complain any more against you, we will do them justice, and fight with you by sea and by land.⁹

Thus was solicited and obtained, by the Jews, that connection with the Romans which brought the utter ruin of the Jewish nation, and the desolation of their land, by the power of the Romans.

⁹ 1 Maccabees 8.

16. The Scepter Departs from Judah

Signs of the Times, July 2, 1902

IN THE year 130 BC, the king of Syria was slain in a battle with the Parthians. Then John Hyrcanus, the high priest of the Jews,

...took the advantage of the disturbances and divisions that thenceforth ensued...to make himself absolute and wholly independent. For after this, neither he nor any of his descendants owned any further dependence on the kings of Syria; but thenceforth wholly freed themselves from all manner of homage, servitude, or subjection to them.¹⁰

And thus the government of the new independent country of Judea was merged in the high priests in succession, the high priest being the head of both religion and the State.

In the year 129 BC, this same high priest conquered the Idumeans,—Edomites,—and...

...reduced them to this necessity, either to embrace the Jewish religion or else to leave the country, and seek new dwellings elsewhere.

They chose to adopt the Jewish religion rather than be driven from their country. But under such circumstances they were as much Idumeans as before, except only in the forms of worship.

About the year 128 BC, Hyrcanus sent an embassy to Rome...

...to renew the league of friendship they had with the Romans. And when the Senate had received their epistle, they made a league of friendship with them, [and] decreed to renew their league of friendship and mutual assistance with

¹⁰ Prideaux.

these good men, and who were sent by a good and friendly people.¹¹

In the year 106 BC, Aristobulus, the eldest son of John Hyrcanus, regularly succeeded to the high-priesthood, and, being also the head of the State, resolved...

...to change the government into a kingdom, [and] first of all put a diadem on his head, four hundred and eighty-one years and three months after the people had been delivered from Babylonish slavery, and were returned to their own country again.¹²

This piece of worldly ambition opened among the Jews the flood-gates of jealousy, strife, assassination, and domestic war, which evils were, if possible, more indulged than among the nations around.

After Aristobulus, Alexander Janneus reigned; and after him his widow, Alexandra. While Alexandra was queen, Hyrcanus, the eldest son of Janneus, was high priest.

At the court there was a shrewd and ambitious Idumean, Antipater by name. He studiously gained the ascendant over Hyrcanus. This he did in the hope that when Hyrcanus should become king at the death of his mother, he himself would virtually rule the kingdom.

However, when the time actually came, Antipater saw all his plans upset by the revolt of Aristobulus II., the brother of Hyrcanus. For Hyrcanus was defeated in a battle, and was obliged to resign to Aristobulus the office of high priest and king. Yet Antipater did not despair; he immediately set on foot, and persistently wrought an intrigue to replace Hyrcanus upon the throne.

¹¹ Josephus.

¹² Josephus.

Under the Roman Power

Such was the condition of affairs in Judea when Pompey came into Syria of Damascus. To Pompey at Damascus came ambassadors from both Hyrcanus and Aristobulus—Antipater the Idumean on behalf of Hyrcanus, and more for himself. Also there came ambassadors from the people to make representations against both Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, and to plead that the kingship be abolished and the governorship be only in the high priest as such. Pompey heard them all; but deferred the decision until he should arrive in Judea.

By the time that Pompey reached Judea, Aristobulus had taken a course greatly to offend him. But Pompey coming to Jerusalem, Aristobulus repented and went out to meet him, and offered to receive him into the city and give him money. But the partisans of Aristobulus would not accept this arrangement. They stationed themselves at the temple and prepared for a siege.

The siege of the temple was promptly begun by Pompey; but he was obliged to spend three months of hard work and fierce fighting before it was taken. However, when the temple was finally taken, Pompey refrained from plundering it of its wealth or of anything, though he passed into the most holy place within the veil.

Judea was now held in subjection, and laid under tribute, to the Roman power, from which she never escaped except by annihilation.

Now the occasions of this misery which came upon Jerusalem were Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, by raising a sedition one against the other; for now we lost our liberty, and became subject to the Romans, and were deprived of that country which we had gained by our arms from the Syrians, and were compelled to restore it to the Syrians. Moreover the Romans exacted of us, in a little time, above ten thousand tal-

ents [about \$12,000,000]; and the royal authority, which was a dignity formerly bestowed on those that were high priests by the right of their family, became the property of private men.

Pompey committed Coele-Syria, as far as the river Euphrates and Egypt, to Scaurus with two Roman legions, and then went away to Cilicia, and made haste to Rome.¹³

Joppa, Gaza, and other coast towns were added to the province of Syria, which was the cause of that province's reaching to Egypt. Thus the Euphrates was made by Pompey the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire.

As the cause of Hyrcanus had been represented throughout by Antipater the Idumean, he succeeded in so gaining the favor of Pompey and the Romans that he sustained confidential relations with them and with Pompey's successor in the East, Gabinius, who...

...settled the affairs which belonged to the city of Jerusalem, as was agreeable to Antipater's inclination.¹⁴

When Gabinius...

...came from Rome to Syria as commander of the Roman forces,

...there was in his army a young officer named Mark Antony. In Judea young Alexander, the son of Aristobulus, had...

...suddenly got together ten thousand armed footmen and fifteen hundred horsemen, and fortified Alexandrium, a fortress near Coreae, and Macherus, near the mountains of Arabia.

In subduing the revolt of Alexander, Antony and Antipater

¹³ Josephus.

¹⁴ Josephus.

were brought into such relationship that a firm friendship was established between them, and which in after years, out of a curious combination of events wholly undreamed of now by either of them, had a positive bearing upon one of the most significant occurrences in the world's history.

In the Roman civil war, 49-47 BC, Caesar was obliged to follow Pompey to Egypt, and to war in Egypt and the East. While Caesar was in Egypt, Antipater the Idumean became of great service to him; for he and Mithridates, king of Pergamus, were chiefly instrumental in bringing Egypt into complete subjection to Caesar. And when they had taken, and in a severe engagement had subdued...

...the whole Delta, Mithridates sent an [announcement] of this battle to Caesar, and openly declared that Antipater was the author of this, and of his own preservation, insomuch that Caesar commended Antipater then, and made use of him all the rest of that war in the most hazardous undertakings; he also happened to be wounded in one of these engagements. However, when Caesar, after some time, had finished that war and was sailed away from Syria, he honored Antipater greatly, and confirmed Hyrcanus in the high-priesthood, and bestowed on Antipater the privilege of Rome, and freedom from taxes everywhere.¹⁵

The Decree of the Roman Senate

And when one came to Caesar with accusations against Hyrcanus and Antipater, hoping to have himself put in their places, again Caesar appointed Hyrcanus to be high priest, and gave Antipater what principality he himself should choose, leaving the determinations himself; so he made him procurator of Judea.

He also gave Hyrcanus leave to raise up the walls of his own city, upon his asking that favor of him; for they had been

¹⁵ Josephus.

demolished by Pompey. And this grant he sent to the consuls of Rome, to be engraven in the capitol. The decree of the Senate was this that follows:

Caius Caesar, consul the fifth time, has decreed: That the Jews shall possess Jerusalem, and may compass that city with walls; and that Hyrcanus, the son of Alexander, the high priest and ethnarch of the Jews, retain it, in the manner he himself pleases; and the Jews be allowed to deduct out of their tribute, every second year the land is let (in the sabbatic period), a corus of that tribute; and that the tribute they pay be not let to farm, nor that they pay always the same tribute.

Antipater the Idumean...

...was in great repute with the Idumeans also; out of which nation he married a wife, who was the daughter of one of their eminent men, and her name was Cypros, by whom he had four sons—Phasael, and Herod, who was afterward made king, and Joseph, and Pheroras, and a daughter named Salome.

Antipater made Phasaelus, his eldest son, governor of Jerusalem and the places that were about it, but committed Galilee to Herod, his next son, who was then a very young man; for he was but twenty-five years of age. But as he was a youth of great mind, he presently met with an opportunity of signalizing his courage. For, finding there was one Hezekiah, a captain of a band of robbers, who overran the neighboring parts of Syria with a great troop of them, he seized him and slew him, as well as a great number of the other robbers that were with him, for which action he was greatly beloved by the Syrians.

For when they were very desirous to have their country freed from this nest of robbers, he purged it of them; so they sung songs in his commendation in their villages and cities, as having procured them peace and the secure enjoyment of their possessions. And on this account it was that he became known to Sextus Caesar, who was a relative of the great Caesar, and was now president of Syria.

Caesar spent the time till the autumn of 47 setting things in order in Egypt and the East, then he returned to Rome, where, in 44, he was murdered. Then within two years Octavius Caesar and Mark Antony held the world under their power; and to Antony there fell the task of gathering from the wealth of Asia the enormous sum of \$170,000,000 for the payment of the troops.

This need and greed of Antony for money stood Herod of Judea in good stead. For when ambassadors from all parts met Antony in Bithynia, among them...

...the principal men of the Jews came to accuse [Herod and his brother Phasaelus, and to charge that though] Hyrcanus had indeed the appearance of reigning, these men had all the power. But Antony paid great respect to Herod, who was come to him to make his defense against his accusers, on which account his adversaries could not so much as obtain a hearing, which favor Herod had gained of Antony by money.¹⁶

To Antony in Cilicia there came again...

...a hundred of the most potent of the Jews to accuse Herod and those about him, and set the men of the greatest eloquence among them to speak. [But] when Antony had heard both sides at Daphne, he asked Hyrcanus who they were that governed the nation best. Hyrcanus replied, 'Herod and his friends.' Hereupon Antony, by reason of the old hospitable friendship he had made with his father [Antipater], made both Herod and Phasaelus tetrarchs, and committed the public affairs of the Jews to them, and wrote letters to that purpose.¹⁷

Antony went with Cleopatra to Alexandria, BC 41. Fulvia, his wife, died in the spring of 40. Antony's giddy infatuation with the voluptuous queen of Egypt was fast estranging him

¹⁶ Josephus.

¹⁷ Josephus.

from Octavius and the Roman people. The matter was patched up for a little while by the marriage of Antony and Octavia, the sister of Octavius, BC 40; and...

...the triumvirs returned to Rome to celebrate this union.¹⁸

Troubles of Herod

In the same year, at the instance of a certain Antigonus, the Parthians made an incursion into Judea, gained possession of Jerusalem, and captured Hyrcanus and Phasaelus, with many of their friends. But Herod with his betrothed, with some of his family and a number of his friends, accompanied by a strong guard, all escaped and made their way to Petra in Idumea.

Thus by means of the Parthians, Antigonus obtained the power in Judea. He cut off the ears of Hyrcanus so that, being maimed, he could not, according to the law, hold the high-priesthood. Phasaelus being imprisoned, and knowing he was devoted to death,

...since he had not his hands at liberty,—for the bands he was in prevented him from killing himself thereby,—he dashed his head against a great stone, and thereby took away his own life.

Herod shortly went from Idumea to the king of Arabia, and from there to Egypt, stopping first at Pelusium. There the captains of the ships befriended him and took him to Alexandria, where Cleopatra received him and entertained him;

...yet was she not able to prevail with him to stay there, because he was making haste to Rome, even though the weather was stormy, and he was informed that the affairs of Italy were very tumultuous and in great disorder.

Having through violent storms, severe reverses, and much

¹⁸ Duruy.

expense, reached Rome,

...he first related to Antony what had befallen him in Judea, [and how] that he had sailed through a storm, and contemned all these terrible dangers, in order to come, as soon as possible, to him who was his hope and only succor at this time.

This account made Antony commiserate the change that had happened in Herod's condition. And, reasoning with himself that this was a common case among those that were placed in such great dignities, and that they are liable to the mutations that come from fortune, he was very ready to give him the assistance that he desired; and this because he called to mind the friendship he had had with Antipater; because Herod offered him money to make him king, as he had formerly given it to him to make him tetrarch; and chiefly because of his hatred to Antigonus, for he took him to be a seditious person and an enemy to the Romans.

Caesar [Octavius] was also the forwarder to raise Herod's dignity, and to give him his assistance in what he desired, on account of the toils of war which he had himself undergone with Antipater his father in Egypt, and of the hospitality he had treated him withal, and the kindness he had always shown him, as also to gratify Antony, who was very zealous for Herod.

So the Senate was convocated; and Messala first and then Atratinus, introduced Herod into it, and enlarged upon the benefits they had received from his father, and put them in mind of the goodwill he had borne to the Romans. At the same time they accused Antigonus, and declared him an enemy, not only because of his former opposition to them, but that he had now overlooked the Romans, and taken the government from the Parthians.

Upon this the Senate was irritated; and Antony informed them further that it was for their advantage in the Parthian War that Herod should be king. This seemed good to all the senators, and so they made a decree accordingly.

When the Senate was dissolved, Antony and Caesar went

out of the Senate house with Herod between them, and with the consuls and other magistrates before them, in order to offer sacrifices, and to lay up their decrees in the capital.

Antony also feasted Herod the first day of his reign. And thus did this man receive the kingdom, having obtained it on the one hundred and eighty-fourth Olympiad [July, 40 BC], when Caius Domitius Calvinus was consul the second time, and Caius Asinius Pollio the first time.¹⁹

And thus when Herod, a full-blooded Idumean, had become king of Judea, the scepter had departed from Judah, and a law-giver from between his feet; and the time was at hand when Shiloh should come, to whom the gathering of the people should be.

Genesis 49

¹⁰ The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be.

¹⁹ Josephus.

Appendix: The Samaritans

Signs of the Times, July 14, 1887

Question: "Please give an explanation of *John 4:20*."

John 4

²⁰ Our fathers worshiped in this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.

THESE are the words of the woman of Samaria to Jesus, as he talked with her at the well. Samaria was a hill that 925 years before Christ belonged to a man by the name of Shemer. When Omri had reigned as king of Israel six years in Tirzah, he bought this hill from Shemer for two talents of silver, and built a city on the hill:

1 Kings 16

²⁴ And he bought the hill Samaria of Shemer for two talents of silver, and built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill, Samaria.

Omri thus made it the capital of the kingdom of Israel, and it remained the capital of the ten tribes as long as they were a kingdom.

About 740 BC, Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, carried captive a part of the ten tribes. *2 Kings 15:29*. About 721 BC, Samaria fell after a siege of three years by the Assyrians, and Sargon, a king of Assyria, destroyed Samaria and carried the remainder of the ten tribes captive unto Assyria, and placed them in Halah, and in Habor, by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. Then to re-people the land...

2 Kings 17

²⁴ [He] brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children

of Israel.

But by taking the inhabitants away, the lions had multiplied in the land. And when he brought up the new people the lions slew some of them. Then they sent word to the king of Assyria that, as they did not know the manner of the God of that land, the lions were slaying them, and asked him to send up there some of the priests who had been carried away captive, so that they should teach the newcomers the way of the God of the land. The king did so, and the priests taught them how they should fear the Lord. So then they all feared the Lord, so as to have him keep the lions off, and went on worshipping their own gods. So:

2 Kings 17

³⁰ The men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima,

³¹ And the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burnt their children in the fire to Aarammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim.

It will be seen at once that this introduced a mixed and most corrupt worship. Afterward there were some Arabians transported there by Sargon, and several peoples by Esar-haddon. *Ezra* 4:2, 9, 10.

When the children of Israel returned from the captivity of Babylon, BC 535, these people of Samaria proposed to join with them in rebuilding the temple and in re-establishing the worship of God. But Zerubbabel and Joshua and their companions would have nothing to do with them.

Then the Samaritans set about to hinder the work all they possibly could, and even hired counselors against them at the court of the kings of Persia, all the time of Cyrus and Cambyses. And thus began an enmity between the two peoples, that never was quenched, but which grew more and more bitter as ages passed by.

The efforts of the Samaritans were in vain with Cyrus and Cambyses, but when the impostor Smerdis came in, they succeeded in obtaining a decree from him putting a stop to the work at Jerusalem. So it ceased for about two years, till the second year of Darius Hystaspes, BC 520. Then the prophets Haggai and Zechariah stirred up the Jews against to go to building. But no sooner had they begun to build than the Samaritans were on hand again to stop them.

There was a new governor over them, however, by this time, and he appears to have been a very honest man himself, he sent to Darius an honest account of the matter, and the effect of it was to bring a decree that not only should they let the work at Jerusalem go on, but that they should help speedily with money from the king's tribute, and with bullocks, rams, and lambs, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, all that was needed at Jerusalem. *Ezra* 4-6.

After this the Jews were bothered no more by the Samaritans for about seventy years, till Nehemiah went up to Jerusalem to complete the work. Then they tried their best to get the advantage of him, but failed at every effort, which only increased their bitterness.

This was at Nehemiah's first visit to Jerusalem. But he returned to the court of Persia and stayed several years, and then went up again to Jerusalem. There he found that in his absence the Jews had intermarried with the heathen, and even with the Samaritans. Eliashib the priest had actually brought Tobiah the Ammonite to Jerusalem and had set him up at housekeeping in the chambers of the temple of God. And one of Eliashib's grandsons had married a daughter of Sanballat the Horonite, who seems to have been then governor of Samaria.

When Nehemiah arrived at Jerusalem, and found matters thus, he pitched all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the

chambers that had been given him, and commanded the chambers to be cleansed. Then he made all the Jews who had strange wives put them away. But this grandson of the high priest, Manasseh by name, who had married Sanballat's daughter, would not give her up, therefore Nehemiah chased him clear out of Jerusalem. Then Manasseh went with his wife over to Samaria to Sanballat, as also did others who, like Manasseh, clung to their heathen wives, and rebelled against the authority of Nehemiah.

In BC 409, Sanballat obtained from Darius Nothus a grant to build on Mount Gerizim near Samaria, a temple like that at Jerusalem, and he made this Manasseh the high priest of the temple and its worship. Thus the enmity became still more bitter, and continued so down to the time of the Saviour, by which time the hatred was so bitter that when the Pharisees would apply to Jesus the most bitter epithet that they could command, it was:

John 8

⁴⁸ You are a Samaritan, and have a devil.

And Jesus when giving in a parable an example of perfect obedience to the divine command to love our neighbor as ourself, pictured an instance of a Samaritan helping a Jew. And in this same conversation with the woman of Samaria, as Jesus sat on the well, the woman came, and he asked her to give him a drink. She was surprised that he, a Jew, should speak to her, a Samaritan, and so she asked:

John 4

⁹ How is it that you, being a Jew, ask drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.

When Sanballat and Manasseh built that temple on Mount Gerizim, there was thenceforth a false worship there as rival to the true worship in Jerusalem. At first it was the mixed

worship of the idolatrous Samaritans and apostate Jews.

But this was not only a place of rival worship, but it became an asylum for all the rebellious, discontented Jews, and by this means it came about in the course of time that the worshipers there were mostly made up of apostate Jews and their descendants, and as the Pentateuch was used in the Samaritan temple, and as the service was made as near like that at Jerusalem as possible, the worship of the false gods was soon dropped entirely, and the Samaritans claimed to be the true people of God, and claimed that Mount Gerizim, and not Jerusalem, was the place which God had chosen, that there Abraham and Jacob had built altars and worshiped God, and that therefore theirs was the true temple and the true worship.

And that is why it was that the woman said to Jesus,

John 4

²⁰ Our fathers worshiped in this mountain [the mountain was right over their heads]; and you [that is, the Jews] say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.

That also was why Jesus replied to her:

John 4

²² You worship you know not what; we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews.

Their worship was a false, corrupt worship from the beginning, and Jesus exposed it all in a word, "You worship you know not what."

