

MARCH 14, 1907 THE RETURN OF THE EXILES--No. 1

THE END OF SEVENTY YEARS (TO BE CONCLUDED)

"Soon after the fall of Babylon and the beginning of the universal empire of Medo-Persia, in **the first year of the reign of Darius the Mede**, Daniel the prophet '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.' {par. 1}

"Daniel and his companions had been taken to Babylon 'in **the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim** king of Judah.' [**Dan 1:1**] They were members of the first company of captives whom Nebuchadnezzar brought from Jerusalem into the land of Shinar. **Daniel was well acquainted with the prophecies of Jeremiah at the time they were given** [**Jer 25:12 - Kim, Jer 29:10 - Zed**], and he had passed through the periods immediately succeeding the first and the second sieges of Jerusalem, when many false prophets had arisen with the claim that the captivity was to be of short duration. {par. 2}

"In the fourth year of Jehoiakim,' [**Jer 25:1**] very soon after Daniel was taken to Babylon, Jeremiah predicted the captivity of many of the Jews, as their punishment for not heeding the word of the Lord. The Chaldeans were to be used as the instrument by which God would chastise his disobedient people. Their punishment was to be in proportion to their intelligence and to the warnings they had despised. 'This whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment,' the prophet declared; 'and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the Lord, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations.' [**Jer 25:11-12**]{par. 3}

"In the light of these plain words foretelling the duration of the captivity, it seems strange that any one should hold that the Israelites would soon return from Babylon. And yet there were in Jerusalem and in Babylon those who persisted in encouraging the people to hope for a speedy deliverance. God dealt summarily with some of these false prophets, and

thus vindicated the truthfulness of Jeremiah, his messenger. {par. 4}

"To the end of time, men will arise to create confusion and rebellion among the people who profess to obey the law of God. But as surely as divine judgment was visited upon the false prophets in Jeremiah's day, so surely will the evil workers of today receive their full measure of retribution, for the Lord has not changed. Those who prophesy lies, encourage men to look upon sin as a light thing. When the terrible results of their evil deeds are made manifest, they seek, if possible, to make the one who has faithfully warned them responsible for their difficulties, even as the Jews charged Jeremiah with their evil fortunes. {par. 5}

"Those who pursue a course of rebellion against the Lord can always find false prophets who will justify them in their acts, and flatter them to their destruction. Lying words often make many friends, as is illustrated in the case of these false teachers among the Israelites. These so-called prophets, in their pretended zeal for God, found many more believers and followers than the true prophet who delivered the simple message of the Lord. {par. 6}

"In view of the work of these false prophets, Jeremiah was directed by the Lord to write letters to the captains, elders, priests, prophets, and all the people who had been taken captive to Babylon, bidding them not to be deluded into believing their deliverance nigh, but to submit quietly, pursue their vocations, and make for themselves peaceful homes among their conquerors. The Lord bade them not to allow so-called prophets or diviners to deceive them with false expectations. Through his servant Jeremiah he assured them that after seventy years' bondage they should be delivered, and should return to Jerusalem. God would listen to their prayers and show them his favor, when they would turn to him with all their hearts. 'I will be found of you, saith the Lord: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the Lord; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.' {par. 7}

"With what tender compassion did God inform his captive people of his plans for Israel! He knew what suffering and disaster they would have to undergo, were they led to believe, according to the prediction of the false prophets, that they should be speedily delivered and brought back to Jerusalem. He knew that this belief would make their position a very

difficult one. Any effort on their part to regain freedom would awaken the vigilance and severity of the king, and their liberty would be restricted in consequence. The Lord desired them to submit quietly to their fate, and make their servitude as pleasant as possible. {par. 8}

{RH, March 14, 1907}



MARCH 21, 1907 THE RETURN OF THE EXILES -- NO. 1

THE END OF SEVENTY YEARS (CONCLUDED)

"A copy of the letters sent by Jeremiah to the Hebrew captives in Babylon, and of the letters sent by the false prophets to these captives and to the authorities of Jerusalem, together with a story of the controversy between the true and false, is found in the twenty-seventh to the twenty-ninth chapters of Jeremiah. {par. 1}

"It was immediately after this interchange of letters between Jeremiah and the elders of the Israelites in captivity, that the prophet was instructed to write in a book all that had been revealed to him regarding the restoration of Israel. This is recorded in the thirtieth and the thirty-first chapters of Jeremiah. {par. 2}

"These, with the prophecies of the twenty-fifth chapter, are the letters and the records that Daniel the prophet, during 'the first year of the reign of Darius the Mede,' prayerfully studied, three-score years and more after they were written. Daniel was familiar with the circumstances connected with Jeremiah's testimonies given very soon after the beginning of the Babylonian captivity. He well knew that the promise of the return was sure; and yet, a short time before, 'in the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar,' the angel of the Lord had instructed him in vision, 'Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.' {par. 3}

"Daniel 'sought for the meaning' of the vision. He could not understand the relation sustained by the seventy years' captivity to the twenty-three hundred years that were to elapse before the cleansing of God's sanctuary. Gabriel gave a partial interpretation; and when he declared that the vision 'shall be for many days,' Daniel fainted. 'I Daniel fainted,' the prophet writes, 'and was sick certain days; afterward I rose up, and did the king's business; and I was astonished at the vision; but none understood it.' {par. 4}

"In his perplexity, Daniel studied anew the prophecies of Jeremiah. They were very plain,--so plain that he 'understood' by these testimonies recorded in 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.' {par. 5}

"With faith founded on the sure word of prophecy, Daniel pleaded with the Lord for the speedy restoration of the captive exiles to the land of their fathers. 'I set my face unto the Lord God,' he declares, 'to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: and I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession.' 'We have sinned,' he acknowledged; 'neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.' {par. 6}

"O Lord, according to all thy righteousness,' the prophet pleaded, 'let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us. Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, harken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.' {par. 7}

"The prayer of Daniel was not offered in vain. Even before he had finished pleading with God, Gabriel again appeared to him, and called his attention to the vision he had seen prior to the fall of Babylon at the death of Belshazzar. The angel then outlined in detail the period of the seventy weeks, beginning at the time of 'the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem.' {par. 8}

"Daniel's prayer in behalf of his people, as recorded in the ninth chapter, was 'in the first year of Darius' the Mede. Darius was favored of heaven; for in the first year of his reign the angel Gabriel 'stood

up to confirm and to strengthen him.' It was this king who, early in the establishment of the Medo-Persian empire, 'set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princess, which should be over the whole kingdom; and over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first... This Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm.' {par. 9}

"Darius reigned over Medo-Persia two years after the fall of Babylon. During this time, Daniel was cast into the lions' den and came out unharmed. This deliverance led Darius to write 'unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, That

in every dominion in my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and steadfast forever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.' {par. 10}

"Thus, while those who had remained loyal to God in the midst of Babylon were seeking the Lord and studying the prophecies foretelling their deliverance, God was preparing the hearts of kings to show favor to his repentant people. {par. 11}

{RH, March 21, 1907}



MARCH 28, 1907 THE RETURN OF THE EXILES--No. 2

THE DECREE OF CYRUS

"Over a century before the birth of Cyrus the Great, the prophet Isaiah was inspired to mention this ruler even by name, and to write a prophecy outlining his work, as recorded in the forty-fifth of Isaiah: -- {par. 1}

"Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, 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; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: and I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have summoned thee, though thou hast not known me. {par. 2}

"I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: 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. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.' {par. 3}

"Cyrus, he is my shepherd,' the Lord declared, 'and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.' 'I have raised him up 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, saith the Lord of hosts.' {par. 4}

"The year that Cyrus succeeded Darius the Mede to the throne of Medo-Persia marked the completion of seventy years since the first company of Hebrews had been carried captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel, who was familiar with the prophecies of Jeremiah and Isaiah regarding the duration of the captivity, and with the prophecies of Isaiah regarding the restoration by decree of Cyrus, was still living, and was occupying a position of

leading responsibility in the Medo-Persian court. His faith in these prophecies led him to plead with God in behalf of his people. And now, when the time came for the temple in Jerusalem to be rebuilt, God moved upon Cyrus as his agent to discern the prophecies concerning himself, and to grant the Jewish people their liberty. And furthermore, Cyrus furnished them the necessary facilities for rebuilding the temple of the Lord. {par. 5}

"In the book of Ezra is found an account of this work of Cyrus, and a copy of his decree:-- {par. 6}

"In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah the prophet might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. 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. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, besides the free-will offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.' {par. 7}

"Let the house be builded, 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; with three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king's house: and also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is in Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored, and brought again unto the temple which is at Jerusalem, every one to his place, and placed there in the house of God.' {par. 8}

"The Lord God omnipotent reigneth. All kings, all nations, are his, under his rule and government. His resources are infinite. The wise man declares, 'The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.' {par. 9}

"Those upon whose actions hang the destinies of nations, are watched over with a vigilance that knows no relaxation by him who 'giveth salvation unto kings,' to whom belong 'the shields of the earth.' {par. 10}

"There were faithful servants of the Most High who were prepared to respond to this decree. Over threescore years before, the Lord had declared that 'after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return... Then shall ye call upon me,' the Lord declared, 'and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will harken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the Lord: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the Lord; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.' Those who were seeking the Lord were prepared to take advantage of the wonderful opportunity afforded them by Cyrus to return to their homes and to restore the temple of God. {par. 11}

"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. 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, besides all that was willingly offered. {par. 12}

"Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods; even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. And this is the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives, thirty basons of gold, silver basons of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand. 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.' {par. 13}

"The company that returned to Jerusalem was led by Zerubbabel (Sheshbazzar), a descendant of King David, and appointed by the king as governor of the restored Israelites. Associated with him were Joshua the high priest, and several of 'the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites.' 'The whole congregation together' that returned to the land of their fathers, under Zerubbabel, 'was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore, 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. Their horses were seven hundred thirty and six; their mules, two hundred forty and five; their camels, four hundred thirty and five; their asses, six thousand seven hundred and twenty. {par. 14}

"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: they gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pounds of silver, and one hundred priests' garments. 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.' {par. 15}

"Soon after their return, in 'the seventh month,' 'the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. Then stood up Joshua the son of Josedech, and his brethren,... and builded 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. 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. {par. 16}

"They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required; and afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the Lord that were reconsecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering

unto the Lord. From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the Lord. {par. 17}

"But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid. {par. 18}

"They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia.' {par. 19}

"The faithful remnant who had returned were greatly cheered and encouraged by the re-establishment of the daily burnt offerings; and they now entered heartily into the preparation necessary for the rebuilding of the temple, in order that they might restore all the ancient services of the house of God. {par. 20}

{RH, March 28, 1907}



APRIL 11, 1907 THE RETURN OF THE EXILES -- NO. 3

AN OCCASION FOR REJOICING

"As preparations for building the temple advanced from month to month, the faithful remnant of Israel began to gather courage. Long had they been deprived of every visible token of God's presence with them. And now, surrounded as they were by many sad reminders of the terrible apostasy of their fathers, which had finally resulted in lifelong captivity, they longed for some abiding token of divine forgiveness and favor. Above the restoration of personal property and many ancient privileges, they valued the approval of God. Wonderfully had he wrought in their behalf; and now they longed for an assurance of his pardoning love and protecting care. By working diligently to rebuild the temple, they hoped to hasten the restoration of special blessings connected with the sanctuary service. Within the walls of this second temple they expected to see revealed the glory of the Lord {par. 1}

"Wise plans for the prosecution of the work were laid by Zerubbabel the governor, Joshua the high priest, and their associates in authority. They 'appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the Lord.' 'All they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem' responded nobly, and with willing hands began to prepare the building material. Some of the immense stones brought to the temple site in the days of Solomon, had escaped destruction at the hands of the Babylonians. These stones were made ready for use, and much new material was provided. {par. 2}

"The foundation-stone of the temple was laid amid scenes of great rejoicing. Accompanied by the trumpets of the priests and the cymbals of the sons of Asaph, the people 'sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because he is good, for his mercy endureth forever toward Israel.' {par. 3}

"The sentiment of this hymn of praise and thanksgiving is that expressed in the one hundred and thirty-sixth psalm--a most appropriate recognition of God's merciful providences in behalf of the children of the captivity:-- {par. 4}

"O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever. {par. 5}

"O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy endureth forever. {par. 6}

"O give thanks to the Lord of lords: for his mercy endureth forever. {par. 7}

"To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth forever. {par. 8}

"To him that by wisdom made the heavens;' 'that stretched out the earth above the waters;' 'that made great lights;' 'the sun to rule by day,' 'the moon and stars to rule by night,'--to him, the Creator of all these, the congregation of Israel gave thanks, acknowledging that 'his mercy endureth forever.' {par. 9}

"To him that smote Egypt in their first-born,' 'and brought out Israel from among them,' 'with a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm;' 'to him which divided the Red Sea into parts,' 'and made Israel to pass through the midst of it,' 'but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea;' 'to him which led his people through the wilderness;' 'to him which smote great kings,' 'and slew famous kings,' 'Sihon king of the Amorites,' 'and Og king of Bashan,' 'and gave their land for an heritage,' 'even an heritage unto Israel his servant,'--to him, the Mighty Leader of the hosts of Israel, the returned exiles now rendered praise as the One whose mercy endureth forever. {par. 10}

"And this same Mighty Leader is the One who hath 'remembered us in our low estate,' 'and hath redeemed us from our enemies.' O, let us ever 'give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy endureth forever!' {par. 11}

"The laying of the corner-stone of the second temple should have called forth expressions of gratitude from every heart. The house that was about to be built was the subject of many prophecies. The Lord's servants, and especially those who had had long experience in the things of God, should have recounted the remarkable providences leading up to

the work that was being done; and they should have entered heartily into the spirit of the occasion. Especially should all the aged have rejoiced because God in his mercy had not cut them off in their iniquities at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar. Throughout the long period of captivity they had been spared, and now they were permitted to witness this scene of rejoicing. {par. 12}

"But mingled with the music and the shouts of praise ascending on that glad day, was a discordant note of sorrow and dissatisfaction. '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.' Among the aged men who had seen the glory of Solomon's temple, there were some who lamented and wept over the inferiority of the building that was now to be erected. {par. 13}

"It was but natural and right that these aged men should have feelings of sadness because of the results of long-continued impenitence. Had they and their generation obeyed God and carried out his purpose for Israel, the temple built by Solomon would not have been destroyed, and the captivity would not have been necessary. It was because of their former ingratitude and disloyalty, that they had been scattered among the heathen. Through long years of exile they were brought to realize the sacredness of God's law and the sinfulness of disobedience. {par. 14}

"But conditions were now changed. In tender mercy the Lord had once more visited his people, and had allowed them to return to their own land. Feelings of sadness because of the mistakes of the past should have given place to feelings of joy. In a remarkable way God had moved upon the heart of King Cyrus to aid them in rebuilding the temple at Jerusalem, and this should have called forth

expressions of profound gratitude. But some failed of discerning God's opening providences. Instead of rejoicing, they entertained thoughts of discontent and discouragement. {par. 15}

"This spirit of murmuring and complaining, and of making unfavorable comparisons, had a depressing influence on the minds of many. The expressions of doubt and discouragement weakened the hands of the builders. The workmen were led to question whether they should proceed with the erection of a building that at the beginning was so freely criticized and was the cause of so much lamentation. {par. 16}

"There were many in the congregation, however, who did not look upon the lesser glory of this temple, as compared with the first temple, with such dissatisfaction. 'Many shouted aloud for joy: 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.' {par. 17}

"Our words and actions have a far-reaching influence for good or for evil. Could those who failed to rejoice at the laying of the foundation-stone of the temple, have foreseen the results of their mournful conduct on that day, they would have been appalled. Little did they realize the weight of their words of disapproval and disappointment. Little did they foresee how much they delayed the final completion of the Lord's house. {par. 18}

"O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!' 'Praise ye the Lord. O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever.' 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the Lord.' {par. 19}

{RH, April 11, 1907}



APRIL 25, 1907 RETURN OF THE EXILES--No. 4

"THE ADVERSARIES OF JUDAH AND BENJAMIN"

"From the time the foundation-stone of the second temple was laid, Satan brought to bear upon the builders many influences that greatly hindered the rapid prosecution of the work. The enemy did not have far to go in order to find men through whom to carry out his evil designs. Close by the Israelites, a few miles northward, dwelt the Samaritans. {par. 1}

"More than a century before the beginning of the Babylonish captivity, the Assyrian kings had devastated Samaria and Galilee, and had taken into captivity many thousands of Israelites belonging to the ten tribes. The conquering kings repopulated Samaria with colonies of heathen peoples from widely separated parts of the Assyrian realm. These heathen intermarried with the Israelites who had been allowed to remain in the land; and thus originated a mixed race known as the Samaritans. {par. 2}

"In later years, the Samaritans claimed to worship the true God; but in heart and practise they were idolaters. It is true, they held that their idols were only to remind them of the living God, the ruler of the universe; nevertheless the people were led to reverence their graven images. {par. 3}

"These idolatrous Samaritans were 'the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin.' About the time of the laying of the corner-stone, they 'heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the Lord God of Israel.' Coming 'to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers,' they expressed their desire to join them in its erection. 'Let us build with you,' they proposed, 'for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither.' This privilege was refused them. 'Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God,' the leaders of the Israelites declared; 'but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel, as King Cyrus of Persia hath commanded us.' {par. 4}

"In the light of the circumstances surrounding the remnant people of God in the days of Zerubbabel, this decision reveals the character of the leaders of Israel at that time. Only a feeble remnant had chosen to return from Babylon; and now, as they

undertake a work seemingly beyond their strength, their nearest neighbors come with an offer to help. The Samaritans refer to their worship of the true God, and express a desire to share in the privileges and blessings connected with the temple service. 'We seek your God, as ye do,' they declared. 'Let us build with you.' {par. 5}

"Had the Jewish leaders accepted this offer of assistance, they would have opened a door for the entrance of idolatry. They discerned the insincerity of the Samaritans. They realized that all the help that could be gained through an alliance with men, would be as nothing in comparison with the prosperity that would accompany strict obedience to the plain commands of Jehovah. {par. 6}

"Regarding their relations with surrounding peoples, the Lord had declared to ancient Israel through Moses: 'Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them: neither shalt thou make marriages with them;... for they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly.' {par. 7}

"'Thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations... Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which I command thee this day, to do them.' {par. 8}

"The result that would follow a breaking of their covenant with God, and an entrance into

covenant relation with surrounding nations, was plainly foretold through Moses: 'The Lord shall scatter you among the nations,' he declared, 'and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the Lord shall lead you. And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell. But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.' Precious assurance! Then follows the promise to the penitent, that God would not forsake them, nor forget the covenant that he had made with their fathers. {par. 9}

"Zerubbabel and his associates were familiar with these scriptures. Their fathers had lost sight of the sacred relationship that should ever exist between God and his chosen people. Forgetting their solemn covenant with the Lord of hosts, they had entered into covenant relation with heathen nations. The prophecies of Moses were literally fulfilled. The chosen nation was scattered among heathen nations. And only a remnant, 'few in number,' had repented and turned to God. Only a few had renewed their covenant with him, and had returned to restore that which had been destroyed because of the disobedience of their fathers. And now, having solemnly rededicated themselves to the Lord at the ancient altar set up before the ruins of his temple, should they, at the very beginning of their work, enter into a covenant with a people who worshiped idols? {par. 10}

"Thou shalt make no covenant with them.' God's servants in responsibility realized that the line of demarcation between his people and the people of the world is ever to be kept unmistakably distinct. They refused to be guided by the counsel of those who for years had known the requirements of God's law, but who had refused to yield to its claims. {par. 11}

"The principles set forth in Deuteronomy for the instruction of Israel, are to be followed by God's people to the end of time. Our prosperity is dependent on the continuance of our covenant relationship with God. In no instance can we afford to compromise principle by entering into covenant with those who fear not God. {par. 12}

"There is constant danger that professed Christians will come to think that in order to have influence with worldlings, they must conform to the world to a certain extent. But although the propositions of Satan may appear to afford great advantages, as did the offer of the Samaritans to assist in the construction of the temple, they always end in spiritual ruin. God's people must guard against every subtle influence that is seeking entrance by means of flattering inducements from the enemies of his truth. {par. 13}

"We are pilgrims and strangers in this world, traveling a path beset with dangers from those who have rejected the only One who can save them. Ingenious subterfuges and scientific problems will be held out before us, to tempt us to swerve from our allegiance, but we are not to heed them. Every one must seek God for himself. {par. 14}

"It is not always open and avowed enemies that are most to be feared. We shall have enemies who come, like 'the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin,' with smooth words and fair speeches, and who would deceive if possible the very elect. It is thus that Satan often works; and again, when it suits his purpose, he goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. {par. 15}

"Let every soul be on the alert. The adversary is on your track. Vigilantly watch lest some carefully concealed and masterly snare take you unawares. Let the careless and indifferent beware lest the day of the Lord come upon them as a thief in the night. Many will wander from the path of humility, and, casting aside the yoke of Christ, will walk in strange paths. Blinded and bewildered, they will leave the narrow path that leads to the city of God. {par. 16}

"A man can not be a happy Christian unless he is a watchful Christian. He who overcomes must watch; for with worldly entanglements, error, and superstition, Satan strives to win Christ's followers from him. It is not enough that we avoid glaring errors and perilous, inconsistent moves. We are to keep close to the side of Christ, walking in the path of self-denial and sacrifice. We are in an enemy's country. He who was cast out of heaven has come down with great power. With every conceivable artifice and device he is seeking to take souls captive.

Unless we are constantly on guard, we shall fall an easy prey to his deceptions. {par. 17}

"In the closing scenes of this earth's history, when intensity is taking possession of every earthly element, the Lord requires of us a vigilance that knows no relaxation. But we are not left to struggle alone. Amid the dangers increasing on every hand, those who walk humbly before God, distrustful of their own wisdom, will have angels as their helpers and protectors. In times of special peril they will know the power of God's keeping care. Those who do not realize their danger because they do not watch, will pay, with the loss of their souls, the penalty of their presumption and their wilful ignorance of Satan's devices. {par. 18}

"Let us trust fully, humbly, unselfishly, in God. We are his children, and he deals with us as such. When we draw near to him, and renew our covenant with him, he mercifully preserves us from the assaults of the enemy. Never will he betray one who trusts in him as a child trusts in its parents. He sees the humble, trusting souls drawing near to him, and in pity and love he draws near to them, and lifts up for them a standard against the enemy. Touch them not, he says; for they are mine. I have graven them upon the palms of my hands. He teaches them to exercise unquestioning faith in his power to work in their behalf. With assurance they say, 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.' {par. 19}

{RH, April 25, 1907}



DECEMBER 5, 1907 THE RETURN OF THE EXILES -- No. 5

LOSS THROUGH DELAY

"During the earlier years of the restoration of the Jews from Babylon, the Samaritans were untiring in their opposition. They 'weakened the hands of the people in Judah, and troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius.' By their false reports they aroused suspicions in minds easily led to suspect. At times, the rulers in authority seemed to be influenced to work against the purposes of God. But for many years the influences for evil were held in check, and the people of God had liberty to continue their work. {par. 1}

"Throughout these years, Satan was striving to influence the highest powers of the kingdom of Medo-Persia to show disfavor to God's people. It was Satan who prompted the Samaritans to persevere in their opposition. But angels of God were working in behalf of the returned exiles, and all heaven was intensely interested in the controversy. In the tenth chapter of Daniel is given a glimpse of this mighty struggle waged for many years between the forces for good and the forces for evil. {par. 2}

"In this vision of the prophet, the angel Gabriel declared: '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.' For three weeks Gabriel had been wrestling with the powers of darkness, and seeking to counteract the influences at work on the mind of King Cyrus. Before the contest closed, Christ himself came to Gabriel's help. All that heaven could do in behalf of the people of God, was done. The victory was finally gained, and the forces of the enemy were held in check all the days of Cyrus, who reigned for seven years, and all the days of his son Cambyses, who reigned about seven years and a half. {par. 3}

"This was a period of wonderful opportunity for the Jews. While the highest agencies of heaven were working on the hearts of kings, the people of God might have been most active in carrying out the decree of Cyrus to restore the temple and its services, and in re-establishing themselves in their Judean

homes. But many failed of co-operating with God. In the day of his power, they proved unwilling. {par. 4}

"The opposition of the enemies of God's truth was strong and determined. Gradually the builders lost heart. Some could not forget the scene at the laying of the corner-stone, when 'many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men,' and who had seen the temple that Solomon built, gave expression to their lack of faith in the enterprise by lamenting because of the seeming inferiority of the plans for this second temple. And as the Samaritans grew more and more bold, many of the Jews began to question whether, after all, the time had come for rebuilding. This feeling soon became widespread. Many of the workmen, disheartened and discouraged, returned to their homes, and engaged in the ordinary pursuits of life,--in sowing and reaping, and in building and beautifying houses for themselves. {par. 5}

"During the reign of Cambyses, the work on the temple progressed very slowly. Finally, in the brief reign of the false Smerdis (named Artaxerxes in **Ezra 4:7**), the Samaritans induced the unscrupulous impostor to issue a decree forbidding the Jews to rebuild their temple and city. {par. 6}

"For over a year the temple was neglected,--well-nigh forsaken,--while the people dwelt in their homes, and labored to attain temporal prosperity; but their situation was deplorable. Work as they might, they could not prosper. The very elements of nature seemed to conspire against them. A drought prevailed, and the harvests were meager. {par. 7}

"These were the conditions existing during the early part of the reign of Darius Hystaspes, king of Medo-Persia. Spiritually as well as temporally, the Israelites were in a pitiable state. So long had they murmured and doubted; so long had they chosen to make their personal interests first, while they viewed with apathy the Lord's temple in ruins, that many had lost sight of God's purpose in restoring them to Judea. {par. 8}

"For a time, the forces of evil seemed to triumph. But even this dark hour in the history of God's people was not without hope for those whose trust was in the Lord God of Israel. {par. 9}

"In tender compassion, the Lord wrought in a marked manner to save his chosen people from utter spiritual ruin. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah were raised up to meet the crisis. In stirring testimonies these appointed messengers of God revealed to the people the cause of their troubles. Their lack of temporal prosperity was the result of their neglect to consider God's interests first. By honoring God and by showing him due respect and courtesy, through the building of his house, they would have invited his presence and blessing. {par. 10}

"In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built.' {par. 11}

"The expression, 'This people say,' is significant. In the hour of their opportunity, the Israelites had not shown themselves willing. Prompt obedience is expected of those whom the Lord chooses and leads. Pleas for delay are a dishonor to God. And yet those who choose to follow their own way, often frame ingenious excuses in self-justification. Thus the Israelites declared that they had begun to rebuild, but that they were broken off in their work because of the hindrances devised by their enemies. These hindrances, they reasoned, were an indication that it was not the proper time to rebuild. They declared that the Lord had interposed difficulties to reprove their hot haste. This is why, in a communication through his prophet, he referred to them not as 'my people,' but as 'this people.' {par. 12}

"The Israelites had no real excuse for leaving their work on the temple. The time when the most serious objections were raised, was the time for them to persevere in building. But they were actuated by a selfish dislike to encounter danger by arousing the opposition of their enemies. They did not possess the faith that is the substance of things hoped for, the

evidence of things not seen. They hesitated to move forward by faith in the opening providences of God, because they could not see the end from the beginning. When difficulties arose, they were easily turned from the work. {par. 13}

"This history will be repeated. There will be religious failures because men do not have faith. When they look at the things that are seen, impossibilities appear; but God can lead them step by step in the course he desires them to take. His work will advance only as his servants move forward by faith. While they may be called upon to pass through trying times, yet they should ever remember that they are contending with a weakened, beaten foe. God's people will finally triumph over every power of darkness. {par. 14}

"Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways.' Why have you been so passive? Why have you done so little? Why do you feel concern for your own buildings, and unconcern for the Lord's building? Why have you lost the burning zeal you once manifested in behalf of the restoration of the Lord's house? What have you gained by serving self at the sacrifice of the best interests of God's cause? The desire to escape poverty has led you to neglect the temple; but this very neglect has brought upon you that which you feared. Nothing has prospered. 'Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.' {par. 15}

"The Lord calls upon them to consider the situation carefully. 'Consider your ways,' he repeats. 'Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord.' He gives the reason for their having been brought to actual want: 'Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. 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 bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labor of the hands.' {par. 16}

"How striking is the contrast between the prompt obedience of the things of nature, and the slothful disobedience of men, those for whom Christ has died! The Lord calls upon the dew and the rain and the varied agencies of nature, and they obey his call, to be used either in blessings or in judgments. Inanimate nature is represented as being shocked at man's disregard for God's word. God calls for famine and plague and pestilence, for calamities by sea and by land, to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. In response to the call of God, the things of nature spring to do his bidding, either in wasting and destruction or in mercies and blessings. {par. 17}

"Because the Israelites let God's house lie waste, the Lord sent upon all their substance a wasting drought. This judgment affected not only all the fruits of the ground, but the living creatures as

well. The cattle must suffer because of the sins of men. God has bestowed on his remnant people the fruits of field and garden, the corn and the wine and the oil, as a token of his favor. It was because of the sins of Israel, the Lord declared through Haggai his messenger,--because the people had used all these bountiful gifts so selfishly,--that the blessings were removed. {par. 18}

"The messages of counsel and reproof given through Haggai were taken to heart by the leaders of Israel and 'all the remnant of the people.' Roused by these warnings, 'Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, 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.' {par. 19}

{RH, December 5, 1907}



DECEMBER 12, 1907 THE RETURN OF THE EXILES -- NO. 6

"I AM WITH YOU, SAITH THE LORD"

"The messages of Haggai led the people to feel that the Lord was in earnest with them. They dared not disregard repeated instruction that their prosperity, both temporal and spiritual, was dependent on faithful obedience to the commands of the God of heaven. As soon as they decided to obey 'the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him,' the messages of reproof that had been given were followed by words of encouragement. {par. 1 }

"Then spake Haggai the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord.' {par. 2 }

"How comforting are these words! The Lord God omnipotent, who reigneth in the heavens, declares, 'I am with you.' He assures his people that those who are obedient are in a position where he can bless them, to the glory of his name. And if God's people today choose to rely on him, and believe in him, he will bless them. He will be a present help to all who serve him in preference to serving self. When the Lord sees that his people have a heart to do his will, he will cause them to know of the doctrine. He will be with them. {par. 3 }

"The presence of God includes every other blessing. He who abides under the shadow of the Almighty can well say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust;' for of every such an one the Lord declares: 'Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation.' {par. 4 }

"Having assured the Israelites of his presence, '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, in the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.' {par. 5 }

"In less than a month after the work on the temple was resumed, the Lord in mercy sent to the builders another comforting message regarding his presence with them. He inspired Haggai to explain to them wherein the glory of the house they were now building was to exceed the glory and magnificence of the former house. It was because of the promised presence of him who is the Desire of nations. {par. 6 }

"In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the Lord by the prophet Haggai, saying, Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying, Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts: according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.' {par. 7 }

"In this comforting message, the prophet refers to the promise of God given through Moses while the Israelites were encamped before Mount Sinai, when he declared: 'I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the Lord their God.' Throughout the wilderness-wandering the Lord had revealed 'great goodness toward the house of Israel,' which he 'bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his loving-kindnesses. For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the Angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.' {par. 8 }

"And now, notwithstanding the fact that repeatedly they have 'rebelled, and vexed his Holy

Spirit,' God again in his infinite mercy stretches out his hand to save and to restore. As a recognition of their co-operation with his purposes, he renews his covenant with them that his Spirit shall remain among them; and he bids them, 'Fear not.' To his children today, as in days of old, he says 'Be strong, . . . and work: for I am with you.' What an assurance! What an incentive to faithful service! {par. 9}

"Haggai now prophesies regarding the first advent of Christ, to which event the Israelites were looking forward with longing expectancy: 'Thus saith 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; and I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.' {par. 10}

"The outward glory of the temple was not the glory of the Lord. Instruction was given as to what constituted the blessing that was to rest upon the temple. Its restoration in a plainer style than that of the first temple, was to place before the people in a proper light their past error in depending upon the pomp and splendor of outward form and ceremony. The temple was to be erected at this time, also, to remove the reproach of their disloyalty to God. Haggai instructed the people that by heartfelt repentance and by a speedy completion of the temple,

they were to seek to be cleansed from the sin of disobedience that had led away from God and had delayed the carrying out of the command to arise and build. {par. 11}

"During the time of delay, the people had not been spiritually sharp-sighted. They had seen many things that they desired to do for themselves, to advance personal interests. Many had spent much time and had put forth laborious effort in beautifying their own homes while taking but little thought for the house of God. Haggai strengthened himself in the Lord of hosts, and presented his message plainly both to the religious and to the civil authorities, as well as to the people. He felt that the Lord's work must no longer be hindered, but that all must obey implicitly, and carry out fully the purposes of God in restoring them from Babylon to the promised land. {par. 12}

"In neglecting the temple, which was the mirror of God's presence, the people had greatly dishonored God. They were now instructed to hold his house in sacred honor, not because of its magnificence, as did the Jews in the days of Christ, but because God had promised to be there. And this second temple was to be superior to the first because in a special sense the Messiah would honor it with his personal presence. '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.' {13}

{RH, December 12, 1907}



DECEMBER 19, 1907 THE RETURN OF THE EXILES--No. 7

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

"Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet,' began to prophesy 'in the eighth month, in the second year of Darius'--only a few days after the Lord had assured the Israelites through Haggai that the glory of the house they were building would be greater than the glory of the former temple built by Solomon. Zechariah's first message was an assurance that God's word never fails, and a promise of blessing to those who harken unto the sure word of prophecy. {par. 1}

"The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers,' the God of Israel declared unto Zechariah: 'therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts: Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts: Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor harken unto me, saith the Lord. Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live forever? 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 hath he dealt with us.' {par. 2}

"The Israelites has resumed the work of the Lord in faith. The difficulties under which they began to labor were of a most discouraging nature. Adversity had attended their efforts to attain temporal prosperity. Their fields were lying waste; their scant store of provisions was rapidly failing. Yet in the face of famine, and surrounded by unfriendly peoples, they moved forward in response to the call of God's messengers, and began anew to restore the ruined temple. Such a work required great faith, and the Lord gave them special assurances through Haggai and Zechariah that their faith would be richly rewarded, and that his word would not fail. The builders were not left to struggle on alone; 'with them were the prophets of God helping them;' and the Lord of hosts himself had declared, 'Be strong,... and work: for I am with you.' {par. 3}

"The Lord, in mercy, warned his people against the danger of falling back into their old ways of negligence and selfish indifference. He revealed to them the necessity of worshipping him in the beauty of holiness. In former years some whose hearts were polluted with sin had sought to please him with the splendor of many rites and ceremonies in the beautiful temple built by Solomon; but their worship was not pleasing to the God of whom it is written: 'Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity.' {par. 4}

"In the dark days of apostasy before the captivity, God had declared to his impenitent people: 'I hate, I despise your feast days... Though ye offer me burnt-offerings and your meat-offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts.' 'For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings.' {par. 5}

"The Israelites who were so diligently engaged in rebuilding the Lord's house, needed to realize constantly that 'the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?' 'Thus saith the high and holy One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.' {par. 6}

"In order that the builders of the second temple might make no mistakes, the Lord plainly instructed them, in the form of a parable, regarding the nature of service acceptable in his sight. About a month after Zechariah began to prophesy, and just three months after the people had resumed work on the temple, 'in the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts: Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying, If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or

pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. {par. 7 }

"Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean.' {par. 8 }

"A soul corrupted by sin is represented by the figure of a dead body in a state of putrefaction. All the washings and sprinklings enjoined in the ceremonial law were lessons in parables, teaching the necessity of a work of regeneration in the inward heart for the purification of the soul dead in trespasses and sins, and also the necessity of the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. {par. 9 }

"Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the Lord; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean.' {par. 10 }

"A mere participation in religious services and ordinances does not make a sinner a Christian. A wicked man does not become righteous merely by associating with those who fear God. A man is made holy, and acceptable with God, only when his unclean heart is made clean by the grace of Christ, through faith, and by obedience to words of truth and righteousness. A work of reformation and restoration must take place in every heart. Those who have had great light and many privileges may perform some good works, notwithstanding their impenitence and their refusal to be saved in God's appointed way. But these good works do not cleanse the soul from corruption. Only those who accept the light of God's truth, choosing to obey him, will be cleansed from the defilement of sin. {par. 11 }

"Having admonished the builders not to fall into the same error that had brought their forefathers into trial and captivity, and had resulted in the destruction of the first temple, Haggai continued:-- {par. 12 }

"And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord: since those days were, when one came to an heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the press-fat for to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were

but twenty. I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labors of your hands; yet ye turned not to me, saith the Lord. 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. Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig-tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive-tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless you.' {par. 13 }

"Wonderful promise! Wonderful assurance of divine favor! Never, never, by their own efforts, could the Israelites have become pure and holy. But when, sinful and polluted as they were, the sport of their enemies, and suffering because of a terrible drought, they turned to the Lord in humility of heart, confessed their sins, and chose to obey the testimonies of his messengers, God recognized their effort to carry out his instruction, and he accepted them as his obedient children. He accepted them not because of their zeal and good works, but because of their faith in the power of the coming Saviour to cleanse from sin. {par. 14 }

"On the day when rich blessings were promised the Israelites because of their faith and their willing obedience, a message was given to Zerubbabel, their leader. The word of the Lord came unto Haggai,... saying, Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I will shake the heavens and the earth; and I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen; and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother. In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the Lord, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts.' {par. 15 }

"This personal testimony to Zerubbabel has been left on record for our special encouragement in time of trial. Zerubbabel had been sorely tried through all the years since he had led the Israelites forth from Babylon. God has a purpose in sending trial to his children. He never leads them otherwise than they would choose to be led if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling. He subjects them to

discipline to humble them,--to lead them, through trial and affliction, to see their weakness and to draw near unto him. As they cry to him for help, he responds, saying, 'Here am I.' {par. 16}

"Christians are Christ's jewels. They are to shine brightly for him, shedding forth the light of his loveliness. Their luster depends on the polishing they receive. They may choose to be polished or to remain unpolished. But every one who is pronounced worthy of a place in the Lord's temple must submit to the polishing process. Without the polishing that the Lord gives they can reflect no more light than a common pebble. {par. 17}

"Christ says to man, You are mine. I have bought you. You are now only a rough stone, but if you will place yourself in my hands, I will polish you, and the luster with which you shall shine will bring honor to my name. No man shall pluck you out of my hand. I will make you my peculiar treasure. On my coronation day, you will be a jewel in my crown of rejoicing. {par. 18}

"The divine Worker spends little time on worthless material. Only the precious jewels does he polish after the similitude of a palace, cutting away all the rough edges. This process is severe and trying; it hurts human pride. Christ cuts deep into the experience that man in his self-sufficiency has regarded as complete, and takes away self-uplifting from the character. He cuts away the surplus surface, and putting the stone to the polishing, wheel, presses it close, that all roughness may be worn away. Then, holding the jewel up to the light, the Master sees in it a reflection of himself, and he pronounces it worthy of a place in his casket. {par. 19}

"In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee,... and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts.' Blessed be the experience, however severe, that gives new value to the stone, and causes it to shine with living brightness. {par. 20}

{RH, December 19, 1907}



DECEMBER 26, 1907 THE RETURN OF THE EXILES -- NO. 8

DAYS OF ANXIETY

"Stirring were the times during which Israel worked by faith to restore the temple of Jerusalem. Through the messages delivered by Haggai and Zechariah, the people were roused to put forth every possible effort to build. As they labored, they were sadly harassed by the Samaritans and others who feared not God. {par. 1}

"The enemies of the faithful builders devised many discouraging hindrances. The provincial officers of the Medo-Persian realm visited the returned exiles, and requested them to state the name of the one who had commanded them to rebuild. If the Jews at that time had not been trusting the Lord for guidance, this inquiry made by men high in authority might have resulted disastrously to the builders. 'But 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.' The officers were answered so wisely that they decided to write a letter to Darius Hystaspes, king of Medo-Persia, directing his attention to the original decree made by Cyrus, commanding that the house of God at Jerusalem be builded, and that the expenses for the same be paid from the king's treasury. {par. 2}

"Darius searched for this decree, and found it, whereupon he directed those who had made inquiry, '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. {par. 3}

"Moreover,' Darius declared, 'I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered. 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: that they may offer sacrifices of sweet savors unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons.' {par. 4}

"The king further decreed that most severe penalties be meted out on any who should in any wise alter the decree; and he closed with the remarkable statement: 'The God that hath 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.' {par. 5}

"Thus the Lord, in his providence, prepared the way for an early completion of the temple. But for months before this decree was made, the Israelites had kept on working by faith, 'the prophets of God helping them.' {par. 6}

"Just two months after Haggai's last recorded message was delivered, Zechariah had a most encouraging series of visions regarding the work of God in the earth. These messages, written out in the first six chapters of the book of Zechariah, were given in the form of parables and symbols. They came at a time of great uncertainty and anxiety, when it seemed as if the permission granted the Jews to rebuild was to be withdrawn. The future appeared very dark. God saw that his people were in need of being sustained and cheered by a revelation of his infinite compassion and love. His testimonies at this time were of peculiar significance to the men who were advancing in the name of the God of Israel. {par. 7}

"After an introductory view of the nations having universal dominion in the earth, Zechariah hears 'the angel of the Lord' inquiring, 'O Lord of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? And the Lord answered the angel that talked with me,' Zechariah declares, 'with good words and comfortable words. {par. 8}

"So the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts: I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. 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. {par. 9}

"Therefore thus saith the Lord: I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the Lord of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem.' {par. 10}

"The prophet is now directed to cry out saying, 'Thus saith 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.' {par. 11}

"Next the prophet sees the powers that had 'scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem,' symbolized by 'four horns.' Immediately afterward he sees 'four carpenters,' representing the agencies used by the Lord in restoring his people and the house of his worship, as decreed by Cyrus and his successors, as well as by God himself. {par. 12}

"'I lifted up mine eyes again,' says Zechariah, 'and looked, and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof. And, behold, the angel that talked with me went forth, and another angel went out to meet him, and said unto him, Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: for I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.' {par. 13}

"God had commanded that Jerusalem be rebuilt, and the measuring of the city was a symbol that he would give comfort and strength to his afflicted ones. His protecting care, they were assured, would be like 'a wall of fire round about.' O, how compassionate is our Heavenly Father! What comfort and hope there are in his promises! {par. 14}

"The prophet is now inspired with an earnest message to the children of Israel who are still in Babylon, the land of their captivity. At the time the decree of Cyrus was given, nearly a score of years before, only a comparatively small number, a mere 'remnant,' had returned to Judea. By far the greater portion had failed of discerning the opening providence of God, as revealed in the decree of King

Cyrus. They had chosen to remain behind, in a heathen land, rather than to return to Jerusalem. {par. 15}

"And now, many years later, the Lord was preparing the way for these thousands who had lingered, to return. A chain of circumstances was rapidly leading to the confirmation of the decree of Cyrus and the issuance of a second decree by Darius Hystaspes. The Lord foresaw the troublous times that would soon follow in the reign of Xerxes--the Ahasuerus of the book of Esther. And so, in a time of special favor and opportunity, the message was given through Zechariah: -- {par. 16}

"'Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north, saith the Lord: for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven, saith the Lord. Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon. For thus saith the Lord of hosts: After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye. For, behold I will shake mine hand upon them, and they shall be a spoil to their servants: and ye shall know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me.' {par. 17}

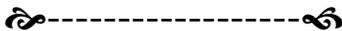
"How sad it is to contemplate that this touching appeal met with so little response! Had this entreaty to flee from Babylon been heeded, how different might have been the condition of the Jews in the trying times of Mordecai and Esther! {par. 18}

"The Lord's purposes for his people have ever been the same. He desires to bestow on the children of men the riches of an eternal inheritance. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. When those who choose to become obedient subjects of the Most High are finally saved in the kingdom of glory, God's purpose for mankind will have been fulfilled. {par. 19}

"To us who are praying and longing for the coming of this most glorious kingdom, as well as to the children of Israel in the days of Zechariah, are spoken the words: 'Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord. 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 thee, and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto

thee. And the Lord shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again. Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord: for he is raised up out of his holy habitation.' {par. 20}

{RH, December 26, 1907}



JANUARY 2, 1908 THE RETURN OF THE EXILES--No. 9

JOSHUA AND THE ANGEL (TO BE CONCLUDED)

"Satan and his army were greatly discomfited and alarmed by the steady advancement made by the builders of the temple. The hosts of evil determined to put forth untiring effort to weaken and depress God's people by holding before them their imperfections of character. Satan well knew that if those who had long suffered because of transgression, could again be induced to disregard God's commandments, they would be brought once more under the bondage of sin. But the Lord, in infinite pity, strengthened his chosen people 'with good words and comfortable words.' In this crisis, he gave to his people a most forcible and impressive illustration of the work of Satan and the work of Christ, and the power of our Mediator to vanquish the accuser of his people. This is recorded in the third chapter of the prophecy of Zechariah. {par. 1 }

"In holy vision the prophet beholds Joshua the high priest, 'clothed with filthy garments,' standing before the Angel of the Lord, entreating the mercy of God in behalf of his people who are in deep affliction. Satan stands at his right hand to resist him. Because Israel had been chosen to preserve the knowledge of God in the earth, they had been, from their first existence as a nation, the special objects of Satan's enmity, and he had determined to cause their destruction. He could do them no harm while they were obedient to God; therefore he had bent all his power and cunning to enticing them into sin. Ensnared by his temptations, they had transgressed the law of God, and thus separated from the Source of their strength, and had been left to become the prey of their heathen enemies. They were carried into captivity to Babylon, and there remained for many years. Yet they were not forsaken of the Lord. His prophets were sent to them with reproofs and warnings. The people were awakened to see their guilt; they humbled themselves before God, and returned to him with true repentance. Then the Lord sent them messages of encouragement, declaring that he would deliver them from their captivity, and restore them to his favor. It was this that Satan was determined to prevent. A remnant of Israel had already returned to their own land, and Satan was

seeking to move upon the heathen nations, who were his agents, to destroy them utterly. {par. 2 }

"As Joshua humbly pleads for the fulfilment of God's promises, Satan stands up boldly to resist him. He points to the transgressions of Israel as a reason why that people should not be restored to the favor of God. He claims them as his prey, and demands that they be given into his hands to be destroyed. {par. 3 }

"The high priest can not defend himself or his people from Satan's accusations. He does not claim that Israel are free from fault. In his filthy garments, symbolizing the sins of the people, which he bears as their representative, he stands before the Angel, confessing their guilt, yet pointing to their repentance and humiliation, relying upon the mercy of a sin-pardoning Redeemer, and in faith claiming the promises of God. {par. 4 }

"Then the Angel, who is Christ himself, the Saviour of sinners, put to silence the accuser of his people, declaring, 'The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?' Israel had long remained in the furnace of affliction. Because of their sins they had been well-nigh consumed in the flame kindled by Satan and his agents for their destruction; but God had now set his hand to bring them forth. In their penitence and humiliation the compassionate Saviour will not leave his people to the cruel power of the heathen. 'A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench.' {par. 5 }

"As the intercession of Joshua is accepted, the command is given, 'Take away the filthy garments from him,' and to Joshua the Angel declares, 'Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.' 'So they set a fair miter upon his head, and clothed him with garments.' His own sins and those of his people were pardoned. Israel were clothed with 'change of raiment,'--the righteousness of Christ imputed to them. The miter placed upon Joshua's head was such as was worn by the priests, and bore

the inscription, 'Holiness to the Lord,' signifying that notwithstanding his former transgressions, he was now qualified to minister before God in his sanctuary. {par. 6}

"After thus solemnly investing him with the dignity of the priesthood, the Angel declared, 'Thus saith the Lord of hosts: If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by.' He would be honored as the judge or ruler over the temple and all its services; he should walk among attending angels, even in this life, and should at last join the glorified throng around the throne of God. {par. 7}

"Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the Branch.' Here is revealed the hope of Israel. It was by faith in the coming Saviour that Joshua and his people received pardon. Through faith in Christ they were restored to God's favor. By virtue of his merits, if they walked in his ways and kept his statutes, they would be 'men wondered at,' honored as the chosen of Heaven among the nations of the earth. Christ was their hope, their defense, their justification and redemption, as he is the hope of his church today. {par. 8}

"As Satan accused Joshua and his people, so in all ages he accuses those who are seeking the mercy and favor of God. In the Revelation he is declared to be 'the accuser of our brethren,' 'which accused them before our God day and night.' The controversy is repeated over every soul that is rescued from the power of evil, and whose name is registered in the Lamb's book of life. Never is one received from the family of Satan into the family of God without exciting the determined resistance of the wicked one. Satan's accusations against those who seek the Lord are not prompted by displeasure at their sins. He exults in their defective characters. Only through their transgression of God's law can he obtain power over them. His accusations arise solely from his enmity to Christ. Through the plan of salvation, Jesus is breaking Satan's hold upon the human family, and rescuing souls from his power. All the hatred and malignity of the arch-rebel is stirred as he beholds the evidence of Christ's

supremacy, and with fiendish power and cunning he works to wrest from him the remnant of the children of men who have accepted his salvation. {par. 9}

"He leads men into skepticism, causing them to lose confidence in God and to separate from his love; he tempts them to break his law, and then he claims them as his captives, and contests the right of Christ to take them from him. He knows that those who seek God earnestly for pardon and grace will obtain it; therefore he presents their sins before them to discourage them. He is constantly seeking occasion against those who are trying to obey God. Even their best and most acceptable services he seeks to make appear corrupt. By countless devices, the most subtle and the most cruel, he endeavors to secure their condemnation. Man can not meet these charges himself. In his sin-stained garments, confessing his guilt, he stands before God. But Jesus our Advocate presents an effectual plea in behalf of all who by repentance and faith have committed the keeping of their souls to him. He pleads their cause, and vanquishes their accuser by the mighty arguments of Calvary. His perfect obedience to God's law, even unto the death of the cross, has given him all power in heaven and in earth, and he claims of his Father mercy and reconciliation for guilty man. To the accuser of his people he declares, 'The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan.' These are the purchase of my blood, brands plucked from the burning. Those who rely upon him in faith receive the comforting assurance, 'Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.' All that have put on the robe of Christ's righteousness will stand before him as chosen and faithful and true. Satan has no power to pluck them out of the hand of Christ. Not one soul that in penitence and faith has claimed his protection, will Christ permit to pass under the enemy's power. His word is pledged: 'Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me.' The promise given to Joshua is made to all: 'If thou wilt keep my charge,... I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by.' Angels of God will walk on either side of them, even in this world, and they will stand at last among the angels that surround the throne of God. {par. 10}

"The fact that the acknowledged people of God are represented as standing before the Lord in

filthy garments should lead to humility and deep searching of heart on the part of all who profess his name. Those who are indeed purifying their souls by obeying the truth will have a most humble opinion of themselves. The more closely they view the spotless character of Christ, the stronger will be their desire to be conformed to his image, and the less will they see of purity or holiness in themselves. But while we should realize our sinful condition, we are to rely upon Christ as our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption. We can not answer the charges of Satan against us. Christ alone can make an effectual plea in our behalf. He is able to silence the accuser with arguments founded not upon our merits, but on his own. {par. 11}

"Yet we should never be content with a sinful life. It is a thought that should arouse Christians to greater zeal and earnestness in overcoming evil, that every defect in character, every point in which they fail to meet the divine standard, is an open door by which Satan can enter to tempt and destroy them; and, furthermore, that every failure and

defect on their part gives occasion to the tempter and his agents to reproach Christ. We are to exert every energy of the soul in the work of overcoming, and to look to Jesus for strength to do what we can not do of ourselves. No sin can be tolerated in those who shall walk with Christ in white. The filthy garments are to be removed, and Christ's robe of righteousness is to be placed upon us. By repentance and faith we are enabled to render obedience to all the commandments of God, and are found without blame before him. Those who shall meet the approval of God are now afflicting their souls, confessing their sins, and earnestly pleading for pardon through Jesus their Advocate. Their attention is fixed on him, and when the command is given, 'Take away the filthy garments,' and clothe him with 'change of raiment,' and 'set a fair miter upon his head,' they are prepared to give him all the glory of their salvation. {par. 12}

{RH, January 2, 1908}



JANUARY 9, 1908 THE RETURN OF THE EXILES -- NO. 9

JOSHUA AND THE ANGEL (CONCLUDED)

"Zechariah's vision of Joshua and the angel applies with peculiar force to the experiences of God's people in the closing up of the great day of atonement. The remnant church will be brought into great trial and distress. Those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, will feel the ire of the dragon and his hosts. Satan numbers the world as his subjects; he has gained control of the apostate churches. But here is a little company that are resisting his supremacy. If he could blot them from the earth, his triumph would be complete. As he influenced the heathen nations to destroy Israel, so in the near future he will stir up the wicked powers of earth to destroy the people of God. All will be required to render obedience to human edicts in violation of the divine law. Those who will be true to God and to duty will be menaced, denounced, and proscribed. They will be betrayed 'both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends.' {par. 1}

"Their only hope is in the mercy of God; their only defense will be prayer. As Joshua was pleading before the Angel, so the remnant church, with brokenness of heart and earnest faith, will plead for pardon and deliverance through Jesus their Advocate. They are fully conscious of the sinfulness of their lives, they see their weakness and unworthiness; and as they look upon themselves, they are ready to despair. The tempter stands by to accuse them, as he stood by to resist Joshua. He points to their filthy garments, their defective characters. He presents their weakness and folly, their sins of ingratitude, their unlikeness to Christ, which has dishonored their Redeemer. He endeavors to affright the soul with the thought that their case is hopeless, that the stain of their defilement will never be washed away. He hopes so to destroy their faith that they will yield to his temptations, turn from their allegiance to God, and receive the mark of the beast. {par. 2}

"Satan urges before God his accusations against them, declaring that they have by their sins forfeited the divine protection, and claiming the right to destroy them as transgressors. He pronounces them just as deserving as himself of exclusion from the favor of God. 'Are these,' he says, 'the people who are

to take my place in heaven, and the place of the angels who united with me? While they profess to obey the law of God, have they kept its precepts? Have they not been lovers of self more than of God? Have they not placed their own interests above his service? Have they not loved the things of the world? Look at the sins which have marked their lives. Behold their selfishness, their malice, their hatred toward one another.' {par. 3}

"The people of God have been in many respects very faulty. Satan has an accurate knowledge of the sins which he has tempted them to commit, and he presents these in the most exaggerated light, declaring, 'Will God banish me and my angels from his presence, and yet reward those who have been guilty of the same sins? Thou canst not do this, O Lord, in justice. Thy throne will not stand in righteousness and judgment. Justice demands that sentence be pronounced against them.' {par. 4}

"But while the followers of Christ have sinned, they have not given themselves to the control of evil. They have put away their sins, and have sought the Lord in humility and contrition, and the divine Advocate pleads in their behalf. He who has been most abused by their ingratitude, who knows their sin, and also their repentance, declares, 'The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan. I gave my life for these souls. They are graven upon the palms of my hands.' {par. 5}

"The assaults of Satan are strong, his delusions are terrible; but the Lord's eye is upon his people. Their affliction is great, the flames of the furnace seem about to consume them; but Jesus will bring them forth as gold tried in the fire. Their earthliness must be removed that the image of Christ may be perfectly reflected; unbelief must be overcome; faith, hope, and patience are to be developed. {par. 6}

"At times, the Lord may seem to have forgotten the perils of his church, and the injury done to her by those who follow principles which he can not indorse. But God has not forgotten. Nothing in this world is so dear to the heart of God as his church.

He marks every action of the members. It is not his will that worldly policy shall corrupt her record as a representative of heaven. Nothing so offends the heart of Christ as injury done those whom he died to save. His heart of love is grieved when the lame are turned out of the way by the crooked paths made by others. God does not leave his people to be overcome by Satan's temptations. He will chastise those who misrepresent him. But he will be gracious to all who sincerely repent. Christ loves his church. He will give all needed help to those who call upon him for strength for the development of Christlike character. {par. 7}

"The people of God are sighing and crying for the abominations done in the land. With tears they warn the wicked of their danger in trampling upon the divine law, and with unutterable sorrow they humble themselves before the Lord on account of their own transgressions. The wicked mock their sorrow, ridicule their solemn appeals, and sneer at what they term their weakness. But the anguish and humiliation of God's people is unmistakable evidence that they are regaining the strength and nobility of character lost in consequence of sin. It is because they are drawing nearer to Christ, and their eyes are fixed upon his perfect purity, that they so clearly discern the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Their contrition and self-abasement are infinitely more acceptable in the sight of God than is the self-sufficient, haughty spirit of those who see no cause to lament, who scorn the humility of Christ, and who claim perfection while transgressing God's holy law. Meekness and lowliness of heart are the conditions for strength and victory. The crown of glory awaits those who bow at the foot of the cross. Blessed are these mourners; for they shall be comforted. {par. 8}

"The faithful, praying ones are, as it were, shut in with God. They themselves know not how securely they are shielded. Urged on by Satan, the rulers of this world are seeking to destroy them; but could their eyes be opened, as were the eyes of Elisha's servant at Dothan, they would see the angels of God encamped about them, by their brightness and glory holding in check the hosts of darkness. {par. 9}

"As the people of God afflict their souls before him, pleading for purity of heart, the

command is given, 'Take away the filthy garments' from them, and the encouraging words are spoken, 'Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.' The spotless robe of Christ's righteousness is placed upon the tried, tempted, yet faithful children of God. The despised remnant are clothed in glorious apparel, nevermore to be defiled by the corruptions of the world. Their names are retained in the Lamb's book of life, enrolled among the faithful of all ages. They have resisted the wiles of the deceiver; they have not been turned from their loyalty by the dragon's roar. Now they are eternally secure from the tempter's devices. Their sins are transferred to the originator of sin. And the remnant are not only pardoned and accepted, but honored. A 'fair miter' is set upon their heads. They are to be as kings and priests unto God. While Satan was urging his accusations, holy angels, unseen, were passing to and fro, placing upon them the seal of the living God. These are they that stand upon Mount Zion with the Lamb, having the Father's name written in their foreheads. They sing the new song before the throne, that song which no man can learn save the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. 'These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the first-fruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.' {par. 10}

"Now is reached the complete fulfilment of those words of the Angel: 'Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the Branch.' Christ is revealed as the Redeemer and Deliverer of his people. Now indeed are the remnant 'men wondered at,' as the tears and humiliation of their pilgrimage give place to joy and honor in the presence of God and the Lamb. 'In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem.' {par. 11}

{RH, January 9, 1908}



JANUARY 16, 1908 THE RETURN OF THE EXILES -- NO. 10

"NOT BY MIGHT, NOR BY POWER"

"Intimately associated with Joshua, the high priest, was Zerubbabel, governor of Judea. It was under the leadership of these two men that the remnant of Israel returned at the close of the seventy years' captivity. They also led out in the re-establishment of the ancient worship at Jerusalem. In the second year of Cyrus, Zerubbabel laid the corner-stone of the temple. It was Zerubbabel and Joshua who, in response to the messages of the Lord through Haggai and Zechariah, 'rose up,' with courage renewed, and once more 'began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem.' These men were true leaders, and 'the spirit of all the remnant of the people' was largely influenced by the cheerful willingness with which they carried out the Lord's commands. {par. 1}

"Immediately after Zechariah's vision of Joshua and the angel, given to the high priest as a personal testimony for his own encouragement and the encouragement of all the people of God, the prophet received a personal testimony regarding the work of Zerubbabel. 'The angel that talked with me,' Zechariah declares, 'came again, and waked me, as a man that is waked out of his sleep, and said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: and two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof. {par. 2}

"So I answered and spake to the Angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my Lord? . . . Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts... {par. 3}

"Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof? And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves?... Then

said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.' {par. 4}

"From the two olive trees the golden oil was emptied through the golden pipes into the bowl of the candlestick, and thence into the golden lamps that gave light to the sanctuary. So from the holy ones that stand in God's presence his Spirit is imparted to the human instrumentalities who are consecrated to his service. The mission of the two anointed ones is to communicate to God's people that heavenly grace which alone can make his Word a lamp to the feet and a light to the path. {par. 5}

"In rebuilding the house of the Lord, Zerubbabel had been encompassed with manifold difficulties. In former years, adversaries had 'weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building,' 'and made them to cease by force and power.' But the Lord interposed in behalf of the faithful builders, and now he speaks through his prophet, Zechariah, to Zerubbabel, saying, 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.' {par. 6}

"Throughout the history of God's people, great mountains of difficulty, apparently insurmountable, have loomed up before those who were advancing in the opening providences of God. Such obstacles to progress are permitted by the Lord as a test of faith. When hedged about on every side, this is the time above all others to trust in God and in the power of his Holy Spirit. We are not to walk in our own strength, but in the strength of the Lord God of Israel. It is folly to trust in man or to make flesh our arm. We must trust in Jehovah; for in him is everlasting strength. The One who, in response to words and deeds of faith, made the way plain before his servant Zerubbabel, is able to clear away every obstacle devised by Satan to hinder the progress of his cause. Through the exercise of persevering faith, every mountain of difficulty may be removed. {par. 7}

"Sometimes God trains his workers by bringing to them disappointment and apparent failure. It is his purpose that they shall learn to master difficulty. He seeks to inspire them with a determination to make every apparent failure prove a success. {par. 8}

"Oftentimes men pray and weep because of the perplexities and obstacles that confront them. But if they will hold the beginning of their confidence steadfast unto the end, God will make their way clear. Success will come to them as they struggle against apparently insurmountable difficulties; and with success will come the greatest joy. {par. 9}

"This was true of Zerubbabel; and for his encouragement he was given, through Zechariah, the assurance: 'The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath 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.' {par. 10}

"The promise, 'The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it,' was literally fulfilled. 'The elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. 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.' {par. 11}

"Shortly afterward, the restored temple was dedicated. '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, and offered at the dedication of this house of God an 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.' {par. 12}

"This second temple did not equal the first in magnificence, nor was it hallowed by those visible

tokens of the divine presence which pertained to the first temple. There was no manifestation of supernatural power to mark its dedication. No cloud of glory was seen to fill the newly erected sanctuary. No fire from heaven descended to consume the sacrifice upon its altar. The shekinah no longer abode between the cherubim in the most holy place; the ark, the mercy-seat, and the tables of the testimony were not to be found therein. No voice sounded from heaven to make known to the inquiring priest the will of Jehovah. {par. 13}

"And yet this was the building concerning which the Lord had declared by the prophet Haggai, 'The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former.' 'I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.' For centuries afterward the Jews vainly endeavored to show wherein the promise of God, given by Haggai, had been fulfilled; yet eventually, when the Desire of all nations actually appeared and hallowed the precincts of the temple by his personal presence, pride and unbelief had blinded their minds to the true meaning of the prophet's words. The second temple was honored, not with the cloud of Jehovah's glory, but with the living presence of One in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,--God himself manifest in the flesh. The 'Desire of all nations' had indeed come to his temple, when the Man of Nazareth taught and healed in the sacred courts. In the personal presence of Christ during his earthly ministry, and in this only, did the second temple exceed the first in glory. {par. 14}

"Following the dedication of the house of God, the Israelites '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 the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month. 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. And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from all the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the Lord God of Israel, did eat, 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.' {par. 15}

{RH, January 16, 1908}

