

GATHERING IN THE CHOSEN NO. 3308

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“Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither. They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.”
Jeremiah 31:8-9

THERE is a wonderful variety in the acts of God, and yet withal there is a most singular uniformity. So complete is this uniformity that any one deliverance which God works for His people will be found to be, in its main features, just like any other of His deliverances.

Starting—for it is a convenient starting-point—with the deliverance of God’s people out of Egypt, there are many points of similarity between that marvel of mercy and the bringing back of the banished tribes from Babylon to their own land, there was a manifestation of the same gracious consideration, of the same omnipotent power, of the some efficient purpose wrought out in all points according to God’s eternal covenant.

Then, taking another great leap, that return from Babylon is, no doubt, a very fair picture and a very excellent type of the gathering together in their own land of the Jews in the days that are yet to come when they shall say to one another, “Let us go up to the house of our God.” Everybody will admit that it will be as great a wonder to see the Jews, who are now a nation scattered abroad throughout the whole world, once more dwelling together in Palestine, as it was for them to have been brought out of Egypt or delivered out of Babylon in days long past.

But taking a still greater leap, this again is a type of the greatest of all deliverances—the deliverance neither of the Jews alone nor of the Gentiles alone, but of the whole chosen company who shall be brought out from all the lands of sin and error into which they have been driven by their first parents’ fall and their own actual transgressions. They shall be brought out by the same almighty power, only on a far greater scale, and they shall meet, as in a common focus, in that Jerusalem above which is the home of all the chosen. I want to turn your thoughts toward that glorious future when the vast assembly of the redeemed will “sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.”

I. And first, I am going to show you that we have, in the text, DEITY MANIFESTED.

There is a divine ring about the text as there was in that ancient fiat which startled the darkness, and caused it to flee away, “Let there be light, and there was light.” So here the Lord says, “I will bring them and gather them....and they shall come....I will lead them; I will cause them to walk...they shall not stumble.” It is “I will” and “they shall” all the way through. There is no admission of doubt or of the possibility of failure. JEHOVAH speaks in the sovereignty of His power, and says, “I will do this, and I will do that,” and there is not an “if” or a “perhaps” or a “peradventure” to mar the certainty of the divine declarations, “I will” and “they shall.”

Remember, beloved, that it was so in Egypt. “Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness.

And Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go." Yet, when the Lord smote his firstborn with all the firstborn throughout the land of Egypt, "he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the LORD as ye have said."

And when the time came for captive Israel to return from Babylon, God had but to speak, and the iron bars snapped in sunder and the gates of brass flew open. So also shall it be in the latter days when the Jews are restored to their own land. By some mysterious influence which probably many of them will not be able to understand, they will be irresistibly drawn from all parts of the earth to Immanuel's land, and meanwhile, that same divine energy is gathering together the chosen unto the great Shiloh, for "unto him shall the gathering of the people be."

Invisible bands of love are continually drawing to Christ those for whom He died. The mighty magnet of His atoning sacrifice is constantly attracting to Him the members of His redeemed family, more in one age than in another, yet always according to the eternal purpose and decree of God, for although He asketh mysteriously and silently, yet He ever "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

I do not know any theme upon which one might dilate with greater joy than that of the omnipotent energy of God as displayed in the salvation of sinners, yet it must always be understood that we proclaim this truth in complete harmony with the responsibility of man and his absolute free agency. I have always taught you that the omnipotence of God over the human heart is never exercised in such a way as to violate the free will of man. It would be a clumsy kind of omnipotence that would do as it pleased with men whether they were willing or not, but it is divine omnipotence that moldeth the will, enlighteneth the judgment, and fashioneth the heart and mind and character of man according to the Lord's eternal purpose

Yet on the other hand, let me beseech you never to let your ideas of the free agency of man prevent you from adoring the omnipotent sovereignty of God. We are not to have man's free will sitting on the throne, its place is that of a humble servant waiting at JEHOVAH'S feet. Let the glorious truth that "the LORD reigneth" be proclaimed in its fullest sense, and let the man who dares to limit the sovereignty of God answer for it before Him who, with a rod of iron, would dash in pieces the potter's vessel that presumed to say, "Why hath thou made me thus?"

We believe that, when the great drama of human history is complete, it will conform in every jot and tittle to the eternal plan that was in the mind of God long before He spake the great creative word which called the heaven and the earth into existence.

In the bringing up of Israel out of Babylon there were a great many questions to be considered. Would the king be willing to let them go? Would they themselves be willing to go? By what proof could they be ranged under one leader? How could they be provided for and provisioned for such a long journey? By what means could they be safely conducted through the perils of the wilderness? How could they again be settled in a land which had become barren through the curse of God resting upon it?

Yet, when the set time comes, all these difficulties vanished. As God was in that plan of bringing His people back from Babylon, the king's heart was turned as the husbandman turns the channel of irrigation in the midst of the garden. As God was in it, the Jews sighed and longed to return to Jerusalem. As God was in it, they went back, not like trembling doves flying from a pursuing hawk, but like a bannered host returning from the conquest loaded with spoil.

Just so is it with the sinner and the salvation of his soul, there are many questions that he may want to ask. How can prejudice be subdued? How can ignorance be overcome? How can the stubborn will be controlled? How is it possible for the Ethiopian to change his skin, and the leopard his spots? But when God come forth to save, it is as though a man walked through cobwebs, and brushed them away from him on either side, or as though a giant stalked through a host of pigmies and made them fly to right or left.

***“When He makes bare His arm,
What shall His work withstand?”***

When He putteth forth the fulness of His strength to effect His divine purpose, who shall say to Him, “What doest thou?” Wherefore, ye ministers of God, be bold, for ye serve the Lord God omnipotent. Ye servants of Christ in every sphere, be brave, for ye have not espoused a losing cause. Every one of you, though you may be but little in the army of the Lord, yet be—

***“Strong in the Lord of hosts,
And in His mighty power;”—***

for His kingdom cannot be overthrown, it must spread until it fills the whole earth, and God, even our own God, must be exalted, and the praises of His holy name and of His glorious work must go on ringing down the ages for ever and ever.

II. Now turning to the second point, we see in the text DIFFICULTIES REMOVED.

Difficulties would naturally be suggested by unbelieving minds. It would be said, in the first place, that *the people had gone too far away ever to be gathered*. Yet the Lord says, “I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth.” There may be, at the present time, some of the Lord’s chosen far away in Greenland, Labrador, and other lands of snow and ice, there were some, in the olden times, when the Moravian Brethren went forth, at God’s command, to bring to Christ those who belonged to Him in “the north country.”

There were others also in the far-away islands of the south, cannibals, given up to the wildest passions, but Christ had bought them with His precious blood, and a sacred instinct constrained John Williams and many another martyr and missionary to go forth to the apostolic task of turning savages into saints.

It may be that God has many of His chosen ones, at the present moment, in the center of Africa, and if it be so, they shall not die before the Gospel has been made known to them, and they have been brought to trust in Him who loved them and gave Himself for them. Distance is no distance in the sight of God. He sees all the inhabitants of the globe at a single glance, and His gaze is fixed upon the blood-bought sons and daughters of men wherever these may be dwelling, and He will gather them from all the coasts of the earth where their lot has been cast.

And as distance of space is no obstacle to the bestowed of God’s mercy, so neither is the distance that is caused by the greatness of sin. “Now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” There may be one, among those when I am now addressing, who has gone to the cold “north country” of infidelity, where he stands shivering in the biting winds of doubt and skepticism. Ah, but my friend, God is able to bring you to Himself even from that dreary region.

There may be some who have gone to the uttermost coasts of sin until they have become masters in iniquity, trafficking upon the broad sea of transgression, and doing business in the deep waters of infamy and perhaps of blasphemy. Ah, but if you are amongst those who were given to Christ, God will gather you sooner or later, even if you have sold yourself to the devil, “your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand.” If you are indeed “bought with a price,” Christ will surely gather you with the rest of His redeemed. By might and main He will make a conquest of you, for when the Lord determines to bring His people to Himself, neither material distance nor moral distance can prevent Him from doing so.

There was also another difficulty, not only were these people in Babylon far away from Jerusalem, but *some of them were blind*. What did it matter to them where they lived? No landscape, even though it was as grand as that which Moses saw from the top of Pisgah, could have any attraction for them. Even if others go back, shall not the blind be left behind? Of what service are the blind? How shall they behold the beauty of the Lord? But the Lord said that He would bring back the blind with the others

from the north country, and from the outcasts of the earth, and we may apply this promise to those who are spiritually blind.

How can you get at a man who will not see his own sin, and who will not or cannot see the beauty of God's plan of salvation? How are you to get at those whose eyes are covered with the scales of prejudice? How can you reach the Romanist whose eyes are plastered up with ceremonies and superstitions? How can you convince the work-monger that his own good deeds, of which he thinks so much, are blinding him to the beauties of Christ? How can these blind ones be saved?

Ah, beloved! no eye is too blind for God to pour light into it, and some of us can bear our personal testimony upon this matter. We should never have known the grace of God in truth if that grace had not come to us in our blind ignorance and enlightened us. May it be so with some who are here tonight! Is there a very ignorant person here? Well, my dear friend, do you know that you are a sinner, that you are guilty in the sight of God? Then do you know that Christ Jesus came into the world to save such guilty sinners as you are? If so, and you put your trust in Him, you are already wise unto salvation however little you may know about other matters. Learn the great truth that Christ died in the stead of all who believe in Him, and you will no longer be numbered among the spiritually blind.

With those blind people in Babylon there seem to have been *some lame folk*, and an objector might have said, "Surely, if the caravan is to pass through the desert, it would be better to leave these poor limping ones at home, how can they ever be brought to Jerusalem?" But the Lord said, "The blind shall be led, and the lame shall be carried, but they must not be left behind."

Now, there are some who are morally lame. If ever they enter into life, it will be among the halt and the maimed. They seem as if they could not walk uprightly, there is a limp in their gait, their knees are weak, they cannot pray as they would. Lame sinners, are you here tonight? Do you feel as if you cannot get to Christ, and cannot pray, and cannot do anything aright? Well, do but cry to Him, "God be merciful to me a sinner," turn your eye to Christ, think of Him as He hung upon the cross, and trust Him to save you, and you shall find that, lame as you are, you shall be brought safely home. Mr. Ready-to-halt shall get to heaven as surely as Mr. Greatheart himself.

Then there were some others of whom it was said that they could not possibly join the caravan, "*the woman with child and her that travaileth with child.*" These were certainly unfit to go, they were in such a weak state that they could not take that long journey from Babylon to Jerusalem, yet the Lord said, "I will gather them and bring them," and so He did.

Well, there are some like them in our midst tonight, burdened ones who have a load of sin pressing upon them, fainting ones whose souls are in a sacred travail. They would fain run, but they cannot even stand, and they are all too apt to fall. But O you who are thus soul-distressed, the blessing is that Jesus Christ will not leave you behind, you shall be brought with the rest of the chosen seed to the heavenly Jerusalem to praise and magnify your great Deliverer for ever and ever!

III. Now, in the third place, we have in the text not only Deity manifested, and difficulties removed, but we also have DESCRIPTIONS GIVEN.

How shall this great company be brought to the Jerusalem which is above? Listen, there is a mighty host on the march, but I hear no sound of trumpet, no voice of mirth, no song of joy, what do I hear? Weeping, mourning, lamentation, "*They shall come with weeping.*" That is the music to which sinners usually set out for the heavenly Canaan, seldom if ever is that start made without tears. It is not the shriek of despair, it is not the groan of disappointment, it is not the yell of rage and hate, it is the plaintive wail of a soul that saith to God, "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." From those who compose that throng you may every now and then catch such sorrowful sentences as these, "I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me," "My sorrow is continually before me. For I will declare mine iniquity, I will be sorry for my sin."

This is the kind of music that we hear from those who are setting out for heaven, have *you*, my friend, ever practiced it? You will never sing in glory if you have never wept over your sin, I do not merely mean such tears as men and women shed, though these will probably not be absent, but I mean

that you will experience that spiritual sorrow which is often too deep for tears. May God the Holy Spirit teach us to weep at the remembrance of our sin, to weep at the foot of the cross as we look upon Him whom our sins have pierced, and mourn for Him as one mourneth for his only son, and be in bitterness for Him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn!

Listen again, now I hear another note rising from the great caravan, the note of *supplication*. It is the hour of prayer, they have got beyond weeping into anxiety, desire, petition, request, and I hear many voices crying, "Save thy people who trust in thee. Be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause thy face to shine upon us." In our day, the supplication takes some such form as this, "Reveal Thyself unto us, O Christ, for in Thee do we put our trust! In Thy name have we set up our banners, come forth, O Lord, as our Helper and Deliverer!"

The march is with weeping and supplication, and I believe these two things will attend that caravan right up to the brink of Jordan. The last tear will be dropped in Jordan's flowing stream, for we shall sorrow no more and repent no more when we stand before the eternal throne, and the last prayer—at any rate, the last prayer that has any sense of sin in it—shall be breathed just on the margin of the river which we cross to enter into glory.

I must next direct your attention to something in our text about *the road the caravan has to traverse*, "I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters." They had to pass through a wilderness in going from Egypt to Canaan, and also in returning from Babylon, and we also have to traverse the wilderness of this world in journeying to the better Promised Land above, but as they had water in abundance on their long marches, we also have "the rivers of waters" of divine grace and almighty love. When we first began to seek the Lord, we found that one of the channels in which the precious rivers were flowing was this precious Bible at which we still quench our spiritual thirst.

Then, when we trusted in Jesus, and confessed our faith in Him, we found the two ordinances that He instituted—believers' baptism and the Lord's supper—to be as refreshing to our spirit as cold water is to the thirsty. I trust that you, beloved, while sitting under the sound of the Word, have often been able to drink of the brook by the way, and certainly, private prayer and intimate fellowship with God, and above all, the secret and mysterious indwelling of the Holy Spirit, have caused you "to walk by the rivers of waters," so that, although the earth is in itself arid, "a dry and thirsty land, where no water is," you have found that from the foot of the cross there flows a living stream, from which all the chosen may continue to drink until they come to that "pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb."

In the description of the caravan route we are next told that it is "*a straight way*." The path to heaven is not at all difficult to find. It would be very difficult to find the way to heaven by the rites and ceremonies about which some are so particular, but to those who trust in Jesus the way of salvation is a very simple one, so simple that the wayfaring man, though a fool in other things, need not err therein.

If any of you are trying to find your way to heaven by the road of your own good works, you may well be puzzled, for you are off the right track altogether, but the believer's path is straight and plain. He trusts, and he is saved; he looks, and he lives; he believes God's Word, and he proves that it is true. You know that the way of policy, such as ungodly men often follow in this world, is a very crooked way, and Christians are sometimes tempted to tread that treacherous path, but that is the slimy way into which the devil led our first parents, and nothing but evil can come to those who walk in it.

The giving up of the whole heart and soul to Christ is the simple way of being saved, and then yielding complete obedience to Christ is the simple way of living. The Lord's promise is, "I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way,"—not in a crooked, twisting, winding, in-and-out way, but in a straight way, the way of faith in Christ, and of unquestioning obedience to His commands.

The description of this straight way concludes thus, "*Wherein they shall not stumble*." It is a good thing to have a straight road, but it is a better thing to have also a sure foot, and God, who teaches His people to do right, also gives them grace to do it. These blind ones, and lame ones, and weak ones, of whom I have been speaking, are upheld by sovereign grace in the narrow way in which the Lord is

leading them. My eye seems to catch the glorious vision. I see the blind finding their way to the great center of eternal blessedness. I see the lame come running as though they had wings to their feet to speed them onward to the pearly gates above. I see the vast blood-bought throng, from the North, and the South, and the East, and the West, casting away, by divine grace, all their burdens and their cares, and with the fetters of their sins snapped forever, streaming in crowds to the one blessed center—

*“Jerusalem the golden,
With milk and honey blest,”—*

where we ourselves expect by and by to be. Angels and the redeemed from among men must be continually witnessing the arrival of those who, first chosen by the Father, then redeemed by the Son then regenerated by the Holy Spirit, have repented of sin and trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ and by grace have been preserved in their march through the wilderness, and brought home to that blest city from which they shall go no more out for ever. Well may we sing—

*“O Paradise eternal!
What bliss to enter thee,
And once within thy portals,
Secure for ever be!*

*“In thee no sin nor sorrow,
No pain nor death is known;
But pure glad life, enduring
As heaven’s benignant throne.*

*“There all around shall love us,
And we return their love;
One band of happy spirits,
One family above.”*

IV. Now I must close when I have spoken for but a minute upon the last point, which is, DIGNITY BESTOWED, “for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.”

Those who are brought out of the bondage of sin, as Israel was brought out of Egypt and Babylon, by the almighty power and grace of God, are acknowledged by Him as His children. John writes concerning Jesus, “He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power (the right, or privilege) to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” This relationship cannot be disputed, and cannot be disturbed, and this is the relationship which exists between God and every pardoned sinner. Happy soul! Though once in the family of Satan, and an heir of wrath, thou art now a child and an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ.

Methinks there are some here whose mouths are set a-watering for this same blessing, and who are longing to be found among the innumerable multitude who shall be gathered in the heavenly Jerusalem at the last. Well, if you truly desire to be the Lord’s, that is a sign and token that the Lord also desires to have you as His child. That is a true declaration in one of our hymns—

“No sinner can be beforehand with thee.”

If you really desire to have God as your God, and Christ as your Savior, God desires it too, and Christ desires it. If you are willing to be saved, do not imagine that Christ is unwilling to save you. If you are coming to Christ, Christ is coming to you, nay, He has come to you, or you would never want to come to Him. “Only believe.” These are Christ’s words to you now, believe that He is able to save you

through the merit of His atoning sacrifice, and through the prevalence of His intercession before His Father's throne above. Trust Him, trust Him to save you now, and then you also shall be among the redeemed of the Lord who shall return, and come with singing unto Zion, everlasting joy shall be upon your head, you shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away from you forever.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

JEREMIAH 31:1-28

Verse 1. *At the same time, saith the LORD, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.*

How divinely He talks—as only God can talk! These people had rejected Him, yet He says, “They shall be my people,” not only some of them, but all of them: “I will be the God of all the families of Israel.” Behold the wonderful power of divine grace upon the hearts of rebellious sinners. There are no “ifs” and no “buts” here, it is “I will” and “they shall.” God knows how to work out His own purposes of love and mercy.

2. *Thus saith the LORD, The people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest.*

If we ever do get true rest of soul, God must cause us to rest, as David said, “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.” The rest of the heart is a miracle of divine power.

3. *The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.* [See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1914, “Secret Drawings Graciously Explained,” No. 2149, “Everlasting Love Revealed,” and No. 2880, “New Tokens of Ancient Love”].

There is the source of everything that is good and gracious, “everlasting love.” When God has once set that love upon His people, anything and everything that is for their good may come out of it, all temporal good and all eternal blessings will come out of everlasting love. Oh, that we might each one of us have grace to appropriate these blessed words to himself, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” They were given to Israel of old, but the spiritual Israel possesses all the privileges of the natural Israel, and much more.

4. *Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built,—*

Whatever God does is done effectually, there is never any failure in His work.

4. *O virgin of Israel: thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and shalt go forth in the dances of them that make merry.*

They had wept and mourned, but they were to dance, they had been very sad and disconsolate, but they were to take down their harps from the willows, and even to have their tabrets or timbrels again.

5. *Thou shalt yet plant vines upon the mountain of Samaria: the planters shall plant, and shall eat them as common things.*

God makes the luxuries of grace to be common things to His people. Fare that once seemed so rare as to be enjoyed only on high days and holidays shall become everyday meat to His people when their Lord reveals Himself to them.

6. *For there shall be a day, that the watchmen upon the mount Ephraim shall cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto the LORD our God.*

For many a year Israel had gone to Bethel to worship the calves, or stayed at home to adore the shrine of Ashtaroth, now they were to go to Zion to serve JEHOVAH. See what the grace of God can do even for idolaters. If any of us have been bowing down to our idols, may we this day turn to the living God, may the power of His grace lead us to go heartily and unanimously to worship the Lord our God.

7-8. *For thus saith the LORD; Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations: publish ye, praise ye, and say, O LORD, save thy people, the remnant of Israel. Behold, I will*

bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither.

Whatever God does, He does thoroughly. When He shall restore His ancient people, He will not leave the weak ones behind, and if, today, we are enjoying His presence, the most afflicted and the most infirm among us shall know what the joy of the Lord means. The Lord grant it, and we will praise His holy name.

9. *They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them:*

Weeping and prayer go well together. There is no prayer like a wet prayer saturated with the tears of repentance.

9. *I will cause them to walk by the rivers of water in a straight way,—*

Hear this, ye mourners. God will supply your need with rivers of waters, and He will make you to walk in a straight way. Sometimes we are perplexed because the road seems to wind in and out like a labyrinth, but God can lead us in a straight way, “I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way,”—

9. *Wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.*

They had forgotten their relationship to JEHOVAH, but He still remembered that they were His children.

10-11. *Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock. For the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he.*

They were the Lord’s chosen people even when they were in captivity in Babylon. He had scattered them because of their sin, but He would gather them in His mercy.

12-14. *Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the LORD, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all. Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow. And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the LORD.*

What a blessed change this was for those who had sorrowfully cried, “How shall we sing the LORD’S song in a strange land?” And we rejoice in a still greater change when the Lord brings us into spiritual liberty.

15-17. *Thou saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tear: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the LORD; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the LORD, that thy children shall come again to their own border.*

A mother’s sorrow over her lost babes is very great and long-enduring, but if she is a Christian, she shall meet them again in the land of the blessed, and shall be parted from them no more forever.

18. *I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus;* [See sermons #743, Ephraim Bemoaning Himself and #2104, The Inner Side of Conversion].

What a wonderfully expressive word that word “bemoaning” is!

18-19. *Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.*

Hear what the Lord says about these bemoaning ones, these sin-loathing ones:—

20. *Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child?*

Or we may render it, “Is this Ephraim my dear son? Is this my pleasant child?” He is all that now that he begins to hate his sin.

20. *For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still:*

Think of this, you who forget your God, ye backsliders, wanderers from your Father’s house.

20-21. *Therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the LORD. Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps:*

Raise cairns along the road at various points to let other travelers know the way in which they should go.

21-22. *Set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities. How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? for the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man.*

Whereas the enemy had compassed Jerusalem round about, now Jerusalem was to be the besieger, and to compass her enemies, and defeat them. Some interpreters think this is an allusion to the birth of the Savior, that “new thing in the earth”—the incarnation of the Son of God.

23-25. *Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; As yet they shall use this speech in the land of Judah and in the cities thereof, when I shall bring again their captivity; The LORD bless thee, O habitation of justice, and mountain of holiness. And there shall dwell is Judah itself, and in all the cities thereof together, husbandmen, and they that go forth with flocks. For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul.*

This prophecy is to be fulfilled in the restoration of Israel to Palestine, until that happens, the promise bears a spiritual meaning to all the children of God. O weary soul, thou shalt be satiated, that is more than being satisfied, thou shalt have as much of holiness and joy as thou canst hold! Plead His promise now, O sorrowful soul, and may God fulfil it to thee!

26. *Upon this I awaked, and beheld; and my sleep was sweet unto me.*

Well might it be. Poor Jeremiah, who so often wept over the woes of Israel, was the very man to be refreshed when he heard from God that He would visit His people in mercy, and bring them back to their own land. Happy dreamer, who dreams such a blessed dream as this, a dream that came true in due time.

27-28. *Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast. And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the LORD.*

What a black list of words we first have here! God’s way of dealing with His people when they wander away from Him is very stern. They must be brought back, but it will be over a very rough road. The Lord says that He “watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict,” and in the same measure He now declares that He will watch over them to do them good. As our tribulations abound, so also shall our consolations abound by Christ Jesus.

If you have been bitterly convinced of sin, you shall be sweetly convinced of pardon. The deeper God digs the foundation, the higher He means to build the house. Those who are brought to Him in great affliction very often afterwards know more of Christ and more of the love of God than any others.

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