



# The Gospel of God's Love

*the true gospel  
revealed anew  
by Jesus*

*book two:  
the  
Old Testament  
Sermons*

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*Old Testament Sermons*



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*Old Testament Sermons*

*Received through  
Dr. Daniel G. Samuels*

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Douglas Oreck*



NEW HEART PRESS

# The Gospel of God's Love

## *Old Testament Sermons*

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We'll confirm at the outset our sincere belief that this book contains the thoughts of Jesus of Nazareth, conveyed by automatic writing through the mind and pen of the listed author, Daniel Samuels. But we'll quickly add that you, the reader, need not subscribe to this claim in order to enjoy or benefit from what follows. The value of this book lies primarily in its contents, not its authorship.



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## Introduction

Within modern-day Christianity, a rift is developing, the likes of which has not been seen in its 2,000 year history. On the one side, the quest for a “historical Jesus,” underway since the advent of the Age of Reason, has led to the prevailing view among Christian scholars that very little of the New Testament can unreservedly be considered as historically accurate – which in turn has led to a complete overhaul of many people’s Christian faith. On the other side, and in reaction to this growing shadow of uncertainty cast over the Bible, a movement predicated on the belief in an absolutely inerrant Bible has been gaining in strength and numbers as well. In this camp we find the robust Protestant “Fundamentalist” movement, as well as the whole of traditional Catholicism.

It has been predicted that this schism will ultimately be of such magnitude as to make the Reformation look like a friendly accord by comparison, and, given the fundamentally different viewpoints of the two camps, this is probably not an exaggeration. Making this split especially bedeviling is the fact that the arguments and inducements presented by both sides are, each in their own way, strongly compelling – to the point where many Christians will be unwilling to wholeheartedly reject either viewpoint, leaving them caught in the crossfire of these apparently irreconcilable theologies.

We’ll briefly describe what we perceive to be at the heart of this conflict: Beginning with pioneering efforts such as the *Jefferson Bible*,<sup>1</sup> two centuries of historical research have led to the conclusion that perhaps as little as twenty percent of the words attributed to Jesus in the Bible were actually spoken by him<sup>2</sup> – leading to a new species of Christianity where theology

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Jefferson’s attempt to create a Bible composed only of authentic sayings of Jesus

<sup>2</sup> The conclusion of the contemporary *Jesus Seminar* (see *Recommended Reading*)

is spoken of in terms of theory and probability, rather than doctrine and canon. In this quest to reconcile faith with hard data, logic, and common sense, the proponents of a “rational Christianity” have come to see the Bible, far from being “God breathed,” as having been compiled and edited (or one might better say mangled) by countless human hands, whose motives seemed to range anywhere from the exalted to the disgraceful. Scholars have found reason as well to disbelieve most if not all of the supernatural events recorded in the New Testament, obliging them to recast their image of Jesus, not as a divine miracle worker, but as a wise and charismatic prophet or sage.

It must be emphasized that many of those who participated in this research were and are Christians, and that it was not their intent to damage or dismantle their religion. They were merely seeking to discover the truth of the historical Jesus, and this being the apparent truth that they uncovered, this they felt duty-bound to report.

The Christian teachings that have emerged from this “cleansing” consist largely of universally accepted spiritual truth, echoing the core precepts of Buddhist, Jewish, Islamic, and Hindu religions, among others. This, to many, is a heartening development, supportive of the belief that all spiritual paths lead in fact to the same destination. But for some Christians, there is a sense of recoil, a feeling that something special and unique to Jesus and his teachings was discarded in the course of this renovation – that the baby was indeed thrown out with the bath water.

These Christians will generally explain their belief in the uniqueness of Jesus and his teachings in traditional Christian terms, stating that Jesus is God, or the Son of God, or their Messiah and Savior. But regardless of the specifics of their “overbelief,”<sup>1</sup> they will often describe their enjoyment of a “personal relationship” with Jesus/God, and will attest to a

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<sup>1</sup> A term coined or popularized by William James (see his *Varieties of Religious Experience*)

deep and abiding sense of connectedness, accompanied by a “peace that passeth understanding” which is to them more convincing and precious than any amount of historical validation or logical deduction. Indeed, a two thousand year accumulation of personal testimony points to the existence, *somewhere* within traditional Christianity, of a profoundly effective transformational and healing power – and yet it is this very power that many find absent in the updated, “historically accurate” gospels of Jesus.

These personal experiences of healing and transformation have left many a Christian with an unshakable faith in the efficacy of their religion. But at the same time, the long-standing Christian doctrine of Bible inerrancy has discouraged any effort to identify precisely *what* in the Bible produced these experiences of salvation. The “all or nothing” policy of traditional Bible scholarship has effectively eliminated any need – and precluded any attempt – to isolate the “active ingredient” of Christianity.

This blanket pronouncement of infallibility has also carried with it a heavy responsibility: the obligation to defend every last word of Scripture, no matter how contradictory or illogical those words may appear to be. Born of this necessity, the arguments of Christian apologetics have, over the centuries, been honed to unassailable perfection. Traditional Christians believe it their God-given duty to defend the inerrancy of the Bible, and so they defend it with a passion.

As the drama of this schism unfolds, and the polarization between these two camps increases, one can find little reason for optimism that a middle ground or meeting place might eventually be found. There are congregations which try to straddle the fence between the “rational” and “supernatural” Christianities, but in the increasingly stark delineation between the two, such a policy of vagueness becomes continually more

difficult to maintain. And to the Christian who perceives validity in both viewpoints, there appears to be no viable solution – except perhaps to walk away from the whole mess, to practice his or her faith in private.

A sincere Christian might well wonder why Jesus would have allowed his church to come to such a pass, where his followers seem faced with a no-win situation – either to embrace these scholarly reassessments of the Bible at the expense of what seemed to be the heart and soul of their faith, or to adhere to a spiritually fulfilling traditional Christianity at the cost of having to intentionally deny reality. Such a dilemma might well inspire a sincere seeker of truth to exclaim, “Where is Jesus now? I’ve a few questions to ask him!”

If there are, indeed, a few questions you’d like to ask Jesus right now, then perhaps this book is for you.

#### *Open Minded Skepticism*

Surely most Christians do believe that “Jesus lives,” and that he is therefore aware of conditions here on earth. Would it be unreasonable, then, to ask him to clear up some of these mysteries for us, once and for all? And would it be inconceivable to discover that he has done just that?

It is ironic that the two camps of the Christian schism will have completely different reasons for wanting not to believe that Jesus could or would communicate with mortal humankind to resolve these issues. The rational Christians will tend to disbelieve claims of “spirit communication” with Jesus because of their general skepticism towards any phenomenon considered to be supernatural, while traditional Christians will be inclined to reject such claims because, as their church leaders have for centuries instructed them, spirit communication is “of the devil.”

Consider, then, these two thoughts:

The last 200 years have seen great advances, not only in our knowledge regarding the Bible, but also in our knowledge of the afterlife, parapsychology, and spirit communication. Scientists have convincingly demonstrated the continuity of life after physical death, and have shown that it is possible to communicate with those who have left the earth life.<sup>1</sup> This being the case, it is not at all far-fetched to consider the possibility that Jesus might endeavor to communicate with mortal humankind – and given the present state of the religious movement which he founded, it would seem an eminently logical thing for him to do.

And for the traditional Christian: set aside for a moment the abiding fear of spirit communication with which the Christian world has been conditioned, *under penalty of death*, for most of the last two millennia, and consider two instances of spirit communication related in the Bible. First, in 1 Samuel 28, read about how the “Witch of Endor,” through her gift of mediumship, facilitated a communication between the spirit of the prophet Samuel and King Saul. Although the news she delivered to King Saul was bleak indeed, we see that the woman of Endor conveyed it quite accurately (according to the Bible story), and apparently was not faulted by God for having done so. Then, consider the New Testament event known as the “Transfiguration,”<sup>2</sup> where Peter, John, and James witness Jesus, Moses, and Elijah talking together – and where once again there is no hint of a suggestion that such spirit communication was evil or forbidden by God.

We would hope, then, that anyone, Christian or otherwise, could agree at least to the *possibility* that Jesus might, if he so desired, communicate with mortal humankind. But having agreed to such a possibility, the considerably more difficult task will be to determine whether Jesus actually did so in these Sermons. Again, we’ll offer that the value and significance of these messages reside more in their contents than in their

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<sup>1</sup> See *The Afterlife Experiments in Recommended Reading*    <sup>2</sup> Luke 9:28-36

authorship, and so we'll suggest that you temporarily withhold judgment about the claimed source of the writings, so as to better focus on what they're saying. The format of the Sermons as a first person narrative by Jesus can, for now, be considered simply as a literary device – a fiction utilized by the mortal author to help convey his thoughts – deferring till later questions about these writings' origins.

So then, what insights do these messages offer for the Christian – and the non-Christian – world?

### *A Synopsis – the Gospel of Love*

Daniel Samuels was actually not the first medium to receive alleged channelings from Jesus, a substantial collection of automatic writings having been received by an unassuming Washington D.C. attorney named James Padgett some 40 years earlier, between 1914 and 1923.<sup>1</sup> The Old Testament Sermons build upon information already delivered through Padgett, so it will be helpful to summarize the key points of these “Padgett messages” for those who have not read them.

We'll start at the beginning. *God is Love.*<sup>2</sup> Simple words, and yet we could spend an eternity learning the meaning behind them. In these three words, John the apostle tells us something of profound importance: that love is not just a four letter word, nor merely a “warm and fuzzy” feeling. In his simple statement, John suggests that there is a love which lies beyond “unconditional acceptance,” even beyond those lofty expressions of human love involving personal sacrifice for the beloved. Very succinctly, John states that there is a love so holy, sublime, and majestic as to be “synonymous” with the name of God.

In the Padgett messages, Jesus affirms that he was and is the “Messiah of God,” but as he spells out the meaning and significance of the term, we find it to denote something very different

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<sup>1</sup> See *Recommended Reading* for sources of the Padgett messages. Why did Jesus wait two millennia before delivering these communications? Read “The Full Time Messiah” in *Notes*.

<sup>2</sup> 1 John 4:8, 16

from what has been commonly accepted through the centuries. Jesus explains that his simple mission as the Messiah was and is to proclaim to humankind that a *gift* is being offered them by God. This gift, given to anyone who sincerely asks for it, is *God's love*, which Jesus describes as the actual essence of God's soul. This gift of God's love is given to us in response to our own sincere desires and prayers for its bestowal – the amount that we receive being in direct proportion to the frequency and sincerity, or “soulfulness,” of our prayers. This *divine love* is conveyed into the human soul through the agency of what is known as the *holy spirit*, its reception into the soul gradually causing a transformation, or “new birth” – the end result of which is a soul conscious of its own immortality, and at-one with God.

As the Messiah, Jesus was blessed with the privilege of being the first person ever to receive this new birth, and his earthly mission was not only to proclaim the availability of this gift, but also to demonstrate tangibly the wonderful results of this divine transformation.

During his short ministry on earth, Jesus performed his mission admirably, teaching people to pray for the wonderful gift of God's love, while manifesting, through his abilities as a healer, the “miraculous” evidences of this love within his own soul. Jesus traveled from town to town preaching his gospel, explaining the availability and nature of this love with parables in his effort to help people understand and appreciate the value of this supremely powerful – and yet completely “invisible” – gift.

### *Another Gospel*

The entire New Testament is filled with references to this gift,<sup>1</sup> this love,<sup>2</sup> this transformation.<sup>3</sup> But then, in addition to this gospel of God's love, we find in the New Testament a “second gospel” – the gospel of Jesus' crucifixion.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 11:13, 2 Corinthians 9:15    <sup>2</sup> John 17:22-23, 26, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, Ephesians 3:19, Romans 5:5    <sup>3</sup> Matthew 13:31-33, John 3:1-8, Galatians 6:15

We make a distinction between these “two gospels” for two reasons: First, because, with the exception of a few lines where Jesus alludes to the “necessity” of his coming death, all references in the New Testament to the “second gospel” of Jesus’ crucifixion are interpretations and explanations supplied *by others*, after Jesus’ death. Simply put, this was not the gospel preached *by* Jesus, but was rather a gospel preached *about* Jesus. But most importantly, we make a distinction between these two gospels because we understand them to be, on several levels, different, distinct, and wholly incompatible with each other.

As astonishing as it may be, Jesus states in the Padgett messages that *his* gospel had absolutely nothing to do with his crucifixion, and that all doctrines pertaining to his death, “sacrifice,” and vicarious atonement were interpretations and embellishments added after his death by followers who sought to make sense of the “impermissible” death of their Messiah.

We say “impermissible” because there were in Jewish culture at that time some very well established rules as to how a claimant to the title of “Messiah” would demonstrate his legitimacy, and according to those rules, the true Messiah would *overthrow* the Romans, not be put to death by them. These followers could not conceive of Jesus’ death as simply the result of the human treachery of those barbarous times, but instead felt driven to make sense of this unexpected turn of events by attributing it to a “divine plan.” Even though Jesus had repeatedly explained to them that his kingdom was “not of this world,”<sup>1</sup> their materially-based minds, conditioned by centuries of Hebrew “Messianic expectation,” could not let go of the belief that their Messiah must establish and reign over an earthly kingdom.

Jesus explains in the Padgett messages that, in keeping with these later interpretations of his death, the authors and editors of the books of the New Testament “reframed” the narratives of

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<sup>1</sup> John 18:36

his life to conform to their ideas. Words were placed in Jesus' mouth, and Hebrew Scripture was misquoted or quoted out of context, in order to substantiate this conception of Jesus as a "sacrificial lamb."

Many Christians will no doubt consider these statements to be preposterous – or worse, heresy, and the work of the devil – but hopefully some will finish this book, get out their Bibles, and visit their libraries for some serious research and rereading – not to mention soul-searching – before reaching a decision regarding these claims.

While contemplating this idea of two conflicting gospels, consider this as the crux of their disagreement: On the one hand, Jesus' gospel repeatedly refers to God's love and salvation as a *gift* from a caring and merciful Father, while on the other, the "gospel" of Jesus' crucifixion speaks of a "price" which first had to be paid for this salvation – a "ransom" to satisfy a wrathful God.

Now, while noting the profoundly different characters of the gods in these two gospels, consider the question: How can one be required to *pay* for a *gift*?

If Jesus "paid" for this gift, then it was not a gift; or else one would have to say that it was a gift from Jesus, not God. If Jesus *is* God, as some believe, then it would appear that God was "required" (by whom, we would have to ask) to pay *Himself* for His own gift.

Jesus' gospel, as related in the Bible, clearly teaches of a gift of salvation which is given *by God*,<sup>1</sup> and so we will simply point out that a gift, by definition, cannot require payment. In addition, we will point out that God, being the Owner of the entire universe, is certainly in a position to bestow gifts, and absolve supposed debts owed to Him, as He sees fit.<sup>2</sup> And so we will suggest that the most logical explanation for these divergent

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<sup>1</sup> John 4:10    <sup>2</sup> Luke 15:21-24

gospels is the one given by Jesus through Padgett and Samuels – that this doctrine of the “vicarious atonement” was a later interpretation added to Jesus’ gospel, inspired by existing Hebrew and pagan beliefs and customs (which will be discussed in detail in the course of these Sermons).

A student of the Bible also cannot help but note the fact that Jesus, while still very much alive, went from town to town preaching his gospel. It is not difficult to surmise that this gospel did not concern his future death – or any future event, for that matter, since most of his preachings recorded in the New Testament are given in *present* tense, and with barely a reference to the topic of death. Jesus explains the new birth to Nicodemus as something which is available for him to experience; he describes the holy spirit as something which Nicodemus can *feel*, even though his mind might not be able to explain how.<sup>1</sup> All of Jesus’ descriptions of the “Kingdom of Heaven” were clearly attempts to explain something that was present and applicable to his listeners in the “here and now.” As Jesus said to his townsfolk at the temple in Nazareth, “Today is this prophecy fulfilled in your ears.”<sup>2</sup>

And so, if we were to rephrase some words of the Bible to more accurately represent the truth of salvation as we now understand it, we might say: For God so loved the world that He gave us His *divine love*, that whosoever receive it should not perish, but have everlasting life. And He chose, as His Messiah and Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, to proclaim the glad tidings of the availability of this great gift.

### *The Choosing People*

Along with this explanation of his role as the Messiah, or “Chosen One” of God, Jesus provides us in the Old Testament Sermons with a fresh perspective on the role of the Hebrews as a “chosen people” of God.

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<sup>1</sup> John 3:1-8    <sup>2</sup> Luke 4:21

This topic of a “chosen people” is a difficult one to discuss, because for many even the phrase is repugnant, conjuring images of primitive parochial superstition wherein the god of “Tribe A” does battle with the god of “Tribe B,” while the members of each proudly boast of their god’s superior might (and sadly, we witness the persistence of such attitudes in our daily news). If we are indeed talking about the one true God, the Creator of the universe and Heavenly Father of all humankind, then some would say that the concept of a “chosen people” is an anachronism, left over from the tribal religions of antiquity. We will assure you in advance that Jesus’ treatment of this subject will be an enlightened one, refreshingly devoid of such small-minded conceptions of our Creator.

If we understand that God is Love, and if we understand that Jesus’ true gospel is a gospel of love, then we can rightly suspect that God’s “choosing” of the Hebrew people had something to do with love. Quite simply, we are told that the Hebrews were chosen to be part of a plan wherein humankind would be lifted to a higher level of human, or “natural” love, making possible the revelation of the “divine pathway,” through which this natural love could be transformed into a love divine.

As a backdrop to this plan, consider the fact that, in the day of Abraham, the base and “devolved” condition of most peoples of the world caused them to be largely oblivious of any such thing as “love.” All humans have the innate capacity to give and receive love (this being intrinsic to the nature of the human soul created in the *image* of God), but in much of humanity in that age, the love nature of the human soul was dormant. Men and women lived in large part like intelligent animals, manifesting kindness and loyalty primarily to their immediate family, and then to a lesser extent to their extended family and surrounding tribe.

Before God would be able to send a Messiah to the world, to proclaim the glad tidings of the gift of His divine love, He would have to awaken in at least some portion of humanity their innate natural love, as a spiritual force which was capable of reaching beyond their immediate family, and which in the fullness of its perfection could extend to embrace the entire "family of man." Without an awakening of the human love - *philos* in the New Testament - it would be impossible for anyone to understand Jesus' teachings of this "higher love," referred to in the New Testament as *agape*.

The story of the Old Testament, then, is of a plan of God to lift up a particular tribe of people into an awareness of their souls' essentially loving nature, into an awareness of their soul-kinship with all of humankind, and into an awareness of their relationship to the one true God, as *children* of their Heavenly Father. And all of this was to be accomplished in service of a greater plan: the eventual bestowal upon humankind of the great gift of God's divine love.

Now as we are given to understand that God does not practice favoritism amongst His children, we can understand that God would similarly choose any group of mortal humans who were even minimally willing to follow His guidance and commandments regarding such a plan of upliftment. And so, in the course of human history, one can observe the slow but steady development in the love nature and spiritual attunement of tribes and cultures throughout the world, in response to the tireless promptings and proddings of God's ministering angels and mortal servants. In "choosing" the descendants of Abraham, then, God most certainly did not "abandon" any of His other children.

We're speaking here in terms of groups of people because, practically speaking, humans in Old Testament times were tribal creatures, spiritual beliefs and attitudes being held in common by the tribe, and being passed down through the generations

within that tribe. At the same time, we understand that God sees and relates to His children primarily as individuals, not as members of a nation. We can only speak of the Hebrew *people* as having been chosen by God because of the degree to which the beliefs and fortunes of that nation's individuals were intertwined in the "collective consciousness" of their tribe.

For whatever reasons, the Hebrew tribes proved to be more malleable to God's uplifting influences than many of the other peoples of the world in that age, causing them over the centuries to develop a lead over neighboring tribes in their progress towards the ideal of perfected human love – and more importantly, in their awareness of the existence and nature of the one true God. Starting with the spiritual perceptiveness of Abraham, who had the breakthrough realization that there *was* a God, an impetus of spiritual growth began, slowly building momentum through the centuries. The pace was maintained and gradually increased through the efforts of Moses, David, Jeremiah, and the many others through the ages who sincerely sought to know and understand God's will for His children.

From our perspective, of course, the spiritual "superiority" of the ancient Hebrews is sometimes hard to discern, since all of the world's inhabitants in that age seem to have been so painfully lacking in the finer human graces of love, compassion, and forgiveness. We may grimace when we hear Moses' recipe for justice: "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," but perhaps we forget that this was actually an injunction against the common justice of the day, which would have included taking *all* the "eyes and teeth" of the offender – and those of every member of his family as well.

From all of this it is hopefully clear that God's choosing of the Hebrew people was accompanied by, and dependent upon, the Hebrew people's choosing of God; in other words, it was a mutual and reciprocal choice. In fact, the Hebrew word for

“chosen,” *bachar*, also means “choose,” and so we could legitimately translate “the chosen people” as “the choosing people.”<sup>1</sup> We want to make clear at the outset our understanding that God loves all of His children equally and unconditionally, since the “Hebrew-centric” perspective of the Old Testament and of these Sermons might tend to obscure this all-important truth.

In considering the Old Testament, we must also keep in mind that this is the story of the Hebrews’ long journey of spiritual upliftment as seen through the eyes of the Hebrews themselves. If we remember that they were not necessarily in a position to clearly see *where* God was trying to lead them, we will then more easily be able to sort through and forgive their various superstitious notions, and, with the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, gain a greater understanding and appreciation of the long and arduous uphill march of God’s “chosen people.”

#### *A Word About Words*

We should mention that the Bible passages quoted in these Sermons appear to have come from several different sources. Some are verbatim quotes from the King James Bible, some follow the Revised Standard, while others appear to be either a paraphrase of one of these translations, or perhaps a quote from another source entirely. Since we do not consider any version of the Bible to be “definitive,” we have simply placed in quotes any words which substantially resemble a passage in the King James or Revised Standard Bible, leaving more extensively paraphrased passages without quotes.

While these Sermons’ subject is a book commonly referred to as “the Word of God,” we would suggest that God’s “word,” ultimately, is pure *truth*, unencumbered by imperfect man-made words. And so, while Jesus uses words in this book in an attempt to clarify words in another book, keep in mind that words are

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<sup>1</sup> *Bachar* could also be translated to mean “the excellent people,” or “the special people.”

but man-made tools – tools which must necessarily fall short when trying to express spiritual realities which the human mind can barely perceive, much less describe.

As an obvious example of the inadequacy of our words, the use in this book of male gender pronouns and the word “Father” in reference to God is not literally accurate: the reason for Jesus’ (and our) use of this seemingly sexist language is that it helps convey a sense of intimacy with our Heavenly Parent, a God who is anything but an “it.” It would be perfectly appropriate to substitute these words with female gender pronouns and references to our “Heavenly Mother,” understanding that no words can adequately define or describe the vastness of God.



*The Old Testament Sermons*



*CHAPTER ONE*  
*The Gospel of God's Love*

*July 16, 1957*

I am here, Jesus.

I am here in response to your request that I write a sermon for those who are interested in learning more about the Gospel which I really preached when on earth – a Gospel designed to show humankind the way to immortality through possession of God's love. Through prayer for this love, the human soul becomes transformed into a divine soul, possessed of the essence of God.

Yes, that was my mission when I was on earth, and that was the great message which my Father in Heaven sent me to preach to all humankind. And it is the message which I have been, and am still endeavoring to bring to humankind over the long centuries from that time until the present. It is my hope that the clouds of incomprehension can be at last cleared away, and that humankind can know exactly what I preached when on earth, and learn the exact way to become at-one with God in His divine love and mercy, and thus be enabled to achieve that immortality of soul which they so much desire and so eagerly seek, and yet which seemingly evades their grasp and frustrated yearnings.

As a preface to these sermons I wish to state that what I have previously written through James Padgett is essentially correct, and that the true and only way to the Father and His love is thoroughly explained in the messages which I and other spirits were able to transmit through him.<sup>1</sup>

In these first sermons we will address the questions: Why is it that the churches neglect to turn humankind to the Father's love? And, what is necessary for religious leaders to do to bring about the realization that God's love is available to all His children?

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<sup>1</sup> A brief summary of the Padgett messages is included in the *Introduction*.

I wish to show why it is so important for *all* humankind, regardless of religious affiliation or background, to understand my simple teachings, an understanding which the trappings and misconceptions of present-day Christian churches make so difficult and uncertain for the very congregations they serve and seek to guide. The Christian churches of today, built as they are upon the speculations of people who did not comprehend my teachings, cannot show the way to the Father and His love, because they have no understanding of God's love as a precious gift – the “pearl of great price” – and so cannot lead their members to seek and obtain this love and its resulting new birth of soul.

These churches cannot inspire their members to seek God's love because they no longer understand, and have not for long centuries understood, that God's love, possessed by the human soul through prayer to Him for its coming, is the “Way” – and the only way – to *at-onement*<sup>1</sup> with God.

The Christian churches of today emphasize the moral order of society, very much as did Moses with his Ten Commandments; and obedience to a moral order, as I have previously explained, has merely the force of purifying a person's soul and bringing it into harmony with God's laws. No matter how thorough the purification, morality does not have the power to bring about the *transformation* of a human soul into a divine soul, filled with God's love and mercy.

No obedience to any moral code, I repeat, nor for that matter, any magical effect of anyone's blood, can cause this transformation, for only God's love, conveyed by the holy spirit in response to earnest prayer, can bring about such a transformation. No church as it is constituted today teaches this simple but great fact – which was the true gospel that I taught as the appointed Messiah of God.

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<sup>1</sup> “At-onement” is a happy play on words, being similar in meaning to the traditional Christian “atonement” (“the doctrine that the reconciliation of God and humankind will be accomplished through Christ”) but having a different root: the self-explanatory words - *at one*.

It is for this reason, I must repeat, that the way to the Father and His gift of immortality lies not with the rituals of the churches, nor with their doctrines of moral behavior, nor through the "efficacy" of my blood or mere belief in my name. The way to the Father is explained in the simple gospel that I taught on earth, and that I am again teaching in these messages.

The present-day churches do not possess this knowledge of the way to at-onement with God, and this is why they must be given this, my true gospel, so that they may follow my teachings, and carry on my work of awakening humankind to the fundamental truth – that we may all be one through God's divine love.

### *The Way to Immortality*

*August 24, 1957*

I have been waiting to write another sermon about the Heavenly Father's love, and His eagerness that humankind should receive it and become His immortal children; and I also wish to continue explaining how and why the present-day churches, including those of Christianity, are not in possession of this great truth.

Now I do not wish to say anything that might be construed as derogatory to the invaluable practices of community service, charity, social welfare, and moral instruction which these churches perform. Throughout the centuries, churches and religious organizations have been forces helping to bring humankind into closer harmony with God's laws, through the teaching of moral and ethical codes such as the Decalogue of Moses, and its equivalents developed and practiced in many other religions.

Of course, religions based upon teachings of morality and ethics were the only kind that could exist before my coming, but the fact is that present-day Christianity, in all its branches

and permutations, is largely a perpetuation of this same type of religion. In modern-day Christianity there is little comprehension that I came, not to purify souls through the moral and ethical principles of Moses (which I merely confirmed as God-given laws) but to show the way to a *divine* soul, made so by the constant inflowing of God's divine love - a soul incapable of sin, impervious to temptation, and no longer in need of the Ten Commandments or any other moral or ethical code.

This divine love, the gift of the loving Father to whosoever seeks it through earnest prayer, is carried into the soul by the holy spirit - which is not the third person of the so-called trinity, nor even the "spirit of God" of the Old Testament, but is that energy of God designated to perform this delicate and "holy" mission. Many Christians understand, somewhat correctly, that the holy spirit is God's *grace* which "fulfills the law," but more accurately, it is not the holy spirit which fulfills the law, but the Father's love, and this love is in reality the grace which pervades the soul.

And this state of grace, if I may use the term, is not a fixed or static condition, due to belief in my name, or because of any vicarious atonement effected by my crucifixion, as preached by the churches, but is a *continuous* process of soul transformation into the divine essence, through constant and earnest prayer to the Father for His love, in this world and in the next, throughout all eternity.

This message of eternal life through the gift of God's divine love was the message which, as the Messiah of God, I taught to the Hebrews and to all humankind when on earth, and represents the only way to achieve immortality of soul, through atonement with God.

I wish to emphasize and repeat, that it be well understood, that this divine love is not the same as the human, or "natural" love which man has or may have for his fellowman and for God.

This distinction has not been understood or taught by most churches, for they erroneously believe that love is universally identical, and that I loved, and that God loves mankind with the same love which man has for God and his fellowman.

An abundance of love for one's neighbor is simply an abundance of the natural love which God provided man at his creation; but God's love for His children is a completely different kind of love, and can come into the human soul only by prayer to the Father for its inflow, and it is by this inflowing that the process of transformation from a human into a divine soul takes place.

The potentiality, or privilege of receiving God's love was available at man's creation, but was rejected and consequently lost by the first human parents (as allegorically related in Genesis), and remained lost until the time of my coming. It was as the first human whose soul had been filled and transformed with God's divine love that I was the Father's "only begotten son" (at the time), and I was, and am, in that way, the Messiah. I was "born of the holy spirit" in that it was this energy of God that brought His love into my soul, as it will into the soul of whosoever seeks His love through earnest prayer.

As a human being, I was born in the same way all humans are born, of my parents, Mary and Joseph, and in no such mysterious and metaphysical manner as taught by the Christian churches. And here again, these churches neither understand who I was, nor what I taught, having me born of a virgin, in violation of God's laws of reproduction, and having no understanding of how God's love, obtained through prayer, enables one to receive a *new birth*<sup>1</sup> of soul, to achieve that salvation unto eternal life for which their soul is yearning.

I shall stop now, for I have said what I had intended for this second sermon; but there are other things that I wish to write

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:13, 3:7, 2 Corinthians 5:17

concerning the failure of the Christian churches to preach the *glad tidings* of the Father's love, and so I shall continue in this vein.

Let me urge all those to whom these sermons may come to have faith in God's love and mercy, and to pray with their whole soul for the inflow of His love, and also to make known that the true gospel of Jesus the Christ is being revealed anew to humankind.

### *The Frailty of the Human Love*

August 25, 1957

I wish to go into further detail concerning the message of the Father's love, and its availability to all humankind through prayer to Him for its inflow, and the reasons why the Christian churches as they are constituted today do not possess or teach the glad tidings of immortality as I preached it when on earth.

The whole message of my ministry while on earth – that God's divine love is available to transform the human soul into an immortal divine soul – has been misconstrued into a teaching about the mere human love, which is not immortal, but always subject to defilement. And the will of the Father – that man should be invited to become at-one with Him in His love – has not been carried out, and is not being taught by these churches. But I wish to declare to you, with all the authority that I possess, that God is not mocked, and that His will must eventually prevail. And it shall, as men themselves choose to come to the Father for that love, and are thereby transformed into His immortal children, with a "soul's understanding" of the truths that these sermons (and others to follow) convey.

The love, then, that is now the concern of the churches which claim Christianity, is not that divine love which I came to make known, but is that love which is human only, and which was given to humanity as part of their created soul. That soul was created in the *image* of God, and not of His essence, and so,

regardless of what some churches might teach, the soul of man is not divine, and man cannot look within himself to develop any so-called "divine spark." In the absence of the divine love, man can develop only the soul qualities that he already possesses – his human love for his fellowman, and his human love for God, as taught by Moses.

It is for this reason that the Christian churches, whether they will it or not, have continued to rely upon the Ten Commandments as the moral code by which their members are to live by; for while they teach that my shed blood redeems the faithful of their sins, yet they realize that good church-goers, as well as all humankind, continue to sin, and that the "saving love" that Jesus has for them does not prevent them from sinning. And so, it is only by obedience to the Ten Commandments – with encouragement and exhortations from the ministers and priests, followed by threats of an everlasting hell of brimstone and fire – that the faithful are able to make progress in their sincere struggles against temptations and the wrongful indulgence of their material desires.

In their prayers to God, therefore, they seek His aid that their souls be purified of sin; and indeed, God does aid the sincere penitent, by sending His "ministers" to strengthen the human will in those persons who seek that aid. Nevertheless, the problem for the Christian faithful continues to be the problem of sin, with a focus on the efforts of the human will to overcome the sinful tendencies to which mortals are prone.

As they sin, those that sincerely repent and turn in prayer to God find that they are indeed relieved of their sins, for the penitent soul is no longer in the same condition that it was while sinning, and so is, in a sense, cleansed of that sin. But even in that cleansed condition, their soul is still subject to temptation. And with only the human will and the desire not to sin, they may be temporarily successful in their efforts to avoid sin, but

are dismayed to find that, despite their belief that they are following the "way" to God, they sooner or later succumb to the evils that cling fast to their souls, and sin again. This process continues repeatedly and with little abatement in their lives, and the only consolation which the sincere Christian may have is the feeling that he is gaining, to some extent, in the constant warfare against sin, as his strengthened will, and love for God combine to lessen his desires to sin.

And thus the Christian finds that the "grace" or "baptism by the holy spirit," of which he is supposedly the recipient by virtue of his faith in Jesus' name, has not purified him of his tendency to sin, and thus has not really "fulfilled the law"<sup>1</sup> – for he must continue in his struggle to live by God's laws in order not to sin. He knows that if the Ten Commandments were given by God that he should not sin, then Christ's "redeeming sacrifice" was also made that he should not sin, and that the holy spirit (which he believes to be within him) should have been a power which protected him against the desires to sin, and made him "free of sin."

Paul taught in Romans 2:14-15 that Christians can do *by nature* the things contained in the law, and yet for many Christians this has not come to pass. And so the sincere churchman finds that his "grace," as the churches so preach it, has not fulfilled the law, (which he must still strive to obey), and he must find his consolation in the thought (as he has been taught) that Jesus' blood will somehow "cover" his sins.

Yet, if that is so, then Christianity degenerates into a religion wherein a person may continue to violate God's laws (in that Jesus' blood will "cover" the sins of those who believe in his name), and wherein God can accept into His holy house a soul laden with sin and evil, merely because of faith in that name.

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<sup>1</sup> The Jewish laws of ethics and morality, or Torah – see Matthew 5:17

Hence, Christians, and all humankind, must understand that neither Jesus' nor anyone else's blood has the power to wash away the sins that each one has committed, and that a soul is "purified" only to the extent that it is obedient unto the laws of God. Christians must also understand that the "grace" they have been taught is theirs as a result of their belief in Jesus and his sacrifice is not the true grace which I taught. Such belief can lead only to the purification of the human love, without that sure power to eliminate sin as does the divine love – which not merely purifies the human soul, but transforms it into a divine soul.

And this is the reason why Christians, despite their faith in the so-called vicarious atonement, are so much concerned with moral "backsliding" – sinning after they have been told they have won salvation through belief in Jesus' name. And this is why the Catholics have their "purgatory" – a place for the purification of the soul after the material death – even after they have been taught that Jesus' blood has redeemed them from sin. And this is why, as I have said, Christianity today is, regardless of the preaching of the priests and pastors, merely a religion identical with Judaism, placing its ultimate reliance upon the Ten Commandments of Moses for human soul purification, without the power of the *new heart* which I came to make known to all humanity. These churches do not know or teach the message which I preached when on earth as the Messiah of God: *soul immortality through prayer for God's love*.

### *The Fulfillment of the Law*

*August 26, 1957*

I was glad to be able to write to explain how the present-day Christian churches are preaching a religion no different in its vital foundation from the religion of Judaism from which they parted, in that they are teaching the moral and ethical principles of human conduct as the "way" to God. As I have shown, these

churches by so doing are merely perpetuating the Mosaic code of obedience to God's laws, leading to the purification of the human soul, and a place in the spiritual heavens prepared for those souls who have *not* been transformed by the Father's love.<sup>1</sup>

These churches believe that, as the Messiah of God, or God Himself incarnate as the Son, I brought salvation to humankind (that is to say, to those church members who adhere to this belief) through my supposed sacrifice on the cross, wherein my divine shed blood is held to be a "ransom" for the sins of those who believe in this supposed sacrifice.

To some, this means that they may continue to sin, for their sins are forgiven, as they falsely believe, and that church absolution for sinning is sufficient to keep them in a state of grace. This is entirely untrue – and a most vicious untruth at that.

Others, with a better understanding of what sin involves, declare that Christ's sacrifice of love, as they believe, makes man duty-bound to answer this love with love of his own, which must manifest itself by a rejection of sin. Others, in an appeal by their church to their love for him whom they consider their savior, are taught, preposterously enough, that each individual sin renews the sacrifice I am supposed to have made on the cross for the sinner, and that I am subjected to the agonies of crucifixion repeatedly as each sin is committed. Of course there is a lack of understanding here that the spirit body, divested of the material body by death, is no longer subject to the bodily afflictions of the material world.

In all these cases, we have an appeal to a person's human love to strengthen his or her will against the desire to sin. And this is Judaism, I must point out, whether the churches understand it or not. For just as the Jew is exhorted not to sin for the love of Jehovah and the Torah, so is the Christian exhorted not to sin for love of his savior. And the effect, if successful, is the same: the

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<sup>1</sup> Those transformed by the Divine Love live in a distinct realm referred to as the "Celestial Heavens."

strengthening of the human will against sinning, and the subsequent step forward in soul purification.

In short, the doctrine of what the Christian calls the "indwelling spirit" or "baptism with the holy ghost," based upon a belief in my name, is meaningless, because this spirit or ghost believed to be in the soul has no transforming action upon it, and so the fulfillment of the law by grace, as taught by the churches, fails to be realized. For while the churches would like to say that, because of Christ's so-called sacrifice and man's faith in his name, man does not sin, they cannot in truthfulness so declare, for it is abundantly evident that this is not the case.

Yet, soul perfection through love *was* my message as the Messiah, and this was what my immediate followers and their disciples taught, as is recorded in the New Testament. And if the false doctrines of my sacrifice and blood-shedding are eliminated as the interpolations they are, and if my message is understood and interpreted correctly, then what these early followers recorded in their gospels is the truth. For the early church, free of these false beliefs, was filled with individuals who had obtained to a certain (and some to a great) extent, that real grace, God's love, which eliminates sin from the soul as it effects its transformation into a divine soul, and thus actually brings about a soul condition whereby the laws of Moses are no longer needed. The Torah is fulfilled by the divine presence of the Father Himself in the souls of those to whom it comes in response to earnest prayer.

So you can see that the Christian churches of today are not preaching my message of soul transformation (with its concomitant purification) through God's love, but are preaching instead a false doctrine of salvation through my supposed sacrifice on the cross, and remission of sin through the shedding of my blood. A consequence of this erroneous teaching is that the *real* grace, which is obtained only through earnest and sincere

prayer, is not sought for, and thus does not have the opportunity to cleanse and transform men's souls. And it is for this reason that many Christians have not experienced the Father's love in their souls to the degree that they would wish, nor have they experienced the remission of sins that they have been promised, for they still sin and are tempted to sin without ceasing.

And thus many Christians, while they continue to be churchgoers, and adhere to the rites and ceremonies of their respective churches, realize that the great saving grace they have been promised and told is theirs with a belief in my name has not been experienced as a reality in their lives, and they feel disappointment and frustration with the realization that the *new birth* is not really theirs.

And the only answer given by the churches is a pure speculation, and a pious hope, that belief in Jesus' name will somehow give them, when they die, a place in Heaven, and that until then they must simply have faith in the teachings of the churches. What a poor and apologetic answer this is, and how contradictory to their own New Testament, which preaches with authority the evidences *on this earth* of the transformation which God's grace - His love - makes in the human soul: in Peter, John, James, and my other disciples; in Saul of Tarsus (Paul), Mary Magdalene, Levi the publican (Matthew), Nicodemus ben Gurion; in Barnabas, Cornelius, Apollo, Aquila, Priscilla, Silas, Timothy, and many others I may name - many of whom died as martyrs because of their *certain knowledge* of their immortality of soul, through their possession of the Father's love.

Christians must learn that the doctrine of the "indwelling of the holy spirit" as the result of a mere belief in my name is a myth. And the proof of the falsity of this doctrine is the brutal but incontrovertible fact that so many Christians, as in other faiths of humankind, continue to be tempted and to sin.

And Christians, like other people, will continue to sin in this world, and suffer the effects of their sins for a long time in the world to come, until they stop merely believing in my name for their salvation, and begin to *pray to the Father for His love*, so that, in answer to such prayer, His love - His real grace - can be conveyed into their souls by the holy spirit, and effect the transformation of the human soul into a divine soul, in the true fulfillment of the law.

*Abraham's True Faith and Righteousness*

September 25, 1957

It is very important for humankind to understand how and why present-day Christianity is not teaching the message of immortal life which I taught when on earth, and so I must continue to dwell upon this subject in detail.

Since Christians continue to be taught and continue to believe that they achieve salvation in special ways from "faith in my name," and through so-called communion with me, they must be thoroughly disabused of this tragic fallacy, so that they may be enabled to open their minds and hearts to the truths of the Father's love. And so I wish to explain the error behind the reasoning that mere faith in my name will be sufficient for a person's salvation, and that such faith will "cover their sins" in the sight of God.

This religious notion, of course, goes back to a saying in Genesis 15:6, to the effect that "Abraham believed in God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And so Christians are told, and believe, that if they simply have faith in Jesus' name, they too will have it "accounted to them for righteousness," and their sins will become as white as fleece in the sight of the Father. But the scriptural story of Abraham, and the supposed testing of his faith with Isaac, does not accurately present that which transpired. The account given in the Old Testament was written in its

final form after the Babylonian exile, some two thousand years after the event it is supposed to describe, and the ideals and deep faith in God which pervaded at that time were very much different from religious thought at the time of Abraham, when child sacrifice and belief in fertility gods were the *norm*.

When Abraham had faith in God, his faith would have been void and in vain had he not accompanied his faith with works, and departed out of Ur of the Chaldees. And when Abraham had faith, he had faith that God did not wish him to sacrifice his son Isaac, and thus he carried out that faith in works, by sacrificing an animal instead.

Abraham rebelled against the custom of the times to sacrifice children, for had he placed Isaac on the altar, it would not have been out of obedience to God, but in obedience to the sacrificial rites and ceremonies of his day. But God, through His messengers, had revealed unto Abraham *not* to bring his son Isaac to sacrifice, and such was Abraham's faith in God that he obeyed with works, and broke with the religious customs of the time. This is the real story of Abraham's faith and obedience to God, for in truth, God never tested anyone in the manner related in the Old Testament account. God is not brutal, as He is so often depicted in the Scriptures, but He is the kind and loving Father who, through Abraham, was able to bring about in that area of the world the cessation, in time to come, of that horrible practice of human sacrifice.

And so I wish to show what Abraham's faith really was, and how it was misunderstood by the writers of the Old Testament, who inserted the supernatural appearance of the ram and the cruel testing of Abraham's faith in an attempt to explain a part of the story they could not otherwise understand. But more importantly, I wish to show that Abraham's faith was not sterile, but led to action and doings contrary to what was customary in those

days, and that it was in the accomplishment of these works that Abraham did what was righteous. As my brother James explained in his epistle, Abraham's faith reached supreme expression through his works, for there is no faith without the *practice* of that faith. And it was in this way that Abraham "believed in God," and it was accounted to him for righteousness, and he was called "friend of God."<sup>1</sup>

And thus I say to the Christians of today who believe that their faith *is* their righteousness, and that their sins will be "covered" by their faith in my name, that they will be greatly dismayed when they come into the world of spirits and realize that their understanding of Christianity was based on a false premise, and that their sins, far from being covered by a white fleece, are completely visible to all; and that the only way these sins can be removed is through the workings of the law of compensation, in bitterness, tears, and remorse, or through the workings of God's great law of mercy, brought into action by prayerful supplications for His love.

So, Christians, be not blinded by a single saying in the Scriptures that may lead to conduct which is contrary to the laws of God, on the false premise that everything contained therein is the "word of God," and is therefore sacred and accurate. My brother James had to preach against a faith devoid of conduct in life - an attitude which had already gained headway at that time, and which is still being perpetuated by some of the Christian churches. Without that conduct which is in conformity with God's laws of love, neither rites, ceremonies, nor vain religious beliefs will bring about a purification of soul, and qualify one for a home in God's heavens.

I will close now, and will write next time to explain why it is that no "shedding of blood" can bring about a remission of sin, as claimed by the Christian churches of today.

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<sup>1</sup> James 2:23

*The Origins of the "Blood Sacrifice"**October 22, 1957*

I wish to explain why it is that no blood, be it of man or beast, has the efficacy of redeeming a human soul from sin.

This concept is at the apex of what is called the Mass in the Catholic Church, or Communion in Protestant churches. This rite has no foundation in Judaism, and it is written, falsely, that it was I who instituted the ceremony at the Last Supper. These churches point to some unimportant incidents in the Old Testament as indicative of the future rite, which I shall explain as having no relationship to the Mass, the facts of these incidents having been severely distorted to accord with the churches' views.

The churches reason that the efficacy of the blood sacrifice is plainly stated in the Old Testament, and that since that book is sacred, and the "word of God," then it is a fact, beyond any doubt, that such a rite does cleanse of sin. The statement referred to, of course, is that "the life is in the blood," taken from the sacrificial code in Leviticus. This statement, and the importance placed upon it, demands that humankind should obtain an explanation of its true meaning.

Worship of a deity through a blood sacrifice, dating from an era prior to the dawn of our civilization, was quite widespread in Old Testament times. It was a means of placating angry gods, and letting loose of certain virtues which the blood, especially of human beings, was supposed to possess. The barbarous peoples of those times, living daily close to death by violent means, either through warfare or in struggle with wild animals, were quick to observe the relationship between shed blood and loss of life, and so it is not strange that blood and life came to be thought of as being synonymous. Of course, there were other ideas pertaining to the source of life, for it was also noticed that there was no breathing in death, and some cultures entertained the notion that life was in the breath. The important thing to understand is that

neither of these barbarian conceptions was "sacred," but that they were merely primitive attempts to understand the source of life.

Thus, the Hebrew people subscribed to the idea of the "efficacy" of blood sacrifice simply because it was widely accepted at the time, not because it was true or "sacred." And so we can observe that some of the Hebrew practices based on this concept developed as a sociological growth, divorced and completely separate from their religion; hence the Hebrews spilled the blood of animals on the ground, making sure that meat for consumption contained no blood, as prescribed in their daily food laws.

The great "contribution" which the Hebrews made to the practice of blood sacrifice was the rejection of *human* sacrifice, as found in the story of Abraham. This was of course a great humane advance, but the fact that animal sacrifices continued to be offered, and that these sacrifices were written about in the Scriptures, did not make them "sacred," nor did it make it in any way true that the shedding of animal blood cleansed from sin.

The priestly class among the Hebrews was naturally in favor of retaining these primitive views, not because they were true, but because it was in the perpetuation of these rites that priests made their livelihood, since certain parts of the sacrificed animals were reserved for them. Such a class, devoted to the religious instruction, purity, and ethical conduct of the people to whom they ministered, was to be encouraged, of course, but it is not hard to understand how, in time, this priestly class, or many among that class, began to lose sight of the moral and ethical standards of living in which they were supposed to guide the people, in favor of those ritualistic activities to which they were the sole heirs, and which gave them in their own eyes a unique importance.

When the national life of the Hebrews was destroyed by the Babylonian captivity, their religion, or better said, the rituals connected with their religion became dominant and all important.

It was during this period that these priests invested many of the old Hebrew customs with an aura of religion and sacredness; and after the return to Judea from Babylonia, the priests and scribes rewrote many of the old stories to suit their fancy. And thus it was that the brutal and primitive concept of the blood sacrifice of animals was retained with great vigor by the priests, being vitally connected with their food, activities, and importance.

The entire concept of the remission of sin through the shedding of blood is, therefore, based on a crude, primitive custom, and is in no way sacred or holy or the "word of God," as accepted blindly by the Christian churches, whose Mass and Communion are simply a continuation of this primitive concept.

The prophets of Israel and Judah, aware of the falsity of the sacrificial system, attempted repeatedly to teach the people the true religion of ethical and moral conduct. Micah, in the days of Israel, declared that these things alone were necessary to righteousness: to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God.<sup>1</sup> And the psalmist said: "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not. Then said I: 'Lo, I come. I delight to do thy will, thy Law is written in my heart'."<sup>2</sup> And other prophets, with sayings coming from God's messengers, wrote in a similar way.

I will stop now, but I shall continue with this subject in my next sermon.

### *The Christian Rite Called Mass*

*November 4, 1957*

I am here tonight to write about that Christian rite called the Mass, or transubstantiation, and to give you further proof and additional reasons why this ceremony is neither God-given, as the churches claim, nor was it ever, nor could it have been, instituted by me.

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<sup>1</sup> Micah 6:8    <sup>2</sup> Psalms 40:6-8

In my last sermon I have told you that the basic principle on which this rite is founded (the sacredness of the blood, or that the life of the living being is in the blood) was never "revealed" to man by God. It is not a truth that blood is the component of living organisms to which all other components are inferior, and on which God has made the "life principle" dependent; first, because there are living organisms that do not contain a system of circulating blood; and second, because, in the animal kingdom, life is dependent in the last analysis upon the health of all the individual organs, and their interrelationship to form an integrated whole, functioning as a unit. And furthermore, life on earth would be impossible without those physical conditions upon which all life is contingent. Therefore, rather than to say that any particular part of the being is sacred, it is the being itself that is sacred, and in a still larger view, it is life itself which is sacred.

In the several centuries following my ministry on earth, the church which developed brought into existence the rite of the Mass, taken from pagan ceremonies which revolved around the sacrifice of a god and his resurrection, and which included the aspiration of achieving "communion" with that god. This communion was accomplished through participation in these pagan festivals, which often featured the eating of the flesh and blood of that animal sacred to, or identified with, that god. And thus in this way much of the ancient world paid tribute to the sacred bull, through Siva, Dionysus, and Mithra. In Palestine the Canaanite cult of the bull extended temporarily to the Hebrews, and was found in the *baalim*, or gods.

Since the early Christians came to regard me as part of the godhead, and sacrificial in character, they came to identify me with the sacrificial lamb of the Hebrews. But as they could not partake of the flesh and blood of the sacrificial lamb because of the Hebrew food laws, they found a substitute in bread and wine instead – bread and wine because such a meal took away from

the Christian rite any superficial similarity with the current pagan practices of feasting on animal flesh and blood, and because such a practice seemed related, at least to the church leaders of those days, to the bread and wine which the king of Salem, Melchizedek, was supposed to have given Abraham in the story in Genesis. This gave these churchmen the occasion to claim that, since this Melchizedek was a priest-king, my appearance as the Christ, also, was in the role of priest-king.

I wish to state here very emphatically that I never have been a priest, either on earth or in the spirit world these many centuries, and that I never practice rites of a religious nature. My only act of reverence to the Heavenly Father is *intense prayer to Him for His divine love*, as I did while on earth, and ever since I entered into spirit life; and to seek to carry out, with all my power and influence, His will, and help to turn humankind to Him and His great redeeming love.

Never was I a king, as was Melchizedek, nor did I ever seek to become one, and the New Testament is correct in stating that I avoided the attempt of some of my unenlightened followers to make me king in Palestine. And the only reason for my being master of the Celestial Heavens is the state of my soul, which is filled to a certain degree with the Father's essence, His love, and which I shall continue to fill with this love throughout all eternity.

In no way was I ever connected with Melchizedek, either as king or priest, nor did Melchizedek serve bread and wine with any other purpose than to be host to Abraham; and bread and wine was the repast because it was these foods which were most available in Palestine, which may be seen from the name of my own birthplace, Bethlehem, meaning *House of Bread*, and the grapes decorating the veil of the temple in Jerusalem, and the many parables about grapevines used in my teachings.

Now one of the reasons why the episode of Melchizedek has such importance to Christians (as evidenced by Paul's epistle to the Hebrews) is that Psalm 110 reads, in part, "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." This psalm is supposed to have been composed by King David, so that the wording is presumed to mean that God made David's "lord" (taken by Paul in Hebrews to mean me) a priest like Melchizedek. Actually this psalm was not composed by David, but by a member of his court, and referred to David himself, so that its meaning was that David was not only king by God's grace, but that such royalty also made him high priest. The occasion for this mention of David as a priest came after he was instrumental in bringing the ark to Jerusalem, when he performed the ecclesiastical duties, dancing before the Lord, making burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, and blessing the people in the name of God.

In the same way, the first lines of Psalm 110: "The Lord said unto my lord, 'Sit thou at my right hand' " does not mean, as has been interpreted, that God spoke to David's "lord," meaning me, but that God spoke to the writer's "lord," meaning David. If you read this psalm carefully, you will see that the references to God's "wrath" reveal that the song is not a revelation about the Christ, as some believe, but merely a reference to King David, the warrior, as a servant of God who will vent His supposed wrath upon the heathen nations.

### *Jeremiah, the Suffering Servant*

*December 19, 1957*

I would like, in this sermon, to explain how and why the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, dealing with the "suffering servant of God," neither refers to me primarily, nor has any bearing upon my mission as the Messiah of God, in that my mission was simply to preach the good news that prayer for His love would bring man into at-onement with the Heavenly Father.

In the first place I must tell you that the Hebrew scribes, in their editing of the old manuscripts, were fond of bringing together similar material under one heading, or shall I say under the name of one author, whether or not he was the sole writer. Many of the psalms attributed to King David were not written by him, and many of the stories in the Chronicles and Book of Kings show differences in content, depending on whether the account was written by an earlier or later source. Thus I want to tell you that the Book of Isaiah was not written by one prophet, but by several, even though the title in the Old Testament suggests but one author.

You should know that two of the "Isaiahs" wrote before the destruction of the temple and the captivity in Babylonia, but that a third one wrote as an exile in Babylonia, and lamented in his writings the sufferings that Jeremiah had endured in trying to bring the people to an understanding of their dire situation. And so, when the last Isaiah wrote about the "suffering servant of God," while he was thinking in a general way of Israel being such an entity, yet he was also thinking specifically of Jeremiah; for, indeed, the life and death of Jeremiah were such that he was a, or *the* suffering servant of Jehovah (as the God of the Hebrews is often called). Jeremiah suffered unto death because of his mission, assigned him by God and His messengers, to explain to the people and rulers that they must mend their ways, or that otherwise they would create conditions of spiritual and material consequences which would bring about the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the people.

The priests and the people brought Jeremiah to trial for his prophecy that the temple would fall, and for calling it a den of iniquity. For this, and for his fearlessness in rebuking their violations of the moral and ethical code of the Hebrew religion, they sought to invoke upon him a sentence of death. He escaped at his trial simply because moderates prevailed in an atmosphere

where the sovereignty of the Hebrew nation proved a stabilizing factor, helping to restore order and common sense – in contrast to my own similar trial, where the lack of this sovereignty helped to create conditions of hysteria. Later, Jeremiah was beaten by the temple priests and placed in stocks, to bear the hostile looks and threats of passersby. When Jerusalem fell, and the people were taken in captivity to Babylonia, there were among those who remained some who blamed Jeremiah's prophecies for the fate of the nation, and when they had the opportunity, they had him put to death.

Now the last Isaiah, who wrote as an exile in Babylonia, learned of the unhappy end of the prophet, and, realizing that Jeremiah had sought to prevent the catastrophe that had befallen the nation, evoked the figure of Jeremiah as a servant of God who had suffered and died in the performance of his mission. It is this episode in the history of the Jewish people which brought forth the 53rd chapter of Isaiah.

The conception of a divine victim who sacrificed his life for others was quite common in Babylonia at this time, and could be seen in the sufferings, death, and triumphal resurrection of the god Tammuz. However, the Babylonian Isaiah thought that Jeremiah had died *because* of the sins of his people, and not, as Christians wish to interpret it, as an expiation for their sins. The writer felt that the figure of Jeremiah could be likened to one of these pagan gods, in that he had actually sacrificed his life in his attempt to keep the people of his nation from wrongdoing, and in that way, from disaster.

Deeply moved by the tragic experience of Jeremiah, and closely in touch with spirit forces at the time, the Babylonian Isaiah sensed that another prophet of a later day would arise and suffer a similar fate in seeking to save his people from sin and destruction. And here he had an inkling of what was to happen to me, not because he actually foresaw those events, but because

he understood that if the people had consistently acted in certain ways through the years, they would most likely act in much the same way at a later period.

In short, never did the Babylonian Isaiah seek to prophesy my death as inherent in the role of Messiah, and never did he mean to suggest or hint that the shedding of my blood on a cross was necessary for man's salvation. What he did mean to express was the lesson, seen with clear hindsight in the example of Jeremiah, that a prophet's call to righteousness must not be ignored.

Isaiah was aware of the "heart of flesh" declared by Jeremiah, and thought that, in view of his great stand for righteousness, Jeremiah had been bestowed with such a heart. Isaiah had a sense that the soul of a "suffering servant of God" was the key to salvation, and in this he was right, for it was my soul, made divine through the Heavenly Father's love, which brought the potentiality of eternal life to humankind.

### *The New Heart in the Old Testament*

*January 25, 1958*

I would like to tell you about the "new heart," and what it really means. It was the new heart that made of me, and makes me now, the Messiah of God. And it was the new heart which was foretold in the Old Testament by those ancient writers who had the spiritual perception to learn what was to be the plan of the Heavenly Father for the soul salvation for humankind. And in my days on earth, as I preached of the Father's love, my disciples and those who followed my teachings recognized that the new heart, as I explained the term, constituted the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation.

I have been telling you in my sermons that the way to the Father taught by me is through prayer for His divine love, which, on being conveyed into the human soul by the agency of the holy spirit, effects the elimination of those accretions and

tendencies at odds with the purity of the soul, and brings about, above all, the transformation of that soul into a divine soul – the abode wherein the essence of God dwells – bringing the “Kingdom of God” to whosoever that soul may be.

This transformed divine soul was and is the new heart which the prophets foretold in the Old Testament, and which was first fulfilled in me as the Messiah. These predictions of the new heart were the true portents of the coming of the Christ, for they told in what way he would prove his claim to that title: he would be the first person ever to be possessed of a soul filled with the divine love of God. It would be in this sense that the Christ would have the new heart within him, and would thus in effect bring the “Kingdom of God” to earth.

Many of the other Old Testament predictions regarding the time, place, and conditions associated with the coming of the Messiah are, of course, true, and I shall in due time deal with them as pertinent to my plan of setting forth the truths of God. But here I must tell you that much distortion was resorted to by those who sought to establish that I was born of a virgin, or of the “seed of woman,” or had come as a priest-king or sacrificial atonement. These so-called predictions are false – merely man-made interpretations and elaborations designed to fit preconceived notions.

I would like to explain what the idea of the “new heart” meant to the writers who conveyed the thought in the Old Testament, and to show how this idea slowly became acceptable to the Hebrews at a period in time when their religion meant, to a large extent, fear of a wrathful God, and consisted largely of the placating of that God through sacrifices.

Now, in the account of the anointing of Saul as first king of the Jews, the prophet Samuel told Saul to go to Mt. Tabor (which many centuries later would be the scene of many of my activities) where he would receive “the spirit of the Lord,” which

would turn him into a “new man.” To Samuel, this meant, and he expounded it to Saul in this way, that Saul would thereafter have to be a “man after God’s own heart” – a man pure in his thoughts and conduct. Of course, neither Samuel nor Saul had any understanding of a transformation of soul brought about by God’s love, for the divine love was unavailable to humankind at that time. They understood this “renewal” to mean the elimination of sin through a purification of soul, wrought by the influence of the Father, or “the spirit of the Lord,” as it was called in the Old Testament.

This means of purification was not an original thought with Samuel, but was used by him because he knew that God had previously wrought a “new heart” in Jacob; that is, He had caused such a change in Jacob’s character that he became, indeed, a “new man,” God Himself reportedly changing his name to Israel. So also was Abraham a “man of God,” a man after God’s own heart.

Thus it was that Samuel felt that Saul, with his responsibilities as king of the Jews, would discard from his soul those sins and evil tendencies adhering to it, and be purified, through the spirit of God, of these evils. He did not have any gift of prophecy (as was inserted into the Bible many centuries later) – only a recognition that Saul could become a new man in heart, and be purified of sin through God’s help, if Saul so willed it. And this did happen for a time, until the old evils of his lower self began to reassert themselves, and Saul began to turn from God to go his own way, impelled by his own desires and self-will.

This concept appeared again when Jeremiah spoke of the “good and bad figs” at the time of the captivity in Babylon, and said, “I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.”<sup>1</sup> Here Jeremiah

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 24:5-7

intended to convey to the Hebrews in Chaldea the thought that faith in God, and obedience to His commandments of righteousness, justice, and mercy were the only necessary requirements to insure survival over material disasters.

Ezekiel, too, stated that the people of Israel would have another chance to be men after God's own heart, not by their own efforts, but through the help of the Father. For God would give them "one heart" (and that meant, as I understood it, His own), and He would give them a new spirit - His own. He would take away the "stony heart" out of their flesh, and would give them a heart after His own.<sup>1</sup> And later on, Ezekiel was impressed to use the same language again: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh." And in the next verse: "I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments, and do them."<sup>2</sup>

Now as I have said, the "new heart," for Samuel, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, meant only the purification of the soul from sin, for nothing beyond such purification was known to the Hebrews before my coming. But there were other things in the Old Testament which spoke, not of law and justice, but of love - the Heavenly Father's love for His children - and I finally grasped and realized that this love *was* the new heart which God had promised to the Hebrews through His prophets. And while, for them, the new heart meant one thing, for me, in the full experience of the divine love aglow in my own soul, the new heart meant *God's love* - the help that would free man from sin forever, and more, give him a heart that was *at-one* with God's, divine with His love throughout all eternity. It was in this way that I understood and knew in my soul that I was a divine child of the Father.

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel 11:19    <sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 36:26-27

In my next sermon I shall tell you about God's love promised in the Old Testament, and how the people came to realize that God was not a primitive "god of wrath," to be appeased through sacrifice, but a God of love unto His children – and how I came to understand that I was the Messiah because of that love in my own soul.

*Human Love as a Forerunner of the Divine Love*

*February 18, 1958*

In my previous sermon, I wrote about the new heart, and how it was that, in the long intervals of time recorded in the Old Testament, people became aware that, if they turned to God, He would help them become men and women after His own heart – which, to them, meant a soul free of evil, and imbued with a sense of righteousness, justice, and mercy towards one another. I showed how this took place at the time of the prophet Samuel, with the anointing of Saul, and how later prophets became convinced that, in the course of time, God would pour out His spirit upon His children and give them a new heart, wherein their souls would be without evil and sin, and bright with the purity of justice, love, and mercy.

In that sermon I mentioned specifically Ezekiel and Jeremiah, for they were the prophets who made principal use of the terms "new heart" or "heart of flesh," understood by them to mean that purification of soul was available to man when he sought God's aid in obtaining it. But in fact, the actual message received by these prophets said that the day *would come* when man would be ready to receive God's help, and that God promised this help when that day should come.

And when, as a youth, I studied the Old Testament, with the Father's love already aglow (and increasing steadily) in my own soul, I realized that purification of soul was *already* available to humanity, by obedience to God's commands as found in the Ten

Commandments; so that the promise of the new heart, wherein the spirit of God was to be “poured out” upon humankind, must mean something above and beyond what was then available to humankind. And so I found, with the Father Himself my mentor, that the way to soul divinity was not through sacrifices or rituals motivated out of fear, nor in the development of the human love, but in doing God’s will of *obtaining* His love through sincere prayer to Him for its bestowal.

I found that, alongside the concept of God as one who exulted in the blood of His enemies, or who punished a believer if he did not conform exactly to the rituals of the many offerings – which, I must tell you, God never commanded Moses to write – there was recorded in the Scriptures a growing understanding of God as a Father who *loved* His children, who exulted in kindness and mercy and righteousness, to whom His children could turn to purify their souls of defilement. I saw, on the basis of the inspired writings of the Old Testament, that God was a God of love and mercy, and began to understand that the new heart promised by God was simply a soul filled and transformed by His love.

At some point I realized that I, Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph and Mary, did possess in my soul some portion of this love, and that I was, to that extent, divine. In that way I realized that I was the “anointed one,” or Messiah, through whom salvation was to be given to humankind, and that in me the new heart of the Old Testament had been fulfilled. And the Father’s love in my own soul told me that the new heart, which up to that time could mean only a purified soul, now meant that the souls of all humankind could be transformed into divine souls, filled with God’s essence, His love.

Now, in order for humankind to understand and appreciate the wonderful gift of God’s divine love and mercy, granted for the eternal life of His children, they first had to develop an appreciation of what love *is*, with its power to engender happiness and

eliminate sin. The only way this could be done was through a deepening awareness of their human love, for this was something which they already possessed, and could more readily understand. And so, the story of love in the Old Testament is one of human love, with the promise of that greater love, the availability of which I was sent to proclaim to humankind.

But the story of that greater love, interrupted by my death, and misunderstood by those who followed my apostles, has been unfolded fully only to souls in the world of spirits. Those in the spirit world who have accepted this message as true have come into the glory of the Father, and are living near Him in the Celestial Heavens, redeemed children of God, transformed into divine angels through His love. But most of those souls who presently live in the material world, and many who have lived since the day I proclaimed the message of divine love to humankind, are not hearing the message which I proclaimed, and are seeking their way to God through the development of their mere human love, which cannot lead to the Celestial Heavens and the divine soul, but only to the spiritual heavens of the purified, but still human, soul.

The development of the human love, as recorded in the Old Testament, is a narrative about which many volumes could be written, and I cannot in these sermons do more than lay down an outline for further elaboration. But already in Abraham, the "man after God's heart," human love shines forth. Abraham's love of his son Isaac, leading to his breaking with the then current practice of human sacrifice; his pleadings with God that sinful Sodom be spared; his proposals to Lot, his brother's son, for a peaceful settlement of their dispute over cattle; and his rescue of this same Lot from captivity when Sodom was taken by marauding chieftains, reveal the love which Abraham had for his fellowman and for his God, many hundreds of years before the Ten Commandments were given by Moses.

And the Old Testament writers present the story of Jacob, son of Isaac, the digger of wells, and how Jacob became prince of Israel after his turbulent years of deceit and trickery. From the robbing of his brother's birthright and blessings, one comes to a different Jacob, a person who showed his sorrow when his sons killed Shechem and his father, Hamor, and the males of Hamor's tribe, even though Shechem had sought to marry Jacob's daughter, Dinah, after he had defiled her. And Jacob, many years after deceiving his brother, sought not to escape or fight Esau, but decided upon some restitution in the form of a gift. And Esau, when he saw his younger brother, ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, kissing him, and they wept.<sup>1</sup>

This was the kind of human love, between father, mother, brother, sister, son and daughter, which humankind could understand, and *had* to first understand, before they could understand the love which the Heavenly Father has for His children.

In my next sermons I shall continue to trace the development of the human love recorded in the Old Testament, as the prelude and prerequisite to the eventual bestowal of the gift of the Father's love.

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 25-35

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Joseph*

*April 4, 1958*

The story of Joseph and his brothers is of great importance to the Old Testament, as a narrative which points out (and has pointed out for many centuries) that even the mere human love can overcome evil. This story, with its drama of a father's bereavement, the brothers' jealousy and resentment, the young boy's change of character through suffering as a slave in a foreign land, and his final generosity towards his erring brothers, is one which has caused many tears to flow, and a stirring in the soul on realization that the goodness displayed by Joseph reaches what is most noble in the human heart, and that this same goodness is latent in all humankind.

Since we are primarily interested in the spiritual message conveyed by this story, we need not be too concerned with questions about its historical accuracy. Some parts, especially those dealing with Potiphar's wife, were current in Egypt as well as in Palestine, and so of course are authentic; but the element which treats of love and forgiveness, and the changes in the human heart wrought by suffering and remorse, as well as the conception that God uses the baser deeds of His unredeemed children to beneficent ends, can be seen as the Hebrew writer's attempt to express a spiritual truth: that human love, mercy and forgiveness are manifestations of the soul, and that as these are practiced, man walks in the ways of God, and approaches closer to Him.

Now Joseph, being the favorite of Jacob, incurred the enmity of his brothers, some of whom, born of different mothers, plotted to rid themselves of him. In the midst of this hatred stands the figure of Reuben, who would not consent to the slaying of

Joseph, and suggested instead that he be thrown into a pit. He intended to take him out of it later, but left the vicinity to obtain water, and when he returned, found Joseph gone, for a group of Midianite merchantmen of the caravan had passed by, and the brothers had sold him to the Arabs, who in turn sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, captain of Pharaoh's guards.

And Reuben rent his clothes, and returned to his brothers and said, "The child is not; and I, wither shall I go?" For Reuben was Jacob's first born, and so was in a manner responsible for the safety of the brothers. He felt that a terrible crime had been committed against one of their number, and that he could not face his father with the news.

The old father wept bitterly and could not be consoled, and the brothers realized the enormity of their sin, and the deep pain they had inflicted upon their father only added to their sense of guilt and remorse.

But Joseph was saved by his abiding faith in God, and by the rectitude of his behavior towards others; for the blow of his brothers' hatred, and the false accusations of Potiphar's wife which sent him to Pharaoh's prison could not dissuade him, despite the dismal circumstances which they compelled him to face, from persevering in his faith, and thereby overcoming these evils. For he was good and kind, and his Egyptian masters found he could be trusted, and finally his gift of interpreting dreams, which was very much in vogue among the Egyptians in those days, enabled him to prevail.

Thereafter the story concerns Joseph's repayment in love and forgiveness the hatred which had boiled against him in his brothers. Joseph dearly loved his brothers and his aged father, and this was a love that was kept whole by his love of God; for he attributed to God the forgetfulness of the wounds which he had suffered at his brothers' hands, and he saw in them his own flesh and blood in a land of strangers.

Joseph knew that, in the course of the famine that stalked all the lands of that region, his brothers would eventually have to come to him for bread, and he knew that they would eventually bow down to him in obedience, as one of his dreams had foretold. But Joseph, more than anything else, wanted their love, and if they would but show sincere remorse for their crime against him, he was ready to shower them with his affection. And as Joseph loved those who had sinned against him, does not the Father love with His Eternal love those who sin against Him and His children?

The remainder of the story, in its essentials, puts the brothers to the test. The requirement that the youngest of the brothers, Benjamin, be brought to prove their word put them in a precarious position, for if anything befell the youngest, they knew their old father would not survive the loss. If, on the other hand, they did not bring Benjamin to Egypt, they would starve. They were caught in the terrible position of exposing to death a brother, and also their father, in precisely the same way they had so callously done many years before. But Joseph's brothers had changed, for where once they had sought in hatred to destroy, they now sought earnestly to save. And this change of heart is further shown by the fact that if they returned to Egypt with Benjamin, they also put their own lives in jeopardy, for, with the sacks filled with gold on Joseph's orders, they faced certain accusation of theft.

The dilemma with Benjamin, and the leaving of Simeon as hostage in Egypt, made them believe that retribution for the crime against Joseph had come:

And they said to one another, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother Joseph, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress

come upon us." And Reuben answered them, saying: "Spake not I unto you, 'do not sin against the child;' and ye would not hear? Therefore, behold, also his blood is required." And they knew not that Joseph understood them, for he spake unto them by an interpreter. And he turned himself about from them, and wept.<sup>1</sup>

Joseph saw that not only were they now very much alive to the sorrows and bereavement of their old father, and courageous enough to face a threatened calamity so that they, their father, and their families might survive, but that they also had been made aware of the terrible crime they had committed against their own. In his love and mercy, he sought not restoration nor retribution, but the changing of their souls from evil intent and action to that of love. And that had been accomplished, for whereas the brothers had thrown away the life of Joseph for whatever might befall him, they now sought to guard Benjamin's life with their very own as surety, especially Judah, who had suggested bondage in Egypt for Joseph. And when Judah, on the brothers' return to Joseph's house after the money was found in Benjamin's sack, pleaded desperately to be kept in bond instead of Benjamin, so that his old father, Jacob, should not die of grief, Joseph could not resist revealing himself to his brothers, because of the common love which they both had for their father and for their brother Benjamin.

"And he wept aloud ... And Joseph said unto his brethren, 'I am Joseph; doth my father yet live?' And his brethren could not answer him, for they were troubled at his presence."<sup>2</sup> And he went on to forgive them, and ask that they be not grieved nor angry with themselves that they had sold him to Egypt, finding a reason for it - that it was the will of God that he come to Egypt,

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 42:21-24    <sup>2</sup> Genesis 45:2-3

so as to be the means of saving them all from starvation. And he wept and embraced his brother Benjamin, and kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. And the story ends with Jacob's joy, and the sojourn of the Hebrews in Egypt.

The story of Joseph, then, is an intensely human one, where fatherly affection and brotherly love are able to overcome envy and hatred, and bring about, after many years, a great service to humankind.

Of considerable importance is the conception which Joseph had of God, for in many respects it was on a far superior level to what was then considered to be the nature of a deity, even among the Hebrews. For the Hebrew concept of God was embedded with the general ideas about gods which prevailed in that day. Jehovah was in many ways considered a god like the others, to be appeased by various offerings and sacrifices, which, if not rendered in the ways prescribed, would bring down the god's wrath upon the tribe, in form of disasters, or plagues that destroyed the crops and domestic animals, or the invasions of ruthless warring tribes.

In the story of Joseph, however, God is truly a Father of love, wherein He watches over each of His children, minimizes the effects upon them of the evils of humankind and the vicissitudes of nature, and rehabilitates them for their own and the common good. While He does not by His authority prevent evil thoughts or actions - which to do so would violate the integrity of the human will which He created and respects - yet He weaves and brings about through His "messengers," or angels, those circumstances which will lift His children from the abyss which they either have created for themselves, or into which they have been thrown.

Here, then, was not an angry or jealous "tribal god" such as He is portrayed by some in the Old Testament, to be propitiated

by ritual or ceremonies, or a fearsome “god of vengeance” for human wrongdoing, but a universal loving Father, keenly alive to the needs of His children (be they Egyptian or Hebrew), helping to alleviate their sufferings due to the material failures of nature, working through those of His children (including those in the spirit world) who respond to His spiritual call.

Joseph is saved because he has that deep fundamental faith in God that enables him to surmount every blow and obstacle through trust in His certain aid. He reaches the point where that faith enables him to lay aside his fierce resentment towards his brothers (which one can but surmise from the narrative) and in its place, fill his soul with human love to such an extent that he can love and forgive those who had so mercilessly ill-treated him – and the result is the conquest of great material hardships, for the benefit of all.

But this story is not only of human love; it also gives a glimpse of that far greater love – the divine love of the Father, to be bestowed in time upon humanity. For Joseph’s heart is so full of generosity, love, and mercy towards his brethren and his father, and so intense in its nature, resulting in such noble and magnanimous actions that people reading this story have considered his love and mercy to be beyond human capability. And this has made them feel that such an outpouring of love and mercy must have been divine in origin – that these qualities had to have been *imparted into* Joseph from the Father, to bring about the deliverance of His children from their distress.

Thus it was that people obtained an inkling that there must be a “divine love,” and of what this love must be like. And in this way they saw in Joseph a prototype of the Christ to come – that person who would bear in himself the very love with which the Heavenly Father loves His children.

*CHAPTER THREE*

*Ruth*

*April 10, 1958*

The book of Ruth tells the story of Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth, who followed the old widow back from Moab to her native Bethlehem in Judea, from whence Naomi had come with her two sons at a time when famine dwelt in the land of Palestine. In Moab, Naomi had lived with her sons and daughters-in-law, until, given the harshness of the times, the two sons were stricken, and she decided to return to her native land, with the thought that her daughters-in-law would remain and perhaps find new husbands in their own country.

Now Ruth's sister-in-law, Orpah, returned to her people and to those gods which the Moabites of those times worshiped, and indeed, Naomi bade Ruth do likewise, but Ruth replied with those words which have become so soul-stirring in their religious appeal, not only in Hebrew, but in many languages all over the earth:

Entreat me not to leave thee or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.<sup>1</sup>

From those memorable words, one might conclude that Ruth, the Moabite, daughter of a pagan people, had received some

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth 1:16-17

unusual or miraculous knowledge of the Heavenly Father, to be able to thus forsake her own local gods and adhere to the God whose existence had been made known to her through her Hebrew husband and mother-in-law; and to a certain degree, this is true. But actually, the loving nature of God, to the extent that it was known to the peoples of those days, had become known to Ruth *through* her relationship with Naomi. For Naomi was kind and loving, treating her daughters-in-law with a solicitude, tenderness, and care for their welfare that brought out in Ruth a great feeling of love and devotion, and it was thus that she wanted to share the fortunes or vicissitudes with this woman who was to her like a mother. And it was these qualities of warmth and love and affection, of concern for Ruth and her interests, that made Ruth realize that here was a person who, in her way of life, manifested a soul that shone with the light of her loving Father in Heaven.

And so Ruth concluded – and she had had many years of life together with Naomi to come to this decision – that a good-hearted woman such as Naomi could exist only if her Creator – her God – possessed the qualities of love and kindness which He had imparted to His creation, and since Naomi was a Hebrew, Ruth knew in her heart that the “God of the Hebrews” was a God of love, such as He manifested through His children.

When Ruth made her abode in Bethlehem, she found that, just as a Hebrew woman could be loving and kind to a degree not before experienced in her life, so could a Hebrew man be as tender and loving, whether he was her husband or not. For when Boaz saw her gleaning in the fields, his heart went out in sympathy for her, because of her unpretentiousness and humility, her resigned acceptance of the harsh events in her life to which she had been subject, and her willingness to place herself at his mercy. These qualities caused her to find favor in his eyes; and

again, he wished to repay her for all the kindness which she, though a pagan woman, had shown to Naomi, his kin.

Boaz also admired Ruth for her courage in leaving her father and mother and coming to live in a land of strangers. He knew she had put her trust in the Heavenly Father, and, being a religious man, endowed with a sense of responsibility towards his ownings, which he felt were a sort of trusteeship from the Father's bounty, he felt that her trust in God should not be in vain, but be rewarded. And so, speaking of her kinsman, Boaz, Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead."<sup>1</sup>

The remainder of the story deals with the business deal whereby the nearer of kin was unable to redeem Naomi's field, in that it would mar his own inheritance, which thus gave Boaz an opportunity to do so, and also obtain Ruth as his wife, in accordance with the Hebrew law which permitted a next of kin to marry that man's wife or other eligible female.

And thus it was that, because of her love for Naomi, Ruth, the pagan woman of Moab, left her native land to be with her; and because of the kindness and love which Boaz saw in Ruth's treatment of his dead brother's wife, he came to appreciate the warm-hearted qualities of the Moabite, and fell in love with her, despite their difference in race.

This story, then, has a certain relationship with that of Joseph, in that it demonstrates with what conviction the Hebrews of those days relied upon God's providence to lift them out of the pit of evil fortune and troublesome times. The goodness of Naomi, of Ruth and of Boaz, working together in harmony and human love, was able to surmount the vicissitudes suffered by the two women as a result of the hard times, famine, and pestilence which prevailed in those days of the Judges. The final prosperity and happiness which succeeded the trials that beset the

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth 2:20

two women was seen as the hand of God, in His goodness and mercy, outstretched to deliver His children from the evils of the world. In reading the story of Ruth, people have seen the great beneficent influence which sincere human love and goodwill can wield, as the spiritual inheritance bestowed upon humankind with God's creation of the human soul.

I wish to point out several other aspects of this story which help make it one of the great universal narratives; for while it appears in the Old Testament of the Hebrews and deals with that period of time, yet this story is one that belongs to all the children of the Father:

Ruth was not a Hebrew, but a woman of the Gentiles, and thus her story reveals the truth that every human being is equally worthy of love and affection, loyalty and kindness, regardless of his or her race or religion, and I might add, color of skin. For a human being is a child of God by virtue of his or her created *soul*, which has nothing to do with genetic or cultural heritage. And so, to treat one another with unconditional love is to manifest the nature of the Heavenly Father, and to show that God exists, through the works of His created beings. This message of equality is all the more poignant in light of the fact that the great king David was a descendant of Boaz and Ruth.

As a conclusion, let me state that, in its final form, edited many centuries after it was first written, this story became a protest against the priestly prohibition of intermarriage between Hebrews and Gentiles, at the time when the Babylonian Jews were permitted by Cyrus to return to rebuild Jerusalem. This caused considerable distress and hardship among people of mixed marriages, and the story of Ruth became, then, a plea for love, tolerance, and human values above strictly racial or religious considerations.

CHAPTER FOUR

*David*

*July 21, 1958*

In the previous sermons I have pointed out how human love reflects the loving nature of God, and is indicative of the fact that the human soul is created in the image of the Father. In the next few sermons we will track the further development of the human love in the person of David Ha-Melech, as he has been called with deepest affection and reverence by the Jewish people throughout the centuries. In the example of David we will see the human love developing to the point where the created human consciously enters into a loving relationship with his Creator.

David, the youngest son of Jesse, a well-to-do landowner and cattle raiser of Bethlehem, was a strong and agile youth, given both to poetic sentiment and to deeds of the chase. His father had provided him with music lessons, and when King Saul began to suffer from moods of melancholia and distemper, it was arranged to bring David into the court as harpist to soothe Saul in his difficult moments. David was soon able to become armor-bearer for Jonathan, Saul's son, and accompanied him on raids into the lines of the Philistines.

David was never secretly anointed by Samuel to become the next king of the Hebrews; this story was later inserted into the Scriptures to make it appear that David had been chosen by God, in order to strengthen his claim to the throne. Actually, David became king in a war with Saul's son, Ishbaal, after the deaths of Saul and Jonathan at Mt. Gilboa (and in that day it was generally accepted that victory was given to him whom God favored).

In the same way, the account of David's triumph over Goliath of Gath is simply a story; the Philistine giant was indeed killed in

battle, but by Elhanan, one of David's men. The whole narrative of David's return to his father's house, his brother's anger on his appearance at the battle front, his inability to use armor, King Saul's complete ignorance of David afterwards, and the taking of the giant's head to Jerusalem (when the city was still in the hands of the Jebusites, and was not captured by David until many years later) all show the hand of a later writer who introduced into the Scriptures this fable of David's exploits to enhance his fame for gallantry and to emphasize his trust in God.

For David *did* have implicit trust in the Father, and sought His aid and protection at every turn, and through his prayers to Him felt that God would uphold him and deliver him out of the hands of his enemies, even in the direst circumstances. David did things that were evil in the sight of God, some which he was aware of, and some which were done unknowingly while following the prevailing practices of the times. Yet David's separation from God was always temporary, and he would seek the Father for forgiveness, safety, and salvation, and abide stoically by what he felt were God's answers to him, conveyed through the prophets of his time, Nathan and Gad.

And the truth is that God, through His "ministers" (in the flesh and in the spirit world) did deliver David out of the hands of his enemies and their jealousies, as God always delivers His children out of the troubles of the material world, sustains them with courage in times of woe, and works to provide circumstances which can supplant the evils of adverse physical conditions and the inclinations of unredeemed human beings.

When David wrote his Psalms, he had a transcendent realization (though not a possession) of God's divine love and mercy, and his own love for God was in keeping with, and concomitant with his love and generosity towards other human beings. For, with all of David's sins, he possessed a heart filled with kindness, far beyond what could be expected of a refugee hunted by

a jealous king, and, reversely, of the most powerful Hebrew monarch of the ages, whose every whim and wish were law.

And while David is here thanking me as I say this, I can in all fairness state that David's life *was* abundant in kindness, charity and generosity. And in the lines that follow I will show how these virtues – which are in fact wonderful gifts of the Father – were used, to David's credit, to help, to forgive, and to refrain from retaliation.

### *David's Nobility of Heart*

*July 22, 1958*

In stories and commentaries, David's valor in battle, his power of leadership, and inevitably, his sins with Bathsheba and her husband Uriah are those themes which consistently recur, and these are of course warranted as a means of estimating the qualities of the man and judging his character. But I want to tell you that David was also a man of personal warmth, who showed kindness and sympathy, not as a duty which he thought was due to God, but as something which he sincerely felt, which came from his own heart.

Hence David entertained a deep affection for Jonathan, in that he sensed in him a loyal friend, and felt sympathy for the young man whose father was irascible and at times uncontrollable in his fits of temper. David's basic nobility of heart, as well as his valor in warfare, was thoroughly understood and appreciated by Jonathan, and the love and friendship between the two have become proverbial throughout the centuries. They acted together in manly sports of the day befitting a monarch's son and his squire, and came to appreciate each other's mettle in forays and hunting. Jonathan's unhappiness as the son of King Saul, who would have sacrificed him to maintain an oath, was alleviated by his friendship with David, and therefore one should not be surprised to find Jonathan later acting to save his friend from

the persecution of the man who quite often was not as a father to him.

And so Jonathan made a covenant with David, “And thou shalt not only while I live show me the kindness of the Lord, that I die not, but also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house.”<sup>1</sup> For David and Jonathan knew in their souls that kindness in humankind comes from God, so that, as the law of Moses proclaimed, they were to “love thy neighbor as thyself.” They understood that the Father’s love, in a sense, acts *through* the love which man shows for man.

And so Jonathan came to console David when he had to live as an outlaw in the wilderness, and David shed bitter tears when hearing of Jonathan’s death, and that of his father, in the battle of Mt. Gilboa: “Jonathan upon thy high places is slain. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant hast thou been unto me; wonderful was thy love to me, more lofty than the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of warfare destroyed.”<sup>2</sup>

As for Saul’s death, David felt that this was Saul’s punishment from God – and vindication of his own ethical behavior, wherein he believed that it was not given unto him to destroy God’s anointed ruler over Israel, even though Saul was bent upon killing him. For as a fugitive, David was able to penetrate Saul’s encampment and take his spear as the king lay sleeping, and when Abishai, Joab’s brother, was ready to kill Saul, David restrained him: “Do not destroy him, for who can put forth his hand against the Lord’s anointed? ... As the Lord lives, none but the Lord shall smite him; or his day shall come to die, or he shall go down in battle. The Lord forbid that I shall put forth my hand against the Lord’s anointed.”<sup>3</sup>

Here was such faith in God that David could not commit what he felt would be a crime against God’s representative. True, this

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel 20:14-15   <sup>2</sup> 2 Samuel 1:25-27   <sup>3</sup> 1 Samuel 26:9-11

is certainly not the highest of ethics, for a pure soul cannot take a life ever; first, because it is a law of God, as stated in the Ten Commandments; and second, because there is no hate or thought of vengeance in a pure soul, regardless of who the person might be who injures or transgresses. Yet, in this instance, David's faith acted with great power, for, in relegating punishment to God, David was able to remove sentiments of hatred and vengeance from himself, which enabled him to keep the law, "thou shalt not kill." And so, David's lament for Saul was not one of exultation in an enemy's defeat, nor did he make any reference to Saul's enmity and jealousy - only sorrow that the leader of Israel had perished before his foes.

Neither did David cause the death of the bearer of the evil tidings from Mt. Gilboa, as found in the first sixteen lines of Second Samuel, as this was an insertion of a later writer, being merely an amplification of the concept of David's aversion to anyone's killing the Lord's anointed.

Rather, David's thoughts were with Jonathan's son, Meribaal, called Mephibosheth, who was crippled on both feet, and David's kindness to him is recorded in the Scriptures:

And David said: "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake? ... that I may show the kindness of God unto him?" [And Meribaal, called Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, came unto David and fell at his feet] ... And David said unto him: "Fear not, for I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Samuel 9:1-7

And David did, eventually, restore to Jonathan's son all that belonged to the house of Saul.

*David and Abigail*

*July 28, 1958*

We turn to those days when David was forced to flee from the wrath of Saul, living as an outlaw in the desert country with a band of several hundred men. We see that David was able to maintain himself only through rapidity of action, either in escape or attack. Sustenance was obtained by a sort of tribute arranged between David and the sheepraisers of the region, whereby, in exchange for food, he would protect them from other outlaws, and would himself refrain from making raids on their herds.

Now the Scriptures relate how on one occasion David learned that Nabal, a rich sheepraiser of Maon with whom David had such an understanding, had killed some of his sheep as food for the shearers and to obtain a profit in the sale of the skins. David dispatched some of his men to obtain food, but Nabal refused, for he had heard that Saul was not far away from Carmel where his cattle were grazing, and thought that if Saul heard he was providing food to the fugitives, Saul in his wrath might march against him and his possessions.

David, of course, depended on these arrangements for food, and so, regardless of the proximity of Saul and his troops, marched rapidly against Nabal. But one of the young men in Carmel warned Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying:

Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to salute our master Nabal, and he flew upon them. But the men had been good to us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we anything, as long as we went with them, and when we were in the fields, they were a wall of protection unto us

by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. Now therefore know and consider what thou wilt do; for evil is determined against our master Nabal and his house.<sup>1</sup>

Then Abigail, without consulting Nabal, who was inebriated, made ready a considerable amount of provisions, laden on donkeys, and brought them forth to intercept David before he reached Nabal's house. And when she did, she fell before David on her face and presented the laden provisions to him, imploring that he not seek vengeance:

Upon me, my lord, be the iniquity ... and hear thou the words of thy handmaid. Let not my lord, I pray thee, pay any attention to Nabal, who is base as his name indicates ... But mine is the iniquity, for I saw not the young man whom thou didst send ... See thou, the Lord hast withholden thee from the guilt of blood-letting and taking vengeance with thine own hand ... Now, therefore, forgive the trespass of thy handmaid, for the Lord will surely make thee an established house, nor shall evil be found in thee ... And when the Lord has dealt with thee, bloodshed against Nabal and his house shall not be accounted against thee.

[And David made answer:] Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent thee this day to meet me; and blessed be thy discretion, and blessed be thou that hast kept me this day from bloodshed,

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel 25:13-17

and from exacting vengeance by mine own hand  
... Go up in peace to thy house; see, I have  
hearkened to thy voice and have accepted thy  
person.<sup>1</sup>

David spared Nabal and his house, for though he was angry, yet he was not deaf to this plea for mercy, because it was made by one who showed a nobility of heart and depth of courage which struck a chord in his own heart; for had there not been a nobility of soul in David, Abigail's pleas would have passed over him in vain.

David also took Abigail's coming as a sign from God that he should not wreak vengeance with his own hand upon Nabal, for he was mindful of what he considered the will of God. Because of Abigail's nobility of soul, David felt that God had sent her, for he had the sense that such nobility of soul could come only from Him. David had that understanding of heart which revealed to him that the Heavenly Father *was* goodness - that love, kindness, mercy, generosity, and everything that was noble, was of God, and that they came to man by Him.

And while Nabal was not "punished" by God, as claimed in the Old Testament account, yet his unloving actions towards David and others helped, as they always do, to create conditions injurious to him. For a person's soul condition attracts spirits of a similar soul condition, and the evil in Nabal's soul drew to him wicked spirits, who helped to weave conditions of evil for him.

Nabal became consumed with fear of what both David and Saul might do, and also what might befall him from his own servants who might rebel, lest his doings cause their death at the hands of either of these warriors. And in ten days, Nabal succumbed, for his fear had produced, at his age, a heart attack.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel 25:24-35

David thought that this was Nabal's punishment from God, and was happy that he had stayed his hand.

David also thought this was a sign from God that he should take this noble widow to be his wife, which he did. Abigail was pleased, inasmuch as she could see the generosity of David's heart, and loved him for it. Now Abigail brought with her wealth and property, and helped to give David new prestige in Judea, and so his act of forbearance came back to him tenfold, developing conditions favorable to him; and it could be said that the Father was pleased with David's soul.

### *Absalom's Rebellion*

*August 1, 1958*

I have tried to show that David, in his conduct towards Saul, Jonathan, and Abigail, revealed a loving heart in which forbearance and restraint were much in evidence. Through this "goodness in action," David gained a respect and popularity which helped to give him the allegiance of hundreds, and later thousands of men, all leading towards his accession to the throne of Judah, and ultimately to kingship of the entire Hebrew nation.

His internal troubles as king resulted largely from his sinful conduct towards Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah. Evil conditions were thereby attracted to David and those surrounding him, for as David thus rebelled against the laws of God, so did his sons and officers rebel against the rule of David. Absalom, his son by a daughter of the royal family of Geshur in Aram (a neighboring district in Syria) conceived the plan of ousting his father and becoming king.

Because he pertained to royalty on both sides of his family, Absalom considered himself superior to the other sons of David, and in fact, exacted vengeance on Amnon, his half-brother, slaying him for the act of defiling his sister Tamar. He then fled to Geshur and for the next three years lived there with an

uncle. David, who loved his children dearly, was very much grieved over this murder, and also because he longed for Absalom, who was winsome and dashing, reminding him in some ways of his own youth.

Absalom, who kept informed of David's frame of mind, was able to enlist his uncle, Joab, in an effort to be brought back to Jerusalem; and this was accomplished, but David, with his sense of justice, refused to see Absalom's face. This went on for a certain time, until the king's son lost patience, and, by setting fire to Joab's barley fields, forced him to intercede with David for him. David relented, and kissed his son as a sign of forgiveness.

David had suffered very much in this strife, and he realized that Absalom's absence could not bring Amnon back to life. But he did not understand, or did not wish to understand that Absalom sought to return to Judea in order to foment civil war against his father; and it was another blow to him when he was told that his son had raised the standard of rebellion against him from Hebron, and was marching towards Jerusalem with a host of soldiers.

But David had faith in God, and acted in that faith. As in the days of Saul's persecution, he felt that the best policy lay in flight, to reach a place from which to gather his faithful servants and have time to prepare for battle. Yet even in this critical moment, when things looked bleaker than storm clouds, David did not remain indifferent to the welfare of his followers. His concern for the six hundred Gittites, the Philistines of Gath who had become his partisans, is an example of his goodness of heart. For David said to Ittai, the leader, "Why come with us? Return and abide with Absalom, for thou art a foreigner and an exile from thine own place, and thou should not risk thyself and thy people in all the perils and wanderings that now confront us. Therefore, return and take back thy brethren with thee in kindness and truth."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Samuel 15:19-20

And Ittai, with faith in that God which had made him unwanted in his own land, made answer, "As the Lord liveth, and as the lord my king liveth, in what place he shall be, whether for death or for life, there also will thy servant be." And so David said to Ittai: "Go and pass over the brook"; and Ittai passed over, he and all his men and all the little ones that were with him. And all the region about Jerusalem wept as the king and the people passed over the Kidron to the Mount of Olives, on the way north to the land of Israel.<sup>1</sup>

The priests also came, Zadok and the Levites, bearing the ark of the covenant of God, to take it along in the flight from Jerusalem, so as to have Jehovah the Lord "abide with them," as they thought. But David knew that he did not need to seek God in any temple, that God could be reached with prayer anywhere. And he had faith that God would answer his prayer, either to deliver him out of the hand of his enemy, or to reject him, and in either case David would accept the decision (as he thought) of God. And the king said unto Zadok: "Carry back the ark of God into the city; if I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me back, and show me both it and His habitation; but if He say thus, 'I have no delight in thee,' behold, here I am, let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him."<sup>2</sup>

And so Zadok and the priests brought the ark back into Jerusalem. And David went up to the Mount of Olives, and wept with covered head and bare feet; and those that were with him went likewise.

David instructed Hushai the Archite, his friend, to remain in Jerusalem and pretend to serve Absalom, so as to bring to naught the evil counsel of Ahithophel, who had conspired with Absalom against him. And David instructed Hushai to pass all information to the priests, Zadok and Abiathar, who would relay all news back to him. And so, Hushai greeted Absalom as king, to serve the son as he had the father.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Samuel 15:21-23    <sup>2</sup> 2 Samuel 15:25-26    <sup>3</sup> 2 Samuel 15:29-37

*Repentance, Forbearance, and Forgiveness**August 2, 1958*

Another instance of David's forbearance is found in preventing Abishai, Joab's brother, from killing Shimei, a man of the house of Saul, when that individual cursed David as he came to the village of Bahurim. Shimei came out of his dwelling, picking up stones and casting them at the king and his servants, and said, "Be gone, thou man of blood, and base fellow; the Lord has visited upon thee all the blood shed by thee of the house of Saul in whose place thou hast reigned; and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son, and behold, thou art taken in thy own mischief, because thou art a man of blood."<sup>1</sup>

What Shimei said, of course, was true, as David had been involved in a series of great conflicts, with heavy carnage inflicted upon the adversaries as well as the Hebrews themselves, and the captives thereof were put to death. David recognized the truth of Shimei's invectives, and he stayed the hand of his servant. When Abishai said, "Why should this dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head," David replied, "I want nothing to do with such a slaughter, son of Zeruah. Let him curse, for the Lord has put it into his head to curse David. Who then shall challenge Shimei for his words?"<sup>2</sup>

For David was not arrogant, but moderate, and he did not seek another's death if it could be avoided, even though he was the ruler of the Hebrew nation, and his word was command. He had also learned a lesson from the death of Uriah the Hittite, whom he had caused to be killed in his taking of Bathsheba, and he felt that God had brought about bloodshed among his own sons in retribution.

Thus, in line with the religious ideas of his time, David felt that his perilous position was owing to the actions of a God who was avenging Himself for David's sins, and so he was resigned to

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Samuel 16:7-8    <sup>2</sup> 2 Samuel 16:9-10

what he felt would be God's decision regarding Absalom's revolt. That he was wrong here was due to ignorance in his time – and indeed, in your own – that the loving Father does not avenge or punish, but that man punishes himself through the workings of his own conscience, and that this is an existing principle in the spirit world as well as on earth.

And so David said, "Behold, my son, the flesh of my flesh, seeks my death. How much more, then, does this Benjamite seek it? Let him alone and let him curse, for the Lord has so bidden him; and perhaps the Lord will repay me in good the evil which he wishes me in his heart this day."<sup>1</sup> And as David and his men continued their retreat, Shimei went along the hillside with them, throwing stones and dirt, cursing as he went.

Now when Absalom was destroyed in the forest of Ephraim in Jordan, and David was returning victoriously to Judah, this same Shimei hastened to Gilgal, just west of the Jordan River, to meet David. He came with a thousand men of Benjamin, and members of the house of Saul, and fell down before the king, begging: "Let not the Lord impute iniquity unto me, nor remember what thy servant did so miserably the day that my lord, the king, went out of Jerusalem. For I know that I have sinned, and therefore, behold, I am here the first of my house to greet the lord, my king, and seek his pardon."

And Abishai said to David: "Shall not Shimei be put to the sword for this, in that he cursed and stoned the Lord's anointed?"<sup>2</sup>

But if David spared the life of Shimei at the time of his great trouble and bitterness, how much more was David prone to spare his life in this moment of victory, which he in sincere faith attributed to the Lord? And David replied: "What have I to do with thee, son of Zeruah, that thou be an adversary unto me this day? Shall there be any man put to death today in Israel?"

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Samuel 16:11-12    <sup>2</sup> 2 Samuel 19:19-21

And David told Shimei: "Thou shalt not die."<sup>1</sup> And here again do we find the noble heart of David, with a sense of mercy and forbearance that had no equal in his time.

Now, before continuing with David, I wish to tell you about the sentence, "What have I to do with thee, ye son of Zeruah?" which was lifted out of the story in the Old Testament and placed by New Testament writers into my mouth as follows: "What have I to do with thee, woman? Mine hour is not yet come."<sup>2</sup> This is what I am supposed to have said at the marriage feast of Cana, according to John the Evangelist. Needless to say, never did I make wine out of water, for I was not Dionysus, the god of the grape, nor did I ever address my mother as "woman." The sentence was written into this fable because it associates me with King David, my ancestor dating back a thousand years, and the Davidic covenant, of which I am the fulfillment.

The New Testament writers caused a great deal of worry to the early church because of their use of the word "woman," instead of my saying Mary, or Mother. Many writers have tried to justify this word, as it sounds disrespectful to the ear. Well, I wish to repeat that I never said it, nor performed the miracle connected with it. The word "woman" was used in order to parallel the Old Testament construction "son of Zeruah"; that is to say, not to use the name, or give the relationship. For both Abishai and Joab were David's nephews by his sister Zeruah, and as David is reported not to have used their names or called them nephews, so the New Testament writer did not use the name Mary or give the relationship, mother. I am glad to be able to explain this, and Christians who read this may perhaps realize that these words actually come from Jesus of the Bible, and are the truth.

I want to pass over those conspiracies and battles in the rebellion against David that speak of the crudity of those times.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Samuel 19:22-23    <sup>2</sup> John 2:4

The decisive battle was fought in the wooded area of Ephraim, in what is today Jordan, and Absalom's forces were no match for David's army. Meanwhile David's love for Absalom was undiminished. His first command to his generals was: "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, my son Absalom,"<sup>1</sup> and it was a command given publicly, so that the people and soldiers alike would understand the king's wishes.

For if David was merciful enough to spare the life of Shimei, who was an open enemy, and of the beaten house of Saul, would he not spare the life of his own son, foolish and ambitious though he be? David wanted to chastise his son, not put him to death. He thought that Absalom might see the light after his defeat, and was ready to forgive him his trespass - much like the father of the prodigal son, whose parable I taught in my mission as the Messiah. For where there is love, there is mercy - just as the Heavenly Father is all-merciful, because He loves His children with a love that surpasses human understanding, even when these children devise evil and work to the sorrow of the Father. And thus David, in his sorrow and anxiety for his erring son, was demonstrating that mercy and love which showed him to be a "man of God."

The fact is that Absalom's safety meant more to David than did the kingdom. When the runners came to report to the king the news of the battle, his first words were not: "Have I won the day? Am I still king?" His first words of inquiry were: "Is the young man Absalom safe?"<sup>2</sup> And when he heard that Absalom was dead, the king was much moved, and he went up to the room which stood over the archway at the entrance to the town and wept, crying, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would to God I had died for thee!"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Samuel 18:15    <sup>2</sup> 2 Samuel 18:29    <sup>3</sup> 2 Samuel 19:33

*The Psalms**December 22, 1958 & January 2, 1959*

These sermons on King David, underlining his essential goodness of heart while in the difficult position of being leader of Israel's armies in those barbarous times, have sought to explain why David was designated a "man after God's own heart." This human love thus characterizing David can perhaps be more readily appreciated by a study of his psalms, which he wrote at various intervals in his life, dating from his days as harpist in the court of King Saul, through his career as king of the Hebrew nation.

These psalms of David, and those added by Asaph, his musician, and others, became the hymnbook of the First Temple built by Solomon, and were a great source of religious inspiration to the people. In fact, the Psalter, or as the Hebrews called it, the Book of Praises, has given great help and consolation not only to Jews, but to Christians for many centuries, inspiring them to a greater trust in God and faith in His mercy.

The psalms written by David, or in which David had his hand, were about seventy in number: all of Book 1, with the exception of Psalm 1; and in Book 2, those numbered between 50 and 72, except 66 and 67; and several others scattered about in the other three books.

These psalms of David, and those written under his inspiration, cover many moods - from joy and exultation to sorrow, penitence, and despair. A common theme runs through them all, however, of hope and faith in God's providence and mercy. The psalms convey the knowledge which the soul has, that God is man's rock of salvation; that through obedience to God's laws and avoidance of sin, man's place with God will be secure; and further, that God will deliver man out of the evils of the material world because of such faith.

These songs are prayers, growing out of the soul's need for help, assurance, and communion, addressed to God in sincere supplication and petition. There are songs of thanksgiving, gratitude and praise; songs of confession of sin and wrongdoing; songs asking for strength to overcome evil; songs expressing happiness for divine companionship and awareness of renewed strength through God's answer to prayer. In addition, there are public or national songs of battle and victory, pleas for the nation's delivery in stress of war, and of course, songs pertaining to court life and celebrations. And so, the psalms are a collection of prayers which fit most every feeling, attitude and aspiration of the human soul.

These psalms, then, represent a different phase in our study of the Old Testament; for while I thus far have been considering these writings in terms of humankind's love for one another (in keeping with the laws of love applicable to the created human soul), a perusal of the psalms of David now takes me to a consideration of humankind's love for God, and their relationship to God as the highest creation of the Father. And you will see, as I continue with these sermons, that man's deepening relationship with God, in terms of love, trust, and a desire to approach closer to God through obedience to His laws, was a necessary step in the advancement of man's spiritual condition - allowing God to make answer, with His promise of divine love as the means of uniting His children with Him in at-onement of soul.

Now David's concept of God was expressed in many ways. He depicted Him in Psalm 18, for example, as a kind of god of war, or "thunder god," who, according to the beliefs of the Semitic tribes, took an active interest in His people, or those whom He favored, and delivered them from harm in battle against their enemies. And so in Psalm 18 David wrote that, in the danger and uncertainties of battle, his only recourse was to turn to God, in whom he placed all his trust, and whom he loved:

I will love thee, O Lord, my strength.  
 The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my  
 deliverer;  
 My God, my strength, in whom I will trust;  
 My buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my  
 high tower.<sup>1</sup>

But, of course, the difference between an ancient Fertile Crescent war god and David's God was that the latter was a God of righteousness, without favoritism, who showed mercy to all those who obeyed His statutes of ethical conduct:

The Lord rewarded me according to my  
 righteousness;  
 According to the cleanness of my hands hath he  
 recompensed me.  
 For I have kept the ways of the Lord,  
 And have not wickedly departed from my God.  
 For all His judgments were before me,  
 And I did not put away His statutes from me.  
 I was also upright before Him,  
 And I kept myself from my iniquity.<sup>2</sup>

And in his great conviction, David repeats:

Therefore hath the Lord recompensed me  
 according to my righteousness,  
 According to the cleanness of my hands in His  
 eyesight.  
 With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful;  
 With an upright man thou wilt show thyself  
 upright;

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms 18:1-2    <sup>2</sup> Psalms 18:20-23

With the pure thou wilt show thyself pure;  
 And with the froward thou wilt show thyself  
 froward.<sup>1</sup>

David here meant that adherence to God's laws of righteousness of conduct will create spiritual conditions favorable to the obedient soul, and that baseness of heart will create conditions of darkness, in this world and in the next.

But if the reader is shocked to find David praising God for giving him "the necks of his enemies,"<sup>2</sup> let me remind you that in David's time - and yes, in your own as well - the concept of a merciful God did not always extend to include mercy for one's enemies, who, if circumstances dictated, would be destroyed as "enemies of God."

If in time of war and trouble David saw God as coming in thunderclouds and bolts of lightning, in times of peace and meditation he could see God as He was manifested in the grandeur of the heavens, and could see Him as the Creator of the Universe - the Universal God of all natural phenomena:

The heavens declare the glory of God;  
 And the firmament showeth His handywork.  
 Day after day through eternity is this speech of  
 glory declared,  
 And night after night, at the sight of the moon and  
 the stars in their courses, have we knowledge of  
 His laws of the heavens.<sup>3</sup>

When David wrote this psalm, he utilized imagery which shows a knowledge of Chaldean or other oriental astrology, writing about the "voices of the heavens" (meaning the influences of the planets), and representing the sun as the ruling

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms 18:24-26    <sup>2</sup> Psalms 18:40    <sup>3</sup> Psalms 19:1-2

body – “the bridegroom coming out of his chamber and rejoicing as a strong man to run a race.” David, of course, meant that the sun could be likened to a bridegroom coming forth at dawn after a night of sleep, with the bride as the moon, whose light reflected that of her consort.

These thoughts may be traced back to the ancient worship of the sun, and later you will find in the Old Testament the use of the word “bridegroom” to indicate God, who is married to His spiritual “wife,” Israel; and you are certainly aware that the Christian theologians borrowed this word to make a “bridegroom” out of me, and to have me married to my “bride,” the Church. And so David wrote:

There is no speech nor language where their voice  
is not heard.

Their line is gone out through all the earth,  
And their words to the end of the world.  
In them hath He set a tabernacle for the sun,  
Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his  
chamber, and rejoicing as a strong man to run  
a race.<sup>1</sup>

But just as God has created the physical universe, so, said David, has He created the soul. And just as the law of the heavens is perfect, so is God’s law for the soul, as His statutes for the human being make for a perfect soul. Thus, for David, the Creator of the universe is also the Creator of the spiritual life of man, and the God of justice and righteousness:

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul:  
The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the  
simple.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms 19:3-4

The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the  
heart:  
The commandment of the Lord is pure,  
enlightening the eyes.  
The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever:  
The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous  
altogether.<sup>1</sup>

And thus David seeks God's help to keep him from sin:

Cleanse thou me from secret faults,  
Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous  
sins;  
Let them not have dominion over me:  
Then shall I be upright,  
And I shall be innocent from the great  
transgression.<sup>2</sup>

In the 32nd Psalm, we clearly see David's understanding of religion as a *personal* relationship between God and the individual. This insight had a tremendous influence on the prophets, especially the writers of the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah. Suffering in his conscience for evil deeds, David knew of no other way to achieve peace of mind than to come unto the Tabernacle of the Lord, to confess his iniquity and seek His pardon. A man whose sin is pardoned by God, was, as David thought, blessed. And so he wrote in all earnestness of heart:

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose  
sin is covered.  
Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth  
not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms 19:7-9    <sup>2</sup> Psalms 19:12-13

When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through  
my roaring all the day long.  
For night and day thy hand was heavy upon me; my  
moisture is turned into the drought of summer.  
I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity  
have I not hid.  
I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the  
Lord;  
And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.<sup>1</sup>

David thus felt that if he came to the Lord, and, sincerely repenting of his evil deed, sought forgiveness, the Father would not withhold His pardon. And the fact is that by thus turning to God, humble and contrite, David *was* able to obtain peace – not through the workings of God’s divine love and mercy, which was not yet available to humankind, but through the higher level of soul condition brought about by David’s sincere remorse and penitence.

In Psalm 41, David was ill, and he prayed that God would deliver him from his sickness. He was also keenly aware of his spiritual shortcomings, and prayed that God would heal his soul – that is, would cause him to act and think in accordance with the commandments of God, so that his soul would be free from sin and wrongdoing.

He bemoaned the fact that his enemies would be glad if he were to die. Here David had cause to think of those who had betrayed him when he was forced to flee from Jerusalem at the time of Absalom’s rebellion. Ahithophel, his counselor, remained behind to welcome Absalom, and to advise him to attack David at once – advice which, if taken, would have unquestionably resulted in victory for the son and disaster for David. He also thought of Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan,

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms 32:1-5

whom David kept at his table and loaded with kindness, for he too remained behind to welcome Absalom, in the hope of obtaining lands and privileges as grandson of King Saul. Hence David lamented in Psalm 41: "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted; which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me."<sup>1</sup>

In Psalm 55, David again complained about the falsity of those who had been in his company, but came back to his theme of trust in the Father, to whom he turned in times of stress: "And as for me, thou upholdest me in my integrity, and settest me before thy face forever. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting unto everlasting."<sup>2</sup>

At this point I wish to make mention of the use which some churchmen have made of these events in the life of David, as reflected in the psalms which he wrote, for they have been interpreted to mean that David prophesied Judas' betrayal of the Christ some one thousand years later, and this is not true. For, while David had a spiritual understanding of religion beyond his age, he was not able to predict events so far ahead in the future; and indeed, even we spirits of the Celestial Heavens cannot see a century in advance with such detailed accuracy, much less a millennium. But the fact is that human behavior can be predicted on the basis of knowledge of a person's heart, and acts of ingratitude are being constantly recorded as a result of the deplorable soul conditions prevalent in humanity.

As for the analogies made between Ahithophel, Mephibosheth, and Judas, let me state here that they are untenable, for Ahithophel was unsuccessful, his advice being rejected in favor of Hushai's counsel - totally different from the consequences of Judas' action, even though both took their own lives. The case of Mephibosheth was, of course, one of ingratitude without further ado. To believe the notion that David foresaw

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms 41:9    <sup>2</sup> Psalms 41:12-13

the events which took place during my ministry, on the basis of his own experiences, is to create the “reefs” before which many rational people pause on reading the New Testament account of my life and mission.

*The Second Psalm*

*January 3, 1959*

We have been considering the Psalms of David from the point of view of an intimate approach of man to the Father, wherein God is seen not as the earlier tribal and communal deity, but wherein the human being, in his own right, turns to his Maker, and seeks from Him that consolation, love, and power to help him combat evil in his soul and in his life. In this relationship, the human being, through prayer and a more elevated ethical conduct, shows his trust in the Father’s ability to strengthen him in his daily struggles, and to deliver him from those enemies and hostile forces with which he must contend.

Thus I have pointed out the range of views which David had of the Father – from a “storm god” of war and battle, helping his “chosen people,” to a God of righteousness, abhorring evil and sin, to a God who is King and Creator of the universe. But it was in the concept of God as Lawgiver – laws of righteousness intended as guides to the attainment of a perfected soul – that we come to David’s finest attitude towards God. This attitude was based upon the insight (all the more remarkable, being that it was obtained centuries before the great prophets) that God is God not only of the nations, but also of the individual soul which He has created, and that this human soul is *important* to God, and is watched over and cared for by Him, as a child is cared for by a loving parent. It is true, of course, that superstitious beliefs regarding a tribal “battle god” still existed in David’s mind, for he was not entirely free from the prevailing ideas of his time, but this higher and more spiritual view of God is a lasting tribute to

David's understanding of the true nature of God, and the true purpose of religion.

Within the framework of these various views of God, King David thought of himself as the Lord's "anointed"; that is to say, God's representative on earth, as the ruler of His "chosen people." In this way, David actually considered himself the messiah, in that, to David, "messiah" simply meant king of God's people, with the mission of establishing this people as the foremost nation in the then civilized world, and bringing the "word of God" to the heathen.

David believed that, with God as his helper, he could not be defeated in warfare with people to whom God was not known. This, then, is the meaning of Psalm 2, which is really the first of the collection. It was written when David had conquered a succession of enemy forces, both Philistine and Trans-Jordanian, and felt secure that, as Jehovah's anointed king, no force could withstand his power. He attributed his victories to God, and has Him say, "I have my king upon my holy hill of Zion."<sup>1</sup> And, as he declared, "The Lord hath said unto me, 'thou art my son. This day have I begotten thee.'"<sup>2</sup> This statement, I must say, was one which David in his psalm puts into the mouth of God, so to speak, and it referred to *himself*. It did not, as some have erroneously thought, allude to me in any way.

David then has God add that He will give him (David) the pagan nations for his inheritance, and that God will destroy them with a rod of iron, and dash them to pieces. Thus you see that David, in the second psalm, spoke like the soldier he was. Never could I have spoken, nor ever did I speak, of destruction and death by brutal force; for I came to bring to humankind the Father's divine love, and peace to all His children, regardless of race or creed, and I substantiated my words of love with healing the lame and the halt. I did not come to destroy men's bodies with sword and spear, but to heal their souls, as I did their flesh.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms 2:6   <sup>2</sup> Psalms 2:7

And yet many there are who, while calling themselves Christians and professing to know me, are ready in their mistaken zeal to prove their contention that this psalm is Messianic, and to attribute to me a destructive intent which they know in their hearts could not possibly have been entertained by their Christ.

David goes on to warn the pagan kings bordering on Israel to take heed – to discard their own false gods and to serve the Hebraic Jehovah with fear. He tells them to pay homage to him, David (for as God’s anointed king of Israel, he is God’s “son”), and he warns them not to provoke Him to wrath, lest they be exterminated by God in His anger. The last line, “Blessed are they that put their trust in Him,” was not written by David, but inserted later as a more peaceful and appropriate ending.

David, then, considered his enemies to be God’s enemies, for as we have seen, he regarded himself as God’s representative on earth, called to decimate the heathens and their worship of pagan gods – a practice, David believed, the Lord wanted eliminated, so that all humankind would turn to Him. David thus felt that he was fighting God’s wars – “holy wars” – and his extermination of his enemies was due in great measure to this belief. This is why David’s humanity did not extend to people outside his own, and explains what otherwise seems like a great contradiction between his actions as an individual and his orders as king of the Hebrew nation. This attitude towards conquered enemies was, one must remember, not peculiarly a result of David’s convictions, but was rooted deeply in Hebrew tradition, as expressed in Deuteronomy 7:2: “Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them.”

### *Injustice in David’s Kingdom*

*January 4, 1959*

Blended with the different religious themes that make up the diversity of the psalms is an awareness of man’s responsibility for ethical conduct towards one another, as children of the Living

God, who demands righteousness and morality. David himself could testify eloquently to the perversity and wickedness he saw in his own court, and he could – and did – confess to his own wickedness in his dealings with others, as in his treatment of Uriah the Hittite. Yet his penitence made him feel free to denounce the social injustices which he saw in his own domain, such as oppression of widows and the fatherless, and exploitation of the poor. He understood that God loves righteousness; as he wrote: “His countenance doth behold the upright.”<sup>1</sup> In Psalm 10 David bewailed the social evils about him:

The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor;  
Let them be taken in the devices that they have  
imagined. . . .  
His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud,  
Under his tongue is mischief and vanity.  
He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages;  
In the secret places doth he murder the innocent;  
His eyes are set against the poor.  
He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den;  
He lieth in wait to catch the poor.<sup>2</sup>

David thus expressed his sympathy for the lowly and the downtrodden, and he bade God shield the poor from those who sought to exploit them. He prayed that God succor the poor person who, “committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless.”<sup>3</sup> And again in Psalm 9: “The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed; a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee; for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.”

As a matter of fact, David wrote of these injustices because he had *not* been, in his reign, one to undertake the administration of

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms 11:7   <sup>2</sup> Psalms 10:2-9   <sup>3</sup> Psalms 10:14

justice with the firm hand which the times warranted, and David knew in his heart that he had not done that which a real monarch should have done to guarantee equal justice in his land. The truth is that David had devoted himself primarily to strengthening the Hebrew nation against hostile neighbors, and his main concern had been to establish his kingdom on a firm footing militarily, and to fill the kingdoms on his frontiers with a fear of the Hebrew and his deity.

David realized that he was unable to undertake the task of reorganizing his government for the betterment of his subjects, and he regretted this inability. It cost him dearly, too, for one of the claims made by Absalom was that it was he who considered the welfare of the people, and not David, and this idea enjoyed considerable currency at the time of Absalom's revolt. A case in point was David's census, instituted to get an estimate of the number of troops he could have at his disposal, which was unpopular with the people, and caused him considerable embarrassment because of a plague that followed.

And so, in David's psalms about justice in the realm, one can feel the sense of regret or frustration with which they were written, where justice is looked upon as a sort of ideal, which will be dispensed by God, and not by His ruler, David.

More in line with his own nature and inclinations, David was concerned about the need for a temple for his people; but once again, because of the effort and treasure that went into the nation's wars, he was unable to construct one.

David was aware of these limitations and defects in his rule, especially in the area of the administration of justice, but he wrote of them just the same, as a theme which could not be ignored – because that theme was central to his conception of the Father, the God who demanded justice and righteousness from great and small, from ruler and ruled, from rich and poor alike.

*The Afterlife**March 10, 1959*

While David was intensely alive to the problems of his kingdom, and of the importance of moral living as adhesive to the covenant which God had made with the patriarchs of his people, he was also deeply concerned with the problem of death, and questions of the afterlife. Psalm 16 introduces this theme, and puts forth the thought that right conduct according to God's laws must be rewarded, if not in the material world, then in another to come, and that this applies as well to those who violate His statutes, who will receive appropriate punishment.

Of course, the subject of immortality is a very complex one, and runs in the human consciousness for ages. Other civilizations prior to the Hebraic were also concerned with death and afterlife, and so it must not be supposed that David was an innovator in his thinking, or conversely, as some commentators on the psalms consider, that serious writings on this subject could not have been composed amongst the Hebrews until the books of the prophets were written, centuries after David's time.

You must understand, however, that many hands were at work after David and his composers at court had completed their songs, and that additions and revisions continued unabated, very often with material contrary to what David had said or thought, simply because new ages brought with them fresh ideas. These revisions mingled with the original songs to give a confused picture of what these psalms originally were trying to express.

Such a mingling is to be found in Psalm 16, and though the language is not always David's, we need not hesitate to credit David with the expectation of life after the mortal demise:

I have set the Lord always before me:  
Because He is at my right hand; I shall not be  
moved.

Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices;  
 My flesh also shall rest in hope.  
 For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell,  
 Neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see  
     corruption.  
 Thou wilt show me the path of life:  
 In thy presence is fullness of joy;  
 At thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore.<sup>1</sup>

One need not be surprised at the presence of such ideas in David's songs of praise to God, for the early Hebrews had never really given up their primitive "cult of the dead," although this was frowned on by the prophets as inconsistent with complete devotion to Jehovah. The Hebrews had their Sheol, or pit of the dead, and their *rephaim*, or wraiths of the departed. It was natural for David to conceive of the afterlife in this manner, and he thought of it with repugnance.

He knew, too, that Saul had sought the spirit of Samuel, and that the latter had appeared to make his prediction. This is an event which you realize actually happened, and that the woman of Endor was merely a medium, whose activities were prohibited because Hebrews at that time were much given to the raising of "familiar spirits."<sup>2</sup>

David's meditations on this subject also included his awareness that Enoch, in the Book of Genesis, was reported to have been translated into heaven without suffering physical death: a sort of "assumption" attributed much later to Elijah the prophet, and in the Christian age, to my mother - a piece of pious credulity which, I must tell you, she most heartily deplores. Of course the Book of Genesis was written down in final form centuries after David's death, but there existed in David's time many fragments

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms 16:8-11    <sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel 28:6

and sources upon which these later editors could depend for information, and the reference to Enoch was among these.

Now David, as we have seen, considered himself God's "anointed," and therefore, His "holy one," who represented Him on earth. In his psalm therefore, David felt that the almighty God, who had stretched forth His hand to ensure him a great Hebrew nation, might in the same way extend to him, as He had to Enoch, a translation into heaven without seeing "corruption," to live with Him forevermore in paradise.

Christians, to be sure, have commonly considered Psalm 16 as messianic, and the verses, "for thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption," are for them an allusion to me, the Christ. They believe this represents a prophecy as to my resurrection to physical life after my death, since they believe that I left my tomb in the same body which had died on the cross. In this, however, they are mistaken, for as I have previously explained in a message through Mr. Padgett, I rose in a body drawn from the elements, after dematerializing the one which had been destroyed.

### *Psalms 18 and 22*

*April 10, 1959*

I would like to discuss Psalm 18, which also appears in Second Samuel, Chapter 22, under the title "David's Song of Deliverance," in which the writer affirms that "the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul."

This psalm is of interest because of the differences in language between the version which appears in the Book of Samuel and the one found in the Psalter, which helps to illustrate how David's writings were constantly being revised by others, to the extent that critics are sometimes led to believe that the psalms were not written by David at all.

We can observe how the themes which the king treated were frequently expanded and elaborated upon by psalmists who lived long after him, so that his thoughts and emotions were projected through these men into ages far beyond his own; and this enables us to appreciate the tremendous force which David exerted upon centuries of later Hebrew thought. It was in acknowledgment of this influence that later psalmists wrote their songs under the title "A psalm of David."

If you compare the two versions of this psalm, you can see that the one in the Book of Psalms contains the first line "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength," and words like "buckler," "sorrows of hell," and "my strength," repeated several times. The version in Second Samuel omits the first line, but adds "and my refuge," and also "thou savest me from violence." I might tell you that the version in Second Samuel is more authentic, but both contain things that David never said.

We read in both versions: "He heard my voice out of His temple." There was no temple in David's lifetime - it was not built until Solomon's reign - but there was a tabernacle, and that was the word David used. However, as the psalms were being revised, the word that best fit the times was used, and "temple" replaced "tabernacle."

Thus you get some idea of how difficult it is to determine what of Psalms is David's and what is not - and in the same way, how difficult it is to positively determine the authorship of any of the writings of the Bible.

Regardless of the differences in these two versions of this psalm, one thing stands out forcibly: David's trust in the Heavenly Father in time of trouble. This great faith in God was expressed many times in his psalms and was restated by other psalmists in later times.

Another psalm of interest is Psalm 22, which has caused confusion among some Christians, who think it is a prophecy of my crucifixion:

But I am a worm, and no man;  
A reproach of men, and despised of the people.  
All they that see me laugh me to scorn:  
They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying,  
"He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver him:  
Let Him deliver him, seeing He delighted in him."  
... Be not far from me; for trouble is near;  
For there is none to help.  
Many bulls have compassed me;  
Strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round.  
They gaped upon me with their mouths,  
As a ravening and a roaring lion.  
I am poured out like water,  
And all my bones are out of joint:  
My heart is like wax;  
It is melted in within me.  
My strength is dried up like a potsherd;  
And my tongue cleaveth to my jaws;  
And thou hast brought me into the dust of death.  
For dogs have compassed me:  
The assembly of the wicked have enclosed me;  
They pierced my hands and my feet.  
I may count all my bones:  
They look and stare upon me.  
They part my garments among them,  
And cast lots upon my vesture. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms 22:6-8, 11-18

Now this sounds very much like a prophecy of my death, especially in the details of counting of bones, piercing of hands and feet, and casting of lots for garments. Actually, however, the writer was inspired by Second Samuel, Chapter 21, which tells of David's grave danger in battle against the Philistines. Here the writer sought to imagine himself in the place of David, depicting the king's plight, as a contrast to the description of Jehovah's might in coming to David's aid in Psalm 18 (David's Song of Deliverance):

Moreover, the Philistines had yet war again with Israel; and David went down, and his servants with him, and fought against the Philistines; and David waxed faint. And Ishbi-benob, which was of the sons of the giant [Goliath of Gath] ... he being girded with a new sword, thought to have slain David. But Abishai the son of Zeruiah succored him, and smote the Philistine ... Then the men of David swore unto him, saying, "Thou shalt go no more out with us to battle, that thou quench not the light of Israel."<sup>1</sup>

This moment of dire peril, in which the aging David found it no longer possible to fight actively in warfare, was the one chosen by the psalmist to portray David's fears and feelings. The writer, as was common among ancient Hebrews, was given to poetic fancies and imagery, such as the "bulls of Bashan," which of course meant the strong enemy soldiers; or being poured out like water, that is, completely exhausted by exertion; his heart melting in his bowels and his tongue clinging to his jaw, meaning growing faint with fear and paralyzed; the dogs compassing him, that is to say, ready to deliver the finishing blows.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Samuel 21:15-17

In the same chapter of Second Samuel, the story of the hanging of Saul's family by the Gibeonites, as approved by David, gave the writer the idea of the piercing of the hands and the feet, the counting of the bones, the bones being out of joint, and the staring of bystanders at the victim. Also mentioned were Saul and his sons, including Jonathan, who had been stripped of their raiment by the Philistines after the battle of Gilboa.<sup>1</sup>

The slaying of wounded after combat and the casting of lots for the garb and armor of the defeated foe were old customs among these people, as well as the Hebrews, certainly for a thousand years and more before they were practiced by the Romans. The writer of this so-called prediction, then, had in mind what David might have been thinking, imagining if he were to be killed by the Philistines; thus there was no idea of a crucifixion in the imagery of the writer, and much less a prophecy of a messiah's death.

### *The Temple Sacrifices*

*July 12, 1959*

I wish to speak to you about David's attitude towards the temple sacrifices. There are many expressions in the psalms indicating that David did not look with favor on them, and there are just as many statements to the contrary, that David wholeheartedly supported the temple sacrifices.

While considering this question, we must keep in mind that Judaism in David's time was primarily nationalistic and deistic – that is to say, that the Jewish religion was concerned first with the tribe as a nation, and that "God" to them meant the God of the Jewish nation that He had chosen and delivered from bondage in Egypt, and whose destiny He was directing. We will see that David's contradictory stances towards sacrifices was the result of his dual view of God as both a personal and a tribal deity.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Samuel 21:5-14

If you review the Ten Commandments given to the Hebrew people through Moses, you will see that they are all laws of conduct, morals, and ethics, and that provision for offerings was made later, in passing (the important instruction being that the altar be made of earth or natural stone, and not constructed by tool or hewn).<sup>1</sup> The building of a tabernacle, and later the construction of the great temple of Solomon were things unknown to the Hebrews of Moses' time – these developments being in response to the changing circumstances of the passing centuries. And in the same way, the concept of sacrifices changed radically with time.

To all peoples of the ancient world, sacrifices were vital. They were offered to the various gods who, to those peoples, controlled their lives and their stability: war gods, fertility goddesses of agriculture and growth, and others taken from the physical universe – the sun god especially, the moon goddess, and those of the heavens. These all had to be offered for fear of incurring their wrath, and defeat in war, famine, and storms were all attributed to these gods.

Abraham more clearly understood the true nature of God because, to him, God was a deity of ethics and morality, who intended these qualities to be manifest in human behavior. Therefore, Abraham had an inkling that man had a *soul*, an entity within him, made in the image of God, that innately stood for morality and right living. Abraham had this insight as a gift, an intuitive understanding, and not as the result of reasoning. And so, while he sacrificed to God, he realized that such sacrifices should be restricted to animals, and that the slaying of humans for that purpose was an abomination unto Him.

Thus began the trend towards reviewing sacrifices, and as time wore on, especially after the Hebrews established themselves in Canaan, and their religion became centered more on

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 20:24-25

righteousness of conduct and the overcoming of evil and hardship through faith in God, Hebrew thinkers became progressively more critical of sacrifices and their utility.

The prophets, stressing righteousness of heart as the only real defense against sin and evil, were generally opposed to sacrifices, or at best, countenanced them only when offered with a clean heart. And it was only with the exile in Babylonia and the loss of national life that the priests, emphasizing the need for a strong focus on the religious aspect of Judaism, brought out to the public the code of minute statutes concerning the old sacrifices.

Thus you see that the laws regarding altars and sacrifices were not at all God-given commandments, but were traditions that experienced changes in accordance with the historical development or fluctuating circumstances to which they were subject.

Now in David's time, the altar was simply the ark, placed in a tabernacle, which traveled with the people, eventually finding a home in Jerusalem after that city was stormed by David in battle against the Jebusites (a people who still practiced human sacrifice).

The Hebrew tribes had been accustomed to sacrificing at their tabernacles – such as the one at Shiloh, where Eli the priest was visited by Hannah, mother of Samuel the prophet. Even in those days, the prophets spoke out that offerings could not atone for evil and sin, and Samuel had God say, concerning Eli's wayward sons:

I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth, because his sons make themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice and offering forever.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel 3:13-14

Now the Philistines rose up in battle against Israel, killing Eli's sons and capturing the ark, but, because of subsequent plagues, these pagans decided to return the object with suitable offerings to placate the god of Israel, whom they felt responsible for their misfortunes. According to the story - which you realize was fictional - the good people of Beth Shemesh, where the ark was returned, joyfully sacrificed unto the Lord, but the only reward from this supposed god of Israel was the slaughter of the villagers (50,070 men, say the Scriptures) because they had looked into the ark of the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

All of this reveals to us the superstitious state of the writer, in that he could attribute to God a wholesale slaughter for the supposedly great crime of looking into the ark. It also reveals to us that sacrifices, even offered with the best intentions, were futile, as the poor Beth Shemites could woefully testify, according to the story.

More importantly, it is obvious that the loss of the ark for seven months, which the Israelites experienced following their defeat, did not result in the destruction of the people. And even though Samuel later sacrificed with a burnt-offering, and the Israelites won in battle against the Philistines at Ebenezer, and (in violation of instructions from Moses) even built an altar at Ramah, the discrediting of sacrifices inevitably came about, because people began to realize that sacrifices had no relationship to, or influence on, subsequent events.

The first book of Samuel was of course written by a man of the priesthood, in that it attributed Saul's downfall to his disobedience of the rituals; and so great was this writer's concern with rituals and sacrifices that he unwittingly wrote these contradictory stories which I now use as arguments against his own stance.

Indeed, this entire book is filled with references to sacrifices; as for example, when Saul first met Samuel as the people were

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel 6

offering sacrifices in the high places and Samuel was blessing them.<sup>1</sup> And again, after anointing Saul with oil for the victory over the Ammonites at Jabesh Gilead,<sup>2</sup> Samuel declared that God had rejected Saul as king of the Jews because he intruded into the priest's office and made peace-and-burnt-offerings, a duty which only a priest could perform.<sup>3</sup> Here we see that even in those days, Saul, as king, challenged the sacrifice laws and the authority of the priests (though unsuccessfully to be sure).

Then again, when Saul himself wished to sacrifice his own son because Jonathan ate when his father had cursed partakers of food, Jonathan exclaimed: "My father hath troubled the land: see, I pray you, how mine eyes have been enlightened, because I tasted a little of this honey. If my people had by chance eaten freely, how much more of a slaughter of the Philistines would there have been?"<sup>4</sup>

Jonathan, we see, was not inclined to believe in the rituals, and yet in the next battle, won a great victory. And then, in violation of the strict statute commanding koshering of meat (salting meat to drain the blood thereof, for the blood was considered the Lord's alone) the soldiers, faint with hunger because of Saul's unreasonable curse, slew the cattle taken from the Philistines and ate them with the blood – and you may be sure that Jonathan and David were among them.<sup>5</sup>

When Saul discovered Jonathan's "sin," he sought to have him sacrificed, but the people said to Saul: "Shall Jonathan die – he who has brought about this great salvation for Israel? God forbid this, curse or no curse; not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground, for he has fought on God's side this day."<sup>6</sup> So the people rescued Jonathan from his father, and the Hebrews went on to many victories.

Saul's final rejection as king was supposed to have been caused by his sparing of the life of Agad, king of the Amalekites.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel 9:12-13   <sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel 10:1, 8   <sup>3</sup> 1 Samuel 13:10-14   <sup>4</sup> 1 Samuel 14:29-30

<sup>5</sup> 1 Samuel 14:31-32   <sup>6</sup> 1 Samuel 14:45

Samuel had ordered Saul, in God's name, to kill Agad, because of his cruelty to the Hebrews. You must understand that such an order never came from the Father, but that Samuel, filled with anger towards the brutal foe, thought it did. Saul's downfall resulted not from such a merciful act as sparing an enemy's life, but from a progressive nervous disorder which proved fatal for Israel at Mt. Gilboa.

From all this you can readily understand that David, connected intimately as he was with these events, realized that these prohibitions and sacrifices had no efficacy. Jonathan, his best friend, violated them, and so did many of the people. The Hebrews were a very practical people, considering the superstitious nature of the day, and many of them, David included, had an instinct which told them that such statutes were made to be violated, and were meaningless with regard to their relationship to God.

But when David became king, and his obligations included being the custodian of the national religion, his outlook towards religious ceremonies underwent a change. He then wanted to see a well-ordered ritual, not because of any belief in their efficacy, but because they were an outward sign connected with the nation's religion – something which the people could hold onto, thereby contributing to the nation's stability.

In keeping with this new attitude, one of the things David wished to do on capturing Jerusalem from the Jebusites was to bring the ark to his new capital. The story of Uzziah's death for touching the ark has no historical veracity, and was inserted later by a priestly-minded editor, who reechoed in one man the so-called disaster to the Beth Shemites. David did dance before the Lord when the ark was placed in the tabernacle constructed for that purpose, and he himself conducted the services, making the peace-and-burnt-offerings before the Lord. He then blessed the people in the name of God.

And thus you see that David did exactly that for which Saul had been rejected in wrath by Samuel, who claimed that he was speaking for God. You realize of course that Samuel spoke not for God, but out of his own manner of thinking, and that in the course of time, as the old views were replaced with new, men were permitted to do what before had been considered abomination.

In the Psalms of David, then, one can see the king's suspicions of, and disbelief in the sacrifices and their efficacy, but also his later desire that they be continued, for form's sake and national purposes. These opposing views are also found in the later psalms, and in the writing of the prophets.

David wrote a psalm of contrition after his trespass with Bathsheba which, with the many alterations and interpolations inserted by later hands, has come down to us as Psalm 51. Here stands David's acknowledgement that not sacrifices, but repentance for sin, are the valid offerings before the Lord:

For thou delightest not in sacrifices; else would I  
give it; thou hast no pleasure in burnt-offering.  
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken  
and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not  
despise.<sup>1</sup>

After David's death, priests took hold of this psalm and added the following verses, favorable to their views:

Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion; build  
thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then wilt thou delight  
in the sacrifices of righteousness, in burnt-offering  
and whole burnt-offerings; then wilt they offer  
bullocks upon thine altar.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms 51:16-17    <sup>2</sup> Psalms 51:18-19

The wall known as the “Wall of Jerusalem” was built by Solomon, and this addition to the psalm was written at this time.

Again, in Psalm 50, the writer has David say that God expresses His dissatisfaction with sacrifices, in favor of thanksgiving unto Him, faith, and seeking Him in time of trouble for deliverance:

Will I eat the flesh of bulls,  
Or drink the blood of goats?  
Offer unto God the sacrifices of thanksgiving;  
And pay thy vows unto the Most High;  
And call upon me in the day of trouble;  
I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.<sup>1</sup>

This attitude towards religious sacrifice had many advocates among the prophets, and in time I shall turn to this subject again; for as Christianity stands today the concept of blood sacrifice cannot be dissociated from my coming, and is something which must be shown to be completely without validity or connection as regards the fact of my being the Christ.

### *The Twenty-Third Psalm*

*July 21, 1959*

The 23rd Psalm is the one that is best loved and remembered of all the 150-odd psalms (not counting those brought to light in the Dead Sea Scrolls) that we possess. It is the one that is most concise, poetic, and inspirational, not only for the Hebrew people, but for all who consider the Old Testament a part of their religious heritage.

This 23rd Psalm is also the one that best represents David and his significance in Old Testament religion. It has been closely associated with him through the ages, as it describes the peaceful, bucolic life which we imagine was his as a shepherd, and

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms 50:13-15

which many of us seek but cannot attain because of the vexations, frustrations, and turmoil of material existence. It represents a dream, an ideal; and some of us have the idea in our mind and heart that eventually this ideal will become a reality, and man will lie down and rest, at peace with himself and his God.

This feeling of peace is a perfume which seems to come forth from the words of this psalm, and it owes its fragrance to an absolute and undying faith in God. In the Old Testament, one will not find a stronger burning faith in actual life than that which David manifested in his times of woe and affliction, and which made possible the fiber of his life, and the strength which he drew from the Heavenly Father. And it is the 23rd Psalm, with its simple, straightforward words, which conveys that overwhelming sense of sincerity, and links it to both David the shepherd, and David the king, unafraid of enemy and death alike, because, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

This inner sense of the presence of God, not within David's soul (since the divine love was not yet his) but all about and at his side, summarizes the great truth of the Hebrew religion: that God was present with David, helping him in his trials, and seeking to straighten his paths, because David had placed his faith in Him. And this strikes a deep and reverberating chord in the heart of every person who has faith in God, and who trusts completely that, as He was present with David, so it is with them, that God is close, lighting the way forward in the march of life.

David knew that the soul lives on, because he believed that Saul did communicate with the departed Samuel, and because his faith in God gave him an insight and an assurance of the afterlife which lesser believers could not grasp nor understand. David was therefore convinced that God would welcome him into the other world of life, set a table before him, such as was

conceived out of his own experiences, and anoint him king of the Jews there, as he had been ruler of the Hebrew nation on earth: "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

The beauty and inspiration of the 23rd Psalm, then, are incontrovertible and enduring, but I want you to know more about this psalm. The first three stanzas are not of David's pen; while they are close to what we might imagine to be David's feelings, yet they are the product of later ages. These opening stanzas of the psalm read:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;  
He leadeth me beside the still water.  
He restoreth my soul;  
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His  
name's sake.

No, David did not write this, though we feel that he might have, because we imagine that he must have felt in such a mood many times. Actually, David never could have conceived of God as a shepherd, for the simple reason that he could never imagine God to be in a situation such as he had found himself, since, to David, God possessed the sublimity and majesty of the Creator of the universe. It was only with the prophets that this idea of God as shepherd became established. It first appears in Isaiah: "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd,"<sup>1</sup> and again in Jeremiah: "And I shall gather the remnant of my flock ... And I shall set up shepherds over them, which shall feed them."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 40:11    <sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 23:3-4

These three verses of the psalm also reflect the inspiration of Ezekiel, the prophet of the exile. In Chapter 34 we read:

For, saith the Lord, Behold, even I, will search for my sheep, and will seek them out ... and feed them ... And I will feed them in a good pasture ... and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. I will feed my flock and cause them to lie down.<sup>1</sup>

One can very well see how close this is in contents and language, though not in concise style or rhythm, to the opening stanzas of the 23rd Psalm.

To continue, David is perhaps the outstanding example of the Hebrew who prays the Lord to lead him in the path of righteousness, as he did, for example, in Psalm 5, where verse 8 reads: "Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness." In the 23rd Psalm, verse 3, however, yet another phrase has been added here which takes us to a later age - "for His name's sake" - and this is something I wish to explain.

It was Ezekiel, alone, who preached that God would restore the Hebrew exiles from Babylonia, not because of any repentance on the part of Judeans, but because God would not suffer His name to be used as a reproach by Gentiles. Ezekiel saw the pagans scorning the God of Israel because the Hebrews had been defeated and exiled, asking them ironically where was their God who had permitted such a disaster to overtake His people. Hence Ezekiel felt that God would protect His own name (or reputation), restoring to His people what He had taken from them as punishment for sin, "for His name's sake." There are many expressions of this type in the Book of Ezekiel.

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel 34:11, 14-15

I also want to tell you that I preached the 23rd Psalm during my ministry when in Palestine, with the divine love of God as the fulfillment of the righteousness sung by the psalmist.

This psalm can be interpreted, of course, as it has been, as conveying a nostalgia for the countryside and its tranquility, away from the cares and vexations of city life. It describes that longing to be alone with God's creation, so as to have a chance to shed from one's soul the crassness of the earth plane and its activities, and, in the retreat of nature, to commune with God and purify one's heart.

But the psalm also has a more spiritual interpretation. The still waters and the green pastures to which the Shepherd leads his flock are the truths of God's ways. Thus, says the psalmist, the man filled with the spirit of righteousness need not fear death; and while here we do not have any consciousness of a resurrection such as taught by Christianity, yet there is a wonderful faith that man's soul survives death, and exists in a place prepared for it by the Heavenly Father. I made mention of this in my teachings, referring as I did to the many mansions of my Father. The psalmist thus has great spiritual insight when he concludes with the vital words, "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

When I taught this psalm, I explained that the green pastures and still waters were the divine food and drink through which the soul could achieve, not merely restoration, but transformation into a divine soul. I preached that the pastures and waters, or food and drink, which I referred to as the bread and waters of eternal life, were really symbolic of God's love, which was available to all those who would partake thereof, through sincere and earnest prayer. I preached that something more than mere purity of soul could now be intimated from these verses, and that when the psalmist wrote: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want," these words meant to me that I could have my everlasting fill of

His substance – His divine love – and that my soul could be fed throughout all eternity through and by this love.

And when the psalm mentioned the preparation of a table in the presence of my enemies, and the anointing of my head with oil, it meant that I was to be a spiritual king, master of the Celestial Heavens, and that any act against me in material life would not avail, and that, come what may, I would accomplish my mission of bringing knowledge of the Father's love to the souls of humankind, making available to humanity His divine love and life for the soul, forever.

I did not see in the phrase "in the presence of my enemies" any indication of vengeance for what these might accomplish against me, although I know that such was the intention of the psalmist. But I could see in it the hope that these enemies would eventually in spirit life understand their mistake, and atone for it by seeking God's love, and loving him whom they had previously opposed.

## *CHAPTER FIVE*

### *Hosea*

*July 21, 1959*

I wish to turn now from the discussion of David, and open the books of the prophets. Here is where we find the essence of what is most noble in the Jewish religion, elevating it to a sublime faith of righteousness, ethical conduct and morality, not only for the nation, but also for the individual. To a considerable degree, these books were also the motivating force behind the laws of the Pentateuch, these legal instruments providing the practical application of the standards set up by the prophets.

Now the period of time from David to Hosea is about 250 years. I want to pass over the life of Solomon and the construction of the First Temple as a different aspect of Judaism from that which I am presently discussing, namely, the development among the Hebrews of the human love, as the forerunner to the divine love which I brought to humanity as the Messiah of God.

Although Amos was really the first of the prophets of the Northern Kingdom of Israel after its separation from Judah, I am going to begin with Hosea, son of Beeri, for in him, for the first time clearly expressed, is the truth that God loves His children with a special love – not as the human being loves God or his fellowman, as the first commandment of Moses reads, but with His own divine love.

I want you to see and understand that I did not come as the Messiah to bring to humankind something unexpected, but as the fulfillment of prophecies recorded centuries previously in the Old Testament. I came to make the divine love – already known by Hosea as overflowing in God more than 750 years before my coming – the great instrument of salvation, and a

reality, available to all humankind, Jew and Gentile alike, through prayer for its bestowal.

The divine love, which could be dimly perceived in the love and forgiveness of Joseph in Egypt; in the kindness and faithfulness of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz; and in the sure mercies of David, became in me a portion of God's glory dwelling *in my own soul*, absorbing into its essence my own humanness, and making of it a part of the living attribute of the Father. Upon realizing that God's love was present and could be possessed by me if I sought for it earnestly in prayer, I did so constantly; and through the knowledge and insight which I obtained through this prayer, and with the constantly increasing divine love in my soul, I became aware that I was the Messiah, in that I was the first human to possess a soul filled with this essence of the Father's divine love.

The beautiful accounts of love, forgiveness, and faithfulness which we find in the Scriptures concerning Joseph and Ruth came to us through the pens of others, as stories; and in the chronicles about David we have a biography written by other hands (although some of this was written quite close to David's lifetime). I have already explained that many editors and priests revised and rewrote the psalms, so that it is hard to discern what is actually David's and what is owing to others. But in the case of Hosea, his writings deal directly with himself, his intimate family life, and his visions as a prophet of Israel.

Hosea was a man of great sensitivity and spirituality, and the sufferings he incurred as a result of his marriage to a wayward woman, Gomer, made him turn to God as a means of consolation. For he deeply loved Gomer, and was disconsolate because of her eyes for other men. And God did give him solace, and he was made to understand that, just as his wife through faithlessness caused him agony of soul, so did the faithlessness of Israel,

God's "chosen people" or "bride," cause the Father sorrow and unhappiness.

But as in the case of Joseph and his erring brothers whom he forgave, and as God forgave His chosen one, Israel, so must Hosea forgive his faithless Gomer. And Hosea did indeed forgive her, for after having sold her into slavery, he repented and redeemed her, putting her on a sort of probation so that she might return as his wife once more after she forsook her lovers.

This is not a mere story, as some commentators on the Scriptures think, but is a true account of how, through prayer and faith in God, the prophet Hosea learned to sublimate his grief over an erring wife into a magnificent conception of the Father's love for Israel, His bride, thereby attaining an awareness of the existence of divine forgiveness. Through his own sorrow, Hosea gained the rarest insight into the nature of that divine love which exists as the great attribute of the Father - a love which suffers or rejoices, is quick to mercy and forgiveness, and is ever hopeful that the person which it loves will cease to be separated from it. And so the "word of God," delivered through His spirit-ministers, came to the understanding of Hosea, saying:

When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto the Baalim, and burned incense to graven images. I taught Ephraim [the Northern Kingdom] also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love. And I was to them as they take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them.

He [Israel] shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return ... How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, My sorrows are kindled together.<sup>1</sup>

This was the first time that the Father was represented in Hebrew prophecy as displaying these delicate feelings of love and sorrow, all the more significant since, at that time and long afterwards, the emphasis was upon God's supposed wrath and vengeance. Here was a God of mercy and compassion, the conception of which was not to become prevalent until the time of my coming, even though it had been hinted at, as I have said, since the time of Joseph, Ruth, and David.

In the Book of Hosea, God's love for Israel was represented as being directed not towards an individual, but towards the entire nation. The thought that God could care about and love each individual in the nation, or that a person could actually possess this love, did not and could not enter the mind of Hosea, for the burning issue of his day, and for centuries thereafter, was man's love *for* God, as a force to keep him from sin and focused on the path of righteousness. The prophets sought to keep people from backsliding into paganism, and to keep the rulers of the nation from becoming so worldly and politically minded as to neglect the one true God and His statutes of morality. Love towards God, then, was the great plea of the prophets, and not God's love for His children.

Now, when I read the Book of Hosea, and considered the character of this man, and his love towards his erring Gomer, I was impressed with the thought that it was God's love for Hosea – an

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<sup>1</sup> Hosea 11:1-5, 8

individual – which enabled the suffering prophet to accept Gomer, and it was God’s love which sustained him in his griefs and enabled him to attain solace. It was from this, as well as from the glimpse that I had of God’s love for Joseph, Ruth, and King David, and from the works of other prophets whom I shall discuss, that I realized that God’s love was flooding the world as a light, even though man was unaware of it. Humankind never sought for this love because, to them, it was as if nonexistent, and so they prayed instead for help in material things, and for a purification of their human love. I realized that, if God’s love was present, as I understood it to be, then I should pray for its possession, which I did – and as I continued to do so, I became aware of the presence of His soul’s love in my own soul.

### *Predictions of Disaster*

*July 23, 1959*

I have shown how Hosea, through personal sorrow, learned that, as man loved with a human love, so did the Father love with a divine love, and that in this love, God sought the return of His erring children (meaning, from the perspective of Hosea, His “chosen people” Israel). And while this return had to be made with free will, by Israel itself, yet God would reach out and endeavor to guide His children, so that they could come to know and love their Creator.

Implicit in this concept of the Hebrews as a wayward people was the idea that such a state of disharmony would lead to misfortune. This does not mean that God punishes His children for the evils they commit, for such could not be further from the truth. The Heavenly Father does not punish; but rather, through His ministering angels and prophets, continually tries to bring His children to a realization that they cannot become absorbed in the material things of life, to the neglect of their spiritual well-being, without suffering the unhappy consequences.

The vicissitudes through which the people of Israel thus passed were not punishments of God – although we shall see that the prophets consistently thought that they were. At the same time, these hardships were effects of causes which were not merely fortuitous, nor solely the result of the blind progression of events or natural forces. Historical events, I must remind you, are not merely the result of the working of natural forces; for men's thoughts and deeds, for good or for evil, are the dominating forces in the march of history – with wars, exterminations, and similar man-made disasters overshadowing by far the calamities produced by the evolving universe.

The troubles encountered by the people of Israel are *not*, then, to be laid at the door of an angry and punishing God, although I wish to repeat that this was the consensus among the prophets, as they thundered against the evils they saw in Israel.

The evils witnessed by Hosea can be seen as stemming largely from the influence of Solomon and his court: Solomon's concept of religion as ritual and temple, rather than ethics and morality, his concern for opulence and material pleasures befitting a pagan monarch, his imposition of burdensome taxes upon the people, his encouragement of the debased pagan ceremonies in the temple, all of which led to the neglect of the Heavenly Father and His laws of love.

The chain of events thus started led to the ascension of Rehoboam, and his foolish acceptance of the counsel given him by his young courtiers that he harshly reject the request of his northern subjects for an easement of their tax burdens, with the result that the Northern Kingdom, Israel, seceded from the rest of the land, and two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, came into existence. Each of these states was of course much weaker politically than they would have been as a unified Israel.

The trend toward pagan practices in worship, and the consequent successive loss of moral and ethical fiber, and the disso-

ciation from the high faith in the Living Jehovah, were all instrumental in bringing the Hebrews down to a material level, and forfeited for them the spiritual strength which they needed to maintain themselves against their physically superior neighbors. It was this moral and physical weakness, then, and not any punishment of God, which eventually caused the downfall of the Hebrew nations – first Israel, and finally Judah.

The prophets saw the moral evils of the people as the cause of the buffeting and threats of disaster which faced the Hebrews; and with intense love for their people and for God, and a wonderful understanding that a return to God's laws would, through faith, clothe them with His protection, they thundered powerfully against sin and evil. They supposed God to be a divine avenger of evil, which He could not tolerate, while at the same time they were clearly aware that the policies and doings of the Hebrew nations themselves were the causes of their difficulties.

Hosea's prophecies were along these lines. Most of his writings dealt with the impending exile of Israel into Assyria, caused by the moral deterioration of the kingdom. For Hosea prophesied in the days of Jeroboam II:<sup>1</sup> "And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord: he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat [from Zereda in Manasseh] who made Israel to sin."<sup>2</sup> This Jeroboam II was devoted to worldly affairs, warring against his neighbors to restore to the Israelites towns which had been previously conquered by the Arameans. He thus extended his boundaries to include many Aramean cities, and the result was that the conquered pagans exerted an influence of moral decay within the nation, which the priesthood willingly accepted.

Hosea looked upon this situation and concluded that if God was the guide and director of his people, He could not permit this to continue indefinitely, and would (as he thought) chastise

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<sup>1</sup> A son of Joash or Jehoash, the grandfather of Jehu, King of Israel, 825 BC    <sup>2</sup> 2 Kings 14:24

Israel for its shameful way of life. Hosea foresaw not only the termination of the Israelite ruling house, but of the entire nation. And so he declared, as coming from God: "I will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel."<sup>1</sup>

In Chapter 4, Hosea brought a general charge against the people: "Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel: for the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land; because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land."<sup>2</sup> Naming, one by one, the evils of lying, killing, stealing, adulterous behavior, and others, he declared that the land would mourn.

The priests, those who should have been leading the people, were pointed out with wrath:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge;  
because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also  
reject thee, that thou shall be no priest to me. ...  
They eat up the sin of my people, and they set  
their heart on their iniquity. And there shall be,  
like people, like priest: And I will punish them for  
their ways, and reward them their days.<sup>3</sup>

Hosea went on to state that the iniquity of Israel was such that the souls of the people had become separated from the All-Soul of the Father, and that in such a condition they could not even think of seeking God. And even if they did, they would not find Him, for their doings had created a "crust" upon their souls, so that they could not see righteousness shining forth from the Father, as though a dark cloud had hidden the radiance of the sun from the eye of the onlooker. Only by removal of the dark cloud – the evil and the sins – by the people themselves could the face of God be revealed anew unto them.

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<sup>1</sup> Hosea 1:4   <sup>2</sup> Hosea 4:1   <sup>3</sup> Hosea 4:6, 8-9

*Render unto Caesar**August 20, 1959*

In my last sermon I showed how Hosea saw punishment approaching as a result of the iniquities and moral degradation to which the Northern Kingdom had descended. But I have also said that Hosea was not right in thinking that it was God who was bringing this punishment for sin, for the Father does not punish.

However, the evils which the Israelites practiced, with their increasing loss of moral fiber, inevitably created material conditions which worked against them. The people had lost their high faith in God, and in the qualities of righteousness and justice which He represented for them. They had lost, in a word, their lofty idealism, which had given them their steel and sinew. They lost their faith that God would protect them, and thus, they lost their link with Him. Only by a return to Him could that link be reestablished.

God's spiritual forces were unable to help and protect Israel, because the people's spiritual contact had been broken by their withdrawal into materialism and evil behavior. The two Hebrew kingdoms were thus left uncovered to the storms of materialism. As I said when I preached in Palestine, "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's." The deeper meaning in this statement is that man is subject to the powers-that-be in the kingdom *to which he belongs*. And so, if man belongs to the "kingdom" of the earth plane, then he has only the forces of that plane to cling to, and must abide by the rule of those forces.

In the earth plane conditions of those times, Israel, as a drop of water against a mighty sea, was tossed about by the larger and more powerful of the Fertile Crescent nations, and had nothing to adhere to for protection. She sought alliances with other countries; but if I may use the word "soul" with a collective connotation, what reliance could she have on nations in a similar or worse condition of soul? Only if the soul returns to the Father and seeks

Him can it receive His protection; and only as Israel turned from her evil ways and returned to God, by obeying His statutes of justice and righteousness, could she rise above the earth plane, reestablish her spiritual link with Him, and obtain His protection.

In his book, Hosea used language which reflected the prevailing beliefs, attributing conditions, both good and evil, to the workings of God. Instead of saying, "Work evil and evil will work within you," he could only say, "Work evil and God will punish you." At the same time, he had the insight to realize that once the people suffered disaster, they would understand that this disaster had been caused by their own sins and iniquities, and would turn to God and seek His help: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help. I will be thy King: where is any other that may save thee?"<sup>1</sup>

If there was no other way for the people to come into accord with God's statutes of righteousness, then their own evils would create the evil forces that would overtake them; or as Hosea thought, God would use other nations as instruments of punishment. Thus, in his love for his people, Hosea exhorted them to forsake their evils and return to God before it was too late – and before the punishment, which he saw coming, could strike its terrifying blows.

Hosea warned that only sincere repentance for evil done, and a return with a contrite heart could have any appeal to God. A superficial, outward turning to God, without the change in heart, was meaningless: "They shall go with their flocks and with their herds (their sacrificial offerings) to seek the Lord; but they shall not find Him; He hath withdrawn himself from them."<sup>2</sup> In this condition, the ritual of sacrifice was worthless: "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."<sup>3</sup>

The main theme in Hosea, then, was a call for a revival of faith in God, a repentance from sin, and the keeping of His statutes.

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<sup>1</sup> Hosea 13:9-10   <sup>2</sup> Hosea 5:6   <sup>3</sup> Hosea 6:6

The predicted “punishment from God” was not merely for the sake of punishment, but to enable Israel to reform and correct its ways, in order to attain the moral and ethical standards set by God. In the words of Hosea, God said: “I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offenses, and seek my face. In their affliction, they will seek me early.”<sup>1</sup>

### *A First Messianic Prophecy*

Hosea then prophesized a return to God after the coming disaster, and a resultant revival of life for the nation: “Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up. After two days will He revive us: in the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight.”<sup>2</sup>

This, we can see, was a promise of redemption given by God to the Israelites through the mouth of Hosea, and it had nothing to do with me, Jesus, as some Christians think. They profess to see in these words a prophesy of my resurrection on the third day, but nothing can be further from the truth. Hosea had no inkling of my coming, as he has told me, and his words were directed only to the Hebrew people, without the slightest idea his words might be misconstrued to be applied to another situation more than seven centuries later.

But Hosea did have an insight into the redemption of his people. This redemption was to be twofold: It meant a return to Palestine from exile in Assyria, and it also meant a redemption from sin. Since, in his day, God was presumed to be living in the temple in Jerusalem, a “return to the Lord” had to mean a material return to the land, as well as a moral reform. Some writers on the subject have thought this “return” to mean a physical return only, but it did not; and in fact, when in later centuries God was more correctly perceived as being universally present,

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<sup>1</sup> Hosea 5:15    <sup>2</sup> Hosea 6:1-2

a return to Him meant *only* a return to His statutes and moral laws. The strong emphasis laid by some Hebrew writers on the physical return or ingathering of the people was made inevitable by the two exiles suffered by the Hebrews during the millennium of which I speak.

Later I realized that return to "the land where God dwells" was a concept which, in its wider meaning, really represented a return to the pristine purity of the soul, and life in the spiritual Heavens. And when I was preaching in Palestine, I had the knowledge that ultimately this return to God and "His land" meant a home in the Celestial Heavens, where the divine love in the soul gives it an abode with the Father Himself.

Now when Hosea spoke of a return to God, he meant primarily a moral regeneration, a spiritual rebirth following the punishment of exile to Assyria which he realized was rapidly approaching. This exile, he thought, would last until the "end of days" but the final return would be in the form of a renewal of their inheritance under their king, David: "afterwards shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord, their God, and David their King; and shall come trembling unto the Lord and His goodness in the latter days."<sup>1</sup>

Here then, Hosea had a clear Messianic concept - ultimate happiness for the Hebrew people under a king come from the House of David. It would be a kingdom achieved through repentance, unto contentment, with God their protector, and ruled by a descendant of their great king, David.

Hosea also wrote: "And the children of Judah and of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint themselves a head, and shall go up out of the land; for great shall be the day of Jezreel."<sup>2</sup> This meant that, after the exile, the Hebrews would be regenerated in spirit, obedient to God's statutes, for "the day of Jezreel" meant the day of redemption. Their head, then, was

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<sup>1</sup> Hosea 3:5    <sup>2</sup> Hosea 1:11

to be the king of their redeemed nation – their Messiah. This was one of the true prophecies regarding my coming found in the books of the prophets, a subject I shall continue to deal with as we trace the development of love in the Old Testament.

Once Israel would forsake her evil ways and return to God, then God would shower upon the land and the people great abundance of life and fertility. Hosea meant to convey to his people that this abundance and life were not only for this world of the material, but for the eternal life of the soul as well. The only way he could convey this feeling was to write about the good things they longed for in this world, but with such wonderful poetry and beauty that some sensed that these descriptions went beyond their fondest hopes, and could be secured only in an ideal world.

At the Messiah's time of redemption, Israel's sins were to be forgotten, for the purified soul cannot hold a memory of sin. The people were to turn from idolatry to faith in God, calling Him, Ishi (my Husband); and God was to return to His people in love – the divine love which the Heavenly Father has for His children: "I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely."<sup>1</sup>

And, stated Hosea, this divine love would bring about a closeness, as between husband and wife:

And I will betroth thee unto me forever. Yea, I will  
betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in  
justice and in loving-kindness, and in compassion.  
And I will betroth thee unto me in faithfulness,  
and thou shalt know the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

It was from the study of Hosea that I realized that God's love was distinct and different from the human love, and that it could be possessed by a human soul.

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<sup>1</sup> Hosea 14:4    <sup>2</sup> Hosea 2:19-20

## CHAPTER SIX

### *Amos*

*August 21, 1959*

Amos was the first of the real prophets of Israel, who exercised his ministry during the reign of Jeroboam II. I have already told you that this king was idolatrous and materialistic in his attitude, devoting his rule to enlarging his domain and making it as powerful as he could. No one could have dared predict the destruction of his kingdom within fifty years, yet Amos did so, and he was correct.

Amos did not base his prophecies on visions, but on his knowledge of the workings of the spiritual forces which act upon the human soul. If a person is evil in their heart, they attract evil to themselves, and evil souls from the spirit world as well, and these work to create conditions that will bring the sinful person to misfortune.

Sometimes material conditions of a nation or individual are favorable to the extent that the pressure of these evil forces cannot sufficiently undermine their prosperous position, leading people to speculate about the explanation for this apparent injustice. And conversely, there are people who, while sincerely striving to live moral and ethical lives, cannot seem to prosper or surmount their material difficulties, causing misgivings as to the power of God to protect His children from evil. You will see that from this paradox eventually evolved the story of Job, which I shall discuss at another time. But here let me say that adverse material conditions produced by the machinations of evil souls, or through the impersonal influence of natural forces, may lead to *undeserved* hardships, and that, as long as one remains on earth, one will be subject to such influences.

The statement, "Thou shalt be subject to the powers that be," is true, yet so also is the one in 2 Chronicles 25:8, that "God hath power to help." Though material, or earth plane, conditions are subject to material laws, yet God, through His ministering angels, always seeks to protect those who seek Him, and works to help them overcome unfavorable material conditions. Sometimes the effort consumes what to mortals is considerable time, but that is simply a point of view, and it is well to remember that these spirit efforts continue ceaselessly, and that the time does come when the protecting forces are able to reach through the earth conditions and bring about an amelioration of the material situation.

During this time, the person with faith in God, and who prays to God, keeps contact with His spirit forces, who then can give him courage and strength in his time of adversity. They also enable him to see his difficulties from a higher perspective, where he can view them as they really are - very temporary when compared to his complete life, both mortal and spirit, extending into eternity.

I must also remind you that God gave man a free will to act, and by that very gift took away from Himself absolute power to force man to act as He wishes. Therefore He cannot, or does not, force man to act contrary to man's wishes, even though they be for unmitigated evil. There are also national and universal laws which God created and which He does not nullify or set aside, even to protect innocent lives.

What God can do, however, is to bring into operation higher laws, which, if obeyed, can neutralize those material laws in effect.

As a perfect example, God made available, through me, the highest spiritual law known to humankind - His divine love - at a time when the Hebrew people were being torn and afflicted by that cruelest and most brutal of oppressor nations, Rome. Only the divine love and its possession in abundance could have given

Israel the fortitude, courage and faith to endure and overcome the great storm of evil that vented its wrath upon that nation. Only the divine love could have enabled the Hebrews to perceive this yoke as it really was – a tempest of great violence, but withal a passing one in the ocean of eternal time, and one from which Israel was to take refuge, not to face.

Human love was not equal to the immense task of coping with the greater human evil that was ancient Rome, and thus Israel adopted the disastrous course of rebellion and insurrection. I could have averted this disaster to my people *if* they had believed the words of their Messiah, and prayed to the Father for His love.

Just as many in Judah in my time had sunk down to the level of the heathen, to act as he did with force, and to “live and die” by the sword,<sup>1</sup> so had the leaders of Israel in Amos’ day sunk to this level, turning away from the moral and ethical statutes of their religion, and acting as did the neighboring peoples, following their idolatry and degradation of behavior. Amos prophesied against these neighboring tribes as well – the Syrians; the Philistines in Gaza, Ashdod, and Ashkelon; the Edomites to the south of Judah; the Ammonites; and the Moabites. He did this to show that God was the God of all peoples, pagan as well as Hebrew, and to warn these tribes that they also would have to bear the consequences of their iniquities.

For the Israelites, though, Amos prophesied destruction not only because of their evil behavior, but because they had despised the laws of God consciously and willfully, in contrast to the neighboring tribes who frequently acted out of ignorance. Amos felt that, as a people with whom God had made an everlasting covenant, the Hebrews were to be held to a higher standard of behavior than the pagan nations. And in a sense this was true, because the laws of compensation work differently upon the willful violator of God’s laws than upon the unconscious or ignorant transgressor.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 26:52

Amos pointed out to the people the punishment God had (supposedly) been meting out: famine, drought, plagues, pestilence, and war had been visible warnings to return to God and His statutes, but these had not touched the hard hearts of Israel.

Amos then pleaded with the people to seek the Lord, that a merciful God might save a “remnant”:

For thus saith the Lord God unto the House of Israel, seek ye me, and ye shall live ... Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth, seek Him ... The Lord is His name ... Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.<sup>1</sup>

By this Amos meant that, while evil conditions were now so advanced that the disasters to come could no longer be avoided, yet a return to God and His righteousness might halt the full flood of disaster, through the reappearance of some favorable forces, and thus might enable a remnant of the people to survive.

Amos then told the people that no amount of religious feasting or ceremonies could take away their sins. What God wanted was righteousness and justice, not sacrifices:

I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. 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. Take thou away from

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<sup>1</sup> Amos 5:4, 7-8, 14-15

me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let justice run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.<sup>1</sup>

Amos had a persistent feeling that, regardless of Israel's shortcomings, the total destruction of the nation would not take place; and so, in an appendix in Chapter 9, which some have felt to be of another hand, he experienced the great expectation that a day of redemption would follow, when sin would be eliminated and the people would live in the warmth of the Father's love:

In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old ... And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be plucked up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God.<sup>2</sup>

The very prescience with which Amos foretold of coming disaster for Israel also gave him the insight that, as perhaps the only people on earth at that time who had consciously accepted God and had some understanding of His ways, the entire nation would not be permitted to perish, just as they had not been permitted to die in Egypt; and that there must be some among them who, while silent in the time of corruption, retained a love of justice and mercy, and would keep alive the light of God's Torah.

In connection with these prophecies of doom, Amos had to show great courage. The official priest of Beth-el, Amaziah, informed Jeroboam that Amos was conspiring against him, raising mistrust in the minds of the people by proclaiming that he would die by the sword, and that Israel would be led away

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<sup>1</sup> Amos 5:21-24    <sup>2</sup> Amos 9:11, 15

captive. The high priest, with the King's approval, ordered Amos to go back to Tekoa, whence he came, Beth-el being no welcome place for him and his prophecies. Amos replied he was not a "professional prophet" – meaning that he was not there to foretell only those things the king wanted to hear, but that he was in reality a messenger of God, declaring those things which God, through His angels, had ordered him to say. He told the authorities that, indeed, he had been content in his humble work as sheep-master and tree caretaker, but that the Lord had taken him away from tending to the flock and the trees, and had told him, "Go prophesy unto my people Israel."

Amos thus showed that courage which prophets in Israel had to possess in order to face the angry rulers and priests, calmly repeat their prophesy, and then repose in confidence in the Lord, even if the unpopular prophesy meant physical death to the bearer. Jeroboam did not move against Amos (and in fact the ruler did not die a violent death as Amos had prophesized), but the next king, Uzziah, did order the prophet to be silenced.

#### *Amos' and Hosea's Obedience to God*

*October 22, 1959*

I want to summarize briefly the place of Amos and Hosea in the spiritual development of the Hebrews. Had there been no people like Moses or the prophets, the minds and hearts of the Hebrews would not have been channeled into the ways leading to soul purity, nor would they have had their intense awareness of the reality of that God whose influence of love kept strengthening the bonds of the human soul to His own great All-Soul. And in time, the Hebrew people's acceptance of the eternal commandments of love to God and fellowman made it possible for God to send, at His appointed time, His Messiah, for the rebirth of the human heart and the partaking of His divine essence.

The story of Hosea, as we have seen, was one of intuition of the Father's love for humankind, and I have shown how this intuition influenced the course of his life to the point where he exemplified, as a true prophet, the love which God has for His children. Hosea, in his troubles with Gomer, showed the full measure of love of which he was capable as a human being who did not have possession of the divine love.

But the fact of Hosea's human love, and the sufferings which that love sometimes entails, brings us to the truth that the prophets, in their adamant stand for moral and ethical law, and in the sternness which characterized their demand for absolute adherence to these laws, carried in their hearts a great love for their fellow Jews. The prophets spoke out fearlessly, without regard to personal convenience or safety, to bring home to the Jews the need to return to the ways of God, so that God would be able to manifest His love for them, to protect them from their own follies as well as from outside threats and dangers. Though they did not say it in just these words, their message was that if the people would acknowledge the Father and walk in His ways, He would be able to guide them through the vicissitudes and travails of the material world, and direct their paths to a material and spiritual homeland of safety and love.

Amos understood this in all its implications. The humble tree dresser and herdsman, in his life of rustic simplicity, held within his being, as an absolute imperative, obedience to God's commandments as the one requirement for salvation of the soul – and as a protection from the hostile forces of nature and nation as well. For he saw in nature the workings of God, and in the activities of other people, the clay with which God molded His work, and brought about His designs.

And as Amos realized that God's laws are intended to further the development of those good things which are embodied in

His love, he thought (though erroneously) that rejection of His laws for the doing of evil would bring about God's wrath and anger, similar to the wrath and anger found in the human heart. He did not understand that evil creates its own evil conditions, which rise as a barrier *against* God's protection and love, so that God is all the less able to help the sinful soul.

Amos' determination to go to Beth-el and denounce the evil conditions existing in Israel was, therefore, motivated by a soul highly developed in human love, and not by anger toward his fellowman. He understood that it was not for him to judge, but to relay the message (as he interpreted it) of that Jehovah who was to be judge, and administrator of that judgment.

Amos sensed that if God did not love these people, who were "His own," so to speak, He would not have manifested such concern for their correction. They in turn, as His "chosen people," were called upon to live up to the Commandments which He had given them through Moses, as a sign of their love for Him.

Here then is a story of God's love, shown through the call to repentance which the Hebrews' falling away from His commandments necessitated. For had there been no repentance, they would have unquestionably fallen into complete paganism, vying with the neighboring tribes in abominable acts of ritual slaughter of firstborn children, and reeking with the foul thoughts and deeds of corruption which the charges leveled by Amos brought into vivid focus. The Hebrew world, or much of it, would have been given over to the brutality and beastliness of the animal in human guise, soulless, devoid of its link with its Creator, and oblivious of its potential fullness of love, kindness and mercy. And in such a state, they would have been incapable of fulfilling their mission as "wayshowers" to the Father.

Amos spoke in terms of the entire nation, for at that time the individual was in many ways considered insignificant, as a grain

of sand on the seashore. But he also spoke of specific kinds of trespasses (implying the principle of individual responsibility), and also of the effects of the punishment against Israel, which, as all Amos' hearers could understand, would be felt by the nation as individuals.

The very fact that Amos, as one man, could go up to Beth-el, face a hostile assemblage of corrupt worshippers, and thunder forth his message of denunciation and doom in the name of Jehovah, gave the individual, as a human soul, greater recognition in the religious circles of Israel. His fearlessness, resolution, and willingness to face physical violence for his principles led the way to other prophets (Isaiah and Jeremiah) and to the eventual acknowledgment that the fate of the nation rested on the fate of the individual soul – that it was this soul that prospered the nation or led to its doom, and that it was this soul which was responsible for its own deeds and decisions, and salvation or separation from God.

In his day, Amos stood for justice for the people, and freedom from oppression from corrupt and selfish leaders. This corruption led to the downfall of the nation, because the guiding message of their religion, of the brotherhood of man, had been cast aside when material prosperity beckoned.

Amos declared that deeds of justice and love were the essentials of faith in God, and the only true foundation of any social order. His words helped the Hebrews to better understand the nature of God, as the Source of their humanity, and as the Creator of living beings upon whom, in the fullness of time, and in the abundance of His tender care, He would pour out His divine love, to give them eternal life with Him.

CHAPTER SEVEN  
*The First Isaiah*

*April 21, 1960*

Isaiah, son of Amos, is known as the prophet of “faith in God,” whose call for faith was directed to the nation of Judah as a whole, and served to show that God cannot be “left out” of international politics. In Amos and Hosea, we saw that these prophets warned of threatened disaster to the nation because of moral laxity and sin, but Isaiah went further, delivering messages which were political in nature, dealing with the nation’s affairs at the highest levels. Isaiah was the first great counselor of *peace* for his country.

Isaiah began to prophesy during the year of King Uzziah’s death, about 738 BC. For some years before, Uzziah had been suffering with leprosy, and his son Jotham had been in charge of the government. Uzziah worshiped Jehovah in the temple at Jerusalem, but permitted pagan rites to be performed in the high places. Uzziah had conquered Philistia, broken down the walls of towns along the border of Judah, rebuilt the port of Elath on the Red Sea, reorganized the army, and did much to improve the water supplies and national defenses. A good report of him was given in the Chronicles,<sup>1</sup> despite his recognition of pagan worship.

The impetus behind Isaiah’s prophecies was twofold: The prosperity of the country, with victory and larger territory, brought with it conditions similar to those in Israel, with inordinate taste for luxury, introduction of foreign customs, false pride, avarice, and the resultant trampling upon the poor. The second factor was the ascension to the Assyrian throne of

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Chronicles 26:4-7

Tiglath-Pileser in 746 BC, and the conquests made by this monarch, as Damascus, Tyre, and other states submitted to his power. Judah would need all of God's help to prevent it from falling prey to Assyria as these countries had – and as Israel did in 721 BC.

Jotham did not last very long on the throne of Judah after his father's death. He died at the age of 41, just as the forces of Israel and Syria marched against Judah because of her refusal to join them in war against Assyria. His son Ahaz, who came to the throne, was a timid person who lacked religious faith.

Isaiah was a native of Jerusalem, and a member of Uzziah's royal family, being a cousin on his father's side. It may seem strange that this young man who belonged to the nobility did not partake of their aristocratic attitudes, but rather espoused the cause of the common tradesmen and workers in Jerusalem who wanted to remain at peace with the other nations of the area. But Isaiah had long been staunch in his stand against all violence and warfare, and this will help one better understand his position against Judah's joining the alliance to fight Assyria, based on his longstanding belief that faith in God was the real and only genuine means of protecting his country. Here he clashed with both the king and the militant nobility.

Isaiah began his ministry as a prophet while in his early twenties, and his picturesque vision of his call by God is given in the sixth chapter of his book in the Scriptures. Many of his early prophecies are in the vein of Amos and Hosea, both of whom he studied and relied upon for prophetic messages. He bewailed the sins of Judah, and the terror to befall the country on the "Day of Jehovah," when the wicked leaders would be consumed. These messages, of course, insisted upon reform to meet Jehovah's standards of ethics and justice.

In the parable of the unprofitable vineyard, Isaiah showed his insight into the nature of God's relationship with the Hebrew

nation. Like Hosea, he emphasized the Father's love for His children, then laid bare their disloyalty to Him. He pictured God as the Planter, and Judah as the vineyard:

Let me sing of my beloved, a song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. Well, my well-beloved had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill; and He plowed it carefully and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vines, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also hewed out a winepress therein; then He waited when it would produce grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes.<sup>1</sup>

Isaiah thus spoke to the people of their ingratitude towards the Father, shown by their sinful behavior. He then continued as though God was speaking through him:

What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?"... For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant: and He looked for justice, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.<sup>2</sup>

The important thing to observe here is that Isaiah thus continued to enlarge the conception of God's love for His children. He spoke and wrote in a parable that was clear and dear to all Hebrews – the love that the man of the soil has for his field. God, the Husband of Israel, or the Planter of the vineyard, loved the Hebrews, and wanted them to bloom and flourish. And when

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 5:1-2    <sup>2</sup> Isaiah 5:4-7

necessary, God would chastise them (as Isaiah thought) so that they would return to Him, and through their practice of righteousness and justice, once again bear "good fruit."

And such was Isaiah's faith in God that he declared the time would come when not only Judah would return to Him, but all humankind as well. For Isaiah knew and proclaimed that Jehovah was not only God of the Hebrews, but the God of all humankind:

And many people shall go and say, come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup>

Isaiah felt that God's "Word" must come from Jerusalem, and I believed this as well, which was one of the reasons why I went to Jerusalem to preach my message of the Father's love. Though it is not recorded in the New Testament, I delivered many sermons on the divine love at the temple in Jerusalem.

Isaiah then described a vision of universal peace, as an ideal for the future, which constitutes one of the great passages in the Bible:

And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up the sword against nation, neither shall they learn of war anymore. O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the Light of the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 2:3    <sup>2</sup> Isaiah 2:4-5

As Isaiah thus denounced war and spoke against violent rebellion as a valid response to oppression, the same did I when on earth. As Isaiah predicted peace through knowledge of God, I taught peace between the Zealots and Roman overlords in Palestine, peace to prevent the nation from destruction, and peace among all humankind through brotherly love. I taught of the Father's love possessing each soul, and bringing to each a compassionate understanding of his brothers and sisters, regardless of race or color, through adherence to my way to eternal salvation – prayer for God's divine love.

*In the Lord Abide, and He Will Provide*

*July 12, 1960*

I would like to write about the prophecies which Isaiah made and is supposed to have made, and tell you what therein is true, and what is false.

These predictions were made in relation to international events taking place at the time: the two great nations of the area, Assyria and Egypt, were vying for dominant power, and the small states between them, Israel, Judah, and Syria, were caught in the middle. You know of course that Isaiah preached neutrality and a policy of quiescence, with faith in God as the guiding principle. His words in Hebrew are hard to carry over into English because of a play on words, but he said something like, "In the Lord abide, and He will provide."

But owing to the fear generated by Assyria in the small states, their rulers, Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel, thought it preferable to join with Egypt as the lesser of the two evils. These two principalities were in fact so vexed at Judah's passivity that they decided to attack Jerusalem.

As I've mentioned, Ahaz, son of Jotham, was on the throne of Judah. Isaiah was now rather removed from close proximity to the royal house; yet as an elder statesman he continued to be

heard at times, speaking in defense of his policy of faith in God and political neutrality, and against the advice of the young nobles surrounding Ahaz. When the ruler came to inspect the water supply system of Jerusalem to prepare for a siege, Isaiah met him with his small son, Shear-Jesheb (which means, "a remnant shall remain"), and told him not to be dismayed, for the two attackers were weak and should give the king no concern. Isaiah spoke from his knowledge of Syria and Israel as a statesman, but he also spoke as a prophet, expressing the insights and inner convictions about the situation which his spiritual perceptions had given him.

Isaiah's message for Ahaz thus dealt with a local event, but a passage from that prophecy has become one of the most famous in the Old Testament:

Behold, the young woman is with child and will  
bear a son and will call his name "Immanuel" ...  
before the lad knows how to reject the bad and  
choose the good, the land whose two kings are  
causing you terror will be deserted.<sup>1</sup>

These sentences were taken out of context, and the Hebrew word "alma," (young woman) was given the meaning "virgin" by the Greek and Latin translators, so that the thought expressed was that of a virgin birth, so popular in ancient religions (and here I may cite the birth of Horus, among the Egyptians, or the Buddha, in India). The early Christian editors, of course, were seeking something in the Old Testament to support their theories of a virgin birth for the Christ, to show to, and convert, their pagan compatriots. They succeeded, to be sure, but many scholars now agree that this prophecy of Isaiah did not refer to me, but

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 7:14-16

to a child born during Isaiah's time. As a matter of fact, the prophecy referred to Hezekiah, the king's son.

The rest of this prophecy was soon fulfilled by the defeat of Israel and Syria – as Isaiah had predicted, yet brought about through Ahaz's secret plea to Assyria for help. Of course this help cost Judah vast sums in gold and silver taken from the temple, and it also reduced the nation's independence. Assyria's armies came marching into Palestine and, in 734 BC, invaded Israel, taking possession of Galilee and lands east of the Jordan river. Syria, with its capital at Damascus, was crushed two years later. In 724 BC, the Assyrians came again to Israel because of rebellion there, and took Samaria, the capital, after a three-year siege. The people, upwards of thirty thousand, were enslaved in different parts of the Assyrian land, and the "Ten Tribes of Israel" were lost as a Hebrew entity.

Isaiah lived through these years, keenly aware of the great threat to Judah from these same Assyrian armies. He felt that the disaster which had overtaken Syria and Israel had been due to their refusal to obey the laws of God, as given in the Ten Commandments, and he felt that Judah was in just as poor an ethical state as the conquered nations had been. Furthermore, he was heartbroken, since Ahaz's alliance with Assyria had entailed recognition of the Assyrian gods. Ahaz went so far as to order the erection in the temple of a new altar dedicated to Tilgath-Pileser, the Assyrian king, and this shrine displaced the old altar to Jehovah.

Like Elijah before him, denouncing the Baal of the Phoenicians, so Isaiah now could not countenance such an "abomination." To him, this could mean only one thing – that Jehovah would cause the destruction of Judah. Even before the disaster that struck Israel, he prophesied that the Judeans would be overwhelmed by the Assyrians:

Inasmuch as this people has rejected the waters of Shiloh that run smoothly ... therefore, behold, the Lord will bring up upon them the waters of the river that are mighty and many ... and it will rise over all its channels, and run over all its banks; and it will sweep on into Judah, an overflowing flood, and will reach up to the neck.<sup>1</sup>

On different occasions Isaiah made known his belief that Judah would eventually be destroyed and the people taken captive. When his second son was born in about 732 BC, he called him "Lemaher Shalal Hash Baz" (Swift is Spoil, Speedy is Prey), and when Egypt and her petty alliances again rose up against Assyria in the years 713-711 BC, Isaiah, then in his forties, went about the streets unclad as a vivid reminder of the way captives were treated by the Assyrians.

This coalition against Assyria was a failure, and though Judah was not directly attacked, yet the king again had to pay considerable sums to buy off assault upon Jerusalem. Sargon, the Assyrian monarch, desisted partly because Judah had remained neutral in the past, and so Isaiah, through his policy of peace and nonintervention, had been instrumental in gaining temporary reprieve for the city which he knew must in time come to grief.

Still another crisis faced Judah in 705 BC, when, following Sargon's death, the petty states subject to Assyria again decided to rebel. The new monarch, Sennacherib, squashed every attempt at liberation, first in the lands neighboring his own, and then, in 702 BC, turning his attention to the west, putting down Sidon, Ashod, Ammon, Moab, and Edom, and other principalities, and defeating decisively the Egyptians in battle at Altaku. Assyria was now ready to assail the fortress of Jerusalem, and

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 8:6-8

indeed, would have taken it, had not Hezekiah, now the Judean king, sent word that he was ready to surrender or negotiate terms. Sennacherib agreed, and Jerusalem was saved, in exchange for vast sums of gold and silver taken from his treasury and that of the temple.

*A "Shoot Out of Jesse"*

*July 14, 1960*

Now the fact is that while Hezekiah continued in the neutralist policy of Isaiah, Judah remained strong and prosperous, the tradesmen of Jerusalem flourishing in the conditions of peace. But when approached by Egypt and other principalities of the region, Hezekiah listened instead to the princelings and patriarians of Judah, who sought the occasion to enlarge their holdings and estates in war.

In connection with Isaiah's reproof of Hezekiah was his prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction – not by Assyria, as would be logical to assume, but by Babylonia: a prophecy that was fulfilled partly in 597 BC, and completely so in 586 BC, a hundred and fifty years later. This precognition is so astounding that there are many students of the Bible who think that this prophecy was never written by Isaiah, but was an interpolation later inserted into his book.

When I asked Isaiah how he could have foreseen these events, he replied that he could detect growing weaknesses in the Assyrian empire. The strain of maintaining many discontented vassals by force was such that it could not endure indefinitely, and so he prophesied that Judah would not be destroyed by Assyria, but by the kingdom which should wrest the empire away from them – Babylonia.

And when I asked why Judah should fall before this new power, he stated simply that the Hebrew kings, led by their

war-like aristocrats, were unable to accept the messages of the prophets for peace and submission to superior earthly powers, and that one day the device of paying ransom money would be of no avail, and the decision would be made to have Jerusalem know the meaning of enemy might in the temple itself. In short, he explained that his prophecy was based on the pattern of behavior of the Hebrew kings, and that he read into the future the normal course of events stemming from the past.

Isaiah therefore predicted that Jerusalem would be safe against Assyria's armies: "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemn gatherings; these eyes shall see Jerusalem, a peaceful habitation, a tent that shall not be removed; the stakes thereof shall never be plucked up, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken."<sup>1</sup>

Sennacherib left, and Jerusalem was safe, thanks to Hezekiah's tribute money, but at the same time a pestilence broke out among the Assyrian soldiers which hastened the invader's departure, and this was magnified into a great catastrophe in the account given in the Bible.<sup>2</sup>

So great was Isaiah's insistence upon peace, which he felt sure was what God desired (as indeed He did) that he declared there must come forth another king of Judah who would bring peace to the land, and at the same time rule the kingdom with the righteousness and mercy demanded by Jehovah. This new king would appear in accordance with the Davidic covenant, a "shoot out of Jesse":<sup>3</sup>

And the spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the  
spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of  
counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and  
fear of the Lord ... but with righteousness shall he

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 33:20   <sup>2</sup> 2 Kings 19   <sup>3</sup> 1 Samuel 16:1

judge the poor, and decide with equity for the weak of the land ... And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.<sup>1</sup>

Isaiah, as I shall show later, was actually thinking of Hezekiah, the newborn child of the king of Judah, while writing this. But in the light of the passing centuries, it evolved that what Isaiah was predicting was an ideal king of Judah - one who would be faithful to God's covenant and His commandments for righteous conduct; one who would put his trust in God and deal in all fairness with God's people placed under his rule.

Isaiah has told me that his prophecy was not intended to depict a spiritual messiah who would govern men only in the moral, ethical or spiritual sense, as this was a concept of the messiah that did not come into existence until many centuries later. But when I studied the Scriptures as a youth in Nazareth, I understood that this prophecy could be interpreted as referring to a spiritual messiah. For when I taught in Palestine, the land was under the rule of Rome, and I agreed with Isaiah that the people must not rebel against their Roman overlords, but await in subjection and peace the passing of this ruler, as had the Babylonians, Persians, and Greeks before them. So I understood that this king of Judah, a "shoot out of Jesse," might be interpreted in a spiritual sense, as the Messiah to rule in the Celestial Heavens, and to teach the people victory over the Romans through the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven, and eternal life through the Father's love.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 11:2, 4-5

*I Desire Mercy, Not Sacrifice*

Isaiah's efforts towards lifting up his people were intended to develop a more elevated attitude towards all of life – not only in the area of established laws of morality, but also regarding the habits and social practices of daily life. Behind these efforts was the realization that the “God of Israel” was a God of absolute righteousness, who was God not only of the Hebrews, but of the whole world, and the universe, such as was known of it at the time.

One evil practice which rich Judeans were guilty of was that of buying up real property, so that the poorer man had no chance to own a plot of land for himself. Since Judah was very small, acquisition of land for monopolistic purposes created a terrible hardship, with the result that poor farmers were impoverished, and forced to come to Jerusalem to live a marginal existence in any way available. This injustice was compounded for farmers who were driven to give up their holdings through rapacious maneuvers, including the bribing of unscrupulous judges, foreclosures on loans, or even violent means. Thus did Isaiah warn the rulers and people of this practice:

Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay  
field to field, till there be no room, and ye be  
made to dwell, alone in the midst of the land ...  
Of a truth many houses shall be desolate, even  
great and fair, without inhabitant. For ten acres of  
vineyard shalt yield one bath, and the seed of a  
homer shall yield an ephah.<sup>1</sup>

Another subject of concern was strong drink, which even in Isaiah's day was a contributing factor in the demoralization of

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 5:8-10

the people. Hosea had already pointed out that “harlotry, wine and the new wine take away the heart,”<sup>1</sup> and thus had the Nazirite and Rechabite cults been formed, prohibiting wine and drink. Isaiah, perceiving its destructive effect upon the land, brought under fire the habit among the wealthier class to become intoxicated, and shun work in indulgence and carousing. Condemned in Isaiah’s tirade were the fake prophets and the priests: “both priest and prophet reel with strong drink, they are swallowed up by wine, they stagger with strong drink, they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean.”<sup>2</sup>

Isaiah was very much like Amos and Hosea in his disapproval of the rituals connected with the worship of God. Speaking for God, Hosea had declared, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.”<sup>3</sup> And Amos, you remember, said: “Yea, though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them ... But let justice well up as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.”<sup>4</sup>

This rejection of sacrifice by God, as the spiritual knowledge of Amos made clear, was not merely because of deterioration of the ritual, but because of the ritual itself. For God delivered the Hebrews out of the wilderness perils after the exodus from Egypt without such rituals: “Did ye bring unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?”<sup>5</sup>

And Isaiah, through his spiritual perceptions, knew that Amos was right, and wrote against sacrifices in very much the same manner. Ritual slaughter of animals was futile and meaningless, but when injustice and violence were added, God averted His face, so to speak, and was repelled. The people, prophets, priests and rulers all had to be taught that ritual was no substitute for righteousness:

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<sup>1</sup> Hosea 4:11   <sup>2</sup> Isaiah 28:7-8   <sup>3</sup> Hosea 6:6   <sup>4</sup> Amos 5:21-22, 24   <sup>5</sup> Amos 5:25

What do I care for the multitude of your sacrifices?  
... I have had my fill of the burnt offerings of rams,  
and the fat of fed beasts; and I take no delight in  
the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats.  
When ye come to appear before me, *who hath  
required this at your hand, to tread my courts?*

Bring me no more vain oblations; incense is an  
abomination unto me ... And when ye spread  
forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you;  
yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear;  
your hands are full of blood.<sup>1</sup>

I have emphasized the words, "*who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?*" to show that God, "speaking" through the prophet, said that He had *never* told the priests to sacrifice animals, or any living creature, either as an offering for sin, or as a firstling for appeasement or redemption (where the first of the crops, or living beings, belonged to God), or for adoration, or any other purpose.

This passage did not state that sacrifice was acceptable to the Lord if the worshipper came with a pure heart, but rather, that sacrifice had never been approved by Him, and could never be used as a substitute for heartfelt and sincere prayer to Him. In addition, if worshippers came to prayer, but with evil in their hearts, He would not answer such prayers - for they came only from the mind, offered for ostentation and public approbation, and could never have come from the heart in sincerity, remorse, and love.

Isaiah ended his sermon in the same way as Amos, with a tremendous appeal by God, through His prophet, to live the true religion that God had revealed to the Hebrews through Moses -

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 1:11-13, 15

the religion of doing what is right in the sight of God: "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean. Put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good. Seek justice, relieve the oppressed; be fair to the fatherless, plead for the widow."<sup>1</sup> We shall see that later the prophet Micah spoke in the same vein.

### *A Miraculous Healing, and a Lamentable Death*

We come now to that final period of Isaiah's life which was beset by the turmoil of the nation's political affairs. Hezekiah had continued to adhere to the prophet's insistence upon neutrality in the power struggle between Egypt and Assyria, but in 701 BC the pro-Egyptian group, favoring a rebellion against Assyria, gained the king's favor. Isaiah pleaded in vain for a continuation of his peace policy, but now Hezekiah made an alliance with Egypt, purchased quantities of military equipment from her, and became the target of attack from Assyria. In a short time all of Judah was overrun, and Jerusalem alone was left to face the might of Assyria. Hezekiah was able to avert disaster once more by paying 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold.

At this time Hezekiah fell very ill, due to an aggravated form of carbuncle that was poisoning his blood. His physicians could do little to relieve him, and Isaiah told him he was going to die. Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall of his chamber, praying and weeping at all his sins and schemings, repentant in his heart for the base things he had contrived, and seeking for recovery by direct prayer to God. And he prayed: "Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a noble heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 1:16-17    <sup>2</sup> Isaiah 38:2-3

And the truth is, as I have said, that the king had tried to follow Isaiah's counsel, though waveringly, and had undertaken some religious reform as well. And thus may I point out a very tangible instance of God's help, in direct answer to prayer, as Isaiah declared, "Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father; I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears; behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years."<sup>1</sup> This is a misquote, for actually Hezekiah lived five years more, from 701 to 696 BC.

Through God's messengers, Isaiah was told how to treat the infection. This cure was a form, I should like to stress, of spiritual healing; for Isaiah, being on a high spiritual plane, was able to catch the words of God's helping messenger: "Let them take a cake of figs, and lay it for a plaster upon the boil, and he shall recover."<sup>2</sup> And he did. The reason, though unknown to the physicians, or to Isaiah either, was that the figs in the palace, lying about without refrigeration, produced molds which contained curative substances somewhat like the penicillin of your day.

Hezekiah's death in 696 BC at the age of 42, due to excesses, unsuitable foods, and lastly illness which his constitution could not master, caused the worst external and domestic troubles that ever plagued Judah, through accession to the throne of that Manasseh whose name is spoken by Jews only with shuddering and heaviness of heart.

One of the evils Manasseh resuscitated was the ritual murder of infants, including his own son, and innocent blood flowed in the streets of Jerusalem and in the cities of Judah. Isaiah could not live in that atmosphere of barbarianism, cruelty and obscurantism, and by the same token, the adherents of these savage policies could not tolerate the prophet's accusing finger against them. Therefore, with Manasseh's approval, they seized Isaiah and, as the Hebrew tradition states, slipped him into a hollow log and sawed it in two. Thus ended the prophetic career of the great successor to Amos and Hosea.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 38:5    <sup>2</sup> Isaiah 38:21

*A Child is Born Unto Us*

Many passages from Isaiah have continued to be quoted over the centuries, testifying to his eloquence in describing a God who is filled with glory and majesty as the Ruler of the Universe. But I wish to remind you that, in New Testament times, Isaiah could still be looked to as a literal prophet, his writings possibly bringing a foreknowledge of events even up to my own days.

Thus my disciples turned to Isaiah 9:2: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." This light, to my disciples, alluded to me, or was in me; and with this light came the conquest of death, in that I came with a soul filled with God's divine love, and taught prayer for possession of this love as the way to eternal life.

Of course, Isaiah's words, as Isaiah himself would tell you, were not a reference to me, but were introductory to the stanzas rejoicing at the birth of Hezekiah. This rejoicing at the birth of the heir apparent took the form of lyrical and exaggerated poetry in Isaiah, expressing the great significance of the event for the well-being of the Hebrew nation – a nation always prone to hyperbole and exuberance. Thus Isaiah meant by the above lines that Hezekiah's birth heralded light and prosperity, as well as a closer relationship to God for the people who had suffered under Ahaz.

Isaiah then went on to exult: "For a child is born unto us; a son is given unto us; and the government is upon his shoulders; and his name is called Pele-Joez-El-Gibbor-Abi-Ad-Sar-Shalom."<sup>1</sup> This Hebrew name means, "God the Mighty is Wonderful in Counsel, God the Everlasting Father, the Ruler of Peace." This did not mean that Isaiah considered Hezekiah to be "God the mighty," or raised to the level of the Deity, as some Bible translations erroneously imply, with the purpose of making the poem

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 9:6

of rejoicing refer not to Hezekiah's birth, but to me, who would be called "God the mighty" and the rest of this tremendous name. Actually Isaiah meant by this name that God, the everlasting and wonderful God of the Hebrews, had been gracious to the Hebrew people for giving them such a fine lad as Hezekiah, who turned out to be an excellent king.

And if you recall the names of Isaiah's two sons, "A Remnant Shall Abide," and "The Spoil Speeds, the Prey Hastens," you will realize that, while such names may sound fantastic to you, they were not so fantastic to the Hebrews of those days, especially not to Isaiah, who "fathered" all three - although the last name was unquestionably "blown up" to please the royal house, of which Isaiah himself, as you recall, was an elder member.

Thus Isaiah went on to relate that "the government may be increased, and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom to establish it, and uphold it, through justice and through righteousness, from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts doth perform this."<sup>1</sup>

In short, Isaiah was giving voice to a fond hope that, through Hezekiah, the throne of King David would be lifted to an ideal state of righteousness, which would continue forever.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 9:7

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *Micah*

*August 24, 1960*

Along with the first Isaiah, and contemporary with him, was another prophet, Micah, who was born near the small town of Moreshah, situated in the southwest corner of Palestine near Gath. This name, we can recall, was connected with Goliath of Gath in the days of King David, as the Philistines had long had a presence there, living in the coastal lowlands, while the Jews maintained themselves in the foothills, somewhat as pioneers or border settlers. It was also near the Egyptian frontier, which extended like an outstretched wing from Sinai into the land of Israel. It was a land that had known war, invasion and disaster.

Micah came from a family of farmers, sturdy and patriotic, ready to defend their rural homeland at any sign of trouble with the Philistines. Micah turned his attention to the town because of an interest in farm implements, and his religious fervor became stirred upon contact with the idolatrous practices in evidence there. His knowledge of the sermons of Amos, Hosea – and Isaiah, the great prophet who was active in Jerusalem – aroused in him a desire to emulate them, and bring to the attention of his neighbors the consequences which they were building up for themselves with their unholy practices.

Micah began to prophesy in about 722 BC, or shortly before the destruction and exile of Israel, and spoke out against Samaria as the place of idol worship which he thought was in line for “punishment” from God through the Assyrian scourge. Being a man of the farm, he thought that it was the large cities that were corrupting the pure country folk: “What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? And what is the sin of Judah? Is it not

Jerusalem?"<sup>1</sup> Therefore, he thought that both of those cities would be taken by the Assyrians because of the sins found therein.

Micah had not spent enough time in the cities to understand the actual source of their evils, but at last he saw what Isaiah had seen and cried out against – that much of the evil from the city came from the pressure of the aristocracy against the poor – and he understood for the first time the meaning of class or social struggle.

Now Micah, being a provincial at heart, spoke in a blunt, and I might say inelegant manner, because the truth is that he lacked the delicacy of the urban prophet. His descriptions were vivid and forceful – all the more so since, being a country man, the city aristocrats refused to listen to him, and heckled him whenever they could, Micah's eloquence becoming all the more uncouth and belligerent in response:

Hear now, you heads of Jacob, and rulers of the house of Israel: Is it not for you to know justice, you who hate the good and love the evil? You, who eat the flesh of my people, and who strip the skin from the bodies, you, who lay bare their bones, and devour the flesh of my people? You break their bones in pieces, and chop them up for the soup pot. Even as meat in the pot and flesh for the cauldron. Then you cry out to the Lord for protection; but He will not answer you, He will hide His face from you, for you have debased your deeds with evil.<sup>2</sup>

Having lashed out at the evil rulers of the people, Micah then turned to the false prophets, who told the aristocrats what they wanted to hear: "Thus says Yahweh about the people who lead

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<sup>1</sup> Micah 1:5    <sup>2</sup> Micah 3:1-4

astray my people, who when they bite with their teeth, they call out, 'peace,' but him who puts not food in their mouth; against him they declare 'war.' "<sup>1</sup>

And he testified against the priesthood as well: "Her head men render judgment for bribes, her priests give instruction for gain and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean upon the Lord, saying, 'Is not the Lord in the midst of us? Misfortune shall not come upon us.' "<sup>2</sup>

Micah therefore prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, for he felt that continued sin could only lead to misfortune, and that God could not help unless righteous conditions enabled His "unseen ministers" to make contact with the people: "Therefore, on account of you, Zion shall be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become as a heap of ruins, and the temple mount, but a bare hill in a forest."<sup>3</sup>

Later, both Jeremiah and I, as well as Urijah, prophesied the temple's fall, and in each case we were brought to trial, Jeremiah escaping without punishment because nothing had happened to Micah.

In some ways, I felt the same as Micah when I preached in Palestine. My message, in addition to the glad tidings of the Father's love that I preached constantly, *was* social and political. I knew that the people, by accepting the *new birth*, could eliminate sin from their hearts, and thereby bring about a new era of the brotherhood of man, where all the people would be equal before the law, and justice and righteousness would prevail in the land.

I also knew that the divine love would give the people an insight into the transitory nature of the Roman overlordship, and would thus have enabled them to overcome the Roman yoke, to remain secure in their faith in God, and be at peace. Thus the fire of the Zealots would have been transformed into a warm glow of understanding, and the rebellions leading to the temple's destruction and Bar Kochba's futile insurrection avoided.

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<sup>1</sup> Micah 3:5   <sup>2</sup> Micah 3:11   <sup>3</sup> Micah 3:12

*Shall I Give My Firstborn?**July 29, 1960*

There is a passage I wish to discuss in the Book of Micah, wherein the prophet pleads with Israel for a return to God, through righteousness of conduct towards their fellowman. He reminds them of the hideous acts of human sacrifice found in the pagan worship of the neighboring kingdoms, and again declares that sacrifices of any kind are futile:

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

It has been told thee, O man, what is good, and what the Lord doth require of thee; only to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.<sup>1</sup>

This passage, for its beauty, power and spiritual excellence, is unsurpassed in the written records of religious thought up to the time of the divine love, for what Micah gives here is nothing less than the essence of ethical religion, or the religion of the "natural" human love. In fact, he teaches, with the greatest simplicity, what millions of people have sought throughout the ages to discover - the meaning of religion. For no, religion is not a matter of ritual or sacrifice for the appeasement of a deity. It is not the offering of animals or foods, or the sacrifice of the firstborn, as

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<sup>1</sup> Micah 6:6-8

early man thought it must be – and which is still being used in a metaphysical way by a modern church whose mistaken doctrine is that I, God’s “first and only son,” had to be sacrificed on a cross for the appeasement of His wrath for man’s sins.

No, God seeks not the sacrifice of animals, nor of the fruit of the earth, nor of human beings, nor, indeed, any kind of sacrifice – except the “sacrifice” of sin. He wants man to live with an abiding sense of, and practice of, justice and mercy, and to know, humbly, that God is the Creator of his being, and holds him, so to speak, in the palm of His hand.

*But Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah*

As for the remainder of Micah’s little book, Chapter 5 is the most famous, because it contains a prophecy that has been thought to refer to my coming. Actually the prophecy began in Chapter 3, which stated that Jerusalem would fall and the temple be destroyed if the rulers of the Houses of Judah and Israel continued to work evil, abhor justice, and build Zion (the temple) with “blood money.” But, continued Micah, there would one day come, as ruler in Judah, he who would do God’s will, bring justice and equity to all, and rule with righteousness and mercy. This ruler of course would be, as had been predicted then for centuries, of the House of David, so that Micah appeared to be simply awaiting this new king.

I have already told you that Isaiah predicted a good king in Hezekiah – who was an improvement over his predecessors, but not to the degree that Isaiah’s words warranted. Now Micah used the same type of lyrical language as Isaiah, so that this “king-to-come” – Hezekiah – is hardly recognizable by the prophecy of his coming. Micah begins:

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from ancient days. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she who travaileth hath brought forth; then the residue of his brethren shall return with the children of Israel.<sup>1</sup>

I will continue with the remainder of this prophecy and explain its meaning, but I want to deal with this part first, as a full citation can lead to confusion.

In the first place, Micah based his prediction: "Until the time that she who travaileth hath brought forth," on that part of Isaiah's which says: "Behold, the young woman shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name 'Immanuel.'"<sup>2</sup> Micah spoke of a son who would be associated with a returned remnant of the Ten Tribes of Israel from captivity in Assyria. Thus Micah was predicting a ruler of the nation, governing the survivors of the exiles, as predicted long before in the last passage attributed to Amos.

This ruler was born at Bethlehem Ephratah (to distinguish this Judean city from another Bethlehem in Galilee), which was unusual, for the royal house of Judah lived in Jerusalem, and the children were normally born in the royal palace. Now Isaiah did not mention it, for he assumed the birth would take place in the palace as always, but Micah made a point of referring to it, because Hezekiah was born in Bethlehem, where his mother Abi, daughter of Zechariah, had been resting, and Micah, writing many years after the event, could record the fact.

The Book of Second Kings relates how well Hezekiah was regarded: "And he did that which was right in the eyes of the

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<sup>1</sup> Micah 5:2-3    <sup>2</sup> Isaiah 7:14

Lord; according to all that David, his father, had done. He removed the high places, and broke the pillars, and cut down the Asherah [Canaanite goddess of fertility]. He trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among them that were before him.”<sup>1</sup>

If we were to credit these words unconditionally, then Hezekiah was greater than David. But to continue: “For he clove to the Lord, he departed not from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses. And the Lord was with him, whither he went forth he prospered.”<sup>2</sup>

This chronicle, written by a member of the priesthood, passes by in silence the king’s imperfections and political troubles, as well as his weaknesses of personality, and stresses instead his reform of the Hebrew rituals, and his elimination of the pagan-type worship that existed.

Micah, however, continues his prophecy of the “ruler from Bethlehem” in a way that reminds us of the praises in Second Kings: “And he shall stand, and shall feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord, his God; and they shall abide, for then shall he be great, unto the ends of the earth.”<sup>3</sup>

In view of what has been written about Hezekiah in the Second Book of Kings, one can perhaps more readily understand the great expectations that both Isaiah and Micah had for the new king-to-be, and the fact is that for a time it did appear that the predicted greatness of Hezekiah was to be fulfilled. That he was, with the years, a disappointment, was due to Hezekiah’s own defects of character.

But the fact remains that these prophets did give voice to a prediction of a Hebrew ruler who would walk in God’s path of righteousness; and if Hezekiah did not live up to their prophecies, it did not mean that, in time to come, someone else born in

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings 18:3-5   <sup>2</sup> 2 Kings 18:6-7   <sup>3</sup> Micah 5:4

Bethlehem of Judah could not make his appearance as leader, to bring justice and righteousness to the people.

From Bethlehem of Judah there could come unto the people, as Micah said, a shepherd who would feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, and in the majesty of His name. This shepherd could be one who would bring to the people a true knowledge of God through the new covenant preached by Jeremiah, wherein God's love would bring immortality to His people and make them secure in "God's land," His Celestial Heaven, to live there in peace and happiness and abundance of spiritual joys for all eternity.

And so, while the prophecy of Micah referred, at first, to Hezekiah, the ideal nature of that prophecy was projected into time and across the centuries, until the Christ should appear, bringing the glad tidings of the Father's love to all humankind.

## CHAPTER NINE

### *Zephaniah*

*November 12, 1960*

Zephaniah ben Cushi, the prophet of the so-called “day of God’s wrath,” was born in Jerusalem during the reign of King Manasseh in about 665 BC., and his prophetic activity dates from the beginning of the Scythian invasion of Palestine, about the year 636 BC. Zephaniah was connected by blood to the royal house of Judah, for a superscription to the book of the prophet names Hezekiah the father of Zephaniah’s grandfather.

Zephaniah lived in Jerusalem near the palace, and he described its topography briefly: “Hark! a cry from the fish gate, and a wailing from the New Quarter, and a great crashing from the hills and a wailing from the inhabitants of Maktesh ... and I will search Jerusalem with a lamp.”<sup>1</sup> (The fish gate was the north gate of the city used by the merchants of Tyre who brought dried fish to Jerusalem, the Second Quarter was in the north area in which Huldah, the prophetess, lived, and the Maktesh was the Tyropeion Valley between the east and west hills to the south of the city.)

Zephaniah was one of those who felt that a reaction against the idolatry and evil introduced by Manasseh and his son, Amon, was imperative if the land of Judah and its people were not to be destroyed. By this I do not mean that the kings alone were guilty, for many of the people had accepted the Assyrian deities and their rites, including even the abomination of human sacrifice. Those who had resisted, to defend the laws of Jehovah and moral living, had been persecuted or killed, and thus true religion in Judah had been compelled to exist underground.

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<sup>1</sup> Zephaniah 1:10-12

Being thus connected with the royal household, and witnessing the dissolute habits to be found among some of its members, Zephaniah felt that the prophetic books of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah showed the only way to a restoration of health and prosperity for the nation. He studied these writings, and was in contact with others, like Shaphan the scribe, who were in agreement with them. And when he heard of the approach of the Scythians from the north, he felt that the time was ripe to express his warning of disaster. At this time, Josiah, the ruler, was in his minority, and the government was being administered by regents, who were deeply frightened by the prospect of a barbarian attack on Jerusalem. They saw that there was a great need to arouse the people to an awareness of the perils which threatened, and they understood that only a spiritual reawakening could do this.

When the Scythians reached the Egyptian frontiers, they were loaded with gifts to induce them to leave without inflicting damage. And they did leave, but on their way back through Palestine, they plundered the temple of Aphrodite in Ashkelon and took possession of Beth-Shean.

Now Josiah had become the ruler when his father, the evil Amon, had been assassinated by his servants in 639 BC, after two years of great suffering for the land and the people. The regents who guided Josiah were able to turn him away from the practices of his father, and taught him to walk in the path of the decimated followers of Jehovah. Their instructions regarding the warning of the prophets – that Judah, like Israel, would fall unless righteousness was restored to the land – eventually had their effect upon him. Aiding them in this task was also Shallum, the husband of Huldah the prophetess, who had charge of the temple wardrobe. But it was none other than Zephaniah who was most instrumental in the indoctrination of the young Josiah.

Thus, in 635 BC, at the age of 12, the young king ordered the destruction of the Baal and the Asherim fertility symbols, and in 629, when he attained his majority at the age of 18, he began to repair and adorn the temple. It was while these repairs were being conducted that the Book of Deuteronomy came to the attention of the king, giving rise to what is known as the great reform of Josiah.

Now Zephaniah could not have begun the prophecy of the Judgment Day before 639, for the previous king, Amon, would have surely silenced him, and it was prior to 635 BC, because Zephaniah cried out against the idols still existing in the land. In the years between (638-636 BC), the Scythians had moved close to the borders of Palestine, and so Zephaniah delivered his sermons in the temple to awaken the people to the urgent need for reform in order to head off the impending destruction. He also sought to give support to those in the royal house who were trying to bring about a return to ethical Judaism among the many who had accepted the Assyrian and other pagan rites of worship during the preceding half century.

Zephaniah was then in his late twenties, and was well versed in the law and the prophets. As an aristocrat, he was not overly concerned with social reform, his focus being more on ritual reform and worship of the true God. But he coupled righteousness of conduct with worship of Jehovah, as a religious duty incumbent upon all believers.

Thus, in the great holiday of spring, when the Passover was celebrated with the sacrifice of the lamb, Zephaniah, in the spirit of Amos, declared a terrible day of judgment: "Bow before the Lord Jehovah, for near is the day of Jehovah, for Jehovah has prepared a sacrifice, He hath sanctified His guests"<sup>1</sup> - meaning that His "guests" - the Hebrews - were to *be* the sacrifice.

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<sup>1</sup> Zephaniah 1:7

Zephaniah took imagery of battle from Amos, intensifying its already fearsome language in his attempt to warn Judah of its impending destruction. Not only did Zephaniah predict exile for Judah, but also the “wrath of God” visited upon other nations because of their immorality and evils. Zephaniah pointed out that God (or more accurately, God’s laws) are impartial, and that other evil-doing nations of that time would reap the consequences of their sins – not only smaller kingdoms like Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and the Philistine city states, but also Egypt (called Ethiopia because of the Ethiopian ruler), Assyria, and Nineveh. The Lord was Lord of the entire earth, and so His “judgment” (as Zephaniah imagined it) was to be executed upon all peoples.

Zephaniah’s indictment, as far as Judah was concerned, started with the members of the royal house – “roaring lions”<sup>1</sup> – and went on to include the judges, who were “wolves of the desert,” and the prophets, “braggarts and faithless men,” while the priests did “violence to the law.” The people had not sought the Lord, and if they once knew Him, had turned from Him and His commands. They had become insolent and dependent upon their own resources, saying in their hearts, “The Lord will not do good; neither will He do evil.”<sup>2</sup>

Yes, they had ceased to feel that God was their living, eternal Father, and that His hand was stretched forth over them to help them, if they sought Him to keep them from the evils of the barbarous times that prevailed. Rather was Jerusalem rebellious against God, and bloodstained with the blood of righteous men.

### *He Will Be Silent in His Love*

*November 12, 1960*

Yet, Zephaniah wrote, Jehovah would not “destroy all the inhabitants of the earth,” but cause those who were repentant and faithful to abide. And this remnant would be caused to be

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<sup>1</sup> Zephaniah 3:3    <sup>2</sup> Zephaniah 1:12

brought back to their own land, for the righteous of the other nations would permit this, in obedience to God's will.

Some students of Zephaniah's writings believe that these prophecies of redemption and return from exile do not represent the prophet's own hand, for he wrote some thirty years or more before the last exile in 597 BC. But these commentators do not consider that Zephaniah had before him the prophetic writings of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah – and it was an article of faith with these prophets that Judah would go into exile. And as their writings, or at least appendages to their writings (especially Amos and Micah), insisted on a subsequent return from exile and redemption from sin, so did Zephaniah harbor such visions of return and forgiveness.

Thus Zephaniah exhorts, with a great sense of God's sway over all the peoples of the earth: "Seek ye the Lord, all ye humble of the earth, that have executed His ordinance; seek righteousness, seek humility."<sup>1</sup>

He spoke of the returning Hebrews as "a poor and afflicted people ... they shall take refuge in the name of the Lord." Poor in material goods, and politically, indeed, but rich in the treasure of the Father's love and protection. When I spoke of the "humble and oppressed" to those who listened to my sermons, I spoke here in the spirit of Zephaniah, identifying ourselves with the poor and the humble, and preaching that safety, salvation, and integrity of the soul lay in trust in God.

The prophet then went on to predict: "The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid."<sup>2</sup>

With Chapter 3, verses 14 to 20, Zephaniah strikes a note of exultation that forms a startling contrast to the grim and gloomy passages of the "Judgment Day." And, of course, writers find it

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<sup>1</sup> Zephaniah 2:3    <sup>2</sup> Zephaniah 3:13

difficult to see this as the prophet's; but Zephaniah was not writing now in a prophetic vein, but reiterating sincerely what Amos and Micah had previously declared. Yet his outburst of exultation and joy here is so exuberant, and the style so personal and convincing, that it was later used by the Second Isaiah as the starting point of his great writings:

Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; Be glad and rejoice with all thy heart, O daughter of Jerusalem ... The King of Israel, even the Lord is in the midst of thee ... The Lord thy God is in the midst of thee, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over thee with joy, He will be silent in His love, He will joy over thee with singing.<sup>1</sup>

The tremendously significant line, "He will be silent in His love," indicative of the love which the Father possesses as His greatest attribute, and with which He loves His children, has caused difficulty among scholars, for they have thought the line meant that God's love was as a silent ecstasy, but was contradicted by God's rejoicing through singing. The explanation that God would, in His love, cover up Israel's sins in silence is unacceptable, for God does not "cover up" sins, but, by His laws, causes the awakening and the workings in man's consciousness of remorse and a sense of repentance. Zephaniah actually meant that, while God's love in itself was so deep as to be silent, yet the expression of that love could be one of "rejoicing and singing" - especially in response to the return of His wayward children. You will recognize that I used this as a theme in my sermon on the Prodigal Son.

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<sup>1</sup> Zephaniah 3:14-17

CHAPTER TEN  
*Jeremiah*

*July 16, 1960*

Jeremiah came from a long line of rural priests, who embraced all the trappings associated with the ancient country shrines, yet who withal remained firm as a rock in their faith and worship of Jehovah. These priests could look back to their ancestor, Ahimelech, who in the reign of King Saul had befriended David as the young fugitive sought food and shelter at the temple in the village of Nob. Ahimelech, the high priest there, gave David and his men the old bread off the altar when the new provision of bread was being offered.

David, who, with his friends, was desperately hungry, told Ahimelech that he was on a mission in the service of Saul, and not a refugee from the wrath of the king; and thus the priest's act of distribution of the bread was one of simple kindness, carried out without even a thought to doubt David's word. Yet an Edomite herdsman, out of malice for a priest of Jehovah, and in hope of a reward for his information, went straightway to Saul and accused Ahimelech of treason for aiding David. The furious king ordered eighty-five of the priests to his palace at Hebron, and had them slain in the courtyard at the hand of the Edomite.

One person escaped this repulsive deed: Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech, and it was through Abiathar that Jeremiah was descended from this kindly priest who had thus fallen victim to the dark minds and souls of tenth century BC Judah.

Abiathar, then a youth of about twenty, was aware that he must seek safety in hiding from Saul's soldiers, and so joined David and his band of outlaws, soon to grow into a company of

some six hundred men. As was natural, Abiathar served as the priest for this assemblage. He followed them in battle, in exploits, and adventures, and became the chief priest of the land when the events took place which made David the ruler of Israel. Eventually his duties for David's kingdom necessitated an assistant, and a younger man, Zadok, was named.

Now Zadok was ambitious to become chief priest; and Bathsheba and a certain group with her promised him this promotion if he would help in a plan to place her son Solomon on the throne of Israel, instead of Adonijah, the oldest living son of David. The gallant old king, when about to pass on into the spirit world, was quietly approached by Bathsheba, Zadok and this group, and, in his weakness of mind and will, was virtually forced into agreeing to Solomon's ascension to the throne, whereupon they anointed Solomon king with indecorous and, I might say, indecent haste, not even waiting for David to die.

The new monarch, true to his promise, had Abiathar removed from the priestly service and banished from Jerusalem, declaring Abiathar worthy of death but sparing the old priest out of respect for his father David. With the recollection of his own father's death at the hands of another monarch, Abiathar, disgusted and heartbroken, returned with his family to his village, Nob. They found it in ruins, and so built a house on a small piece of property that had belonged to his father just north of the town.

His family grew with the years, and a village came into being, called Anathoth. These people returned to their ancestral vocation of priest, trusting in the goodness and mercy of God rather than in the base hearts of kings and temporal rulers. They survived the destruction of the village in 701 BC at the time of the Assyrian advance against Jerusalem; and thus it was that Jeremiah, son of Hilkiyah the priest, was born in the year 649 BC - about the time that the worst king of Judah's history,

Manasseh, was seeking with unparalleled barbarity to squeeze from the hearts and minds of the people the love and remembrance of the one true God.<sup>1</sup>

It would seem, from the circumstances, that Jeremiah ben Hilkiah was destined to follow in the footsteps of his pious forebears, and become a priest in the service of an altar of God in the little village of Anathoth, only three miles north of Jerusalem – living a quiet, uneventful life, and not submerged in the violent international affairs that prevailed in those days and in that area of the world. But the background of the nation and the personality of Jeremiah decreed otherwise, for such was Jeremiah’s heart, and such the land and its history that God found He could use him: as a torchbearer of the true Hebraic religion of justice and mercy for all; as a guide for a conquered and exiled people; as the hope for a returned remnant to work towards the establishment of an ideal kingdom of righteousness; and lastly, as deliverer of the promise of God, that in the fullness of time He would take away from Israel the “flinty heart” of profit and evil, and pour out upon them His own spirit of love and mercy.

Even as a young boy, Jeremiah knew that he was to be in the service of God, not as a village priest, but as His prophet. In his book, which he wrote and edited in later life, he tells us of God’s call to him: “Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.”<sup>2</sup>

Many theologians have taken these words to support claims of a virgin birth for me, Jesus, but if you read carefully, you will realize that Jeremiah, as he has told me, simply meant that God knows the souls of his created beings before they are incarnated in the flesh through conception, and that Jeremiah’s soul had been entrusted by God to be His prophet, or “instrument on earth,” to show the way to God’s righteousness and mercy.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings 21:11, 17    <sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 1:5

*I Have Forsaken Mine House**July 16, 1960*

There can be seen a certain relationship between Jeremiah, and Joseph, son of Jacob – who, even as a little boy, knew that he was a person “after God’s own heart,” and who, relating these things to his brothers, incurred their jealousy, and found himself set apart from the others, eventually being sold into slavery in Egypt. The children of Anathoth were hostile to Jeremiah because of his closeness to the Father – they could not understand it, and they resented it. And Jeremiah, for his part, instead of playing with the other children, took delight rather in the reading of the prophets. He studied the preaching of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah, and the works of Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha, learning from them the demands of justice, righteousness, and mercy, as well as the deep significance of God’s love for His people.

Jeremiah at times also visited the places where these prophets had spoken. Jerusalem, where Isaiah had preached in the marketplace and at the gates, was only three miles to the southwest. Samuel’s home site was three miles northwest of Anathoth, and Elijah and Elisha had done their work in Ephraim, on the east bank of the Jordan, also to the north. Thus, there was combined in Jeremiah a soul sensitive to the “nearness” of God, and to the will of God, as the Hebrew prophets had understood and expressed it, and also sensitive to the era of history which had produced these prophets. He knew, too, that these prophets had suffered because of their faith in God and their uncompromising stance that His commandments be obeyed, and he anticipated that this might be his experience as well.

As a young lad, Jeremiah would spend some of his free time, when not studying, becoming familiar with the district in which he lived. He took great interest in the birds and the animals, having a compassion for them that stemmed from his sensitive soul, and his regard for the forms of life which God had created.

He learned the habits of the wild beasts, such as the lion and the wolf that inhabited the valley of the Jordan, and the smaller animals that made their abode in the hill country to the north, as well as the goats, cows, and fowl of the farms. Jeremiah's love of nature and animals, and especially the birds of his countryside, is unmatched in the Scriptures.

Jeremiah has told me that the trouble he experienced with his family was due to the fact that they insisted upon his becoming a priest of Anathoth, a vocation he detested. To him, this priesthood meant the sacrificial ritual, and the slaughter of the lamb and other animals in the prescribed fashion of the rites reintroduced by Manasseh, with phallic symbols and asherah and other throwbacks to the Canaanite fertility practices – all, for Jeremiah, both carnal and repellent. Later he described these rites in the coarse language they provoked.

With his respect for animal life, and an awareness of the protests of the earlier prophets against sacrifices in general, and sacrifices conducted in pagan-like manner by corrupt priests in particular, and with deep insight into the just and merciful nature of the true God, he refused to become a local “high place” priest as his parents commanded. The result was that they thought he was an apostate against God, and his neighbors were also much incensed against him for his perversity in seeking to break the established pattern of life in the village.

Jeremiah, true to his worship of God, and in the spirit of Micah, could never consent to this debased form of religious worship, and as a result, he became a virtual outcast in his own village. He lost the one woman in his life whom he really loved, for her parents would not consent to marriage with this rebel. Later he wrote about Anathoth: “I have forsaken mine house, I have left mine heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 12:7

As a matter of fact, those who preferred the more spiritual worship of Jehovah were being persecuted by Manasseh, and by the priests of the high places as well, and so one is not surprised to find out that a plot was formed to poison Jeremiah, discovered to come from his own family and neighbors:

But I was like a lamb or an ox that is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me, saying let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered.<sup>1</sup>

But Jeremiah escaped out of the hand of his uncompromising family and hostile neighbors, and he saw the death of Manasseh in 638 BC, and that of his son Amon two years later, and the reign of the child-king Josiah, who, after a ten-year regency, began to rule for himself in 636 BC.

### *The Lord Put Forth His Hand*

*July 17, 1960*

At about this time, nomads from the north, the Scythians from southwest Russia, began to make their terrifying raids into the land of Israel, and Jeremiah, like Zephaniah, felt the call to prophesy in the name of God. Jeremiah tells us that this was in the 13th year of Josiah's reign, that is, 623 BC, when Jeremiah was approaching his 27th year.

That year had been a troubled one for the prophet in his love life, and he felt that he had been appointed for this trouble with his prospective bride by God, just as God had been having troubles with His "bride," Israel (as Hosea had earlier expressed it). This was one reason why Jeremiah never did marry, since he

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 11:19

thought that what had applied to Hosea was in a manner applicable to himself as well.

Jeremiah thought that the Scythians would ravage and destroy Judah, and, with the terror that gripped the people on all sides, that the time for his commencement as a prophet of God had come. He hesitated, until he observed an almond tree which had begun to bloom, and realized that all things must come to pass in the fullness of time, and that the time was now ripe for him to raise his voice as God might dictate.

On his opening page, which tells of his call, he has recourse to Isaiah, but makes some interesting changes. There is no imagery, no references to being unclean, or being purified by a live coal in the hand of a Seraph; instead, he is converted from a "child" into a messenger of God, who touches his mouth with His hand, and assures him of His protection. This is the first mention in the Bible of direct "physical" contact between God and a mortal. It is, of course, figurative, for God has no "hand" in the sense that humans or spirits might conceive of it, but it does show how close Jeremiah felt to his Creator:

For the Lord said unto me, "Say not I am a child, for to whomsoever I shall send thee; thou shalt go; and whatsoever I shall command thee; thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of them, for I am with thee ... saith the Lord." Then the Lord put forth His hand, and touched my mouth; and the Lord said unto me, "Behold, I have put my words into thy mouth."<sup>1</sup>

These words were a very important prelude, inasmuch as his first sermons attacked the debased sacrificial rites which his family in Anathoth, as well as local places all over Judah and Israel,

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 1:7-9

espoused and practiced as part of their religion. Jeremiah saw the advance of the ruthless Scythians as the hand of God risen to strike down His people because of their continual adherence to the paganism of Manasseh.

Now Manasseh and Amon had made of religion in Jerusalem a veritable inferno of heathen rites. Worship of Moloch, popularized by Ahaz in the days of Isaiah, had become the accepted practice. This was human sacrifice, that terrible abomination which had been practiced since the dim days of past millennia as man struggled to evolve to a higher order of spiritual consciousness than that of barbarian superstition. The firstborn child was brought to the Valley of Hinnom, southwest of Jerusalem, and burned alive in the arms of the idol, which was heated red hot. Moloch was a corruption of the name Melech, meaning "king," and there were those who believed that they were committing this heinous crime in the service of Jehovah.

It happened that, as Josiah attained his majority as king in 625 BC, an event took place which enabled Jeremiah to preach reform of the sacrificial rites without being put to death, and this was the mysterious discovery of the Book of Deuteronomy. I might also mention that this year coincided with the death of Ashurbanipal, the Assyrian monarch, when signs of deterioration were apparent in this empire, and it was thought the time for a great reform for the Hebrew religion had come.

The high priest at the time, Hilkiah (not Jeremiah's father), found in the collection box located at the temple's door a scroll said to have been written by Moses. It was not, of course, having been written and edited by a committee of pious elders of Jerusalem who were very zealous in their desire that the idolatrous rites be eliminated in favor of what they considered the true worship of God.

The Book of Deuteronomy also contained laws dealing with social behavior, designed so that powerful people might not,

because of their positions, be able to impede justice. For its time, it actually was a humanitarian document, and it is only from our present perspective, and in its purely doctrinal aspect, that the book appears rigid and oppressive.

This committee was aware that Josiah was going to collect money for the repair of the temple, and so they quietly left their scroll where they knew it would be found. Hilkiah delivered the scroll to Shaphan the scribe, who presented it to the king. Josiah was greatly moved, and inquired of the prophetess Huldah (who was the daughter-in-law of Tivah, whose father, Harhas, was a member of the committee). Huldah, who was also very much in sympathy with the reform movement, knew exactly what to say: she delivered a prophecy of disaster to Judah because the people had forsaken the Lord and had offered sacrifices unto other gods. Huldah predicted that since Josiah's heart was tender and he had humbled himself before the Lord, he would die in peace and not see all the evil which God would bring to Judah. We can note that Josiah was in fact killed by Pharaoh Necho at Megiddo in 608 BC, before the Babylonian victory of 596 BC, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and the exile of his nation.

### *The Fountain of Living Waters*

*July 18, 1960*

When Jeremiah began to preach, the reform of Josiah had been going on for more than two years. But while Jerusalem itself, with its ardent reformers in the city, welcomed the changes for the most part, the country priests were reluctant to adhere to Josiah's dictates. They lost their importance as local priests, as well as their income, and some were transferred to serve in minor posts in the temple of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah thus began his ministry by calling for an end to the worshipping of false gods and the immoral practices associated with them. Like Hosea, he referred to Israel as the "bride":

"I remember for thee the affection of thy youth, the love of thine espousals; how thou wentest after me in the wilderness ... Israel is the Lord's hallowed portion, His first fruits of the increase."<sup>1</sup>

He then went on to complain: "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the Fountain of living waters, and have hewed them out cisterns ... that can hold no water."<sup>2</sup>

Jeremiah meant of course that the people had forsaken the Living God for man-made idols. I made use of this image of God as "the Fountain of living waters" in my own preaching when I announced the glad tidings of the Father's love. I used other material written by Jeremiah as well, because much of what he said was true and applicable to my own preaching.

Jeremiah made use of Deuteronomy, in its insistence that the believer in God need not be afraid to act or to face trouble, for God was with him. Deuteronomy 1:23 has Moses say: "Behold, the Lord thy God hath set the land before thee; go up and possess it; as the Lord, the God of thy fathers, hath spoken unto thee; fear not, neither be dismayed." And later in that chapter, when the Hebrew exiles fear the Amorites, Moses is made to say: "Dread not, neither be afraid of them. The Lord thy God who goeth before you, He shall fight for you, according to all that He did for you in Egypt before your eyes."<sup>3</sup>

Thus did Jeremiah take heart to talk out against the idol worshippers, the priests of debased rites, even his people in Anathoth, because he had faith that God would help him to confront and overcome these evils: "Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee; be not dismayed at them ... And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee."<sup>4</sup>

And so Jeremiah set forth to preach putting aside the immoral pagan rites and the worshipping of the Cananite and Assyrian

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 2:2-3   <sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 2:13   <sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 1:29-30   <sup>4</sup> Jeremiah 1:17, 19

gods, describing Judah as an unfaithful wife who had played the harlot: "Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel."<sup>1</sup>

And like the forgiving husband, who still loves his wife and seeks only that she mend her ways to have his love, Jeremiah wrote with great power:

If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord; yea, return unto me; and if thou wilt put away thy detestable things out of my sight, and wilt not waver; and wilt swear: as the Lord liveth, in truth, in justice, and in righteousness; then shall the nations bless themselves by Him, and in Him shall they glory.<sup>2</sup>

But because the people did not return to the Lord, declared Jeremiah, they and the land would be destroyed. When he first wrote his tirades here, Jeremiah was thinking of the Scythians, but when their raids subsided without the sacking of Jerusalem, he rewrote his verses many years later to conform to the Babylonian peril.

As Jeremiah continued to talk to the common people in the marketplace, in the street of the bakers, at the gates of the city, and later when he lived in Jerusalem itself, he became increasingly aware of a situation which, as a resident of a small hamlet like Anathoth, he had been unaware of, and which affected him more and more deeply: the exploitation and the grinding down of the poor by the priestly class and the aristocrats of the city, and the relegation of the underprivileged to an inferior position as Hebrew citizens of Judah.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 3:20    <sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 4:1-2

*In Jerusalem**July 19, 1960*

We come to Jeremiah Chapter 5, beginning: "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem." Jeremiah had lived long enough in the capital and had seen enough to make him realize that the worshipping of false gods (and the resulting rites and practices) was not the only thing which would provoke evil conditions to overwhelm the land, but also the unethical behavior of the superior and wealthier classes towards the economically and socially downtrodden, as well as their licentious living which the Ten Commandments had expressly forbidden. Yet the poor themselves were guilty of not doing justly, of not seeking the truth and the way of the Lord: "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if there be a man; if there be any that doeth justice, that seeketh truth; and I will pardon her [the city]."<sup>1</sup>

This, of course, hearkened back to Genesis 18:32, the story wherein God promised Abraham that Sodom would be spared if there were found only ten righteous people therein. Jeremiah was not very subtly comparing Jerusalem to the wicked city of Sodom, and thus aroused much resentment in all quarters against himself. Moreover, the prophet, on re-editing his writings many decades later, refused to delete or revise his words, for, in his deep sensitivity to sin and impurity, he could not find one righteous man. Later he complained: "For from the least of them, even unto the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for gain; and from the prophet even unto the priest, everyone dealeth falsely."<sup>2</sup>

Jeremiah was especially incensed at the breaking of the commandments on adultery and covetousness: "And when I had fed them to the full, they committed adultery, and assembled themselves in troops at the harlots' houses. They are become as well-fed horses, lusty stallions; every one neighed after his neighbor's wife. Shall I not punish for these things, saith the Lord?"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 5:1   <sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 6:13   <sup>3</sup> Jeremiah 5:7-9

And when the statues to the different luminaries had been destroyed with no disastrous aftermath, showing that stellar worship was unnecessary and futile, Jeremiah felt that the people should have realized that the heavenly bodies in themselves are simply creations of God, and that they should worship the Creator, not the creation. He told the people that they were blind not to see this: "Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; that have eyes, and see not; that have ears, and hear not; revere ye not me? saith the Lord; will ye not tremble at my presence?"<sup>1</sup> In my own generation I felt as Jeremiah did, and used similar words in response to the people's lack of comprehension as I spoke to them of the presence of the Father's divine love in my soul.

As he observed conditions in the city, Jeremiah also concluded that a God of righteousness and mercy could not call the temple of Jerusalem His house of prayer if the people who worshiped there were "unclean" in heart and deed. As I have mentioned, the prophet Micah, in the days when Assyria was on the march, had written of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, saying: "and Jerusalem shall become heaps; and the mountain of the house [the temple area] as the high places of a forest."<sup>2</sup> Eventually Jeremiah also spoke out against the temple, but only after a long period of silence as a prophet.

Following his outburst against the immorality in the "high places" and the social injustices in Jerusalem, Jeremiah had expected the Scythians of the north to come down and take the city, plundering and ravaging. This had not occurred, because the Scythians had turned off to the east in search of easier and more accessible prey, and in fact, after a troubled generation, their raids ceased to be a matter of concern. The people therefore felt that Jeremiah had not proven to be an accurate prophet, and turned from listening to him. And the fact was that with the land

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 5:20-22    <sup>2</sup> Micah 3:12

secure against enemy forays and attacks, there was no longer a need for him to voice warnings of disaster. If God permitted, who was Jeremiah to protest?

Thus Jeremiah was silent for 14 years, pursuing his avocation as a dealer in animals for the temple rituals, studying the Hebrew laws and prophets, and seeking, through prayer and contemplation, to know God's will for him.

Then, once more, disaster suddenly looked Judah in the face. In a previous sermon I referred to the death of good King Josiah in 608 BC at the hands of Pharaoh Necho. The Pharaoh had assembled an army, and passed up the highway through Palestine to help the Assyrians in their war against the Babylonians. The Pharaoh requested Josiah to meet him at a conference at Megiddo, where he could gauge the attitude of Judah towards the Assyro-Babylonian conflict, and seek to persuade Josiah to join him. Now Josiah, under the influence of Isaiah's preaching against alliances with Egypt, refused to join Pharaoh Necho against Babylonia. Enraged, the Pharaoh had him shot with an arrow as he was leaving in his chariot. Josiah died on reaching Jerusalem, and the Pharaoh then imprisoned his son Jehoahaz, and appointed another son, Jehoiakim, as ruler in Judah.

### *The Trial*

*July 21, 1960*

Pharaoh Necho was defeated in battle by the Babylonian monarch Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish in 605 BC, and Jehoiakim thus became a vassal to Babylon. A puppet, therefore, of the ruling forces both of the west and the east, Jehoiakim began to permit the old pagan practices to be reestablished in the temple. He also began to play politics with the hope of a successful revolt against Babylon, and Jeremiah felt that the time had come for a renewal of his role as God's prophet. He appeared at

the gate of the temple and began to preach against the offerings to the Baalim, and against the social injustices that prevailed in the land.

Jeremiah was in his middle forties, older and more mature than when he had begun his prophetic mission, and his speech now possessed a striking force of expression:

Hear the word of the Lord, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying words, saying, the temple of the Lord; the temple of the Lord; the temple of the Lord, are these. Nay, but if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt, then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave your fathers, for ever and ever.

Behold, ye trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not, and come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name and say, we are delivered to do all these abominations? Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the Lord. ... Therefore will I do unto this house,

which is called by my Name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim.<sup>1</sup>

Now, the effect of these words upon the people was galvanic. Instead of taking to heart Jeremiah's words for their salvation, both material and spiritual, a throng of people led by priests and prophets seized him. A riot started in the temple area, that subsided only when Jehoiakim and his courtiers hurried to the new gateway of the temple and took seats therein, for this was the usual court of justice at this period. A trial began, and the spokesman for the priests demanded Jeremiah's death, on the ground that he had inveighed against God's holy temple. Jeremiah, with the courage given him by his complete faith in God, arose to speak before the judging princes and the people who were gathered in the gateway:

The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words you have heard. Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and hearken to the voice of the Lord your God. And the Lord will repent Him the evil that He hath pronounced against you. But as for me, behold, I am in your hands; do with me as is good and right in your eyes. Only know ye for certain that, if ye put me to death, ye will bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof. For of a truth the Lord hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 7:2-11, 14-15    <sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 26:12-15

Some of the princes and people were in accord with Jeremiah's appeal, one among those being Ahikam ben Shaphan, son of the revered scribe Shaphan ben Azaliah, who was one of the writers of the Book of Deuteronomy, and a staunch supporter, therefore, of Jeremiah's sermons. It was Shaphan, you recall, who had read the Book of Deuteronomy to King Josiah, and who went to the prophetess Huldah for her interpretation. Ahikam recalled to the people assembled at Jeremiah's trial that Micah the prophet had prophesied the destruction of the temple, and that no harm had been done him. Ahikam, Achbor ben Micaiah, and some other elders of the palace associated with the reform of Josiah won the day for Jeremiah, and he was freed.

Yet King Jehoiakim took revenge on another prophet, Uriah ben Shemaiah of Kirjath Jearim, who, like Jeremiah, predicted that disaster would overtake the city unless the people repented. The priests and false prophets determined to make an example of him, since Jeremiah had been freed at a public trial. Uriah was warned of the temper of the king and the priesthood, however, and fled to Egypt to escape their wrath. The king had him tracked down, and he was taken alive back to Jerusalem, and executed in the king's presence.

A precedent, however, had been established by Micah and Jeremiah, whereby prophecies against the temple because of iniquities wrought therein were not punishable by death - at least, not in a public trial.

### *Jeremiah's Conception of a Moral World*

*July 22, 1960*

Jeremiah, and all interested in preserving the "purified" rituals of Jehovah and the atmosphere of better ethical conduct among the people, were bitter, as they saw Jehoiakim seek to do away with the great reforms of his father, Josiah. Imbued with his spirit of trust in the Father, Jeremiah feared not the hostility

of the king, and spoke out against him with daring, declaring that Jehoiakim would die like a dog, and without burial:

Did not thy father eat and drink, and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is this not to know me? saith the Lord. But thine eyes and thy heart are on nothing but covetousness, and unlawful gain and on shedding innocent blood, and on doing oppression, and violence. Therefore, thus saith the Lord concerning Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, King of Judah: They shall not lament him ... He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup>

I should explain that Jeremiah thought the destruction of Jerusalem imminent, for with Necho's defeat by Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonians could come up to attack Jerusalem without an Egyptian army on any of its flanks. But no direct attack developed, for the reason that no Hebrew troops had been sent to fight with Egypt against the Babylonians (such a policy being unenforceable in a land whose king had just been slain by an Egyptian pharaoh). However, Jeremiah was convinced that, despite the delays and postponements, the day of reckoning had to dawn, in the fullness of God's time.

Jehoiakim died in 597 BC, or about the time the first investment of Jerusalem was begun. He died at the early age of 36, certainly unsung and unwept by the vast majority of the people – and the others, the high priests and aristocrats, were far too practical and indifferent to shed tears over him. That part of

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 22:15-19

Jeremiah's prophecy concerning him was correct, but the fact is that he did manage to die in time to be buried with his royal ancestors.

Jeremiah thought of God as the shaper of people and events, to be molded and redone as circumstances required. Through his contact with the spirit world, he was told, "go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words."<sup>1</sup> He did so, and beheld the artisan laboring at a potter's wheel in a stall at the Jerusalem marketplace. He saw the emergence of beautifully shaped vessels; but sometimes the jar might be marred in the process, and so the potter would remake the jar, more beautiful than ever, from the same clay.

Then the sermon came to Jeremiah: "O house of Israel, cannot I do with you, as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay in the potter's hand, so are ye in my hand, O house of Israel."<sup>2</sup> Thus he felt that God could pluck up or destroy an evil kingdom or nation, but if it repented of its evil, God could undo the work of destruction, and repair and rebuild. In short, God's work of rebuilding and constructing of nations, as of individuals, was linked with moral purpose and deed.

In connection with this idea, one meaning in the above passage about Jehoiakim and Josiah has frequently been overlooked by commentators. Here is a statement to the effect that material prosperity is not to be sought or expected when doing the Father's will. If a man does the will of God, and treats his fellow-man with justice and righteousness, "Is this not to know me?" as God says through the spiritual insight of Jeremiah. But in Josiah's case, to be "well" did not mean physical or material well-being, for Josiah died at the hands of an assassin. To be "well" in the sight of God meant to be well in one's *soul*, and in the happiness of one's after-life in the spirit world, regardless of one's fortunes or vicissitudes on earth.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 18:2    <sup>2</sup> Jeremiah: 18:6

Jeremiah could not express himself clearly here, even though he understood that a soul must face a “bar of justice” in some way after death, for, as a prophet, he was against making known any conception of a post-mortal world to his compatriots. He felt that man must overcome evil in his mortal environment, and do the will of God by walking in the path of righteousness here on earth. He thus made no reference to a period of recompense in the spirit world to atone for sin, but, for punishment, envisioned Jehoiakim being taken from his throne, and dying before a normal span of life.

### *The Burning Heart*

*July 24, 1960*

Jehoiakim, as I have said, had reverted to the abominations of Manasseh and Amon. Jeremiah spoke in the gates of the temple and in a place called Topheth in the valley of Hinnom to protest against rites and offerings to pagan gods and the practice of human sacrifices, and the imagery of his sermons became increasingly graphic and violent. He predicted that, as Topheth was a place of slaughter, so should Jerusalem be, with the carcasses of the people serving as food for the beasts and the scavengers, and he included in these predictions the houses of the kings of Jerusalem. On one occasion, as he delivered such a sermon at the temple gates, Pashur,<sup>1</sup> chief security officer of the temple, struck Jeremiah in the face, and had his guards put him in the stocks of the temple in the north gate of Benjamin, where he languished until the next morning.

It was from this experience that Jeremiah emerged with a closeness to God wherein he felt a “burning fire” in his heart which prevented him from being pressured into silence to avoid persecution. Through this sense of direct “contact” with God, he realized he must continue to cry out, because such was God’s

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<sup>1</sup> According to Young’s Concordance: Chief governor of the house of the Lord in the days of Jeremiah - 605 BC

will: "the word of the Lord is made a reproach unto me, and a derision, all the day. And if I say: I will not make mention of Him; nor speak any more in His name; then there is in my heart a burning fire shut up within me, and I weary myself to hold it in, but I cannot."<sup>1</sup>

This burning fire in the heart of Jeremiah heralded an advance in God's closeness to man such as had never before been experienced by a Hebrew prophet. The will of the Heavenly Father had been made known to Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk through an inner voice or a vision, but now it made itself *felt*, through a commotion, a tumult in the heart, as a burning fire. If an inner voice or vision could be disregarded, these feelings in his heart were a reality of such proportion and nature that Jeremiah was forced to acknowledge that here was God's "presence," making itself manifest through a burning in his heart.

It was this experience of Jeremiah's that taught me, under God's tutelage, that God's presence could "enter" the human soul and thus deeply affect it. In Jeremiah, this presence of the Father was His will, accompanied by an overwhelming sense of righteousness, which battled the evil thought in Jeremiah's mind to keep silent in the face of iniquity. But it was not Jeremiah's mind that was upset – it was his heart that reacted to the Father's presence, becoming melancholy at the unworthy thoughts of silence in his mind. Once his decision to keep silent had been banished, the burning fire in the heart ceased to trouble the prophet, and he was calm. God's will had not been circumvented; it remained uppermost in his mind and heart, and gave Jeremiah more courage and resolution than ever before.

Thus it was that God's will, felt as a presence burning in Jeremiah's heart, was a harbinger which showed me that the glow in my own heart, which I could feel from earliest childhood, was

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 20:8-9

the divine love of the Father, the very presence and essential nature of God. And when I spoke to the fugitives at Emmaus, and revealed my presence to them, and explained, as I had many times before, of the availability of the Father's love, they exclaimed, "Didst not our hearts burn?"<sup>1</sup> For with that burning of the heart had come to them the divine love, as 600 years before had come to Jeremiah the burning heart of the Father's will for righteousness.

*Baruch and the Prophet's Book*

July 25, 1960

In the year of Egypt's defeat at Carchemish, 605 BC, when Jehoiakim realized that his new master was to be Babylonia, Baruch ben Neriah became a scribe for Jeremiah. Jeremiah was instructed by his spirit guides to write a scroll that would bring to the people of Judah a message of warning, and so this was done. Jeremiah reports this "voice of God" as saying: "It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin."<sup>2</sup> The "Book of Jeremiah" was, then, this work of dictation through Baruch.

Now at this time, Jeremiah had been forbidden by temple decree from giving sermons in the Lord's House, because of the agitation which his preachings produced among the hearers there. The idea, then, was for someone else to read aloud his book, or portions thereof. It was planned that this would be done on a day of atonement, when fasting was prescribed, so that the people would have a fresh reminder of Judah's sins, which would thus intensify the appeal of Jeremiah to return to righteousness and worship of Jehovah.

The book took some time to write and edit, and so was not ready for the reading until the next year, 604 BC. In those days

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 24:32    <sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 20:8-9

several fast days could be called during the year, instead of the fixed one, Yom Kippur, of later days, and the next one called was in the winter (scripture calls this the ninth month, a reckoning different from the later Hebrew calendar).

People came from all over Judah, as well as Jerusalem, as was customary with the Passover which Josiah had instituted, and they heard the contents of Jeremiah's book read to them by Baruch ben Neriah in the chamber of Gemariah (one of the sons of Shaphan the Scribe), at the entry of the new gate of the temple. The book itself was not very long, being less than one half of what it is today, due to later additions by Baruch as well as others, and it created a strong impression on all.

Micah, Gemariah's son, reported the contents of the book to some members of the royal court (including Elishama the scribe, Delaiah ben Shemaiah, Elnathan ben Achbor, and Zedekiah ben Hananiah), and they sent Jehudi ben Nethaniah to have him read the work to the princes of Judah. The denunciations upon the people and the land filled these men with trepidation, and their conclusion was to tell Jehoiakim the king. They advised Baruch to hide with Jeremiah, fearful lest the wrath of Jehoiakim seek vengeance on the writer and his scribe. Jehudi read Jeremiah's book to the king, who with his penknife ferociously cut the scrolls and, despite the pleas of Elnathan and Delaiah, threw them into the fire of the brazier which was burning to keep the king comfortable that winter day. In fact, Jehoiakim sent some of his officers to arrest Baruch and Jeremiah, but these had taken refuge out of the city beyond the Mount of Olives, and, as the Old Testament says, "the Lord hid them."

*Ye Have Not Harkened Unto Me**July 29, 1960*

As I have explained, such a defeat could not deter Jeremiah from his purpose, since he wholeheartedly felt that he was doing God's will, and so he dictated another book to Baruch.

Meanwhile, Nebuchadnezzar consolidated his power and empire, and in 600 BC invaded Syria and Palestine. All the small nations in that area, including Judah, recognized him as master, and Jehoiakim raided the temple treasury to pay tribute to him.

Finally, against the advice of Jeremiah, who saw in Babylonia the "hand of God" for the scourge of nations, Jehoiakim rebelled, and in short order Jerusalem was taken by the mighty empire from the north. The conquerors placed Zedekiah, Jehoiakim's brother, on the throne (Jehoiakim having died soon after starting his rebellion). The Babylonians looted the city, emptied the temple treasury, and departed to Babylonia with thousands of the upper classes, as well as craftsmen, workers and men fit to wage war. This was the first captivity of Judah, and the end was in sight.

And as for Jehoiakim, Jeremiah had uttered his prophecy of the king's death and dishonor to his body, which I showed almost, but did not come to pass. Nor did Jeremiah predict correctly that he would not be succeeded by a son, for in 597 BC, at his death, his son Jehoiachin reigned for three months. When the Babylonians captured the city they took Jehoiachin prisoner, carrying him off to Babylon where he died as an old man.

Shortly before Jehoiakim's death, when the Babylonians commenced their attack upon Jerusalem, a group of Rechabites, cultists who swore not to drink liquor, and who lived as nomads in tents, took refuge from the hill country of Judah, open to the devastation of Nebuchadnezzar's advancing armies, into the city of Jerusalem, where they would be safe as long as the city would

resist siege. These people, in their aversion to strong drink, were thus like the Nazarites, who produced Samson in the days of the Judges, and they were very pious in their beliefs and tenets. Jeremiah learned of their coming and brought them into the temple (for the ban against him had been lifted) and he gave them wine to drink. But they refused, recalling the pledge which they had given. In admiration of their faith, Jeremiah lifted his silence and felt moved by the “voice of God” to acclaim:

Whereas the words of a man, the son of Rechab,  
who commanded his sons not to drink wine, are  
obeyed ... for they hearken to their father's  
commandment; but I your God have spoken unto  
you often and again, and ye have not hearkened  
unto me ... through my servants and my prophets  
... therefore, saith the Lord, behold, I will bring  
upon Judah and Jerusalem all the evil I have  
pronounced against them.<sup>1</sup>

Jeremiah thus saw that, though delayed, his prophecies were to come true. He therefore preached vehemently and often not to rebel against the conquerors, but to remain faithful to them.

Zedekiah was the brother of Jehoiakim, and was 21 years old when he began to reign, and reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar had been advised by his spies that Zedekiah had not been active in fomenting revolt against him, as the sons of Jehoiakim had been, and thus chose him to rule under his suzerainty.

Now Zedekiah (he had been named Mattaniah by his father) was pressed both by the pro-Egyptian party of the priests and prophets, and by those who, like Jeremiah, favored peace with

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 35:14-17

Babylonia. In fact, the king had great respect for Jeremiah, whose writings he was familiar with, and whom he had heard preaching, and he was impressed by the fact that his prophecies of Jerusalem's fall to Babylonia had been fulfilled.

But Jerusalem had not been destroyed, and there were false prophets who pointed this out, and predicted that in a short time the exiles from Babylonia would return. For this to happen, of course, there would have had to be waged a successful war of rebellion against Babylonia, and Jeremiah knew that such a revolt could only end in the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem. To emphasize and constantly remind the people that they must be subservient to Babylonia, Jeremiah used to wear a wooden yoke on his neck.

The last dozen or so chapters in the Book of Jeremiah pertain to the reign of Zedekiah. They show the anguish suffered by Jeremiah because of his certainty of Jerusalem's destruction, due to hesitation, doubts, and ultimate inability of the king to understand Jeremiah's message. Here too in these chapters is found the hope and optimism that a remnant would abide, who, chastened by the experience of exile and loss of homeland, would conform to the commandments of God, with a "new heart" given them to know God and be His true children.

The Scriptures relate the story of how, in the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign, one of the popular false prophets of the day, Hananiah ben Azzur from Gideon, came to Jerusalem to speak to the priests and the people. Hananiah declared that God had broken the yoke of Babylonia, and in two years would bring back the treasures of the temple, as well as the royal house and all the captives. When Jeremiah answered him that the history of prophecy was a declaration *against* wars and such evil behavior, and one that stood for peace, Hananiah took the wooden yoke from Jeremiah's neck and broke it. Jeremiah went to a blacksmith's

shop, and had an iron one made, putting it around his neck. When next he saw Hananiah in the temple, he retorted:

For thus saith the Lord: Thou hast broken the bars of wood; but thou shalt make in their stead bars of iron. For thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel: I have put a yoke of iron on the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. . . . Hear now, Hananiah; the Lord hath sent thee not; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie.<sup>1</sup>

Jeremiah predicted Hananiah's death that same year, for preaching "rebellion against God," and Hananiah died two months later. This report is actually true: Hananiah lacked faith and inward conviction in what he was saying, and so was struck with terror by Jeremiah's words, spoken from the heart with absolutely sincerity. Hananiah was a party man, a politician, who spoke as he did only because it was profitable; therefore Jeremiah's words clung to his mind, and assumed the shape of truth.

This dramatic instance of the "power of suggestion" is one which shows the might (here in death, as it could be for healing) of the energy of truth and righteousness - i.e., the "word of God." For it is like a fire burning in the heart, bringing unquenchable courage - as it can also strike terror into the hearts of those who know they have worked iniquity. God, of course, did not want (or cause) Hananiah's death, yet the burden of Hananiah's own conscience brought him death, as it did many centuries later to my companion Judas.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 28:13-15

*Jeremiah's Letter for the Exiles**August 5, 1960*

For nine long years, Zedekiah adhered waveringly to Jeremiah's policy of peace and vassalage to Babylonia. So great was Jeremiah's influence that at one time the king sent two of his officers to deliver a letter written by Jeremiah to Nebuchadnezzar and the captives in Babylonia. This letter was designed to quiet the people there, to give them confidence that the Lord was with them and would redeem them in time to come, and to induce them to put aside thoughts of revolt that were being spread about by false prophets and agitators. The letter was also designed to encourage Nebuchadnezzar to treat the Judeans there with more kindness, as a people who would live in peace and help in the prosperity of the land as obedient inhabitants of Babylonia. In fact, these words of Jeremiah contained great wisdom for his people:

Build ye houses, and dwell in them, and plant your gardens and eat the fruit thereof; take your wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters and multiply you there and be not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it; for in the peace thereof shall you have peace.<sup>1</sup>

The amazing part of this letter, in view of the time and age in which it was written, is that Jeremiah told the people to pray to the God of Israel while on Babylonian soil. To you today, with an understanding of the universality of God, this would be taken

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 29:5-7

for granted, but in those days, people worshiped the god of the land. Thus did the Assyrians who were brought to Samaria in the days of Ashurnazirpal relinquish their gods to worship Jehovah, the “god of the land.” But the Lord had been “transported,” so to speak, by the Hebrews, first of course from Sinai to Canaan, but then, in this move to Babylonia, without benefit of a tabernacle, temple, or any other “physical presence” of God.

Another important feature of this letter was its emphasis, not on political or worldly success, but on spiritual and moral achievement – the worshipping of God and adherence to His laws. Regardless of who controlled the land of Israel, it was paramount that the people devote themselves to God and to His will. A land, a nation, a temple, sacrifices – these were not important in God’s view of the nation or the individual. The important thing was that the people maintain and demonstrate their faith in God. And in fact, the Jewish people in Babylon learned to reach out to the Heavenly Father in new ways, through religious meetings and prayer, rather than sacrifices, and so achieved a more elevated attitude towards God and His commandments.

### *The New Covenant*

*August 7, 1960*

Jeremiah thus felt that a new covenant between God and these captives in Babylonia was in the making, wherein this new insight into the nature of God would achieve for them a “new heart.” This new heart was for each human being as an individual, not as a mere member of a collective – each person being responsible for his own actions, and entering into a personal relationship with God:

In those days, they shall say no more; the fathers  
have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are  
set on edge; but every one shall die for his own

iniquity; every man that eateth the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.<sup>1</sup>

This new heart in man, with individual responsibility as the keynote, was to come as the result of an understanding of man's past failure to heed God's laws, and the desire to approach God once more. This repentance from evil, as Jeremiah conceived it, would be accompanied by a return from Babylon to the homeland of Judah. The Lord would heal the wounds of Israel, and take the people once more under His protection. Jeremiah, in short, became imbued with knowledge that the Babylonian captives would retain their faith in God, and purify their ways and their hearts in returning to Him, so that God could once more declare His love for His people:

Thus saith the Lord: The people that were left of the sword have found grace in the wilderness; yea, Israel, when I go to cause him to rest. From afar the Lord appeared unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with affection have I drawn thee. Again will I build thee, and thou shalt be built ... For there shall be a day, that the nobleman shall call upon the Mount Ephraim; arise ye, and let us go to Zion, unto the Lord our God.<sup>2</sup>

The new covenant of the heart which God was to make with Israel was one which would not need instruction, but would be in the soul of each person, so that "knowing the Lord" would be in their nature. This would be a consequence of the people's return to God, and God's love for His children:

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 31:29-30    <sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 31:2-6

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel, and the House of Judah . . . I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their hearts will I write it. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more, every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying: Know the Lord. For they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more.<sup>1</sup>

Now if you read these words carefully, you will see the meaning that with the new covenant of the heart, there would be no more sinning, for to fully know God means to fully be able to do His will and obey His commandments. Here, in Jeremiah's words, is the Christian doctrine of grace – for as I taught, and Paul taught after me, one whose soul is filled with God's love is not tempted to sin.

Jeremiah thus predicted a time when the Hebrew people would not sin because the nature of God would be in their souls. Jeremiah could not say that this nature of God was His divine love, for he had no knowledge of the divine love. But he had a tremendous intuition – one might say, a perceiving as through a veil – that this was so. For Jeremiah's chapters 30 and 31 are filled with an inward emotion, as he pours forth, in lyrical terms, the love that God has for His people, whose wounds He will bind up, and whom He will cause to be brought back into their homeland, with gladness and rejoicing. For, says the Lord, "I am become a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 31:31, 33-34    <sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 31:9

The new covenant between Judah and God was no longer to be recognized by the outward sign of the old covenant, circumcision, but by the inward sign of a personal relationship between God and His children. My followers used the phrase, "circumcision of the heart," to emphasize this difference – a covenant for eliminating the impurities of the heart, as the old covenant provided for removing the "impurity" of the foreskin.

Jeremiah expected this new covenant to take place with the return of the captives to Jerusalem, which he thought would be in about seventy years, or about 525 BC, broadly speaking, but then he was unable to see the period of about five hundred and fifty years, covering the time of the Second temple until my appearance in Palestine.

### *Jeremiah's Final Days*

*August 12, 1960*

Zedekiah had maintained his wavering course of vassalage to Babylonia, despite the opposition of many of his advisers and princes, but when Pharaoh Hophra of Egypt entered Palestine to wage war on Babylonia, Zedekiah was finally persuaded to join him. In the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem, then lifted it temporarily to meet Hophra. The people rejoiced, thinking that danger had been averted, and that they would be free, but Jeremiah, in his firm belief that the Babylonians were the "scourge of God," declared they would return and conquer Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup>

As the Babylonians broke camp to meet the Egyptian army, Jeremiah decided to leave Jerusalem to receive some land in Anathoth that he had bought from his nephew. He was arrested at the gate of Benjamin as a deserter to the enemy. Though Jeremiah protested his innocence, he was brought before certain of the princes who sustained the charges, had him flogged, and

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 37:5-9

placed him in a dungeon beneath the house of Jonathan the scribe. He was held there for many days, while the Babylonians (who had in the meanwhile driven off the Egyptians) returned, as Jeremiah had predicted, and began to besiege the city in earnest.

Zedekiah, realizing that Jeremiah had prophesied accurately, decided to ask him what might be the result of the siege, and had him brought from the dungeons to ask him alone, "Is there any word from the Lord?" Jeremiah could only repeat his admonition to continue to submit to Babylonia. He then pleaded that his prophecies were from God, and that he had not sinned in any way to deserve being condemned to prison. He asked the king not to send him back to that terrible dungeon, or he would die there. The king had mercy on the old man, and had him transferred to a more tolerable prison, called the court of the guards, with provision of a loaf of bread daily for as long as food was available in Jerusalem.

I do not care to linger on the vicissitudes and hardships which Jeremiah endured during this time, for it is a subject that brings forth only sorrow, nor is Jeremiah himself anxious that these things be dwelt upon. They merely show that, like other prophets before him and after, Jeremiah was persecuted by those who found God's will not to their liking and contrary to their materially-based desires.

Because he had preached submission to Babylonia, Jeremiah was again accused by the court princes of treason. These princes were of the military caste, who felt that God would not permit His holy city to be taken. Zedekiah threw up his hands, saying, "Behold, he is in your hand; the king can do nothing against you." And so they had Jeremiah lowered with cords into a pit that was in the court of the guard, and the prophet sank into the mire, left to die of starvation and exposure.

Jeremiah was later rescued by Eben-Melech, a native of Ethiopia and officer in the king's house, who protested to the king that "evil" had been done unto him. Zedekiah, who simply could not control his cousins or others in his family, had no wish to be responsible for Jeremiah's death, and so ordered Eben-Melech to take thirty men and rescue him. The Book of Jeremiah relates the officer's kindness to the prophet, providing him with cloths to be placed under his armpits so that the ropes would not tear his skin in the process of pulling him up.

I have spoken with Zedekiah, and he tells me that he was afraid of the princes surrounding him, fearing that they would assassinate him if he yielded to the Babylonians. He had no choice but to continue in the defense of Jerusalem, and to depend upon the mercy of Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar has told me that he realized all along that Judah's revolt was not a serious attempt on his kingdom, being a tiny outpost, but that he felt the burning of the city and deportation of the people to Babylonia would act as a deterrent to other possible rebellions. At the same time, he expressed astonishment at the tenacity and fanaticism shown by the Judean soldiers.

Jerusalem was taken on the 9th of Ab, 586 BC, the city burned, and the temple destroyed. The fleeing king and nobles were captured in the plains of Jericho and brought to Nebuchadnezzar's headquarters at Riblah, where the monarch executed judgment upon the rebels. Zedekiah's sons were slain before his eyes, and the nobility as well. Most of the survivors of the siege, and many dwellers of the countryside were marched to Babylon as captives, to be treated as enslaved people. Only the poor of the rural areas were permitted to remain on the farms and vineyards so that the land would not become a desert.

Jeremiah was taken along with other captives to Ramah, but was released by orders of Nebuchadnezzar, and given a choice of going with the people or remaining in Judah. Jeremiah chose

to stay behind, and so was told to dwell with Gedaliah, son of Ahikam, who had saved the prophet's life at his first trial.

Gedaliah, a descendant of the house of David, had been appointed governor of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar because he had shared Jeremiah's view that it was better to submit than to fight Babylonia. On Rosh Hashanah of that year, a few princes who had escaped to Moab, foremost being Ismael, son of Nethaniah, came back to Mizpah and, at the feast of this holy day, killed Gedaliah with the sword. Gedaliah, a good man, could not believe the warning of Johanan ben Kareah, that Ismael or anyone else would come to kill him at the table of the feast. The people were profoundly heartbroken at the news of Gedaliah's death, and instituted the holiday of the Fast of Gedaliah, the 3rd of Tishri, the day after Rosh Hoshanah.

In the massacres and confusion that followed Gedaliah's death, the remnants abiding in Judah fled to Egypt for fear of the Babylonians, and they took Jeremiah and Baruch with them, despite their advice and warnings. And it was there, in Taphanhes, that Jeremiah ended his days, through violence, while preaching against Egypt and predicting disaster for those that remained there.

*To Proclaim Liberty, Every Man to His Brother*

*August 1, 1961*

There remains to tell of Jeremiah's democratic ideals, which for their maturity of thought impress one even to this day. Aside from religious topics, this prophet's most important teaching, touching upon the broader aspects of human existence, was of the principle of human equality.

At the time when Pharaoh Hophra entered Palestine to wage war against Babylonia, and after Zedekiah had joined Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar, as I have said, turned away from his siege of Jerusalem to meet the Egyptian army. During the siege, when the

situation looked bleak, some Judean slave owners went into the temple with the sacrifice of a lamb, and then released their Hebrew slaves as an appeasement to God, in order to enlist His help in saving the capital from destruction.

But as soon as Nebuchadnezzar raised the siege to meet the Egyptians, these members of the ruling class saw no reason why they should adhere to their pledge, and forced the bondsmen and women back into slavery. This was moral degradation to an extraordinary degree, inasmuch as the liberation had been proclaimed as a religious measure, intended to obtain God's aid by an act of justice. To re-enslave these people – going back on a “bargain” with God in the process – was contemptible behavior meriting a stinging denunciation, and so Jeremiah spoke out, proclaiming the equality of all human beings:

Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel . . . ye were now turned, and had done that which is right in mine eyes, in proclaiming liberty every man to his neighbor; and ye had made a covenant before me in the house wherein my name is called; and ye turned and profaned my name, and caused every man his servant, and every man his handmaid, whom ye had let go at their pleasure, to return; and ye brought them into subjection. Therefore thus saith the Lord: ye have not hearkened unto me, to proclaim liberty, every man to his brother, and every man to his neighbor; behold I proclaim for you a liberty, saith the Lord, unto the sword, unto the pestilence and unto the famine; and I will make you a horror unto all the kingdoms of the earth.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 34:13-17

These sermons have only touched on some of the highlights in the stormy prophetic career of Jeremiah ben Hilkiah. In his forty-odd years of preaching and working for the moral and ethical elevation of his people, he faced many situations which were similar to those which confronted me many centuries later. We both predicted destruction of the temple, and were brought to trial (or a hearing, in my case) for our statements. We were both beaten while under arrest, and we both lost our mortal lives due to the violence of the opposition group – in both cases, the aristocratic and priestly party. In both our cases we favored peace and submission to the overlord nations of our times: the Babylonians and the Romans, respectively. Jeremiah, of course, witnessed the last stand against Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC, and beheld the destruction of the temple and the razing of the city walls, and it is possible that I would have seen the destruction of Jerusalem under Titus in 70 AD, had I not been cut down two generations earlier.

And as Jeremiah first predicted the coming of the new covenant, so was I the first to bring that covenant – the *new birth* through the Father's love – to fulfillment, with the opening up of the Celestial Heavens to whosoever should seek and possess, through earnest prayer, this love.

*CHAPTER ELEVEN**Habakkuk**August 1, 1961*

In relating the story of Jeremiah, I have told of the indecision of the kings, influenced by the great nations Egypt and Babylonia, as well as by the mean spirit of the nobles who constantly intrigued and pressured, always aware of their own interests and oblivious to the needs and welfare of the nation.

In the terrible period after the death of King Josiah and the defeat of the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho by Nebuchadnezzar, there followed the Babylonian advance against Judah resulting from King Jehoiakim's rebellion. The times for Judah were sore and perplexed; there was wickedness in high places and fear of the barbarians, and a faithful worshipper of Jehovah could well ask himself why iniquity and evil were so rampant and seemingly triumphant, and why Jehovah remained impassive, not stretching forth His hand for the protection of the righteous.

And thus I wish to speak of the prophet Habakkuk ben Jeshua, the Levite and singer in the temple choir from the time of Josiah who, after the touching death of this good king, and about the time of the Carchemish disaster, began to write. Habakkuk was a mature man nearing his fortieth year, a native of Jerusalem, and not of princely origin. Habakkuk was concerned with a twofold problem: the triumph of the great and cruel power, Babylonia, as the coming successor to that other evil nation, Egypt, while a weak and equivocal Hebrew king, Jehoiakim, sat on his throne and was indifferent to the evils that were rampant in his land. Habakkuk spoke openly about the foreign evils, but he also had in mind these domestic evils, which he did not openly denounce for fear of jeopardizing his own position.

Thus Habakkuk developed a prophecy which called upon God to answer his misgivings: why was it that a pure and holy God, who could not look upon iniquity, set a human being (the prophet) to observe nothing but evils and violence and aggression? Habakkuk was not merely content to obtain a message from God for His people, but he queried and complained and questioned God concerning these complexities and his doubts, as did Job centuries later in his questionings of God on the problem of evil in human existence.

Habakkuk complained: "Why dost thou show me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? For spoiling and violence are before me ... Therefore the law is slacked and judgment doth never go forth; for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth."

And God "answered" that the Chaldeans would arise, cruel, swift, and dreadful, to conquer and possess. Habakkuk thus believed that these conquerors would come as a "corrective" to the evils of the Hebrew nation, yet since they were more evil than the Hebrews, God was using an instrument for punishment more wicked than those He was punishing. Therefore God, who "cannot see evil," looked upon those that dealt treacherously and destroyed men more righteous than they.

Habakkuk went to his watchtower, to meditate in silence and await God's answer to his queries. And God answered him: "Write the vision and make it plain upon writing tables, that he may run that readeth it" (so plain that anyone running by in haste can still read it). "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold his soul which is puffed up is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faithfulness."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Habakkuk 2:2-4

This is the first part of the answer, and I wish to comment upon it and clarify it in the light of our spiritual knowledge before taking up the second part.

The New Testament translation is usually given as “the just shall live by his faith” (emunah), which is different from what the Old Testament prophet meant to convey. Habakkuk did not mean that the good man “lives” (or avoids death) by his faith in God, having faith that God will protect him from evil, for this is not always so. The good man may be destroyed by diseases, violence, and troubles over which he has no control, and though he is helped by the Lord’s agents when he calls upon Him in earnest prayer, material vicissitudes may claim a man’s life or fortune as material law dictates.

Habakkuk meant here that the just man continues to do what is right, living an “upright life” *regardless* of the evil around him, remaining loyal to principles of morality because he knows these come from God.

Now when Habakkuk spoke about the vision that was “yet for an appointed time,” he referred to the destiny of every soul at some time to leave this earth life and enter into the spirit world. And in that world, the good soul would reap the rewards of its good life, living in light and happiness in one of the beautiful spheres of Heaven.

Habakkuk thus meant that we should humbly strive to live a moral and ethical life, and that even if life in the flesh is extinguished by evil in the material world, the soul, untouched by that evil, will continue to live happily in the spirit world. Commentators on Habakkuk, whether Jewish or Christian, have generally not been able to discern the prophet’s true meaning here, and so I wanted to explain what is really meant by those words so cherished by Christian churchmen, “The just shall live by his faith.”

*The Problem of Evil**August 1, 1961*

Now the second part of Habakkuk's answer, covering verses 5 to the end of Chapter 2, deals with the fate of the wicked. It explains that wickedness creates its own destruction, and where goodness forgives, evil brings on endless cycles of retribution and vengeance. Or, stated in more spiritual terms, evil creates evil conditions, and the man of evil is finally devoured by his own evil, and the evil which it has spawned.

Thus, iniquity eventually destroys an evil man, destroying his prosperity and bringing on diseases of mind and body. And if, by some material law, this does not happen on earth, the evil man then pays for his sins and iniquities when he becomes a spirit, as his soul undergoes purification under the spiritual "law of compensation." This, then, is the answer to the "problem of evil."

Habakkuk thus understood that God rules the world through moral law, which makes itself final in the spirit world, but which is also operative upon the soul while in the world of the flesh. He also understood that God was not to be worshiped simply as a provider of food or health, or as an ally on the battlefield (as the pagans worshiped their gods of agriculture, fertility, and war), as this was a very low and primitive level of religious faith.

Were the Jews to worship Jehovah simply as a protector in battle against mighty nations? And were the Jews to forsake God, because they were now like bits of wood, tossed about on the ocean of the power politics of the day? A Hebrew nation conscious of its justness and righteousness could and would attract great spiritual forces, manifesting themselves in quiet confidence, resolution, and courage, as well as worldly assistance, to preserve the integrity of the country and the people. But a country filled with individual as well as corporate hatred, drunkenness,

violence, deceit, spilling of blood, covetousness, and idolatry could not find help from a God whose "eyes were averted" from such abominations. And so, with its meager material strength, it would falter before superior earthly might, and go down to defeat and destruction.

Habakkuk preached that righteousness in a nation, as in a person, would instill courage, born of trust in God's help. He pointed out that faith in God must result in moral and ethical conduct, and that by such faith man and nation had to live, as the only way to meet and overcome the assaults of the powerful but wicked nations of the times.

Habakkuk helped to provide his people with a greater trust in the Lord, who, at the appointed time in the future, would reward them with a God-given home, and peace. This could be accomplished on earth, but unquestionably was to be fulfilled in the great hereafter, in the world of spirit. And because Habakkuk knew that the way to life, happiness, and safety, on earth as well as in the spirit world, rested on faith in God, and righteous and just conduct, he foresaw the day when God's will would eventually triumph, and the earth would be "filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."<sup>1</sup>

Habakkuk fled from Jerusalem in 586 and stayed in Egypt until the Chaldeans withdrew. He did not survive by more than five years the destruction of the holy city, and died in his early sixties, in a place called Kellah, 18 miles to the southwest of Jerusalem.

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<sup>1</sup> Habakkuk 2:14

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### *Ezekiel*

*April 15, 1963*

Ezekiel ben Buzi was born around 615 BC, and began to write his prophecies in 593 BC, when he was about twenty-two years old. His father, Buzi, was a wealthy priest connected with the temple in Jerusalem, with holdings and estates outside the city, and Ezekiel was born in the hillside country some 15 miles north of Jerusalem, in the neighborhood of Ophrah. He was like Jeremiah in this respect, for he lived close to, and was a keen observer of nature. Thus we see his imagery of Babylonia as a great eagle which carries off the top of the cedar,<sup>1</sup> of Judah as a lioness, mother of two whelps,<sup>2</sup> or as a vine planted by many waters,<sup>3</sup> or a branch burned at the ends.<sup>4</sup> His writings show a love for his native surroundings in a way that surprises us for a prophet who became known for measurement and precision, so characteristic of man's intellect rather than love of nature and rural environment.

Because of the location of his home, Ezekiel could not help but think of the northern kingdom, Israel, which had been lost to the Hebrews. The area of Ophrah, headed by Jericho, had once formed part of the kingdom of Israel, and thus Ezekiel was interested in that land and people - especially the prophet Hosea, who belonged to that region. One also notices that Ezekiel maintained discreet silence about the nearby local shrine of Beth-el, denounced in the reforms of Josiah.

Ezekiel's affinity to Hosea, as would later be evidenced in his book of prophecies, became even greater when his father brought him on several occasions to visit the temple in Jerusalem, where

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel 17:3   <sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 19:2   <sup>3</sup> Ezekiel 19:10   <sup>4</sup> Ezekiel 15:4

he saw signs of Astarte (or Ashtoreth) the fertility goddess, Tammuz, nature myths, and sun worship. Judah had indeed played the "harlot," and in time Ezekiel was to voice a tremendous protest. His imagery, if inspired by Hosea, would go far beyond it in coarseness and earthliness. Ezekiel felt that the preceding prophets of Israel and Judah were right in their conviction that an idol-worshipping temple and its city were doomed to devastation.

On trips to Jerusalem when in his teens, Ezekiel heard Jeremiah speak, and became familiar with his prophetic work. Thus Ezekiel came to believe that the time was rapidly approaching when Jerusalem would be destroyed, and when it was, he considered it to be a fulfillment of prophecy. The terrible event convinced him that the prophets really were "spokesmen for God," and in time Ezekiel felt that there were things which God wanted to say to His people through him.

The new Babylonian master Nebuchadnezzar singled Ezekiel out as a nonconformist Zadokite temple priest, and so he departed with his wife to the land of Babylonia, part of a group of several thousand craftsmen, workers, and soldiers. The prisoners journeyed about 700 miles over the Arabian desert, on foot, with scanty supplies of food and water, and there were those who died and were buried along the route. The passing of the centuries has stilled the anguish of children and parents torn from each other, knowing they would never see each other again. Ezekiel felt the anguish of separation from his parents, while his wife wept bitterly for hers.

In 597 BC then, Ezekiel and his wife found themselves near Babylon, along the Chebar River – a long and wide canal which branched off from the Euphrates north of the city of Nippur, and then returned to it some distance below the city. The land was low, fertile, and irrigated.

The Hebrews, accustomed as they were to the rocky soil of Judah, were amazed at the greenery and favorable conditions for agricultural pursuits, and the exiles took this to mean that God, though He had taken them away from the land He had given them, had not entirely forsaken them. The Hebrews thus settled down to their various crafts and trades as they had in Jerusalem. The Babylonians were not as cruel to them as the Egyptians had been, and, encouraged by Jeremiah's pastoral letter, they developed thriving communities, and continued to hold to that Jehovah who, even in adversity and travail, seemed to be showing love and mercy towards His children.

Ezekiel, as a temple priest, came to be looked upon as a religious representative of the exiles; and if he could not earn a living as a craftsman or farmer, his needs were provided for by what you might call his parishioners, who looked to him for spiritual comfort and guidance.

### *Son of Man*

*April-July 1963*

It took Ezekiel some years to recover from the displacement to the new land, and to fit into the pattern of living which eventually established itself amongst the exiled Hebrews. First of all, in order to completely accept these new conditions and carry on, Ezekiel had to persuade himself that the great misfortune suffered by the Hebrews had been fully deserved and (as he believed) brought about by God. In studying the old prophets of Israel and Judah, he became thoroughly convinced of this – so much so that, in his prophetic writings, he elaborated vehemently on all the misdeeds and erring conduct which his people had been accused of by his predecessors, and strove to persuade his hearers that such indeed were the facts.

It had at first occurred to Ezekiel that he had to find a way to bring Jehovah from His temple in Jerusalem (which before 586 BC was still standing) to Babylonia, but since he was a priest and knew thoroughly the Hebrew scrolls, he was also aware that Jehovah had led the people from the Sinai Peninsula to the "promised land" of Israel as "a pillar of fire and cloud," and so he knew that Jehovah could leave His sanctuary and come to Babylonia.

From the sixth chapter of the book of Isaiah, Ezekiel was able to obtain the elements for his first "vision from God" - which of course was not really a vision, but simply an adaptation from the writings of the preceding prophet. And just as Jeremiah had found inspiration in this chapter, converting the seraph's live coal into the "hand of God," so Ezekiel used the phrase "the hand of the Lord" to be upon him whenever he felt impelled to voice a prophecy. Ezekiel went beyond Isaiah in elaborating his so-called vision, complete with opulent and exotic descriptions, but he was not actually a mystic or a visionary in the sense that he has been generally considered.

Ezekiel felt that God wanted a prophet through whom to instruct His children in Babylonia, as Jeremiah had been His prophet in Jerusalem. And as the Lord "put forth His hand, and touched Jeremiah's mouth, saying: Behold, I put words into thy mouth,"<sup>1</sup> so did God give Ezekiel a book to eat, a scroll with writing on both sides: "So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that roll. And He said unto me, 'Son of man, cause thy belly to eat and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee.' Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness."<sup>2</sup> Or as Jeremiah had said previously, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 1:9   <sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 3:2-3   <sup>3</sup> Jeremiah 15:16

Ezekiel echoed several other thoughts which Jeremiah had expressed in his opening passages – God telling him not to be afraid, and warning that he would not be listened to by the people. With this opening “vision,” Ezekiel now felt that he could voice God’s wishes in Babylonia, and could even consider that God had come to this land to preside over the spiritual fortunes of His people. Where in Babylonia, Ezekiel did not say, but it wasn’t necessary – to the prophet, God was the King of the Universe, and could abide wherever He wished.

A word about the term “son of man” which I have just quoted. This term was applied to me in various places in the New Testament as having a special meaning connected with my messiahship. Actually, the term, as Ezekiel conceived it, meant “son of Adam,” but it referred to “man” not merely as a living being, but as man having a soul – man the creation made in God’s image – and therefore, man with whom God could communicate concerning His affairs. The term therefore was used to refer to those “sons” who walked in God’s ways, and who were close enough to Him to hear Him, and thus receive His instructions. Hence, “son of man” also meant a prophet of God, who could communicate with God and be His spokesman. When I delivered my message proclaiming the availability of God’s love to humankind, I considered myself a “son of man,” or prophet of God; and in fact, so I was, for God’s divine love was in my soul to a considerable degree, and I knew what God wanted, and I strove to carry out His wishes.

In the seven years from 593 BC, when Ezekiel first received his prophetic call, to 586 BC, the affairs of the exiles slowly became stabilized, while at the same time the situation in Jerusalem continued to deteriorate, until the final destruction by Nebuchadnezzar took place. The same abuses, idolatries, and political intrigues continued to flourish around the weak king, Zedekiah, who eventually succumbed to the pro-Egyptian party,

and made war upon Babylon. Ezekiel, according to some commentators, is supposed to have gone back to Jerusalem to observe the conditions that existed in the crumbling city, but actually he did not, for travelers and letters from Jerusalem were able to give the Hebrews in Babylonia a fairly accurate picture of conditions in Jerusalem, and Ezekiel remained in his adopted town, a place called Tel-abib on the Chebar, to bewail the evils of the "holy city," and predict its eventual disaster.

Ezekiel constructed a relief map of Jerusalem, making use of kneading clay on tile to predict the coming siege, and restricted himself to a very unpleasant diet to indicate forcefully what the besieged people would be obliged to eat. He also cut off his hair and beard, which he divided into three parts, for burning, further cutting, and scattering in the wind, to symbolize the complete destruction of Jerusalem. His descriptions of the coming fall, such as the parable of the boiling pot<sup>1</sup> which he devised from a passage in Jeremiah, are vivid, and show great intensity of feeling. These graphic depictions of Jehovah's "wrath" at the Hebrew transgressions were intended as an admonishment to the exiles that such transgressions must not make their appearances amongst them.

### *The Prophet's Wife*

*April-July 1963*

The exiles had been saved from destruction by the grace of God, yet it seemed to Ezekiel that God had utterly turned His face from Jerusalem, and the prophet's personal experience with its destruction is one of the most touching in all of Hebrew prophetic writing. Ezekiel's wife, "the desire of his eyes," was suddenly taken ill one morning, and died that evening. She was a young woman in her mid-thirties, named Chavah, or "first woman," modest and long-suffering in spirit and frail in health. Her death coincided with the capture of the temple in Jerusalem

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel 24:3-13

by the Babylonians in July, 586 BC. Ezekiel of course did not know that this had happened until several months later, when a refugee who escaped from the destruction appeared in Tel-abib to relate the events of the fall of the city.

Ezekiel had been expecting the worst for several years. His mind had gone back to Hosea, who had likened the relationship between God and Israel to that of a husband and wife.<sup>1</sup> And so we see that the story of the foundling in Ezekiel 16 speaks of a faithless Jerusalem and God, her royal lover. Continuing in this vein, Ezekiel thought of himself as reliving, in his own marriage, the spiritual union between God and Judah. And, given the demise of his beloved wife and the destruction of Jerusalem on the same day, he was struck by the thought that, as spokesman for God, his wife's death was symbolic of the loss of God's "spouse," Jerusalem.

Ezekiel, despite his sorrow and bereavement, was better able to console himself with this thought. Believing in his heart that the city's loss represented a necessary and inevitable "punishment," Ezekiel was moved to declare that God had commanded him not to mourn the death of his wife by sitting the "Shivah," or customary mourning rites (removal of headgear and shoes, covering of the face, and fasting for a week), as a sign that neither did God mourn the loss of his own spouse, Jerusalem.

The simple passage describing his wife's death, coming from the pen of the otherwise emphatic and oratorical prophet, is a most poignant account of a man's bereavement, illuminated by implicit faith in God:

The word from the Eternal came to me: "Son of man, behold I am taking from you at one stroke the treasure of your eyes. Yet thou shalt neither mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down.

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel 23

Sigh, but not aloud, make no mourning for the dead, bind thy headgear upon thee, and put thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy beard, and eat not the bread of mourners." So I spoke to the people in the morning: and at evening my wife died, and I did in the morning as I was commanded.<sup>1</sup>

Ezekiel tells us that, with Chavah's death, he ceased his prophecies regarding Jerusalem's fall, inasmuch as the prophecy was thus fulfilled. But with the news of the disaster, he felt that "his mouth was opened," and that he could express his hopes for a future resurrection for Jerusalem.

If Jehovah was the one true God, He would restore His people and His own city, not for their sake, but to show that the destruction and exile resulted from merited "punishment" and not from His own weakness, as pagan people of the times would assuredly assume. Ezekiel therefore wrote the "Vision of the Dry Bones,"<sup>2</sup> which related the material bringing forth of the dead from their resting places, their return to life through the "spirit of God," and return of a righteous remnant to their homeland. Upon these elect, God would pour out His spirit, making them, as Jeremiah had already predicted and which Ezekiel recognized as truth, "new creatures" walking in His statutes:

A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your bosom, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep mine ordinances, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel: 24:15-18    <sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 37    <sup>3</sup> Ezekiel 36:26-28

In the "Sign of the Two Sticks," Ezekiel went on to have God say that the people would be united as one nation (referring to the separate states, Israel and Judah), to be governed forever by one shepherd, His servant "David." The Lord also affirmed that He would make a lasting covenant of peace with them, and that He would set His sanctuary and tabernacle in the midst of them, forever.

This was, then, a great prophecy of resurrection; and centuries later, as the Messiah, I preached the fulfillment of this prophecy.

### *Prophecies with Multiple Meanings*

*April-July 1963*

In Ezekiel's prophecies, material and spiritual interpretations could often be applied to the same passage, because he was a man of concrete thought, through which spiritual content was "projected" by the spirit forces working with him. If you understand, then, that Ezekiel was speaking in both spiritual and material terms at the same time, you will thus appreciate that his physical descriptions, written with considerable visual power, were simply attempts to convey these larger spiritual meanings.

Ezekiel's vision of dry bones, therefore, was physical in nature, but the overlying spiritual message gave it the meaning that, at the time this "resurrection" was to take place, a new and more elevated spiritual reality would have emerged in the world. Ezekiel thought that this resurrection was possible on earth, though this "world to come" would have had to possess spiritual qualities unknown to his own times. But this vision, like many other passages in the Bible, took on various new meanings with the passing ages, as new insights into the nature of spiritual reality were gained.

As has been mentioned, people in those days, and the prophets themselves, were often not amenable to the concept of a "spirit world." And so the prophets, in their efforts to ameliorate the

moral and ethical life of the nation and individual, generally spoke only in terms of the earth life, with material destruction being a punishment for sin, and material restoration a reward for righteous behavior.

Thus the valley of dry bones originally alluded to a place on earth, but the time frame was so far removed into the future that Ezekiel felt no need to be concerned with the details of time and place. It was only succeeding generations that became preoccupied with determining the exact time and location of the prophecy, and it was these later generations who more clearly understood the spiritual locale implied in the vision.

In the vision, the bones represented "the whole house of Israel," and they were "very dry," indicating not only the most recent deaths but those of countless generations of the past. It was eventually realized, then, that the vision did not describe a return in the flesh to an earthly Israel, but to a new or spiritual Israel, where those departed from earth would live in their renewed life, freed of the anxiety of death. Thus this new land of Israel would no longer be used for burials: "Therefore thou [the land] shalt devour men no more, neither bereave thy nations any more."<sup>1</sup>

Ezekiel actually had less insight regarding the coming of the Messiah than did Jeremiah, and so in his references to "David, the servant of God" he sometimes imagined King David himself ruling over this united Hebrew nation, free of sin, and enjoying the blessings of a purified existence. (Ezekiel thought this resurrection would also include his departed wife, for, as a symbol of the destroyed Jerusalem, she too would be restored to a purified life in the "New Israel.")

The passages concerning "David" can be confusing, because Ezekiel used the term to mean three different things: in one case, a descendant of David ruling a material kingdom; and then, a resurrected King David ruling his nation in a "perfected" world;

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel 36:14

and finally, as an intimation of the coming Messiah. The prophecies written before the fall of Jerusalem made "David" the ruler of a restored material nation, while those that were made after 586 BC referred to a more spiritual David, or a "prince" of the House of David.

To make this vision of resurrection even more complex, the living Jews in Babylonia and the survivors in Jerusalem also had to be taken care of, and so the prophecy included the means for their physical return from exile, in accordance with the prophecies of the preceding prophets. Special emphasis was placed on the moral regeneration of these returning Jews, by virtue of the "second covenant" made between them and God, with the outpouring, as Jeremiah had said, of His spirit upon them. Thus we find yet another superimposing of the spiritual upon the physical, here to include both the living Hebrews and the departed of ages past. "David, servant of God" thus becomes a living member of the House of David, in the material sense, and at the same time represents a spiritual "shepherd," caring for his flock.

The remainder of this prophecy has only material meanings. With the fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel felt that the prophecies of his predecessors were a certainty; thus Jeremiah's prophecy regarding the "Northern barbarians," the Scythians, was converted into a prophecy of an attack against a restored Israel by "Gog," of the "Land of Magog." Now, there is such a people mentioned in Genesis 10:2, but there was no such people or land in Ezekiel's time. The name was used to refer secretly to Babylonia and a second invasion by that nation that was to occur at some future time. The account of God fighting personally alongside His people to destroy the invaders from the east gave the exiled Hebrews great satisfaction, while at the same time, the use of a name that could be understood only by students of the Scriptures prevented the Babylonians from understanding its true intent, and so gave no offense to them.

### *The Father of Judaism*

With a return to Jerusalem considered by Ezekiel to be a certainty, he felt the need to write out plans and specifications for the rebuilding of the temple. Some of these were a remodeling of Solomon's temple, but the outer courts and gates were to have a different layout. There was to be a temple area, isolated from Jerusalem itself and expressly designed for the prevention of any profanation, so that even the royal palace and the adjoining cemetery, which in the pre-exilic days stood close by, were to be eliminated. Various innovations were introduced: the Levites were given the menial tasks once performed by slaves, while the Zadokite priests of Jerusalem were placed in positions of superiority with respect to these Levites - priests of the rural areas whose worship had been characterized by their "impurities."

Ezekiel's emphasis, then, was on purity, in order to ensure Jehovah's eternal "residence" in the temple sanctuary; and an unfortunate result of this was the development of a strong emphasis on the ritual side of the nation's religious life. It is easy to see how Ezekiel's earlier priestly training and experience provided the background for this revised and refined, as well as very strict, ceremonial system. This ceremonial holiness, thought Ezekiel, would by its nature help to maintain the righteousness of the Hebrews in the restored Jerusalem of moral rectitude, with the "heart of flesh," given by Jehovah Himself, the means of keeping sin and transgression from "the elect."

So important was this concept of religious purity to Ezekiel, and so thoroughly was he convinced that this was the will of God, that he reported seeing the temple in a "vision," wherein he was (as he believed) carried to Jerusalem by an angel. It was because of these elaborate plans for the restored Jerusalem, intended to give assurance of Jehovah's eternal residence in the

temple (and resulting in its greatly increased importance in the ceremonial life of the people), that Ezekiel was given the title of "Father of Judaism."

*He Shall Be Their Shepherd*

*April-July 1963*

One of the reasons for Ezekiel's concern with the priesthood and its functions was his sense that the priests had not lived up to their duty to lead the people in the path of righteousness. This charge had been leveled against them before, and he believed it was one of the reasons why the Hebrew kingdoms had perished. But now, declared Ezekiel, Jehovah Himself would care for His own. The picture of the shepherd and his flock, aglow with the love which Jehovah has for His people, presents one of the most beautiful and significant passages in the Jewish religion, with the Messiah, spoken of here as the Lord's servant, David, lovingly seeking out, and feeding with eternal life, the sheep of the Heavenly Father's flock:

For thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Behold, I myself, even I, will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered abroad, so will I seek out my sheep; and I will deliver them out of all places whither they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them ... into their land, and I will feed them upon the mountains of Israel, by the watercourse, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture; and upon the mountains of the height of Israel shall

their fold be; they shall lie down in a good fold; and on fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountain of Israel. I myself will be the Shepherd of my sheep, and I shall cause them to lie down, saith the Lord Jehovah. I will seek that which is lost, and will bring back that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick . . . And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I, Jehovah, will be their God, and my servant David, prince among them. I, Jehovah, have spoken it.<sup>1</sup>

This passage had several meanings: To the exiled Hebrews of Babylonia, it meant the promise of a return to Israel, with God Himself preparing the way and ensuring a homeland protected by His zeal. But it also meant a homeland beyond the mortal life on earth; for to the pious Jew, "the mountain of Israel" meant a place of holiness out of this earth, and the pastures and water-courses signified the food and waters of eternal life. The 23rd Psalm, with its vision of future happiness in the life beyond, under God's protecting love, was inspired, as I have mentioned, by these words of Ezekiel. The passage was also a promise of the coming of the Messiah: restoration of Jerusalem was to take place through the workings of God Himself, but thereafter He would appoint a prince among them, His servant David, to be their shepherd.

In conclusion, I should like to mention that it was Ezekiel who brought full measure to the principle of individual responsibility which had previously been expounded by Jeremiah – an innocent

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel 34:11-24

son was not to be punished with a guilty father. This concept, though found in earlier scriptural passages,<sup>1</sup> was one which King David could never have agreed to, since in fact he often acted in a contrary manner. But the passing of 400 years had brought a greater understanding and acceptance of the concept of individual, rather than family or group, innocence or guilt.

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers 16:22, Deuteronomy 24:16

CHAPTER THIRTEEN  
*The Second Isaiah*

*July 15, 1963*

The Second Isaiah became the “voice of liberation” for the exiles in Babylonia at about the time of the rise of Cyrus of Persia, Prince of Anshan. As in previous times, when the voices of Israel’s prophets could be heard as great events were in the making (though usually voices of warning and admonition), so now the victorious campaigns of Cyrus against the Medes and Lydia convinced one of Israel’s great writers that another important moment was approaching for the Hebrew people: the end of the Babylonian exile.

Cyrus had made himself ruler in his own country, and began subdividing his neighbors, winning a great victory from Croesus of Lydia in 546 BC, and eventually making himself master of Babylonia from 542 to 529 BC. This Cyrus, whose name meant “sun” or “king,” has since been deeply respected and mentioned with something approaching awe by Jews everywhere, for he issued a proclamation permitting the exiled Hebrews to return to their own land in 537 BC. To the pious Jew, this sudden stroke of history in their favor seems to have been nothing less than the decision of the Lord to redeem His people from their exile.

But to those who were by then acclimated to the conditions in Babylonia, whose rulers had proved to be moderate in their dealings with the exiles, the proclamation by Cyrus was greeted with concern and perplexity. It meant upheaval, a difficult journey, and the barest of prospects for a people who, as a vast majority, knew only Babylonia as their home.

Almost 50 years had passed since the time of the great disaster, and so it was remembered only by the elders, and was

simply a tradition, if a most sorrowful one, among the others. The Hebrews had learned that they could continue to serve Jehovah in their adopted country, for they now believed that God was everywhere. And if His temple, or home, was in Jerusalem, He was accessible to them through their prayers at the synagogues which had sprung up in the new land to perpetuate the love and worship of their God.

For the Jews of the exile had not renounced their devotion to Jehovah. They believed that Israel had been brought to its knees before a pagan nation, not due to the weakness of their God, but because God had delivered them into the hands of that nation after they had broken the covenant of moral and ethical living which had bound them to Him.

In the foreign land, the Jews had sought to hold onto their religious and cultural heritage by teaching the young, and carrying out the precepts given to them by Moses. Israel, in its time of trouble and affliction, had turned once more to God. And if the nation could not claim to have found paradise on earth, yet its spiritual insight and understanding had been sharpened and clarified. A keen observer could note the higher plane on which Israel now lived. And so, this sudden event could indeed be interpreted as a sign that the God of Israel had willed that the period of "retribution" for Israel had been fulfilled, and that the time of redemption was at hand.

The Second Isaiah was born about the time of Ezekiel's death, and made his home in Babylon. His people, who were small traders in the Hebrew community of the capital, were devout Jews, and they provided Isaiah with all the necessary schooling in the Mosaic law and the prophets. The youth quickly showed an enthusiasm and love for the religion of his forebears, and early voiced his determination to become a leader in teaching his people the beauties of their heritage. Isaiah was deeply emotional in nature, and reacted to the world in terms of feeling and

poetry – and, as we shall see, his poetic license was sometimes used at the expense of truth and accuracy.

Isaiah's imagination was fired by Cyrus' spectacular victories, and he felt that this new "sun" in the political firmament foreshadowed a new day in the fortunes of the Jewish exiles. The Persian triumph was consummated when Cyrus' General Gobryas defeated Belshazzar, the son of the Babylonian King Nabuna'id,<sup>1</sup> in the battle of Opis in 539 BC, and entered the capital city, whose stronghold fell the following spring. Isaiah was present at this event, and saw the entourage of Cyrus parading through the procession street, along which the religious festivals usually made their way. Isaiah was highly impressed with Cyrus, and in his subsequent writings referred to the Persian leader as a messiah, appointed by God to liberate the exiles.

As a matter of fact, Cyrus was glad to have a friendly people indebted to him for his generous treatment of them, who would build up Jerusalem as a strong outpost for his far-flung empire. But regardless of Cyrus' motives, Isaiah felt that the time for Israel's redemption had come. He was not the recipient of any vision as had been reported by Ezekiel, but, having studied this prophet's writings, he was sure that the temple was soon going to be rebuilt, and that Cyrus' presence in Babylonia was proof.

### *The Messenger of Good Tidings*

July 21, 1963

Isaiah's writings, therefore, are replete with personal emotion, lyricism, and exultation that the day of redemption had at long last arrived. Isaiah called himself the "messenger of good tidings," and called for others as well to proclaim the good news to Zion: "On a high mountain get you up O heralds of good news to Zion! Lift up your voice with strength."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 555-538 BC; <sup>2</sup> Isaiah 40:9

Now, when I spoke in Palestine, I was also the bearer of “good tidings” – the redemption of the soul from sin unto everlasting life through the gift of God’s love which He had made available to humankind with my coming. I therefore felt that my cue in preaching of the Father’s love should be taken from the Second Isaiah, the preacher of redemption from exile and God’s “forgiveness” of Israel’s sinful past.

This sense of forgiveness was understandable, since Israel had indeed forsaken many of its former iniquities to renew its covenant with Him. This did not mean that Israel was free from sin, as Isaiah was well aware, but it did mean that a sincere effort had been made on the part of Israel to mend its ways – a fact which no doubt pleased the Heavenly Father, who was able, through His instrumentalities, to shape events leading to the liberation of the Hebrews.

Isaiah, as did Ezekiel, took this to mean that the Lord was doing this for His own sake.<sup>1</sup> The prophet himself made this plain in his poetry: “her warfare is accomplished, ... her iniquity is pardoned: for she has received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.”<sup>2</sup> By “warfare,” Isaiah meant Israel’s time of punishment. And again he declared: “Jacob was given for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers”<sup>3</sup> because they sinned against the Lord.

But with Cyrus’ might and magnanimity in dazzling array, Isaiah thought that the Persian leader must indeed be the “Lord’s anointed,” and as I have said, called him a messiah.<sup>4</sup> Also in Chapter 44, verse 28 he has God call him “my shepherd.” Now when Isaiah recited these verses in the synagogue, he was reminded quickly that only a son of the royal house of David could be the messiah, or the Lord’s “shepherd.” Isaiah explained that the use of the word shepherd was actually a play on words, so frequent in Hebrew, and which I myself was fond of. For while *Cyrus* means “sun,” in the analogous Cassite tongue it is *kuras*, which means “shepherd.”

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 43:25   <sup>2</sup> Isaiah 40:2   <sup>3</sup> Isaiah 42:24   <sup>4</sup> Isaiah 45:1

Isaiah also explained, in verses composed shortly thereafter, that the term “messiah” referred not to a spiritual leader, but to a material instrument of God, such as He had used to “punish” the people in days gone by. Cyrus was going to bring about God’s will of redemption from exile. Isaiah had God declare: “I have roused him up in victory, and I make level all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let mine exiles go free, not for price or reward, saith the Lord of hosts.”<sup>1</sup>

The redemption at hand was thus represented by Isaiah as the work of God, who commands and disposes at His will. He tried to emphasize the greatness of Jehovah to the people, who had seen the mighty armies of Babylonia, and then of Persia, serving gods of wood and iron. In Babylon they had watched the parades, learned the stories of the fertility goddess, the gods of the heavens and the dying deities, and seen the shrine of Tammuz. Isaiah therefore, on different occasions, emphasized the “nothingness” of the pagan gods, and the certainty of Jehovah as the one spiritual living God, with whom Israel had a covenant of righteous conduct, and who loved Israel with a love surpassing that of human understanding. As did Hosea before him, he had God to say:

But Zion says, “Jehovah has deserted me and the Lord has forgotten me.” Can a woman forget her baby, and not have pity on the child of her womb? Even if these shall forget, yet I will not forget thee. See, I have engraved thee on my palms, thy walls are constantly before me.<sup>2</sup>

Isaiah then delivered a powerful message of the Heavenly Father’s love – though we see that its truth was compromised by that age-old erroneous concept of an “angry” God:

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 45:13    <sup>2</sup> Isaiah 49:14-16

For like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit, has Jehovah called thee, and like a wife from youth when she is rejected, says thy God. For a small moment I forsook thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In quick anger I hid my face from thee for a moment. But with enduring love will I have compassion on thee, says thy vindicator, Jehovah. For like the days of Noah is this to me; in that I swore that the waters of Noah shall not again pass over the earth; so have I sworn not to be angry with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains may remove, and the hills may totter, but my love will not leave thee, nor will my covenant of peace waver; says Jehovah who has compassion on thee.<sup>1</sup>

Here was the Heavenly Father, proclaiming His love for “His people” (as of course He loves all His children, regardless of race, religion, or nationality). God sought their return to Him in the covenant of righteousness (walking humbly with Him and doing justly and mercifully), as He now seeks them in the covenant of divine love which became available to humankind with my coming.

### *The Servant Songs*

*July 1963*

A survey of the Second Isaiah’s writings brings us to the “Servant Songs,” which present a concept that was of major importance in shaping the basic doctrine of Christianity – the prototype of a faultless victim bearing the sins of humankind, and thereby securing its salvation. In view of their later significance, we will give these verses close attention, and will see that,

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 54:6-10

in spite of their beautiful poetry and inspiring spirit, they often convey a message which is not in accord with the reality of our loving Heavenly Father. For while I certainly can confirm that a faithful "servant of God" may encounter suffering in the course of that service, I want to take this opportunity to refute, in no uncertain terms, any implication of a punitive or wrathful God as the cause of these sufferings.

These Servant Songs must be distinguished from the *Song of Songs*, written in the days of King Solomon, wherein is depicted (in descriptive language that seems at times entirely too graphic for such a spiritual subject) God's love for Israel, under the guise of a man's love for his wife. You will remember that this also was Hosea's concept, except that Gomer was an erring wife, and Israel, God's "wife," had deserted Him for pagan deities.

This erring wife could be redeemed if she abandoned her lovers and returned to her spouse, and Israel could be redeemed if she gave up her sins and returned to God. This had been the theme, constant and insistent, of the subsequent prophets. They saw in Israel a "sinful wife" facing disaster unless she returned to the ordinances of the moral code which gave her spiritual union with her "husband." And when Jerusalem fell before Nebuchadnezzar, the prophets of the time felt that the predictions of Hosea, Amos, and the First Isaiah had been fulfilled, and that Israel, the wife, had been cast away for her sins. But Israel could be redeemed by a return to God, through the soul purification of its people.

Undoubtedly, a considerable improvement in the moral level of the exiles had taken place in Babylonia. The people more willingly accepted the teachings of the prophets, humbly endured their hardships as sojourners in a foreign land, and sought to become more ethical, living by the statutes of God, and retaining faith in Him. But even with these changes, the people still

fell well short of the level of righteousness called for by their prophets.

Jeremiah had been in despair because his admonitions and efforts as a prophet had been in vain. He wished he had never been born; he suffered immeasurably from the indifference of the people to his warnings, and their continued attachment to the material. His writings show with dramatic power that Jeremiah was indeed a "suffering servant of God," while seeking desperately to bring the people back to God, and while following what he perceived to be God's instructions.

Ezekiel, who experienced the exile at first hand, also called himself a "suffering servant of God." As a matter of fact, in the Book of Ezekiel, God purportedly lays upon the prophet the iniquity of the people of Israel, just as later, in the Second Isaiah, the iniquity of the people is laid upon the allegorical "suffering servant." I want to emphasize that Ezekiel's suffering was caused only by his own spiritual sensitivities, and by the suggestions of the various spirit forces which were influencing him at the time, not by any pronouncement from God.

In Chapter 4 of his book, God instructs Ezekiel to act out the besieging of Jerusalem, as a sign to the people of Israel to forgo their sinful behavior and pagan worship, and return to God in repentance and clear hearts. Ezekiel is instructed to lie first on one side, then on the other, for a certain number of days, each representing a year, during which time the prophet has "taken upon himself" the iniquity of the people. I thus show you that Ezekiel, on the "command" of God, took upon himself the sins of his people; and this is exactly what the Second Isaiah wrote in the Servant Songs. We read in Chapter 4, verses 4-6:

Moreover lie thou upon thy left side and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it; according to

the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon it, thou shalt bear their iniquity. For I have appointed the years of their iniquity to be unto thee a number of days, even 390 days; so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. And again, when thou hast accomplished these, thou shalt lie on thy right side, and shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah: 40 days, each day for a year, have I appointed thee.

We see, then, that the Second Isaiah had as justification for his use of the term “suffering servant of God” a passage from Ezekiel; and Ezekiel, of course, had as inspiration for his suffering servant one whom you already suspect: none other than Jeremiah.

But there is more to the Suffering Servant Songs than the identity of the suffering servant – and, as you will see, Isaiah “transformed” and enlarged upon this identity to meet the requirements of the changing times.

### *Religious Traditions of the Suffering Servant*

*July 1963*

In keeping with several prevailing religious traditions, it was conceived by Isaiah that this servant of God had to die in order for his noble deed (taking the sins of his people upon himself) to have an effect. In the Hebrew rite of atonement, a sacrificial goat became the sin offering, and, bearing the iniquity of the congregation, was sent out into the desert to die. Additionally, the Canaanite concept of a “dying god” and its relationship to agriculture was well-known to the Hebrews who came into possession of that country and acquired knowledge of its agricultural pursuits. This tradition portrayed the death of the god in autumn

and his rebirth in the spring, coinciding with harvest and planting times.

This “dying god” concept, as found here and in other Eastern lands, had a most important effect upon Christianity as it is now understood, and one early Greek writer of the gospels even had me to say: “Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”<sup>1</sup> I never said this, to be sure, but the intent behind this invention was to make early converts to Christianity feel that I was a god similar to their familiar pagan deities who experienced death and resurrection.

Among the exiles in Babylonia a similar trend was in vogue, leading to their assimilation of pagan practices. The Book of Ezekiel, Chapter 8, describes how an angel brought the prophet to Jerusalem, where at the entrance of the north gate of the temple women were worshipping Tammuz, the Babylonian god: “Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord’s house which was towards the north; and, behold, there sat the women weeping for Tammuz.”<sup>2</sup>

And so the Babylonian god Tammuz was well-known in Jerusalem, and even worshiped by some Hebrews in the temple itself; and his cult was very well understood, if not in some cases actually adhered to, among the Jews in Babylonia. A series of songs, therefore, combining a “scapegoat prophet” of Jehovah (who in these songs also symbolized the Hebrew nation itself) and a propitiatory dying god, Tammuz, were quite acceptable as a prophet’s message to the Hebrews in exile.

Now Tammuz, like other gods of this type, conformed to the Egyptian Osiris-Isis legend, differing in some unimportant details. He was Sumerian and Assyrian, as well as Babylonian, and represented the yearly cycle which brought the withering and reviving of vegetation. Tammuz, brother and lover of Ishtar,

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<sup>1</sup> John 12:24    <sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 8:14

the heaven and earth goddess, descended each year into the underworld, and then was brought back to earth by Ishtar for a season, during which time flocks and plants flourished. During the time of his annual death, descent, and sojourn into the netherworld (which naturally began in the heat and drought of mid-summer, and continued until spring rains brought a renewal of plant life) there took place the religious "wailing for Tammuz," conducted by a priestess of Ishtar and her women devotees, as mentioned by Ezekiel.

There were inconsistencies in the relationship of Ishtar to Tammuz, some cultists calling her "sister," others "mother," and also "lovers," inasmuch as it was Tammuz's fecundation of the earth that brought the growth and harvest, and, like Osiris, he was slain or drowned in the water. At the New Year celebration at Babylon, corresponding to September, the god Marduk, identified with Tammuz, was slain, descended into the underworld, was brought back by Ishtar (here regarded as mother), and proceeded to come forth from a sepulcher to bring life to the world. I am quite aware that all this has a fairly close analogy with Christianity as it is now taught, and is one of the important reasons why this Christianity spread so quickly among the pagan peoples, who readily accepted a theology so similar to their own.

The foregoing, in a brief way, presents a background to these Servant Songs. Isaiah blended the role of the Hebrew prophet – a suffering servant of God who "took on" the sins of the people – with the role of a pagan god, annually dying and being *resurrected* to bring renewed life to earth.

This concept of resurrection seemed appropriate, for as Isaiah continued to write these prophecies under the impact of King Cyrus' decree permitting the exiles to return to Jerusalem, and with the exultation that the Lord had finally redeemed his people, he felt that the Hebrew people, exiled into a strange land and now returning home, were much like the god

Tammuz, resurrected to earth after his stay in the netherworld. Isaiah incorporated this resurrection theme into his portrayal of the Suffering Servant, who symbolically personified this redeemed portion of the people of Israel.

*I Have Put My Spirit Upon Him*

July 1963

The Second Isaiah considered that Cyrus, a pagan, was an instrument of God's will on earth to release the Jews, just as the Assyrians and Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian were His instruments to chastise His people for their backsliding. In short, Isaiah affirmed that "the God of Israel" was the only God, the universal God of all people and all nations. In reaffirming Cyrus as the "messiah," God said through Isaiah: "I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded. I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will make strait all his ways."<sup>1</sup>

And again, God "spoke": "There is none beside me. I am Jehovah, and there is none else ... Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else. ... the word is gone from my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return; that unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear."<sup>2</sup>

The earth itself, in the fullness of time, would decay, as would all material things, to be rebuilt and regrouped into other transitory forms, but God and His salvation would remain forever: "for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die like gnats; but my salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished."<sup>3</sup>

Now the Hebrews could also be considered as instruments of God, through whom knowledge of Him was to be given to the rest of the world. This was evidenced in the history of a people

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 45:12-13    <sup>2</sup> Isaiah 45:6, 22    <sup>3</sup> Isaiah 51:6

who, in a relatively consistent fashion, had accepted and sought knowledge of God, and who even in their darkest days of defeat retained their faith in Him. And thus it was that the Hebrew nation could collectively be called “servant of the Lord,” with the mission of bringing knowledge of God, and eventually knowledge of the salvation of His divine love, to the world.

The Second Isaiah then, with unsurpassed insight, wrote his four Servant Songs, portraying Israel, the “Suffering Servant of God,” as a people called to bring a knowledge of God to the nations, regardless of suffering entailed – just as the prophets, especially Jeremiah and Ezekiel, suffered and “took upon themselves” the iniquities of the uncomprehending people.

These Servant Songs are four in number, and I am going to analyze each in the light of the background I have given. The first is in Second Isaiah, Chapter 42:1-4:

Behold, my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him; he shall make the right to go forth to the nations. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the dimly burning wick shall he not quench. He shall make the right to go forth according to the truth; he shall not fail nor be crushed, till he has set the right in the earth; and the isles shall wait for his teachings.

This passage attracted the quick notice of copyists seeking any relationship between the Christ and Old Testament prophecy, in order to show fulfillment of the Scriptures in my coming. Here they underlined “I have put my spirit upon him,” which they thought must refer to me, but which actually referred back to the

great words in Jeremiah foretelling the new covenant. It meant that, since the Hebrews were being permitted to return to Jerusalem, they were “redeemed” of the Lord, and (as Isaiah thought) the prophecy of the heart of flesh had been fulfilled. They would return without sin and teach knowledge of God to the nations.

The description of a servant so peaceable that he would not break a bruised reed or blow out a lighted candle was thought by the Christian writers to refer to me, in that I offered no resistance to arrest, but actually this was meant to describe the people of Israel when possessed by the “spirit of God.” And here again, Isaiah had in mind Jeremiah as his model for a people redeemed from sin by the spirit of God.

The prophet ended with the statement that this servant/nation would not fail or be crushed before bringing the truth into the world. This of course could have referred to me, as bringing to light the divine love of the Father, but it also referred to the promise of God’s love that had already been brought to humankind by Jeremiah, prior to his death.

### *How Beautiful Upon the Mountains*

*July 1963*

The second song is found in Isaiah 49:1-6: “The Lord hath called me from the womb, from the bowels of my mother hath He made mention my name; and He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand hath He hid me ... And He said unto me: ‘Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.’ ”

The meaning here is that God had selected Israel to make known His name and worship from the ancient times, when Abraham came to Palestine and when the Hibri tribes were nomads in the desert. The language here is, of course, very figurative and employed by other prophets with the same intent.

In the third song, God Himself “speaks”: “Behold, my servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and extolled. Many were astonished at him because his face was so marred, it was no longer like that of a man. Therefore many nations will marvel; kings will keep quiet before him, for what had not been told them, they shall see, and shall consider what they had not heard.”<sup>1</sup>

This did not refer to the Christ, the Messiah stricken on the cross, as orthodox Christians have been taught to believe, but to the people of Israel who, in the words of the Lord envisioned by Isaiah, would be so transformed from the suffering, woebegone, desolate image presented by the Babylonian captivity that many nations would be startled by the great change wrought by God in their return to their homeland, and even kings would be dumbfounded by the transfiguration. That this is so may be seen more clearly from Chapter 51, verses 17-23:

Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of His fury . . . hear now this, thou afflicted . . . thus saith the Lord and thy God that pleadeth the cause of His people; Behold I have taken out of thy hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again.

And following this, in Chapter 52, verse 7, is that magnificent passage, which thrilled my heart, beginning:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publishes peace [love], that bringeth good tidings of good [soul satisfaction], that publishes salvation; that saith unto Zion, thy God reigneth!

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 52:13-15

So you see that the third Servant Song refers to Israel, the people, the return to Jerusalem, and redemption through God's love.

### *A Lamb Led to Slaughter*

The most controversial of these Servant Songs is the extraordinary Chapter 53, which I wish to explain in detail. The chapter begins: "Who hath believed our report? [what we heard], and to whom was the arm of God revealed?"

The meaning is: who could believe the report that Cyrus had permitted repatriation of the Hebrews? And to whom did God reveal His arms (give military power) in order to liberate them? Not even to the Jews themselves, but to Cyrus.

The chapter continues – and here we have Isaiah expressing the astonishment of the Babylonians themselves, who, as I now interpret the poetry, declare:

For Israel grew up before his God a tender plant,  
and as a root out of dry ground. Israel had no  
beauty or culture, that we Babylonians should be  
attracted to him. He was despised and forsaken by  
other nations [weak vassals to our might], a nation  
ailing and feeble and acquainted with sickness in  
body. And as one from whom others hide their  
face, he was despised, and we in our own power  
had no use for this weakling.

In short, to the Chaldeans, Israel was a weak herb, planted by its god without a proper firmness to withstand storms and adversity. It had no strong virility, neither works of art (because the Hebrews were forbidden to make graven images) nor archi-

ture (because of its enslaved position). Without government or army of its own, it was weak and diseased in structure as a nation, and therefore the other nations looked at this beaten Israel with scorn. It was forsaken by the other countries of that area of the world, and suffered because of its position as an out-cast among nations.

Isaiah then goes on to have the Babylonians explain the meaning of Israel's suffering; though as a poet he inherited from Ezekiel the art of projection, and so these verses can be interpreted to mean several different things at the same time. Isaiah accomplished this multi-layered imagery by deliberately refraining from identifying the subject. Therefore it is possible to regard the verses below not only from a Chaldean point of view, but also from a wider historical perspective, referring to the Hebrew people. And further, the "stricken one" can also refer to the "scapegoat prophet," whom we can identify not as one single person, but as a combination of Ezekiel, in a figurative sense, and as Jeremiah, from the standpoint of actual suffering.

Never did the Second Isaiah have any intent of portraying an actual Messiah, atoning for the sins of his people through a redemptive death; his thoughts were on the religious rites of the Babylonians, who, as the "speakers" of the following lines, interpreted the suffering Israel in accordance with their own religious beliefs in a dying and resurrected fertility deity:

Surely he [Israel, or the suffering prophet] has borne our sicknesses, and carried our sufferings, while we esteemed him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his

own way; and Jehovah laid upon him the punishment of us all.

Here Isaiah, as he has told me, had in mind the sins, oppressions, and barbarisms, not only of his own days, but all those that had attended the slow course of history. He felt that, although Israel had surely sinned (as the Scriptures made clear), yet the ritual slaughter of children and other inhuman behavior among the neighboring tribes, which had called forth so many invectives from the prophets, was a record of positive fact of which Jehovah must be aware, and which surely had to be punished. And who should be punished, reasoned Isaiah, but one who knew God, and had therefore less excuse for iniquity – i.e. Israel (or, if I interpret the subject as the “scapegoat-prophet,” one who knew God more than the “laypeople”).

Thus in these verses Isaiah makes the Babylonians have a sense of their own sins and moral failings, realizing that Israel had received the “punishment” of God for the sins which they and other pagan nations had committed. Isaiah then elevates to a moral plane the agricultural rites connected with the god Tammuz, and makes the innocent suffer for the guilty in a sort of vicarious atonement quite at home with the pagan concept of the dying god, and at the same time evoking an emotional response in Hebrews familiar with Ezekiel’s writings and Jeremiah’s sufferings.

The prophet, once having combined these elements, now stresses the humiliation and death of the “nation/prophet” along traditional Babylonian lines:

He was oppressed, yet he humbled himself, and  
opened not his mouth, as a lamb is led to the  
slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers is  
dumb. He was taken from prison and from

judgment, and who shall declare his generation?  
For he was cut off from the land of the living, for  
the transgressions of my people was he stricken.  
And they made his grave with the wicked, and with  
evildoers his mound, although he had done no  
violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.<sup>1</sup>

These words are noteworthy: first, from a literary perspective, in that they form inspired religious poetry, depicting the punishment of the scapegoat nation/prophet preceding redemption, and containing a high emotional appeal; and second, because many Christians regard these verses as prophetic, seeming to point to the Christ to come. I am interested in explaining the source and composition of these verses to show they did not refer to me in any way, but followed a line of thought resulting from Israel's sorrowful situation as exiles in the land of the Babylonian overlords.

Given the concept of a nation/prophet as scapegoat, taking upon it/himself the sins of others (which is, as I have already shown, purely Hebrew in concept), the Second Isaiah sought the locale and circumstances of this sacrifice in the actual Babylonian religious experience: In the early pagan spring festival, or Sacaea, the god Marduk and the fertility goddess Ishtar triumphed over the forms of death represented by the autumn-winter seasons; and this same tradition characterized the cult of Tammuz. In very ancient times this triumph was sometimes "brought about" through the actual death of the king; and his offspring, his son, would reign in his stead with his revitalizing youth. This spectacle gradually evolved into a festival play, first in which a son died instead of the king, and later wherein a criminal, condemned to death, was taken from prison to enact the role of the king, and was actually mocked, scourged, and then put to death in this bloody pagan sacrifice.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 53:7-9

This spectacle was repeated yearly in the spring, and the Hebrew prophet, as well as the Hebrew community in Babylon, was intensely aware of this barbarous practice. Thus the verses just cited referred to this festival of Sacaea. The sacrificed criminal, who died in place of the king's son to bring life again to the fields and food for the people, was blended with the image of the Hebrew nation/prophet, dying to bring life again to the nation and to all peoples, through the redemptive action, as Isaiah thought, of this "suffering servant."

I repeat that Christians traditionally have thought this to refer to me, and they have eagerly seized upon such details as the "lamb led to slaughter," and others which have been exhaustively "explained" in their books of theology. But let me disabuse them once again that I am not a "dying god" of the Babylonian, Christian, or any other sect, come to take away the sins of humankind with my dried-up blood; but rather Jesus, the Messiah, come to make available to humankind the eternal life of the soul through prayer to the Heavenly Father for His love.

*I Will Give Thee as a Light*

July 1963

According to the King James version, the Second Isaiah says in Chapter 53:8: "He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off from the land of the living, for the transgressions of my people was he stricken."

However, this translation is not accurate, and the meaning should be as follows: By an oppressive judgment he was taken away; and who took notice of his fate, that he was cut off from the land of the living, and for our transgressions smitten unto death?

Here Isaiah had in mind one prophet: Jeremiah, and the sufferings, in spite of his innocence, which he endured before his

death. And of course, he also had in mind Israel, whose destruction by Babylonia meant nothing in the eyes of the pagan world, and which had died as a nation, although its moral development, at least among many of its people, was superior to that of the neighboring nations who had been "permitted" to survive and wreak judgment upon it.

But this, asserted Isaiah, was done according to divine plan. Who but a more moral and ethical Israel could set a higher standard for the pagans, and show them the way to God and His statutes of morality, of justice and mercy? For that reason had Israel found "his grave with the wicked ... although he had done no violence."

The meaning of verses 10 and 11 are also somewhat veiled in the King James version; and if we take them at face value, they express a grievous untruth - that God wills His children to suffer:

Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; He hath put him to grief. When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.<sup>1</sup>

If we attempt to uncover the underlying truth in these words, it might expressed like this:

Yet in his heart, it was the humble desire of the nation/prophet to do God's will, and because of this, he placed himself under the purview of, and in service of, God's higher forces and

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 53:10-11

laws. As a result, he derived strength and protection from these forces, and at the same time served as a teacher and wayshower of these laws, even as he was forced to bear the scorn and abuse of those whom he taught and led.

I will continue with Chapter 53, verse 12: "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors: yet he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

Isaiah has told me that here he was writing poetry, not prose, and so his meaning had to be fitted into a poetic pattern, and that the translations that have been rendered do not give the meaning he meant to convey. Where the translation reads: "he was numbered with the transgressors," it means that Israel was considered such by Nebuchadnezzar, and that Jeremiah was considered a transgressor by the royal circle, and also by the Egyptians. The words "made intercession for the transgressors" did not mean that Israel was praying to God that the sins of evil-doing nations be pardoned, but that Israel would show other nations the way to right living before God. Isaiah tells me that the words quoted above should thus read: "he brought religious enlightenment to the transgressors, showing them the way to God."

That this is the true meaning of the prophet's poetry is shown by this similar passage:

And now the Lord did say; He that formed me  
from the womb to be His servant: that He would  
bring Jacob again to Him, and Israel should be  
gathered unto Him, for I [the nation/prophet] am  
honorable in His eyes, and my God has become  
my strength; and He said, it is not enough that  
you should raise up of the tribes of Jacob and

restore the preserved of Israel; so I will give thee as a light to the Gentiles, that my salvation may be to the ends of the earth.<sup>1</sup>

From these lines I realized, before I began my mission, that God's love was prophesied to be for all people who seek His salvation. God, through His servant Israel, was to be made known to all people, first through Israel's example of righteousness and moral living, and then through my example of a soul transformed by His divine love and mercy.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 49:5-6

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

*The Third Isaiah*

*April 1, 1964*

The trek to Jerusalem, in the days of the Second Isaiah, did not happen as the prophet would have liked: a triumphant march back to the land of Israel, with song and cheer, and a great multitude giving thanks to God for His redemption of the land, and the redemption of the people from sin. The return to Jerusalem was a slow trickle, undertaken by some of the young, the pioneers in spirit, and a few of the elders whose religious zeal was so great that hardship and death on the sacred soil of Israel were preferable to life in an alien land given to paganism and abomination. The voice of the Second Isaiah, then, diminished in its loudness and exultation: not all of the people, thus, would be redeemed; only that remnant that returned to the "holy land" and was redeemed by faith in the Lord and love for their homeland - a homeland which of course the Hebrews considered to have been given them by God as His promise to His "chosen people."

The Third Isaiah was called so because he continued the plea of his predecessor for the return to Jerusalem from Babylon. With the same great faith in God, this "Isaiah" was a young man who felt that, then more than ever, a renewed voice of thanksgiving unto the Lord for His shaping of events in favor of the Hebrews was necessary - the disappointment of the Second Isaiah must not be the final word on the return to Jerusalem. A new voice, powerful and triumphant, must go forth in the name of the Lord of Hosts once more to the people, encouraging them to forgo their Babylonian living and return to the "land of Jehovah." The

Third Isaiah therefore modeled his style on that of the Second Isaiah wherever he could, and it is this that causes many students of the Isaiah group of writings to believe that there were only two Isaiahs.

The Third Isaiah, like the second, felt that those who had gone to Jerusalem, or were planning to go, were the "righteous remnant." His message, therefore, was to the "unredeemed" bulk of the people who were loath to give up home and livelihood in Babylon, to plod their way back over a vast desert to a land in ruins and with little means of subsistence. The new Isaiah felt that this reluctance was a transgression against God, who had clearly made known His will for the Hebrews: He had created a "miracle" to make possible their return to His holy land of Israel, and they who sought not to obey this will were sinful.

The prophet, therefore, turned to them in the spirit of the older prophets, exhorting the people to forgo their sins and turn to the Lord, and much of the subject matter reads like the earlier prophets' diatribes on the transgressions of the people. But the righteousness of the Lord would triumph in the end, declared Isaiah, and not only would the people return to Jerusalem, but the Gentiles would finally acknowledge the one true God, throw away their ways of abomination, and come to Jerusalem to worship at the shrine of the eternal God of soul and universe.

The voice of the new prophet rings out in Chapter 55, with the theme of a return to the Lord, and salvation. In my day in Jerusalem, I was very much impressed with these opening lines, and in my own sermons used the imagery of thirst and hunger to represent the soul's longings for salvation:<sup>1</sup>

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the  
waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy

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<sup>1</sup> John 7:37

and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk and honey without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not the bread of life? And your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in rich nourishment. Incline your ear, and come unto me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I shall make a covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.<sup>1</sup>

Here, of course “David” meant the person who should be the Christ, and his “mercies” meant God’s redeeming love, as revealed by the Messiah of God.

The Third Isaiah did not know exactly what the “mercies of David” meant, but he wrote this knowing that it did not refer to the historical person, King David; and he felt that the phrase, though often used by the prophets, had a connotation far beyond its original meaning, referring in some way to the redemptive power of God through His agent on earth.

*The Acceptable Year of the Lord*

*September 1, 1964*

I recited the lines of Isaiah 61 in my sermon delivered in the synagogue in Nazareth:

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek. He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 55:1-3

that are bound, to proclaim the acceptable year  
of the Lord ... to comfort all that mourn ... in  
Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil  
of joy for mourning.

These lines of the Third Isaiah had a tremendous impact on those who first heard his discourse. They suggested that an entirely new dispensation was at hand, and that the old defeats, frustrations, and proneness to sin were to be washed away in God's waters of oblivion. It was a discourse meant primarily in the physical sense: the people were to be free, proud in the assumption of their heritage on earth – the land of Israel – to be followed by miracles of binding up physical wounds as well as moral smarting. The mourning and the ashes of death and destruction resulting from the loss of the temple would disappear before the glorious rebirth of God's house on Mount Moriah, and the joys and exultation which worship there would give to His people.

When I spoke to my townspeople in Nazareth, I also used these lines of the Third Isaiah's magnificent poetry to indicate a new dispensation – not in the physical sense, but in the soul sense, referring to the availability of the Father's love to all those who should seek it in prayer. I knew that this love could figuratively "break the chains," and *spiritually* overcome the misery of the Roman occupation – for, in the face of their subjugation by the Roman overlords, "liberty to the captives" could not mean the same thing for the people who heard me as for the populace who first heard these words 600 years earlier.

The Jews of Babylonia who received Isaiah's preachings were settled in the homeland of their conquerors, treated tolerably, wanting to remain where they could make their livelihood; while the Jews of Israel of my time, living under the lash of the Romans, were extremely sensitive, taut to the breaking point,

over anything that infringed the sovereignty of their Jewish homeland – promised again to them through the Third Isaiah. The Jews who heard my words of “good tidings” were dedicated more to the violent expulsion of the Romans than to the proposition of overcoming through love. In the light of their grim experiences with the Roman overlords, most simply could not understand my spiritually-based message.

The sermons of the Third Isaiah, then, dealt very much with the physical “New Jerusalem,” and the glory of the land which God had given to His people. They emphasized the forgiveness of God towards His erring people, His command to go forth and inhabit the land of Israel, the joys of the redeemed who would go there, and the promise of prosperity, happiness, and peace in the land.

In Chapter 66 God asks: “Where is the house that ye build unto me?” And later Isaiah writes: “a voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of the Lord that rendereth recompense to His enemies.”<sup>1</sup> By the time the Third Isaiah stopped writing, something in the way of a beginning was astir to restore the temple, and an effort had been made to create housing in the demolished city. The mood was one of rebuilding, restoration, and faith that God’s “house” would be erected solidly, and under His loving protection. This indeed was to come to pass, as would the continued efforts towards righteous living for centuries under the Second Temple.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 66:6

*CHAPTER FIFTEEN**Haggai**July 1, 1965*

The Third Isaiah had sought to encourage the return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple in the same way as his predecessor, saying that a miracle of God, through Cyrus, had given the Hebrew people this opportunity, and that, through an "acceptable year of the Lord," God had forgiven the trespasses of His people, and was setting them up as an example to the Gentiles.

However, between the time of the initial return of some of the people in 537 BC, and 520 BC, when Haggai and Zechariah spoke out for the rebuilding of the temple, upheavals over a great area of the East had gradually remolded the ideal of the temple from a purely religious image into a religious-political one: the temple must be the religious center, not of a small, isolated corner of the Persian empire, but of an independent Hebrew state.

The reason for this change in thinking, as in the past, lay in the historical events of the time, as Darius Hystapes, the Persian king, became preoccupied with putting down rebellions all over his country, and subjected areas began to entertain thoughts of independence. It is noticeable in Hebrew prophecy that "spokesmen for God" arose most frequently in response to political disturbances affecting the Hebrew people; and thus it was that when the rumors of troubles for King Darius Hystapes reached the Hebrews, Haggai made known his appeal for the building of the temple, delivered as "the word of God."

Haggai was the first of the three prophets, including Zechariah and Malachi, who dealt with the period of the restoration of the temple. This became known as the Second, or Zerubbabel's

Temple, and lasted for hundreds of years, in fact until Herod began the construction of a new temple in my day, 19 BC.

Between 537 and 520 BC, little or nothing had been done with the temple, the fifty thousand people who returned to Jerusalem being very much concerned with the work of bringing the land to fertility, which continued to be poor and undesirable compared with the productive lands of Babylonia. They were also concerned with maintaining peace with the Samaritans, their neighbors to the north, with whom some intermarriage was taking place, and who opposed the construction of the Second Temple. The Samaritans obtained a ruling from the Persian monarch, bringing the work of construction to a halt.

With the people impoverished, frustrations and disappointments emphasized the unfulfillment of the glorious prophecies of the previous prophets. Additional hardships were brought about by drought and crop failures, and in this soreness of distress, where hindrances from God seemed contrary to the promises of help He had assured them, Haggai came to them with a message of explanation. God was not with them, he said, because His "house" had not been rebuilt.

Of course you realize that God does not require a physical temple in order to be "present" amongst a people, and that what Haggai was calling attention to was the lack of spiritual focus among the people. In Haggai's mind, this focus had to be created, or at least evidenced by something physical: the temple.

Let me also explain here that the extreme orthodox sect of the religion proved a discouraging factor in the desire of the people to restore the temple, as, with meticulous arguments, they sought to show that the time for restoration had not yet come. They based this interpretation on Jeremiah's statement of "seventy years,"<sup>1</sup> which would have brought the earliest year of construction to 516 BC. But if we were to engage in interpretive hair-splitting, and consider as a basis for this prophecy King

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 25:12 "...and these nations shall serve the King of Babylon seventy years."

Jehoiakim's surrender of Jerusalem in 597 BC, and the following deportation of the Hebrew leaders, then the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy becomes the year 527 BC.

Regardless of which interpretation is correct, I must point out that the will to act and the desire to do what is right in the sight of God are far more important than such sterile subtleties and dissipation of energy in the name of piety. God's "Word" is eternal and therefore "elastic" as it covers all the ages of man, until the time when man may exist no longer on earth. And so, man must make interpretations that are applicable to and satisfy the new conditions, which constantly change with the generations.

Traditional Christians of many, many centuries have allowed their religion to become crystallized into molds no longer useful or satisfactory to the conditions of life as they continue to unfold; and many are ready, or will at least be inclined to hear the gospel of the *new birth* which I am once again "bringing to earth" for the salvation of humankind.

Haggai was a true prophet who gave voice to a higher level of spiritual insight, explaining that the exigencies of the times were more important than mathematical exactitude, and that the faith and fate of the Jewish pioneers were more precious to God than Jeremiah's numerical approximations (for these they were, and nothing more). Haggai's insight, and his assurance that God was with him, brought a great reversal in attitude – a miracle, so to speak – and the temple was completed within a remarkably short period of three months.

Who, then, was this prophet Haggai, and what did he say that so inspired the disheartened dwellers of Jerusalem? To begin with, Haggai was born in Jerusalem, and remembered the temple in the days before its destruction. He was taken to Babylonia, where he was raised as a tiller of the soil, but he was also a great lover of the old prophets and a man strong in the faith of the Hebrew religion. When the call was made in 537 BC to return to

Jerusalem, Haggai answered the appeal within a few years. Even though at that time a man over fifty years of age, Haggai endured all the hardships of the return to that comparatively sterile land, which he sought with much earnestness to bring back to productivity.

Haggai was not of the priestly class; rather was he of the world of the prophets, seeking spirit and life instead of form and formula. At the same time, Haggai was endowed with a sense of order, and felt that a leader from the house of David, Zerubbabel by name, would help reestablish the faith and spirituality of the people of Jerusalem.

The Book of Haggai is short, containing four exhortations. The first of these urged the people to begin work immediately on the restoration of God's temple in Jerusalem. This was an appeal that took place in the sixth month (named Elul in the later Hebrew calendar) of Darius' second year as king; therefore, in the autumn of 520 BC. On the first day of this month Haggai went to the foundations of the temple, and there spoke to a gathering of people who were accustomed to visit there on the Sabbath and the new moon. The talk was designed to reach the ears of Zerubbabel ben Shaltiel, governor of Judea, and those of Jeshua, the high priest, whose family dated back to the high priesthood of pre-exilic days. Zerubbabel, also referred to in Ezra 1:8 as "Sheshbazzar, prince of Judah," was grandson of Jehoiakim, the Hebrew king who had been taken to Babylonia.

Addressing these two as the secular and religious heads of the people, with a faithful audience, Haggai flatly declared in the name of God that the cause of their impoverishment and difficulties arose from neglect of, and indifference to, rebuilding God's house. "Is it time for yourselves to dwell in your ceiling houses, while this house lieth waste?"<sup>1</sup> God's favor would wait for the restoration of the temple, he said – the drought and scarcity being visible manifestations of His displeasure at not being able to have

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<sup>1</sup> Haggai 1:4

His house in Jerusalem. Three weeks later, the two leaders and the people were cleaning up the debris, gathering wood from the hill country, and beginning the restoration of the temple, as Haggai assured them: "I am with you, saith the Lord."<sup>1</sup>

In Chapter 2, Haggai contended with another problem. Construction had gone on for about a month, and the workers realized that the new temple would be far inferior to the splendor of Solomon's temple. A few of the old people still remembered the magnificence of this structure before its destruction sixty-six years before. The discouraged builders needed a new stimulus, and Haggai, emphasizing that the spirit of God was with them, declared that no fear need be had over lack of magnificence:

For thus saith the Lord of Hosts: Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth ... and I will shake all nations, and the choicest things of all nations shall come, and I shall fill this house with glory ... Mine is the silver and mine is the gold.<sup>2</sup>

In the five hundred or so years to the time of my coming as the Messiah, the temple acquired vast treasures, not through a stripping or despoiling of other nations, as Haggai thought and so declared in order to infuse his fellowman with needed confidence, but through patient acquisition of the world's goods.

### *The Laws of Love*

*July 1, 1965*

When we look back at the work of Haggai, two of his strengths catch our attention: first, his ability to infuse faith and stir people to action; and second, his insight into the problem of a fixed law covering thousands of years. He rightly felt that the essential

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<sup>1</sup> Haggai 1:13    <sup>2</sup> Haggai 2:6-8

truths of God were immutable – the principles of the “golden rule” and love for God remaining untouchable – but that since material conditions change, amendments to the Jewish law were necessary to meet those changes.

These two conceptions of a fixed versus a pliant interpretation of Hebrew law caused a cleavage in the people, as was later evidenced in the divergent views of the Sadducees, the conservatives, and the Pharisees, or moderates. The Pharisees believed in an oral law to supplement and modernize the old statutes, which had become crystallized into something unworkable, causing frustrations and burdens for those who sought to adhere to them. For example, when Moses proclaimed the Ten Commandments, he declared against adultery by married women because the latter were considered the *chattel* of their husbands, and the attitude was that such “property” used by someone else constituted a crime against the “owner” of this property. This was the original meaning of the seventh commandment, and it was only many centuries later that a higher view – that adultery was a violation against one’s vows of love and fidelity – developed to supersede the earlier economic attitude towards women.

And in more recent days, where this commandment is broken, it is often recognized that the “violation” was not so much the breaking of this vow, as it was the insincere marriage, in which one or both parties did not really love, but married for other motives. And thus, adultery has evolved from an economic crime punishable by death, to a religious one characterized by divorce, to an indictment of a marriage institution which does not safeguard against loveless marriages; i.e., unions for sexual expression only, or based upon other unworthy motives. Here then is one example of how laws, and attitudes towards them, have changed with the passing of time, bringing a realization that they cannot be set in a rigid mold.

When I preached in the holy land, I had discussions of this nature with opponents of the elastic concept of law (the Sadducees), who argued not in the vicious or venomous vein that one reads in the New Testament, but in the atmosphere that so often prevails where the views held are very precious and important to each. Thus, I healed on the Sabbath, and even helped a mule out of a hole, to the consternation of those who set their store by rigid rules. I contended that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath, putting life first, as God intended. Thus you see that, in so doing, I was not going outside Hebrew law, as some commentators believe, or even bringing a new, God-given revelation to humankind, as some Christians would like to think; but I was following and agreeing with the insight of Haggai, prime mover in the rebuilding of the temple, and Hebrew prophet *par excellence*. And I was also in agreement with a great number of the Pharisaic membership, whose liberal views regarding the interpretation of the laws made of me a sympathizer with their outlook.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### *Zechariah*

*September 7, 1965*

The name of Zechariah is usually associated with Haggai, for two months after the latter spoke forth for the rebuilding of the temple, the former made his appeal for the same purpose. But Zechariah, unlike Haggai, was a young man when his call to prophesy came, and his approach and attitude were very dissimilar. His prophecies, which accompanied the progress in the temple construction, looked forward to the realization of great days for the Jewish people and their religion of love for God and purity of soul.

Zechariah was born in exile, the son of Berechiah the priest, and grandson of Iddo, who had some reputation as a seer or prophet himself. His name, meaning "Jehovah's Memorial," was well suited to this young man, as he was one who would call the people to a remembrance of God's laws and requisites.

Zechariah was not interested in the dark days of Israel's past. He felt that, with the Jews once more in the holy land of Israel – a miracle of God in its own right – the future would be bright and resplendent. Therefore, Zechariah dreamed dreams in the night. These dreams were personal in nature, which the prophet then interpreted and presented as messages for the people. These visions served as an inspiration for the apocalyptic literature of Daniel and John, centuries later;<sup>1</sup> but, despite their mysterious and dramatic imagery, they in fact dealt with relatively mundane subjects, concerning conditions and events of his time.

In Chapter 6:9-15, Zechariah reported to have received a command from God Himself. Here the prophet was not in a

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<sup>1</sup> Many believe the book of Daniel to have been written in the second century BC.

visionary state; it was morning. A delegation of Jews still living in Babylon had arrived in Jerusalem bearing gold and silver as an offering for the work of restoring the temple. The prophet was instructed to go that same day to the house of Josiah, where the metal was deposited, and to make two crowns: one of silver for Josiah the high priest, and the other of gold for Zerubbabel. The prophet was ordered to tell the high priest:

Thus speaketh the Lord of Hosts, saying: behold, a man whose name is the Shoot, and who shall shoot up out of his place, and build the temple of the Lord; even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and there shall be a priest before his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both. And the crowns shall be ... as a memorial in the temple of the Lord. And they that are far off shall come and build in the temple of the Lord, and ye shall know that the Lord of Hosts hath sent me unto you. And it shall come to pass, if ye will diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord your God.<sup>1</sup>

Zechariah, it should be mentioned, was an artisan, a worker in metals, and so was very capable of carrying out God's "command" with respect to the two crowns.

The "shoot," of course, was Zerubbabel, and this gives an insight into the prophet's concept of the messiah, which was typical for that period in Israel's history. The messiah was to be an earthly king of an independent nation, and the religious affairs were to be in the hands of the high priest, Josiah. We see then that Zechariah's vision of the messiah was purely that of a material ruler, lacking the soul or spiritual qualities even of

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<sup>1</sup> Zechariah 6:12-15

King David. We may also note that this prophecy was not to be fulfilled, as the Persians had Zerubbabel removed from political power, and Israel was not to become an independent nation until the time of the Maccabean struggle more than three hundred years later.

In the year 518 BC, a delegation from Babylon inquired as to whether the day commemorating the fall of the temple should be retained as a holiday, and the question was referred to Zechariah in the belief that the prophet could obtain an answer from God. Zechariah stated that the people had not fasted on that day, nor on the day which commemorated the assassination of Gedaliah, the governor of Jerusalem. However, declared the prophet, the Lord was not concerned with fasting, but with doing what is right in His sight. What had caused the plight of the Hebrews in former times was exactly this lack of righteous living, which had been preached by earlier prophets and fallen on deaf ears. Evil-doing had reaped its harvest, but now that punishment had resulted from the work of the Hebrews' own hands, God was eager to bring about restoration and a binding up of wounds.

When I preached in the holy land, I did not come fasting, but, as has been recorded in the New Testament, I came eating and drinking, as did my followers. I felt that God was not interested in what I put into my stomach as food or drink, but rather that He was concerned with what came out of my mouth - these expressions indicating the condition of my soul. And this, in short, was what Zechariah taught - that God is interested in the principles of ethical conduct and morality that guide the individual through life, rather than in the performance of rites and ceremonies.

And for the people who were receptive to my teachings of the *new birth*, I explained that God, above all, was interested in the divine love that burned in their hearts; and that their conduct would be conditioned by this love, rather than by rules of ethics and morality.

As I explained to the guests at the house of my father (called Alphaeus in the New Testament to disguise the fact that I had a real father), the followers of John the Baptist and the members of the Pharisees fasted because they were conscious of sin, and had only the inadequate natural love to combat it, whereas I came with a soul impervious to sin, due to the divine love therein. I taught my disciples that divine love, through prayer to the Father, and a divine soul, through possession of this love, would result in a solid protection against worldly sin and evil.

My teachings on this subject did not violate the traditions of Judaism, as some have claimed, but adhered to a basic principle of Hebrew prophecy, affirmed by Zechariah, to the effect, let me repeat, that God was not concerned with fasting or rituals, but in doing righteousness. All the prophets of Israel had proclaimed this, and so you can see that my teachings were in harmony with their revelations and well within the laws of Israel.

My metaphor of the presence of the “bridegroom” simply referred to the Messiah, and the “presence” of God which manifested itself through the divine love within my heart – with happiness and joy being the appropriate responses to this presence.

### *Rejoice, Daughter of Zion*

*January 4, 1966*

With the ninth chapter of Zechariah it is necessary to pause and make some comments. The contents of the last six chapters have nothing in common, as far as subject matter is concerned, with the preceding ones, and consequently many commentators feel that a second Zechariah wrote them. This, however, is a case where the same person penned all the chapters, despite the new tone and ideas introduced. We find the same visionary and optimist, only now on a larger and more grandiose scale.

Some 25 years elapsed before Zechariah wrote his remaining chapters. The temple was restored in 516 BC, and all seemed

peaceful; yet in 490 BC the battle of Marathon took place, and 10 years later the Greeks defeated the Persians in the naval battle of Salamis, and Zechariah, now a middle-aged man, saw in these events a sign to again take up the pen of prophecy. Now he was no longer interested in the temple, an accomplished fact, but in the fate of the Jews if Persia were to be conquered by the Greeks, as proved to be the case when Alexander the Great appeared on the scene about 150 years later.

Zechariah's conclusion was that, with Israel again in the possession of the Jews, any assault by the Greeks or a combination of nations must this time fail, even if God Himself had to come down from heaven and fight, standing on His holy mountain, to save His people from destruction. The Jews were told to look forward to the future with confidence, regardless of the upheavals wrought among the surrounding nations. The threat of Greece would fade, and Jerusalem would become the "temple city" of the entire world, to which peoples from everywhere would come to worship. And in that future day "the Lord shall be king over all the earth; in that day shall the Lord be One, and His Name One."<sup>1</sup>

When on earth in Palestine I was very much interested in Zechariah's writings, not only because of his faith in the Lord's love for His people, but because of the new figure of the Messiah which he now introduced:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is just and mercifully loving;<sup>2</sup> lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt, the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim,<sup>3</sup> and the horse from Jerusalem, and

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<sup>1</sup> Zechariah 14:9    <sup>2</sup> Not "triumphant and victorious," as given in some translations. The meaning of *tzaddik* is "just," and the word *nosha* means "recipient of salvation"

<sup>3</sup> The Euphrates

the battle bow shall be cut off. And he shall speak peace unto the nations; and his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.<sup>1</sup>

Now there can be no doubt about a new dimension in Zechariah's conception of the Messiah, clearly no longer a conventional ruler of an earthly kingdom. Zechariah now saw that the Messiah-to-come must be, to be sure, a human being, but possessed of transcendent spiritual qualities of humility and love. In addition, Zechariah saw that the Messiah of God would have not only Israel at heart, but all humanity.

Here, then, was a concept of the Messiah that went beyond the traditional regal figure – one that was endowed with a human spirit and a breadth that gave the term a grandeur heretofore unknown. The Messiah was to bring peace to the war-torn world through his care and humility, and his teachings of love.

I was very much impressed by these verses in Zechariah, and the divine love in my heart told me that this concept of the Messiah was more nearly in accord with what God had willed for His Christ. And so, when I set out for Jerusalem, I chose to enter the city exactly in the manner described in the lines I have quoted, riding the foal of an ass. You can thus see that the prophets of Israel were very important to my intellectual understanding of the nature of the Messiah promised the Hebrew people.

But if Zechariah saw in his vision of the Messiah an expression of God's will for love and peace, yet he saw struggle and violence all about him. New wars were in the offing, and Zechariah wished to imbue his hearers with a sense of security: God would fight for them now, as He had not done in the defense against Babylonia:

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<sup>1</sup> Zechariah 9:9-10

In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that stumbleth among them at that day shall be as David. And the house of David shall be as a godlike being, as the angel of the Lord before them. And it shall come to pass that I will set myself to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and supplication. And they shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son.<sup>1</sup>

In this prophecy, attributed to God Himself, we once again receive the promise that He will pour out His spirit upon the people.

I have asked Zechariah when this prophecy took place, or was to take place, and who was the person mourned for whom they had thrust through; and Zechariah has told me that he was inspired by a vision, such as he had received in earlier prophecies, and could only say that this was a matter of interpretation. He did say, however, that he knew of no one in the spirit world who had come forth to proclaim himself to be that person, and so thought that this must refer to the Messiah, son of Joseph, who was to die violently in the performance of his mission, in keeping with what had become almost a "tradition" for the prophets of the Hebrew nation.

Of course, the New Testament considers this prophecy as having been fulfilled by my death outside Jerusalem, and the Talmud also declares that this refers to the Messiah and his untimely death.<sup>2</sup> If so, then the prophecy is indeed astounding, having been delivered some 500 years before the fact.

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<sup>1</sup> Zechariah 12:8-10    <sup>2</sup> Sukkah, 52A

At the same time, when I realized I was the Messiah of God, I knew that my road in preaching salvation through God's love must inevitably incur the hostility of those whose concept of Judaism brooked no further development, as well as the enmity of high-placed officials whose positions could be abolished by acceptance of the *good news*, and persecution from the Roman authorities whose duty it was to prevent revolt against the existing order.

The beginning of Chapter 13 refers to a fountain of waters in Jerusalem: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for purification and for sprinkling, for sin and for uncleanness."<sup>1</sup>

Since the only stream in Jerusalem is the Kidron Brook, the reference here was to Ezekiel's prophetic vision of "waters flowing from the temple."<sup>2</sup> This fountain could only refer to the outflowing of God's divine love to me as His Messiah, and to all who would listen to my preaching of God's new salvation – the *new birth*, brought about by the prayer for and reception of His love.

Thus I was very much alive to the writings of Zechariah, and learned a great deal about my mission as the Christ through the "word of God" received by this and other prophets of Israel centuries before my coming.

*Jesus of the Bible  
and  
Master of the Celestial Heavens*

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<sup>1</sup> Zechariah 13:1    <sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 47:1

## Notes

### *The Full-Time Messiah*

To date, the information received through Daniel Samuels has been corroborated by several score of similar “mortal instruments,” and we are given to understand that this number will only continue to increase in the coming years.

In fact, our understanding is that for the last 2,000 years Jesus has never *stopped* in his work of ministering to and communicating with mortal humanity (and this is strongly intimated in the books of the New Testament<sup>1</sup>). Jesus’ efforts have been seriously hampered, however, due to the lack of qualified *receivers* of his communications here on earth. Let us explain.

All spirit-mortal communication is governed by spiritual law – laws which are as exact and immutable as the material laws governing the workings of a telephone. All spirits, from the meekest to the greatest, must work within the constraints of these spiritual laws.

One law governing spirit-mortal communication states that there must be an affinity, or rapport, between a spirit and mortal before effective communication can occur. As an illustration, one can observe that, in the resurrection appearances immediately following his death, Jesus revealed himself primarily or exclusively to his followers with whom he had an established rapport. One might wonder why he didn’t simply appear to Herod, Pilate, Tiberius, or Caligula, but the limitations of the “laws of rapport” presumably would have made such communication difficult, if not impossible. Jesus did, of course, manage to speak to Paul on the road to Damascus, but his communication in that instance was very purposeful and to the point, and was not, we are told, accompanied by any great visual manifestation as reported in the New Testament.<sup>2</sup>

For this same reason, reports of “visitations” by Jesus have been relatively few in the centuries since his death, and those recorded have not taken the form of earthshaking public appearances, but have generally been personal visits to deeply sincere and prayerful individuals.

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<sup>1</sup> Notably – 1 John 4, 1 Corinthians 12:10    <sup>2</sup> Acts 9:3-5

The close spirit-mortal rapport that Jesus enjoyed with his early followers eventually was lost, as his spiritually-centered earthly flock evolved into a politico-religious institution co-governing the Roman Empire. And though there certainly have been, in the ensuing centuries, mortals who yearned and prayed to be in communion with Jesus, it is also true that successful spirit-mortal communication requires a sincerely open mind on the part of the receiving mortal – and open-mindedness is not something which has been encouraged or even permitted in the Christian world for most of its history.

And so, it is only in recent centuries, after the passing of that reign of terror known as The Inquisition, that we have begun to see orchestrated attempts by Jesus to communicate with mortal humankind. The first attempt, through the person of Emanuel Swedenborg in the 1700's, was not considered a success, due to distortions and embellishments introduced by the mind of Swedenborg. It was not until the early years of the 20th century that Jesus was able to establish the necessary rapport with a qualified “mortal instrument,” a Washington D.C. lawyer named James Padgett, to finally convey to humankind thoughts that he had been largely unable to share for all these centuries.

#### *More Thoughts on Mediumship*

*Mediumship* is a word fraught with negative connotation, conjuring images of gypsy charlatans, muttering witches, necromancy, and all matter of darkness. But after setting aside its association with that most dreaded of topics – death – we can dispassionately observe that mediumship is simply a form of communication, and as such, is no more evil than a telephone. What determines the good or evil of a telephone call are the good or evil intentions of the parties at either end of the line – which brings to mind a line from a popular gospel song: “Operator, information, get me Jesus on the line ...”

For in truth, one person's mediumship is another person's “divine revelation,” “gift of prophesy,” or “angelic apparition.” Throughout the centuries, and true to human nature, we observe that mediumship which is agreed with receives the lofty names mentioned above, while mediumship which is disagreed with is branded as “occult witchcraft” or “demonic deception.” But when we take a closer look at Hebrew Scripture, the New Testament, the Koran, as well as secular and scien-

tific explorations into mediumship, we find that the criterion and means for making appraisals of spirit communication are not nearly as clear-cut and easy as some might want to think. While engaged in our investigations, we must continually remind ourselves that this entire field is one in which human ignorance far outruns human knowledge.

We are encouraged, though, to witness a global awakening, as humankind pools its collective knowledge on the subject to discover that the "hereafter" is not merely a hope, theory, or myth, but a reality, substantiated by a massive body of anecdotal evidence, as well as a growing collection of well documented scientific research. The human family is beginning to realize that "death" is the myth, and that each and every one of us will continue our lives long after our physical bodies have been discarded.

In the light of these awakenings, a report of spirit communication can no longer be summarily dismissed as childish fantasy or schizophrenic delusion, nor can it automatically be written off as a demonic apparition or satanic deception. There is a growing awareness of the vast and varied nature of the "spirit world," encompassing the good, the bad, and yes, even the indifferent.

Another effect of this awakening is that many are beginning to acknowledge a reality behind the tradition of "angels" and guardian spirits found in the mythology and literature of cultures throughout the ages. Although there is by no means a consensus about the nature of these unseen helpers and "messengers of God," there is a growing perception that there are many of these "friends of God" working behind the scenes in the beneficent service of mortal humankind.

### *The Spirit World*

Our basic understanding of the world of the "hereafter," as detailed in the Padgett messages, is simply this: that every mortal human being who has ever lived and died now resides in a very real "spirit world," which, though not perceptible to our physical senses, is nonetheless a substantial realm of form and location. These "spirits" have bodies, live in homes and sometimes towns, and continue to lead lives which are in many ways similar to the ones they led on earth.

One notable difference between spirit life and ours, however, is that within the vastness of this spirit universe, spirits are required to live at

a particular level, or "sphere," commensurate with the elevation or purity of their "soul condition." As a result, there is a full spectrum of these spheres, ranging from the lowest hells to the most exalted heavens. Spirits cannot by their own will change their place of abode to a higher sphere; only by changing their soul condition for the better can they qualify themselves to progress from one sphere to the next.

It should be mentioned that all residents of the spirit world are aware of the existence of God, the mere fact of their continuing existence in this "afterlife" being fairly incontestable proof of His existence. But while even the spirits in the hells can attest to the existence of God, there are understandably widely varying degrees of actual "knowledge" of God.

We are given to understand that many spirits, even residents of the lower spheres, will offer assistance to mortals, in simple observance of the Golden Rule. They can readily understand that they themselves needed and received such help during their mortal lives, and so they in turn offer whatever help they can, often acting as "guardian spirits" for their kin here on earth.

Other, more elevated spirits are actually able to perceive the will of the Father, and so are actively engaged in the carrying out of that will. These higher spirits may very appropriately be referred to as "angels," or "messengers of God."

This brief description of the "layout" of the spirit world will hopefully give the reader some idea of the vast variety of communication which might be received from a spirit. There are indeed depraved spirits in the hells who would take pleasure in conveying misinformation designed to cause harm to the mortal receiver. There are mischievous spirits who, simply for the sport of it, would convey other sorts of falsehood. There are well-intentioned spirits, whose kindly advice may or may not be well-informed and useful. And then there are progressively more exalted and loving spirits, who are capable of conveying not only higher levels of truth, but also greater amounts of love, with its accompanying healing energies.

When considering any spirit communication, then, the first question one must ask is, "Who is talking?" And the second, of equal importance is, "How accurately is the medium conveying the message?" With most mediumship, unfortunately, there is no completely foolproof method of answering either of these questions, and because of this, many

rational people are reluctant to give consideration to “channeled” material at all, feeling it to be intrinsically unreliable. But we will ask you, if there were discovered some charred, crumbling scraps of a book, possibly written by the hand of Jesus himself, would not those scraps be studied and scrutinized with the greatest care, in hopes of obtaining even the slightest bit of illumination?

Indeed, we are fully aware of the potential dangers and pitfalls inherent in mediumship. Even under the best of conditions, spirit-mortal communication is fraught with opportunity for the introduction of error. But, with that realization, should we then turn our back on the opportunity to receive, even imperfectly, the thoughts of these exalted spirits who have expressed a desire to thus communicate with us?

As you can surmise, we are by no means representing this book to be a completely accurate communication from the Master Jesus. But we do sincerely believe that the actual Jesus of the Bible endeavored to communicate through Dr. Samuels, and that Dr. Samuels was to some degree successful in committing these communications to paper.

It is important to understand, though, that these thoughts of Jesus necessarily had to “filter” through the mind of Samuels, and were at times limited by his vocabulary, attitudes, and preconceptions. And while we have made a sincere effort in editing these messages to clear up any of these areas of unclarity, we certainly would not presume or profess that our corrections have resulted in a “perfect” document. Ultimately it will be up to you to decide what in these messages is *truth*. For, in this realm, and much to the distress of those who are accustomed to working with scientifically obtained, objectively verifiable data, we have found that the most convincing “proofs” are often also the most subjective.

#### *Mediumship About Mediumship...*

Having seen that communication between angels and mortals is simply a rarefied form of mediumship, we can then observe that the entire Old Testament is filled with instances of such mediumship. How so?

All authentic occurrences of communication between mortals and God recorded in the Old Testament were, more accurately, exchanges between mortals and God’s “middlemen,” His angels. There are two reasons for this. First, there is fairly wide agreement these days that God

has no physical body, and therefore no physical voice. Second, mortal humans frequently do not have the spiritual attunement to directly perceive God's thoughts or will, and so God uses the angels to, in a sense, "amplify" His thoughts for our "hearing-impaired" spiritual ears.

There are many places in the Bible where it is expressly stated that "an angel of the Lord" said or did something, but it is safe to say that anytime a communication with or from God is described, it was in fact facilitated by God's "messengers," the angels. Of course, we must restrict that statement to apply only to the authentic communications; for, as we have seen, the Hebrew prophets and other Bible authors had fertile imaginations, and were quite capable of fabricating or embellishing their accounts of contacts with the divine.

We can understand, then, that the Old Testament prophets were essentially no different from any other mortal seeking to hear and know God's will through mediumistic communication with His angels - as capable of insight, and as vulnerable to error. As we look at the writings of these "spiritual pioneers" of the Old Testament with a discerning eye, we can see that, as with all mediumship, their accuracy was limited by the spiritual development (or lack thereof) of the mortal medium. With our 20/20 hindsight we can also note the ways in which the preexisting ideas and prejudices of these prophet/mediums frequently became intermingled with "God's word" in these communications.

### *Test the Spirits*

In the New Testament, John the Apostle writes, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world."<sup>1</sup>

Now there are many ways that one might "test" a spirit or a spirit communication. One could ask a spirit his name, but even if he clearly identified himself as "Jesus of the Bible," he might of course be lying. If, however, that spirit then proceeded to deliver thoughts of a spiritually elevated and profoundly loving nature, then the very contents of those communications would tend to rule out the possibility of an unprogressed, evil, or mischievous spirit as their source. And if a palpable energy of healing love accompanied the delivery of the spirit's message, this could certainly weigh as further evidence of the spirit's credibility.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 John 4:1

But then, some Christians might counter, is not Satan capable of appearing as an “angel of light?” Can he not deceive with elaborate cunning and flowery words? And here, although Paul of the Bible puts forth such a claim,<sup>1</sup> we cannot completely agree, because, as Jesus said, “a house divided against itself shall not stand.”<sup>2</sup> There is only so far that an evil spirit could go, in the impersonation of a good spirit, before it would simply cease to be evil. This was Jesus’ response to those who accused him of being “of the devil” – that his every word and act was dedicated to leading people closer to God, which was the exact opposite of what a “devil” would hope to accomplish.

We believe that this is an equally appropriate response to those who suggest a “satanic” influence behind these messages. In reading them, we would simply ask you to observe whether their net effect is to draw you closer to God, or further away, and let these results speak for themselves.

But as the ultimate test, we would invite – no, *exhort* – you to go to God, yourself, for the answer to these questions. It is our sincere hope that this book will help empower you to believe more deeply in your own ability to “talk with God.” It has been our experience, and perhaps it will be yours as well, that a confirmation of the ideas presented in this book can come directly from God, from His soul to yours. In matters such as these, no other proof could or should be completely convincing.

But how would you know that it was God talking? And in what language would He speak? And the answer that we’ll give, you can already guess: you’ll know that it’s God by His love. And He’ll speak to you in a language which your heart can readily understand – the language of His holy love.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:14   <sup>2</sup> Matthew 12:25   <sup>3</sup> Jeremiah 31:33-34

*About the Reception and Editing of the Old Testament Sermons*

We would like to share what little we know about the medium, Daniel Samuels, and, in the interest of "full disclosure," explain how and why these messages were edited prior to publication.

First, here is the scant personal information we have, provided by the Foundation Church of the New Birth:

"We do not have a record of the date or place of birth of Dr. Samuels, or the date or place of his passing into the world of spirit. It is believed that his demise occurred sometime in 1966. Dr. Samuels was a graduate of City College (New York) in 1930. He received an M.A. from Columbia University in 1931, and a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Columbia University in 1940. His proficiency was romance languages and journalism, which he taught in both secondary schools and colleges/universities.



He also worked for the U.S. Government as a translator.

He met Dr. Leslie R. Stone (a close personal friend of James Padgett) in the fall of 1954, while he was employed by the University of the District of Columbia as an instructor in Spanish. The meeting took place in a park in Washington, D.C., near Dr. Stone's residence. A friendship sprang up, and it was soon realized that Dr. Samuels was able to take automatic writings ..."

We can gather from the brevity of this biography that Samuels was a private person, and, respecting that, no effort has been made to uncover more personal information about him.

Nor do we know the details surrounding Samuels' reception of these messages, and so we can only speculate about the exact methods which Jesus and Samuels employed. We are not sure whether Samuels was actually able to channel the Bible quotes which are interspersed throughout the messages (an impressive feat for any medium), or

whether these were inserted (or at least corrected) after the fact. From the tone of his writings, we can surmise that Samuels was Jewish, with perhaps an intimate knowledge of Jewish scripture, and so it is possible that Jesus was able to “trigger” Samuels’ existing memories to produce these quotes. The fact that the quotes do not seem to be taken from any single Bible translation does lend credence to the idea that these passages were in some way channeled by Samuels.

### *The Sanctity of Free Will*

There is an upside and a downside to Samuels’ preexisting familiarity with Judaism and the Old Testament. The upside is that, quite simply, it prepared him for the task of receiving Jesus’ thoughts on the topic. This is in keeping with a basic law of spirit communication which states that a medium will be most capable of receiving information on subjects with which his or her mind has a prior familiarity.

This law is of special importance with regard to the type of mediumship engaged in by Jesus, which is characterized by an absolute respect for the free will of the mortal medium – Jesus’ thoughts being conveyed to the mortal through the noninvasive means of “light trance,” or the even more gentle method of “thought impression.” In these forms of mediumship, the mortal medium remains completely conscious and in control of his or her body and mind, and the spirit-author to a large extent draws upon vocabulary, phrases, and concepts already resident (though perhaps unconsciously) in the mind of the mortal.

While it is true that some mediums can receive information completely extraneous to their mind’s experience (as when a message is delivered in a foreign language), such mediumship is often accomplished through a state of “deep trance” – which, we are given to understand, violates to some degree the free will of the mortal medium. In this sort of mediumship, the mortal is essentially no longer in control of their mind or body, and it has been suggested that such states of deep trance can in fact be harmful to the mortal medium. The higher spirits apparently refrain from engaging in such mediumship, even though it might result in more accurate channelings.

The light-trance or thought-impression types of mediumship, while respectful of the medium’s free will, also leave room for that free will to interfere with the content of the channeling. In such channeling,

then, it is an important and sometimes difficult discipline for the medium to maintain a state of objective neutrality, holding a steadfast desire simply for "truth," with no attachment or expectation as to the content of the channeling.

Despite this potential stumbling block, we have in our investigations witnessed many verifiably accurate communications from Jesus and his followers in the spirit world (who refer to themselves as "celestial angels"). If the mortal medium has a good rapport with a celestial spirit, and is holding a "burning desire for the truth," and if the medium's mind has a reasonable familiarity with the subject at hand, a clear communication can be obtained even through the gentlest of thought impressions.

And this will briefly help to explain why Jesus and other exalted spirits would employ the seemingly cumbersome agency of mediumship to communicate with mortal humankind. Instead of "imposing" their teachings upon us, these celestial spirits patiently wait for we mortals to reach a point of spiritual development where such communication can occur "lawfully" (i.e. in accordance with the spiritual laws of rapport and communication), and with our willing consent and participation. And since the angels' patience knows no limit, the ball is (and has been) in our court, and it is up to we mortals to attain, through prayer, the condition of soul, mind, and heart which will lead to a rapport with our celestial guides.

To continue with our discussion of Samuels, the downside earlier referred to regarding Samuels' Jewish heritage and familiarity with Hebrew scripture is that he cannot be considered an objective party regarding the topic of Judaism. And indeed, occasional passages in the original manuscript of the Sermons seemed to veer from the perfect impartiality that we have come to expect from the channelings of Jesus, suggesting that Samuels' personal thoughts and feelings may have intruded from time to time upon Jesus' writings. Perhaps Samuels felt that the Jewish world, newly energized and highly motivated in the aftermath of World War II, would be in a condition to readily embrace these messages, his emotions and hopes in this respect exerting an influence on the writings.

We, in fact, share his enthusiasm, since we realize that the Sermons' presentation of Jesus' teachings harmonizes gracefully with the traditional teachings of Judaism - "completing the law,"<sup>1</sup> as Jesus expressed his intention in the New Testament. At the same time, we did not want to limit in any way the audience for these writings, and so, in preparing them for publication, we made the decision to correct these apparent instances of bias or inaccuracy. By comparing the Sermons with writings received from Jesus through a number of other mediums, we concluded that these corrections were both appropriate and needed.

The scope of this editing project eventually expanded to include modernization of language, correcting and smoothing out of grammar, elimination of redundancies, and even the addition of an occasional phrase or sentence to help make a particular passage more clear or accurate. In the course of this editing, which at this point would more accurately be called a rewrite, corrections were based upon information from the Padgett messages, as well as from a continually growing body of channeled material received through several dozen mediums over the past 30 years. We also relied on the continuous input of Daniel Samuels, Jesus, and others of our celestial guides who have worked with us throughout the course of this project.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5:17

## *Acknowledgments*

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And we all thank our beloved brother Jesus for his tireless efforts to share the *good news* with all of God’s children.

## *Recommended Reading*

*The Gospel of God’s Love: The Padgett Messages* – Fall 2004, New Heart Press (Multi-volume set - ISBN: 0-9725106-4-8). The Padgett messages as originally received, with minimal editing.

Check with your bookseller or the New Heart Press web site for new titles in the *Gospel of God’s Love* series.

*Angelic Revelations of Divine Truth Vol. I & II* – Foundation Church of Divine Truth (ISBN: 1887621008 & ISBN: 1887621016). Selected Padgett messages, edited for readability and grammar.

[www.truths.com](http://www.truths.com) distributes freely downloadable files of the Padgett and Samuels messages, with translations in several languages.

*The New Covenant* – Rev. Mark P.Th. Kramer. An in-depth correlation of Jesus’ teachings in the Padgett messages with those found in the Bible. An indispensable resource for any student of the Bible. (Available Summer 2004 – check the New Heart Press web site for release news). Rev. Kramer also hosts the web site: [www.divine-love.org](http://www.divine-love.org)

*Illuminata: A Return to Prayer* – Marianne Williamson, 1995 Riverhead Books (ISBN: 1573225207). What it all comes down to: inviting God into our lives through prayer.

### *Afterlife Research:*

*The Afterlife Experiments* – Gary E. Schwartz, Ph.D., 2002 Pocket Books (ISBN: 0-7434-3658-X). Scientifically sound and well-documented double-blind tests demonstrating the existence of the afterlife.

*Life After Life* – Raymond A. Moody Jr., M.D., Second edition, 2001 Harper San Francisco (ISBN: 0062517392). A compelling collection of accounts of “near death” experiences.

*Messages: Evidence for Life after Death* – George E. Dalzell, Gary Schwartz, 2002 Hampton Roads Publishing Company (ISBN: 1571742964).

#### ***Bible Scholarship:***

(These books are primarily recommended as a source of historical information, with no implied endorsement of their interpretations).

*The Five Gospels – The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* – Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and the *Jesus Seminar*, 1993 MacMillan (ISBN: 0-02-541949-8). A new translation of the New Testament and Gospel of Thomas, with each passage rated as to its probable accuracy by the *Jesus Seminar*.

*The Lost Gospel – The Book of Q & Christian Origins* – Burton L. Mack, 1993 Harper San Francisco (ISBN: 0-06-065374-4). A detailed explanation of the reasoning behind the “Book of Q.”

*The Wilderness Revolt* – Diane Kennedy Pike and R. Scott Kennedy, 1972 Doubleday (LCC# 72-171311). Theories on the life and death of Jesus based upon ideas of the late Bishop James Pike. Noteworthy for the fact that, in contrast to much of the writing on the historical Jesus, the authors acknowledge the impossibility of entirely discarding the Bible accounts of Jesus’ resurrection.

#### ***Additional Resources:***

Visit the *New Heart Press* web site – [www.newheartpress.com](http://www.newheartpress.com) – or write us at P.O. Box 1845 Aptos, CA 95001-1845 for information about publications and newsletters, online and real world communities and healing circles, and the annual and semi-annual gatherings of the *Divine Love Fellowship*.

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