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Watching and Waiting

LIGHT FOR PERILOUS TIMES

SCRIPTURAL

Reformed, Protestant, Puritan, Prophetical, Expository, Doctrinal

CONFERENCE SUPPLEMENT

The objects are:

1. To teach the nearing approach of our Lord's return. James 5:8
2. To hold forth the Truth and to expose and resist error. Jude 3
3. To note passing events in the light of 'the Scripture of Truth.' 2 Peter 1:19
4. To unfold the Word of God by comparing Scripture with Scripture. Acts 17:11
5. To encourage missionary endeavour, and all service for Truth. Acts 1:8
6. To comfort and strengthen those who seek to stand with the Lord, apart from abounding lawlessness. 2 Timothy 2:19
7. To call for separation from false ecumenism. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

SOVEREIGN GRACE ADVENT TESTIMONY

Spring Conference, 28th April, 2017

Theme for 2017:

The Glory of God – Studies in the Book of Ezekiel

Afternoon Meeting:

The Visions of the Sins of the Rulers of Jerusalem

(Chapters 11 – 14)

Evening Meeting:

The Vision of the Parables about Jerusalem

(Chapters 15 – 17)

Summaries of Sermons preached by Dr John Douglas

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The Vision of the Sins of the Rulers of Jerusalem

(Ezekiel 11 – 14)

The chapters chosen for our subject are plainly instructive and carry words particularly pertinent to the age in which we live. Yet Ezekiel is a prophecy avoided by all too many of God's people who feel these visions and these prophecies are beyond them. We do well to remember Romans 15:4, 'Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for **our learning...**' Here are words we ought to keep in mind because the Lord says them. While the verse is in the New Testament, the reference is primarily to that which is written in the Old Testament. We are talking about things written specifically for **our learning**. When you think of that instruction in terms of Ezekiel, it is amazing. The Lord had us in mind in the writing of these chapters in Ezekiel. We can each look at chapters 11 and 12 etc. and say, Here are chapters of the Word of God given for my own edification.

Things for Our Learning

We repeat these words because they bear repetition, 'Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for **our learning**,' but how can we **learn** if we regularly avoid Scriptures like these? Many Christians neglect books of the Old Testament like Ezekiel. I do not see how any Christian can read Romans 15:4 and all the while avoid such Scriptures. No one will ever learn anything that way.

Besides in James 1:5, there is a marvellous promise for the believer, 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him **ask** of God.' Who is there in coming to portions like these from Ezekiel but feels a need to ask the Lord for wisdom? The promise is wide enough to take us in. The verse tells us that God '*giveth to all men* liberally and upbraideth not.' We are included in the 'all men.' So it is our business when we are at a loss with a chapter or verse, to take this promise to heart, go straight to the Lord, and say, 'Lord Thou hast included me in this category. I lack wisdom.'

The point is that we are to **ask** God for wisdom, and we should keep in mind our need to ask God repeatedly. There is no such thing as a 'once for all' prayer whereby the first time we open the Bible we ask the Lord for wisdom, and that is it. We must ask *repeatedly* for the Lord to give us wisdom. Let us ask *earnestly*; and certainly, we have to ask *expectantly*. This thought should prevail, ask believingly.

Looking back then on what we have been saying, Ezekiel is included in those things written aforetime. It is a part of the Bible specifically in view when we are given Romans 15:4 to examine. These chapters are not in the Bible by accident. They are there with purpose. They are there for our instruction.

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The Prophets Had to Ask God Too

It is good to keep in mind that the prophets themselves, even prophets as highly esteemed as Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, besides others, all of them had to enquire of God. It cheers us immensely to know that. Ezekiel himself would have been one of those to seek God **about the things he wrote**. We think of Daniel and time after time he asked the Lord for an understanding of things he himself had written; and God gave him remarkable understanding. Certainly the Lord answered these prayers for wisdom.

Here we have in the chapters of Ezekiel some of those things written aforetime and written for our learning and, like the prophets, we should ask the Lord for wisdom, counsel, instruction. Throughout Psalm 119, there is the **petition** with variations, 'Teach me Thy statutes.' As with the psalmist, the Lord has to be our instructor. If the prophets had to ask God for wisdom to understand scripture, how much more do we need to do so? That lesson should be borne home to the Lord's people today. I feel many Christians come short in understanding that, because they just give up. As previously stated, Ezekiel is a prophecy avoided by all too many of God's people because they feel that these prophecies, visions and symbols are beyond them.

The Significance of Chapters 9,10 and 11

The section for our study is chapters 11 - 14 and I would like to say very much more on these passages than I will have time to say. Chapter 11, to me, is a precious portion. This chapter can be read in conjunction with the two chapters that go before it, chapters 9 and 10. These three chapters talk about the departure of the divine glory from the temple in Jerusalem. That was a sad day, a day to carry calamity with it, when the Lord removed Himself. Though many years have elapsed since this actually took place, I can scarcely think about it now without feeling the wrench of it and what an awful thing it was to have the Lord go away.

It is needful to look at chapter 9. Let us look at some of the things and then we will be able, in putting these verses together, to have a complete picture. Remember we are talking about the departure of the Lord from Jerusalem. This was a sad day. It was a day of gloom, a day of tragedy, a day surely with the forebodings of judgment, awful judgment written into it. Ezekiel 9:3, 'And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub.' Do not forget that the cherub refers to the cherubim on the mercy seat, the mercy seat inside the sanctuary, the holiest of all. So, in a way, we have gone into that holy place, we have come to the veil beyond the golden altar. There **in the inner sanctuary** was the mercy seat with the cherubim, their heads bowed, their faces turned toward the mercy seat itself. The glory of God would normally have manifested itself there between the cherubim. That is a Bible expression, 'between the cherubim,' and you will recall reading it. Well, the scene presented to us in this verse shows the glory of God ascending from the mercy seat, from between the cherubim *whereupon He was*. So, just to stop there, that is *where the Lord was*. That is where His glory was manifested but it moved from thence in the process of departing 'to the threshold of the house' (verse 3). How disturbing this is!

Details of the Lord's Departure

Then we will go to chapter 10:4 keeping ourselves in touch with the movement. 'Then the glory of the LORD went up from the cherub.' This retraces our steps, brings us back to things already stated from 9:3. 'Then the glory of the LORD went up from the cherub, **and stood** over the threshold of the house.' I pause now. The house was filled with the cloud, that is, the Shekinah Glory. The court was full of the brightness of the Lord's glory. It is not as if the Lord had changed. Israel had changed. The Lord is forever the same. When the Lord came, sanctifying the temple and the holy mountain by His presence, then the Shekinah glory filled the house, and even in this sad moment of departure, the glory of the Lord was again made manifest. It had gone up from the cherubim. It had proceeded to the threshold of the house, and there it **stood**. (Note: 'cherubim' does **not need an added 's,' being plural already**. 'Cherub' is the singular).

Let me clarify. The glory of the Lord went up from the cherub. The ark of the covenant remained. The Lord's departure was not completed all at once; it was like a partial movement. Although there was a destination in view, He **stood**. We go from there to 10:18. 'Then the glory of the LORD departed from off the threshold of the house, and **stood** over the cherubim.' These cherubim were seen in the vision of Ezekiel and they were moving in the presence of God, and the glory of the Lord, having departed from the sanctuary stood over them. Once more, in verse 18, we have the word '**stood**.' The narrative could well have recorded the ongoing movement of the Lord, but the Lord stood still. It is in verse 19 also. 'And the cherubim lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight: when they went out, the wheels also were beside them, and every one stood at the door of the east gate.' It had moved to the eastern gate, the gate that looks up to the summit of the Mount of Olives. 'And the glory of the God of Israel was over them above.' Each time we have the thought, *the Lord stood*, in hesitation, as if to suggest to the reader He did not want to go. It was as if the Lord was waiting for someone to say, noticing His departure, 'Stop. Do not leave us now. Please do not go from this city.' I fully believe this to be the case (Cf. Ezekiel 22:30; 13:5; Hosea 5:15; Jeremiah 5:1 with Jeremiah 2:6,8).

The Temple in the Midst of the City

We will go now to chapter 11:22-23, the conclusion of the chapter. 'Then did the cherubim lift up their wings, and the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. And the glory of the LORD went up from *the midst of the city*.' You see, the temple is to be looked on as *the midst of the city*. The temple is the dwelling place of the Lord. It is in perfect conformity with the language of the New Testament, when our Saviour described the gathering together of two or three, saying, 'There am I in the midst.' Likewise, it is the temple of the Lord, the place where He is that is 'in the midst.' We must not think of the words, 'in the midst of the city' as being a geographical point that happens to be put in for our attention and nothing else, but let us know that the temple of God is the midst of the city. As far as the worship of God's dear children is concerned, the place where the Lord is must be the centre of attraction.

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The Lord 'went up from the midst of the city and *stood upon the mountain* which is on the east side of the city' (11:23). This is the Mount of Olives. We need to be clear about that.

I do feel many Christians will read this chapter, see these statements, and not even take it to heart that there is a path we should follow, stage by stage. The departure of the Lord from the mercy seat to the threshold of the house; from the threshold of the house to the eastern gate of the temple; and from the eastern gate of the temple to the ascent of Olivet; and all the while the departure of the Lord was not done in haste.

The Subject of the Three Chapters

The Lord could have dispensed with His people with some haste. He could have been weary with their sin and backsliding. He could have accused them of casting Him off and forsaking Him and have gone instantly. That was not the case. You may have noticed this; or, on the other hand, you may not really have given enough thought to it, that the departure of the Lord was held over for our admonition; *held over through these three chapters*, when the whole thing could have been described in one short paragraph.

Why did the Lord stretch it out? Surely it was to have the reader understand that the Lord did not want to go, and waited for someone to cry, 'Lord, stop, stop.' How many just read those references stating that 'He stood' as if they were of no weight; but they do have weight. It is significant that He stood. If a friend of yours, on the way out of your house lingered on, after the time for him to go, would you not begin to wonder why? Here, in the Bible, it is the Lord, and every time He stood we know that action of His was meaningful and not to be overlooked.

Is the Lord standing today? Does He linger? Are there churches similarly placed in this country where God's people assemble? Could it be that the Lord has left the pulpit, moving over to the door? Could it be He is standing there today? We are living in days of apostasy and cannot read Ezekiel without coming right into the situation of apostasy. And the Lord explains in chapter 8:6, He will go far from His people because of sin in the sanctuary. I have spoken at more length on this point than I should have done given the fact that I have chapters 12, 13 and 14, but you will agree this is a vital part of the whole portion. Everything surely turns on this.

The Twenty-Five Men

Let me try to do some summaries as I will not now be saying all I wanted to say. **Chapter 11 tells us Ezekiel saw twenty-five men.** These were the priests of the Lord, the leading priests in the city. The twenty-four courses were all represented, each by a man in the twenty-five, and the twenty fifth was the High Priest himself who towered above the rest in supremacy. These twenty-five men were up to no good. It was a sad thing. These were the men who were to lead the worship of God and their hearts were far from Him. We have the words in the New Testament, quoted from the Book of Isaiah, 'This people draweth nigh unto Me ... with their lips; but their heart is far from Me' (Cf. Matthew 15:8). How sad that was. Turn again to chapter 8:6 and you will see there that these people are no use, because of sin 'that I should go far off from My

sanctuary.' So, the departure of the Lord was made known. Then we go from verses 6 to 16. 'He brought me into the inner court (*i.e. Where the sanctuary was, the Holy Place, with the menorah, the table of showbread and the golden altar*) of the Lord's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the LORD and their faces towards the east; and they worshipped the sun ...' That is what it says, 'They worshipped the sun.' They did not worship the Lord Who created the sun. He created the whole host of heaven, the earth and all that is therein. These men worshipped virtually everything but the Lord.

Now the twenty-five men had their backs to God. That speaks volumes. How vivid these visions of Ezekiel are! For many of the Lord's people to ignore these precious passages is a terrible thing. They miss many blessings. If only they would linger. If only they would come with confidence in the Lord, He Who said they could ask Him; but they do not ask. Think of that verse that I quoted at the start, if any of you lack wisdom, *let him ask a friend!* A Bible which says that must be a different version. Yet the thought is held by a lot of Christians. Their version does not seem to say, Let him ask of God, because that is what they do not do. There is nothing wrong in asking a friend. I am not against the Christian discussing a Scripture portion with a friend. All I am saying is the Scripture is explicit enough. It does not say, let him ask a friend. It actually says, as you know, let him ask of God, Who giveth. The Lord will give help if we follow the right lines of enquiry.

So here we have these twenty-five men and we note **first of all** Ezekiel 11:2, which says, '*These are the men that devise mischief, and give wicked counsel in this city.*'

Malachi 2 is well worthy of examination in this regard. 'The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they (*the people*) should seek the law at his mouth ...' They should receive counsel from him. These men instead were stirring up mischief and revolt against the Lord and they were giving wicked counsel in this city. So obviously, they were not giving counsel as those who had been instructed by the Lord.

Secondly, they turned their backs on the Lord (8:16) and upon His Word; they had turned their backs upon the mercy seat and the precious blood of the atonement that was brought there. That is something very much relevant today. There are so many areas of Christendom where men have turned away from God, and turned their backs on the Word of God. So this is most important.

Thirdly, they have openly contradicted the Word of God (11:3) and they have despised those who were carried into captivity (11:15). Those who were carried away from Jerusalem and taken to Babylon and left there in their wretchedness and misery, were despised by the people in Jerusalem.

Now let us go for a cross-reference to the last chapter of Chronicles. It is a passage we could study at more length with relevance to our chapters in Ezekiel. *This passage speaks of 'all the chief priests'* – that is, the twenty-four men plus the High Priest, making in total a company of twenty-five. Remember that there were twenty-four courses and each priest was in charge of a course, which meant he had a number of subsidiary priests serving under him. He was at the top. The twenty-five men are the

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people in view. They are the men who can be described as ‘*all the chief of the priests.*’ 2 Chronicles 36:14 tells us, ‘Moreover, **all the chief of the priests**, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen: and polluted the house of the LORD which He had hallowed in Jerusalem’. It is bad enough to read that they transgressed, but how much more dreadful that they transgressed *very much* after *all* the abominations of the heathen! It is unthinkable.

Further, they polluted the house of the Lord which He had hallowed in Jerusalem. The Lord sent messengers because He had compassion on His people, and on His dwelling-place (verse 25). That shows the situation we were describing about the Lord lingering, standing. He had compassion on His dwelling-place as well as for the people. I did say these chief priests openly contradicted the Word of God, and it may be hard to take in but you can see from verse 16 that ‘they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people till there was no remedy.’ That was a very serious thing.

Their names are worthy of notice.

I will not have time to elaborate on them but two of them are named in Ezekiel 11, Jaazaniah the son of Azur, and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah.

Names in the Bible are often significant, especially in the Old Testament. Jaazaniah means a person who has the ears of Jehovah, but he did not have the ear of God at all. It is a lovely name for a priest in the sanctuary, a man who might have honoured God, a man who might have been an authority in the Scriptures, who walked with God as men did in times of old. It would have been a blessing to come seeking counsel from a man who had the ear of the Lord. It could have been a great thing, but this man was a fiend, a wicked man, just the opposite of his name. The name Azur gives thought about the help of God. Imagine if we join the names together, one who has the ear of God and who is confident of God’s help.

Then Pelatiah speaks of a man who will escape judgment, wrath, and calamity by means of the Lord. Pelatiah believed that. He believed in his name in reference to his own fate, even though what he believed was contrary to the Word of God. Then Benaiah means to build up. That is a good name because it is the building of Jehovah. Yet these were men filled with wickedness. To them, their names just meant the opposite to all the good we would have liked to see in them. In real life, they were opposing God. They said, ‘We are not leaving Jerusalem. The armies of Babylon will never conquer this city. The temple will never be destroyed, no matter what Jeremiah says, or any other prophet. The temple will stand. We will escape (*Peletiah*). We are told not to build any more houses here because the city will be destroyed, but we can build. Let us start building (*Benaiah*). You see that contrary spirit, that spirit of rebellion was there. So these names then are used to contradict the actual word of the Lord.

The Notable Work of the Holy Spirit

The Lord had departed and when we come to chapter 11:1, ‘The Spirit lifted me up, and brought me unto the east gate of the LORD’s house.’ **The glory had departed but**

the Holy Spirit was still working. This is important. The Holy Spirit, still working in Ezekiel's life, brought him to the east gate. You can see in verse 5 how the Spirit of God 'fell upon' him. He was empowered by the Spirit of God. This encourages us because we can see that even in the worst days of apostasy, should the glory of the Lord depart as is described here of the case in Jerusalem, *even then*, a man like Ezekiel can walk with God. The Spirit of God came upon him with mighty power. That is the force of the expression, 'the Spirit of the LORD fell upon me.' That was akin to the prophets of old.

You will see also in verse 5 the prophet had no other message but the Lord's message. He was told how to speak, it was: 'Thus saith the LORD.' He did not have his own message; that is true of all the prophets. Many scholarly writers have missed this point altogether. It is a serious error to talk about the prophets as if they wrote from their own understanding and their own perspective. That never was the case. The Spirit of God came upon them and as with Ezekiel, 'fell upon' them with mighty power. The result was, the Lord gave them HIS word.

It will be helpful for us to look at the conclusion to each chapter. We have already looked at 11:22 and 23, those verses which bring to a close the sequence on the departure of the Lord. They are to the Christian, verses of extreme grief. However I have in mind verses 24 and 25. The conclusion to chapter 11 is of the highest importance, because it explains the movement of the prophet Ezekiel. He had been carried away to Babylon in the captivity and now he had returned to Jerusalem. Then he went back again to Babylon. The verse explains that it was all done by vision. He did not move physically. 'Afterwards the Spirit took me up, and brought me in a vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea.' That would clear up a lot of questions some readers would have. We can say he was moving in the course of the vision God gave him. So this conclusion is enlightening.

Moreover, there is something else of importance in this conclusion. It is that the principal object Ezekiel had in all his discoveries was to illumine the thoughts of those who were already in captivity. **Ezekiel had a ministry to the captives in Babylon**, those captives described in Psalm 137, who sat down by the rivers of Babylon in gloom. They did not have the Lord's song and they felt justified in not singing, when they said, 'How can we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?' They refused to comply even though there were people among the Babylonians who, prompted by curiosity, had asked, Can you tell us something about the Lord's song? You can see how much these captives were plunged into despair. They did not need to hear from far off Jerusalem the opinion of the High Priest and the leaders of all the courses who spoke of the people in Babylon as only being there because God had cast them off; and thus they had no time for them. They despised the captivity. That is why God said He did not despise them. He promised, I will be 'a little sanctuary' to them (11:16). What a comfort that was. It was as if the tabernacle of the Lord was back in the midst of His people who had relocated to Babylonia. It was as if the glory of God having moved away from Jerusalem had come down there. His promise that He would be a little sanctuary became a wonderful token! What an assurance from God it was!

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Chapter 12 carries an unforgettable message.

It is summed up in reference to the people in verse 2. They had a judicial blindness imposed upon them. They had eyes but did not see; they had ears to hear, but could not understand. Jaazaniah had ears; he should have had the ear of God, but God did not have his ear. That is sure. They had ears physically but they heard not. They were a rebellious house. The message in regard to Ezekiel is summed up in verse 3. He had to go through the performance of showing that there will be yet another captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. The prophet was to break through the hole in the wall, having gathered up his stuff, such as he had, as if he was a captive going into servitude. What sort of 'stuff'? I reckon he would have a staff; he would have something to roll up like a sleeping bag. Probably the like was not available in his day, but it was that kind of thing, a bag or a blanket to roll round himself during the night-time; maybe a crust of bread; and very likely, a water-bottle. His '*stuff for removing*' would be severely limited. Ezekiel would have to carry the kind of paraphernalia you would see with a pilgrim.

Everybody would have been looking at him, asking what his performance was all about, digging the hole in the wall and getting through it with a lot of difficulty, and with the stuff for removing. *Seven times in the first seven verses*, the express command of God was to do it in their sight.

A Dramatic Enactment

The Jewish captivity had to see this. Ezekiel covered his face (verse 6). They were asking all sorts of questions, and he had to explain that judgment was yet to come. He carried a burden on his shoulder (verse 7) and he acted out the whole thing. It was very real to him. 'I bare it on my shoulder in their sight.' He acted it bit by bit, every piece of it. It is a marvellous thing that people should ever suggest they do not want to read Ezekiel. It is riveting, absolutely powerful.

What about the head-covering? It is not what we usually mean by the expression 'head-covering.' What does it mean? Look at verse 10, 'Thus saith the Lord GOD; This burden concerneth the prince in Jerusalem, and all the house of Israel that are among them.' The burden has to do with people still in Jerusalem including king Zedekiah. He is called the prince in this case. It has to do principally with him. There are two thoughts basically in the head-covering here. **First of all, disguise.** When Ezekiel pulled that hood over his head, it so completely covered him, he could see nothing of the ground beneath his feet. He then went through the hole in the wall with all his equipment, his body bowed over in weariness, knowing this was for Zedekiah who would try to disguise himself to escape in the darkness of the night from the city. **Then there is this other thought more terrible still as to the use of this hood,** for while God had said Zedekiah would be taken away to Babylonia it was made clear at the same time he would never see it. To the skeptic this appeared to be a contradiction. Little did the king know the awful fate that awaited him for Nebuchadnezzar caught him and slew his sons before his eyes; so the last thing that wretched man saw was the murder of his own sons in a horrible fashion. His heart must have pounded within his breast. Then

Nebuchadnezzar instructed his soldiers to gouge out the man's eyes. Thus King Zedekiah would never see Babylon. Everything foretold in the scene which opens up to us is not only to be visualised but to be recognised as having come to pass exactly as God said. How does God fulfil His prophetic Word? Is it by a process going beyond what the language means and simply left to people's imagination to explain? No! not even in this case where these visions were enacted, rather the word God gave had a precise fulfilment. It was fulfilled literally.

Ezekiel 12 is an important chapter in reference to the Word of God. Five times there is the iteration, 'The Word of the LORD came unto me.' This is the old time prophetic formula. Fifty times the expression (or words that are equivalent) appears in the Book of Ezekiel. No other book has as many occurrences. This in itself should persuade believers not to neglect its study. The words are characteristic of the whole book. The Word of God came unto him. He did not invent it. You are familiar with the verb 'to be' and it is represented here by the word 'came.' The Word of God was in existence before it came to Ezekiel.

Let me talk about the chapter's conclusion. Here in the last section you can **see how (verses 25 and 28) also relate to Scripture.** 'I will speak, and *the word that I shall speak shall come to pass*'... I will 'say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord GOD.' *What God says, He will do.* Look at verse 28, 'There shall none of My words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord GOD.' If it was our subject, I could take you through Ezekiel looking at chapter after chapter where that kind of thing is said. Oftentimes the reference is to judgment, but some of the time it has to do with blessings still to come. Please understand this is a characteristic of the prophecy of Ezekiel. Namely, if God has spoken the word, He will do it.

Chapter 13 is about false prophets

The first part was delivered to the men; the second part delivered to the women who were false prophets. Notice what God says about them. In verse 5, they did not stand in the gap. In verse 6, they proclaimed a lie. In verse 8, the Lord is against them. And in verse 9, they will ultimately perish in hell; they are not written among the saints. Their names are not in the Lamb's Book of Life. These are serious things and it is very much to our edification to be meditating on such Scriptures.

What about the chapter's conclusion? Verse 22 shows the sad effect of lies involved in false teaching. *The righteous are made sad.*

This is true today in the apostasy. When an evangelical man is stuck in the apostasy, every day his heart is breaking. He is immensely saddened by what he sees of the departure from God and from Biblical principles, so his heart is crushed. And some men have eventually come out. They would have been much more blessed if they had come out sooner. Consider verse 22, 'with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad; whom, I have not made sad.' That is a telling statement. In the present ecumenical situation you could ask, Why are you so downcast? Where has that spirit of despondency come from? I have said that to Christians in other situations too, when despondency has filled their hearts. I have said, 'Where did that come from? Did the

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Lord give you that?’ No! God says, ‘I have not made them sad.’ Those same lies that made the righteous sad have become *an even greater indictment, for they have strengthened the wicked in his wickedness* so that he would not repent; he would ‘not return from his wicked way.’ They have in effect, sent him to Hell.

Chapter 14 can loosely be described as a prayer passage

In the first sentence you have the elders who came before Ezekiel with an interest in enquiring of the Lord, but God shows Ezekiel there are hindrances; they had ‘idols in their heart.’ So, we could have people today worshipping in Christian circles who do not have any images in their rooms; do not have any images in their church either, but they might have an idol in their heart. This is sad. This is very much a chapter of high relevance.

In the latter part, three great men are mentioned four times, twice by name and twice by simply referring to them as ‘these three men.’ This is done with the four judgments in view, (14:21).

They are named in verse 14, ‘Noah, Daniel and Job.’ That Daniel is seen as a contemporary of Ezekiel, helps to settle the time of his ministry for sure.

The Three Spiritual Giants

Could I just sum up with these men? They are real people to God. They are not figments of somebody’s imagination. They are not mythical characters. Worldly people today, if they know anything about Noah, Daniel and Job, which is highly questionable, account them to be mythical. Noah was associated with the universal flood and they cannot believe that. Daniel was associated with remarkable miracles (the lions’ den, his visions etc.). They cannot believe any of that. To them it is all mythical. Job was a man afflicted by the devil; everything in connection with this poor man has to do with the devil’s assault and they cannot believe that. They believe the Book of Job to be simply an allegory. That is not so. It is in the first place a history.

These three men were real people. Furthermore, they may representatively take a spiritual aspect; the world, the flesh and the devil. Noah had to condemn **the world** as an heir of righteousness. Daniel had to abstain from all the desires of **the flesh**. Job was battling with **the devil** and hell.

Let me finish by saying these three people are mentioned in the New Testament. This is another evidence that they were real men. One of the Scriptures where Noah is mentioned is Matthew 24. Daniel is mentioned in that same chapter. It is striking that the chapter mentions Daniel and Noah in reference to the coming of the Lord. Job is mentioned in James 5 in the context of being patient for the Lord’s coming. So this is a striking thing. There is Noah – ‘As the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.’ The mention of Noah in Matthew 24 is tied into the warning about the return of Christ. Daniel is mentioned in Matthew 24 in reference to the setting up of the abomination of desolation prior to the coming of the Lord. Job is spoken of in James 5 along with the words, ‘The coming of the Lord draweth nigh.’

The concluding verses promise a comfort from the preservation of the remnant, and

from the *recognition* that the Lord has not done without cause, all that He has done in Jerusalem.

The Glory of the Lord Will Come Back

As for these four chapters, Ezekiel 11, 12, 13, and 14, so much could be said about them, so much of vital interest to the Christian, and what a blessing there is in contemplating the message they present. We were thinking earlier of *the glory departing* from the Mount of Olives. When the trumpet sounds and the Lord comes back again, *the glory will return* to the same mountain as was seen from the eastern gate so long ago, the Mount of Olives!

In Ezekiel's vision, the Glory of the Lord stood still on Olivet, before His departure. In the Day of His return, our Lord will stand again on that Mountain. In the former He stood with Mourning, in the latter, it will be with Majesty.

Visions regarding the Judgment of the Nations around Israel

(Ezekiel 15 – 17)

For our consideration we have three chapters in this inspired and inspiring prophecy of Ezekiel. I said earlier that there is a natural unwillingness and even reluctance on the part of many to read consistently through a book like Ezekiel because they are 'put off' by the puzzling symbols and difficult passages in its pages. Nevertheless there is a great blessing for those who persevere, pray over and ponder the contents of this book. I did explain earlier how the Lord teaches us by the apostle that 'whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning' ... they were specifically then **for us** - or as Corinthians puts it, 'for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come' (Romans 15:4; 1Corinthians 10:11). Then we also thought about that marvellous promise in the Book of James (1:5). It is a promise for every day, for every conceivable circumstance, and is given for those who lack wisdom; and what man is there who does not fit into that category? 'Let him ask' means he must ask repeatedly, earnestly, and with expectation, and he will surely receive it.

Some Distinctives in the Book

So we have these three chapters. Ezekiel 16 is *the longest* chapter in the prophecy, and chapter 15 is *the shortest* chapter in the prophecy.

The three chapters, 15, 16 and 17, are chapters of analogy. In chapter 15, we have the *analogy of the vine*. In chapter 16, *the analogy of the new-born babe*, the abandoned, unwanted child. Chapter 17 has *the analogy of the two trees*, the cedar, tall

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and stately, on the one hand; then the vine so lowly in comparison.

Let us start at chapter 15. 'The Word of the LORD came unto me' (verse 1). This is a key statement in the book.

The expression can be described as the prophetic formula, that is to say, the prophets of old used this style of speech to show that the word they brought was not their own word, but the Word of God in the fullest sense. Many writers, Christian by profession, talk about the prophet of God as if he was some sort of genius who ministered the word which naturally came to him. This is nonsense. The prophets of old time spake the Word of God, knowing it to be a divine utterance. The Holy Ghost used them. What they said was indeed the word of the Lord.

When we think about this vine, we remember there is another chapter in the Bible running in parallel to Ezekiel 15. It is in the New Testament. It is John 15. Providentially, it is easy to recollect - Ezekiel 15 and John 15. If we could concentrate the entire time on this, it would be most profitable to take John 15 on the one side and then Ezekiel 15 on the other. There are parallels to be noted; there are words of contrast. I think everybody who reads Scripture is familiar with John 15. What a lovely chapter it is. *'I am the True Vine; and My Father is the husbandman. Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.'* Our Lord stated that He is the True Vine and we can draw many lessons from the comparison drawn.

God's Purpose for the Vine

Oftentimes someone commenting on Scripture may say how wonderful the Lord is in His powers of observation. He teaches us lessons about the sheep, about trees and various lessons from nature, they say. But there is the possibility of a terrible mistake here. The Lord truly is observant. Not a thing escapes His notice. He knows the things that come into our minds, every one of them (Ezekiel 11:5). However, the Lord made the vine before He started to teach lessons about it. He is the Creator. He made the vine the way it is. Our Lord Jesus Christ as the Creator made the sheep with the characteristics it has. The Lord created the tree and He gave the tree its features. This is true of the vine. The Lord made the vine first and then He drew the lessons that He intended from the beginning for His teaching on the vine. This is lovely, because it is **the purpose of the vine to bear fruit**. You can see in verse 2 that He purges it *that it may bring forth much fruit*. Then in verse 3 He said, 'Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you,' showing by using the symbolism of the vine, it is His purpose to cleanse us in order that we may bear fruit for Him. In verse 4 we are back to the analogy, 'As *the branch cannot bear fruit of itself*, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.' So we learn precious truth. Even in verse 5, He said, 'Without Me ye can do nothing.' Again in verse 16, 'Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that *ye should go and bring forth fruit, and*

that your fruit should remain; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you.' He has purpose in creating the vine the way He did with all the characteristics it has, and He also has brought into existence the child of God that there should be a bringing forth of fruit for Him. The whole purpose of the vine is that it may produce fruit.

Some Questions in Ezekiel 15

With this in mind let us go back to Ezekiel 15 where the question of its purpose is drawn to our attention in verse 2, *'Son of man, What is the vine tree more than any other tree, or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest? Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? Or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon? Behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire devoureth both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned. Is it meet for any work? Behold, when it was whole, it was meet for no work; how much less shall it be meet yet for any work, when the fire hath devoured it, and it is burned?'* This is a remarkable chapter. It makes full use of the analogy and we are taught that if the vine does not bear fruit it is useless. It is good for nothing.

If you have been to Israel you will know the shops, especially those catering for tourists, display lovely carvings which are from olive wood. I have never been in a shop in Israel where anything displayed is made from the wood of the vine. This is the remarkable thing about the wood of the vine, if it is not producing fruit, it is no use for anything else. The answer to the question in verse 3, *'Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work?'* must be 'No.' Could you carve a little animal out of it? No. Well then, the prophet speaks of a tent pin. Of all the items that would have belonged to life in olden time, a tent pin would have had the least importance. It was driven into the earth in order to keep a tent standing. It was so necessary and yet it was of little value. A tent pin would be the cheapest item in the store, and yet it says here of the vine, men could not even make a tent pin out of it.

What a picture of the child of God. It is so humbling to us. In fact, the lesson hits home to us with such conviction and power we feel the impact of it and maybe we are saying we would rather not have that lesson because it is so overpowering; but it is true.

When the wood of the vine no longer serves the purpose (verse 4), it is cast into the fire for fuel. What a terrible thing is this. Are you a child of God? Do you belong to the Saviour? Are you born again by the Holy Spirit? Have you been washed in the precious Blood of Christ? It has to be said to the Christian that when the Lord saved you, you were only fit fuel for hell. That is a humbling thing, but it is the lesson taught so powerfully in these chapters 15, 16 and 17. If it were not for the grace of God, there is nothing in us to merit salvation. You cannot get to heaven the way you are. How powerful, how heart-searching is that truth!

We are not here meditating on this by mere chance or accident. God has brought us here and so the preacher must press this on your attention. Do you belong to the Lord? Are you clear about that? If you were to die tonight, what about your soul? Would you

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be with Christ in glory? Do you have that eternal life the Lord spoke about? Maybe you are a stranger to grace, a nominal Christian, and never been born again. You are lost.

God's Purpose for the Christian

There is a lesson for the Christian. As a child of God, you have to face this fact that if you were not saved you would be fit fuel for hell. The fruitless wood of the vine is no use for anything but for the fire. The Catechism starts off with the question, 'What is the chief end of man?' And the answer is 'Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.' That is right in line with what I am saying. What was the chief end of your creation? Why were you created? Why did God give you life? It was to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever; but what if man does not fulfil that purpose? What is he fit for?

The useless branches of the vine are cast into the fire.

There is a book of illustrations with Mr Spurgeon's name attached to it. Evidently he told these illustrations in the course of his preaching and there is a story about a Sunday school teacher who sought to communicate this lesson to the boys and girls. He fumbled in his pocket. They looked with interest, and he pulled out a watch, and asked what it was. Everyone recognised the watch. He asked what the purpose of the watch was, and a child replied that it was to tell the time. Then he intimated the watch was broken, there was some problem inside, and the watch would never work again. The children said that it was worth nothing. It was no use for anything. After giving other illustrations the lesson had gone home. Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever, and if we do not attain to that then we are just like the watch, no use for anything.

In Isaiah 43:7, we read, 'Even every one that is called by My name: for I have created him for My glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.' You are not here by accident. You are not here on earth by chance. You have a precious life now to live. Within your breast there is an immortal soul that will never die. It will be somewhere in God's great eternity, either in heaven for ever with Christ or in a lost sinner's hell without the Saviour for ever. Why did the Lord make you? He made you for Himself. In verse 21, God was speaking about Israel but we can apply it to ourselves. It is equally true for us. 'This people have I formed for Myself.' Now we have come to the point for the child of God; why did the Lord make the vine? It was to bring forth fruit. Why did the Lord make you? Why did He give you life? He formed you for Himself. The verse continues, 'They shall shew forth My praise,' that is to say, My grace will be seen in them. You cannot be like that unless you are a Christian, but if you know Christ and the Lord Jesus abides in your heart, your life begins to show forth His likeness.

We have seen that the vine is a weak and straggling plant; that it has no use if it does not bear fruit. It has to be attended to and its branches have to be lifted up in order to catch the sunshine of heaven; the rain of that land must come down at the appropriate time to produce the luscious fruit. The vine needs the attention of the person in the

Bible called 'the husbandman.' It will not bear fruit in itself.

In Proverbs 24:30-31 it says, 'I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down.' This refers to a man who cannot be bothered. He is slothful and dull of mind. The lessons are all apparent. The stone wall is necessary as a wall of protection around the property, because the little foxes spoil the vines; and then if no-one lifts up the branches, the vine gravitates towards the earth. Before long the grass and nettles cover over the branches and tie them down, so that if the keeper comes belatedly it is only with difficulty that he can extricate the branches. What a lesson for the Christian. The world has such power when we are not in the right place with God. Many become entangled and ensnared by adapting to the world or worldly companions, to such a degree they begin to walk in the ways of the ungodly. They soon find themselves backslidden, cold in heart, out of fellowship with God and only a shadow of the person they formerly were.

Striking Lessons in Chapter 16

You remember that chapter 16 is a chapter of analogy and is the longest chapter in Ezekiel. In verse 1, it is again certified that this is the Word of the LORD. We pictured, at the start, some Christian people saying they were avoiding Ezekiel. Such miss a blessing. It is true there are some things in the Book of Ezekiel which will require searching and much prayer, but we have the promise of James 1:5.

In addition, since Ezekiel is included in the things written aforetime, it follows there are things to be gleaned from these pages.

If I were to try to summarise this chapter in one verse I think it would be the second verse. Verse 1 certifies this is the Word of God which has come to the prophet, and then the purpose in view is stated in verse 2, '*Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations.*' The fact is the Jew then and the Jew today prides himself in his righteousness. He does not carry a sense of sin or wrong-doing. Thus he does not feel (we speak generally) under compulsion to come with a contrite heart, owning before God with shame and brokenness his own sinfulness. The inhabitant of *Jerusalem* will readily proclaim his own righteousness, in spite of all the Bible says, therefore the Lord teaches the lesson which requires the prophet to make him feel the terrible guilt of his sin. That it is sin of the worst order, both in continuance and character, is clear, for they need to **know** their **abominations**. This is the label they carry in verse two. Their sins therefore are not of little account, as if they were offences of a trivial kind. No, God is speaking of dreadful '*abominations*.'

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Giving Attention to the Last Verse (verse 63).

Did you notice the last verse in the chapter? Earlier I said in reference to some of the chapters, the conclusion is important, and it is so in this case. You see, God shows that ultimately He will bring back the remnant of Israel to Himself. They will look to Christ and be saved in the great day when the trumpet sounds and the Lord Jesus Christ comes again. The sinfulness of sin, their sin, will be made known, 'That thou mayest remember.' This shows the objective in the lesson being taught. It is unpleasant for anyone but it is certainly unpleasant for the Jew, priding himself in his righteousness, not seeing any blemish in himself; thinking he is keeping the law. There are around 613 precepts in the law and the 'righteous' man judges himself to have made a good job of it if he can stand before God, with 613 precepts to his credit. He foolishly imagines he is keeping the entire law in regard to these precepts. He is convinced his righteousness is without a blemish. So the Lord has to teach him the shame of his sin. He has not seen his own heart. He is mistaken. Thus verse 63 says, *'That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord GOD.'* The lesson will be well taught when this truth is carried home to his heart. That day hastens on. The Lord Jesus will come again. They shall look on Him Whom they have pierced. In that day the realisation will dawn upon them; they will see their own sin, they will behold His spotless righteousness, for the veil of blindness will be lifted, the branch that has been broken off from the olive tree will be grafted in again.

Our experience as believers will be very similar. The Hymn writer put it well, 'And from my stricken heart with tears two wonders I confess; The wonders of His glorious love and my own worthlessness.'

Note: the term '*pacified*' v63, belongs inherently to the work of atonement (cf. Hebrew).

The Summary of the Chapter

Now I will just summarise this very graphic chapter. At the start, there is the babe lying in the open field, nothing about its tiny form to draw out affection toward it, nothing to cause pity; it lies there to the loathing of its person, still unwashed and covered in its blood, doomed and ready to die. This applies to Israel, but we can apply it to ourselves, and learn this lesson. God takes a poor, helpless, unseeing, untaught perishing infant lying in the open field to show us how exposed we are to ruin, and this was the plight of the babe from birth. I was born in sin and shapen in iniquity. Not one thing can I do. Now the babe will feel its miserable condition. It senses that all is not well when it is thrown out into the field unwanted, unloved, uncared for, unwashed. That is the trouble with the sinner who has never been washed in Jesus' Blood. He feels

everything is wrong but cannot intelligently discern his state or danger. We have a picture of how the sinner stands unclean in the sight of God. Verses 1-14 show us, we are *unclean by birth, therefore sinners by nature*.

Then we come to verses 15 – 25 and we can conveniently describe this section as showing *we are sinners by practice*. Then thirdly, verses 26 - 34 reveal man's desires, his thoughts, so he is *a sinner by choice, by disposition*. All the way through we see the sinfulness of man; a sinner by birth, by nature, by practice and by choice; sin is in his very character. How can he be anything else other than a sinner needing salvation by grace? Given a choice in life the ungodly person makes the wrong choice. He does not have it in him to do the right thing, to choose the right as opposed to the wrong. '*How weak is thine heart, saith the Lord GOD, seeing thou doest all these things, the work of an imperious whorish woman*' (verse 30) as if there could be no change, just that contaminated way of life and weakness of heart. So we have the whole man from birth right through to the fulfilment of his life.

Isaiah put it, '*The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores.*' There we have the whole man contaminated with sin in the sight of God. If you get to grips with this chapter it is a powerful analogy.

I cannot leave chapter 16 without referring to verse 14. It describes salvation in such a way that the Christian can look back and see what the Lord has done for him, 'Thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through My comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord GOD.' This is true of every Christian. He has the robes of sin exchanged for the robe of Christ's spotless righteousness, and is made perfect, not through his own comeliness. What a message for the self-righteous, whether Jew or Gentile! We can only be perfect, as He says, 'perfect through My comeliness,' through the robe of Christ, which He has put upon us by His grace.

The Endowment of a Wholly Perfect Salvation

Jude 24 says, 'Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you (*people like us*) faultless, before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.' Before the presence of His glory, there is such a brilliance of light as to show up any fault if it were there, yet He will present us sinners *faultless*. The half has never been told. What does this salvation amount to? I cannot keep this salvation. I could not myself, but He is *able to keep me*. What will this salvation amount to in that coming day? I read He will present us *faultless*, every stain of sin washed away. Where will this presentation be made? Before 'the presence of His glory'. I have made the comment already and it needs to be made, the blazing light of that divine glory is such, as it shines forth in all

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its radiance and fullness, if there was one flaw there, one stain of sin there, the blinding light of that glory would reveal it. This shows the miracle of salvation. He will present us *faultless*. Not one thing can be found in the book against that man, that woman, that sinner saved by grace. We cannot go to heaven the way we are, without Christ, no matter how sincere we are, how many prayers we pray, how many good works we try to do. Yet, although we are sinners and far off from God, on that great day He will gather all His redeemed without fault, without a stain, *with exceeding joy*, into His wonderful presence forever.

If you are not a Christian you will remember this message when you stand before God and the books are opened in the judgment. You will remember this word that the preacher preached about sin, about your sinful nature, and your need of Christ. If you never come to know the Lord you are lost for all eternity.

The Fascination of Chapter 17

Chapter 17 has the cardinal doctrines in the great message of the gospel. Look at the chapter. There are visuals. There are two great eagles; there are the cedar tree and the vine.

There are three time zones in the chapter. Verses 1 – 6, recall *the recent past*. Coniah, king of Judah was carried away captive, and the people who were with Ezekiel knew full well how Coniah ended his days as king. Then (verses 7 – 21) *there is the present*, because Zedekiah is king in Ezekiel's lifetime and these verses make us think of the impending judgment which was to fall upon king Zedekiah. Then (verses 22 – 24) *there is the future*; the vision foresees the coming of Christ, Heaven's King. He is not at all like the kings so far mentioned. He is God's Dear Son coming from the clouds of heaven to reign.

The great eagle at the start is Babylon, that great eagle with great wings. The power of Babylon is suggested by the great wings, 'long-winged' so that their king could come with his armies from many miles away. Distance meant nothing to him. 'Full of feathers' combining all the nations which he had conquered and he had these men in his army, combined nationalities coming in to take 'the highest branch of the cedar.' King Coniah, although filled with pride and defiance, was carried away.

Then Pharaoh, king of Egypt was the second eagle, (verses 7 – 21). Zedekiah is seen working treachery after having given his oath. He imagined he could get help from Pharaoh, king of Egypt. So there is the other great eagle and 'the vine did bend her roots toward him, and shot forth her branches toward him, that he might water it.'

The King Like a Low Creeping Vine

There was treachery because Zedekiah had sworn with an oath that he would abide by

the rule of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, but he broke his oath, so that before a heathen man, he did not have the character Nebuchadnezzar had expected of him. His name, Zedekiah, meant ‘the righteousness of Jehovah.’ Nebuchadnezzar would be saying, ‘I can see what the righteousness of Jehovah is like. You give your word and seal that word with an oath yet it does not mean a thing. You have disregarded your covenant promise, you have cast it off.’ In verse 19, God called it ‘My oath, My covenant’ because it was the testimony of the Lord which was at stake. God did not make the covenant. It was Zedekiah who made it, but he took the divine name upon his lips when he made it.

We should not make a promise in the Lord’s name and have no intention of keeping it. We are told not to take the name of the Lord in vain. It should be seen that integrity belongs to a Christian. Our word should be our bond.

Nebuchadnezzar could not work with Zedekiah. He found him such a wretched man with no character. Although *he* was a heathen king, with mistaken worship, Nebuchadnezzar had a higher standard. Look at verse 14. It indicates the way Nebuchadnezzar had to treat Zedekiah. *He had to keep him low, to the ground – so ‘the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift itself up.’*

That is what we told you about the vine. It could not lift itself, a weak straggling plant, its branches fell to the earth at the first opportunity. That is the way a Christian is in danger of backsliding. The devil and the world seek to hold you. ‘Not lifting itself up’ carries the sense that Nebuchadnezzar would keep Zedekiah weak and low. He could not be trusted. He was rebellious and crooked, unreliable and yet he carried the name Zedekiah, ‘the justifying righteousness of Jehovah.’ His character gave the lie to the name.

We always need to consider our present lifestyle. A Christian would not want his character to be such as to leave serious questions about himself. Are not these lessons really powerful? Are they written in our hearts?

Look at the last part of chapter 17. One of the characteristics mentioned earlier today relative to the Book of Ezekiel comes up again in the last line of verse 21, ‘*Ye shall know that I the LORD have spoken it.*’ Zedekiah might think nothing of his promise and go back on his word a thousand times but when the Lord has spoken He will hold to it, and perform it. It is *repeated in the very last line of the chapter*, ‘*I the LORD have spoken and have done it.*’ He does not change *His* Word. He does not fail to remember *His* promise. The Lord does not want you and me to go back on our word so we do all we can to keep it. We say these things because *He* has no intention ever of going back on *His* word. I am glad about that. The promises of the Bible, yes, the prophetic Scriptures in the Bible will be fulfilled exactly as God says. The Lord will never go back on *His* Word.