



Volume 79 No. 4 MELBOURNE, JULY/AUGUST 1996

Approaching Mount Zion

“For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” – Hebrews 11:10

The original purpose of the Epistle to the 1 Hebrews was to strengthen the faith and renew the zeal of a group of Hebrew converts who had let these things slip, and who, therefore, again needed to be reminded of the sure foundation of faith upon which their hopes, as followers of the Master, were built. Very carefully, therefore, the apostle points out to these Hebrews the manner in which their relationship to Jesus, as the Messiah, was the divinely arranged sequence to the prophecies and types of the Old Testament. Thus, God had spoken to His chosen people in times past. He had now spoken to them again, and the proof was that the message was fully harmonious with that of the past, being but a further revelation of the Messianic purpose as previously outlined through the prophets.

When “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners ‘spoke’ in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,” He spoke in terms of covenants, of a Kingdom, of sacrifices, of a tabernacle, of a law, of a priesthood, etc. So the apostle would have these Hebrew Christians realize that God was still speaking in the same manner, only on a much grander scale and higher plane; just as the antitype is always so much superior to the type. Truly, if these Hebrews could but grasp the reality of the thought that God was actually speaking to them, even as He spoke to their fathers in the past, it should do much to help them in holding fast to the profession of their faith without wavering.

Now just as the tabernacle, and the priesthood, and the covenants, and the typical sacrifices, were all very sacred things in the mind of every devout Hebrew, and would need to have a proper place in his faith structure as a Christian, so the city of Jerusalem with its capitol hill of Zion also was very sacred to every Israelite. Just as the Hebrew captives in Babylon wept when they remembered Zion, so these Hebrew Christians of the Gospel dispensation could not be thoroughly satisfied that they had done the right thing in espousing the cause of Christ, unless they could be made to see that their sacred Zion of old was being superseded by a better and more enduring Zion, a heavenly Zion.

“CITY” SYMBOLIZES KINGDOM

In ancient times, when the population of the earth was small, each community of people known as a city, was usually a separate kingdom with its own king and governmental arrangement. Indeed, the word “city” is derived from the same root as “civic,” “civil,” “civilization,” etc. A civic government is a local city government. This word in all its forms, has the thought of that which is under control, or being governed. Thus we think of “civilized” people as those who have respect for law and order.

When, therefore, the apostle tells us that Abraham looked for a “city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God,” we are to understand that it was a divine government that Abraham looked for—a Kingdom that would be of heavenly origin, and through which the God of heaven would fulfil His promise to bless all the families of the earth. Frequently, those ancient cities were composed largely of the descendants of one man. They were a sort of family or tribal arrangement. So when God told Abraham that through his seed all the families of the earth were to be blessed, it really meant that all the kingdoms, or “cities” of the earth would be blessed, in that they were to come under the protectorate of a divinely instituted government.

Just how much Abraham understood of this future Kingdom arrangement, we do not know. From the apostle’s words we are justified in supposing that the promises made to the patriarch inspired him with a hope of some sort of a coming Kingdom, and it was this same Messianic Kingdom hope that formed such a basic element in the entire national life of typical Israel. Later, God, through the prophet Micah, amplified the thought of such a hope by explaining that in the last days, all nations shall go up to this Kingdom of the Lord – this Kingdom in which the law shall go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem—Micah

4:1-4.

“In the days of these kings shall the *God of heaven set up a Kingdom.*” was the reassuring promise recorded by Daniel. (Dan. 2:44.) This golden thread of promise runs through all the prophecies of the Old Testament. This Kingdom hope was God-inspired, and no religion, no system of theology, can be of God if it lacks this fundamental theme of the prophets. It was for this reason that the enlarged hopes of the Gospel age were introduced by the message, “The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.” No matter how great a prophet Jesus may have been, He could not be the one sent of God unless His message was in harmony with the voice of God as it had been uttered by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. And the message of Jesus *was* in full accord with all the testimony of the law and the prophets. He had come to be the great King sent by the God of heaven to establish that “city” for which Abraham “looked”, and for which all the true people of God from Abraham’s day until now have looked and longed.

THE KINGDOM MESSAGE

Those today, who claim to be “truth” people, will do well to place a proper value on the Kingdom message. If we lose sight of the Kingdom as the great objective to which all of God’s work in every age has been leading, then our conception of God and His purposes in and for us becomes shallow indeed. So it was that Paul, in setting things in order for those early Christians, reminded them of the great importance of the Kingdom hope and assured them, also, that, in espousing the cause of Christ, they had not lost that hope, but by faith had entered into the reality of that which was typified by literal Zion. “But ye are come unto (or are approaching unto) mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” writes the apostle.—Hebrews 12:22.

The actual functioning of the Messianic Kingdom for the blessing of the people is still future, yet in the apostle’s day it was “at hand” in the sense that the future joint-heirs with the Messiah were already being selected. While Abraham “looked for a city,” the church have approached unto, or are approaching unto, that city. In Hebrews 12:28 the apostle adds, “Wherefore we receiving a Kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” It was Abraham’s privilege to *look* for the Kingdom, but it is our privilege to receive it; although, before we can reign therein as joint-heirs with Christ, we must prove our worthiness by being faithful even unto death.—Rev. 2:10.

This is one of the important lessons of the book of Hebrews: namely, that having heard the voice of God speaking to us through the truth, we should give all diligence to hearken thereunto, and to obey. The apostle says: “See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven.” (Heb. 12:25.) In the typical age, God’s voice was heard in no uncertain tones. Back there, His voice “shook the earth,” the apostle explains. Referring to the time when the Law Covenant was inaugurated, Paul explains that there was “fire” and “blackness” and “darkness” and a “trumpet” and the “voice of words.” Even Moses said, “I exceedingly fear and quake.”—Heb. 12:18-21.

Certainly, there could be no doubt in the mind of any Israelite during those momentous happenings that God was speaking. So far as the experiences at Mt. Sinai were concerned, it was a time of sight, more than of faith. Although we are now living in the age of faith, yet the apostle points out that *God is still speaking* to His people, and that grave responsibilities are attached to the hearing of His voice. How are we able to identify the voice of God as He speaks to His people in this age? The apostle shows that it is distinguished by the fact that it still proclaims the great truths of the Kingdom, the covenants, the sacrifices, the priesthood, etc. In other words, so far as the truth of the divine plan is concerned, the voice of God today, is the same as it has been in all ages, the only difference being that the message it proclaims reveals a further development in the divine program.

THE KINGDOM PROSPECT

How wonderful is the hope of the church! How encouraging to realize that God is speaking to His people today just as surely as He spoke to them at Mt. Sinai! In order to emphasize this point, the apostle compares the hope of the church with the blessings of those who took part in that great demonstration at Sinai. Involved in that experience back there were the Levites (who had been substituted for the firstborns of Israel), the priest, angels, Moses the mediator, the blood of sprinkling, and, most important of all, God, the judge of all. But all of that, the apostle shows, was merely typical. It was a wonderful experience for all those who had had an active part in it; but not nearly so wonderful as the antitype.

“But ye are come unto Mt. Sion,” the apostle says, not a literal mountain, but to the real mountain Kingdom of God. Those to whom God speaks in this age are blessed with the glorious vision of the antitypical Mt. Sion. Let us mark this point well. There is much that is good in practically all the religious teachings of the various churches, that has produced much that is ennobling in the way of high standards of righteousness, and even along the line of full surrender to God. But, to those who have actually heard the voice of God, there has been

revealed this glorious vision of Mt. Zion, which, in brief, symbolizes the hope of joint-heirship with Jesus in the long-promised Messianic Kingdom. Those who have not heard this message, have not heard the voice of God, have not “come unto Mt. Zion.” Heb. 12:22.

“Unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” This “city” symbolism is a little more comprehensive than that of Mt. Zion. Mt. Zion illustrates more particularly the government feature of the Messianic Kingdom—“the law shall go forth of Zion.” (Micah 4:2.); whereas the “city,” the “heavenly Jerusalem,” includes the entire Kingdom arrangements. Zion was the capitol hill of the typical Jerusalem; and, in reality, it is only as we consider the combined symbolism of Zion together with Jerusalem, that we get the full beauty of the picture. Thus Paul groups “Zion” with the “city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.”

So the prophet declares that not only shall the “law go forth out of Zion,” but, also, that the word of the Lord shall go forth “from Jerusalem.” It is a heavenly Jerusalem, not because every phase of the new Kingdom will be spiritual, but because it is of heavenly origin. “The God of heaven shall set up a Kingdom,” says Daniel. (Dan. 2:44.) John saw this city for which Abraham looked, “coming from God out of heaven.” (Rev. 21:2.) Actually, the Kingdom is designed to function on the earth—“Thy Kingdom come; They will be done, *in earth.*” (Matt. 6:10.) The rulers in this “city” will be divine beings, hence for this reason also, it is properly called a “heavenly Jerusalem.”

MINISTERING SPIRITS

“And to an innumerable company of angels.” Just what the angels had to do with the inauguration of the old Law Covenant, the Scriptures do not reveal; but, evidently, they had some important part in connection therewith. In Hebrews 2:2 we read, “For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward,” etc. In Acts 7:53, Stephen is recorded as saying of the Jews, “Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.” Although the “world to come” will not be in subjection to angels, the apostle tells us (Heb. 2:5), yet they have no small part in connection with the preparatory work of that Kingdom. “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?; the apostle asks— Heb. 1:14.

In what sense then has the church approached unto an “innumerable company of angels”? Evidently, it is in that we are able to see, by faith, that their service is contributing to the Kingdom preparations. The thought of approaching these various things, as illustrated by Moses and the Israelites approaching Mt. Sinai, is not that of actually being a part of everything involved, but rather of seeing, or having them loom up before our spiritual vision. As one approaches a literal mountain, the outlines are, at first, very indistinct; but as he gets nearer, he is able to see many of the details. Abraham “looked” for the city, but he wasn’t near enough to it so that it could be said that he approached unto it. But with the church it is different: we see the mountain, and now, at this end of the age, are able to discern many of its details. And another thing we see is that the angels have been made “ministering spirits,” doing their share in helping us to make our calling and election sure. Doubtless, when we actually enter into the Kingdom, we will find that this “innumerable company of angels” will have additional important functions to perform in connection with that heavenly city.

“To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.” Heb. 12:23. The entire church of the firstborn was not complete in the apostle’s day; indeed, only Jesus, the Head of that church, had been glorified. Hence, the mere fact that Paul mentions these various things is not to be understood to mean that they had become as yet realities. No, the thought merely is that now, by faith, we see that there is to be a church of the firstborn; and we see, also, that upon the condition of faithfulness we may become a part of that church. Yes, we see this as a part of “the prospect which is so transporting,” and, seeing it, we are incited to strain every nerve in an effort to attain a lasting position in it.

“And to God, the Judge of all.” (Heb. 12:23.) It is rather striking that Paul should remind us at this point that God is the Judge of all. He has just told us that the church of the firstborn is made up of those whose names are written in heaven; and, perhaps, he wants us to ever remember that God is the Judge as to whose names are worthy of being enrolled in that heavenly ledger. Whether, or not, this is the intended connection, it certainly is important on our part to refrain from attempting to decide who, among the professed followers of the Master, are actually the ones chosen to be with the Lamb on Mount Zion.

A VISION OF GOD

How meaningless would be our vision as we approach antitypical Zion, if we did not see God as the very centre of the entire arrangement! It is in the Kingdom picture—and only there—that the true God reveals Himself in all His glorious beauty. Due to the image of God implanted in man, some may be able to visualize God to a limited extent; but such a vision is more in the nature of what one’s best judgement indicates that God *should be*; but those who are “come unto Mount Zion,” and coming, see the outlines of the Messianic Kingdom arrangements planned by the “God of heaven,” actually see God as He is. Yes, they see Him as a God of love—a God who is ever active in providing blessings for His creatures. They see Him as a God of

justice and mercy. They see Him as One who sacrificed the dearest treasure of His heart—His only begotten Son—in order that His rebellious creature, man, might be given an opportunity to repent and be reconciled to Him and live.

Yes, the apostle would have the Hebrews realize that, in coming to Mt. Zion and to the city of the living God, they were coming, also, to the “God who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets (Heb. 1:1.) that He was the same God, carrying out the same divine plan—a plan that involved, antitypically, a tabernacle, a priesthood, a Kingdom, a Covenant, and better sacrifices. How important it was for the Hebrews not to lose sight of this glorious God; and how important it is for us not to lose sight of Him! What would be the value of all our Bible study, of our coming to a better understanding of the types and shadows—indeed, of our knowledge of any part of the plan of God—if we lose sight of God. Indeed, our chief object in seeking a clearer vision of His Word of truth, should be that of seeing and knowing “God, the Judge of all,” more perfectly.

“And to the spirits of just men made perfect.” (Heb. 12:23.) This statement, evidently, is a reference to the resurrected ancient worthies. The Great Company is properly included in the “church of the firstborn,” because the firstborn of Israel were later represented by the whole Levitical tribe, made up of priests—type of the “Little Flock”—and the Levites in general—type of the Great Company. Both of these classes are to be in the heavenly phase of the Kingdom; but the “spirits of just *ones* (according to the Greek) made perfect,” is evidently another class.

In the 11th chapter, the apostle tells us about this class, of how they suffered because of their faithfulness to the Messianic promises of God. He says that they died in faith not having received the fulfilment of the promises. They “received not the promise.” (Heb. 11:39.) They “looked” for the city, but saw no evidence of its coming. The Greek here translated “promise” has the thought of evidence, or token, or assurance. It is the same Greek word that is used in chapter 6, verse 15, where Paul says that after Abraham endured he obtained the “promise.” God made a promise (a different Greek word) to Abraham before this, but after he had passed the test, God gave the patriarch a token, a fuller assurance that what had been promised would be fulfilled; that is, He confirmed it with His oath.

THE ANCIENT WORTHIES

But, so far as any outward evidence of the Messianic Kingdom was concerned, the ancient worthies had none. They died in faith without receiving this blessing. “God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.” (Heb. 11:40.) Now, as we approach unto the glorious city for which they looked, we see the position they are to occupy in it. By faith, we see these just ones “made perfect,” even as the apostle says they were to be: and we see, furthermore, that their being made perfect must await the full glorification of the church of the firstborn ones.

“And to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant.” (Heb. 12:24.) How incomplete our vision of the approaching mountain, if we did not see Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant. This does not mean that the New Covenant became operative at the first advent, any more than our vision of the resurrected ancient worthies, means that their resurrection took place prior to the time that this epistle to the Hebrews was written. Paul is merely summarizing all the glorious features of the divine plan that have been brought in prospect before us through the truth—that glorious panorama of divine arrangements in which we see God and Jesus and the glorified church and the great company, and the resurrected ancient worthies and the angels, who are ministering spirits, and the heavenly phase of the kingdom and the complete Kingdom: in fact, in a general way, all that had been foretold and illustrated by God during the preceding ages.

As we approach unto this antitypical mountain, we see Jesus, the One chosen by God to be the Mediator of the New Covenant. Moses, the mediator of the Law Covenant, was very closely identified with the events at Sinai. The Hebrews had been accustomed to seeing him in everything which was connected with their worship of God. But now, these converted Hebrews were to see One better than Moses. In approaching the antitypical Sinai, they were to see Jesus. Not merely as a man, nor even as a divine personality alone, but Jesus as the Mediator of the New Covenant. Only as the Hebrews could see God and Jesus in their relationship to the divine plan could they be blessed with the real vision of these divine personalities.

“And to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.” Those who are not yet approaching unto Mount Zion, have no particular use for the blood of Jesus. The shedding of blood in the typical sacrifices is looked upon by them as being uncalled for and barbaric. But not so with those who are blessed with a vision of the divine plan. Not only do they see God and Jesus in this vision, but they see the beauty and the necessity of the blood—the blood of Christ which cleanseth us from all sin.

There was a literal sprinkling of blood at the time the Law Covenant was inaugurated. We observe that the blood in the type was typical of Jesus’ blood; that while the church are co-sacrificers with Him, yet it is His life, or blood, that is the acceptable part of their sacrifice. It is Jesus’ blood that seals the New Covenant. It is

Jesus' blood that the apostle speaks of as the "blood of sprinkling." When the New Covenant is inaugurated, the literal blood of Jesus of course, will not be sprinkled over the people. The thought is that the people will be accepted as parties to that covenant because of the merit of His blood. It is that same blood which makes possible our preparation to be able ministers of that New Covenant.

Thus, in both senses, as we approach Mount Zion, we see and recognize the value of the blood "that speaketh better things than that of Abel." Seeing this should help to keep us humble before God. To be so highly favored in seeing this vision of truth might tend toward pride did we not see, also, that without the blood of Christ we could have no share whatever in the picture, no longer see "Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith;" and have no basis for our hope of Kingdom blessings.—Heb. 12:2.

THE VOICE OF GOD

Next follows the admonition: (Heb. 12:25.) "See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh." The apostle's thought seems, clearly, to be that the precious doctrines of the divine plan pertaining to the Kingdom and its hopes—hopes that are based upon the ransom, and which will be realized through Jesus, and in association with Him as the church of the firstborn, and in "the spirits of just men made perfect"—constitute the voice of God speaking to His people during this Gospel age. Let us, then, give more careful attention to this voice, by taking more earnest heed unto the doctrines!

It seems quite possible to refuse Him who is thus speaking to His people simply by taking a disinterested attitude toward the doctrines of the divine plan. The God that spoke to the fathers through the prophets is now speaking to us by His Son. He reveals Himself and reveals His Son through the doctrines. When we treat the doctrines lightly, we are treating God and Jesus lightly. We have heard the voice of God speaking to us through the truth. Through this glorious array of precious doctrines, we have been brought face to face with God. We have thus seen and have learned to love His glorious character. We have been inspired with the desire to be like Him, and to be like His beloved Son. We have heard His voice saying to us that, if faithful, we may be actually like Him because it is His plan to exalt us to the divine nature.

All these glorious facts loom up before us as we approach unto Mount Zion. May we never permit anything, neither the vain philosophies of men—conjured up by ourselves or others—nor yet the "doctrines of devils," to mar our vision of the glorious outlook that is ours, nor dull the sweetness of the voice of God which we hear as we approach our antitypical Mount Zion. The apostle tells us that in the type God's voice shook the earth; but that now, heaven, also, is to be shaken, not the literal heaven, of course, but the symbolic—the heavenly phase of the new Kingdom in its preparatory stage.

From this Kingdom, everything not in full harmony with God must be removed ere it begins to function in power and great glory. Every period of the age has been a testing time for God's true people; but now, in the end of the age, in the "evil day," the tests seemingly are more severe than ever. Shall we be able to stand? Shall we keep our place among those who are marching to Zion in spite of the shaking and falling that is going on all around us? If so, it will be only because we "Refuse not Him that speaketh," and "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering." Let us then, brethren, 'Give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip (margin, run out as leaking vessels)."—Heb. 12:25; 10:23; 2:1.

God Loveth Thee

God loveth thee - then be content;
Whate'er thou hast, His love hath sent;
Come pain or pleasure, good or ill,
His love is round about thee still.
Then murmur not, nor anxious be.
Rest thou in peace, God loveth thee!

Samuel: Judge and Prophet

"Only fear Jehovah, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider how great things He hath done for you." -1 Samuel 12:1-5, 20-25.

Samuel the Prophet stands out on the pages of sacred history a very noble character—very similar in many respects to Moses. He had served the Lord and the people faithfully for a long period, and then, at the urgent request of the people, and with God's assent, he had anointed Saul their king. The latter had been received rather half-heartedly, but the battle with the Ammonites and the great victory which the Lord granted to His people on that occasion united their hearts to Saul who had been the visible leader in that victory and

Samuel perceived that the right time had come for a public coronation of the king, and the formal transfer of allegiance to him as the Lord's representative in the temporal affairs of the nation. Accordingly, a general convocation of the people was called to meet at Gilgal—one of the several prominent places for public gatherings—one of the places at which Samuel was in the habit of holding court when, as a kind of supreme judge, he went at different seasons of the year to various parts of the territory of Israel to hear and to decide causes and differences which the elders of the tribes could not adjudicate satisfactorily.

OBEDIENCE

Upon the assembling of the people, the Prophet Samuel opened his address (vs. 1-5) by calling upon God and the people to witness to his own rectitude of character in all of his dealings with them for the many years in which he had served them; to his justice in seeking to decide their various questions righteously; to his honesty, in that he never received even the smallest bribe, nor permitted anything to vitiate his judgement; neither had he been an oppressor of his people, but had always sought their good. With united voice the people concurred in the excellence and purity of his administration—a wonderful tribute, one which would be almost inconceivable in our day, in which we find that even the best and noblest officials are sure to have enemies, traducers, backbiters, slanderers.

We are not to suppose that Samuel was merely eulogizing his own administration, but are, rather, to attribute to such a noble character a nobler object. He wished to make a lasting impression with this address and this transfer of authority to King Saul; and, to make his words more impressive and more effective in the interests of his successor and in the interests of the Lord's people, he impressed upon his hearers the fact that his entire life had been one of devotion, and that they might well understand that his words now were in full accord with all the course of his previous life. They would thus realize that he had their best interests at heart, that he was thoroughly loyal to the Lord, and that his example, as well as his advice, would be beneficial to them. Perhaps, too, he would thus set before the people a standard of what they might look for and hope for from their new king, and set before the king a standard of the ideal after which he should pattern his rule.

Next, he called attention to God's faithfulness to them in the centuries past, from the time that he adopted them as His people and made a covenant with them through Moses and became their heavenly King. He recounted to the people the many deliverances which the Lord had wrought for them through various agents whom He had raised up. He would not wish them to think of the recent victory over the Ammonites as being the only one; but he desired that they recognize it, in common with all previous victories, as from the Lord by whatsoever hand they were effected. He would have them discern that they exercised great ingratitude in forgetting that the Lord had all this time been their King, and in preferring an earthly king to the government He had established. Nevertheless, now that God had granted their request and given them an earthly king, they must not fail to recognize that he was only the representative of their real King, the heavenly One. Otherwise, their condition would be deplorable in every way. They had the king of their choice and God had set him over them: let the matter thus stand, and from this new standpoint they should go on to make the best of their condition; and to do this, would be to give close attention to the commandments of the Lord.

Obedience to the Lord would bring blessings both to the people and to their king, and disobedience and rebellion or any measure of irreverence toward the Lord and His commandments would bring upon them Divine disfavor and injury. Not that the Lord would vindictively render evil for evil, but the hand of the Lord would be against them in the same sense that the current of the river is against the persons who attempt to go contrary to it. Divine justice has its steady flow. It is irrepressible; it opposes anything that comes against it, and favors anything that goes in harmony with it.

We can recognize something of this principle in various laws of nature, as, for instance, gravitation. Let us also recognize that the principles of Divine government operate in a very similar manner. As fire burns the evil or the good when they come in contact with it, and as the law of gravitation operates in respect to all, whether good or bad, who come into the line of its influence, so the principles of Divine justice operate automatically.

ENCOURAGEMENT

Samuel proceeded to do a miracle before the people—to cause a thunder shower in the middle of harvest. In Palestine they have the early and the latter rains. The spring rains usually end in April, and the fall rains begin in October or November. A writer on the subject says, "In ordinary seasons, from the cessation of the showers in spring until their commencement in October or November, rain never falls, and the sky is usually serene." The wheat harvest which the Prophet pointed out to them as just in order must have been the first of June and, hence, nothing could have been further from the expectation of the people than a thunder shower at that time. The bringing of it at the Prophet's announcement, was to remind the people how completely their affairs and interests were in Divine power. They were to discern that the recent victory need not have been theirs except as the Lord had been pleased to favor them and grant them the victory; and that simply by bringing unfavourable showers upon their harvest, the entire fruitage of their labors of many months might be quick-

ly spoiled and they be reduced to starvation, and in that way become more thoroughly subdued than by any foreign invasion. The Prophet calls their attention to the wickedness of their course in the rejection of God as their King, and to this power of God, which could easily be exercised did He wish to requite them according to their dealings with Him.

The people saw the point. They discerned that if it were to rain a few days they would lose their all: they recognized that they were wholly in the power of God, and entreated Samuel to pray for them, confessing not only the wrongs they had done in seeking a king, but also their sins: "We have added unto our sins."

As the Lord's mouthpiece, the Prophet assured the people that they need not fear God's taking vengeance upon them, notwithstanding their wrong course. On the contrary, they should more fully than ever determine to turn to the Lord whole-heartedly, and let their mistake and the trials and difficulties that would come to them as a result of it prove a blessing to them in drawing their hearts nearer and nearer to the Lord; their true King, who never sought anything but their highest welfare. So it should be with us. If at any time we find that we have taken a wrong course which is irretrievable, we may expect it to bring the disappointments as the Lord foretold; but He may permit it to bring, as well, some blessings in the way of contrition of heart, and humility toward the Lord, and greater zeal, watchfulness, and faithfulness for the future. Thus, even some of the blunders of life may become stepping-stones to higher planes of grace and truth.

The sentiment of verse 22 is very beautiful, and, doubtless, was very encouraging to the Israelites in assuring them of God's continued love and favor toward them because of His having adopted them as His people. Applying this verse to spiritual Israel, we may take great comfort from it, too. If it was a favor to natural Israel to be adopted as the Lord's peculiar people, as the house of servants, how much greater is the blessing to spiritual Israel, adopted of the Lord as the house of sons under the chief Son, Jesus; "whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end!" (Heb. 3:6.) It is well that the Lord's people be called upon to fear, to reverence, the Lord; but if the Scriptures were entirely made up of commands and reproofs, the Lord's people would all surely have been discouraged long ago. On the contrary, with the reproofs and corrections, the Lord gives us very precious testimonies respecting His love and mercy, His goodness and long suffering kindness, to encourage us.

All the members of the Body of Christ laboring against the course of this world and against public opinion, and against the weaknesses of their own flesh, and against the great adversary Satan, need spiritual encouragement—assurances that the Lord is for them. The Apostle points out, saying, "If God be for us who can be against us?"—what will all the opposition against us amount to if God be on our side? He again encourages us with precious words, reminding us of the unchangeableness of God and the fact that He has already done great things for us and is preparing to do still greater things, while we were yet sinners Christ died for the ungodly, much more shall His favor be with us now that we are adopted into His family and are seeking to walk in His ways as members of the Body of Christ.

FAITHFULNESS

The grandeur of the Prophet's character shines out in the twenty-third verse again: He seems to have none of the petty animosities which some smaller creatures might have under the circumstances, and was a patriot to the core of His heart, as well as a faithful representative and ambassador of the Lord and mediator of His people. He says, practically: "Nothing that you have done toward me—rejecting me in choosing King Saul—shall in any manner or degree hinder my love for you and my prayers on your behalf. God forbid that it should! I should consider this a sin against the Lord who has placed me as a kind of representative of Him to you, and of you to Him; and I certainly would be failing of my duty and privilege did I neglect this important office of mediator. You may rely upon it that I not only will refrain from pleading against you with the Lord, but that I will petition Him on your behalf."

The nobility of Samuel's course may well be copied by the Lord's people under various circumstances in life. When those who are near and dear to us flag in their love and devotion, they need all the more our sympathy and our prayers; and, as our dear Master showed us, even our enemies are to be prayed for and have our good wishes—that the Lord would grant them in His providence such opening of understanding, such experiences as in Divine wisdom would be for their highest welfare to bring them into full accord with Himself, and thus back into harmony with us and all who are in harmony with Him. The Prophet indicates that although he was ceasing to be their judge and ruler, he would not cease to be their instructor in the good and right way so long as the Lord's providences might permit him to serve them, and so long as they would accept his aid.

Returning, however, to the principal point of his instructions, he points out that reverence for the Lord serving Him in truth with all their heart, was not only a proper course, but a course which would bring them the Lord's blessing. And as a help to our flagging zeal, we should continually remind ourselves of the Lord's great blessings to us. As we learn to appreciate the goodness of the Lord, if rightly disposed at all, the influence will be to strengthen us and to make us more loyal to Him. Failing to seek with our whole heart the

Lord's service after we have become His people and entered into covenant relationship with Him, receiving of His favors and blessings in this life, and also, by promise, in the life to come, would mean wickedness which, persevered in, will surely bring destruction. Faithfulness to God should be the key-note of all our desires. "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer."—Psa. 19:14. ("The Herald")

The Completeness of the Body

The Church is the "one body" of Christ, and all 1 Christians are individual members of that body. No one liveth to himself, no one dieth to himself; when one member suffers all members suffer with it. It is one of the sins of a self-sufficient age to deny the unity and completeness of Christ's body, and to set up tests of unity other than those which He has appointed. In the natural body each member united with the head has vital union with every other member connected with the same head.

The basis of true Christian unity is union with Jesus Christ who is the Head of the body. Men lay down as the basis of their unity, union with some human leader through the doctrines which he has proclaimed or the forms which he has instituted. They are united by external observances, by laws, forms, rites, and bands. Their union is the union of staves in a barrel; Christ's union is the union of branches in a vine. Their union is that of bones in a skeleton, joined and wired together, but destitute of vital energy; the union of Christ and His people is the union of the members of a body, joined together by those ligaments which every joint supplieth, and pervaded by the energy of a common life.

The unity which Christ inaugurated embraces the whole family of God. It includes every one who has vital connection with the great Head of the Church. Men's schemes are too narrow for this, and include only those persons who coincide in opinions, who agree in forms, who are trimmed according to a certain pattern, or shaped in conformity to certain human standards. Christ bids us to receive one another as He has received us. The fact that we have passed from death unto life, and we are united to Christ the living Head, is proof that we are united to His people.

If our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son Jesus Christ, it is also with one another. Men, however, restrict their fellowship; and hence, while Christ's Church is inclusive and wide reaching, their churches are narrow, and shut out more Christians than they shut in. The results of this are grievous to God's people who are thus excluded from union with saints, but still more grievous to those who exclude them.

How often we see churches crippled and helpless for lack of the labor and sympathy of Christian brethren who stand by their side ready and willing to be helpers in their toils, but are excluded by some party Shibboleth, or by some unscriptural name or form. How often we see men and women shut away from their proper field of Christian effort, simply because they cannot accept the unscriptural statements and arrangements, which others presume to impose before they receive them to their fellowship. Some toil in weariness, and bring themselves to the borders of the grave, that they may do work which others would willingly and wisely do, who are not permitted to participate in the labor. Thus they virtually say to God's children: "You may be members of Christ's body, but we have no need of you or your services."

The Apostle has taught us that no member of the body can be spared from its place and its proper work, without serious injury. No one can separate himself or herself from the body of Christ without harm; nor can any portion of Christians separate themselves from others who love the Lord, or exclude other Christians from their fellowship, without doing themselves great injury.

The union of true Christians springs from a higher than human source; and their adaption to each other for mutual helpfulness is so complete and perfect that any separation must work harm both to those who cause it and to those who endure it. The feet may say, We are strong we have no need of the eyes, we carry the body, and the eyes are mere useless gazers. But when the eyes are gone, and the feet are groping and floundering in the ditch, the folly of this decision is most manifest.

So whenever any of the Lord's children in their inexperience and self-sufficiency think themselves able to dispense with the presence, the service, and the loving fellowship of others of the children of the Lord, they may find sooner or later, by their weakness, inefficiency, and a thousand calamities and troubles that may come upon them, they have overestimated their own powers, and have put away from them those members which God hath set in the body, that they might abide together in the unity of love and in mutual helpfulness.

All down through the age comes our Savior's parting prayer for His disciples, that "they all may be one," and the hearts of the truly regenerate yearn and long for this unity. Deeper than the names and forms and creeds of men, throbs that inward, divine and universal life which Christ imparted, and which makes His children one. — *Selected.*