

Temples Made With Hands

"The Holy Spirit this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while the first tabernacle was yet standing." — H e b 9 : 8

IN OUR readings for today (Aug. 12) we see the nation of God's special choice in three important epochs of their history.

It is a wonderful privilege to be able to view at a glance the great historic panorama of the Hebrew people, for God has chosen them as the vehicle of His manifestation to the world. By their history He teaches us His ways, His divine principles of righteousness, His great purpose of salvation.

* * *

In the first reading (1 Kings 7) we are with Solomon in the building of the Temple—the most magnificent building of its time, and perhaps of all time. Its value is estimated as up to 5 billion dollars.

It was a great, intricately ornamented jewel of stone, cedar and gold—the pride of the nation and the wonder of the world—breath-taking in its lavish splendor.

But it was not *God's* idea. Like the appointment of the king, it was *man's* idea and desire. True, in God's great purpose there was to be a Temple, and there was to be a King. But the time had not come; and this was not the kind of Temple or King that God had in mind.

The Temple and Kingship were great paradoxes. They were *types* of the *Spirit*, but they were *manifestations* of the *flesh*. How beautifully does God bring the promise of future good out of present evil!

No trouble or expense was spared upon the Temple's external glory and beauty. If ever a splendid edifice could contribute to the value of divine service, this was such.

But as to inner, spiritual glory, it was a beautiful monument of failure, and God Himself had to finally destroy it because of all the evil that had become associated with it.

Our second reading (Jer. 33) deals with that time—the days of the prophet Jeremiah, when both the Temple and the Kingship were thrown down—

"Remove the diadem (the royal crown), and take off the mitre (the priestly headdress)...it shall be no more until he comes whose right it is" (Eze. 21:26-27).

There is a great lesson in all these things, to be found in the words of Paul (1 Cor. 3:17)—

"The Temple of God is holy, which Temple are ye...If any man defile the Temple of God, him shall God destroy."

The building of the Temple was David's idea. It was an expression of deep thankfulness and reverence (1Chr. 17:1)—

"David said to Nathan the prophet, Lo, I dwell in an house of cedars, but the ark of the covenant of the Lord remaineth under curtains."

"Then Nathan said unto David, Do all that is in thine heart, for God is with thee."

King and prophet—both worthy men—decide that God needs a splendid Temple for His honor. Nathan was so sure that this would be a good thing to do that he immediately gave assent on God's behalf. What could possibly be wrong with such a great and righteously intended plan to advance God's honor and worship?

But that night the Word of God came to the prophet—

"Go and tell David My servant, Thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt NOT build Me an house to dwell in; for I have not dwelt in an house since the day that I brought up Israel unto this day...Spake I a word to any of the judges, saying, Why have ye not built Me an house of cedars?" (vs. 4-6).

Then follows the great Covenant of God with David—the raising up of Christ to rule the world in righteousness and peace from David's throne in Jerusalem. God continues—

"Furthermore, I tell thee that the Lord will build THEE an house" (v. 10).

God is the great Builder. That is the point. *We* cannot build to God, but He to us. Paul says (Heb. 3:4)—

"Every house is builded by some man, but THE BUILDER OF ALL THINGS IS GOD."

Houses are manmade, but God is building a universal house, not of dead stones, but of living hearts.

How gently and graciously He takes the sincere desires of David to glorify God with a magnificent building, and lifts them to an application to eternal things!

David, the man of war, the man of struggle and conflict, is permitted to *prepare* for the house.

David, the man after God's Own heart, desires to build Him an house. God holds up a gently restraining hand to his hasty zeal, and begins to explain many things to David, and through David to all like him who seek God's heart.

Taking up this desire, God fashions it to a pattern of type and lesson for all succeeding generations. David, the man of war and conflict, must prepare. Solomon, the man of peace, must erect. To David was given a revelation of all the plans and specifications.

God must be recognized above all as both the **Planner** and the **Builder**—"both to *will* and to *do* in us of His good pleasure"—and to Him are reserved the times and the seasons.

The Temple, like the Kingship, was to prove to be a lesson in many ways, for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. Its splendor lasted but 40 years from the time its first foundation was laid—40, the period of trial and probation.

In the 5th year of Rehoboam, Shishak, king of Egypt, came and plundered the Temple's gold. Its great external glory and magnificence was no defense, but a weakness and danger.

It was the king of *Egypt* who first came and robbed it. In our reading today we read of other buildings of Solomon as part of his royal estate. Among them (v. 8) was a house for the daughter of the king of Egypt, whom Solomon had taken to wife.

The House of God was not Solomon's only project—it was *not his ONLY alliance and defense*. He had considered it prudent also to make political affinity with Egypt—

"And Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter" (1 Kings 3:1).

He felt safer to seal his friendship in this way with this great world power. All the "wise" kings did so. It was considered very foolish not to take out this political insurance.

"And it came to pass in the 5th year of Rehoboam, that Shishak, king of Egypt, came up against Jerusalem. And he took away the treasures of the House of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house; he even took away ALL."

Solomon's misguided affinity with Pharaoh and marriage with his daughter had given Egypt a foot in the door and excuse for a hand in Israel's affairs. How often God turns our world scheming against us, to teach us wisdom, and smite us with the very rod we made for our defense!

* * *

Were the children of Israel able to build this Temple to God themselves? When God directed Moses to build Him a Tabernacle of the materials that had been offered *freely and willingly* by Israel, He said to Moses (Ex 31:2)—

"See, I have called by name Bezaleel, the son of Uri, of the tribe of Judah; and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship."

God says He *called him "by name."* His name means "the shadow or protection of God."

But when Solomon came to build the Temple out of the materials *taken by force as spoil* from the heathen nations around Israel (1 Kings 7:13)—

"He sent and fetched HIRAM out of TYRE."

The meaning of Hiram's name does not seem to be known. **God did not call him by name.** It was a Gentile name—he was named after the Gentile king of Tyre.

Hiram was not an Israelite. He was the son of an Israelite woman who had married out of Israel. He had a Gentile name and did not live in Israel.

Here again is manifested both weakness and promise. *Weakness* in the choosing of a half-alien as the chief artificer of God's Temple—*promise* in the union of both Jew and Gentile in this Temple-builder. In the beauty of God's infinite wisdom and mercy we see future promise and strength brought from the womb of present failure and weakness.

* * *

IN THE second reading, 400 years have passed. The Temple has seen much iniquity and neglect, and **very little true worship**. The 400 years (10x40) have measured the patience of God with a fleshly and unholy people. The conditions leading to this crisis are described in 2 Chr. 36:14—

"All the chief of the priests and the people transgressed very much after the abomination of the heathen, and polluted the House of the Lord which He had hallowed.

"And the Lord God sent to them by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place.

"But they mocked His messengers, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people TILL THERE WAS NO REMEDY.

"Therefore He brought upon them the Chaldeans...and they BURNED THE HOUSE OF GOD...and all the vessels of the House they brought to Babylon, to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah."

And so the great Temple for which David had longed, and planned, and labored, and which had been built to the design given by God Himself, was destroyed because all its splendor had failed completely to bring the people to godliness and purity of heart.

And so our second reading begins—

"Moreover the Word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah the second time while he was yet shut up in the court of the prison" (Jer. 33:1).

The end for Jerusalem and the Temple is very near. The Chaldean army has surrounded the city for the last time. All escape is cut off. It is during *the last year of the last king of Judah*.

Jeremiah is in prison for devoting his life to proclaiming the Word of God. The nation is making its final stand against a cruel and terrible enemy, and Jeremiah is telling the people that there is no use to resist but that they should give in and allow the Babylonians to take them captive.

The people were doing just what Hezekiah was praised so highly for doing one hundred years before.

But there was a great difference. Hezekiah defied Assyria in faith and righteousness and obedience to God; Zedekiah defied Babylon in wickedness and disobedience. And there was a difference in the purpose of God. The cup of His wrath was filled; the time had come to pour it out.

How easy to be deceived by His apparent forbearing! But the cup is being filled—drop by drop—and finally it is too late. In v. 5 God says—

"I have hid My face from this city."

Its doom was sealed.

Then from this point to the end of the chapter there follows a **stirring prophecy of their time of final blessing**, especially striking in view of the background against which it was uttered: the enemy overrunning the whole land—the city shut up and surrounded—the people in misery at the end of their endurance—the one man of God among them shut up in prison. There is always promise and hope shining through judgment—

"Behold I will bring it HEALTH AND CURE, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth" (v. 6).

The nation was *sick*—very sick of the evil disease of sin. As another prophet described it (Isa 1:6)—

"From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, bruises and putrifying sores."

If sin is thus described as a *sickness*, why should not its sufferers be pitied rather than punished? **Because a divine remedy has been freely offered, but men love the sickness rather than the cure.** Jeremiah says (8:22)—

"Is there no balm in Gilead, is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of My people recovered?"

Gilead was proverbial for its healing balm. God is here asking in a figure: "Why is Israel corrupted with sires—have I ceased to be available as a Forgiver of sin and Guide in righteousness?" In Jer 3:22, God says—

"Return, ye backsliding children, and I WILL HEAL your backslidings."

This figure is used frequently throughout the prophets. God says similarly through Hosea (14:4):

"I will heal their backslidings."

And we remember the familiar words of Isaiah (53:5)—

*"The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with **his stripes we are HEALED.**"*

"With his stripes we are healed." Can we not then see a deeper meaning to the healing ministrations of Jesus, as he went about the villages of Galilee and Judea?—especially when he said, as he often did to those whom he healed—

"Thy sins be forgiven thee: go and sin no more."

Sin and sickness are inseparable parts of the great pattern of evil that holds the world in bondage. *"With his stripes we are healed."* In the New Testament reading it is recorded that, as he was healing the deaf man, Jesus—

"Sighed, and looked up to heaven."

Sin is the greatest disease, and God is the Great Healer. This is the lesson that underlies the first incident in the New Testament reading—the issue between Jesus and the Pharisees over the endless traditional washings of the Jews.

It is so easy to fall into the same pattern as the Pharisees—careful and troubled about external washings—physical cleanliness, bodily ailments, fleshly diseases, natural infections—yet have far too little anxiety about the **INFINITELY MORE DANGEROUS** germs of impatience and anger, the virus of harshness and sourness, the infection of thoughtless living for self, and the gangrene of covetousness for worldly things.

Verse 6 of Jer. 33 continues—

"I will reveal to them the abundance of peace and truth."

Surely here is a foreshadowing of God's great manifestation of Himself through His Son in the fullness of times—*"the abundance of peace and truth."*

"I will cause the captivity of Judah and Israel to return."

There is no hint here that 2500 years were to pass over them before this would be fulfilled. It is hard for us to get the divine perspective of time. The workings of God are a great lesson in quiet patience. The few years of a lifetime mean nothing to Him. See how long Abraham merely waited in faith. And Moses, who had such a great work to do, was 80 years old before God began to use him—before God was ready to use him, and *he* was ready for God's use. He kept sheep in obscurity for 40 years after *he* thought that he was ready and the time was ripe.

"And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity" (v. 8).

This is the part the Jews did not, and still do not, realize the need of. **The cleansing and purifying and preparing of the individual is everything.** 99% of our work for God is right inside ourselves—inside our own hearts.

The Jews wanted a Savior, but they did not realize his greatest work was **saving them from their own sins. DO WE?** Take care of that—the preparing of the individual—and all the rest takes care of itself. Subduing the world will come easily, at the proper time, once we have subdued ourselves.

Our greatest work in the Truth is making *ourselves* fit for God's use. It is so easy to forget *that* in our enthusiasm to prepare *others*. God will erect the Temple visibly at the proper time. Now is the time for preparing the stones, for hewing the timbers and refining the gold.

* * *

WE MAY wonder how God can suddenly cleanse a whole nation that has lain in wickedness and blindness for so long. Is not righteousness and cleanliness an *individual* matter of *voluntary* acceptance?

The method and circumstances of the purifying gives us the answer. Zechariah (ch.13) reveals that 2/3 of the people in Israel will be cut off and destroyed in the terrible days of the Armageddon conflict.

Ezekiel (ch. 20) reveals that the Jews of the world will be gathered into the wilderness of the nations, and there God will plead with them, and make them pass under the rod, and will purge out all the rebellious and unrepentant.

They are a strange and closely-knit people. There have been times in the past when a wave of earnest repentance has swept the nation. This time the shock of realization will be greater than ever, for after 2000 years of fighting against the light, they will suddenly be confronted—in the sight of all the world—with inescapable evidence of the age-old rebellion and folly—

"They shall look upon him whom they pierced, and mourn...In that day shall there be a great mourning in

Jerusalem ...And the land shall mourn, every family apart."

Can we picture the unprecedented anguish of their remorse?

"His blood be upon us and upon our children!"

2000 years of nightmare suddenly revealed to be self-imposed! 2000 years of self-pity suddenly exposed as 2000 years of self-justification for the vilest of crimes against their own great Messiah—the Son of God who loved them and gave himself for them.

Consider their utter humiliation in the sight of all the world! Never was such a scene as this—never was there such a national self-searching—never was there such a sudden stripping away of all self-esteem! And coming just at the moment of the deepest danger and greatest deliverance of all their long history. What an emotional turmoil will twist and rend the nation to its depths!

Can we not see how in the marvelous wisdom of God the scene is gradually being prepared for this great national cleansing and transformation—**a nation born in a day?**

* * *

"And it shall be to Me a Name of joy, a praise and an honor before all the nations of the earth" (v. 9).

Out of this purified humility of the Jews will come honor. In weakness they shall be made strong.

Their past repentances have short-lived, and have died with the death of the powerful and righteous leaders who have from time to time led them back to God.

But this time they shall be given righteous judges who shall not be taken away—judges who will be able to discern the thoughts and intents of the hearts, and render swift and unerring judgment, as promised in v. 15—

"In those days and at that time will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David, and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land.

"David shall never lack a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel."

Never again will they drift into evil through lack of righteous leadership. Never again will evil men pervert justice and set iniquity up in power.

And as by this divinely-contrived arrangement the nation of Israel will be prepared for God's use and honor, so that nation will be used to carry God's praise to all the world.

And not just honor and praise, but a name of *joy* before all the nations of the earth. How different from all the powers that have dominated the world in the past, even the hypocritically self-righteous ones! Here is one that will be a name of joy before all the nations under her divinely-guided sway!

(Taken from Volume 3 "Be Ye Transformed" Pages 137-145 by Bro. G. Growcott.)