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"Prepared" pt. 1

Robert Surgenor

Coming to the Scriptures we find saints preparing in many ways, and so that is what this article is all about – people who prepared.

WORK - Ezra Prepared

"For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10).

The children of Israel, under Zerubbabel, had come up from Babylon in 536 BC to Jerusalem to reestablish a testimony for God. Under the exhortations of Haggai and Zechariah, they finished the construction of the house of God in 513 BC, 23 years later. In 457 BC, About 57 years after the completion of the temple, Ezra came up from Babylon to set up an administration that righteousness might be maintained in the nation. History records that Ezra could quote all the scriptures that were available at his time, which would have been all of the Old Testament except Malachi. The same was recorded of Nicodemus, and Fanny Crosby of our day. What a tremendous accomplishment!

Scripture tells us that he was "a ready scribe in the law of Moses," and that the hand of the LORD His God was upon him (7:6). That simply means that he was skillful and diligent in the scriptures. He was diligent in his study of the scriptures, and skillful in the way that he taught the scriptures. The statement that the hand of the LORD his God was upon him, indicates two things. First, the Lordship of his God was acknowledged in his life and conduct. He was totally submissive to His God. Second, God's ability was upon his servant Ezra. This man had power with God. In Ezra 7:25 it is not

God's hand that is mentioned as in verse 6, but rather Ezra's hand, meaning that wisdom gave him tremendous ability in the management of his affairs. Artaxerxes said of Ezra that the law of his God was in his hand. This heathen king observed a uniqueness in Ezra, probably not seen in others.

When news came to Ezra informing him that the children of Israel had not separated themselves from the people of the lands and that the princes and rulers were chief in the trespass (Ezra 9:1), notice his godly reaction. "I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished. Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God, And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens" (9:3-6).

Notice, first he expressed complete remorse and distress of heart. He then assembled godly saints with himself, and while the evening sacrifice was being offered he prayed to his God, and included himself in the sins of God's people. What a holy and humble man! Nehemiah plucked off the hair of his adversaries, but Ezra plucked off his own hair. This conduct was the result of his diligent study of the scriptures. This lovely teacher in Israel wept and cast himself down before the house of God over the sin of God's people (Ezra 10:1).

Then we read; "Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away. And they made proclamation throughout

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Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem" (Ezra 10:6-7). That gathering, resulted in a great cleansing in Israel that day — all because of a man who studied the scriptures, obeyed the scriptures, and proclaimed the scriptures in love to his God and to the people of God.

Scripture states, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Rom. 15:4). The conduct of Ezra is a model for every saint today, especially elders. Ezra did not prepare for gaining wealth, prestige, honor, power, or any other thing connected with the flesh. He was far above that. The primary concern in his life was to know the Lord his God in an intimate way, that he might be of help to God's people. Is this your goal in life? If not, why? Let us search ourselves honestly and ask ourselves, why are we as God's people becoming overcome with so much weakness? Why do we hear "mechanical prayers"? Why are we seeing so few souls saved today? Why are things coming in that would have shocked us thirty years ago? Why are we becoming so "programmed" and politically correct? Why is our gospel preaching becoming like a dripping faucet instead of like a thunderous waterfall? What is the reason? Could it be that we have so many irons in the fire that we have very little time for God? Ask yourself, how many hours a day are Christians studying their Bibles? Since when have you heard of an all day prayer and fasting meeting in a Gospel Hall? I never have. How many times at a conference have you heard brethren rise in prayer, confessing our sinfulness and departure? Yes, it used to be done, believe it or not. But today we are so sophisticated and self confident, such prayers are seemingly out of place.

Ezra prepared his heart for three major things. One - "to seek the law of the Lord." Two - "and to do it." Three - "and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." Ezra ordered his heart, it was a fixed purpose. God says; "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). We must guard our heart against all worldly influences, or we will be worthless for God.

Ezra was a seeker. He investigated the

scriptures. It's one thing to look at something, but quite another thing to investigate something. Ezra approached the scriptures like a detective; digging, searching, comparing, and drawing godly conclusions. Paul places ministry into two categories; "gold, silver, precious stones," then "wood, hay, and stubble," (1 Cor. 3:12). God has produced the first three elements and buried them deep in the earth. To obtain them, there must be the toil of digging. The last three lie on the surface and are quite common. So it is with ministry. To obtain ministry that is of any value, one must dig for it. Ezra's ministry was "gold, silver, and precious stones," certainly not just wood, hay, and stubble. The OT prophets "inquired (to investigate, scrutinize) and searched diligently" the sacred writings (1 Pet. 1:10). One is reminded of those Jews who listened to Paul in Berea; "they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched (investigated) the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

However, there is something more necessary than just possessing a knowledge of the scriptures, and that is obedience to what one gleans. Ezra's heart was prepared to DO what the law of God said. Paul exhorts Christian teachers at Rome; "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching" (Rom.12:6-7). In other words, a man teaching must be conformed himself to his teaching. Ezra would never expect a person to conform to his teaching, if he himself was not conformed to it. It is not a matter of, "do as I say," but rather, "do as I do." The late David L. Roy said; "The man in the message, is worth more than the message in the man." How true. What good is the teaching of a man who tells you not to love the world, yet he himself is engaged in events and pleasures? His teaching holds no weight, and produces little, if any affect, in his listeners. Ezra "taught in Israel statues ("engrave," marking out our way) and judgments" (judicial rulings, what's right and what's wrong).

Shepherds have the responsibility to feed the flock. The food is varied. There is exhortation, exposition, guidance, rebuke, and many other

avenues of ministry. The need is great, and can only be met by men that, like Ezra, have prepared their heart to investigate the scriptures, obey the scriptures, and teach the scriptures in the fear of the Lord. Failure on their part will only help in launching the assemblies into the vile ocean of Christendom, with sacred testimonies for God completely lost. Brethren, pray for godly "Ezra-like" elders.

WEALTH - David Prepared

"Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God"... Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house" (1 Chr. 29:2-3). ... "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee (vs.14).

After 70 years, King David finally came to the end of his earthly journey. His love for the house of God had never diminished. I often pray that the Lord will keep me in love with His assemblies and His saints, until my home call. I want to finish well. The time had come when God would have a structure on earth, unparalleled in beauty and cost, for Himself. David when speaking of the temple that was about to be built, exclaimed; "For the palace is not for man, but for the LORD God." Thus he acknowledges the greatness and authority of God's house. Paul, in 1 Timothy 3:15, speaks of God's local assembly as "the house of God." It is in view of this that we link David and the temple with ourselves and the local assembly. I trust that we recognize the greatness and authority of God's assemblies today.

Even though David was not chosen of God to build the place, he provided all that he could for its construction. Unlike some today, if they cannot play a leading role they pout and contribute nothing. This was not the character of David. C. H. Spurgeon said; "It needs more skill than I can tell to play the second fiddle well." Young men that God will eventually place as elders in His assembly, need to play the second fiddle well. There must be subjection to the elders in the house of God. Young men

entering the work of God as evangelists, should be willing to play the second fiddle well, willing to be under the wing of an older evangelist for a few years. We have young preachers who know nothing of this, for seemingly they are not enthused to play the second fiddle. Miraculously they sprout up in a matter of a year or two to become, so called teachers. This is not the scriptural pattern. Joshua was taught by Moses; Elisha was taught by Elijah; Mark was taught by Peter; and Timothy was taught by Paul. There you have the pattern.

David was called upon to step aside for his son Solomon, who would build God's house. There comes a day when elders will have to step aside, and leave for heaven. Prior to this their responsibility is to encourage younger men in continuing the work that they will leave. David, prior to his death, was very active in contributing all that he possibly could in aiding his son for the tremendous work the Lord had called Solomon to do. His first move is very interesting. "And David assembled all the princes of Israel, the princes of the tribes, and the captains of the companies that ministered to the king by course, and the captains over the thousands, and captains over the hundreds, and the stewards over all the substance and possession of the king, and of his sons, with the officers, and with the mighty men, and with all the valiant men, unto Jerusalem" (1 Chron. 28:1). David saw the importance of unity. He also realized that no matter what station in life these people occupied, every one of them had a responsibility to help in the building of God's palace.

Today, God has enjoined upon every believer a responsibility to contribute to the house of God, their assembly. To facilitate this, He has equipped every believer in the fellowship with the ability to do so. "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal" (1Cor. 12:7). The word "man" is "hekastos," meaning a human being, which includes women.

All brothers and sisters in an assembly have a designated work to do, none are exempt. The work is multicolored. There is shepherding, teaching, ruling, visiting the sick, encouraging the downcast, preaching the gospel, supporting the weak, expressing hospitali-

ty, cleaning the hall, tending the outside grounds, bringing sinners to the gospel meetings, encouraging the young, counseling the wayward and the list goes on and on. Ask yourself, what work are you engaged in regarding the house of God? Paul, upon his conversion said, "Lord what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). If you are ignorant as to what God would have you to do in His assembly, I suggest you ask Him in fervent prayer what role He has for you. There is no room for indifference or laziness in the assembly of God.

Notice David addresses his servants as "my brethren" (28:2). What grace and humility on his part. He manifested true love and tenderness to his subjects. This is the mark of a godly leader among the people of God. Peter warns against being "lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Pet. 5:3). No godly elder is a boss. Quite the contrary. They are men following Christ, then exhorting others to follow them. When David challenged the people with these words; "And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the LORD? (29:5), he had previously stated; "Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God. ... I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, Even three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses withal" (29:2-4). Paul told Timothy; "Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). With David it was not a matter of, "Do as I say," but rather, "Do as I do." He set the good example for his flock to follow. The late Jack Hunter remarked that an assembly can rise no higher spiritually that the spirituality of its elders. How true!

David's example and exhortation produced the desired results. "Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the LORD: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy" (29:9). David was a man who assembled his brethren, challenged them, and influenced them. Men of this character are

extremely valuable in God's assembly.

It is very touching to me to see the tenderness, faithfulness, wisdom, advice, and deep concern of David to his son. David had just been in touch with God when he approaches his son with these words; " 'And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek Him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake Him, he will cast thee off for ever. Take heed now; for the LORD hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary: be strong, and do it.'... Then David gave to Solomon his son the pattern..." (28:9-11).

Then we read; "He gave of gold by weight for things of gold, for all instruments of all manner of service; silver also for all instruments of silver by weight, for all instruments of every kind of service: ... And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, even my God, will be with thee; He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD' " (28:14, 20).

Thus we see an older man exhorting, warning, encouraging, enabling, and passing on a divine pattern to a younger man, for the work of God that was to continue. Tremendous! This should be the attitude and exercise of all elders to promising young men in the assembly. Young men need to be encouraged. When a young man prays at the breaking of bread, and leads me into the presence of God, I seek to express to that man my appreciation of his prayer. Worthy compliments encourage the heart, while undue criticism discourages the heart. Let us who are older seek to work with younger brethren and sisters, so that when we have departed the assembly will not be at a loss.

I remember 45 years ago holding a series of gospel meetings with a fairly large assembly. The elders informed me that when they were gone the character of the assembly would remain the same. The reason for their bold assertion was because they had taken some promising young men into their confidence and were training for leadership in days to come. Their prediction proved itself to be true. Those

older men are now all gone, but the testimony goes on in the same character.

David's person and pathway are exposed to us in his dying words. " But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee. For we are strangers before Thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding. O LORD our God, all this store that we have prepared to build Thee an house for Thine holy name cometh of thine hand, and is all thine own" (29:14-16). What a godly confession. Can you say like David, "I am nothing"? When it comes to the Lord's Supper, the collection, the prayer meeting, and the Bible reading, "I have offered so willingly"? Do you attend the assembly gatherings prepared? Prepared to build up the testimony? Are you walking the pilgrim and stranger pathway? Or are you stained in your testimony from the world? Your sacrifices, silver, and godly sojourning are valuable to God. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; ... but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Josh. 24:15). Are you prepared to prepare?

(continued)

"I am personally of the opinion that one of the causes of weakness in the churches today is the virtual disappearance from our pulpits of sound, steady, Scriptural, expository teaching, and that a widespread return to that desirable practice is essential to the solid building-up of our members in the faith." Guy King

"We have caught nothing. . . henceforth you will catch men"

Allan Turkington

In a previous class with the Teacher, there was only one student, Nicodemus. But on this occasion it was difficult for the people to come

near to the Teacher. Luke tells us that the people pressed upon him to hear the Word of God. The Lord entered into Simon's boat separated a little from the land, and sat there teaching the multitude from the boat. We notice their special interest that they had to hear the Word of God.

Another time he says that the people admired His doctrine, and in the synagogue in Nazareth, they marveled at the words of grace that proceeded from His mouth. Like the Preacher in Ecclesiastes, He taught the people with wisdom and made them listen. We read in Mark 12 that a great multitude of people heard Him gladly.

It is very important to gain the attention of our students during a class and to captivate their interest in the lesson. Perhaps the reason why our Bible classes are so small is because we give very dry sermons, and only one class is sufficient to cause them to flee away from the Bible school. On the other hand, we don't need clowns or other modern artifices, but a fisher of men who is ready to obey the voice of the Master.

We learn what happened by the words between the two expressions of our title. "We have caught nothing", was what Peter said at the beginning, but at the end it was the Lord that said, "Fear not, from henceforth thou shall catch men." (Luke 5:10). The Master's class resulted in that same Peter, who was discouraged on the shore of Lake Genesaret, to be the one who cast the net on the day of Pentecost and caught more than 3,000 men. There are lessons that we learn here, and the first lesson that we need to learn is:

Obedience without Hesitation

Even though the Master's order was very clear, "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught" (Luke 5:4), Peter's reasons were contrary: "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing." But Peter's decision was correct, "at thy word, I will let down the net," and the results were amazing: They enclosed a great amount of fish, their net broke, and they filled both boats to such an extent that they were in danger of sinking.

The Master's orders should be obeyed without a question. How sad it is when we think

that we are wiser than He, and we want to serve Him but we allow our own whims to put aside the Word! There is one detail that is interesting, and it is that the Lord said, "Let down your nets," but Peter said, "I will let down the net". It is to say that Peter wasn't ready to completely obey the Word of the Lord. Was it because of this that the net broke?

Brethren, we should not hold a partial form of the Word of the Master, but complete. Speaking to the Corinthians Paul said, "(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled." 2 Cor. 10:4-6.

Now let us notice that this led to:

Confession without Pretension

The result of that fishing experience was so astonishing that Peter fell down on his knees before the Lord Jesus, saying, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." (Lk. 5:8). If the Lord's sight could penetrate the waters of the lake, why couldn't He see Peter's heart also? Peter's discovery was double: The Master was the omniscient Lord, and he was a sinner. His confession was frank and complete. The Lord said to that trembling fisherman, "Fear not."

Many years later, in the upper room, the Lord said to him, "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean," (John 13:10). Peter was completely clean before he could serve the Lord, but the need to wash his feet was continuous. This is what Paul said to Timothy, "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work." (2 Tim. 2:21). Clean vessels, even though made of clay, are what God uses for His work.

Finally, we note in Peter a:

Consecration without Restriction

When they brought those boats to the land,

they left all, and followed Him. Peter, James and John didn't present even one "but" to following the Lord, and the Lord recompensed them. In the mount of the Transfiguration, in the house of Jairus, and in the garden of Gethsemane, they enjoyed a more privileged position than the rest. The Lord is debtor to no one. We read, "And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life." (Mark 10:29-30). What bank can offer more? 10% interest in this life and in the coming age, interest unmeasurable.

Peter dedicated the rest of his life to this elevated service of fishing for men, and because of the Lord's trust in him, he fed the sheep. But if the Lord calls us, like He did Peter, to serve Him full time, there is another passage that corresponds to us: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. (Matt. 10:37-38). Wherever the Lord puts us, we have one thing that we should express, consecration without restriction. Whatever is less than this is not worthy of Him. HE doesn't ask more of us than He was willing to do for us. He gave Himself for us; we are bought with a price, and He obtained us by His own blood.

"Thy life was given for me,
Thy precious blood was shed;
That I might ransomed be,
And quickened from the dead;
Thy life was given for me,
What have I given for Thee?"

The manna and the water—Christ and the Spirit—were given to Israel in the wilderness, not to take them out of trouble, but to sustain them in it, and to impart strength and joy in the way. Exod. 16 and John 6 give Christ as the manna; Exod. 17 and John 7 give the Spirit as the water.
Scott

Things that Differ: Israel and the Church

Joel Portman

Careful students of the Bible learn to recognize things that may seem similar or closely related at first, but upon deeper study are recognized as being different. Much confusion in Christianity has resulted from not recognizing these differences, such as the distinction between the local assembly and the dispensational church, or between the day of man, the day of Christ, the day of the Lord and the day of God. Among many other examples this article deals with the difference between Israel and the church. Those who are of the "reformed" persuasion, amillennialists, and other forms of Christian beliefs who do not discern a dispensational pattern to the Holy Scriptures fail to see this distinction, and as a result, they confuse Israel and the Church and apply truths that pertain to one to the other. For example, some refer to the church in the Old Testament, or see that the Church in the New Testament is simply a continuation of Israel, but in a different form. It is true that Stephen, in his defense, refers to the "church in the wilderness", but the word "iglesia" can be applied in a variety of ways to any kind of congregation (Acts 7:38, 19:32, 39). What is more disturbing is the trend that is taking place in evangelical circles that were the fundamental churches of our world, and that is to rob the nation of Israel of its future and the promises that God made to them beginning with Abraham, and to apply them to the church in a spiritual manner. This denies the truth of many portions of the Bible, including Romans 11, that clearly state that there is a future for the nation of Israel, that the nation will be restored and brought into a right relation with God when the Lord Jesus returns in His glory to the earth. It is to invalidate the promises that God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and to negate the prophecies of Isaiah that anticipate a glorious future for the nation Israel when restored again in the revelation of the Lord Jesus.

Generally, those who interpret the Holy Scriptures by recognizing a dispensational pattern, believe firmly that God has two distinct

people, those that compose the nation of Israel and those who form the entire church, the body of Christ, composed of every true Christian in this present dispensation, that of the church, (it has many terms applied to it, but we include those from the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) to the Rapture of the Church). One is a people who are to receive promises that are mainly earthly, and the other is a people who are blessed with "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus", (Eph. 1:4). Israel has a glorious future on the earth and will one day be the center of God's government in a restored earth during the Millennial period from which will flow out blessing to all the world. The church has a glorious future that is entirely linked with Christ in glory, and it has the blessed hope that where He is, there we shall be also, (1 Thess. 4:17).

Recognizing this distinction, let us consider some, but not all, of the aspects of their particular character that would support this viewpoint.

Differences in God's Purposes and Blessings

Beginning with Abraham, (Gen. 12:1), we learn that God began a new aspect of His work toward men when He called Abraham out of Ur. As a separated man, called by God and responsive to His will, Abraham received promises regarding his descendents, which subsequently were seen in the sons of Jacob. His promise was "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:2-3). That purpose was reaffirmed to Jacob at Bethel when Jehovah appeared to him in the vision in the night and said, "I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed," (Gen. 28:13-14).

Throughout the Old Testament, this purpose of God was confirmed repeatedly, and that was to establish Israel as a nation through

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whom God would bless the people of the world. That blessing was established primarily in the coming of Christ, the promised Messiah, but ultimately through the na-

tion united with their Messiah, the entire world will be blessed, as we read, for example, in Zechariah 2:10-12 "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD. And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto thee. And the LORD shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again." Again, in Isaiah 2:2-4, "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

References could be multiplied, but it is evident that if one believes what the Bible records in a normative manner of understanding words, then the conclusion is that the Lord intends to use Israel as a center of His government and blessing to all the nations, a term which always applies to those that are on the earth.

The church is seen in a different capacity, not linked with earth but passing through it temporally as "strangers and pilgrims" in it (Heb. 11:13, 1 Pet. 2:11). We are in the world, but not of it, as the basic meaning of the word "church" bears this out, since it is a company of people who have been called out of the masses and who have responded to that call, to be identified with Christ, who is their Lord now in the glory. We are in this world to bear testimony to Him in His absence, but the purpose of the church is linked with being with Christ and enjoying His presence eternally.

Those purpose don't appear to be totally isolated from each other; rather we would suggest that they are complementary, both

ultimately expressing the divine purpose that will be completely fulfilled according to God's will.

Distinctions in their Blessings

God's promised blessings to Israel have only been partially fulfilled, never fully realized. The nation reached its maximum extent in territory under Solomon's reign, but even though there was peace and prosperity during that time, the extent of his dominion never attained the area that God had promised. We can see that his reign anticipated that of Christ in His millennial kingdom, but it was only a rather faint picture of the conditions that will prevail in that glorious day.

The blessings that God promised them, if taken at their face value, pertain to the realm of the physical and earthly, not heavenly. We might take God's promise to Abraham in Gen. 13:16, that his seed would be like the dust of the earth, pertains to the nation in its corporate condition, while that in Gen. 15:5 describes the spiritual state of the true believers among them. (Granted that many see the latter verse, which identifies the seed of Abraham as the stars of the heaven to be the church, but it could also refer to the spiritual element among the nation that truly believed God. "This is perhaps a promise of Abram's spiritual children, those who would have faith in God as he did." [Notes on Genesis, Constable]) That is not to say that this couldn't also include believers of this present dispensation, who share in the faith of Abraham.

Also, the blessings that God promised Israel were contingent on their obedience to His commands and faithfulness to His person (Deut. 28:12). Sadly, history shows that they failed to respond as they should have, so that the predicted curse of Deut. 28:15 came to pass until they were virtually destroyed as a nation (Deut. 28:20). Their time of blessing awaits their genuine repentance and restoration that is described in numerous prophetic passages so that even as there was a physical scattering among the nations, there will also be a physical and spiritual regathering, when they "look upon me whom they pierced, and they shall mourn for him. . . (Zech. 12:10-14). Following that, Zechariah speaks of a fountain

opened for cleansing (Zech. 13:1), that will remove their sin and uncleanness. These prophetic passages are too numerous to cite properly.

However, God's promised blessings to the church are all described as spiritual, linked, not with Christ on earth, but with Christ in glory. Ephesians 1:3 tells that we have been "blessed with all (every) spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ". Those in the church have these blessings, not on the ground of our obedience and faithfulness (though that should mark believers who truly know the Lord Jesus), but they are granted on the ground of sovereign grace according to God's eternal purpose (Ephesians 2:4-22, 3:11). We participate presently in all the riches of God's grace and blessings which have been secured for us in the Person and Work of our Lord Jesus, and are linked with Him as the risen Man in the glory. The fullness of experience of these blessings awaits the day of His return for the church, but they are ours in the present work of the Holy Spirit, the "earnest (down-payment) of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession," (Eph. 1:14). His presence indwelling the child of God secures the believer for the inheritance even as it also secures the inheritance for the believer.

Differences in the Covenants

The epistle of Hebrews contrasts the conditions under which Israel's relationship was established with that of the church. One could argue that the church is not under any covenantal relationship with the Lord, but we can look at a covenant as simply defining the conditions under which a relationship is established. Seven covenants have been defined in the Scriptures that are associated with different relationships that God has had with mankind, beginning with that made with Adam in Gen. 2:16-17, that simply required their allegiance to God that they were to show by not eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Other covenants followed, including that subsequent to the fall and expulsion from the garden, with Noah after the flood, with Abraham and with Israel under the law. Some of these, such as that with Abraham, had a character of grace in that God defined entirely what He would do

(Gen. 15) without placing corresponding demands on man.

God made a covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai after He delivered them from Egypt (Exodus 19:5, Deut. 5:2). He promised blessing if they obeyed, judgment if they disobeyed. Israel responded with a promise, that appears to be short-sighted and foolish on their part, as was the result through their failure, to obey all that the Lord said to them. I feel that we might modify our criticism of them, however, by taking into account that they were only expressing their gratitude to the Lord for His mighty deliverance to bring them out of bondage. It would appear to me that any one of us would have done the same. Have we not seen, even in our early experience, that a newly saved believer in Christ is determined to always obey and do what is pleasing to the Lord? It is from our sincere gratitude for salvation, and that is what they were expressing. Failure to follow through on our promises is inevitably the result because of human weakness and innate sinfulness, but it is the early, sincere expression of the heart.

The ten commandments, which comprised the heart of God's relationship with His people, were actually not overly difficult or oppressive, at least not to a spiritual person, whether in Israel or in ourselves. They were made burdensome by the interpretations that were added to them, so that obedience became very complicated and burdensome. The Lord summarized the abundance of commandments to Israel in one brief sentence: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." (Matt. 22:37-39) Nothing less would

"Should we not face the fact that the reason why holy men and women are becoming rare is not because of ignorance of God's will, but rather for want of heart to pay the price that holiness demands?"

Albert McShane