

***A Word for our Time?
Zechariah 9-14,
the New Testament
and Today***

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The last six chapters in the book of Zechariah are a part of the Old Testament on which Jesus himself had deeply reflected and to which the New Testament writers turned to interpret his story. The question that I want to discuss is whether these chapters have a universal word which should be treasured today in addition to their historical meaning.

There are three questions which may rightly be asked of an Old Testament passage which has influenced the New Testament: First, what is its historic meaning in its own setting. This—the scholarly investigation of the original meaning—is the foundation of everything else. Secondly, a further historical question can properly be asked about how the New Testament actually uses the passage. But there is a third question, no less intellectually demanding than the other two, but neglected because it does not fall into the same precise academic disciplines: the question of how the passage may rightly be used to convey truth in the writer's own century. Here there is just as much need as in the other disciplines for discussion and criticism that by the concerted operation of many minds a satisfactory use may be hammered out. Neglect of this discipline has resulted in an unhealthy gap between the work of the historical scholars and the general understanding of the Bible. New provision needs to be made for the serious study of this third discipline in the study of the Bible at British universities.

There are two initial obstacles in the way of finding in Zechariah 9-14, however deeply loved by the New Testament writers, a significance as a vehicle of truth in our contemporary scene—the historical obscurity of the oracles it contains and the absence from it of connected passages in which the universal truth is immediately communicated as in some of the psalms and in the prophecies of Second Isaiah. The second obstacle we must just bear with, the first we must hope will be

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overcome by the progress of historical study. The difficulty here is that the variety of datings ascribed to parts of these chapters makes it unhelpful to bring the material down

to a particular period. It is better to accept the approach of Professor P. R. Ackroyd who says:

It may be wondered whether the attempt to date is the most useful approach to the material ... There are inevitably many points at which it must be confessed that we do not know the events to be sure of a historical attachment to the oracles: and it may be more useful to see in them messages which, however much originally conditioned by particular situations, have been preserved because they were discovered to be readily applicable to new needs. (Peake's Commentary rev. ed. Nelson 1962, 569 e).

These chapters, as is well known, belong to the type of literature known as apocalyptic, which nourished faith in a time of difficulty, and despair of any immediate answer to besetting problems, by appealing to the ultimate triumph of God which would come. Whereas the greater prophets spoke of the fulfilment of God's word within the experience of the generation to which they spoke, the apocalyptists nourished faith in a hopeless present on the certainty of the victory of God in time to come. All believers in God need at all times confidence in God, and at a time like the present in Britain in which it can be openly said that the churches are dying, it may well be that a book like Zechariah 9-14 has a word to say to us. This word must be distinguished from the nationalistic accompaniments which make the triumph real to the mind of the writers—the conquest of Damascus and Tyre, Askelon and Philistia, and of all the nations—but the fact remains that it is the triumph of God to which the oracles are pointing.

If we approach this booklet through the New Testament, then it is right that our starting-point will not be simply the use of Zechariah in the New Testament, but initially the fact that it is clear that Jesus himself turned to this portion of Scripture for the nourishing of his own mind. Any one who studies the use of the Old Testament in the New will draw a distinction between some quotations which are rather artificial and accidental in their present setting and others which represent a profoundly creative mind at work affirming its own

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order of priority as to what is important in the Old Testament. It is difficult not to think that this is the mind of Jesus himself.

The New Testament scholar who has most illuminated the use of Zechariah 9-14 for me is my colleague Professor F. F. Bruce, in his John Rylands Lecture "The Book of Zechariah and the Passion Narrative" (*The John Rylands Bulletin* vol. 43, 1961, pp. 336-53) and its development in his book *This is That* (Paternoster Press, 1968, ch. 8)—though the importance of these chapters as primary testimonies for the New Testament had been made plain by C. H. Dodd in his book *According to the Scriptures* (Nisbet, 1952).

Bruce turns to Mark 14: 27-8 according to which Jesus said to his disciples 'You will all fall away; for it is written, "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered". But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee'. And the scripture to which reference is made is Zechariah 13: 7-9 'Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be

scattered' with the outcome after the remnant endures a fiery test that the covenant promise is fulfilled:

They will call on my name,
and I will answer them.
I will say; 'They are my people';
and they will say 'The Lord is my God'.

He sees this not as an isolated detail—but as a common theme between these six chapters of Zechariah and the presentation by Jesus Himself as the Good Shepherd. We shall be looking at the shepherd theme in Zechariah. The Good Shepherd theme is focussed in John 10: 1-18, but this is the high-lighting of what is to be found in all the Gospels (cp. Mark 6: 34; Matt. 9: 36; 18: 12-14; Luke 15: 3-7).

The only thing to add is that he reminds us of T. W. Manson's well-known insistence that the New Testament phrase 'like sheep without a shepherd' (Mark 6: 34) must be interpreted in terms of Old Testament usage on the analogy of 'an army without a general, a nation without a national leader'. The shepherd is the Shepherd King. And this image is not wholly to be dissociated *in idea* with that of the Suffering Servant of the Lord, even though the two ideas are not linked linguistically (cp. Bruce *This is That* pp. 112-13).

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I find this approach wholly satisfying and convincing, even though some of the details may be over-pressed. For example, Bruce keeps to the Massoretic text in Zech. 13: 7, 11—with the meaning 'the poor of the flock'—rather than following as the R.S.V. and N.E.B. do, the Septuagint, and interpreting it as 'the traffickers in the sheep'. I think that the latter is nearer the original meaning, but it may be that the Massoretic text represents what Jesus himself would have read. But the evidence seems too uncertain to place any firm reliance on these references supporting the emphasis on the role of the shepherd. But minor uncertainties do not affect the overall certainty.

Starting then from the assumption that Jesus himself found in these chapters a help in clarifying his own conviction about the nature and outcome of his own vocation, and that the primitive church on the basis of his example turned to these chapters to interpret the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, let us look at some elements in these chapters which may have a universal meaning.

I The King Shepherd

Lo, your King comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on an ass,
on a colt the foal of an ass.
(Zech. 9: 9)

This picture of the Shepherd-King who is at once victorious and humble is the one that Jesus himself used to interpret the nature of his vocation as he made his entry into

Jerusalem. Only two of the evangelists refer to this passage, but it seems clear that Jesus' decision to ride into Jerusalem on a colt was understood as a fulfilment of Zechariah 9: 9. Matthew gives the fuller quotation (21: 1-5) which he seems to link with Isaiah 62: 11. John's more abbreviated quotation (12: 14-15) may be linked with Isaiah 40: 9.

We can hardly over-estimate the importance for our contemporary world as well as for the ancient world of the fact that Jesus built into his conception of the Kingdom of God a transvaluation of authority, and that in this he was focussing and sharpening what God had brought to birth in ancient

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Israel. The tradition of Israel is one in which the word for righteousness does not mean a careful balancing of merit and defect but a leaning over to rescue the wrongdoer from his sinning, and in which the vivid stories of Nathan's rebuke of David (2 Sam. 12: 1-15) and of Elijah's rebuke to Ahab over the murder of Naboth (1 Kings 21) testify to a conception of authority which is not absolute, but is bound up with a real caring for the well-being of the people. In the teaching of Jesus authority is not repudiated: it is reinforced. 'No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon' (Matt: 6: 24). But he makes it plain that in his followers authority does not mean adopting worldly standards, but instead it is linked with a humble and self-sanctifying devotion to the well-being of others. 'If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all' (Mark 9: 35). 'He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted' (Matt. 23: 11-12) (cp. Mark 10: 45; Luke 9: 48b; 14: 11; 18: 14; John 13: 14).

It cannot be said that the Church has borne unblemished testimony to this important aspect of the Gospel in any of the many Christian traditions, in spite of the fact that one title of the Head of the Roman Catholic Church is that he is servant of the servants of God. But the presence of the conviction that authority to be true authority needs to be transformed from arrogance and self-seeking into humble self-giving to people's needs at the heart of the Christian tradition, has been immensely influential in Church, State and community. It is of crucial importance for the maintenance and renewal of true humanity that it continues to be reaffirmed.

II *The Saving God*

In the section that follows the affirmation about the coming King (Zech. 9: 11-10: 12) there are a number of verbs that express confidence in God's saving action. It starts with a reference to the Exodus Covenant (9: 11) and says, (I quote here from the N.E.B. translation) 'God will *save* them' (9: 16). 'God will *restore* them' (10: 6), 'God has *redeemed* them' (10: 8).

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It is worth considering what appeal emphasis on God's saving action may have today.

The difficulties that all religions face are not only due to dissent from their fundamental tenets in apostasy and unbelief, or to their distortion in what is called heresy, but also to the fact that words fade or lessen in effective *rapport* with people in changed situations. That God saves would be widely recognized as a conventional religious affirmation. How far can it be said to be a living one? I suppose that all who are in any sense Christian will accept the conviction that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world and that his saving action transforms the individual believer from the corruption of sin and unbelief into fellowship with the living God.

But have we let fade the emphasis of the Old Testament that God's saving action affects the whole of society and that in the end his final Kingdom—The Day of the Lord—will express his dealings with all mankind? We live in a society in which in many ways human life is distorted and needs to be rescued from its corruptions. Different people might express what these corruptions are in different ways. I myself would say that in spite of very great gains in the present century the society in which we live is greedy, self-indulgent, and violent. Since God is and reigns, we must look to him to deliver mankind from its distortions. And if so, the people of God must acknowledge that God is calling them to make their faith relevant to the overcoming of the distortions in the corporate life of society, and not isolate it, either by confining it to the personal attitudes of individuals, or the interior life of a sacral society. Here the Old Testament in its emphasis has an element which needs to be re-experienced in contemporary terms.

III *The breaking of the Covenant and the smiting of the Shepherd*

The central section of these chapters—the passage 11: 4-17—is at once exceptionally obscure and essentially profound. With this passage we may link 13: 7-9 as the N.E.B. does, though this is disputed, and some have seen it linked more truly with the mourning over the Pierced One (12: 9-13: 1). In the story of the breaking of the covenant, the prophet is commanded to be

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shepherd of the flock on whom Jahweh has no pity. We note how in this story the symbolic and the literal are intertwined and a little confused. But the N.E.B. translation-interpretation which interprets shepherding as fattening (vv. 4, 7) distorts the sense. The shepherding is the positive side of what the worthless shepherd (vv. 15, 16) does not do. He misses any who are lost, he searches for those who have gone astray, he heals the injured and he nurses the sickly. The two staves are Grace or Favour—the graciousness of God, and Union—the brotherhood between Judah and Israel. By divine authority the shepherd-prophet got rid of three shepherds. But the sheep were hostile to the shepherd and he came to dislike them. And so he broke the staff Grace annulling the covenant which Jahweh had made with all nations. The dealers paid him as wages thirty silver pieces—a miserable sum—the price which according to the law in Exodus (21: 32) was compensation for the death of a slave gored to death by someone else's ox. This salary, at the command of Jahweh, the prophet cast into the temple foundry to be melted down, and brought to expression what had happened by breaking the second staff—Union—symbolizing the destruction of the

brotherhood between Judah and Israel. As a result of this repudiation of the good shepherd, there is now installed a worthless shepherd who takes no proper care of the sheep.

We would be greatly helped by a greater knowledge of the historical setting of this story in which the relevance and sequence of the different items would take on new life. But the heart of it is the awful possibility of God's people repudiating his care of them so drastically that the covenant between God and man and man and man is annulled. If this was one of the Old Testament passages on which Jesus meditated for the discernment of the true nature of his mission, then he did not follow the horrifying character of this macabre story. For this depicts something worse than the annulling of the natural covenant of Genesis 6: 7, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground'. This affirms the annulling of the historic covenant between God and his people because of the wickedness of men and their repudiation of the Shepherd-King whom God has sent them. Jesus saw in these prophecies

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the sombre likely outcome of his own mission. But in place of the repudiation of the historic covenant as the outcome of the rejection, piercing and smiting the Shepherd, he saw God making it the opportunity of establishing the historic covenant on a firmer basis as a new covenant. So St. Paul testifies (1 Cor. 11: 23, 25): 'The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took ... the cup, saying: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood"'. In this he was both reaffirming the covenant with Noah (Gen. 8: 21, 22; 9: 8-17) which was the answer to that ancient dark possibility, and picking up the hopeful outcome of 13: 7-9 from these chapters:

They will call on my name,
and I will answer them.
I will say, 'They are my people';
and they will say, 'The Lord is my God'.

It is not easy to see how anyone can ponder on the sombre theme of Zech. 11: 4-17 and not be driven to wonder, love, and praise of the generous love of God who persists in his transforming grace in spite of the churlish ingratitude which man exhibits, manifestly to his own hurt.

Dr Kenneth Kirk, whose Bampton Lectures for 1928, *The Vision of God*, bore witness to the author's massive learning and scholarship preached a sermon at the ordination of a bishop in 1954 entitled *Beauty and Bands* (see *Beauty and Bands and other papers* by Kenneth Escott Kirk, Hodder and Stoughton, 1955). These are the names of the shepherd's two staves in the A.V. of Zech. 11. These he interprets as the beauty of the pastoral ministry of a bishop and the thing that conflicts with it—the shackles of his administrative duties. So he wrote: 'I have known bishops of little oratorical power or distinction of utterance; but the love for their flock exhibited in every word and action has been such as to leave an indelible impression of beauty of ministry which can come from heaven alone ... But besides the beauty of pastoral ministrations in the bishop's life, there are also the "bands"—the shackles and limitations laid upon him by administrative cares and responsibilities'. (op. cit., p. 11; see pp. 9-12). In spite of the eminence of the distinguished preacher, it must be said quite categorically that this is a completely unjustified and undesirable way of using

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scripture. The author picks on details in a particular translation, and transfers them without regard to the thought of the passage to a wholly irrelevant situation, even in the process, placing the shepherd's two staves in opposition to one another. Only a use of the Bible which, in applying it to a new context, respects the integrity of the original thought, can be justified.

There is a secondary element in Zech. 11: 4-17: the contemptuous wages paid to the good shepherd in spite of his faithful service in caring for the sheep. In the New Testament the First Evangelist links this with the money paid to Judas for betraying Jesus (Matt. 26: 14-16, 27: 3-9) 'There is no reason' wrote C. H. Dodd (op. cit., pp. 64-5) 'to suppose that this [incident] belongs to the primitive corpus of *testimonia*, but we may well believe that Matthew was led to it because the whole passage of Zechariah was already recognized as a source of testimonies'. F. F. Bruce calls attention to the fact that the belief that Judas's defection was a subject of Old Testament prediction is deeply embedded in the Gospel tradition (op. cit. p. 109), and in support of this he links this with Mark 14: 18-21, Acts 15-20 (with its appeal to Psalm 69: 25; 109: 8), and John 13: 18; 17: 12. This corresponds to something deep in the New Testament conviction, that the betrayal of Jesus was not something accidental, that might easily have been different, but something rooted in the whole history of man's grudging disobedience of God. So, in retrospect, they looked upon what had happened as rooted in the unshakable purpose of God to overcome the sinfulness of man. We read in Acts 4 how, when Peter and John had been released to go back to their friends, they affirmed in prayer to God 'for truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place' (Acts 4: 27-28). The idiom may not come naturally to us in the twentieth century, but it contains a truth about human nature that deserves to be taken seriously. Still the linking of the money paid to Judas with the money paid to the shepherd of Zechariah 11 is only a detail in the main theme.

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IV The Pierced One and the Fountain of Cleansing

Chapter 12 opens with what we may call The Day of the Lord Part I and we may take it along with chapter 14. But we may consider here 12: 10-13: 1. This, in contrast to the note of victory sounded in the early verses in chapter 12, is a note of repentance for someone whom the people have 'pierced', that is, seriously hurt, whether the word is meant literally or metaphorically. We must note that this repentance and grief is a gift of God. It is Jahweh himself who will pour out a spirit of pity and compassion upon the people (v. 10). And who is this pierced one? That is very uncertain. It may be some historical figure who has been harshly and unjustly treated and for whose treatment the writer thinks that the people ought to repent even if till now they have not. It is natural also for an expositor, if not necessarily in the same way for an historical scholar, to link the thought in these verses with Second Isaiah's prophecy of the Suffering Servant:

Surely he has borne our griefs

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and carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions,
he was bruised for our iniquities;
Upon him was the chastisement that made us whole,
and with his stripes we are healed.
(Isa. 53: 4-5)

Or it may be that if we read v. 10 as N.E.B. does:

‘They shall look on me, on him who they have pierced’ that this is applied to Israel’s mourning over its lack of faith in and obedience to its covenant God. This last interpretation may be the one meant historically. This is in fact linked with ritual mourning for national sins against God, and it is emphasized firstly that it is at least as great as that of mourning for fertility deities and secondly, that the mourning is taken very seriously as each grouping within the people, section by section, takes part in it.

As a result of the people’s response to God’s pouring out on them a spirit of pity and compassion, there will be opened in

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Jerusalem a fountain to cleanse them from all sin and impurity (a prophecy to be linked with Ezek. 36: 25).

The writer of the Fourth Gospel, alone of all the Evangelists, picks up the first part of this section, and applies the thought of the pierced one to Jesus. So he says (John 19: 36-7) ‘these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled; “Not a bone of him shall be broken”. [Here he is appealing to Exod. 12: 46 which refers to the Passover Lamb]. And again, another scripture says, “They shall look on him whom they have pierced”.’

It may be noted that it is this Gospel alone which speaks of the piercing of Jesus’ side by the Roman centurion with a spear; just as it is the only one to make explicit reference to the piercing of Jesus’ hands by the nails (see John 20: 25), though nail wounds may be implied by Luke 24: 39.

F. F. Bruce quotes here P. Lamarche *Zecharia IX-XIV* (Paris, 1961) who

finds an association of *ideas* between the pierced one and the suffering servant, as also between the smitten shepherd and the suffering servant. Such an association may readily be found, and may best be explained if the pierced one, the smitten shepherd and the servant are all in their respective ways presentations of Israel’s King enduring suffering and death in his people’s place, thus procuring their cleansing, deliverance and peace with God.

But if that is the right setting for the understanding of these passages, Bruce insists that the New Testament goes deeper for he says:

Whatever be the original reference of the piercing and mourning, in the passion narrative it has by implication been brought into close association with the oracle of Zechariah 13.7; the pierced one and the smitten shepherd are both recognized as pointing to Jesus, scourged and crucified as ‘the King of the Jews’.

After the mourning it is said in 13: 1, as we have seen, that there will be opened in Jerusalem a fountain to cleanse them from all sin and impurity. This is, of course, a symbolic cleansing such as we find in the New Testament in connection with baptism (cp. Mark 1: 9-11; Acts 8: 36-39; Eph. 5: 26), but we do not find associated with the forgiving and transforming power of the death of Christ. The characteristic images used

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here are of a different kind. So Paul says in Romans 3: 24-25 that sinners ‘are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith’. But there is one English poet who has apparently linked Zech. 13: 1 with the cleansing power of the death of Christ—William Cowper (1731-1800) who wrote the hymn:

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.

The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day;
And there have I, as vile as he,
Washed all my sins away.

Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed Church of God
Be saved, to sin no more.

E’er since by faith I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.

Then in a nobler, sweeter song,
I’ll sing thy power to save,
When this poor lisping, stammering tongue
Lies silent in the grave.

This hymn has been condemned by many people on the grounds that it offends their sense of taste, and in at least one collection is relegated to hymns labelled as chiefly for private devotion. Whatever the rightness of the objection on the ground of taste, and it may be that some of the objectors do not know their Old Testament as William Cowper did, the real question is: was Cowper justified in relating Zech. 13: 1 to the cleansing power of

the Cross of Christ (though he had no New Testament precedent to support him)? I must say that I think he was, and that the verse:

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E'er since by faith I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.

is as moving a tribute as can be found to the power of the Cross of Christ to stir the sinner to the response of a new obedience in faith and life.

V *The Removal of Prophecy*

In 13: 2-6 the prophecy referred to is uniformly false and unworthy prophecy. It may be, of course, that The Day of the Lord is so near in the prophet's mind, that the time when prophecy had a legitimate function was almost at an end. However that may be, we must take account of this denunciation of false prophecy. P. R. Ackroyd says: (Peake's Commentary rev. ed. Nelson, 1962, 571 n) 'Older prophetic sayings are here reinterpreted to show how the external trappings of the prophet—the hairy garment, the ecstatic practice—are being misused', and he quotes Deut. 13: 5 and 18: 20, Amos 7: 14. Is this an illustration of the old Lancashire saying: 'clogs to clogs in three generations'? Did the institution of prophecy, rescued by the great prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries from its unworthy associations, and transformed into a costly and demanding vehicle for a searching vision of the truth of God, slip back into its old unworthy forms and associations, so that its total removal was deemed necessary to the coming of the Kingdom of God? Certainly the picture given is that of the prophet being disowned by his family, and himself explaining away the scars of wounds received in ecstatic excitement.

It seems fair to say that the interpreter may legitimately see in this passage another instance of the insistence to be found in Old Testament and New Testament that the holding of office as such is no guarantee that this deserves respect, that only the holding of office with concern for truth and right and with compassion and insight can do it justice. Institutions, even the most venerable, sometimes especially the most venerable, can decay and need either to be renewed or discarded. The truth, so painfully worked out in the hard experience of Jeremiah that there is no security except in God must be re-learned by God's

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people again and again. And it is this which is re-affirmed even more searchingly in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—even though in the history of the Church it has often been forgotten.

F. F. Bruce has called attention to the misuse by E. B. Pusey, the great Tractarian scholar of 13: 6 'What are these scars on your back (or chest)?'. And he will answer: 'I got them in the house of my friends (or lovers)'. Pusey treated them as a prophecy of the nail-wounds in the hands of the crucified Jesus. And Bruce quotes the nineteenth century scholar T. V. Moore, *The Book of Zechariah* (New York, 1856; reprinted London, 1958 p. 208) who

said that 'The application of this verse to Christ is the grossest misapprehension of its meaning'. There are two points here. In the first place, the Hebrew idiom 'between the hands' means on the body, and not in the hands themselves. And Bruce says (op. cit. p. 114): 'It is astonishing that so able a Hebraist as E. B. Pusey should have been capable of this misinterpretation'. But even if the Hebrew idiom would yield the meaning wounds in the hands, the application of this verse to the crucified body of Jesus involves taking the phrase by itself in total isolation from the context. Since the Bible is a book that nourishes living religious faith, what it says must be applied to contexts other than the original ones. But any application must seek to respect the original thought.

VI *The Day of the Lord: Triumph, Transformation, Worship and Holiness*

The presentation of The Day of the Lord—the prophetic vision of God's final Kingdom—in these chapters has two sections. The first is chapter 12: 1-9 and the second is chapter 14. The first section expresses the victory of God as the victory of Judah and Jerusalem over the nations round about. There is a tension between Judah and Jerusalem in the passage of which there is a partial resolution. The outcome is that 'the feeblest' of the inhabitants of Jerusalem 'shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God', a phrase which is immediately lessened to read 'like the angel of the Lord'. This seems to refer to the heartening effect of the victory on those who share in it. We may see in it a preliminary expression of that hope of which

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St. Paul writes in Romans 8: 19-20 when he says that 'the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God', the outcome of which will be that the creation itself will share in 'the glorious liberty of the children of God'.

The second and longer presentation of The Day of the Lord in chapter 14 is more complex and to some extent badly arranged. There will be a final battle in which Jerusalem is sacked and half the people exiled. But God himself will come to fight for his people, and take his stand on the Mount of Olives which will be cleft in two. One valley will be blocked, and another wide one opened up. The nations who warred against Jerusalem will suffer plague (v. 1a), or a different fate, but it is given as an addition, panic and slaughter (vv. 13-15).

The positive outcome of God's intervention consists first of all in the transformation of nature—so that there are no opposites of hot and cold, but one equable temperature; no opposites of light and darkness but one pleasing light; the land will be perpetually nourished in both east and west by permanent streams of water; and the hilly country of Palestine will be made a plain on a lower level while Jerusalem keeps and enhances its eminence. This is the result of the Kingship of Jahweh over the whole earth—he is the one Lord, and his name the one name. This is the fulfilment of the Shema of Dent. 6: 4 'The Lord our God is one Lord', and of Isaiah 45: 5 'I am the Lord, and there is no other'.

The result is the universal worship of the King, the Lord of Hosts (with penalties of the withholding of rain for those who do not worship, or in Egypt of plague). In Jerusalem and in Judah the distinction between the sacred and the secular will be abolished; every

household pot will be holy; and the Temple will be cleansed from secular trading and be the fitting vehicle of universal worship.

When we ask what use the New Testament has made of these chapters, we must distinguish between the general theme—the coming of the final Kingdom of God—which is a theme common to both Testaments, and the particular treatment of it here, which is not greatly influential.

It is possible that Jesus referred to the Mount of Olives when

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he said: ‘Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain: “Be taken up and cast into the sea” and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him”’ (Mark 11: 23), had in mind this passage, and linked the having of true faith with the coming of the final Kingdom. The reader of the New Testament will have the Mount of Olives in mind as the scene of the *denouement* so very different from that of Zechariah 14 in the submission of Jesus to his Father’s will in the garden of Gethsemane. It may be also that the language of this chapter has influenced the language of the Lukan version of the eschatological discourse in the Synoptic Gospels which speaks about ‘Jerusalem surrounded by armies’. It may also be that the scripture referred to in John 7: 38 when Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles said ““If any one is thirsty let him come to me; whoever believes in me, let him drink”. As scripture says, “Streams of living water shall flow out from within him”” (N.E.B.) is verse 8 of this chapter which says ‘On that day living water shall issue from Jerusalem’ (N.E.B.) for the chapter stresses the worship at the Feast of Tabernacles (v. 16). But the precise scripture referred to in John 7: 38 is uncertain. Still, in spite of the limited use of these passages in the New Testament, the theme of the coming of the final Kingdom of God is common to the New Testament as well as to the Old.

But what use can legitimately be made of the passages in our own century?

One way of answering this is to say that this is a way of thinking, which, though essential to the understanding of the biblical material, is a way of thinking that we have outgrown and that it contains no universal element which can have any importance for us. This is apparently an attitude which many people share, but it is an attitude which dissolves the reality that it seeks to understand. The recognition of God at all is the recognition of the transcendent as a reality which it is intellectually as well as emotionally hurtful to try and do without. With the acknowledgement of God we must affirm the purposes he has for the universe of which he is the Creator and Redeemer. Eschatology is in fact the cutting edge of any living religion. Our present

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action is determined by a vision of what the future holds. The Christian religion is in a weak state because so many within it are uncertain about the will of God either for

themselves, or for humanity or for the universe. In a technological civilization, when we are so heavily involved in questions of a penultimate character, we urgently need to recover in a valid and convincing way the claim and nourishment of the ultimate. And reflection on these chapters may help us to do this.

When we turn to positive reflection on The Day of the Lord as Zechariah presents it, there seem to be four elements: Triumph, Transformation, Worship and Holiness.

The triumph of God comes in the conquest of evil. When the evil to be conquered can be thought of as outside ourselves as when in Zech. 14: 3 we read: 'Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle', then it is not too difficult to picture it. This is still the case in the book of Revelation in the New Testament in which the triumph of God is pictured as external to the company of the Redeemed. So it says:

Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!
It has become a dwelling place of demons,
a haunt of every foul spirit,
a haunt of every foul and hateful bird;
for all nations have drunk the wine of her
impure passion,
and the kings of the earth have committed
fornication with her,
and the merchants of the earth have grown rich
with the wealth of her wantonness.
(Rev. 18: 2-3)

The situation is different when we take seriously the fact that God's purpose is to bring to completion his whole dealing with human history, to gather into one all things in Christ, and do not seek to evade the force of that text which gave so much trouble to the medieval theologians which speaks of 'God our Saviour, whose will it is that all men should find salvation and come to know the truth' (1 Tim. 2: 4, N.E.B.).

The problem is unconsciously presented to us by Rev. 21: 26-27, where the kings of the earth shall bring into the heavenly

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city 'the glory and honour of the nations'. At the same time 'nothing unclean shall enter into it, nor any one who practises abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life'. How shall we picture for our time the total fulfilment of God's purposes, without minimizing the awful distortions of human life that have happened, and what would be involved in the total victory over evil in the human heart so that all share 'in the light of the knowledge of the glory of God'? It is not easy to say, but the fact that we find it difficult should not prevent us seeing in Zechariah 14 an early pointer to that which we also must strive to find a way of saying.

The transformation of nature is pictured in terms of what inhabitants of Palestine would like to picture in that hilly thirsty country—plenty of water, level country (except that Jerusalem keeps and enhances its position), equable temperature and pleasing light. This is a way of picturing the right setting for the coming of God's Kingdom.

The biblical tradition is not uniform here. In Isaiah 65: 17 Jahweh declares: 'Behold I create new heavens and a new earth'. But the meaning here is not that the existing world will be utterly destroyed but that it will be completely transformed. On the other hand, Isaiah 51: 6 says:

Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
and look at the earth beneath;
for the heavens will vanish like smoke,
the earth will wear out like a garment,
and they who dwell in it will die like gnats;
but my salvation will be for ever,
and my deliverance will never be ended.

It is this latter tradition which is appealed to in the New Testament which we read in 2 Peter 3: 12-13. He writes to those who are 'waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells'. And this apparently is the implication of Rev. 21: 1: 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth'.

Here again it is difficult for us in our own century to deal with this element in the eschatological hope. On the one hand,

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the immense fact of death makes it difficult to envisage this present universe as the scene of God's final Kingdom; on the other hand, it is difficult to think that God has created the universe to serve a limited purpose, and when it has done so, it will be jettisoned like a car which has served its purpose, discarded on a scrap heap. The phrase 'a new heaven and a new earth' is vague enough to allow some relation to the present universe, and in that sense a fulfilment of its creation, and at the same time something that is in many ways utterly new to serve permanently as the vehicle of God's completed purpose. However that may be, we may find in the passage of Zechariah 14 with its limited picture of a transformed condition of Palestine as the vehicle of God's triumphant purpose a stimulus to reach out to the transformation of the universe to be the vehicle of the completed triumph of the greater purpose which we discern in Christ.

In a transformed world the prophet has a vision of the universal worship by all in Jerusalem. This is a true vision, because since man's true life is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever, in the final kingdom all men will acknowledge their true life and have the freedom and fulfilment of worshipping the true God.

There are more moving expressions of this same theme earlier in the book of Zechariah: 'Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favour of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you"' (Zech. 8: 22-3), and in the prophecies of Isaiah:

It shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the house of the Lord
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills;
and all the nations shall flow to it,
and many peoples shall come and say:
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.'
(Isa. 2: 2-4)

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Here, though the vision of the universal worship of mankind is the right one, it is limited by the provision of sanctions against any who are not willing to take part in the worship of the true God. Rain will be withheld from their territory whereas as for Egypt which has a different relation to the rainfall, as S. R. Driver has put it, (Century Bible, 1906, p. 280) 'its people will not escape: the same "plague" of scarcity, famine, disease, etc., which is to affect other nations will affect them also, though it will be due, it is implied, not to the failure of rain, but to the failure of the annual rising of the Nile'. We must not blame the prophet too much here. The lesson that while it is important that the object of worship should be the one true God, who alone deserves the worship of mankind, it is equally important that the worship should be the free response of mind and heart, and that coerced worship is a contradiction in terms, is one that mankind has been very slow to learn. The immense authority of St. Augustine was lent to the belief that worship can be extorted from unwilling people, by his interpretation of Luke 14: 23 where in order to make up the deficiency of guests for the great banquet the phrase is used: 'Compel them to come in'. St. Augustine used it in support of his argument that the Donatists should be compelled to return to the Catholic Church (*On the Correction of the Donatists*, 24), and subsequently it was widely used as a justification for persecution. In recent centuries the need for toleration of beliefs considered erroneous as necessary to safeguard the integrity of the spirit of man has grown and been given notable expression in the Declaration of the Second Vatican Council on Freedom of Conscience. But the lesson has been slowly learnt, and it is right to read Zechariah 14 for the vision it enshrines rather than for the limitation placed on it.

With universal worship there will be universal holiness. In the final verses of chapter 14, there is a vision of the overcoming of the division between secular and sacred by taking up the whole field of the secular into the realm of the sacred. The vision is not very profound or consistent. In one sense it rests on mundane considerations, since there will be so many worshippers flocking into Jerusalem so that household cooking pots will have to be used in

the service of worship. The exclusion of the trader (literally, Canaanite) from the sacredness of the

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temple is put in, paradoxically, to safeguard its totality, but it means that the fusion of sacred and secular is in fact unresolved. It is possible that the Fourth Gospel has this final phrase in Zechariah 14 in mind when in its story of the cleansing of the temple Jesus said: 'You shall not make my Father's house a house of trade' (John 2: 16).

In the great New Testament apocalypse the image used for the overcoming of the division between secular and sacred is the opposite to the one used in Zechariah. The city is not swallowed up in the temple, rather the temple disappears in the city, which is made holy. So we read (Rev. 21: 22-3) 'And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb'. It is this conception which is wholly in line with the Christian view, expressed in Hebrews 9: 23-8 that the sacrifice of Christ, made once for all, has made any additional sacrifice unnecessary. It is also a greater vision of the totality of life being open to the immediate presence of God.

The way in which the prophet expresses the universal holiness of the final kingdom is by saying that the bells on the horses' harness will bear the same inscription as that on the high priest's turban (Exod. 39: 30-1) which was meant to symbolize God's call to all the people to be holy (Exod. 19: 5; Jer. 2: 3). It is an external symbol, and a dangerous one. Not that God does not use matter to communicate with man, or that obedience to God takes place in a supposed spiritual realm, which is divorced from his embodied state. But rather that visions of the final kingdom may be applied to the life that is still in pilgrimage in which there can be no guaranteed holiness, but only a call to find security in trust and obedience to the living God. This danger is also to be found in the vision of the new temple in Ezek. 40-8, in which the priests' garments are intrinsically holy (Ezek. 42: 14), in which the plan of the temple itself will make people ashamed of their sins (Ezek. 43: 10) and the territory of the temple as such is holy (Ezek. 43: 12). It is better to think of any conception of the holiness necessary to the final Kingdom of God as a continuation of what is necessary here and now and borrow from St. Paul's letter to the Philip-

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pians (2: 1-5). 'If there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness and conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus.'

This little booklet Zechariah 9-14 sounds both the depths and the heights of human life. It bids us reckon with the exceeding sinfulness of sin, which goes far to wreck the very foundations of human life. It asks us also to take with equal seriousness the triumph of the

Hubert Cunliffe-Jones, *A Word for our Time? Zechariah 9-14, the New Testament and Today*. The Ethel M. Wood Lecture delivered before the University of London on 15 February 1973. London: The Athlone Press, 1973. Pbk. pp.24.

eternal God. It is a great pity that the historical background of almost all of it is so uncertain, and we may hope that continued historical study will clarify this. It is a section of the Old Testament on which Jesus himself meditated to clarify his conception of his own mission, and to which his interpreters turned to explain it. There is in it a universal meaning, as well as a localized one, and we need concerted intellectual study, here as elsewhere in the Bible, of the kind of use which can be made of it today, alert to all that historical scholarship has to say about it, and compatible with intellectual integrity. It is out of such concerted intellectual study that a satisfactory general use of the Bible will grow.

To this end it is urgently necessary that Universities should appoint additional lecturers to their Departments or Faculties of Theology—lecturers who are competent to be members at once of Departments of Biblical Studies and also of Departments of Theology. They should lecture to both Biblical students and students of Theology on the use of the results of Biblical exegesis—to the one group to show them the legitimate use of their historical studies, and to the other group to show them what kinds of use of the Bible are legitimate, and to make it plain that in the theologian's use of the Bible he must respect and learn from the discipline of Biblical exegesis. In this way a hurtful intellectual gap would be filled, and an important educational opportunity would be grasped. To the closing of this gap, and the seizing of this opportunity, this lecture is a very tiny contribution.

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