

The Covenant

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon passionately explains that God's Covenant of Grace is an unbreakable, sovereign promise of salvation and transformation for all who are in Christ by faith and the new birth.

Scripture: Psalm 111:5, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 11:19-20, Ezekiel 36:25-28, Galatians 3, Romans 5:19, Hebrews 7:22, Isaiah 53:11

Topics: "Covenant Theology", "Grace", "Salvation"

Description

In this profound sermon, C.H. Spurgeon explores the nature and certainty of God's Covenant of Grace. He explains how this divine promise is unbreakable and based solely on God's sovereign will, fulfilled through Jesus Christ, the Second Adam. Spurgeon challenges listeners to examine their faith and birth by the Spirit to confirm their place in this Covenant. This teaching offers assurance and encouragement to all who trust in Christ, emphasizing the transformative blessings guaranteed by God.

Transcript

"He will ever be mindful of His Covenant." Psalm 111:5.

[Another Sermon by C. H. Spurgeon upon the same text, is #2681, Volume 56—Covenant Blessings.]

IT is an amazing thing that God should enter into gracious Covenant with men. That He should make man and be gracious to man is easily to be conceived, but that He should strike hands with his nature and put His august majesty under bond to him by His own promise is marvelous! Once let me know that God has made a Covenant and I do not think it amazing that He should be mindful of it, for He is "God that cannot lie." "Has He said, and shall He not do it?" Has He once given His pledge? It is inconceivable that He should ever desert from it. The doctrine of the text commends itself to every reasonable and thoughtful man—if God has made a Covenant, He will ever be faithful of it. It is to that point that I would now call your attention with the desire to use it practically.

For God to make a gracious Covenant with us is so great a gift that I hope everyone here is saying within his heart, "Oh, that the Lord had entered into Covenant with me!"

We shall practically look into this matter, first, by answering the question, What is this Covenant? Secondly, by putting the enquiry, Have I any portion in it? And, thirdly, by bidding each one say, "If, indeed, I am in Covenant with God, then every part of that Covenant will be carried out, for God is ever

mindful of it."

I. First, then, WHAT IS THIS COVENANT?

If you go to a lawyer and enquire how a deed runs, he may reply, "I can give you an abstract, but I had better read it to you." He can tell you the sum and substance of it, but if you want to be very accurate—and it is a very important business—you will say, "I would like to hear it read." We will now read certain parts of Scripture which contain the Covenant of Grace, or an abstract of it. Turn to Jeremiah 31:31-34—"Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that I will make a new Covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the Covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which My Covenant they broke, although I was an Husband unto them, says the Lord. But this shall be the Covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After those days, says the Lord, I will put My Law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts; and will be their God and they shall be My people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Print every word of that in diamonds, for the sense is inconceivably precious! God in Covenant promises to His people that instead of writing His law upon tablets of stone, He will write it on the tablets of their hearts. Instead of the Law of God coming on a hard, crushing command, it shall be placed within them as the object of love and delight, written on the transformed nature of the beloved objects of God's choice! "I will put My Law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts"—what a Covenant privilege this is! "And I will be their God." Therefore all that there is in God shall belong to them. "And they shall be My people." They shall belong to Me. I will love them as Mine. I will keep them, bless them, honor them and provide for them as My people. I will be their portion and they shall be My portion.

Note the next privilege. They shall all receive heavenly instruction upon the most vital point—"They shall all know Me." There may be some things they do not know, but "they shall all know Me." They shall know Me as their Father. They shall know Jesus Christ as their Brother. They shall know the Holy Spirit as their Comforter. They shall have com-

munion and fellowship with God! What a Covenant privilege is this! Hence comes pardon, "For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." What a clean sweep of sin! God will forgive and forget—the two go together. "I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more." All gone—all their transgression blotted out, never to be mentioned against you again, forever! What an unutterable favor! This is the Covenant of Grace! I call your attention to the fact that there is no, "if," in it! There is no, "but," in it—there is no requirement made by it of man. It is all, "I will," and, "they shall." "I will be their God, and they shall be My people." It is a charter written in a royal tone and the majestic straining not marred by a "perhaps" or a "maybe"—but dwells always on, "shall," and, "will." These are two prerogative words of the Divine Majesty and in this wondrous deed of gift in which the Lord bestows a Heaven of Grace upon guilty sinners, He bestows it after the Sovereignty of His own will without anything to put the gift in jeopardy, or to make the promise insecure! Thus I have read the Covenant to you in one form.

Turn over the pages a little and you will come to a passage in Ezekiel. There we shall have the bright-eyed Prophet—he who could live among the wheels and the seraphim—telling us what the Covenant of Grace is. In Ezekiel, the 11th Chapter, 19th and 20th verses, we read, "I will put a new spirit within you, and I will

take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances, and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God."

You will find another form of it further on in the 36th of Ezekiel, beginning at the 25th verse. How intently ought you to listen to this! It is a deal better than hearing any preaching of mortal men to listen to the very words of God's own Covenant—a Covenant which saves all those who are concerned in it! Unless you have an interest in it, you are, indeed, unhappy. Let us read it—"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean; from all your filthiness and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you shall keep My judgments, and do them...And you shall be My people, and I will be your God." This promise always come in at the close, "I will be your God." In this form of the Covenant, I call you again to witness that God demands nothing, asks no price, demands no payment—but to the people with whom He enters into Covenant, He makes promise after promise, all free, all unconditional, all made according to the bounty of His royal heart!

Let us go into a little detail about this. God has made a Covenant with certain people that He will do all this for them—and in each case it is of pure Grace. He will take away their own hearts—it is clear from the promise that when He began with them, they had stony hearts. He will forgive their iniquities—when He began with them, they had many iniquities. He will give them a heart of flesh—when He began with them, they had not a heart of flesh. He will turn them to keep His statutes—when He began with them, they did not keep His statutes. They were a sinful, willful, wicked, degenerate people and He called to them many times to come to Him and repent—but they would not. Here He speaks like a king and no longer pleads, but decrees! He says, I will do this and that to you and you shall be this and this in return. Oh, blessed Covenant! Oh, mighty, Sovereign Grace!

How came it about? Learn the Doctrine of the two Covenants.

The first Covenant of which we will now speak was that of Works, the Covenant made with our first father, Adam. This is not first in purpose, but it was first revealed in time. It ran thus—You, Adam, and your posterity shall live and be happy if you will keep My Law. To test your obedience to Me, there is a certain tree—if you let it alone, you shall live. If you touch it, you shall die, and they whom you represent shall die.

Our first Covenant head snatched greedily at the forbidden fruit and fell—and what a Fall was there, my Brothers and Sisters! There you and I, and all of us, fell down while it was proven once and for all that by works of the Law no man can be justified! For if perfect Adam broke the Law so readily, depend upon it, you and I would break any Law that God had ever made! There was no hope of happiness for any of us by a Covenant which contained an, "if," in it. That Old Covenant is put away, for it has utterly failed. It brought nothing to us but a curse—and we are glad that it has waxed old and, as far as Believers are concerned, has vanished!

Then there came the Second Adam. You know His name, He is the ever-blessed Son of the Highest. This Second Adam entered into Covenant with God somewhat after this fashion—The Father said, I give You a people; they shall be

Yours: You must die to redeem them and when You have done this—when for their sakes You have kept My Law and made it honorable—when for their sakes you have borne My wrath against their transgressions—then I will bless them. They shall be My people. I will forgive their iniquities. I will change

their natures. I will sanctify them and make them perfect. There was an apparent, "if," in this Covenant at the first. That "if" hinged upon the question whether the Lord Jesus would obey the Law and pay the ransom—a question which His faithfulness placed beyond doubt! There is no "if" in it, now. When Jesus bowed His head and said, "It is finished," there remained no "if" in the Covenant! It stands, therefore, now as a Covenant entirely of one side, a Covenant of promises—of promises which must be kept because the other portion of the Covenant having been fulfilled—the Father's side of it must stand! He cannot and He will not draw back from the doing of that which He covenanted with Christ to do! The Lord Jesus shall receive the joy which was set before Him. "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." By His knowledge shall the Christ who became God's righteous Servant justify many, for has He not borne their iniquities? How can it be otherwise than that they should be accepted for whom He was the Surety? Do you see why it is that the Covenant, as I have read it, stands so absolutely without, "ifs," "buts," and, "perhappes," and runs only on, "shalls," and, "wills"? It is because the one side of it that did look uncertain was committed into the hands of Christ, who cannot fail or be discouraged! He has completed His part of it and now it stands fast and must stand fast forever and ever! This is now a Covenant of pure Grace and nothing else but Grace! Let no man attempt to mix up works with it, or anything of human merit! God saves now because He chooses to save—and over the head of us all there comes a sound as of a martial trumpet and yet with a deep, inner peaceful music in it—"I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." God observes us all lost and ruined and, in His Infinite Mercy, comes with absolute promises of Divine Grace to those whom He has given to His Son Jesus.

So much, then, with regard to the Covenant.

II. Now comes the important question, "HAVE I ANY PORTION IN IT?" May the Holy Spirit help us to ascertain the Truth of God on this point! You who are really anxious in your hearts to know, I would earnestly persuade to read the Epistle to the Galatians. Read that Epistle through if you want to know whether you have any part or lot in the Covenant of Grace. Did Christ fulfill the Law for me? Are the promises of God, absolute and unconditional, made to me? You can know by answering three questions.

First, Are you in Christ? Did you not notice that I said that we were all in Adam and in Adam we all fell? Now, "as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so, by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous." Are you in the Second Adam? You certainly were in the first one, for so you fell! Are you in the Second? Because if you are in Him, you are saved in Him! He has kept the Law for you. The Covenant of Grace made with Him was made with you if you are in Him, for as surely as Levi was in the loins of Abraham when Melchisedec met him, so were all Believers in the loins of Christ when He died upon the Cross! If you are in Christ, you are a part and parcel of the Seed to whom the promise was made—but there is only one seed, and the Apostle tells us—"He says not, And to seeds, as of many, but as of One, And to your Seed, which is Christ." If, then, you are in Christ, you are in the Seed—and the Covenant of Grace was made with you!

I must ask you another question. Have you faith? By this question you will be helped to answer the previous one, for Believers are in Christ. In the Epistle to the Galatians, you will find that the mark of those who are in Christ is that they believe in Christ. The mark of all that are saved is not confidence in work, but faith in Christ. In the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul insists upon it, "The just shall live by faith," and the Law is not of faith. Over and over again he puts it so. Come, then, do you believe in Jesus Christ with all your heart? Is He your sole hope for Heaven? Do you lean your whole weight, the entire stress of your salvation, on Jesus? Then you are in Him and the Covenant is yours—and there is not a blessing which

God has decreed to give but what He will give to you! There is not a gift which out of the grandeur of His heart, He has determined to bestow upon His elect but what He will bestow it upon you! You have the mark, the seal, the badge of His chosen if you believe in Christ Jesus!

Another question should help you. It is this—Have you been born-again? I refer you again to the Epistle to the Ga-latians which I would like every anxious person to read through very carefully. There you will see that Abraham had two sons. One of them was born according to the flesh. He was Ishmael, the child of the bondwoman. Though he was the firstborn son, he was not the heir, for Sarah said to Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." He who was born after the flesh did not inherit the Covenant promise! Is your hope of Heaven fixed on the fact that you had a good mother and father? Then your hope is born after the flesh and you are not in the Covenant! I am constantly hearing it said that children of godly parents do not need converting. Let me denounce that wicked lie! "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," and nothing better! They that are born after the flesh—those are not the children of God! Do not trust in gracious descent, or in holy ancestors! You must be born-again, every one of you, or you will perish forever, whoever your parents may be! Abraham had another son, even Isaac—he was not born of the strength of his father, nor after the flesh at all—for we are told that both Abraham and Sarah had become old. Isaac was born by God's power according to promise. He was the child given by Grace. Now, have you ever been born like that—not by human strength but by Divine Power? Is the life that is in you a life given by God? The true life is not of the will of man, nor of blood, nor of natural excellence—it comes by the working of the Holy Spirit and is of God. If you have this life, you are in the Covenant, for it is written, "in Isaac shall your Seed be called." The children of the promise, these are counted for the seed. God said to Abraham, "In your Seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," and that was because He meant to justify the Gentiles by faith, that the blessing given to believing Abraham might come on all Believers! Abraham is the father of the faithful, or the father of all them that believe in God—and with such is the Covenant established.

Here, then, are the test questions—Am I in Christ? Am I believing in Jesus? Am I born by the power of the Spirit of God according to the promise, and not by the fleshly birth, or according to works? Then I am in the Covenant! My name stands in the eternal record! Before the stars began to shine, the Lord had covenanted to bless me. Or before evening and morning made the first day, my name was in His Book of Life. Christ, before the world's foundation, struck hands with the Father in the council chamber of eternity and pledged Himself to redeem me and to bring me and multitudes of others into His eternal Glory! And He will do it, too, for He never breaks His suretyship engagements any more than the Father breaks His Covenant engagements! I want you to get quite sure upon these points, for oh, what peace it will breed in your soul, what a restfulness of heart to understand the Covenant and to know that your name is in it!

III. This is our last point. If, indeed, we can believe upon the good evidence of God's Word—that we are of the Seed with whom the Covenant was made in Christ Jesus—then EVERY BLESSING OF THE COVENANT WILL COME TO US. I will put it a little more personally—every blessing of the Covenant will come to you!

The devil says, "No, it, won't." Why not, Satan? "Why," he says, "you are not able to do this or that." Refer the devil to the text! Tell him to read those passages which I read to you and ask him if he can spy an, "if," or a, "but," for I cannot. "Oh," he says, "but, but, but, but, but you cannot do enough, you can't feel enough." Does it say anything about feeling there? It only says, "I will give them a heart of flesh." They will feel enough then! "Oh, but," the devil says, "you cannot soften your hard heart." Does it say that you are to do so? Does it not say, "I will take the stony heart out of their flesh"? The tenor of it is—I will do it. I

WILL DO IT. The devil dares not say that God cannot do it—he knows that God can enable us to tread him under our feet. "Oh, but," he says, "you will never hold on your way if you begin to be a Christian." Does it say anything about that in the Covenant further than this, "they shall walk in My statutes"? What if we have not power in and of ourselves to continue in God's statutes? Yet He has power to make us continue in them! He can work obedience and final perseverance in holiness in us. His Covenant virtually promises these blessings to us. To come back to what we said before—God does not ask of us, but He gives to us! He sees us dead and He loves us even when we are dead in trespasses and sins! He sees us feeble and unable to help ourselves—and He comes in and works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure—and then we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. The bottom of it, the very foundation of it, is Himself! And He finds nothing in us to help Him. There is neither fire nor wood in us, much less the lamb for the burnt offering—all is emptiness and condemnation! He comes in with, "I will," and, "you shall," like a royal helper affording free aid to destitute, helpless sinners, according to the riches of His Grace! Now be sure that, having made such a Covenant as this, God will ever be mindful of it!

He will do so, first, because He cannot lie. If He says He will, He will. His very name is "God That Cannot Lie." If I am in Christ, I must be saved—none can prevent it. If I am a Believer in Christ, I must be saved—all the devils in Hell cannot stop it, for God has said, "He that believes in Him is not condemned." "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." God's word is not, yes, and, no. He knew what He said when He spoke the Covenant and He has never changed it, nor contradicted it. If, then, I am a Believer, I must be saved, for I am in Christ to whom the promise is made! If I have

the new Life in me, I must be saved, for is not this spiritual Life the living and incorruptible Seed which lives and abides forever? Did not Jesus say, "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life"? I have drunk the water Christ gave me and it must spring up into everlasting life! It is not possible for death to kill the Life that God has given me, nor for all the fallen spirits to tread out the Divine fire which Christ's own Spirit has cast into my bosom! I must be saved, for God cannot deny Himself!

Next, God made the Covenant freely. If He had not meant to keep it, He would not have made it. When a man is driven up into a corner by someone who says, "Now you must pay me," then he is apt to promise more than he can perform. He solemnly declares, "I will pay you this day fortnight." Poor fellow, he has no money, now, and will not have any then, but he makes a promise because he cannot help himself. No such necessity can be imagined with our God! The Lord was under no compulsion—He might have left men to perish because of sin—there was no one to prompt Him to make the Covenant of Grace, or even to suggest the idea! "With whom took He counsel, and who instructed Him?" He made the Covenant of His own royal will and, having made it, rest you sure that He will never run back from it! A Covenant so freely made must be fully carried out.

Moreover, on the Covenant document there is a seal Did you see the seal? The grand thing in a deed of gift is the signature or seal. What is this—this red splash at the bottom of it? It is blood! Yes, it is blood. Whose blood? It is the blood of the Son of God! This has ratified and sealed the Covenant. Jesus died. Jesus' death has made the Covenant sure! Can God forget the blood of His dear Son, or do despite to His Sacrifice? Impossible! All for whom He died as a Covenant Substitute He will save! His redeemed shall not be left in captivity, as if the ransom price had effected nothing. Has He not said, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and he that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out"? That Covenant stands secure, though earth's old columns bow, for despite to the blood can never be possible on the part of the Father.

Again, God delights in the Covenant and so we are sure He will not run back from it. It is the very joy of His holy heart! He delights to do His people good. To pass by transgression, iniquity and sin is the recreation of Jehovah! Did you ever hear of God singing? It is singular that the Divine One should solace Himself with song, but yet a Prophet has thus revealed the Lord to us, "He will rest in His love; He will joy over you with singing." The Covenant is the heart of God written out in the blood of Jesus—and since the whole Nature of God runs parallel with the tenor of the Everlasting Co-venant—you may rest assured that even its jots and its tittles stand secure!

And then, last of all, O you who are in the Covenant, do not doubt that God will save you, keep you, bless you seeing you have believed on Jesus, are in Jesus and are quickened into newness of life! You dare not doubt if I tell you one thing more—if your father, if your brother, if your dearest friend had solemnly stated a fact, would you bear for anybody to say that he lied? I know you would be indignant at such a charge! But suppose your father, in the most solemn manner, had taken an oath—would you for a minute think that he had perjured himself and had sworn a lie? Now turn to the Word of God and you will find that God, because He knew that an oath among men is the end of strife, has been pleased to seal the Covenant with an oath. "That by two Immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." God has lifted His hand to Heaven and sworn that Christ shall have the reward of His passion, that His purchased ones shall be brought under His sway, that having borne sin and put it away, it never shall be a second time charged on His redeemed!

There is all of it. Do you believe in Christ? Then God will work in you to will and do of His good pleasure! God will conquer your sin! God will sanctify you! God will save you! God will keep you! God will bring you to Himself at last! Rest on that Covenant and then, moved by intense gratitude, go forward to serve your Lord with all your heart, and soul and strength! Being saved, live to praise Him! Work not that you may be saved, but because you are saved—the Covenant has secured your safety! Delivered from the servile fear which an Ishmael might have known, live the joyous life of an Isaac! And moved by love of the Father, spend and be spent for His sake! If the selfish hope of winning Heaven by works has moved some men to great sacrifice, much more shall the godly motive of gratitude to Him who has done all this for us move us to the noblest service and make us feel that it is no sacrifice at all! "We thus judge that if one died for all, then were all dead. And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again." "You are not your own, you are bought with a price." If you are saved under the Covenant of Grace, the mark of the covenanted ones is upon you and the sacred character of the covenanted ones should be displayed in you! Bless and magnify your Covenant God! Take the cup of the Covenant and call upon His name! Plead the promises of the Covenant and have whatever you need! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: JEREMIAH 31:1-22.

Verse 1. At the same time, says the LORD, will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people. During the Israelites' banishment to Babylon, God's Covenant with them had been, as it were, in abeyance. But in this promise of their restoration, He brings it to the front, again, and He gives a peculiarly gracious turn to it—"I will be the God of all the families of Israel." What a mercy it is to have a family God and to have our whole family in Christ! Brothers and Sisters, you have a family Bible and you have, I hope, a family altar—may your whole family belong to

God!

2. Thus says the LORD, the people which were left of the sword found Grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest Pharaoh tried to kill Israel. When he drew his sword, it looked as if the whole nation would be slain. But God got them away from Pharaoh into the wilderness—and there He caused them to rest. God still has a people whom He will certainly save and the adversary shall not be able to destroy them. Now comes this glorious verse—

3. 4. The LORD has appeared of old unto me, saying, Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with

loving kindness have I drawn you. [See Sermons #1914, Volume 32—SECRET DRAWINGS GRACIOUSLY EXPLAINED; #2149, Volume 36— EVERLASTING LOVE REVEALED and #2880, Volume 50—NEW TOKENS OF ANCIENT LOVE.] Again I will build you and you shall be built Jerusalem was all broken down. Her houses were vacant and her palaces were in ruins, but God's promise to her was, "Again I will build you, and you shall be built." If the preacher tries to rebuild those who are spiritually broken down, his work may be a failure. But when God does it, it is effectually done.

4. O virgin of Israel: you shall again be adorned with your tabrets, and shall go forth in the dances of them that make merry. God can take away His people's sorrow and fill them with exultant joy. Their flying feet shall follow the flying music and they shall be exceedingly glad. May the Lord make His people joyful, now, in His House of Prayer!

5. You shall yet plant vines upon the mountains of Samaria: the planters shall plant, and shall eat them as common things. God's people shall get to work, again, and they shall have the fruit of their toil and shall rejoice before God because they do not labor in vain nor spend their strength for nothing.

6. For there shall be a day that the watchmen upon the Mount Ephraim shall cry, Arise you, and let us go up to Zion unto the LORD our God. The men of Ephraim did not go up to Zion to worship—they forsook the one altar at Jerusalem. But the day will come when they will turn again to the Lord! Watchmen have to be on the lookout for enemies, but the day will come when even they shall be able to leave their watchtowers and say, "Let us go up to Zion unto Jehovah our God." Are any of you watching just now with anxious eyes? Have you been watching all through the night? Well, you have not seen much and your eyes ache with looking out for evil—so drop your watching, now, and say, one to another, "Let us go up to Zion unto the Lord our God."

7. 8. For thus says the LORD, Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations, publish you, praise you, and say, O LORD, save Your people, the remnant of Israel Behold, I will bring them/Notice the prayer and the answer. The prayer is put into our mouths and before we hardly have time to utter it, the answer comes—"O Lord, save Your people, the remnant of Israel. Behold, I will bring them!"

8. From the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame. How can they come? Will they help one another? God Himself will be eyes to the blind and feet to the lame!

8. The woman with child and her that travails with child together: a great company shall return there. They were not fit for traveling, yet God, in His great mercy, can make the feeblest of His people strong! And when He means to bring them to Himself, they shall come even though it looks as if they could not come!

9. They shall come with weeping. Never mind the weeping, as long as they do but come, and remember that there is no true faith without the tear of repentance in its eye—"They shall come with weeping."

9. And with supplications will I lead them. The way of prayer is the way home to God.

9. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble. Happy are the people who have such precious promises as these! The way is to be straight and their feet are to be so firmly planted in it that "they shall not stumble."

9-11. For I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My first-born. Hear the word of the LORD, O you nations, and declare it in the isles afar off and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd does his flock. For the LORD has redeemed Jacob. The secret of every other blessing is redemption! If God has redeemed, He will save—depend upon it—the precious blood of Jesus shall never be shed in vain!

11, 12. And ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he. Therefore they shall come. If they are redeemed, "they shall come." Christ did not die in vain! The redemption that He worked must be effectual—"therefore they shall come."

12. And sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the LORD, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd. These are all temporal mercies and it is a great blessing to see God's goodness in them. If God blesses common mercies, they are blessings, indeed! But without His blessing they may become idols and so may become curses.

12. And their soul shall be as a watered garden. What a delightful simile! It is of little use for the body to be fed unless the soul is also well nourished! "Their soul shall be as a watered garden."

12-14. And they shall not sorrow any more at all. Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow. And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness. God will give the spiritual leaders of His people enough and more than enough—more than they can take in—He will satiate them with fatness.

14. And My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, says the LORD. What a delightful promise this is! Listen to it and carry it home, all of you who are truly the Lord's people.

15. Thus says the LORD, A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. There is here a prophetic allusion to the massacre of the infants by Herod at the time of the birth of our Lord. It was a time of sorrow, indeed.

16. 17. Thus says the LORD; Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears: for your work shall be rewarded, says the LORD: and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in your end, says the LORD, that your children shall come again to their own border. As Rachel is represented as weeping for her children, so is she represented as mourning for the tribes that were carried away into captivity. Yet is she comforted with the Lord's gracious assurance—"they shall come again from the land of the enemy." So they did, and there is to be a glorious future yet for the people of God of the ancient race of Abraham!

18. I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus. [See Sermon #743, Volume 13—Ephraim bemoaning himself.] There is never a penitent in this world bemoaning himself without God hearing him! Do not think that a single penitential cry ever rises unheeded from a contrite heart! That cannot be—God has a quick ear for the cries of penitents.

18. You have chastened me, and I was chastened as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke."I bore the chastisement, but derived no benefit from it. I have not repented of my sin, I have not turned unto You."

18. Turn You me, and I shall be turned, [See Sermon #2104, Volume 35—THE INNER SIDE OF CONVERSION.] for you are the LORD, my God. If the Lord undertakes to turn us, we shall be truly turned—that is, converted.

19. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yes, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Are there any here recollecting the past with terror, and lamenting before God because of their sins? Then hear what God says! He seems to echo the voice of Ephraim. As Ephraim bemoans himself, God bemoans him!

20. Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? You might expect the answer to be, "No, he has lost the rights of childhood. He has been unpleasant and provoking to God." Yet God does not give such an answer as that to His own questions, but He says—

20. For since I spoke against him, I do earnestly remember him still Notwithstanding that the Lord threatened him, and sent Prophets to foretell evil to him because of his sin, yet He says, "I do earnestly remember him still."

20. Therefore my heart is troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him says the LORD. What a wonderful speech for God to make! Even the infinitely-blessed God represents Himself as in trouble concerning penitent sinners, remembering them in pity and longing to have mercy upon them.

21. Set you up signs, make you high heaps: set your heart toward the highway, even the way which you went: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these your cities. In crossing the desert, travelers raise little mounds of stone that they may be directed on a future occasion across that pathless sea of sand. And so God bids them set up signs and make high heaps that they may know how to come back to Him.

22. How long will you go about, O you backsliding daughter? God still asks in pity, "how long will you seek here and there for comfort?" You will never find it till you come back to your God! Emptiness is written upon everything till the heart comes to its Savior and Lord!

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