

THE HOUSE OF GOD :
TRACED THROUGH THE SCRIPTURES

BY

EDWARD DENNETT

REPRINTED FROM

“THE CHRISTIAN FRIEND AND INSTRUCTOR”

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THE HOUSE OF GOD.

I.

THE TABERNACLE IN THE WILDERNESS.

MANY questions having been addressed to us concerning the formation, limits, &c., of the house of God, we propose, if the Lord will, to trace out the subject, in several successive papers, from the word of God. There is really no difficulty, if our minds are but subject to the Scriptures, and our hope is that some at least may be helped to a clearer understanding of the question by a dispassionate presentation of the teaching of the Spirit of God.

It is evident to every reader of the Bible that God did not, in any sense, dwell on earth before the redemption of Israel out of Egypt. He visited Adam in paradise, and walked in the garden in the cool of the day (Gen. iii. 8); He appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and communicated freely with them. In like manner He revealed Himself to Moses in the desert, at the mount of God, when He commissioned him to return to Egypt as the deliverer of His people; but search the record as closely as you may, not a trace is found so far of His having a habitation on the earth. But after the redemption from Egypt the Lord said to Moses, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering. . . .

And let them make me a sanctuary ; that I may dwell among them." (Exodus xxv. 2, 8.)*

The thought of dwelling in the midst of His people came thus first from God Himself. And this is in harmony with His own purposes of grace in redemption. We read that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ "hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." (Eph. i. 3, 4.) In that past eternity God dwelt in the perfection of His own bliss ; but in the fulness of His grace and love He purposed to surround Himself with a redeemed people that should be for His own joy, and for the glory of His beloved Son—a people who should find their joy in the presence of Him who had redeemed them, and redeemed them at the infinite cost of the death of His only begotten Son. This purpose was first declared, in its germ at least, in Eden, on the failure of Adam as the responsible man. (Gen. iii. 15.) Consequent upon his sin and judgment God announced the Man of His counsels, the One in and by whom all the purposes of His heart were to be accomplished, in the redemption of those who were to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. (Rom. viii. 29, 30.) Gradually His purposes were unfolded in types and shadows, in His ways with Abel, Enoch, Noah, and the patriarchs, and finally in the deliverance of the children of Israel, on the ground of the sprinkled blood of the Passover lamb, out of Egypt,

* This is really the first mention of a dwelling for God on earth. The words in Exodus xv., "I will prepare Him a habitation." are often cited, but the reading is very doubtful. The Septuagint, Vulgate, Luther, and the French version, all agree in rendering it—"He is my God, and I will glorify Him ; my father's God, and I will exalt Him."

and from the claims and power of Satan, as well as from death and judgment, as set forth in their passage through the Red Sea. Henceforward they were a redeemed people. The Lord had become their strength and song, and their salvation. In His mercy He had led forth the people which He had redeemed; He had guided them in His strength unto His holy habitation. (See Exodus xv.)

Having now chosen and redeemed a people for Himself, the Lord announces, as we have shown, His desire to come and dwell among them. And it will be seen in due time that His taking up His abode in the midst of Israel, while it indicated the whole truth of redemption, was but a shadow of the fulfilment of His entire counsels of grace in eternity; that, in a word, the encampment in the wilderness was but an anticipation of the time when, after the appearance of the new heaven and the new earth, the tabernacle of God (the Church, the holy city, new Jerusalem, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband—the Lamb's wife) shall be with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, their God. (Rev. xxi.) The erection of the tabernacle in the wilderness was the response to the Lord's command to Moses. The people offered willingly; for the Lord had stirred up their hearts, and the tabernacle was made in all things according to the pattern which had been shown to Moses in the mount, even as the Lord had commanded him. (See Exodus xl.)

There are two things especially to be considered. The first is the ground on which God took up His abode in the midst of His people. This is made very clear from Exodus xxix. *After* the directions had been given for the construction of those sacred vessels and

the furniture which set forth in type and figure some display or manifestation of God, and after the consecration of the priests who were to act for God in ministry on behalf of the people, and *before* the directions are given for the vessels of approach—those vessels which were necessary for drawing near to God—there is a break, a parenthesis. And this is occupied with directions concerning the continual burnt-offering. Thereon it is added, “The tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory. And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar: I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest’s office. *And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God.* And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the Lord their God.” (vv. 38–46.)

This account shows three things most clearly. First, that the ground on which Jehovah was able to dwell with His people was the perpetual ascension of the fragrance of Christ as the burnt-offering. Typically the children of Israel had been redeemed, and now in virtue of the continual burnt-offering they stood before God in all the acceptance of Christ. Hence Jehovah could dwell in their midst. Secondly, as a further consequence, the tabernacle was sanctified by His glory—the tabernacle, the altar, and the priests alike were claimed in virtue of the same sacrifice, and set apart to God according to all that He was as revealed—the claims of His glory having now been met, that glory became also from that moment the standard for everything devoted to His service. Thirdly, the people should know the One who dwells in their midst as the One who had brought them out of Egypt, as, in

fact, the God of redemption. If these three points are comprehended, the whole truth of God's habitation on earth, in any age or dispensation, will be understood. It will be then seen that, while a consequence of redemption, it is dependent upon what Christ is in the efficacy of His death, and upon what God is as so revealed.

The second thing to be noted is the actual taking possession of the tabernacle when completed. Moses "finished the work," and eight times it is recorded that all was done as the Lord had commanded him. Jehovah's approbation was now expressed in another way; for, together with the statement that Moses finished the work, it is added, "Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." (Exodus xl. 34, 35.) God thus took possession of the house which had been built according to His word, and henceforward dwells in the midst of His people, and was known as dwelling between the cherubim (1 Sam. iv. 4; Psalm lxxx. 1, &c.); i.e. between the cherubim overshadowing the mercy-seat. The mercy-seat was His throne, the throne on which He sat, whence He governed His people, and from whence He dispensed mercy according to the efficacy of the incense and the blood of the sacrifices that were presented before Him on the great day of atonement. (See Lev. xvi.)

It should be most distinctly observed that the tabernacle, and not the congregation of Israel, formed the house of God in the wilderness. To lose this distinction would be to confuse the typical teaching of the whole encampment of Israel, as already pointed out in relation to Rev. xxi. The people, as such, were not

permitted to enter into the tabernacle; God met with them at its entrance. (Exodus xxix. 42-44.) Moses alone had access at all times (the high priest only once a year) to the mercy-seat (Exodus xxv. 22), and this in his capacity as mediator, and as such a type of Christ. It is most important to bear these distinctions in mind. At the same time, it is equally of moment to remark that all the people—all the people with their families; all, in a word, who were on the ground of redemption (typically)—were grouped around the tabernacle. God was in their midst, and all the people had been brought into a known relationship with Himself as their Redeemer, all alike could enjoy the privileges of the priesthood which had been instituted on their behalf, and all could approach the brazen altar in the appointed way, and with the appointed sacrifices. It was the only spot on the earth where the Lord had His sanctuary; and as we remember all that this involved, we may understand a little of this place of blessing into which the children of Israel had been brought. Whether they themselves apprehended or enjoyed it is not the question. There were, as we know, stubborn and ungodly souls among them; still, the character of the place remained unchanged. God *was* in their midst, and on this account, because of what He was in Himself, and because He had opened up a way into His own presence, the camp of Israel was such a place of blessing as was found nowhere else upon the face of the earth. It was therefore no mean privilege to be found numbered with those who surrounded the tabernacle.

But if, on the one hand, it was a place of blessing, it was most surely, on the other, a place of responsibility. "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Command the children of Israel, that they put out of the camp

every leper, and every one that hath an issue, and whosoever is defiled by the dead : both male and female shall ye put out, without the camp shall ye put them ; that they defile not their camps, *in the midst whereof I dwell.*" (Num. v. 1-3.) Again, "I am the Lord your God : ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy ; for I am holy." (Lev. xi. 44.) In one word, as these scriptures show, holiness, and holiness according to the nature of the One who dwelt in their midst, was incumbent upon every Israelite who surrounded the tabernacle. Jehovah, as revealed, was the standard for the whole camp (compare 1 John ii. 6), for every individual, whatever his state, who formed part of it. Being numbered with God's people was to be brought therefore into a place both of blessing and of responsibility.

Into the typical significance of the sanctuary in the midst of Israel we do not propose to enter.* It will suffice to point out here that as its primary idea was God's habitation, so every part of it, together with all its sacred vessels and furniture, was fraught with some manifestation of God and of His glories as hereafter displayed in Christ. This was so, indeed, on two grounds ; first, because it was a pattern of things shown to Moses in the mount, and therefore a revelation of heavenly scenes ; and because also it told in every part—boards, curtains, ornaments, hangings, and vessels—of the glories of Christ, inasmuch as He Himself in a later day took the place of the temple of God. (See John ii. 19-21.) But it may be added, that the more thoroughly God's thoughts concerning His habitation in the midst of Israel are understood, the

* Those who desire to do so may consult *The Typical Teachings of Exodus* (Broom), p. 215.

more fully will the character of the Church as God's house be comprehended.

II.

THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON.

The tabernacle, which had been the house of God in the wilderness, together with its sacred furniture, was carried by the children of Israel into Canaan, and was pitched in Shiloh. (Joshua xviii. 1.) It was accordingly to this place that the children of Israel resorted with their yearly sacrifices (1 Sam. i. 3), and it was still called "the tabernacle of the congregation" (1 Sam. ii. 22), but also "the temple of the Lord," and "the house of the Lord." (1 Sam. iii. 3, 15.) These latter names did but foreshadow the house which should hereafter be built in Jerusalem. While the children of Israel were pilgrims in the wilderness, and dwelt in tents, God Himself abode in a tent (2 Sam. vii. 6), suiting Himself, as He has ever done in His precious grace, to the condition of His people; but when He had established His chosen in the glory of the kingdom a house was erected—"exceeding magnificent"—which in some measure should be the expression of His majesty who deigned to make it His dwelling-place in the midst of Israel. (2 Chron. ii. 4-6.)

It is not within our present purpose to call attention to the characteristic differences between the tabernacle and the temple, but rather to point out their similarity both as to origin and object. As in the case of the former, so in the latter, the plan was divinely communicated. It was David who was honoured to become the depositary of this design; and inasmuch as he was not permitted, according to the desire of his own heart, himself to build the temple, he communicated it to

Solomon. "Then David gave to Solomon his son the pattern of the porch, and of the houses thereof, and of the treasuries thereof, and of the upper chambers thereof, and of the inner parlours thereof, and of the place of the mercy-seat, and the pattern of all that he had by the Spirit, of the courts of the house of the Lord, and of all the chambers round about, of the treasuries of the house of God," &c. (1 Chron. xxviii. 11, 12.) Everything that Solomon did and made, in connection with the work to which he had been called, was in accordance with the instructions he had received. The site itself had been divinely indicated, as well as the design and manner of the building. (1 Kings vi. 38; 2 Chron. iii. 3.) Though entrusted to human hands to erect, the building was divine; for human thoughts and human conceptions must not intrude themselves into the things of God.

The connection between the tabernacle and the temple, as being both alike God's dwelling-place, may be seen in two ways. When Solomon had completed the house, he assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel; and we read that "all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto the king, in the feast which was in the seventh month" (*i.e.* the feast of the blowing of trumpets, a figure of the restoration of Israel in the last days—Num. xxix. 1). "And all the elders came; and the Levites took up the ark. And they brought up the ark and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that were in the tabernacle, these did the priests and the Levites bring up." And then, after they had sacrificed sheep and oxen without number, "the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the Lord unto his place, to the oracle of the house,

into the most holy place, under the wings of the cherubim." (1 Chron. v. 1-7.) It was the ark that gave its character to the house; for it was God's throne in the midst of Israel, from whence He governed His people on the basis of His holy law, as is noted here by the statement that "there was nothing in the ark, save the two tables which Moses put therein at Horeb, when the Lord made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of Egypt." (v. 10.)

And now, secondly, the Lord endorsed the work of His servants by taking possession of the new house, even as He had formerly done with the tabernacle. "And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place: (for all the priests that were present were sanctified, and did not then wait by course: also the Levites, which were the singers, all of them of Asaph, of Heman, of Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, being arrayed in white linen, having cymbals and psalteries and harps, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them an hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets :) it came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying, For He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord; so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God." (2 Chron. v. 11-14.) Following upon this description, we find Solomon reciting the circumstances by which he had become the divinely-appointed instrument in building "an house of habitation" and "a place of dwelling" for

the Lord "for ever;" and then he knelt down on a brazen scaffold (which he had prepared) before all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands towards heaven, and prayed with respect to the house which he had built, and he concluded his intercessions with words cited from Ps. cxxxii.: "Now therefore arise, O Lord God, into thy resting-place; thou, and the ark of thy strength. Let thy priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, and let thy saints rejoice in goodness. O Lord God, turn not away the face of thine anointed: remember the mercies of David, thy servant." And thereon we read, "Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt-offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the house. And the priests could not enter into the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord had filled the Lord's house." (2 Chron. vi. 41, 42; vii. 1, 2.)

In this manner and under such circumstances did the Lord take up His abode in the temple—the whole scene, the white-robed priests, and their glorifying God with one mind and one mouth, being no dim foreshadowing of the glory of a later day, when the true Solomon shall come to His temple and surround Himself with a righteous and willing-hearted people. But the one point to be observed is, that we find once again God dwelling in His house in the midst of the people whom He had chosen. The difference between the temple and the tabernacle, as before remarked, is shown by the contrast between the wilderness and the land; by the pilgrim character of Israel's passage through the former, as distinguished from their settled abode in the latter. But in both alike God had His habitation, His house. God dwelt in the midst of the whole of Israel,

and, as seen again from the fact that the fire came down in response to Solomon's prayer and consumed the burnt-offering and sacrifices, did so on the ground of redemption—on the ground of redemption through the value of all that Christ was in His sacrificial work. It had not been possible on any other ground; but because it was on the foundation of all the sweet savour of Christ in His death, He could, spite of what the people were practically, dwell in their midst, and all the people, on their part, could come with the appointed sacrifices, in the appointed way, and at the appointed times.

Thenceforward Jerusalem was the one holy place on earth, the one spot, therefore, to which the heart of every true Israelite turned with thoughts of worship and praise. "How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. . . . Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house: they will be still praising Thee." (Ps. lxxxiv.) And there on the recurrence of the feasts the people assembled. "Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together: whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord." (Ps. cxxii. 3, 4.) There all the first-born children were carried and presented to the Lord (Luke ii. 22-24), and there too the families of His people assembled three times a year. (See Deut. xvi.) Jerusalem, therefore—because of Jehovah's house—was the one place of blessing in the whole world, and it was no mean privilege to be permitted to form part of the assembly that gathered there from time to time in obedience to the Word. "And thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy

maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are among you, in the place which the Lord thy God hath chosen to place His name there." (Deut. xvi. 11.)

III.

THE TEMPLE AFTER THE RETURN FROM BABYLON.

The temple of Solomon lasted until its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Chron. xxxvi.); and Ezekiel describes the departing of the glory of the Lord from it, on account of the abominations of His people, ere it was consumed with fire by the Chaldees. (See Ezek. viii.-x.) During seventy years Jerusalem was desolate (2 Chron. xxxvi. 21; Dan. ix. 2); and then, "that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and He hath charged me to build Him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah." (Ezra i. 1, 2, &c.) The government, because of the sin of Judah and Israel, had been now transferred to the Gentiles, and God therefore wrought, in the first instance, through the instrumentality of Cyrus. The reader will find all the details of the return of a remnant of the two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, with priests and Levites, in response to the proclamation of the king, recorded in the book of Ezra. Not until the second year of their return did they "set forward the work of the house of the Lord." "And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and

the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the Lord, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang together by course, in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people; for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off." (Ezra iii. 10-13.)

They praised the Lord with cymbals; while the priests blew with their trumpets, and sang the same song when they laid the foundation as had been sung at the dedication of Solomon's temple. But many wept—the old men who had been eye-witnesses of the splendour of the former house. The contrast was indeed great. That was built amid the glories of the kingdom, and at a time when that kingdom was pre-eminent—a time also of peace, prosperity, and blessing; a period which typified the reign of the Messiah, when all kings shall fall down before Him, and all nations shall serve Him. This was commenced by a feeble remnant amid the desolations of the once-glorious city, which men called the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth (Lam. ii. 15), themselves the subjects of a Gentile monarch, dependent on him, by the will of God, for permission to build, and surrounded on every hand by adversaries. Still they builded; and finally, after much

unfaithfulness on their part, the house was completed, and they "kept the dedication of the house of God with joy." (Ezra vi. 15-22.)

This house took the place of that which Solomon had built. There were, however, important differences. No cloud, no glory of the Lord filled this house, as in the case of the tabernacle and the first temple; and no fire descended from heaven to consume their sacrifices, as with Moses (Lev. ix. 24) and with Solomon. (2 Chron. vii. 1.) It is this fact which makes the parallel between this remnant and the Church so interesting. Thomas believed when he saw; but the Lord announced the blessedness of those who should believe without seeing. (John xx.) This was the position of this feeble remnant as well as that of ourselves. That God accepted their sacrifices and dwelt in His house was with them entirely a matter of faith—faith as based upon God's word, in the same way, for example, as the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of those gathered to His name is apprehended only by faith, faith begotten and sustained by His own word. (Matt. xviii.) But so completely did the Lord regard this as His house, that He even identified it with the one it succeeded. Speaking through Haggai, one of the prophets He had used to stir up the people and encourage them in their building, He says, "The glory of this latter house," or, as it should be translated, "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former." (Haggai ii. 9.) The house was but one—whatever its outward circumstances—in the divine mind, and hence God's habitation equally with Solomon's temple.

This house existed until the time of Herod the Great, who rebuilt it (though we have no account of this in the Scriptures) on a scale of surpassing grandeur

and magnificence, and it was this temple to which Joseph and Mary carried the infant Saviour when they presented Him before the Lord. And it is a most noteworthy fact that, built as this temple was by an alien king—for while he professed the Jewish faith he was probably of Idumean descent—the Lord Himself recognized it as His Father's house. Surrounded, and even filled, as it was with corruptions He yet owned it (Matt. xxi. 12, 13; John ii. 13-16, &c.); and not until His rejection by His people had been made manifest did He abandon it. Then He pronounced the sentence, "Behold, *your* house is left unto you desolate" (Matt. xxiii. 38); and thereon He departed and went out of the temple. In patience and long-suffering God bore with His people, and with the corruptions of His house, until there was no remedy, and then He abandoned it, as He had done before with Solomon's temple. On His part there had been judgment mingled with grace and mercy again and again expressed; on His people's part sin and corruption, which reached their climax in the rejection and crucifixion of their Messiah—Jehovah indeed, who had condescended through so many centuries to have His habitation in their midst.

This closes up until millennial days the period of God's earthly house; but even so it was only preparatory to the accomplishment of His purpose to dwell on the earth in a more excellent way.

IV.

THE CHURCH.

Acts ii.

We have already traced the history of God's house from Exodus until the close of the Mosaic dispensation. During the life of our Lord on the earth there were,

however, premonitions of the coming change. Speaking to the Jews He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. . . . But," the evangelist tells us, "He spake of the temple of His body." (John ii. 19, 21.) He said to Peter, moreover, on his confessing that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matt. xvi. 16-18.) If we pass now to the day of Pentecost we shall see that God commenced then to dwell on earth in a new and a twofold way: "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, *and it filled all the house where they were sitting.* And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. *And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost,* and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." (Acts ii. 1-4.)

Now this took place according to the express promise of the Lord to His disciples: "And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." And again: He "commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence." (Luke xxiv. 49; Acts i. 4, 5.) The Holy Ghost then came down at Pentecost according to the Lord's word, and the effect was that God made His temple by the Spirit in the

individual believer (see also 1 Cor. vi. 19); and that He made His habitation with believers collectively, even as Paul writes to the Ephesians, "Ye are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." (Eph. ii. 22.) Believers therefore now were, as their Lord had been while on the earth, God's temple, and the house of God, which is the church of the living God, was now formed. It is the latter truth which is to occupy our attention, and with this object we propose to examine more closely the teaching of this chapter (Acts ii.).

Speaking generally, we have in this scripture three things—the building of God's house, the mode of entrance, and the occupations of those who are within, or, to speak more accurately, of those who form it.

1. *The building of the house.* We read concerning Solomon's temple, that "when it was in building, it was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron, heard in the house, while it was in building." (1 Kings vi. 7.) The same thing is seen precisely in respect of the house of God which was built at Pentecost. The disciples were all with one accord in one place; and who were they? They were the one hundred and twenty mentioned in the previous chapter, all of whom (for Judas was no longer of the company, having by transgression fallen that he might go to his own place) were living stones which had been by the grace of God brought into saving contact with Christ, and thus made participators of everlasting life. And the same divine power which had saved them through faith in the Lord Jesus, brought them on this day together, and put them silently in their appointed places on the one foundation-stone to form the habitation of God on the earth through the Spirit. Thus

the building was raised. Christ, according to His word, had built His church, and made it ready for its divine Inhabitant. Hence just as when Moses had completed the tabernacle, and also as when Solomon had finished the temple, the glory of the Lord filled the house of God (Exod. xl. ; 2 Chron. v.), so here, there came suddenly a sound from heaven as of a mighty rushing wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. God manifestly took possession of the house which had that day been erected. Others might come in, and would indeed be brought in, to form part of the house ("And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (v. 47)); but still the house of God was built. The apostle could therefore say to the Ephesians, "Ye are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit;" and to the Corinthians, "Ye are the temple of the living God." In this aspect the house of God is always looked upon as complete, and yet other believers are continually brought in to occupy their appointed places in the building. This will be at once understood if for one minute we change the term and use "church" instead of "house."

And that the Lord Himself looked upon the house as now built is seen from the connection between the second and third chapters. At the commencement of chap. iii. we read of Peter and John going up together into the temple at the hour of prayer; but the Lord had a lesson for them as well as for us in what occurred to them by the way. There was a man, lame from his mother's womb, who was carried and laid daily, not inside, but at the gate of the temple, to beg of those who entered for prayer or worship. He asked an alms of Peter and John, who were, like many others, about to go into the temple. The Spirit of God

used the circumstance by leading Peter to heal the lame man, as a testimony to the power of the risen Christ, and for the apostles' and our instruction. The man, be it repeated, is outside the temple, and it was there—outside—that he received the blessing. The new house of God had just been formed, and now the Holy Spirit testifies that blessing is outside of the old house and in connection with the new, a lesson which Peter and John may have failed to apprehend at the moment, but one which has been written for the edification of all whose eyes have been opened by the Spirit of God. Yes, there in Jerusalem, and on the feast-day, with no sound of hammer or axe or any tool of iron, in the midst of an unbelieving generation, and while Herod's temple was there before their eyes, and the object of the veneration of their carnal hearts, the true Solomon had built His Church of precious stones, whose lustre and beauty could only be appreciated by Him who had laid them in their appointed place upon the chief corner-stone.

It is also to be remarked that here there were none but living stones, inasmuch as the house in this chapter is of the Lord's own building. (v. 47.) So far therefore, the body of Christ, although the revelation of this truth was reserved till another day—until its appointed minister had been called and qualified—and the house of God are co-extensive. That is to say, every stone of this building was also, though this was not yet understood, a member of the body of Christ; for on this day, including the three thousand souls that repented under the mighty operation of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of Peter, not one was brought in who was not really converted. All were genuine believers. It was they who *received* the Word who were baptized, and it was those of the same character whom the Lord

afterwards daily added. This fact must be distinctly stated, and firmly maintained.

2. The house of God having been built, we find the way very plainly indicated by which souls were to be brought into it. One simple remark may perhaps clear away a difficulty for some before we enter upon this part of our subject. It is often hastily assumed that God brings souls *secretly*, as it were, into His house; *i.e.* that if He converts a soul, that soul is thereby brought into His habitation on earth. Let us then for one moment change the term "house" for a "company of believers," for remember it is the company of believers who have a very distinct and separate existence in Acts ii. that form God's house, and then we may ask if a soul who is born again is brought thereby into the company of believers? Nay, he may be unknown to them, and in that case could not be said to form one of their number. That God knows such an one as a believer is another thing; but the question is, as we have seen, concerning God's habitation *on earth*. And since it is on earth, there is, as we shall also see, an appointed way into the company which compose this habitation.

Let us look, in the first place, at the different classes brought before us. There are the one hundred and twenty who have this day been formed into the Church—God's assembly. There are the Jews standing round about them—the "Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven" (v. 5), those to whom Peter afterwards preached. Then, lastly, there were those to whom Peter refers in his address—"All that are afar off," a well-known scripture term for Gentiles. We have then that threefold division which the Spirit of God elsewhere makes—the Church, the Jews, and the Gentiles (1 Cor. x. 32), a representation therefore of the whole world.

Now it was in connection with this inner circle, this central company, the church of God, that Peter, standing up with the eleven, rendered his testimony to Christ. The manifest operations of the Spirit—manifest even to the unbelieving Jews—had produced perplexity in the minds of some, and became for others an occasion of derision and mockery. Peter then, as led of the Holy Ghost, addressed himself to the multitude that came together. First of all, he explained from the Scriptures the character of the manifestations they had witnessed (*vv.* 16-21); then, he testified of "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him, in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know." He told them of God's counsel as to His death, and their wickedness in His crucifixion; of His resurrection, which had been foretold in their own scriptures, and of which Peter and those with him were witnesses. (*vv.* 22-32.) Then he concluded with these remarkable words: "Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on my right hand, until I make Thy foes Thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." (*vv.* 33-36.)

This was a very distinct testimony. Jesus of Nazareth, rejected and crucified by man, had been raised from the dead, exalted by the right hand of God, and made both Lord and Christ. What a contrast between the mind of God and the mind of man! And what could more plainly demonstrate man's guilt and man's con-

dition? Truly the cross of Christ brought everything to the test, and not only told out what was in the heart of God, but what was also in the heart of man. This testimony of Peter was carried home to the consciences of those who heard, and, pricked in their heart, they said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost; for the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." (*vv.* 37-39.) Now it is this answer of Peter to these penitent Jews that requires our careful attention. Two things were then to be done, and consequent on this there were two blessings to be received. They were to repent, and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Let us suppose for one minute that these Jews had truly repented, and yet refused to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Is it not plain on the very face of this scripture, that in such a case, whatever their state of heart before God, and notwithstanding that they might be truly born again, they could not have been received into the company of believers that stood before them—that, in other words, they could not be brought into the house of God on earth? For what was involved by their baptism in the name of Jesus Christ? "Know ye not," says the apostle Paul, "that so many of us as were baptized unto Jesus Christ" (Christ Jesus, really) "were baptized into" (unto—*εἰς*) "His death?" (*Rom.* vi. 3)

It would be, therefore, not only to believe the testimony concerning His death, resurrection, and present place at the right hand of God, but it would be also

their identification with Him in His death; so that, accepting death for themselves, they would thereby, in figure, be dissociated from man, and brought upon the ground of association with Christ's death, so that they henceforward would accept for themselves the place of being dead—dead with Christ—in this world. The apostle, therefore, could write to the Colossians—"If ye be dead with Christ . . . why, as though *alive* in the world?" &c. (Col. ii. 20.) And this death with Christ is Christian ground, and inasmuch as baptism is the divinely-appointed mode of entrance upon it, there is consequently no other way into the house of God on earth. It was therefore necessary that these Jews should repent and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. The former would be produced by the Spirit of God working through the testimony they had heard; by the latter they would be publicly separated from the nation that had crucified the Lord Jesus—would from that moment cease to be Jews, and be brought into the number of those who were His followers on earth; and these, as we have seen, composed the house of God.

Upon their repentance and baptism two blessings were promised. The first was remission of sins, and the second was the reception of the Holy Ghost. These two things are connected, as a word or two will show. The remission of sins here is, we apprehend, that which the apostles were empowered to administer on repentance towards God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. On the profession of this, and being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, forgiveness of sins was not only entered upon as before God, connected by Him with repentance and faith, but also authoritatively declared by His servants. (See John xx. 23; Acts xxii. 16.) Further, there was the gift of the Holy

Ghost. As we have already said, these two things are connected. Everywhere in the Scriptures the gift of the Holy Ghost is consequent upon the forgiveness of sins. Cleansed by the precious blood of Christ (as seen in figure also in the consecration of the priests and the cleansing of the leper—Exod. xxix.; Lev. xiv.), God seals (anoints) those so cleansed with the Holy Ghost. (See Acts x.; Rom. v.; 2 Cor. 1; Eph. i., &c.)

Let us recall the divine order here presented. On repentance towards God there was baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, whereby those so baptized were brought out from among the Jews who had rejected their Messiah, and brought into the number of those who formed the house of God. Forgiveness of sins was announced to them from God, and, now in the sphere where God dwells by the Spirit, they themselves received the Holy Ghost; and then they were not only a part of the house of God, but also, as we see with the disciples in the beginning of the chapter (v. 4), they were indwelt by the Spirit. The Lord's words to His disciples were in this way fulfilled: "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; [even] the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; *for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.*" (John xiv. 16, 17.)

There was yet more in the abounding grace of God. "For," said Peter, "the promise (the promise of these blessings which have been considered) is unto you (you Jews), and to your children (these were not to be excluded), and to all that are afar off (the Gentiles—see Eph. ii. 11–13), even as many as the Lord our God shall call." The Church—the habitation of God—having been

built, the gift of grace is proclaimed both to Jews and Gentiles, and the way was declared by which the Jew and the Gentile, in the sovereign grace of God, could pass out from the two outer circles—both of which were in the kingdom of darkness, where Satan reigned—into that new sphere which had that day been formed, where the Spirit of God acted and dwelt.

3. We call attention now, more briefly, to the occupations of those who form, and are within, the house of God. For this purpose we may add a passage from 1 Peter. The apostle says: "Ye also, as lively" (living) "stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." (ii. 5.) Inasmuch as Peter deals with the priesthood of believers—the new order of priests, who take the place on earth of Aaron's family—a dignity which now attaches to all saints without exception, he is led to point out their occupation with the sacrifice of praise. It is no longer sacrifices of bulls or goats, but spiritual sacrifices suited to the spiritual house of which they formed part, as well as to those who worshipped God in spirit and in truth. They were indeed to offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually; that is, the fruit of their lips, giving thanks to His name. Perpetual praise and adoration were to be heard in this new and spiritual habitation of God. (Comp. 1 Chron. ix. 33.)

Turning back to the Acts, we have another aspect of the employment of the saints. It says, "They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." (ii. 42.) They persevered in learning the mind and will of God as communicated by His servants (for at this time none of the New Testament scriptures were in existence), and hence they were brought into enjoyment of fellowship

with the apostles (comp. 1 John i. 3), in which those newly-converted souls delighted to be found. Then together they were gathered around the Lord at His table to commemorate His death; that death which was the foundation of all the blessings into which they had been introduced; and together also they persevered in assembling to pour out their hearts in prayer to God.

As we gaze upon this beautiful picture of the house of God, of the energy of the Holy Ghost, producing constant praise and prayer, as well as obedience to the Word, we can truly say, in the language of the psalmist, but with another meaning, "How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! . . . Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house: they will be still praising Thee."

V.

THE CHURCH, AS BUILT BY MAN.

1 COR. iii.

This scripture demands the most careful consideration, as it occupies an important place in respect of the truth of the Church of God. As is so often the case in the epistles, the Holy Spirit uses the condition of the saints as the occasion for the unfolding of a new aspect of the Church. The Corinthian saints were carnal (*σαρκικοί*), and on this account the apostle could not minister the truth he would have desired, but was compelled, because of their state, to speak to them as "babes in Christ," to feed them with milk, and not with meat, etc. (*vv.* 1, 2.) The evidence of their "carnality" was the formation of schools of opinion in the assembly, the existence of "divisions," the saints ranging themselves around their self-chosen and favourite teachers; some choosing Paul, some Peter, some Apollos, and some even venturing to use the name of Christ to refuse the servants whom He

had sent. The apostle seizes the opportunity to develop the true position, both of the servants and of the saints, and of both alike in relation to the Lord. "Who then," he exclaims, "is Paul; and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye have believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." It was intolerable to Paul—a heart-rending sorrow, we might say, that the name of a servant, however eminent, should come between the Lord and His people. For what were the labourers? God's workmen—labouring in unison and fellowship, but all belonging to God.* And what were the saints? "Ye," says the apostle, "are God's husbandry, ye are God's building." (v. 9.) The servants were God's workmen, the saints were God's building—God in His grace was thus everything, servants and saints alike owed everything to Him. All things were of Him, and He alone must therefore be magnified, whether by saints or servants.

Proceeding now further, the apostle shows what the responsibility of God's workmen is in the work entrusted to their care. He says, "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (vv. 10, 11.) Two things will at once strike the reader in contrast with what has been considered in a former paper. First, the apostle speaks of himself as laying the foundation; and also of himself

* The English version gives scarcely the correct thought. The apostle does not mean that the servants were God's fellow-labourers one with another, but that they belonged to God, and as such were fellow-labourers.

and others as building upon it. This is a very different thing from that contained in the Lord's words to Peter, "Upon this rock I will build my Church." And it is this difference which explains the two aspects of the house of God. The work of Christ in building His Church must of necessity be perfect. Himself in His death and resurrection, the Son of the living God (declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead), the foundation, every stone He lays upon it, like Peter himself, must be a living stone. But, as this scripture in 1 Cor. teaches, He also entrusts the work of building to His servants, and holds them responsible for the character of their work. Paul can thus say, "I have laid the foundation"—as he was the first to proclaim the gospel in Corinth, and thus was the means of forming the assembly of God in that city. (See Acts xviii.) He had laid the foundation as a wise master-builder, and he warns others as to the manner in which they might build upon it, reminding them in this way of their responsibility to the Lord for the character of their work.

And looking more closely into the details of this scripture, we find that there are, or may be, three classes of builders, and that the testing of their work will take place at a future day. The apostle says, "If any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it (the day) shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. (Know ye not that ye are the temple of

God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?) If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." (*vv.* 12-17.) There are then, as has often been observed, the good workman, and his work good, and who receives a reward; the workman who is himself saved, but whose work is bad and is therefore burnt up, and who consequently suffers loss; and lastly there is the bad workman and his bad work, and both alike are destroyed.

What is meant by the "works" or "building" is manifest from the context. It is putting wood, hay, or stubble on the foundation, instead of gold, silver, or precious stones; *i.e.* bringing souls into the assembly of God who are without divine life. This may be done in two ways; by the proclamation of false doctrines—doctrines which are subversive of the truths of Christianity, setting aside, for example, the necessity of the new-birth, or the need of cleansing by the precious blood of Christ, so that natural men, men not having the Spirit of God, are introduced into the Church as the result of such teaching; or it may be done by openly and avowedly bringing into the assembly those who are not saved through faith in the Lord Jesus, including in the Church of God other than those who have the title to be within. A third case is possible; *viz.*, the workman being deceived as to the true character of those he may introduce. In one or in all of these ways the workman may fail in responsibility to Christ as to the character of his building. He may seemingly, outwardly to the eyes of men, be a most prosperous and successful builder, while he may in reality be but piling up upon the foundation wood, hay, or stubble, for future and certain destruction. Surely all should perceive what a solemn thing it is to be engaged in

building in connection with the Church of God, and at the same time learn that the character of the work done is of far more importance than its extent. Even as in the parable of the talents, fidelity and not success is that which elicits the commendation of the Lord, so here it is the nature, not the quantity, of the work which will meet with reward.

Having pointed out the different characters of building, the next thing to be observed is, that the revelation of the character of the work is left to a future day—in fact to “the day,” a term, we apprehend, which signifies the appearing of the Lord. Whatever the sort of building His servants may carry on in the meantime, all abides until the fire—the fire, as usual, being a symbol of the holiness of God as applied in judgment—tries every man’s work of what sort it is. We may think or judge that certain builders are doing their work badly; but who are we to judge another man’s servants? To their own Master they stand or fall. Besides the fact that we are not the judges, we cannot detect the true nature of any work. We may test the methods employed by the word of God, but as to the work itself there is One only who has the necessary discernment, the infallible knowledge, and the unerring standard to obviate all possibility of mistake; and He is the One whom John saw in the Revelation, who was “clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire; and His feet were like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters. And He had in His right hand seven stars: and out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and His countenance was

as the sun shineth in his strength." (Rev. i.) To "the day" therefore which will be revealed by fire every man's work must be left, to be pronounced upon after the perfect standard of fire has been applied to it by the Lord Himself. Knowing this, in the very next chapter Paul tells the Corinthians that it was a very small thing that he should be judged of them, or of man's day, and he reminds them that he could not even give a true judgment about himself, that the Lord is the Judge, and hence nothing could be truly estimated until the Lord should come, "who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts," etc. (1 Cor. iv.)

In connection with the truth that all the work of the Lord's servants will be left for judgment until He comes, there is another important principle to be remembered. It is that the Lord in the meanwhile bears with the work of His servants. We do not mean that He approves of it, only that as the time of judgment has not yet arrived He allows the work to remain, and does not pronounce upon its character. Thus if souls are brought wrongly into the house of God, He deals with them according to their profession, and holds them responsible for the ground they are on. The epistles everywhere bear out this statement. Take for example 1 Cor. x. Paul reminds the saints "how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness." (vv. 1-5.) Now what

object had the apostle in citing these facts of Israel's history? It was to apply the teaching they afforded to the Church of God in Corinth, and to all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours. (i. 2.) He expressly says that these things happened to Israel as types—types for believers in all ages; and hence he warns the saints of their danger—the danger of lusting after evil things, of tempting Christ, of murmuring, etc. The “ifs” of the epistles, as they are called, teach the same lesson. We thus read in Col. i.: “And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled . . . *if ye continue in the faith.*” This is not that the reconciliation is dependent upon our persevering in the faith; but rather that if we continue in the faith we are shown (not to God, who knows the secrets of all hearts) to be real believers, and if genuine believers, and not merely professors, we are reconciled. These and other passages of the same kind abundantly prove that God accepts all according to the ground they take. If brought upon the ground of Christianity, professedly associated with Christ in His death, they are spoken to as Christians, they have come under the responsibility to walk as such, and they are warned of the consequences of sin, of departing from the living God, as the children of Israel did in the wilderness. (See Heb. iii., iv.) God does not say to them, “You are only professors, deceiving yourselves and others;” but He meets them where they are, supplies them in His word with tests by which such may easily discover the truth of their condition, warns them of the obligations they have incurred by being numbered amongst His people; but exposure and judgment He defers until “the day.” Not that He does not in His

government judge them now. He does, for judgment begins at the house of God, but public judgment before all is left until the Lord's appearing.

Another proof of the above principle is found in the Lord's attitude, during His life, towards the temple at Jerusalem. The Jews had profaned it in many ways—made it a house of merchandise (John ii.) and a den of thieves (Matt. xxi.), but He still called it His Father's house; and He continued to recognize it as such, until, finally judging it, He said, "Your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." (Matt. xxiii. 38, 39.) And immediately we read that "Jesus went out, and departed from the temple." Until that moment, spite of the abuses and corruptions that had grown up around it, He had borne with His people, and regarded the temple as His Father's house; but now, having judged it and them, the house was desolated by His own departure from it. In the same way—whatever the unfaithfulness of His servants, and however indeed they may corrupt the temple of God—He waits in His long-suffering and grace before He pronounces judgment upon it; and, as also in the case of the Jewish temple, He still treats it as God's house on the earth.

We conclude therefore, on the ground of this scriptural teaching, that the house of God includes, in this wider aspect, all who have been brought upon the ground of Christianity, not only the living stones, as in 1 Peter ii., but also all whom the Lord's servants, in their individual responsibility as builders, have introduced, whether believers or only professors. With the word of God in our hands, we may be tempted to refuse the work of this and that servant, deeming

it worthless; but all must remember, we again add, that we are not the judges, that the Lord in His own time will make manifest every man's work of what sort it is, and that in the meanwhile we must not refuse what the Lord has not rejected; that is, we must likewise acknowledge this aspect of the house of God on earth. Salvation is not secured, as this scripture shows, by being in the house of God. Wood, hay, and stubble are there equally with gold, silver, and precious stones. And moreover it must never be forgotten that the fire will test every part of it. It is therefore a solemn thing—solemn both in the view of present responsibility and of future judgment—to be within. It is also a precious privilege to be within the sphere of the abode and action of the Holy Spirit; but this very privilege neglected and slighted becomes the ground of judgment in a future day. Christendom—for Christendom for all practical purposes expresses the extent of the house of God—will on this very account be the scene of unparalleled judgments. The measure of light is the measure of responsibility, and the history of Babylon in the Apocalypse reveals the character of the awful judgments that will descend upon a Christless church, on that which still claims to be the church, but from which the Holy Ghost has long departed, and which Christ has long since spued out of His mouth.

The judgment spoken of here, however, is more especially that of the builders. The one whose work abides receives a reward. Called and qualified by grace for His service, and indeed sustained in it by divine power and grace, the same grace rewards him for his faithful labour.* He whose work shall fail to stand the test of the holy fire, and is consumed as wood, hay,

* See for the principle Matt. xxv. 14, etc.; Luke xix. 12, etc.; Ephes. ii. 10.

or stubble, is himself saved, yet so as through (διὰ) fire, but he suffers loss. He had been led astray, though a real believer—led astray by human thoughts and reasonings, and, labouring after man's methods, he had lost sight of the true character of the house of God, and thus all his service was in vain, and is not only counted as worthless, but draws down upon itself the consuming fire of judgment. The servant therefore suffers loss; he not only receives no reward, but he has also to see that all the energies of his professed life of labour for the Lord have been misdirected and in utter opposition to his Lord's mind. The third case is sadder still; it is that of an evil servant who corrupts the temple of God. He had taken the place of a builder, and he had laboured, it may be earnestly, according to his own thoughts; but by his preaching he had corrupted Christianity, denying its fundamental doctrines, and adapting it to the tastes of the natural man. Himself unconverted, he might yet have been a wise teacher, a man of progress and intellectuality, one who had shaken off the traditions and superstitions of past ages (as men speak), and known how to harmonize the teachings of the Bible with the speculations of science and philosophy; a man consequently of a broad and catholic spirit, who would look upon all men, in such a land as this, as Christians, denying the distinction between the saved and the unsaved, bringing all alike within the pale of the Church. But the time of judgment has at length come, when his work is examined, not by the light of reason and man's ideas, but in that of the fire of the holiness of God; and what is the result? Not only are the wood, hay, and stubble consumed which such a workman had put upon the foundation of the house of God, but he himself is also destroyed (φθίρω)

because he had corrupted (*φθείρω*) God's temple. What a warning for the teachers of Christendom, as indeed for all who take the place of service in connection with the Church of God! May all such lay it to heart, and seek, in anticipation of the time when every man's work shall be made manifest, to form a true estimate of their service in the light of God's presence, and of His word.

Two observations have yet to be made; the first as caution, and the second as guidance. The fundamental error of popery, as indeed of high-churchism and sacerdotalism, if not inherent in the principle of all State churches, lies in the attribution to the house of God as man's building of that which belongs only to the Church which Christ Himself builds. The Church which Christ builds is indestructible; the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Not so popery (or the church as builded by man anywhere); but "her plagues shall come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her." (Rev. xviii. 8.) It is therefore always necessary, when speaking of the Church of God, and what is said of it in His word (if we would be preserved from error, or misconception as to its privileges and claims) to carefully distinguish between the two aspects which are given in the Scriptures. Secondly, we find in 2 Timothy all needful direction for our path and conduct in the midst of all the corruptions which man has brought into the house of God. "Nevertheless," says Paul, "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ" (Lord, is the correct reading) "depart from iniquity. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to

honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, prepared unto every good work. Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." (ii. 19-22.) Man may put bad materials on the foundation, but he cannot disturb the foundation itself; he may confound the distinction between the saved and the unsaved, but the Lord is not deceived, He knows them that are His; and the responsibility that lies upon every one who names the name of the Lord, while waiting for the day which will manifest everything, is to depart from iniquity. Then the apostle reminds us that through the activity of teachers of evil doctrines (see verses 16-18, etc.) the Church, in its outward presentation to the world, has become like to a great house which contains vessels both good and bad. The Lord's servants are to purge themselves from the vessels of dishonour if they would be qualified for the Master's approval and service. Moreover, they are to flee youthful lusts. In other words, they must be separate both from ecclesiastical and moral evil; and they must be found in the practice of every Christian grace and virtue, together with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Such is the path for the saint amid the abounding and increasing corruption of this evil day. May the Lord give more and more of His beloved people wisdom to discern it, and strength to walk in it to the praise of His holy name.

VI.

THE FINAL ASPECT OF THE CHURCH.

EPH. ii. 19-22; REV. xxi. 2, 3.

The final aspect of the Church as the house of God on earth is that presented in this scripture;—viz., that

of the temple. From 1 Cor. vi. we learn that the body of the believer is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and from 2 Cor. vi. that believers collectively are the temple of the living God; but the temple in Ephes. ii. differs from these in that it is not yet completed. The apostle says that the saints "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." Thus they were built together as God's habitation, but the temple was in the process of building—it was *growing*.

This shows very clearly that the temple, in this aspect, includes all the saints of God of this dispensation, from the day of Pentecost until the Lord's return; whereas, the house or the habitation of God, as has been before explained, is regarded as complete at any given time. So indeed with respect to the Church as the body of Christ. In Ephes. i. 22, 23, we read that God hath put all things under the feet of the risen Christ, and hath given Him to be head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. In other scriptures, where the body of Christ is mentioned, it is composed of all believers existing at any given time; but in this place it is viewed as comprising all the saints of the dispensation—the Church in its totality and completion. The temple "growing" therefore reminds us that Christ is still building His church, and that He will continue to build until the time of His patience ends in His rising from His seat, when He, having now ended His work as builder, will fetch His bride, and will present her to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle,

or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

If we now turn once again to Rev. xxi. we shall find the same two aspects—the Church as the bride of Christ, and as the tabernacle (not here the temple) of God. “And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, their God.” (vv. 2, 3.) The first heaven and the first earth had now passed away, and a new heaven and a new earth had come into existence at the word of God; a scene in which righteousness could eternally dwell. The new creation, in a word, both within and without, had been consummated. The Church, the Bride, the Lamb’s wife, which had been associated with Him in the heavens, in the perfect enjoyment of the intimacy of His love, now descends upon the new earth, and in connection with this it is that the proclamation is made, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men.” On earth it had been His habitation through the Spirit, and now, completed as the temple, it has become His tabernacle for eternity, a special privilege, which the saints of other dispensations—“the men” of this scripture, blessed to the full, and perfectly, as they will be—are not permitted to share. They surround the tabernacle, and God will thus dwell with them, and bring them into the enjoyment of relationship with Himself as His people, and He will manifestly be with them, and be their God.

The question may be raised as to the significance of the different appellations on which we have touched—

house, temple, and tabernacle. The term "house," as will be apparent to the most simple reader, always carries with it the idea of a dwelling-place. The Church as the house of God is thus His habitation—His habitation on earth, as cannot be too frequently recalled. The thought connected with "temple" in the three places in which it is found (1 Cor. iii, vi; 2 Cor. vi) is that of holiness; as for example, "The temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." But what constitutes the holiness of the temple is the fact of the divine presence, and then, together with that, there may be perhaps associated the further thought of what is due to the One whose temple it is. God, who inhabits the temple, is holy, and those who form it must be holy, as indeed we read in the Psalms, "Holiness becometh Thine house, O Lord, for ever." And again, "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." Then there is doubtless a very special reason for the use of the word tabernacle in Rev. xxi. The language used supplies the key. Turning back to Leviticus we read, "I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people." (xxvi. 11, 12.) This was the desire of God's heart—a desire which for the time was frustrated by the sin and iniquity of His people. Thus He "forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh" (see Joshua xviii. 1), "the tent which He placed among men, and delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemy's hand." (Ps. lxxviii. 60, 61.) And after that Solomon's temple had been built, the Lord spake by Jeremiah concerning it, "Then will I make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth." (Chap. xxvi. 6.) The Lord was faithful to His word, for His people "mocked

the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people till there was no remedy. Therefore He brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary. . . And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his princes ; all these he brought to Babylon. And they burnt the house of God," &c. (2 Chron. xxxvi. 16-19.) After seventy years the remnant that returned from Babylon built again the house of the Lord ; but when He suddenly came to His temple (Mal. iii. 1), His people refused and crucified Him, and finally this temple, together with Jerusalem, was destroyed by the Romans.

God could not therefore dwell in the midst of His people, as He desired. Accordingly we find the prophet Ezekiel, speaking of a future time when Israel shall have been restored to their own land, and when the true David shall be king over them, delivering this message—"My tabernacle also shall be with them : yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Ezek. xxxvii. 27) ; and this promise was not more than partially fulfilled. It is evident therefore that the term tabernacle in Rev. xxi. has reference to these scriptures ; that, in fact, the first outward expression of God's purpose to have His eternal habitation in the midst of His people is seen in Israel's encampment ; that His tabernacle in the wilderness, surrounded by the twelve tribes, was both a type and a prophecy, and that once again the more perfect habitation of the millennium became also a figure of His perfected tabernacle in eternity.

The scene therefore in Rev. xxi. is the consummation of God's eternal purposes of grace, and hence the full

result of the efficacy of the precious blood of Christ. John the Baptist had announced our Lord as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world; and here we find that the work is done. Hence we read, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Sin having been put away, death, its bitter fruit, with all its sorrows, has also disappeared; and thus God has for ever wiped away the tears of His people. A further consequence, moreover, is that He can now dwell in this perfect way in the midst of the redeemed. He is now all in all; He Himself in all that He is, as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, fills the scene, the eternal source of the eternal happiness of His glorified saints.

Such is the final revelation of the Church as God's dwelling-place. But during the thousand years, after the Church has been caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, God will once more dwell upon the earth. The temple will first be rebuilt in unbelief, and not be owned by the Lord (see Isa. lxvi. 1-6); but this will be superseded by one built by divine directions, and according to divine measurements. (See Ezek. xl.-xlii.) To this God returns, as seen in vision by the prophet: "And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and His voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with His glory. And it was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city: and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face. And the glory of the Lord came into the house, by the way of the gate whose pros-

pect is toward the east. So the Spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house." (Compare Exod. xl. 35; 2 Chron. v. 14; Acts ii. 2.) "And I heard him speaking unto me out of the house; and the man stood by me. And He said unto me, Son of man, the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever, and my holy name, shall the house of Israel no more defile," &c. (Ezek. xliii. 2-7; see also chaps. xliv. xlv.)

We thus see that God has had, and will have, His habitation on earth in every age or dispensation on the ground of redemption. Having brought His people out of Egypt, He spake to Moses, saying, "Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them." (Exod. xxv. 8.) Thence onward, as we have traced from the Scriptures, He continued to dwell on the earth. The temple took the place of the tabernacle, the Church superseded the temple, the temple will once more be rebuilt in the millennium; and last of all, when the former things have passed away, and all the purposes of God in grace and redemption have been accomplished, the Church is seen on the new earth as the tabernacle of God. The same thought, in one aspect, is expressed by the house in every dispensation; viz., God's joy in surrounding Himself with His redeemed people, and God's delight in being the source of their joy and the object of their adoration and praise. His habitations on earth, however, are but the anticipations of His perfected house in the eternal state—of that temple which is even now silently growing, as stone after stone is laid in their appointed place upon the living Foundation, and which, when completed, will, after the close of all earthly dispensations, become His tabernacle throughout eternity.

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