

THE COVENANTED WORD.

Wednesday Evening, January 4th, 1928.

"According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remaineth among you; fear ye not."—HAGGAI ii. 5.

ON reading through the Book of Ezra, there is a discovery of the needs-be for Haggai to have spoken this word. There we read of the return from captivity and the commencement of the rebuilding of the Temple. It had been sadly desolated; its walls were broken down, and that holy place which had been made so glorious for the service of the sanctuary was a ruin. That was sad enough! The people had passed through seventy years' captivity away from the house of God. A whole generation had almost passed away, and a new one now returned to see a desolate building and a desolate city. It looked as though the hand of God was still out against them, and that their return from captivity was not to have with it, or in it, any prosperity. Many difficulties had arisen, for after they had begun to build, others came to hinder, and they hindered with authority. They obtained a decree, signed by the king, to put an end to the work, and by force they made it to cease. It was, therefore, a terrible desolation, for there was not only the original ruin, but also what had been rebuilt, lay desolate. That must have been discouraging to those who saw it. It looked as if both God and man were against them; and yet they had returned in accordance with the word which the Lord had spoken by His servant Jeremiah.

Some would be asking, "Is the Lord amongst us? Has He left us altogether? Does He care for us,

seeing these authorities and powers, these rulers and the king, are all against us?" Thus they caused the work to cease (Ezra iv. 23, 24). But in the following chapter we read these words, "Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the Name of the God of Israel, even unto them" (v. 1). They spoke to the people in the Name of the Lord, and thereby stirred up Zerubbabel to go on with the work, and to continue to build the Temple. After this there arose another enquiry, and others sought to hinder the work, saying, "Who hath commanded you to build this house?" (v. 3.) Their answer was, "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was builded these many years ago, which a great king of Israel builded and set up. But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, who destroyed this house, and carried away the people into Babylon. But in the first year of Cyrus, the king of Babylon, the same king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God" (vers. 11—13). The next step of the enemy was to entreat the succeeding King Darius to make an enquiry into this matter, and it was found that the declaration was all true; that there had been such a decree, and it was brought to light. They then went on with the work by the king's authority.

Thus the Lord changed the whole scene, and this is how He brought it about. He used two men, Haggai and Zechariah, to prophesy to the Jews who prospered through their prophesying. "And they builded, and finished it according to the command of the God of Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes the king of Persia" (vi. 14). They could then say, "The work is the Lord's. He will prosper us; it matters not how many rulers and kings oppose it, or false friends who say, 'We will build with you,' yet are seeking to hinder the work by their professed help." In spite of all, they continued to

build, and God prospered their work, and sent them this word by Haggai: "According to the word I have covenanted with you."

In Haggai i. there is a call to consideration. The Lord told them to consider their ways. The work had ceased, they had gone to their fields, and were trying to prosper. But no matter what they did, the Lord frustrated it. Whatever gain they put into their bags ran through holes; for the Lord put a hole into their bags, so that they could not retain their wages. They covered themselves with garments which could not keep them warm, and whatever they did, failed. When they looked for the reason, they heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Consider your ways"—it is because My house lies waste. "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?" (ver. 4). "Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord" (ver. 8). Again their spirit was stirred up by the application of this promise, "From this day will I bless you" (ii. 19): Therefore, they returned with renewed strength; and again the word of the Lord was sent: "Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts: according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not."

The Lord takes their mind back to what their fathers had told them, how it was with those who came out of Egypt, what they came through, and what they came to; of the giants that were in the land, and how they were overcome; all because of the word of the Lord. This is what is here brought to their minds. It was no small thing that brought them out of Babylon into Jerusalem after their captivity; but He would have them know that it was in accordance with His covenant. This is the first thing in the text:

"According to the word I have covenanted with you." It was a *covenanted* word to a covenanted people, with a covenanted faithfulness attached to it. All that people were brought out of Egypt on the ground of a covenanted word. And all the people of God in due time are brought out of a land of dark, desolate bondage into a land of liberty, peace and holy freedom, a land where the Lord reigns graciously in Zion. He brings them out from the one, and He brings them into the other, all on the ground of a covenanted word to Jesus Christ His Son.

The Lord told Abram what He would do with his posterity, and told him where they should be and what they should be. "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them: and they shall afflict them four hundred years." He also told Abram He would punish that nation, and He did. He said, "I will give this land to thy seed." That covenant was in regard to the land of Canaan, The Lord renewed it with Isaac, and with Jacob at Bethel, when He promised, "I will bring thee again to this land," and He did; and all on the ground of a covenanted word. Abram's seed was a typical people, typical of the Lord's family, who are saved by grace and brought out of the land of spiritual Egypt, spiritual darkness and bondage, all in accordance with a covenanted word.

That word and that covenant was made with our Head; the Lord made a covenant with His dear Son on behalf of all His people. He gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. He made a covenant with His Son for His people's eternal salvation, and in that covenant, every part, every detail, was settled. It was

"The covenant made with David's Lord,
In all things ordered well."

In accordance with the promise of that covenant, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, in due time

convincing everyone of His elect of his need of Jesus Christ. Every part of the covenant is exact: the Father's choosing, the Son's redeeming, the Spirit's calling; and each part settled in relation to every member of His Church—the people which the Lord is pleased to call His body. Jesus Christ is the Head, and with Him the covenant was made. Every part of it is perfectly well known to the Son, perfectly well known to the Spirit, and therefore every gracious heart is made to know these things.

It may not be that we can look back to anything very conspicuous in our call by grace. Some are called with a very clear call indeed, much clearer than in the case of others; but in every case, sooner or later, there will be a Voice heard. A Voice that only the sheep know: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." "A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers." How do they *not* know them? In the same way as they *do* know the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ. No voice is like His, and when He speaks He speaks to His sheep. He speaks as to His own, they are His property; they are the flock of slaughter, but Christ's flock for all that. They will not be destroyed by the devil, though they are accounted as sheep for the slaughter; that is, they come into those afflictions, pains, trials and difficulties which are the common lot of all the sheep of Christ. They are not reckoned among the nations, not valued by them; they are an ignored people, set at nought as their Master—that great Shepherd of the sheep—was set at nought.

He speaks to them in such a way that they are bound to hear, and having heard, they are bound to follow, for the Lord does not speak in vain. Some would tell us that Christ is appealing to souls who will not hear, and that He goes away disappointed, and speaks no more; and that as a consequence such souls will be lost. *That* is not the voice of the Lord to His people. He will not be ignored; indeed He will not. When He speaks,

He speaks to purpose; and He speaks to His people in the power of the Holy Ghost, and makes them know it. He makes them know their sins and their transgressions, and what weak creatures they are in themselves. If we have any real apprehension of the glory of God, it has been revealed. The Lord reveals Himself to His people as the God of glory, the God of power and might, dominion and authority. There is stamped upon that revelation the power and authority of God. That revelation makes the recipient of it feel what he is in God's sight. He may feel very dark, gloomy, apprehensive and fearful, but the very sense of danger which comes from that is a proof that the Lord cares for him. God is not against him to make him fall. He will not have His people insensible, careless or indifferent, but He makes them *feel*; and the impression of His Word on the heart is in accordance with His glorious covenant of grace.

In the first days of Divine things and opening up of the truth, what a sense there is of the *holiness* of God, even if there be no felt sense of the *mercy* of God—that sweet, blessed mercy flows into a heart made right for it, and that rightness is produced by the application of God's holy law, and the sense of the holiness of God in that law. It makes the soul to be separate from all others, to walk a path which is peculiarly trying and painful. He is a lonely soul, and has no others (in those days) to speak to, for he does not think there are any like himself. The soul that is taught these things is a separated individual, a unit, not feeling united to the Lord's family, and not united to the world, separate from both. But after a time he feels to be more united to the one, and more and more separated from the other, as the light which God imparts grows. And as knowledge increases, so will that separation increase, and that uniting to those who fear God will increase. Here is a mark of grace, and if we have that mark we have something to take away with us, to walk about with—a pledge from heaven. If this is deeply engraved on our heart, we cannot live with the world, and we

cannot live without the Lord. We cannot live without His word. We cannot live without some heavenly food. A deep knowledge of truth is not gained in a day, but as these things grow, and they *do* grow, there is a growth in grace, even in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But this does make itself manifest; there is a going away from the world, a drawing near towards the Lord.

This bringing out of Egypt was a reality; and the bringing out of spiritual Egypt and the darkness of it into His marvellous light is a blessed reality. He brings the soul out of the one, and brings it into the other by His own mighty power. In the midst of it, from time to time, He drops into the heart words which cheer and comfort; and if the Lord has ever pledged His word, you know that word. Has He said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee?" or has He said a word in regard to your sins, "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins: return unto Me; for I have redeemed thee"? (Isa. xlv. 22). That is a covenanted word to a covenant people from a covenant Head. It is a word on which you may live. Those who profess to know the truth, and yet have not heard anything in their souls, go on just as ever they did, having a form of godliness, but denying the power. Because they do not know the power thereof, they do not want applied things, they do not know them; they have never been made to stand and hear a solemn reproof from God, and therefore they have no ear to hear the sweet sound of mercy. O! there are many in this day who make a profession, but are just at one place and condition all through their journey. They know neither the solemn denunciations of the Law, nor the sweet blessed promises of the Gospel. They have merely got a creed. It may be a good creed in itself, containing all the doctrines, which they can make fit together quite easily; but there is that missing which makes a difference—there is no abiding, no spiritual union, no striving after the things of God. It is all words with no accompanying power; it is merely the

letter of the Scripture, but no going after it with eagerness, and anxiety, and fear, lest they might not receive it. Those who go after the things of God are a fearing and trembling people, saying within themselves, "I wonder if I shall be received; if the Lord will regard me or not?" Their language is:

"Regard, O Lord, a sinner's cry
For I have nowhere else to fly,
My hope, my only hope's in Thee,
O God, be merciful to me!"

However little we may know, if that little is from God we are safe. If we have only received *one* word, that is a covenanted word. Sometimes a line of a hymn will run through the mind with sweetness and power again and again. It is ours because He makes it ours. But oh! when He comes in with some direct promise to the soul, and says, "*I am thine; I have redeemed thee; thou art Mine.*" When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isa. xliii. 2)—that is a *covenanted* word. And though there may be many things come to pass to try that word, and they do try it, yet here is the soul's anchor, "According to the word which I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remaineth among you; fear ye not." "I told you these things at the first, and made My word power and life to you, and the word was sweet: when you heard the word in the gospel proclamation, you heard it from heaven. I will never go back on that, although you may wander and backslide from Me."

The Lord never went back on His covenanted word with Abram, and although He tells His people what He will do with them if they do forsake His commandments, saying, "Then will I visit their transgressions with the rod and their iniquity with stripes;" He says also, "Nevertheless My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer My faithfulness to fail."

(Psalm lxxxix. 32, 33). Thus the children of Israel were taken in hand, not for a few days or years, but to have all done for them to the end of the journey. And so it will be with all those to whom the Lord speaks. The word that He has passed He will never deny. "If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself." He cannot deny His promise. Jacob, when he came to Peniel and knew that his brother was coming to meet him, pleaded the word, "I will surely do thee good." That was the chief anchor of his soul. The Lord *had* spoken, and how could that be forfeited? Jacob never had such a day of blessing, a day of so much goodness and power in his soul. The Lord answered him with regard to his brother Esau, and kept His promise, and did him good again and again.

David asked the Lord to remember the word upon which He had caused him to hope. It was a covenanted word which only the Lord could speak, a word that the Lord Himself did speak, and spoke to purpose, to make the recipient of it stand and listen, wait and watch, to see if it proved to be true. Will the Lord do what He said? You remember how David was brought into his father's house and Samuel had the word concerning him, "Arise, and anoint him, for this is he." And yet he becomes a fugitive from the one who was on the throne; it seemed that everything was in the way of David's ascending it. David could not do it himself, and the Lord would not let him, and it seemed sometimes as though David never would come to it. How could it be from the Lord? "Surely I could not be like this, if the Lord cared for me. Why am I hunted like a partridge on a mountain if I am to be the king of Israel?" But that was the way to it.

Some of you may be in trouble at this time, saying, "I fear the word I once rested on did not come from the Lord at all." Unbelief urges its impossibility. In Ezra's day it looked as though the Temple never would be built, but the Lord had His own way. He circum-

vents all the letters of the enemies and brings them to nought, even making them vehicles carrying blessings, so that the people got more than they would have done without them, more than they had already received under the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia. So we meet with many afflictions and many trials in the way; but we should not have received what we have, had it not been for the things which came against us. Trial is a vehicle carrying mercy and blessing, although it looks like a vehicle carrying a curse and hindering the work of the Lord. So when they looked at the temple in its ruins, it must have seemed as though the Lord's hand was not in it at all. But then they must hear this word, "According to the word which I covenanted with you . . . fear ye not." Though His hand has seemed to be against you, He has not broken that bond. The Lord's bond with His people is an unbreakable bond; it may be strained, it *is* strained, but it will bear all the strain that ever can come. No weight, however heavy, will break the bond between God and His covenant people. It is a three-fold cord, not quickly broken.

Speaking on behalf of His people, who are called the "election of grace," God says, "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips." Nothing can prevent the carrying out of every part of that covenant. You may have your fears, I have mine, but this word covers it all. The Lord will not sever or break the bond that exists between Himself and our souls if He has taken us in hand and spoken His word to us. When we are in the dark, fearful and tempted, tried about our standing, our place and position in this life, we hear gladly the word of the Lord, "My Spirit remaineth among you; fear ye not." We should have cause to fear if it read: "My Spirit may remain among you if ye be obedient; but if not, I will have no more to do with you." But He is a faithful God: "God is faithful, by whom ye were called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. i. 9). If He speaks like that to us,

then we must be safe. The *enjoyment* flows in when He puts His hand like this to the work in the midst of desolation, and says to the people, "I am still your God." "I have never forgotten you; I know all about these enemies, all about those in Babylon, and all about those down in Egypt, and I know all about *you*: fear ye not! Your foes shall never overcome you, for I am with you." "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people, from henceforth, even for ever." Look at the mountains, and see whether they move about or disappear. They may be covered with mist, and obscured by darkness; but when the sun shines again, have these mountains been removed? No; you say, they are just where they always were. This is a pledge of His faithfulness: it is verily true that He will not leave His people.

I have hope that this word is for us here as a people, and that His Spirit remaineth among us; that He is not removed, but that He will surely do us good. He *has* come to His people in this house. His power is not diminished. He will not take away His covenant word. No! He may scourge us if we stray or wander, but He will never take away His covenant promise. If He be among us we are safe. Safety is of the Lord, every blessing we ever receive must come from heaven, and must come in the way the Lord of heaven has prescribed it. This is no legal covenant; here is no question of, "You do this, I will do that;" no such thing as, "You keep My law, and I will give you My gospel;" *not that*. It is an irrevocable covenant. He will never remove it, never cancel it. "My Spirit *remaineth* among you; fear ye not." Do not fear the Lord will remove Himself from you. "I will not remove My gospel from you, you shall not be destroyed. I will give you that which your souls may need. I will give it you in My own way"—that is the way it seems to speak to me; not in a way of *my* own devising, but in the way the Lord will Himself devise.

The Lord Jesus Christ, before He ascended to

heaven, said to His disciples, "Lo, I am with you all the days" (margin). He is with His dear people, and blesses their souls, makes them humble by a variety of checks, restraints and weights, crosses, scourges and painful things, and thus keeps them at His feet. He will never take away His covenant. The fulfilment of it is based on the ground of His faithfulness to that covenant. This word goes forth, "Be strong, O Zerubabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work; for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts." "Fear ye not, I will not fail you. I will not forsake you, though others may do so." The world will, and professors, too, though they may seem for a time to be with you, and appear strong supports. The Lord will never leave His people like that.

"That soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not, desert to his foes,
That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake."

The Lord add His blessing. Amen.