



the
**Golden
Candlestick**

**COVENANT RENEWAL AND THE
TESTIMONY OF JESUS**

**Excerpts of a conference by T. Austin-Sparks
and editorial comments**

Part 4

PREFACE

In this publication the editors have chosen to take excerpts from a conference held in Kilcreggan in August 1933 by T. Austin-Sparks and combine these with editorial comments on the Biblical texts that were used during this conference — mainly the book of Jeremiah — and some historical context. The reason for this approach is that the editors did not find the manuscript suitable for publication as a whole, but thought many of its passages were precious and edifying for the church.

This issue contains the last three chapters, nine, ten and eleven. The quotations from the conference manuscript are marked with “...” and a sans serif type face is used. The editorial parts are marked with [Ed.]..

THE COVENANT, THE BLOOD AND KNOWING THE LORD

Reading: Gen. 14:13, 21:22-24,33, 26:25-29, 31:44-55; 1 Sam. 18:1-3, 21:1-13; John 1:1-14, 6:53-58,63; Col. 2:11; Ps. 50:4; 2 Thess. 2:1; Heb. 10:25.

[Ed.] During this conference T. Austin-Sparks, has been asking his audience to identify themselves with Jeremiah. Companies of believers are being urged to fulfill a similar kind of ministry as Jeremiah's, that is a call to the Lord's people to renew the covenant. According to the speaker, the church has come to such a state that such a ministry is needed. Brother Sparks' burden is that the significance, strength and power of the covenant of the blood of Christ will be regained by the church, so that God's ends will be met and the nations will be reached with the gospel.

In Jeremiah, after a long series of severe warnings, a message of consolation comes as a complete surprise. It is as if the reader suddenly arrives at an oasis during a long desert journey. The prophet's message of turning back to the Lord goes beyond recovery now and is filled with promises. It is from this section, known as "the Book of Consolation", chapters 30 to 33, that the author of the letter to the Hebrews quotes. It is about a new covenant, *the* New Covenant. The letter is written to prove the utter excellency and sufficiency of Christ by way of comparison with the foreshadowing of Christ, the Old Covenant.

The people of God tragically failed to keep the Old Covenant. That is Jeremiah's message. But it is not because of this failure that God now brings in a new covenant. In a sense they *had* to fail; they had to come to the conclusion that they needed "grace upon grace". In this way the need for the Saviour had

to become very clear to humanity as a whole. "... through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles," says Paul (Rom. 11:11, ESV). God was preparing His people for that truth through Jeremiah. Before this oasis of promises is reached there is a letter from Jeremiah to the exiles (chapter 29), telling them that the exile is going to take a long time. They are to settle in Babylon and seek its welfare. God is in charge. He knows what He is doing. It is all part of the covenant. The New Covenant is not a 'plan B' now that 'plan A' has not been successful. It is the follow-up of the Old Covenant. In the light of the Old Covenant — a beautiful but rather dim light — it becomes clear that only the blood of Christ can do to the human heart what is necessary as far as his relationship with God is concerned and his being part of His people, the people of God's inheritance. The promises in Christ are so utterly sufficient that they will take the believer right through to the end. They will make the people of God enter their rest, if only they do not harden their hearts today. "Just don't shrink back," is the message. The hardship that the Lord allows is the necessary test to prove the unshakeable quality of His Kingdom. It is the Lord's loving discipline unto spiritual maturity, the painful way of growth that will finally yield its peaceful fruit of righteousness (see the letter to the Hebrews).

This is the point where T. Austin-Sparks picks up his message. It is the suffering side of the covenant, the sufferings of the believer in relation to the sufferings of Christ.

“We are again occupied with that great central word in Jeremiah 31:31 concerning the new covenant which the prophet here says the Lord will make; and we have seen that in Hebrews 10 this passage is quoted, and the apostle there makes clear that it is fulfilled. Hebrews 10, as you know closely related to the ninth chapter, has to do with the blood of the Lord Jesus, and it is in that blood that the new covenant is said to be instituted and established. And we have been very much occupied with the meaning and the nature of the blood of the everlasting covenant and now we will consider that further. I want you to have clearly in mind that this new covenant in the blood of the Lord Jesus embodies all that is meant by the testimony of Jesus, and it is the testimony of Jesus which is the ultimate thing in the conflict of the ages and in the

purpose of God. The great issues of the book of the Revelation are all bound up, as you know, with that very phrase "the testimony of Jesus", which occurs many times in that book; and we feel that we are related to the Lord's purpose concerning the testimony of Jesus at the time of the end, and therefore it is vital that we should know what the testimony of Jesus is and what are the features and constituents of it; in other words, what is the meaning of the covenant, and the blood of the covenant.

(...)

Now dealing with the covenant we would perhaps be helped a little if we first of all considered the matter of covenants in a more or less general way. That will lead us to the more specific and definite facts of the covenant. To begin with, the Hebrew word itself means a thin cut, a dividing, an opening up or piercing, so that a covenant is something cut, a dividing, an opening up, a piercing. All those elements as you know, are associated with the shedding of blood by which a covenant is made, and turning to the Scriptures for the history of covenants we get a considerable amount of light and sidelight upon the matter. The earliest reference to a specific covenant in the Scriptures is found in Genesis 14:13, a covenant which was made between individuals. On the one hand the three Amorites, Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner who entered into a covenant with Abraham the Hebrew. They cut a covenant with Abraham. The next instance is that which Abraham and Abimelech make, a covenant at the wells of Beer-sheba. You remember Abimelech sought this covenant with Abraham because of his faith in Abraham's God and a covenant was made between them. Then later still in Genesis 26:25 we have another covenant in which Abimelech takes part, made with Isaac. After that we reach Genesis 31:45 a covenant between Jacob and Laban. Then further on still we come to 1 Samuel in which David and Jonathan cut a covenant. It is important to remember that although it is not in every case stated how the covenant was made, the ground of it, the very word itself carries that. The cutting of a covenant meant in some way the dividing, the opening up, the piercing. All these have their own connection

with the new covenant in the blood of the Lord Jesus and it will be a part of your helpful study at some other time if you take each one of these individual covenants and extract their specific feature and see the relationship of those features to the one all-inclusive covenant. It is not my purpose to spend time on that now; I am giving you the ground for more work.

There is also associated with this matter a very interesting as well as illuminating feature, that is, that covenants were very often marked by some permanent memorial, some symbol, and we find that trees and stones and pillars exist through the Scriptures as witnesses and testimonies to covenants. One in Genesis 21 for instance: "And Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God." There you have a tree as a witness and a testimony to a covenant. Go over to chapter 31:44-46,48: "And now come, let us make a covenant, I and thou; and let it be for a witness between me and thee. And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar. And Jacob said unto his brethren, Gather stones ... Laban said, This heap is witness between me and thee this day." There is a stone and a pile of stones as a witness and a testimony to a covenant. You will find quite a number of such instances throughout the Scriptures and they themselves are typical features of the covenant. For instance the Lord Jesus Himself is not infrequently represented as the Tree, or represented by a tree. Then again the church is called the pillar and ground of the truth. There you have a pillar which is a testimony to the truth, a witness to the Tree. The church is constituted to be a memorial of the truth. Taking the tree you begin right in the early Scriptures in Genesis with the tree in the garden. We know that that tree in the garden was a type of Christ and that it represented a basis of union with God by faith. That is the abiding truth about the Lord Jesus; that it is in Him that union with God by faith is experienced, is known. That tree in the garden was a tree of union with God by faith as a tree of life, and concerning it there was a mutual understanding. When faith was put aside and unbelief took the place of faith the covenant broke down and death entered

and that tree became a witness against life instead of unto life. The tree is the Lord Jesus in type. Then move to the other end of the Scriptures and you find yourself at the end of the book of Revelation in the presence of a tree, the tree of life, and here again you have the testimony of a living covenant fellowship in the Lord Jesus with the benefits resultant therefrom. In Christ a people have been brought again into covenant fellowship and there is fruit from that tree, and there is health from its leaves. The Lord Jesus is that tree, the witness to the eternal covenant and life is its mark. It is this life that we want to see and apprehend very clearly in these messages.

When we come to the New Testament and the question of the covenant, we find that the state of things which obtains is death universally abounding. Death is everywhere. I do not mean that that is just something which as a matter of course exists: I mean that the New Testament coming in makes that apparent. It is like the coming of something into a realm which possesses a certain condition, but coming into something declared and made manifest that that condition does obtain. So the New Testament comes into a realm where death is universally, and the fact of universal death is made manifest, and the Lord takes this for granted as He comes in. But there is also a universal craving and longing for life. The apostle Paul tells us of the universal groanings and travailings of the whole creation because subjected to vanity and the bondage of corruption, waiting to be delivered. The end is brought into view. The ultimate issue, that is the redemption of the whole creation synchronizing with the manifestation of the sons of God. (...) And the manifestation of the sons of God represents the final victory of life over death, and after that the groaning creation is redeemed, is delivered from its bondage of corruption, from its state of subjection to vanity. What is that ultimately then? It is but the issue, the outcome and outworking of the covenant of life. It is the full victory of the power of the blood, for the whole creation has got to be delivered in virtue of that shed blood. The whole of the Adam creation has got to stand in life in virtue of that blood. Just as Noah revived the earth by the shedding of blood when he came out of

the ark, so this whole groaning creation has to be vivified in the power and virtue of the blood of the Lord Jesus. The creation itself will be delivered from corruption as the final outworking of the power of the blood. Everything in heaven and in earth is to come under the touch of that sprinkled blood and thereby will become alive with divine life. It is this wonderful life principle in the blood that is occupying us. Oh, that we might more fully in a practical way appropriate and enjoy the value of sprinkled blood for deliverance, life and victory in everyday life.

We have said that the coming in of the New Testament takes this for granted and immediately touches upon this situation as a matter of course. We take John's Gospel and what you have in this first chapter is some definite concrete statements about life in relation to the Lord Jesus. "In him was life." Now that is a testimony. That says in effect that life is in no other and life is nowhere else: death is universal. In Him and only in Him is life. He is the Messenger of the New Covenant. He has come that we might have life. In Him is life. He has come to set up that which is an abiding memorial, testimony and witness against the universally prevailing condition. Everyone in that relationship to Him forms for Him a pillar of this truth. We are reminded of Ezekiel 47, the river from the sanctuary and on its banks there were very many trees yielding their fruit every month, and their leaves were ever green, and those trees are simply witnesses down the ages to the life which that river represents as coming out of the sanctuary. And we have other Scriptures which make it perfectly clear that the Lord's idea for His people is that they shall be trees. I have been asking the Lord to fulfil Psalm 1 in my case: "He shall be like a tree ... whose leaf doth not wither ... that bringeth forth its fruit in its season." What I covet is an ever green leaf, no staleness, dryness, no inwardly changing colour whatever the outward condition might be. It is something to seek the Lord for, that our ministry should be that of trees by rivers ever fresh, ever green, always having in them something that is fresh from the Lord. A vivifying feature. Well, there is much in the Lord's Word which indicates that that is His thought: that His own

people should be like trees, witnesses to the covenant of life in the blood, testimonies to the value of that blood as triumphant over death. Now the coming in of the Lord Jesus in incarnation in the New Testament is the coming in of life. In Him was life. And then it goes on in John: "As many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God ... who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh ...", not along natural lines, for whom nothing natural could account or be the explanation, "but of God".

So the New Testament brings in with Christ the life, and then with those who are born of God, the life. That is simple and elementary but that is the beginning. We cannot get very far until we have got there. It is important to notice that life in the New Testament is always in the Person of the Lord Jesus. It is not some thing that is given to us apart from Christ. It is the impartation of Christ Himself as the life. Life is always inseparably bound up with the Person. "He that hath the Son hath life." This is clearly a statement of the fact that life is not some abstract thing that you get as a gift; it is Christ. And it means spiritual union with Christ. That is seen in the types of the Old Testament and in the definite statements of the New Testament. John 6:53-58: "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life ...". That makes us one with Christ as one loaf, one life. Interrupt this spiritual union and you arrest the life immediately. Life depends upon the free course of our fellowship with the Lord Jesus. There is that definite statement: "It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing", and that would lead us on to the putting aside of the whole body of the flesh in Colossians 2:11, on to the circumcision of Christ. Christ's circumcision as a child in His infancy was the Old Testament foreshadowing of the cross to which He directly moved on and always had in view. The circumcision of Christ led on and pointed to the cross. Now the object in view was the securing of a spiritual company. Isaiah 53 takes us by way of the cross to this: "He shall see his seed." The cross which is the spiritual meaning of His circumcision leads on to a spiritual seed. Not of the flesh, that is Hagar, but of the Spirit, that is Isaac. He that was born after the Spirit. That is that the Lord's

children of John 1:12, to whom He gives the right to be¹ children of God, are a spiritual seed possessing a spiritual life by reason of the whole body of the flesh being put away in the cross.

A fundamental requisite for spiritual life is the putting away of the flesh, and in so far as the flesh is not put away and is still in evidence, the spiritual life is arrested. (...) And what is needed? It is for that company to come into their blood rights in Christ against that other testimony. (...) Then there will be a testimony of the absolute ascendancy of Christ over the power of death. (...) death to the flesh: life through the flesh being put away. Satan's witness and testimony in this earth always functions on the ground of the flesh (...), the flesh is the ground of Satanic resistance and it is only as the cross, the circumcision of Christ comes in effectively that the power of the enemy to withstand is overthrown to the extent that his ground is removed and a life in the Spirit is brought about. Spiritual children are born of God through the circumcision of Christ, that is, the blood of the everlasting covenant.

We pass on with the thought of the covenant with us all the time and we come to Gethsemane. Here we touch the agony of intercessory suffering in which He sweated as it were great drops of blood. Blood agony of intercessory suffering. I want you to remember that the time in which this took place was the time of the commemoration of the Passover. He is in His intercessory suffering and the sweating as it were of great drops of blood, forming the everlasting covenant. Connected with that you have two things. You have the great claims which are represented in John 15:13-16: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants ... but I have called you friends ... Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit ... that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you" (KJV). That is one thing related to Gethsemane and the cross. The laying down of His life unto what? Well, what we have been saying all the way

1. Most translations render, "become children of God"; see also 1 John 3:1-3.

through, what obtained in the case of Abraham, that he came into the friendship of God by reason of the blood of the covenant. And now here in the blood of the Lord Jesus, the covenant is constituted which brings them into unreserved intimacy, no longer servants but friends. And that friendship means that He keeps nothing from them. Friendship demands a complete trust, confidence, where it is not necessary to have reservations; and that is a feature of the covenant in His blood. "I have called you friends."

Related to that is this other thing, the Lord's Supper. And in the Lord's Supper, in order to establish the true nature and value and fruit of the covenant, any unfriendly element has to be dismissed, got rid of, and so Judas is sent out and then there is the establishment of the relationship; in His blood. The Lord's Table is the testimony to the absolute oneness that exists between Christ and His own, His own and Himself. We must always bear that in mind when we gather round the Lord's Table, that it is a testimony to absolute oneness with the Lord Jesus in which there are no reservations but a complete committing of ourselves to Him just as He committed Himself to us.

There are two sides to the covenant. You remember that Abraham was called upon to prove his side of the covenant for there are always two sides. Abraham had declared himself as entering into a covenant with God. In Genesis 15 we do hear the Lord speaking to Abraham and calling upon him to provide the means of the covenant, and he divided the various sacrifices in two and put one half on one side and one half on the other; that is two sides represented, God's side and Abraham's side. And Abraham committed himself to the covenant that day, to give himself wholly and utterly to the Lord, to be the Lord's. The Lord accepted it, came in and declared Himself as entering into that with Abraham, and there passed between the two, the light, symbolic of the Spirit sealing the covenant. We are sealed unto the day of redemption by the Holy Spirit who ratifies the covenant into which we enter with the Lord in His blood. The Devil did his utmost to make impossible the ratification of what was bound up with that covenant, and all

day long the vultures came down to endeavour to destroy. Abraham spent his time beating them off; he fought for the ratification of this covenant, and in the evening it was ratified. The enemy had been fighting to destroy the ground of the covenant knowing what was bound up with that: a spiritual seed to come through Abraham. Well, Abraham has committed himself unreservedly to the Lord, and the Lord said: I commit Myself without reserve to you. But this is no mere formality, no mere external rite, you are going to be proved, and I am going to be proved. Our mutual undertaking is going to be tested out and proved up to the hilt.

From that day onward by successive steps Abraham was led step after step until he came to Mount Moriah. "Take now thy son ... whom thou lovest ... and offer him." This was the last step in the test of Abraham's faithfulness to his part of the covenant in being all for God. God tested him out and proved him on his undertaking, his side. "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me." Abraham has been true to his undertaking. It is a great thing when the Lord gets a man right through to the point where He knows that man will go right through to the end without a reservation. The Lord had committed Himself also to that covenant and the Lord Who dwells in the eternal present withheld not His Son, His only begotten, but freely delivered Him up for us all. And in Calvary there was God's superior answer to Abraham's proved faith in the covenant. And Abraham secured his seed eternally and spiritually through God's half of the covenant, the Lord Jesus, so that the real seed of Abraham is not the Jews as an earthly people, but the heavenly people, the seed of Christ. It is in Christ that the covenant made with Abraham is realized to the full, and Abraham came to see something of that before he died. He came to see that an earthly country did not altogether fulfil the terms of the covenant. There were elements about the covenant which could never be attained unto by anything earthly, so he looked for a city whose builder and architect was God. And that is realized in Christ, not in an earthly Jerusalem. Abraham did not give his all for the pathetic spectacle we have in Jeremiah. God

gave His all to Abraham not for that but for the new covenant which comes out of Jeremiah, the spiritual seed. So in Calvary we have God's greater answer to Abraham's tested and proved faith. In that there comes about the mutuality of friendship. That is our inheritance in the blood of the covenant. In the Lord's Table we testify to this twofold thing. The Lord has given everything of Himself to us, and we have given everything to the Lord; not that we are going to, but that we have. Whenever we take the symbol of the covenant we testify to something we have done; we are all for the Lord. That may yet have to be proved but as the test comes we shall have to take the new position: Yes, but I committed myself to this in the covenant, I stand by my original covenant with God in the blood of the Lord Jesus. Yes, but it all so much needs the putting away of the flesh and every new crisis raises that issue: is the flesh going to come back and triumph or is the Spirit going to triumph. Which one will determine whether the life is going on in liberty and increase or whether there is going to be arrest?

Let me gather this all up² in a familiar passage in Psalm 50:5: "Gather my saints together unto me, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice." We link that with the two other passages we have read: "Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him" (2 Thess. 2:1) and "Not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh" (Heb. 10:25). The book of Psalms is spiritual experience born in a period of difficult history. That is, the book of Psalms is the product of history and as far as it

2. With his emphasis on knowing the Lord by experiencing difficulties and a believer's sacrifice the speaker now decides to diverge from the context in which Jeremiah 31:31-34 is quoted in Hebrews 9 and 10. In these passages the covenant in the blood of Jesus is presented as the only way in which the problem of sin is dealt with and so a severe warning is justified against the possibility for believers to fall back into a sinful life. The blood of Christ was sacrificed for a far higher purpose than to forgive occasional sin, namely to provide full entrance into the presence of God and to provide, thereby, full assurance of Salvation, which is eternal glory (the inheritance). That is why the covenant in the blood of Christ is such a serious matter. Hebrews 11 then, is not so much an account of people who were willing to sacrifice everything for God, but of people who — by faith in action — proved God to be faithful to His promises of His eternal Kingdom. T. Austin-Sparks' main point though, that God's faithfulness *demands* the believers' faithfulness, fits well into this context.

mainly comprises the Psalms of David, it is David's spiritual life as born and developed in history. With 2 Kings 25 that part of history closes and everything is in a state of collapse, everything has broken down. The history passes but the spiritual value continues and it is the book of Psalms which perpetuates the spiritual value which has been derived from a spiritual man — that is the spiritual experiences which are embodied in the book of Psalms. That is gathered up in a very real way in this passage: "Gather my saints together unto me, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice."³ The gathering of the Lord's people unto Himself, both now in this time and ultimately in our gathering together unto Him, will always be upon a basis of spiritual experience. The nature of a gathering is that it shall be a testimony to their experience of the Lord in their own history. The covenant means that. The covenant means that spiritual experience and spiritual history becomes the ground of our relationship to the Lord. I am only now saying over again what I have just been saying about Abraham. The fellowship with the Lord on covenant ground we have in the Scriptures is because of spiritual history. Abraham came to his friendship with God through spiritual history born of experience, difficulty, adversity and trial. He came into the enjoyment of the covenant of friendship with the Lord by being tested out through difficult passages of history.

Israel came onto covenant ground through testing and trying. It had to be worked out. It was all implied in the blood. The blood of the covenant in Exodus 12 in the Passover committed them to a life of history of trial in which they were to be proved. Well, that generation failed but the next generation came into the good of that covenant: spiritual knowledge of the Lord. That is the ground of relationship. We have committed ourselves to the Lord in the acceptance of the precious blood. We have our side to the covenant. Now spiritual history is being made in us. We are coming into experience through history, and every trial is a test as to whether we are

3. Psalm 50 is attributed to Asaph; this does not effect the author's statements concerning the Psalms being born of experience. In this Psalm Asaph shows that God is all-sufficient and does not need anything from man and therefore the sacrifices He accepts are the sacrifices of thanksgiving.

going on in the covenant, whether we are going on in the end with the Lord, whether we are going to be true to our side of the implications of that covenant; so that the gathering together unto the Lord, the union and fellowship with the Lord, are upon the basis of our firstly having made a covenant of giving ourselves to the Lord, and then proving the Lord in experience. And the company that will be gathered unto Him in that day will be a tried and proved company who in experience have come to know the Lord. "Gather my saints together unto me, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice." It will be a people tried and proved in the terms of that covenant, with a spiritual experience to carry over to the future.

Then the next thing is: "Those that have made a covenant with me *by sacrifice*." A covenant by sacrifice. Those who have recognized that the Lord in giving everything from His side, has demanded that everything should be given from their side and they have made that covenant, that they shall be wholly and utterly for the Lord. The company of the Lord's people is from the Lord's standpoint intended to represent that truth, that that people is wholly and completely for the Lord. This is so different from the old covenant which passed away, but that is the nature of the new covenant which was brought in, a people wholly for the Lord, a monument to Him. I wonder if you noticed that chapter ten of Hebrews precedes chapter eleven and this has a significance. Chapter ten tells of a new covenant in His blood, and it says that in that new covenant the Lord Jesus gave Himself without reserve to the will of God. "Sacrifices and offerings ... thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein ... then hath he said, Lo, I am come to do thy will ...". Chapter eleven follows (for there are no chapter divisions really) without a break or change of subject. It tells you of all those in the new covenant by blood and what that blood meant where they were concerned. "By faith" — and one after another right through the whole company, those who came into the good of the old covenant proved themselves as true to the will of God at all costs, because the blood implied that. The will of God at all costs, all for the Lord.

Finally, "Gather my saints together *unto Me*." Quite a simple

thing to observe and yet central and perhaps all important that the people who represent the meaning of the new covenant are the people who have the Lord as their abiding Object of attraction and all their gathering together. There is a difference here between a fellowship in the Spirit with the Lord and organizing meetings or having congregations; having congregations and having gatherings are quite two different things. It is a gathering unto Him; that is the nature of the gathering. The Lord as the Centre and the Life of His people.”

[Ed.] In closing the author wants to return to the supreme characteristic of this whole truth of the covenant. It is the testimony of the Lord Jesus as the Life of His people. He refers to the time in Jeremiah's life when king Josiah reinstated the Passover (see 2 Chr. 35). He suggests that Jeremiah must have stood back because the Passover was allegedly done in outward form without the inward reality, which must have been the reason for God to not turn away the fierceness of His wrath and decide to set that people aside and make a new covenant. From now on the Lord would seek a people gathered to Him on the basis of the inward reality of the covenant, which is the Lord as their very life. But the Scriptures actually indicate that this Passover revival was genuine and we do not read about Jeremiah being reserved about it. Prophetess Huldah praised Josiah for his tender heart and that he humbled himself before God (2 Chr. 34). It is true that Jeremiah kept on prophesying against Judea during Josiah's reign, but that does not mean that the covenant renewal by king Josiah was only an outward performance without the inward reality. Huldah said in fact that God would postpone His judgement because of Josiah's spiritual reform, but that He had made up His mind to destroy Jerusalem. God's promise of a new covenant was based on the statement in the old covenant that after having dealt with the unfaithfulness of His people by sending them into captivity, He would bring them back to the promised land and make a fresh start (see Deut. 30:1-6; the circumcision of the heart refers to the new covenant). There was a condition: "... return to the Lord your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the Lord your God will restore ..."

“That is where we are brought at this time. It is of course a thing that has to be made true in experience. You and I can agree to that; we can all say: Yes, the Lord is my life and I have no other interest in life but the Lord, I simply live for the Lord. We can agree to the statement, but you and I have not yet reached the place where the Lord is absolutely our life no matter how far we have got. Some of us think we have gone pretty deeply in this matter, but it can yet be possible for us to know the Lord as our life in a way we have never known it. I mean without necessary pressure. It is a very real thing to have your own life taken away, your natural resources taken away, to be emptied out until there is nothing left of nature and there is no prospect in the future, no work, nothing at all unless the Lord does it, unless the Lord is the life of it, unless He is everything. That is involved in the covenant. The Lord the very Life of His people. (...) The Lord does not want an ally in the old creation at all. It is Himself as the life, and in everything, when the Lord does it it abides; the Devil cannot undo it, the thing stands for ever. It is in the power of His resurrection. That is implicit in the covenant. (...) Nothing else will meet the situation as it is. Nothing else will overthrow the power of the Devil as it reigns. Nothing else will break the resistance of the Devil but the absolute supremacy of the Lord’s life in resurrection, in virtue of the precious blood.

May the Lord in the future make the truth of the precious blood very much more real and of practical value to us in life and in service; something to really stand upon. It is a tremendous thing, the blood of the everlasting covenant.”

THE HEAVENLY NATURE OF THE CHURCH

Reading: Eph. 1:4,5,9,11,20; Jer. 1:5; Matt. 28:18; Luke 24:36.

“With these passages present in our minds we proceed with our contemplation of the church which is the House of God, the Body of Christ, to see it now from its heavenly standpoint. The passages which we have read all bear upon that heavenly aspect of the Lord’s instrument.”

T. Austin-Sparks continues by reminding the participants of the conference of his view that Jeremiah represents an instrument raised up by the Lord in relation to the recovery of the whole testimony of the Lord. The purpose of the conference is to exhort believers to support and be part of such an instrument in the present time.

“This one thing has been mentioned several times, but we shall be occupied with it almost entirely in this chapter, that is, the heavenly nature, position and vocation of the Lord’s vessel. It is presented as being in a place over and above nations and kingdoms. “I have made thee a prophet to the nations: I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms.” The Ephesians passages brought that right up to date and we have seen that what is there in Jeremiah in principle is realized in the church of this dispensation in the letter to the Ephesians. It is a heavenly vessel in nature, in position, in ministry. I think it hardly necessary to stress the importance of our apprehending that truth as generally presented. I mean that that represents the coming through at

length of the whole thought of God. We have had that thought of God coming through in parts, in fragments in veiled ways by types and figures and parables, and no one was ever able to grasp the whole mind of God about this matter until the Lord gave it by special revelation to the apostle Paul.⁴ A vessel elect for a full purpose for the dispensation, and by giving this to the apostle in a special revelation we have the whole thought of God, everything that has come through in fragments and in the shadows of the past has now been comprehensively and concretely given through this ministry by a special revelation. It is as though the Lord had been seeking step by step, fragment by fragment, to get what was in its fulness in His own heart, through to man, and moving towards a day when He would be able to give the whole thing in fulness and in comprehensive and concrete form. Then at last having brought His vessel for that purpose into being, He breaks through and deposits that revelation in that vessel, and with and through the apostle Paul we get all God's thought with regard to His church, the Body of Christ. And that immediately constitutes for us a very important matter for our recognition, because if this is God's full thought then it is exceedingly important that we should see exactly the nature of the thing which is revealed and what the implications of that revelation are. It is hinted at, we have said all the way through, it is illustrated, it is suggested, but it is not given fully until Paul is brought in for that purpose. So we give to this thing its one all embracing definition, and then break up that definition into its threefold aspect.

Firstly the general definition: the heavenliness of the vessel. And the threefold aspect of that is: its nature, its position, and its ministry or vocation.

1) The nature of the vessel

First we want to say something about the heavenly nature of the vessel, of the church. The best way I feel of getting at that

4. Paul says that the revelation has been given to "His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph. 3:5, ESV).

aspect is to notice that with which it is associated in the acts of God. The church is always associated primarily with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The church is constituted by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. It is repeatedly said to have been brought in by the resurrection of Christ. In Ephesians it is made perfectly plain that that is the basis of the church. "And raised us up together with Him". "We who were dead through our trespasses and sins were quickened together and raised together with Him." And we were seeing earlier in these messages that in Ephesians everything is collective, everything is corporate. It is not so much the individual aspect of things in Ephesians as the collective. What is in view is the one New Man in which all the individual members have their place and everything is regarded collectively and relatively in Ephesians, so that we who were dead, and have been quickened and raised, are the church which is His Body, and the church, His Body, comes into being because of resurrection union with the Lord Jesus. Now keep that in mind, that the church's very being is always related at its commencement with that specific act of God in raising the Lord Jesus from the dead. The church is a resurrection body spiritually. John 12:24, makes that quite clear. "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit." The Lord Jesus says immediately before that: "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die ...". The hour to which the Lord refers is the hour of His cross. It is what we have called: 'The Watchword of the Son of man'. "Mine hour". He says in other words: "Unless I die I will remain alone, and it was never the intention of My Father that I should remain alone. From all eternity in the thought of My Father there was a company chosen in Me before the foundation of the world. Unless I die that company can never be, but if I die like the grain of wheat, and there is quickening in resurrection, as surely there will be, I shall not be raised alone, I shall be raised with a whole company, the one grain will be changed into the ear, the collective thing will result from My dying and My being raised again." The church, the Body of Christ,

is related to His death, is implicit in His resurrection. The church is, in effect, Christ raised from the dead. That does not set aside the individuality and the Personality of the Lord Jesus as something quite distinct, but the church is spiritually in effect Christ risen from the dead. It is His spiritual body raised from the dead. What is then the nature of the church if that be true? If resurrection is its basis, and if it has no existence apart from its union with Him in resurrection, what is the nature of the church, what is the nature of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus? Let us take His personal resurrection as illustrating the resurrection of the church.

It is firstly spiritual. And yet not spiritual in that sense in which we so often use the word: a mere abstraction, something intangible. No, that is why we read that passage from Luke 24. They thought He was a spirit and He hastened to correct them in their apprehension. He was spiritual very truly, and that fact was also going to be demonstrated, but this kind of spirituality was a very real kind of spirituality that could be seen and handled. This church is spiritual but it is also a tangible thing. I am saying this because a lot of people have got very vapoury ideas about Scriptures such as: "Seated together in the heavenlies in Christ." Now the church as a heavenly and a spiritual reality is what Christ was in resurrection. That is very real on the one side, from the standpoint of being seen, handled, and heard. Not something that has gone out of the world and become a mere abstraction; but on the other hand it is essentially spiritual. It is something that you cannot define. It is something with a mystery about it and that is why the symbol of the church throughout the Bible is always an eagle. The eagle is the symbol of heavenliness and mystery. There is a mystery about Christ. John said: "The world knew him not", "The world knoweth us not." It is something here that can be seen, made up of living, tangible people with flesh and bones, something that can be seen and heard and handled and recognized by the senses and yet there is something about it that is a mystery. You cannot naturally understand it and everything to do with it is mysterious. Its very birth is a mystery. You cannot naturally understand that. The mystery which

defeated the master in Israel in all his attempts to analyse: "How can a man be born when he is old?" How? A master in Israel with all his intelligence cannot understand this. And then the mystery of its maintenance and sustenance coming up in John 6: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" The church's sustenance from heaven is a mystery. There is a mystery concerning the dead being raised up which comes up later in John, and which is put into expression by the apostle in 1 Corinthians 15: "How are the dead raised up and with what body do they come?" Nature has no intelligence capable of understanding that. The continuation of the consummation of the church is a mystery.

Can you explain your new birth? I venture to say if you started out you would soon come to this conclusion: Well, I know it happened but exactly what happened I do not know, but the fact is as real as my very body and the bodily presence of other people here, but exactly how, I cannot tell you that. The fact stands, and so it is the mystery, and that is the church. How are we sustained in our spiritual life from above? You can declare the fact and say: Well I feed upon the Lord and the Lord feeds me, I am kept going; but that does not explain the mystery. That does not explain the mystery any more than you can understand how a meal that you took yesterday or last week is today expressing itself in your reason and thought. How can you get eggs and bacon turned into a poem? You sit down and work out the mathematical problem with your brain. That is the eggs and bacon expressing themselves. Stop eating and you will stop your mathematical reasoning sooner or later. How does bread and butter get into thought? How do the two things become one? There is not a man in this world who can explain it. They will tell you of certain processes, but just exactly how, no one knows. There is a mystery about the sustenance of the spiritual life of the church, but it is a fact. In the very presence of death universally reigning the church lives by a life which is not natural. There is a mystery. Well, the resurrection is that mystery. But it is very real in expression, and the church is that. Seek to get rid of the mystery about the church and you get rid of the greatest

reality of its being. If we bring the church down to the level where everybody can understand it and come into relation to it by the ordinary process of natural apprehension and appropriation, we destroy the church. Make a miracle necessary to become a member of the Body of Christ and you have kept the church in its place and you have made it safe. It is dispensing with this mystery and this miracle which brought about the condition we have in Jeremiah's prophecy and it is God's reaction to that to get back to the place of resurrection as the basis of relationship to Himself.

Now the mystery of the church is here. It is something of which we are conscious and which we know to be a tremendous reality, to which we cannot attain by any natural course at all. A good many people have just misapprehended the truth at this point and they have forsaken the watertight compartments of denominations and undenominations and come along and said: We are interdenominational and they think it is approximating to the church. So they repudiate all names and labels and think that by so doing they have come into the New Testament idea of the church, and that is where they have made a mistake. There is a great deal of difference between that and coming into the New Testament idea of the church. The church is neither denominational, nor undenominational: it is super-denominational. It is above everything that is earthly. You can be just as sectarian outside denominations as you can in denominations, in spirit, in attitude, in the way you divide yourself up and cut yourself off from others. To be in the church is to have lost altogether a sectarian spirit and to have altogether had buried in the grave of the Lord Jesus every kind of thing that divides from any other member of the Body of Christ. The Body is one and to come into that we have to come into it spiritually. You cannot come into that by a course of action. You see what I am trying to get at. You can never get into the Body of Christ by forsaking one line of things and taking up another, by leaving a certain church or denomination and coming out and taking a certain position. We can only come into the Body of Christ spiritually in exactly the same way as we come into our new birth. It is one and the same thing

in principle. (...) It is spiritual in its nature, and it is a miracle. The miracle of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus has been expressed in it. We have been brought as from the dead into an entirely new realm of life. It is all the work of the Holy Spirit just as much as new birth is. Well then firstly, it is spiritual and can only be spiritually understood, apprehended and known.

Secondly its nature is liberty. You remember in the raising of Lazarus from the dead the Lord's final word was: "Loose him, and let him go" and that is always a feature of resurrection. In the case of the Lord Jesus which we are taking as our illustration right through, His resurrection was a marvellous liberation. Up to that time He had been limited and bound. His own word was: "How am I straitened till it be accomplished!" He was limited geographically. He was limited very largely by time factors. There were those limitations which held Him, which He transcended from time to time by miracles and by speeches which had effect at great distances, but nevertheless as Son of man, representing man, He was voluntarily limited, and He was conscious of that limitation. His liberation came through His death. Now nothing can limit Him: neither space, geography, time nor material things can limit. He passes through a barred door, all His limiting elements have gone; He is free. And that is the church which is His Body. Because it is spiritual and because it is heavenly it partakes of that liberation which is in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. It is emancipated from the earthly bonds of human control, of man's tradition and man's orders and systems. You have got to experience that to enjoy it. To find yourself out in the universality of a spiritual life and ministry is again something that cannot be represented in words or explained in language; it is only a thing to be felt, to be known. Oh to be free from the hampering tradition of men, the accepted orders and the hard and fast systems of men and to be out in the church the Body of Christ, is a marvellous liberation. You get from what is merely local to what is universal and that is a great movement. Oh you may be working in a locality but you are in what is universal in that locality; that locality is made universal. There is nothing which is

merely local in the church which is the Body of Christ. It may have a local expression and a local base of operation but it is universal in its character and effect. There is such a thing as being smothered and buried alive by the overwhelming sense of localization, restriction within a narrow area. When you have got a resurrection Body-consciousness you are out from limitations, of what is merely local. Now that cannot be explained but that can be experienced. The Lord simply brings you into that and then like those local assemblies in Thessalonica and Ephesus the influence reaches right out to the entire region, in one case through all Asia. It is something which is not tied up with location. It is Christ in resurrection. You may have to work and live in some spot on this world which seems to be like a veritable grave to you, but you may have a universal awareness so that your being there may be having influences far, far beyond what is represented by your location.

We have illustrations of this. It is not the Lord's continuous method of doing things right through the dispensations, that is obvious; but they are there to illustrate principles. For example, the fact that the Spirit of the Lord told Philip to go down into the desert, where he brought him to talk with the treasurer of the Queen of the Ethiopians. He is in the desert brought into touch with far-flung interests of the Lord and suddenly the Spirit of the Lord catches away Philip and he is found many miles away. Study your map and you will see something quite remarkable happened in the destroying of the power of distance of geography. The principle is illustrated. The principle is that when you come into touch with the Risen Lord, the Lord brings you into touch with interests of His and makes you a significant factor without geographical considerations. You in your very living grave, and yet if you are really living in the Spirit and in relation to your Lord in resurrection, the Lord can bring into touch with your life, or bring your life into touch with interests of His which may be to the utmost bounds of this earth. That is a principle. That is His order. He does that sort of thing. In your workroom, your office, you can be a universal factor; you can be fulfilling a universal ministry. How? You do not know how but it

happens. Geography ceases to exist in the realm of spiritual life. It is emancipation itself for you to know it. Oh that every point where believers are found might partake of that very character. Not being something in a location, and fixed there and bounded by that, but in which the Holy Spirit is so moving as to cause that thing to be related to the whole range of the Lord's interests. The figure of the body is such a perfect representation of this principle; that the furthest extremity of your physical body is as closely in touch with your head as the member close to the head. Put your finger and toe simultaneously upon the point of a needle and tell me which feels it first. You do not know. And yet your finger is much nearer your head than your toe. Your nerve system brings every member, near and far, into exactly the same proximity to your head. And the Holy Spirit Who is the nerve system of the Body of Christ knows no near and distant member of Christ. Distance does not count in the spiritual realm. Time does not count. All ranges are bounded. There are no limitations. And that universality is to be represented in every member and in every local assembly.

There is no such thing as the Chinese church, the African church etc. There may be the church in China, the church in Africa, but it is not the Chinese church, the African church; that is wrong phraseology altogether. It is One church, one Body represented locally but universal even in its location, where represented. It must be that in its influence, in its ministry. Not something shut up in a corner. Liberty. Release from every kind of earth bond through the cross.

2) The position of the vessel

And then the position: in the heavenlies in Christ. Again this is a spiritual thing but very real and we may perhaps be helped to grasp this if we say three things about it. This being in the heavenlies in Christ is first of all a heavenly consciousness. A consciousness is a very real thing, and very strong. You are made conscious of it. It is a heavenly consciousness. You know the outworking of that consciousness in various ways. It makes you very un-at-home in

the world. That is a very healthy sign. Is that true of you? Some of you mature saints may think it is unnecessary for me to press an interrogation of this kind. Let me say it for the younger folk. Are you miserable in the world? Are you miserable in the things of this world? Do you keep away from them simply because you have been told that they are wrong and that Christians do not do these things, or is there a secret hankering for them? Would you, if you could get your liberty from those restraints, Christian traditions, Christian friends and associations, would you do those things? Or do you know what it is to be thoroughly miserable in the things of the world and happy in the things of the Lord? Do you regard conference meetings as a burden and if the weather was fine you would not be in them? This heavenly consciousness is being in the heavenlies in Christ. That you do not belong to this world; you belong somewhere else, the things of this world are not your things, your things are somewhere else. That your heart is never satisfied with things here. You can say with the Psalmist: "All my well springs are in thee." That is a heavenly consciousness. Being linked with the Lord in heaven and therefore being detached in heart from this world. Well then, test things by that consciousness. You have been raised together with Christ. That quickening and that raising means you have been given a consciousness of things on the resurrection side of the cross. It means that we have a heavenly consciousness and that we are in a heavenly realm, and that means that there is a realm which to us is not heavenly, and is not our realm of things at all, and we recognize that in that realm there are things which do not accord with our spirit. We are in another realm. We hear certain people speaking, and well, they are not in *our* realm. It is a spiritual but a real thing to be in the heavenlies in Christ. And when we try to get into their realm we find that we are doing damage to something within us and unless we are careful we shall find ourselves losing our life, our peace, our joy, our light, and we shall have a reaction from that and want to get back to our realm. Now you know what I mean by being in the heavenlies in Christ.

And then the heavenly things; the things of heaven are the

greatest realities to us. Far more real than the things of earth; the greatest of all, the Lord Himself. Is the Lord real to you? Forgive me for coming back to such elementary stages but I do want you to see the simple implications of this matter. Is the Lord real to you or is He real to someone you know and you get your knowledge of the Lord from someone else. Is He real to *you*? When all arguments are finished, when all controversies are done, when all our questionings have brought us to a standstill, perhaps when all our rebellion of heart has got us nowhere but into an awful tangle, when we have said the last word to the Lord about the hardship of our position, and the disadvantage of our lives, and asked again and again why should it have been this and that, and why have we not had the chance that others have had, and when all this sort of thing has worked itself to a point where we can get no further, after all is the Lord such a reality that these things cannot take us away from Him? We do come into difficult situations, trying positions; the Lord does things so strangely, so extraordinarily. He sometimes seems not even to be faithful to His own promises, He sometimes seems to deny us when we ask and refuse to answer our prayers, and to do things which look altogether unkind and even cruel. We are worked up into a state of question and perhaps rebellion, and we have a bad time of controversy with the Lord, and yet when that thing has worked itself up to its highest pitch and we have to stand and face the issue, the Lord is so real to us that all that cannot take us away. This proves the reality of heavenly things and the Lord as Chief of those things. And there are many, many things within the range of the heavenlies. I will not stay to mention them, I simply embrace everything in this, that heavenly things are the things which are the greatest realities to those who are a heavenly people, and the church His Body is a heavenly thing by reason of its position, and its position is composed of these three things: a heavenly consciousness, a heavenly realm, and heavenly things.

3) The vocation of the vessel

Now I close with a brief word on the heavenly vocation. We might say first of all that is the introducing and establishment of the kingdom of the heavens in other hearts. That is the church's business: to bring the kingdom of the heavens to men. To introduce it and then to follow up the introduction where it is received by the developing of that kingdom: to minister to the increase of the heavens in lives where that kingdom has been introduced. It is another way of bringing the heavenlies to be the life of others and then seeking to water and increase by the aid of the Holy Spirit. That is the first general phase of the ministry, the vocation of the church, the vessel of the testimony.

Then there are other aspects. I must leave all but one, and that is governing by prayer. Ephesians chapter 6 brings us to that. In the heavenlies governing by prayer. We are brought into fellowship with the Throne and our Throne fellowship expresses itself in governing situations by prayer! Oh if we did but know the possibilities of this realm, what a lot we should see done which is not done. That really situations can be governed by prayer. In touch with that Throne, by prayer, movements can be arrested, others can be initiated, the course of things can be changed; the forces of evil can have the power of that Throne registered upon them. That is Ephesians 6:12. Think of what is said there. Here are principalities and powers. They are evil spirits under the headship of Satan who are commanded to exercise Satanic power over certain areas, territories of this world; principalities. And powers, and world-rulers of this darkness; there you have got the whole satanic system of evil spirits organized for the government of this world under Satan's headship. Now the apostle says our position in the heavenlies and our functioning in the heavenlies by prayer brings all those principalities and powers and world-rulers of this darkness under the government of that Throne. "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and in earth. You go therefore." Where? Into the nations. Oh, but Satan governs the nations. The principalities and powers and world-rulers

govern the nations. NO! "Because all authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and in earth you go therefore." Oh, that great "therefore". Because of that. "Through Me you govern the nations" or "I govern the nations through you." That government may mean spiritual conflict in the heavenlies with principalities and powers, but the issue is stand, withstand, and having done all remain victors on the field. It is ascendancy in the Lord. That is possible through prayer. We want a great deal more time than we have at our disposal to deal with that aspect fully. It is here that the universality of the church comes in, that it reaches out over the nations by prayer and deals with principalities and powers. It is the government of this world by the Lord Jesus through the saints mainly in their prayer life.

And then, if only we trusted the Lord a little more. We sometimes take what we think is the direct course of trying to influence and manipulate other people's lives and conduct, and put our hands on them and get them to do what we think they ought to do, and usually that course of things results in a mess. More difficulties than are cleared up. If a life is at all open to the Lord you can get into that heart through the top. If you go to the Lord concerning anyone whose heart is open to Him, that life can be changed if it ought to be changed by prayer. It is a much more satisfactory way for you to be out of the way. You do not get the kickback of their flesh. The Lord has done it. I think we ought to trust the Lord a little more about this matter. Where lives are not open to the Lord it does not mean there can be no government in that realm. What I am seeking to say without fully developing it is that our vocation is governing by prayer in the heavenlies.

Do you see what the church is? It is His Body. You cannot organize that, you cannot join that; you can only come into that by the Holy Spirit. Are you going to recognize that if you are in Christ you are in that, but as the Lord gives you light about it you must apprehend it by faith, reach out and accept it. It means of course that all that is of nature has to go. It is by means of death first before you get to resurrection, and to come into this spiritual phase

of life, vocation, relationship can only be by the Spirit in resurrection. It is a real spiritual thing. May the Lord give us light now about it. That is what it means to be joined to the Lord. Do we accept what is bound up with this? Earthly interests have no place whatever in the way of the Lord's things, the heavenly things. These are first; our whole heart drawn above.

We were speaking about the laying on of hands in the New Testament. That was just the testimony to membership of this Body. Baptism was the testimony of baptism into Christ. Laying on of hands follows as a testimony to identification with His spiritual, resurrection Body; it declares that this one has come to take position in the Body of Christ; the Body is one. And you remember the Holy Spirit was associated with that and with baptizing into one Body. "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body." Now whatever you may say about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, remember that the baptism of the Holy Spirit always relates primarily to identification with the Body of Christ. You may say, it relates to speaking with tongues. But that is only one fragment of the functioning in the Body of Christ. Read what Paul teaches about it. He says if that gift by the Spirit is exercised with the result that the Body is not edified or built up, then it is wrong to exercise that gift. That gift is for the building up of the Body and if people exercise gifts which do not have the effect of the building up of the Body they have missed the object of their gift, and made their gift something which miscarries. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not primarily related to any gift or gifts: it is related to identification with the Body of Christ, any gifts come into that afterwards. There are gifts. When the Lord called Jeremiah He touched his mouth and gave him a gift for the fulfilment of his ministry. And we come into the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit and we have equipment for whatever ministry the Lord may call to. That is why Paul said: "Stir up the gift of God, that is in thee by the putting on of my hands." It was a testimony to the Body of Christ, to membership thereof, and in that testimony the Holy Spirit equipped for the functioning in that Body. Timothy had a gift with which to function in the Body of Christ; and there are

many gifts. The gifts are the outcome of being in the Body, they are not things apart.

So I trust we shall all respond to the Lord's truth, seeking with our hearts that we shall come spiritually into the benefit of it all. We let go everything else for this. This is our objective, this is our sphere. I trust that the Lord may lead us all to take that position. We declare ourselves as standing in this He has shown.”

THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS AND THE GUIDANCE OF THE SPIRIT

Reading: Num. 10:1-10; Rev. 2:7.

[Ed.] Before giving the floor to the conference speaker an attempt will be made to bridge the gap between his original Scripture sources for his speeches that cover the life and ministry of the prophet Jeremiah and the passage from Numbers about the two silver trumpets that he uses for his final address.

The sound of the trumpet is found in Jeremiah 42:14, but in a negative way. The historical context is the following. The group of people that is left in Judea and Benjamin after the fall of Jerusalem is confronted with a dilemma. The king of Babylon has taken the inhabitants of the city into exile and has appointed Gedaliah, son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, governor over the Judean remnant. But rebellion is set up from the side of the royal house and Gedaliah is killed. The rebels flee eventually, but the people that remain in the land are afraid the Chaldeans will take reprisals against them. And so the plan is born to go to Egypt. They ask Jeremiah for advice and they promise that they will do whatever the Lord says. Jeremiah prays about it. No, it is not God's will to go to Egypt. The remnant should remain in the land and not be afraid. They do not listen and decide to go to Egypt.

What is striking is the remnant's motivation. It seems that their sole interest is "that it may be well with us" (v. 6). The following chapters reveal how they have fooled themselves, when they asked Jeremiah to pray for them, by their deeply rooted idolatry. But their attitude is understandable. They are tired of war and conflict. They are willing to do everything to avoid suppression and poverty. They seek relief. "Just leave us alone. We just want to be happy." That is what verse 14 seem to imply. Never again the sound of the

trumpet! This kind of attitude will sound familiar to most Christian ears. Please, we have had too much conflict already! No more! I want to live peacefully with my family, have good food, a garden, a car, relax, go on holidays, enjoy life. Nothing wrong with that, is there? Of course I will go to Church every Sunday as well.

Surprisingly, Jeremiah chooses to go with the people to Egypt. But that does not mean he has given up hope or has turned away from God himself. It is a sign of God's endless patience with His people. They are given yet another chance to repent. Besides that, it is believed that here in Egypt Jeremiah finished his manuscripts that now compose the entire book of Jeremiah as it is printed in modern Bibles. It is possible that this is the version that Jeremiah sent to the exiles in Babylon and was subsequently taken with those who returned to Judea. That would explain why the Septuagint version is shorter and ordered differently. That is how the people of God still benefit from Jeremiah's move to Egypt.

God does not want to spare His people from conflict. A readiness to hear the sound of the trumpet is vital. It is the sound of expectation, of going on towards the rest, into which — says the letter to the Hebrews — believers should diligently strive to enter (4:11). It is the sound of victory, the anticipation of the sound of the trumpet at the return of the Lord Jesus, "... the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. 15:52, ESV). This is where a connection between Jeremiah and Numbers 10 can be made. Will the people of God listen to the voice of the Lord or will they not? In Numbers 10 the people of God are in the desert and have just celebrated Passover. They are now preparing themselves to set out for the journey from Sinai to the promised land. The twelve spies are sent into Canaan. What will be the outcome? ...

“There are many things which are represented spiritually by these trumpets of which we have read but there are only two things, one in the main, which I feel led to mention at this time as we are finishing this series of messages.

We have been occupied in all these chapters with the testimony of the Lord. We have been having a good deal of information, teaching. Now the practical side of things confronts us, the

outworking of it all. And the two things which arise, are that firstly, what the Spirit says is to govern all our movements. These trumpets governed the entire life of the Lord's people in the wilderness. All their movements were controlled by these trumpets. Assembling, worship, warfare, order, fellowship, the more grim aspect of things in the conflict, and the more jubilant aspect of things in the feasts: always under the control of the two silver trumpets. Those trumpets were the trumpets of testimony, the Lord's testimony. They gave expression to the Lord's mind for His people, what the next thing was in the Lord's mind. Everything from the Lord came, so to speak, through the silver trumpets. And in the light of all that the Lord has been saying to us, we resolve everything into this one conclusive fact, that our lives as the Lord's people, on all sides, in every detail, have to be governed by the Lord's testimony. Our goings and our comings, our movements and our stayings, all our affairs, our interests, our own homes; and in the assembly life of the Lord's people, in any fresh movement that has to be made, any fresh decision that has to be taken, in all the unexpected developments which will come, our relationships to one another as the Lord's people, everything has to be brought into the light of the testimony and be governed by the testimony of Jesus. What that testimony is we have been seeing and I do not stay with that now. It means that we are to be dominated in everything by the testimony of Jesus, that we are to regard everything in the light of that testimony. (...) We cannot have our life in any part separated from the testimony of the Lord. (...) We have to see that everything is governed by the testimony. How does this affect the testimony? How can the testimony be advanced by this? Is this in the interests of the testimony or is it not in the interests of the testimony? These are to be the governing questions. Wherever we are in the world, in whichever country, we represent a very wide area reaching out into far distant lands, and henceforth not the generalization of religious activity, but the specific definite testimony of the Lord Jesus should govern everything. (...) We go over the ground covered and say: Now what is the testimony of Jesus? Become quite clear and

settled about that. I would recommend that you have a time of exercise about that yourself apart and sit down and see if you can formulate your spiritual apprehension of the testimony of Jesus and clearly define it in your own mind. Get away from the indefinite and general to the concrete.

Then we have seen we are called into that testimony. We are here for the testimony of Jesus. Now whatever our work may be, wherever it may be, whether it be what we might call exclusively spiritual or whether the spiritual has to run through what we might call the secular, it does not matter. Everything has to be held in the light of the testimony of Jesus, and we have to make every decision in the light of the interests of that testimony.

The trumpets of testimony must govern everything. (...) Remember there was one man who took the trumpet and blew it who had no right to. That was Saul. You will recall when Saul because of impatience took the trumpet and blew it, and the result was that he moved out of place and out of time. (...) Saul was a man who brought a very great deal of confusion among the Lord's people and lost his own crown (...) lost spiritual power (...). But the Lord's order is that the testimony should come along the line of the sons of Aaron, a life that is cut off from the flesh and is in the Spirit by reason of the blood and the oil.

The second thing is the necessity for a spiritual intelligence. Here are these people in their tents, scattered, reaching out to the distant parts. Then at the door of the Lord's House the trumpets are sounded. They catch the sound and they discern the nature of that sounding. Is it a soft gentle sound reaching out without an element of emergency? They know that that means one thing. Is it a strong blast? They know that means another thing. Is it one sound? Well that means a specific thing. Is it two? That means something else. They have intelligence of apprehension as to the meaning of things. It is that, I think, which is meant by this sevenfold repetition in the book of the Revelation: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches." It is possible to have an ear to hear, or recognize that the Spirit is speaking, but it is something more to

know *what* the Spirit is saying. And in relation to the testimony of the Lord we have to have intelligence. Sometimes the Spirit would lead quietly on to action. Sometimes a strengthening of relationships, a coming together in fellowship. Sometimes to battle. The testimony has all these aspects and important features, and you and I have to know what the testimony calls to from time to time. What is the Spirit saying to us at this time? What is He saying to you?

Is He saying that certain adjustments have to be made? Maybe the Lord is just trying to get through to some lives to show certain adjustments have to be made. Perhaps severances in some directions, or movements on in faith. It may be one of many things. If I were to try and catalogue them I would just miss the one that relates to you and send you off by occupying your mind with other things. The Spirit may be trying to say something which relates to you personally concerning the testimony, and to that in which you are. And the thing for you is to ask the Lord what it is, what does the voice of the testimony imply where you are concerned. What does the testimony mean for me? In my life, my work, my place, what is the Lord saying to me is necessary in relation to this testimony? What is the move that I have to make? What is the adjustment that I have to make? What is it that I have to let go? Or what is it that I have to accept? What in all my arrangement and order of things do I have to rule out or put right? What is the Lord saying to us as His people at this time in a collective way? You see it is intelligence as to what the Spirit says, knowing what the present sound is, what its meaning is. The thing has got to come to our own hearts and have a meaning for us which is quite clear so that we say: I see what the Lord is requiring where I am concerned; I see exactly what the Lord means for me, it is perfectly plain to me that the Lord wants this or that. Intelligent apprehension of what the Spirit says. That means that the inner ear has got to be quickened, made alive to the Lord. It is a tremendous thing to be made alive to the Lord. Everything depends upon whether we are alive to the Lord. We can just be right out of the way at a most critical time if we are not alive to the Lord.

We might be somewhere and the Lord might be just saying where we ought to be if we are alive to the Lord. But because we are not alive to the Lord and have not been waiting or watching before the Lord (saying, Lord, where do You want me to be?), we are out of the way just at that time. Our movements, where we ought to be at given times, depend on whether we are alive to the Lord. It is this inner ear which has to be keen and alert. It is walking in the Spirit which means we know what the Spirit says. That is absolutely fundamental to our relationship to the Lord's interests.

(...)

I do feel that this is where everything is focussed for us at the end of these messages, that it is our live intelligence, apprehension of what the Spirit says, that henceforth everything shall be governed by that for that is the testimony. What the Spirit says.

Ask the Lord to make you alive to what the Spirit says, that we may have intelligence as to the meaning of all this where we are concerned, and then come right under His government. It will be costly. (...) We must be governed by the Spirit, and not by expediences or what will be the most comfortable thing for ourselves, or anything according to our own reasons. It will mean tremendous changes in many lives, facing enormous issues. The alternatives are perfectly clear. Going on with the Lord and taking all that that means and coming with him to the place of reigning, or not going on with the Lord, escaping the suffering, that particular kind of suffering connected with going on with Him, but missing the inheritance. (...) I am sure it is not necessary for me to bring home with any force to you the dark, cloudy alternative. We do want to know what the Lord wants us to do, what this means for us, and then we will seek grace to go right on. Governed by the trumpets for what the Spirit says as to the testimony's meaning and application to us for our lives. The Lord make that very clear to us.”

Concluded.

The purpose of this publication is to encourage God's people to lay hold on eternal life, the hope set before them, knowing that Jesus Christ, their Saviour, will soon return to establish His eternal Kingdom, "so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:12).

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