LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE ONE

INTRODUCTION

(1)

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 1:1-3; Num. 4:2-3; 1 Chron. 23:3a; Luke 3:23a; Ezek. 40:17; 41:6a; 46:22; Num. 8:24; Gen. 11:6, 31

Our intention in these messages is to see the visions in the book of Ezekiel. Our goal is not to research this book or to expound it but to see the visions of God's glorious life contained in it. Therefore, instead of considering Ezekiel verse by verse or even chapter by chapter, we will endeavor to release the crucial points concerning life in this book.

THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL BEING PARALLEL TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The Bible reveals that a mysterious story is unfolding in the universe—a story involving God and man. In this story God enters into man to be man's life, causing man to have His nature and His glorious image. Ultimately, in the divine nature God and man will be built together to be the place of God's rest. As a result of this building, God and man will have a complete union. This is the mysterious life story between God and man.

Although the entire Bible tells this mysterious story of God and man, two books are concerned with this story in a particular way. These books are Ezekiel and Revelation. Both books speak of God being life to man, of the Spirit of life, of the flow of the water of life, and of God's people, who have His glorious likeness, becoming His dwelling place. Both books end with a vision of Jerusalem, and both books show us that God's people are built together to become not only God's dwelling place for His rest but also His corporate counterpart for His satisfaction.

The books of Ezekiel and Revelation go together in parallel. If we would understand Ezekiel, we need Revelation, and if we would see something in the book of Revelation, we need to understand the things revealed in Ezekiel. Thus, it is helpful to take these books together. If we read Ezekiel and Revelation together, we will see that in many respects they are quite similar. The main points in these two books are nearly the same.

Visions Related to Life

The first similarity is that both books start with visions. Both Ezekiel and John saw visions, and the visions seen by them are mainly related to life. The Bible speaks to us about life. In the books of Ezekiel and Revelation, we have not only the term *life* but also visions portraying what life is and how life works within us and among us. In both books we have not just a description of life but also visions showing us the matter of life.

The Flow of Living Water

In the entire Bible the books that speak most clearly concerning God flowing out as life are Ezekiel and Revelation. Ezekiel and Revelation both show us the flow of the living water. Ezekiel 47:1 speaks of the river that flows out of the habitation of God. Verse 9 says, "Every thing shall live whither the river cometh," and verse 12 says, "By the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine." In Revelation 22:1 and 2 we see the river of water of life proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. "He showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the middle of its street. And on this side and on that side of the river was the tree of life, producing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." In both Ezekiel

and Revelation, therefore, we have a river flowing out of God with the life supply.

Visions of Jerusalem

The main thing that Ezekiel and Revelation have in common is that both books give us a vision of Jerusalem. Ezekiel ends with the vision of Jerusalem, and so does Revelation. These two books, which end with a vision of Jerusalem, tell us that God's intention is to come into us as life that we may have His nature and image so that, in His nature with His image, we who have Him as our life may be built up together as the holy city to be God's dwelling place for eternity. This is the central message of both Ezekiel and Revelation. Therefore, the message of the book of Ezekiel is the same as that of the book of Revelation.

Both Ezekiel and John Standing in the Position of a Priest

Not only are the books of Ezekiel and Revelation similar in content, but the authors of these books are similar in certain respects. The most important similarity is that the prophet Ezekiel and the apostle John were both priests before God. Although Ezekiel was a prophet, when he saw the visions recorded in his book, he stood in the position of a priest, having the status of a priest (Ezek. 1:3) and also the life of a priest. As he was by the river Chebar, he surely was carrying out his priesthood in the spirit, serving God and fellowshipping with God, so that the heavens were opened and he saw the glorious vision of God being life to man so that He and man could be built together. In Revelation 5:10 the apostle John speaks of God's redeemed people being priests to God. This indicates that John himself must have been serving as a priest. When John wrote the book of Revelation, his heart, standing, condition, and situation were that of a priest.

A MINIATURE OF THE ENTIRE BIBLE

The book of Ezekiel occupies a very important position among the books of the Bible. If we know what the Bible reveals, we can see that Ezekiel is a miniature of the entire

Bible. What is revealed in Ezekiel is a condensed form of the whole revelation in the Bible. In this sense Ezekiel is a miniature of the Scriptures as a whole.

God's Eternal Purpose

The Bible shows us clearly that God's eternal purpose is to dispense Himself into a group of human beings. His intention is to dispense Himself into us that we may have Him as our life, that we may have His nature, and that we may bear His glorious image. This means that God's purpose, His intention, is that we and He would have the same life, nature, and image and that eventually, we and He, He and we, would be mingled together as one entity with two natures, the divine nature and the human nature, in order to be built together as God's eternal dwelling place. This is God's eternal purpose, which is clearly revealed in the Scriptures. The book of Ezekiel shows us the same picture in a condensed way, revealing that God's intention is to work Himself into us as our life and to mingle Himself with us that we might be built together in Him as life to be His eternal habitation. This is what the Bible reveals, and this is what, in miniature, Ezekiel also reveals.

Life, Nature, Image, and Building

In the first three chapters of Genesis, we see that God created man and placed him before the tree of life. The tree of life signifies God Himself as life to us in the form of food. Due to the fall of man, the tree of life was encompassed and concealed by cherubim, and "a flaming sword which turned every way" kept "the way of the tree of life" (Gen. 3:24). From Genesis 3 onward we see both God's judgment and God's care, mercy, and salvation. On the one hand, God's flaming sword executes His judgment, burning away whatever is contrary to Himself. On the other hand, through His grace God has redeemed a people for Himself. Through the redemption of Christ the way to the tree of life has been opened again to man. Now man, under and through Christ's redemption, has free access to the tree of life and may take the tree of life as his food. This is why in John 6 the Lord Jesus told us that He came as the bread of life and that we should take Him as our

food. He said, "He who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me" (v. 57b). If we take Him as our food, we will have His life and nature, and eventually, we will bear His image. By having His life, nature, and image we will be built up together. He prayed for this building in John 17:21 when He prayed, "That they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us." To be one in such a way means that we need to be built up together. If we go from John's Gospel to John's Revelation, we can see that in Revelation 21 and 22 all the redeemed ones have been built together into one city. In this city we are all one, not just one in doctrine nor even just one in vision but one in building. From this we see that we need to be built up one with another in life. Then God will have a city, the New Jerusalem. This is the picture portrayed in the Scriptures.

When we come to the book of Ezekiel, we see the same picture. In the first chapter are the cherubim of flaming fire with God in their midst. Other chapters show us how God comes to be our life (chs. 11, 33, 34, 36, 37, 47). Eventually, chapter forty-eight reveals that we who have God's life will be built up together into the holy city, Jerusalem. Once again we see that the book of Ezekiel is a miniature of the Bible.

We need to be deeply impressed with the fact that the Bible as a whole and the book of Ezekiel as a miniature of the Bible reveal that God's intention is to dispense Himself into us as our life that we may have His divine nature and bear His glorious image. Then by the divine nature with the divine image we will be built together as one eternal dwelling place—the New Jerusalem. This is the central point of the revelation of the Bible and also of the book of Ezekiel.

THE FOUR SECTIONS OF EZEKIEL

Ezekiel is a book of visions. The first section of this book (ch. 1) presents a vision of the appearance of the glory of the Lord, revealing how God is manifested, how God moves, and how God administrates His government through the four living creatures. Through the coordination of the living creatures, God is able to move and administrate. In the second section (chs. 2—32) God comes as the consuming fire to judge

His people and the heathen nations. After the judgment God comes in to recover His people by life. The third section (chs. 33—39) is the section of recovery. The fourth section (chs. 40—48), which concerns the holy building of God, comes out of the recovery by life and consummates the book. Thus, Ezekiel begins with the appearance of the glory of the Lord and ends with the holy building of God. This indicates that God's goal is the building.

AN EXTRAORDINARY INTRODUCTION

Every book of the Bible begins in a unique way. For instance, Genesis begins in this way: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Matthew and John begin in a very different way. Matthew 1:1 says, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The book of Ezekiel also begins in a very peculiar way. The first three verses of Ezekiel are a special, specific, extraordinary introduction to the book.

Ezekiel 1:1-3 says, "Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. In the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity, the word of the Lord came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was there upon him." In this introduction four main things are covered. First, this is a book of vision, and these introductory verses show us the year, the month, and the day that Ezekiel began to see the visions. Second, these verses show us the place where he saw the visions. Third, here we have a word concerning the man, the person, who saw the visions. Fourth, in this introduction we see the conditions for seeing the visions.

THE DATE OF THE VISIONS

Regarding the introduction to Ezekiel, the first thing we need to consider is the date, with the year, the month, and the day.

The Thirtieth Year

The year was the thirtieth year. This refers to Ezekiel's age. At that time Ezekiel was thirty years of age. According to Numbers 4:2-3 and 1 Chronicles 23:3 a priest, a Levite, started to serve the Lord at the age of thirty. The Lord Jesus also began to serve God in His ministry at the divinely legal age of thirty (Luke 3:23). As a priest who had reached the age of thirty, Ezekiel was qualified to start his priestly ministry.

Here we have the principle that to realize spiritual things and to see heavenly visions, we need the maturity in life. The age of thirty signifies maturity. By the time the priests reached the age of thirty, they were regarded as mature. Therefore, the phrase *in the thirtieth year* indicates that Ezekiel, being thirty years of age, was mature. This indicates that if we would see the visions in the book of Ezekiel, we must have the maturity in life. Christians today have difficulty understanding this book because most of them lack the maturity in the divine life. Spiritually speaking, not many Christians have reached the age of thirty, and thus it is hard for them to understand the visions in this book.

In Ezekiel 40 through 48, the portion of this book that is devoted to God's building, the number thirty is used for three kinds of things. The outer court of God's temple in 46:22 has four corner courts, each of which has a breadth of thirty cubits. These four corner courts are the places for the priests to prepare the offerings for the people to eat and enjoy. According to 40:17 the outer court of the temple has thirty chambers. When the people come together to worship God, they may enjoy the rich offerings in these thirty chambers. Ezekiel 41:6 mentions another thirty side chambers. These are around the temple on three sides, in each of the three stories. In every story there are thirty side chambers. All these side chambers indicate the fullness of the temple. When we put these verses together, we can see that thirty is a number related to preparing Christ, ministering Christ to others, enjoying the riches of Christ, and expressing the fullness of Christ. Hence, in the Bible the number thirty signifies the

maturity in life to prepare Christ for others, to enjoy Christ ourselves, and to express Christ in all His fullness. When Ezekiel saw the visions recorded in this book, he was thirty years of age. He was a mature person, able to prepare Christ and to minister Christ for others' enjoyment and able also to enjoy the riches of Christ himself and to express Christ in all His fullness.

The number thirty was not only significant for Ezekiel but is also significant for us as believers in Christ today. Just as Ezekiel had to be mature in order to serve as a priest, to see the visions, to prepare Christ as the offerings for others' enjoyment, to enjoy the riches of Christ, and to express the fullness of Christ, so we also need to be matured in our spiritual life so that we can see the visions concerning Christ and His Body, prepare Christ for others' enjoyment, and enjoy all the riches of Christ to become the fullness of Christ as His expression.

In the book of Ezekiel the number thirty is formed in two ways: five multiplied by six and three multiplied by ten. Mainly it is constituted of three times ten. In the Bible the number ten, which is the complete number of a man, is composed of two fives, of five times two. Consider, for example, the ten virgins in Matthew 25. Five virgins were wise and five were foolish. Here we see that the ten virgins were divided into two groups of five. With the Ten Commandments, there were five commandments on one tablet and another five commandments on a second tablet. The Ten Commandments, therefore, were also divided into two groups of five. The number five signifies the responsibility we can bear by having God added to us. Four is the number of the creature, and one is the number of the Creator. When the Creator is added to the creature, the creature is able to bear responsibility. The number two is the number of testimony, union, and balance. When the Lord Jesus sent out the disciples, He sent them two by two. The number ten, composed of two fives, signifies that as creatures we have God added to us so that we may be able to bear responsibility. It indicates that we are graced to bear responsibility before God in the way of testimony, union, and balance.

As shown in the following chapters, this responsibility is in three layers, or stories, signifying the three persons of the Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Three is the number of the Triune God, and thirty signifies God's threefold nature being in man. Thirty is therefore an important number signifying man with the Triune God in him bearing responsibility in a complete way. From all this we can see that in Ezekiel the number thirty indicates that the creatures have the Triune God added to them so that they can bear the responsibility in the Triune God. This is the maturity in life that we need to prepare Christ for others' enjoyment, to enjoy Christ in a full way ourselves, and to express Christ as His fullness. Only by having this kind of maturity will we be able to see the visions of the book of Ezekiel.

The Fifth Year

Ezekiel goes on to speak of the fifth year. Whereas the thirtieth year was counted from the year of his birth, the fifth year was counted from the year of captivity. Why did the visions come in the fifth year of captivity and not in an earlier year? The visions did not come earlier because the people were not ready and Ezekiel himself, being under the age of thirty, also was not ready. This indicates that seeing the visions recorded in Ezekiel requires that we make ourselves ready.

Since Ezekiel was thirty when he saw the visions, in the year of captivity he was only twenty-five. Numbers 4:2-3 tells us that the priests began their ministry at the age of thirty, but Numbers 8:24 says that the Levites began to serve at the age of twenty-five. The reason for the difference here is that the priests needed five years of apprenticeship. They could not come into the priestly service immediately. Rather, they needed to be trained and disciplined for five years. At the beginning of the captivity, Ezekiel was an apprentice priest, a learner. He did not yet have the maturity required for seeing the visions. This indicates that in spiritual things there is the need of maturity. Due to the lack of maturity, some among us cannot see the visions which the Lord intends to show us from this book. We cannot see certain spiritual matters when we are young. Thus, we need to look to the Lord that He

would grant us the maturity in life that we may see, accept, receive, and take in all the spiritual things.

The fact that the visions came in the fifth year indicates that not only Ezekiel but also the people had been made ready. The number five signifies that man is graced by God to bear responsibility toward God. Even though God's people were in captivity, they still had some grace from God, so when the time came, they could bear responsibility before God. The "fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity" indicates that the time had come for the people of Israel to bear responsibility toward God. When this captivity began, Ezekiel began learning to be a priest. Even in captivity God gave him grace that he might learn to be a priest. At the time of the fifth year, both Ezekiel and the people were ready. On the one hand, Ezekiel, having reached the age of thirty, could officially minister as a priest before God. On the other hand, the people could now bear their responsibility, and God came in to speak to them concerning it.

Before a child's parents can speak to him about a particular responsibility, the child must be the proper age to receive such a speaking. A child must reach a certain age before his parents can ask him to bear a certain responsibility. The situation is similar with God's speaking in the book of Ezekiel. God did not speak until the fifth year of their captivity. Before Ezekiel reached the age of thirty, God did not give him the responsibility of speaking for Him. Likewise, before the fifth year of the captivity, the people had not received the sufficient grace to bear the responsibility of what God would speak to them. But by the time of the fifth year, the people had sufficient grace, and Ezekiel had enough learning and could now bear the responsibility of speaking for God. Thus, in the fifth year God wanted Ezekiel to bear the responsibility to speak to the people of Israel and He wanted Israel to bear the responsibility of listening to His words.

We cannot speak concerning the things in the book of Ezekiel to those who have just been saved, for they cannot understand them. However, when someone reaches "the fifth year" of his salvation, God may want to speak to that one in a particular way. Likewise, as one who speaks for God, I could

not speak of these things until I had reached “the thirtieth year.” Now that I have come to my “thirtieth year” and others have come to their “fifth year,” I am able to speak to them regarding the visions in Ezekiel, and they are able to receive this speaking. Both the one speaking and the ones listening must bear their responsibility toward God.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE TWO

INTRODUCTION

(2)

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 1:1-3; Num. 4:2-3; 1 Chron. 23:3a; Luke 3:23a; Ezek. 40:17; 41:6a; 46:22; Num. 8:24; Gen. 11:6, 31

In this message we will continue to consider Ezekiel 1:1-3, three verses which are the introduction to this book. We have seen the date of the visions, and now we will go on to see the place of the visions, the person who saw the visions, and the conditions for seeing the visions.

THE PLACE

The second point in the introduction is the place where Ezekiel saw the visions. Verse 3 tells us that the visions came to Ezekiel when he was "in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar."

In Chaldea

The place—the land of the Chaldeans—was not a good place, for Chaldea was the place where Babel began. The name *Babel* in Hebrew is the equivalent of *Babylon* in Greek. Thus, we may say that Chaldea was actually Babylon and that Babylon was Babel, the place where Satan collected the fallen people to rebel against God. The very place where Ezekiel saw the visions was the place where Satan instigated the greatest rebellion against God among the fallen people. That was also the place out of which God had called Abraham that He might have a chosen people (Gen. 11:6, 31). Unfortunately, at Ezekiel's time most of God's chosen people had been carried back to that place. Their captivity was their fall. They

had fallen into the very place out of which their forefather Abraham had been called by God.

I would ask you to consider the situation of today's Christians. Are most Christians in the land of Canaan or in the land of the Chaldeans? Surely the majority of Christians are not in the good land but in a place of degradation. For this reason the book of Ezekiel exactly fits the situation of Christians today.

By a River

When Ezekiel saw the visions, he was by a river. He says in verse 1, "I was among the captives by the river of Chebar." The river of Chebar signifies the power of the enemy to damage God's people (cf. Isa. 8:7-8). *Chebar* means "strong," "many," "powerful." This river, the river of Babylon, indicates that Babylon was strong and powerful, and thus it signifies the power of Babylon in being against God's people. Today the "river of Chebar" is the satanic tide of the age that carries people away from God to Babylon.

There are two rivers in the book of Ezekiel: the river Chebar in chapter one and the river flowing out of the temple in chapter forty-seven. The river Chebar carries the people of God away from God, but the river flowing out of the temple brings people into God's life. We need to realize that these two rivers are still on earth today. One river is the trend, the course, the tide, of this world. This is the river of Babylon, the river in the fallen world, which carries people away from God. We praise the Lord that there is another river and that everything lives wherever this river comes.

Two rivers are flowing today. One river is of this world; the other river is of the holy land. One river carries people away from God; the other river brings people back to God in life. One river destroys the building of God; the other river builds up God's dwelling place.

By which river are you—the river Chebar or the river that flows out of the dwelling place of God? You may say that you are by the river of living water which comes out of the dwelling place of God, but you still may have something of the course of this age, of the trend of today's world. If you are still

in the trend of today's world, you are not by the river of living water but by the river of Chebar, and you are not in the holy land but in the land of the Chaldeans.

When the heavens were opened to Ezekiel, he was *by* the river of Chebar, but he was not *in* this river. Many of the people of Israel had been killed by the Babylonian army; others had died because of famine, disease, and wild animals. Nevertheless, the situation was not totally hopeless, for God still left some "dry land" by the river which had carried His people away. By giving them this "dry land," God enabled them to stay alive and to be preserved. This indicates that God's grace remained with Ezekiel, with King Jehoiachin, and with many others who had been carried away into captivity. If they had not been by the banks of the river Chebar but instead had been in the river, they all would have perished. Because of God's grace they could still live by the river in the land of captivity. Although they could not live in Canaan and thus could not enjoy the abundance of grace in Christ, they could still enjoy some mercy in the land of captivity.

The visions recorded in the book of Ezekiel are urgently needed by today's Christians and by today's church. The more I contact the Lord and fellowship with Him and the more I observe today's situation, the more I realize that the visions of Ezekiel are messages from God for the present age. The visions God gave to Ezekiel were for a people who were in captivity by the river Chebar. Today most of God's children are also in the land of captivity. Instead of remaining in Christ as the good land of Canaan, they have fallen into captivity in Babylon, where they do not live in Christ properly and continually and where they do not enjoy the riches of Christ. This is the overall condition of Christians today. For this reason, I believe that the visions in the book of Ezekiel meet the need of God's people today.

THE PERSON

The next point to consider is the person—Ezekiel—who saw the visions.

Among the Captives

In verse 1 Ezekiel tells us that he "was among the captives by the river of Chebar." As a captive in the land of captivity, Ezekiel was tested and surely must have felt perplexed, distressed, and depressed. This also may be our experience today. Sometimes when we come together with the brothers and sisters, we sense that we are in the land of captivity and we feel distressed and depressed.

A Priest

Verse 3 speaks explicitly of "Ezekiel the priest." As a priest Ezekiel was one who lived in the presence of God, serving God and being mingled with God. Ezekiel was this kind of person. Although he was in the land of captivity, he still lived in the presence of God and ministered before God. He was by the river Chebar, not in the holy temple, yet as a priest he looked to God, prayed to God, contacted God, fellowshipped with God, and waited for God. Because Ezekiel was such a person and contacted God in such a way, the heavens were opened to him, and he "saw visions of God" (v. 1).

We encourage all the brothers and sisters in the Lord to serve Him as priests. We all need to learn to pray to God, to contact God, to have fellowship with God, and to live before God. If we exercise as priests in this way, the heavens will be opened to us, and we will see God's visions.

The Son of Buzi, yet Strengthened by God

Ezekiel was the son of Buzi. *Buzi* means "contempt" or "despised." Ezekiel was a prophet who was very much despised by the people and who was treated with contempt. In his ministry he received no glory. If you are an Ezekiel in the Lord's recovery today, you should expect to be a despised person. Do not think that you will have any glory. Others will despise you and treat you with contempt.

Ezekiel means "God will strengthen." It also means "the almighty One is your strength." The name *Ezekiel* ends with the suffix *el*, which means "the mighty One." On the one hand, he was the son of Buzi, despised by others. On the other hand,

he was Ezekiel, strengthened by God, the mighty One. In 3:8-9a the Lord said to Ezekiel, "Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead." He was despised and treated with contempt, but he was strengthened by God.

For Ezekiel to be the son of Buzi meant that he was a son of shame, a son of abasement. We might think that as a prophet his prophetic ministry would have been glorious. However, when we read the book of Ezekiel, we see that in fulfilling his ministry as a prophet, he was constantly disgraced and put to shame. God appointed Ezekiel to be a sign to the people of Israel, a sign of their being put to shame (12:6, 11; 24:24, 27). God required him to perform certain demonstrations, and in these demonstrations he became a prophet in disgrace. For instance, God told him to lie on his left side three hundred ninety days and on his right side forty days (4:4-6) and to eat bread prepared with cow's dung (vv. 9-15). God also told him to dig through the wall of the city and carry out his stuff through the wall, and Ezekiel did as he was commanded (12:1-7). Furthermore, one day his wife suddenly died (24:16-18). Ezekiel surely was a son of disgrace.

Those who minister the Lord's word today will also be sons of disgrace. When God's people are in captivity, those who rise up to be God's ministers, serving as His priests and seeing His visions, will have to bear the shame of God's people. Because God's captive people are in disgrace, God's ministers will also be in disgrace as they minister God's words.

Although Ezekiel was a son of disgrace who suffered shame and disgrace, the almighty God was his strength. Because he was empowered by God, Ezekiel could be strong in the midst of disgrace. As a man strengthened and empowered by God, he could bear all the shame and the disgrace in order to fulfill his ministry as a prophet of God, God's oracle.

THE CONDITIONS FOR SEEING THE VISIONS

Finally, regarding the introduction in 1:1-3 we need to consider the conditions for seeing the visions.

The Heavens Being Opened

"The heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God" (v. 1b). The opening of the heavens is God's special visitation. Whenever people on earth are one with God, the heavens will be opened to them. In the land of captivity there was a man, Ezekiel, who was mature and who was one with God, and the heavens were opened to him. Today the principle is the same. We need the heavens to be opened to us, but in order for the heavens to be opened in our experience, we need to be Ezekiels. If we are today's Ezekiels, we will have an open heaven.

The first time the Bible mentions the heavens being opened was when Jacob was wandering in his attempt to escape his brother Esau. He had a dream, and in that dream the heavens were opened to him (Gen. 28:11-17). This signified that God intended to gain Jacob as His beachhead on earth so that the heavens could be opened to the earth. When the Lord Jesus was baptized, the heavens were opened to declare that there was a man on earth who was one with God in the heavens (Matt. 3:16-17). When Stephen was martyred, the heavens were opened up to him (Acts 7:56). When the Lord Jesus comes back, the heavens will be opened once again. It is a great blessing for God's children to have the heavens opened to them.

After the earth had been occupied by Satan and the people on earth had been damaged by Satan, God could not come to earth, and the heavens, where God is, could not be opened to the people on earth. This was the situat1`ion at Ezekiel's time. The people of Israel had been damaged by Satan and carried away into captivity, and, as a result, the heavens could not be opened to them. However, among those in captivity, there was a priest who was seeking God and contacting Him and who was connected to the heavens. The heavens could therefore be opened to him and even come down to the earth, enabling God's heavenly things to be seen by people on earth and to be fulfilled among them on earth. This was truly a great matter.

God continues to need a people who can cause His heavens

to be opened. Today the earth is still occupied by Satan; the people on earth are still in Satan's hands; and most of God's people are still in captivity. Thus, there is an urgent need for some, like Ezekiel, who will seek God, contact God, and be God's priests ministering before God. If God has such Ezekiels today, the heavens will be opened, the people on earth will be able to see heavenly visions, and the heavenly things will be fulfilled on earth. In these days may we all seek God and contact Him, and may the heavens be opened to us!

A Vision Received

Not only were the heavens opened to Ezekiel, but the visions came, and something was revealed, unveiled, to him. God said to Ezekiel, "Behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall show thee" (40:4). The heavens were opened for the purpose of allowing Ezekiel to see visions of God. God's visions are His revelations, which enable us to see divine, spiritual, heavenly things. Those for whom the heavens are not open cannot see God's heavenly things.

In chapter one God opened the veil in heaven and let Ezekiel see what was behind the veil. Ezekiel saw four living creatures and God's glorious throne. Because of what he saw, he was burdened to convey these visions to others. What he spoke was not a teaching or something imaginary but a heavenly vision which he had seen in spirit. Every minister of God's word should convey spiritual, heavenly visions to others. In these messages I am not ministering a theory, a concept, a doctrine, or anything of systematized theology; I am ministering a vision from the open heavens.

All the churches and all the saints need to see heavenly visions. Therefore, what we present to the children of God should not be mere teaching or doctrine or knowledge gained from reading but a vision we have seen in spirit under the open heavens through our contact with God. This will cause God's people to be recovered from their captivity, and it will lead to the building up of God's churches. I hope that all the

messages delivered among us in the Lord's recovery will be filled with the visions of God.

The Word of God Coming Expressly

God not only gave His visions to Ezekiel—He also gave him His words. Visions are God's revelations, which cause us to see something. God's words are His explanations, which cause us to hear something. Because God wanted Ezekiel not only to behold with his eyes but also to hear with his ears (40:4), He gave him words along with His visions. He explained His visions with His words.

The words that came to Ezekiel were not common or ordinary; they were special. The words given to Ezekiel, being special, fresh, and vivid, are different from the words given to Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. In fact, they are different from the words in any other book of the Bible. When we read the book of Ezekiel, we sense that the words in this book are special. The words in Ezekiel are God's special words, which came in a particular way to a man who was in close contact with God.

Ezekiel 1:3a says, "The word of the Lord came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest." This was not an ordinary word—it was an express word. Today, we also need not an ordinary word but an express word. For such an express word, do not go to the expositions of the Bible, and do not go even to the books of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee. You need to have an express word from the Lord. With Ezekiel, the heavens were opened, the visions came, and the word came expressly.

Those who are ministers of God's words need God to give them not only visions but also special words, fresh words. We need to see God's heavenly visions, and we need to hear God's special words. We need the words that will enable us to understand the visions, and we need the words that will enable us to proclaim and explain what we have seen. May God's words come to us expressly along with God's visions!

The Hand of God Being upon Him

Ezekiel 1:3b goes on to say, "The hand of the Lord was there upon him." Here we see that the hand of the Lord

follows the word of the Lord. The sequence is significant: the open heavens, the visions, the word of God, and the hand of God. God's hand always follows His speaking. Whatever He says, He does. If what we minister is truly God's word, God's hand will follow. However, if you minister many things and nothing happens, this means that you have a babbling mouth, but God's hand is not working. You need God's almighty hand to work out what you are speaking.

Today we need the heavens opened; we need the vision coming to us; we need the word of the Lord to come expressly to us; and we need the hand of the Lord to be upon us. If we speak and the divine hand does not follow, then our speaking is a vain babbling, and others should not pay attention to it. However, if what we minister is God's express word, others should be careful about how they deal with such a word. The one who speaks God's express word may be an insignificant person, but God's hand is not an insignificant matter. God will come in to do what He says and to work according to His speaking.

God's hand upon man is also for leading man and for causing one to take action (cf. 1 Kings 18:46). The visions are for seeing; the words are for hearing; and the hand is for action. The Lord's hand upon Ezekiel held him, led him, lifted him, and carried him so that he could take action. After the Lord's hand came upon Ezekiel, everything he did was due to the leading and directing of the Lord's hand. God's hand led and directed Ezekiel as a person who spoke for God. His every action was under God's hand. Wherever he went, whatever he did, and how he acted and behaved were all due to God's leading and directing hand. Whether he was bound or free, whether he mourned or rejoiced, whether he went or came—everything was under the leading and directing of God's hand.

Here we see that a man who speaks for God no longer has his own freedom and can no longer do things according to his own convenience. If God's hand leads him to go to a certain place, he must go there. If God's hand directs him to do a certain thing, he must do it. His actions are according to the leading of God's hand and are under the strict directing of

God's hand. Where he goes and what he does are not according to his choice but are under and according to the leading and directing hand of God. This requires the one who speaks for God to pay a considerable price.

Every minister of God's word needs to fulfill the four conditions for seeing God's visions. Everyone who speaks God's words in a normal way must be one to whom the heavens are opened, one who has seen God's visions, one to whom God's words have come expressly, and one who has God's hand upon him.

May we all come to "the thirtieth year," and may we all be by the river of Chebar, not in the tide of Babylon. May we all have an open heaven, see God's visions, receive God's words, and have God's leading and directing hand upon us. God needs such persons today, and the church also needs them. May we all become such persons to meet God's need!

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE THREE

THE WIND, THE CLOUD, THE FIRE, AND THE ELECTRUM

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 1:4; Psa. 75:6-7a; Ezek. 37:9; John 3:8; Acts 2:2, 4a; Exo. 24:16a; 40:34; Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29; Ezek. 1:27a, 28; 8:2b, 4; Rev. 4:3a; 22:1

In this message we will consider Ezekiel 1:4. This verse covers four main things: the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum. First, a stormy wind came from the north. Second, a great cloud came along with the wind. Third, there was a fire enfolding itself. Fourth, out of the fire there appeared the glowing electrum.

OUR SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES BEING ACCORDING TO OUR KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Genesis 1 begins with a word concerning God, and Ezekiel 1 opens with a glorious vision of God. Those who know God can testify that our spiritual experiences are according to our knowledge of God. Likewise, our service and the church affairs also depend on our knowledge of God. The degree of our knowing God will determine both the degree of our spiritual experience and the situation of the church. Spiritually speaking, everything we have depends on God's being, vision, and manifestation and on our knowing God.

The visions in the book of Ezekiel begin not with man but with God. The visions, which begin from the north, where God is, show us God in His will, plan, intention, work, action, and relationship with man. These visions reveal what God expects man to be in relation to Him. In addition to the four items mentioned above, the visions in chapter one include the four living creatures, the high and dreadful wheels, a sky as clear as crystal, God's glorious throne, and the man upon the

throne. As we consider God's glorious visions in this chapter, we need to pay careful attention to all these matters.

THE BIBLE BEING A BOOK OF PICTURES THAT DESCRIBE SPIRITUAL THINGS

The Bible is a book of pictures revealing to us God and the spiritual things. God is Spirit, and as such He is abstract, mysterious, invisible, intangible, and unfathomable. Not only is God abstract, but all spiritual things are also abstract. Without the pictures in the Bible, it would be rather difficult for us to understand God and the spiritual things. In His wisdom God uses visible, material things to describe invisible, spiritual things. Furthermore, He uses signs and symbols to express abstract, mysterious matters. For this reason the Bible uses many types, figures, and pictures to describe and portray spiritual things.

A great many items in the universe are symbols of spiritual things. For example, the sun symbolizes Christ as our light (Mal. 4:2; Luke 1:78), and food symbolizes Christ as our sustenance (John 6:35). Actually, all the positive things in the universe may be used to portray what Christ is to us. God's intention in His creation is to use the things of creation to illustrate what Christ is. This means that the entire universe came into existence for the purpose of describing Christ. For example, if vines had not been created, the Lord Jesus could not have used a vine to describe Himself (John 15:1). If there were no foxes or birds, Christ could not have compared His situation in His ministry to that of foxes with their holes and birds with their roosts (Matt. 8:20). Even the pasture was created so that the Lord Jesus could use it as an illustration of Himself (John 10:9). Because the universe with the billions of things and persons in it was created for the purpose of describing Christ, He, in revealing Himself, can find in any environment something to serve as an illustration of Himself. The whole universe is a picture of Christ. If we see this, we will realize how rich, profound, unlimited, and unsearchable Christ is.

Just as the Bible as a whole is a picture book, so Ezekiel as a miniature of the Bible is also a picture book, a book full of

pictures. These pictures are presented in the form of visions. The visions Ezekiel saw were absolutely related to God and to spiritual things and therefore should not be understood in a literal, physical way. If we try to interpret the visions in Ezekiel literally, we will not be able to understand them.

When I was young, I could not understand the book of Ezekiel. The more I read this book, the more confused I became. In particular, I could not understand the matter of the four living creatures. Each of the living creatures had four faces: at the front, the face of a man; on the right, the face of a lion; on the left, the face of an ox; and at the back, the face of an eagle (Ezek. 1:5-6, 10). Furthermore, "the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot," and "they had the hands of a man under their wings" (vv. 7a, 8a). I thought that the picture of the living creatures was very strange, and I could not understand it at all. I thank the Lord that as I gradually advanced in my spiritual experience, I began to understand the visions in Ezekiel, comparing the record in Ezekiel with other portions of the Word. Eventually, like someone putting together the pieces of a puzzle in order to have a complete picture, I put various parts of the Word together and began to see the pictures of the spiritual matters portrayed in the book of Ezekiel, realizing that Ezekiel uses visible, physical things to signify spiritual things. Now in our study of Ezekiel we need to see the intrinsic spiritual significance of the pictures in this book, considering them in light of the entire Bible and comparing them with our spiritual experience.

Let us now begin to consider the four matters in Ezekiel 1:4 point by point.

THE STORMY WIND

From the North

The first part of Ezekiel 1:4 says, "I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north." John Nelson Darby's New Translation and the American Standard Version both translate the Hebrew word rendered *whirlwind* as "stormy wind," and I feel that this translation is preferable. Thus, this verse is saying that a *stormy wind* came from the north.

Why did the stormy wind come from the north and not from the south, the east, or the west? The answer to this question is found in Psalm 75:6-7a: "For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge." Here *north* is replaced with *God*. This indicates that God is at the north. In geographical terms the north is commonly regarded as up, and thus to go north is to go up. God, who is at the north, is always up. Spiritually speaking, this means that when we are going north, we are going to God. The fact that the stormy wind came from the north means that it came from God. The dwelling place, the habitation, of God is the source of all spiritual things. The stormy wind came from the north, from the habitation of God. God, therefore, was the source of the stormy wind.

Signifying the Spirit of God

The Hebrew word for *wind* is *ruach*. *Ruach* may be translated "wind" or "breath" or "spirit." In the King James Version of Ezekiel 37, this Hebrew word is translated in all three of these ways: "wind" in verse 9, "breath" in verses 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10, and "Spirit" in verses 1 and 14. It is difficult for translators to decide whether in a certain verse *ruach* means wind, breath, or spirit. The decision must be made according to the context.

In 1:4 *ruach* denotes a wind, a stormy wind which signifies nothing less than the powerful Spirit. On the day of Pentecost there was a rushing, mighty wind which filled the house where the one hundred twenty were sitting. Then all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:2, 4a). No doubt, that rushing, mighty wind was the powerful Spirit.

In John 3:8 the Lord Jesus said, "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from and where it goes; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." Some versions point out in a footnote that the word *wind* in this verse is a translation of the Greek word for spirit, *pneuma*. The Hebrew word *ruach* and the Greek word *pneuma* have exactly the same meaning. Like *ruach*, the word *pneuma* can be translated "wind," "breath," or "spirit." Thus, in this verse the Greek words translated *the wind blows* may

also be rendered "the Spirit blows." In Ezekiel 1:4 the strong, stormy wind is a figure, a picture, of the mighty Spirit of God.

In the Bible the wind has both a negative and positive significance. In its negative significance the wind is a symbol, or sign, of God's judgment upon man. This is the significance of the wind in Daniel 7:2 and in Revelation 7:1. In its positive significance the wind is a symbol, or sign, of the blowing of the Holy Spirit upon man or the descending of the Holy Spirit upon man to take care of man. This, of course, is the significance of the rushing, mighty wind in Acts 2. In the book of Ezekiel the wind also has this twofold significance: the negative significance—God's judgment by raising up circumstances through which He judges those who rebel against Him; the positive significance—in the Spirit's coming to man to cause man to have God's life. The stormy wind in Ezekiel 1 has this positive significance.

Our Spiritual Experiences Always Beginning with a Spiritual Storm

Our spiritual experiences always begin with a spiritual storm. According to church history, throughout all the generations the Spirit of God has blown like a mighty wind to move people to repent of their sins, to believe in the Lord Jesus for their regeneration, to give up the world in order to follow the Lord, and to be desperate in heart and burning in spirit to serve the Lord. Have you not had this kind of experience? Have you not sensed the wind of God blowing upon you? Have you not been touched by the Spirit of God? Have you not sensed, at least once in your life, that a certain power—the stormy wind from God—was moving upon you, causing you to hate sin, to have a different attitude toward the world, or to change your view concerning your life? If you have never had such experiences, you need to look to the Lord and pray for His wind from the north to blow upon you.

A certain promising young man, who was a strong member of a political party, experienced this wind from the north at the time of his conversion. One day he went into an idol temple and saw a Bible on the table which was used for the offering. He walked up to the Bible and read a few verses.

Suddenly, the Holy Spirit blew upon him, and he was convicted of his sins. As the wind of the Spirit continued to blow upon him, he began to repent of his sins and to make a thorough confession, crying bitterly as he prostrated himself and even rolled on the floor. He was saved through the blowing of a mighty wind from the north.

God's visitation always begins with the blowing of the wind of God upon our being. Did you not experience a storm, the blowing of the Spirit of God, when you were saved? Perhaps you were a young student caring for nothing but simply going to school, studying, and playing. Then one day a storm came to you. A stormy wind blew upon you and turned you upside down. This caused you to consider the meaning of human life, and you began to ask yourself about where you came from and where you were going. This was the result of the blowing of a stormy wind. I believe that every saved person experienced such a storm at the time of conversion.

I cannot forget the storm I experienced on the day I was saved. As a young man under the age of twenty, I was full of ambition, and I was studying hard, pursuing the knowledge of the world in order to have a good future. But one day I heard about an evangelistic meeting, and I decided to attend. In that meeting as I listened to a strong gospel message, a stormy wind blew upon me and turned me upside down.

A storm comes to us from the Lord not only at the time of our conversion but also after we have been saved. Whether we are young or old, we all experience the stormy wind. For example, certain ones among us in the church life formerly were missionaries or Christian workers. One day a storm came to them from the north and turned everything upside down. This caused them to seek the Lord desperately and eventually to come into the church life.

Actually, a stormy wind blows upon us at every turn in our spiritual life. This stormy wind is God Himself blowing upon us to bring a storm into our life, into our work, and into our church. It is truly a grace to have storms coming to us from God. As we are following the Lord, we will experience storm after storm. I cannot say how many storms have come to me, but I can testify that every storm is worth recalling. Every

storm has become a pleasant remembrance. I believe that when we are in eternity, we will recall the storms that we experienced.

Whenever God visits us and revives us, His Spirit blows upon us like a mighty wind. We need to experience the Spirit in this way—the more, the better and the stronger, the better. I have the deep longing that in these days the Spirit of God would blow strongly upon us like a mighty wind.

THE CLOUD

The cloud always follows the stormy wind. If we have the wind, we will surely have the cloud, for the cloud is the issue of the blowing of the wind. Like the stormy wind, the cloud signifies the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit touches us, He is like the wind. When the Holy Spirit visits us and overshadows us, He is like the cloud. First, the Holy Spirit blows upon us like the wind to move us, and then He abides with us like a cloud to cover us.

The Brooding God Coming as the Wind and Staying as the Cloud

The cloud in Ezekiel 1:4 is a figure of God covering His people. We may use the word *brooding* and say that the cloud was God brooding over His people. The cloud, therefore, was nothing other than the brooding God. God comes as the wind, but He stays as the cloud. By staying as the cloud, He covers us, overshadows us, and broods over us to give us the enjoyment of His presence, thereby producing something of Himself in our daily life. How wonderful! This is the covering God typified by the covering cloud.

By considering the history of the people of Israel, we can understand more fully the significance of the cloud. A number of times God appeared to them and visited them like a great cloud that overshadowed them. For instance, after the Israelites came out of Egypt, they passed through the Red Sea. Concerning this Paul says, “All our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor. 10:1-2). The cloud that covered the children of Israel typifies the Spirit of

God. Eventually, the children of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai and camped there. In Exodus 19:9 the Lord said to Moses, "Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud," and there was "a thick cloud upon the mount" (v. 16). In chapter twenty-four we are told that "a cloud covered the mount," that the Lord "called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud," and that "Moses went into the midst of the cloud" (vv. 15, 16, 18). Later, after the tent of meeting was set up for God, God's glory filled the tent and a cloud covered it and abode upon it (40:34-35). All the people could see that the cloud was covering the tent of meeting. That cloud signified God's visitation and His abiding with them.

The cloud also signifies God's care for His people and His favor toward them. He appeared to them like a cloud, covering and overshadowing them, in order to care for them. Proverbs 16:15 says that the king's favor is like "a cloud of the latter rain." In His gracious visitation God comes to us like a cloud to care for us and to show favor to us.

Experiencing and Enjoying God as the Gracious Cloud

In Ezekiel 1:4 the cloud is mentioned in relation to the wind. Together, the wind and the cloud are an indication that an important transaction is about to take place between God and man. At least from time to time, in our Christian life there needs to be a significant spiritual transaction between God and us. I believe that everyone who has been genuinely saved has experienced such a transaction. We also experience a spiritual transaction during times of revival. First, the Holy Spirit touches us and moves us, causing us to turn to the Lord, to see our corruption, and to repent and confess our sins. Then we have the sense that God is like a cloud visiting us, overshadowing us, and covering us. We may sense also that the grace of God is upon us, covering us like a canopy.

God is the blowing wind, and He is also the covering and overshadowing cloud. Whenever we experience God as the blowing wind, we also have the sense that, after He blows upon us, He remains with us, overshadowing and covering us and brooding over us. This is God as the gracious cloud. The

blowing of the wind brings the presence of God to us in the form of a heavenly, brooding, overshadowing cloud.

When I was saved, I experienced not only the blowing of a mighty wind from the north upon my whole being but also the Lord's presence overshadowing me like a cloud. Under this overshadowing I began to ask myself, "What is life all about? Should I keep going on the way I have been going?" Because of the blowing wind and the overshadowing cloud, an important transaction took place between me and God. A genuine experience and a true revival involve both the spiritual wind and the spiritual cloud.

I cannot forget the particular experience I had of God as an overshadowing cloud in 1935. On one Lord's Day afternoon I was ministering about the Spirit. At a certain point I had the sense that a cloud had come down and was covering me. Although I did not see anything with my physical eyes, I sensed that something was overshadowing me. I was enveloped by the cloud which covered me, and I had a deep sense of the Lord's presence in a very definite and practical way. At that time the presence of the Lord truly was like a cloud. That experience was a matter not only of faith but also of something that could be sensed. I sensed that I was covered and overshadowed by the presence of the Lord. It was wonderful, pleasant, comforting, strengthening, and energizing. The congregation realized that something had happened and that the atmosphere had changed, and immediately I began to speak in a powerful way.

Many of us have experienced the Lord as an overshadowing cloud. When you pray, repenting and confessing your sins, you may sense that you are under the covering of a canopy or of a cloud. It might have been your experience that during your morning revival or during a time of pray-reading the Word, a stormy wind from God came and blew upon you. Then after the blowing of the wind, a cloud came and stayed with you, perhaps for the whole day. Throughout the day you had the sense that something was following you, overshadowing you, covering you, and brooding over you, and you enjoyed the Lord's presence all day long.

I can testify that I have experienced this many times. As I

was in contact with the Lord early in the morning, the Spirit came to me like a strong wind from the north, and immediately I entered into the Lord's presence, which was like a cloud covering me. His presence became my enjoyment, and all day long I experienced His covering and enjoyed His presence.

We all need to experience the Lord's presence like a brooding, overshadowing cloud. We should not be content with mere doctrines and teachings. Instead of coming to the Bible seeking more knowledge, we need to seek the Lord Himself. When we come to the Word, we should pray, "Lord, I need the wind and the cloud. Lord, blow upon me as a stormy wind from the north and cover me with the overshadowing cloud. Come to me as the wind and stay with me as the cloud."

THE FIRE

Ezekiel saw that the cloud which overshadowed him was covered with fire flashing continually. This also is a matter which corresponds to our spiritual experience. When the stormy wind comes from the Lord and the overshadowing presence of the Lord remains, we have the sense that something within us is shining, searching, and burning. Under such a shining, enlightening, searching, and burning, we may realize that we are wrong in certain things. For example, we may realize that our attitude toward a particular brother is wrong. Under the shining and searching of the Lord's presence, we are exposed, and we condemn ourselves and confess our shortcomings. Then the searching fire will burn away the negative things within us.

The fire seen by Ezekiel signifies God's burning and sanctifying power. Everything that does not match God's holy nature and disposition must be burned away. Only what matches His holiness can pass through His holy fire. This can be confirmed by our spiritual experience. The Holy Spirit comes to convict people regarding sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). Whenever the Holy Spirit touches us and causes us to confess our sins and pray, we will sense the need to be sanctified and to have all the corruption purged out of our being. We will realize that anything that does not

match the holiness of God must be burned away. If someone claims to have been visited by God but has no feeling concerning his sins and unholiness, that person has not truly been touched by the Spirit of God. When God visits a person, His holy fire will come to consume the negative things in him. This burning fire also causes us to be enlightened. The more the fire of the Holy Spirit burns in us, the more we will be purified and enlightened.

If we experience the Lord in this way, there will be no need for others to tell us that we are wrong in certain matters or that our attitude toward a particular brother is wrong. If someone tries to correct us, we might be offended. But even if we would receive a word of correction and then try to improve ourselves, this would not mean anything as far as the inner life is concerned. We need to be under the shining and the searching of the Lord's presence. The more we are under this shining, the more we will be willing to say, "Lord Jesus, burn me! I am not good for anything except to be burned. O Lord, burn away my disposition. Burn away my intentions, my self-aim, my motives, and my goals." This is a genuine experience of the inner life, not a mere teaching.

After ministering the Word to the Lord's people for many years, I have learned that mere teaching does not accomplish anything. We all need the blowing of the wind, the overshadowing of the Lord's presence, and the searching and burning of this fire. Our God is a consuming fire (Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29). The wind, the cloud, and the fire are all the Lord Himself. When He comes, He comes as the stormy wind. When He remains with us, He stays as the cloud. When He searches and burns us, He searches and burns as the consuming fire. No one can experience the Lord as the blowing wind, as the covering cloud, and as the burning, consuming fire without undergoing a real change and transformation. We all need transformation by fire. We all need to be transformed by being burned.

Our God, the Lord Jesus, is not only the living water but also the consuming fire. Many Christians appreciate Ezekiel 47 because this chapter speaks of the flowing river. We need to realize that the flowing river is not the first thing

in Ezekiel. Rather, the river comes after the fire. The fire is in chapter one, and the river is in chapter forty-seven. The fire always comes first. The source of the fire is the blowing wind with the covering cloud. From this we see that the fire does not come to us directly. God comes to us as the blowing wind and stays with us as the covering cloud. Under His covering we are exposed by His shining. As we are under His shining, we should confess our need for His burning and then pray for Him to burn away our self, our old nature, our disposition, our worldliness, and our attitudes, goals, aims, motives, and intentions. We all need to be burned by the Lord in this way. One such burning is better than a thousand teachings.

THE GLOWING ELECTRUM

God's intention is not simply to burn us and turn us into ashes. God is a good God with a good purpose. What is His purpose in blowing upon us as the wind, in covering us as the cloud, and in consuming us as the fire? The answer to this question is that out of the fire appears the glowing electrum. The burning of the divine fire is for the manifestation of the electrum.

The Hebrew word for *electrum* is very difficult to translate. In his note on Ezekiel 1:4 in his New Translation, J. N. Darby says that the Hebrew word denotes "an unknown substance; some think a mixture of gold and silver." One Jewish version uses the word *electrum*. Electrum is an alloy of gold and silver. Gold signifies the nature of God, and silver signifies redemption. The King James Version renders the Hebrew word as "amber" because the color of this shining metal is the color of amber, which is somewhat like the color of gold. Electrum is not merely gold nor merely silver but gold mixed with silver.

In the book of Revelation we can see the same principle. Revelation 22:1 speaks of the throne of God and of the Lamb. The One on the throne is not just God and not just the Lamb but the Lamb-God, the redeeming God. In Genesis 1 God was solely God, but in Revelation 22 He is our redeeming God, our Lamb-God. According to Revelation 4:3 God, the One on the throne, "was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance."

Jasper, which is dark green, signifies God as the God of glory in His rich life, and sardius, which is red, signifies God as the God of redemption. The fact that the appearance of God on the throne is like a jasper stone and a sardius indicates that God is no longer just God but also our Redeemer. These illustrations from Revelation 22 and 4 help us to understand the significance of the electrum in Ezekiel. Our God is not merely the divine Being signified by the gold; He is also the redeeming God, signified by the silver. No longer is He just gold—He is electrum, gold mingled with silver.

When we experience the blowing wind, we enjoy the covering cloud and then we pass through the burning, consuming fire. The result is the glowing electrum, something shining, lovely, precious, and pleasant. As the electrum, the Lord Jesus is the One who has redeemed us and who is everything to us. He is our God, our Lamb, our Redeemer, our jasper, and our sardius. If we consider our spiritual experience, we will realize that the One who dwells within us today is the Lamb-God, the One signified by the electrum.

In the sight of God, before we were saved, we were base and wicked, having nothing that was honorable or glorious. Praise the Lord that He saved us and regenerated us! His wind, His cloud, and His burning fire have made it possible for us to have Him, the redeeming God, within us as the glowing electrum. Now we have Him as the treasure in the earthen vessel (2 Cor. 4:7), and we have thereby become a people of honor and glory. We need to consider how precious and honorable is the Christ who is within us. As the electrum within us, He is the treasure of incomparable worth. This treasure is the issue of the wind, the cloud, and the fire. The more we pass through the wind, the cloud, and the fire, the more the electrum is constituted into our being, making us a people who are filled with the Triune God and who manifest His glory.

We all need to experience more of the spiritual wind, the overshadowing cloud, the burning fire, and the glowing electrum. By passing through this kind of experience, we become the vision of the glory of God. In our experience we have the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum. Then whenever we

meet together, we are the vision of the glory of the electrum, having a precious treasure that is shining and glowing.

THE BASIC EXPERIENCE

What we have been considering in this message is the first vision seen by the prophet Ezekiel. This vision portrays the most basic experience among all the spiritual experiences of the divine life. There are various categories of spiritual experience, but this experience is the first, and basic, category—the category of the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum.

We do not experience the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum once for all. On the contrary, this experience is a cycle which should be repeated again and again. Today we may experience the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum, and then after a period of time the wind comes again, followed by the cloud, the fire, and the electrum. This cycle should be repeated again and again throughout our Christian life. From this we see that, in a sense, we Christians have no rest in our spiritual experience. I have been a Christian for over forty-five years, and I have never had any rest from this cycle. Instead, there has been a continual experience of the blowing wind, the covering cloud, the burning fire, and the glowing electrum. Every time this cycle is repeated, more of the electrum is brought forth.

It would be awful for this cycle to stop. In our experience the cycle of the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum should never stop. The more we experience this cycle, the better. It would be wonderful if we daily experienced the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum. This is the real experience of the inner life, and this will bring in the growth in life.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE FOUR

THE WIND, THE CLOUD, THE FIRE, AND THE ELECTRUM BEING A CHRISTIAN'S SPIRITUAL LIFE STORY

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 1:4; Psa. 75:6-7a; Ezek. 37:9; John 3:8; Acts 2:2, 4a; Exo. 24:16a; 40:34; Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29; Ezek. 1:27a, 28; 8:2b, 4; Rev. 4:3a; 22:1

In this message I would like to give a further word concerning the experience of the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum. My burden is to point out that the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum should be a Christian's spiritual life story. Throughout our whole Christian life, our spiritual experiences should be a continual cycle involving these four matters.

NOT A THEORY BUT AN EXPERIENCE OF THE BLOWING WIND, THE COVERING CLOUD, THE CONSUMING FIRE, AND THE GLOWING ELECTRUM

What we spoke in the previous message regarding the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum is absolutely not a theory but something of spiritual experience. If a person has never experienced the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum, that person surely is not a normal Christian. A certain person may have a little doctrinal knowledge of the truth concerning salvation and then be baptized in a formal way without having any experience of the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum. A genuinely saved person is one who has had spiritual transactions with God, one who has experienced the blowing of the wind and the covering of the cloud.

Before you were saved, your life might have seemed peaceful and tranquil, but one day you heard the gospel and experienced the blowing of a mighty wind. As a result, you were awakened and began to wonder about the meaning of

human life and, in particular, about the significance of your life. You began to question yourself, saying, "Where did I come from, and where am I going? What is the purpose of my life? What is its meaning? If I continue to live the way I have been living, where will I end up?" The wind kept blowing upon you and within you until you believed into the Lord and received His full salvation.

A spiritual wind not only blew upon us when we were saved but also blows every time we have a spiritual revival. A particular believer may be quite careless regarding his spiritual life and yet be quite content with his spiritual condition. If such a believer is in a good mood, he may read the Bible and pray, but if he is in a bad mood, he may neglect prayer and Bible reading. The situation is very different with a believer who experiences the blowing of a mighty spiritual wind. When the wind blows upon him, he cannot feel satisfied with his spiritual condition. On the contrary, he will become restless and quite concerned about his situation and begin to ask questions concerning the condition of his spiritual life. The principle with the church corporately is the same as it is with a believer personally. The blowing of the wind always makes us feel restless and concerned about our situation and condition. I deeply long that a rushing, mighty wind would blow upon all the saints in all the churches and make them restless and cause them to seek the Lord about their spiritual condition.

The blowing wind brings the covering cloud. We have learned from our spiritual experience that when the Holy Spirit blows upon us and touches us, we sense that God is overshadowing us and exercising His care for us. His presence is like a cloud covering us and surrounding us, and we can sense both His presence and His care. Following this we experience the burning of the consuming fire. This burning makes us realize that we are wrong in many ways and with many persons. Such a burning exposes our condition and causes us to confess our transgressions and deal with ourselves before God. The more the fire burns, the more we confess and the more we are sanctified and purified.

I would ask you to consider the matters of the blowing

wind, the covering cloud, and the burning fire in light of your own spiritual experience. Have you not experienced the wind blowing upon you, the cloud covering you, and the fire burning and purifying you? Before you experienced the Spirit's blowing and burning, you might have felt that others were always at fault and that you were always right. But then through the blowing of the wind, under the covering of the cloud, and by the burning of the fire, you began to see how sinful and corrupt you were. The fire burned you to such an extent that you realized that even your love was selfish and fleshly.

This fire consumes not only our pride but also our humility, not only our wickedness but also our kindness, not only our hatred but also our love. When we are under the blowing of the wind, the covering of the cloud, and the burning of the fire, we will not feel that we are all right. On the contrary, our "I" will fall apart and be dissolved. Eventually, this fire will burn away everything other than God. Only God can pass through this burning.

THE RADIANT EXPRESSION OF THE REDEEMING GOD

We thank the Lord that in the fire there is the glowing electrum. I would remind you that the electrum, an alloy of gold and silver, signifies the redeeming God. After we have been burned by God as the consuming fire, we sense that we are filled with God's nature and glory. This means that once we have experienced the wind, the cloud, and the fire, the only thing that remains is the glowing electrum, the redeeming God. The wind and the cloud bring forth the fire, and the fire manifests the shining electrum. The issue of the spiritual transactions involving the blowing wind, the covering cloud, and the purifying fire is always the radiant expression of the redeeming God.

At this juncture I would like to give a brief testimony of my experience when I was in my twenties. Having been attracted by the Lord, almost every morning I went to a mountain near my home to pray. As I consider my experience in light of Ezekiel 1:4, I can testify that I surely experienced the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum. Shortly after I

reached the top of the mountain, I sensed the moving of the Holy Spirit, the blowing of the wind. Often as I was singing, my tears flowed freely. At those times I sensed also that I was under the overshadowing of the great cloud of the Lord's presence. At the same time, I had a strong realization that I was sinful and corrupt, and I confessed my sins to the Lord. After praying in this way and after reading the Bible, I was filled with something sweet and glorious—the redeeming God as the glowing electrum. This experience was repeated morning after morning for quite a period of time.

THE SPIRITUAL HISTORY OF EVERY CHRISTIAN

The spiritual history of every Christian should involve the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum. When we were saved, we experienced the Lord in these four ways, and we should continue to experience Him in this way. In fact, every time we are graced by the Lord, we have spiritual transactions with Him involving the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum. When you wake up in the morning, you may sense that the wind of the Spirit is blowing upon you and that a cloud is overshadowing you. Then as you spend some time to pray, you may sense that a fire is burning within you to consume your corruption, worldliness, and many other negative things. Eventually, you may sense that within you there is something bright, beautiful, and dignified—the glowing electrum. As a result of this experience, you may live the whole day in the enjoyment of the glowing electrum. However, as you live and walk in this corrupted world, you cannot avoid being defiled and contaminated, so at the end of the day or the next morning you may have a further experience of the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum. Once again the wind blows, the cloud broods, and the fire burns. You confess your sins and deal with your filthiness, and following this you once again enjoy the shining of the electrum within you.

This kind of experience is inexhaustible and unending. Day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year, we need to experience the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum. Every time the wind blows, the cloud covers, and the fire burns, we will be enlightened to see that

we need to deal with matters about which we had no awareness before. As these negative things are burned away, we experience a further purification and have a deeper enjoyment of the glowing electrum.

BEING GRACED BY THE LORD

Some believers have been saved for a long time, but their spiritual condition remains the same. In their Christian life there is nearly no experience of the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum. The wind does not blow, the cloud does not cover, the fire does not burn, and thus there is no manifestation of the electrum. Such a situation is altogether abnormal. If a believer wants to be graced by the Lord, he must experience the spiritual wind and the spiritual cloud—the more, the better. Sometimes we need to experience the blowing of a mighty wind, a wind that causes us to have a great turn. Whenever we make such a turn, we receive much grace from the Lord.

I wish to emphasize the fact that being graced by the Lord is a matter of the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum. The Holy Spirit blows upon us like a wind from God. This is the beginning of our being graced. Then as we are under the brooding, covering cloud of the Lord's presence, we spontaneously realize how sinful and impure we are. We may have an experience which, in principle, is like that of the prophet Isaiah. When he saw a vision of the Lord in His glory, he cried out and said, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6:5). After he confessed his sinfulness, he was cleansed. Concerning this Isaiah said, "Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged" (vv. 6-7). Whenever the wind blows, the cloud covers, and the fire burns, we will sense our sinfulness and realize that we need all the negative things within us to be burned away. Everything that does not match God's holy and glorious nature will

be consumed. Everything that is not of God—everything related to sin, the world, the flesh, and Satan—must be burned away. The only thing that can pass through the consuming fire is the redeeming God as the glowing electrum.

The more you pursue the Lord, the more you will realize that the holy fire burns not only your weak points but also your strong points, including your natural goodness, your natural virtues, and everything in you that you and others admire, appreciate, and hold in high regard. Like Augustine, you may eventually feel that even your confession and tears of repentance need the Lord's cleansing.

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE ELECTRUM

The issue of the blowing of the wind, the covering of the cloud, and the burning of the fire is the radiant manifestation of the electrum. As we experience the burning of the consuming fire, God Himself is manifested in us. The more we pass through God's wind, cloud, and fire, the more the Lord is manifested in us in a dignified and glorious way. When He is manifested in such a way, we sense that He alone is precious, lovely, bright, majestic, and glorious. Like the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, we see "no one except Jesus Himself alone" (Matt. 17:8). The only one in view, the only one in the scene, is the lovely, precious, glorious Lord Jesus. Then we can do nothing other than bow before Him, worship Him, exalt Him, crown Him, and pour out everything to Him. In this way we gain the Lord, and He gains us.

May we all be deeply impressed with the picture in Ezekiel 1:4, and may our Christian life be a continual and inexhaustible experience of the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE FIVE

THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 1:5-6, 10, 26; Rev. 5:9b; John 5:25; Col. 2:12-13; Phil. 2:7-8; Mark 10:45; Rev. 5:5; Exo. 19:4; Isa. 40:31; Phil. 1:21

Ezekiel is a book of figures, or pictures, portraying spiritual things. We have considered four of these figures—the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum—which depict what God is to us. In our experience of Him, God is like a blowing wind, like a brooding, hovering, and overshadowing cloud, like a flashing, enlightening, searching, and consuming fire (Heb. 12:29), which sanctifies us by burning us, and like the glowing, shining electrum. The electrum, composed of the elements of gold and silver, signifies the compound God, the Lamb-God (Rev. 22:1). The God who lives within us today is the Lamb-God; He is the very God (gold) and He is also the Redeemer (silver). Hence, as the compound God, He is signified by the electrum. For the Jews, God is typified merely by gold, but for us Christians, our God, the compound God, is signified by the electrum with its two elements of gold and silver.

NOT DEAD BUT LIVING

Ezekiel 1:5a says, "Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures." We need to pay attention to the first word in this verse, *also*. Not only does electrum come out of the fire; something else also comes out. The wind brings in the cloud; the cloud enfolds the fire; and the fire produces the electrum plus something else—the four living creatures. When we experience God as the blowing wind, the overshadowing cloud, the burning fire, and the electrum, we become the four living creatures. We were dead, but by

experiencing God in this way we become something living. The Lord Jesus said that "the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God" and that "those who hear will live" (John 5:25). Paul said that we were dead but God has made us alive (Eph. 2:5). The more we have the cycle of the wind, cloud, fire, and electrum, the more living we become. Every time we are blown upon by God and overshadowed and consumed and burned by Him, we are enlivened. As a result we become lively and vibrant. If we are not living in the meetings, this proves that we are lacking in the experience of the cycle consisting of the wind, cloud, fire, and electrum. The more we experience this cycle, the more living we will be. Whereas many of today's Christians prefer to attend a quiet service, we should be very living in the meetings and sometimes even make a joyful noise to the Lord (Psa. 95:1-2). Only the living ones can make such a noise. If we experience God as the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum, we will not be quiet but will be living and even noisy in the church meetings.

The word *living* in Hebrew has the same root as the word for *life* in Genesis 2:9, which speaks of the tree of life. How can we, who are creatures, become the living creatures? We become living creatures by experiencing God as the tree of life. This life, the divine, eternal, uncreated life of God, is the real life. Only by having this real life can we become a living creature. Whenever we experience God as the tree of life, we sense that we have something living within us. We have a living element, a living factor, within us. This living element, or factor, will always make us living.

Before we were saved, we were dead in our offenses and sins (Eph. 2:1, 5; Col. 2:13). In John 5:25 the Lord Jesus spoke directly concerning those who were spiritually dead: "Truly, truly, I say to you, An hour is coming, and it is now, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live." In this verse to live means to be alive in spirit. When we were saved and regenerated, we experienced the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum. The wind of the Holy Spirit blew upon us, the cloud of the Holy Spirit overshadowed us, and the fire of the Holy Spirit enlightened us and burned us. As a result, we confessed our sins, and the

electrum was produced inside of us. In this way we heard the voice of the Son of God and were enlivened. We met the glory of God and were saved and regenerated in His glorious manifestation. Through the experience of the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum, we, who were dead, were enlivened to become living creatures. Now we should daily experience the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum so that we may become living and vibrant in our inner being.

How can we prove that we are no longer dead but have become living creatures? There is a twofold proof, that is, an inward proof and an outward proof. The inward proof that we are living creatures is that we now have a feeling, or sense, of life. Living persons have feelings. For example, as we are sitting in a room, we will have a feeling concerning the temperature. We may feel hot or we may feel cold. A dead person, on the contrary, has no such feeling. Likewise, if we are living before God, we will have an inward, spiritual sense regarding our situation. If we offend God or if we do something that is not pleasing to God, we will have a feeling about this. A person who is spiritually living will have a deep feeling whenever he lives in a way that does not glorify God or that is not pleasing to Him. If our inner feeling, the inner sense of life, is sensitive, deep, and fresh, this is a proof that inwardly we are living and that we are therefore a living creature. However, some children of God may behave very badly, putting the name of the Lord to shame, yet they have no feeling about what they are doing. They are far from God and they need to repent, but they have no inner feeling at all. This is a proof that inwardly they are dead. A believer who is truly a living creature has much inner feeling about his situation.

Whereas the first proof that we are living creatures is inward and is related to our feeling, the second proof is outward and is related to our activities. A dead person is inactive, but a living person is very active. For example, children are very active because they are full of life. The principle is the same in the Christian life. A Christian who is living, that is, who is a living creature, will engage in a number of activities. The first of these activities is prayer. Just as we cannot live physically without breathing, so we cannot live

spiritually without praying. Prayer is a Christian's spiritual breathing, and it is often spontaneous. For instance, as soon as we wake up in the morning, we may spontaneously thank the Lord for a new day. To pray like this is to breathe, and it is a sign that we are living. However, some believers may go for a long time, even months, without praying. Their lack of the activity of prayer is a proof that they are not living. Other activities that prove that we are living creatures include reading the Bible, functioning in the meetings, serving God, and preaching the gospel. Not reading the Bible, not attending the meetings and not functioning in the meetings, not serving God, not testifying for the Lord, and not preaching the gospel—all these shortages indicate that one is not a living creature. The way to prove that you are a living Christian is to consider all these points. Do you pray? Do you read the Bible? Do you exercise your spirit to function in the meetings? Do you serve the Lord? Do you testify for the Lord and preach the gospel? If you are lacking in these matters, you are not a living believer.

We should never think that a mature Christian does not need to engage in all these activities. The older and more mature we are in the Lord, the more spiritual activities we should have. I believe that if the apostle Paul were in our midst, he would be very active in praying, in reading the Bible, in functioning in the meetings, in serving the Lord, and in preaching the gospel. In the Christian life we can never "graduate" from being living. To graduate from being living is to die. Every living person must be living continuously. Daily we need to experience the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum. Every time we meet the Lord as the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum, our inner being will be made alive.

FOUR IN NUMBER

It is significant that verse 5 speaks of four living creatures. Many verses in the Bible indicate that the number four is related to God's creation and signifies man as God's creature (Isa. 11:12; Jer. 49:36; Rev. 7:1). Revelation 5:9 says that the Lord has redeemed us out of four sources: out of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. Furthermore, Revelation 21

tells us that the New Jerusalem has four sides—the east, the north, the south, and the west—and that each of the four sides has three gates. This means that from every direction of the earth we can enter the city. Therefore, the number four symbolizes that we are the people redeemed from many tribes, tongues, peoples, and nations. In the eyes of God we are the four living creatures.

A CORPORATE EXPRESSION

The four living creatures are reckoned not as individuals but as a group. All of them are counted as one entity. Later on we will see that these living creatures are the corporate expression of the man on the throne. As such an expression, they express this man not only in one direction but in the four directions of east, north, south, and west. This indicates that as the four living creatures we are not only the unique expression of Christ but also that we are the complete expression of Christ. We express Christ in every direction, toward every side. We are the four living creatures expressing Christ in an adequate and complete way.

BEARING THE APPEARANCE OF A MAN

The main point of Ezekiel 1:5 is that the four living creatures bear the appearance of a man. Verse 26 says that "upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it." *Man* is a great word in the Bible. God's intention is with man, God's thought is focused on man, and God's heart is set upon man. God's desire is to gain man. The fact that four living creatures bear the appearance of a man and that God on the throne also bears the appearance of a man indicates that God's central thought and His arrangement are related to man.

In our reading of the four Gospels we may be under the influence of a religious concept that places undue emphasis upon Christ's divinity. As a result, we may not have the proper appreciation of the Lord's humanity. When we read in the Gospels how the Lord Jesus manifested His divinity by performing miracles, we may praise the Lord for the power of His divinity. However, when we read in John 13 about how

the Lord washed the feet of His disciples, we may not offer any praise. Likewise, when we read about the miracle of the Lord's feeding more than five thousand people with five loaves and two fish, we may feel that this was something great, but we may have no appreciation for His ordering the people to sit down in groups or for His directing the disciples to gather the broken pieces left over so that nothing would be lost. Such things may make no impression on us. If we know how to read the Gospels in a proper way, we will realize that the glorious beauty of the Lord Jesus is manifested in His humanity. He manifested His glorious beauty not through His divine dignity but through His humanity with its lowliness and tenderness. At the Lord's table meeting, we need to praise the Lord for His humanity.

Many Christians have been influenced by the concept that it is better to be an angel than to be a man. If you had a choice, which would you prefer to be—an angel or a man? Perhaps many of us would prefer to be an angel. However, God has enough angels, but He is short of men. God does not appreciate angels so much. The angels are His servants. God tells them to go, and they go; He tells them to come, and they come. The angels are also our servants (Heb. 1:13-14). As believers we all have our own angel (Acts 12:12-15). We need to drop the concept that it is better to be an angel than a man. We need to see how glorious and how marvelous it is that we are men.

If we do not desire to be like angels, at least we may desire to be like God. Many Christians are continually striving to be like God. However, God wants to be like us. He even became a man in order to declare God (John 1:18), and today in the heavens the Lord Jesus, who is God, is still a man. There is a man on the throne (Acts 7:56).

The Bible clearly reveals that man is the means for God to manifest Himself. God cannot be manifested without man. Man was created in God's image in order to be God's expression. God is the center of the universe, but He needs an expression, and this expression is through man. Without man, God has no expression. The millions of angels cannot be the expression of God. God needs a corporate man to express Him. You should never despise the fact that you are a man.

In the Bible there are actually only four men: the first man, the second man, the new man, and the man-child. We were the first man; Christ is called the second man (1 Cor. 15:47); we have become the new man by regeneration; and now there is the prospect that we may become the man-child. This ministry is not only for the new man but is also for the man-child.

We may talk about the church as the expression of Christ, but we may not realize what the expression of Christ is. The Christ whom the church must express is the man upon the throne. If we would express Christ, we need to realize Christ today is still a man. We do not express merely God; we express God in a man. The church is the expression of Christ. This means that the church is an expression not merely of God but also of a man.

Ezekiel 1:26 shows us that the Lord today is a man on the throne. God needs a man, and eventually He became a man. We as the living creatures express Him as a man. He is the man on the throne, and we also bear the appearance of a man. It is man who fulfills God's plan, it is man who expresses God, it is man who defeats the enemy, and it is man who brings the kingdom of God into the human race. God needs a man.

The religious teachings in Christianity encourage us either to be like an angel or to be like God. However, the divine revelation unveils that God's desire is to have a man. We need to remember that the subtle one tempted the first man by telling him that if he ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would be like God (Gen. 3:5). From that day the concept of being like God has been in our blood. Every fallen human being has the concept of wanting to be like God. Certain devilish teachings encourage people to be something other than man. But in His redemption and salvation God has no intention of making anything other than man. God's redemption and God's salvation are to bring us back to the beginning and to recover us to being a proper man. We are the living creatures and we have God's life within us, yet we bear the appearance of a man. We should not try to be like an angel. Instead, in whatever we do, in

whatever we say, and in whatever we express, we should be a man. This is what God needs today.

The vision in Ezekiel 1 reveals three crucial matters concerning the four living creatures' bearing the appearance of a man. First, God's glory is manifested upon them. The manifestation of God's glory depends upon their having the appearance of a man. Where they are, there God's glory is. God's glory is not separate from them, and apart from them God's glory cannot be manifested. Second, these living creatures are the means of God's move. God's move depends on them. When they move, God will move, for His move is with them. Third, the four living creatures, who bear the appearance of a man, are the means of God's administration. Ezekiel 1 reveals that God is sitting on the throne. God's throne dominates everything on earth and everything recorded in this book. This throne, therefore, is the center of God's administration. However, the center of God's administration depends on the four living creatures having the appearance of a man. Because of this, there is the administration of God's throne. If we put these three things together, we will see that man is the means of God's manifestation, that man is the means of God's move, and that man is the means of God's administration. In God's eyes and in God's hands, man has such an important position.

We all need to realize that God's desire is to gain man. God uses the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum to enliven us in order to gain man as the means of His manifestation, move, and administration. Since man is so important to God, it is crucial for us to be a man and to bear the appearance of a man. We need to be a man for God's manifestation, for God's move, and for God's administration. For this we need to be the living creatures enlivened by experiencing the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum.

THE LIVING CREATURES HAVING FOUR FACES

Each of the four living creature has four faces. If we saw someone with four faces, we would be frightened, yet this is exactly what we should be. We all need to have four faces.

The Face of a Man

The first face is the face of a man. We are men, and because we are men, we should look like men. We were created as men, but we were corrupted, poisoned, and damaged by the fall. Therefore, we need the Lord's redemption. Through the Lord's redemption we are brought back to the proper humanity. Actually, the humanity we have now is not ours but His, for we have the humanity of Jesus.

Some say that it is difficult to be a man and claim that they are disgusted with being a man. Those who have this attitude toward their humanity need to see that their concept is absolutely different from the Lord's concept in His salvation. The Lord's salvation is to make us proper men. If you are a husband, the Lord's salvation is to make you a proper husband. If you are a wife, the Lord's salvation is to make you a proper wife. If you are a parent, the Lord's salvation is to make you a proper parent. If you are a child, the Lord's salvation is to make you a proper child. The Lord's salvation is to make us proper human beings. Thus, we all should bear the face of a man. However, some Christians, especially certain sisters, do not seem to be human beings. Rather, they are so "spiritual" that it seems that they have become strange creatures—half human, half angel. We need the face of a man. We should not prefer to be something else, and we should not pretend to be something else. We should just be what we are—a man. Instead of trying to be something other than a human being, we should simply be human. However, we should be human not by our natural humanity but by the humanity of the Lord Jesus.

If we read the four Gospels again, we will see that Jesus was a person with a proper humanity. Many who read the Gospels only pay attention to the miracles worked out by the Lord in His divinity; they do not pay adequate attention to the things worked out by the Lord's humanity. For example, John 4 relates how the Lord Jesus was traveling with His disciples to a city in Samaria. He was tired and thirsty, and He asked His disciples to go into the city to buy something to eat. After they went away to buy food, a Samaritan woman came

to draw water from the well near which the Lord Jesus was sitting. Although He was the Almighty God, in this situation He conducted Himself just like an ordinary man, without any indication or hint that He was God. When He asked the woman for water, He gave no indication that He was anything more than a man. The woman questioned Him, saying, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask for a drink from me, who am a Samaritan woman?" (v. 9). He responded to her question in a very human way. The four Gospels record many similar stories which show us how the Lord Jesus behaved Himself like a normal man, bearing the face of a man. Unlike certain religious people today who dress in way that is very strange, the Lord Jesus did not dress in a peculiar manner. In His clothing He was not strange or different from others. On the contrary, His living was that of an ordinary human being. His living was ordinary to such an extent that some would say, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" (Matt. 13:55). In the eyes of the people, the Lord Jesus was the son of an ordinary carpenter. Far from being strange, He was an ordinary man and He bore the face of a man. Today, we too need to bear the face of man.

Some believers have the thought that once they begin to pursue the Lord, they should be special or different from others. We need to realize, therefore, that we should be ordinary, that is, we should be the same as common, ordinary human beings. Although we pray, read the Bible, attend the meetings, and serve God, our appearance is still the appearance of a man, and our face is the face of a man. In our dress we are proper, but we are ordinary, not peculiar or eccentric. Yes, we experience the Lord as the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum, but the issue of this experience is that we bear the face of a man. As living creatures, we are not angels but are very human. In fact, the more spiritual we become, the more normal and human we will be. The more we have of Christ as our life (Col. 3:4), the more we will bear the face of a man. In the Epistles we are taught by the apostles to be proper human beings, in particular how to be proper husbands, wives, and parents (Eph. 5:22—6:9; Col. 3:18—4:1). God's salvation causes us to be proper men for His manifestation, move, and administration.

The Face of a Lion

We also need to bear the face of a lion. In the Bible a lion signifies boldness, vigor, strength, and victory. In our Christian life we first need to be a man. Wherever we may be—at our school, in our office, or among our neighbors—we should be a man. But we should also be a lion. If in the office you are a proper man, others will be drawn to you. However, those who are drawn to you may be "germs" that can corrupt you. Because they like you, they may invite you to participate with them in a certain kind of worldly amusement. At such a time you should behave not like a man but like a lion. This means that toward anything sinful or worldly, we must be as bold as a lion. All those who work in your office should know that if they talk to you about worldly things, you will behave like a lion.

People often consider that the Lord Jesus was gentle and mild. However, at least on certain occasions, He was not at all gentle. For example, when He went into the temple and found "those selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers sitting there," He became angry and made a whip out of cords and "drove them all out of the temple, as well as the sheep and the oxen, and He poured out the money of the moneychangers and overturned their tables" (John 2:14-15). Furthermore, in Matthew 23 He severely rebuked the religionists, saying to them, "Serpents! Brood of vipers!" (v. 33). In these situations He surely was as bold as a lion. In Revelation 5:5 He is even called "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." There are times when we also need to have the face of a lion.

In the Bible a lion signifies not only boldness, vigor, strength, and victory but also reigning. The lion is the king of the animals. We, who have become living creatures through regeneration, should not only be men to manifest God but also lions to reign for God. If toward sin, the world, and Satan we are strong and bold like lions, God will be able to establish His reign through us.

The Face of an Ox

We need not only the face of a man and the face of a lion but also the face of an ox. The face of a lion is balanced by the

face of an ox. If in your office you have the face of a lion, that alone will not convince others. You need to be balanced by having the face of an ox. An ox is one who is willing to bear the burden, to do the work, and even to sacrifice himself. We all need to have such an appearance and to express such a reality of serving others, bearing the burden, caring for the responsibility, and even sacrificing our life. If as you are working in an office you are a proper man, you are as bold as a lion, and you are also faithful in bearing responsibility, you will make a good impression on others. In order to make such an impression, you need to behave not only like a man and like a lion but also like a serving, suffering ox. When the office needs to be cleaned, you should take the lead to clean, doing more than the other employees. In this way you will show your colleagues that you are willing to sacrifice, to help others, and to serve them. Then you will have the reality of the face of an ox. When others see you with the face of a man, the face of a lion, and the face of an ox, they will say, "This is a real Christian."

The Face of an Eagle

Furthermore, we also need, at the rear, a hidden face—the face of an eagle. After God brought the people of Israel out of Egypt and led them into the wilderness, He said to them, "I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself" (Exo. 19:4). This indicates that in the Bible an eagle signifies the powerful, transcendent God. God is transcendent, buoyant, and powerful. Nothing can suppress Him, oppress Him, or depress Him. The more you try to suppress Him, the more buoyant and transcendent He becomes. A Christian has God's life within him, and this life is transcendent, causing us to have an expression of buoyancy and transcendence. This is the significance of the face of an eagle.

We need to be like an eagle, not allowing anything to hold us, to suppress us, or to depress us. This means that we should be able to overcome both persecution and praise. Sometimes it is more difficult to overcome praise than it is to overcome persecution. Some can overcome persecution, but they are unable to overcome people's praise. This should not

be the case with us. Whether we are persecuted or praised, we need to be able to fly away on eagles' wings. We should be buoyant and transcendent. This is exactly how the Lord Jesus was in John when the people tried to make Him king after He fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. Concerning this John 6:15 says, "Jesus, knowing that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him King, withdrew again to the mountain, Himself alone." He could not be held because He had the power of an eagle and was therefore transcendent.

A Christian should not be held by anything. However, it is possible for us to be held by many different things. One believer may be held by poverty, and another may be held by riches. If we would be a proper Christian, we should be held neither by poverty nor by riches. Like Paul, we should be able to say, "I know also how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in everything and in all things I have learned the secret both to be filled and to hunger, both to abound and to lack. I am able to do all things in Him who empowers me" (Phil. 4:12-13). Paul's word reveals that he had the wings of an eagle. He bore the appearance of a man, of a lion, of an ox, and also of an eagle.

THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES BEING A FOURFOLD EXPRESSION OF CHRIST

These four faces—the face of a man, the face of a lion, the face of an ox, and the face of an eagle—portray the life of Christ. These four faces correspond to the four Gospels, which may be regarded as four biographies of the Lord Jesus, with each presenting a certain aspect of Christ. Luke shows Him as a man, Matthew shows Him as a lion, Mark shows Him as an ox, and John shows Him as an eagle. This fourfold life is the life of Christ.

The four living creatures are a corporate expression of Christ. They express Christ in four aspects—as a man, as a lion, as an ox, and as an eagle. This is the expression of the life of Christ in a corporate way. As Christians, we should be the living creatures, those who are a corporate entity to express Christ exactly as He was on earth. When He was on

earth, He lived in the four aspects of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle. Today we should be the corporate expression of such a Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE SIX

EAGLE'S WINGS, MAN'S HANDS, AND CALF'S HOOFS

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 1:6b-9a, 11b; Isa. 40:31; 2 Cor. 4:7; 1:12; 12:9; 1 Cor. 15:10; Phil. 4:13; Psa. 17:8b; 57:1b; Acts 20:34; Col. 3:9; Psa. 29:6a; Rev. 1:15

The first chapter of Ezekiel contains many figures which compose one picture. Unless all these figures are applied in a spiritual way, they seem to be meaningless. Consider, for example, the four faces of the living creatures: the face of a man, the face of a lion, the face of an ox, and the face of an eagle. If we apply these things spiritually, they are quite significant.

In this message we will consider the eagle's wings, the human hands, and the calf's hoofs. The four faces are the expression of the living creatures, and the wings, the hands, and the hoofs are related to the actions and moves of the living creatures.

Speaking of the living creatures, Ezekiel 1:6 says, "Every one had four faces, and every one had four wings." Surely the wings are the wings of an eagle because among the creatures represented by the four faces, only the eagle has the wings.

Verse 8 says, "They had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides." On every side there was the wing of an eagle, and under the wing there was the hand of a man.

Verse 7 speaks of the calf's hoofs: "Their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot." Of the creatures signified by the four faces, only one, the ox, has straight feet. Man's feet are not straight but are shaped like an *L*. A lion does not have feet, but instead has paws with claws. An eagle also has claws. Strictly speaking, verse 7 speaks not of ox's feet but of calf's feet, or, hoofs, which are straight.

If we would understand the spiritual significance of the eagle's wings, the man's hands, and the calf's hoofs, we need to remember the significance of the blowing of the wind, the hovering and brooding of the cloud, and the consuming, searching, enlightening, and burning of the fire, out of which comes the glowing electrum. As we have pointed out, the experience of all these things causes us to become the living creatures, expressing Christ and living out His life in a corporate way.

THE EAGLE'S WINGS

Let us now begin to consider the eagle's wings.

Signifying the Strength of God Applied to Us

According to the pure Word it is easy to see the spiritual significance of the eagle's wings, the man's hand, and the calf's feet. In the Bible the wings of an eagle signify the strength of God applied to us. In Exodus 19:4, God said to His people, "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself." This verse speaks of the strength of God applied to His people. Isaiah 40:31 says, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." This also shows us that God's strength applied to us is like the wings of an eagle.

In the New Testament the eagle's wings are the grace, the power, and the strength of God in Christ applied to us. Second Corinthians 4:7 says, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not out of us." This is the eagle's wings. In 1:12 Paul says, "Our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in singleness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and more abundantly toward you." Again, this is the eagle's wings. Furthermore, in 12:9a the Lord Jesus said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness." Because of this, in 12:9b Paul could say, "Most gladly therefore will I rather boast in my weaknesses that the power of

Christ might tabernacle over me." In our experience of the Lord, the power of Christ may overshadow us, even as the eagle's wings overshadow the covered ones. From these verses we can see that the eagle's wings signify the strength and the grace of the Lord Jesus applied to us.

In 1 Corinthians 15:10 Paul says, "By the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace unto me did not turn out to be in vain, but, on the contrary, I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God which is with me." This is the eagle's wings. Whatever we do and whatever we are should not be according to our own wisdom, strength, and ability but by the grace, power, and strength of the Lord. Therefore, as Paul says, if we boast, we should boast in the Lord (1:31). We have no boast in ourselves or in anything else but only in the Lord. His power, strength, and grace are the eagle's wings to us today.

In our Christian life we all should bear four wings on four sides, showing others that whatever we are and whatever we do is not by ourselves and is not of ourselves but of God, so that the excellency of the power may be of God and not out of us.

For Covering and for Moving

Each of the four living creatures had four wings, two for covering and two for moving. "Their wings were joined one to another" (Ezek. 1:9a). This joining is for moving. Later we will see that this moving is altogether a corporate matter.

The Bible reveals that the wings of an eagle are not only for power but also for protection. In Psalm 17:8 David asked God to hide him under the shadow of His wings. Psalm 57:1 speaks of making our refuge in the shadow of God's wings, and 63:7 speaks of rejoicing in the shadow of His wings. Psalm 91:4 says, "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust."

The grace, power, and strength of the Lord are both for moving and for covering us. On the one hand, the Lord's grace is the power for us to move; on the other hand, the Lord's power is our protection, our hiding place. We are under the overshadowing of the grace and the power of Christ, and we are under the covering of His power. Whatever we do and

whatever we are must be by the grace of the Lord and the power of the Lord. At the same time, we are under the overshadowing, the covering, of the Lord's grace and power.

This indicates that as Christians, God's children, we should have an element that causes others to wonder at us. They should sense that something is covering and overshadowing us. They should realize that we are normal, yet there is something empowering, strengthening, overshadowing, and covering us.

The front face of the four living creatures is the face of a man, but the body is that of an eagle. Two of his wings are stretched forth to join to the other living creatures, and two of his wings are wrapped around his body for a cover. Thus, if you look at his face, he looks like a man, but if you look at his body, he looks like an eagle. He looks like a man, but he moves like an eagle. This indicates that we must always express ourselves like a normal man, for example, like a normal and proper husband, wife, parent, or child. But when others look at us and consider us, they should realize that there is something covering, empowering, strengthening, protecting, and overshadowing us. As a result, it should be difficult for others to describe us. Those who work with such a person might say, "He can suffer the things we cannot suffer, and he can bear a responsibility that we cannot bear. He understands things more deeply than we do. What kind of person is he? How can he live this way?"

The point here is that with us as children of God there should always be something mysterious. Although we suffer, we are happy and rejoice in the Lord because something is covering us. We have two wings for moving and another two wings for covering and overshadowing us. These moving and overshadowing wings should give others an impression of the Divine Being. We have the four wings of an eagle, giving others the impression that we have God with us as our power and protection. This is the eagle.

THE HANDS OF A MAN

Ezekiel 1:8a says, "They had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides." This indicates that a proper,

normal Christian should always do things exactly like a man. This is to use man's hands. This was Paul's testimony in Acts 20:34: "You yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my needs and to those who are with me."

Regarding faith in God, we need to be balanced. Some may claim that since they have faith in the almighty God to supply all their needs, there is no need for them to use their hands to do anything. In particular, they may suppose that there is no need for them to work in a human way. But consider the apostle Paul. Paul was balanced; with him there always were two sides. His writings indicate that he had not only the eagle's wings but also the hands of a man. He could say that he conducted himself not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God and that the grace of God with him was not in vain. This is the side of the eagle's wings. However, he also said that he labored more than all the other apostles. We may think that there was no need for Paul to work with his own hands. But Paul took the way of working with his own hands. This indicates that even though he experienced the eagle's wings, he was still very human in his living, taking the human way and doing things in a human way.

Sometimes the young people may imagine that because they are seeking the Lord, there is no need for them to study hard. They may hope that, even without studying, they may pass their examinations with high grades. This attitude is mistaken. Young people, no matter how much you seek the Lord, love the Lord, and care for the Lord, you still need to be diligent in your studies. This means that no matter how much the grace of God is with us and no matter how much the Lord is empowering us, we must nevertheless fulfill our human duty in our daily living. For instance, we should eat healthy food in the human way and according to human principles. If we do not eat in a proper human way but instead try to behave like an angel, we will get sick. We have to do things in a human way. Under the eagle's wings there should be human hands, and these hands should always be working. This is to be balanced.

The worldly people, on the contrary, have only the hands of a man; they do not have the wings of an eagle. But many

so-called religious people seem to have only the eagle's wings; they do not have the man's hands. We need to have both the wings of the Lord's empowering grace and the hands of a man, cooperating with God in a human way.

It is very significant that the human hands of the four living creatures are under the eagle's wings. This indicates that in doing everything we should be under God's grace and under His covering. In all that we do, we should depend on the Lord and express Him. In this matter we are altogether different from the worldly people, who neither rely on God nor express Him. All their actions do not express God but express themselves. In contrast, in everything we do we should be under the Lord's grace and power, depending on Him and expressing Him.

HAVING THE HOOFS OF A CALF

Let us now go on to consider the calf's hoofs, a matter of particular importance in the vision recorded in Ezekiel 1.

Being Straight

We all should walk like a calf, having straight hoofs. No Christian should walk on lion's paws. While we can apply the boldness of a lion to our Christian character, we should not apply the lion's paws to the Christian walk. Neither should we walk with the claws of an eagle. Those who walk with the claws of an eagle will eventually hurt others.

Also, we should not walk with the feet of a man. Man's feet are good, but they are somewhat crooked. Human cleverness is something crooked. This is why Paul said that he did not conduct himself in fleshly wisdom, that is, not in human cleverness. Instead of being crooked or clever, our Christian walk should be straight and frank. This is why Paul tells us not to lie to one another (Col. 3:9). We should never lie to a brother. To lie is to be crooked. If you are able to speak something, speak it honestly. If you are not able to speak honestly, simply do not speak.

During the last days before the Lord Jesus was crucified, He went to Jerusalem and was surrounded by the leaders of religion and politics. On one occasion, "the chief priests and

elders of the people came to Him as He was teaching and asked, By what authority do You do these things?" (Matt. 21:23). In His answer the Lord Jesus said to them, "I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, from where did it come, from heaven or from men?" (vv. 24-25a). Then they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, From heaven, He will say to us, Why then did you not believe him? But if we say, From men, we fear the crowd, for all hold John as a prophet" (vv. 25b-26). In this kind of dilemma, they considered that the best answer was a crooked one. Thus, they turned to the Lord Jesus and said, "We do not know" (v. 27a). Actually they did know, but they would not tell. This indicates that they were crooked. Then the Lord Jesus, knowing their crookedness, said to them, "Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things" (v. 27b). Here we see that whereas the chief priests and the elders were crooked, the Lord Jesus was straight. The Lord Jesus' feet were calf's hoofs; with Him there was no crookedness.

If we read the four Gospels, we will see that while the Lord Jesus was on earth, He walked in a very straight way. Step by step His walk was straight. He walked on the earth with calf's hoofs.

We also should walk in this way today. If we walk in a crooked way, we should not expect the church to be built up. In the church life we all need to learn to be frank, honest, faithful, and sincere. We should be simple and single. If we mean yes, we should say yes; if we mean no, we should say no. Anything more than that is from the devil (Matt. 5:37), the father of all lies (John 8:44). One may lie with a good intention, but that lie is still of the devil. We should not walk according to our crooked man's feet but should walk with calf's hoofs. Man's feet are crooked, but calf's hoofs are straight.

Not only the Lord Jesus was straight in His walk, but also the apostle Paul was very straight, frank, faithful, and honest in his walk. By reading Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians, we can realize that Paul was a straight and frank person. In 1 Corinthians 4:21 he asked, "What do you want? Should I

come to you with a rod or in love and a spirit of meekness?" What if one of the Lord's servants should write a letter asking such a question to a church today? The whole congregation would be shocked. If we would be a faithful servant of the Lord, we must be straight in such a way.

Being Cloven

In addition to being straight, the calf's hoofs are also cloven, or divided. According to Leviticus 11:4-6 any animal that does not have cloven hoofs is not clean. All the clean animals have their hoofs cloven, divided. Clean animals such as the cow and sheep have two characteristics: the chewing of the cud and the dividing of the hoof.

The divided hoof signifies that in our walk with the Lord we need a proper discernment to divide the right things from the wrong and the clean things from the unclean. To have a hoof that is not cloven, like that of a camel, is to have a walk without discernment. As believers in Christ, we need to have such a walk that we can discern what is right and what is wrong in the eyes of God. We need this kind of discernment in our daily Christian walk.

We need this discernment also concerning the practice of the church life. In this country the term *local church* has become somewhat popular. Many groups pick up this term and in a loose way call themselves a local church. Therefore, we need to be able to discern whether a particular group of believers is in fact a normal, proper, genuine local church. We need the cloven hooves. We should not be careless, thinking that simply because a group says that they are a local church, they must indeed be a local church. Some groups are genuine and others are not. Some are right and some are wrong. Some are real and some are not real. We need discernment. Both in our daily Christian walk and in the church life, we need the cloven hoofs of the calf.

Shining as Burnished Brass

Ezekiel 1:7 tells us that the calf's hoofs "sparkled like the color of burnished brass." The shining of brass comes from the heat of the furnace. The more the brass is burned and tested,

the brighter it shines. This indicates that we need a walk that has been tested and burned by the Lord. If our walk has been tested in this way, it will be like shining brass, enlightening others and becoming a kind of shining to them. If we have been tested and examined by the Lord, our walk will shine like burnished brass, giving light to others, testing them, and causing them to realize whether their walk is right or wrong.

Likewise, if we have the proper discernment concerning what the genuine church life is and if we have been tested and examined by the Lord in the church life, then our walk in the church life will be like shining brass, enlightening others and testing them. But if we are careless and sloppy, lacking discernment concerning the church life, to us everything will be about the same. Black, white, and gray will seem to be the same. This means that we are unable to exercise any discernment. If this is our case, then our walk will be like a darkened stone, with no light.

If our walk is a walk of discernment, we will discern all the things in our Christian walk, and eventually our hoofs will be like shining brass. Wherever we go and whatever way we take, our walk will shine upon others, giving them light and testing them.

Freshness and Livingness

In the Bible a calf signifies freshness and livingness. A believer in Christ who enjoys grace and lives in the presence of God is always new and fresh, and with him there is no oldness. Sometimes you may meet a brother who is quite young humanly but spiritually is rather old, lacking in freshness and newness. At other times you may have fellowship with an older brother who is very experienced in the Lord. Whenever he prays, you sense something new and fresh. In all of our activities as believers, we should be new and fresh. If we become old, we no longer are living creatures.

The Bible says that a calf skips and jumps (Psa. 29:6; Mal. 4:2). This means that a calf is alive. Our Christian walk should not be a dead walk but a “skipping walk,” a walk which is full of life. A calf is young and vigorous, full of energy. We all should be full of life, like a young calf, coming to the

meetings like skipping calves. May the Lord cause us all to skip like calves!

All these points on the calf's hoofs are related to our Christian walk. The Christian walk is straight and frank. It is also a walk with discernment, a walk that shines and gives light to others and tests them, and a walk that is vigorous, full of life, energy, freshness, and newness.

When we talk of feet like shining brass, we should remember Revelation 1:15, where we are told that the feet of the Lord Jesus "were like shining bronze, as having been fired in a furnace." We all should have a walk like the Lord's walk.

In a later message we will see that the four living creatures are coordinated together. They can be coordinated only by this kind of life and walk. This life is a life with eagle's wings and human hands, and this walk is a walk of calf's hoofs.

The Christian life must be this kind of life, and the Christian walk must be this kind of walk. It is by having this kind of life and walk that we, the living creatures, can be coordinated and become one entity. Coordination is the central point in the first chapter of Ezekiel. This coordination, however, depends upon all the foregoing items: the wind, the cloud, the fire, the electrum, and the four living creatures with the four faces and having the eagle's wings, human hands, and a walk with the calf's hoofs. If we would have a proper coordination, we need such a Christian life and walk. We need a life that has the wings of an eagle and the hands of a man, and we need a walk that has the straight hoofs of a calf. May the Lord impress us with all these matters so that we may have the proper coordination in the church life.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE SEVEN

THE COORDINATION OF THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES

(1)

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 1:11b-14; Rom. 12:4-5

Ezekiel 1:11b-14 reveals a very clear picture of coordination. No other verses in the Bible present the matter of coordination in such a definite and practical way. In this message we will begin to consider the coordination of the four living creatures described in this portion of Ezekiel 1.

COORDINATION IN THE DIVINE POWER, STRENGTH, AND SUPPLY

Ezekiel 1:11b says, "Two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies." Here we see that two of their wings are for moving, and this moving is in coordination. By two of their wings they are joined to one another, and in this way they are coordinated. As we have seen, the living creatures use the other two wings to cover themselves.

We have also seen that in the Old Testament the eagle's wings signify the divine power, the divine strength, and the divine supply. This indicates that the coordination of the living creatures is not in themselves. In themselves they do not have the ability to be coordinated. Their coordination is in the divine power, in the divine strength, and in the divine supply because the eagle's wings are the means for them to be coordinated with one another. Thus, their coordination does not depend on themselves; it does not depend on what they are or on what they can do. Their coordination depends on the eagle's wings. The eagle's wings are the means by which they are coordinated and move as one. God Himself is the power

and strength, and it is by this divine power and strength that they are coordinated.

The same principle can be seen in the tabernacle. The tabernacle was built of forty-eight boards coordinated into one entity. These boards were coordinated into one building not by themselves but by the overlaying gold (Exo. 26:29-30). All the boards were overlaid with gold. Upon the overlaying gold were the golden rings, and through the golden rings were golden bars. The gold, therefore, coordinated all forty-eight boards into one entity. The overlaying gold signifies the divine nature and indicates that God Himself is the coordinating factor that enables all the parts of the divine building to be one.

In themselves the living creatures are separate and are individuals, but with the eagle's wings they are coordinated as one body. This indicates that the coordination among us Christians is not something of ourselves. What we have in ourselves does not coordinate—it divides. Whatever we are in ourselves, whatever we have in ourselves, and whatever we do in ourselves result not in coordination but in division and separation. However, we have the eagle's wings, and with the eagle's wings we can be one and we can be coordinated.

FOR THE LORD'S EXPRESSION, MOVE, AND ADMINISTRATION

It is important for us to realize why we need to be coordinated. We must be coordinated as living creatures in order that Christ may be expressed and manifested. Also, the coordination of the living creatures is for the Lord's move. The Lord moves in the center of the coordination of the living creatures. Furthermore, coordination is the divine administration, the divine government. The throne upon which the Lord is, the throne which is for God's administration, is in the center of this coordination. Thus, the coordination of the living creatures is for the Lord's expression and manifestation, for the Lord's move, and for the divine government.

THE WAY OF COORDINATION

Now we need to see how the four living creatures are coordinated. Each of the living creatures faces one direction,

respectively facing north, south, east, and west. As they face these four directions, two of their wings spread out and touch the adjacent creatures' wings, forming a square. Each of the living creatures uses two of his wings to join with other living creatures.

Ezekiel 1:12 says, "And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went." Here we see that every one of the living creatures goes straight forward. They do not turn, but some return, that is, move backward. For instance, while one of the living creatures is moving toward the north, the living creature facing the south must return, moving backward. Thus, one goes straight forward while the opposite creature moves backward. At the same time, the other two living creatures must move sideways. One moves sideways to the left, and the other moves sideways to the right. No matter in which direction the living creatures are moving, there is no need for any one of them to turn. One simply goes straight forward; one returns, moving backward; and the other sides move sideways. This is a beautiful picture of the coordination that we need in the church life.

Certain brothers and sisters cannot tolerate being coordinated together. Instead, they prefer to be separated and to do things on their own. As long as they are separated, there is no suffering. Once they are coordinated, there is a kind of suffering, because in coordination there is no freedom or convenience.

Coordination keeps us from making turns. If one is moving by himself, he may first move to the north and then turn and move to the east. Later he may turn again to move to the south and eventually turn once more and move to the west. He moves in many directions by making many turns. In the Lord's ministry, on the contrary, there is no such turning. Instead, one moves straight forward, and those who coordinate with him move either backward or sideways.

If someone acts without coordination in the church service, doing things on his own, he will make a number of turns. If he functions in the way of doing many different things by himself, it will be necessary for him to make many turns. In the

church service, however, there is no need for turns. Everyone has his function and position. He can simply go straight forward in his function and position. If there is the need to move in another direction, others can take care of that. There is no need for anyone to turn.

In the church life we all need to learn not only how to walk straight forward but also how to walk backward (that is, to return) and to walk sideways. Although this may seem quite awkward, we all need to learn this lesson. Otherwise, we cannot be coordinated.

One problem is that certain brothers and sisters either want to do everything or do nothing at all. Those who want to do everything want to be able to move in every direction. If they are asked to move in a particular direction, they will also want to move in other directions. This means that they want to make a lot of turns. No matter what direction is needed in the church service, they want to be able to walk in that direction.

In the proper coordination there are no turns. You walk straight forward or you either return by walking backward or you walk sideways. It is particularly difficult to walk sideways, and many brothers and sisters are unable to do this.

We need the proper coordination in the local churches. In some churches certain brothers and sisters are very capable and make many turns. Others are not very capable, so they do nothing. As a result, there is no coordination. If we would have coordination in the church life, we all need to learn to walk straight forward, to walk backward, and to walk sideways.

COORDINATION IN MINISTRY

If in a local church one brother has a ministry to preach the gospel and another has a ministry to build up the saints, they must coordinate. Otherwise, they may cause a problem. If there were only one ministry—the ministry of preaching the gospel of building up the saints—there would be little or no problem. However, if brothers with different ministries do not know how to coordinate, they will compete and may even strive against each other. The brother who is burdened for the gospel may contend for the outreach and the increase, and he

may try to convince others to join him. The brother who is burdened for the building up of the saints may criticize the one who is burdened for the gospel, claiming that he brings in new ones but does not care for them. Then he might encourage others to help him to take care of the new ones. The result of this lack of coordination between these two brothers may be division, with some concerned only for the gospel and others concerned only for shepherding.

Since brothers have different ministries, what should they do? They should learn to coordinate. This means that when the brother who is burdened for the gospel is functioning, moving straight forward, the brother who is burdened for shepherding should learn to walk backward. Likewise, when the brother who is burdened for shepherding is functioning and moving straight forward, the brother who is burdened to preach the gospel should walk backward. The other saints should follow these two, walking sideways, sometimes in the direction of the ministry of gospel preaching and at other times in the direction of the ministry of shepherding.

COORDINATION IN THE MEETINGS

We should also practice this kind of coordination in the meetings. Some brothers like to shout, and others prefer to be quiet. Sometimes those who like to shout need to walk backward and learn to be quiet. At other times those who are quiet should walk backward and learn to praise the Lord with a loud voice. The problem is that neither those who like to shout nor those who prefer to be quiet may be willing to walk backward. In the meetings we need to learn to walk straight forward, backward, and sideways. Such a practice will keep us from having divisions in the meetings.

WALKING BACKWARD AND SIDEWAYS

In the church life we need to be able to walk straight forward, backward, and sideways. This will cause us to be truly coordinated.

To walk backward is to say “Amen” to another’s ministry, function, and burden. While one brother is walking straight forward according to his burden, you should say “Amen” and

walk backward in coordination with him. To walk sideways is also to say "Amen" to another's function. The problem today is that in the churches there are too many turns and too little of the backward walk and the sideways walk. It is very difficult to help the brothers and sisters to walk sideways. Few are willing to walk in this way.

In a local church a certain brother may be very active in taking care of a particular service. He does a good job in this matter, but he is constantly searching for capable ones to join him in this service. He cares only for this service and neither for the preaching of the gospel nor for the building up of the saints. Because he cares only for his particular service, eventually he will cause a problem in that church. From this we can see that it is easy for us to cause a division, but it is difficult for us to have the proper and real coordination.

We all need to keep our position and go straight forward. We also need to learn to walk backward and sideways, saying "Amen" to another's position, function, and ministry. This means that in the church life we all need to learn to have four kinds of walk: the straight forward walk, the backward walk, the sideways walk to the right, and the sideways walk to the left. If we do not learn to have these four kinds of walk, we will become a problem to our local church. The more we grow, learn, function, and minister, the more trouble we will cause because we know only how to walk forward and to have turns.

We need to realize that there are no turns in the proper coordination. There is no turning to the right or to the left. Instead, we have the four kinds of walk—straight forward, backward, sideways to the right, and sideways to the left.

FOLLOWING THE SPIRIT

If you are the one who is walking straight forward, you must be very careful to walk according to the leading of the Spirit. Ezekiel 1:12 says, "Wither the spirit was to go, they went." To follow the Spirit is the responsibility of the one walking straight forward; it is not the responsibility of those walking backward or sideways. If the one who is walking straight forward is not careful to follow the leading of the Spirit, the coordination will be damaged.

For example, it is right that one brother should have a ministry of preaching the gospel and that another brother should have a ministry of shepherding. But there must be the leading of the Spirit concerning the time for preaching the gospel and the time for shepherding. When it is time for the church to carry out the ministry of preaching the gospel, the brother with this ministry should take the lead under the guidance of the Spirit, and the whole church should follow and be one with this brother. Those with a different ministry or function should coordinate by walking backward or sideways.

Sometimes a certain brother should take the lead to move in a certain direction. However, because he is naturally humble, he hesitates and does not take the lead in a bold way. This causes the church to be delayed and to have no direction for its going on. At other times one who should not be leading takes the lead. This damages the church life. When it is time for you to take the lead, do it boldly. When it is time for others to take the lead, learn to walk backward or sideways. This will enable the church to go on in a good way.

THE ISSUE OF COORDINATION

At this point we need to consider the issue, the result, of the coordination of the four living creatures—the burning coals and the burning torches. We all need to bear the likeness of living creatures, the likeness of a man, and the likeness of burning coals and burning torches.

Becoming Burning Coals

Ezekiel 1:13 says, "As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning." Here we see that the result of the coordination of the living creatures is that they become burning coals. There is a fire among them and within them. Because they are coordinated ones, God comes in as fire, and each of them becomes a burning coal.

How can we know whether or not there is the proper coordination in a particular local church? We know this by the

presence of the burning coals. If there are no burning coals in a certain church, there is no coordination there. Where there is coordination, there will surely be the burning coals.

In the coordination we burn one another. You burn me, and I burn you. However, if we are isolated from the saints and do not attend the meetings, we will not be burning coals. Instead, we will be cold, black coals. The spiritual principle is that we burn one another. From experience we can testify that the more we coordinate together, the more we burn one another. The issue, the result, of coordination is that we all become burning coals.

Burning Out the Negative Things

The burning of the coals does at least three things. First, it burns out everything that is negative. If something is put upon a heap of burning coals, that thing will be burned. If there is proper coordination in the church, there will be a burning to burn away such things as worldliness, the flesh, self-aims, self-goals, pride, opinions, and boasting. All kinds of negative things will be burned away by the coordination. Anything that does not correspond to God and to the nature of God will be burned out by the sanctifying and purifying fire of the burning coals, and only what is of God will remain. This is the proper condition of the church life.

Making Us Fervent

Second, the burning of the coordination will make us fervent, intensely hot. Instead of coldness and lukewarmness, everyone will be burned and burning. When others come to the church, they will realize that they cannot stay unless they are willing to be burned. Coordination brings in a real burning, a genuine fervency. This burning will not allow you to be like the church in Laodicea, which was lukewarm, having no fervency, no burning.

Producing Power

Third, the burning in the coordination produces the power and impact of the church. The impact in a local church comes out of the burning. This power is internal and mysterious

because it comes from the burning. If you want to have impact, you must be coordinated, and in this coordination you will become burning. Then out of this burning will be the impact and the power. The negative things will be consumed, you will be set on fire, and you will have power and impact.

Becoming Burning Torches

The four living creatures look not only like burning coals but also like burning torches. Whereas the coals are for burning, the torches are for enlightening. From the proper coordination in a local church, there will not only be burning but also enlightening and shining. If a church is normal in its condition, it will be full of burning coals and enlightening torches.

The Sanctifying Fire Becoming the Sanctifying Light

Whenever the coals are burning, the torches will be shining. This means that the sanctifying fire becomes the sanctifying light. The more the fire burns, the more the light enlightens. If the fire burns us thoroughly, we will be enlightened thoroughly. However, if we do not allow the sanctifying fire to burn us in a certain matter, we will not be enlightened regarding this matter. The areas in which we have been burned by the sanctifying fire spontaneously become the areas in which we are enlightened and concerning which we can enlighten others. If a particular aspect of your character has been burned by the sanctifying fire, in this matter you will be enlightened, and thus you will be able to enlighten others in this matter.

The more intensely the fire burns in the church, the brighter will be the shining in that church. Everything negative will be exposed and burned. In the proper church life there should be nothing of darkness among the brothers and sisters. Every corner should be thoroughly enlightened.

However, it may be that when you visit a certain local church, you have the sense that that church is in darkness. Nothing is clear, and nothing is in the light; rather, everything is dark, and every part is under darkness. There is

darkness because the church is divided and does not have the proper coordination. If the church has the proper coordination, everything will be under the light.

Having a Fire Going Up and Down

Among the coordinated living creatures, who are burning coals and burning torches, there is the fire going up and down. This indicates that the fire is not static but is always moving, because the fire is God Himself. Whenever the church is properly coordinated, burning as coals and enlightening as torches, there will be the divine fire going up and down.

The fire among the living creatures has its source in God's burning fire. God's fire is not next to the living creatures; it is above them. There is fire with the living creatures because in their fellowship they allow God to move freely among them. Thus, the fire in their fellowship is the likeness of God's fire.

On the one hand, Ezekiel 1 shows us that God is a burning fire. On the other hand, this chapter shows us that there is a burning fire among the four living creatures. The likeness of God is burning fire, and the likeness of the four living creatures also is burning fire. This indicates that the living creatures have the likeness of God's sanctification. They are like God in sanctification. From this we see that the more we are burned and enlightened, the more we have God's likeness and express Him. If we are fervent and bright, we will be full of God and will express God.

The Brightness of the Fire and the Lightning in the Fire

Ezekiel 1:13b says, "The fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning." The fact that the fire was bright indicates that the living creatures manifested a glorious and majestic condition. This should be the condition in the church life today. If this is the situation in the church, there will be no discord. On the contrary, the younger ones will obey the older ones, and the older ones will serve the younger ones. Such a situation is beautiful and radiant.

If we want this to be the condition of the church, we must be thoroughly burned and enlightened. The more we are

burned and enlightened, the more others will see the brightness of God's glory, beauty, and majesty.

In the fire there is not only brightness but also the flashing of lightning. Whereas the brightness is usual, the flashing of lightning is special, as it is often related to storms and darkness. Ordinarily, the church should be full of God's enlightening with its brightness. However, at special times—in an emergency or in a crisis—there may be the flashing of lightning. This means that at special times there may be a special light that flashes suddenly and causes others to be astonished.

Not Walking but Running

Verse 14 says, "And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning." This indicates that the living creatures, having such a coordination, being the burning coals and the burning torches, and having the fire going up and down, will not walk but run. They run because they have the power and the impact.

In some churches, however, there is no running. Instead, there is fighting. In other churches the saints are either sitting or squatting. In still other churches they may be crawling. A proper church is a church that runs.

The church runs because in that church there is the proper coordination. The church runs like lightning, and as the church runs it gives light to others. This is the coordination, and this is the proper move of a local church. Every local church should be like this. Since the coordination is for the move and the move is in the coordination, with such a coordination there is the move of a local church.

These verses in Ezekiel 1 show us how to have the proper coordination. We have seen that if we would have this kind of coordination, we need to have four kinds of walk: the straight forward walk, the backward walk, the sideways walk to the right, and the sideways walk to the left. This will give us a good coordination. As a result of this coordination, we will become burning coals and shining and enlightening torches, and we will have God as the divine fire among us going up and coming down. This will become our power and our

impact. Others will see the light in our running. Wherever we go and whatever we do, we will manifest the lightning. With us there will be the flashing of light, causing others to be enlightened. This moving is the proper church life. Such a coordination will bring in the Lord's presence and blessing, and it will keep the church in a proper balance, preventing it from going to extremes.

We should apply this matter of coordination not only in a particular local church but also among the churches. This means that we should be followers of the churches (1 Thes. 2:14). We are one Body in one move of the Lord. When one church takes the lead in a definite direction under the leading of the Holy Spirit, we all should walk backward and sideways to follow.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE EIGHT

THE COORDINATION OF THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES

(2)

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 1:11-14; Rom. 12:4-5

Concerning the vision in chapter one of Ezekiel, we have paid close attention to the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum, to the four faces of the living creatures—the faces of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle—and to the eagle's wings, the man's hands, and the calf's hoofs. In the previous message we began to consider the coordination of the four living creatures, and in this message we will consider this matter further.

GOD'S EXPRESSION, MOVE, AND ADMINISTRATION FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF HIS PURPOSE

It is crucial for us to realize that Ezekiel 1 shows us the desire of God's heart and unveils to us the purpose that God wants to accomplish. As we read this chapter, we may think that it speaks merely about four living creatures. However, if we read this chapter carefully, we will see that it speaks of God's desire to be expressed in His Son. The four faces of the living creatures signify the complete and adequate expression of Christ. Furthermore, the four living creatures with their four faces signify a coordinated, corporate entity, the corporate Christ (1 Cor. 12:12). This corporate Christ is the corporate expression of God among human beings.

The four living creatures exist for at least three reasons. First, these living creatures are for God's expression. God in the Son wants to express Himself among men. Second, the living creatures are for God's move. As they coordinate together, they are full of burning, shining, and enlightening,

and the great and high wheel, which is for God's move, follows them. This one entity composed of four living creatures is both for God's expression and His move. Their expression of God is for the move of God. Third, the living creatures are for God's administration. Over their heads was the likeness of an expanse, or a firmament (Ezek. 1:22), and "above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne" (v. 26). The throne is for God's ruling, God's administration. When God has His expression, move, and administration, He can manifest Himself in His glory and complete His eternal purpose and plan.

Today many Christians think that the reason for believing in the Lord Jesus is that they may have peace and well being in the present and that in the future they may go to heaven to enjoy eternal bliss. This thought falls far short of the divine revelation. In Ezekiel 1 God reveals that He needs a group of living creatures who can coordinate together as one entity for His expression, move, and administration. When God gains such a corporate expression, His purpose will be accomplished.

In the church life God's plan is fulfilled on a small scale. We who have received grace and have experienced the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum are a group of living creatures with four faces to express Christ. We have God's grace and power as the wings for both moving and covering. We also have the calf's hoofs and thereby have a walk that is full of discernment, enlightening, and freshness. Now we can be coordinated together for God's expression, move, and administration. If this is our situation in the church life, then when others contact us, they will say, "God is among you." There needs to be such an expression of Christ in the church life today.

Regarding the coordination of the living creatures, there are five points that we need to consider: the basis of coordination, the need of coordination, the prerequisites of coordination, the practical condition of coordination, and the result of coordination.

THE BASIS OF COORDINATION

The basis of the coordination of the living creatures has a number of aspects.

All Being out of Christ

The basis of our coordination as living creatures is, first, that we all are out of Christ. You are out of Christ and I am out of Christ; therefore, we can coordinate together.

By His blood the Lord has purchased us for God "out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). No matter what our race or nationality may be, we all are out of Christ and we can coordinate together as one entity in Christ. If we were not of Christ and if we were not in Christ, we could not coordinate together. But although in Adam we have many differences, in Christ we can be blended together and we can coordinate together.

Having the Same Life

We are not only out of Christ—we also have the same life, the life of Christ. Outwardly we are quite different, but inwardly we all have Christ as our life (Col. 3:4). Therefore, we have the same life.

In 1933 I visited some Japanese brothers and sisters in the Lord. I could not understand Japanese, and they could not understand Chinese. Nevertheless, when we knelt down to pray together, we had a sense of freshness and sweetness in our spirits. This indicates that we, the living creatures, all are out of Christ and that we all have the same life, the life of Christ. If we reject everything that is not Christ, we will be one entity in Christ and we will be able to coordinate together.

Having the Same Heart to Express Christ

Another aspect of the basis of coordination is having the same heart's desire to express Christ. Deep within many believers, including those who have fallen away from Him, is the desire to express Christ and glorify Him. To glorify the Lord, to express Him, is to live Him out. As a genuine living creature, every Christian who has experienced the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum has such a desire to express Christ.

The basis of our coordination is that we are out of Christ, that we have the life of Christ, and that we wish to glorify Christ and express Christ. Now, because of this, we can coordinate together.

A proverb says, "Birds of a feather flock together." Since we all are out of Christ and have the same life and the same desire to express Christ, we are "birds of a feather" and we "flock together" to become one entity in Christ. This is the basis of our coordination.

THE NECESSITY OF COORDINATION

I hope that every believer will understand the we cannot be Christians in isolation. Basically, as believers in Christ we are a collective entity, and we cannot do anything alone. The vision in Ezekiel 1 shows us that we need to be corporate and that we need to be in coordination.

Necessary for God's Expression

Coordination is necessary for God's expression. We have pointed out that the four living creatures are for God's expression in Christ. In order for God to have a corporate expression of Himself in Christ, we need to be joined together and knit together with all the saints and thereby become one entity. If we are isolated, we cannot express Christ adequately.

Each of the living creatures has four faces. However, if we were to look at the living creatures one by one, we could not see all four faces at the same time. Only when the living creatures are coordinated together can we see all four faces simultaneously. This indicates that as individual believers we cannot express Christ completely and adequately. For the corporate expression of Christ, we need to be joined together, knit together, and coordinated together.

Necessary for God's Move

Coordination is also necessary for God's move. The spreading of the gospel of God, the advancement of God's move on earth, the execution of God's will, the progress of the church of God—all this requires coordination. It is impossible for us to accomplish these things as individual Christians. Through our experience in serving the Lord, we have learned that coordination is necessary for every aspect of God's move. The great wheel of God moves according to the coordination of the living creatures.

Necessary for God's Administration

Furthermore, coordination is necessary for God's administration. In Ezekiel 1 the throne of God's administration is upheld not by any individual living creature but by the coordination of all four living creatures. Thus, coordination is necessary for God's expression, God's move, and God's administration.

THE PREREQUISITES OF COORDINATION

Now we need to see the prerequisites of coordination.

Experiencing the Wind, the Cloud, the Fire, and the Electrum

The prerequisites of coordination include the matters of the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum. In order to coordinate with other Christians, we need to pass through the experience of the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum to become living creatures bearing a human image and, in the grace of the Lord, manifesting Christ in four aspects as a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle. Having the wings of an eagle, we must deny the self and rely on the grace and power of God. We also need the man's hands and the calf's hoofs. These are the prerequisites of coordination.

Suppose a certain person has not passed through the experience of the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum, yet he is a nominal Christian. Such a person cannot participate in the coordination of the four living creatures.

Allowing the Lord to Continue His Work on Us and Experiencing the Dealing of the Cross

Suppose another person, a genuine believer in Christ, has experienced the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum and thus has become a living creature. However, he is not willing to allow the Lord to continue His work on him. As a result, he does not manifest the expression of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle, and therefore he cannot coordinate with others for God's expression, move, and administration. Because he stays in himself and because he expresses himself in every word and action, it is impossible for him to coordinate with others.

We should not think that it is easy for us to express, to live out, the faces of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle. This requires much experience of the dealing of the cross. Today, although many brothers and sisters have passed through the experience of the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum, they are not willing to allow the cross to work in them. Therefore, they do not have the expression of the four living creatures.

Instead of having the expression of an eagle in their daily living, some believers may have the expression of a creeping thing. Ephesians 4:26 says, "Be angry, yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your indignation." To be angry is not a sin, but with it there is the possibility of committing sin. We should not continue in anger but should relinquish it before the sun sets. However, when certain brothers and sisters get angry, they do not let go of it. Because they do not overcome their anger and do not let it go, they have the expression of a creeping thing, not of an eagle.

The situation is the same with believers who are unwilling to forgive those who have offended them. Once certain brothers and sisters are offended by what is spoken to them or what is spoken concerning them, they will refuse to forgive that offense. They may go through their whole life without forgiving the ones who have offended them. Believers who lack the willingness to forgive offenses surely do not have the eagle's wings, and they certainly cannot coordinate with other saints. Those who do not accept the dealing of the cross and enjoy grace are not able to share in the coordination of the four living creatures.

There are some brothers and sisters who are reluctant to part with and forget such things as their education, money, and career. Therefore, they also have the expression not of an eagle but of a creeping thing. However, one who enjoys grace will count his career or education as loss (Phil. 3:7). Even if he has a doctoral degree, he will count it as refuse (v. 8). Because he is willing to receive the dealing of the cross and because he enjoys grace, he has the eagle's wings and he can coordinate with others.

Brothers and sisters who do not understand God's grace

and power but do everything in themselves and with their cleverness and natural ability cannot coordinate with others. Those who can coordinate are those who deny themselves, reject themselves, regard themselves as nothing, and trust in God's grace, power, and work in everything and for everything. These ones can easily coordinate with others. Actually, there is no need for them to endeavor to coordinate; they coordinate spontaneously and effortlessly because they are in God, not in themselves. Those who are in themselves cannot coordinate, but those who are in God can coordinate with ease.

Being a Proper Man

In order to participate in the coordination of the living creatures, we must have the hands of a man. This means that we need to be a proper man. If we are lacking in the proper humanity, there will be problems in our coordination.

This was the situation with a certain brother who insisted on visiting a particular family at a time that was inconvenient for them. The brother was determined to visit this family at meal time, even though the saints in that family felt that meal time was not a suitable time for him to visit. This brother might have had the wings of an eagle, but he did not have the hands of a man. A few days after his visit, we received a report from a family member about what happened. The brother visited the family at lunch time, expecting to be served a meal. However, the wife was sick and could not prepare anything for him to eat. Nevertheless, the brother sat in the house, waiting for lunch to be served, even though the husband was busy caring for his wife and could not provide anything for the visitor to eat. This brother did not have the hands of a man; he did not have the proper humanity. This kind of person cannot coordinate with other saints.

In the vision in Ezekiel 1 we see not only the wings of an eagle but also the hands of a man. The divine revelation shows us that we need to be balanced. No matter how spiritual we may be, we still need to be a proper human. For example, a young brother may be quite spiritual, but when he is with an older person, he must have the proper human respect. If we do not have the hands of a man and if we do not

have a balance of spirituality and the proper humanity, we cannot coordinate with others.

Having the Calf's Hoofs

Another prerequisite of coordination is having the calf's hoofs. If a certain brother does not have the calf's hoofs, his walk will be crooked, and this will make it impossible for him to coordinate with others.

We all need to be clear regarding the prerequisites of coordination. The wind, the cloud, the fire, the electrum, the faces of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle, the eagle's wings, and the man's hands—all these are the prerequisites of entering into the coordination of the four living creatures.

THE PRACTICAL CONDITION OF COORDINATION

Let us now go on to consider the practical condition of coordination.

Living and Acting by God's Grace and God's Power

Ezekiel 1:11b says, "Their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies." This indicates that the four living creatures were arranged not in a line but in a square. We have pointed out that in the Bible the wings of an eagle signify the grace and power of God. If the four living creatures were not joined together by the wings to form a square, they could not be coordinated. This indicates that the coordination of the living creatures is in the Lord and by the grace of God.

If as believers in Christ we are not in the Lord and in the grace of God, we cannot be joined to others. But if we abide in God, rely on God, and express God, we can coordinate together in God. Our coordination, therefore, is not based on our ability and talent but on our dwelling in God and depending on God. If we all abide in God, trust in God, and express God, God will become the power and the means of our coordination. We will then coordinate and move in oneness because we are in God.

Just as the boards of the tabernacle in the Old Testament were held together by the gold to be one entity, so the living

creatures are joined by the wings to be one unit. If the overlaying gold were removed from the boards of the tabernacle, the tabernacle would collapse. If the living creatures did not have wings, they could not be joined together. The meaning in both cases is the same: We are held together because we are in God. The crucial point here is that the oneness and coordination of the four living creatures depend on the eagle's wings, that is, upon the grace and power of God. God's grace and power make the living creatures one entity and are the means by which they coordinate.

This picture of coordination corresponds to the teaching in the New Testament. Romans 12:5 says, "So we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." First Corinthians 12:13 says, "For also in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit." These verses reveal that we are joined together as one Body and coordinate as one Body because of Christ and the Spirit. If Christ and the Spirit were taken away from us, we could not be one and coordination would be impossible. The coordination in the church requires that we all deny the self and live in the Lord. Without the eagle's wings we are separated, but with the eagle's wings we are coordinated.

Walking according to the Spirit

The second aspect of the practical condition of coordination is walking according to the Spirit (Ezek. 1:20). The living creatures follow the Spirit. Wherever the Spirit goes, there the living creatures go also. This indicates that if we, as living creatures in Christ, would be coordinated, we must walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25). We must not follow ourselves. If we deny ourselves and walk according to the spirit (Rom. 8:4), we will have genuine coordination. However, if we walk in an arbitrary way according to self-will and if we live in the flesh, we cannot coordinate together.

Moving Straight Forward and Accommodating Others

Another aspect of the practical condition of coordination is

moving straight forward and accommodating others. When the living creatures move, they go straight forward; they do not make any turns. If one living creature takes the lead to move straight forward toward the east, the other living creatures also move in this direction. This indicates that everyone functions properly in coordination. In the church life today, every member has his own function (1 Cor. 12:14-30) and moves in a straight forward direction to fulfill his function, without turning to do something else.

As one of the four living creatures moves forward in a particular direction, the others accommodate him by moving in the same direction, walking backward, sideways to the right, or sideways to the left. Only one living creature at a time can move forward. However, in moving with him, the others do not turn; rather, they walk backward or sideways. Regardless of the direction in which the living creatures move, one moves forward, one moves backward, and the others move sideways. Thus, those who move backward and sideways accommodate the one who moves forward.

This should be the situation in the church life today. Often we need to move backward or sideways in order to accommodate the one who is moving forward. In the meetings or in the practical service, as someone is exercising his function, moving forward, we need to accommodate him by moving either backward or sideways. This is coordination.

However, if everyone goes his own way and does not accommodate others, we cannot be a corporate entity and we cannot coordinate together. The move of the living creatures is not individual—it is corporate. The living creatures move by coordinating together. If we would participate in such a coordination, we need to deny ourselves, experience God's grace, and follow the Spirit in a corporate way.

I believe that in the Bible the clearest picture of coordination is found in chapter one of Ezekiel. A central feature of the vision of the four living creatures is their coordination. Here we see not the move of an individual living creature but the corporate move of four living creatures. This portrays the move not of believers in an individual way but of the church

in a corporate way. We, the living ones who are in the grace and power of God, have become one entity. Everyone has his ministry and carries out his proper function. This means that everyone goes forward in his own direction without making any turns. Although the directions may differ, the move is the same. When someone goes toward the north, all the others follow him to move in this direction. If someone else moves south, all the others move with him toward the south. Whenever someone is moving forward, all the others accommodate him by moving either backward or sideways. If we study the clear picture of the coordination of the living creatures in Ezekiel 1, we will understand what coordination is.

THE RESULT OF COORDINATION

Finally, we need to see the various aspects of the result of coordination.

The Corporate Expression of Christ

First, coordination results in the corporate expression of Christ.

Becoming Burning and Full of Light

Second, coordination results in those who coordinate together becoming burning and full of light. Because they are burning and shining, they can enlighten others.

The Move of the Great Wheel

Another result of coordination is God's move, signified by the great wheel (vv. 16-19). As the living creatures coordinate together, the great wheel appears. This indicates that God's move follows the coordination of the four living creatures. If there is no coordination, there cannot be the move of the great wheel.

God's Administration

The coordination of the four living creatures also results in God's administration. The throne of the divine administration rests upon the coordination of the living creatures. Without such a coordination, God would not have a means of ruling

and He would not have the means to express His authority and His glory.

The Carrying Out of God's Will

A further result of coordination is the carrying out of God's will and His plan. Because of the coordination of the four living creatures, there is a way for God's will and God's plan to be carried out.

We need to be impressed with the crucial importance of coordination. Before we can be coordinated together, we need to experience the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum and thereby become the living creatures. Then we need to have the image of a man and the faces of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle. Furthermore, we must have the eagle's wings, the man's hands, and the calf's hoofs. If we have all these things, then we will be able to coordinate together. This coordination will result in the corporate expression of Christ, in our becoming burning, shining, and full of light, in God's move, in God's ruling, and in the accomplishment of God's eternal plan.

We need to see that coordination is the key to understanding the vision in Ezekiel 1. On the one hand, many things are for coordination; on the other hand, many things are based on coordination. Coordination is the key. May we all see this and may the Lord bring us all into a coordination with many other living creatures for the sake of the corporate expression of Christ, God's move, and God's administration.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE NINE

THE HIGH AND DREADFUL WHEELS

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 1:15-21

The items in Ezekiel 1 are presented in a good sequence. First we have the wind and this is followed by the cloud, the fire, and the electrum. Then the living creatures appear with four faces to express Christ in a corporate way. Next we have the eagle's wings, the man's hands, and the calf's hoofs. All this is for the coordination. The living creatures move in a coordinated way. This chapter goes on to speak of the fire going up and down and of the burning coals and the burning torches. After all this, verses 15 through 21 describe the high and dreadful wheels. By the side of every living creature there is a wheel. This wheel is so high that it is dreadful; it is dreadfully high. In this message we will consider the significance of the high and dreadful wheels.

A wheel is for moving, not in an ordinary way but in a special way. At home, when we walk from the kitchen to our bedroom or living room, we do not need a wheel. But when we travel a distance, we need a wheel. When we do something to fulfill a purpose, we may also need a wheel. Thus, the move by a wheel is not an ordinary move but a special move with a purpose. The wheel in Ezekiel 1 implies a move with a purpose. Furthermore, the wheel implies that this move is not by our own strength.

FOR THE CORPORATE EXPRESSION OF THE LORD

The four living creatures are for the manifestation, the expression, of the Lord. They are for the corporate expression of Christ, and thus they express Christ in a corporate way. The Lord on the throne looks like a man, and the four living creatures expressing the Lord also look like a man. The Lord

on the throne looks like burning fire, and the four living creatures also look like burning fire. From this we see that the living creatures are the expression of the Lord. Whatever the Lord is, they express. The Lord is living, and they also are living. The Lord is the living God, and they are the living creatures. Whatever the Lord is, they are. Whatever the Lord expresses, they also express. Therefore, the four living creatures are the expression of the Lord.

FOR THE MOVE OF THE LORD

In verses 15 through 21 the four living creatures are not only for the expression of the Lord but also for the move of the Lord. The Lord moves on the earth by them.

Whenever a church is proper, expresses the Lord, and has the proper coordination with the fire going up and down, the move of the Lord will be with that church. However, if a church claims to be proper and yet has no move of the Lord, something is wrong. If there is no increase in number year after year and no growth in life among the members, there is no move with that church. With those in that church there is neither increase nor spread. This indicates there is something wrong with that church. If a church is proper, it will have a great wheel at its side.

Manifest to All

If a local church has such a wheel at its side, there will be no need for it to claim that it has a wheel. Everyone will see the move of this wheel. If a church claims to have the move of the Lord, this may indicate that it does not actually have the Lord's move. When a church has the move of the Lord, no one needs to declare, "Look at the move of the Lord among us." If there is a move, it will be manifest to all. Everyone can see the great wheel, high and dreadful, for it is at the side of the living creatures for all to see. The wheel is simply there.

Every local church needs to have such a high and dreadful wheel beside it. Furthermore, every individual believer, if he is proper and normal, should also have a wheel.

This was the situation in Acts 13. "Now there were in Antioch, in the local church, prophets and teachers....And as

they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (vv. 1-2). These prophets and teachers were living creatures coordinating together and having the burning coals and the burning torches. They fulfilled all the requirements in Ezekiel 1 related to being in the Lord's move. Thus, the move of the great wheel was with them.

An Extraordinary Move

The living creatures have more than one way to move. First, they can move by flying because they have the wings of an eagle. They can also move by walking on the calf's hoofs. These two ways of moving are an ordinary move. But when they need to move in a special way, they move by a wheel.

On your job you need to move daily by the eagle's wings and the calf's hoofs. If you move in this way, your co-workers will see that with you there is something powerful. You can suffer things which others cannot suffer and you can endure things which others cannot endure because you have the eagle's wings. They can also realize that in your character and behavior you are honest, straight, frank, and sincere, having no crookedness. They will see the eagle's wings and the calf's hoofs upon you, and thus they will be convicted by you in their conscience.

In addition to this kind of move with you on your job, there should also be another kind of move—an extraordinary move, the move of a wheel. Eventually, because the move of the wheel is with you, some of your co-workers may be gained by the Lord.

If you should work at a job for several years and nothing happens for the Lord's interests, this indicates that with you there is no move of the Lord. You may consider yourself spiritual and heavenly, but you are lacking the wheel. If there is no move of the Lord with you, it is questionable whether you have the eagle's wings, the man's hands, and the calf's hoofs. This may indicate that while you are at work, you are somewhat worldly and that you are not a proper human being;

therefore, the move of the Lord is not with you. But if you have the eagle's wings, the man's hands, and the calf's hoofs, there will surely be a wheel beside you. The move of the Lord will be with you.

Wherever we go, there should be a high and dreadful wheel by us. If we move to a certain city, there should be a wheel in that city. If we move to a particular country, there should be a wheel in that country. The presence of the wheel will prove that we are proper, that is, that we have the eagle's wings, the man's hands, and the calf's hoofs. As we have pointed out, if we do not have the eagle's wings, the man's hands, and the calf's hoofs, we are not qualified to have a wheel standing beside us.

If we would have the wheel, we need to be the proper living creatures. This means that we need to experience the blowing of the wind, the overshadowing of the Spirit, and the burning of the Spirit in order to gain much electrum. We also need to have the four faces expressing Christ in an adequate way and the eagle's wings by which we can move and behave in a divine way. Furthermore, we need the calf's hoofs in order to walk in a straight and sincere way, in a way that convinces others and commends us to their conscience. If this is our situation, then certainly there will be a high and dreadful wheel beside us. This wheel is the move of the Lord.

Consider the apostle Paul. By reading his Epistles and the book of Acts, we can realize that Paul regarded himself as less than the least of all saints (Eph. 3:8). Even his name, Paul, means "little." Paul was a little man, yet with him there were the eagle's wings, the man's hands, and the calf's hoofs. Thus, wherever he went, there was a great, high, and dreadful wheel. The situation should be the same with us today. We should have the eagle's wings, the man's hands, and the calf's hoofs, and thereby have a great wheel for the Lord's move.

DETAILS CONCERNING THE HIGH AND DREADFUL WHEELS

Let us now proceed to consider a number of details concerning the high and dreadful wheels.

The Wheels Being at the Side of the Faces of the Living Creatures

The wheels were at the side of the faces of the living creatures (Ezek. 1:15). This indicates that if we would have the Lord's move, we must first live out the Lord, expressing Him. If we live out the expression of Christ, we will have the wheel of the Lord's move.

The Wheels Being upon the Earth

In verse 15 we are told that the wheels are upon the earth. Do not expect that the move of the Lord will be in the heavens. God has angels to carry out His move in the heavens. What He needs is a move on earth. God needs a move in the United States and in many other countries.

The Wheels Having the Appearance of Beryl

Verse 16a says, "The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the color of a beryl." According to Daniel 10:6 beryl was the appearance of the Lord when He was moving. This indicates that within the move of the wheels is the appearance of the Lord. Wherever the wheel goes it brings the appearance of the Lord. If the wheel moves to a certain place, it will bring the appearance of the Lord to that place. If a wheel is with you at school or at work, it will bring the Lord's appearance there. Others will be able to see the beryl, the appearance of the Lord.

The Wheels Having the Same Appearance

Verse 16b says, "They four had one likeness." Here we are told that all four wheels have the same appearance, the same likeness. This indicates that the move of the Lord has the same likeness and appearance in every church. All the moves bear the same appearance of the Lord. Therefore, the likeness of all the wheels is the same.

If the church in one locality has a likeness, an appearance, which is different from the likeness of the church in another locality, something is wrong. The saints in a particular church may think that they need to build up their own local

distinction, that they need to build up something typically and uniquely local. This is contrary to Ezekiel 1, where we are told that all four wheels bear the same likeness.

We should not think that the wheel moving in the United States should bear one appearance and that the wheel moving in other countries should bear a different appearance. In every place and in every country the wheel must bear the same appearance. This does not mean that all the churches should follow one particular church. Rather, all the local churches should be mutual followers of one another (1 Thes. 2:14).

The Wheels Going in Four Directions

"When they went, they went upon their four sides: and they turned not when they went" (Ezek. 1:17). The wheels went on the four sides—in four directions—not turning as they went. This indicates a move in coordination, without any turns.

The Wheels Being Dreadfully High

Ezekiel 1:18a says, "As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful." Here I would point out that we should never try to make ourselves great; instead, we should be little ones. However, the wheel beside us should be so high that it is dreadful. In our locality we should not have a small wheel only a few inches in diameter. On the contrary, in our city there should be a high wheel, a wheel that is dreadfully high and that will surprise others. The wheel in every church should be so high that it is dreadful.

The Wheels Being Full of Eyes

Verse 18b goes on to say, "And their rings were full of eyes round about them four." Here we see that the high and dreadful wheels are full of eyes. If we apply this to our spiritual experience, we will realize that it is absolutely correct to say that the wheels are full of eyes. If a church has no move and no wheel beside it, that church is blind. If you do not have any move, yet you claim that you have some move, you are surely blind. You have no eyes. If your church has a high and

dreadful wheel, a high and dreadful move, within that move there will be many eyes. As a result, you will have insight, foresight, and other kinds of sight.

If you are a Christian who has no wheel and who only knows how to behave properly, you are blind. If you mean business with the Lord for His move on earth today, you will be full of eyes, and thus you will have insight and foresight. Because Paul was a person full of eyes, he was very clear. He was clear about the present, the future, the world situation, the Word, the church, physical things, and spiritual things. As a person full of eyes, he was clear about everything.

Some Christians, on the contrary, do not have any eyes. Likewise, some local churches have no eyes. The reason these Christians and these churches are blind is that with them there is no wheel, no move of the Lord. But the more we have the move of the Lord, the more we are enlightened. The more we move, the more we will be able to see.

Do not be like a frog in a well—limited by your environment and able to see only what is directly above you in a very narrow way. You need to jump out of your "well" and participate in the Lord's move. The more you are in the Lord's move, the more eyes you will have and the more clearly you will see. The more move you have, the more you can see.

I can testify of this from my own experience in the Lord's move. During the past years I have done much traveling. I have traveled throughout China, America, and Europe. The more I travel, the more eyes I receive. In 1958 I traveled through thirty different countries. By that traveling I received many eyes, and I saw many things.

We need to be impressed with the fact that the wheels are full of eyes. As the wheel moves, it sees. The more it runs, the more it sees. If the wheel were to stop moving, it would stop seeing. This is the way the church should be today. We see by going on. The more we go on, the more we see. It may be that today we can see only to a certain extent, but tomorrow we will go on and see more. If we stop moving, we will stop seeing. We Christians should be a moving people. The church must move in order to see.

A Wheel within a Wheel

Verse 16c says, "Their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel." It is very significant that the wheels look like a wheel within a wheel. When we speak of a wheel, we say that the circumference is the rim, that the center is the hub, and that in between are the spokes. Thus, we have the three main parts of a wheel: the rim, the hub, and the spokes. But in Ezekiel 1 there is no hub, and there are no spokes. Instead, there is a wheel within a wheel.

James 5:17 may help us to understand this. This verse tells us that Elijah prayed earnestly. Literally, the Greek words translated "prayed earnestly" mean "prayed in a prayer." This indicates that a prayer from the Lord was given to Elijah, in which he prayed. He did not pray in his feeling, thought, intention, or mood, or in any kind of motivation, arising from circumstances or situations, to fulfill his own purpose. Rather, he prayed in the prayer given by the Lord for the accomplishing of His will. For Elijah to pray in a prayer means that there was a prayer within his prayer. This is the wheel within a wheel.

We may apply this matter of a wheel within a wheel to the church life. If the church is proper and is moving, then within the church's moving there will be the move of the Lord. This means that in our move there is the Lord's move. While we are moving, the Lord is moving in our moving.

The inner wheel is the source of power for the moving. This means that the inner wheel is the "motor" which causes the wheel to move. If our move is genuine, it must be that within our move is the move of the Lord.

Every wheel has a hub which turns the wheel. If the hub stops, the wheel stops. We may say that the hub is the little wheel within the rim of the big wheel. The big wheel turns because the little wheel is being turned. In the church life, the Lord Jesus is the hub—the wheel within the wheel—and we are the rim. If the churches do not move with the Lord, they have no way to go on because there is no wheel within the wheel. But when the churches move with the Lord Jesus, He becomes the wheel within the wheel.

Nothing can frustrate or stop this kind of move. Recently a number of saints in the churches migrated to other cities for the spread of the church life. When some heard about this migration, they despised it and asked whether it would accomplish anything. I can testify that this migration is the Lord's move, the move of the wheel, and that within this wheel there is another wheel. In this migration there has been a wheel within the wheel.

The Wheel Following the Living Creatures

Ezekiel 1:19 says, "When the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up." This verse tells us not that the living creatures follow the wheels but that the wheels follow the living creatures. When the creatures move, the wheels move. When the creatures stop, the wheels stop. When the creatures are lifted up, the wheels are lifted up.

This is contrary to the concept, held by many believers, that we need to wait until the Lord moves before we can move. I have been burdened by the Lord to tell His children that there is no need for them to wait for the Lord to move. The Lord has been waiting for nearly two thousand years. If we go on, the Lord will follow us. If we do not exercise to move, there will be no wheel, but if we move, the wheels will follow us. The move of God's work, the move of the gospel, and the move of the church all depend on our moving. We need to have the confidence, the assurance, and the faith to go on boldly. If we move on boldly, the wheels will follow us. Let us act boldly and move on to take this country and to take the earth.

The Spirit Being in the Wheels

Verse 20 continues, "Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels." The wheels follow the creatures, and the creatures follow the Spirit, but the Spirit is in the wheels. It is hard to tell who follows whom. We are one with Him. One day when we meet the Lord we may say, "Lord, we followed You," but the Lord may say, "No, I followed you."

If we have the wheel with the coordination, it is difficult to determine who follows whom. We are one with the Lord, and the Lord is one with us. The Lord follows us, we follow the Spirit, and the Spirit is in the wheels. This is the Lord's move on earth today, and this is the Lord's recovery.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE TEN

A SKY AS CLEAR AS THE TERRIBLE CRYSTAL

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 1:22-25

Ezekiel 1:22-25 is very profound and deep. These verses tell us that upon the heads of the four living creatures there is the firmament, or the expanse, which we call the sky. The appearance of the sky is like terrible crystal. It is so clear that it looks terrible. This sky stretches forth over the heads of all the creatures. Under this sky the living creatures stretch their two wings straight. In a previous message we saw that two of the wings of each of the living creatures are stretched forth and joined to the wings of others. The living creatures use their other two wings to cover their body. Whenever they move and whenever they act, a voice, or a sound, comes from their wings. This voice is like the noise of great waters and also like "the voice of the Almighty" (v. 24), that is, the Almighty God. It is also like the voice of tumult, the voice of a host or army. (The word *host* in verse 24 means "an army.") Furthermore, when the living creatures stop and stand still, they lower their wings (v. 25). We need to consider the spiritual significance and application of all these matters. If we do not understand this spiritual significance and application, then to us these points may appear either nonsensical or meaningless.

BASED ON ALL THE PREVIOUS EXPERIENCES

These verses are based on the preceding verses. This means that we first need to experience the blowing wind, which brings in the cloud of the Lord's presence to overshadow us. As we enjoy the Lord's presence, the cloud brings in the burning fire, and we experience the burning. Out of the burning fire, we gain the electrum, and then we become living

creatures. As living creatures, we move in coordination with others to express Christ. We have four faces to express the all-inclusive Christ in a corporate way. In order to have these four faces, we need to be dealt with by the cross. Following this, we need to experience and enjoy the eagle's wings; that is, we move by the divine power and strength and by the grace of Christ. We also cover ourselves, hiding ourselves under His overshadowing wings, hiding ourselves under the grace and power of Christ. Furthermore, we need to learn to work as a man by using the man's hands and also learn to walk on the calf's straight feet, having a walk that is straight, frank, honest, sincere, and faithful. This will qualify us to be in coordination. Within the coordination we will have the fire up and down, the burning coals, and the enlightening torches. When we reach this point, the holy God as a consuming fire will be among us in a corporate way. Then there will be a high and dreadful wheel beside us, indicating that we have God's move on earth by us and with us. Within this wheel is a wheel, signifying that within our move is the Lord's move. He is moving within us. By having such a wheel, such a move, we will be full of eyes and have insight and foresight. Now we need to see that when we have all these matters in our experience, we will have a clear sky and a very particular sound—the sound of great waters, a sound that is the voice of the Almighty.

A CLEAR SKY, EXPANDING AND STABLE

Ezekiel 1:22 says, "The likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the living creature was as the color of the terrible crystal, stretched forth over their heads above." This reveals that after we have experienced all the things in the first twenty-one verses, the sky over our heads will be crystal clear. It will be like a great expanse of crystal. We will have a wide, clear expanse above us. This means that above us is an open, clear heaven.

The sky is not only clear; it is also expanding. It is not just a matter of having a clear sky vertically, from heaven to earth, but also a matter of having a clear sky horizontally. This means that the clear sky is expanding. Our sky, therefore, should be clear and expanding.

Before we were saved, our sky was dark and cloudy, even foggy. It was also narrow, without any expanse. With us there was hardly any heaven, hardly any sky. But one day we repented, confessed our sins, and received the Lord Jesus as our Savior. The more we confessed our sins, the more clear our sky became. After we made a thorough confession, we had the sense, for the first time, that the sky above us was clear. We sensed that the day was dawning, that the clouds were leaving, and that the fog was lifting. When we were saved, we received not only a clear sky but also an expanding sky. We had the sense that our sky was expanding.

Later, however, some problems might have arisen with ourselves personally, with our relatives, with the church, or with some of the brothers and sisters. Immediately our sky became somewhat cloudy again. It was not as cloudy and dark as before we were saved, but still it was no longer clear. Clouds and fog reappeared. We all have had this kind of experience. Eventually, we confessed our failures, condemned such things as our attitudes, motives, intentions, and goals, and received God's forgiveness and the cleansing of the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:9, 7). The sky above us became clear again, and once again we were under a clear sky. Then the sky began to open and expand above us. In our experience we should always have a clear, open, and expanding heaven.

The kind of sky a Christian has depends upon his conscience. Your conscience is connected to your sky. If there is no blemish on your conscience, your sky will be clear. If your sky is not clear, this means that there is some offense on your conscience. In order to have a clear sky, we need to deal with any offense and condemnation in our conscience. The story of our sky is the story of our conscience.

When we as living creatures reach the point of having a clear, open, and expanding heaven, there will be nothing between us and God and nothing between us and one another. There will be nothing cloudy or foggy covering us or separating us from one another. All the clouds, coverings, separations, and fog will be gone, and we will have a sky that is thoroughly clear and continually expanding. Our expanse will be as clear as crystal. When others look upon our clear

sky, they will be astonished. Our sky is terrible because it is crystal clear and expanding.

This clear and expanding sky is also stable. As a rule, the sky above the earth usually has some kind of movement. Either the clouds are moving or the wind is blowing. But the sky above the living creatures is not moving; rather, it is as stable as crystal. There is no change.

We need to consider this in light of our experience. At the time we were saved, we had a clear sky. However, we enjoyed such a sky only for a short time. Like the weather in certain places, our sky fluctuated very much. Sometimes our sky became cloudy, but after we confessed our sins, it became clear again. Later we would have another failure, such as losing our temper, and our sky would become cloudy once again. There were many fluctuations in the sky above our head.

With the living creatures, however, the situation is altogether different. The sky above the heads of the living creatures is perfectly stable, like crystal. There is no fluctuation. The heaven above them is clear, expanding, and stable. They have a thorough fellowship with the Lord vertically and also a clear fellowship among themselves horizontally. They have a wide and stable span of fellowship.

A proper local church should be like this. Unfortunately, however, the sky in some local churches seems to be cloudy and narrow. The sky over that church is very small and narrow. There is no expanse, and the situation is dark and touchy, making it difficult for anyone to say anything. If you say anything in this touchy situation, some of the saints will be offended. No matter what you say, certain ones will be unhappy with you. However, if a local church is proper, the sky over it will be clear and broad. No matter what you say, no one will be offended.

This does not mean that we should try in ourselves to be broad-minded. If we are like a frog in a well, it matters little whether we are broad-minded or narrow-minded. We need to jump out of the well and come under a clear sky where the horizon is broad. Once we are under such a sky, even if we are narrow-minded, we will spontaneously become broad. It is

impossible for the living creatures to be narrow-minded, because there is a wide expanse above their heads. The sky above them is clear, expanding, and terrible to behold. Under such a sky we have the proper fellowship with the Lord and with one another.

BEING STRAIGHT IN OUR COORDINATION

If we are under a clear and expanding sky, we can have the adequate and proper coordination, a coordination that is altogether straight. In the first chapter of Ezekiel, the word *straight* is used a few times. In verse 7 it is used for the calf's hoofs. In verse 23 it is used for the eagle's wings: "Under the firmament were their wings straight, the one toward the other." This indicates that in our coordination we must be straight.

Sometimes the coordination in the local churches is not straight but is somewhat crooked. For example, brother A might fellowship a matter with brother B and then ask him not to tell brother C about this matter. But brother B goes to brother C, passes on the information to him, and then asks him not to say anything about this to brother D. This kind of coordination is political. We should never play politics in the church life. If we say something to one brother, we should be able to say it to others as well. This means that our wings must be straight. Our coordination must be frank, sincere, earnest, and straight.

A VOICE COMING OUT OF THE WINGS OF THE LIVING CREATURES

Verse 24a says, "When they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of great waters, as the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech, as the noise of a host." Here we are told that as the living creatures moved, Ezekiel heard the voice of their wings. This means that as they moved in a straight coordination, a voice came out. This voice was their testimony. From this we see that the voice of the testimony of any local church must come out of the proper coordination. It should not be the voice of an individual believer; it should be the voice of the coordination. The voice comes out of the wings that have been joined to one another.

Consider the situation with Peter in the New Testament. Before the day of Pentecost, Peter often voiced something by himself, and what he spoke was usually rejected by the Lord Jesus. This was because he voiced it by himself (Matt. 16:22-23; 17:4-5, 24-27). But after the Lord's ascension, on the day of Pentecost, Peter stood up with the eleven (Acts 2:14). I believe that when the twelve stood there, they were like the four living creatures in Ezekiel 1. The voice which came out on the day of Pentecost was not the voice of an individual Peter but the voice of a corporate body.

THE LIVING CREATURES USING TWO WINGS TO COVER THEMSELVES

On the one hand, the four living creatures stretched two of their wings for coordination, for moving, and for giving the voice. On the other hand, they used the other two wings to cover themselves. This indicates that in the church life, in the coordination, we all need to learn to hide ourselves under the Lord's grace. Do not display yourself but instead hide yourself. Hide under the eagle's wings. There should be no manifestation of the self or of any individual. No matter how great our portion may be, we need to hide ourselves under the Lord's grace. We should never boast in ourselves but always boast in Him.

If our sky is clear, if we have a straight coordination, and if we hide ourselves in the Lord and under His grace, there will be a beautiful situation among us in the church life.

AS THE SOUND OF GREAT WATERS

If the situation of a local church is like that of the four living creatures described above, that church will be qualified and adequate to sound out the voice and to give a strong testimony. The voice will not be that of an individual person but will be like the sound of great waters. A particular believer may be spiritual and love the Lord very much, but if he is not coordinated with others, the voice of his testimony will be weak; it will not be like the voice of great waters. We need to look to the Lord that the testimonies of all the local churches would be like the great waters. One individual brother should

not always speak something for the local church, but a coordinated body should sound the voice and give the testimony. Others will be astonished at this kind of voice, and they will say that the voice of this local church is like the sound of great waters.

AS THE VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY

Verse 24 says also that this voice is the voice of the Almighty. It becomes the voice of God Himself. It is the voice of a corporate body, but eventually this voice becomes the voice of God. How marvelous!

The testimony of a local church should be like this. The voice in your local church should be the voice not of any individual but the voice of the Almighty.

AS THE VOICE OF AN ARMY

Eventually, as verse 24 says, the voice is the voice of a fighting army.

Often the situation in the local churches is not like this, because the church does not have a clear, expanding, and stable heaven. If the brothers and sisters do not have the proper fellowship and coordination, they may try to vindicate themselves and claim to have something. But if they have something real, they do not need to claim anything. If they claim to be rich, this indicates that actually they are poor. A millionaire does not need to claim that he is rich. If our church is like the four living creatures, there is no need for us to claim anything for our church.

Consider again the wonderful situation in Ezekiel 1. Look at the expanse, the move, the coordination, and the fellowship. Here is the voice of great waters, the voice of the Almighty, and the voice of an army.

This cannot be accomplished in us overnight. We must begin with the blowing wind from the north and then pass through all the subsequent experiences in order to have a sky that is crystal clear.

All the local churches need to arrive at this point, following one another until we get there. In the New Jerusalem there is only one street (Rev. 21:21b; 22:1), indicating that

there should be only one street in the church life today and that we all need to walk on it. We need to follow one another on this one street until we arrive at the point described in Ezekiel 1:22-25. This means that we need to have a clear sky with a wide expanse which is awesome and terrible in the eyes of others. When we reach this stage, we will have a proper testimony. We will have a voice like the sound of great waters and like that of the Almighty God and of an army fighting the battle for God's economy.

LETTING DOWN THEIR WINGS TO LISTEN TO GOD'S VOICE

There is another matter that we need to consider, and this is mentioned in verse 24b: "When they stood, they let down their wings." Here we see that the living creatures do not move all the time. Sometimes they stop and stand still. When they stand still, they let down their wings, lowering them. When they hear a voice not out of their wings but out of the clear sky above their heads, they stop and let down their wings. This indicates that they know how to listen to God's voice. They know not only how to speak and sound forth their voice but also how to listen to God's voice. Whenever they listen to God's voice, they stop moving, stand still, and lower their wings.

If we have a sky that is crystal clear, expanding, and stable, there will be a twofold result. On the one hand, having a clear sky enables us to speak; on the other hand, it enables us to listen. We speak to others, and we listen to God. This means that we should be a Christian who both speaks for God and listens to God's speaking. If our condition is like that of the living creatures in Ezekiel 1, our sky will be clear, and then we will be able to speak for God and also to hear God's speaking. The ability to speak and to hear depends upon having a clear sky.

A clear sky, speaking for the Lord, and listening to the Lord are all matters of fellowship. Genuine fellowship is related to genuine coordination. When we have fellowship with God and with one another, there will be a genuine coordination among us. Then as we move we can speak for God,

and when God comes to speak to us, we can listen quietly to His speaking.

This should be the situation in all the local churches. A proper local church knows both how to move and how to stop, how to sound forth its voice and how to listen to God's voice. Is your local church like this? I am concerned that your church may not know how to stop, lower its wings, and listen to the voice from the sky. I am also concerned that in your local church there may not be the proper coordination. Instead, there may be a one-man show, with one person doing everything and insisting that everything and everyone be under his control. Any local church that is like this will be poor and weak. No matter what such a church may claim to have, there is no voice coming from the wings. The coordination of the four living creatures, on the contrary, is not a one-man show. One person does not decide everything. Their coordination is a coordination of all the living creatures.

Ezekiel 1 presents the clearest picture in the Bible concerning the proper church life, and we all need to see the church life as it is portrayed in this chapter. The coordination shown here is marvelous. All the experiences in a wonderful sequence bring the living creatures to a point where they are under a crystal-clear, expanding, and stable heaven. Therefore, the living creatures have a proper move on earth and give a proper voice and testimony to the whole universe. Here they learn how to stop and listen to God's voice. They know how to give the voice by moving and know how to listen to God's voice by stopping.

We all, especially the leading ones in the local churches, need to see this picture and experience what is unveiled in it. May the Lord be merciful to us and cause all the local churches to be brought into the experiences depicted in this chapter.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE ELEVEN

THE THRONE ABOVE THE CLEAR SKY

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 1:26-28; Matt. 26:64a; Acts 2:36; Rev. 3:21

In the vision in chapter one things in the natural realm are used to describe things in the spiritual realm. These spiritual things are deep, but we can understand them through the natural and physical things that are used to describe them. According to God's plan the spiritual things revealed here begin with the wind (v. 4) and end with the rainbow (v. 28). As we will see in the next message, there is a rainbow that manifests God's splendor. In our experience, the throne (v. 26) and the rainbow both depend on our having a sky that is crystal clear.

In the last message we saw that above the heads of the living creatures is a clear firmament, a clear sky, that is expanding and yet was stable. Now in this message we need to see that above this clear sky there is a throne. Ezekiel 1:26 says, "Above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it." We need to consider the meaning of the throne and apply it to our experience.

A CLEAR SKY AND A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

We Christians need to maintain a clear sky with the Lord. This means that we need always to have a clear fellowship with Him. We should have nothing between us and the Lord. When there is nothing between us and the Lord, our sky will be crystal clear, and our conscience will be pure, void of any offense (Acts 24:16).

We need to be deeply impressed with the fact that if, as

Christians, we would have a clear sky, a crystal heaven, before the Lord, we need to have a conscience that is without offense. Whenever there is condemnation or an offense on our conscience, our sky immediately becomes cloudy, darkened, and foggy. At such times we should confess our failure and our sin to the Lord and receive His forgiveness and the cleansing of His precious blood (1 John 1:9, 7). This will cleanse our conscience so that it will be void of offense. We will again have a clear sky and a clear fellowship with the Lord, with nothing between us and Him.

Sometimes a small matter, such as a poor attitude toward our spouse, can cause us to have clouds in our sky. Perhaps the other party is wrong, but our attitude is also wrong, and we lose our joy and our peace. Also, we may have no anointing to pray for a period of time. Our conscience begins to condemn us and bother us. This is the loss of a clear Christian sky, the loss of a clear heaven. We no longer have a clear heaven over us, because something is wrong between us and the Lord. This situation will remain until we go to the Lord and ask His forgiveness for our bad attitude. Then the Lord's anointing within us may cause us to sense that we need to confess and apologize to our spouse. Although we may hesitate, because we have lost the Lord's presence, eventually we confess, apologize, and ask for forgiveness. As soon as we do this, the "weather" changes; the clouds disappear, and the clear sky returns. Something within us is living once again, and we can praise the Lord. Once more we have a clear sky, a sky like the firmament of terrible crystal over the heads of the living creatures. We should have this kind of experience not only in our daily life but also in the church life.

A CLEAR SKY AND THE THRONE

Whenever we have such a clear sky in our Christian life and in our church life, we will also have the throne, which is above the clear sky (Ezek. 1:26). The throne is the center of the universe, and it is where the Lord is. We often talk about the Lord's presence, but we need to realize that the Lord's presence is always with the throne. Where the Lord is, there His throne is. His presence can never be separated from His

throne. The Lord's throne is in the third heaven, but His throne is also in our spirit. Hence, the Lord's throne is with us all the time.

As Christians and as local churches, we all should be under a crystal clear and expansive sky. Above this clear, expansive sky is the throne of the Lord. By having such a clear sky, we are spontaneously under the government of the Lord's throne. Now we are under the ruling and reigning of the throne.

We should always be under the ruling of the Lord's throne. Because we are under the throne, we do not need policemen and law courts to rule over us. If we need to be ruled by the police and by the courts, this means that we are not under the throne.

We should be under the throne of the Lord all the time. Perhaps we want to say a certain thing, but the ruling of the throne does not allow us to speak a word. As we begin to speak, the throne exercises its ruling, and we are forced to swallow our words. At other times, we may become angry and may be close to losing our temper, but we realize that we are under the ruling of the throne, and we are subdued. Who is ruling over us? We are ruled not merely by the teachings of the Bible but by the throne.

In our Christian life and in our church life, if the sky is clear, the throne will be there. But if our sky is cloudy and darkened, we will not see the throne. When we do not see the throne, we can be loose and do many things according to our taste and convenience. Today many believers are careless in their daily Christian life because they do not have a clear sky with the throne above it. Whenever believers are in darkness and thus are not under the throne, they can be quite loose, speaking what they want to speak, expressing what they want to express, and going where they want to go. But a person who is under the throne has no liberty to behave in such a way.

In a sense, because we have been saved, we are liberated, but in another sense we are under the throne and have no liberty at all. I can testify that sometimes I wanted to go to a certain place, but because of the throne I did not have the

liberty to go there. Praise the Lord for the clear sky and for the throne! Above our heads is the firmament, and above the firmament is the throne.

THE HIGHEST SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE— HAVING THE THRONE IN OUR FIRMAMENT

The highest step in the spiritual experience of a Christian is to have the throne in our firmament, in our clear sky. To have the throne, or to arrive at the throne, is to allow God to have the highest and most prominent position in our Christian life. For God to have the throne in us means that He has the position to reign in us. Therefore, to reach the throne in our spiritual experience means that in everything we are completely submissive to God's authority and administration. Then we are no longer a person without the throne, without authority, without government.

A believer who does not have a clear sky with a throne above it can easily be loose and careless in his daily living. On the contrary, a believer who has a sky that is crystal clear has the sense of being under divine government and restraint; therefore, he cannot be loose or careless in anything he says or does. A believer who has a clear sky above him is under an authority which restricts and restrains him in things such as speaking or a display of anger. This authority is a matter of the throne.

The clearer our firmament is, the more we are under the throne. The more we have clear fellowship with the Lord, the more we will be under His authority. We need to ask ourselves if there is a throne in our Christian life. If we have the throne above the clear sky, we are greatly blessed, and we should worship God for this blessing.

A certain young sister came from a wealthy family. After she was saved, she received the blessing of learning to live under the throne and to accept the restrictions of the throne in everything. Things that others could do she could not do, and things that others could use she could not use. Although her parents loved her very much, they could not understand her way of living. One day she testified to them, saying, "I do not do certain things because others tell me not to do them.

There is One in me who is reigning and restricting me from doing these things." After that conversation, her father, a perceptive person, realized that she was a genuine Christian. He esteemed her highly and gave her absolute freedom.

I want to emphasize the fact that the highest point in our spiritual experience is having a clear sky with a throne above it. Have you reached this stage? Have you come to the point where you sense that there is an authority restricting you? Have you come to that state in your spiritual life where you are regulated in all things by the throne? I would urge you to consider this matter before the Lord in your fellowship with Him.

THE THRONE AND GOD'S PURPOSE

The throne is not only for God to reign over us but also for God to accomplish His eternal purpose. If we have a throne in our spiritual life, God will not only rule over us but will also fulfill His purpose in us, with us, and through us. Those who do not have the throne in their Christian life will not allow God to obtain His purpose with them. I hope that the Holy Spirit will deeply impress you with this matter. If you want God's purpose and plan to be carried out in you and with you, you must be a person who submits to the throne. You must be a person under the reign of God. Only then can God carry out His purpose in relation to you.

THE THRONE TRANSMITTED TO THE EARTH THROUGH THE LIVING CREATURES

The living creatures are still on earth, moving or standing, but above their heads there is a clear heaven with the throne. From what is portrayed here we can see that the throne in the heavens is transmitted to the earth through and with the living creatures. With them and through them the heavens with the throne are opened up to the earth. In this way the throne in the heavens becomes one with the earth, for the throne is transmitted to the earth.

This transmission can be compared to the transmission of electricity. Electricity is in the generator at the power plant far away from our homes, but electricity is transmitted to us through the electrical lines. By means of this transmission,

the electricity which is in the generator is also with us in our homes. We may say that the living creatures in Ezekiel 1 are the heavenly electrical lines. It is through them, by them, and with them that the heavenly throne is transmitted to the earth. Wherever they are, there is the throne. Wherever they go, the throne follows them.

Sometimes we may contact a dear brother who is gentle, mild, and meek, yet in his presence we have the sense that something weighty and powerful is present ruling over the situation. We may be a loose and careless person, but when we come into the presence of such a brother, we realize that something is ruling over us. This is the throne, or we may say that this is the Lord's presence. Whether we call it the throne or the Lord's presence, it is the transmission of the heavenly throne to the earth through this dear brother.

We may have the same kind of experience in visiting the churches. We may visit a particular local church where the saints are gentle, nice, and happy, yet we sense that there is something weighty and powerful, something of authority, something that is ruling over everything and everyone in that church. This is the throne.

THE AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH NOT BEING HUMAN AND NATURAL BUT BEING THE THRONE ABOVE THE CLEAR SKY

We should not talk about authority in a human, natural way. In the church there is no human authority. The authority in the church is the throne above the clear sky.

Suppose the leading brothers or the elders in a local church are not under a clear sky, yet they exercise authority based on their position. This kind of exercise of authority does not work because it has no weight and no ruling; there is no throne in a clear sky. However, suppose the leading ones and the elders are continually under a clear sky, having a conscience that is pure and void of offense. If this is their situation, they will be under the heavenly throne, and with them there will be something weighty and something of authority. Thus, there will be no need for them to claim authority over the saints.

To claim authority over the saints indicates that one does not have any authority. As long as we are under a clear sky with a throne above it, there is no need for us to claim to have authority—the authority is simply there. We should never try to bring others under our authority. Such a thing is a hierarchy; it is something of organization. We should not try to rule over the saints. Instead, we should humble ourselves and remain under the throne in the clear sky.

It is shameful for anyone to claim to be the authority in a local church. There is no such thing! In the church there is no human authority. The Lord Jesus said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever wants to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you shall be your slave" (Matt. 20:25-27). In Matthew 23:11 He said, "The greatest among you shall be your servant." This is the way to have authority. The authority is not mine nor yours nor others'. The only authority is the throne above a clear sky.

I can assure you that if we are under a clear sky with the throne above it, the genuine authority will be with us. No opposition or persecution will be able to defeat us or shake us because heaven and the throne are with us. If the sky above us is clear and the throne is with us, we will have the authority and the weight.

The weight of a person before God is equal to the degree of that person's subjection to God's authority. A particular brother may be quite proper in his speaking and behavior, but he is light as a feather, altogether lacking in spiritual weight. This indicates that he is not subject to the throne. However, the situation with another brother may be very different. When you contact him, you sense that he is weighty and you respect him. This brother is weighty because he has learned to subject Himself to God's authority. The more we submit to the throne, the weightier we will be.

Let me tell you about the experience of a female missionary in China. As one who preached strongly concerning regeneration, she was under God's authority and thereby was a person with authority and weight in the Lord. One day a

boat on which she was traveling was seized by pirates, who retained control of the vessel for several days. As they searched her room for money and jewels, she sat there calmly, without any fear. She told the leader of the pirates that it was too hot to confine the passengers to their rooms. She also told him that he should be responsible for cleaning the boat. The leader of the pirates obeyed her and told his men to clean the boat. A ferocious pirate leader came under the authority of this missionary because she herself was under the throne. She subjected herself to God's authority; therefore, God's authority was with her.

We need to realize that the amount of weight we have depends on our subjection to the throne. The words out of one brother's mouth may have weight and power, but the same words out of another brother's mouth may have nothing. The reason is that one brother is under a clear sky with the throne, but the other is under a dark, cloudy sky without the throne. It is easy to learn to repeat or quote others' words. But whether the words that issue out of our mouth have weight or amount to nothing depends on whether or not we are under a clear sky with the throne. The proper Christian life and the proper church life is a life under the throne that is above a clear sky.

I would remind all the dear ones who bear responsibility in the local churches never to exercise their authority. We need to realize that none of us has any authority. The authority is the throne. Consider the situation with Moses in the book of Numbers. When the people of Israel rebelled against him, he did not exercise his authority. Instead, Moses and Aaron bowed down and called upon the highest authority. Then the Lord came in to vindicate (Num. 14:5; 16:1-4, 22; 20:2-6). It is a serious mistake to exercise authority over others in the church. Nothing is more shameful than this. To exercise authority over the saints is not glorious—it is shameful. None of us is the authority. The authority is the man on the throne. We must have the man on the throne in our clear sky. In the church life we need a clear sky with a heavenly throne.

The Lord needs such a church today. He needs a group of

coordinated living creatures. While they are standing or walking on earth, the heavens are opened to the earth. Through them the heavenly throne is transmitted to earth. This is the church life.

Do not take the natural, human way to exercise any kind of authority. Even if others come to you trying to recognize you as an authority, you must refuse it. You need to tell these ones that you are not the authority. This is not what authority is. Proper authority is a matter of a throne above the clear sky. It is absolutely not a human matter of organization and hierarchy. We need to have a clear sky with a throne.

It is shameful to have power among the saints, to be the authority among the saints, or to intend that the saints should listen to us. We always consider Paul a great apostle. But his name means "little," and he regarded himself as less than the least of the saints (Eph. 3:8). Paul might say, "You give me too great a title. I am not worthy of that."

THE CLEAR SKY AND THE THRONE VINDICATING

Whether the brothers and sisters listen to you or not, depends on where you are and on what you are. Are you under a clear sky? If you are under a clear sky, there is no need for you to argue, and there is no need for you to claim anything or even say anything. The clear sky and the throne above the sky will vindicate.

All the local churches need this revelation of the throne above the clear sky. In the church life we do not have any organization or any kind of hierarchy. We do not have a mission board or any other board; we have no headquarters and no organization of any kind. We have only a clear sky with a throne above the sky.

I can testify that I am afraid only of one thing—that I would lose the presence of my Lord. Many times when I have been alone in my own room, I have declared to the whole universe and to myself that the only thing I fear is losing the Lord's presence. As long as I have the presence of the Lord, I am afraid of nothing. I care only for His presence, not for anything else. In other words, I care only for the clear sky with the throne above it. I have the full assurance that as I am

speaking these words, the throne is with me. Praise the Lord that this is sufficient! We all need to learn this.

We are so little, and we are unworthy, yet the Lord has visited us. I must confess that, in the past, sometimes I told the Lord that I did not like doing this job, and I asked Him why He has taken hold of me. At such times the Lord gave me a serious warning about speaking in this way. Then I said, "Lord, forgive me. Do whatever You like. I am willing to lose everything, but I do not want to lose the clear sky and the throne." Under the Lord's covering, I testify that I really mean this.

In your local church you should not care for anything except having a clear sky with the throne above it. As long as we have the clear sky and the throne, opposition and criticism mean nothing. The only thing we need to care for is the clear sky with the throne above it.

THE THRONE BEING IN THE LIKENESS OF A SAPPHIRE STONE

Ezekiel 1:26 speaks of "the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone." Here we see that the throne has the appearance of a sapphire stone. Exodus 24:10 is helpful in understanding the significance of the sapphire stone in Ezekiel 1. This verse says, "They saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness." A sapphire stone signifies a kind of heavenly condition which exists when God is present in a particular situation. According to Exodus 24:10 when Moses, Aaron, and the chief men of Israel saw God, they saw under His feet the appearance of a sapphire stone. This gave the people an insight into the appearance of the Lord's presence. A sapphire stone is blue in color, and blue is a heavenly color indicating the situation and condition of God's presence. This verse also says that at that time the heavens were exceedingly clear. God was present in that kind of situation and atmosphere. Therefore, the sapphire stone signifies the situation or the condition of the heavens with God's presence in it. The throne being in the likeness of a sapphire stone shows the presence of God in a heavenly situation.

Whenever we have the throne of God in a clear heaven, the situation will be heavenly. There will not be anything earthly or anything gloomy or impure. Rather, everything will be heavenly, clear, clean, and absolutely transparent. This portrays the kind of situation we should have in the presence of God. Whenever we have a clear sky with God's throne in it, we are in a heavenly situation having the appearance of a sapphire stone.

I would ask you to look once again at the picture in Ezekiel 1. The Lord is upon the throne above the firmament in the heavens, and the living creatures are walking or standing on earth. Through them the Lord in the heavens becomes one with the earth, and in this way the heavens are connected to the earth. This means that the heavens have been brought down to the earth and that the heavens are now moving on earth through, by, and with the living creatures. This needs to be the situation among the local churches today, the situation among the overcomers, and the situation and condition of our daily Christian life.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE TWELVE

THE MAN ON THE THRONE

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 1:26-28; Exo. 24:10; Gen. 9:12-15; Rev. 4:2-3; 21:19a; 22:1

In the foregoing message we pointed out that in the Christian life and in the church life we need a clear sky with a throne in it. To have a clear sky means that we have no clouds or darkness between us and the Lord, and to have the throne means that we are under the ruling of the heavens. We all need to have a life with a clear sky and the throne above the clear sky. In this message we will go on to consider the One sitting on the throne (Ezek. 1:26-27).

THE ONE ON THE THRONE HAVING THE APPEARANCE OF A MAN

Verse 26b says, "Upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it." Here we are told that the One on the throne looks like a man. This is absolutely different from the human concept and also different from the religious concept, including the concept widely held in today's Christianity. Mainly, our concept is that the One on the throne is the mighty God. Have you ever thought that the Lord on the throne is not only the mighty God but is also a man? Oh, the One who sits on the throne is a man! However, verse 28 speaks of "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord." The One on the throne looks like a man, yet with Him there is the appearance of the glory of the Lord.

Christians realize, of course, that the Lord Jesus was a man when He was on this earth. They recognize the fact that from the manger in Bethlehem to the time He was on the cross at Golgotha He was a man. We all have this concept. However, many believers in Christ have not considered that

the Lord who is on the throne today is still a man. He is a man there. As the One on the throne, the Lord is still a man. Although He is the almighty God, on the throne He looks like a man. Therefore, Matthew 19:28 tells us that "in the restoration," that is, in the coming kingdom age, the Son of Man will be sitting on the throne of His glory.

How precious it is that the One sitting on the throne in Ezekiel 1:26 has the appearance of a man! This verse speaks not of the almighty God but of One who has "the likeness as the appearance of a man." There is at least a twofold significance to the fact that the One sitting on the throne here has the appearance of a man. First, there is surely a connection between Ezekiel 1:26 and Genesis 1:26, which says that God created man in His own image and according to His likeness. Second, in the incarnation God Himself became a man. Having the nature of man, He lived, died, resurrected, and ascended as a man, and now in heaven He is still the Son of Man (John 6:62; Acts 7:56).

In the Bible there is a mysterious thought concerning the relationship between God and man. God's desire is to become the same as man is and to make man the same as He is. This means that God's intention is to mingle Himself with man and thereby make Himself like man and make man like Him. The Lord Jesus is the God-man; He is the complete God and the perfect man. We may also say that He is the Man-God. The One whom we worship today is the Man-God. Furthermore, to be a man of God, as Moses was (Deut. 33:1; Josh. 14:6; Psa. 90, title), is to be a God-man, a man who is mingled with God. It is a delight to God that all His chosen and redeemed people would be God-men.

GOD'S INTENTION TO HAVE A MAN

God's intention on earth is to have a man. This is His desire. Eventually, He Himself became a man, and today on the throne He is still a man. People may want to be like God, but God wants to be a man. God's intention is to work Himself into us, making us the same as He is, and even more, making Himself the same as we are. Thus, God's intention is to have a man and to work Himself into man. We need to be deeply

impressed with the fact that the Lord is still on the throne as a man. In the book of Ezekiel, the term *the son of man* is used more than ninety times. This indicates how much God desires to have a man.

If we would live out God and express God, we need to be a man and have the appearance of a man. Ezekiel 1:5 says that the four living creatures have the appearance of a man, and verse 26 says that the One on the throne has the appearance of a man. The crucial point here is that because man was created in the image of God in order to express God, only man is like God. A person must have the appearance of a man in order to live out the image of God and therefore express God. If we want to live out God and express God, we must be a man and have the appearance of a man. Anyone who does not have the appearance of a man cannot express God. The One on the throne and the four living creatures both have the appearance of a man, indicating that the four living creatures on earth are the expression of the One on the throne.

Chapter one of Ezekiel is the deepest chapter in the Bible. The thought in this chapter is profound. We have seen that the throne is above a clear sky, above a spiritual and heavenly expanse, or firmament. God's grace works upon a group of people to such an extent that their condition now is the very condition of heaven. In this condition, indicated by a sky that is crystal clear, the throne of God is present. The place of the throne is the place where heaven and earth are connected. Because with the living creatures on earth there is a throne above a clear sky, God is not only the God of heaven but also the God of the earth. Through these living creatures, who have the throne over their heads, heaven and earth are joined.

In Ezekiel 1 the One on the throne is the union of God and man. Thus, the place where the throne is, is the place where heaven and earth are joined. The One on the throne is God, but He manifests the appearance of a man. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He was God manifest in the flesh, for He was the God-man and had the appearance of a man. Inwardly, He was God, but His appearance on earth was the appearance of a man. Now, as the One on the throne after His ascension,

He is still the God-man; He is God, yet with the appearance of a man.

In the church life today, there should be a condition where God is manifested in man. This means that in the church we should have not only a clear sky with a throne and the Lord on the throne but also the expression in man of the One who is on the throne. When this is the condition of the church, there will be in the church the great mystery of godliness—God manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:15-16). On the one hand, there are a clear sky, a throne, and the Lord on the throne; on the other hand, the Lord's manifestation in the church is in the appearance of a man. In the church life there should be the manifestation of God in the flesh. In order for this to be the situation, there must be in the church the glorious union of God and man. Inwardly we should have God, but God is manifested in the flesh, manifested in and through a normal and proper humanity. All those in the church life—the brothers and the sisters, the elderly ones and the young ones—should behave in a way that is normal and fitting for their respective ages. Instead of pretense, there should a genuineness that is both human and divine. This is the condition of God being manifested in humanity.

God's eternal plan is to connect heaven and earth and to join God and man. God in heaven wants to gain man on earth for His expression by working Himself into man. The desire of God's heart is to reach the one goal of connecting heaven and earth and of joining God and man. Where there is such a condition, there is the throne. The One sitting on the throne is God, but His manifestation has the appearance of a man. God's eternal plan is to have such a manifestation. In the church today we need to be in a condition where God is manifested in the appearance of a man.

BRINGING MAN TO THE THRONE

God's intention is to work on man in order that man can be on the throne. Have you ever realized that this is His intention? We might be satisfied to go to heaven. This might satisfy us, but it would never satisfy God. God will not be satisfied until we are on the throne.

In Revelation 3:21 the Lord Jesus says, "He who overcomes, to him I will give to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat with My Father on His throne." The Lord Jesus seemed to be saying that He became a man, and as a man He went to the throne. God's intention is to take us to the throne. His desire is to make us people of the throne. God's kingdom cannot come in full until we are on the throne. Furthermore, God's enemy will not be subdued until we are on the throne. God's goal, therefore, is not merely to deliver us out of hell but to bring us to the throne.

We need to consider our present condition in light of God's intention. In many things we are careless and loose. The Lord will bring us to the throne, but if we are still careless and loose, we are not ready to be on the throne. No one can sit on the throne in a way that is undignified or improper. I do not agree with the forms in formal Christianity, but neither do I agree with the looseness that is so widespread today. If you mean business with the Lord as a Christian and as a disciple of the Lord Jesus, you cannot be loose, careless, and undisciplined. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He was not careless in anything. Many believers today, on the contrary, do not seem to have the proper concept and feeling about how to be a proper human being. Such a person cannot be on the throne.

God has chosen us. He has called us to the throne. A strong proof that God has called us is that we call on the name of the Lord. God's calling is to bring us to the throne.

SATAN'S REBELLION AGAINST THE THRONE

Why does God want to bring us to the throne? God desires to bring us to the throne because of the rebellion of Satan against God's throne (Isa. 14). If we read the Bible carefully, we will see that the greatest difficulty God faces in the universe is that His throne has been opposed and attacked by rebel forces. God's throne is absolute, but one of His creatures has rebelled and seeks to exalt his throne to be equal with that of God. In his rebellion against God's throne, Satan intended to exalt his throne to the heavens and thereby to intrude upon God's authority. Isaiah 14:12-14 says, "How art

thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!…For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God…I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High." From the time of Satan's rebellion until now, there has been a dispute in the universe regarding authority. Much of what is happening on earth is an expression of Satan's resistance to God's throne. The crucial question is this: Who is actually reigning on earth—God or Satan?

When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He was absolutely submissive to God's authority. To obey the Lord is to be a person under the throne. Because the Lord Jesus obeyed God the Father and submitted to God's authority in an absolute way, after He was resurrected from the dead, God gave Him all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18) and exalted Him to the throne. Now the One sitting on the throne is not only God but also man, for this One is the mingling of God and man. Therefore, after the ascension of the Lord Jesus, there has been a man on the throne.

God's mind is on man (Heb. 2:6), and He wants man to express Him and to exercise His authority. Man has God's image and God's dominion with His authority. God desires to manifest Himself through man, and He desires to reign, to administrate, through man.

God's intention is to cast Satan down and to redeem many of those taken captive by Satan and bring them to His throne. God cannot receive the full glory until we are brought to the throne. One day we will be brought to the throne, and then God will be able to boast to Satan. He will triumphantly declare that His chosen ones, who had been taken captive by Satan, have been brought to the throne.

However, we need to realize that in our present condition we are not qualified to be on the throne. Do you look like a king? If you were weighed on the heavenly scales to determine your spiritual weight, how much would you weigh? I am concerned that many of us would weigh hardly anything at all. This is a very serious matter. We have been called to be sons of God, and we are destined to be kings, but we need God to work in us and on us to qualify us for kingship.

THE LORD JESUS BEING A MAN ON THE THRONE

Through His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, the Lord Jesus was brought to the throne. A real man whose name is Jesus is on the throne. This is why we declare, "Jesus is Lord" and why we call, "O Lord Jesus." God has always been the Lord, but now a man is on the throne as the Lord. Through His resurrection and in His ascension, "God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus" (Acts 2:36). God has made Jesus, a Nazarene, the Lord, and now today the Lord of heaven and of earth is a man.

Do you really realize that the Lord of the universe today is a man? Hallelujah for this man! It would not seem strange to us to say that Jehovah Elohim is the Lord of the universe. But it is not easy for us to realize that a man who could be crucified and buried could be the Lord of the universe. When Judas and the multitude came to arrest Him, He did not run away. He willingly made Himself weak and allowed Himself to be arrested and crucified. In the words of 2 Corinthians 13:4, "He was crucified out of weakness." But after He was crucified and buried, God resurrected Him and set Him at His right hand, making Him the Lord of all the universe. Today, the Lord of the universe is a man.

THE LORD JESUS BEING THE PIONEER TO THE THRONE

We also need to see that the Lord Jesus led the way to the throne. He was the Pioneer, the Forerunner (Heb. 6:20), cutting the path to the throne (2:10). This indicates that He is not the only man destined for the throne. He has cut the path and has taken the lead so that we may follow. He was the first one to the throne, and we will come after Him. Now we are marching to the throne, for God intends to bring us into glory and to set us on the throne.

THE APPEARANCE OF THE MAN ON THE THRONE

Ezekiel 1:27 says, "I saw as the color of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it

had brightness round about." Here we see that the appearance of the man on the throne has two aspects: From His loins upward He looks like electrum, and from His loins downward He looks like fire. Why does His upper part look like electrum, and why does His lower part look like fire? The upper part of a man, from his loins to his head, is the part of feeling, of sensation. This part signifies his nature and disposition. According to His nature and disposition the Lord Jesus on the throne looks like electrum. The lower part of a man's body is for moving. The appearance of fire from the loins downward signifies the Lord's appearance in His move.

When the Lord comes to us, He first comes as fire. When He stays with us, He becomes electrum. Furthermore, whenever the Lord moves through us, He moves like fire to burn, enlighten, and search. After this burning something will remain, and that will be the electrum—a mixture of gold and silver signifying the Lamb-God, the redeeming God.

God wants us to gain Him as the electrum. In order for this to be our experience, He must first come to us as fire to enlighten, search, and burn. Then through the fire He becomes electrum to us. Thus, if we would gain Him as the electrum, we need to experience Him as the fire.

Eventually, we need to realize that nothing good dwells in us. Like Paul, we should be able to say, "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, nothing good dwells" (Rom. 7:18a). The following is a partial list of the negative things that we have within us: division, strife, hatred, envy, temper, self-love, self-goals, ambition, selfishness, ego, and many other ugly, evil things. We are full of these things, but we may have very little of the Lord. Therefore, we need the Lord to come to us and burn away all these negative things. After these things have been burned out, the electrum, the redeeming God, will remain in us.

No matter how clear our sky is and no matter how much we may have the throne in our sky, we still need the Lord's presence as the fire which enlightens, searches, and burns so that we may have Him remaining in us as electrum. This is the Lord's visitation with us, and this is the Lord's move with us and on us. It is a great blessing to be under the Lord's

visitation. The Lord comes to us as a consuming fire, and we gain Him as electrum. Often there is no need for us to declare that we have such a God. When others are with us, they will be able to sense that we have the electrum, the redeeming God, remaining with us. They may also have the impression that we are not light but are persons of weight. We are weighty with electrum, weighty with the Lamb-God.

HAVING A RAINBOW

At this point the four living creatures are not only for the manifestation of the Lord and not only for the move of the Lord but also for the administration, the government, of the Lord. The Lord is among them and above them for His manifestation, move, and government. This is truly wonderful.

As a result of having a clear sky with the throne and of experiencing a man who has the appearance of electrum and a consuming fire, we will have the appearance of a rainbow. Ezekiel 1:28 says, "As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord." A rainbow is the brightness around the man who is sitting on the throne. This brightness signifies the splendor and glory around the Lord on the throne.

In order to understand the significance of the rainbow, we need to remember the rainbow at the time of Noah. A flood had destroyed the whole earth, and only eight people were spared from that judgment. After that, when people saw storm clouds in the sky they might have been afraid of being destroyed. Therefore, God made a covenant in which He promised never again to destroy all living things by a flood, and He set the rainbow in the cloud as a sign of this covenant. "I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: and I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between

God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth" (Gen. 9:13-16). The rainbow, therefore, was a sign of God's faithfulness and promise not to destroy the fallen human race with a flood.

In His judgment and destruction of the fallen human race at the time of Noah, God spared some by His faithfulness. This also is our situation as believers in Christ. We need to realize that we have been spared by God. We all are fallen and deserve to be destroyed, but God has spared us. Praise the Lord that we have been spared by His faithfulness! Now we have a rainbow as a sign of God's faithfulness. Although God is a holy God and a consuming fire and none can exist in His presence, by His faithfulness we have been spared.

In the rainbow there are several different colors, but the basic colors are only three—red, yellow, and blue. When these colors are shining and blending, they produce other colors, such as orange, green, and violet. It is very significant that the three primary colors of the rainbow are red, yellow, and blue because they correspond to what we have already seen in Ezekiel. The throne looks like a blue sapphire stone, the electrum is yellow, the fire is red. By their shining and refracting, these three colors combine to make a rainbow.

Now we need to see the spiritual significance of these three colors. Blue signifies the throne. According to Psalm 89:14 the foundation of God's throne is righteousness. This indicates that the blue throne signifies the righteousness of God. Fire signifies the sanctifying, separating, and consuming fire. This means that red here refers to God's holiness. Yellow signifies God's glory in the glowing electrum. Therefore, here we have God's righteousness, holiness, and glory signified by the colors blue, red, and yellow.

God's righteousness, holiness, and glory are three divine attributes that keep sinners away from God. Before we were saved, we were kept away from God by His righteousness, holiness, and glory. But the Lord Jesus came, died on the cross to satisfy the requirements of God's righteousness, holiness, and glory, and was resurrected, and He is now our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). He is also now our glory. In ourselves we are short of God's

glory (Rom. 3:23), we are under God's righteous judgment, and we are kept away by God's holiness. But now, as believers, we are in Christ, and He has become our righteousness, holiness, and glory. Moreover, because we are in Christ, we even bear Christ as righteousness, holiness, and glory. Because we are in Christ, in the sight of God we look like righteousness, holiness, and glory.

This should not be simply a doctrine or a teaching to us. We need to experience Christ in such a way that when others contact us, they can sense righteousness, holiness, and glory. This means that they should be able to sense that we have a clear sky, that we have a throne, and that we are righteous and proper, not careless or loose in any way. We should also have the electrum, glowing, shining, and weighty. Then we will have the appearance of a rainbow, and the angels, the demons, and Satan will be able to see it. This rainbow is the sign of God's faithfulness in sparing us, the fallen ones. As those who were fallen but who have now been saved, we have become a testimony of God's faithfulness in saving us. Every local church should bear the testimony of such a rainbow.

Even the New Jerusalem has the appearance of a rainbow. The foundation stones of the New Jerusalem are of twelve layers, with each layer being a different color (Rev. 21:19-20). Some time ago I read an article which stated that the twelve layers of the foundation stones have the appearance of a rainbow in color. From this we see that the holy city, New Jerusalem, looks like a rainbow. This rainbow signifies that the city is built upon and secured by God's faithfulness in keeping His covenant. This rainbow will declare for eternity that when God judged sinners according to His righteousness, He did not destroy everyone but saved many from destruction as a testimony of His faithfulness. In eternity we, the aggregate of the saved ones, will be a rainbow testifying forever that our God is righteous and faithful.

We, God's spared ones, will be this holy city. By His righteousness, holiness, and glory, we will have the appearance of a rainbow declaring to the whole universe God's saving faithfulness. At the end of the Bible is a city whose foundation has the appearance of a rainbow surrounding the eternal God as

His strong testimony. The experience of the Christian life and of the church life will consummate in such a rainbow.

When this rainbow appears, God will have the fulfillment of His heart's desire. Throughout the ages, God has been judging fallen man according to His righteous throne, His holy fire, and His glorious nature. Nevertheless, God has saved some to such an extent that they have become a bright rainbow reflecting His glory and testifying of Him and His faithfulness forever. The appearing of this rainbow indicates that heaven and earth have been connected and that God and man have been joined. Around the throne in the New Jerusalem, there will be a group of people who have received salvation because of God's faithfulness, and for eternity they will be a rainbow reflecting the brightness of God's righteousness, holiness, and glory. At this point, God's eternal plan will have been accomplished.

Although this rainbow will be manifested in eternity, the spiritual reality of this bright rainbow should be manifest in the church today. In the church life we need to allow God to work in us and we need to receive grace to the extent that everything becomes pure, just, and holy. This means that God's holy fire must burn away everything that does not match God so that God's nature is manifested as bright gold in and through the humanity of the brothers and sisters. Then the church will be filled with God's righteousness, holiness, and glory. These three characteristics will combine and reflect one another to form a bright rainbow expressing God and testifying for Him.

Once again I say that this should not be merely a teaching to us. Rather, the reality of this rainbow must be wrought into us so that, as God's spared ones, we will bear the appearance of a rainbow, bearing God's testimony and declaring God's faithfulness to the entire universe. This means that we will bear God's righteousness, holiness, and glory.

Ezekiel said that what he saw was the appearance of the glory of the Lord. "When I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake" (Ezek. 1:28b). If we want to hear the word of the Lord in the following chapters of Ezekiel, we all need to come to the same point—under a clear sky in

front of the throne with a man sitting on it and bearing the shining and reflecting rainbow. This is the place where we can hear the voice from above. Being here positions us to hear the voice speaking from the heavens. I hope that every one of us will come to this point, and I also hope that all the local churches will also be here. Then the Lord will have a way to speak to us.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE THIRTEEN

THE DEGRADATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 20:6; 6:9; 11:12b; 13:4-5, 17-18; 14:3, 5; 22:25-30; 3:7; 2:3-4, 6; 22:13-19

As we pointed out in the first message, the book of Ezekiel is of four sections. The first section, consisting of chapter one, presents a vision of the appearance of the glory of the Lord. This chapter reveals how God is manifested, how God moves, and how God administrates His government through the coordination of the four living creatures. The second section includes the next thirty-one chapters and covers the judgment of God by fire. In this section we see that God judges His people and the heathen nations by Himself as a consuming fire. The third section (chs. 33—39) is concerned with God's recovery of His people by life. After carrying out His judgment, God comes in to recover. Whereas God's judgment is by fire, His recovery is by life. The last section (chs. 40—48) covers the holy building of God. The issue, the result, of God's recovery by life is a holy building, which is the consummation of the entire book of Ezekiel. Thus, the four sections of Ezekiel cover four main things: the vision of the appearance of the glory of the Lord, the judgment by fire, the recovery by life, and the holy building of God. This is a sketch of the book of Ezekiel, a book that begins with a glorious vision and ends with a holy building. This indicates that God's goal is the building.

We have also seen that the book of Ezekiel and the book of Revelation are similar. Like Ezekiel, Revelation covers the four matters of vision, judgment, recovery, and building, and it covers them in the same sequence that we find in Ezekiel. The vision of the Lord in Revelation 1 is followed by God's judgment, God's recovery, and God's building. Ultimately, the

book of Revelation, like the book of Ezekiel, consummates with God's building with its twelve gates. From this we see that the books of Ezekiel and Revelation are not only similar but are also parallel to each other. The former is on the history of God's people in the Old Testament; the latter is a revelation of the church in the New Testament. God's Old Testament people were a foreshadow, a prefigure, a type, of the New Testament church.

If we read Ezekiel carefully, we will realize that it portrays a picture of the church. In a sense, the picture in the Old Testament is more clear and complete than the revelation in the New Testament. Therefore, in reading Ezekiel we should not merely be concerned with the history of Israel or with prophecies regarding Israel, but we should consider the clear picture of the church, in particular the picture unveiled here of the degraded situation of the church. Because the degradation of Israel is a picture of the degradation of Christianity, what we see in this picture is applicable to today's situation.

In this message we will begin to consider the second section of Ezekiel—the judgment of God by fire. In chapters two through twenty-four we see God's judgment on Israel, His chosen people, and in chapters twenty-five through thirty-two, His judgment on the Gentiles, the nations. God's judgment is first upon His people, the children of Israel, and then His judgment comes upon the Gentiles. This matches the principle in the New Testament, seen both in the book of Revelation and in 1 Peter, that God first judges His house (1 Pet. 4:17) and afterward judges the unbelievers.

THREE STAGES OF THE ENJOYMENT OF CHRIST

In the Old Testament Israel was God's chosen and elect people. God had delivered the people of Israel out of Egypt and had brought them into the good land. God's putting the people of Israel into the good land typifies God's putting us into Christ, who is our good land today. Ezekiel 20:6 says that the good land is the glory of all lands. Christ is the glory on earth, and God has put us into the glorious Christ, who, in His unsearchable riches, is a land flowing with milk and honey.

The people of Israel experienced three stages of the enjoyment of Christ. In the first stage they enjoyed Christ in Egypt as the Passover with the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs. In the second stage they enjoyed Christ while they were wandering in the wilderness as the heavenly manna and the living water. In the third stage they enjoyed Christ as the land, full of rich produce.

These three stages match our experience today as believers in Christ. When we were saved, we enjoyed Christ as the Passover Lamb. Afterward we began to enjoy Christ as our daily portion, our daily manna. However, this is not the ultimate enjoyment of Christ. The ultimate enjoyment of Christ is to enjoy Christ in the church as the good land with all His unsearchable riches.

Concerning Christ as the good land, Ezekiel 20:6 says, "In the day that I lifted up mine hand unto them, to bring them forth of the land of Egypt into a land that I had espied for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands." Milk and honey, both of which are the product of the mingling of the plant life and the animal life, represent the riches of the good land of Canaan. In Christ there are both spiritual food (honey) and spiritual drink (milk). Both milk and honey are the issue of Christ being two kinds of life: the redeeming life, typified by the animal life, which has blood, and the generating, or multiplying, life, typified by the plant, or vegetable, life. On the one hand, the life of the Lord Jesus is a redeeming life—a life which has the blood that was shed for our redemption. On the other hand, the life of the Lord Jesus is a producing and generating life—a life that was released through His death on the cross for His multiplication and increase. These two aspects of His life have been blended to produce milk as our spiritual drink and honey as our spiritual food. Christ is now our milk and honey, and as such He is our supply and enjoyment. If we abide in Him as our good land, we will enjoy the riches of His supply.

Eventually, Israel, God's chosen people, were living in the good land with a temple and a city. The temple signifies God's house, and the city signifies God's kingdom. God's presence is in His house, and God's authority is in His kingdom. In the

church life today, we enjoy Christ as our good land, and therefore we have God's presence and God's authority. Because we are God's elect living in Christ and enjoying all that He is, in the proper and normal church life, we have God's temple with His presence and God's kingdom with His authority.

THE RIGHTS, PRIVILEGES, AND STANDING OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

At this juncture we need to consider the rights, privileges, and standing of the people of Israel.

God's Elect

Israel was God's elect, His chosen people. As His elect, they should have been separated from the nations and different from them. The principle is the same with Israel in the Old Testament and with the church in the New Testament.

God's Vine

Israel was not only God's elect but also God's vine. God's vine is for the accomplishing of God's economy. John 15 reveals that Christ is the true vine and that we are the branches. As a whole, Christ and we are a vine for God's economy. To the vine God grants His rich visitation with the supply of sunshine, air, rain, soil, and many other things that are necessary for the vine to grow and produce something.

This vine consists not only of human beings but of human beings joined to the divine person. This means that the vine is a combination of the Divine Being with many human beings. Such a vine is for God's economy, and it should produce something that can make God happy and cause people to rejoice. As God's chosen and elect people, Israel was God's vine for His economy. Christ with the church is God's vine today.

In the Bible the vine tree signifies God's people as they are under His care and in union with Him. The vine tree in John 15 is formed by the union of the glorious Christ, God's Son, and all who believe into Him and belong to Him. This union issues in the flowing forth of the divine life, and this life becomes the wine that brings joy to both God and man.

Therefore, with the vine we have four crucial points: God's care in His grace, the union of God and man, the flowing forth of the divine life, and the producing of wine for the joy of God and man.

In His grace and in His care for us, the believers, God has put us into Christ (1 Cor. 1:30), and now He is cultivating us that we may live in union with Christ. He is the vine, and we are the branches (John 15:5a). We are in Him, and He is in us. As we abide in Him, the divine life flows forth in fruit-bearing, and grapes are produced. Eventually, these grapes become wine to cheer both God and man (Judg. 9:13).

God's Bride

Israel was also God's bride, His counterpart, for His satisfaction. Whereas the vine is a matter of the flow of life and the manifestation of grace, the wife is a matter of love and satisfaction. God does not want to be alone but wants to have a bride. Genesis 2:18 says that it is not good for man to be alone. In typology, this signifies that it is not good for Christ, for God, to be alone. Christ desires to have a bride. According to Ezekiel 16 and 23 Israel was God's bride in the Old Testament time. Today the church is Christ's bride for His satisfaction (John 3:29; Rev. 19:7). What will satisfy God the most and bring Him the greatest pleasure will be the church as His bride, His counterpart.

God's Flock

The house of Israel was also God's flock. In the Old Testament God had a flock on earth that was under His care, and this flock was Israel. Today the church is God's flock, under His care (1 Pet. 5:2).

A Precious Treasure

In addition, the people of Israel were chosen by Him to be a precious and peculiar treasure (Exo. 19:5). How marvelous was Israel's standing before God! They were His elect, His vine, His bride, His flock, and His treasure. These were the rights, privileges, and standing of the people of Israel.

THE CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

Unfortunately, the actual condition of Israel was very poor. If we read the long record in Ezekiel from chapter two to chapter twenty-four, we may feel like weeping over Israel's pitiful condition.

A Rebellious House

The people of Israel were God's elect, but they became rebels against God. Many times in these twenty-three chapters God said that Israel was a rebellious nation, a rebellious house. In 2:3 the Lord said to Ezekiel, "Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me." In verses 5 and 6 God referred to them as "a rebellious house," and in verse 7 He said that "they are most rebellious." They were God's elect, but they had become rebels against God.

Briars and Thorns

The people of Israel were God's vine, but they became briars and thorns (2:6). A vine should produce grapes as fruit to eat and for making wine. Instead of producing grapes, Israel became briars and thorns. They became a pricking, injuring, and damaging plant which yielded no fruit and no wine. God's elect became rebels, and God's vine became briars and thorns.

A Harlot

Moreover, although the people of Israel were God's bride, they became a harlot. They had a "whorish heart" and they went "a whoring after their idols" (6:9). What a miserable situation! In chapters sixteen and twenty-three God said that His heart was broken because of their whorish heart. As a dear Husband, God was grieved because His people had become a whorish wife.

Scorpions

According to the record in Ezekiel, what became of Israel as God's flock? In 2:6 we see that God's flock became scorpions. As God's flock they should have been sheep producing

meat to nourish people and wool to warm people. But they became scorpions, and with scorpions there is no producing, only stinging.

Dross

Ezekiel 22:18 says, "Son of man, the house of Israel is to me become dross: all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace; they are even the dross of silver." This reveals that Israel, God's precious treasure, had become dross, the waste material that remains after gold and silver have been refined. As God's elect, they became rebels; as God's vine, they became briars and thorns; as God's bride, they became a harlot; as God's flock, they became scorpions; and as God's treasure of gold and silver, they became dross.

This picture of Israel can be applied to the situation of today's Christianity. In their standing Christians are God's elect, but many have become rebels against God. Instead of being a vine, they have become briars and thorns. Instead of being a wife, they have become a harlot. According to Revelation 17 and 18 today's Christianity is not a bride but a great harlot with many daughter harlots. Thus, today's Christianity is altogether a whoredom. Moreover, among Christians what we see today is not a flock producing meat and wool for others but stinging scorpions. Finally, although some Christians today may be a treasure to God, most have become dross.

THE REASONS FOR ISRAEL'S DEGRADATION

How could such a wonderful people who were God's elect, God's vine, God's bride, God's flock, and God's treasure become rebels, briars and thorns, a harlot, scorpions, and dross? In order to answer this question, we need to consider the reasons for Israel's degradation.

Idolatry

The first reason for their degradation was their idolatry. Ezekiel speaks again and again about the idols among the people of Israel. We should not consider that an idol is always an outward image. Idols are substitutes for God. Ezekiel 14:3

says, "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart." Those who set up idols in their hearts are estranged from the Lord through their idols (v. 5). Verse 4 says, "Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the Lord will answer him that cometh, according to the multitude of his idols." In these verses we see a principle: All those who have idols within them and yet seek God in an outward way cannot find God. God will not be found by those who set up idols in their hearts. Those who seek the Lord with their whole heart will find Him (Jer. 29:13). However, God will not be found by those who seek Him outwardly, yet have idols inwardly. If there is an idol in our heart, something in our heart that occupies us instead of God, it will be useless for us to seek God, for in this situation God does not have a way to be found by us.

Anything within us that is a substitute for God is an idol. Whatever we love more than the Lord is an idol. A scholarship, education, money, clothing, a wife, a husband, children—all these can be idols, something or someone that we love more than God and that replaces God in our life. Whatever is more important to us than the Lord is an idol. The first reason for the fall and degradation of Israel was idolatry.

The principle is the same with the degradation of the church. In Revelation 2 we see that the degradation of the churches began with the leaving of the first love to the Lord (v. 4). The Lord Jesus said that the church in Ephesus had many good works, yet He had something against them, for they had left their first love for Him. This indicates that they had some idols. If we do not love the Lord with the first love, this is a sign that we have some kind of idol. Whatever we love more than the Lord, is our idol. If we realize this, we will see that the cause of the degradation of Israel and of the church is exactly the same.

The people of Israel worshipped idols as substitutes for God. The situation is the same with a great many Christians today. Most Christians have lost their first love. Some love their missionary work much more than they love the Lord Himself.

Others love their study of the Bible or their evangelistic outreach more than the Lord. Many care for their work, but they do not care for the Lord. Dr. A. W. Tozer of the Christian and Missionary Alliance once said that if the Lord Jesus came into a conference of Christian leaders, they would not recognize Him. Although they might be discussing their work for the Lord, if He were to come into their meeting, they would not know Him. Tozer's observation indicates that it is common for Christians to love many things other than the Lord Himself.

Association with the World

Idols bring people into association with the world. The people of Israel had idols, and through these idols they were brought into contact and association with the world, that is, with the heathen nations. This indicates that as long as we have something within us that is a substitute for the Lord, we will be associated with the world. We may love various things in place of the Lord: money, a degree, a good job, an automobile, a house, a good living, and even our husband, wife, or children. Anything that we love more than we love the Lord will bring us into association with the world and lead us into worldliness.

Walking after the Manner of the Nations

After the people of Israel became associated with the nations, they began to walk after the manners and customs of the nations. This means that they followed the nations.

We need to realize that the three causes of the fall and degradation of Israel are also the main causes of the fall and degradation of today's Christianity. These causes are loving something more than the Lord or in place of the Lord, association with the world, and walking after the manner of the heathen.

Although we are in the Lord's recovery, I am concerned that some may still have an idol within them, may still be associated with the world, and in their daily living may still walk after the manner of the heathen. We should not pattern our life after unbelievers in any way. For example, we should not follow the unbelievers in the matter of the style of dress. We should not care for any particular style but care to have a

proper outward appearance. The way we live, the way we spend our money, and the way we dress should not be after the manner of the nations. We are a holy people, and for this reason we must be different from the worldly people.

THE KINDS OF PEOPLE AMONG THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

Now let us go on to consider the various kinds of people among the children of Israel described in these chapters of Ezekiel.

The Priests

Ezekiel 22:26 says, "Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they showed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them." Here we see that the priests violated the word of God, profaned the holy things, and even profaned the Lord Himself. They made no distinction between the holy and the profane, between the clean and the unclean. Because they did not minister the word of God but instead violated it, they cheated and robbed the people. They did violence to the Lord's word and they profaned the name of God. This is also the situation with certain teachers in today's Christianity. They minister God's word in a violent way, cheating and misleading others by the wrong use of the Word and profaning the name of God.

The Kings

Ezekiel 22:27 goes on to say that the princes, the kings, were in the midst of the land like wolves ravening the prey, shedding blood, and destroying souls for dishonest gain. Like many in today's Christianity, they were anxious to grasp something for their own gain.

The Prophets

Ezekiel 22:25 tells us that the prophets were like roaring lions devouring souls. They took the treasure and the precious things, causing many to be widows.

Ezekiel 13:4-5 says, "O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts. Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord." Like foxes in the desert, the prophets loved to hide and live in a desolate place. It is difficult for a fox to live in a proper house, but when a house is desolate, foxes may come in. Furthermore, the prophets would not fill up the gap and make up the hedge during the time of battle. Today's situation is similar, for very few Christians are willing to stand in the gap for the Lord's recovery and for the Lord's interest.

At Ezekiel's time there were many false prophets who prophesied according to their own heart. In 22:28 Ezekiel used a parable to describe their manner of prophesying: "Her prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord God, when the Lord hath not spoken." Here Ezekiel said that their manner of prophesying was like daubing the walls with untempered mortar. Mortar is made from lime and must be thoroughly saturated with water before it is applied to a wall. This would give properly tempered mortar. If the mortar is not thoroughly saturated with water before it is applied to the wall, the rain will wash the mortar away, and the wall will crumble. The meaning of this parable is that many prophets ministered the word of God in a way that was not properly tempered. To minister the word of God in such an untempered way is to be not saturated with the Holy Spirit and not soaked with the experience of life. Today many preachers and teachers are daubing with untempered mortar. They may give a good sermon, but when a storm comes, it is washed away like untempered mortar.

A word which is fully saturated with the Spirit and with the experience of the divine life is absolutely different. When this kind of word is ministered, it will strengthen God's people to withstand whatever storms may come. From this we see that we need teaching that is saturated with the Spirit and soaked with the proper experience of the divine life. This is not a matter of eloquence or of speaking words that are pleasant to the ear. Rather, it is ministering the word of God in a way that is real, solid, and thoroughly saturated with the

Holy Spirit. Such a word will protect us, strengthen us, build us together, and enable us to stand against every kind of storm.

An even worse situation than that of the false prophets existed among the daughters of the people, who prophesied out of their own heart (13:17). They not only prophesied falsely; they also prophesied when the Lord had not spoken. This kind of prophesying occurs frequently today. Many say, "Thus saith the Lord," but the Lord has not spoken. For example, in recent years several people have prophesied that the city of Los Angeles would fall into the ocean, and some even predicted the exact date. But Los Angeles is still here. They said, "Thus saith the Lord," but the Lord never said such a thing. When these prophesies were not fulfilled, they were proved to be false.

In addition to prophesying falsely, these women in Ezekiel also practiced superstition and witchcraft. For instance, they sewed on a magic band, an amulet, as a superstitious protection from the demons. They even sewed veils to hunt people (13:18-21). Likewise, today certain pastors, preachers, and ministers speak in a superstitious way, comforting others in a way that is false and not according to the truth.

The Elders

The Lord told Ezekiel that the elders who came to him to inquire of the Lord had set up idols in their hearts (14:1-3). Because of the idols in their hearts, the Lord would not be inquired of by them. They were not honest with the Lord. Also, they were ravening and robbing, taking others' treasures into their own hands. In many respects, the situation today is similar.

The People

From Ezekiel 22:29 we see that the people used oppression and exercised robbery. They vexed the poor and the needy, and they oppressed the stranger wrongfully. The Lord was not able to find anyone among them who could make up the hedge and stand in the gap. Concerning this, verse 30 says, "I sought for a man among them, that should make up the

hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none." Sadly, in today's Christianity the situation is almost exactly the same.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE FOURTEEN

GOD'S JUDGMENT UPON HIS PEOPLE

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 8:2-4; 9:3a; 11:22-24; 10:2; 22:20-22; 14:21; 12:15; 7:21; 33:21; 3:17; 9:4; 6:8; 11:16-17; 20:40; 17:22-23; 21:10, 27; 29:21

In this message we will consider the judgment of God's people.

THE BASIS OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

First, we need to see the basis of God's judgment upon His people. God's judgment upon His people was based on three things: the righteousness of God, the holiness of God, and the glory of God. In the first section of Ezekiel (ch. 1), in the vision of the appearance of the glory of the Lord, we saw three main things: the throne, which looked like a sapphire, signifying God's righteousness; the fire, signifying God's holiness; and the glowing electrum, signifying God's glory. As we have pointed out, these three things give us three basic colors. The throne in the appearance of sapphire was blue; the fire was red; and the glowing electrum was yellow. When these three basic colors shine, reflect, and refract together, they give the appearance of the rainbow. The crucial matter here is that God's righteousness, holiness, and glory are the basis upon which God exercises His judgment over His people.

God's Glory versus Idols

In chapters two through twenty-four there are some negative things which are versus the righteousness, holiness, and glory of God. God's glory is versus idols, and in 8:2-4, 10 and in 9:3 God's glory is contrasted with idols. In a vision Ezekiel was brought to Jerusalem and entered the temple. Before Him the glory of God and the idols were contrasted. On the

walls were the images of the idols, and over the temple was the glory of the Lord. The glory of the Lord could not tolerate the images of the idols. Those images were called *provoking* images because they provoked God's jealousy (8:3). Our God is a jealous God; He will not tolerate idols. Because of the idols in the temple, the glory of God withdrew step by step, leaving the temple, the city, and the people. In the last step the glory of the Lord left the temple and the city, stopping on the Mount of Olives on the east side of the city (11:23), the same place where the Lord Jesus ascended to the heavens. The glory of the Lord stopped there and waited for a while, but eventually it left that mountain and went back to the heavens. That was the departure of the glory of the Lord.

God's judgment upon His people is based first upon His glory. Anything that is versus God's glory will surely provoke His judgment. Today's Christianity is under God's judgment. The situation of today's Christianity is provoking God's jealousy because of the many idols. The Roman Catholic Church has all kinds of idols, and other so-called churches also have idols. In some of these places there may not be physical idols, but there are other kinds of idols. With some their work for God is an idol. With others Bible teaching or evangelism becomes an idol. If we love our work, activity, or practice more than the Lord, even such things, which are for the Lord, may be idols. Based upon this principle, we can realize that the situation of Christianity is filled with idols. This is why I say that the situation of today's Christianity is provoking to God and under His judgment.

God's Holiness versus Dross

God's holiness is God's separation and sanctification, and this is versus dross. As God's elect, God's chosen people, the church should be pure gold, pure silver, and a pure treasure. However, like the people of Israel at Ezekiel's time, the church has become dross. Therefore, like Israel the church needs to be burned by fire. The Lord said that He would put the city of Jerusalem and the people of Israel into a furnace to burn them (22:17-22). This indicates that God's holiness is versus dross. God's holiness cannot tolerate any kind of dross.

Consider the situation of today's Christianity. Where can you find a pure treasure to God? Nearly everywhere you look there is only dross. Surely there is the need of God's burning fire to burn out the dross.

The love expressed by many Christians today is not pure but is dross because it is according to the flesh. These ones may love others, but their love is according to the natural human emotion and contains a great deal of mixture or impurity. This kind of love is a love that has not passed through the cross. The same is true of the kindness and humility expressed by many Christians. In this kind of love, kindness, and humility there is no pure gold. Instead of something pure and holy, there is mixture, dross. Those who express such love, kindness, and humility are in the flesh, doing good things or expressing something in a good way. Although the expression may be good, it is still the flesh. There is no dealing of the cross and no dealing of God's holiness. Therefore, this kind of love, kindness, and humility needs to be burned and judged; it needs to be put under God's judgment by fire. From this we see that not only does our hatred need to be burned, but even our love needs to be burned. Likewise, both our pride and our humility need to be burned by God.

God's Righteousness versus Injustice and Oppression

God's righteousness was versus Israel's injustice and oppression. During Ezekiel's time the people used oppression and exercised robbery (22:29). On the basis of His righteous throne, God had to exercise His judgment upon all unrighteous and unjust things.

Now we can see that God's judgment of His people was based on His glory, holiness, and righteousness. Anything that did not match His glory, holiness, and righteousness had to be judged.

THE MEANS OF GOD'S JUDGMENT UPON HIS PEOPLE

God judged His people by four terrible things: the sword, famine, pestilence or disease, and wild, noisome beasts (14:21). Ezekiel says clearly some were killed by the sword.

The escapees died from the lack of food; others were killed by pestilence; and the remainder were devoured by beasts. War causes famine. Thus, when there is war, there is a shortage of food. The lack of food brings in pestilence or disease. These are the means God used to exercise His judgment on His people (7:15-17).

These four means of God's judgment can be applied to the situation of today's Christianity. Among Christians there is much fighting and very little peace. If in a particular church there is war, this indicates that God's judgment has come. It indicates that something idolatrous, unholy, or unrighteous has brought in God's judgment, which is first by the sword, that is, by fighting. We all need to be careful. If there is fighting or dissenting among us, that is a sign of God's judgment. The more we fight with one another, the more we will suffer God's judgment.

Due to the fighting among Christians, there is the shortage of food. When a church is filled with fighting, there will not be in such a church a rich supply of spiritual food. Instead of spiritual food, there will be dirth, famine. There will be no supply, no riches of Christ, no living word, and no healthy word. If we desire to have the healthy word, the supply of Christ, and the rich and special spiritual food, we need oneness, peace, and harmony. There is the need for everyone to be in the Spirit and to be one. Such a church is always full of the food supply. After every meeting, there is an abundance of "leftovers." This is a strong proof that those in this church are not under God's judgment.

Because of the shortage of spiritual food, there is pestilence among Christians today. This means that there are all kinds of spiritual disease, sickness, and weakness. However, when the church life is proper, there will be no pestilence, no disease. Rather, there will be healing, strengthening, and building up.

Furthermore, among Christians today there are many roaring, devouring, and ravening beasts. In Acts 20:29 Paul warned the elders from Ephesus that one day wolves would come into the church who would have no pity on the flock. Caring only for themselves, they would devour the church. It

may be that there are small wolves in some of the local churches.

Today's Christianity is characterized by fighting, by the shortage of food, by spiritual diseases, and by roaring, devouring beasts. As a result, nearly all Christians are spiritually dead. Not many living ones remain.

THE RESULTS OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

Now we need to go on to see the results of God's judgment of His people.

Losing the Good Land

The first result of God's judgment was that the people of Israel lost the good land. They were scattered, dispersed, and brought into captivity (Ezek. 12:15; 7:21). In spiritual experience, to lose the good land means to lose the enjoyment of Christ. Today the vast majority of Christians are deadened, scattered, and have no enjoyment of Christ.

The Glory of the Lord Departing

The second result of God's judgment was that the glory of the Lord departed (9:3; 11:22-23). In the history of the people of Israel, the glory of the Lord came to them twice and filled them. The first time was at Mount Sinai, when the tabernacle was erected (Exo. 40:34). The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle from that time until the time of Eli. During the time of Eli, the people of Israel fought against the Philistines with the ark in a superstitious way and were defeated (1 Sam. 4:3-10). The ark was captured, and the glory of the Lord left the tabernacle. This means that the Lord gave up the tabernacle. When the temple was built at the time of Solomon, the glory of the Lord returned to fill the temple (1 Kings 8:10-11). The glory of the Lord remained there until the time when Ezekiel saw it departing, leaving the temple and the city, resting on the Mount of Olives, and finally returning to the heavens.

With today's Christianity there is no glory of the Lord. On the contrary, there are dispersion, scattering, captivity, and the loss of the enjoyment of Christ. Concerning this matter

there is no need to argue in the way of right and wrong. Instead, we should simply check if the glory of the Lord is present. If you have the glory of the Lord, you are right. If you do not have the glory of the Lord, you are wrong. If God's glory is not in the church, we will not be able to sense God's flavor and manifestation.

The Temple Being Destroyed and the City Being Burned

The third result of God's judgment was that the temple was destroyed and the city was burned. About 606 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and captured King Jehoiachin, taking him to Babylon (2 Chron. 36:9-10). Ezekiel was also captured at that time. Five years later he began to see the visions in chapter one of Ezekiel. In the following years, he continued to see visions concerning a later capture of Jerusalem. While he was in captivity, he was brought back in the Spirit to Jerusalem to see the coming events. After Nebuchadnezzar captured Jehoiachin, he established Jehoiachin's brother, Zedekiah, as the king over Israel (v. 10). However, Zedekiah, rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar, turned to Egypt for help. Then Nebuchadnezzar came back to Jerusalem, burned the city, destroyed the temple, and captured Zedekiah (v. 19; Jer. 52:11; Ezek. 33:21). Before these events actually happened, Ezekiel saw them in his visions.

There were eleven years between these two captures. The city and the temple were destroyed not in the capture of Jehoiachin but in the capture of Zedekiah. At the time of the capture of Zedekiah, the glory of the Lord left the holy city and the holy people. Then both the temple and the city were destroyed. Apparently, that was the end of the history of Israel.

GOD'S MERCY

Although everything seemed to be lost due to God's judgment, God showed forth His mercy. We praise the Lord that in His judgment there are still His mercy and the visitation of His mercy. How marvelous! This also is applicable to today's

Christianity. Although the situation is pitiful and seemingly hopeless, God's mercy is still present. No matter how much Christianity is under God's judgment, God's mercy still remains there.

In the midst of His judgment upon Israel, God was merciful to His people and provided a number of things for them.

Establishing Watchmen

First, in His mercy God established watchmen such as Ezekiel to warn the people (3:17). As we read the book of Ezekiel, we can see that the people of Israel were not happy with him, because Ezekiel did not speak pleasant words to them. God told Ezekiel that He was sending him to a rebellious house, to those with hard foreheads and stiff hearts. However, He said that He would make Ezekiel's forehead harder than theirs and his heart harder than theirs, as a diamond is harder than flint (vv. 8-9). In His mercy God established such a watchman to warn His people. The principle is the same today.

Marking Out His Seeking Ones

Before God sent fire to exercise His judgment, He sent His angel to mark out His seekers (9:4). He marked out those who sighed and cried over all the sinfulness and evils in the city of Jerusalem. God told His angel to mark them out so that they would not be killed by the sword, not be killed by pestilence, not be devoured by beasts, and not suffer famine. Only the marked-out ones would remain alive. The situation is the same today. Certain dear seekers have truly been marked out by God. No matter how much other Christians fight, they have nothing to do with that. These marked-out ones are not damaged by the fighting among Christians. Neither do they suffer a shortage of spiritual food or have any kind of spiritual disease. Praise the Lord that He has some marked-out ones. At the beginning of the Lord's recovery in this country, in 1962, some brothers and I prayed day after day for the seeking ones, praying that the Lord would bring them into His recovery. Today the Lord still has His seeking ones, those who have been marked out by Him.

Preserving a Remnant

Ezekiel 6:8-9 says, "Yet will I leave a remnant, that ye may have some that shall escape the sword among the nations, when ye shall be scattered through the countries. And they that escape of you shall remember me among the nations whither they shall be carried captives, because I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me, and with their eyes, which go a whoring after their idols: and they shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations." Here we see that in the midst of His judgment God, according to His great mercy, preserved a remnant. Most were killed by the sword, and others died of famine or pestilence or were devoured by beasts. The rest were scattered in captivity, where God kept them as a remnant. The principle is the same today. God has not only marked out the seekers, but He has also preserved and kept a remnant. I believe that those who come into the church life in this country will be the remnant, the seekers marked out by God. The remnant—the seekers marked out by God—will be brought by the Lord into His recovery.

Being a Sanctuary for a Little While to Those in Captivity

God said that even in the captivity He would be a sanctuary to His people for a little while (11:16, lit.). He became not a permanent sanctuary like the one in Jerusalem but a temporary sanctuary to His captured and scattered people.

If you tell others that Christianity has become degraded, they may argue with you by saying that they have the Lord's presence in their meetings. We must admit this fact. It is true that the Lord is a sanctuary for a little while to those in captivity. We should not say that they do not have the real presence of the Lord at all; rather, we should point out that this is only a temporary sanctuary. Here and there, in some homes and groups, they have the Lord's presence in a temporary way as a temporary sanctuary. However, no one should be satisfied with a temporary sanctuary. The temporary sanctuary should be a calling back to Jerusalem, back to the permanent sanctuary.

Bringing Them Back to the Land

We praise the Lord that in His mercy He promised those in the captivity that one day He would bring them back to the land (11:17). The land to which He would bring them would be on the highest mountains of Israel (20:40). The high mountains typify the resurrected and ascended Christ. The Christ whom we experience and enjoy today in the local churches is very high, for He is the resurrected and ascended Christ.

Predicting Christ

In this section on God's judgment, God, in His mercy, predicted something concerning Christ.

A Twig Becoming a Cedar Tree

In 17:22-23 the house of David, the royal household, is likened to a cedar tree. First, a branch of the tree, Jehoiachin, was cut off. Later, another branch, Zedekiah, was set up and was also cut off. Eventually, this chapter tells us that on the top of this cedar tree there was one tender twig, one tender branch, which was cropped and planted on the top of the mountain, becoming a high cedar. If we read carefully, we will realize that this tender twig is Christ. Christ, who belongs to the house of David and who was born as a descendant of the house of David, is a tender branch of the cedar of David. As such a tender branch, He was cut off by being crucified. When He was nailed to the cross, He, the tender One, was "cropped." But by His resurrection He was planted on the mountaintop and eventually became a great cedar tree. Man "cropped" this tender One, but God caused Him to be resurrected and to ascend. In this way God planted Christ in a high place, and Christ became a majestic cedar under which many people will dwell.

This was not only a prophecy but also a promise given by God to the discouraged people. At that time the house of David was fully discouraged and disappointed, but Ezekiel predicted that out of the house of David there would be a tender twig set upon the mountaintop and this twig would become a great cedar tree. This was an encouragement and a promise to the house of David concerning Christ.

Although the house of David was "cropped" because of their corruption and thus became desolate and lowly, one day they will be revived in Christ. Because they will be joined to Christ, they will become majestic once again. The principle is the same with us in our spiritual experience. Because of certain wrongdoings, we may be "cropped" and thereby become lowly. But because God has caused us to be joined to Christ and to be one with Him, we will become majestic in Him.

The Scepter of Judah

Ezekiel 21:10 is another verse which many students of the Word believe refers to Christ. This verse is difficult to translate, but the best rendering is, "The scepter of my son despises all trees." This word is surely based on Genesis 49:10, which speaks regarding the scepter of Judah. The scepter of Judah is Christ. In Ezekiel's time the cedar tree, the house of David, was cut off and burned. Some, however, still made mirth and were joyful, saying, "The scepter of my son despises all trees." This means that while Ezekiel was prophesying, telling the people that God was about to burn the people of Israel, including the house of David, which belonged to the tribe of Judah, some of them made mirth, saying, "We have Christ. We have the scepter of God's Son, who despises and surpasses all trees." God's reply was to ask a question: Since He was going to burn everything, should they make mirth by saying this? Thus, this verse refers to Christ, the scepter of Judah; that is, it refers to the power and authority of the Son of God.

The One Who Has the Right to Inherit the Kingdom of Israel

Ezekiel 21:27 indicates that Christ is the One who has the right to inherit the kingdom of Israel. At that time God was overturning the kingdom and the nation of Israel, but eventually the One who has the right to inherit the kingdom of Israel will come. This One is Christ.

The Horn of the House of Israel

Ezekiel 29:21 says, "In that day will I cause the horn of the house of Israel to bud forth, and I will give thee the opening of

the mouth in the midst of them; and they shall know that I am the Lord." Christ is the horn of the house of Israel which will bud forth. God will bring forth this horn of the house of Israel. At Ezekiel's time other nations had conquered and oppressed the people of Israel, and they had no way to go on. But God promised that one day a horn will spring forth from the house of Israel to be against all the nations and to overcome the authorities on earth so that the nation of Israel may be saved. Christ will become the horn to deliver them from all oppression and bondage.

Now we can see that while the judgment of God was upon His people and while they experienced much disappointment, God prophesied that Christ was their hope and encouragement. Although they were under the judgment of God, there was no need for them to be disappointed, for they were able to be encouraged by Christ and with Christ.

This should also be our experience today. If while we are under God's judgment we are faithful to Him, we may be encouraged with Christ. We have God's mercy, and we have God's Christ. Yes, we may be under God's judgment. However, even under God's judgment there is still the mercy of God and the encouragement of Christ. Hallelujah for God's mercy and for God's Christ!

The final result of God's judgment upon the Israelites was to cause them to turn to Christ and to gain Christ so that Christ would be everything to them. Because they will be joined to Christ, they will ascend from being lowly to being very high, having Christ as the authority to surpass all the nations and authorities on earth. Because of Christ, the nation of Israel will be restored and Christ will be the King. In that day Christ will become the horn to deliver them from oppression and bondage. Therefore, everything is based on Christ and is received in Christ.

The principle is the same with the church today. The result of God's judgment upon the church is to gain a group of people who return to Christ and gain Christ. Christ becomes their cedar tree to be their authority, and Christ becomes their horn of salvation.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE FIFTEEN

GOD'S JUDGMENT UPON THE NATIONS

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 25:2-3, 7-8, 12-16; 26:2, 4; 28:21-22, 24, 26; 29:3, 6-7, 16; 30:6, 10; 31:16, 18

In this message we come to the matter of God's judgment upon the nations. This is covered in chapters twenty-five through thirty-two.

ISRAEL BEING THE CENTER OF GOD'S ECONOMY AMONG THE HUMAN RACE ON EARTH

According to Genesis 11 rebellious mankind sought to do something to build the tower and city of Babel in order to concentrate themselves and make a name for themselves. However, the Lord came down to exercise His judgment over these rebellious people. Under the Lord's judgment, Babel became a center not for gathering but for scattering, and the human race was scattered from Babel as the center.

Deuteronomy 32:8 says, "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, / when he separated the sons of Adam, / he set the bounds of the people / according to the number of the children of Israel." Here we see that God set up the boundaries of all the nations according to the number of the people of Israel. This indicates that in His economy on earth among the human race, God made Israel the center. Israel is the center of the earth's population. To be sure, God did this with a purpose.

If we look at a map, we will see that Palestine, the good land where God put Israel, is the real center of the inhabited earth. Palestine is situated at the center of the three continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa, the continents where the human race began. Later, the human population spread to America and also to Australia. The central location of the land of Israel provided a good opportunity for the spreading

of the gospel. We know from history that the preaching of the gospel began in Jerusalem and then spread to Europe, Egypt, and Asia. Eventually, the preaching of the gospel spread to America and Australia. This was God's purpose in putting His people at the center of the human population. Furthermore, according to the prophecy concerning the coming age, the millennium, the people of Israel will be the priests on this earth teaching all the nations to worship God (Isa. 61:6; 2:3). These prophecies also show us that Palestine is the center of the earth.

However, at the time of Ezekiel, the people of Israel became degraded and unsuitable for God's purpose. Their degraded situation forced God to exercise His judgment upon them and temporarily to give up Palestine as His center. God turned to Babel again and raised up King Nebuchadnezzar, who built the great empire of Babylon. The Babylonian empire then became God's center for executing His judgment. Through the empire of Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar, God executed His judgment not only upon His people Israel but also over the nations.

SEVEN REPRESENTATIVE NATIONS

Chapters twenty-five through thirty-two of Ezekiel speak of seven nations that surrounded the nation of Israel. Actually, there were more nations around Israel, but the record mentions only seven. This is similar to the mentioning of the seven churches in Asia in Revelation 1—3. When the Lord spoke of the churches in Asia, He selected seven (1:11). This does not mean that there were only seven churches in Asia but that the Lord selected seven representative churches. The principle is the same in the book of Ezekiel. There were more than seven nations surrounding Israel, but the Lord selected seven nations as representatives of all the nations. These seven nations were Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyrus, Zidon, and Egypt.

Divided into Three Groups

These seven nations are divided into three groups. The first four nations—Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia—form

the first group; Tyrus and Zidon make up the second group; and Egypt stands alone. We know that these nations are divided into these three groups because Ezekiel saw three separate visions at three different times concerning these groups. His first vision covers the first four nations; his second vision, Tyrus and Zidon; and his third vision, Egypt. Moreover, the first two, Ammon and Moab, fit together as a pair; the third and fourth, Edom and Philistia, stand as a pair; and the fifth and sixth, Tyrus and Zidon, are a pair. Only Egypt is alone.

Applicable to Today's Situation

The Old Testament is not only a record of history but a record that can be applied to the church today. We need to keep this in mind as we read the book of Ezekiel and be impressed with the fact that Ezekiel was not written merely for the sake of history. Rather, the record in this book is applicable to today's situation. Therefore, we need to know the spiritual application of all these seven representative nations. Previously we pointed out that the spiritual application of the noisome beasts is that some evil people could be in the church as wolves (Ezek. 14:21; Acts 20:29). Here we have the spiritual application of Ezekiel's word concerning the beasts. Now we need to see the spiritual application of the seven nations. Otherwise, we may read these chapters merely as prophecies which have been fulfilled in history.

AMMON AND MOAB

Ammon and Moab were brothers who were born of Lot by his daughters. Their origin was an ugly, evil thing. Yet Lot was a relative of Abraham, the first forefather of the people of Israel. Hence, in blood Ammon and Moab were somewhat close to Israel.

According to the record in Ezekiel, Ammon offended God. First, when the sanctuary of God was profaned, they were happy and said, "Aha" (25:2-3). Second, when the holy land of God was made desolate, the Ammonites were also happy. Furthermore, when the house of Judah was carried away into captivity, the Ammonites again were happy. They were happy

about three things: the sanctuary being profaned, the good land being made desolate, and the house of Judah being carried away. This indicates that they hated the sanctuary, the holy land, and the house of Judah.

The sanctuary was a type of the incarnated Christ tabernacling on earth as God's dwelling place, God's sanctuary (John 1:14). The good land also signifies Christ with all His riches and grace that God has given us. According to typology the house of Judah signifies the church. Thus, the sanctuary signifies Christ, the good land signifies all of God's rich grace in Christ, and the house of Judah signifies the church. Today's Ammonites hate these three things. They hate Christ, they hate the grace of God in Christ, and they hate the church.

During the first centuries A.D. the Roman Empire was a kind of Ammonite. The Roman Empire hated the incarnated Christ, the tabernacle as God's sanctuary on earth, and it hated the rich grace given by God to His people. The Roman Empire also hated the church. There are still "Ammonites" on earth today, people who hate Christ, God's grace, and the church. In this country and even in your neighborhood, there are some "Ammonites."

The Moabites said, "Behold, the house of Judah is like unto all the heathen" (Ezek. 25:8). The Moabites were happy to see that Jerusalem was no longer separated from the nations. This signifies the kind of person who likes to bring the church into an association with the world and who likes to make the church the same as the nations. During the first two centuries of the church, the Roman Empire was an "Ammonite," hating Christ, God's grace, and the church. Then a Roman emperor, Constantine, came in not as an "Ammonite" but as a "Moabite." He brought the church into the world, making the church nearly the same as the nations.

Today the situation is still the same. Some "Ammonites" hate the church, but some "Moabites" have come into the church and have tried to cause the church to be associated with the world and to make the church the same as the world.

Although Ammon and Moab were brothers, what they did toward the people of Israel was very different. Today we still

have these two kinds of people. I am concerned that in some of the local churches certain ones might be used by Satan to be "Moabites" to bring the church back to the world and to cause the church to be associated with the world. They want the church to be the same as the world, the same as the heathen.

EDOM AND PHILISTIA

Like Ammon and Moab, Edom was also closely related to Israel. Edom was the son of Esau, the brother of Jacob. Therefore, according to blood Edom and the sons of Israel were cousins. Edom signifies the old man; he signifies us as the old man. Our unregenerated old man is Edom, and our regenerated new man is Israel. We may say that, in a sense, our old man and our new man are "cousins," for they are quite close to each other.

According to the record of Ezekiel, Edom was full of hatred toward Israel, continually seeking revenge and vengeance. This is the way we are in our old man. Our old man hates the church. You may say, "I love the church," and I believe that you do. However, sometimes you also hate the church. Have you not discovered that you are two men? On the one hand, you are a real Israelite loving the church; on the other hand, you are also a real Edomite, hating the church. Sometimes you love the church and all the leading ones, but at other times you hate the church and all the elders.

Along with Edom in the second pair is Philistia. In order to know the Philistines, we need to study Judges and 1 Samuel. The Philistines were even closer to Israel than the Edomites were. The Philistines were living very close to the good land and even mingled with the Israelites. A number of times the Philistines came to the people of Israel and intervened in their worship to God. Once the ark was captured by the Philistines and was kept by them for a period of time.

The Philistines typify you and me not as the old man but as the natural man. We have the old man, and we also have the natural man. The natural man is more difficult to recognize than the old man. An illustration may help us to understand the difference. Suppose that there are three

elders in a local church. They all love the Lord. When one of them begins to take the lead among them, the others react. Their reaction is an expression of the old man. Then the brother who is taking the lead may endeavor to do many things for the church, exercising his wisdom, power, and capabilities. He may even conduct himself in a political way, maneuvering in various situations and exercising control to work things out. This is the natural man. As a result, the elders' meetings become meetings of the old man with the natural man. This damages the church life. Some churches can hardly go on because they are frustrated by the old man and the natural man of the leading brothers.

The church is God's new creation in Christ. Thus, in the church there is no place for things of the old man, such as jealousy, pride, competition, and dissenting. These things are all of the old creation. Also, in the church there is no place for human wisdom, talent, and gamesmanship. The things both of the old man, the old creation, and of the natural man are damaging to the church life. On the one hand, history shows us that the church has been damaged by worldly people outside the church who either persecute the church or try to bring the church into association with the world. On the other hand, history teaches us that the church has been damaged by saved persons within the church who continue to live in the old man and according to the natural man.

In the church life in the Lord's recovery, we are not afraid of the "Ammonites," and we are only a little fearful of the "Moabites." Our real concern is with the "Edomites," the old man, and with the "Philistines," the natural man. The "Edomites" and the "Philistines" cause the most damage to the church life.

TYRUS AND ZIDON

Tyrus typifies those who are seeking worldly wealth, those who desire to make a great deal of money and to be rich. They will sacrifice everything related to the Lord for the sake of their business. They do not care for the Lord's interest but care only for their wealth, riches, and business.

People of Tyrus can be found among unbelievers and also

among believers. Some of your unbelieving relatives, classmates, and friends may be "Tyrians." If you speak to them concerning Christ, the church, or the Lord's testimony, they do not understand what you are talking about. They are interested only in what will help them to have a better living, to make more money, or to get a higher position. Some genuine Christians also are "Tyrians." If you speak to them about the Lord's recovery, they may think that you are foolish and say that you spend too much time in attending meetings, in having fellowship, and in reading the Bible. They may think that you do not care enough about making money. Therefore, both believers and unbelievers can be today's "Tyrians."

As recorded in the book of Ezekiel, the people of Tyrus declared that Jerusalem would fall, and they were happy about it. The situation is the same today. Those people who are pursuing worldly wealth would be happy to see the church terminated and would be glad if the meeting hall doors were permanently closed, for they think that attending the meetings of the church is a waste of time. Perhaps even certain ones among us in the church life may hold such an attitude. Desiring to make more money and to secure a better living for themselves, they do not care for the church or the Lord's interest. They care only for business, wealth, and position in the world. When they hear about some who are backsliding, they are happy.

Along with Tyrus is Zidon. Ezekiel says that Zidon was a pricking brier and a grieving thorn to the house of Israel (28:24). The Lord Jesus said that the deceitfulness of riches and the anxiety of the age are like thorns which choke the growth of life (Matt. 13:22).

If Tyrus is present, Zidon is close by. If there are "Tyrians" among the saints, there will also be "Zidonians." This means that if the saints love the world and care for worldly riches, they will become briers and thorns. Many Christians have become pricking briers and grieving thorns which damage the church life.

EGYPT

According to the Bible Egypt is a nation that depends not

on God but on its own resources. Egypt had the Nile River as the resource of its riches. Thus, the Egyptians did not depend on the rains from heaven but on the water from their Nile. In addition, they exercised their wisdom to develop their natural resources in order to become rich and have a sufficient supply. Whenever the people of Israel were short of food, they went down to Egypt for the supply. From all this we see that Egypt represents persons who exercise their natural wisdom to develop their natural resources to be rich and have a supply. At the time of Ezekiel, Israel turned to Egypt and leaned upon Egypt, trusting in Egypt as a staff. But the Lord said that Egypt was a staff made of reeds, easy to break (Ezek. 29:2-9).

When Ezekiel spoke about Tyre and Egypt, he compared them to the garden of Eden (28:13; 31:9, 16). With their riches and resources, Tyre and Egypt made their contemporary world "a garden of Eden." This was not a garden of Eden prepared by God but "a garden of Eden" made by those who cared not for God but only for their rich enjoyment on earth. However, God said that He would send Egypt, with its "garden of Eden," to Hades, to the pit, to the depths of the earth. This reveals that God will judge those people who care only for earthly happiness and enjoyment but who do not need God.

In this message we have considered seven kinds of people who can damage the church life. Some are against the church, hating Christ, God's salvation, and God's grace. These are the "Ammonites." Others creep into the church and try to bring the church into association with the world and to make the church the same as the world. These are the "Moabites." Then there are the "Edomites," the old man, and the "Philistines," the natural man. The "Tyrians" seek the riches of the world, and the "Zidonians" become briers and thorns to the church due to the seeking of riches. Finally, there are the "Egyptians," those who, independent of God, seek worldly riches by developing their own resources to be rich in supply and to be a source of supply for others. These are the different people who can be a damage to the church life. We all need to be on the alert that none of us would become these kinds of persons.

GOD'S JUDGMENT

Now we need to go on to see how God exercised His judgment over these seven nations. God executed judgment in four ways: by destroying these nations, by making them desolate, by making them very low, and by delivering them to the nether parts of the earth, that is, to the lower parts of the earth (31:14). Where are those in the Roman Empire who hated the church? They are in the nether parts of the earth, the place where every persecutor of the church will eventually go.

It is crucial that we deal with our old man. If we do not judge our old man, God will exercise His judgment upon us, making us low and "down" in spirit. If we judge our old man, not caring to be first or to have any position in the church, we will be happy in the church life, we will be "up," and our spirit will be "high." To be "down" means that we are under God's judgment.

Because we go along with our natural man, in His judgment, sometimes God will even destroy us and make us desolate. When we are desolate, we have nothing fresh, new, living, and growing. Instead, we are like a desert. Desolation is the result of our going along with our natural man. The more we exercise our natural wisdom, the more desolate we will be. But if we judge our natural man, our spirit will rise up and will be fresh, living, and flourishing.

Our old man and our natural man surely need to be dealt with by God. We cannot be responsible for the "Ammonites," the "Moabites," the "Tyrians," the "Zidionians," and the "Egyptians," but we can, and we should, be responsible for the "Edomites" and the "Philistines," who signify our old man and our natural man. By God's grace we need to deal thoroughly with the old man and with the natural man, not allowing them to carry out a destructive work in the church. First Corinthians 3:17a says, "If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him." If our old man and our natural man destroy the church of God, God will destroy us with our old man and natural man. Regarding this, we need to learn to fear God.

THE RESULT OF GOD'S JUDGMENT UPON THE NATIONS

The first result of God's judgment upon the nations was that all the nations (and also Israel) knew that He was the Lord. "That they may know that I am the Lord": the expression is used many times in the book of Ezekiel. Again and again the Lord seemed to be saying, "I will destroy them that they may know that I am the Lord. I will make them desolate that they may know that I am the Lord. I will make them low that they may know that I am the Lord. I will put them into the nether parts of the earth that they may know that I am the Lord" (25:7, 11, 17; 26:6; 29:6). All those who opposed the Lord and who are now in the nether parts of the earth, such as Emperor Nero, Hitler, and Mussolini, now know that Jesus is the Lord. Eventually, all those who are still opposing God and persecuting the church will be put into the nether parts of the earth, where they will know that Jesus is the Lord.

The second result, or issue, of God's judgment upon the nations was that God's purpose was carried out and fulfilled.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE SIXTEEN

GOD'S RECOVERY BY LIFE

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 33:7, 11; 34:11-16, 23-31

In the last message we considered God's judgment upon seven representative nations surrounding the nation of Israel: Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyrus, Zidon, and Egypt.

The dates of Ezekiel's visions are significant. For instance, the vision in chapter twenty-six concerning Tyrus was in the eleventh year, and the vision in chapter twenty-nine concerning Egypt was in the tenth year. This indicates that Ezekiel's record is not according to chronology but according to meaning. He wrote not according to the sequence of history but according to the sequence of meaning. According to spiritual meaning or significance, Tyrus comes before Egypt, although in fact Ezekiel saw the vision concerning Egypt before the vision concerning Tyrus. The record regarding these seven nations is arranged not according to historical events but according to meaning. This is a strong proof that these seven nations have a spiritual significance.

The last three nations—Tyrus, Zidon, and Egypt—are mainly related to worldly wealth and natural resources. Tyrus represents worldly riches and wealth, which damage the church life. We may say that we love the church, but if we pursue the wealth and riches of the world, we will become a damage to the church life. We need to look to the Lord that, in His mercy, none of us in the local churches in the Lord's recovery would care for worldly riches. Instead of caring for the riches of the world, we should prefer to be poor.

Out of caring for worldly riches comes Zidon as the pricking briers and the grieving thorns, as indicated by the Lord's parable in Matthew 13:3-23. The church is like a farm for producing something (1 Cor. 3:9). Briers and thorns frustrate the

growth of the proper plants on the farm. In the church life none of us should care for the world's wealth and riches. If we care for riches, we may hinder not only our own growth but also the growth of others.

The last nation, Egypt, is closely related to Tyrus and Zidon and represents the development of natural resources for others to trust in. When the people of God become poor and are short of food, they put their trust in Egypt. But God said that Egypt was a staff made of reeds and was not strong enough to trust in (Ezek. 29:6-7). If you trust in Egypt, you will hurt yourself. This indicates that natural resources are not trustworthy. Even many worldly people realize this. If you put your trust in natural resources or in the riches that come from the development of natural resources, you will be a damage to the church life.

We should not regard this understanding of the spiritual significance of the seven nations as mere knowledge. Rather, we need to apply this understanding to ourselves in the church life.

GOD'S JUDGMENT AND GOD'S RECOVERY

In this message we come to the third section of the book of Ezekiel—the section of recovery (chs. 33—39). God's judgment is always with a purpose, and God never executes His judgment without a purpose. The purpose of God's judgment is to bring in recovery. He does not exercise judgment apart from His purpose to recover something.

We need to remember that God's judgment is based upon His righteousness, His holiness, and His glory. Whenever the condition among His people or in the world does not match His righteousness, holiness, and glory, God will exercise His judgment for the purpose of recovery. God wants to recover His people according to His righteousness, holiness, and glory. As we will see, whereas God's judgment is by fire, God's recovery is by life.

SETTING THE WATCHMAN

In His recovery by life, the first thing the Lord does is to set the watchman. Ezekiel 33:7 says, "So thou, O son of man, I

have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me." A watchman is one who has been commissioned by God to give His people a warning, to sound the trumpet to cause God's people to turn to Him and repent. The principle is the same in the New Testament, where God sent John the Baptist as a great watchman. When John the Baptist came, he sounded the trumpet of repentance, crying, "Repent!" (Matt. 3:1-2). In principle, Ezekiel voiced the same thing when he urged the people to turn from their evil ways. God did not want them to die; His desire was that they would turn and live. Concerning this, Ezekiel 33:11 says, "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

COMING TO BE A SHEPHERD

After setting the watchman, God Himself came in to be the Shepherd (34:11-31). After the warning of the watchman, God did not send an angel or another person; He Himself came as the Shepherd. How wonderful! We see this not only in Ezekiel but also in the New Testament. After John the Baptist sounded the trumpet of repentance, the Lord Jesus came in as the Shepherd (Matt. 9:36; Luke 15:1-7; John 10:11).

In God's recovery by life, He first sends the watchman to His people to repent, turn, and live, and then He Himself appears as the Shepherd. In our own personal experiences it is exactly the same. First we may hear a warning from the Lord causing us to repent. Then we realize that the Lord Jesus is not only our Savior but also our Shepherd, seeking and searching us out.

Searching for His Sheep and Seeking Them Out

Ezekiel 34:11 says, "For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out." As the Shepherd, the Lord not only seeks but also searches. Because of our fallen condition, we were all buried under many evil things, so we needed God to search for us. In Luke 15 we have

both the shepherd (signifying Christ as the Shepherd) seeking the lost sheep and the woman (signifying the Spirit) lighting the lamp and searching within the house for the lost coin. The prodigal son then was drawn home by the searching of the Spirit.

The Lord has done the same thing with us. He searched for us in order to save us and recover us. Before we were saved, we were buried under many sins, but the Lord Jesus sought us. Then after we were saved, we backslid into degraded Christianity, and we were buried under many things, such as doctrines, forms, and gifts. However, once again the Lord Jesus searched for us; He sought us out and brought us out. Now we are the ones who have been sought out by the Lord Jesus as the Shepherd. How is it possible for us to be here in the church life? This is not of us but absolutely of Him. We are here because as the Shepherd He sought and searched for us.

Bringing Them out of the Nations

Ezekiel 34:12-13a says, "As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries." Here we see that Ezekiel prophesied that as the Shepherd the Lord would bring His people, His sheep, out of the nations.

This also has been our experience. When we were fallen as sinners or when we became backsliders, we were among the nations living like Gentiles. Although we were living like unbelievers among billions of others on earth, the Lord Jesus sought us out and brought us out of the nations, out of the unbelievers. You might have been a school teacher among many others, but you alone were sought out and brought back by the Lord Jesus, who then caused you to be different from the Gentiles. Formerly you were the same as the unbelievers, but one day the Lord Jesus as the Shepherd sought you and brought you out from among the unbelievers and brought you to Himself.

Bringing Them Back to Their Own Land

In verse 13b the Lord went on to say that He would bring His people back to their own land. They were in captivity in heathen countries, but the Lord promised to bring them back to their own country, to the good land of Canaan. Our good land is Christ. Before we were saved or after we backslid, we were separated from Christ. But the Lord sought us out and brought us back to Himself and even into Himself as our good land. Today we are in Christ as the good land. The good land today is also in the church life. Thus, when we were brought back to Christ, we were also brought to the church life, where we have the riches and the enjoyment of the good land.

Bringing Them Back to the High Mountains

The Lord promised to bring His people back not only to their own land but also to the high mountains (vv. 13-14). Since the high mountains signify the resurrected and ascended Christ, this indicates that the Lord Jesus brings us back to the experience of the resurrected and ascended Christ. Thus, in the Lord's recovery today, we do not enjoy a Christ merely on the level of the plain but on the highest mountains as the resurrected and ascended Christ.

Bringing Them Back to the Rivers

The Lord also said that He would bring His people back to the rivers (v. 13). These rivers signify the life-giving Spirit, the living water of the Spirit. From the mountains, the resurrected and ascended Christ, the living water of the Spirit flows. The Spirit of life flows forth from Christ in His resurrection and ascension. After the Lord sought us out and brought us back to Himself, we not only returned to Christ in the transcendent position of His ascension, but we also began to drink of the Spirit as the living water.

Feeding His Flock by the Rivers

Furthermore, verse 13 says that the Lord would feed His flock by the rivers. We can testify that in the local churches we have the sense that the Lord Jesus is feeding us day by

day by the rivers of living water. While we were in the denominations, we had the sense of dryness and drought, but once we came into the meetings of the local churches, we began to have the sense that we had been brought back to the river and that by this river we were being fed by the Lord Jesus. Something was flowing there as a river, and we were by the side of the river enjoying the riches of Christ. This is not something of man; it is something of our Shepherd, who is feeding us by the rivers. In the meetings of the local churches we have the river, the flow, and the watering.

Bringing Them Back to the Good and Fat Pasture

Verse 14 goes on to say, "I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel." Here we see that the Lord would bring His people back not only to the rivers but also to the good and fat pasture. Whereas the rivers signify the life-giving Spirit, the pasture signifies Christ. By the rivers we have the rich Christ as our pasture. The rivers are for our drinking, and the pasture is for our eating. In the meetings of the local churches, we do have the sense that we are by the rivers and in the pasture, that we are drinking and eating. Praise the Lord that we are under the care of our Shepherd, drinking by the rivers and feeding in the pasture!

If visitors come to your local church and do not have the sense that they are under the watering and the feeding with a river flowing and with a good, fat, and green pasture, this indicates that the church life is wrong. If the church life is right, then when others come to the meetings, they will sense that they are by a flowing river and in a good pasture.

Causing Them to Lie Down

In verse 15 the Lord, the Shepherd, says, "I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down." To lie down means not to work, struggle, and strive. In the Bible to lie down is to rest. In Song of Songs 1:7 the seeker asked the Lord where He fed His sheep, where He gave His flock rest at noontime. Whenever the Lord feeds us, shepherds us, and gives us something to

drink, He also gives us rest. In the church meetings we often have the sense that we are lying down to rest. Outwardly we are sitting, but inwardly we are lying down to rest.

Binding Up That Which Was Broken

Ezekiel 34:16a continues, "I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick." Here to strengthen means to heal. As the Shepherd the Lord will bind up that which was broken and heal that which was sick. How we need the Lord's binding and healing! Frequently in the church meetings we have the sense that we are under the tender binding of the Lord and that the wounds and the broken places are being bound up by Him. At other times we may sense that we are experiencing His strengthening, His healing. Praise the Lord that while we are eating, drinking, and resting, we are under His binding, strengthening, and healing.

Judging between Rams and Goats

Verse 17 says, "And as for you, O my flock, thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he goats." Verses 18 through 21 continue the Lord's word concerning His judging, and then verse 22 concludes, "Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle." This indicates that when we have experienced the Lord's recovery by life—that is, when we have been brought back to the mountains, the rivers, and the pasture and have experienced rest and healing—there can be righteous judgments among us. When we were fallen or backslidden, we argued with others and blamed them for our situation. But after we have been revived, recovered by life, we begin to realize that we ourselves have been wrong. Only then will righteous judgments be made among us. Actually, only the Lord who shepherds us, supplies us, and heals us can make such judgments. Only after He gives us the life supply, binds up our wounds, and heals us can all the unjust things among us be cleared away.

However, if we lack the Lord's supply, binding, and healing, we will condemn others, blame others, and complain about others. If we condemn and blame one another, we cannot be in harmony with one another. But as the Lord recovers us by life, we have genuine revival, we have the enjoyment of Christ, which causes us to be satisfied, restful, and peaceful, and we experience the Lord's binding and healing. The One who nourishes us and supplies us causes us to have an accurate sense concerning our relationships with the brothers and sisters. When we have such a sense, we judge ourselves, and as a result we have a genuine oneness with the saints as the one flock.

Setting Up David as a Shepherd over Them

Verse 23 goes on to say, "And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd." David typifies Christ. Christ is the real David, the real Shepherd, feeding us and causing us to be filled and satisfied.

Taking Care of Us

As our Shepherd Christ takes care of us, including all our problems and responsibilities. He takes care of us not only in spiritual things but in all things related to our human needs. This means that, according to Psalm 23, He takes care of us in every aspect of our living.

Since the Lord Jesus is our Shepherd taking care of us, we should not worry about our problems or about our living. Instead, we need to learn to put our trust in Him. At the end of the day, it is very good to pray to the Lord as our Shepherd. There is no need to pray at length in a formal, religious way. Simply say, "Lord Jesus, I thank You that I am under Your care. Now I am going to sleep, and I ask You to come and take care of me." Such a simple prayer is good enough. When you wake up in the morning, you say, "Lord, I thank You that I am still under Your care." There is no need to be religious, asking the Lord to protect you and do many other things for you. If you pray in a religious way, the Lord might say, "Child, I know

what you need. Do not waste your time and do not burden Me with this kind of prayer. Simply enjoy My care."

The Lord Jesus truly is our Shepherd. I could give many testimonies of how I have enjoyed His care throughout the years. Wherever I have gone and wherever I have worked, I have been under His shepherding care. I rejoice that we are under the care of our Shepherd. We are not a flock without a Shepherd. In His recovery we, as His flock, are under His constant shepherding. As He cares for us, He feeds us, and we have the real experience of Psalm 23: The Lord is our Shepherd, and we have no want. May we all learn to experience Christ as our Shepherd.

Coming to Be the King

When the Lord Jesus comes as the Shepherd, He comes also as the King. The issue of the Lord's caring for us as our Shepherd is that we obey Him as our King and come under His kingship. The Lord is our Shepherd to be our King, and He is our King to be our Shepherd. On the one hand He shepherds us; on the other hand, He governs us. As we receive the Lord's shepherding, we understand the Lord's throne, kingdom, and authority. He is shepherding us with His care and supply so that we may be subject to His kingship and that He may set up His throne and His kingdom within us.

Making a Covenant of Peace with Them

Certain portions of Ezekiel speak of God's covenant with Israel. Ezekiel 16:60 and 62 say, "Nevertheless, I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant.... And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord." In 37:26a the Lord promises, "Moreover, I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them." Once a matter has been covenanted, it is established and secure and it cannot be changed. Therefore, this covenant of peace is established, secure, and unchanging. As we experience the Lord's shepherding and remain under His kingship, we enjoy His peace and are no longer subject to

spiritual troubles and disturbances. Regarding this covenant there are a number of points that deserve our attention.

Causing the Evil Beasts to Cease out of the Land

Ezekiel 34:25a says, "I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land." Here we are told that, under the Lord's shepherding, all the evil beasts will be kept away from the Lord's recovered people. According to Paul's word in Acts 20:29 evil beasts ("fierce wolves") refer to evil persons who disturb God's people. In the proper church life there are no wolves, only lambs. In His recovery the Lord causes the evil beasts to cease.

Breaking All Their Yokes

In Ezekiel 34:27 the Lord promised to break all the yokes, including the yokes of sin and the world. With Him as our Shepherd, we have no yokes and no bondage. Jesus breaks every fetter! In the local churches we have no yokes. Instead, we have full liberty and full release.

Delivering Them from Slavery

Verse 27 also indicates that the Lord delivers us from all kinds of slavery. In the church we do not have the sense that we are under slavery. Rather, we have the sense of liberty. The more we enjoy the Lord's shepherding, the more we are liberated from every kind of slavery.

Never Being a Prey to the Enemy

Verse 28a says, "They shall no more be a prey to the heathen." Here the Lord promised that those in His recovery would never be a prey to the enemy. This means that they would never be defeated or captured by the enemy. In the church life we share the spoil of the Lord's recovery, of the Lord's victory. Instead of struggling to gain the victory, we are simply enjoying the victory of the Lord.

Dwelling in Peace and Safety

Eventually the Lord promised that all those in His recovery would dwell in peace and safety. Verse 25b says, "They

shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods"; verse 27b says, "They shall be safe in their land"; and verse 28b says, "They shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid." This indicates that we will dwell safely and restfully in Christ, without any fear. In Christ we have peace.

In verse 15 we have the phrase *lie down*, and in verse 25, the word *sleep*. Under the Lord's shepherding, it is safe to sleep even in the woods. In the Lord's recovery, there is no need for us to be afraid of anything. If you go to a local church where you have to be careful because the situation is touchy and you are afraid, that must not be a proper local church in the Lord's recovery. In the proper church life in the Lord's recovery, there is nothing for you to be afraid of. In such a church we have the sense of safety. In every aspect of the church life, we should feel safe. There should never be a situation in the church life that causes you to be fearful. For instance, you should never be afraid to talk to an elder or to an older sister.

Some have asked me why I can be so frank in speaking for the Lord. I can be frank because in the Lord's recovery we have peace and safety; therefore, I am not afraid of anything.

Making Them a Blessing

Ezekiel 34:26 says, "I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing." Here the Lord promised not only that His people would receive His blessing but also that He would make them a blessing. If there is the peace which is the peace of the covenant, the Lord's blessing will follow. First, we ourselves will enjoy the Lord's blessing, and then He will cause us to become a source of blessing to others so that they may be supplied.

We need to comment briefly on five aspects of this blessing.

The Shower Coming in Season

God will cause the shower of blessing to come down in its season. This means that its coming will be timely. There will be timely rain. As we are abiding in Christ, the rain, the Holy Spirit, will often come upon us.

Showers of Blessing

The Lord promises that there will be "showers of blessing." There will be no lack of water, for there will be not only rivers but also showers. Many times in the meetings of the local churches we sense that something is not only flowing but also coming down like a shower. Sometimes even at home after the meeting, we have the sense that the showers of blessing are still coming down upon us. This is the strongest sign that the Lord's blessing is upon the local church. He sends us showers of blessing in season, so timely.

The Tree of the Field Yielding Its Fruit and the Earth Yielding Its Increase

Verse 27 tells us that the tree of the field will yield its fruit and that the earth will yield its increase. The showers will cause the trees to yield their fruit and cause the earth to yield its rich produce. This indicates that there will be an abundance of spiritual food not only for us to enjoy ourselves but also for us to supply others. Because the local churches are rich with spiritual food, in the Lord's recovery there is no more famine, no shortage of food. At the start of a meeting, we may seem to have only five small loaves, but after the meeting we have twelve full baskets left over. This is a real blessing.

Thus far we have seen that there are three signs that the local churches are under the Lord's blessing: the showers in season, the trees yielding fruit, and the abundance of produce from the good land. We should never have the sense that the local church meetings are short of food. If we are short of food, we are wrong. If we in the Lord's recovery are under His blessing, we will be rich in food.

The Lord Being a Plant of Renown

Ezekiel 34:29a says, "I will raise up for them a plant of renown." Here the Lord promised to raise up a plant of renown, whose fruit would be for the enjoyment of His recovered people. Once again, this plant is Christ as the rich food supply. Whatever needs we may have and whatever difficulties we may face, He will give us the rich supply.

No Longer Being Consumed with Hunger in the Land

Finally, verse 29b says, "They shall be no more consumed with hunger in the land." Instead of spiritual famine, there will be a rich food supply.

God Being Their God, and They Being His People

Verses 30 and 31 conclude, "Thus shall they know that I the Lord their God am with them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the Lord God. And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord God." Here the Lord promised that He would be with them, that they would be His people, and that He would be their God. They have God's presence, God is among them, and they are before God. This is the perfect fellowship with God, the fellowship in oneness—the genuine recovery.

In the Lord's recovery we have God's presence. God is with us. We are His people, and He is our God. We are His and He is ours. We have such a fellowship, such a oneness, for we are one with God, and God is one with us. This is the recovery of the church life—the real mingling of God and man. From this we see that the recovery of the church life is not a matter of teachings or gifts but a matter of the Lord's presence. We are here on earth enjoying such a oneness and mingling with the Lord. This is the Lord's recovery by life.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE SEVENTEEN

THE OUTWARD AND INWARD RECOVERY BY LIFE

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 34:5, 14, 10, 15; 36:8-12, 15, 22-30, 33-38

In this message we will consider the matter of the outward and inward recovery by life.

JUDGING THE OLD MAN AGAIN

The recovery by life begins in chapter thirty-three, where God sets a watchman. This recovery continues in chapter thirty-four, where God Himself comes in to be the Shepherd to search for His people, to seek them out, to bring them back, and to cause them to enjoy the riches of Christ signified by the riches of the good land. Following this, in chapter thirty-five the Lord reminds us of the need to condemn our old man, which is signified by Edom. This is the reason that after chapter thirty there is another word concerning the judgment upon Edom. For the most part, God waits until judgment has been executed before He begins His work of recovery. However, in the process of recovery, there is still the need of God's judgment. This is true, in particular, regarding Edom. Edom was judged in the previous section, but because the old man is very difficult to deal with, the judgment upon the old man must be repeated. Yesterday you might have condemned your old man and experienced judgment upon him. But today your old man may return to pay you a visit, perhaps in a nice way or in a subtle way. You have been recovered and you have been brought back to Christ as the good land and have entered into the rich enjoyment of Christ. You might have thought that your old man had been fully condemned and judged, but you did not realize that he has come back

without giving you any notice and without asking for permission to visit you. Now as you are enjoying Christ, he is with you, hating your enjoyment of Christ and your enjoyment of the church life.

Ezekiel 35 says that Edom and his company were happy to see that Israel was desolate (vv. 12, 15). Edom was also waiting to possess the two nations of Israel and Judah, claiming them as belonging to Edom. To the Lord Edom was speaking nonsense, for He intended to exercise His judgment upon Edom once again.

We need to learn the lesson of judging Edom. While we are being recovered, we have to judge our old man again and again. The judgment upon Ammon, Moab, Tyrus, Zidon, and Egypt may be once for all, but the judgment upon Edom cannot be once for all. On the contrary, Edom, our old man, must be judged repeatedly until the day of the redemption of our body. This is the reason that between Ezekiel 34 and 36, which are wonderful chapters, there is a very negative chapter regarding the judgment upon Edom. Because Edom returns, the judgment upon him must be repeated. Although we have condemned him, judged him, and chased him away, he comes back. Therefore, we need to cooperate with the Lord to exercise once again His judgment upon the old man.

The genuine recovery of the Lord is not simply a matter of repenting, turning to the Lord, and enjoying the blessing of the Lord. There also needs to be a change in our life and nature. In His recovery, God needs to touch our heart and our spirit and thereby touch our life directly and change us in life and nature. Therefore, we need both the outward recovery described in Ezekiel 34 and the inward recovery described in Ezekiel 36. Because the recovery in Ezekiel 36 concerns our life and our nature and involves our heart and our spirit, chapter thirty-five is inserted to show the importance of judging our old man. In order to recover us and make us a new man, God must judge our old man, our old creation.

THE RECOVERY OF THE GOOD LAND

A major point in Ezekiel 36 is the recovery of the good land, that is, the restoration of the full enjoyment of the

riches of Christ (vv. 8-15, 33-36). Whenever we backslide and become fallen, we lose the rich enjoyment of Christ. Christ Himself is rich, but we may lose the enjoyment of His riches. We praise the Lord that in His recovery there is the restoration of the enjoyment of the riches of Christ.

THE OUTWARD RECOVERY AND THE INWARD RECOVERY

In the Lord's recovery there are two aspects: the outward aspect and the inward aspect, the outward recovery and the inward recovery. Suppose that you have fallen away from Christ, from the church life, and from the fellowship with the saints and have become involved with sinful, worldly things. But one day the Lord seeks you out and brings you back to Himself, to the church life, and to the fellowship with the saints. This is a recovery, but it is only an outward recovery, the outward aspect of the Lord's recovery. However, at the same time the Lord does an inward work. He not only brings you back to the good land, but He also recovers you inwardly. To be recovered back to the church life and to the fellowship with Christ is only the outward aspect. You still need the inward aspect of the Lord's recovery, which is covered in 36:22-30.

CARING FOR HIS HOLY NAME

Ezekiel 36:21-23 says, "But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes." Here we see that in recovering His people, God acts on behalf of His holy name. The inward recovery of life is carried out by God for the sake of His name. Many of us can testify that we have been recovered and revived not because of any merit in ourselves but because God did something in us for His own name.

BRINGING THEM TO THEIR OWN PLACE

"I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land" (v. 24). In His recovery, God brings us out from the world and brings us back to our own place. He returns us to Christ as our land.

THE LORD WASHING US WITH CLEAN WATER

The Lord not only brings us back to the enjoyment of Christ; He also washes us with clean water. Zechariah 13:1 says that the Lord's blood is a washing fountain. Likewise, the clean water in Ezekiel 36:25 refers to the Lord's redeeming and cleansing blood. The Lord Jesus washes us with His cleansing blood not only when we are saved but also every time we are revived and brought back to Him.

Cleansed from Filthiness

The Lord washes us from two categories of dirty things—from filthiness and from idols. Filthiness includes all kinds of sinful things, unjust things, unrighteous things, and dark things. It also includes hating others, doing wrong to others, and indulging in worldly amusements. When we were saved, we felt ashamed of these filthy things. When we are revived, we also have such a feeling of shame, not wanting to recall the sinful and worldly things that we were once involved with. The Lord's blood as the clean water washes us from all our filthiness. Perhaps today we need to be washed from gossip, rumors, jealousy, criticism, and unkindness. We praise the Lord that no matter how filthy we were, the Lord's blood is the clean water that washes us and cleanses us.

Cleansed from Idols

Before we were saved, we had not only a great deal of filthiness, but we also had many idols. This also might have been our situation after we became backslidden and before we were revived. Consider how many idols you had before you were saved or revived. For some, an article of clothing is an idol. They love this item of clothing more than they love

the Lord Jesus. Once while Brother Watchman Nee was ministering in Shanghai, he suddenly pointed to a certain sister and asked, "How many chapters are there in Matthew?" She answered, "Twenty-six." Then Brother Nee asked her how many buttons were on her long gown, and without hesitation she told him the correct number. Brother Nee went on to say, "You know your long gown so well. You even remember how many buttons it has. But you do not remember how many chapters there are in Matthew." This simple illustration shows us that we may love an article of clothing more than we love the Lord Jesus. Anything that we love more than the Lord is an idol.

Some Christians have never shed a single tear for the Lord Jesus, but they have shed many tears for their clothing. This proves that they love clothing more than the Lord Jesus. Others may care for things such as a doctoral degree or a high position. Still others may desire fame or may want to make a name for themselves. All these things are idols. We need the Lord's redeeming blood to cleanse us not only from all our filthiness but also from all our idols.

A NEW HEART AND A NEW SPIRIT

The cleansing mentioned above is something on the negative side. On the positive side, after the cleansing, the Lord gives us a new heart and a new spirit. Many of you have been Christians for years, but you have never heard a message telling you that you have a new spirit. No one told you that at the time of your conversion, the Lord gave you not only a new heart but also a new spirit.

Loving the Lord with Our Heart

We need to realize that there is a difference between the heart and the spirit. Our heart is an organ of love. Once I gave a message in which I pointed out that it is not enough just to have a loving heart toward the Lord. A particular sister was troubled by this and wanted to know what I meant by saying that we need something more than a loving heart. To illustrate, I asked her if she loved a certain Bible which belonged to her husband and if she would like to have it.

Then I said, "The Bible is yours; please take it." When she stretched out her hand to take the Bible, I said, "Do not use your hand. Just use your loving heart. Take the Bible with your heart." Through this illustration she came to understand that having a loving heart is not sufficient. She also needed to stretch forth her hand to take the Bible. In like manner, we need both a heart to love the Lord and a spirit to receive Him.

Receiving the Lord with Our Spirit

We love the Lord with our heart. The heart is the loving organ, but it is not the receiving organ. In order to take or receive anything we must use the proper organ. If we would contact the Lord, receive the Lord, enjoy the Lord, eat the Lord, and drink the Lord, we need a spirit. Whereas we love the Lord with our heart, we contact the Lord and receive the Lord with our spirit.

First, we need to love the Lord. This means that we have an appetite for the Lord. If we have no love for the Lord and no appetite for Him, we will not come to Him or receive Him. Before we were saved, we did not love the Lord and we did not have any appetite for the Lord. Instead, our taste was for the world and for the things of the world, especially worldly amusement. When others spoke to us about the Lord Jesus, we did not care to listen. We had no interest because we had no appetite. We loved other things, and our heart was set on those things. However, one day the Lord granted us His gracious visitation, and immediately our appetite was changed. We began to love the Lord and the Bible, and we lost our appetite for the worldly things. This was the Lord's gracious doing, and it caused our heart to turn from the world to the Lord.

We need to love the Lord Jesus and have an appetite for Him that will turn us from the appetite for other things. We should be able to tell the Lord Jesus that we love Him and that we are hungry and thirsty for Him. Once we have acquired such a loving appetite for the Lord, we need to use our spirit as the organ to contact Him, receive Him, eat Him, drink Him, and breathe Him. Now we can see that we need two organs: a loving heart and a receiving spirit.

The receiving spirit has been greatly neglected by many

Christians. In some places messages stir up people's loving heart but give them no help to exercise their spirit. We thank the Lord that He has given us not only a new heart to love Him but also a new spirit to contact Him, receive Him, and contain Him.

A Soft Heart

The new heart which the Lord has given us is very soft. Instead of a stiff, hard, and stony heart, we now have a heart of flesh, a heart that is soft toward the Lord. Before we were saved, we could do many sinful things without any feeling of regret. Because our heart was hardened and stiff, we had no inner sense toward sin. But when we were saved, our heart was changed by the Lord. Now we have a softened heart. For example, we may speak only part of a sentence and sense that we are wrong and that we should not have said anything. Immediately we stop speaking and perhaps even apologize for what we have spoken. At other times because our heart is soft, we may be troubled by even a small mistake or by a slight impurity in our motive. This proves that we have been converted and revived, that we have turned to the Lord, and that our heart has become soft and sensitive.

Exercising Our Spirit

We also need to exercise our spirit. A loving heart is not sufficient. In addition to a loving heart, we need a renewed, receiving spirit.

We had a human spirit before we were saved, but it was deadened. In Ephesians 2:1 Paul says that we were dead in offenses and sins. This surely means that we were dead not in our body or in our soul but in our spirit. While we were living in our body, we were deadened in our spirit. When we were saved, the Lord Jesus enlivened our spirit. Thus, we now have an enlivened and renewed spirit.

You may feel that it is difficult to discern the difference between your spirit and your heart. Instead of trying to analyze the difference, we can recognize the difference according to our experience. When we consider how sweet and precious the Lord Jesus is and how much He has done for us, we may become

stirred in our emotion and say, "Lord Jesus, I love You!" This is an expression of our loving heart. But when we call on the name of the Lord Jesus, we can sense that deep within something other than our heart has been exercised. This is our spirit. Just as we know that we have two feet by using them to walk, we know that we have a spirit by exercising our spirit to contact the Lord. One of the best ways to use our spirit to contact the Lord is to call, "O Lord Jesus!" When we exercise our spirit in this way, we have the sense of something moving deep within our being. That something is our spirit.

In his subtlety, Satan has hidden this matter of the human spirit from most Christians. When many believers read the Bible, they do not exercise their spirit but exercise only their mind. When we read the Bible, we need to exercise our spirit as well as our mind. We should never neglect our spirit. If we do not exercise our spirit, we cannot be proper Christians. It is tragic that Christians are taught to take care of the mind but not to care for the spirit. Many care either for fundamental teachings or for Pentecostal gifts, but according to history teachings and gifts have not been effective in building up the church. Of course, teachings and gifts have some value, but the main thing we need today is the exercise of the spirit. This is the most crucial, vital, and prevailing thing.

First Corinthians speaks not only of gifts but also of many other things. For example, in chapter three Paul talks about food and growth. Verse 2 says, "I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, for you were not yet able to receive it. But neither yet now are you able." In verse 6 he goes on to say, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth." This is not a word concerning gifts. In 12:13 Paul says, "For also in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit." In this verse Paul says that we have been positioned to drink of one Spirit, but he says nothing about gifts. Another crucial verse in 1 Corinthians is 15:45b: "The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit." Many readers of 1 Corinthians appreciate the word in chapters twelve and fourteen about speaking in tongues and prophecy but neglect 15:45b. Which do you prefer—speaking in tongues or Christ as the

life-giving Spirit? If we compare the life-giving Spirit to speaking in tongues, we can say that the life-giving Spirit is like gold and that speaking in tongues is like brass. In 13:1 Paul says, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but do not have love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal." This indicates a sound without life. If we speak in the tongues of men and of angels and yet have no life in our spirit, this speaking is like sounding brass. Paul's word here indicates that speaking in tongues is not a matter of life. Speaking in tongues is not an expression of life.

At this juncture, we need to consider Paul's way of speaking in 1 Corinthians 7. In contrast to many in today's Pentecostalism, Paul did not say, "Thus saith the Lord." Rather, in verse 25 he said, "I have no commandment of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who has been shown mercy by the Lord to be faithful." The expression *Thus saith the Lord* is taken from the Old Testament, but it is not used by the New Testament writers. Peter, Paul, and John did not use this expression. Instead of following Pentecostalism to adopt Old Testament expressions, we should learn to exercise our spirit to be one spirit with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17). This means that we need to realize that, in His inward recovery by life, He has given us a new spirit.

Putting His Spirit into Their Spirit

Ezekiel 36:27 says, "I will put My Spirit within you" (NASB). Here we see that the Lord said not only that He will give us a new heart and a new spirit but that He will put His Spirit in us, putting His Spirit into our spirit. We should not neglect our spirit, because our spirit is the vessel which contains the divine Spirit. When believers hear the word *spirit*, they usually think of the Holy Spirit. They seldom consider that they have a human spirit. Yes, we need the Holy Spirit, but we need to realize that the Holy Spirit is in our regenerated human spirit. "The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit" (Rom. 8:16). Praise the Lord that we have a new heart and a new spirit and that we have the Holy Spirit within our spirit strengthening us all the time.

This enables us to keep God's commandments. God's

commandments are according to His nature, and we have the nature of God within us because we have His Spirit within us. Now there is something within us that corresponds to God's law. God's Spirit within us contains God's nature, and God's nature corresponds to God's law. Because we have God's nature within us, it is easy for us to keep His law. Formerly it was difficult for us to love others, but now it is easy to love others and difficult to hate them because we have a new nature, God's nature, within us.

THE LAND BECOMING LIKE THE GARDEN OF EDEN

In 36:34-36 the Lord promised that the desolate and waste places would become like the garden of Eden. There the plant of renown (34:29), Christ as the tree of life, would be their rich supply. The local churches need to reach such a high condition that they are like the garden of Eden. Even today, often in the church meetings we have the sense that we are in the garden of Eden.

INCREASING THEM WITH MEN LIKE A FLOCK

Ezekiel 36:37-38 says, "Thus saith the Lord God; I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock. As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts; so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men: and they shall know that I am the Lord." Here the Lord promised that He would bring in flocks of people. Although He has promised to do this, we still need to inquire of Him. This means that we need to pray for the increase, saying, "O Lord, flock people in. You promised this to us."

In the past, whenever we prayed for an increase of number, the Lord answered. I feel that we need to pray more. The Lord promised, yet He needs our inquiring. He promised that He will increase our number by flocks of men, but we need to pray for this and ask Him to do it. I hope that the saints in all the local churches will pray definitely and specifically for the increase of numbers. We should never be content with our present number. Rather, we should all aspire

to be doubled within a period of time. Thus, we need to pray, "Lord, flock people in."

In 1963 in Los Angeles, we had only twenty to thirty people, but after we prayed for six months, the number was greatly increased. In Elden Hall we also prayed that the Lord would flock people in. We prayed, "Lord, bring flocks of men to us," and the Lord heard this prayer. I feel that today we need to pray even more, standing upon and claiming Ezekiel 36:37-38 concerning the increase of numbers.

We should not say that numbers do not mean anything and that we do not care for numbers. We should not comfort ourselves with any failure in the matter of increase. We surely need the increase in numbers. We need to pray for the increase, claiming the Lord's promise in Ezekiel 36. When some hear this, they may say that they care not for quantity but for quality. However, quality comes out of quantity. Therefore, we need to pray that the Lord will give us the increase and that He will bring in flocks of men.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE EIGHTEEN

THE DRY BONES, THE TWO STICKS, AND THE ARMY

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 37:1, 5-17, 21-28

The book of Ezekiel has four main sections, each of which contains one crucial point. The first section, consisting of chapter one, speaks of the glorious vision of God and reveals the holy God in His glory. The second section, composed of chapters two through thirty-two, speaks of God's judgment to deal with all things and matters that do not match His righteousness, holiness, and glory. God judges everything among Israel and among the Gentiles that is incompatible with His nature. The third section, which includes chapters thirty-three through thirty-nine, concerns God's recovery of a remnant of His people. When God comes in to judge, He remembers His covenant of grace, and thus He preserves a group of His elect and brings them back to their own land. This indicates that the main idea in the third section of Ezekiel is the Lord's recovery. The fourth section, consisting of chapters forty through forty-eight, speaks about God coming to build His beloved recovered people into His dwelling place. This means that the last section is devoted to the matter of God's building.

In the book of Ezekiel, there are three chapters which may be considered great chapters in the Bible—chapter one, chapter thirty-seven, and chapter forty-seven. These chapters occupy a special position not only in Ezekiel but in the Bible as a whole. Each of these chapters may be represented by a single word: chapter one—*fire;* chapter thirty-seven—*breath;* and chapter forty-seven—*water.* No chapter speaks of God as fire in the way Ezekiel 1 does. John 4 and 7 and Revelation 22 speak about water, but not in the way that Ezekiel 47 does. Likewise, Ezekiel 37 is unique in the way it speaks of God's

breath. This chapter reveals how God's Spirit comes into us in order to enliven us that we may become a corporate body, formed into an army, and also built up as God's dwelling place. Only in this chapter do we see the result of our being enlivened by the breath of life. From this we see that Ezekiel 37 occupies a particular position in the Bible.

Chapters thirty-three through thirty-seven of Ezekiel describe God's recovery of His people from different aspects. Chapter thirty-four emphasizes the Lord's coming as a Shepherd to seek His lost sheep and to bring them back to their own land. In chapter thirty-six we see that the Lord recovers His people by life not only outwardly but also inwardly, by giving them a new heart and a new spirit and by putting His Spirit within them. Chapter thirty-seven reveals that the Lord comes to revive His dead and scattered people and to make them one. From this we see that God's captured people needed to be recovered in different aspects. Because they had been driven away and scattered like sheep, they needed the Lord to search for them as their Shepherd. Because their inward condition was unclean and old, they needed a new heart and a new spirit. Because they had become dead, dry bones, they needed to be enlivened and joined together.

THE PLANT OF RENOWN AND THE GARDEN OF EDEN

Before we begin to consider chapter thirty-seven, I would like to say a word about two matters—the plant of renown (34:29) and the garden of Eden (36:35). The plant of renown, a famous plant, is Christ. Christ is not only the good land, containing many trees whose fruits are good for food; Christ is also a plant of renown. Concerning the expression *like the garden of Eden*, we need to see that eventually the Lord's recovery should come to the point where it is like the garden of Eden. Then wherever we may be in the Lord's recovery, we will be in the garden of Eden. Frequently in the meetings of the local churches we have the sense that we are in the garden of Eden. In the garden of Eden we have Christ as a famous plant, the plant of renown. This means that in the church life we enjoy the riches of Christ in a special way day by day.

A CHAPTER SHOWING HOW GOD RENEWS US AND REGENERATES US

Ezekiel 34 mainly covers outward aspects of the Lord's recovery. In this chapter God comes as the Shepherd to search and seek for His people and to bring them back to His good land. Ezekiel 36 covers the inward aspect of the Lord's recovery. In His recovery, the Lord not only brings us back outwardly, but He also inwardly gives us a new heart and a new spirit and puts His Spirit into our spirit. If we see this, we will realize that the Lord's recovery is not merely a matter of outward position and outward circumstances but also a matter of inward nature and disposition. In the Lord's recovery, which is something both outward and inward, not only are our position, circumstances, and surroundings changed, but we also have the inward renewing of our heart and our spirit, and we receive the Spirit of God. Outwardly there is a change, and inwardly there is a conversion.

Ezekiel 36, however, does not tell us clearly and thoroughly how we may have a conversion, how we may have a new heart and a new spirit, and how we may obtain God's Spirit. We are simply told in a general way that the Lord will give us a new heart and a new spirit and put His own Spirit within us. Thus, we need Ezekiel 37 to show us how God renews us and regenerates us.

BEING DEAD AND DRY BONES

Before God came in to renew us and regenerate us, we were like dead and dry bones. If we had only Ezekiel 36, we would realize that we were sinful and filthy, but we would not think that we were dead. Ezekiel 37 reveals that we were not only dead but that we were also dry bones. This indicates that God's salvation is not only for those who are sinful but also for those who are dead.

In the sight of God, when we were fallen, either as a sinner or as a backslidden believer, we were dead and buried in a grave. We were in the "grave" of various sinful things and worldly entertainments. Before we were saved or before we were revived we were all buried in some kind of grave. We were sinful, dead, buried, and dried up. We had no blood, no

flesh, no sinew, no skin—just dry bones. This is a picture showing what we were and where we were.

BEING SCATTERED

Because we were dead and dry, we were also scattered. According to Ezekiel 37 not one piece of bone was joined to another piece. All the bones were disjointed and scattered, having no oneness. Whether we were an unsaved sinner or a backslidden believer, this was our situation.

Today many Christians are buried in the graves of denominations, divisions, independent groups, and different movements. All denominations, sects, groups, and movements are graves. Many of us can testify that formerly we were in such graves, dead, dry, scattered, disjointed, and not connected to anyone.

GOD'S PEOPLE COMING UP OUT OF THEIR GRAVES

Ezekiel 37:11-13 says, "Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves." Not only unbelieving sinners need to be delivered from their graves, but even many brothers and sisters need to be revived and delivered from death and from their graves. Some saints have become fallen and desolate and now are bound in their graves. I do not know by what you were slain or in what kind of grave you are being held. But I hope that God's wind will blow upon you, that God's light will shine into you, and that God's life will work within you to tear open your grave and cause you to come up out of this grave and to be revived.

The Bible reveals that the Lord is the Savior of the dead. In John 5:25 the Lord Jesus says, "An hour is coming, and it is now, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live." In Ezekiel 37 God is speaking not to

the sick but to the dead. It is a blessing to realize that we are dead and that we need the Lord to enliven us. God's word in this chapter is not to make a sick person well and not to turn an evil person into a good person; God's word here is to cause a dead person to become a living person. I hope that many will humble themselves before the Lord and pray, "Lord, I confess that I am not only sick and sinful—I admit that I am dead. My heart and my spirit are dead. Lord, I am completely dead and dry. I am like a pile of dead, dry bones. O Lord, I need Your life to come into me. I need You to breathe the breath of life into me so that I may live."

RECOVERY THROUGH PROPHESYING

Praise the Lord that He did not leave us in our situation but came in to rescue us! However, the Lord did not come in directly to be our Shepherd, but, in keeping with Ezekiel 37, He came in through the prophesying of His word.

Many Christians have a mistaken understanding of prophesying, thinking that to prophesy is only to predict. But there is hardly any prediction in Ezekiel 37. Instead, the prophesying here is a matter of declaring something or speaking something forth. This indicates that prophesying in this chapter does not mainly mean to predict but to tell forth, to make some kind of declaration. When the Lord told Ezekiel to prophesy, He meant that Ezekiel should speak forth. The Lord told Ezekiel that when he prophesied, He would send the breath and the wind. When Ezekiel spoke forth, God gave people the Spirit. From this we can see clearly that the main meaning of prophesying is not to predict but to speak forth something for the Lord.

Other Christians think that to prophesy is to teach. But no matter how much one may teach dry bones, they remain dry bones. One may teach dry bones about the need for wind, breath, and the Spirit, but nothing happens to these bones. In this chapter Ezekiel neither predicted something to the dry bones nor taught them. On the contrary, when Ezekiel prophesied, he spoke something for God, and God followed him. As Ezekiel was prophesying, God was blowing upon the dry bones, sending the wind, the breath, and the Spirit.

THE WIND, THE BREATH, AND THE SPIRIT

In Ezekiel 37 three things are related to the prophesying: the wind, breath, and Spirit. In English these are three different words, but in Hebrew they are only one word, *ruach*. Verse 9 uses the word *wind* and the word *breath*, but in the Hebrew text both are the same word, *ruach*. In verse 14 there is the *Spirit*, but this also is a translation of *ruach*. It is difficult for translators to decide how to translate *ruach* in these verses. The translation is based both upon the context and upon the understanding of the translator.

If we apply this matter to our spiritual experience, we may say that when God blows upon us, that is the wind; when we breathe the wind, it is the breath; and when the breath comes into us, it is the Spirit. First comes the wind and then the breath and then the Spirit. When Ezekiel prophesied, God blew the wind, the people received the breath, and the breath became the Spirit, the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b).

A NOISE AND A SHAKING

In this chapter Ezekiel prophesied twice, in verse 7 and again in verse 10. Verse 7 says, "So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone." Here we see that when Ezekiel prophesied there was a noise and a shaking.

Sometimes others complain that our meetings are too noisy. My answer is that if all were dry bones, everything would be quiet. There would be neither noise nor voice, only quietness. All the bones in the valley in Ezekiel 37 were quiet and motionless. But when Ezekiel came and prophesied, there was a noise and a shaking, and all the bones came together. I cannot explain why this happened. We do know, however, that when we come together in the meetings and make a joyful noise (Psa. 95:1), we are truly one.

Suppose we all came into the meeting and sat quietly for thirty minutes. Soon we would become critical of one another, and eventually we would lose our oneness. But when we shout joyfully to the Lord Jesus, praising Him and calling on His name, we are one. It may not sound nice to you, but the

more we make noise in this way, the more we are one. If we get out of ourselves by calling on the Lord and praising Him, we will be one.

THE BREATH COMING IN

Ezekiel 37:8 says, "And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them." After the noise, the shaking, and the coming together of the bones, something very particular happened. Sinews, flesh, and skin came upon the bones, covering the bones and causing their appearance to be much improved. Formerly they were only dry bones; now they were a lifeless body with the parts gathered up, joined, and connected. The body was lifeless because it had no breath.

The description in verse 8 is applicable to our experience. The dry bones must first come together, and then the breath will come into them. If we do not gather together, we will not have the breath of God. We should not wait until we have the breath of God and then come together. Rather, we should first come together, with "a noise" and "a shaking," and then the breath of God will be breathed upon us.

Verses 9 and 10 continue, "Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army." When Ezekiel prophesied again, God sent the breath to enter into the dead bodies, and then they stood up upon their feet and became an "exceeding great army" to fight the battle for God.

TWO DRY STICKS BEING JOINED

In verses 16 and 17 the Lord said to Ezekiel, "Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: and join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become

one in thine hand." First, Ezekiel dealt with the dry bones and then with the dry sticks. A stick is something wooden, but it is lifeless and dry. These two dead sticks symbolize the two kingdoms of Israel, the southern kingdom (Judah) and the northern kingdom (Israel, or Ephraim). These two kingdoms could never be one, and in the eyes of the Lord they were thoroughly dead and dried up.

The Lord has a way to make these dead sticks one, and His way is the way of life. His way is to make the sticks alive and then to put them together so that they may grow together. This is very similar to grafting, in which two branches are joined and eventually grow together. This actually is what is mentioned here. The two sticks are like two branches. Formerly they had no life, but then they were made alive. Having been enlivened, they are now able to grow together and become one.

Whereas the bones are for forming the army, the sticks are for the building of the house of God. The sticks had been divided, but now they are one and are the dwelling place of God. Therefore, here we have both the army fighting the battle for God and the house of God as His dwelling place.

THE WAY OF LIFE

Christians today talk much about the Body, the church, and the house of God, but most do not see the practical way to have the Body, the church, and the house of God. Ezekiel 37 clearly reveals that the only way, the unique way, is the way of life. Two dry sticks can grow together not by gifts or teachings but by life.

The Lord did not tell Ezekiel to exercise certain gifts or to teach. The Lord charged Ezekiel to prophesy, to utter, or speak forth, some words for God. As Ezekiel declared something to the dead ones for God, He blew upon them and they received breath. When the breath came into them, it became life to them. Then by the way of life the two dry sticks could grow together.

We can become one not by gifts or teachings but by life. Oh, we all need the blowing of the wind! Then we need to

receive the breath, and the breath will become in us the life-giving Spirit. Then we will be able to grow in life.

Life is wonderful. It takes care of so many problems. Our physical body can overcome many problems simply because it is living. This is an illustration of the fact that what we need in the church life is life, not gifts or teachings. By life the dead branches can be enlivened and grow into each other. Then these branches will have the oneness that issues out of the growth in life. If we pay attention to gifts or teachings, we will be divided. We all need something better, something higher, and this better and higher thing is life.

First comes the blowing of the wind, which is followed by the breath and by the life-giving Spirit. This causes the dry bones to become alive and to become one. Finally, the bones become an army fighting the battle for the Lord. Likewise, the dry sticks become alive and grow together. By the growth in life they are one and no longer have any divisions. Throughout the years, here in the church in Los Angeles we have paid our attention not to gifts or to teachings but to life. If we had paid attention to gifts and teachings, we would have been divided again and again. But because we care for the Lord's way of life, we are one.

ONENESS BY LIFE

We praise the Lord for the oneness in His recovery. Although we come from many different backgrounds, we are one. We are one not by gifts or teachings but by life. Among us we have many former ministers, pastors, missionaries, and Bible teachers, but all of these are now one in life. Because we have life and are in life, we are one. Now we are an army fighting the battle and we are a dwelling place for the Lord.

When the saints migrate for the spreading of the church life, they are an army fighting the battle. We cannot have proper migrations if we do not have oneness. It is very good that in the migrations saints come from different parts of the country to be one in a particular city. They come together to be one not in teachings or gifts but in life. Because we are one in life, we are both the army and the dwelling place of the Lord. The army is formed with dry bones which have been

made alive, and the dwelling place with dry sticks which have been enlivened and joined together. Now no one is dry. Every part of the army and of the dwelling place is full of life and is living in oneness. This is the Lord's recovery.

FURTHER JUDGMENT

Following chapter thirty-seven there are two further chapters which speak of further judgment. These chapters indicate that if we go on with the Lord in oneness as an army and as a dwelling place for the Lord on earth, He will take care of all our enemies.

We should not think that since we are an army we will have no enemies. Neither should we think that since we are one as the Lord's dwelling place, we will have no battles. There is still an enemy, but the Lord will deal with him. In chapter thirty-five there is Edom, the enemy within, and in chapters thirty-eight and thirty-nine there is the enemy outside. We have to judge Edom, the old man, the enemy within us, but the Lord will take care of the enemies which are outside. We may have the assurance that as long as we are one, the Lord will fight the battle for us. He will deal with our enemy, who is also His enemy. Praise the Lord that we can be in the church life in peace and safety. As we deal with the inward enemy, the Lord will deal with the outward enemy, and a strong church life will be built up to be "an exceeding great army" and the Lord's sanctuary on earth. Only when God has judged all the enemies can His people dwell peacefully without fear. When His people are in such a peaceful condition, the building up of the Lord's dwelling place will be completed, and the Lord will have a place of rest among His people.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE NINETEEN

THE VISION OF THE HOLY BUILDING OF GOD

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 40:1-27

In the foregoing messages we saw the appearance of the glory of the Lord, the judgment of God by fire, and the recovery of the Lord by life. Now we come to the last section of Ezekiel (chs. 40—48), which is concerned with the holy building of God. The three previous sections are for the last section; that is, the glory of the Lord, the judgment of God, and the recovery of the Lord are all for the holy building of God. We may even say that the issue of the glory of the Lord, the judgment of God, and the recovery of the Lord is the building of God. God's eternal purpose is to have a building. Whatever God does among His people on earth is for His building.

THE TIME OF THE VISION

At the very beginning of this section (40:1), we are told the time of the vision—the year, the month, and the day. If we compare the year mentioned here with that mentioned at the beginning of the first chapter, we will see that there is a difference of twenty years. The vision of the appearance of the glory of the Lord which Ezekiel saw in chapter one was seen in the fifth year of the captivity. The vision of the building of God's house which he saw in chapter forty was in the twenty-fifth year of the captivity. There is a difference of twenty years, which is not a short time. We need to remember that when Ezekiel saw the first vision, he was thirty years of age, the age at which a priest began to function. When he saw the last vision, he was fifty years of age, the age of retirement for a priest. This is very meaningful, for it indicates that to see the building of God, Ezekiel needed more maturity in life. When he saw the first vision, he was still rather young, only thirty

years of age. But when he saw the vision of God's building, he was at the age of retirement, indicating that he attained further maturity in life and could see the building of the Lord. To see the vision of God's building, maturity in life is required. Due to their immaturity in the divine life, very few of today's Christians have seen anything regarding the Lord's building. Spiritually speaking, many are far below the age of thirty and thus are not even qualified to be an apprentice. Thus, it is not possible for them to see the vision of God's building.

It is significant that the years are counted in increments of five. The first vision was seen in the fifth year, and the last vision was seen in the twenty-fifth year.

Twenty-five is five times five. In the Bible the number five signifies man plus God. Four is the number of the creature, man, and one is the number for the Creator, God. Five signifies the bearing of responsibility. Therefore, five, which is composed of four plus one, signifies that man as a creature plus God as the Creator together bear responsibility. The number twenty-five signifies not only maturity but also the full qualification for bearing responsibility.

This year is also called the fourteenth year. The twenty-fifth year was counted from the time of the captivity, whereas the fourteenth year was counted from the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. Ezekiel 40:1 says, "After that the city was smitten."

In the Bible the number fourteen is composed mainly of seven times two. Seven is the number of completion, and two is the number of testimony. Therefore, seven times two denotes a testimony of completion. This indicates that for fourteen years the destruction of the city of Jerusalem had been a strong testimony to the people. Originally, the people did not believe that the city would be destroyed. Nevertheless, Ezekiel prophesied concerning the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, and his prophecy was fulfilled. Fourteen years after the destruction of Jerusalem, Ezekiel saw further visions. This means that the testimony of the destruction of the city was sufficient. It stood for fourteen years, and after those fourteen years the people in captivity realized that it was a strong testimony.

Furthermore, we are told that Ezekiel saw the visions at the beginning of the year, in the first month. The first month indicates a new start. This indicates that with us in our experience, the building of God must have a new start. When we see something regarding the building up of the church, this is a new start in our life.

The record speaks also of the tenth day. According to Exodus 12:3 the tenth day of the first month was the day that the people of Israel prepared the lamb for the Passover. This surely points to Christ, our Passover, for our redemption. From this we see that whenever we have a new beginning in our Christian life, it must be based on Christ and His redemption. In ourselves, by what we are and what we can do, we can never have a new beginning. We are not qualified to have a new beginning, and we have no merit to have a new beginning. Any new beginning that we can have in our spiritual life is always based on Christ, the Passover Lamb, and His redemption. Only by Christ and His redemption can we have a new beginning in our Christian life.

THE PLACE TO SEE THE VISION

Now we need to consider the place to see the vision. Ezekiel did not see the vision concerning the building of God in the land of captivity. Rather, he was brought back to the holy land, the land of Israel (Ezek. 40:2). Since this land signifies Christ, to be brought back to the land of Israel is to be brought back to Christ. In addition to being brought back to the land of Israel, Ezekiel was brought to a high mountain, signifying a place of resurrection and ascension. When we come back to Christ, we may sense in our spirit that we are in an elevated place, that is, in the resurrected and ascended Christ. Furthermore, Ezekiel was brought back to Jerusalem. Many of us can testify that while we were in captivity in the denominations, we could not see the vision of the building of the church. But when we came back to the holy land, to the church life, we could see the vision of the building of the church.

In order to see something properly, we need the right position, the right standing, and the right angle. If we are wrong either in position or in standing, we will not be able to see. For

example, if we want to see Los Angeles, we must be in the right position and have the right standing. If we want to see God's building, we need to be on the mountain in Jerusalem.

Ezekiel was not the only person who saw the vision of God's building. In the book of Revelation the apostle John told us that he was carried away in spirit to a high mountain to see the holy city, New Jerusalem (21:10). The reason that we need to be on a mountain (which signifies resurrection and ascension) is that the building of God is something in the resurrection and ascension of Christ, and we need to be in an elevated position in order to see the vision of God's building.

Some people have been offended because of my ministering on the building of God. The reason they are offended is that, regarding spiritual matters, they are like little children playing with toys. If you touch their "toys," they will be offended. If you tell them that they need to grow up in the spiritual life and give up their toys, they may be quite upset. May the Lord be merciful to us so that we may grow up and also go up. We not only need to grow up, but we also need to go up to the highest position with the highest standing and the best angle to see the building of God.

If Ezekiel had remained in Babylon in the captivity, he could not have seen the building. Likewise, if he had been on a plain and not on the mountaintop, he could not have seen the vision of God's building. Therefore, if we would see this vision, we need to grow up and to go up. This means that we need maturity in life and that we need to be on the high mountain. Then we will be able to see the building of God.

THE VISION OF A MAN

Before Ezekiel saw the vision of the building, he saw the vision of a man. Unlike the man in chapter one, this man did not look like electrum but instead looked like brass (Ezek. 40:3). In chapter one, in the vision of the glory of the Lord, the Lord Jesus on the throne as a man looked like electrum. But in chapter forty He is not on the throne; He is at the gate of the building, measuring. In the Bible to measure means to judge and take possession. When a sister buys some cloth, first she measures it. While she is measuring the cloth, she is

judging the quality of the cloth. In her measuring, she judges. Likewise, the measuring in chapter forty is related to judging. Here the Lord Jesus is not on the throne but is at the gate in the appearance of brass to measure and to take possession.

When the Lord comes to measure something, first He judges that thing. In typology brass or copper signifies judgment. When the Lord Jesus was on the cross, He was likened to a bronze serpent (Num. 4:9; John 3:14). In the Old Testament the altar of burnt offering was overlaid with bronze. Both of these examples indicate that bronze (brass) signifies judgment.

Once something has been judged, it is able to stand. After a certain thing has been judged, it can stand any kind of test or examination. It can also withstand further judgment. The Lord Jesus is such a person. He passed God's judgment, and now He has become a test to others. Because He was able to stand all kinds of tests, examinations, and judgments, He is fully qualified to measure everything, including the building of God. By His judgment He measures what belongs to God's building.

EZEKIEL CHARGED TO BEHOLD, HEAR, AND SET HIS HEART

Ezekiel 40:4 says, "And the man said unto me, Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall show thee; for to the intent that I might show them unto thee art thou brought hither: declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel." While God was showing the vision of His building to Ezekiel, the prophet needed to have keen sight and to listen intently. Also, in order to absorb the things that would be shown to him, he had to set his heart upon them. Then he would be able to declare to God's people all that he had seen and heard.

THE HOLY BUILDING OF GOD

The holy temple is the place where God is, God's dwelling place. If we want to seek God, contact God, fellowship with God, and serve God, we need to realize that God has His dwelling place. On the one hand, God is omnipresent; on the other hand, God has His particular place. If we want to meet

Him, we must know His exact location, His definite habitation. Thus, we need to consider the vision of God's building in Ezekiel, for this vision describes the place where God dwells—His holy temple.

Let us first consider a general sketch, or plot plan, of the building of God. Please consult figure 1, which is the plot plan showing the temple and the inner and outer courts.

The building is square, with each of the four sides being five hundred cubits long. Three of the four sides have an entrance. There are gates on the east, the south, and the north, all leading to the outer court around the walls. In the outer court are six pavements made of stone. On each pavement are five chambers built as places for the people to eat and enjoy the sacrifices and offerings. This means that the thirty chambers are places for us to enjoy Christ.

Within the outer court there is an inner court, which also has gates on three sides, on the east, south, and north. This makes a total of six gates—three to the outer court and three to the inner court. Regarding this, we need to realize that the building which Ezekiel saw has two walls, the wall outside the outer court and the wall outside the inner court. With each wall there are three gates. The measurement and design of the walls and the gates are exactly the same.

Within the inner court is the altar. This altar is the center of the whole compound of the building of God. The altar is a type of the cross. Thus, the altar at the center of the compound indicates that the cross of Christ is at the very center of God's economy and of God's interests.

In Ezekiel 40—48, a section on God's building, three main things are covered: the holy temple, the holy city, and the holy land. The temple, the city, and the land are all holy. It is significant that Ezekiel begins not from the outside but from the inside. This is the way of God's economy. In His economy God always begins from the inside, not from the outside. We see an indication of this in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, which speaks of our "spirit and soul and body," not of body, soul, and spirit. This reveals that God begins from within, from our spirit, not from the outside. God's economy always begins from within, whereas human movements are always outward. In light of

this, we need to learn in the church life not to have anything that begins in an outward way but always to have something that begins from within. This is to apply what is revealed here concerning God's building—first the temple, then the city, and then the land.

THE WALL

The first item we need to see concerning the temple is the wall. The temple has a wall on all four sides. The wall is for separation, separating what belongs to God from what cannot belong to Him. It separates what should belong to God and what should never belong to God. The wall is thus a separating line.

The measurement of the wall indicates that it signifies Christ Himself as a separating line. Whatever is within Christ belongs to God's interests and to God's building, but whatever is outside of Christ is excluded from God's interests and God's building. In a city of millions of people, we can know who is of God and who is not of God by Christ as the separating line. Whoever is in Christ belongs to God, and whoever is outside of Christ is separated from God. In other words, whoever belongs to Christ is within the wall, and whoever is outside of Christ is outside of the wall.

The measurement of the wall is quite unusual. I do not think that through all the centuries of human history, there has ever been such a wall. This wall is six cubits high and six cubits thick. If we could look at a cross section of the wall, we would be looking at a square six cubits by six cubits. The number six refers to man, who was created on the sixth day. Since the wall is six cubits high and six cubits thick and since six is the number of man, we may say that the wall signifies the Lord Jesus as a square, upright, perfect, and complete man. As a square, upright, perfect, complete, and even resurrected man, Christ is the separating line. Because He is square and upright, He is fully qualified. In Him there is no imperfection; with Him there is nothing lacking and nothing crooked. Rather, with Him everything is straight, upright, perfect, and complete. Again I say, such a man is the separating line.

If only the Lord Jesus were such a man, we would be excluded. We are not square, straight, or upright. We surely are not perfect or complete. Although we are so short, we should not try to imitate Christ. It is impossible for any fallen human beings to imitate Christ, the One who is square, upright, perfect, and complete.

When we come to the Lord Jesus and compare ourselves with Him, we are exposed and condemned. For example, in Luke 2 we see that when the Lord Jesus was a child of twelve, no matter how much He was for His Father, He still obeyed His parents. Young people, you are not obedient to your parents while you are seeking after your Father's interests, but the Lord Jesus was obedient. From this one example we can realize that the life history of the Lord Jesus is a condemning factor to us.

THE GATE

Praise the Lord that He is not only the wall but also the gate. As the wall He excludes us and condemns us, but as the gate He brings us into God's building. If we are in the sphere of God's building today, it is because Christ as the gate has brought us in.

Christ is our gate, our door. In John 14:6 the Lord Jesus tells us that He is the way to the Father. Apart from Him, no one can come to the Father. Christ is the gateway for us to enter into God and into God's interests, God's building, and God's kingdom.

We may realize that Christ is the door, the gate, but we may not know Christ as the gate in a detailed way. Ezekiel, however, saw the details concerning Christ as the gate.

The Measurements

The depth of the gate, from the front to the rear, is fifty cubits. The breadth of the gate, from side to side, is twenty-five cubits. These numbers are both multiples of five, the number of responsibility.

A Stair of Seven Steps

In front of the gate is a stair of seven steps. The steps of

ascent are quite high, indicating that in order to get into the building, we need to go up. Whenever a person believes in the Lord Jesus, he has the sense that he is going up. But when we participate in certain worldly amusements, we have the sense that we are going down. Whenever we come to the Lord Jesus, we sense that we are on a staircase going up.

Composed of Four Sections

The gate is composed of four sections: the outer threshold, the passage, the inner threshold, and the porch. There are three thresholds, which are the outer threshold, the inner threshold, and a passage between these two which may be considered a hallway. The middle part, the passage, is also called a threshold, but as a help to our understanding we may use the word *passage*. Thus, here we have the outer threshold, the passage, the inner threshold, and the porch. The porch is somewhat like a lobby to the temple. By passing through the outer threshold, the passage, the inner threshold, and the lobby, one can enter into the temple. Then one must take another flight of stairs. This time the ascent is even higher, being eight steps rather than seven.

The Entry of the Gate

By referring to figure 2, which is a drawing of the gate detail, we can see that within the gate is the entry of the gate, which is exactly ten cubits wide. It is significant that the opening of the entrance is ten cubits in width. In the Bible the number ten first refers to the Ten Commandments. Whatever the Ten Commandments require, the entry of the gate fulfills. The width of the entry is exactly the span of the Ten Commandments. This indicates that the Lord Jesus fulfilled all the requirements of the Ten Commandments. When we are faced with the Ten Commandments, we are excluded by them. However, the Lord Jesus was able to fulfill every commandment, and He has become the gate for us to enter into God's building.

Whereas the entry, or opening, of the gate is ten cubits wide, the gate itself is thirteen cubits wide. On both sides of the gate, the wall measures one and a half cubits. By adding

the two together, we have three cubits. Three is the number of the Triune God and also the number of resurrection. Here the three is divided, with one and a half on each side. I would ask you to remember that in the tabernacle the standing boards were each one and a half cubits wide and that two boards formed one unit of three cubits. All these numbers are significant. They indicate that the Lord Jesus, who fulfills all the requirements of the Ten Commandments, is the Triune God who became a man, was put to death, and was resurrected. In His death Christ was "split," cut into halves, and then He was resurrected.

The Threshold

After the gate comes the threshold, which measures six cubits by ten cubits. By putting all these numbers together we can realize that Christ was the Triune God (the number three) who became a man having the number six. He was "split" in His death and was resurrected, fulfilling all the requirements of the Ten Commandments. In this way He opened the gate.

The Passage

From the threshold we go to the passage, which has many details.

The Guardrooms

Ezekiel 40:10 says that in this passage are six little chambers. Some of the better translations use the word *guardrooms*. These are the rooms where the guards stay to protect the temple. Each of these guardrooms is six cubits square and is thus the same in size as a cross section of the wall. This indicates that the Lord Jesus in His person and work is the real guard of God's glory and holiness.

If there were no wall, sinful people would be able to enter into the temple, and that would be an insult to God's glory and holiness. Whereas the wall separates sinners from God, the gate brings people into God and into God's building. In order to be the gate, the Lord Jesus had to fulfill all the requirements of the Ten Commandments. He was a square,

upright, and proper man, able to fulfill the Ten Commandments, and now He Himself is the guardrooms of God's glory and holiness. Only those who are qualified and who match God's glory and holiness can enter into the temple. If we would be qualified in this way, we need to pass through the gate. By passing through Christ as the gate, we are qualified to enter into God's building, which is full of God's glory and holiness.

The six guardrooms are divided into two groups of three. Again we have the number three signifying the Triune God, who became a man and was "split" into two. This indicates that the guardrooms are a person, Christ Himself.

The Borders

Between the three guardrooms are two spaces of five cubits each. Again we have ten cubits composed of two groups of five cubits. This shows us once more that Christ bears the responsibility to fulfill all the requirements of the Ten Commandments. Furthermore, we once again have the number two, signifying a testimony. On one side there are two spaces of five cubits each, and on the other side there are also two spaces of five cubits. This indicates that Christ fully bears the responsibility of the Ten Commandments and that this becomes a testimony. The Lord Jesus as the Triune God became a man and died on the cross to fulfill all the responsibilities of the Ten Commandments.

From the guardrooms we go on to the borders. Instead of *borders* the King James Version uses the word *space;* other versions use the word *platform*. Outside each of the guardrooms is a border, a space, which is one cubit wide. These are in two groups of three, signifying the Triune God in resurrection.

We need to remember that the passage is ten cubits wide. However, there is a sense in which we may say that the passage is eight cubits wide. If we deduct one cubit for the border around the guardroom on each side, this leaves the passage only eight cubits wide. Eight is the number of resurrection. The first day of the week, the day on which the Lord Jesus was resurrected, is also the eighth day. Hence, the eighth day

is the day of resurrection and signifies a new beginning. When we pass through Christ, we pass through resurrection and have a new beginning.

The Posts

Next we need to consider the posts, which are difficult to locate. Ezekiel 40:14 says that the posts are a total of sixty cubits and that every post (column) has two sides. Each post, each column, has two sides, and each side is of two cubits. On the sides of the passage are fifteen sides of two cubits each. Thus, there are thirty cubits on both sides of the passage, altogether equaling sixty cubits. Fifteen is composed of three times five, signifying the Triune God in resurrection bearing all the responsibility. The number two, indicating a testimony, is also present. The number thirty corresponds to the chambers of all the pavements for the enjoyment of Christ.

The columns, which support the roof of the structure, indicate that we need to be upheld by the supporting strength of Christ in order to enter into the enjoyment of Christ. The supporting strength is of the number thirty, and the enjoyment of Christ is also of the number thirty. This indicates that we can enjoy only as much as Christ can support. As we will see in a later message, the expression of Christ, as seen in the side chambers of the temple, is also in the number thirty. Thus, the expression of Christ, the enjoyment of Christ, and the supporting by Christ are all signified by the number thirty. We can only express what we can enjoy, and we can only enjoy what Christ can support.

The Palm Trees

On the two sides of each column is a palm tree (v. 16). In the Bible palm trees signify victory, even victory that is everlasting. Christ, the guard of God's holiness and glory, is the everlasting, victorious One standing, bearing, sustaining, and prevailing.

The Porch

From the posts we go to the porch, where the number eight is used. In the previous portion, mainly the numbers five, six,

and ten are used, but with the porch the number eight is used. This indicates that we are now in resurrection, in a new beginning.

THE WINDOWS

The windows are for letting in light and air. These are not narrow windows but latticed windows, having strips of material over them to protect the building from negative things. Yet the windows are kept open for air and light.

These latticed windows signify the life-giving Spirit. There are altogether thirty windows, fifteen on one side and fifteen on the other side. The gate is full of windows. This indicates that Christ is full of the life-giving Spirit. The life-giving Spirit brings in air and light and keeps out all the negative things.

The Hebrew word for *lattice* implies the thought of being beveled. This means that the outer side of the window is narrow but the inner side is wider (40:16). The life-giving Spirit is always toward the inside. Outwardly He is not wide but inwardly He is very wide.

SPREADING IN A SPACIOUS WAY

Although Ezekiel mentions the height of the wall, he does not give the height of the gate. The omission of this dimension is quite significant. The entire compound of the temple does not give the impression of height but of spreading in a spacious way. Even the height of the wall is only six cubits. According to the plot plan, the temple compound is five hundred cubits square. Thus, the height is not great, but the spread is very great.

The human concept is that one should climb higher and higher until one reaches the heavens. That was the concept in the building of the tower of Babel. However, God's intention is to be with man on earth. God's desire is to come to earth and to spread His testimony on earth. Thus, God came to the earth as a man to spread His testimony over the whole earth.

In this message we have seen that the gates signify Christ as the Triune God. Christ became a man who was square, upright, perfect, and complete. Christ bore the responsibility

and fulfilled all the requirements of the Ten Commandments in order to open the way for us to enter into God and into God's interests. Furthermore, Christ is the testimony of God, and as the resurrected One, the enlivening life-giving Spirit, He is a living witness of victory forever.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE TWENTY

THE OUTER AND INNER COURTS

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 40:17-47; 46:21-22

In the foregoing message, we covered many of the details related to the gates. They are divided into four sections: the first threshold, a passage, a further threshold, and the porch. Each gate is six cubits high and ten cubits wide. Six is the number of the Lord's humanity, by which He fulfilled all the requirements of the Ten Commandments. This indicates that the number six fulfills the number ten; that is, the man Jesus fulfills the Ten Commandments. As we have pointed out, the dimensions of the guardrooms match the dimensions of the cross section of the wall—six cubits by six cubits. This indicates that to us the guardrooms are Christ Himself as God mingled with man. The passage, having the number eight, indicates a new beginning in resurrection. The porch, the final section of the gate, has the numbers two, six, and eight, indicating that the Lord as a man is fully in resurrection

All the numbers used in Ezekiel with respect to the building of God are very meaningful. The numbers three, five, and multiples of five are used frequently. For instance, extensive use is made of the number thirty, which signifies the Triune God in resurrection bearing the full responsibility. When Ezekiel saw the visions in chapter one, he was thirty years of age. There are thirty supporting posts, thirty chambers in the outer court, and thirty side chambers surrounding the temple. In Ezekiel the number thirty indicates both maturity which is able to bear something and also the enjoyment and expression of Christ.

The palm trees on the posts signify victory and everlasting power. Because the columns must bear the weight of the roof and support the entire building, they need to be in victory and

to be everlasting. Christ is the column which supports and bears God's building with a victorious, everlasting life.

We have also seen that the gate has thirty windows to let in light and air. These windows are covered with a lattice, or screen, to keep the negative things out. All this is precisely the work of the life-giving Spirit: He brings in the light and the air, but He continually screens out the negative things.

In this message we will go on to see that with the temple in Ezekiel there are two courts: the outer court and the inner court. Let us first consider what is in the outer court and then the inner court.

THE OUTER COURT

If we would enter into the temple which Ezekiel saw in his vision, we must first climb up the seven steps and then pass through the spacious gate. This would bring us into the outer court of the temple.

The Pavement

The first thing we need to pay attention to in the outer court is the pavement. There is pavement around the wall on the three sides of the outer court, on the east, the south, and the north.

The Chambers

There are six different sections, or areas, of pavement, and on each section there are five chambers. This means that there are thirty chambers. Here the number thirty is composed of five times six.

In addition to the thirty chambers on the pavement, there are four small courts, one at each corner of the outer court. These four courts at the four corners are places for boiling the sacrifices. In modern terms, these are kitchens, places for cooking food. These cooking places are used not by the priests but by the people. Whereas the priests eat in the inner court, the people eat in the outer court.

Outside of these kitchens, these cooking places, are some chambers. These chambers are for eating, just as in our homes the room connected to the kitchen is the dining room, a

place for eating the food prepared in the kitchen. In Ezekiel, the chambers connected to the kitchens are dining places for the people to enjoy the sacrifices. This indicates that these chambers are places to enjoy Christ. From this we can see that the main thing in the outer court is the enjoyment of Christ as the offerings and sacrifices. After we pass through the gate, we come to the outer court and enter into the chambers to eat, to enjoy, Christ, who is the reality of all the offerings.

Ezekiel tells us that these chambers for eating are built upon the pavement (40:17). In ancient times the pavement of a court was made with stones. This indicates that whenever we are about to enjoy Christ, we need to be on a pavement made of stones. The stone pavement separates us from the dirt of the earth. Otherwise, our feet would be on the dirt. As believers in Christ, we have the pavement of the stones to separate us from the dirt. Although we are still on the earth and in the world, we are separated from any kind of dirt.

Originally, as the old creation, we were clay, being the same in nature as the earth. We came out of the earth, and we were one with the earth. But when we were saved, converted, and regenerated, we became stones, which are for the pavement. Now if we intend to enjoy Christ, we need to stand upon the stones of our regeneration.

However, in their daily situation, many genuine Christians do not stand upon these stones. After work, they may engage in certain worldly activities and entertainments. They are genuine Christians, but they are standing on dirt; they do not have a pavement of stones under their feet.

As those in the church life in the Lord's recovery, our situation should be very different. When we come home after a day at work or at school, we may take a rest or have dinner. Then, exercising our spirit to call on the Lord, we gather together in a meeting to enjoy the Lord. This indicates that we are standing on a pavement of stones. Furthermore, in our experience the pavement on which we are standing becomes a place, a "chamber," for us to enjoy Christ. Many of us can testify that day by day we are in the chambers enjoying Christ. This is especially true of the Lord's Day. By contacting the Lord early

in the morning, we put our feet on the stones and prepare ourselves to come into the chambers. Then in the meetings of the church we enjoy Christ by eating Him.

The Number Thirty

The number thirty, used in relation to the chambers, is composed either of five times six or of three times ten. If thirty is composed of five times six, we then have man (six) multiplied by responsibility (five). If thirty is composed of three times ten, then we have the Triune God in resurrection (three) fulfilling all the requirements (ten). The Christ whom we enjoy is the number thirty. He is not merely five or six or three. As the number thirty, He includes six, five, three, and ten. In Him we have man, the Triune God, resurrection, responsibility, and the fulfillment of all the requirements. The number ten also signifies completion and perfection. This indicates that in Christ we have completeness and perfection. Praise the Lord that we have such a rich Christ for our enjoyment!

The number thirty here corresponds to the thirty sides of the posts. This indicates that our enjoyment of Christ depends on His being the supporting posts, or pillars. The extent to which He bears, supports, and sustains, is the extent to which we can enjoy Him. Also, the thirty chambers correspond to the thirty windows. If the all-inclusive Spirit were not of the number thirty, we could not have the rich enjoyment of Christ as the number thirty.

The Width of the Pavement

If we consult the diagram of the plot plan, we will see that the width of the pavement equals the length of the gate. This signifies that the Christ whom we enjoy is the Christ whom we experience. How much we can enjoy Christ depends on how much we experience Christ. If our experience of Christ measures fifty cubits, then our enjoyment of Christ will also measure fifty cubits. How much are we able to enjoy Christ? This depends on how much we experience Christ. The more we pass through Christ, the more we experience Christ, and the more we experience Christ, the more we enjoy Christ. We

cannot enjoy Christ if we have Christ only in doctrine. This means that we cannot enjoy a Christ whom we have not experienced. We can only enjoy the Christ whom we have experienced. The width of our enjoyment of Christ always equals the length of our experience of Christ.

Connected to the Gate

The pavement is connected to the gate, for it is by the two sides of the gate. This indicates that the enjoyment of Christ is connected to the experience of Christ. If we do not have the experience of Christ, we cannot have the enjoyment of Christ. Again we see that the enjoyment of Christ depends on the experience of Christ.

The Boiling Places

In the outer court, at the four corners, are the boiling places. This indicates that, by God's grace, the preparation of Christ for others' enjoyment is spreading to every corner, becoming available everywhere. At every "corner" there is a "kitchen" where Christ is being "cooked" for our enjoyment. Wherever we are, there is a kitchen for us. We thank the Lord that the local churches are spreading to every corner of this country. Every corner of the country needs a "kitchen" to prepare Christ for peoples' enjoyment.

The measurement of the corner chambers is thirty by forty. Thus far we have seen four thirties: thirty sides of the posts, thirty windows, thirty chambers, and thirty cubits. All these thirties are related and correspond to our experience. We need to pass through Christ and then we have to enjoy a Christ who has been "cooked."

Here we have a new number—forty. Forty is the number of testing and trials. The people of Israel were in the wilderness forty years, and the Lord Jesus was in the wilderness forty days in order to be tested and tried. This indicates that without suffering, testing, and trial, Christ could not have been "cooked," prepared, to be our enjoyment. For our enjoyment Christ was "cooked." His suffering under the process of "cooking" was for our enjoyment of Him by eating Him.

Apart from the Lord's suffering and trials, He could not

have been prepared for us to enjoy. In a sense, when the sisters prepared food in the kitchen, the food "suffers." While the Lord Jesus was on earth and especially while He was dying on the cross, He was under the suffering, the "cooking," for the sake of our enjoying Him by eating Him.

THE INNER COURT

From the outer court we need to pass into the inner court.

Another Set of Stairs

As we enter into the inner court, we also ascend higher. At the entrance to the inner court, there is another set of stairs, consisting not of seven steps but of eight. Outside on the street there are seven steps leading up to the gate of the outer court, and now we see that there are eight steps bringing us to the inner gate of the inner court. From this we see that entering into the inner court means that the more inward we travel, the higher we become. As we go inward, we also go higher. When we pass through the gate into the inner court, we are fifteen steps higher than the people who are outside the wall.

The number seven signifies completion, and the number eight signifies resurrection. This indicates that if we would come into the inner court, we need to be in resurrection. All the natural life and the natural man must be repudiated and crossed out. As indicated by the eight steps, we need to be absolutely in resurrection.

In the inner court we repeat our experience of Christ. We experience Christ again by passing through another gate. We experience the same Christ, but we experience more of Him. This ushers us into the inner court.

A Place for Washing the Burnt Offerings

In the outer court there is some enjoyment through the boiling and the eating, but there is no service, no ministry to the Lord. But when we pass through the gate to the inner court, the ministering begins immediately.

There is a chamber, probably within the north gate of the inner court, for the priests to wash the burnt offerings (v. 38).

In preparing a burnt offering to be offered, a number of steps had to be followed. First the animal was killed, and then it was flayed, or skinned and cut into pieces. After this, the offering was washed. After being washed, the offering was ready to be burned. Washing, therefore, was the last step in the preparation of the burnt offering. The chamber here is not for killing the burnt offering; neither is the chamber for skinning the offering or for cutting it into pieces. Rather, the chamber is only for washing the burnt offering. This indicates that at this point in our experience, we are ready to be a burnt offering for God. Only when we are in resurrection and on a higher level, are we ready to be absolute for God.

Here in the inner court begins the life that is for God. We do not see this in the outer court. In the outer court we have the enjoyment of Christ. But in the inner court we have improvement and progress, for here we are in something that is more inward and also higher. Here the priests are ready to offer the burnt offering, meaning that they are ready to be absolute for the Lord.

The Tables

Within the north gate there are eight tables. Four are on one side and four are on the other side, making a total of eight. These tables are for slaying the offerings (vv. 39-41). This is the real service, the real ministry. The only ones who participate in this service are the priests. Today in the New Testament age, we all are priests. However, according to our actual experience, if we remain in the outer court, we are still only the people; we are not yet priests. In our experience we cannot be priests until we are in a situation that is both higher and more inward. Only after we get higher and more inward will we have the maturity in life. Then we are ready to be a burnt offering. At this point we can actually serve the Lord and minister to Him. Now we are no longer simply the people; we are priests ready to serve the Lord with a particular ministry.

With the tables, we once again have the number eight, which signifies resurrection. The eight tables are divided into two groups of four and also into four groups of two. These

numbers show that the creature is in resurrection as a testimony. We may say that eight is composed of two times four, with four being the number of the creature. We may also say that eight is composed of four times two. Four signifies the creature, eight signifies resurrection, and two signifies testimony. Therefore, here we have the creature in resurrection as a testimony.

The tables are one and a half cubits square and one cubit high. The number one signifies the unique God. By adding the one and a half cubits of the length to the one and a half cubits of the breadth, we have three cubits. Once again, the number three signifies the Triune God in resurrection. The Triune God has been "split," as indicated by the two sides of the gate, with each measuring one and a half cubits. In the matter of the eight tables, we see that the Triune God, the unique God who became a creature, was "split" on the cross, yet He was resurrected. Now in resurrection He is a testimony. Today our service, our ministry, must be in the Triune God, the unique God, who was "split" as a creature and is now in resurrection as a living testimony.

At this juncture, I would like to summarize what we have covered thus far concerning the burnt offering and the tables. The chambers are for washing the burnt offering, which is something absolute for the Lord. To be ready to offer the burnt offering means that we are ready to be absolute for the Lord. The eight tables, which are in four groups of two tables each, are for slaying the offerings. Eight signifies resurrection, four signifies the creature, and two signifies a testimony. Then the measurement of the tables is one cubit high. One signifies the one God. The number three (three cubits formed by adding the one and a half cubits of the length and width) signifies the Triune God in resurrection. That this three is divided into two parts indicates that the Triune God, who became a creature, was "split" through death and now He is in resurrection. Our service today is in the Triune God, the only God, who was "split" and who is now in resurrection to be a testimony.

Two More Chambers

From the gate we proceed into the court, where there are two more chambers, one on the north side and another on the

south side. These two chambers are for two groups of priests: those who take care of the temple and those who take care of the altar. The chamber on the south side is for the priests who take care of the temple (v. 45), and the chamber on the north side is for the priests who keep the altar (v. 46). These chambers indicate that at this point their service, their ministry, is settled, fixed, stable, and steady. They are fully qualified and steadfast in their ministry.

Originally, we were wandering outside of the wall. Praise the Lord that we got into Christ and passed through Christ into the outer court. Eventually, by the mercy of the Lord we came into the chambers and there we began to taste Christ and enjoy Him. Once we taste Him, we do not want to leave these chambers. However, after we have considerable enjoyment of the Lord, we realize that we need to go up again and experience the significance of the number eight to be absolutely in resurrection. For this, we need to pass through Christ again and come into the inner court. Once we are in the inner court, we need to be ready to be absolute for the Lord. Here we begin the ministry, the service, with the Triune God, who became a creature, who was "split," and who is now in resurrection as a testimony. Now we become fully qualified priests settled steadfastly in the chambers and taking care of the temple and the altar.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE TWENTY-ONE

THE ALTAR

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 40:47; 43:13-17

In this message we will go on from the inner gate and even from the inner court to consider the central matter—the altar. Before we do this, I would like to review two other matters so that we may be impressed with them.

First, we have seen that altogether there are six gates in three groups of two, on the east, on the south, and on the north. We need to remember that six is the number of man, who was created on the sixth day, and that the number three signifies the Triune God in resurrection. The six gates signify that the Triune God is mingled with man. Three is mingled with six. The fact that the gates are divided into three groups of two indicates that the Triune God became a man, the God-man, and was "split," or "cut," in His crucifixion, and is now in resurrection. He is now the gate through which we enter into God and into all the things of God.

Second, we need to notice that from the outer gate to the inner gate is a distance of exactly one hundred cubits (40:47). The number one hundred is composed either of ten times ten or of twenty times five. Ten times ten signifies fullness in fullness or completion in completion. Twenty times five signifies full and complete responsibility as a testimony. Furthermore, as the chart on page 215 indicates, there are three sections of one hundred cubits each, making a total of three hundred cubits. Once again, the number three signifies the Triune God, who became a man, the God-man. How wonderful and marvelous it is that we are in such a God-man! He was crucified, but now He is in resurrection, and we are in Him.

THE ALTAR BEING THE CENTER OF THE COMPOUND

If we consult the diagram on page 215 which shows the plot plan of the temple, we will see that no matter which gate we take to enter the compound, eventually we will come to the altar. There is no exception; the altar is unavoidable. We have all come in through the wonderful God-man, who was crucified and who is now in resurrection. If we want to meet God, we must come to the altar.

The altar is at the center of the compound. The altar is the center not only of the inner court but also of the whole premises of the temple.

This altar, which signifies the cross, is actually the center of the universe. As far as the relationship between man and God is concerned, the earth is the center. The center of the inhabited earth is the good land of Canaan, Palestine, for it is the connecting center that connects the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa. The city of Jerusalem is the center of the good land; the temple compound is the center of Jerusalem; and the altar is the center of the temple compound. Thus, ultimately the altar is the center of the universe. Since the altar signifies the cross, this means that the cross is the center of the universe.

It is crucial for us to know the full significance of the cross. According to superficial Christian teachings, the cross is the place where the Lord Jesus died for us. This is surely true, but the cross means much more than this. As the center of the universe, the cross signifies the all-inclusive death of God, of man, and of all the creatures. The death of the Lord Jesus on the cross was not the death merely of one single person; it was an all-inclusive death involving God, man, and all the creatures.

THE MEETING PLACE OF GOD AND MAN

As we have pointed out, by looking at the plot plan of the temple compound, we can see that no matter through which gate we enter, we will arrive at the altar. When God comes from the temple to meet man, He likewise arrives at the altar. Therefore, the altar is not only the center of the universe but also the meeting place of God with man and of man with God.

If one person comes in through the north gate and another enters through the south gate, both will eventually meet God and each other at the altar.

God came out of His dwelling place and went to the cross and died there. First, He left His dwelling place and was born in Bethlehem. After living on earth for thirty-three and a half years, He went to the altar, to the cross. As He was dying there, He was not alone. Through His incarnation He had put man upon Himself. Hence, as He was dying on the cross, man was also dying there. This indicates that God and man met together on the cross in the way of death.

Death Being a Release to God

God, however, cannot be affected by death. No matter how much death He passes through, He remains the same. Death actually helps Him to be released. God came out of His dwelling place and went to the cross and died there in order to release what was in Him. We may use a grain of wheat as an illustration. When a grain of wheat is sown into the earth, it dies. Is this death terrible or is it wonderful? We should say that the death of a grain of wheat is wonderful, because without this death all the riches and beautiful things in the grain cannot be released. For this reason, the death of a grain of wheat is not terrible but wonderful. In the same principle, death is wonderful to God. The Lord Jesus said, "Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). He was speaking of Himself as the one grain who would fall into the ground and die in order to be multiplied into many grains. By His death the riches of the divine life within Him were released. Because God is life, even resurrection, He cannot be terminated by death. Whatever is of man can be terminated, but whatever is of God is released through death. Now we can see that when God went to the altar, the cross, and died there, His life was released.

Death Being a Termination to Man

As we have pointed out, man also was on the cross. When the Lord Jesus died, man also died, and this death meant the

termination of man. All the negative things related to man were terminated on the cross. Praise the Lord that we all were terminated on the cross! By the all-inclusive death of the Lord Jesus on the cross, all the riches of God were released. The death of Christ on the cross was a wonderful release to God and a wonderful termination to us. We all need this vision of the altar. We need to see that, no matter what our age may be, we all were terminated on the cross at the same time. The riches of God were released there, and all the negative things were terminated there. Therefore, the all-inclusive death of Christ on the cross was our termination and God's release.

The mingling of God with man began when the Lord Jesus was born in Bethlehem. By His incarnation God came into man. But the mingling of man with God began on the cross and was fully accomplished at the resurrection. Through the Lord's death and resurrection, we were put into God and were mingled with God. Therefore, through incarnation God came into man, and through death and resurrection man was put into God.

All that we are and have was terminated on the cross, on the altar. Through the cross the divine life was released, and then this life was imparted to us through Christ's resurrection. If we bury a grain of wheat and a small stone, something living will grow out of the grain of wheat, but the stone will remain buried. Through His death on the cross, the Lord Jesus as a grain of wheat was released, but we, a dead "stone," were terminated. Although we have been terminated in this way, the divine life has been imparted into us to make us wonderful persons.

Originally we were not wonderful. Before we were saved, we were outside the wall of the temple compound, and we loved ourselves very much. After we were saved and passed through the gate into the outer court, we no longer loved ourselves as much but still had a certain amount of self-pity. However, after we come into the inner court, we no longer love ourselves or pity ourselves; rather, we hate the self. As we proceed further and come to the altar, we see that the ugly self, which we loved when we were outside the wall, pitied in

the outer court, and hated in the inner court, has already been terminated. Since the self has been terminated, there is no need for us to love it or pity it or even hate it. Instead, we should simply forget the self and leave it on the altar.

We have pointed out that since the cross, the altar, occupies a central place in our relationship with God, we cannot avoid it. Actually, as soon as we enter through the gate, we begin to realize something concerning the cross. The cross is implied in the gate which signifies the Lord Jesus who fulfilled all the requirements of the Ten Commandments and who then died on the cross to fulfill the righteous requirements of God's law. The cross is also implied in the eating of the sacrifices, which have passed through death. This eating takes place on the pavement. Furthermore, the boiling places and the tables upon which the sacrifices are slain both imply the cross. This indicates that throughout the holy building of God, we can see the cross—at the main gate, on the pavement, at the boiling places in the corners, and at the tables in the inner court. The cross, therefore, is not only the center but also the circumference. The cross spreads in every direction and to every corner. After we have been saved, we will meet the cross everywhere. Apart from the cross, it is impossible to contact Christ or to have Christian spiritual experiences.

Although we meet the cross everywhere in our Christian life, we experience the cross in a particular way when we come to the altar at the center of God's building. To come to the altar at the center is to realize that all that we are and all that we have were terminated at the cross. Here we have a definite experience of the cross and not merely a superficial knowledge about the cross. In our fellowship with the Lord, we are brought to the point where we touch the cross in a definite way and sense that God will no longer allow us to live in our natural man. This causes us to have a major breakthrough and an absolute submission to the cross. As a result, we will know what the natural life is and what it means for the old creation to be stripped away. This is the experience of the cross as the center.

I am grieved that although many of us have heard messages about the cross, only a few among us truly live a

crucified life. For example, we may not live a crucified life in our married life. If a married brother and his wife argue with each other, this indicates that they are not living a crucified life. If they were living a crucified life, they would not accuse each other and vindicate themselves. Those who live a crucified life do not vindicate themselves when they are attacked or criticized. They experience the termination of their Adamic life and of the old creation through the death of the cross and enjoy God's riches and His divine element, which were released through the cross.

When some, especially young people, hear this word about the altar, they may be frightened and think that it is better not to love the Lord and seek Him. They may think that it is adequate simply to enter through the gate into the outer court and enjoy Christ on the pavement; they may think that there is no need for them to go further through the inner gate, which leads into the inner court toward the altar. They may fear that it would be dangerous to reach the altar and become a burnt offering.

We need to realize, however, that since the Lord has had mercy on us, we cannot escape Him. We were not saved of our own will. On the contrary, while we were wandering in the world, having no intention of entering in through the gate, the Lord brought us through the gate. Apart from our own choice, we believed into Christ. This is altogether a matter of God's selection, of His mercy, and of His reaching us with His care. The principle is the same in our loving the Lord and pursuing Him. If we did not believe in the Lord, love Him, and pursue Him, we would feel uncomfortable and dissatisfied. But the more we love the Lord and pursue Him, the more we are satisfied. This also is a matter of the Lord's mercy. Because of His mercy to us and His operation within us, we have no choice except to go forward; we cannot turn back. If we do not advance toward the altar but instead try to go back to the outer court, we will feel uncomfortable. Therefore, we need to go on and on until we reach the altar.

Eventually, all those who are spiritual and who pursue the Lord end up on the altar where they are terminated, even destroyed, by the Lord. Seemingly without reason, the Lord

tears them down and strips them of everything. God puts to death all that we are and all that we have. Madame Guyon experienced this and could say that God gave her the cross. Because we love the Lord and pursue Him, sooner or later we will meet the cross, which will tear us down and bring everything into death. We will be forced to pass into death, even if we are not willing to do so.

We do not experience the cross once for all—we experience the cross again and again. Those who pursue the Lord will meet the cross at every turn. At one time they will meet the cross through their children. At another time they will meet the cross through their spouse or through illness. At other times, they may experience the cross through the church or through the co-workers. The reason that the cross is everywhere is that we must go through the cross in order to contact God. Thank the Lord that God gives us the cross and that the cross gives us God. The ones who love God the most and experience Him the most are the ones who have gone through the cross.

THE DESIGN AND MEASUREMENTS OF THE ALTAR

How can we prove from the record in the book of Ezekiel that God, man, and all the creatures died on the altar, on the cross? How can we prove that the death of Christ was such an all-inclusive death? How can we prove that the cross gives us God? All this is proved by the design and measurements of the altar.

The clear details of the altar are a special characteristic of Ezekiel's vision. The earlier books of the Bible do not speak specifically about the measurements of the altar in such a particular way, but Ezekiel gives us details concerning the altar. If we consider figure 3 (altar detail), we will see that according to Ezekiel's vision the altar has four sections: the base, the lesser ledge, the greater ledge upon the lesser ledge, and the upper altar upon the greater ledge. The upper altar is called the hearth of God, the place where something burns for God and by God.

Let us now briefly consider the measurements. The base of the altar is one cubit high. The number one signifies the

unique God; thus, the base of the altar being one cubit high indicates that God is the base of the altar. This means that the cross was initiated by God. The lesser ledge, which is upon the base of the altar, is two cubits high. Here the number two signifies not only a testimony but also the second person of the Triune God. Christ is the second person of the Triune God as a witness. The third section, the greater ledge, is four cubits high, signifying the creatures. The upper altar on top of the greater ledge is also four cubits high.

The top of the altar is a square, twelve by twelve cubits. The number twelve is composed either of six times two or of three times four. In this case all these numbers are involved. The number four signifying the creature, the number six signifying man, and the number three signifying the Triune God are all here. From all this we can see that God is here, that Christ is here, and that all creatures, including man, are here.

God as the base includes Christ. When Christ died upon the cross, God, man, and all the creatures died there with Christ. Therefore, this altar signifies the all-inclusive death of Christ.

Because the death of Christ is mysterious, there are many different opinions concerning it. An unbelieving Jew might say simply that a man named Jesus, the Nazarene, died there. Many of today's believers would say that the One who died on the cross was their Redeemer. Other Christians, who are more advanced in their spiritual understanding, might say that Christ their Redeemer and they themselves died on the cross. However, I would declare that not only Christ, my Redeemer, and I died there, but also all the creatures and God Himself died there. The whole universe with the Creator has passed through death. Because everything has passed through death, everything could be tested. Whatever could be terminated by death was terminated. Actually, only God was able to pass through the test of death. We and the entire creation were terminated, but God was able to pass through the test of death.

The all-inclusive death of Christ worked out a mingling which brought man into God. In that death God died in man

to be released, and man died in God to be terminated. Praise the Lord that in the wonderful, all-inclusive death of Christ, God died in man, and man died in God! Hallelujah for Christ's releasing and terminating death! In His death we were terminated, and God was released.

THE HEARTH

The top of the altar, the hearth of God, is twelve cubits square. This is the fireplace of God, the place of God to burn things for God, to God, and by God. It is significant that the hearth measures twelve cubits by twelve cubits. This is the first time the number twelve is used in the temple measurements. The number twelve is the number of the New Jerusalem and is composed of three times four. The number three is the number of the Triune God, and the number four is the number of man as a creature. The number twelve, therefore, signifies the Triune God mingled with man. The New Jerusalem will be the consummate mingling of the Triune God with man. The church life today is also the mingling of the Triune God with man.

THE GREATER LEDGE

The greater ledge, the section which is directly under the upper altar, has an edge on either side which measures one cubit. This is why the greater ledge is fourteen cubits wide. The number fourteen is composed in two ways: seven times two and ten plus four. Seven is the number of completion, two is the number of testimony, ten is the number of fullness in perfection, and four, of course, is the number of the creature. By putting all these numbers together, we can realize that this signifies that the creature in fullness bears a complete testimony.

THE LESSER LEDGE

Under the greater ledge is the lesser ledge. This ledge also has two edges of one cubit each, making it a total of sixteen cubits. The number sixteen is composed of eight times two, signifying a witness (two) in resurrection (eight). Christ is a living witness in resurrection.

THE BASE

The base also has two edges of one cubit each, making it a total of eighteen cubits wide. The number eighteen is composed of six times three or three times six, signifying man, the Triune God, and resurrection.

Because of its unique design, the altar is very solid and stable. It is wider at the base than it is at the top. The base is eighteen cubits square, the lesser ledge is sixteen cubits square, the greater ledge is fourteen cubits square, and the altar is twelve cubits square. This type of construction makes the altar very stable. If the top were wider than the bottom, the altar would not be stable. But because the bottom is much wider than the top, the altar can stand solidly. Nothing can shake it.

On every story, on every section, there are edges, which spread out like two arms to hold something. The borders of the edges also rise up to hold something. This clear picture shows us that the altar is not only solid and stable but is also able to hold things. This indicates that the death of Christ on the cross is not only stable and solid but also able to hold things. His wonderful, marvelous, all-inclusive death is able to hold all of us.

THE HORNS

At each of the four corners of the hearth of God, a horn points upward. In the Bible horns signify strength and power. The horns on the altar, which are toward the four corners of the earth and which are also upward, signify the power of the cross of Christ. The power of the church and of the saints depends on the cross. The more we experience the cross, the more spiritual power we will have.

THE STEPS

The steps up to the altar are toward the east. The east indicates the glory of the Lord. It is the direction of the rising of the sun, which signifies the glory of the Lord (Num. 2:3; Ezek. 43:2). This indicates that the cross always points to God's glory and always leads to God's glory.

THE CUBIT MEASUREMENT

The cubit used by Ezekiel is not the common human cubit; rather, it is a cubit plus a handbreadth (43:13). This is called a *great cubit* and is not a human measurement but a divine measurement. Thus, the altar is not measured by the human cubit but by the divine cubit. We should never measure ourselves by our human measurement. Our measurement may be of value to us, but it is of no value to God. We may feel that, according to our human measurement and standard, we are qualified, but according to the divine measurement, we fall short.

THE ALTAR AND THE TEMPLE

The last point concerning the altar is the relationship of the altar with the temple. Only after passing through the altar can we come to the temple. This means that without the proper realization and experience of the cross of Christ, we cannot have the reality of the church life. The temple signifies Christ, and it also signifies the church. We can have the genuine church life only after we have had the experience of the altar. If we desire to have the proper church life, we need an adequate realization and experience of the altar, of the cross of Christ. It is only after we realize that we have been thoroughly terminated on the cross that we can have the real church life.

To be in the outer court having the enjoyment of Christ is wonderful, but it is far from the experience of the temple. To be in the inner court where the ministry begins is also wonderful, but even this is far from the experience of the temple. To be in the temple is to be in something that is altogether in resurrection. Therefore, we need to go on until we pass through the altar, through the cross of Christ, and come to the temple. There we will have the reality of the church life.

We need to be impressed with the fact that only by passing through the altar can we come to the temple. Whereas the altar signifies the cross, the temple signifies both Christ and the church, the Body of Christ. The cross, Christ, and the church are the central subject not only of the New Testament

but also of the whole Bible. First we come to the altar, the cross, and then we come to the temple. This indicates that we cannot have the church apart from the cross. Through the experience of the cross, we are brought into the reality of the church. Only as we pass through the cross do we have the real church life. On the one hand, as saved ones we come together to practice the church life; on the other hand, we can have the reality of the church only after we have passed through the cross.

We all need to be brought to the point where we know and accept the cross. Then as we pass through the cross, our flesh, our old creation, our self, and our natural man with the natural life will all be dealt with. Everything that has its source in our humanity will be terminated at the cross. Then we will have the reality of the church. Then we will be one in the Lord, we will have genuine coordination, and we will have harmony, rest, and the presence of Christ. This is the temple, the place where God dwells. This is the expression of Christ, the reality of the church.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE TWENTY-TWO

THE TEMPLE AND SIDE CHAMBERS

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 40:48-49; 41:25b-26a

In this message we will consider the temple and the side chambers. The temple is composed of three sections: the porch, the Holy Place (outer temple), and the Most Holy (inner temple).

THE TEMPLE

After we pass the altar, we come to the temple. The temple is composed of three main sections: the porch, the outer temple, which is called the Holy Place, and the inner temple, which is called the Most Holy or the Holy of Holies. In addition, there is an attachment which Ezekiel calls the side chambers. The side chambers surround the entire building of the temple. Thus, the temple is composed of three sections with an attachment.

The Porch

Let us begin with the first main part of the temple, the porch.

The Steps

Ten steps lead up to the porch (40:49). Now we can see that the compound of the temple has three levels: the first level in the outer court, the second level in the inner court, and the third level in the temple. The ground floor of the temple is on the third level. We need to remember that the street outside the wall is on a level even lower than that of the outer court. If we count from the street outside of the wall of the compound of the temple, there are four levels, with the street as the first level, the outer court as the second, the

inner court as the third, and the ground floor of the temple as the fourth. This gives us some idea of the elevation of the temple.

It also indicates that the further inward we proceed in the temple, the higher we rise. When we are outside the wall, we are on the lowest level. But when we enter and progress inward, we rise higher and higher. When we go from the street to the outer court, we must ascend seven steps higher. When we go from the outer court to the inner court, we must ascend another eight steps higher. When we go from the inner court into the temple, we must ascend an additional ten steps higher. From this we can see that the temple is altogether twenty-five steps above the level of the street.

Although we must climb twenty-five steps to go from the level of the street to the level of the temple, we actually ascend only fifteen cubits in height. We can calculate this because the ten steps to the temple are equal to the height of the platform of the temple. In 41:8 Ezekiel says that he saw an elevation of the temple which was six cubits high. This equals the height of the ten steps. The platform, which is six cubits high, is the base of the whole building of the temple and the side chambers. The height of the ten steps equals the six cubits. Therefore, the twenty-five steps from the level of the street to the level of the temple should be fifteen cubits.

Once again, the numbers are significant. Twenty-five is five times five, which indicates responsibility within responsibility. Fifteen is five times three, indicating the responsibility borne by the Triune God in resurrection. By putting these things together, we can see that the way to ascend higher and higher in the temple is by the responsibility within the responsibility borne by the Triune God in resurrection. We have no way to ascend higher apart from the Triune God bearing responsibility in resurrection.

The Two Pillars

From the steps we go on to the two pillars. We need to differentiate the pillars from the posts of the temple (41:21). The posts are square, whereas the pillars are round. While the measurements of the posts are given, they are not given

concerning the pillars. The fact that Ezekiel does not give us the measurement of the pillars indicates that they must be unlimited. Thus, these pillars signify Christ as God's witness bearing the house of God with a strength which is unlimited and immeasurable.

Now we come to the porch itself. Ezekiel 40:48 says, "He brought me to the porch of the house, and measured each post of the porch, five cubits on this side, and five cubits on that side: and the breadth of the gate was three cubits on this side, and three cubits on that side." Here we have two posts which measure five cubits each. Since the number five indicates responsibility and the number two indicates testimony, the significance of these two posts is responsibility in testimony. Again the number three signifies the Triune God in resurrection.

The height of the porch is twenty cubits, and the entry of the porch is fourteen cubits. As we have seen, the number fourteen is composed either of seven times two or of ten plus four. Seven signifies completion, two signifies a testimony, ten signifies fullness, and four signifies the creatures. Thus, the porch also signifies that the creatures bear a complete testimony in fullness.

An additional point concerning the porch is that it is used as a lobby. This makes the temple easy to approach. In the church life we also should have a lobby, making it easy for others to come in. This means that we need to have an atmosphere that is stretching out and making it easy for others to contact us and touch us. Such a lobby makes the church accessible and enables us to take others in and hold them. In addition to making the temple approachable, the porch, or lobby, is a place where we can slow down, draw near, and prepare ourselves to enter the temple.

The Outer Temple

After we pass through the porch, we come to the outer temple. The entrance to the outer temple measures ten cubits (41:2). The first entrance, that of the porch, measures fourteen cubits, but the second entrance to the outer court measures ten cubits. This indicates that the further inward

we progress, the more narrow the way becomes. As we will see, the entrance into the inner temple is even narrower, measuring six cubits. According to 41:2 there are five cubits on the sides of the doors. There are two posts measuring five cubits, indicating responsibility in testimony.

The length of the outer temple is forty cubits, and the breadth is twenty cubits, making a total of eight hundred square cubits. The number eight hundred indicates one hundred times resurrection. The numbers forty and twenty are multiples that can be factored by five. Twenty is four times five, and forty is eight times five. Five is composed of four (the creature) plus one (the unique God) and signifies man receiving God's grace to bear responsibility. The number eight signifies resurrection. Therefore, composed of eight times five, forty signifies the adding together of the man as God's creature and God in resurrection to produce something that has a perfect and complete form.

The Entries

The entry into the inner temple is six cubits wide (41:3). As we have seen, this shows us that the more inward we advance, the narrower the entry becomes. If we are outside the porch, we have no restriction. When we come inside the porch, we have some restriction. This restriction is not very narrow, for it is still fourteen cubits wide. However, when we pass from the porch to the outer temple, the entry is narrowed to ten cubits. Finally, when we proceed further and reach the inner temple, the entry is narrowed to six cubits. From our spiritual experience we know that the closer we are to the Lord, the more we are restricted by Him. If we are loose and careless, this is a sign that we are far off from the presence of the Lord. The closer we are to the Lord, the more we will be restricted.

The Inner Temple

From the outer temple we go on to the inner temple. Ezekiel 41:3 says, "Then went he inward, and measured the post of the door, two cubits; and the door, six cubits; and the

breadth of the door, seven cubits." Once again, two cubits, the measure of the post of the door, indicates testimony.

Verse 4 tells us that the inner temple is twenty cubits square. The Holy of Holies in the tabernacle was a square (Exo. 26), and the Holy of Holies in the temple that was built in the good land was also a square (2 Chron. 3:8). The wall of the house (Ezek. 41:5) measures six cubits, signifying the humanity of the Lord Jesus. The humanity of the Lord Jesus is the standing strength of God's dwelling place. In the tabernacle the acacia boards standing upright signified the humanity of the Lord Jesus (Exo. 26:15). Now we need to see that the wall of the temple in Ezekiel also signifies the humanity of Jesus. As a proper human being, the Lord Jesus is the standing and supporting wall.

Twenty is composed of four times five. Twenty cubits squared, the area of the inner temple, equals four hundred cubits, that is, one hundred times four. Five times four (twenty cubits) becoming one hundred times four signifies God in the creature, with the creature as God's dwelling place. When we, the creatures who have received God's grace, are blended into one and are perfectly squared, becoming a unit of one hundred times four, God will have His abode among us.

THE SIDE CHAMBERS

On the south, the west, and the north sides of the temple are side chambers. These side chambers are of three stories, each having thirty side chambers, making a total of ninety side chambers. If we consult the diagram on page 242, we will see that the wall of the temple is in three sections. The first floor of the wall is six cubits wide, the second floor is five cubits wide, and the third floor is four cubits wide. Because these are set one upon the other, a ledge of one cubit is created, and the beam of the side chambers is placed upon this ledge. The beam of the first story of the side chambers is placed upon the first ledge, and the beam of the second story of the side chambers is placed upon the second ledge.

As the side chambers which surround the house increase in height, they also increase in breadth. The lowest story

of the side chambers is four cubits wide, the second story of the side chambers is five cubits wide, and the third story of the side chambers is six cubits wide. However, the breadth of the temple continues straight upward with no change. As the side chambers go higher, they also become broader. This indicates that as we go higher with the Lord, we also become broader and richer in our experience. As we progress inward, we ascend higher, and as we ascend higher, we become broader. Because the side chambers at the first level are four cubits broad, they signify us as the creatures in a general way. But as we become higher and broader, we, who are number four, become number five bearing some responsibility. Then as we go higher and become even broader, we become the number six, the proper man created by God on the sixth day. This indicates that we will be the same in measurement as the Lord Jesus, who is the wall. This reveals that merely to be a creature and merely to bear some responsibility are not sufficient; we need to become a proper man bearing the number six.

According to Ezekiel 41:8 around the house there is an elevation which is a platform, or a base, on which the temple and all the side chambers are built. This elevation is six cubits high, signifying once again the humanity of the Lord Jesus. Thus, the humanity of the Lord Jesus is the foundation, the base, and the wall.

Being the Fullness of the Temple

The beauty of this temple is with the side chambers. If the side chambers were removed, the temple would be too simple and have no beauty.

Strictly speaking, the temple signifies Christ. Although Christ and the church are the same in nature, the temple refers to Christ Himself, and the side chambers, as the fullness of the temple, signify the church as the fullness of Christ. In Ephesians 1:23 we see that the church, the Body of Christ, is His fullness. If there were no side chambers to the temple, there would be no fullness to the temple. The ninety side chambers in three stories express the fullness of the temple. To remove these chambers would be to strip away the fullness of the temple. Just as the side chambers are the

beauty of the temple, so the beauty of Christ is the church, the Body, as His fullness.

In Ezekiel's account of the holy building of God, he makes frequent use of the number thirty. There are thirty chambers on the pavement, thirty windows in the gates, and thirty sides of the posts in the gates. All these figures indicate that we can only enjoy as much Christ as we have experienced and that we can express only as much Christ as we have enjoyed.

The side chambers typify the church as the fullness of Christ, His expression. The thirty side chambers for expression are based upon the thirty chambers for enjoyment. We cannot express more of Christ than we have enjoyed. We can express Christ only to the extent that we have enjoyed Him. Our enjoyment of Christ eventually becomes the fullness, the expression, of Christ.

Signifying the Triune God in Resurrection

The side chambers being in three stories signifies the Triune God in resurrection. We express Christ in the Triune God and in resurrection. When we are in the Triune God—in the Father, in the Son, and in the Spirit—and when we are in resurrection, we express Christ with our enjoyment of Him. When we pass through the cross and enter into resurrection, we are in the Triune God, enjoying the love of the Father, the grace of Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14).

Of the thirty side chambers, twelve are on the north side, twelve are on the south side, and six are on the west side. The thirty side chambers can also be divided into six groups of five. The number six signifies man created on the sixth day, and the number five signifies man as a creature bearing responsibility through receiving God's grace. We do not bear responsibility in our own strength but through God's grace. This indicates that the side chambers are the result of having God added to us for bearing responsibility. The side chambers have three levels, with thirty rooms on each level divided into six groups of five. This indicates that we are in resurrection and in the Triune God, that we are dependent upon the grace of God to bear responsibility before God,

and that, as a result, we are the fullness, the expression, of the Christ whom we enjoy.

The Outer Wall

The outer wall of the side chambers is five cubits thick (Ezek. 41:9). The number five here indicates those of us who have received God's grace and who are bearing responsibility before God. On the one hand, the church is a combination of God and man. On the other hand, the church is also the responsibility of man before God. If the elders, co-workers, and all the saints do not bear any responsibility before God, there will not be the side chambers, that is, the church as the fullness of Christ. But if we bear responsibility together, then there will be the fullness, the expression, of Christ. When we, God-created men who have received God's grace, bear our responsibility and fulfill our function, then we will have the church as the fullness of Christ.

THE LATTICED WINDOWS AND PALM TREES

Now we come again to the latticed windows with the palm trees. We have pointed out that the latticed windows are for letting in air and light and for blocking out the negative things (41:16). These signify Christ as the life-giving Spirit. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor. 3:17b). The life-giving Spirit is so free and liberated, yet there are the lattices. On the one hand, there is liberty; on the other hand, there is the screen. Whatever is heavenly, of life, of light, and of the pure, clear air can come in. But whatever is unclean, evil, and negative will be blocked out by the lattice, by the screen. This is how Christ as the life-giving Spirit operates within us.

Palm trees were carved on the walls next to the windows (Ezek. 41:18-19). Palm trees grow in the wilderness and are evergreen in summer and in winter. This indicates that in trial and temptations Christ is always victorious, having everlasting power and everlasting strength. Victory and everlasting power and strength always go together with air and light. This means that our victory and power are related to the life-giving Spirit. If we enjoy the life-giving Spirit, we will also enjoy Christ's victory, power, and strength.

THE SPACE LEFT

Ezekiel 41:9 says that outside the side chambers there is a space, or place, left. This signifies the surplus of the riches of Christ. No matter how much we need Christ and no matter how much He fills our needs, something will be left. Twelve baskets will be left over, as when the Lord Jesus satisfied the hungry ones (John 6). We may say that the place left on the three sides of the chambers is the twelve baskets. The Lord is never scarce; He is always rich with something left over. Christ is always abundant, and the grace of Christ is also abundant. Christ and His grace are inexhaustible. No matter how much we enjoy Him, there is always a surplus.

The spaces outside the side chambers that are left free are five cubits in breadth (Ezek. 41:11), the same measurement as the thickness of the outer wall. Once again, the number five indicates the receiving of the Lord's grace resulting in our bearing responsibility. Here we need to see that no matter how much we bear responsibility by the grace of God, there will always be a surplus of grace. When we bear five cubits of responsibility, God will give us five cubits of grace in surplus. As we bear our responsibility, God will always give us an abundance of grace. This is God's principle.

OPEN SPACE

Between the space left of the side chambers and the holy chambers, there are open spaces twenty cubits in width (v. 10). These twenty cubits of open space indicate that the grace of Christ is not only sufficient but also rich. The number twenty is composed of ten times two and of five times four. This indicates a perfect (ten) testimony (two) obtained by the creature receiving grace to bear complete responsibility before God. From this we see that the Christ whom we experience and the grace which we enjoy are spacious, broad, rich, full, and with much surplus.

If we see this, we will realize that after we have the twelve baskets left over and we feed others again, we will have many more baskets left over. This is because Christ is always richer and richer; He is inexhaustible. When we enjoy Him once, we have five cubits left. When we enjoy Him again, twenty cubits

are left. Christ will never become less; rather, He will always become more and more. Because Christ is so rich, the minister continues to become richer as the years go by.

THE DOORS

Although there were ninety chambers, there were only two doors. This indicates that, since there are not many exits, it is easy to get in, but it is not easy to get out. There is no back exit or side exit. There are many windows but only two doors. Furthermore, the doors are toward the spaces that are left. If there were no space left, there would be no way to open the door.

We need to pay attention to the fact that the doors are open to the spaces that are left free. If there were no free spaces, there would be no doors and thus no entrance. This indicates that there can be an entrance only when there is a surplus of grace. If we are exhausted in our service and are barely overcoming, then with us there is no surplus of grace. As a result, there is no door, no entrance. The entrance is based on the surplus of grace. If we live in the Lord, our meeting and serving should be with space left over, that is, with a surplus of grace. Then a door will be open to us which no one can shut (Rev. 3:8).

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE TWENTY-THREE

THE BUILDING AT THE BACK, THE WALLS, THE INCENSE ALTAR, THE HOLY CHAMBERS, AND THE BOILING PLACES

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 41:12-20, 22-25; 42:1-20; 46:19-20

In this message we will consider the building at the back of the temple, the incense altar within the temple, the holy chambers on the sides of the temple, the two boiling places where the priests prepared the offerings, and the walls.

THE BUILDING AT THE BACK OF THE TEMPLE

In the past I spent many hours considering the building at the back of the temple (41:12-14) and looking to the Lord to find out the meaning and purpose of this building. Sometimes what the Bible does not say is more meaningful than what it does say. We can know the meaning and purpose of most of the buildings in Ezekiel, but we cannot find a hint concerning the use of the building at the back. This building is larger than the temple. The temple measures one hundred cubits by sixty cubits, but the building at the back measures one hundred cubits by eighty cubits. Although this building is larger than the temple, the record does not tell the purpose of this building.

As I was studying this building, the Lord showed me that it signifies the riches of Christ. The side chambers signify the fullness of Christ, but the building at the back signifies the riches of Christ. We need to distinguish between the riches of Christ and the fullness of Christ. The riches of Christ are what Christ is. For example, Christ is life, light, reality, and the way. The fullness of Christ is the church as the expression of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). The fullness of Christ is based on the riches of Christ. When we experience and enjoy the riches of

Christ, we become the church as the fullness of Christ, His expression. Whereas the side chambers indicate the fullness of Christ, the building at the back indicates the riches of Christ.

Let me give you a simple illustration of how the building at the back signifies the riches of Christ. Suppose you are a guest in a brother's home, but instead of giving you a room to stay in, the brother asks you to sleep on the sofa in the living room. This would indicate that the brother is not rich but rather poor. However, if the brother would provide you a vacant, spacious room prepared especially for you, this would indicate that he is rich. The point here is that our Christ is very rich. Christ is so rich that He is able to fulfill all the requirements and meet all the needs of both God and man and still have a large "building" left. This building indicates that Christ is rich, with an abundance left over.

We should not think that as the building of God Christ is only as much as we need. In principle, Christ as the building always has something left over, and what is left over exceeds what is used. We need to remember that five loaves fed five thousand people with twelve baskets left over (John 6:12-13). The amount left over was greater than the amount at hand at the beginning. This indicates that Christ is unlimited. Behind the portion of Christ that we need is an even greater portion that is "vacant." Unlike an apartment building displaying a sign that says "No Vacancy," with Christ the "sign" always says "Vacant." Because Christ is unsearchably rich, He is a "building" that is always "vacant."

The size of this building—one hundred cubits by eighty cubits—is significant. Eighty is ten times eight. The number eight signifies resurrection, and the number ten signifies fullness. The number eighty, therefore, indicates resurrection in fullness. Furthermore, the area of this building is eight thousand cubits square, that is, one hundred times eighty. In other words, it is one thousand times of resurrection.

The dimensions of the building at the back include the wall, which is five cubits thick on all four sides. The actual capacity of the building is seventy cubits by ninety cubits (Ezek. 41:12). These numbers also are significant. Seventy is

ten times seven, ninety is ten times nine, and nine is three times three. These numbers indicate completion (seven), fullness (ten), resurrection (eight), and the Triune God (three). All this shows us how rich Christ is.

THE SIZE OF THE TEMPLE AND THE SEPARATE AREA IN FRONT OF IT AND BEHIND IT

Ezekiel 41:13-15 gives us the size of the temple and the separate area in front of it and behind it: "So he measured the house, a hundred cubits long; and the separate place, and the building, with the walls thereof, a hundred cubits long; also the breadth of the face of the house, and of the separate place toward the east, a hundred cubits. And he measured the length of the building over against the separate place which was behind it, and the galleries thereof on the one side and on the other side, a hundred cubits, with the inner temple, and the porches of the court." The temple is one hundred cubits long, and the width of the front of the temple and of the separate area along the east side totals one hundred cubits. The width of the nave is twenty cubits (vv. 2, 4). The thickness of the two sides of the wall is twelve cubits altogether, with each side six cubits (v. 5). The width of the side chambers is four cubits on each side, altogether eight cubits (v. 5). The thickness of the outer wall of the side chambers is five cubits on each side, altogether ten cubits (v. 9). The width of the space left along the side chambers is five cubits on both sides, altogether ten cubits (v. 9). When we add all these, we have sixty cubits. The separate area between the side chambers belonging to the temple and the outer chambers is twenty cubits in width on both sides of the temple. If we add all these together, we have one hundred cubits. This makes a square with one hundred cubits on each side, signifying that Christ is absolutely perfect, upright, complete, and plentiful as the dwelling place of God.

The width of the inner court, the front of the temple, and the area along the east side, is one hundred cubits and its length is also one hundred cubits. Thus, this area, which has the altar as its center, is also a square with one hundred cubits on each side. This is a further indication that Christ is

perfect, upright, and complete and that He is fully qualified to be used by God to accomplish His work of redemption.

The separate area with the building at the back and its wall is one hundred cubits long (v. 13). The width of the building along the front of the separate area behind it, with a gallery on each side, is also one hundred cubits (v. 15). Here at the back of the temple we have another square with one hundred cubits on each side. This is yet another indication that Christ is perfect, upright, and complete. He is more than sufficient to meet all the needs of both God and man with an abundant surplus remaining. The surplus of Christ is surely plentiful.

This marvelous arrangement reveals the wisdom of our God. Altogether we have three pieces of land, all of which are one hundred cubits square. This indicates that in the Triune God there is one hundred times of complete squares and one hundred times of plentiful surplus.

I would ask you to use the diagram of the plot plan on page 215 to consider the whole area of the temple and of the inner and outer courts. Added together, the length of the east gate leading to the outer court (40:6-16) and the length of the east gate leading to the inner court (vv. 32-34) equal one hundred cubits. The outer court is also a hundred cubits long from the outer gate to the inner gate. The inner court is one hundred cubits long; the temple itself is one hundred cubits long; and the length of the separate area and the building at the back is also one hundred cubits. By adding these five parts, we have a total of five hundred cubits. This refers to the situation of Christ before God. As the gate He is one hundred percent perfect; as the outer court He is one hundred percent perfect; as the inner court He is one hundred percent perfect; as the temple itself He is one hundred percent perfect; and as the plentiful surplus He is also one hundred percent perfect. Christ, who is absolutely perfect in every way, is one hundred times five. We need to remember that five is the number of responsibility. Thus, for us Christ bears complete responsibility before God a hundredfold. This is a picture of the completeness, uprightness, and surplus of Christ. His completeness, uprightness, and surplus are

perfect, being derived from God and being in resurrection. In bearing responsibility for us before God, Christ is a whole, perfect, and flawless testimony for God.

THE WALLS OF THE TEMPLE

According to the record in Ezekiel, all the parts of the building related to the temple, including the temple proper, the porch, the side chambers, the building at the back, and all the walls, are covered, wainscoted, with wood (41:16). Thus, when we enter into the temple, we can see nothing but wood. This is altogether different from the tabernacle raised up by Moses, in which one could see gold everywhere. Every part was overlaid with gold (Exo. 26:29). Here in Ezekiel, on the contrary, every part is overlaid with wood. Whereas gold signifies divinity, wood signifies humanity, especially the proper humanity of the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel is a book full of humanity. In chapter one Christ on the throne is a man. Upon the throne is a man. Even in His glory, Christ is revealed as a man. In chapter forty-three, when the glory comes back to the temple, the man is there (vv. 2, 6). This man is the Lord Himself. In God's building the primary material is humanity. This indicates that we need to be human but not in a natural way; rather, we need to be "Jesusly human." The proper humanity is not our natural humanity; the proper humanity is the crucified, resurrected, and ascended humanity of Jesus.

In the record concerning the temple, the number six is used many times. Nearly every entrance, gate, and threshold has the number six. The guard chambers are six by six, and the thirty chambers on the pavement are five by six. Once again I would point out that the number six here signifies the humanity of the man Jesus. The wood that covered the inside of the temple signifies the humanity of the Lord Jesus.

The record does not tell us what kind of wood was used for the wainscoting. In like manner, it is difficult to describe what kind of humanity the Lord Jesus has. The humanity of Jesus is marvelous. We cannot describe it, but we can see it and we can possess it.

On all the wooden wainscoting, cherubim and palm trees

were carved (41:18-20). The cherubim are the four living creatures described in chapter one. They signify the glory of the Lord manifested upon the creatures. Among the cherubim are palm trees, signifying the victory of Christ and the everlasting and ever-existing power of Christ. In chapter one the cherubim had four faces, but in the carvings on the walls, they have only two faces—the face of a man and the face of a lion. The man's face signifies and expresses humanity, and the lion's face signifies the victory in humanity.

Ezekiel 41:18-19 says, "It was made with cherubim and palm trees, so that a palm tree was between a cherub and a cherub; and every cherub had two faces; so that the face of a man was toward the palm tree on the one side, and the face of a young lion toward the palm tree on the other side: it was made through all the house round about." Here we are told that between every two cherubs there was a palm tree. This signifies that we manifest the victory of Christ in the manifestation of the glorious image of Christ. Every palm tree has the face of a man on one side and the face of a young lion on the other. This signifies that the glory and victory of Christ are manifested on a victorious man. This means that if we have fellowship with Christ and enjoy Christ and if we manifest Christ and are victorious because of Christ, then others will see on us the face of both a man and a lion. Upon us there will be the image, glory, and victory of Christ.

We need to pay attention to the fact that the cherubim and palm trees are not painted on the wood but are carved into the wood. This reveals that, as the wainscoting, we need to be "carved" by the Lord. To be carved means to suffer something. When we meet certain brothers and sisters, we have the impression that upon them there is something carved of the Lord. The victory of Christ and the glory of the Lord have been carved into them. The everlasting power, the freshness, and the evergreen life have been carved into their being. Because of the Lord's carving, they bear this kind of image and impression wherever they go.

THE WOODEN INCENSE ALTAR

The incense altar is made wholly of wood. Every part,

including the horns, is made of wood (v. 22). This is altogether different from the incense altar in the tabernacle erected by Moses. The incense altar in the tabernacle was made of wood overlaid with gold, signifying humanity overlaid with divinity (Exo. 37:25-26). The incense altar standing in this temple is made only of wood, signifying only the humanity of Jesus.

In the tabernacle and in the temple there were the altar, the lampstand, and the showbread table. But here in Ezekiel the altar is also the table (41:22). As an altar it is good for us to offer something to God, and as a table it is good for God to minister something to us. The altar is for us to offer something to God for His satisfaction, and the table is good for God to prepare something for us for our satisfaction. Hence, the one altar serves two purposes: for us to God, it is the altar; for God to us it is the table. We offer something of Christ to God on this altar, and God prepares something of Christ for us on this table. Both are upon the humanity of Christ.

Whatever is on this altar-table must be Christ. Christ on the altar is incense for God, and Christ on the table is food for us. When we offer Christ to God on it, it is the altar for God's satisfaction. When God prepares something of Christ for us on it, it is the table for our satisfaction. In other words, Christ on the altar is incense, and Christ on the table is food.

The main point here is that the walls were covered with wood and that the incense altar was made of wood, signifying the humanity of the Lord Jesus. The wooden incense altar was three cubits high and two cubits long. This signifies the Triune God in resurrection as a testimony.

The altar, which was made of wood, was put in a place of wainscoted wood carved with cherubim and palm trees. This indicates that if we are those who manifest the glory and victory of Christ, we will have the altar-table for God and us to have fellowship together in Christ. Here God enjoys the incense we offer in Christ and we enjoy the food supplied by God in Christ. In this way, both we and God enjoy Christ. God is satisfied because of the fragrance in Christ, and we are satisfied by the food supply in Christ. Now we need to see that this mutual enjoyment can only be in an atmosphere and situation where there is a manifestation of the glory and

victory of Christ. If we overcome through Christ and manifest the image and glory of Christ, then we will have an altar-table for us to fellowship with God and enjoy Christ. This fellowship and enjoyment issue from our victory in Christ and through Christ.

NO LAMPSTAND

In this temple there is no lampstand for giving light. In the tabernacle, there was no window, or opening, in the Holy Place, so it needed the lampstand. But in the temple described in the book of Ezekiel, there are many windows letting in light and air. Thus, there is no need of a lampstand.

THE DOORS

Both the outer temple and the inner temple had doors at the entrance (v. 23). At both gates there were two doors, each of two folding sections. The gates were simply openings, but within the gates were doors which could be opened and closed. As we apply this to our situation today, we may say that when positive ones, such as the apostles, come, we should surely open the door. However, when negative ones, such as wolves (Matt. 7:15), come, we must close the door.

Does the local church in your place have doors? I am concerned that the church in your locality may have only ways in but may not have gates with doors. In the church life we need the gates with the doors. On the one hand, we should be open to positive people and positive things; on the other hand, we should be closed to negative people and negative things. We should shut the door and refuse to let them in. The function of the doors is similar to that of screens on windows: They are open to let in the positive things, but they are closed to keep out the negative things.

Each gate has two doors which are made of two pieces. This makes a total of four pieces on each gate (Ezek. 41:24). The fact that each door is made of two folding pieces shows us that the doors are flexible, turning and folding. Sometimes in the church life the leading ones are not flexible. They do not know how to be folded and turned. The church needs turning, folding, flexible doors that are easy to open and easy to shut.

THE HOLY CHAMBERS

The holy chambers are connecting buildings which connect the inner court with the outer court. These chambers are located both on the north side and the south side (42:13). The holy chambers are fifty cubits wide and one hundred cubits long, with a walkway ten cubits wide between them. Each of these buildings consists of two rows which face each other with a walkway between. Thus, the many doors in the south building open toward the north, and the many doors in the north building open toward the south. This makes it a connecting building.

The important point is that the holy chambers are for the priests to eat the offerings. We have seen that the chambers on the pavement in the outer court are for the people to eat the offerings. Now we see that the holy chambers are for the priests to eat the offerings and also to place and store the offerings. It is here that the priests lay their priestly clothing (v. 14).

In the chambers on the pavements, the people can enjoy Christ, but they cannot express Christ, because they do not have the priestly clothing. The priestly clothing signifies Christ expressed and lived out. Whereas the offerings signify Christ as our enjoyment, the clothing signifies Christ as our expression. Those in the outer court can only enjoy Christ, but they cannot live out Christ and express Him. The situation with the priests is much improved. The priests not only enjoy Christ but also express Christ. They not only eat Christ but also live out Christ. In addition, they have the storage of Christ. In all these things we can see much improvement in the experience of Christ.

It is here in the holy chambers that one reaches the highest peak of spiritual experience. To live in the holy chambers is to live in Christ. To eat the offerings in the holy chambers is to eat Christ. To wear the holy garments is to wear Christ. From this we see that in the holy chambers we live in Christ, we enjoy Christ, and we express Christ.

The holy chambers located on the north and south face one another. This signifies fellowship, testimony, and confirmation. The storage, supply, and enjoyment of Christ are a matter of fellowship, testimony, and confirmation.

The holy chambers are one hundred cubits long and fifty cubits wide. The number one hundred signifies perfect completeness in fullness, and the number fifty signifies man bearing full and complete responsibility after receiving God's grace. Also, if we combine the holy chambers on the north and on the south, we have another square with one hundred cubits on each side, signifying perfect storage, supply, and enjoyment. Furthermore, these holy chambers testify for each other, and when they are combined, there is absolute and perfect completeness. This indicates that when the mutual testimonies are added together, there is the absolute enjoyment and storage of Christ. We cannot have this individually but with all the saints (Eph. 3:18).

The holy chambers, like the side chambers, are of three stories (Ezek. 42:5-6). In height they are equal to the side chambers, indicating that they correspond to the fullness of Christ. The priests enjoy Christ, wear Christ, store Christ, and possess Christ to such an extent that the height of their chambers equals the height of the side chambers, which signifies the fullness of Christ.

Verse 6 says, "For they were in three stories, but had not pillars as the pillars of the courts: therefore the building was straitened more than the lowest and the middlemost from the ground." Although the holy chambers were in three stories, they did not have any pillars. As far as spiritual experience is concerned, this indicates that those who enjoy Christ to such a high degree are not like those who are on a comparatively lower level. Those in the holy chambers do not express the power of Christ, which is signified by the pillars. Instead, there is an emphasis on the excellency and superiority of Christ. The chambers on the pavement and at the four corners emphasize the lowliness and applicability of Christ; the porch indicates the availability of Christ; the buildings linked to the temple and the free space next to the side chambers point to the fullness and surplus of Christ; and the separate area around the temple and the vacant building show forth the riches and abundance of Christ. Now we need to realize that the holy chambers emphasize the excellency and superiority

of Christ. For this reason, the holy chambers are in three stories but have no pillars like the pillars of the courts.

The galleries on the third story, the highest level, faced each other. This indicates that the more we enjoy Christ, the more confirmation we will have. The higher we ascend in the enjoyment of Christ, the more fellowship and mutual confirmation we will have.

When we have the enjoyment of Christ signified by the third level, we appreciate fellowship, confirmation, and being open to others. We do not want to be alone or to be closed. However, those who are young in the Lord and who do not have much spiritual growth do not sense the same need for fellowship and confirmation and may prefer to be alone. Those who enjoy Christ, store Christ, put on Christ, live by Christ, and serve God because of Christ will mature and reach a level of spiritual experience where they live a life full of fellowship and of mutual testimony, confirmation, and openness.

Because of the space taken by the galleries, the chambers on the third story are smaller than those on the first and second stories. This indicates that when our experience and enjoyment of Christ reach the third level, we will open wider to others in fellowship and confirmation and will have less to keep from others than we had when we were on the lower stories.

THE TWO BOILING PLACES

At the end, toward the rear, there are the boiling places, two places for the priests to boil their offerings and to bake the meal offerings (46:19-20). These are the priestly "kitchens." The kitchens for the people are at the four corners of the outer court, but the kitchens for the priests are these two places within the holy place.

THE LAND SURROUNDING THE TEMPLE

After the measuring of the temple was completed, Ezekiel was brought outside the compound of the temple, where the man measured the land outside the wall (42:15-20). In each direction the measurement of the land was not five hundred cubits but five hundred reeds (vv. 16-19). One reed equals six cubits. Hence, the land outside the wall is three thousand

cubits square, making a total of nine million square cubits. However, only an area in the center five hundred cubits square was used, leaving a wide, spacious land surrounding the temple compound.

A Strong Impression of Separation

The design of the temple gives a strong impression of separation. The wall around the spacious piece of land separated what was holy from what was common.

Altogether, there were at least four walls: the wall around the entire lot, the wall around the outer court, the wall around the inner court, and the wall around the temple. These walls enclosed the temple, separating the holy from the common. This reveals that when a person enters the temple, he has passed a fourfold separation. What a great margin of separation there is! On every side of the temple compound, there is a spacious "suburb" of one thousand two hundred fifty cubits reaching to the wall. This indicates the spaciousness of the separation in Christ.

An Impression of Progression

The design of the temple also gives an impression of progression. The further we advance inward, the higher we become. When we are in the temple, we are fifteen cubits higher than ground level. Also, the higher we become, the broader and wider we become. Inward, higher, broader, wider—this is progression. This experience of the holy building of God is progressive.

An Impression of Balance

Moreover, in the appearance of the temple there is a clear impression of balance, of symmetry. In this design nothing is unbalanced or crooked. Everything is fully balanced, square, and upright. Nothing is crooked.

A Picture of the Church Life

This is a picture of the church life. The church life is a life of absolute separation, a life of progression, and a life of balance. The church life is upright, square, and straight.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE TWENTY-FOUR

THE RETURN OF GOD'S GLORY TO THE HOUSE

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 43:1-5; 44:4; 43:6-12; 44:5; 43:18-27

After the completion of the building of the house, the glory of the Lord returned. In his early ministry Ezekiel had seen the glory of the Lord depart in a series of steps. First, the glory of the Lord left the temple and hesitated upon the threshold (Ezek. 9:3; 10:4). From the threshold it went out to the city. From the city the glory of the Lord went further out to the Mount of Olives on the east side of the city (11:23), and from there the glory of the Lord ascended to the heavens.

When the Lord in His leaving stopped on the threshold of the house, this indicated that He was not happy to leave. He did not want to leave, but He was forced to do so. Indicating His unwillingness to leave, He hesitated and lingered at the threshold. Eventually, He was forced to leave because of the abomination, whoredom, and degradation of the people. But now the glory of the Lord is returning by the same way He left. He departed from the east side, and now He is returning from the east (43:1-3).

THE GLORY RETURNING BECAUSE THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE WAS COMPLETED

It is important for us to understand why the glory of the Lord came back. The glory of the Lord returned because the building of the temple was completed. This is the crucial point. How much the Lord desires to come back to the earth! Yet, for His coming back He needs a place for the soles of His feet to rest, a place upon which He can set His feet. His habitation, His house, is the place on earth where He can put His feet.

Throughout the centuries the enemy in his subtlety has kept Christians from knowing anything about the building. Christian teachers emphasize greatly the matter of salvation and to some extent the matter of spirituality, but they rarely emphasize the matter of building. God's concern is not merely with salvation or with spirituality but with the building. For years the Lord has burdened us with one thing—the building. The building is nothing other than the church.

Brother Watchman Nee was fully committed by the Lord with the burden for the church. I knew him very well, and I knew that he was burdened for the church and for the building of the church. He realized that for the building up of the church, there was the need of the inner life, and the Lord gave him many messages on the inner life. However, these messages were not released so that people could be spiritual in an individual way but so that the church could be built up. All of his messages on the inner life were for the building up of the church. But the subtle enemy, Satan, has utilized some so-called spiritual people to publish many of his messages on the inner life to be used for individual spirituality. Those who put out the inner-life books by Brother Nee do not have much regard for his books on the church life. Many Christian bookstores sell *The Normal Christian Life; Sit, Walk, Stand; What Shall This Man Do?; The Song of Songs;* and so forth—all books on the individual spiritual life—but very few sell Brother Nee's books on the church. They seldom sell *The Normal Christian Church Life, The Glorious Church, Further Talks on the Church Life,* or other books by Brother Nee that have the word *church* in the title. Here we can see the enemy's subtlety.

Do you believe that the Lord cares only for spirituality? Let me assure you that the Lord does not care merely for spirituality; He cares for the building up of the church. Regarding this, we need to expose the subtlety of the enemy. Some have said that Witness Lee is different from Watchman Nee—that Watchman Nee is for the spiritual life but Witness Lee is too much for the church. That Brother Nee was not only for the spiritual life but also very much for the church is

indicated by his books such as *Further Talks on the Church Life, The Orthodoxy of the Church,* and *The Glorious Church*.

Today the Lord is not concerned merely for individual spirituality. Even if many spiritual people such as Daniel had been raised up in Babylon, the glory of the Lord would not have gone there to fill them. The Lord's glory did not return to Daniel; rather, it returned to the temple after it was rebuilt.

After the measuring of the whole building, the Spirit brought Ezekiel to the east gate where he saw the appearance of the glory of the Lord returning. "And it was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city: and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar" (Ezek. 43:3). When I first read this verse, I thought that the word *I* should be *He*. To my impression, the verse should read, "When He came to destroy the city." Nevertheless, the proper translation is, "When I came to destroy the city." It seems strange that Ezekiel would say that he came to destroy the city. This means that when the prophet went to Jerusalem, the Lord also went to Jerusalem. The Lord went there in Ezekiel's going there. In his earlier ministry, Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord leave the temple and the city, but in his later ministry he saw the glory coming back to the house of the Lord.

We need to be deeply impressed with the fact that the glory of God returned only after the building of the temple was completed. If we want to dwell in the church and manifest His glory in the church, the church must be complete. If the church today corresponds to all the details of the holy building of God covered in these chapters of Ezekiel and thus is built up in every aspect, God will dwell in the church gloriously. Therefore, in order for the glorious God to dwell in the church, the church must be built up to become the dwelling place of God.

God wants to have the church built up on earth because He desires to have a dwelling place on earth. He, the God of the heavens, wants to live on the earth. The place where He lives, His dwelling place, is the church. Since God dwells in

the church, those who want to seek God and contact Him must come to the church. Our main burden in this study of Ezekiel is to see the dwelling place which God desires to have on earth. If we have the grace to be built up in the church, the God of glory will live among us.

THE GLORY RETURNING FROM THE EAST

Verse 2a says, "And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east." The glory returned from the east, that is, from the direction of the sunrise. The direction of the sunrise signifies glory (Num. 2:3). The Lord came back from the glory. He left toward the east, and He came back from the east.

Ezekiel 43:2 also says, "And his voice was like a noise of many waters." The Lord returned not only with glory but also with a great noise, for His voice was as the noise of many waters. This indicates that whenever the Lord's glory comes back to the church, there will be a great deal of noise. When the Lord's glory leaves, we should be quiet. Quietness indicates that the glory is gone, but noise is a sign that glory has returned. In Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, it was not quiet. "There was a sound out of heaven, as of a rushing violent wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting" (v. 2). Whenever the church is revived, there will be a loud sound and a great noise.

According to Ezekiel 43:2, "The earth shined with his glory." The earth was under the light, the shining of the Lord's glory. There was no darkness. On the day of Pentecost, the city of Jerusalem was under the shining of such a light. Whenever the church has a revival, God's glory is expressed, the voice of God is heard, and God's glory shines forth. However, without the manifestation of God and the voice of God, there is darkness.

HIS APPEARANCE BEING THE SAME

Ezekiel 43:3 says that the appearance of the Lord was the same when He returned as when He came with the prophet to destroy the city. This comforting word reveals how merciful the Lord is. Even while Ezekiel was in captivity, the vision of

the Lord was there. The vision of the Lord came not only to the holy land but also to the place of captivity.

In Zechariah 1:8 the Lord was riding on a red horse among the myrtle trees in the bottom. At that time the Lord's people were in a low place, in the bottom, but the Lord was riding among them to bring them out. This indicates that He was with those in captivity. The Lord was still with His people but not in a normal way.

THE EAST GATE BEING OPEN TO THE GLORY OF THE LORD

Ezekiel 43:4 says, "The glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east." The Lord came back by the east gate.

The temple has three gates: one toward the east, one toward the south, and one toward the north. The gates on the south and the north are for the convenience of the people, but the gate toward the east is not only for the convenience of the people but also for the glory of the Lord. In the church life we need several gates, but the most important one is the east gate—the gate that is open to the glory of the Lord. This means that in the church life we need a gate which is open to the glory of the Lord. We should not only care for convenience; we should care especially for the glory of the Lord. In the church life the first consideration we should have is the Lord's glory. The decisions in the church life must be made primarily according to the Lord's glory. Even in making decisions concerning the day and time of the meetings, we should care for the Lord's glory and not simply for people's convenience. The church must be open to the Lord's glory so that His glory may come into the church.

THE LORD'S STRONG DESIRE FOR HIS HOUSE

The glory of the Lord came into the house, and "Behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house" (v. 5). Eventually, the house and the inner temple were filled with the glory of the Lord.

Here we see that the Lord has returned to the earth. Because He had lost His standing on earth, He went back to the heavens. The Lord's standing on earth is the building up

of His house. In order for the Lord to come back to the earth, He needs a built up church as His standing on the earth. The Lord will not simply come back to the earth; the Lord will come back to the church.

At the time Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord, he also saw a man standing by him. He saw both the glory of the Lord and the Lord as a man. The man who stood by him said, "Son of man, the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever" (v. 7a). The words *the place of my throne* prove that the man who stood by Ezekiel was the Lord Himself. According to the grammatical construction, "The place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell," does not seem to be a good composition. It may be that because His desire and joy were with His house, the Lord neglected the matter of grammar. He was fully occupied with His house.

The Lord was so happy with His house that seemingly He did not care about grammar. Upon His return to the temple, the Lord was very happy. The house had been recovered, and once again He had a place for the soles of His feet. Therefore, He said, "Son of man, the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet."

Here we see the Lord's desire for His house, for the church. The Lord cares for the recovery of the church life. He has been desiring and waiting to come back to the church. This is why we have so much joy in the meetings. We are joyful and happy because the Lord within us is joyful and happy. He is happy because in the church He has a place—a place for His throne, a place for the soles of His feet. For centuries the Lord did not have on earth a place for the soles of His feet. How happy He is that, having been kept away from the earth for so long, He now has the local churches as the place of His throne and the place of the soles of His feet! It is marvelous that the Lord, the almighty God, could utter the word recorded in verse 7: "The place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet."

If I had been Ezekiel, I might have asked, "Since You are the almighty God, why do You care about such a small place? Why does this place make You so happy?" If Ezekiel had asked this question, the Lord might have answered, "I love

this particular place on earth because it is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet."

The place of the soles of the Lord's feet is the place of His throne. The throne is for God's government, administration, and kingdom; it is the place from which He can administrate. The soles of the Lord's feet are for His move on earth. Apart from the temple as the place of His throne and the place of the soles of His feet, the Lord has no base for His administration and move on the earth. Unless the church is built up, the Lord has no standing to administrate His government and to move on the earth. Furthermore, the church is the place where the Lord can dwell for His rest and satisfaction.

THE PEOPLE'S WHOREDOM AND CARCASSES

In verse 7b the Lord told Ezekiel that the people had offended Him by their whoredom and by their carcasses. Here the Lord did not rebuke the house of Israel for their behavior and conduct, but for their whoredom and carcasses. Whoredom is fornication. No matter how kind and nice a certain wife may be and no matter how many good things she does, if she loves a man other than her husband, this is whoredom. In principle, this was the situation of the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2. The Lord said that they had done many good works but they had lost the first love (v. 4). He was saying that, besides Himself, they loved some other things. This is whoredom. No matter how good, pure, or holy something may be, if we love that thing more than we love the Lord Himself, this is whoredom. Not many Christians today simply care for the Lord Himself. Instead, many care for other things, including things that are good, fundamental, spiritual, and holy. This is whoredom.

Carcasses are dead things. Ezekiel 43:7b speaks of "the carcasses of their kings in their high places." In interpreting this part of the verse, after *high places* we may insert *of Zion* to indicate that these *high places* here might refer to the high places on Mount Zion. According to custom, the bodies (carcasses) of the kings were buried beside the temple. This is why the Lord says that the threshold of the carcasses was close to His threshold and that the post of their grave was close to His

post in the temple (v. 8). On one side was the Lord's sanctuary; on the other side was the grave of the bodies of the kings. Thus, these were not the carcasses of people from the lower classes but of the kings, people of a high standing.

THE LORD INSTRUCTING EZEKIEL TO SHOW GOD'S HOUSE TO THE PEOPLE

After pointing out these abominations, the Lord told Ezekiel how to instruct the people: "Thou son of man, show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities" (v. 10a). The Lord did not charge Ezekiel to teach God's people the law and the Ten Commandments as He had charged Moses. Rather, He told Ezekiel to show God's house to the people. Here the Lord seemed to be saying, "From now on, it is a matter not of the dispensation of the law but of the dispensation of My house. Simply to keep the law is not good enough. You have to keep the form, the fashion, the ordinances, the statutes, the laws, the comings in, and the goings out related to the house. You should behave not merely according to the Ten Commandments but also according to My house."

According to verse 10 God wanted Ezekiel to show the temple to the house of Israel so that the people would be ashamed of their iniquities. The temple of God is a pattern, and if the people would examine themselves in light of this pattern, they would know their shortcomings. It was God's intention to check the living and conduct of the people of Israel by His house, His habitation, as a rule and pattern. The living of the people of God must match the temple of God. Showing the temple to God's people exposes their sins and shortcomings and causes them to be ashamed of their iniquities.

Most believers today feel that moral regulations and spiritual principles are sufficient as rules of behavior and conduct. Few realize that our behavior and conduct should be examined not only according to moral regulations and spiritual principles but also according to the church, the house of God.

The common, or lower, teachings in today's Christianity tell the believers how to behave, that is, what to do and what not to do. The believers are given many rules of conduct.

There are also higher teachings which encourage the believers to be spiritual. These teachings are an improvement over the teachings regarding behavior. The Lord did not tell Ezekiel to show the law or spiritual principles to the house of Israel. Rather, the Lord charged Ezekiel to show His house to the house of Israel. Because the house was to be their regulation, the Lord charged Ezekiel to show them "the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof" (v. 11).

Our main concern today should not be with behaving ourselves or even with becoming spiritual. Our concern should be with fitting into God's house, that is, with how we conduct ourselves in God's house. The Lord did not command Ezekiel to show the law, the Ten Commandments, to the house of Israel; neither did He command him to show the spiritual principles to the house of Israel. On the contrary, the Lord charged Ezekiel to show His house to the house of Israel.

Suppose a certain young man gets saved. Before he was saved, he treated his parents and his sister quite poorly. Now that he has been saved, he learns how to treat them with respect and to behave rightly and properly in relation to his father, mother, and sister. Later, he learns to be spiritual and to do things such as reckon himself dead. He is good in conduct and in certain matters he is even spiritual; however, he is altogether independent. He is so independent that he is not willing to pray with others. Such a person, who is extremely independent, does not know anything about God's house. He does not care at all for the church. Everything he does is for himself individually; nothing is for the church, the Body, Christ's corporate expression.

If this kind of person is measured by the house, he will realize that he is lacking in many ways. For instance, he will realize that he does not have the windows, that is, the life-giving Spirit. He needs to have the windows by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. The more he calls on the Lord's name, the more windows he will have. This brother also needs to be checked by and compared with the doors of the house.

This may cause him to realize that he has many doors by which he can exit the church life. Concerning the church life, he may come and go as he pleases, coming in one day and going out the next. Although he has many doors, the temple does not have many doors. He does not have windows, but he has many doors, many ways to leave the church life.

We all need to be checked by the building, the house, in our comings in and goings out. If we would come into the church life, we must come in through one gate. Then we need to progress inward and upward, ascending higher and higher. Once we reach the rear of the third story, we realize that we cannot escape, for there are no gates through which we can go out.

In the book of Ezekiel, God measures His people by the temple. For example, in the temple the number six is used many times. As we have pointed out, the number six here, which is used with the wall, the entry, and other parts of the temple, signifies the humanity of the Lord Jesus. This indicates that we need to check our humanity by the building and take the humanity of the Lord Jesus as our humanity.

Another example is related to the wood used in the temple. The wood that was used for a certain purpose had to be of an appropriate measure. This means that the wood had to keep its position and function accordingly. If a piece of wood were either larger or smaller than its prescribed measure, it would not fit properly into the building. In applying this to our experience in the church life today, we need to consider whether in our situation we match the measurements of God's temple. Suppose God's wants you to measure three cubits. Do you match this measure, or are you either more or less than three cubits? A sister should stand on the position of a sister. If she presumes to stand on the position of a brother, she will not be within her measure, and this will not match the building or fit into it.

Yet another example of being measured by God's building involves the cherubim and the palm trees. If we are measured by the cherubim and palm trees carved into the walls, we will consider the matters of the expression of Christ's glorious image and the expression of Christ's victory. As one who is in the church life, do you have the image of Christ? Do you

express the glory of Christ and the victory of Christ? Have you experienced God's "carving"? Do you have any wounds or scars which testify that God has been carving you? If we are measured by the temple in this way, we may realize that we are still "smooth wood," wood that does not have cherubim and palm trees carved into it.

A particularly important point is that in the building there are no independent pieces. Every piece of material has been built in. Every piece is related to others, and no piece is independent. What about you? Are you independent? Have you been built into the building? Do your form and fashion fit into the building? You may say that you like this and not that, but the question is not what you like or do not like but whether or not you fit into the building, into the church. Does your way fit in with the church life?

Ezekiel was told that from that point on the house of Israel was to behave according to God's house. This indicates that today we should behave ourselves not according to certain teachings but according to the church. The church has to be our regulation. We need to be regulated by the fashion of the church, by the comings in and goings out of the church, by the ordinances, statutes, and laws of the church. This means that we should be God's people not according to the law of Moses but according to the form of the temple in Ezekiel.

Today the Lord's concern is not the law—it is the house. His concern is not spirituality—it is the church. The Lord cares for the church, that is, for the place of His throne, for the place of the soles of His feet, for the place where He can dwell for rest and satisfaction. Because the Lord cares so much for the church, His house, we also should care for the church as His house and fashion ourselves according to it. If we realize this, we will not care merely for teachings from the Bible or about the inner life. Likewise, we will not care for speaking in tongues or for a particular way to pray. Instead, we should care absolutely for the church and fashion ourselves according to the church, God's house.

The church life, or the Body life, is the greatest test of real spirituality. If we cannot pass the test of the church life, our spirituality is not genuine.

We need to see from the book of Ezekiel that the requirement of the indwelling Christ is not according to the law but according to His house. Everyone must be measured and checked according to the measurement of God's house. We are not under the dispensation of the law; we are under the dispensation of the house. This is the age of the church, not the age merely of being spiritual. Now is the time for the church life. If what we are and what we do cannot fit into the church life, it amounts to nothing in the sight of God and may even be an abomination to Him, a kind of whoredom. Therefore, we need to fashion ourselves according to the church and allow the church to measure us and check us in every aspect.

THE ALTAR—THE PLACE FOR GOD'S PEOPLE TO BE REDEEMED AND CONSECRATED

After the temple, we come to the altar. In 43:18-27 we have the ordinances of the altar. The altar is the place for God's people to be redeemed and consecrated. According to the record in these verses on the altar, it takes seven days for the people to be purified. They are required to offer a sin offering with the redeeming blood every day for seven days. Then on the eighth day, the day of resurrection, they have to consecrate themselves by offering a burnt offering (v. 27). Following the burnt offering, they enjoy the peace offering as a feast with the Lord and His people. This indicates that after the purification, the cleansing on the altar for seven days, the Lord's people are accepted by Him, become a satisfaction to Him, and have a feast with Him.

In the church life today, we need the altar both for purification and for consecration. We need to offer ourselves to the Lord as a burnt offering. To do this means that we are absolutely for the Lord. First we need to be cleansed, purged, and purified, and then we can consecrate ourselves to the Lord. In order to keep the temple, we need the altar. In order to preserve the church life, we need purification, sanctification, and consecration through the cross.

The purification requires a period of seven days (v. 26). This indicates that purification cannot be accomplished quickly; it takes a period of time for us to be cleansed and

purified, a time in which we are kept away from all negative things. Then on the eighth day, in resurrection, we need to offer ourselves to the Lord as a burnt offering absolutely for His satisfaction. After this, from the eighth day onward, we can have a feast with the Lord, enjoying the riches of Christ in the presence of God.

A SUMMARY OF THE LAW OF THE HOUSE

Verse 12 says, "This is the law of the house; Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house." Here we see that the law of the house can be summed up in two points: The house must be upon the top of the mountain, and it must be most holy. To be on the mountain is to be in resurrection and in the position of ascension. This indicates that the church life must be high, on the top of the mountain. The church must also be holy, separated and sanctified from anything worldly.

The law of the house, the law of the temple, is related to God's character. God is a God of height, and He is a God who is holy. Therefore, He wants His dwelling place also to be high and holy. Everything in the church life must be both high and holy, able to match the law of the temple.

Being high and being holy—these are two great principles concerning the church. Height is the position of the church, and sanctification is the nature of the church. In position the church is high; in nature the church is holy. We should not lower the church, and we should not make the church common. Rather, we must always respect the height of the church and regard the holiness of the church, knowing that in position the church is in resurrection and ascension and that in nature the church is most holy.

Is your church life on the top of the mountain? Is your church life holy? We all need to check ourselves by these two aspects of the law of the house. If in our church life we are in resurrection and in the position of ascension and if we are most holy, then we can be God's habitation.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE TWENTY-FIVE

THE PRIESTS AND THE OFFERINGS

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 44:9-30; 45:13-25; 46:1-7, 13-15

In the last message we saw that God cares for His house and that His desire is toward His house. Therefore, our work, behavior, and person must be according to the form, the pattern, the statutes, and the laws of the house (43:10-12). This means that everything we do needs to be according to the church, which is God's house. The standard of measurement is neither good behavior nor personal spirituality; the standard of measurement is the church. All that we are and do must be measured, tested, by God's house, the church.

In this message we will cover two major points: first, the kind of person who is qualified to serve in the house of the Lord and how such a person can serve the Lord; second, the offerings made to the Lord. First, however, we need to say a word about a particular gate which was to be shut.

THE OUTER GATE OF THE SANCTUARY WHICH LOOKED TOWARD THE EAST BEING SHUT

Ezekiel 44:1-3 says, "Then he brought me back the way of the gate of the outward sanctuary which looketh toward the east; and it was shut. Then said the Lord unto me; This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord the God of Israel hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut. It is for the prince; the prince, he shall sit in it to eat bread before the Lord; he shall enter by the way of the porch of that gate, and shall go out by the way of the same." The east gate was special because God had entered into the temple through this gate (43:1, 4). This gate was to be shut, and only "the prince" could enter in by it and sit in it to eat bread before the Lord. The prince here is the

king in the coming millennial kingdom, and surely this prince is Christ. This word about the east gate indicates that Christ and God have an equal position, for after God had entered in by this gate, the only other person who can do so is Christ. Only Christ can enter in and go out by the gate through which God has passed. This reveals that God and Christ have a special, holy portion among God's people.

THE PRIESTS

Being Circumcised

If we would serve the Lord in His house, the church, we need to be circumcised (44:9). Uncircumcised persons are not qualified to serve in God's house. Circumcision typifies dealing with the flesh, the natural man, and the old man by the cross. To us as believers in Christ, circumcision today is not something outward but an inward dealing by the cross with the flesh, the natural man, and the old man. If our flesh, natural man, and old man have not been dealt with by the cross, we are not qualified to serve in the church life. Rather, we are considered by the Lord to be a stranger. A stranger is an uncircumcised person, someone whose flesh, natural man, and old man have not been dealt with by the cross. We may be real believers, but if we have not dealt with our flesh, natural man, and old man by the cross, the Lord regards us as strangers, those who are not qualified to serve in the church life. We need to bring this matter to the Lord and ask Him about our flesh, natural man, and old man. These things must be dealt with through the working of the cross. Only then will we be circumcised and qualified to serve the Lord in the church life.

Being like the Sons of Zadok

When the majority of the people went astray, some of the circumcised ones also went astray (44:10). Although these ones were circumcised, they went astray from God to idols by following those who went astray. Because these circumcised ones went astray, we may say that they were only half qualified to serve the Lord. On the one hand, they were qualified

because they were circumcised; on the other hand, they were not qualified because they had gone astray from God to idols. Their circumcision qualified them, but their going astray disqualified them.

What should the Lord do with them, and what was His attitude toward them? The Lord said that such persons could serve in the house, but they could not come near to the Lord or to the holy things (vv. 11-14). They could minister in the temple by helping the people to present their offerings, but they could not come near to the Lord and serve Him. Some of the saints in the church life today are also half qualified. In a sense they are circumcised, but in another sense they have gone astray with the majority of the people. To follow the majority is awful. Consider today's situation: Most Christians have gone astray from the Lord to idols, and some of the saints in the church have followed the majority in going astray from the Lord. Because the majority of Christians have gone astray, they have lost their qualification and position to serve the Lord in a direct way. They may still have a part of the church service, but it is an indirect service to the Lord.

We all need to be like the sons of Zadok, who were circumcised and absolutely faithful to the Lord. They never went astray, following the majority of the people. They were circumcised and they were always honest and faithful to the Lord (vv. 15-16). Therefore, they could serve the Lord in a direct way. The Lord said that they could come near to Him and serve Him directly. They were not limited merely to serve the people; they could serve the Lord Himself.

I hope that none of us is only half qualified. I hope that all of us will be fully qualified: circumcised, honest, never going astray, and never following the majority.

Offering the Fat and the Blood

At this juncture we need to consider how the circumcised, faithful, and qualified ones serve the Lord. First, they serve by offering the fat and the blood of the offerings (v. 15). The most precious part of the offerings is the fat, which typifies the precious person of the Lord Jesus. Whereas the fat typifies the preciousness of the person of Christ, the blood

signifies the redemptive work of Christ. In brief, the fat signifies the person of Christ and the blood signifies the work of Christ. In our service to God, we must present to Him the precious person of Christ and the redemptive work of Christ.

Not Wearing Any Woolen Garment

When the priests came in to minister to the Lord, they were not allowed to wear any woolen garment (v. 17). Instead, while they were in the Lord's presence serving Him, they had to wear linen garments. In the Bible linen signifies a behavior, a living, that is pure, clean, and fine. Linen garments signify a daily living and walk in the life-giving Spirit by the life of Christ.

The priests were not allowed to wear woolen garments because woolen garments would make the priests too warm and cause them to sweat. According to Genesis 3:19 sweat is a sign of being under God's curse. Because fallen man is under God's curse, he must labor and sweat. Under the curse man, lacking God's blessing, must exercise his energy and strength, which cause sweating. In the Lord's service there is no need for us to use our own strength. When we use our own strength to endeavor and struggle, this proves that we are not under the Lord's blessing but rather are under the Lord's curse.

In the church service in the Lord's recovery, we need to avoid and even escape from any kind of self-energy, self-struggle, and self-endeavor. We should not push anything. If a certain matter is of the Lord, the Lord will surely grant His abundant blessing upon it and work that matter out. There is no need for us to push, endeavor, struggle, and expend our energy to work out anything. We should not do anything that causes us to "sweat." In the church service we all need to be in the life-giving Spirit by the life of Christ and not exercise our natural strength to push anything. On the contrary, often we may need to back off a little and give in to others. To do this is to give in to the Lord and to place on Him the responsibility for the matter that concerns us. Then we will be able to say, "Lord, if this burden is of You, I will stay back and ask You to come in. I ask You, Lord, to take up this burden. This will confirm my burden so that I may know that it is truly of You."

May we realize that there is no need for us to strive or contend with others in our service to the Lord.

Putting Off the Garments Wherein They Minister and Laying Them in the Holy Chambers

Ezekiel 44:19 says, "When they go forth into the outer court, even into the outer court to the people, they shall put off their garments wherein they ministered, and lay them in the holy chambers, and they shall put on other garments." Here we see that when the priests go forth into the outer court to the people, they must put off their garments wherein they ministered and lay them in the holy chambers and then put on other garments. This indicates that the priests are not allowed to mix what is holy with what is profane but maintain a separation between the holy and the profane. If we today would stand in the position of a priest, we must maintain this kind of separation. God does not allow mixture; He requires us to be separated unto Him.

Their Hair Being Cut Short

Another matter concerning the priests who came near to serve the Lord is their hair. "Neither shall they shave their heads, nor suffer their locks to grow long; they shall only poll their heads" (v. 20). This verse says that the priests should neither shave their head, cutting off all their hair, nor should they let their hair grow long. Rather, they should *poll* their hair, which means to cut it short.

First Corinthians 11:5 indicates that to cut off, or shave off, all our hair signifies rebellion against the Lord's headship. In serving the Lord we must not be rebellious against His authority. Rather, we must submit to the Lord's headship. For this, we need some amount of hair upon our head, signifying our submission to the Lord's headship. On the other hand, 1 Corinthians 11 tells us that to have long hair indicates self-glory and self-dignity (v. 15). We may even use another term—*self-enjoyment*. In the Bible long hair signifies beauty and glory. If a man keeps his hair long, this indicates that he is keeping his self-glory and self-dignity and that he is

fulfilling his self-pleasure and self-enjoyment. He simply enjoys his long hair.

These points concerning hair are applicable to the church life. Suppose a brother has the attitude that there is no need for him to be under anyone; he is independent and claims that he is equal to every other member in the Body. He may even quote the Lord's word in Matthew 23:8 in defense of his attitude. For him to have such an attitude indicates that, spiritually speaking, he has shaved off all his hair and thus does not submit to the Lord's headship. Yes, Matthew 23:8 does say that we all are brothers, but 1 Peter 5:5 says that the younger should submit to the elder and that we all should submit to one another. In the church life we need the proper submission. Hence, we should not shave our head.

Now we need to see that, spiritually speaking, to have long hair in the church life, signifying self-glory, is to desire and seek to be a leader. One problem in the church life is the lack of submission, and another is the desire for position and leadership. To seek a position in the church is to seek self-glory and self-dignity. Some are seeking to be an elder or to be a leader. This kind of seeking is not a glory; it is a shame. It is a shame to seek after leadership or any kind of self-glory. This kills us spiritually and disqualifies us from serving the Lord properly. If we want to be qualified to serve the Lord, we should not shave our head, meaning that we should have a proper submission, and we should not let our hair grow long, meaning that we should not seek self-glory, self-dignity, position, and leadership.

Both the lack of submission and the seeking after a position damage the church. Whoever is seeking leadership in the church life is disqualified and finished with the church life. I thank the Lord that many brothers have received grace from the Lord and have no desire to seek leadership. However, some brothers desire not only to be an elder but to be the leading one among the elders. This is to let one's hair grow long, that is, to seek self-glory.

Spiritually speaking, we need to keep a moderate cut of hair. We need to poll our hair, that is, to have a moderate cut. On the one hand, we submit to the Lord's authority. On the

other hand, we do not seek to be a leader. Instead of seeking to be a leader, we should simply minister life to others and support the church life by His grace. We should do everything we can for the church without seeking to have a position or to be a leader. Such an attitude is marvelous.

Not Drinking Wine

"Neither shall any priest drink wine, when they enter into the inner court" (Ezek. 44:21). Here we are told that the priests who minister directly to the Lord in the inner court were not permitted to drink wine. Wine signifies worldly, physical pleasure and joy. Those who serve the Lord in a direct way should have nothing to do with the "wine" of worldly pleasures.

Not Taking for Their Wives a Widow or One Who Has Been Put Away

Verse 22 says, "Neither shall they take for their wives a widow, nor her that is put away: but they shall take maidens of the seed of the house of Israel, or a widow that had a priest before." This signifies that in our contact and relationships with others, we need to be pure and uncomplicated. However, if we contact others in a way that is not pure, we will be defiled with an impure element.

Teaching God's People the Difference between the Holy and the Profane

Verse 23 continues, "They shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean." A priest must be able to teach God's people what is holy and what is profane and what is clean and what is unclean. One who draws near to God as a priest must be able to discern these things and also be able to teach others to discern.

Standing before God to Judge in Controversy

Verse 24a says, "In controversy they shall stand in judgment; and they shall judge it according to my judgments." When there was a controversy, the parties involved would appear before the priest. The priest would then render a

judgment, not according to his own opinion but according to God's judgments. If, as those who fear God and approach Him, we are asked to settle a controversy, we need to ask God what He would say about this matter and then we should judge according to God's will. This means that in helping to solve difficult matters, we need to stand before the Lord with a fearing heart. Then we need to touch the Lord's feeling and judge accordingly.

Keeping God's Laws and Statutes in God's Feasts

"They shall keep my laws and my statutes in all mine assemblies" (v. 24b). All the feasts, or "assemblies," are related to the gracious story of God's salvation. Thus, if we would serve God as priests, we need to remember the gracious story of God's salvation, including His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Hallowing God's Sabbaths

"And they shall hallow my sabbaths" (v. 24c). The Sabbath indicates that God has done everything; therefore, God rests. To keep, or hallow, the Sabbath means that we accept all that God has done and take rest in all that God has accomplished. Instead of trying to do something in addition to what God has done, we should simply enjoy what God has done and take what He has accomplished as our satisfaction and rest. This means that we depend not on what we do but on what God has done.

Not Being Defiled by Dead Persons

A priest who would serve the Lord directly in His presence cannot be defiled with any dead person (v. 25). This means that we should not contact those who are spiritually dead. We should not touch any "carcasses." Spiritually speaking, many Christians are dead, even to the point of stinking. If you contact them and listen to them, they will cause you to become dead, partially if not wholly. Having nothing positive to say, they will speak only negative things to you, perhaps criticizing the elders, the co-workers, or various saints. Contact with such dead persons can cause us to become dead and negative. Thus, when we realize that we are in the presence of this kind

of person, we should avoid contact with him. Otherwise, we will be defiled by his death.

To be defiled by death is more serious than to be defiled by something sinful. If we are defiled by something sinful, we can confess, receive the application of the blood of Christ, and immediately be cleansed (1 John 1:9, 7). However, if we are defiled by death, it will take a period of time before we can be cleansed and purified from this defilement (cf. Num. 19:11).

Some of us have had this kind of experience. After spending even a short time with a believer who was spiritually dead and negative, we found that we could not pray or function in the meetings for a period of time, perhaps several days. This should warn us about spending time with dead persons. Stay away from them! Do not think that you can help them. Instead, their death will spread to you. Those who are spiritually dead may be very alive with respect to worldly things or negative things, but with respect to the church they are dead. As far as the church life is concerned they are dead. If we want to serve the Lord in a direct way, we must stay away from dead persons and thereby keep ourselves from the defilement of death.

Offering the Sin Offering

"In the day that he goeth into the sanctuary, unto the inner court, to minister in the sanctuary, he shall offer his sin offering" (Ezek. 44:27). Whenever we approach God, we need to offer the sin offering, even if we are not conscious of any uncleanness. Every time we draw near to God, we need to apply the Lord's redemption and receive the cleansing of His precious blood.

Having Only God as Their Possession

"I am their inheritance: and ye shall give them no possession in Israel; I am their possession" (v. 28b). This reveals that the priests have no possession besides God. Their possession is God Himself, and they enjoy God as their supply. All these serving ones have only God Himself as their inheritance, their possession. This indicates that as today's priests we should not expect to be rich in physical, material possessions. Instead, we need to realize that our God, whom we serve, is our possession, our inheritance.

Enjoying the Riches of Christ

Finally, all the priests enjoyed the riches of Christ. All the heave offerings, all the firstfruits, and all the top produce of the people of the Lord belonged to these serving ones (vv. 29-30). This indicates that the riches of Christ were for their enjoyment. They had God as their possession, and they had Christ in all His rich aspects as their enjoyment. May we all serve the Lord in this way.

THE OFFERINGS

Requiring Richness in the Experience of Christ

The responsibility of the priest was to present the offerings to God. Concerning this, the record in Ezekiel may seem to be peculiar. Moses told the people of the Lord to offer to God one lamb out of ten, but Ezekiel told them to offer one out of two hundred (45:15). This indicates that if we do not produce large quantities of the enjoyment of Christ, we are not qualified to offer anything. Anything less than two hundred lambs was not adequate. If we would be qualified to offer one lamb, we must first raise up two hundred lambs. This means that our richness in the experience of Christ qualifies us to offer something.

The principle is the same with the wheat and the barley. Ezekiel 45:13 says, "This is the oblation that ye shall offer; the sixth part of an ephah of a homer of wheat, and ye shall give the sixth part of an ephah of a homer of barley." One homer equals ten ephahs, and the offering must be one-sixth of an ephah. Thus, one was required to offer one part out of sixty. This is different from Moses' requirement, which was one part out of ten. Those who had less than an homer of wheat were not qualified to offer anything. If one had an homer of wheat, he was qualified to offer one-sixtieth to God. In order to present an offering of wheat, one had to be rich in wheat. In contrast to Moses' requirement, Ezekiel's requirement forces us to be rich.

The offering of oil also required an abundant supply. Ezekiel 45:14 says, "Concerning the ordinance of oil, the bath of oil, ye shall offer the tenth part of a bath out of the cor, which

is a homer of ten baths; for ten baths are a homer." One homer equals ten baths, and the people were told to offer one tenth of a bath. To offer one tenth of a bath of an homer is to offer one percent. One must be rich in the produce of Christ to offer an offering of oil to the Lord.

Those who were not rich were not qualified to offer anything. The offering of the wheat and the barley was to be one-sixtieth; of the oil, one-hundredth; and of the lambs, one two-hundredth.

Three Categories of Heave Offerings

In the writings of Moses there are many kinds of heave offerings, but Ezekiel mentions only three categories for the heave offering: wheat and barley, oil, and lambs. The heave offering was heaved up into the air which signifies the ascended Christ, the highest Christ. In our service to God, we need to "heave" Christ, that is, offer the ascended Christ, the highest Christ, to God.

In *The All-inclusive Christ* we point out that wheat signifies Christ incarnated to die for us. In John 12:24 the Lord Jesus likened Himself to a grain of wheat falling into the ground to die. From His incarnation to His crucifixion, He was wheat. Barley signifies the Christ in resurrection, because in Palestine barley is the first grain to be harvested. Thus, barley signifies the firstfruits of resurrection. It is significant that the Lord Jesus fed the five thousand with loaves made of barley (John 6:9). Wheat and barley signify Christ from the time of His incarnation all the way to His resurrection. As we know, the lamb signifies the redeeming Christ, and the oil signifies the Holy Spirit. These are the main aspects of the heave offering which we need to offer in our service. All these are related to Christ, for Christ is the wheat, the barley, the lamb, and the oil.

When to Offer

The Yearly Offering

According to Ezekiel's record there were the yearly offering, the monthly offering, the weekly offering, and the daily

offering. The yearly offering was offered on the first day of the year, signifying that, in principle, every year we should have a new beginning (45:18-19). Every year we need a fresh cleansing and clearing up. The yearly offering was offered not only on the first day of the year but also on the seventh day of the year (v. 20). This indicates a period of graciousness for the people. Some were not ready on the first day of the year to fully clear up their situations and to be cleansed, so the Lord gave them another opportunity on the seventh day. If they missed the first day, they had another opportunity on the seventh day.

In principle, at the beginning of every year, we need to have a renewal in our service for the Lord. At the beginning of every year, we need a new beginning in our service.

The Monthly Offering

There was also the monthly offering at the time of the new moon. Whenever there was a new moon, an offering had to be made (46:6). The new moon also indicates a new beginning. We need a new beginning not only yearly but also monthly.

The Weekly Offering

In addition, there was to be a weekly offering. An offering was to be made every week on the Sabbath (v. 4). The Sabbath means not only that we have a new turn but also that we are enjoying the Lord's work. To keep the Sabbath means that we stop our work and enjoy what the Lord has done. Keeping the Sabbath indicates that we are not trusting in our work but are fully trusting and enjoying the Lord's work. We need to be able to declare to the universe, "Our work has ceased and we are enjoying the Lord's work." This is the principle of the Sabbath.

The Daily Offering

There was also a daily offering (v. 13). The daily offering in Ezekiel is different from the daily offering required by Moses. Moses said that the continual daily burnt offering had to be both in the morning and in the evening, but in Ezekiel there is no offering in the evening. I believe that this indicates that

in the service of the priests there is no evening; they are continually in the freshness of the morning. The situation in Ezekiel has improved to the point that there was no evening, only morning. There was no sunset, only sunrise.

The Offerings at the Appointed Feasts

In addition to the yearly, monthly, weekly, and daily offerings, there were also the offerings at the appointed feasts—at the Feast of the Passover, Feast of the Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of Tabernacles (45:21, 25). Praise the Lord for the offerings and the feasts!

Now we know what kind of priests we need to be in order to serve the Lord and what we need to offer to the Lord.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE TWENTY-SIX

THE RIVER FLOWING FROM THE HOUSE

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 47:1-12; Psa. 36:8; 46:4; Joel 3:18b; Zech. 14:8a

The book of Ezekiel speaks of two rivers. The first river, in chapter one, is the river Chebar, which was in the place where the people of God were held in captivity. The second river, in chapter forty-seven, is the river of life in the holy land. The first river is for carrying out judgment; the second river is for supplying life. To be near the river Chebar is to be in a place of discipline, but to be near the river of living water is to be in a place to receive life. In this message we will consider the river flowing from the house.

GOD BEING FOOD AND WATER TO MAN

Genesis 2 speaks of the tree of life (v. 9) and of a river that went out of Eden to water the garden (v. 10). Both the tree and the river signify that God desires to impart Himself to man as life. The tree of life indicates that God wants us to eat Him, and the river indicates that God wants us to drink Him. The tree and the river in Genesis 2 are the beginning of two lines—one concerning God as living food and another concerning God as living water—that run throughout the Bible until they consummate with the tree of life and with the river of water of life in Revelation 22. Regarding God as man's food, the Bible speaks of the meat of the lamb, the unleavened bread, the manna, the various offerings, and all the produce, both animal and vegetable, of the good land of Canaan. In John 6 the Lord Jesus spoke clearly about this: "I am the bread of life" (v. 48); "I am the living bread which came down out of heaven" (v. 51); "My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink" (v. 55); "he who eats Me, he also shall live because

of Me" (v. 57). Regarding God as water for man to drink, the Bible speaks of the spring (Exo. 15:27), the water out of the rock (17:6; Num. 20:11; 1 Cor. 10:4), the water from the well (Num. 21:16-17), and water from the ground (Judg. 15:19). Psalm 36:8b says, "Thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures." Psalm 46:4 says, "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, / the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High." Joel 3:18 says, "A fountain shall come forth of the house of the Lord." Zechariah 14:8 says, "It shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem." The Gospel of John speaks of the living water in 4:14 and 7:37-38. These portions of the Word reveal that God as living water has flowed out from eternity into us to satisfy our thirst.

The portion of the Word that describes the flow of the living water of God in the most detail is Ezekiel 47. It is significant that the flow of the river of life is not in chapter one. In that chapter, instead of the river of life, there was a consuming fire. In chapter thirty-seven there was a wind that became breath to us, but there was no water flowing. The flowing of the water did not begin until chapter forty-seven. The water could not come in before chapter forty-seven, because the house had not been built up.

THE FACTORS WHICH PRODUCED THE RIVER

Several crucial factors brought in the flow of the river. The first was the building up and completion of the house. Following this, the people began to have their living according to the house, according to its pattern, laws, and statutes. Their daily life and all their conduct began to be according to the form, fashion, pattern, statutes, and laws of the house (43:10-11). Next, the serving ones, the priests, were serving the Lord in a proper way. Finally, there were all the offerings: one lamb out of two hundred, one-sixtieth of the wheat and barley, and one-hundredth of the oil. There were yearly offerings, monthly offerings, daily offerings, and all the solemn feasts. We need to realize that the experience of all these matters brought in the flow of the river.

When the Lord saw all these things, He must have been

very happy. He had a house—the place of His throne, a place for the soles of His feet, a place where He could dwell for His rest and satisfaction. He saw the house with its forms and statutes, and He saw the priests and the offerings. Therefore, He sent the flowing of the river, and the river began to flow out of the house.

Now we can understand why there is no mention of the flowing of the river before chapter forty-seven. The flow of the river depends on the building. Whenever and wherever a group of believers is built up in oneness as described by Ezekiel, there will be the flowing of the river out of the building. If there is the building in your locality, the flow will come forth out from the building. Suppose regarding the church in your locality the Lord can say, "This is the place of My throne, this is the place where I can put the soles of My feet, and this is the place where I can dwell, rest, and be satisfied." If the Lord is able to say this about your place, the river will surely flow out of the building.

Today many zealous Christians pay attention to outreach and to gospel work in the mission field, yet their situation is quite poor. They go out to work for the Lord, but no flow follows them, because they neglect the source—the building up of the church. There can be no flow apart from the genuine building. If there is a strong building up in the local churches, there will be river flowing out of the building to other places. There will be the flowing, the flooding, and the impact.

How much we need the building! We need the church to be built up as the temple, the house of God. Out of such a building, the flow of God will issue. The outreach depends on the building. The preaching of the gospel depends on the building. This is the reason that in John 17:23 the Lord Jesus said that when we are perfected into one, the world will know that the Father has sent the Son. This means that when we are built up as one, the world will be convinced. The divided situation of Christianity greatly limits the impact of the gospel.

WATER FLOWING OUT FROM THE THRESHOLD

Ezekiel 47:1a says, "Afterward he brought me again unto the door of the house; and, behold, waters issued out from

under the threshold of the house eastward." In order for the water to flow forth, there must be a threshold, an opening, through which it can flow. This indicates that if we, through Christ, have more contact with God and draw closer to Him, there will be an opening which will allow the living water of God to flow out from the church.

THE RIVER FLOWING TOWARD THE EAST

The river issues forth from the house and flows toward the east (v. 1b). The east is the direction of the glory of the Lord (Num. 2:3; Ezek. 43:2). The flowing toward the east indicates that the river of God will always flow in the direction of God's glory. The river cares for God's glory.

Everything in the church life should be for God's glory. For example, in our preaching of the gospel, we should seek the glory of God. If our gospel preaching is for God's glory, there will be an outflow of living water. However, if we do not care for the glory of God, the flow will be limited. Everyone in the church should seek and care for the glory of God. Then the living water will flow out from the church.

THE WATER FLOWING OUT FROM THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE HOUSE

Ezekiel 47:1c also tells us that the water flows out from the right side of the house. According to the Bible the right side signifies the highest position. The flowing of the water from the right side indicates that the flow of the Lord should have the preeminence. We need to give the Lord the highest position, and we also need to give the flow of the Lord the highest position. Then the flow will be prevailing and become the controlling factor in our living and work.

FLOWING BY THE SIDE OF THE ALTAR

The flowing is by the side of the altar (v. 1d). This indicates that the flow is always by the cross. If we do not have the dealing of the cross, the flow will be frustrated. If we would have the flow, we must have the dealing of the cross. We need to be willing to pass through the cross so that the flow may come forth.

THE MAN WITH THE MEASURING REED

The main point here is the man with the measuring reed in his hand (v. 3). This man, who is the Lord Jesus Himself, has the appearance of brass (40:3). As we have pointed out, in typology brass, or copper, signifies judgment and testing. The Lord Jesus was tested and judged as a man, and because He was tested and judged, He is now testing and judging. Because He was tested, He is qualified to test, and because He was judged, He is qualified to judge. He is the One with the measuring reed in His hand, fully qualified to measure us.

We have pointed out previously that to measure means to test, to judge, and to possess. When a sister is about to buy some cloth, she first examines the cloth and then measures it. Whatever amount she measures she also possesses. This indicates that to measure is to examine, test, judge, and eventually take over and possess.

MEASURING THE FLOW OF THE RIVER

The man came with a measuring reed in his hand to measure the flowing of the river (47:3-5).

Measuring a Thousand Cubits

When this man first measured the river, there was only a trickle coming out from the house. Then he measured a thousand cubits, and the flow became deeper, up to the ankles (v. 3). Again he measured a thousand cubits, and the flow became deeper, up to the knees (v. 4). After this the man measured yet another thousand cubits, and the flow became even deeper, up to the loins (v. 4). When he for the fourth time measured a thousand cubits, the flow became a river which could not be passed over, and the river became waters to swim in.

In the Bible the number one thousand signifies a complete unit. For example, in Psalm 84:10 the psalmist says that a day in the Lord's courts is better than a thousand outside. Since one thousand signifies a complete unit, to measure a thousand means to measure a complete unit; it is a complete measuring.

If we want to enjoy the flow out of the house, we need to be measured completely. If we want to enjoy a flow that is deeper, we need to be measured, that is, tested, examined, judged, and taken over by the Lord. Our motives, our intentions, our aims, our goals, our desires—all must be judged. Everything we possess and everything we are involved in must be judged. This will deepen the flow within us.

As we are judged by the Lord, we need to make a thorough confession. We need to allow the Lord to be our Judge and let Him bring us into His light and expose us. Then we should say to Him, "Lord, all that You have judged is now Yours. I ask You, Lord, to take me over, to take full possession of me."

The Lord's judging and testing of us are not once for all. In Ezekiel 47 the man measured not once or twice or even three times; he measured four times. In the Bible four is the number of the creature. The four measurings here indicate that as a creature we need to be thoroughly judged and tested by the Lord and then be fully taken over by Him.

To be taken over by the Lord completely is not easy to experience. We may think that we have been fully taken over by the Lord, but after a period of time we will realize that we still have some reservation. Then we will be tested and judged again, and after this we will have a further consecration to the Lord, saying, "Lord, take this and possess it." We may think that the Lord has taken over everything, but the Lord knows that He has gained us only to a certain extent. Therefore, some time later we may again realize that we have reserved and preserved very much for ourselves. Once again we will make our confession to the Lord and experience His testing and judging. Even after a number of years, we still may have not been fully possessed by the Lord, and thus we will again need to be measured, tested, judged, and possessed by Him.

The Depth of the Flow Depending on How Much We Have Been Measured and Taken Over by the Lord

You may be wondering how we can determine how much we have been measured and possessed by the Lord. We

determine this by the depth of the river. If the river is only up to our ankles, this proves that we have not been measured fully by the Lord. The depth of the river depends on how much we have been measured by the Lord. There is no need for us to argue and justify ourselves. Instead, we should simply consider the depth of our flow. How deep is your flow? Is it up to the ankles? To the knees? To the loins? Has the flow become a river that cannot be passed over? Has the flow become waters to swim in? We need to consider our personal situation in this way.

The same principle applies to the local churches. There is no need to argue concerning the church in your locality. You may say that the church in which you are is the best. Your church may be the best according to your concept, but it may not be the best according to the flow. You may claim to have a flow, but how deep is this flow? Consider the depth of the flow in the church where you are. The flow may be only up to the ankles or the knees or the loins. Perhaps the flow is a river that cannot be passed over, and thus it may be waters to swim in. The depth of the flow in every local church depends on the degree of the Lord's measuring and possessing. Concerning this, we can fool others, but we cannot fool the Lord. He knows the depth of the flow where we are.

We all need to be measured and taken over by the Lord. For His measuring the Lord needs our cooperation. It is difficult for the Lord to measure us, judge us, possess us, and take us over without adequate cooperation on our part. May we look to the Lord for His mercy that through His measuring in all the local churches there will be a river that no one can pass over.

GRACE VERSUS SELF-EFFORT

It is easy to walk on dry land, but the flow of the river makes it difficult to walk. When the water is up to the ankles, we can still walk, but it is not very convenient. When the water is up to the knees, it is more difficult to walk. When the water is up to the loins, it is very difficult to walk. This indicates that before we enjoy the grace of the Lord as the flow, we are able to do whatever we like. When we experience

the Lord's flow only in a shallow way, we can still walk by our own effort. But when the flow becomes deeper, reaching up to the knees, walking becomes much more difficult. We have grace, but the amount of grace we have is not sufficient, so we continue to exercise our own effort.

As the flow increases, it bothers, restricts, and frustrates us. When the flow of grace rises higher, to the loins, this is the hardest time to be a Christian. Our situation becomes quite awkward. For example, on the one hand, we may have enough grace to make it difficult for us to lose our temper; on the other hand, we may not have enough grace to overcome our temper. We have grace, but we still need to exercise our own effort. This is a dilemma. The river of grace is with us, but it is not deep enough. But once the flow of grace becomes so deep that we cannot pass over, we will praise the Lord and begin to swim in the river. As we swim, we will no longer try to stand on our feet. Instead, we will abandon our self-effort and begin to swim in the river.

The less grace we receive from the Lord, the more we need to use our own strength. But when we receive an abundance of grace, we no longer need to use our own strength. Instead, we cease from our self-effort and allow the flow of the river to carry us along. As we are carried along in this way, we can easily follow the Lord and let Him lead us wherever He wants us to go.

I am concerned that many among us have not yet given up their self-effort but are still trying to stand up on their own. They continue to struggle in their efforts to stand on their feet. This means that they are exercising their own effort to be an overcomer. Those who are in such a situation need to realize that they need more grace. They need a deeper flow so that they will give up trying to stand and instead will swim in the river. The best way for us to swim in the river is to put our trust in the flow of the river, forget our own efforts, and let the flow carry us along. When we receive the abundance of grace, this is our experience.

Although the grace is sufficient, we still need to go along with the flow of the Lord's grace. When we are being carried along by the river, we should not try to have our own direction.

We should forsake our direction and move in the direction of the flow. However, the flow may be in one direction, but our intention is to move in the opposition direction. For this reason, the Lord often has problems with us.

THE RIVER CAUSING EVERYTHING TO LIVE

Where the river flows, everything shall live and be full of life (Ezek. 47:9). This river is the river of life, and only life can cause things to live. Mere teachings and gifts are not important here, because they cannot impart life. Ezekiel does not say that everything shall know or that everything shall exercise gifts; he says that where the river comes everything shall *live*.

In this flow the trees live and bear sweet, delicious fruit every month (v. 12). Also, the water brings forth an abundance of fish (v. 9). Cattle are implied by the names of two cities—*Engedi* and *Eneglaim* (v. 10). *Engedi* means "the fountain of the lamb," and *Eneglaim* means "the fountain of two calves." These fountains are for the young cattle, the lambs and the calves. From all this we see that the flow of the river produces trees, fish, and cattle.

In the proper church life there are many trees producing fruit, and thus there is no lack of fruit. If the church in your locality is living, there will be trees bearing fruit. Trees producing fruit are an indication that there is a flow in your church. The trees grow by the living water. If there is a flow in your local church, there surely will be the trees bearing an abundance of fruit.

With the flowing of the river, there is also fishing (v. 10). Fishing signifies the increase in numbers. If the number of people in your local church does not increase year after year, this means that there is no fishing, and no fishing means that there is no flow. If we would have fishing, we must have the flow. We need a place to cast out and spread our net. We need fishing in order to have an increase in numbers.

In the church life we also need some fountains of lambs and fountains of calves for feeding. Thus, we need food, we need the increase in numbers, and we need the feeding. This will bring in the mending, the building up. Oh, we need the

trees, the fishing, and the fountains! All these matters depend on one thing—the flow of the river. Once again we see how much we need the flowing of the river of God.

THE RIVER FLOWING TOWARD THE EAST SEA

Ezekiel 47:8 says that the river flows toward the East Sea. According to the map, the East Sea is the Salt Sea or the Dead Sea. By the flowing of the river out of the house, the salt water of the Dead Sea will be healed. This means that death will be swallowed up by life. When there is a rich and deep flow of life in a local church, much death will be swallowed up by life. However, if there is no flow in a particular church, that church will become a "dead sea" full of salt. But if there is the flow of the river, deadness is swallowed up by life, and then the "dead sea" will be made alive.

THE RIVER BEING UNABLE TO HEAL THE MARSHES

Although the Dead Sea and the dry places can be made alive and deadness can be swallowed up by life, the marshes cannot be healed (v. 11). A marsh is a place that is neither dry nor flowing with water. Consisting partly of mud and partly of water, a marsh is neither wet nor dry. A marsh signifies a situation that is full of compromise. This means that wherever there is a compromising situation, there is a marsh. We should never become involved with any situation that is a "marsh."

The Lord Jesus rebuked the church in Laodicea for being lukewarm and neither hot nor cold. He told those in Laodicea that they should be either hot or cold but not lukewarm. He also said that if they remained lukewarm, He would spew them out of His mouth (Rev. 3:15-16). To be lukewarm is to be in a compromising situation, to be in a marsh.

Our stand concerning the church must be absolute. If you stand in a denomination, you should stand absolutely. If you stand with an independent group, you should stand with that group absolutely. If you stand on the ground of the church, you must stand absolutely. You should be either cold or hot, but you should not be lukewarm. To be lukewarm is to be in a marsh. If you give up the denominations and the

independent groups yet are not absolute for the proper ground of the church, you are in a marsh. It is possible for one to be in the church life without being absolute. Such a person is a marsh.

Not even the Lord can heal a marsh. A marsh is a neutral place, a halfway place, a place of compromise. Certain saints are neither in Babylon nor in Jerusalem but in a halfway place between Babylon and Jerusalem. This means that they are in a marsh and even that they are a marsh.

We need either to be absolutely in the flow or stay on dry ground. If we remain in a marshy or "muddy" situation, the Lord cannot do anything with us. It is very easy to get into a marsh, but it is very difficult to get out of one. The church must be in a place of absoluteness. Thus, for the church life we need to be absolute.

The church should also be a place after its kind. Genesis 1:11-12 says that the grass, the trees, and the herbs brought forth each after its own kind. An apple tree cannot bring forth an apple-peach. To bring forth an apple-peach, that is, for something not to be after its kind, is to be a marsh. A man must be a man and a woman must be a woman; no one can be a man-woman. If you are in a denomination, be there after your kind. If you are in an independent group, be there after your kind. Likewise, if a group of saints in a certain locality are the church in that locality, they must be the church after its kind.

If you are in the Lord's recovery, be in the recovery absolutely, not halfway. Come back all the way from Babylon to Jerusalem. If you stop halfway, you will become a marsh, and you will not have any flow, not even a trickle. Rather, you will have just enough water to make you "muddy." You will be a marsh, and a marsh cannot be healed. Throughout all my years in the Lord's recovery, I have never seen a marsh that was healed.

In Revelation 22:11 the Lord Jesus says, "Let him who does unrighteousness do unrighteousness still; and let him who is filthy be filthy still; and let him who is righteous do righteousness still; and let him who is holy be holy still." Here we see that the Lord Jesus desires and requires absoluteness.

We must learn to be absolute. By being absolute we will be in the flow, and the flow will not be a trickle but a river to swim in. Then everything shall live where the river comes.

LIFE-STUDY OF EZEKIEL

MESSAGE TWENTY-SEVEN

THE HOLY LAND AND THE HOLY CITY

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 45:1-8; 47:13-20; 48:8-20, 31-35; Rev. 21:12-13

In this message we come to the end of Ezekiel, and we will consider two matters—the holy land and the holy city.

THE HOLY LAND

The Temple Being the Issue of the Land

We need to see something further concerning the holy land. Apart from the land, there can be no temple. We may appreciate the temple very much, but we need to realize that the temple is in the land and that without the land there cannot be a temple. The temple, which typifies the church, is the issue of the land, which typifies Christ. Thus, the temple depends on the land. If we do not have the experience of Christ, it is impossible for us to have the church. The church is the issue of the enjoyment of the riches of Christ.

A History of the Land

The land is first mentioned in Genesis 1:9. On the third day of the Lord's recovery of His creation, the land was recovered, for on this day the land emerged from the waters of death. Prior to that time, the land had been under the death waters. But on the third day the Lord caused the land to rise up out of the waters of death. The land here in Genesis 1 typifies Christ, who was resurrected from the dead on the third day as the all-inclusive land. Every kind of life—plant life, animal life, and human life—came out of this land. All manner of living beings issued out of the land. Since the land signifies Christ, this means that all these living things came out of Christ.

Christ is the good land which God prepared for man. However, man fell and became degraded, and this caused God to judge the earth again. During the time of Noah, the land was flooded and again was covered by the waters of death (7:19). As a result, the human race lost the land. But the Lord again brought the land out of the death waters, and the family of Noah was given the right to enjoy the land.

Human history is a record of man's fall. In the course of this history, the descendents of Noah fell and eventually gathered at Babel to build a tower of rebellion against God (11:1-9). Then "the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth" (v. 8a). Later God called Abraham out from the land of Babel and brought him into Canaan, the good land (12:1-8). Eventually, however, the descendants of Abraham fell from the good land into Egypt. The whole house of Israel went down into Egypt, and thus they lost the good land.

Four hundred years later, by God's deliverance, the people of Israel experienced the passover, left Egypt, and passed through the Red Sea (Exo. 12—14). After forty years of wandering in the wilderness, they crossed the Jordan into the good land. Fighting against the inhabitants of the land, they recovered their lost land. Upon the recovered land they built the temple, and God's glory filled it (2 Chron. 5:14). Later, due to their falling away from the Lord and their degradation, they were carried away from the land and lost it once again.

In the midst of the captivity, Ezekiel was brought back to the land by the Spirit and saw the land. In our reading of Ezekiel, we need to pay attention to the fact that many times the Lord promised to bring His people back to the land (chs. 11, 33, 34, 36, 37). He even promised to bring them back to the top of the mountain of Israel (34:14). This indicates a recovery of the land.

It is crucial for us to realize that before we can have the recovery of the building, we need to have the recovery of the land. The recovery of the land signifies the recovery of the enjoyment of Christ. Christ Himself cannot be lost, but in our experience Christ can be lost. When we were saved, we received Christ. However, not long afterward we fell away

and lost Christ in our experience. The recovery of the land is the recovery of the experiences of the riches of Christ. Once the land has been recovered, the house can be built on the land.

A Land of Milk and Honey

The land, with all its riches, is called a land "flowing with milk and honey" (20:6). Milk and honey are both the product of two lives working together—the vegetable life and the animal life. It takes both the vegetable life and the animal life to produce milk and honey. To produce milk we need cattle, the animal life, and also the pasture, the vegetable life. Milk is therefore the product of these two lives working together. The principle is the same with honey. Honey is produced by bees, but the bees need the flowers of many different kinds of plants. Therefore, both milk and honey are the produce of these two kinds of lives.

As our good land, Christ has two kinds of lives; He has the vegetable life and the animal life. The Gospel of John indicates this. On the one hand, the Lord Jesus said that He was a grain of wheat (12:24); this is the vegetable life. On the other hand, this Gospel says that Christ is the Lamb of God (1:29); this is the animal life. The animal life is for being slain so that blood may be shed for redemption, whereas the vegetable life is for producing and generating life. One grain of wheat falls into the ground, dies, grows up, and multiplies into many grains. Thus, with Christ we have the animal life for redemption and the vegetable life for germination. Out of these two lives mingled together, we have the riches of Christ—the milk and honey—for our enjoyment.

The Borders of the Land

Ezekiel presents the borders of the good land in a particular yet wonderful way. He says that the border on the west is the Great Sea (47:20). This indicates that the coast of the Mediterranean Sea is the western border. Ezekiel tells us that there is also a sea on the east side (v. 18). The sea on the east is not the Great Sea; it is the Dead Sea. At the top of the Dead Sea is the river Jordan, which proceeds northward to

another sea, the Sea of Galilee, or the Sea of Tiberias. Another river, the river of Egypt, is the border of the good land on the south (v. 19).

The position of the good land between the waters of the Great Sea on the west and the waters of the Dead Sea on the east is significant. For the good land to be surrounded by water indicates that it is surrounded by death. In the Dead Sea there is nothing but death, and in the Great Sea there is salt water, which signifies death. Furthermore, in typology the Jordan River signifies death. Thus, the good land is surrounded by death, but it is not overflooded by death. This reminds us of the land that came up out of the waters of death on the third day, thereby signifying the resurrected Christ.

Certain portions of the Word indicate that the good land of Canaan is an elevated land (Deut. 32:13; Ezek. 20:40-42; 34:13-15; 37:22). The good land is a raised-up land, typifying Christ being raised, elevated, from the dead. Hence, the good land is not a low land but a high land. Whereas the Dead Sea is hundreds of feet below sea level, Mount Zion is hundreds of feet above sea level. This signifies that the good land, as a type of the resurrected Christ, is an elevated land.

On the north side of the good land, there is no river as a border; instead, there is Mount Hermon. According to Psalm 133 the dew comes down from Mount Hermon and descends upon the mountains of Zion. This signifies that grace comes down from the heavens and descends upon all the local churches. This elevated land with Mount Hermon signifies the resurrected Christ, who has ascended to the heavens. Now there is not only resurrection but also ascension, for Christ is not only the resurrected Christ but also the ascended Christ. He is above the death waters, and He has ascended to the high mountain, Mount Hermon.

The Subdivisions of the Good Land

Regarding the subdivisions of the land, seven of the tribes of Israel were in the north and five were in the south. (See figure 5: The Distribution of the Holy Land.) Of all the twelve tribes, Judah and Benjamin were most dear to the Lord.

When the twelve tribes were divided, only Judah and Benjamin remained with the Lord and did not participate in division. For this reason they were located close to the Lord's habitation. Because of Gad's poor condition, the tribe of Gad was placed in the extreme southern portion of the land.

We should have confidence in the Lord's judgment and estimation concerning us. Others may be mistaken concerning us, but the Lord cannot be mistaken. He is fair, and He knows whether to put us in the north or in the south. He can never be wrong. With respect to the church life, we do not know where we should be, but the Lord knows where to put us. For example, no matter how much attention we may give to where we should go in the migration for the spread of the church life, eventually we will be in the best place under the Lord's sovereignty. He knows whether we are Dan or Benjamin, Judah or Gad. We should not blame others but recognize and submit to the Lord's sovereignty.

Dan, however, was never satisfied with where he was placed. In Revelation 7 the name of Dan is not mentioned in the list of the tribes of Israel because of Dan's idolatry and degradation (Judg. 18). Temporarily the Lord removed his name from the list of the tribes.

The Middle Portion

Ezekiel tells us that the whole land of Canaan was divided into three portions. The northern portion was for seven tribes (48:1-8), the southern portion was for five tribes (vv. 23-28), and the middle portion, the holy portion, was an offering to God. Because the Lord gave the people of Israel the whole land of Canaan as their possession, He asked them to heave the middle portion back to Him as an offering. Therefore, the middle portion of the land was a heave offering, heaved up by the people to God (vv. 8-12).

In the middle portion there was a square twenty-five thousand reeds long and twenty-five thousand reeds wide. One reed equals six cubits. The twenty-five thousand reeds indicates five, the number of responsibility, multiplied by five thousand. What a great amount of responsibility this indicates!

This square is called *the holy heave offering* and is divided into three strips. The middle strip is twenty-five thousand reeds long from east to west and ten thousand reeds broad from north to south. This was the part for the temple; it was also the part given to the priests, especially to the sons of Zadok, because of their faithfulness (v. 11). This middle part became their inheritance, in which was the lot for the temple. This indicates that the priests, the sons of Zadok, were the ones who were closest to the Lord. The Lord even lived on their inheritance, their lot. Their inheritance was the Lord's dwelling place.

The second part, on the south, was also twenty-five thousand reeds long and ten thousand reeds broad. This part belonged to the Levites who ministered to the house and to the people and who helped in all the business of the service with the offerings. The Levites were close to the Lord but not as close as the priests were (v. 13).

The third portion, on the north side, measured twenty-five thousand reeds by five thousand reeds. This portion was for the city (v. 15). The city was in the middle part of this northern portion. The remainder of this portion belonged to the laborers, the workers, in the city. From all this we see that the land for the holy heave offering was divided into three parts: one part for the priests, one part for the Levites, and one part for the city with all of its workers.

The map showing the distribution of the holy land indicates that besides the land for the holy heave offering, there was still some remainder of the land on the west and on the east. These two pieces of land as a residue were assigned and allotted to the king, to the royal family (v. 21).

The Nearness of the Tribes to Christ Not Being the Same

The allotment of the land and the placement of the tribes upon their particular portion of the land are quite significant. This picture shows us that from Dan in the north to Gad in the south, all the Israelites enjoyed Christ, but their nearness to Christ was not the same. The closest ones to Christ were the priests, the faithful sons of Zadok. Next to them were the

Levites and those who worked in the city. Next to these were the royal family. Thus, each tribe enjoyed Christ, but their distance from Christ varied.

The nearness of the tribes to Christ determined their importance. The most important people were the priests, who were the closest to Christ and who maintained the fellowship between the people and the Lord. The Levites were next in nearness to the Lord, and they maintained a service to the Lord. Service to the Lord is good, but it is not as good as fellowship is. Their service, which was necessary, was not as dear and precious as fellowship was. Then the workers for the city were the third closest to the Lord. The city is the symbol of the divine government, so there was a work to maintain God's government. Here we can see the fellowship, the service, and the work to maintain the divine government. In addition, there was the royal family with the king and the kingship.

Ezekiel's record indicates that the temple was not within the city but was separated from the city. Whereas the city signifies the government of God, the temple signifies the fellowship of God. The temple is God's house, God's dwelling place, for His rest, and the city is God's kingdom for His authority.

It is crucial for us to realize that all these things—the fellowship of the priests, the service of the Levites, the work to maintain God's government, and the kingship—all come out of the riches of the land. This means that all the fellowship, service, work, government, royalty, lordship, and kingship come out of the enjoyment of the riches of Christ.

The more we enjoy Christ, the closer we are to Him, and the closer we are to Him, the more important we are in His purpose. We may be like Dan or Gad, far away from His presence, yet we still enjoy His riches. However, we are not so important to His economy because of the distance between us and Him. The priests, on the contrary, are extremely crucial. Their lot, their portion, is the Lord's dwelling place. We all should aspire to be in the position of the priests. There is no need for us to be concerned about who will be in the place of Dan. The Lord will take care of that.

We should desire and exercise not only to be priests but also to be kings. Revelation 1:6 says that the Lord has made us a kingdom, priests to God and His Father. As kings and priests we have been predestined to be very close to the Lord. Hence, we should not be content to be like Dan, far away at the northern extreme of the land. We must be priests, the sons of Zadok, and the kings who are very close to the Lord. In eternity we will all be kings and priests (20:6; 22:3b-5). We will enjoy the milk and the honey—all the riches of Christ.

Today we need to learn to enjoy Christ. Instead of caring so much for teachings and gifts, we should care for the riches of Christ. We have not been predestined to teachings and gifts; we have been predestined to the enjoyment of Christ. Therefore, we need to learn to enjoy the riches of Christ as the good land. Day by day we should enjoy Christ by eating, drinking, and breathing Him. This is the way for us to go on.

THE HOLY CITY

Both Ezekiel and Revelation end with a city, Jerusalem. Only one city in the Bible has twelve gates with the twelve names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is the city of Jerusalem.

Because we will eventually become the New Jerusalem, we should apply to ourselves the things mentioned in Ezekiel. This means that we should not regard the words of Ezekiel merely as prophecies. Although the book of Ezekiel contains prophecies, we should apply this record primarily to ourselves, applying the points in Ezekiel not merely to the future but also to the present.

A Mingling of God and Man

With this city there is the number twelve, which is composed not of six times two but of three times four. It is three times four because there are three gates on four sides, making a total of twelve gates. We need to remember that four is the number of the creature and that three is the number of the Triune God. Thus, twelve signifies the mingling of the Triune God with the creatures.

Eventually, this city is not only a mingling but also a

perfect government with a complete administration. In the Bible the number twelve also indicates a perfect government and administration in completion. It is not only a mingling of divinity with humanity; it is also a perfect government which comes out of this mingling. This mingling is for eternity. This city, which issues from the mingling, will exercise full authority for God's complete administration.

The church should be like this today. This means that the church should be the mingling of God with man. Out of such a mingling there will be the church government for God's administration on earth.

Causing All Who Enter to Be One

The fact that the city has four sides with three gates on each side also indicates that no matter from which side we enter the city, we will be in the same city. No matter which gate we enter, we will be one. In this city we cannot be divided.

Revelation 21:21 shows us that in the New Jerusalem there is only one street. No matter what direction we come from and no matter what gate we enter through, we will all be on the same street. On this street there is the one flow, the one river, with the one drink and the one tree of life (22:1-2). In this city we all are one. We have one street, one river, one flow, one drink, one tree of life. In every way we are one.

The book of Ezekiel concludes with the words, "The name of the city from that day shall be, The Lord is there" (48:35b). God dwells in the temple, and He dwells also in the city. In the temple God has fellowship with His people, and in the city God reigns among His people. This indicates that God has come down from heaven to live with man.

We hope that this will be the situation in all the local churches. In the church as His building today, God has His temple, His dwelling place, and He also has His city for His administration. In this way, the church becomes the center for the fellowship with God and for the reigning of God. If we have the adequate enjoyment of Christ as the good land, there will be an issue—the temple and the city. When there is the temple and the city in the good land, God will have His

expression, we will enjoy God and God will enjoy us, and we and God will have mutual satisfaction.