

As regards the land promise (3), all the people of God will enjoy the rich blessedness of everlasting life in the new heavens and the new earth, which will be far better than Eden—more wonderful and completely unloseable!

Isaiah 51:3 speaks twice of “comfort.” This is a frequent and blessed word in the second “half” of Isaiah (Isa. 40-66). In fact, the second part of the evangelical prophet begins with two occurrences of this word: “*Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God*” (40:1). The church’s comfort consists in the fact that “her iniquity is pardoned” (2). Isaiah then introduces John the Baptist, the Lord’s forerunner: “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it” (3-5; cf. Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4-6; John 1:23).

Jesus Christ is “the LORD” and “our God,” whose “way” or “highway” John prepared (Isa. 40:3). Our Saviour is “the glory of the Lord” who was “revealed” so that “all flesh”—people all around the world—have seen Him by faith (5).

John’s message also includes a comparison between the transitoriness of mankind and his goodness, and the abiding permanence of the Word of God: “The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever” (6-8).

Not just John the Baptist but even Zion proclaims, “Behold your God!” (9). The church’s God is heralded as a strong and tender shepherd: “Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young” (10-11).

Within this framework of comfort, and building upon it, Isaiah 51:1-3 holds out the consolation of the increase of the church with more to be added with the return from the Babylonian captivity and throughout the New Testament age until our Lord comes again (1-2), for God is not willing that any of His beloved, elect people should perish but that all of them should come to repentance (II Pet. 3:9). Moreover, our comforting hope is not only the bliss of heaven with Christ after death, but especially the new creation, the perfect paradise of the far greater Eden (Isa. 51:3)! *Rev. Stewart*

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The Rock Whence We Are Hewn (4)

We conclude our exposition of Isaiah 51:1-3 with the third verse: “For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.” Here God promises to console devastated Zion by making it like the Garden of Eden so that His people will rejoice.

Do you see the Spirit’s method in our text? The first problem was the lack of numbers in the church, so the Holy Ghost points to a person, Abraham, noting how Jehovah multiplied his seed (1-2). The second issue is the desolation of Jerusalem, so God reminds us of a place, Eden, pledging that His people will dwell in paradise (3).

The Holy Spirit in Isaiah 51:3 recalls us to the words He inspired in Genesis 2, such as the following: “And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food ... And a river went out of Eden to water the garden ... And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat” (8-9, 10, 15-16).

In other words, our text promises that the “waste places,” “wilderness” and “desert” of Zion will be transformed into a new Garden of Eden, with the greatest fertility and blessedness (Isa. 51:7).

So what is the fulfilment of Isaiah 51:1-3? The first stage of the fulfilment is the return from the Babylonian captivity. The number of the people of God increased (1-2) but not massively, however. In fact, the largest group of returnees was only about 50,000 (Ezra 2; Neh. 7). Jerusalem was rebuilt with houses, city walls and a temple that was much smaller than Solomon’s, but it was not like Eden (Isa. 51:3)!

The second stage in the fulfilment of our text is the first coming of Jesus Christ, His substitutionary sufferings on the cross for His elect and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As regards numbers (1-2), our Saviour is now gathering His catholic or universal church, which consists of millions and millions of Jews and Gentiles. The people of God in the New Testament age are much more numerous than in the Old Testament, with more being gathered every day all around the world. But what about the land (3)? Has the world become like a new Eden? No!

The third and final stage in the fulfilment of Isaiah 51:1-3 awaits Christ’s glorious, bodily, second coming. Then the whole catholic or universal church of all ages consisting of millions upon millions upon millions of people will be gathered unto Him (1-2).

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The Work of the Holy Spirit (3)

In 2008, the British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) held its tenth biennial conference at the Share Centre on the shores of Lough Erne in County Fermanagh, N. Ireland. The subject was “The Work of the Holy Spirit.” Later, the speeches and sermons were published in book form. One reader recently asked me a series of questions about the contents of the book, wanting to have the answers included in the *News*.

His second question reads, “What is the difference between the Spirit now as the Spirit of the risen Christ rather than just the Spirit of Christ? You mention that the Spirit could not work the reality of salvation because all he had to use was a picture book [*The Work of the Holy Spirit*, p. 34]. Could you expand on that? I think the footnote on page 35 goes a long way to answering that—the anointing teaches you all things (I John 2:27). The Spirit of truth ... and more truth than before! On the next page you say it was difficult for Old Testament saints to pray and impossible for them to call God ‘Father.’ But nevertheless many examples can be found and there are instances where Israel calls God ‘Father.’”

Of the questions he asked me, two remain to be answered. The first one has to do with the question that arises out of statement I made that the Spirit of Christ, poured out on Pentecost, was poured out in heaven as well as on earth. The questioner wanted to know what difference the outpouring of the Spirit made in the lives of the saints in heaven.

We know very little of what heaven is like and we face great difficulties in trying to know what precisely happens in heaven. But, given the fact that the Holy Spirit of Christ is the One who binds all the saints together in the one body of Christ, this must, of necessity, include the saints in heaven, for they are one with the saints on earth.

We must also remember that Christ had not yet come into our flesh to accomplish His glorious work of redemption in His death, resurrection and exaltation. The devil still had access to heaven to slander the saints and fight with Michael (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; Rev. 12:7-10; Jude 9). What a tremendous difference came about when our Lord ascended on high and was crowned as universal king: king over the whole earthly and heavenly creations, king over His beloved church, king over the devil and his demons, king over all!

To mention only what I discussed in the last *News*, just as saints on earth became prophets, priests and kings under Christ by the Spirit of Christ, so it was also in heaven. It is impossible to say what difference that great event made in the lives of the saints in heaven to see Christ Himself and to be prophets, priests and kings under Him. But different it was: vastly different!

The second question that still needs answering concerns the Old Testament saints calling God “Father.” I had said that this was rare, if indeed it ever happened. The questioner challenges this assertion. He cited no texts and I would be interested in receiving from him a list of such verses.

There is one point that does need to be made, however. God repeatedly addressed Israel as His “son,” His “firstborn” (Ex. 4:22; Jer. 31:9, 20). In that sense of the word, the nation as a whole, taken in its organic unity, is God’s son for He is the nation’s “father” (Deut. 32:6; Jer. 31:9) and was addressed by Israel as such (Isa. 63:16; 64:8). God called Israel His son when He led them out of the land of Egypt by signs and wonders. Israel as a nation recognized that it was the son of God because He had delivered the nation from the bondage of Egypt, a picture of the bondage of sin. It was, for the nation, Israel’s regeneration, Israel’s second birth. This is the reason why Hosea, referring to this event, says, “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt” (Hos. 11:1).

But, do not forget that Joseph and Mary were commanded by God to flee from Herod’s bloody sword because, as Matthew tells us, Hosea had prophesied this. We read that Joseph “took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son” (Matt. 2:14-15). Hosea was speaking of Christ who was present in Israel—in Israel’s loins. God called Christ out of Egypt when Israel was delivered.

The only Old Testament references to God’s being the “father” of an individual who is His “son” involve the anointed King Jesus, typified by Solomon (II Sam. 7:14; I Chron. 17:13; 22:10). Jehovah calls Christ His “firstborn” (Ps. 89:27) who cries out to Him, “Thou art my father” (26). In Psalm 2, the Most High addresses “his anointed” (2) as “my king” (6) and “my Son” (7). God’s “Son” (12) is “begotten” of Him (7).

The point is that the New Testament calls us sons (or daughters) of God as individuals only because we belong to Christ who is the Son of God who has come into our world and died for our sins. Only because we belong to Christ can God possibly be our Father—as He is Christ’s Father. Only, therefore, because we have the Spirit of Christ, whom the old dispensational saints did not possess, can we call God our Father.

Thus Galatians 4:4-7 states, “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his *Son*, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of *sons*. And because ye are *sons*, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his *Son* into your hearts, crying, *Abba, Father*. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a *son*; and if a *son*, then an heir of God through Christ.”

The disciples must have been momentarily stunned when Jesus, teaching them how to pray, said that they must begin their prayers with the words, “Our Father.”

To appreciate what the old dispensational saints lacked is to appreciate what we now have in the cross, resurrection and Spirit of Christ!

Prof. Hanko

The 180-page softback book by Profs. Hanko and Engelsma entitled *The Work of the Holy Spirit* to which Prof. Hanko refers in this series of articles is available from the CPRC Bookstore for just £5.50 (inc. P&P). Simply contact the Bookstore or order on-line through the CPRC website (www.cprc.co.uk).