

'The Feast of Tabernacles in the Gospel' Ch. 7

by Charles Alexander

The Feast of Tabernacles in the Gospel represents the fulfillment of the Old Covenant and the inauguration of the New Covenant, symbolizing the obedience of the Gentiles to the Gospel and the harvesting of souls through the preaching of the Word of God.

Scripture: Zechariah 14:16, John 7:2, John 7:37, Romans 8:15, Ephesians 1:10

Topics: "New Covenant", "Eternal Kingdom"

Description

Charles Alexander preaches about the significance of the Feast of Tabernacles in John 7, highlighting the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant through Christ's ministry. The impending fulfillment of the Jewish feast symbolizes the end of the Old Covenant and the ushering in of the Gospel era. Jesus, the fulfillment of the feast, proclaims the coming of the kingdom of heaven and the eternal Gospel feast. The sermon delves into the prophetic significance of the Feast of Tabernacles, emphasizing the eternal rejoicing in heaven and the perpetual Gospel feast brought by Christ's sacrifice and resurrection.

Transcript

"Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand" (John 7:2). The Word is prophetic. More than this annual autumn festival of the Jews was due to be observed. What was really "at hand" was that which was predicted and dramatized by the Jewish feast of tabernacles. The Old Covenant, in which these deeply religious observances were consecrated, was moving to its close. The Jewish feast would end along with its temple, priesthood, and worship, even though the skeleton of that feast of tabernacles would remain to Jewry for the countless generations down to our own day as a boney memorial of things long since fulfilled in Christ. What was at hand at this stage of our Lord's ministry was the glorious realization of all that the feast of tabernacles stood for, along with the other two great Jewish festivals, Passover and Pentecost. The Gospel was coming in fast. The kingdom of heaven was at hand. John the Baptist had proclaimed it. Christ had been preparing it. That for which all the world and all creation and all human and all divine history had awaited for four thousand years since the Garden of Eden was about to be verified in the seed of the woman who was to bruise the serpent's head. The shadow would merge into substance and type into fulfillment; the Old Covenant would be dismantled and pass into history. What would be celebrated henceforth would be man's true deliverance from curse and condemnation, and the feast of tabernacles (that great feast of rejoicing when the harvest was brought home in the seventh month of the Jewish year) would no longer be celebrated in a yearly journey to Jerusalem and an annual display of palm branches and fading leaves for the making of booths or tabernacles. It would be a perpetual Gospel feast, a festival

without an end which now has lasted well nigh two thousand years and may (for aught we know to the contrary) soon be merged into the eternal rejoicing of heaven when the heavenly Reaper gathers in His harvest home in the delectable country beyond the swelling flood of death and time. Then the tabernacle of God will be with men, and He will dwell among them; and He will be their God, and they will be His people.

History was moving fast when the Lord said to His Jewish brethren, "I go not yet up to this feast; for my time is not yet full come." These brethren, no doubt near relatives of Joseph and Mary, spoke generally for all those brethren of the Jewish race whose blood flowed in the veins of Him who for us men and for our salvation had deigned to take upon Him the seed of Abraham (Matthew 1:1; Hebrews 2:16). They did not believe in Him (John 7:5); and they challenged Him to go up to Jerusalem to the feast to demonstrate His miraculous claim (if He dare!) and not to remain in Galilee, where He had withdrawn Himself because in Judea they sought to kill Him.

The challenge of the false brethren, so typical of the casuistry and subtlety of religious hypocrisy, was couched in terms which were a thinly veiled expression of their scepticism - "There is no man that doeth any thing in secret and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world" (John 7:4).

The world indeed! What had the world to do with these things? The false brethren might well speak of the world's opinion because it only too truly represented theirs.

"The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil"

(John 7:7).

Yet they spoke better than they knew, for He would indeed show Himself to the great world outside their restricted Jewish world and would gather a people for His name from every kindred, tongue, tribe and nation. The Lord dismisses the false brethren with the words, "Go ye up unto the feast. I go not yet up unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come."

The Lord's time was the Gospel time to be introduced by His death at the hands of His "brethren." "I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children" (Psalm 69:8). But the Eternal Father would raise up for Him a new and a more numerous kindred. From the ends of the earth they would come to attend the Gospel feast that never ending feast of tabernacles which He would introduce by His atoning death and glorious resurrection and ascension.

But the time for that was not yet full come. He must surely go up to this seven day feast at Jerusalem when it became time to declare Himself openly to the Jews, but His deep prophetic words and actions would speak of that other feast of which that now preparing at Jerusalem was but the faintest shadow. Five more months and He would begin a new cycle of feasts at the very next passover when He would introduce the New Covenant, dispense the symbols of it in the ordinances of bread and wine, and seal it all in His prayer of dedication unto death--"Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee" (John 17:1).

THE THREE GREAT FEASTS

The three great feasts of the Jews were instituted by Moses to keep alive the remembrance of the Lord's deliverance from Egypt. They were Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. The Passover illustrated the

mystery of redemption and was truly fulfilled on the dark betrayal night when the Lord with His disciplines kept the last Passover supper under the Old Covenant. Henceforth it was to be "Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast not with the old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice or wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:7-8). Pentecost (the feast of the firstfruits, the springtime of Gospel grace) followed in fifty days and was fulfilled when there came on that festal day a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind and cloven tongues of fire rested upon the disciples in the upper room.

The third great feast occurred in the seventh month and lasted for seven days, during which a graduated scheme of sacrifices was offered day by day beginning on the fifteenth day of the month. An eighth day was added in which a great day of national assembly was observed. This was "the last day, that great day of feast" referred to in John 7:37. To this we shall presently come. The regulations for this feast were meticulous and exhaustive, and the entire festival was timed to coincide with the great annual harvest home (See Leviticus 23 and Numbers 29).

This seventh month was the most important in the Jewish calendar. It began with the ceremonial blowing of trumpets on the first day and was followed on the tenth day by the solemnities of the day of atonement. Five days later the feast of tabernacles began.

After the Chaldean captivity, public worship was restored in Jerusalem on the first day of the seventh month (Ezra 3:6), and the feast of tabernacles was observed in the appointed manner though the foundation of the new temple was not yet laid. The feast acquired the character of Israel's restoration and hence becomes in Zechariah 14:16-19 the prophetic symbol of the Gospel dispensation in which, not Israel alone, but all the nations of the world also, are required to present themselves at Jerusalem for the observance of the feast under pain of the divine displeasure.

ZECHARIAH'S PROPHECY

The attempt in modern times to make Zechariah 14 a description of a so-called millennial kingdom in which Israel is held to be restored to her ancient and exclusive national privileges breaks down everywhere when this chapter is closely studied. The frightful millennial plague described in Zechariah 14:12-19, visited upon the nations that do not come to Jerusalem to keep the feast of tabernacles, makes nonsense of the forecast of a "golden age" of peace and contentment under the personal reign of Christ at Jerusalem.

The prophetic words of Zechariah can apply only to our Gospel millennium, the whole period of time between Pentecost and the second coming, during which Christ rules from heaven over the nations of the world and destroys those powers and dominations which refuse submission to the Gospel (See Psalm 2). In Zechariah 14, this feast is singled out as the symbol of the obedience of the Gentiles to the Gospel. The feast lends itself prophetically to the conception of a continuous harvesting amongst the nations through the preaching of the Word of God.

The heavenly sower scatters His seed over the fields of the world and reaps the ripened grain. By not comparing spiritual things with spiritual, by not relating Zechariah 14 to John 7, prophetic interpretation wanders in confusion and imagines disgusting plagues visited upon nonconforming nations and calls this a millennium, otherwise represented as the consummation of the ages when universal righteousness and peace prevail. The inconsistency of the millennial view in the conditions pictured in Zechariah 14 (a favored preserve of futuristic Chiliasm) must be self-evident.

It is to be noted that the graduated sacrifices of the feast of tabernacles as described in Numbers 29 provided that during the seven days of the feast a total of seventy bullocks should be offered, commencing with thirteen on the first day and reducing each day to seven bullocks on the seventh day. The figure seventy shows the complete nature of the sacrifice and brings us to the eighth day, that great day of the feast when one bullock only was offered, illustrating that in the time of the New Covenant one sacrifice for sin forever was made by Christ.

Once every seven years the Holy Convocation of the eighth day was marked by the public reading of the complete law of Moses (Deuteronomy 31:10-13). He who will attend closely to these things cannot fail to perceive that the feast of the tabernacles was designed to point to the great Gospel feast, when all the world should hear the law of life proceeding from Christ in the midst of His church. It is not disputed that the feasts of Passover and Pentecost were fulfilled in the death of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit in New Testament effusion on the fiftieth day thereafter.

Can it then reasonably be disputed that the great feast of Tabernacles likewise was fulfilled in the same way? By what rule do our futuristic brethren teach that this feast of Tabernacles still awaits fulfillment after two thousand years of separation from the two preceding festivals? Is it not clear that Zechariah (in the days of whose prophecy there was no temple at Jerusalem) could speak only of a feast of Tabernacles to be celebrated in its spiritual reality in the days of the Gospel and not literally in some imagined earthly millennium? The final answer lies, as we shall presently see, in the words by which our Lord associated Himself with the prophecy in John 7:37-39.

It is to this Feast of Tabernacles, then (the very last to take place under the Old Covenant), that the Lord now makes His journey from Galilee, to which He had earlier retired to avoid the Jewish conspiracy to slay him. Now He proceeds steadfastly to Jerusalem, because there to show (as show He did) that the feast was about to be fulfilled by Himself and in Himself. The New Covenant of the Gospel was to be inaugurated before another Feast of Tabernacles could be celebrated. The time had come for the beginning of the prophecy in Zechariah 14:4 ("His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives") to be realized. Zechariah speaks in this verse of Christ's first coming not His second. There will be no Mount of Olives to bear His feet when He comes again to judge the world. Before His face heaven and earth will flee away. He purposed to show at the feast then preparing at Jerusalem how its meaning would be fully unfolded in Himself in the ensuing ages of the New Covenant of grace.

THE FALSE BRETHREN

He delays till the false brethren leave Galilee; and when they are arrived at Jerusalem, He goes up secretly to the feast. The Jews vainly enquire, "Where is He?" (John 7:11). Confusion exists among the people. Some say He is a good man. Others that He is a deceiver. None dare speak of Him openly for fear of the Jewish authorities, who are already pledged to destroy Him. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (John 1:11).

In the midst of the feast, He suddenly appears in the court of the temple, where He openly teaches the people (John 7:14).

What was the nature of the Lord's teaching to the crowds thronging the temple? It seems plain that He would speak as He ever did of the kingdom of God being at hand that kingdom promised from the beginning, which would overthrow Satan's empire of darkness, sin, and death. He would show (as He clearly warned through His earthly ministry) that a Jewish genealogical descent availed nothing as

qualification for citizenship in the mystical kingdom of God. Like John the Baptist before Him, He taught that repentance was the only gate by which they could enter. He would, as was His wont, expose the false righteousness taught by the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and by parables and other forms of prophetic speech He would prepare the humble and meek for the full revelation of Gospel grace so shortly to be preached to the nation and to the entire Gentile world.

The Jews marvel. They had never heard the like before. "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" (John 7:15). He had never been to the Rabbinical schools to be taught by the official interpreters of Jewish law and traditions, and it was a marvel that He should display such profound knowledge, going so very far beyond and even contrary to the teaching of the elders.

It must not be supposed by the language used that the average Jew was illiterate. There is no evidence to support this. When the Apostles are described as "unlearned and ignorant," this is to be understood only in the sense that they were not qualified teachers according to the official schools of the rabbis. Hebrew had been a dead language ever since the Babylonish captivity six centuries before. Greek and Aramaic were the common languages of Palestine. Hebrew was understood only by those who had passed through the rabbinical schools, where the interpretations and traditions of the elders were already an offence to any but that kind of prejudiced mind which had cunningly perverted the Divine Word. These "learned" Jews neither went into the kingdom of God themselves nor suffered those who would to enter.

A specimen of the offensive nature of the rabbinical interpretations and disputes would not be out of place here. The rabbis claimed that there were six hundred and thirteen precepts in the law, some light and some heavy. Therefore the frequent question was, "Which is the greatest commandment?" In the tract Shabbath (Dean Farrar informs us) we are told the most important law is that about fringes. On one occasion Rabbi Rabba, having accidentally trodden on and torn his fringe while mounting a ladder, would not move until it was repaired. No less a person than Rashi in the twelfth century A.D. is still bold to repeat that the law about fringes is the first and great commandment. In their interpretation, Neighbor usually meant a Jew. Dean Farrar says, "The traditions of the rabbis shifted the centre of gravity of the whole moral system. The consequence was the gradual literalising of spiritual conceptions, and the depreciation of righteousness in comparison with ceremonial and theological opinion. Among the rabbis, if a man were but an orthodox casuist his sins were recorded with unblushing indifference. The Talmud abounds in narratives which detail without the slightest blush the impurity of the rabbis. Their hedge about the law made no pretence about keeping out the wild bears of pride and lust, though they might exclude the little foxes of irregular ceremonial."

Dr. Farrar further tells us that it had been a rule of the rabbis, that what had been delivered orally was to be retained only by memory. But the point was reached where it was impossible to retain a mass of precedents so immense, accumulated from Ezra to Aquiba (second century AD). Rabbi Juda (died 200 AD) for the first time committed it to writing, for which he earned the title of Rabba, although none could be compared with him. His compilation was called Mishna (learning or repetition from the word to learn or repeat).

"Henceforth the Mishna moulded the entire theology and philosophy of Judaism. This strange collection of completed and dead decisions, being treated as of divine authority, superseded the Scriptures.

"The commentators took over at his death, and their labors resulted in the Jerusalem Talmud. This Talmud covered only four of the six Mishnaic orders of Hillel's classification, and was completed by the

Gemara (completion), which, with the Mishna, makes up the Babylonian Talmud. The Talmud finally closed AD 490. In the Mishna and Gemara, the Jews boasted they had the secret without which the law was valueless.

"All that is essential in this immense encyclopedia of Jewish literature falls under the headings, the Halakha (or decisions), the Haggada and the Qabbala. In the Halakha the additions made by the rabbis to the law multiplied in bulk a thousandfold and that with the most frivolous minutiae. Rabbi Eliezer boasted of delivering three hundred Halakhoth or decisions about Egyptian cucumbers, and there were three hundred Halakhoth about the "tower that floats in the air" (Isaiah 33:18). The rabbis said that the Halakhoth were part of the Oral Law delivered to Moses on Sinai.

"In the school of Tiberius there once rose a fierce quarrel between the pupils of Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Jose about the lawfulness of using on the Sabbath a bolt with a knob. The former said it might not be used. The latter said it might be used since it was lawful on the Sabbath to use a belt with a knob for mashing garlic. In their rage they actually tore assunder a role of the law.

"The foolish questions, strifes, wordfightings, etc., which Paul writes about (Titus 3:9 and 1 Timothy 6:4) are a close description of what went on in the schools of the rabbis."

Dr. Farrar proceeds, "Although the decisions were set even about scripture, though God Himself is represented as repeating them in the name of the rabbi from whom they emanated, though heaven is described as an academy in which the angels were taking opposite sides in a question about leprosy, though the most tremendous curses are pronounced against those who resist these decisions, yet there was scarcely a single Rabbinic precept about which there were not eager and sometimes even savage dissensions.... And so once more like the medieval priesthood, they built upon ignorance and superstition a terrific usurpation."

There are huge folios of minute discussion as to the shape, size, and construction of phylacteries, as to the way in which the knot of them was to be made and as to the question whether they are worn by God Himself or not. One whole treatise of the Mishna, that known as "The Egg," derives its name from the question discussed whether an egg laid on the Sabbath or a festival day may, or may not, be eaten. The rabbis themselves compared this mass of inferential precept to a mountain dangling by a single hair.

After this exposure of Rabbinical "learning," how can our futuristic brethren persist in adopting the rabbinical views of a literal kingdom of Messiah on earth and teach a coming millennium and Jewish restoration built upon the same unprincipled mode of interpretation as contributed so much to Jewish blindness and hardness of heart? It is a most disquieting feature of the most popular prophetic and futuristic theories current among Christians today that these theories agree so much with the rabbinical errors concerning Messiah's kingdom and reign. It is also disquieting that they who plead for the prophecies to be interpreted according to the New Testament use of them by Christ and His apostles should be regarded with astonishment by otherwise good Christian men.

SELF CONSCIOUS DEITY

The Lord's reply to the Jews is profound and all comprehending, as shown in John 7:16 19.

Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. He that speaketh of

himself seeketh His glory: but he that seeketh His glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him. Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me?

Here is the self consciousness of deity interpreting deity God the Son, united still in eternal essence with the Father through the Spirit in the meek subordination and filial reverence of Sonship. In this place He announces He is the Word of God and Wisdom of God sent by the Father into the world to proclaim the divine will and complete the Father's purpose in creation. "My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent me."

He that will ponder this saying of Christ will perceive that Christ's knowledge of the Father's will and message lay in the knowledge of Himself as the divine Word who was ever with God and who in fact is by consequence God Himself in the one essence of the Holy Trinity. We shall see this more particularly as we come to Christ's words on "the last day, that great day of the feast," when He openly proclaims Himself to be the source and fountain of life.

His words proceed directly from God, and this is the source of His wisdom. Moreover, He taught that His hearers would know His meaning only so far as they desired the will of God to be done in them. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." The full responsibility of man for his own unbelief and final condemnation is clearly taught by Christ. There is a heaven born desire which wills to do the will of God and seeks to know in order to be transformed and sanctified by what it knows. This is true repentance and this is its ground and its product, its growth and its increase. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power" (Psalm 110:3).

Man is responsible before God for his own sinful choice and cannot lay upon a holy and righteous Creator the blameworthiness of the evil for which man alone is responsible. Satan's aim is to accuse God of unrighteousness in the exercise of an arbitrary an oppressive will, and our Reformers and Puritans would have recoiled in horror from any theological dogma which denies the responsibility of man for his own sinful choice. This is not to take away the sovereignty of divine grace in the conversion of the sinner. Christ's words show the manner of the Lord's working to bring about through the awakened conscience the conversion of the soul. Not unwillingly the sinner returns to a pardoning God.

If not in this world, then certainly at the judgment seat every mouth will be stopped and eternal justice will "execute judgment upon all and convince all that are ungodly among them of all the ungodly deeds they have committed and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken" against God (Jude 15).

Let us give full range to our Lord's words and proclaim to sinners everywhere that which their conscience must confess to be true, that if any man will do His will he will know of the doctrine whether it be of God or no. Let the Savior's tears over Jerusalem be witness of the truth that the fate of the sinner is in the utmost degree deplorable and chargeable to his own free choice: "How often would I ... and ye would not!" The saintly John Howe, one of the most enlightened of the Puritans, preached on "The redeemer's tears wept over lost souls" and taught us to bow before the solemnity of man's tragic choice and perceive that (like Judas) man dies by His own hand.

THE SON SEEKS THE FATHER'S GLORY

He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him (John 7:18).

These words of Christ reveal the heart of the Godhead and the manner of Deity. That Christ in all things pleased not Himself but sought only the glory of the Father is made clear by the true theology of the only begotten Son. The relationship of Son to Father in the Godhead is the most exquisite of all divine mysteries. It is fully expressed in the Lord's dedicatory prayer (John 17) on the eve of the crucifixion, "Father, glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee!"

This is the eternal principle of the divine life in the Godhead the Son seeks the glory of Him that sent Him and the Father glorifies the Son for that obedience by which the Son dedicates Himself to the death of the cross.

GREATER THAN MOSES

Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me?

(John 7:19).

This seems a strange intrusion into the dialogue, but it witnesses to the fact that the people of the law were condemned already. The object of the law was the glorifying of the name of God; and here was one who came in that holy name, yet they sought to slay Him. This is the final indictment of the nation and their crowning sin. The dialogue proceeds prophetically between Christ and the people. "Thou hast a devil," they declare. The root of their complaint goes back to the healing of the impotent man at the Pool of Bethesda. As far back as John 5, Christ had broken the law (in the estimation of the Jews) by healing a man on the Sabbath day. The Lord exposes the unreasonableness of this prejudice. In doing so, He declares the superiority of His doctrine to that of Moses. Circumcision was performed on the Sabbath day. Was it so great a marvel that He should make a man every whit whole on the Sabbath? But there is a new depth in His teaching, for He shows in this statement that the Gospel equivalent of circumcision is the restoration of the whole man in regeneration. Hence the counterpart of circumcision in the New Testament is not baptism, but the inward work of the Spirit which baptism represents, as Paul also shows (Colossians 2:11-12). Baptism is the type of the new life from the dead, not of circumcision, for there cannot be a type of a type. Those who insist upon the point will have to acknowledge that baptism does no more for the man than circumcision, or a ceremony, which certainly never had any saving or spiritual effect on the Old Testament Church.

The Lord persists throughout His ministry in exposing the falseness of the Jewish teaching which substituted ceremony for spirituality. This was the essence of pharisaism and rabbinicalism and stood in the way of true spiritual religion. His insistence that their doctrines were fatal to eternal life shows that this was no idle controversy which He was pursuing. He was exposing that which was destructive of the soul itself and which could not for a moment be tolerated.

Amazed at the boldness of Christ in thus exposing Judaism in the very center of its kingdom, some of them "of Jerusalem" wonder if there is any collusion between Christ and the authorities, who preserve such an ominous silence concerning Him. Did the rulers know that He was Christ? Yet how could this man be Christ, seeing they knew whence He came (Galilee), whereas no one could know (according to Judaistic teaching) where Christ came from?

How terribly wrong they were. They knew both Him and whence He came, for Christ came from God, and this they were in a position to know but were blinded by their prejudice against all light and truth.

Then cried Jesus in the temple as he taught, saying, Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am: and I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom ye know not. (John 7:28).

A distinction appears to be made in John 7:31 between the Jews of Jerusalem and those from the provinces, for many (especially of Galilee) were present at the feast who were acquainted with Christ's mighty works. These undoubtedly were of the "many" who believed on Him (John 7:31).

For the rest, they "sought to take Him," but "His hour was not yet come"; and they were as powerless to arrest Him as were the officers sent by the Jewish Council when the events in the temple at last came to their attention (John 7:30, 32, 44). The powerlessness of the authorities to overstep the boundaries of the Divine permission is a remarkable feature throughout the life of the Lord and indicates most significantly the overriding providence of God in bringing to pass His purposes. As the years which separated Daniel from the coming of Messiah were meticulously measured and weighed by God, setting periods to the rise and fall of the four great monarchies and preparing all history for the greatest event in time or in eternity, so the hand of God was upon the wicked throughout the ministry of the Savior on earth. A holy and resolute sovereignty controlled all events so that neither earth nor hell could do anything to accelerate or retard the appointment God had made for the accomplishing of redemption. This is predestination at its grandest and holiest. Only when all was ready in the infinite patience of God would the Savior lift up His eyes and address the Father in that eternal moment of self dedication "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee."

Fully in control of His own destiny, the Son declares in John 7:33 36:

Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come. Then said the Jews among themselves, Whither will he go, that we shall not find him? will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles? What manner of saying is this that he said, Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come?

Hidden from the earthly wisdom of the Jews was this saying. They speculate hopelessly on its meaning. One day soon they would know. In their fanaticism and despair, they would cry to God to save them but would perish in the ruins of their city and temple. The forty years during which they provoked and grieved God in the wilderness would be matched by the forty years of probation during which the Gospel would be preached to the Jew first, from the time of the crucifixion to the destruction of their temple and nation. The wrath of God was coming upon them to the uttermost, and they knew it not. Yes, indeed, Christ would go to the "dispersed among the Gentiles," but not in the sense in which they spoke. He would go to the Gentiles to find a people for His Name and the kingdom would be taken from the Jews and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. This new gospel nation is the nation often spoken about by our futuristic brethren that is to be "born in a day." That nation is not earthly Israel, but the new gospel nation of Jew and Gentile united in one body through the cross; and it was born in one day, and that the day of Pentecost.

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water (John 7:37 38).

Standing in the midst of the prophetic Scriptures as the fulfillment thereof, the Lord makes this sublime declaration. He is the smitten rock whence flows the life giving water. By His grace alone the thirst of the

soul is supplied. "He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." This is not an isolated quotation, but is presented as the burden of Old Testament prophecy as a whole. Many Old Testament sayings and incidents are blended in this declaration of Himself as the fountain of all life and truth, the One from whom the Holy Spirit in full New Testament effusion of grace and life should proceed.

Here is the great thirty second chapter of Isaiah with its vivid portrayal of the reign of the king of righteousness, our great and heavenly Melchisedec. "A king shall reign in righteousness and princes shall rule in judgment" (Isaiah 32:1). The king is Messiah, the princes are the Apostles, and the whole is descriptive of the Gospel kingdom.

And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land (Isaiah 32:2).

Here also is Ezekiel's description of the New Testament Temple with its mighty river of living water flowing from the threshold of the house and emptying itself into the Dead Sea, bringing life and healing wherever it goes (Ezekiel 47). Again the heavenly bride, the church, in the Song of Solomon 4:12, 15, is described as a garden enclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed and "a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon."

Beyond all these examples, however, there is the great prophecy of Zechariah 14, which beyond doubt is the prophecy of which Christ has primarily in mind, for we must remember that He uttered these words on "the last day, that great day of the feast" of Tabernacles to which such prominence is given by Zechariah in his fourteenth chapter. Zechariah's river of living waters (Zechariah 14:8) is a prophetic development of Ezekiel's river, flowing this time from Jerusalem in two directions, East and West into the Dead Sea in the wilderness and the great western sea (the Mediterranean), both of which are the seas of the Gentiles in prophecy.

In Zechariah, the life giving stream of Gospel grace proceeds from the mystic Zion bringing life and salvation to the whole world. "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth; in that day shall there be one Lord and His name one" (Zechariah 14:9). We plead with our brethren to recognize how empty of all spiritual meaning and purpose is their interpretation that the double river is simply a flood of natural water flowing from Jerusalem to the sea.

Zechariah's vision is all the more significant because it is associated in the same chapter with that Feast of Tabernacles, which was the occasion chosen by the Lord to make this great announcement in Jerusalem. The prophecy is one, and the meaning is fixed by the words of the Lord. This is no materialistic and utterly meaningless millennial river flowing two ways out of Jerusalem, but a river of the Spirit of God pouring forth its copious streams of eternal life from the bowels of the mystic church, the new Israel, the heavenly Mount Zion, the church of the living God, irrigating all the world with the water of life. "He that believeth on me,...out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)"

Writing long after the temple and nation of the Jews had passed into history, John thus supplies the commentary and the interpretation in this chapter. On the one hand, the millennial fantasy, conjured out of Zechariah 14 by a groundless futurism based on the principles of the false interpretations of the rabbis, is exposed; and on the other, the unsubstantial devotionism which excites illusions of spiritual power conditional upon "surrenders" and "consecrations" subsequent to conversion is forbidden. The converted

are already in the situation described by the Lord "He that believeth on me out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." There is no "second work" of the Spirit in view. The experience of the believers at Pentecost must be distinguished from the experience of Christians subsequent to the Apostolic day. At Pentecost believers crossed the boundary separating the two dispensations of Law and Gospel and received the new effusions of the Holy Spirit (although they were already believers) because the Holy Spirit was not previously given in those copious streams of grace which could not begin to flow until Jesus was glorified (that is, crucified, risen, and exalted).

They who now "tarry" to receive some abundance of the Spirit not hitherto experienced may be very devotionally earnest, but they are certainly very mistaken. Some "experience" they may no doubt receive. Human psychology is such that an intensive concentration of the mind on mental or spiritual phenomena can bring extraordinary results; but these will not be spiritual, in the true meaning of the term, because they are entirely unwarranted by Holy Scripture. The believers at Pentecost were instructed to "tarry" to receive the New Testament blessing because the Holy Spirit was not yet given in this full sense until Christ was exalted. The church in subsequent times has no warrant to "tarry" because the promise is already fulfilled--"He that believeth on me ... out of his belly shall flow rivers of living waters." The only condition is believing in Christ for the salvation of the soul. Conversion is consecration and dedication to God, or words have no meaning.

What, then, is this manifestation of the Holy Spirit in rivers of living water? It is that expansion of knowledge and experience and privilege in the grace of God, which denotes the coming of the church into the full inheritance of Sonship. The servitude of the Old Testament church to these rudiments and symbols of the Mosaic law, which were the shadows of future grace, was a necessary discipline until the time of the full revelation of Christ, when the church passed in one stupendous moment at Pentecost from her "minority" under the Old Testament to her full maturity under the New Testament. Paul expresses it in these words:

Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: 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 (Galatians 4:1 7).

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. (Romans 8:15 16).

The law of Moses was the "schoolmaster" which kept the church of the Old Testament under types and shadows until the Gospel came in. Pentecost was the release of the church from this bondage and her glorious expansion into the liberty and privilege of "adoption." Away went her subjection to priesthood, altar, temple, and ordinances, which were so grievous a yoke in Old Testament times. Now she has a high priest in heaven, set over the true house of God, an altar and sacrifice, an immediate right of access not possible to the Old Testament believer. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus...." (Hebrews 10:19 20).

The glory of the New Testament church is the preaching of the Word of God (Isaiah 52:7; 1 Corinthians 1:21). The shame of the church in the 20th century is the grievous decline of preaching. The sermon becomes a tissue of emotional appeals, anecdotes, or dry repetitions of doctrinal formulas. Charismatic gifts and experiences are no substitute for the exposition of the Word of God. The decline of the pulpit in our time is largely the product of indolence in the study and the imposition of false and ready made systems of Bible interpretation based upon a plausible and utterly fallacious dispensational programme, which makes large areas of the divine word irrelevant to the church today and the church herself a mere interlude in the prophetic scheme. We are now in the "dispensation of the fulness of times" (Ephesians 1:10). There can be no further development beyond the present age, either Jewish or millennial, for the ultimate aim of the divine program in history is the church. The next event is the consummation, the end of the world, the resurrection day, the judgment seat, and the eternal paradise of God. "Little children, it is the last time"(1 John 2:18). Paul's doctrine of the church in Ephesians leaves no room for question that the church of Jew and Gentile combined in one body, all national identity and distinction lost in one mystic and glorious temple, is the point to which the divine wisdom and patience has been working from the foundation of the world. It is "according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ephesians 3:11).

The opening of the fountain of living waters in Christ through His atonement, resurrection, and exaltation is the climax of the ages. This is the Feast of Tabernacles which all nations must keep or suffer the eternal consequences of their unbelief. This event seals up the vision and prophecy, anoints the most holy, finishes the transgression, and brings in everlasting righteousness (Daniel 9:24).

The rivers of Ezekiel 47 and Zechariah 14 represent the Holy Spirit, or Christ's words have no meaning.

The remainder of this most important chapter records the astonishment of the people who heard the Savior's doctrines. Many believed saying, "Of a truth this is the Prophet" (John 7:40). Others doubted and were confused, unable to believe that Messiah could come from Galilee and being ignorant of the fact that Christ was born not in Galilee but in Bethlehem, of David's line. The officers sent to arrest Christ return empty-handed, astonished by the doctrine they had heard. The Jewish authorities break up their session in disorder, as the bold and faithful Nicodemus reminds them that their proceedings are illegal so long as they do not give fair hearing to the case. They commit a crowning error when they retort, "Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet" (John 7:52).

They forget, or conveniently overlook, Jonah, the son of Amittai, who was of Galilee (see 2 Kings 14:25; Joshua 19:13; Isaiah 9:1 2; Matthew 4:15). But perhaps they did not regard Jonah as worthy to rank among the prophets, seeing that contrary to all Jewish prejudice, he preached the gospel of repentance to the Gentiles. That great prophetic ministry of Jonah was shortly to arise from the dead (as Jonah rose from the belly of the whale) to preach the mercy of God to the gentiles. On the Jewish sentence, "Out of Galilee ariseth no prophet," the great Augustine comments pointedly, "Yet the Lord of the prophets arose there."

The glory of Christ is bound up with His office, by which He bestows the Spirit of God in fulness upon the church. "The same is he that baptizeth with the Holy Ghost," John the Baptist had declared (John 1:33).

Old Testament believers were regenerate of the Holy Spirit even as New Testament believers, but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater even than John the Baptist (not in spiritual attainment, but in spiritual privilege). No longer is the church hedged around with Mosaic types and restrictions, her

approach to God regulated by a burdensome yoke of ecclesiastical observances and rituals. Candlesticks, incense, altars, days of atonement, sacrifices, priesthood all these stood between the worshipper and his access to God. "The Holy Spirit this signifying that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing" (Hebrews 9:8).

In the New Testament economy, which came in at Pentecost, the believer has immediate access to God. No temple veil shrouds the divine mysteries and forbids entry into the holy presence of God. He carries not with him a dish of animal blood to sprinkle upon a golden ark, but is a king and priest to God in his own right. He comes boldly to the throne of grace with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having heart sprinkled from an evil conscience and his body washed with the pure water of the divine word and Spirit. No longer in bondage and fear, but in the full joy and liberty of the Holy Spirit of God, the Spirit of adoption, he comes before his Lord and cries, "Abba, Father."

The token on the day of Pentecost that this great and final dispensation of grace had dawned was the outpouring of the Spirit in the gift of tongues. This was not a sign intended to endure beyond apostolic times, for it marked the inauguration of the New Testament, not the continuing mark of its existence. The effusion of the Spirit in outward signs and marvels was only perpetuated during apostolic times by the laying on of apostolic hands upon new converts to Christ. The apostolic office was not perpetuated beyond the days of the last of the apostles (John), and it is manifest that miraculous works and speaking in tongues ceased with the apostles. Augustine writes most wisely, "Because he that is baptized in Christ and believes on him does not speak now in the tongues of all nations, are we not to believe that he has received the Holy Ghost? God forbid that our hearts should be tempted by this faithlessness. Since therefore the Holy Ghost is even now received by men, some one may say, Why is it that no one now speaks in the tongues of all nations? Because the church itself now speaks in the tongues of all nations. Before, the church was in one nation and it spoke in the tongues of all. By speaking then in the tongues of all it signified what was to come to pass: that going among the nations it would speak in the tongues of all. A man may ask how then dost thou speak in all tongues? Clearly I do, for every tongue is mine, namely of the body of which I am a member. The church spread among the nations speaks in all tongues; the church is the body of Christ; in this body thou art a member; therefore since thou art a member of that body which speaks with all tongues believe thou to speak with all tongues. For the unity of the members is of one mind by charity and that unity speaks as one man then spoke."

CHARISMATIC GIFTS TODAY

The quest for charismatic gifts, which historically ceased with the last of the apostles, is one of the most disquieting and unhealthy signs of these last days. The phenomena of tongues speaking today ought to be recognized for what it is - a mere hysteria which can be self induced at any time and which is ominously being imitated even by Roman Catholic priests and other non evangelicals, including as is well known, Buddhists and Moslems.

The accusation by the so called Pentecostalists that it was the failure of the church which led to the disappearance of the miraculous signs is a statement which only ignorance could make. The church in which the signs ceased was the martyr church. Men and women were thrown to the lions, cruelly butchered and tortured for their faithfulness to Christ. To say that these saints were "unfaithful" is an insult not to be borne any longer in silence. The Holy Spirit has managed well without miracles throughout all the great movements and revivals of the past two thousand years, including the glorious Reformation, when in one generation lay preaching alone the Word of God was restored to its paramountcy among the nations.

To the spirit filled sectaries of his time, Luther declared, "I slap your spirits on the snout," and ignored (as well he might) the howling of their execration that he had blasphemed the Holy Ghost.

It is the decline of preaching and the pitiful state of the evangelical pulpit today which have given the role in our time for the revival of these false claims to charismatic gifts. When charismatic manifestations come in, out goes preaching through the window as everyone knows; and in comes every other species of lying and deception as the record of leading Pentecostals nowadays shows the love of money, the get rich quick revivalists, the Pentecostal multimillionaires who a short time ago were penniless, and all the evils of uncontrolled fleshliness in the dubious morality which accompanies all practices which specialize in emotional abandon, handclapping, cavorting, and pretended exorcisms.

That miraculous manifestations were apostolic signs denoting the authority of the Apostles and marking the introduction of the New Testament is clearly taught in Hebrews 2:3 4 and 2 Corinthians 12:12. An Apostle must be one that had seen and heard Christ in the flesh. Hence Paul, who was born out of due time, must be caught up to heaven to meet Christ in his glorified humanity to receive direct from Christ Himself the charge and the office of an Apostle to the Gentiles. No one else but an Apostle, by the laying on of hands, could transmit the Apostolic signs. Search and look the Book of Acts to find this is so. There are now no Apostolic hands, and therefore the signs have ceased.

The easiest sign to imitate is that of tongues, and it is simulated by self induced hysteria. Hysteria causes an agitation of speech and produces unintelligible sound. It is dangerous to give oneself to those delusions, as the practice easily transports the personality into familiarity with abandoning physical, mental, and moral control and can produce aberrations which may be subversive of all moral standing.

The modern tongues movement produces no revelation or exposition which is worthy of being listened to. The "interpretations" which come forth in Pentecostal meetings are childish, unnecessary, without spiritual import or maturity, and often clearly banal, and reflect not the mind of the Spirit but very much the mind of man and very ordinary minds at that. It is an insult to the Holy Spirit to claim that these appallingly naive utterances (to put it no lower) are a divine communication.

The ignorance of Holy Scripture which allows and induces these aberrations is appalling and even sinister. It ought to be known that in the very chapter to which these people most frequently refer (1 Corinthians 14) verses occur which overthrow all these pretentions.

In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe (1 Corinthians 14:21 22).

Elementary exegesis of these verses compared with their source (Isaiah 28:11) shows that Pentecostal tongues were a sign to the Jewish nation that the kingdom of God was passing from them to the Gentiles. Since the Old Covenant and the New Covenant were finally severed (and severed forever) with the destruction of nation, temple, and priesthood in A.D. 70, tongues died out, their object being exhausted.

It cannot be sufficiently emphasized that Christ's words in John 7:37 39 lay down no conditions for receiving the Holy Spirit except that simple condition of faith in Christ by which we enter into the kingdom of God. In other words, conversion to Christ gives us all, and there is no more to be received of the Holy Spirit, for in His fulness He is then come to abide. There is, of course, a growth and maturity and

knowledge, a warfare between flesh and spirit, but it remains that "ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you..." and "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Romans 8:9).

The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ also, according to this verse; for there is one Spirit, even the third Person in the divine essence. He is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, though leading Pentecostals have shown their ignorance of the divine Word by postulating two spirits in the Godhead, if not three. This does not argue well for their claims to the special gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is a matter of sadness to us that some of our most respected evangelical spokesmen, some of them even in the leading ranks of "reformed" movement, are being carried away by the charismatic delusions. This pursuit of miraculous gifts and signs is one of the most unhealthy symptoms of our time. It marks the bankruptcy and frustration of mind of men who have a dubious appetite for the sensation of revivalism, but find that all their faithful preaching does not produce what they seek. Hence they turn to a pentecostalism which began with poor Edward Irving at the beginning of the last century and ought to have died with him, and which was resuscitated in our time by a kind of evangelism which arose in the New World with such sick characters as Aimee Semple Macpherson.

We repeat and urge that there is no substitute for a full exposition of the Word of God in sobriety and intense understanding. Charismatic practices are not just a diversion. They will prove destructive of all the holiest ends we have in view.

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